Hiding One's Feelings

'Emotionless' Rhetoric in Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* and Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung*

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In his analysis of Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (*The Investigation*), Christopher Bigsby claims that Weiss intended to write a "dry and emotionless" text, and that he wished to avoid a "purely emotional response".[1] Similarly, Mark Anderson, in his overview of documentary tendencies in German literature during the 1960s and 1970s, claims that *Die Ermittlung*, despite its "clear political motivations"[2] uses a "rigorously unemotional, highly formalized […] language".[3] Moreover, he implies that this text, as well as Alexander Kluge's *Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945* (*The Air Raid on Halberstandt on 8 April 1945*) and Günter Grass's *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (*From the Diary of a Snail*), is "objective [and] cold".[4] Contradicting this view, Stefanie Harris argues that although Kluge's texts may be accurately described as a "cold medium", they do not per se take an unempathetic stance towards victims of extreme violence.[5] In a similar vein, I attempt to explain why *Die Ermittlung* has been considered "unemotional", and suggest reconsidering this notion. I suggest that Weiss's use of modernist techniques renders the question of emotionality in *Die Ermittlung* complex, and that a seeming lack thereof does not imply an emotionally neutral attitude on behalf of its author. Another author whose prose has been described

1 Bigsby 2006: 161; 167. He offers no sources to substantiate these claims, though.

2 Anderson 2008: 132.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.: 140.

5 Harris 2010: 304. The idea of "hot" and "cold" media is Marshall McLuhan's.

as "detached", or "cold", is Raul Hilberg.[6] Like Peter Weiss, he was a German-speaking Jew[7] and able to flee the anti-Jewish legislation and persecution in his home country before the outbreak of the Second World War. As such, both authors have a similar perspective on the Shoah from a cognitive point of view: partly informed by semantic, partly by episodic knowledge.[8] Admittedly, the discrepancy in age (Hilberg was 13 when his family fled in 1939, Weiss 19 in 1935) constitutes an important cognitive difference at the times of the events but may be less relevant when looking for traces of emotionality in their texts, which were both written during the 1950s and published in the early 1960s:[9] *The Destruction of the European Jews* is Hilberg's repeatedly revised doctoral thesis and *magnum opus*.

Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (*The Investigation*) is a 'hybrid' text: it is based on the proceedings of the 1963-65 Frankfurt Auschwitz trial and its media coverage (to the extent that Weiss has been accused of plagiarism) but also includes fictional elements. It is, however, possible to examine the function of this fictionalisation – the literary establishment of an emotional code – by taking two (contemporary) autobiographical texts, *Abschied von den Eltern* (*Leavetaking*) and *Meine Ortschaft* (*My Place*) into account.

The benefits of this selection is that one looks at texts whose authors may have had a similar perspective on the Shoah but who published in entirely different contexts. Moreover, Weiss's texts may have strong factual claims but show obvious signs of fictionalisation. The same cannot be said of Hilberg's *magnum opus* and autobiography. These crucial differences compel us to consider issues like authorial self-staging and corresponding emotional codes. Why should one be looking at "emotionless" strategies in order to dig for personal feelings, when other texts offer us direct and unambiguous clues as to those feelings? Ultimately, a comparison of the emotional codes in different genres (documentary theatre, monographs, autobiographies) may shed light on questions of poetics: who is 'entitled' to certain rhetorical strategies (sarcasm, polemics, "coolness") in order

6 Bolkosky: 2003: 22.

7 Weiss was born in the German Empire but never held German citizenship; Hilberg was born in Vienna. Both came from secular backgrounds.

8 Semantic knowledge is, according to Winko, propositional knowledge of the world (i.e. knowledge gained by education, reading, the media), whereas episodic knowledge sprouts from first-hand experiences. Thus, both Hilberg and Weiss hover between both modi: their survival is due to their exile (but both have lost several family members to the genocide). Cf. Winko 2003: 79.

9 In the case of Hilberg, this was the period during which he conducted his doctoral research; for Weiss see Spielmann 1982: 40.

to depict the Shoah? And what does this indicate about the cultural significance of this event in different cultures of memory?

The starting point, however, is a theoretical perspective on the difference between emotion and feeling in order to develop a hermeneutic methodology.

Theoretical background: differentiating feeling and emotion

In her extensive overview of the several research paradigms in emotion studies, Simone Winko paraphrases the insights from the psychology of emotions, claiming that emotion is a holistic notion containing subjective experience, a corporeal state, and an expression of the experienced. By contrast, feeling is a constituent of emotion: the subjective (personal, biographic) experience.[10] Eric Shouse's trichotomy consists of affect, feeling and emotion, corresponding respectively with pre-personal (i.e. biochemical neurological processes), personal and social levels.[11] As such, he writes: "We broadcast emotion to the world; sometimes that broadcast is an expression of our internal state and other times it is contrived in order to fulfil social expectations. […] Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned."[12] Winko and Shouse seem to be in accord as to the concept of feeling, but not entirely on the concept of emotion. Notwithstanding, they agree on the fact that there is a clear distinction between the personal experience of an emotion and its communication. Therefore, there is potentially a strong distinction between the actual feeling at the moment of writing and the emotion perceived by the audience.[13] "Emotionlessness" does not equate to "feelinglessness".[14]

The question is: how do we find out whether a text is veiling its author's feelings? Several disciplines (within linguistics and history) suggest looking at the connection between metaphor and emotion: either a metonymical relation[15]

10 Cf. Winko: 2003: 73.

11 Cf. Shouse 2005: s.p.

12 Ibid.

13 The perception of the texts cannot be discussed here; suffice it to point out that the reception of *Die Ermittlung* in 1965 was highly politicised (denounced and heralded as anticapitalistic) but did not analyse the play in the broader context of Weiss's literary oeuvre. Cf. Weiß 1998: 53-68.

14 This translation is admittedly not the most elegant. "Gefühllosigkeit" would be translated as numbness, but the difference between feeling and emotion gets lost in this translation.

15 Cf. Scheer 2012: 218: metaphors "merging […] the body and mind".

or one with a *tertium comparationis*.[16] In the texts under scrutiny, bodily metaphors are lacking, however, which may explain why *Destruction* in particular has been described as "cool" or "distanced". Nonetheless, an implicit-lexical reading method takes both co- and context – i.e. the texts under scrutiny and autobiographical paratexts – into account.[17] Including such paratexts, and the authors' biographical backgrounds, is hermeneutically valid in this case, since the texts under scrutiny have strong factual claims – it would be notoriously more problematic to read fictional texts with these backgrounds in mind, even in the case of concentration camp survivors, as the reception of Tadeusz Borowski's prose has shown.[18]

1. RAUL HILBERG

Hilberg's text describes the proliferation of anti-Judaic legislation and rule-by-decree leading up to the mass shootings and gas chambers in Eastern Europe in a sarcastic fashion, using various – admittedly isolated – rhetorical figures that seem to disguise deeper feelings. These figures include, but are not limited to, litotes, antiphrasis, blunt statement, and depersonalising similes and tropes. Consider the following examples:[19] "The Slavs had *no particular liking* for their Jewish neighbors, and they felt *no overpowering urge* to help the Jews in their hour of need."[20] "A few weeks later, Wöhler organized a forced labor system for the Moldavian Jews – *the German army's parting gift to the Rumanian Jews*."[21] "Lohse was *a little late* [in forbidding members of civil administrations in Eastern Europe to take part in the shooting of Jews]."[22] In these cases, the litotes resp. antiphrasis can easily be read as accusatory descriptions of mindsets, attitudes and (in)actions, without resorting to a polemic discourse. Note that in the

16 Cf. Winko 2003: 105-106.

17 In Hilberg's case, one could also consider his appearance in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, but I cannot dwell on this matter in the present paper. The apparatus for establishing the interview's emotionality would need to be established – body language and prosody would presumably offer good keys.

18 Cf. Franklin 2011: 27-28.

19 The emphasis in every example to follow is mine, unless explicitly mentioned otherwise.

20 Hilberg 1985: 307.

21 Ibid.: 794-795.

22 Ibid.: 379.

first example, the sarcasm lies particularly in the inclusion of modifiers – without these, the phrases may or may not be read as litotes. This is also true for the third example, where Lohse is seemingly depicted as benign but failing to save the Jews.

However, in certain instances the text demands from the reader a slightly bigger interpretative effort, similar to the one the historian confronted with the obscuring language of the Nazi documents has to undertake: "For the deportees one-way fare was payable; for the guards a round-trip ticket had to be purchased."[23] Not only do such petty descriptions in both Nazi documents and *Destruction* indicate the genocide's bureaucratic nature, they also disguise the victims' fate – which is obviously known to the reader of *Destruction* and to the historian, but which the perpetrators wished to obscure. Both in the ironic figures of speech (litotes and antiphrasis) and in these petty details, *Destruction* mirrors – sarcastically – the language of Nazi bureaucracy.[24]

Given the fact that *Destruction* was Hilberg's life project,[25] one should take several editions in several languages into consideration, all the more because the focalisation implied in certain tropes becomes inverted in translation. Comparing the table of contents of the English versions (1961 and 1985) with the German versions (1982 and 1990), one notices that the actions of *Einsatzgruppen* are described with the metaphor of a sweep. This means that the perpetrators' perspective is (unwittingly?) adopted, because the *tertium comparationis* is the supposed stain that Jews form on a society and that needs to be cleaned. In short, it dehumanises the victims and implies the fulfilment of a goal on the part of the perpetrators. However, the German editions describe the same actions as *Tötungswelle*, i.e. "a wave of killing". This translation embraces (again, unwittingly?) the Jewish perspective, since the *tertium comparationis* is the inevitability of the German onslaught. It also implies a passive undergoing rather than the activity implied in the sweep metaphor, and dehumanises the perpetrators by using a metaphor usually associated with natural catastrophes.

Apart from subtle rhetorical differences due to translation, the time gaps between versions allow probing into the evolution of the emotional code of "cool-

23 Ibid.: 410.

24 Think of terms such as "Endlösung der Judenfrage", "Sonderbehandlung", "Umsiedlung nach Osten" etc. Obviously, use of such terms had strategic reasons – secrecy – but also expressed the desire to rid Germany/Europe of a perceived problem. Our very labelling of expressions as antiphrasis (in this context at least) is rooted in a political and ethical perspective.

25 Cf. Hilberg's preface to his autobiography *The Politics of Memory*. Cf. Van Den Berghe 1990: 110.

ness". It should perhaps not surprise that the tendency is to retain these figures, and to stick to a similar "coolness" in the updated sections. For example, the 1982 and 1985 editions contain considerable elaborations in Hilberg's conclusions about the Jewish reactions to German violence. In this way, a few metaphors and similes depersonalise the German perpetrators, either by depicting them as a machine-like force ("the all-consuming destruction process"[26]) or as ravenous predators: "The Jews attempted to tame the Germans as one would attempt to tame a wild beast."[27] Similarly, in the expanded section on the Netherlands, the 1985 edition sarcastically describes the Jews transported to Theresienstadt instead of Auschwitz as "beneficiaries of German generosity"[28] – the sarcasm lies in the contrast with Hilberg's description of Theresienstadt *not at all* being as mild a place as common perception would have it, and in the fact that a considerable number of those Jews were ultimately transported to Auschwitz anyway.[29]

Overall, the tone becomes more accusatory throughout the years: with regard to the Slavs (cf. supra), Hilberg initially wrote that they "perhaps felt no overpowering urge to help the Jews in their hour of need".[30] This "perhaps" is no longer found in the 1985 edition.[31]

The increase of such sarcastic and accusatory rhetoric in subsequent editions suggests deeper-lying feelings, particularly since a similar discourse is found in Hilberg's autobiography, especially when describing the fate of his family members who remained in Europe.[32] Moreover, the fact that Hilberg ends his autobiography with a quote by H.G. Adler, authorises Adler's perception of Hilberg's drive and failure to definitively come to terms with the Shoah:

> What moves me in this book [*Destruction*, T.V.] is the hopelessness of the author. […] He already has the viewpoint of a generation, which does not feel itself affected directly, but which looked at these events from afar, bewildered, bitter and embittered, accusing and critical, not only vis-à-vis the Germans. […] At the end nothing remains but despair and

26 Hilberg 1985: 1038.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.: 594.

29 Cf. ibid.

30 Hilberg 1961: 201.

31 Remarkably, the 1990 German translation does not take this into account, and retains the "vermutlich" from the 1982 edition.

32 Cf. Hilberg 1996: 24-25.

doubt about everything, because for Hilberg there is only recognition, perhaps also a grasp, but certainly not understanding…[33]

2. PETER WEISS

As mentioned above, the hybrid nature of *Die Ermittlung* complicates the question of emotionality even more than 'standard' factual or fictional texts. After all, its composition of largely non-fictional testimonies by Auschwitz survivors in a court room – inherently emotional speech acts[34] – renders the traditional notion of authorship problematic. This means that one cannot analyse its rhetorical build-up in an attempt to unveil any feelings the play's author may have experienced – rather, it seems that the latter's selection of testimonies and (paradoxically!) the instances of fictionalisation offer better cues. Yet here as well ambiguity prevails: the lack of punctuation and omnipresence of enjambments – which cannot be entirely preserved on stage – may be associated with the Brechtian epic theatre and its aims to frustrate any emphatic identification with the characters on stage, but may also remind the reader of the song verse in ancient Greek drama, which was used for personal expression.[35]

Consequently, the reader is confronted with a strong contrast between the inherently emotional survivors' testimonies and the literary practice of alienation. Anderson is correct in asserting that Weiss "required audiences to do a double take, reconciling monstrous crimes with mundane personal details".[36] The double take, however, also applies to the text's emotionality.

It seems that other criteria may be more relevant for *Die Ermittlung*: particularly, I would suggest taking two interpolations into account. The first is a reference to the Sermon on the Mount (as found in Matthew) and is fictive, i.e. it cannot be traced to any testimony before court:[37]

33 Ibid.: 202-203. Van Den Berghe offers a similar interpretation, albeit for different reasons. Cf. Van Den Berghe 1990: 120.

34 Cf. Bigsby 2006: 167-168: "it is precisely the unemotional recitation of fact that generates the emotion".

35 I thank Ingeborg Jandl for this insight. The argument is strengthened by Devin Pendas's correct remark that *Die Ermittlung* is modelled on ancient Greek drama; cf. Pendas 2006: 4

36 Anderson 2008: 132.

37 Cf. Meyer 2000: 123-140; Weiss 2005: 258-259.

Only the cunning survived
only those who every day
with unrelentless alertness
took and held their bit of ground
The unfit
the slow-witted
the gentle
the bewildered and the impractical
the ones who mourned and the ones
who pitied themselves
were crushed[38]

Clearly this is an inversion of the Beatitudes, which offer hope. The fact that it is fictive does not mean it is fictional. Rather, it must be read as an interpolation by Peter Weiss, which offers his perspective on the hopeless situation of the concentration camp inmates – according to Weiss, it took a cynical attitude to stand the barest chance of survival. The text thematises emotions as much as it represents or evokes them, but the relation is not (nor can it be) a one-to-one correspondence.

The second interpolation is the play's Dantesque structure, which reinforces the notion of an infernal and hopeless situation of the inmates in Auschwitz.[39] There is absolutely no *Paradiso* to be found in *Die Ermittlung*; at best the trial might be considered a secular *Purgatorio*. Also telling is the fictional ending of the trial, which ends with a rhetorical victory for the defendants – not with a conviction. These poetic liberties may just as well have articulated Weiss's (partly politicised) feelings.

The complexity of the hybrid nature of *Die Ermittlung* compels us to look for other traces in Weiss's oeuvre. These may be found in two autobiographical texts, *Abschied von den Eltern* and *Meine Ortschaft*, assuming that these are factual texts. There is a dispute within literary studies as to whether or not autobiographies ought to be labelled as factual or not. Philippe Lejeune speaks of an autobiographical pact between author and reader, since it is impossible to distinguish the autobiography on formal (narratological, rhetorical, discursive) terms

38 Weiss 2006: 146; for the original German excerpt, cf. Weiss 2005: 42.

39 Cf. Lindner 1990. References to Dante are also found in contemporary Allied newspapers, (cf. Chéroux 2001), in Hannah Arendt's *The Concentration Camp* (1948), and in Primo Levi's prose. The trope of Auschwitz – or the concentration camp in general – as Hell was already well-established by the time of *Die Ermittlung*'s premiere.

from fictional texts with first-person narrators.[40] On the other hand, there is a widespread practice of interpolation and poetic liberty in autobiographical writing.[41] Again, however, these instances of interpolation are fictive, not fictional. There need not be a logical disruption between fictive instances and a factual pact with the reader – provided the author relies on the reader's hermeneutic capacities to distinguish these fictive from the (assumingly) predominant non-fictive elements. For this reason, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* cannot be used as a factual counterpart to *Die Ermittlung* as, in accordance with Holdenried, this novel is a "Wunschautobio-graphie",[42] i.e. a wished-for autobiography, in which the fictive elements outweigh the factual references to Weiss's life. For the same reason, it seems that using *Abschied von den Eltern* as a counterpart is justifiable, even though Robert Cohen demonstrates Weiss's extensive use of fictionalisation strategies.[43] There are, however, various passages which had already featured in Weiss's earlier prose and which are deemed autobiographic.[44]

Abschied von den Eltern

The centrality of the Shoah for Weiss's self-perception can already be found, albeit *ex negativo* and between the lines, in his autobiographical *Abschied von den Eltern*. The text depicts a narrator, supposedly identical with Peter Weiss, who is isolated in three regards.

Firstly, there are lacunae within his own memory, which are admitted with regard to his earliest memories.[45] Contrary to the common practice of interpolation,[46] the author/narrator admits that his memory shows lacunae – which in turn ought to strengthen the text's authenticity.

Secondly, the narrator's family is depicted as fragmented, falling completely apart after the death of both parents.[47] However, the narrator also explains how his childhood had been marked by the distance to his parents, apparently originating in their lack of autobiographic narration.[48] The young narrator makes up

40 Cf. Lejeune 1975.

41 Cf. Holdenried 2000: 31.

42 Cf. ibid.: 249.

43 Cf. Cohen 1993: 41-44.

44 Ibid.: 44.

45 Cf. Weiss 2014b: 21. For the original German text, cf. Weiss 2014a.

46 Cf. Holdenried 2000: 31.

47 Cf. Weiss 2014b: 37.

48 The exception to the rule is his mother's eager telling about how she met the narrator's father, but even this story is "impenetrable". Cf. ibid.

for this silence by looking for clues but ultimately imagining their lives before his birth: "From the fragments I found in the attic, I was able to piece together a family history."[49] The most salient instance concerns his father's experiences in the First World War: "The battlefield. The shots of the machine gun. […] My father with a bleeding stomach, moaning among others in the field hospital. And then my mother appearing. […] In the picture world of my mythology she holds him in her arms."[50] Whether the young narrator imagines his parents in this fashion due to overnight eavesdropping or to already predominant mediatised war imageries (or a combination of both) remains unclear, but the boy extrapolates these images into a fantasy where he takes the role of a senior officer:

> When I lowered my face to the edge of the countryside it was if I were there myself. […] With cold passion I marked off the countryside, arranged the positions of the troops. […] After the great battles when the mangled corpses had been buried and the wounded had been brought to the hospitals, I made little expeditions.[51]

The discussion of whether or not this passage is to be read in a Freudian fashion (more specifically, the son's killing of his father[52]), or rather as the combination of childish play and juvenile fascination with war, is not central to the argument. What is essential is that the narrator, although having *no* first-hand experience – which in the German original is expressed in the conjunctive II – simulates knowledge of this experience, casting himself in a role which is simultaneously active and distanced, namely as a commander overlooking and directing the battle. Note that this also translates in an ambivalent description of his feelings, i.e. "cold passion" – passion, at least in Western cultures, traditionally being described with metaphors of heat or fire.

Finally, the narrator depicts his isolation within society, particularly when describing his childhood and youth. Without explicitly thematising Weiss's "Jewishness"[53] or foreign nationality, its rhetoric depicts an authoritarian, militarily inspired society and subtly anticipates the genocide – which arguably

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.: 38.

51 Ibid.: 39.

52 Weiss did show a profound interest in psychoanalysis; cf. Holdenried 1991: 272 and 2000: 40, 248. Evers offers an interesting variant on this scheme: only after the death of Weiss's father is the author (not per se the narrator) able to replace this silent veteran/father with a heroic soldier. Cf. Evers 2008: 220.

53 The only exception is being told that he cannot join the Nazis due to his being Jewish. Cf. Weiss 2014b: 58.

originated in that authoritarian society[54] – and Weiss's exile during the war years.

Friederle, a schoolboy whose father is the Weiss family's landlord, is described as behaving "imperiously"[55] towards the narrator; he is a bully whose violent and humiliating actions towards the narrator[56] can be read as a prelude to German (Nazi) violence and the humiliation of Europe's Jewish populations.[57] This interpretation seems to be strengthened when one reads that from the landlord's family only one son, a former highly decorated officer, is still alive.[58] When we accept this interpretation, the narrator's heavy stomach in retrospect is not only explained by his personal experience (i.e. the childhood bullying) but also by his knowledge of the fate he escaped.[59] This leads him to avoid meeting Friedrich/Friederle, even though he has been given his address, claiming to know "what he was like".[60] Notice that this claimed knowledge is similar to that articulated in his war games as a child: second-hand at best; only this time the mass killing is merely implied, and the narrator does not cast himself in a participatory role. Both the subtext (the bully as future Nazi; the Nazi as grown-up bully) and the narrator's supposed superior knowledge of Friedrich's character implies that Friedrich was involved in acts of genocide or war crimes, but the narrator's

54 Jones offers a critical analysis of the role of socialisation in pre-war Germany (which, he argues, is sometimes invoked as exculpatory in current lay assessments). Cf. Jones 1999: 117. Nonetheless a more recent (fictional) artwork which draws an unspoken line between the authoritarian, pre-1914 German society and totalitarianism is Michael Haneke's *Das weiße Band – eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* (2009), although the director insists the link between authoritarian, religiously strict education and totalitarian ideology is not limited to the German context. Cf. (the TV interview with) Kluge 2009.

55 Weiss 2014b: 29.

56 Cf. Ibid.: 29-30, 31, 32, 33.

57 I realise that my interpretation of the Nazi-as-bully paradigm might be anachronistic, however: although Paul mentions the demonization and pathologising of the Gestapo and SS before the Eichmann trial, I have not found any indication that the bully paradigm (which has certainly been present in educational approaches during the last decades) had already found articulation. Cf. Paul 2002: 20. It might only have been hinted at in literary criticism, e.g. in Berghahn's interpretation of Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906). Cf. Berghahn 1963: 28-29.

58 Cf. Weiss 2014b: 29.

59 Cf. ibid.: 25-26.

60 Ibid.: 29.

refusal to meet Friedrich, which is based on this assumption, paradoxically renders any settling of the matter impossible.

Yet the anticipations of Nazism and genocide are not restricted to biographic instances, they are also present on a more structural level: school is described as a place of natural and social violence, with storks attacking each other; and man inflicting damage upon pigs and butterflies – lethal in the first case, seemingly sadistic in the latter.[61] This violence is also reflected in the school's militarily inspired architecture.[62] Such peripheral descriptions of violence prelude the punitive measures handed out by the teacher, which the pupil (more reflexively than consciously, it seems) tries to evade:

> I was hauled up by the ear onto the podium and placed in front of the blackboard, and what I had to demonstrate to the teacher and class was how one kept one's palm out under the raised cane. It was a difficult exercise, for my hand would not stay still under the cane, it always jerked back.[63]

If we accept the premise that the narration anticipates – between the lines – the fate of the Jews in Germany, the narrator's attempt at withdrawing from German violence can be symbolically read as the precursor of his emigration. Yet his attempt is, in the end, futile: the hand does get whipped.[64] The symbolical meaning of this being-hit cannot be the subject's destruction – for Weiss survived – and must therefore indicate another pain. This pain is probably that of being destined for destruction *tout court*, which is explicitly expressed in *Meine Ortschaft*.

Meine Ortschaft

Whereas the writing of *Abschied von den Eltern* took place several years before that of *Die Ermittlung*, and the two texts – at least theoretically – may therefore contain traces of different feelings, *Meine Ortschaft* was written after a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau and in the larger context of the Frankfurt trial.[65] The thematic and temporal proximity to *Die Ermittlung,* therefore, indicates a bigger correspondence as to Weiss's feelings during the writing processes of both texts. Moreover, there are – to my knowledge – no indications that this text contains

61 Cf. ibid.: 32.

62 Cf. ibid.: 30-31.

63 Ibid.: 33.

64 Cf. ibid.: 33.

65 Cf. Bigsby 2006: 160.

any elements of fictionalisation, and hence offers a more direct access to Weiss's feelings.

> One place alone, where I spent just one day, remains. […] It is a place for which I was destined and which I evaded. I myself learned nothing in this place. I have no other connection to it beyond the fact that my name stood on the list of those meant to be relocated there forever.[66]

The entire account is marked by similar contrasts. Firstly, there is the explicit juxtaposition of past and present. In analeptic excerpts, Auschwitz is described as the "end of the world",[67] only to be contrasted with descriptions as a place of learning (the presence of a school class[68]), but also as a touristic destination, including commercial practices.[69]

Secondly, the vicinity of said commercial enterprise stands in clear contrast with the remnants of genocide: "Immediately behind the barracks [where postcards are sold, T.V.] low walls of concrete, above them a slope overgrown by grass, rising to the flat roof with the short, squat, square chimney. The map of the camp tells me that I am already standing in front of the crematorium."[70]

Thirdly, there is a rather subtle contrast between a purported lack of feelings and an implicit-lexical code which suggests the opposite, not unlike the emotional code in *Die Ermittlung*. It should be noted that all three types of contrasts are not isolated phenomena but overlap with and even reinforce each other. The following excerpt combines the first and the third contrasts: "I have come here of my own free will. I was not unloaded from any train. I was not driven into this terrain with truncheons. I come here twenty years late."[71] Here, the idea of doom escaped (cf. supra) is resumed and shaped in a *kyklos*: the first sentence highlights Weiss's situation in the 1960s, the second and third the fate of the German Jews, while the final sentence can be read as the synthesis of past and present: an

66 Weiss 2008: 4-5. The page numeration is only relevant within the article, since – at least in the online version of the journal – page numerations are not percurrent. For the original German text, cf. Weiss 2005.

67 Ibid.: 5.

68 Cf. ibid.

69 Cf. ibid.

70 Ibid.: 5-6.

71 Ibid.: 6.

expression of survivor's guilt.[72] This reflection, however, finds its pendant upon the narrator's entering of the crematorium: "Without thoughts. Without any impressions beyond the fact that I am standing here alone, it is cold, the ovens are cold, the wagons are stiff and rusted."[73] Similarly, the anaphora finds a rhetorical pendant in the ellipsis used in the gas chamber's description: "I walk slowly through this grave. Feel nothing. See only this floor, these walls. Register."[74] Upon leaving the building: "At the end of the room a cast iron door with a peephole, behind it a narrow staircase, leading into the open air. Into the open."[75] In his introduction Hillman justly remarks that the German original "ins Freie" has a double meaning: 'into the open', but also 'towards freedom'.[76] The emotionality is again explained by the contrast between past and present, yet with a cynical conclusion: "There stands a gallows."[77] Even though the narrator can leave the gas chamber alive, the text relentlessly evokes violent death.

The fourth contrast is that between knowing, i.e. how the deportees were unloaded, killed and burnt, and not-knowing, i.e. not being able to imagine their agony. Compare "had read and heard a lot about it"[78] with "A living person came, and what happened is closed off from this living person".[79] This trope is a widespread one, and it is due to both philosophical analyses[80] and survivors' testimonies, which highlight the problem of putting the events to words.

The (non-)experience of the Shoah is, in short, the pendant for the (non-)experience of the First World War – at least from Weiss's/his narrators' point of view. In both cases, the big outlines of the events are known (reduced to clichés?), but whereas to Weiss the First World War seems imaginable to a certain degree, the Shoah remains aloof: "Ashes remain in the earth, from those who died for nothing, who were torn away from their home."[81] Despite our vast scientific and cultural knowledge, it defies understanding.

72 Moreover, it seems to me that Winko overlooks repetition (here in the form of the anaphora) when listing the rhetorical devices particularly prone to expressing emotion. Cf. Winko 2003: 135-136.

73 Weiss 2005: 6.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.: 3.

77 Ibid.: 7.

78 Ibid.: 8.

79 Ibid.: 13.

80 Cf. Horkheimer/Adorno 2010; Arendt 1948.

81 Weiss 2008: 13. Evers notices that the paradigm of the "un-tellability" of WWI does not stand the test of empirical research, and that this paradigm may be instrumental-

Comparisons and conclusions

Apart from these text-internal contrasts, *Meine Ortschaft* shows similarities to *Die Ermittlung*, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and *The Politics of Memory*. *Meine Ortschaft* has political implications similar to those of *Die Ermittlung*, namely that the Shoah was not only a matter of the SS or NSDAP, but also implemented by bureaucrats, judges, and capitalists: "the death sentences were pronounced, by men who today live an honest existence and enjoy their bourgeois honors."[82] The narrative's conclusion may be more understated, but no less condemning: "Now he is just standing in a world that has perished. Here he can do no more. For a while total silence prevails. Then he knows it is not over yet."[83] The implication is that the political system that enabled genocide has not vanished after the military defeat, and that it has gladly rehabilitated the war criminals it had produced.

The main similarity with Hilberg's writings is the (infrequent) use of cynical antiphrasis, as in the following example: "Those men who were allowed to live a while longer went to the right."[84] The choice of the modal verb "durften" constitutes an antiphrasis in two senses: firstly, it (sarcastically) connotes life as a privilege bestowed, rather than a basic right – reinforced by the arbitrariness and temporariness of this privilege; secondly, it implies that this short period in the camp is a better fate than being gassed upon arrival.[85]

Obviously, the crucial difference between Hilberg's and Weiss's texts is the amount of fictional content: *Destruction* and *Memory* show no signs of fiction; *Die Ermittlung* does so very clearly. As a consequence, the implicit-lexical analysis of *Destruction* has more explanatory power about Hilberg's feelings than *Die Ermittlung* has about Weiss's, for the simple reason that narrators in factual texts – if one assumes factual texts have narrators in the first place – coincide

ised to discredit certain forms of testimony in the case of the Shoah. These remarks, however, are not echoed in Weiss's texts under scrutiny here: the question of how these experiences reach collective and cultural memory is not thematised. Cf. Evers 2008: 221-222.

82 Weiss 2008: 9.

83 Ibid.: 14.

84 Ibid.: 11.

85 The second implication can be read as antiphrasis, or not. Reading it as antiphrasis would correspond with the rhetorical question Miklós Nyiszli poses: "Who then – of our parents, brothers, children – was more fortunate, he who went to the left or he who went to the right?" Nyiszli 1993: 57. As outlined before, certain political and ethical opinions underlie our labelling of certain tropes, especially in this sensitive context.

with the author of said texts.[86] This also explains why the section on *The Politics of Memory* is remarkably shorter than that on *Abschied* and *Meine Ortschaft*: Hilberg's autobiography recuperates the emotional code of *Destruction*, and ends by motivating it. Weiss's autobiographical texts are rife with paradoxes and contrasts, and his emotional codes build upon a pre-existing discourse of trauma and non-representation.

In concluding, so-called "emotionless" rhetoric clearly does not indicate "feelinglessness". In general, however, it is easier to plausibly demonstrate that an author experiences strong feelings at the time of writing, even if he supposedly tries to hide them. Defining and qualifying these feelings is a different matter. The stimulus-response schema offers one explanation for this problem. According to this behaviouristic interpretation of feeling, the same stimulus may evoke different responses.[87] The simultaneous experiencing of distinct (but not contradictory) feelings further defies any definite attempt at qualifying feelings.

Equally, this does not necessarily mean that Hilberg wished to mask his feelings completely: it may simply indicate an adhering to his professional discipline's standards vis-à-vis objectivity and emotional communication, even if he probed at the limits of these standards. Ultimately, however, whether or not his "emotionless" rhetoric was an attempt at concealing his feelings remains uncertain, but this need not be problematic. It ought to be seen as an emotional code, to be found in certain registers, and which may have influenced other authors. It would be more fruitful to look for instances of this emotional code synchronically and diachronically, i.e. in contemporary discourses, but also in the historiography of the last decades.

By contrast, Weiss builds on an already-existing emotional code to depict and articulate the hopelessness of Auschwitz. Judging by his autobiographical writings (especially *Meine Ortschaft*) it seems safe to assume that these were not just politicised emotions but very personal feelings as well. Hilberg and Weiss seem to share a certain cynical outlook on both the possibility of the Shoah and the post-war politics of silence; an outlook which primarily points to a sense of personal involvement and suffering.

86 The argument pro or contra cannot be developed here; I recommend the reader consult the following texts: Genette 1991; Cohn 1999, especially Chapter 7; Fludernik 2013.

87 For a concise overview of stimulus-response theories, cf. Mellmann 2006, especially Chapter 1.

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Writing Wounded

Reading Djuna Barnes's Writership as Affective Agency

LAURA OULANNE

In a letter to poet Edwin Muir, Djuna Barnes (1892–1982) declares: "[…] I'm not a 'writer'; once in every twenty years or so, the wound bleeds, that's all."[1] This statement is one of her many striking one-liners, which have amused readers and intrigued researchers. As Julie Taylor points out, it portrays writing as "an intensely personal endeavor" for Barnes, which becomes puzzling when combined with her resistance to biographically oriented readings of her work, as well as the way her texts seem to share a high modernist aspiration toward an impersonal universality.[2] Taylor's work with this metaphor is inspiring and accurate, but a few things yet remain to be said about Barnes, wounds, writing and feelings.

In the light of writing and emotions, how should a literary researcher consider herself informed by such a statement? Of course, it is only one sentence, albeit a dramatic one. Scholars writing after the heyday of biographism are also accustomed not to put too much weight on what an author has to say about her writing. However, in this case it is quite tempting to literally take the author at her word, which quite a number of researchers of Barnes's fiction have done. Here the word in question would be "wound". It evokes immediate bodily pain, but also, etymologically considered, the returning pain of the past: *trauma* derives from the classical Greek *τραῦμα,* wound. There is biographical evidence that Barnes suffered some kind of sexual violation as a child, although the details remain unclear.[3] She grew up in a polygamous family with controversial atti-

1 Letter from 26 October 1957; quoted in Taylor 2012: 1.

2 Ibid.: 5-6. Barnes especially rejected the labels of "lesbian writer" or "woman writer".

3 Cf. Ibid.: 7; Herring 1995: 55-58, 268.

tudes towards sexuality, married and separated very young and had a problematic, physically close relationship with her grandmother. Later in life, Barnes had many unhappy love affairs, the most famous of these with artist Thelma Wood, unavoidably present in her novel *Nightwood* (1936). She sometimes refers to her writing as a claim for justice for the wrongs committed by others, and as a way to process trauma.[4] All this biographical information, as well as comments such as the one above, build an image of Barnes's writing as permeated by trauma and pain. In addition, however, we have her stories, novels, plays and poetry, which slightly complicate the case. As Taylor has shown, they resist biographical and "deep psychological explanation", and their relation to trauma is not one of simple covert repetition, but of creative and performative rewriting and possible reparation.[5]

Some have tried to yoke the life and the fiction together, however. Biographer Philip Herring is grasping for some kind of truth behind the fictional works, as he cites another letter of Barnes's: "I can't imagine spending years writing fiction, things made up entirely out of thin air, and without a foundation in some emotion."[6] This he follows with his own interpretation: "Invention was not a priority because in remembering her past she found no end of emotional subjects. She simply couldn't have invented fiction more compelling or bizarre than her life had been."[7] Barnes, in her comment, contrasts fictionality and made-upness with something she calls "a foundation in some emotion". It is Herring who draws the parallel between emotion and life: according to him, the emotions that grant the text a factual foundation are ones found in the writer's biography.

Such interpretation seems inescapably narrow – yet Barnes, as a readerly *feeling* of some sort of agency behind the text, remains present in the event of reading. When reading her work from the perspective of "writing emotions", it is this affective presence that needs to be dealt with; but how to do this without hastening to draw a parallel between the writer's life and her work? This essay discusses the readerly construction of Barnes's writerly agency. The logic of hidden-but-discoverable authorial emotions does not do justice to Barnes's work, but neither is it possible to completely disregard the author as an agent. We need to admit that the author as an imaginary, *affective* agent is present in the event of reading, but that we do not have access to her original, inner emotions, and that guessing at them is not necessary to be affected by a work of fiction. This is why

4 Cf. Herring 1995: 168, 281.

5 Taylor 2012: 18, 8-9.

6 Barnes to Emily Coleman 14 December 1935, quoted in Herring 1995: xvi.

7 Ibid.

the title of this essay says "reading Djuna Barnes's writership": I claim that to approach Barnes's "emotional foundations", we simply need to read, both her writing and her extraliterary statements.[8] In the following, I will first clarify some conceptual and theoretical starting points related to *reading, affect,* and *agency*, then discuss two examples from Barnes's short fiction, and finish by returning to the introductory quotations, on which I hope the reading of fiction will shed new light.

HOW TO READ THE WRITER AS AN AFFECTIVE AGENT

As the focus of this essay is on how the sense of the writer emerges in reading, a brief look is needed into how this kind of reading is conceptualized. Combining Monika Fludernik's concept of 'figuralization' with enactivist phenomenology[9] and psychological text-processing studies, Marco Caracciolo suggests that it is not so much the reader's consciousness but a fictionalized, virtual version of the reader's body that can be projected into the fictional world. This phenomenon he calls "the fictionalization of the reader's virtual body".[10] The virtual body is rooted in the experiences of the reader's actual body: the embodied experiences of moving, perceiving and being in the world enable readers to enact the experiences attributed to fictional characters.[11] Caracciolo limits his discussion to the enactment of characters' movements in space and does not, for instance, separately discuss affective experience. However, the same idea could extend to that direction as well, since affective experience is also embodied experience, and it is often through the described gestures, movements and bodily feelings that a character's affective state is conveyed in an immersive way (more so than through naming it, as for instance "excitement", "joy", "sadness" and so on).

8 I will also prefer the term 'writer' to 'author', to highlight both the process-like, materially inclined aspect of *doing* involved, as well as to be able to think of this action as paired with that of *reading*.

9 The enactivist branches of phenomenology and cognitive science entail a view of the organism *enacting* its cognition in a dynamic relationship to its lifeworld, instead of passively receiving and processing information from a separate outer world. Views of this kind usually also imply, as opposed to Cartesian dualism, that cognitive functions are essentially embodied. See for instance Varela et al. 1991; Noë 2004; Colombetti 2014.

10 Caracciolo 2014: 160.

11 Cf. Ibid.

To go one step further, the aim here is to experiment with the proposal that there is a similar process involved in the way readers imagine a writerly agent beyond the text. The writer's body could be seen as one of the fictionally constructed bodies inviting the reader's enactment, besides characters and narrators. Even though this body is not described in the text, and in that sense is not experiential, it is there in flashes of a sense of an agency making choices of words and events, moving characters, giving and withholding information and so forth. It might – but it need not – come close to the narrator of the text. This model differs from the 'implied author' introduced by Wayne C. Booth[12] in that it underlines the readers' capacity to imagine the author as a lived and affective material body that we can grasp through our own livedness and materiality, *in addition to* construing a purely textual projection. Readers will also undoubtedly make assumptions and deductions on the basis of what they know about the writer's life, which may lead to deliberation of authorial intentions, and further into biographically oriented interpretations. The intention here, however, is not to go down this path, but to focus on the kind of affective presence the text invites its reader to enact. As Yanna Popova has written, "what matters in literary reading is not a recovery of the intention of a real person (the author) but the reader's projection of one: the fact that a reader engages in a hypothetical attribution of meaning to an agency in the text".[13]

The claim that this presence of the writer is *affective* also requires some explanation. I am using the concept of 'affect' in the sense of a not-so-clearly definable *feeling,* a tone, often to refer not to any particular kind of affect but to the general domain and activity of feeling, moving and being moved. As such, it is distinct from what is usually referred to as an *emotion,* even though there is also considerable overlap in the definitions – and even though 'emotion' is the term used by Barnes in the quotation above. One way to think of the difference would be the following generalization: affects occur somewhere in between bodies, whereas emotion is usually seen as arising from an individual subject, as a result of a cognitive process, which is often an appraisal of a given situation.[14] Jonathan Flatley puts the difference in the following words: "Where *emotion* suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indi-

12 Cf. Booth 1961.

13 Popova 2015: 64. Popova does not, however, emphasize the embodied or affective aspects of this projection.

14 There are, also, exceptions to this, as for instance, in the study of "collective emotions". However, the concept of affect allows for even wider scope of in-betweenness, reaching beyond intersubjectivity, in that it is also capable of encompassing nonhuman 'bodies'.

cates something relational and transformative. One *has* emotions; one is affected *by* people or things."[15]

Using 'affect' like this binds this discussion to a certain theoretical tradition. The definitions that I follow stem mostly from the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affectivity. For Deleuze, affect is "any mode of thought which doesn't represent anything".[16] Brian Massumi's preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* offers a more precise but concise definition of affect as a "prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act".[17] Massumi and Flatley convey two significant sides of the concept of affect in this account: its connection with *agency* and a shift of location away from the individual and towards relationality. When studying Barnes's writing, this means both encounters and movements between bodies in the fictional world and relations between author, text and reader as affective bodies – not, for instance, the study of the *representation* of certain emotions.

Finally, the account of affect described above points toward the definitions of 'agency' put into use here. Marco Bernini has successfully drawn attention to writerly agency as "distributed", extending from the individual into multiple agencies in the material world (including the "materiality of words").[18] However, his focus is on theorizing authorial *intention*, and does not encompass affectivity. To reach toward the affectivity of writing and its presence in reading, I turn to theories of agency that take one step further from the notion of "material agency"[19] employed by Bernini, namely, the posthumanist and/or new materialist views presented by Karen Barad and Jane Bennett. The two have a lot of common ground but also some differences; however, this does not necessarily imply that they would be in conflict with one another.

Barad constructs her account of distributive agency on the basis of quantum physics. In this case, its distribution means that agency always happens in constellations involving more than one agent. However, the agents interacting in these constellations, which she calls "phenomena", actually emerge in and through them and do not pre-exist their "mutual entanglement"[20] as distinct from one another. Consider the writer, the text and the reader, and all of the other agencies involved in reading a story, for instance: the materialities of language,

15 Flatley 2008: 12, emphasis in original.

16 Deleuze 1978.

17 Massumi 2013: xv.

18 Bernini 2014: 350.

19 Bernini 2014; cf. Malafouris 2008.

20 Barad 2007: 32-33.

the book, the context and so on. A written story needs the printed or otherwise materially present form to be read, and a reader to read it; the reader becomes a reader only in the act of reading; and the reader's sense of writerly agency emerges in the phenomenon of reading.

Barad does not refer to affect, but it does make sense to view these kinds of phenomena as affective. In Jane Bennett's thinking on the agency of the nonhuman, affect has a central role. Bennett conceives of agency in *assemblages*, "confederation[s] of human and nonhuman elements", in which the force of the confederation is more than the sum of its parts, and which results in the capacity to affect.[21] Thus, in Bennett's account, it is rather the effects, not the agencies involved, which emerge as a result of the constellation.

The following discussion of Barnes's writership draws on Barad in suggesting that even the agents themselves are emergent properties of a phenomenon, in this case the phenomena of reading passages of Barnes's fiction and her extraliterary comments. However, Bennett's account makes it possible to focus on such processes as affective. There is considerable overlap in the concepts of 'phenomenon' and 'assemblage', although they are not identical. For the sake of clarity, I will use 'phenomenon' to refer to the broader activities of reading involving the performative construction of writership, whereas by 'assemblage' I mostly denote constellations of characters and things in the fictional world, with whose help I discuss the affective dynamics and the sense of writerly agency involved. In the following, I wish to pin down some singular occurrences of a rather murky, ambiguous and momentary *sense* of writerly agency that a text, in this case Barnes's short stories, invites its readers to enact – while keeping the more broadly considered makings of that agency itself as an ontological backdrop.

MOVING THINGS: WRITERLY AGENCY IN THE *TABLEAUX VIVANTS* OF BARNES'S SHORT STORIES

This essay focuses on two stories rich with descriptive passages displaying material abundance characteristic for Barnes's work. There are a few reasons for selecting just such passages for closer analysis. For one thing, descriptive passages seem to be as close as we get to affects and emotions in Barnes's prose. Usually narrated in third person, her stories do not tend to use forms of psychonarration or other modes of reporting characters' emotions. Some of her work

21 Bennett 2010: 21, 23.

does feature the presentation of affective experience in free indirect discourse, but more often even this device is left out and replaced by mere diegetic description of a character's actions and scarce instances of dialogue. Furthermore, there seems to be a preference for the stillness of a *tableau* over dynamic action, which is a striking feature especially in short fiction, as it likens whole stories to still lifes, arrangements of objects.[22] These arrangements are never completely static, however. In the manner of assemblages, they are an arena for emerging affect and agency – like a *tableau* particularly *vivant.* Both the descriptions of action and the descriptive *tableaux* do indeed get their form in assemblages consisting of human characters and the things surrounding them, which highlights the nonhuman, thing-like and impenetrable elements in them. This does not, however, diminish the affective intensity of the stories.[23] In such a context, the authorial agency emerges as a skillful arranger comparable to a visual artist, which Barnes also was.

Another reason for a focus on abundant descriptions is that they express the style of *grandeur* and dramatic exaggeration that also characterizes Barnes's extraliterary comments and appearance, which have been discussed as a kind of performance comparable to her art – she even wrote journalism under the pseudonym "Pen Performer".[24] This style of expression can also be read in the more mimetic instances of witty and enigmatic dialogue in her fiction, but limiting the discussion to them would not admit a similar focus on distributed agency.

The first story discussed falls somewhere in the middle of the scale from *tableau* to action. "A Boy asks a Question" (originally "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady", 1923; revised version 1929) is a brief account of a meeting between Carmen la Tosca, an actress spending her holiday in a village, and a local boy, who approaches her with a vague but troubled question related to the general nature of love. The narrative proceeds in third person from a description of the character of Carmen and her setting towards a brief dialogue and an abrupt ending typical of the stories: "And that very afternoon, Carmen la Tosca rode off,

22 Barnes's earliest short stories, such as "The Jest of Jests" and "A Sprinkle of Comedy" (1917) display a different preference as regards action: they emphasize the element of *plot* and especially plots of intrigue, and even parody them. Cf. Plumb 1986: 52. They usually feature a very surprising turn of events and elements of slapstick comedy. However, the early stories, too, have a preference for opaque characters and a tendency to highlight the story as skillful arrangement (thereby highlighting an authorial presence as well), in which they resemble the *tableaux* of the later stories.

23 Cf. Oulanne 2016.

24 Cf. Taylor 2012: 1, 12; Caselli 2009: 1, 21, 27.

with her entire *entourage.*"[25] The narrator is quite intrusive, for instance in commenting on the introduction of Carmen in parentheses: "with a name like that, what could she be but an actress?"[26] The sudden ending and its wording invite a heightened sense of the agency of the writer: the character is taken away and the story ended *by* someone with the power to do it. Looking simply at one story, that someone could be said to be the narrator; but especially the context of the whole volume and its succession of comparable, drastic endings introduces also the sense of a continuing, writerly agency beyond different narrators.

At the heart of the story, there is a description of Carmen's breakfast:

> Carmen la Tosca breakfasted in bed, and late. Having caught herself out of sleep in a net of bobbin-lace, she broke fast with both food and scent, lazily dusting her neck and arms with perfumed talc, lolling on the bed (which stood between two ovals of pear-wood, framing versions of Leda and the swan), ripping through the wrappers of Puerto Rican journals and French gazettes with the blade of a murderous paper-cutter, and finally, in the total vacancy of complete indulgence, her hand sprawling across a screaming headline, would stare out into the harsh economy of russet boughs, pranked out in fruit.[27]

The description features slow characterly action, but it is almost of a metaphorical kind: Carmen is "catching herself out of sleep", lazily "lolling", and her hand is "sprawling across" a headline – we do not know if she reads it at all. The flood of things appeals to all (five) senses: there is the feel of bobbin-lace and dusting the neck, the rather abstract food and scent along with perfumed talc, the aurally striking onomatopoeia of "ripping through the wrappers of Puerto Rican journals and French Gazettes with the […] murderous paper-cutter", and with all this, the visual stimulus of both the whole assemblage and the specific reference to visual arts, the oval paintings. Together they form an entangled mixture of multisensory experiences in which the senses themselves are not clearly separable but come together in the haptic harshness of the boughs, the smell of food, the sound of ripping open a wrapper.

Both the presentation of things in this assemblage and the slight actions involved invite the reader's sensory and affective engagement. Carmen, like the majority of Barnes's characters, is opaque as to her thoughts and feelings ("no one knew her"[28]), but she still undeniably functions in the narrative as a feeling body into which the reader's virtual body can be projected. As I claim elsewhere,

25 Barnes 1997: 350.

26 Ibid.: 344.

27 Ibid.: 346-347.

28 Ibid.: 345.

the projection might spill over the borders of the human character and into the sensuously appealing things taking part in the assemblage, the surfaces touching one another.[29] As we are able to share the sensory experience of such things, it is enough to evoke them to make us enact an imaginary experience of sensory pleasure in the character.

Where, then, is the writerly agency lurking in a passage like this? The feelings evoked by the passage and the whole story seem to be mixed, dominated by a general ambiance of leisurely pleasure. However, the boy's question (what it is that has made his elder brother cry, and whether he will end up crying also) and the subsequent interaction add some darkness and tension. The combination of an older woman in bed, a child and the theme of love and suffering gestures toward the Oedipal scheme, especially if the reader is aware of the frequency of these motifs in Barnes's fiction; and access to biographical information might bring forth further associations with incest. In light of such considerations, it would be easy to see the multisensory pleasures of breakfast as both secondary and superficial, as covering for the actual, darker affective content of the story. However, to do justice to what actually happens in the fictional assemblage, we cannot disregard the pleasure, either. The clue really seems to be on the surface or between the surfaces, in the constellation in which the feelings, darker and lighter, emerge.[30] In the readerly experience, it is likely that pain and suffering become incorporated as parts of a plentiful, pleasurable whole; and we cannot say which feeling is the truer one: they are profoundly entangled in their material expressions.

Such entangled assemblages invite us to imagine and enact a version of an embodied Barnes-like agent moving the words as if they were objects like paper-cutters and laces, playing with feelings, characters and story structures: making gestures. Gesturing is a fitting analogy here, in the case of the virtual Barnes both as the extraliterary performer making comments about writing and as the writerly agency present in her fiction, as it evokes the dimensions of action and embodiment. Furthermore, there is no law as to how much one can gesture in one direction or another. An expression of luxury and pleasure as a gesture need not necessarily be balanced by a dark underside, and similarly there may be an abundance of suffering. The feelings evoked are only grounded in the materiali-

29 Cf. Oulanne 2016.

30 This kind of mixture might evoke the notion of *jouissance.* Cf. Barthes 1973. However, Taylor has convincingly demonstrated the necessity of not conflating pleasure and happiness with the more difficult and dark tones of jouissance in Barnes's *Ladies' Almanack* (1928). Cf. Taylor 2012: 147-148. The term may indeed carry unfortunate theoretical baggage, and will not be adopted here, either.

ties of the fictional assemblages, as well as the materialities involved in the phenomenon of reading, and these allow for both pleasure and pain.

The ability of writerly gestures to accommodate excess also becomes clear in another story, with descriptions of two fictional rooms:

> Everything was disorderly, and expensive and melancholy. Everything was massive and tall, or broad and wide. A chest of drawers rose above my head. The china stove was enormous and white, enameled in blue flowers. The bed was so high that you could only think of it as something that might be overcome. The walls were all bookshelves, and all the books were bound in red morocco […].
> It was a beautiful room, Madame, '*traurig*' as she said. Everything was important and old and gloomy. The curtains about the bed were red velvet, Italian you know, and fringed in gold bullion. The bed cover was a deep red velvet with the same gold fringe: on the floor, beside the bed, a stand on which was a tasselled red cushion, on the cushion a Bible in Italian, lying open.[31]

These assemblages are encountered in two separate bedrooms, in the story "Cassation" (originally published as "A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady", 1925, revised version 1929). It is one of a cycle of three stories all focalized and narrated by Katya, a young woman of Russian origin leading a cosmopolitan life. In Berlin, she meets a mysterious older lady, Gaya, who invites her to stay with her in a luxurious house, and later, after a year, to take care of her disabled child and stay "forever" in the house without going out. This Katya refuses, leaving and returning only once, to find Gaya succumbed to some kind of madness beyond language, comparable to the inert state of the child. The ending is once again also a departure: Gaya says "go away", Katya goes and concludes: "Things are like that, when one travels, *nicht wahr,* Madame?"[32]

As we can see, in addition to the similarity of the original titles, "Cassation" also shares several thematic and structural features with "A Boy Asks a Question": encounters that seem meaningful, but whose meaning is not completely disclosed to the reader (denying the moment of epiphany typical of short stories); a sense of stagnation as opposed to action (while the actions of "telling" and "asking" are present in the original titles), with the exception of the endings; a preference for foreign-sounding, specialized or archaic words (*entourage, nicht wahr,* cassation, gazette…); a bed, a character on a bed, and the whole surrounded by an array of things with the air of luxury. In "Cassation", however, the role of the character as agent is perhaps smaller than in "A Boy Asks a Question",

31 Barnes 1997: 384-386.

32 Ibid.: 392.

and the human component in the assemblages comes mainly in the form of Katya's focalization. And as Katya is also the narrator, the writerly agency does not seem to identify with this fictional position as clearly as in the previous story. In any case, this amount of repetition on different levels prompts the sense of shared writerly agency behind the texts.

The excerpts from "Cassation" are teeming with mixed feelings, even more explicitly than in the first story. "Melancholy", "gloomy" and "*traurig*" are direct references to emotions, which participate in the affective coloring of the whole assemblage. However, not everything in this assemblage is reducible to the gloomy ambiance. Red velvet and morocco, blue-and-white china, gold bullion and fringe, the cushion and the bible bring forth both sensuous and culturally defined qualities with affective potential of their own. The evocation of the soft feel of velvet bed covers and morocco book covers is combined with the associations of fine materials in red and gold to both status and pleasure: royal or papal interiors and garments as well as the lush privacy of boudoirs or even brothels of the 19th century and beyond. When reading onward from the "gloom" evoked in the first sentence, it is plausible that a reader will experience affective shifting towards something again governed by sensuous pleasure, through an embodied projection of the reader's virtual body into the narrator's experience of the space. Yet the darker tones do not completely disappear either. The most frequent word in the passages is "everything", and the predominant feeling might be that of excess and abundance, extending in every direction: things are either "massive and tall" or "broad and wide", never small or middle-sized, as if Goldilocks had entered a cabin with only the large bear present, or Alice had just drunk the shrinking potion.

In this story, the luxurious coverings do indeed hide something: a disabled child is kept in the house, lying on the first high bed, like a dark secret or a black hole into which Gaya later is sucked. However, Barnes does not leave it at that. Once again, the image of a bed is combined with an older woman, this time also associated with mother (earth) by her name, and a younger woman (in the title, a "little girl").[33] There is also a "declining"[34] husband looming about in the house, although no one seems to be particularly interested in him. The potential Oedipal drama between these players is never realized, however. In "Cassation", it is descriptions of very slight movements, of hands touching fabrics, taking off and putting on clothes, touching the pages of the bible, that remain most poignant, like an intimate ritual, or like a dream (Katya herself describes having become a

33 Or two older women, if we also consider "Madame", the narratee.

34 Ibid.: 386.

"*religieuse*" in the house).[35] There is no sense of narrative suspense related to discovering the "secret", and no tragic culmination in the revelation: in the end, Katya enters and leaves what was to become her prison "quite easily by the door, for all the doors and windows were open"[36] and finds the mother and child on the bed. The writer seems to be showing everything: and that "everything" is indeed golden and gloomy, red and soft and *traurig,* all at the same time, and there is actually nothing to discover because there is nothing to hide.

Some of the subject matter of both "Cassation" and "A Boy Asks a Question", is undoubtedly made of the stuff of Barnes's biography. There are motifs she keeps repeating in all her writing: mother and son/daughter figures engaged in love, seduction and power, weak and peripheral men, beds and bibles, fine fabrics and decadent pleasures. However, our understanding of the affective content of the stories *and* of the writer's agency, from a readerly perspective, is to remain thwarted if we limit ourselves to explaining it in light of what we know of Barnes's past, the wounds we imagine her to have carried. Barnes as a virtual, enacted, gesturing agent behind the story gives us both pleasure and pain in abundance.

We have experimented with a readerly position that brackets suspicion and conceives of the writer's agency as an embodied presence making gestures. The meaning of the work itself becomes something of an affective gesture, and the text an affective body moving readerly bodies, with the writer's virtual body as a prime mover. This does not mean that *symbolic* meanings would not exist in Barnes's work – they most definitely do, and are present in this reading as well. An attention to symbolic meaning is necessary to make sense of the stories, and, as we will see, also of Barnes's commentary. However, what has been avoided here is the conflation of the "deeper meaning" with the author's intention and agency, and the search for the original emotion. In the following, it remains to show that this is the readerly position from which we can also provide a more encompassing reading of Barnes's metaphor of the wound.

RECLAIMING THE WOUND

Read in the context of the totality of Barnes's oeuvre, the wound need not point merely toward pain experienced by the writer's actual body. Rather, the word could be seen as an affective agent like the paper-cutter, Carmen la Tosca, the

35 Cf. ibid.: 387.

36 Ibid.: 392.

velvet bed cover, the china stove or the bible, which need not be separate from considering its symbolic meanings. Symbols and metaphors, being assemblages of their own kind, also need some materiality for their meaning to emerge: the materialities of the pictorial or linguistic form they take, the materialities involved in the phenomenon of their interpretation, as well as the way metaphorical thinking in general draws on our embodied experience.[37] In the context of the quotation about writing, the word choice comes across as a dramatic and accentuated gesture. It is capable of evoking some kind of embodied enactment of pain. Taylor compares the wound in the comment to the image of a bleeding tree in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata,* which in turn is used in Cathy Caruth's influential study as a metaphor for the repetition inherent in trauma.[38] However, in the context of affective abundance created by Barnes's fiction, the sensation of pain is accompanied by a bundle of other feelings and meanings.

Barnes often uses Christian, more specifically Roman Catholic, iconography, which can also be seen in the excerpts from "Cassation".[39] A wound that sometimes bleeds also resonates with statues and paintings that are found miraculously weeping blood, as well as the phenomenon of stigmata, and the image of the "Sacred" or "Bleeding Heart", a symbol for Christ's love for humanity, which is explicitly evoked in another story.[40] The wound thus comes to embody a type of animism and its bleeding to signify the *coming to life* of something inanimate. An occasionally bleeding wound also evokes menstruation and female genitals, and thus is likened to reproduction and creation.[41] The association between wound and life need not suppress the sense of pain involved, or to cause us to rush into an abstract celebration of life and creativity. For instance, Suzanne Bost has shown how pain and illness are mingled with understandings of life and creation in Catholic traditions.[42] This has potential to change the reading of the

37 Cf. Lakoff/Johnson 2003.

38 Cf. Taylor 2012: 10; Caruth 1996, 2.

39 In another letter, Barnes discusses her secrecy as an attempt to let a wound heal, and jumps to mention "The wound in the side of Christ" and, as interpreted by Caselli, ends up arguing that the wound, whatever it is, needs to stay open as public testimony of a wrongdoing. Barnes to Emily Coleman, 30 November 1937; cf. Caselli 2009: 195-196.

40 "Aller et Retour" (1924); Barnes 1997: 363, 366.

41 Wounds and femininity also come together in Naomi Schor's influential essay on "female fetishism" Schor 1995; elsewhere, I show how Barnes's version of fetishism is also defined by the logic of "everything" instead of lack and recompensation. (Cf. Oulanne Forthcoming).

42 Cf. Bost 2010: 60–76.

whole quotation to something along the lines of "I am not a writer, but every once in a while I come painfully to life – and writing happens."

This way, the comment becomes a simultaneous renunciation and claiming of agency, in which the meaning of agency itself undergoes a change. Barnes commits a performative gesture of handing writership over to "the wound". However, in light of Barad's thinking, we can see her as emerging as an agent and an author only in the event of the enunciation of her words. If we follow this line further, it is not at all far-fetched to say that a wound could be involved as an agent in the phenomenon of writing. In the other quotation, Barnes renounces "writing fiction" and claims emotional foundation for her writership. In a sense, we could "take her at her word" – and understand the foundations to involve, but not to be limited to, her imaginary body as a feeling agent. This body would become performatively moulded in such utterances, as well as in the fiction. When complemented with some cultural understanding surrounding wounds and put in the context of Barnes's fiction, we get a vision of writing profoundly connected to trauma, but in a relation that constantly makes something new and different, something affectively manifold grow out of it.

TO CONCLUDE

Daniela Caselli notes how Barnes's body, clad in an impressive black cape she was usually seen wearing, "haunts the criticism".[43] It does seem like we cannot get rid of the writer-as-a-body, but letting her be part of the reading does not need to mean speculation about the experience of a biographical body. The agency behind Barnes's stories seems to create a play with meanings and feelings, which is not left floating in a relativist void but remains grounded in actual and virtual materialities. The writerly body is the one moving things, but the things move the readers, and readers need to enact these movements to make sense of them. Not all agencies should be set on the same plane: the author and reader are different *in kind* from book and pen and paper, as characters are different from paper-cutters and tassels – although there is also a difference between paper-cutters and tassels. Yet the human agents become not only affected by these things but constituted as writers and readers in contact with them.

Barnes's gesture of renouncing writership and attributing it to a wound has potential to move readers in many ways, inviting a multitude of images, meanings and sensations that tend toward the abundance of her fiction. "A foundation

43 Caselli 2009: 15.

in some emotion" cannot be read simply as an invitation to discover the original, conceptualizable emotion, be it sadness, bitterness or happiness, in the writer's actual life. Barnes's writing opens its doors and windows and presents us with assemblages that say, "this is all there is." Such gestures might make an educated reader suspicious: surely something must remain hidden, too? This is quite true, in the sense that all the elements cannot be exhaustively explained and made sense of. However, were we to understand literary sense-making as a process of going through an experience with the story, being moved by its materiality and its symbolism, as we should here, we could say that Barnes does really show "everything". While doing this, the writer performatively creates herself as the provider and organizer of this abundance. Through her commentary, she shows that all of it emerges, as it were, from a wound. In the act of writing, pain and pleasure are intertwined, and trauma becomes *also* a creative force. Another flashy statement attributed to Barnes shows a lighter take on the subject, while keeping agency and writing close to materiality: "Keep on writing. It's a woman's only hope, except for lace making."[44]

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