Affective Affinities:
Memory, Empathy and the Weight of History in the Work of Herta Müller

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DECLARATION

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THESIS SUMMARY

Herta Müller's writing forms a densely interwoven body of work that merges fiction, autobiography and political commentary. Previous analyses have failed to develop a critical framework that encompasses her self-consciously difficult texts' forms, contents, intents and impacts. This project was designed to test the potential of recent theories of memory (notably the work of Alison Landsberg, Michael Rothberg and Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman) as a critical framework for interpreting Müller's work. The image-worlds and affective resonances of texts such as *Niederungen* (1982), *Herztier* (1994) and *Atemschaukel* (2009) allow specific histories of National Socialism, Romanian Communism and Stalin-era forced labour to stand for something larger: all the suffering of history's unknown Others, all the mental and physical violence human beings perpetrate on one another. Müller's approach to memory is orientated around the possibility that attention to the past and to our shared vulnerability can mobilise ethical engagement. Her texts rework memory as a route towards imagination and empathetic engagement, not a mere imitation of history, bound to facts. She prioritises "authenticity" – meaning larger structures of experience – over reality or specificity. Pushing her reader to attend to memories which are not their own, and engage with patterns of perception that uncover a common humanity, her work represents specific experiences but presents them as iterations. Thus memory alludes to the present and demands action. Empathy is Müller's ultimate concern: memory serves to foster ethical engagement. My critical framework captures the way her writing exploits universal experiences of memory and historically located subjectivity, encompassing core elements of her themes and aesthetics and offering a new perspective on her work. *Affective Affinities* represents a first step in holistic readings of Müller and reframes memory as the engine rather than the fuel of her ethical and literary projects.

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This thesis is dedicated to my Nana, Monica Watson, who took a sixteen year-old goth on holiday to Hesse, showed her the sights and made a budding obsession with all things German significantly worse. She started work at fourteen and didn't get a chance to follow her interests. I feel deeply lucky to be twenty eight and still developing mine.

Contents

Introduction: The Weight of History and the Potentials of Memory

Herta Müller is an author whose work is only beginning to be fully recognised. Far from becoming a household name after her Nobel Prize win in 2009, she has remained on the periphery of the international literary scene. Her ability to represent marginal histories was praised by the Nobel Committee but this choice of subject matter has contributed to the perception of her as an author whose work is idiosyncratic and of limited relevance beyond the context of Romania, the land of her birth (Braun, 2013, 224). Müller's texts are highly personal and locally situated, and draw consistently on her experiences as a dissident under Ceaușescu and the history of the Banat-Swabian ethnic group into which she was born. Her work serves an important function as a 'history from below' of situations and experiences unfamiliar outside the former communist bloc. However, to focus too narrowly on the autobiographical dimension of Müller's writing is to overlook its universal relevance and the groundbreaking methods of representing human historical subjectivity it contains. She uses the past and the way we relate to it as a means for promoting ethical, empathetic engagement not only with her life story and the lives of her characters but with the experience of all oppressed people. She speaks of a common type of experience founded in state-orchestrated 'Todesangst', which damages and destroys the individual even where the threat of death is never realised, leaving them 'zerbrochen' (*Falle*, 36). Invoking the memory of the 'Zerbrochene' and communicating their experiences through references to personal, collective and cultural memory becomes a means for identifying and reacting against political and ideological regimes that inflict such suffering in the present.

This dissertation is the first to identify memory as the central focus of Müller's work and to analyse it – as a recurring theme and formal and ethical underpinning – across the full breadth of her *oeuvre*. Her use of memory defies easy description and analysis through a single theoretical framework. Instead I have combined elements of several recent theories of post-national, non-narrative and non-indexical memory in order to describe the techniques which make up Müller's distinctive approach, such as a focus on sensation, symbolism, patterns of images and comparison. Examining these interrelated features from different critical perspectives allows me to capture what makes her writing unique as a study of memory and bring together some of the most productive lines of enquiry in existing scholarship on her work. From the very beginning, Müller's writing has been saturated with historical awareness and has presented memory, particularly memories of

the National Socialist era, as the basis for ethical dilemmas and responses. It also mimics the mechanisms and sensations of memory, such as involuntary memory, association and decoding through cultural memory, continually reminding the reader of their experience as a remembering subject and producing a complex imbrication of individual subjectivity and text. Müller uses memory, at the level of narrative and of imagery, as a means for creating empathy, questioning responses to the past and challenging her reader to engage with their imagined other, to ask 'what would I have done?' She explores the relationship between memory and historical awareness, highlighting what cannot be known – the experience of the (historical) Other – and revealing ways of imagining that render it momentarily visible. The fundamental importance of the past to Müller's work is immediately obvious but has remained a marginal concern in scholarship; this project locates memory at the centre of Müller's imaginary universe and reveals the gains to be made by adopting memory as the focus of our critical approach.

A Writer at the Convergence of Histories: Life and Works

Herta Müller is a writer who reflects intensively on the multiple historical circumstances which determined her life. She was born in Nitzkydorf (Nițchidorf), a small village in rural Banat, Romania in 1953 to parents, Josef and Katharina, whose lives had been fundamentally changed by the Second World War and the opposing regimes of Hitler and Stalin. Josef, a volunteer to the Waffen-SS at seventeen, served on the Eastern Front until 1945 and returned to the village from military internment in Britain to become a lorry driver (*Onkel*, 85-6; Zierden, 1987, 84). Müller's mother, Katharina, also left the village, but did so as a forced labourer taken to the Soviet Union to repair infrastructure destroyed during Operation Barbarossa, as restitution for German crimes. She returned after five years of crippling labour, prematurely aged and exhausted, and Müller has described the lifelong aftereffects of her mother's imprisonment on her behaviour and mentality (Müller, 2012). Raised in a conservative community in which the authoritarian ideology of the pre-war era still dominated, Müller experienced the dual repression of minority and state, calling the village 'die erste Diktatur, die ich kannte' (Haines and Littler, 1998, 18). Her move to the city of Timişoara for grammar school in 1968 represented a caesura and brought about her first confrontation with the Nazi past, which had been variously glorified and glossed over in the village, through her history lessons and in books as well as with the true nature of the Ceauşescu dictatorship (Hensel, 1987, ZB2). She began

publishing poetry while still a schoolgirl in the youth supplement of the local newspaper, *Neue Banater Zeitung*, moving on to publish in anthologies and the Bucharest journal *Neue Literatur* from the late 1970s.

Her first novel-length work, *Niederungen*, published in 1982 in the wake of her father's death, was a critical, if not uncontroversial, success in both Romania and West Germany, increasing her profile and drawing the more intensive interest of the *Securitate*, which had been putting her under pressure for her association with other minority German authors since the mid-1970s. These included the former members of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, who were considered troublemakers for their attacks on traditional values and interest in the fascist past. The decade Müller spent working closely with these friends and the intensive engagement with the Nazism of their parents' generation had a profound affect on her iconoclasm and approach to the past as a haunting, warning presence in the present day. The same period also saw her endure years of increasingly disturbing harassment, including interrogations, house searches, defamations and threats of violence, an experience she has addressed repeatedly in her works. It would later emerge that her flat was bugged and that several of her acquaintances and a close friend had turned informant (see *Cristina und ihre Attrappe. Oder was in den Akten der Securitate nicht steht*). Although she continued to publish in Romania in the early 1980s – her second collection of interlinked short stories, *Drückender Tango* (1984) continued many of the themes established in *Niederungen* – by 1985 the regime was limiting Müller's contact to the outside world and she reached the decision to emigrate (Kegelmann, 1995, 51; Krause, 1998, 150, 152). Under a *Veröffentlichungsverbot*, Müller, along with her mother and her husband, the writer Richard Wagner, would wait over eighteen months to leave. In the meantime, she managed to smuggle writing, including *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (1986) to the West through contacts, and used the attention of the West German media as leverage to prevent the Romanian authorities from taking more drastic action (Glajar and Brandt, 2013, 44). Müller emigrated to the Federal Republic in February 1987.

Her arrival in relative safety in the West allowed Müller to begin addressing all that had happened to her in Romania more directly, and she intensified her personal campaign (begun while still in Romania)[1] to correct the lack of knowledge in the West regarding

[1] e.g. 'Wir wollen dieses Land aus politischen Gründen verlassen. Gespräch mit der rumäniendeutschen Schriftstellerin Herta Müller'. (Müller-Wieferig, 1986, 21-23 cited Müller, J., 2014, 292n).

communism in general and Romania in particular (Spiridon, 2002, 156).[2] She wrote essays and newspaper columns and gave numerous interviews recounting her experiences, as well as campaigning on specific issues such as the destruction of villages in Romania (as part of Ceauşescu's manic drive for urbanisation) and refugee rights. Her first novel written after emigrating, *Reisende auf einem Bein* (1989), carried the peculiar, fearful perspective of Müller's previous narrators – who respond to circumstances in Romania and the repression of the Banat-Swabian village milieu – into the setting of West Berlin and reflected on the experience of flight and the indifference of West German society to the refugees in their midst. There followed works which offered detailed insight into the kinds of regimes that were causing people to flee the communist bloc. *Der Fuchs war schon damals der Jäger* (1992) focuses on the final months of the Ceauşescu dictatorship, highlighting the violence of the regime against the backdrop of ongoing disappearances of people from the country. *Herztier* (1994), one of Müller's most elaborate and exemplary works, ties together the two settings of the Banat-Swabian village and the late-stage communist city to reflect on the nature of historical responsibility and the damage wrought on personal relationships by totalitarianism. Scenes of interrogation similar to those seen in *Herztier* become the prime focus in *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* (1997), the narrative of which unfolds during a narrator's journey to an appointment with the secret police. After this novel Müller produced no fiction for twelve years, only publishing three collections each of essays and collages – both areas of her writing life in which she is relatively prolific – in a departure from her previous pattern.

The apparent slowing down in fiction writing during this period was followed by another of the pivotal moments which have marked Müller's life: the publication of *Atemschaukel* (2009), which was closely followed by her award of the Nobel Prize in Literature. The most overtly memory-focused of her works, *Atemschaukel* is a fictionalised account of the deportations of Germans to the Soviet Union, based in part on the testimony of poet Oskar Pastior. The two authors' intensive collaboration on a novel about the labour camps – a project Müller claims to have always intended to write, because of her mother's experience there – led to a great friendship and artistic relationship that was cut short by Pastior's death in 2006 (Müller, 2012). Having worked with Pastior for several years, Müller was forced to come to terms with writing without his input and has spoken of having to find a new voice for the text and permit herself to depart from Pastior's reports

[2] 'Man ist in Deutschland so oft versucht, Metaphorik zu sehen, wo es für mich nackte Realien sind'. (Haines and Littler, 1998, 18)

in some cases (Müller, 2012). What resulted was a novel which has been acclaimed around the world and which, together with the Nobel Prize, has led to a new wave of translations of Müller's works into different languages, including Chinese and Polish (Sievers, 2013, 180) . *Atemschaukel* combines all the features and themes of the works that preceded it – vividly subjective narration, complex visual images, highly poetic language, trauma, suffering, loss, the individual's assertion of her own existence and selfhood – with meticulous research into the universe of the *Gulag*.

Existing Scholarship and the Aims of This Project

Despite being active since the late 1970s Müller was little-known until after her emigration in 1987, a delay reflected in the secondary works by Western scholars, which only appeared after 1989 (with the exception of newspaper editorials). Norbert Otto Eke, who contributed an entry on Müller to *Harenbergs Lexikon der Weltliteratur* in 1989, edited the first volume on her in 1991. Eke has gone on to become one of the most respected scholars of her work and the 1991 volume *Die erfundene Wahrnehmung. Annäherung an Herta Müller* sets out issues which remain important to Müller scholarship: narrative perspective, the transformation of experience into fragmentary assemblages of images, the repressive culture of the Banat-Swabian village, and the recurrence of images of death and decay in her writing. These were developed further in Ralph Köhnen's 1997 edited volume *Der Drück der Erfahrung treibt die Sprache in die Dichtung. Bildlichkeit im Werk Herta Müllers*, in which essays on natural imagery and the importance of detail were supplemented with several analyses of Müller's essays. 1998 saw the publication of the first scholarly work on Müller in the English-speaking world. *Herta Müller*, edited by Brigid Haines, the most wide-ranging secondary work to that date, contains pieces on Müller's ethics, representations of the city and response to totalitarianism, as well as an influential interview with Müller, conducted by Haines and Margaret Littler. Two more edited volumes were published in English following Müller's Nobel Prize win: *Herta Müller* (2013, edited by Haines and Lyn Marven) and *Herta Müller: Politics and Aesthetics* (2013, edited by Bettina Brandt and Valentina Glajar). The first of these is an attempt to give an overview of her work, with a partial focus on the context of Müller's literary development, in Romania, under Romanian communism and as a speaker of the Romanian language. It develops themes such as life writing and gender, and reflects on the

impact of the Nobel Prize. Brandt and Glajar's volume can be divided into two main themes: the importance of Müller's personal experience for her writing and the importance of objects to her aesthetic. Both themes are predominantly developed through analysis of Müller's post-1989 works, with *Herztier* and *Atemschaukel* as the main focus of the essays.

Scholarly collaboration has been the hallmark of Müller research, which has so far seen relatively few single author studies. Edited collections and special issues of journals such as *Literatur für Leser* (34(2), 2011), *Gegenwartsliteratur* (10, 2011) and *Text+Kritik* (155, 2002), as well as multiple individual articles responding to similar themes such as trauma (see Chapter One) point to a lively and tight-knit, if somewhat unassuming, scholarly community. Few scholars who work on Müller do so anywhere near exclusively and monographs, where they have appeared, have tended to take Müller as an example of a theme or mode of writing alongside other authors such as Paul Celan, Günter Grass and Libuse Moníková. These monographs have focused on minor literature (Astrid Schau *Leben ohne Grund*, 2003), trauma (Marven, *Body and Narrative*, 2005), alterity (Iulia Patrut, *Schwarze Schwester – Teufelsjunge*, 2006; Maria S. Grewe, *Estranging Poetic*, 2009) and space (Antje Johanssen, *Kisten, Krypten, Labyrinthen*, 2015). Exceptions to this have included the study of Müller's writing as a tool for the classroom (Carmen Wagner, 2002), the socio-cultural background of German-speaking Romanian (Herta Haupt-Cucuiu, 2011) and thematic studies of issues such as provocation (Graziella Prediou, 2001) and alienation (Paola Bozzi, 2005). Studies published after the Nobel Prize (such as Haupt-Cucuiu's) demonstrate a notable turn to reconsiderations of Müller's pre-1987 works such as *Barfüßiger Februar* (Roxanne Compagne's *Fleischfressendes Leben*, 2010) and schoolgirl poetry (Julia Müller's *Sprachtakt*, 2014).

The past and memory are recognised as important throughout Müller scholarship but have appeared predominantly as marginal topics or as appendages to other ideas. Surveys of secondary literature seem to suggest that the presence of the past is so ubiquitous to Müller's writing that it is taken for granted. Nevertheless, significant work has been done on specific aspects of Müller's approach to memory in the broadest sense. Her autofictional approach and the importance of personal experience to her writing and ethics has been widely discussed (Dagmar Von Hoff, 1998; Beverly Driver Eddy, 2000; Köhnen, 2002; Katrin Kohl, 2013; Pavlo Shopin; 2014), as has the role of memory in forming the perspective of her narrators and their attachment to objects (David Midgeley, 1998; Eddy, 2013; Katrina Nousek, 2013; Monika Moyrer, 2013). Another trend to emerge

in relation to memory is the consideration of Müller's writing as memory work, in particular in relation to the *Gulag*s (Karin Bauer, 1996a; René Kegelmann, 2003; Olivia Spiridon, 2009; Haines, 2013; Glajar, 2013). Of these works, the majority respond to Müller's personal history and comments on autofiction, with few making reference to theories of memory or wider memory debates. A notable exception to this is Haines's work on *Atemschaukel* and 'soft memory' (2013) and the distinct but related stream of trauma-based interpretations of Müller's work by Eddy (2000), Haines (2002) and Marven (2005; 2013) in particular.

A focus on memory and the application of memory theory has the potential to unite some of the most productive lines of enquiry in existing Müller scholarship. Müller's writing as response to totalitarianism, the bringing together of disparate times and places in her fiction and non-fiction, her sensitivity to language, her reliance on images of horror and fearful perspectives, her autofiction and her profound ethical investment in the Other are all aspects of her central concern with memory and can be analysed afresh through a memory theory framework. Memory is both a thematic and a formal hallmark of Müller's work, and a means to account for some of the most challenging aspects of her writing, including the involvement of the reader in the creation of meaning, the tension between the specific and the universal, its profound affective impact, and the way in which it is haunted by the past. It is also a key to better explaining Müller's ethics.

Of course, memory theory is an extremely broad field, with a plethora of approaches and interests, ranging from collective memory, and the work of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, to psychoanalytical analyses of personal remembering and representations of cultural memory. It is today also a highly politicised field of enquiry developed above all in response to the Holocaust and the emergence of trauma as an interpretative framework in the 1990s. Memory theory in cultural studies has a tendency to be proscriptive, descending into quasi-scientific attempts to categorise and distinguish rigidly between different kinds of memory. Some of these endeavours have produced important insights, such as that collective memory must be understood only as a metaphor (because all memory is individual) (Erll, 2010, 4) but other categorisations, such as Jan Assmann's distinction between collective and cultural memory are less usefully applicable to the analysis of real examples, since memory is always an interaction between its different aspects (Assmann, 2010, 110-11). The preponderance of value judgements attached to memory, especially to memories of historical traumas such as the Second World War, have led to what Amir Eshel calls a 'symptomatic reading' of many texts,

which are judged by the political appropriateness of their representations (Eshel, 2013, 11, 31-2, 34-5). A prominent example of this in Germany is the debate around post-war fiction and whether works do enough to represent and engage with the history of German guilt. Policing of representation, which is often held to the same standards as public debate and political discourse, is founded in a 'zero-sum logic' of contest, which holds that there is a finite amount of public attention and that narratives about the past must not obscure the prime narrative of the Holocaust or neglect contrition (Rothberg, 2009, 5). Comparison tends to be conflated with equation and seen to lead to the loss of critical insight and reduction of the experience of others (Rothberg, 2011, 525). What emerges is an ongoing struggle to account for the breadth and variety of historical experience and the move away from first-hand accounts of the great traumas of the twentieth century precipitated by the passing of time.

Recent developments in memory theory point to ways out of these dilemmas by bringing ethical considerations to bear on the previously thorny subject of memories that are not our own. Theories of postmemory (Marianne Hirsch, 1997, 2012) and intergenerational transmission examine the possibility of 'remembering' loved ones' experiences by proxy, and prosthetic memory (Alison Landsberg, 2004) considers how emotional investment and bodily experience might allow one to remember the experience of unknown others through recourse to cultural memory. Multidirectional memory (Michael Rothberg, 2009) concerns the productive, critical gains that can be made by the comparison of different historical contexts and experiences, brought together in moments of connection, and palimpsestic memory (Max Silverman, 2013) holds that history exists in layers and iterations in the present. Concentrationary memory (Griselda Pollock and Silverman, 2014) also concerns the presence of the past in the present but focuses specifically on the haunting presence of the Holocaust in representation, including in individual images.

All of these theories revolve around ideas of imagination, comparison, haunting and ethical investment and represent forms of memory that are grounded neither in personal experience *per se* nor in narrative memory at all. They rely on momentary awareness, sensation, fleeting connections and tensions between sameness and difference, focusing on the individual's cultural memory, a passively-developed sum of conceptions about what the past was like, yet advocating active engagement with this realm of knowledge. Each of the theories is concerned with ethics and several of them draw on work by Hannah Arendt (*On the Origins of Totalitarianism*; *Between Past and Future*) and

Walter Benjamin ('Über den Begriff der Geschichte') on the past as a driver of ethical engagement. They present ways in which memory enables the individual to seek knowledge of the Other and offer recognition (Judith Butler), and hold up historical knowledge as a resource for resisting dehumanising structures. Memory work like that practised by Müller in her writing life, which reflects these ideas about memory, seeks a 'usable past' that is fundamentally future-orientated (Oakeshott, 1999, 40 cited Eshel, 2013, 10). It presents what Eshel calls a 'new vocabulary' for raising ethical dilemmas and engaging the reader in questioning their own morality and the morality of the world around them (Eshel, 2013, 8). It provides new imaginative resources – through images, metaphors and narratives – which, although conveying the horror of the past and scepticism about the possibility of a better world, contain within them indicators of how this better world might nevertheless be formed.

Limitations: Theory, History and Corpus

Such a breadth of theoretical resources and the complexity and volume of Müller's work mean that, although seeking to provide as holistic a view as possible, this project is necessarily a first step in this line of enquiry. Although it is only the *combination* of the frameworks described above that allows an effective analysis of her unique approach to memory, each throws up new areas of investigation which there is not sufficient space here to address in detail. These include semiotics, psychoanalysis and metaphor, which are alluded to in various discussions but would also make valid starting points for describing her manner of writing in more detail. Future study of Müller and memory may also include recourse to disciplines as diverse as cognitive linguistics and critical discourse or computer-aided analysis. In addition to inviting a plethora of interpretations, each of Müller's individual works is part of an interconnected whole of such complexity that a truly holistic analysis becomes an unending task, meaning that I have had to pursue a balance between oversight and over-description. My focus on memory as a resource for empathy and driver of form means that some areas of interest, especially that of Müller's place within a wider German tradition of literary memory work and the influence of cultural memory, have been only touched upon.

What forms the focus or heart of all this (predominantly non-narrative, sensual) memory – in Müller's fiction and non-fiction – is another open question. Her writing life brings together several historical moments, of the World Wars, communism, Banat-

Swabian settlement in Romania and emigration to Germany, and references many others. It concerns highly localised and little-known events of history, including that to which she bore personal witness, but is also limitless in its openness to other experiences and stories. It presents a tension between the utterly specific and the universal sensations of historical subjectivity and memory and communicates essential truths about the past as a nebulous yet burdensome and mobilising force tied to imagination and sensation rather than fact or narrative. However, there is a particular historical event which functions as an anchor and enduring point of reference in her writing: the Holocaust. This rupture in the fabric of the possible, through dehumanisation, abjection and the destruction of human life, is the silent heart of Müller's work. Knowledge of the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Nazis and the complicity of her native community in them is what Müller maintains drove her to write and to adopt her personal resistance to all regimes that require moral compromise or abuse the innate spontaneity and agency of human beings (Hensel, 1987, ZB2). I shall argue that knowledge of the Holocaust – vaguely and broadly defined – underpins her suspicion of collective memory, selection of images and gestures of recognition as a sort of centre of gravity, a personal measure by which all other human actions are judged and an inescapable burden which colours her perception of the world. However, this project is not solely an attempt to illuminate the burdensome awareness of the German or European past that Müller brings into her writing but also to demonstrate how this history is placed in relation to other iterations of violence and cruelty in human relations and political systems. Equally as important as the presence of the Nazi past in her work are the universal ideas about and approaches to memory which she develops from it. It is both an inescapable responsibility and a "force" that "presses forward", a resource for developing ethical engagement and recognition (Arendt, 1977, 10).

The texts I use for my analysis appear in broadly chronological order and were selected for the prominence of memory in their thematic structure. Four main fiction works, representing the span of Müller's writing life, form the basis of the chapters, *Niederungen* (1982), *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (1986), *Herztier* (1994) and *Atemschaukel* (2009), with additional texts referenced throughout where relevant. An exception to the pattern of one main text per chapter is Chapter Three, in which I consider a range of examples from Müller's writing, as well as archival work on other Romanian authors active in the 1970s-1980s, although *Barfüßiger Februar* (1987) remains important there. Each text offers the most fertile basis for interpretation of a different broad aspect of memory in Müller's writing, *Niederungen* for personal memory,

Fasan for collective memory, *Herztier* for cultural memory and *Atemschaukel* for transnational, comparative memory. I have aimed to give equal weighting to her pre- and post-1987 writing and to include extensive reference to her essays, interviews and journalism, in order to offer a complete picture of her writing life. The only area I leave undiscussed is her collage work, which, although it would also benefit from a memory-based reading and especially from the perspective of concentrationary memory and Lazarean art (see Chapter Four), differs substantially from the other works. Although the narrative perspective, repetition, circulation and bringing together of different histories I discuss in the fiction texts listed above are illuminated through reference to the essays and interviews, the collages would primarily offer further examples rather than bringing fresh insight. I will nevertheless flag up aspects of my analysis that are particularly relevant to the collages with a view to returning to them in future.

Outline of Structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters which cumulatively expose and describe central techniques deployed by Müller in relation to memory. Both texts analysed and the theory employed follow a rough progression from personal dimensions of memory to memory at its most universal. Aside from the specific topics of each chapter (which I outline below), there are several red threads running through the project which are worth drawing attention to here. First of these is the productive tension between memory and imagination which informs Müller's writing. She has little faith in the factual veracity of memory, which she recognises as something created in retrospect, in the 'Gegenrichtung dessen, was geschieht', vulnerable to the shifting demands of the present (*Teufel*, 40).[3] However, she also sees remembering and sharing memories as an important ethical activity, and presents the imaginative reconstruction of the past – through the memories of others or on the basis of literature and witnessed behaviour – as a conduit through which an essential truth can be accessed. Reflecting on her collaboration with Oskar Pastior, Müller emphasises the importance of witnessing his trauma when writing *Atemschaukel*, for example, 'die Beschädigung war intuitiv da im Körper und das hat mich auch erschreckt. […] Es war in den Körper hereingemeiselt' (Müller, 2012). The valorisation of imagination arises again in the second underlying concern I identify in Müller's writing, namely the involvement of the reader in the texts. Critics have interpreted Müller's omission of explanations as her

[3] 'Das Nachhinein ist angesichts dessen, was man drüber zu wissen glaube, unverschämt neu.' (*König*, 107).

relying on her readers' background knowledge, and even though her texts are also effective in appealing to readers *without* full awareness of the political and historical contexts she writes about, this invitation to bring one's own knowledge to bear on the texts enhances affective as well as intellectual engagement with them (White, 1998, 76). The innate human instinct to decode and interpret is exploited by Müller as a means to throw the reader back onto their own historical awareness, confronting them with their own vision of the past and relying on cultural memory as a resource for creating her images and the affinitive connections between them. Finally, there is the metaphor, which Müller makes great use of in her fiction. Metaphor must be understood not just as a stylistic element but, following Roman Jacobson ('Two Aspects of Language', 1956), a term for the equivalency principle and the basic function of language, in other words, metaphor is 'das in Form von Similaritäts- und Kontrastsbeziehungen die paradigmatische Ebene der Sprache kennzeichnet'; the foundation of cognition (Thomas Roberg, 1997, 32; see also Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Her work is highly poetic and renders unpredictable what is or is not a representation of something else. This occurs at the level of image, in her sentences – which often read as potential epigrams – and in the imaginative moves she demands from her readers. Empathy, identification and comparison all require metaphorical gestures, the placing of two unrelated things in juxtaposition to create new meaning. Empathy and identification require one to momentarily place oneself in the position of another, even while the distance of awareness is maintained ('What if that were me?') and are integral to memory. Our past and future selves are also Others with whom we relate through metaphorical leaps of imagination (Cohen, 2008, 67-68). Comparisons, typically made by placing two separate contexts in jarring coincidence with one another, for example Holocaust imagery and daily life in Romania, create a shocking moment in which the reader recognises similarity. I shall return to these three ongoing concerns in my concluding remarks but also attempt to highlight moments in which they become particularly conspicuous or relevant over the course of the five main chapters.

The first chapter, 'Literary Embodiments of Memory and Evidence of Trauma in Herta Müller's Writing Life – the case of *Niederungen*', outlines my argument that memory represents an interpretative key to Müller's oeuvre, of which her journalism and activism must be seen as a constitutive part. Her texts are interwoven into a single expansive project that centres on personal memory. A productive mode of interpretation for Müller's writing has been trauma theory yet, I argue, this approach has struggled to account for the importance and function of the Nazi past in her work. Müller identifies

learning about the Holocaust and the crimes of the SS, of which her father was a member, as a cataclysmic shock yet the intrusions of knowledge related to National Socialism into her texts defies interpretation through an event-based trauma paradigm; the Holocaust did not happen to her and she has no knowledge of her father's supposed crimes. In attempting to account for the role of historical knowledge in the production of trauma-like symptoms in Müller's narrators and in her texts at a formal level, I propose viewing trauma as a subcategory of memory, which in turn provides a more complete framework for analysis. Formal elements previously taken as proof of trauma, such as flashbacks and fragmentation of narrative, are also integral to 'healthy' memory. As well as describing the influence of historical knowledge, involuntary memory also emerges as an important aspect of how Müller draws the reader into empathetic engagement with the narrators of her works, rather than rendering their experience Other. Müller's autofiction demonstrates a mode of remembering which is radically open and alert to the associative leaps and Proustian recall of involuntary memory; reducing this to a diagnosis of trauma is to place it unnecessarily in the realm of the pathological, at a remove from memory as experienced by all people. Distancing Müller's narrators and characters from 'normal' life and medicalising their perception works against her authorial intention of promoting empathy and encouraging her readers to imagine themselves in another's shoes.

My second chapter, '"Hörst du überhaupt zu": the failure of communicative memory and the dissolution of village identity in *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt'* considers the collective memory and historical self-identity against which Müller writes. *Fasan* illustrates the fundamental importance of narrative memory to certain forms of identity and the modulation of historical narratives to accommodate present-day concerns. In the fictional Banat-Swabian village of Müller's village tales memory is a source of power and repression; it functions as a means of control and is utterly removed from ethical engagement. The Swabians recall the Second World War and narratives of heroism as a resource for asserting their existence; however, their attachment to the past hinders their adaptation to life in changing Romania. Müller shows that the end of such communities of memory is not only brought about by mass emigration but by their own stifling of the younger generation, who are not interested in the past. The text emulates the gossip and snippets of overheard conversation that constitute communicative memory in a setting where the truth about the past is taboo. By doing so, however, it presents a more hopeful possibility; the reader is able – despite the selectivity of the villagers' remembrance – to glean detail about the past and evaluate which memories are more

credible. *Fasan* replicates Müller's reception of the static, doomed memory culture of the Banat Swabians, demonstrating ways of 'reading between the lines' of pasts that are instrumentalised yet *unusable* (in Oakeshott's sense) (Oakeshott, 1999, 40 cited Eshel, 2013, 10).

In my third chapter, '"Überall, wo man den Tod gesehen hat": haunted *Heimat*, guilty fathers and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Romania', I seek to uncover how Müller developed her own, idiosyncratic perspective on the Holocaust and its remembrance. The silence surrounding the Nazi past identified in texts like *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* is something she rejects on moral grounds but Müller's engagement is not solely founded in the rejection of that self-exonerating discourse. Her approach to the troubled history of fascism is also indebted to various streams of thought in post-war German culture and Romanian-German literary discussions of the Nazi past. Acknowledging that her personal response to the history of the Holocaust forms a fundamental basis of all her work, I explore the literary antecedents and contemporary context which led to the development of her world-view. I offer an examination of the Romanian-German literature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the 1970s-80s as the often overlooked, fertile ground in which her approach to and manner of utilising the past was developed, focusing on discourses surrounding guilt and punishment of perpetrators in German-language journalism from Romania, the reception of international literature related to the Holocaust in the journal *Neue Literatur* and ways in which young authors responded to, and were encouraged to engage with, the role of their communities in the National Socialist system. Setting up the discussion of image-based memory and the cultural imaginary in Chapter Four, the final part of my discussion is concerned with the recurring motif of haunted rural landscapes in her work and that of contemporaries such as Franz Hodjak and Christian Maurer, which I argue represent an original, Romanian-German inflection on Western literature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and search for a usable past. In her writing on the Holocaust, exemplified in her 1986 text 'Überall, wo man den Tod gesehen hat: Eine Sommerreise in Maramuresch', Müller presents a perspective which is emphatically Eastern, focusing on aspects of the Nazi genocide, including mass killings by bullet and the murder of Jews in extermination camps, which are distinct from the narrative of deportation and imprisonment which dominates Western representation. In particular, she denaturalises and renders alien the everyday rural environment in such a way as to allude to the history of improvised and civilian-led ethnic violence in Romania. This approach, which anticipates the 'Eastern Turn' of the 2000s,

brings the relatively neglected history of violence beyond the concentration camp setting home to roost in German literature through a sensual, spatial engagement with her environment. By rendering the pastoral spaces of Heimat, precious to the Banat-Swabian and wider German identity, alien and threatening, and by tying this post-Holocaust awareness to the concealed violence of 1980s Romania, Müller troubles the spatial and temporal delineations of the Holocaust and undermines the understanding of it as something that happened in the imagined elsewhere of the East and as something that is passed. Her spatial approach to Holocaust memory in her texts, which recall Nazi racial violence through the creation of a palimpsest, is fundamental to the wider understanding her use of imagery, which I discuss in Chapter Four.

Following on from this discussion of landscapes and spaces that are rendered uncanny by historical awareness, my fourth chapter, 'Terror, Obscene Consumption and Visual Dimensions of Cultural Memory in *Herztier'*, considers the fundamental importance of cultural memory in the visual elements Müller uses, including objects, gestures and human activity as well as physical space. These details are the primary means through which her work produces meaning, interacting not only with the plot and semantic fields but with each other as often contrasting, unrelated elements whose combination is novel and challenging. Using the framework of concentrationary memory to explore her work's indebtedness to the image-world of the Holocaust and considering ideas of directed association taken from surrealism and her own writings on literature, I analyse *Herztier* as a prime example of Müller's use of images. It is bound together by recurring images that accumulate and distribute meaning, encouraging interpretation at the level of sensation and affect in parallel to the narrative, and sensitising the reader to these undercurrents in the real world. Her symbolism and recurring visual motifs are founded in a post-Holocaust awareness sensitive to dehumanisation and submerged violence which is communicated in complex networks of meaning. In *Herztier* one example is the network surrounding grotesque consumption, which subverts the natural cycle of life and growth by rendering eating a symbol of the utter violation of individuals by the Ceaușescu regime.

Finally, I discuss the importance of comparison in Müller's approach to the past and the way different histories of violence are brought together to produce meaning in her writing. I analyse *Atemschaukel* as a text influenced by Holocaust writing, examining intertexts and individual images as examples of multidirectional memory in action. Similarities and contrasts between the work camps of the Soviet Union and cultural memories of the Nazi concentration camps move the story beyond the specific history

which it so meticulously portrays to facilitate an identification with unknown victims of violence past and present. Using Judith Butler's theories of recognition, developed in her works *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009), I argue that Müller's novel engages the reader in a practice of empathy and Levinasian apprehension of the Other which is subtle and shifting yet also a radical means of promoting ethical engagement. The past becomes through her writing a source of endless grief and, thereby, a resource which points to the possibility of a better future.

Müller accesses the experience of the individual faced with the collective past through sensation, affect and emotion, providing insight into the impact history has on our awareness, selfhood and imaginative world. The weight of history permeates every moment of her complex, interconnected literary project, which educates her reader not only in the specific, local histories of twentieth-century Romania but in how to open oneself to the echoes and iterations of history in all contexts. Remembering is for her an ethical pursuit, one which breaks the bounds of factual history and is instead an exercise in empathy and personal investment. Recognising the experience and suffering of the Other in our collective past develops our capacity to empathise with and act on behalf of unknown Others and thwarts the project of regimes (past and present) which seek to silence them or place them beyond our collective frames of reference. Memory is the most important theme and guiding formal principle in Müller's work and memory theory offers a rewarding framework for exploring some of its most challenging dimensions.

Chapter One: Literary Embodiments of Memory and Evidence of Trauma in Herta Müller's Writing Life – the case of *Niederungen*

While culturally we continue to live under the illusion that the past is somehow separate ('a foreign country' (L.P. Hartley, 1953), Herta Müller is a writer who sees the present as alien and incomprehensible. Her work exposes the way in which the past informs life as it is experienced but also imitates and engages with the processes of memory. Her narrators are subjects in progress, seeking to uncover and understand elements of the world around them and attempting to do this through acts of imagination, association and interpretation which are all based in personal acts of remembering. This chapter will focus on these individual acts of memory, underlining their importance within Müller's fiction in terms of narrative content, and consider memory as a determiner of literary form. Müller's writing implicitly rejects the view of memory as a straightforward conduit for accessing the events of the past in the form of narrative, whilst at the same time valorising individual acts of remembering and imagination as the only way to retrieve or uncover the truth of past events. I discuss this apparent paradox in relation to Müller's own writing on memory and outline the advantages and limitations of both autobiographical and anti-autobiographical readings of her work, before exploring the phenomenon of 'autofiction', a concept the author herself identifies as useful. I discuss the way Müller collapses boundaries between reality and imagination at a metatextual level, and make a case for reading her work as a 'writing life', a framework with may offer some way out of the truth-claim conundrum.

Moving on to the function of memory at a formal level in the second half of the chapter, I explore existing trauma-based scholarship on Müller and discuss some of the limitations of that approach, before outlining my own memory-based reading of her work. Building on critiques of trauma as a tool of literary interpretation, by scholars such as Stef Craps, I consider the ways in which Müller's biography may interfere with proper understandings of her formal choices and work against the intentions of both trauma theory and the author. Scholarship that considers Müller's work as primarily trauma literature also tends to offer an uneven picture of her work's thematic preoccupations, foregrounding the importance of her experience of persecution under Ceaușescu at the expense of the possibly more foundational background of the Nazi past and European fascism.

An undifferentiated application of event-based trauma as an interpretative framework risks undermining the ethical practices which define Müller's writing and overlooks formal elements that might more productively be seen as part of 'healthy'

memory. I explore the multiple potential advantages of a memory-based reading of her work over a purely trauma-based one, discussing how the formal element of the 'flashback' can be read as an example of the author taking advantage of the universal commonplaces of voluntary and involuntary recall in order to engage her reader.

'Es ist seltsam mit der Erinnerung'[4]: Autobiography, Autofiction, and Herta Müller's literary Project

From the beginning of her career, Müller's literary success has been accompanied by a marked public interest in her personal life and background, a tendency that she has encouraged through her willingness to discuss these topics and her passionate activism on behalf of other oppressed people. Aside from her German-Romanian upbringing, which led to her exoticisation in some sections of the West German press, it was her revelations about the culture of the Banat-Swabian minority, whose members she was seen to represent as unreconstructed fascists, that seem to have led to initial interest in her work and person (Braun, 2013, 225).[5] Her 'discovery' by Friedrich Christian Delius in an article in *Der Spiegel* and early Western reviews of her first novel-length work[6] *Niederungen* focused on this aspect of her writing and the novelty of Germans apparently untouched by

[4] Müller, *In der Falle*, 21.

[5] Delius's review of *Niederungen* emphasises the idea of the Romanian-Germans as an exotic or unknown people: 'Wir haben uns daran gewöhnt, diese Minderheiten auf dem Balkan den Funktionären der Heimatvertriebenen und der rechten Presse zu überlassen. Wer denkt sich schon etwas dabei, wenn rumänische und bundesdeutsche Politiker über Ausreisekontingente feilschen wie um Importquoten für Salami und Rohmöbel? Wie diese Auslandsdeutschen leben und weshalb etliche in unser enges Land drängen, ist nicht leicht herauszufinden' (Delius, 1984, 119). Works on *Migrantenliteratur* and second-language writing in German which include Müller tend to focus on her Romanian background rather than engagement with German culture and history, even exoticising her as a second-language speaker of *Hochdeutsch* on the basis of her Swabian dialect (Binder, 2013, 465). Pointing to the limited usefulness of analysing Müller as an author of migration literature, Terkessidis highlights the 2007 Reclam textbook *Migrantenliteratur: Arbeitstexte für den Unterricht*, which includes her as an example to facilitate classroom discussions on immigration issues such as 'migrationsbedingter Entwurzelung', 'Systemintegration' and 'Migration und Kriminalität' (Terkessidis, 2015, no page number). As Paula Bozzi observes, ethnic German authors from Eastern Europe find themselves in a double bind of being too German to be appreciated as authors of migration literature but also not German enough to be regarded as an integrated part of native literary culture (Bozzi, 2005, 18-19). Richard Wagner explains that one of the first questions faced by Romanian Germans in Germany is 'Wann hast du Deutsch gelernt?' (Wagner, 2009).

[6] *Niederungen* is a collection of interlinked short stories that, while often read as a novel, does not fully resolve questions surrounding the identity of the first person narrator, who varies in age throughout the texts. Each story functions as a discrete entity and Müller has opted to publish her early stories from *Niederungen* and *Drückender Tango* in various combinations. My approach is to read *Niederungen* as a single entity (most conveniently called a novel) made up of equally significant constitutive parts. The shared settings of the stories (either the Banat-Swabian village or the 1980s Romania city) and the overlapping details suggest that the individual stories can be used to interpret each other.

modern life and its accompanying *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Hensel, 1987, ZB 2).[7] The contrast between the absolute denial of responsibility for the Nazi past (and the continuation of its fascist value system) present in Müller's portrayal of the Banat Swabians and the stringent discourse of contrition in late 1980s West Germany can be credited with creating some of the initial interest around her writing.

Public fascination with Müller grew once her emigration to the *Bundesrepublik* enabled her to speak more freely about her equally newsworthy experiences in the Ceauşescu regime.[8] As a persecuted intellectual offering insights into life behind the Iron Curtain and an outspoken commentator on German society intra and extra muros in the late 1980s, Müller was of two-fold interest, and in the 1990s her background and the subject matter of her writing went on to dovetail with both the collective processing of the fall of communism and the trend for literature on migration. To this day, her upbringing, membership of a minority group, and the tribulations she faced as a dissident author in Romania and later immigrant to West Germany are consistently foregrounded in popular and scholarly analyses of her writing.[9]

Marked interest in the person of any author naturally has the potential to distort interpretations of her work. However, in Müller's case it is she who does the most to argue that her cultural authority and personal experience are crucial to understanding her writing at the textual and metatextual level. She undermines the fictionality of her own texts and

[7] Delius tends to accept the representation of the village there as an authentic representation of 'das grauenvolle Landleben der Banatschwaben' (Delius, 1984, 121).

[8] Shortly after her arrival in the FRG Müller talked openly, along with then husband Richard Wagner, about the activities of the *Securitate* in Timişoara and the bribes that had to be paid in order to leave the country: 'Wagner: Nein, es gibt immer so vorgeschobene Figuren. In Temeswar gibt es einen, über den lacht das ganze Banat, der heißt 'der Gärtner'' (Rainer Traub and Olaf Ihlau, 1987, 154-163, 154). It is notable that only a few months after fleeing and under considerable ongoing intimidation from the *Securitate*, Müller's first interview with *Der Spiegel* saw her call Ceauşescu an idiot: 'Dieser Idiot, der Genosse Präsident […] Man kann wohl sagen, daß diese rumänische Surrogat-Kultur auf das Niveau eines Präsidenten reduziert wurde, der vier Grundschulklassen durchlaufen hat. Was der Conducator (*Führer*) als Kultur und Unterhaltung begreift, das darf stattfinden' (ibid, 157, 158). Her writing immediately changed after emigrating, focusing on the lack of awareness shown in the West of suffering behind the Iron Curtain (in her *Du* columns, later collected in *Eine warme Kartoffel ist ein warmes Bett*) and fictional accounts of flight and oppression. Before emigrating from Romania, and while under *Veröffentlichungsverbot*, Müller gave an interview to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in which she embarrassed the regime by describing the ban on travel faced by authors such as Franz Hodjak (Spiridon, 2002, 156).

[9] While interest in her background is almost universal within media coverage, responses to her continued discussion of Romania and her childhood there have also led (from relatively early on in her career) to criticisms of Müller as a 'one-trick pony'. Even sympathetic critics have tended to view her, as John J. White puts it, as 'an unfortunate prisoner of her Romanian years' (White, 2002, 180). A recent *Spiegel* interview about Müller's feelings on Putin implicitly rehashes this old challenge: 'Sie gehören zu den wenigen Schriftstellern in Deutschland, bei denen einem sofort das Adjektiv "politisch" einfällt. Sie haben Ihr Werk auch ganz der Auseinandersetzung mit der Diktatur gewidmet. Bietet Ihnen der Alltag in der Demokratie nicht genügend Stoff?' (Beyer and Schmitter, 2014, 128).

constantly reasserts the importance of her personal experience to her writing process and interpretation of the world. Although the term 'autobiography' fails to describe the majority of Müller's texts it does provide a useful starting point for analysing the wider importance of personal memory to her work, and the texts she engages with, such as concentration camp memoirs, reaffirm the relevance of the genre to her literary practice.[10]

'Autobiography' traditionally describes texts in which the person of the author and the narrator are explicitly identified as the same, real person and the content of the work is an account of that person's life. Lejeune, one of the most prominent theorists of autobiography, describes 'the assumed identity of author, narrating self and narrated self' as the 'autobiographical pact', the agreement between the author and the reader which 'underpins autobiography's claim to truthfulness' (Lejeune 1975, 14–16; Marven, 2013, 207). The sealing of this pact imbues the work with authority as a work of non-fiction, even though the subjective position of the author complicates this understanding. Despite widespread awareness of the fallibility of memory, autobiography remains a privileged genre within popular culture.

In criticism, autobiography has long been stripped of its mantle of authority, with deconstructivist philosophers calling the very possibility of relating one's own past into question. Paul de Man has had perhaps the greatest influence on the modern understanding of autobiography in his 1979 essay 'Autobiography as De-Facement'. There he described autobiography as a mode of reading rather than a discrete genre, and said that the author of an autobiography was engaged in:

> a linguistic dilemma which is liable to be repeated every time an author makes himself the subject of his own understanding. The author reads himself in the text, but what he is seeing in this self-reflective or specular moment is a figure or a face called into being by the substitutive trope of prosopopoeia, literally, the giving of a face, or personification. […] Autobiographies thus produce fictions or figures in place of the self-knowledge they seek (Anderson, 2001, 12).

[10] Sonia Saporiti points out that *Cristina* and *Die Nacht ist aus Tinte* are claimed by Müller to be completely autobiographical (Saporiti, 2010, 43). Her recent extended interview with Angelika Klammer, *Mein Vaterland war ein Apfelkern* (2014) also falls into this category of explicitly-claimed autobiography, which was previously limited to parts of essays and press interviews. In a 1998 interview with Haines and Littler, Müller says that it is no coincidence that she read so many books written by victims of National Socialism because they are the most extreme examples of literature containing strictly autobiographical elements (Haines and Littler, 1998, 14).

De Man points out that any narration of past experience is an act of identification with a person who is now essentially 'other' and whose subjectivity can only be reconstructed imaginatively. Barthes and other French theorists of the 1970s go so far as to suggest that '*no* definitive truth about the past self may be available' (Smith and Watson, 2010, 259-60, my emphasis). However, because human beings as subjects constantly place themselves into the past metaphorically in order to understand their own experience, these acts of identification – not to mention the unconscious imaginative leaps and edits we make in order to turn past events into a coherent narrative – tend to go largely unnoticed (Cohen, 2008, 67-68). Müller reflects on this conundrum and rejects factual reconstruction of events as the main priority of literary memory:

> Es ist seltsam mit der Erinnerung. Am seltsamsten mit der eigenen. Sie versucht, was gewesen ist, so genau wie möglich zu rekonstruieren, aber mit der Genauigkeit der Tatsachen hat dies nicht zu tun. Die Wahrheit der geschriebenen Erinnerung muß erfunden werden, schreibt Jorge Semprun. (*Falle*, 21)

This idea of 'erfundene Wahrnehmung' and its relationship with truth as one which bypasses the faulty approach of reconstructing past events as a series of facts is important to understanding Müller's approach to her own autobiography and the question of personal memory. She describes her writing as the direct product of lived experience but shies away from attempts to represent it directly, instead using reality as the necessary basis for her fiction, which communicates the "essence" of the past more effectively: 'Ich brauche […] diese sichere Beziehung zu der Erfahrung, um in die Fiktion zu gehen' (Haines and Littler, 1998, 14).

Another central criticism of common understandings of autobiography has been that the claim to narratorial authority made by the dominant Western mode of life-writing excludes many marginal forms such as those using fictional devices or reflecting particular traditions of cultures outside the West, '[leading] many postmodern and postcolonial theorists [to] contend that the term autobiography is inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life writing not only in the West but around the globe' (Smith and Watson, 2010, 3). The reverse of this critical engagement with the exclusionary aspects of autobiography as a genre has been the active search by various writers, such as Jamaica Kincaid, whose work I discuss below, to find new ways to combat and escape Eurocentric models of life-writing. Similar arguments against narrow,

hegemonic definitions of autobiography have emerged in feminist criticism, which recognises positional difficulties in seeing and representing the self. Shoshana Felman suggests that women may more often make use of narrators or protagonists who cannot be identified directly with them because women have difficulty producing autobiography, for example:

> None of us, as women, has yet, precisely, an autobiography. Trained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged to ourselves, we have a story that by definition cannot be self-present to us, a story, in other words, that is not a story, but must become a story. (Felman, 1993, 14 cited Eigler, 2001, 298)

Relating one's autobiography is complicated by the socially-constituted barriers which govern alterity and the formal assumptions which underpin the genre. In the case of both women and writers of a postcolonial (non-European) background, whatever is written is often received as confessional and essentialised as representative of a particular group or identity so more overt fiction may offer more potential for subverting these patterns and power relations (Weigel, 1987, 19-23 cited Figge, 1993, 286).

Müller describes her work as 'autofiktional', saying of her literature that it is 'überhaupt [keine] Autobiographie […] natürlich eigene Erfahrung als Hintergrund, aber sehr stark literarisch bearbeitet, und dadurch wird das *Fiktion*. Also ich habe überhaupt nichts in meinen Büchern so aufgeschrieben wie es war' (Haines and Littler, 1998, 14-15, my emphasis). However, she makes interventions via her public appearances and non-fiction writing which undermine such claims. Müller trades on a certain cultural authority related to her experiences of life in Romania, placing her lived experience front and centre in all interviews she gives, as well as in her non-fiction writing. Furthermore, critics have identified various specific details which recur in both her fiction and non-fiction writings, thereby disrupting any clear division between the three strands of her output.

The most often cited example of this is her description of the fox fur in *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*, which has pieces cut from it by the *Securitate* agents who enter the protagonist's house in her absence. Although *Der Fuchs* stands out from texts like *Herztier* and *Niederungen* in its naming of its narrator (Adina) and third person narration, Müller undermined these overt markers of fiction when she revealed that the macabre cutting of the fox skin was a direct reproduction of something the secret police

had done to her, 'the metaphor was fact' (Eddy, 2013, 97). Marven identifies Müller's essays as the area of her output in which most of these kinds of confirmations are made, arguing that 'it is in fact the essays that create the "autobiographical pact" by identifying the usually unnamed 'ich', the first-person narrator, of the fictional texts (*Herztier* in particular) as Müller (Marven, 2013, 207). Köhnen describes the connection between *Niederungen* and Müller's biography as 'eine Spur, die die Autorin erst später gelegt hat' (Köhnen, 1998, 18).

I interpret this refusal by Müller explicitly to identify herself with the narrators of texts that she confirms elsewhere are essentially autobiographical as a two-fold rejection of the totalising structures of autobiography and of the contemporary concern with the person of the author. Instead of clarifying the relationship between Müller the author and Müller the implied author, she allows her 'writing counterpart [to] merge[…] into the imaginary process that generates the written text and the imaginary world of the characters' (Kohl, 2013, 23). Speaking with explicit personal as well as cultural authority through her texts themselves would be to condone (further) interrogations of the 'truth' of her work and destroy the nuance of her texts, which focus determinedly on the structure and sensation rather than documentary reconstruction of past experience. She is not interested in factuality in terms of a series of events but rather in authenticity, which she creates through the compression of her own experience into hyperreal scenarios which communicate the essential nature of the worlds she describes and allow the reader to make imaginative forays into the lived experience of others.

Müller makes the claim to authority associated with autobiography, both through her assertion of the unity of narrator, protagonist and author into her autofictional texts *from the outside* and in the sense that she is implicitly concerned with persuading the reader, albeit in an atypical manner. In her case, this persuasion, which Smith and Watson identify as a central element of autobiography, is not aimed directly at telling her life story and asserting that it is true but rather at communicating the innate "truthfulness" of the fiction into which her experience has been condensed. She endeavours to reveal the reality, not of her life but of the experience of oppression.

Taking her whole output as a quasi-autobiographical project, Müller's work resembles Louis Bernard's description of Jamaica Kincaid's intratextual 'writing life':

> [the taxonomically ordered] self-inventory [which, along with] the connections which emerge between [the] fictional and non-fictional voices […] pushes against the

> boundaries of autobiography and memoir. Her oeuvre is self-consciously constructed as a fluid, intermeshed body of work that relates, back and forth, […] a historical undertaking and an unapologetic attempt to piece together, and thus make sense of, an immediate and intimate past. (Bernard, 2002, 118)

Kincaid, like Müller, writes against the legacy of oppression – in her case, colonialism – a setting in which truth claims and questions of veracity related to the past dominate, but which no factual account can ever satisfactorily describe or explain. The oppression exerted by a regime like Ceaușescu's or a legacy like that of slavery is not something that any single autobiography could communicate in its entirety, but personal experience is indispensable for gaining insight into its effects. The 'writing life' describes a more flexible and permeable approach to personal memory, which allows fiction and non-fiction to blend and more fully confronts legacies of violence: 'Essays, speeches, and interviews become emotionally intense textual sites that permit fluid interaction between the biographical and the aesthetic, personal memory and general reflection' (Kohl, 2013, 22).[11] Müller's works may not describe all that befell her in Romania on a one-to-one basis but they are nevertheless a record of her life.

Using Trauma Theory to Analyse Müller's Literary Aesthetic

Bernard's theory of the writing life is useful for understanding the interplay of truth and fiction in Müller's work, which circulates around certain events and images which, as her essays and interviews reveal, are taken from her own experience (Bernard, 2002, 118).[12] Her fictional texts contain impressions of multiple events from her life compressed into single fictionalised versions; particular episodes or experiences recur across different texts. This repetition across her writing has been interpreted, along with various formal features, as a response to trauma, and to Müller's personal need to come to terms with her own past. She herself says that her literature, like that of the concentration camp and *Gulag* survivors whose work inspires her, comes from the fact that 'das vorderste Bedürfnis das ist, mit dem, was passiert ist, zurechtzukommen' (Haines and Littler, 1998, 14). In the following I will outline some of the implications of trauma theory for interpreting Müller, focusing on

[11] Rebecca Braun makes similar observations about Günter Grass, arguing that he 'has created a body of work that can be understood as a kind of loosely autobiographical project […] [one which] knowingly engages with an implicit ethics of public self-presentation' (Braun, 2008, 1052).

[12] In Chapter Four I will offer my own analysis of recurring images and the universe Müller creates with them.

formal aspects of her debut text *Niederungen*, and offering my own evaluation of the potential problems in inscribing trauma onto Müller's 'writing life' as a whole (Bernard, 2002, 118).

In contemporary medicine, trauma is generally defined in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), that is, the damage to selfhood and mental health following a particular harrowing incident or experience. Prior to the emergence of PTSD, and its predecessors, such as 'shell shock' and 'concentration camp syndrome', trauma in the medical sphere concerned only physical damage and its aftereffects. Although the negative impact of certain life events on the mental health of patients was recognised, it was the work of psychoanalysis which provided a theoretical basis for understanding the nature of this damage and its consequences

Trauma is loosely defined as the result of an event or stimulus that floods the mental apparatus and that cannot be reconciled with the individual's other experiences (Whitehead, 2008, 97-8). The majority of trauma symptoms are related to memory (*ibid*, 115-116). Most prominent among these is a lack of control over remembering, which manifests negatively in the inability to remember past events (particularly the event or events which caused the trauma, and life prior to them) and positively in the intrusion of traumatic memories into everyday life (*ibid*). This latter aspect is the best known symptom of PTSD, which often presents in the form of flashbacks or nightmares. The inability to incorporate the source of trauma into narrative memory is the defining feature of the condition, and gradually accessing and integrating the traumatic event, in order to incorporate it into one's life story (and in theory then be able to forget it), is widely regarded as the route to alleviating trauma.

Other symptoms of trauma are behavioural, such as the compulsive repetition of physical movements, or instinctive hoarding of items such as food in the case of survivors of extreme hunger. Internally, the traumatised person experiences a splitting of self, for example between themselves in the present and in the past, or a more radical alienation of aspects of themselves in the present, for example by experiencing their fear or anger as external to them. Conversely, the boundaries of the self may break down, with the sufferer feeling invaded, or incorporated into their surroundings. Elaine Scarry's study of torture offers examples of this, with pain causing victims to lose their conception of themselves as distinct from their surroundings (Scarry, 1985, 35, cited Marven, 2005, 56). Fragmentation is the other important aspect of trauma, with sufferers perceiving their body as a series of

separate parts, or experiencing a heightened awareness of certain physical or visual details in their surroundings.

Whilst in medicine, trauma and the related pathology of PTSD first achieved credibility in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, trauma in literary theory has its origins in the study of Holocaust literature and psychoanalysis. The ideas of damage to recall, and unmanageable or inaccessible memory spoke to personal and collective experiences of the Holocaust's unprecedented horror and the failure of cultural products adequately to communicate the severity or extent of its effects. Trauma theory gained currency as part of the 'ethical turn' in the mid-1990s which sought to prove the value of text-based study as a means to understand the 'real world' (Stef Craps, 2010, 52). Cathy Caruth's landmark work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* put forward the case that textualist analysis, which had been accused of having reached 'political and ethical paralysis' was actually a means to uncover historical experiences of political and ethical importance (Caruth, 1996, 10 cited Craps, 2010, 52).

Theorists such as Caruth identified symptoms of trauma in testimony by members of survivor collectives, including concentration camp memoirs. These classic examples of trauma literature have been used alongside psychological studies of non-literary testimony by survivors to categorise the symptoms of trauma in terms of both content (describing traumatic experience) and form (kinds of writing which betray symptoms) (Kaplan, 2005, 34, 38). The cultural significance and scale of the concentration camp experience make it a unique case for the study of trauma and there is a degree of territorialism regarding the special place of the Holocaust in histories of trauma and mass violence. However, trauma theory has, since the 1990s, come to be used as an interpretative framework to account for many other kinds of unfathomable or inexpressible experience, including historical subjectivity itself. Theorists like Caruth and Frederic Jameson, who pioneered trauma-based textual analysis, tend to 'view all history in terms of trauma: that is, as an overwhelming experience that resists integration and expression' (Craps, 2010, 52).

This notion of universal trauma has also been put forward as a potentially useful shorthand for the experience of modernity by some critics, with trauma's fragmentary effects and disturbed relationship to the world being linked to postmodernism's distrust of monolithic views of the world and rejection of encompassing concepts such as 'man' and 'God' (Modlinger and Sonntag, 2011, 5). As Haines writes,

> the bold injunctions to read trauma as 'Signatur der Moderne' or 'ein neues Deutungsmuster für Moderne und Modernität allgemein' are […] compelling [despite scepticism resulting from the broad application of trauma], founded as they are on the notion of aporia which links the individual pathology […] with the gaps in knowledge and scepticism towards metanarratives that are the hallmarks of the (post)modern condition. (Erdle, 1999, 30; Weigel, 1999, vii both cited Haines, 2002, 267)

In her consideration of trauma in relation to the body, Marven takes up Müller's concept of the 'Riss', which she reads as a cipher for *différance* in the Derridean sense, and says that the structures used by Müller to relate the insufficiency of language and the necessary partialness of memory 'bespeak an understanding of trauma as part of the subject's coming to language' (Marven, 2005a, 399).[13] Roger Luckhurst suggests that these psycho-linguistic questions lie at the heart of why trauma theory has proved so appealing across so many fields and disciplines, saying that 'trauma has become a paradigm because it has been turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood that have saturated Western cultural life' (Luckhurst, 2008, 80 cited Modlinger and Sonntag, 2011, 4).

Formally, literature which is read as displaying the effects of trauma is seen as reflecting the symptoms of PTSD listed above (Kaplan, 2005, 34, 38). Disjointed narratives, the perception of the world in distinct images and objects, and fleeting impressions of events all contribute to a sense of fragmentation, while shifts in temporal setting imitate the flashbacks of PTSD (Marven, 2005, 54). A variety of narrative voices, such as the shift between the first and the third person, communicate the experience of seeing oneself as other and vivid explorations of subjective perception enable the author to communicate the experience trauma symptoms in exacting detail. Gaps in the story are a primary characteristic of trauma literature, because they reflect the impossibility of producing narrative out of traumatic memory (Schwab, 2010, 53-54). These techniques reflect the literary practices of modernism, with its interest in new methods for communicating characters' (and human beings') internal lives and experimentation with

[13] Müller has written about her awareness of the gap between word and meaning and how this stemmed from both her bilingualism (as a teenager and adult) and from witnessing the linguistic poverty of the village in which she grew up: 'In der Dorfsprache, so schien es mir als Kind, lagen bei allen Leuten um mich herum die Worte direkt auf den Dingen, die sie bezeichneten. […] Es gab für die meisten Leute keine Lücken, durch die man zwischen Wort und Gegenstand hindurch schauen und ins Nichts starren mußte, als rutsche man aus seiner Haut ins Leere' (Müller, 2002, 6).

narrative voice aimed at communicating the nature of experience as it is lived, that is, not as a coherent story. I will return to the limitations of this method of reading trauma below.

Many of these literary techniques of fragmentation, narrative disruption and attention to detail can be found in the work of Herta Müller, and her literary texts have been analysed in terms of trauma theory by several scholars since the late 1990s. Although some of the aforementioned elements associated with trauma writing, such as disjuncture, varied temporal and narrative perspectives, and the importance of detail, had been important to analyses of Müller since the 1980s, it was in analyses of Müller's 1998 novel Herztier that scholars first made an explicit connection to trauma theory. Eddy combined work on Holocaust testimony and witnessing by Felman and Laub (1992) with the textual reading of trauma proposed by Caruth (1996) to analyse the way in which Herztier functions as a trauma narrative (survivor account) and as an example of testimony (eye-witness account) (Eddy, 2000). She argues that Herztier contains both acts of testimony and the recording of personal trauma, with each mode informing and activating the other. The narrator acts as a witness to the suffering of others at the hands of the regime and this leads her to record her own experiences.

Marven's 2005 book *Body and Narrative in Contemporary Literatures in German: Herta Müller, Libuse Moníková, Kerstin Hensel* provides the most comprehensive trauma-based analysis of Müller's texts in terms of form, through her focus on representations of the body. By focusing on three aspects of traumatic perception, the collapse of boundaries, the experience of the self as other and the sensation of physical fragmentation, Marven argues that trauma is displayed by Müller not only through her characters' experience but at the level of the text, pointing to the episodic nature of the narratives, which are marked by abrupt transitions between times and settings, aporias within scenes and the pairing of incompatible images alongside each other as evidence of the collapse of boundaries and fragmentation. She sees the experience of the self as other as being demonstrated through the multiplicity of narrative voices and temporal perspectives, as well as at the metatextual level by Müller's insistence on autofiction as her primary mode of writing (Marven, 2005, 57).

Haines was the first to reassess earlier works by Müller in light of trauma theory, in her 2002 analysis of the Berlin novel *Reisende auf einem Bein* (1987). This moved away from the book's reception as a text primarily concerned with migration experience and female *flanêurie*, and built on Eddy's previous discussion of trauma as a formal element to analyse the protagonist Irene (Littler, 1998, 50-53). Haines argues that Irene's aberrant

behaviour, such as her voyeurism, compulsive repetition of actions related to her troubled past and negative responses to authority are a consequence of traumatic experience (Haines, 2002, 274). She also analyses Irene's internal struggle to live with the effects of trauma, represented by her fearfulness and sensory flashbacks, such as when her necklace breaks and she feels as if the beads falling down her dress are in fact her spine collapsing into pieces, which demonstrates disintegration of her selfhood (*ibid*).

Haines's piece discussed how Irene begins to recover by resisting the effects of fear on her behaviour and introduced the idea, later taken up by others, including Marven, of how Müller's work itself might represent a process of moving beyond trauma,. By taking risks, and by relinquishing control over her life, Irene asserts the agency that has been stifled by fear and instinctive acts of psychological self-protection. The most important aspect of this agency are the efforts she makes to communicate her own impressions and emotions, indirectly addressing what has befallen her in 'das andere Land' (rather than shying away from it) and taking tentative steps to integrate inaccessible past experiences into her life story (and thus heal herself in the classic understanding of traumatic recovery) (Haines, 2002, 273). Collage is the means by which Irene reaches self-expression, 'transform[ing] the aporias which arose from being subject to (politically occasioned) trauma into an opportunity' (Littler, 1998, 278).[14]

Marven has written several times about the importance of collage to Müller's own creative process and as a form which captures traumatic experience, starting with her 2005 article '"In allem ist der Riss": Trauma, Fragmentation, and the Body in Herta Müller's Prose and Collages' (Marven, 2005a, 396-411). There, Marven argues for the presence of trauma in the pre-1987 texts by Müller, including *Niederungen*, especially through what she terms 'syntactic gaps', and declares that these are designed to encourage the reader's critical engagement (an important strategy under a regime practising censorship) (*ibid*, 400). She also traces a development in Müller's oeuvre towards a divergence of style in the collages and prose works which have appeared from *Reisende auf einem Bein* (1987) onwards and the increasing frequency of Müller's use of Romanian in her collages.[15]

[14] The fluidity of meaning and element of chance within the collage represent a positive recognition of the gulf between language and meaning – experienced traumatically by Irene in the form of objects whose significance is understood only by her – as a source of creativity rather than only a limitation. This idea of a gap or 'Riss' as a source of creativity and agency is central to Müller's poetics and has been read as stemming from trauma in terms of post-traumatic stress and in terms of the trauma inherent to language within psychoanalysis (Marven, 2005b).

[15] For my analysis of Müller's use of Romanian and the tendency towards *Sprachkritik* in her writing, see Watson (2014).

Marven contends that Müller's communication of traumatic experience through content – exploring the events which caused the trauma – and form – linguistic and formal choices which reflect the traumatised state – is being divided as time goes on, with the prose texts adopting more traditional narrative forms, and collages taking over the role of testing ground for ways of representing experience. I will return to Marven's reading of changes in Müller's work as a progression towards narrative and the issue of recovery in my discussion of critiques of trauma theory. In order to set the scene for this evaluation of the relative merits of memory and trauma as interpretative frameworks for Müller's prose texts, I will now offer my own trauma-based reading of her first novel-length work.

Niederungen as a 'Trauma Text'

Niederungen (Bucharest, Kriterion, 1982; Berlin, Rotbuch, 1984)[16] was Müller's first significant publication and received widespread acclaim in West German literary circles as well as a great deal of criticism from certain Romanian-German interest groups (as I will discuss in Chapter Three). Set in an unnamed village in the Swabian Banat, *Niederungen* is a collection of interrelated stories of varying length, narrated primarily by a female child whose name is not disclosed. The central focus of the novel is this child's fearful relationship with her surroundings and the horror she experiences when confronted with everyday instances of brutality and oppression within her own family and in her wider community.

Niederungen contains characters apparently living with the effects of traumas whose causes lie in the distant past and are not explicitly identified. The child narrator's perspective primarily revolves around her own fears and responses to stimuli but she also bears witness to behaviour in others which can be interpreted as the result of trauma. She sees her mother biting down on a spoon handle in an apparent expression of anguish, her grandfather tearing at his face and lashing out with an axe when he thinks he is unobserved, and her father's extreme negative reaction to physical contact with his child (*Niederungen*, 45; 72). She also observes behaviours redolent of coping mechanisms, which include the strict maintenance of routine, drinking and the refusal to discuss topics beyond the bounds of banal activity. The lack of connection in interpersonal relationships

[16] The two versions differ in content, with certain stories not included, or edited, in the both the 1982 Bucharest and 1984 Berlin editions. The edition of the text I use is the most complete, with the cut stories reincorporated and some texts from *Drückender Tango* (1984) included at the author's behest.

(similar to that which Eddy, following Scarry, identifies as the consequence of dictatorial terror in *Herztier*) is evidenced throughout *Niederungen,* such as in the scene where the family sits in silence around the kitchen table: 'Wir sitzen alle rund um den Tisch. Jeder isst und denkt an etwas. Ich denke an etwas anderes, wenn ich esse. Ich sehe nicht mit ihren Augen, ich höre nicht mit ihren Ohren. Ich habe auch nicht ihre Hände' (Eddy, 2000, 71-72; *Niederungen*, 45). The narrator recognises that she and her family members are similarly preoccupied but also that it is impossible for her to access or understand the reason for their introversion.

The child narrator is ill equipped to fully understand the behaviour of the adults around her. She is alone in coping with her fearfulness and appears to be in a heightened state of awareness brought about by fear for much of the text. Her perception is clearly marked by the symptoms of trauma, and in several episodes, especially traumatising events are described in the disrupted fashion typical of trauma narratives. Marven's clear outline of the three typical aspects of trauma in relation to the body is helpful when attempting to map trauma onto the child narrator in *Niederungen*.

In an episode in which the (presumably teenaged) narrator is sent to a village dance, she dances with a boy named Peter at the behest of her mother. Also in the room is Toni, a boy with whom, it is revealed through flashbacks, the narrator has had a sexual encounter. Both in the remembered episodes and in the present of the dance, the narrator experiences an alienation from her own body which is redolent of trauma:

> die Brücke ist hohl und stöhnt, und das Echo fällt mir in den Mund […] Toni gräbt mit stockendem Atem ein Loch in meinen Bauch. Meine Knie schwimmen an den Brückenrand. Die Brücke fällt in meine Augen. In meinen Bauch fließt heißer Schlamm und breitet sich über mir aus […] Meine Finger kleben in Peters Fingern. Meine Arme winden sich um seine Ellbogen. Vor meinem Gesicht dreht sich das Fenster aus seinem Arm und meinen zerdrückten Händen […] Meine Augen schwimmen aus dem Fenster, schwimmen aus meinem heißen Kopf, aus meinem heißen Mund, aus meinem versteckten Schweiß. (*Niederungen*, 120-21)

The narrator appears helpless, detached from her body as it co-operates in dancing with Peter although she does not want to and her eyes avoid their own gaze, seemingly without her direction. The scene evokes her shame and unarticulated fear of judgement; her mother's eyes appear to her from the other end of the village and the image of Jesus

flashes to her mind. The window which reflects the scene back at her is itself emblematic of shame.

A second symptom of trauma is also present in the scene, and the extended quote above. The dissolution of the boundaries between self and other is represented in phrases such as ‘die Brücke fällt in meine Augen’ and the image of river mud spreading within and also externally smothering her as the act of sexual intercourse disrupts her sense of her body as self-contained and separate from the world around her. The fear of external objects or agents invading the boundaries of the body is something which the narrator displays throughout *Niederungen*, for example when she falls and cuts her knee,

> Wo die Haut von meinen Knien abgeschürft war, brannte das Fleisch, und ich hatte Angst, dass ich vor so viel Schmerz nicht mehr am Leben bin, und gleichzeitig wusste ich, dass ich am Leben bin, weil es so schmerzte. Ich hatte Angst, dass durch diese offenen Knie der Tod in mich hineinfindet, und ich legte rasch die Hände auf die Wunden. (*Niederungen*, 25)

The fear caused by pain and the shock of injuring herself changes the narrator’s perception so that the usual certainties about the limits and wholeness of the body are temporarily suspended. Writing in 1991, Claudia Becker suggests that the child in *Niederungen* is not able 'das Wahrgenommene von sich abzugrenzen’; she is in a permanent state of uncertainty regarding what is possible, and her vivid fantasies suggest a merging of her and the world (Becker, 1991, 30). Trauma theory would regard this as a symptom of a subject whose self-awareness has been disrupted by traumatic experience and Becker identifies fear as the driver of her fantasies surrounding dissolution.

The scene in which a pig is slaughtered on the narrator’s family’s farm is often taken up by critics as an extreme example of the narrator’s daily life causing terror and illustrates how a witnessed event (rather than physical pain, as in the previous example) can cause the boundaries between self and environment to collapse.

> Ich hörte das Schwein. Es stöhnte.
> Sein Widerstand war so klein, dass die Ketten überflüssig waren.
> Ich lag im Bett. Ich fühlte das Messer an meiner Kehle.
> Der Schnitt ging immer tiefer, mein Fleisch wurde heiß, es began zu kochen in meinem Hals.

> Der Schnitt wurde weit größer als ich, er wuchs übers ganze Bett, er brannte unter der Decke, er stöhnte sich ins Zimmer (*Niederungen*, 34).

The narrator lies in bed, imagining or dreaming of a stomach and still-moving intestines hanging over her bed. This nightmarish fantasy (there is no definitive confirmation of whether the narrator is awake or sleeping) resembles a flashback in its focus on several particular images such as 'der Schnitt', 'der maisvolle Magen', and 'der Darm' that threatens to rip open under its own weight. The pig's death permeates the narrator's perception of her body and the world around her, which are no longer discrete or guaranteed.

The dissolution of boundaries between the narrator and the world beyond is not limited to instances such as this where a specific image or object is seen to merge with her but also includes instances in which she projects her emotions onto external objects. Arguably, the empathy she feels with the pig is a mirroring of her own fear, rather than being based in any evidence of the pig's suffering (it does not struggle and only grunts submissively), and in other episodes this extension of her perception beyond the boundaries of her body is more obvious. During a particularly tense family meal, for example, the child says, 'ich fürchte, dass der Tisch in die Knie gehen, dass er einstürzen wird, bevor wir uns daran setzen oder während des Essens' (*Niederungen*, 94). The fear which oppresses her (her father has threatened her mother with a knife) is subliminally relocated in the table. The choice of the phrase 'in die Knie gehen' (fall to [its] knees) exposes the connection. Her agency vanishes as she assigns the responsibility for bearing the pressure of the situation to the inanimate object at the centre of the scene.

Marven argues that boundary dissolution is also present in Müller's writing itself, in the way the unreal impacts on the understanding of the plot. A slippage occurs between *discours* (poetics) and *histoire* (plot) as visual elements that at first appear as details come to convey meaning in and of themselves. One example of this is the repeated use of the image of a broom, an item associated with the narrator's mother. She endlessly buys new brooms of all kinds (the narrator list over twenty different kinds), which function as a physical sign of her manic drive to clean (*Niederungen*, 79). Cleaning is an outlet for the mother's nervous energy and a means for her to assert and retain control in her life.

> Mutter rutscht auf den Knien über die Dielen hin.
> Ich erkenne sie nicht, weil sie immer mehr sie selber, immer mehr ein Vorgang wird.

> Die Fußbodenbretter glänzen sauber vor ihr.
> Mutters Augen schauen hin und her. Sie haben einen schwarzen Fleck Pupille, der dreht sich um sich selbst. Mutter hätte schöne stille Augen, wenn sie nicht den ganzen Tag ein Vorgang wär. (*Niederungen*, 75)

The mother's desperate and compulsive behaviours seem to be related to trauma stemming from her experience as a forced labourer in Russia and function as an ambivalent symbol, redolent both of survivors' efforts to regain normality and the oppression that produced a need for such strategies. She works continuously in the name of hygiene, which is also a means to control her environment and her family members. She cuts the child's fingernails down to the quick, which traumatises the child, reinforcing the link between cleaning and oppression (*Niederungen*, 46-47). This obsessive monitoring of household hygiene is mirrored in the exacting standards of cleanliness in the wider Banat-Swabian community and killing of vermin such as mice, as well as perceived vermin such as sparrows and kittens, which are seen as unwanted extra mouths to feed (*Niederungen*, 29-30, 76-78).

The oppressive and normative associations of cleaning and the importance of the broom as a symbol of oppression for the mother impact on the *discours* in the story 'Die Strassenkehrer', where the sweeping in question is done by the Communist state. In this highly abstract and metaphorical text the narrator, now in the city, is overwhelmed by the sense of being watched and controlled: a car 'runs over her eyes' with its lights, owls eat up the kisses left behind on park benches, and the street cleaners sweep the city clean (*Niederungen*, 155).

> Sie kehren die Glühbirnen weg, kehren die Straßen aus der Stadt, kehren das Wohnen aus den Häusern, kehren mir die Gedanken aus dem Kopf, kehren mich von einem Bein aufs andere, kehren mir die Schritte aus dem Gehen. Die Straßenkehrer schicken mir ihre Besen nach, ihre hüpfenden mageren Besen. Die Schuhe klappern mir vom Leib. Ich gehe hinter mir her, ich falle aus mir heraus, über den Rand. […] Jetzt reden alle Straßenkehrer alle Straßen durcheinander. Ich gehe durch ihre Schreie, durch den Schaum ihrer Zurufe, ich zerbreche, ich falle in die Tiefe der Bedeutungen. (*ibid*)

The fantastical tone of the scene is accompanied by an intense fear on the part of the narrator, the source of which is informed by her experience in the village milieu. The brooms used by her mother to uphold norms and retain control are now in the hands of the

state, which uses its brooms to restrict freedom and destroy life. They affect everybody, by sweeping the living out of the houses and the streets from the city but by doing so sweep the thoughts from the narrator's head. She is overwhelmed by their pressure on her, falling into a chasm where her thoughts are marked by trauma, until finally the broom falls over her (*Niederungen*, 156). This is one of a small selection of images in the *Niederungen* collection where one can read an attempt by Müller to expose the experience of state surveillance but it is only through the convergence or collapsing into each other of imagery and plot, established in the politically 'safe' setting of the Banat-Swabian village that this meaning is established.[17] This is what Marven describes as the 'culmination' of the interplay between fantastical images and the plot, 'the generation of narrative by associative links on the level of the *discours*' (Marven, 2005, 89).

Although observed as a symptom of trauma, it is important to note the effectiveness of this kind of interplay in circumventing censorship in Romania. 'Der Straßenkehrer' is a strikingly political text yet it appeared in print three times between 1978 and 1982, which suggests that the censors did not pick up on its critical undertones. Poetic language and ambiguity in images was one way for authors to communicate with their readership, which was highly sensitised to shades of meaning and implied criticism of the regime. Authors were practised in working in 'Andeutungen', which would pass muster thanks to the often insensitive censors and editors who gave the seal of approval to new works (Spiridon, 2002, 100, 158).

Haines identifies similar resistant tendencies in Müller's use of detail, which maps onto the third aspect of bodily trauma as outlined by Marven: fragmentation. In several of the episodes mentioned above, the narrator zeroes in on small details of the scene and either imbues them with meaning or agency, as in the case of the table in the incident where her parents are fighting, or takes them as a focus away from the main events of the scene, for example when she hears the echo under the bridge where she and Toni. Haines argues that this approach offers a way of resisting totalising structures; regimes that dominate meaning with grand narratives are confounded by attention to precise details which they cannot subsume into their worldview (Haines, 1998). Eke quotes Müller's poetics lectures, collected in the 1991 volume *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel*, in which she

[17] This text appeared in *Echinox* in 1978 and was published again in *Neue Literatur* in 1979, as well as in the Bucharest edition of *Niederungen* (J. Müller, 2014, 57n; *NL*, 30, 5 1979, 24-25; *Niederungen*, 155-56). Several other authors in the Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn circle wrote texts about street cleaners: Franz Hodjak ('Kurzes Lied der Straßenfeger', 1983) and Rolf Bossert ('Die Straßenkehrer. *Nach Herta Müller*', 1984) around the same time. Astrid Schau traces these and Müller's texts back to Michael Marian's 'Straßenfeger' (1970) and points out the linguistic games the authors place with each other (Schau, 2003, 25-26)

talks about the power of detail, 'Der Eindruck, daß genaues Hinsehen zerstören heißt, verdichtet sich mehr und mehr. […] Wenn man Menschen, auch, wenn sie einem nahe stehen, ansieht, wird man schonungslos. Man zerlegt sie. Das Detail wird größer als das Ganze' (Eke, 1991, 13).

Marven accounts for this fragmentation using Elaine Scarry's formulation that the world is 'experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe' (Scarry, 1985, 35 cited Marven, 2005, 56). In the dancing scene mentioned above, the narrator's perspective narrows in this way so that her focus is on the details of her body,

> Peter dreht mich um sein Gesicht.
> Die weißen Glocken werden schwindlig und rauschen einen Takt. Meine Schuhe treten einen Takt, die Fransen meines Schultertuchs taumeln einen Takt. Mein Haar fliegt einen Takt. Eine Locke fällt mir übers Ohr, eine Locke fällt mir in den Nacken, eine Locke fällt mir auf die Nasenwurzel. Die Trommel summt so hohl wie eine Brücke. (*Niederungen*, 118)

Her perspective has shrunk to such an extent that the rest of the scene recedes; her clothes and hair, and the parts of her body they touch, fill her awareness, with only Peter's face and the beat of the music reminding the reader of the wider scene. The latter description of the drum sounding as hollow as a bridge offers a connection between her anxiety in the present and the site of the incident she recalls later in the scene, the bridge under which she and Toni had sex. In the context of trauma this connection might be understood as the result of a trigger, the unexpected prompting of traumatic, intrusive memory caused by something in the present.

Malfunctioning memory is the primary feature of trauma, represented both in the inability to recall experiences at will or as part of a narrative and the intrusion of traumatic memories into the present. Flashbacks and lacunae are the most obvious expressions of this and two instances from *Niederungen* are referred to particularly often in scholarship. The episode in which the child recalls the slaughter of a calf but not the moment of its death, and the discussion which takes place between her and her mother afterwards both contain what appears to be intrusive memory and gaps in memory (Marven, 2005, 100). However, as I shall explore, some of the flashbacks and lacunae do not fit a trauma reading

entirely neatly. The scene between mother and daughter offers a particularly clear example of Müller's complex use of silence as a space in which meaning is created.

> Ich fragte [meine Mutter], ob auch sie traurig wäre, wenn man mich ihr wegnehmen, mich schlachten würde. Ich fiel an die Kastentür, ich hatte eine geschwollene Oberlippe und einen violetten Fleck auf dem Arm. All das von der Ohrfeige. Mutter sagte, jetzt ist endlich genug geheult. Ich musste augenblicklich mit dem Schluchzen aufhören und im nächsten Augenblick freundlich mit Mutter reden. […] Ich musste laut und freiwillig einsehen, dass ich die Ohrfeige verdient hatte, dass es schade sei um jeden Hieb, der danebengehe. (*Niederungen*, 65)

Two gaps in the narration are especially noticeable here: the time between the child's question and her hitting the door, and the time between the injury and the mother saying that the child must stop crying. Both could be read as the failure of memory as a result of trauma, with the narrator unable to access her memory of the moment the blows fell. However, the first of these gaps is problematised as a true lacuna of memory as the narration continues. Initially the child remarks of her injuries 'all that from a clip round the ear', and the word 'Ohrfeige' is the only concrete statement of what took place, but the severity of her injuries and her fall make the declaration seem questionable. The version of events which explains her injuries with a typical disciplining slap is called further into question by the words which her mother requires her to say after she demands that she stop crying: that she ultimately earned the slap and that it's simply too bad about all the blows that went with it. So what took place in the first gap in the narration was not a single 'Ohrfeige' but an unspecified number of blows, which led to the child hitting a cupboard door as she fell to the ground. The use of the subjunctive in the sentence where the child must recognise her own guilt, as well as the change from one blow to more than one suggests that the mother is trying to present a particular version of events, out of guilt. The narrator's statement, that all had come from a slap, is proved false but its placement at the beginning of the story suggests that in hindsight this has become the agreed version of events; the child is covering up for the mother and 'Ohrfeige' is a knowingly euphemistic description. Therefore, the gap between the child's question and her finding herself on the floor cannot be read as a straightforward example of trauma rendering memory inaccessible. Müller is instead using gaps in the narrative to represent the selective remembering of events motivated by internal and external factors. The mother puts

pressure on the child to exhibit good behaviour by both pretending that nothing serious has happened and by apologising for causing the incident. The narration reinforces the idea of the narrator having to 'toe the party line' by agreeing with her. The gradual revelation of the reality of what happened, through the memories of the narrator and the reported speech of the mother, imply that the incident is fully accessible to memory but purposely being repressed. Self-censorship, rather than trauma, lies behind the disjointed and nonlinear revelation of the truth.

As demonstrated above, many of the elements of trauma outlined in previous scholarship on Müller are clearly visible throughout *Niederungen*. Physical dissociation, dissolution of boundaries and the narrator's hyper-awareness of individual body parts demonstrate the effects of trauma on the self's relationship with the body, whilst a narrative which switches between the first and third person, the merging of plot and image and a gaze which jumps between details mirror these effects at a textual level. However, subsuming her narrative techniques entirely under the category of trauma remains problematic. As the incident in which the mother slaps the child to the ground illustrates, Müller's narrators are not always straightforwardly unable to access what happened, and the choices she makes regarding discontinuities and narrative fragmentation often have a complex impact on reader understanding. In the following I will discuss some critiques of trauma theory relevant to readings of Müller, return to the issue of authorship as an influence on interpretative approaches and lay out what I see as the advantages of a focus on memory when it comes to her work.

Critiques of Event-Based Trauma Theory

While theorists like Caruth promote trauma as a framework for understanding modernity and accessing the experience of historical subjectivity, other critics, such as Dominick LaCapra, condemn what they see as the disconnection of trauma from historical specificity (LaCapra, 2001, 64, cited Modlinger and Sonntag, 2011, 7). LaCapra criticises the development of a 'wound culture', in which everyone can be considered traumatised, and disagrees with Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's view of identification with and 'sharing' of others' trauma as a useful tool for historical understanding (*ibid*). Instead, he, along with other critics with a background in the specific traumas of the Holocaust, sees the wider application of trauma theory as something which dilutes meaning. The widespread use of the term within popular discourse contributes to this sense of dilution; Haines makes

reference to jarring effect of the term's application to both Holocaust victims and those who grieved for Diana, Princess of Wales after her death in 1997, for example (Haines, 2002, 267).

Although the narrators in Müller's texts definitely fall into the category of people whose responses to their life experiences seem proportionate and therefore culturally valid within the more exclusionary discourse of trauma, the issue of what within their experience qualifies as a traumatic *event* is complicated: are they traumatised by childhood beatings, interrogations or other instances of intimidation, or can their traumatisation be traced to events at all? Recents critiques of trauma are helpful for the new light they shed on this issue of where and how to locate the source of trauma.

Moving on from issues surrounding cultural authority and the broadening of the definition of trauma, recent criticism of trauma studies has pointed out a Western-centric conception of trauma in cultural studies and of pathologies such as PTSD. The paradigm of 'event-based' trauma, based on a particular experience, fails to account for trauma encountered by people whose lives differ from those upon which white, Western consumer-capitalist societies base their understanding of the human psyche. Critics such as Stef Craps talk of the failure of trauma theory's grand scheme to pioneer 'a new mode of reading and listening' envisaged by theorists in the 1990s (Caruth, 1996, 9, 11 cited Craps, 2014, 45-46). They argue that psychological theories of trauma do not meet the requirements of post-colonial, minority and non-Western survivors of traumatic events whose processes of recovery are devalued and obstructed by hegemonic discourses of recovery, and cultural theories of trauma replicate this exclusionary tendency (Craps, 2014, 48-49).[18]

The normative understanding of what constitutes a "normal" life (or the absence of trauma) is a fundamental flaw in contemporary approaches to psychiatry, most obvious in the failure properly to describe trauma which does not arise from the single catastrophic events or any other change to a person's life. This equation between trauma and exceptional event still form the basis of the American Psychiatrist Association's world-famous DSM manual (Craps, 2014, 49). Writing in 1995, feminist psychotherapist Laura Brown argued that the DSM was discriminatory because it neglected the experience of

[18] Psychology scholarship is ahead of literary studies in this respect, Craps argues, with psychiatrists such as Summerfield and Watters railing against 'psychiatric universalism' and the acceptance of PTSD as a universal phenomenon (Summerfield, 2004, 238 cited Craps, 2014, 48). Watters makes use of case studies from Sri Lanka which demonstrate the destructive impact of Western grief counsellors flown in after the 2004 tsunami, for example (Watters, 2010 cited Craps, 2014, 49).

groups for whom 'exposure to acts or threats of physical or psychological violence is a constant reality – the rule rather than the exception –' (Craps, 2010, 55):

> (A) continuing background noise rather than an unusual event, the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class and other inequities is not recognised as being traumatic by those adhering to the dominant, event-based model of trauma, which assumes that trauma stands outside normal everyday experience. (Brown, 1995, 207 cited Craps, 2010, 55)

Where everyday experience itself forms the source of trauma and its attendant psychological disturbances, event-based models of trauma and recovery are not applicable, and for as long as the structural violence that created the trauma continues to exist there can be no talk of healing its effects.

Haines has repeatedly made arguments in a similar vein, pointing to the falseness of any underlying assumption of previous wholeness to which Müller's protagonists might return (Haines, 2002 269). Irene, the protagonist from *Reisende auf einem Bein*, is, she argues, not able to *return* to a state of psychological purity precisely because her life under dictatorship is one of the sources of trauma and she has known no alternative reality. Haines also points to the problems of any claim to 'wholeness' in subjectivity, citing Düttmann: 'Erst wenn man den traumatischen Einbruch, die Durchbohrung und das Hängenbleiben anders zu erklären vermag als durch die dogmatische Voraussetzung oder anprangernde Reduktion einer Reinheit, wird man dem Trauma gerecht werden können' (Düttman, 1999, 213-14 cited *ibid*).

Craps lists alternative theories of trauma developed within the field of psychiatry, the names of which point to the continuing gaps in mainstream frameworks of trauma. These include 'disorders of extreme stress not otherwise specified' (Herman), 'safe-world violations' (Janoff-Bulman), 'insidious trauma' (Root), 'oppression-based trauma; (Spanerman and Poteat), 'postcolonial stress disorder' (Duran et al) and 'post-traumatic slavery syndrome' (Poussaint and Alexander)' (all cited Craps, 2014, 49). Of these I prefer the term insidious trauma for describing the kinds of psychological suffering Müller represents, which, as I shall argue, stem not only or sometimes not even at all from her protagonists' position within an oppressive community or the communist regime (which

might be described under the 'oppression-based' or 'slow'[19] trauma paradigms), but are strongly related to the legacy of fascism, as well as dysfunctional family dynamics and other cultural factors.

The formal characteristics of trauma literature are another target of critics of Eurocentrism, who point to a myopic focus on literary modernism in the field of trauma studies. The tendency to see trauma literature as most appropriate or proper when it is expressed through modernist techniques is the result of that genre's two-fold advantage within the context of European cultural discourse post-1945: it is seen to imitate trauma in form, therefore redoubling its efficacy at communicating the experience of traumatic events, and its resistance to narrative is applauded as following Lyotard's dictum that effective literature of testimony 'does not say the unsayable but says what it cannot say' (Lyotard, 1990, 47, cited Modlinger and Sonntag, 2011, 5). If trauma is about inaccessibility and the inability to communicate, then, so the argument goes, only a text which does not address trauma directly is able to address it effectively.

Luckhurst challenges this view in his 2008 volume *The Trauma Question*, arguing that elitist assumptions about literary quality and its relationship to narrative style cause critics to overlook or undervalue certain texts. He attempts to rehabilitate non-canonical texts, arguing that 'a wide diversity of high, middle and low cultural forms have provided a repertoire of compelling ways to articulate that apparently paradoxical thing, the trauma narrative' (Luckhurst, 2008, 83 cited Craps 2014, 51). Although modernist, anti-narrative techniques are seen in literatures from across the cultural spectrum, this bias against realism and traditional literary styles also reinforces Eurocentric and exclusionary tendencies in trauma studies because it disproportionately excludes indigenous and 'non-literary' forms (Craps, 2010, 51). Preconceptions about what constitutes an effective trauma text are restrictive and lead to misinterpretations, as well as working against the commitment made by trauma theorists such as Caruth to use the universal category of trauma to 'contribute to cross cultural solidarity and (…) creat(e) new forms of community' (Craps, 2014, 46).[20] The close identification of modernism and trauma may also work in the opposite direction, preventing readings of modernist texts such as Müller's that go beyond or resist a trauma reading.

[19] The idea of slowly-enacted damage which is not necessarily visible as a process was popularised through Rob Nixon's concept of 'slow violence', used to analyse actions with measurable but distant and long-term effects, such as the West's consumption of natural resources and the consequences it holds for the global South (Nixon, 2011).

[20] Recognition of others' experience is crucial to Müller's literary project and I will discuss the potential for shared suffering as a means to foster solidarity in Chapter Five, in relation to Judith Butler's work on grievability.

Related to the issue of form is the continued reliance of literary trauma theory on the symptomology of PTSD and the focus on individual experience that this brings with it. As Craps points out, adhering to medicalised discourses of trauma in contexts where the cause of trauma is systematic shifts attention away from its structural causes so that 'people affected by [such structures] are pathologized as victims without agency, sufferers from an illness that can be cured' (Craps, 2014, 50). As well as running the risk of 'psychological recovery being privileged over the transformation of a wounding political, social or economic system,' understandings of trauma based on individual pathology overlook the collective dimension of oppression and the need for 'material recovery' (Craps, 2010, 55). While theorists like LaCapra warn of the possibility of diluting trauma by applying it to social groups or successive generations (see Van Alphen, discussed in Chapter Three), the broadening of trauma-based interpretation to include these collectives may be the only means to access the effects of, and possible responses to, structural violence.

'Im Grunde genommen sind [alle Dinge] zerstreut'[21]: Problems with Trauma Theory as an Approach to Müller

When reading Müller within a trauma framework it is important to be mindful of the criticisms outlined above. The tendency within literary trauma studies to privilege individual narrative, event-based paradigms of traumatisation and recovery and certain formal preferences have potential implications for interpretations of her work and the usefulness of a trauma framework as a starting point. In the following, I will discuss what I see as counterproductive tendencies within existing readings of Müller, including how trauma theory in this model conflicts with her authorial intentions and undermines the complexity of her literary technique.

The first issue I identify relates to my previous discussion of Müller's authorship and persona. Müller's biography plays an important role in the reception of her work, with audiences and critics reading her work in the light of her known history of victimisation by the security services in Romania. As I argue above, Müller's conscious undermining of the boundaries between fiction and her personal experience reinforces this, bringing her life and identity closer to that of the protagonists she represents in works such as *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*, *Herztier* and *Heute wäre ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*

[21] (Haines and Littler, 1998, 18).

especially. The author's public discussion of her experiences of persecution in the form of surveillance, interrogation and ongoing psychological intimidation by the *Securitate* forms an important part of her writing life and scholarship based on it. Haines talks of Müller 'repeatedly present(ing) in fiction the locatedness of her own complex experience of trauma' (Haines, 2002, 270). This recognition of the importance of Müller's biography is desirable in general but exacerbates several issues in conjunction with the event-based trauma reading of her work, which has been the majority approach thus far.

Scholars who focus on the author's known suffering at the hands of the Romanian state tend to interpret her work in light of this knowledge, interpreting the silences and disturbances in her work as revolving around the terror instigated by the *Securitate*. Marven demonstrates this tendency in her assessment of "progress" in Müller's writing, where she argues that, 'Müller's three novels since 1989 […] mark Müller's shift towards 'autofiktional' writing (her preferred term), with protagonists and narrators who are *particularly close* to her experiences, and express the physical threat and psychological repression within the Romanian state' (Marven, 2005a, 397, my emphasis). Eddy, similarly, focuses on the author's later life when she states that: '*Herztier* was written in response to the trauma of life under the Ceauşescu dictatorship, when the citizens of Romania lived in constant fear of the secret police or Securitate' (Eddy, 2000, 58).

Even though both scholars are obviously right to interpret these texts as expressing aspects of life in communist Romania, the idea that these later texts (1987-2009) are more reflective of Müller's life experience and the sources of her personal trauma than texts like *Niederungen*, *Drückender Tango* or *Barfüßiger Februar* assumes that interrogation, surveillance and other active forms of intimidation – which are indeed represented most clearly in these texts – stand at the absolute heart of Müller's literary project.[22] This tendency to focus on events in the emergence of trauma fails fully to account for the role of insidious trauma in the narrators' perception and thereby the importance of other historical contexts to Müller's work. Although the specific, active instances of persecution are undeniably important to her narrators and within her stories, a more accurate reading of Müller becomes possible when we adopt Eke's position that Romania is *both* part of Müller's autofictional project *and* an example of persecution that stands for other situations and remain open to other interpretative possibilities (Eke, 2013, 99). The

[22] As Marven puts it: 'Traumatic events evident in Müller's texts are caused by, and rooted in, physical experience: torture and interrogation, threat of violence, and, ultimately, death' (Marven, 2005, 53).

alternative background most deserving of further examination among these is the collective trauma of fascism and its legacy.

Attending to the content of Müller's work with a mind open to other contexts, it quickly becomes apparent that the legacy of National Socialism is equal to the processing of Romanian communism in terms of importance. Yet existing readings of Müller's work based in trauma theory struggle to account fully for the presence of the Nazi past in her writing. Although all scholars identify this history as playing a role in the narrators' troubled perception, the tendency is to view its significance in relation to later events of the author's life, often reading Müller's famous statement that the Banat Swabian village was the first dictatorship that she knew as confirmation of this teleological analysis. Marven discusses the child narrator in *Niederungen* as a 'traumatised individual' but does not identify the source of her trauma specifically or other than in relation to Müller's later experience of repression (Marven, 2005a, 397). This implies that the pre-1987 texts are best read as a precursor to those in which Müller is able to express political oppression more openly:

> In these (pre-1987) texts, the projection of violence onto nature also functions as a veiled reference to the political repression which cannot be depicted directly. Just as descriptions of the rural Banat also function as a microcosm of the repressive political situation, Müller's consciousness of the violence of the Ceaușescu regime is displaced onto seemingly unpolitical, pastoral scenes. (Marven, 2005, 65)

Although Marven's projection of the wider political system onto *Niederungen* is entirely valid, it does not work as a complete interpretation because the scenes she refers to are marked by elements connected to the Nazi past that are in themselves a source of psychic disturbance, rather than ciphers for the communist system. The threat of violence the child narrator projects onto her surroundings has causes which are indicated within the text itself, including family dysfunction and the related legacy of Nazism. Writing in 2000, Eddy is explicit about the importance of the fascist past in her analysis of *Herztier*, pointing to the connections made between it and the narrator's contemporary experiences of state violence which are revealed through the double narrative (Eddy, 2000, 67). However, she creates a separation between what she terms the two traumas, which erroneously implies that the first is somehow completed or passed: 'Müller creates

linkages that join the narrator's childhood trauma with the Romanian-German, Nazi past, and the narrator's adult trauma with the horrors of the Ceauşescu dictatorship. […] her present as a citizen of Romania and her past as the daughter of a Nazi soldier' (*ibid*, 67). Similarly, Haines names the trauma of the child narrator in *Niederungen* as being related to the legacy of fascism but does not bring this to her analysis of *Reisende auf einem Bein* as a means of understanding trauma alongside the narrator's presumed experiences of persecution, even though the Nazi past plays a similar, if less pronounced role in the creation of images. However, she does indicate the importance of the legacy of fascism across Müller's oeuvre as a whole:

> Other traumas, also arising from Müller's biography, are never far away in her work. […] Müller indicates the complex interrelationship of oppressions emanating from the petrified diasporic German values of the villagers on the one hand and the power of the Romanian state on the other. The dilemma of being a child in this community based on secrets is particularly vividly invoked in the story 'Die Grabrede'. […] (The father's) unvoiced crimes haunt the child, causing nightmares, in a case of what […](some) might call transgenerational trauma. (Haines, 2002, 267)

At a metatextual level, Müller has referred to the revelatory impact of her learning about the Nazi state and its crimes as a teenager many times throughout her career. She struggled to believe her teachers at the German Gymnasium in Timişoara at first when they taught her about the Holocaust, suspecting their descriptions to be part of the widespread misinformation and propaganda of the communist regime (Hensel, 1987, ZB 2). However, further investigation in international publications and academic works showed her that they were telling the truth,

> In erster Linie war das Sachliteratur; auch Zeitschriften, Zeitungen aus dem Bundesrepublik, etwa im Spiegel Fotos von den KZs, es waren Berge von Brillen, es waren Berge von Schuhen, es waren Berge von Leichen. Die Tatsachen waren so beschrieben, daß ich mich nicht mehr wehren konnte, also habe ich auch das, was man mir in der Schule gesagt hat, hinterfragt und begonnen, mich damit auseinanderzusetzen (ibid).

Breaking the taboo on guilt which existed within her village and her family, Müller embarked on a personal mission to learn about the crimes of the Nazi era. She cites specific historical works as having facilitated this discovery, most notably Eugon Kogon's *Der SS-Staat* (1946) and Victor Klemperer's *Lingua Tertii Imperii (LTI)* (1947) and describes how she went in search of testimonial literature by Jewish writers and poets such as Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Theodor Kramer and Georg-Arthur Goldschmidt, a literary-political education she reflects on in the essay collection *In der Falle* (1996) (Adameşteanu, 2003, 8-10; Bischoff, 2016; *Onkel*, 78; *Falle*, 6, 19). Shocked and frightened by how much had been concealed from her, the teenaged Müller was forced to reassess her family members' involvement in the Third Reich, and even their character, .

> Sie erwähnten Paul Celan, ja den verehre ich. In die Bewunderung seiner Gedichte fiel aber von Anfang an das Wissen, dass ich auf der anderen Seite geboren wurde, auf der Seite seiner Lebensbedrohung. Ich hatte einen SS-Soldaten zum Vater, einen zum Onkel. Und einen Großvater, der mir als Kind mitten im Hof zwischen Hühnern und Aprikosenbäumen sagte: 'Wenn wir den Krieg gewonnen hätten, dann wäre jetzt hier Deutschland.' Ich verstand das als Siebenjährige nicht. Aber als ich zehn Jahre später Eugen Kogon's *SS-Staat* las und mir Celans Gedichte das Herz in den Mund schlagen ließen, verstand ich, dass dieser Satz wie viele andere Sätze in diesem Dorf, in diesem Haus, Celans Eltern auf dem Gewissen hatte und Celans Davonkommen mit dem Leben nicht zugelassen hätte (Sienerth, 1997, 302, cited Kegelmann, 2003, 309n).

Müller's struggle to understand and accept the role her father played in the structures of the Third Reich and may have played in the crimes it committed was exacerbated by his early death from cancer in 1978 (Saliste, 2009). Faced with the knowledge that he would soon die, she found herself unable to broach the subject with her father beyond tentative confrontations, 'Ich zeigte ihm Paul Celans »Todesfuge«. Er sah mich achselzuckend an' (Falle, 8).

> Da entstand für mich dieser Bruch, ich habe zwei Wochen lang gewußt, er wird sterben, da gab es ihn noch. Ich konnte auch damals nicht mit ihm reden. Es war einfach keine Kommunikation zwischen uns früher entstanden und die konnte sich auch in den letzten Wochen nicht mehr einstellen. Ich bin nicht einmal so weit

> gegangen, daß ich versucht hätte, ihn auf diese Dinge hin anzusprechen. Ich weiß nicht, vielleicht war es das Wissen, daß er sterben wird. Ich kann das jetzt nicht mehr verantworten, mich mit solchen Sachen zu quälen, aber ich glaube, da wäre auch nicht viel dabei herausgekommen, wenn ich es getan hätte. (Hensel, 1987, ZB 2)

It is notable that criticism which favours an event-based model of trauma, and relies on details from Müller's autobiography to define which events are of significance, has yet to focus on these moments of horrifying revelation, to which Müller constantly refers in anecdotes but, significantly, has yet to narrate. Müller has also described this confrontation with the past around the time of her father's death in 1978 as the initial drive behind her writing:

> Als mein Vater gestorben war und ich diese Einsichten alle hatte, haben die mich zum Schreiben getrieben. Ich habe überhaupt nicht an Veröffentlichung gedacht, "Niederungen" als Tagebuch geschrieben und Bekannten gezeigt, die selbst geschrieben und mich darauf hingewiesen haben, daß ich, wenn ich diese Art von Beschreibung fortsetzte, damit ein Buch machen könnte. Ich glaube, daß das Schreiben der ersten Prosatexte damals geholfen hat, daß ich an den Sachen nicht verrückt wurde, weil ich sie aufschreiben konnte. (*ibid.*)

Having a father who was in the SS is, after all, not inherently traumatising but the sudden acquisition of knowledge that casts your parents, community and identity in a new and terrible light undoubtedly presents the potential for trauma, and may be even more violating of pre-existing assumptions about one's fundamental identity than political persecution from without, which is a threat to life and limb. Müller also gives these reflections a structural dimension when she recalls how German guilt was trumpeted by the communist regime in Romania as a way to shirk Romanian responsibility and smear the ethnic German (and Hungarian) minorities (Müller, 2016).

Part of the problem with integrating the fascist past into an event-based theory of trauma and why I believe scholars shy away from doing so is this issue of its viability as a form of trauma in a medicalised sense. The 'unvoiced crimes' of the past which 'haunt' the child lie firmly outside her experience and in some instances the elements that seem to break into her consciousness can only be imaginary. There is also a tension between

trauma in the sense of post-traumatic stress and symptomology that account so neatly for some of the formal elements of Müller's writing and the general 'trauma as a symptom of modernity' thesis. The Nazi-related elements straddle the two categories, appearing in texts like *Niederungen* and *Herztier* as a product of specific, locatable trauma rather than crises of subjectivity yet not accountable for within a PTSD model because of their lack of connection to lived, physical experiences. Working to locate the source of trauma in terms of an event or series of events in Müller's biography, one might look at the moments of revelation described above. Overall, however, a non event-based model is more promising.

Craps's arguments for a move away from both of these approaches into a non-event based model of traumatisation focusing on systems or structures offers a potential way forward in discussing post-fascist trauma in Müller's work, by allowing us to talk about traumatic experiences which are ever-present or ongoing. Narrators such as the one in *Niederungen* are traumatised by their experience of structures which have emerged in the aftermath of Nazism, including being raised by parents who *do* appear to be suffering from trauma accrued during the Nazi era, and authoritarianism, sexism and restrictions on free thought that appear to be inflected by fascist ideology.[23]

This focus on structure satisfactorily accounts for some elements of the ongoing trauma experienced by the narrators in several of Müller's texts and the interspersing of upsetting incidents from childhood into the narration of *Herztier*, as connected to National Socialism. However, in texts like 'Faule Birnen' and the title story from *Niederungen*, which are set entirely during the narrator's childhood, it is not memories of a childhood affected by ideological and emotional aftereffects of fascism which seem to intrude unbidden into the narration (see Chapter Four), but images and sequences taken directly from the fascist era itself (see the Rübenfeld scenes, discussed in Chapter Three). In their formal analyses of Müller's works, scholars discuss 'flashbacks, hallucinations and dreams' in the text as well as the temporal disjuncture in its plot in terms of the classic PTSD phenomenon of intrusive memories (Marven, 2005a, 398). Haines builds on Judith Herman's definition of intrusion as something which 'reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment' (Herman, 1992, 32; Haines, 2002, 273). The question then comes of how to account for instances in which it is not a moment that is imprinted or is not a traumatic memory that is intruding, in the classic sense at least.

[23] For a discussion of the impact of being raised by traumatised parents see Van Alphen (2006), whose work I explore in Chapter Three.

Although viewing the Nazi past as a direct source of trauma is highly problematic because of its distance from the live experience of the narrators, refining the focus to the structural aftereffects of the fascist period (insidious trauma) and the experience of acquiring knowledge of the past (event-based trauma) clarifies the issue. However, the problem of form – specifically representations of flashbacks, associative leaps and hyperarousal – remains unsolved. In many instances throughout Müller's works, the images which come unbidden to the narrator's mind or steer their interpretations come from second-hand knowledge, the information imparted about the Nazi past from others. In the final section of this chapter I will interrogate the category of intrusion and lay out my case for memory as a complementary framework for interpreting this and other aspects of Müller's writing.

Involuntary Memory and the Universal Experience of Memory as a Route into Ethical Engagement

Flashbacks in Müller's narrative constructions tend to be read in terms of trauma. This is a valid and productive approach to her work, as I endeavoured to demonstrate in my analysis of the dance scene above. However, these flashbacks, whose origins are signalled in the text as being part of the narrator's experience, are often accompanied by associations and other details of memory whose origins are either obscure or non-traumatic. In order to account more fully for the processes which are unleashed by this chain reaction and to do justice to the complexity of Müller's techniques in sequences reflecting these processes, it is useful to consider a more differentiated view of flashbacks (which I understand as unexpected scenes from the narrator's past that Müller places to suggest interruptions to her perception) and other instances of involuntary recall (individual images, sounds and other sense memories as well as historical knowledge), against the backdrop of cognitive psychology.

Although involuntary memory is a strong feature or even overall "hallmark" of post-traumatic stress, it is not limited to this context. Psychologists view it as one of the two facets of autobiographical memory along with its opposite, voluntary memory, *i.e.* the memory produced by a conscious attempt to remember (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, 2000 cited Deeprose et al, 2012, 758). A strong association between involuntary memory and trauma also informs the field of psychiatric research, leading to the common interchangeable use of 'involuntary memory' and 'intrusive memory', even though the latter connotes distress associated with involuntary memory resulting from trauma and is

thus a more loaded term (Brewin et al, 2011, 559). Although it may be most strongly associated with trauma, involuntary memory, where not distressing, is in fact 'a common phenomenon in healthy adults', with leading expert John H. Mace arguing that it 'is probably common to everyday life, both when remembering intentionally and when memories comes to mind unintentionally' (Mace, 2014, 1). In fact involuntary and voluntary memory of significant events seem to occur with similar frequency (Rubin and Berntsen, 2009 cited Deeprose et al, 2012, 758) and there is no consensus that it is any more likely to arise in relation to negative experience.[24]

Whether predominantly positive or negative, involuntary memory is certainly not limited to cases of trauma. The experience of involuntary recall, the arousal of memories of varying fullness and magnitude which come unbidden, is integral to cognition. They may be triggered by the content of voluntary memory or arise from triggers of which the subject is unaware (Mace, 2014, 1). In the cultural sphere, the most widely known example of involuntary memory is that of the madeleine episode in Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way*, in which the smell of a pastry evokes memories of childhood that had previously been "forgotten". Scent functions here as a trigger of memory, which follows the common pattern found in studies of involuntary memory, namely that such memories tend to contain 'sensory-perceptual' elements rather than, for example, words (Brewer, 1996; Conway and Pleydell Pearce, 2000; Arntz, de Groot and Kindt, 2005; Conway, 1990, 2005 cited Deeprose, 2012, 758). In the context of Müller's work, this would give an alternative explanation of the importance of the body identified by scholars such as Marven, since not all the sensory memories which appear unexpectedly in the text are necessarily traumatic (Marven, 2005b, 59). In her essays, Müller describes memory as an uncontrollable experience and foregrounds the unpredictability of the images or impressions which provoke it or which become the focus of remembrance. She writes:

> Ich schreibe in dieser Diskontinuität, die im Grunde genommen auch ihre Kontinuitäten hat. Es sind immer mehrere Ebenen, aber sie werden dann auch natürlich in ihrer Lage fortgesetzt. Ganz ohne Kontinuität kommt man nicht aus, sonst bindet sich nichts zusammen. Es muss ja alles irgendwo hinwollen und muss ja auch irgendwohin gelangen. Ich kann aber so wenig einlinige, einspurige, oder

[24] While some scholars argue that involuntary memory is more frequently negative than positive (Bywaters, Andrade & Turpin, 2004; Walker et al, 2009 cited Deeprose, 2012, 758), or that it is more prevalent following negative cues (Schlagman & Kvavilashvili, 2009), Brewin et al (1996) find that it is equally likely to be positive, and Bernsten (1998) finds that it is more often positive (all cited Brewin et al, 2011, 560).

eingleisige zeitliche Folge erkennen, ich kann sie auch so wenig in der Welt erkennen. Es passieren immer so viele Dinge auf einmal. Um die Dinge handhabbar zu machen und sie auf uns zu beziehen, vereinfachen wir sie und fügen sie zu in sich geschlossene Vorgänge zusammen, aber im Grunde genommen sind sie alle zerstreut.' (Haines and Littler, 1998, 18)

Another feature explored within scholarship on involuntary memory is what Mace terms 'memory chains', in which autobiographical memories (both voluntary and involuntary) trigger each other (Mace, 2014). He posits that observations of the chains of involuntary memories show that episodic memories are organised thematically, 'as conceptual classes of events'; for example memories of visiting a museum are more likely to evoke involuntary memories of other museum visits than they are to evoke memories of events which are temporally linked to the subject of the first memory, for example what you had for lunch afterwards (Mace, 2014, 1). This idea of involuntary memory, 'the obligatory spread to neighbouring, related memories within a network', is supported by the fact that what triggers the first memory (what made you remember the museum visit initially) is often not related to the subsequent involuntary memories (*ibid*).[25] Mace's research demonstrates not only that conceptual linkages become significantly more common as time from the event they refer to increases but also that their frequency increases with age, suggesting that concept is the principle by which the basic architecture of memory is structured (Mace, 2014, 2).

This is significant for readings of Müller's texts. Understanding traumatic, intrusive memory as a subcategory of involuntary memory and focusing on the chaining effects of all involuntary memory allows us to account for the elements within her narrators' perception which cannot easily be attributed to trauma. Their thoughts are affected by involuntary autobiographical memories that may not themselves refer to a traumatic event, but bear some conceptual connection to voluntary memory, their present sensory stimuli or to an involuntary traumatic memory. This latter possibility presents a reverse of the normal triggering paradigm associated with trauma and can be used to explain instances such as the dance scene above, in which a traumatic scene (being forced to dance against her will) evokes involuntary memories of a non-traumatic event (having sex with Toni). Involuntary

[25] This idea of memory chaining at the level of individual perception mirrors ideas of paradigmatic montage in the field of film studies and cultural memory, where images and gestures evoke scenes from disparate contexts which nevertheless share certain features. I discuss this concept further in Chapter Four.

memory is also a useful paradigm for describing the presence of historical knowledge, which cannot in itself be traumatic, in the narrators' flashbacks.

The influence of historical knowledge can be seen in the pig scene from *Niederungen*, in which the narrator displays symptoms of trauma in relation to the slaughter of the pig, apparently experiencing traumatic visual memories of its internal organs and the way it was killed. However, her involuntary memory response is not limited to the scene of slaughter. When she goes outside to look at the carcass, the narrator sees the blood, which is evidence of the pig's death and has been absent from her memory until this point. She relates this both to what she has witnessed and her childish repository of knowledge, which includes the story of *Schneewittchen*, 'Schneewittchen hatte Haut, so weiß wie Schnee, und Wangen, so rot wie Blut' (*Niederungen*, 35).

This linking of the slaughtered pig to the fairy tale of the princess is founded in involuntary, cultural memory and points to the child's trauma being focused around her parents. Becker reads the girl's reaction as being a product of her empathy with the pig, which becomes 'Auslöser eigener existentieller Todesangst' but the pig does not exhibit fear; it is the act of violence and the destruction of the pig that disturbs her (REF to Becker, 1991, 34). Intertextual references to the Grimm story of a princess whose (step)mother tries to murder her renders this fear more concrete.[26] The narrator's identification of herself with the victim of the adults and fantasy of being under attack exposes her fear of the people who care for her and the associative leap she makes into the childhood world of make believe, which can be read both as a retreat and an attempt to rationalise what she has seen, is tainted by this fear. The words of the story flood her mind as an involuntary memory, '…Haut, so weiß wie Schnee, und Wangen, so rot wie Blut. Schnee mit Blut bespritzt, Schnee und Blut über sieben Bergen. Kinder hören sich das Märchen an und greifen sich an die samtig glatte Wange' (*Niederungen*, 35). Here, Müller creates a link between the child's fear and an existential threat to children more generally, as well as between her yard covered in blood and wider German culture. The image of pig's blood, sprayed across the seven mountains beyond which Schneewittchen takes refuge, implies that refuge from the violence that has horrified her is impossible, while the dead pig evokes the boar piglet whose heart the hunter returns to the queen as a substitute

[26] Although the most familiar form of *Schneewittchen* features a murderous queen who is the stepmother of the protagonist, the 1812 first edition of Kinder- und Hausmärchen depicts the queen and Schneewittchen as mother and daughter. Ute Holfelder calls the decision to edit this in all subsequent editions (1819 onwards) one of 'd(er) bekanntesten Beispiele für die editorische Arbeit von Grimm.' (Holfelder, 2009, 110) The ambiguity regarding the nature of the parental relationship in *Schneewittchen* hangs disturbingly over modern references to the text. The same editorial change was made in the case of *Hänsel und Gretel*. (ibid.)

for the heart of the princess in the Grimms' tale. The slaughter of the pig becomes a cipher for parental violence both in the sense of a general, innate tendency and the possibility of it being turned against the child. The mention of 'sieben Bergen' also evokes its near homonym Siebenbürgen (Transylvania), pointing to involuntary memories regarding the history of the Germans in Transylvania and the actual violence of which the Romanian-German community has proved itself capable.[27]

From the point of view of form, too, it is useful to complicate the trauma reading of Müller's work with the complementary, overarching framework of involuntary memory for practical and (for want of a better word) ideological reasons. Where it is applied as a key to the entirety of her written project the trauma framework overlooks the idea that features such as flashbacks and disjuncture may be imitations of healthy as well as unhealthy involuntary memory and doing so unnecessarily pathologises her writing.

As Craps and other critics of trauma theory argue, thinking about human subjects in terms of trauma has an inevitable othering effect: their perception is seen as damaged, their interpretations as based solely in their experience and their subjectivity as pathological (Craps, 2014, 50). This effect is seen in the reception and interpretation of Müller, which tends to see her as a victim and her style as a product of her experiences, albeit to greater and lesser extents. This has repercussions on issues of agency, both in terms of understanding her writing life and in analyses of her narrators. When it comes to the first, I suggest that an excessive focus on trauma in relation to Müller undermines the linguistic control she exercises in her writing and reduces her output to the compulsive or semi-voluntary self-expression of a single person and a single experience. For the second, focusing on trauma pathologises her narrators to a greater extent than is necessarily justifiable and makes them responsible for their own recovery, drawing attention away from the truly unhealthy political and social structures which are traumatising them. It also diminishes the possibility that their sensitivity to the content of memory may also be an act of resistance.

[27] Other Banat writers of Müller's generation make reference to the Schneewittchen story in a way that suggests a play on the 'sieben Bergen/Siebenbürgen' opposition. Hans Matye's poem 'was aus den 7 zwergen geworden ist' sees the seven dwarves establish dominion over seven herds in the meadows below the seven mountains before arming themselves with seven fighter planes and seven tanks to defend themselves from seven wolves (Matye, 1980, 29). The repetition of the number seven and the eventual defeat of the seven dwarves, along with the references to modern warfare suggest that this is also a reference to the history of the German minorities. Balthasar Waitz's 'aufsätze zu dem taschen-, und gesellschaftsspiel: Schneewittchen in deinem schwaben-dörfchen' recasts Snow White as a stereotypical Swabian housewife, complete with drunken husband (the prince), who 'besitzt ein eigenes messer für schweinekehlen' (Waitz, 1974, 14). Critics discuss Müller's use of fairytales across her oeuvre and Schneewittchen recurs in *Herztier* (Eke, 1991b, 85-86; Marven, 2005, 112).

Although the openness to memory and attentiveness to involuntary memories displayed by Müller's narrators are definitely a partial product of their traumatic experiences, the content of some of the involuntary memories and the mechanisms that govern them, such as sensual triggers and chaining, are not the sole domain of trauma and speak to a universal experience of memory. This is crucial to another important aspect of Müller's ethical approach, namely the demands she places upon her readers to interpret and open themselves to empathetic engagement. As Marven writes of trauma-like formal features: 'These devices represent effects of trauma within the texts' reality […] as well as forming part of Müller's political intent: the reader is forced to experience the same effects, but also to (re)construct links between sentences or episodes, thus becoming critically engaged' (Marven, 2005a, 400). However, although this argument rightly and convincingly underlines Müller's involvement of the reader, to say that they are thereby forced to experience the effects of trauma overlooks ways in which Müller plays into *universal* experiences.

As discussed in the section on autobiography, memory as it is experienced is seldom sequential or narrative and trauma theory tends either to view this non-sequential and incomplete quality as a product of modernity and its traumatising effects or to conflate "memory" as a general term with narrative memory, the facet of voluntary memory most disturbed by trauma. Although the traumatised subject does not have the capacity to remember the source of their trauma, it is not the case that a healthy subject has complete recall or does not experience chaotic or confusing instances of recall. Involuntary memory and voluntary memory overlap, both in patterns of neural activity and in experience, and memories inaccessible with effort can sometimes appear voluntarily in response to triggers (known or unknown) (Hall, Gjedde and Kupers, 2008).[28] We are simply not always conscious of involuntary memory's importance to recall because it is often too weak or irrelevant to voluntary memory and the demands of day to day life (Mace, 2014, 1).

When thinking about Müller's literary project, especially in terms of ethics (which I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5 in more detail), involuntary memory has much to offer as an interpretative framework.This idea of trauma as an alien experience to which the reader is allowed access does not do justice to the sensitive and above all sustained way in which Müller prompts engagement. Müller's work is received with gratitude and recognition in

[28] Proust's madeleine sequence emphasises the unreliability of voluntary memory in the narrator's inability to remember his childhood before the sudden rush of memory which comes involuntarily. He contrasts the 'caricature' of the past he is able to summon through rational thought with the complete and overwhelming sensory recall prompted by the madeleine (Whitehead, 2008, 106-07).

post-dictatorial contexts where oppression and its traumatic effects have been felt first hand and reviews continue to celebrate her writing as communicating trauma (Haines and Marven, 2013, 13; Sievers, 2013, 184). Yet her ability to connect to others is not predicated upon them having endured similar situations, or even upon their interest or curiosity regarding exceptional experiences. The artistry of her work lies not in transitory moments in which she is somehow able to "give" people the experience of trauma but rather in the essential *familiarity* of memory structures deployed in her writing.[29] A reading that views elements such as flashbacks, nonlinearity and lacunae as aspects of healthy as well as unhealthy perception of the past is thus beneficial for understanding the universal impact of Müller's writing. Formally, a focus on involuntary memory is able to account for this in several ways, drawing attention to considerations other than trauma within her work and allowing for greater precision in describing its structure. Thematically, such a reading highlights her interest in memory as a source of knowledge and primary human activity. Ethically, the universality of involuntary as well as voluntary memory corresponds to Müller's commitment to recognition and 'building bridges' between people with differing experiences as well as her stated ethical belief that the past must be remembered.

Conclusion

As well as offering an overview some of the most important theoretical foundations for my study of Herta Müller, this chapter has sought to establish several main ideas which are important for considering her work. First, that the way in which Müller uses her own life subverts the demands of both fiction and autobiography – and that her *Autofiktion* forms part of a wider 'writing life'; her autobiographical literary project. Second, that trauma is a productive way into understanding Müller's literary approach but that it is unable to account for every aspect of her writing. Third, that event-based trauma theory has inherent problems which it is important to consider in relation to Müller, and finally, that the familiar mechanisms and sensations of non-narrative memory are a means by which she is able to inculcate a sensitivity in her reader to their own memory processes and to mirror the sensations of memory in her writing.

[29] By the times she was awarded the Nobel Prize, Chinese publishers had bought the rights to fourteen of Müller's works and published ten (Sievers, 2013, 177-78). Her reception in Poland has seen her celebrated as 'one of us', although few comparisons are made in the press between Poland and Romania (ibid, 184, 186).

Müller sees narrative memory as a product of imagination and an unreliable means to access the past but uses her narrators' perspectives and acute observations of the often-overlooked dimension of involuntary memory to reveal the ways in which memory – non-narrative, uncontrollable yet perceptible and appreciable with proper attentiveness – nevertheless offers access to the past. Furthermore, the imaginative act inherent to turning these highly subjective fragments into stories forms a starting point for engaging the reader in imaginative work through empathy. Memory-based and memory-like acts of imagination are fundamental to Müller's entire oeuvre and represent both a means of bypassing the problematic issues of truth claims and cultural authority and an effective formal technique for increasing reader engagement.

In Chapter Two, I argue for the importance of these interpretative acts of reconstruction and imagination to evaluating narrative memory and memory narratives. Müller engages the reader as a collaborator in her acutely-observed criticism of the Banat-Swabian community and its petrified, distorted memory culture. Müller exposes the fallacies of this collective vision of the past against which she has written and agitated for decades, revealing the vulnerability of narrative memory to manipulation whilst at the same time highlighting the value of authentic memory as a bridge between people.

Chapter Two: '"Hörst du überhaupt zu"'[30]: the dissolution of village identity and the collapse of memory narratives in *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (1986)

As I demonstrated in Chapter One, Müller's autofictional prose writing – exemplified by *Niederungen* – takes up memory both as a central theme and as a governing aesthetic principle. However, in addition to portraying individual memory processes and engaging with wider discourses of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* through her depictions of family dynamics (as in *Niederungen*), Müller also displays an interest in the content and function of memory at the collective, local level. Her village tales in the collections *Niederungen* (1982), *Drückender Tango* (1984) and *Barfüßiger Februar* (1987), as well as her novels *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (1986) and *Herztier* (1994), feature communities whose group identity is centred around their relationship to the past. Mimicking communicative memory and placing the reader in the position of listening bystander, Müller uses shared memories and their circulation as a way of exposing the villagers' narrow mentality and the way the past is altered to serve the demands of the present. She provides insight into the discourses she opposes and demonstrates the power of collective memory to manipulate individuals and their ability to recall events whilst ironically undermining the authority of memory narratives *per se*.

The villagers in Müller's texts exhibit nostalgia for the interwar and National Socialist eras and view the loss of the Second World War by the Axis as regrettable, appearing to share in her grandfather's view that, 'wenn wir den Krieg gewonnen hätten, wäre hier jetzt Deutschland' (*Teufel*, 23; Hensel, 1987, ZB 2). Opinions like these, which in the mouths of Müller's characters appear to form a striking critique of Banat-Swabian society, combined with expressions of prejudice against Jews, "gypsies" and those of other races, have contributed to the critical interpretation of Müller's village setting and figures as 'fascistic' (Bauer, 1996a, 266; Becker, 1991, 35). If her child narrator's horrified imaginings of parental violence in *Niederungen* can be read as a response to the past and collective guilt, then the other characters in the village embody the silencing and self-glorification which obstructs this process of reflection. *Fasan* in particular is a biting response to the nostalgic and self-exonerating aspects of Banat-Swabian memory, breaking through the image of a harmonious past to criticise the 'mummified' culture of the villagers (Eddy, 1998, 335; Bauer, 1996b, 143). However, alongside this critique, Müller's focus on the Banat-Swabians also exposes lesser-known historical events such as the deportation of ethnic Germans from Romania to the Soviet Union in 1945, and offers an

[30] (*Fasan*, 129).

insight into the traumatic experiences which are constitutive of their self-understanding; memories of real suffering which are deserving of sympathy and recognition yet tend, problematically in Müller's view, to overshadow ideas of culpability. The resulting combination of sympathetic memory work and critical engagement with the shortcomings of the Banat-Swabian community's historical self-image has been characterised by Spiridon as expressing '[die paradoxe] Hypothese des schuldigen Sündenbocks' (Spiridon, 2002, 147).

Beyond this "content" aspect of village memory, which reads as a counterpart to Müller's explicit "real-world" criticism of her parents' generation and its failure to acknowledge the Nazi past, Müller also displays an interest in the function of remembering in that space at the collective level.[31] The transmission of memory, via anecdotes, apocryphal tales and received wisdom, as well as in the enactment of rituals and traditions, is highly visible in the community, which is represented as being cut off from wider systems of cultural memory. In the carefully managed public space of Ceauşescu's Romania public memory was reduced to the celebration of communism's victory over capitalism (synonymous with fascism), meaning that the communities Müller portrays had to rely to a great extent on local memory activities, such as war memorials, songs, and personal acts of commemoration, and on the interpersonal transmission of knowledge about the past for the continuation of a memory culture reflecting their experience (Balogh, 2008, 190).[32] Although the Banat-Swabian community, and the international German community as a whole, generally shied away from discussing their collective culpability for the crimes of the National Socialists, this silence was filled with stories about German suffering, wartime experiences and victimhood, which in Romania went against the mainstream of public memory. The sharing of personal memories is a particularly fundamental activity for the villagers in *Fasan*, who buttress their crumbling sense of communal identity through reference to the past. The sharing of individual stories, often fragmented and without full explanation, plays a central role in reconstructing the past within Müller's texts too, which emulate oral history and rely on readers both to judge the statements of the villagers and to fill in the gaps when it comes to political history. At times the stories the characters tell seem to reveal authentic experience but more often

[31] See for example *In der Falle,* 'die heimgekehrten SS-Soldaten […] warfen sich in den Rausch einer derben Gemeinsamkeit. Die damit verbundenen Verbrechen blendeten sie aus' (*Falle*, 21).
[32] This divergence of local memory from official history is something I return to when discussing the documentary literature of Banat writers in the 1970s-1980s in Chapter Three.

their views on the past clash with reader knowledge, especially when it comes to the question of German guilt.

Fasan offers a view of the village at the moment when its rigid social structures, strongly connected to the ideological control of the past, begin to collapse, meaning that the novel also provides opportunities for comparison with the works in which the village and its internal mechanisms are 'intact'. It demonstrates, through a polyphony of voices, how memory is susceptible to alteration to meet the demands of the present and that, even though they are a source of self-affirmation, narratives about the past are ultimately unreliable and restrictive. Over-attachment to the past supports the continuation of stifling tradition, which alienates the younger generation and hinders the community's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The decline of the village's population due to emigration, combined with the unwillingness of the next generation to listen to the memories of their predecessors, means that the narratives of the past and the structures of authority they support are doomed. However, although Müller demonstrates how truth about the past is lost when it is transformed into a story (especially one which suits a collective agenda), she continues to assert the importance of sharing personal memories at an interpersonal level. Memories of individual suffering – such as that of Katharina Windisch during her imprisonment in a labour camp – are inherently valuable resources when not used for the purposes of identity politics. Before discussing the relationship between power and memory and the decline of collective memory in *Fasan*, I will give overviews of the central ideas of collective memory and of Müller's portrayals of Banat-Swabian identity.

Theorising Collective Memory

Alongside her determinedly subjective engagement with the past, Müller exhibits a great interest in portraying the social dimensions of memory. Maurice Halbwachs is recognised as among the first philosophers to connect the idea of group membership with investment in a certain shared view of the past and coined the phrase 'collective memory' in the 1930s (Whitehead, 2008, 123). Since then, theorists have mainly been preoccupied with attempting to refine and expand this concept so that it can account for representation and transmission as well as individual psychology. Pierre Nora was a pioneer in this aspect of collective remembering, formulating the term 'lieux de memoire' to describe the position held by certain historical events within the memories of multiple people and different

groups, as well as art and literature (Nora, 1989, 19; Whitehead, 2008, 141-142). In the case of Müller's fictional village, the most important lieux des memoires are the World Wars, deportation, expropriation, the settlement of Banat and the "halcyon" days of the interwar period. Michael Rothberg proposes an alternative term, *noeud de memoire* as a way to capture the complexity and contested nature of many of such historical events, as well as move beyond assumptions about nationality or territorialisation of memory (Rothberg, 2010, 7).

Two of the central problems which arise in the study of collective memory centre on the issue of delineation. First, and most obviously, the term 'collective memory' is something of a misnomer, given that all actual remembering takes place solely at an individual level. Instead of being an objectively accurate description of a phenomenon, 'collective memory' is shorthand for a complex and multidirectional relationship between individual memory and what Halbwachs describes as the individual remembering *as a group member* (an important aspect of the imagined community described by Benedict Anderson) (Halbwachs, 1980, 48 cited Erll, 2016, 16, my emphasis). An alternative and useful conception of group memory is the metaphorical transference of an individual's cognitive process onto the group level (Erll, 2010, 4). A group does not have a brain but its members share and internalise (to differing degrees) narratives of events which are important to its identity.

Jan Assmann carefully divides what is meant by collective memory – a shared awareness of and identification with a certain narrative of events of the past – into 'cultural memory' – the representation and discussion of this past in the public arena – and 'communicative memory' – the transmission of this past from person to person through anecdotes and other informal memory activities (Assmann, 2010, 110). Although he concedes that cultural memory may be seen as a form of collective memory in that it concerns transmission to a group and the formation of group identity, communicative memory is strictly non-institutional and informal (Assmann, 2010, 111). It is this informal, person-to-person form of memory circulation that is of primary interest here.

Although Assmann's disentanglement of forms of collective memory allows greater precision, this kind of categorisation also contributes to the second notable problem faced by those using a collective memory framework. Just as Halbwachs's initial attempt to characterise memory as the opposite of history was revealed to be an artificial separation, any attempt to delineate formal and informal group remembering, or indeed any form of memory, is doomed to offer only a partial view (Whitehead, 2008, 131).

Memory is fundamentally entangled and memories acquired from all kinds of sources interact and overlap in each individual's repertoire, both because subjects bring multiple types of knowledge to bear on any narrative regarding a collective past – for example supplementing historical accounts with what others have told them – and because any representation or record of the past is the product of an individual.

Recognising these limitations and the difficulties relating to any attempt qualitatively to assess a group's collective view of the past, especially through cultural products, my focus must remain on how Müller's writing represents the mentality of the Banat-Swabian community, rather than socio-historical analysis of the Banat Swabians as a real existing social group. Yet I find Assmann's theoretical distinction between formal (cultural) and informal, interpersonal (communicative) memory in social groups useful for my reading of memory culture in the village. Müller's village tales, although primarily concerned with anecdotal and unconscious (for example, linguistic) communication regarding the past, also provides clear examples of formal memory activities, such as memorialisation, as well as practices belonging to a less easily-distinguishable area of group memory relations, which could be called customs. There are also many instances in which an implied cultural memory can be discerned, both within the dialogue, as characters appear to parrot ideology, and in the implicit demands Müller makes on her readers' historical knowledge as a contrast to the villagers' attitudes. The first strand of my investigation, then, is to assess what the Banat Swabians remember and the way in which Müller represents these memories to the reader. This analysis will exceed the bounds of many studies of collective remembering, in that it is concerned not just with multiple memories (as opposed to a single event or era in isolation) but also with the idea of historical mentalities (Confino, 2008, 77-84). Müller represents the mentality of the Banat-Swabian community in different historical periods across her fictional writing of the village setting and focuses on the attitudes of multiple generations towards past and present.

Müller herself must also be considered as acting within these complex memory matrices, both as a member of and outsider to the group which she is representing and as a writer contributing to the discourse on Banat-Swabian memory culture. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, her exposure to cultural memory was different to that of the characters she represents and of the neighbours and family members she has described in autobiographical accounts of her childhood, primarily because she left the village to attend school at the age of fifteen. Müller has reflected on the role of the communist regime in

transforming the life path of her generation through the expropriations and dismantling of family-based farming:

> Nein, nachdenken haben wir von diesen Deutschen nicht gelernt. Daß wir es trotzdem lernten, war ein Zufall. Ein Zufall war, daß es kein Feld mehr gab… und so konnten sie uns nicht mehr in die Landwirtschaft jagen, sondern mußten uns in die Schulen lassen. (Schuller, 1982 cited Spiridon, 2002, 134)[33]

Müller's bilingualism and interest in Romanian culture also provided a further perspective on the nation's history, while her (self-)education in German literature and culture from other countries inevitably affected her view of history (see Chapter Three). In respect to communicative memory too, Müller's departure from the village changed her perspective, in that the trustworthiness of other people's accounts of the past was called into question and she began to recognise the motivation behind the management of historical narratives. The habit among men in the village, including her father, of singing SS anthems as drinking songs is one of the features of life in that community which was thrown into sharp relief by her increasing knowledge of the crimes perpetrated under Hitler. From being a naturalised part of her environment, the songs came to symbolise an unwillingness to accept responsibility:

> … ich habe […] das, was man mir in der Schule gesagt hat, hinterfragt und begonnen, mich damit auseinanderzusetzen. Eine lange Zeit über mit dem Gedanken, daß vielleicht auch mein Vater ein Mörder sein könnte oder inwieweit er direkt an diesen Dingen beteiligt war. Wieviel er gewußt haben konnte. […] Da habe ich dann zum ersten Mal meinen Vater gesehen, als Bauer, als Lastkraftwagenfahrer später, als der, der […] zusammen mit anderen auf Hochzeiten, wenn die Stimmung schon sehr feucht war, wenn die Leute betrunken waren, Lieder gesungen hat, von denen ich erst später wußte, daß es eigentlich Lieder aus seiner Nazijugend waren. (Hensel, 1987, ZB 2)

> Daß der Zeigefinger in seinem Kopf dieses Lied aus dem Suff trieb, daß er keinen Ton der Melodie und kein Wort des Textes vergessen hatte, zeigte, daß er, was er

[33] This exact quotation has also been attributed to Richard Wagner. It was reported in Germany as part of his Laudatio to Herta Müller after she won the AMG-Literaturpreis for prose in 1981 (K.H., 1981, 2).

einmal gewesen ist, geblieben war. Daß er, wie alle die anderen, die "Kameraden" dieses Lied nie bereut hatte, wie er diesen Krieg nie bereut hatte. (*Teufel*, 23)

In addition to examining the villagers' (and Müller's) remembrance of events which affected the Banat-Swabian community at the level of content, the aim of this chapter is to identify ways in which Müller reveals memory to be transmitted between members of the group. This second strand is intimately linked with identity, and although this chapter looks primarily at how characters in Müller's novels express or inculcate a sense of collective identity in others through the discussion of the past, social practice is equally important in Müller's portrayal of village identity and closely associated with memory. The notion of tradition, which is so important in the village's relationship with its past, is communicated not only through ritual and memorialisation such as the war memorial but also embodied forms of memory, such as dress and domestic routines. The importance attached to them is an extension of that attached to maintaining racial purity and moral behaviour, as well as a signal of the authority with which "pastness" is invested. Semi-conscious and habitualised actions, for example, use of language, habits of work and the organisation of the home are also part of the transmission of memory, and Müller's village tales contain many instances in which children are initiated into these.[34]

The chauvinistic attitude of the Banat-Swabian community as represented and discussed by Müller is based in three loosely-defined categories: character, religion and culture. The Banat Swabians see their superiority as proven in differences between them and other ethnic communities, especially the Romanians, who they call 'Walachen' and describe as lazy (*König*, 164-65), dirty (*ibid*), dishonourable (*Februar*, 12) and uncultured (*Fasan*, 73). Because Romanians are not part of the Catholic church the villagers gossip about their religious practices (*Fasan*, 76); even the priest expresses the opinion that Romanians cannot be buried in the same churchyard because 'die Gräber der Rumänen anders riechen als die Gräber der Deutschen' (*Fasan*, 43). The Germans criticise Romanian culture as backward and unsophisticated, pointing to their traditionally larger families as evidence of a lack of sexual continence (*Fasan*, 76) and attacking their farming methods as a product of inherent ignorance, 'Walachisches Gesindel. Die Wissen nicht mal, wie man Schweine füttert' (*Fasan*, 73). Intermarriage is regarded as a greater crime than murder or incest (*Niederungen*, 15), despite the visible examples of interethnic

[34] For a more detailed discussion of village language and its representation by Müller as a language 'tainted' by National Socialism, see Watson (2014).

relationships (*Februar*, 12; *Fasan*, 110-11). Social practice is essentialised and supports an immutable "us and them" mentality.

However, Müller also reveals the incoherence of this prejudice, portraying Banat-Swabian xenophobia as animosity to all difference rather than specific racial ideology. In her essay 'Das Ticken der Norm' Müller describes the community's division of the world into 'normal' and 'nicht normal', whereby all of their habits and beliefs were considered right and all others wrong. 'Normal', '[ein] abstrakte[s] Wort, das ihrem Bildungsstand weit überlegen war', became a flexible yet authoritative basis for rejecting difference: 'Und weil es willkürlich zu verwenden war, in allen Situationen abstrafend konkretisiert' (*Hunger*, 89). Müller exposes the dogmatic attachment to the Banat-Swabian definition of 'Normal' and the confused ideas about race it produces in *Fasan*, where the Nachtwächter and Windisch talk in platitudes about 'die Juden', '…in Amerika sind die Juden am Ruder.' / 'Ja […] die Juden verderben die Welt. Die Juden und die Frauen' (*Fasan*, 77). In the latter sentence, the equation of Jews and women adds a humorous dimension to the anti-Semitism voiced by the characters, which is more suggestive of habit, ignorance and in-built reflex than any coherent ideology. The mixture of what appears to be a knee-jerk and possibly externally influenced prejudice against the Jews (the use of the term 'verderben' could be a direct quote from Nazi propaganda) and the implicit suggestion that they and women are somehow "in it together" demonstrates that the (male) villagers' prejudice is, as Müller argues, against everything that challenges their highly patriarchal, narrow worldview – even if this includes members of their own community. However, she does not neutralise or justify these kinds of expressions, or see the ignorance of the men as an exonerating factor, saying that every such remark 'Celans Eltern auf dem Gewissen hatte und Celans Davonkommen mit dem Leben nicht zugelassen hätte' (Müller, 1997, 320 cited Kegelmann, 2003, 309n).

The xenophobia displayed by the villagers in *Fasan* and other texts is also revealed to have a historical basis. One aspect of this is the ideology of fascism, which is evoked in their choice of words, animosity towards Jews and other races and celebration of the Second World War, which I discuss below. However, the early history of the Banat Swabians and pre-war interethnic relations, including pre-1919 Magyarisation, unfavourable agricultural reforms in the interwar period and mass emigration to America, provide important contexts for the rabid xenophobia and victim complex of the Swabians

(Schieder and Conze, 2004, 18-23E).[35] Banat-Swabian pride in their farming methods can be traced back to the myth of settlement popularised by Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn's novel *Der große Schwabenzug* (1913), in which Banat is described as having been a barren waste before the Germans arrived and civilised it.[36] The surprisingly emotive relationship the villagers seem to have to this tradition must also be read against the pre-war period of expropriations and the frustration of ethnic Germans losing land to traditionally less intensive and profitable Romanian farms (Schieder and Conze, 2004, 20E). Such measures represent a pre-history to the post-war nationalisation of farming, a period of upheaval referenced relatively often in Müller's village-set stories, which is interpreted as the persecution of Germans by Romanians despite affecting all landowning farmers equally (Patrut, 2006, 128). The narrative of victimhood, although strongly rooted in the forced relocation and deportation of Germans in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, is shown to have developed and reinforced as part of a continuum of nationalist and isolationist thinking over the course of decades.

Although the villagers' statements carry echoes of the *Blut und Boden* ideology of the Third Reich (a connection Müller purposely creates), 'das kompakte Selbstverständnis der Dorfgemeinschaft und deren etablierte Alltagspraxis [sind] in ihrem *Wesen* von der Geschichte nicht alteriert worden' (Motzan, 1983, 69).[37] The connections which Müller undoubtedly makes between National Socialism, fascist ways of thinking and the village milieu are thus more complex than a simple cause-and-effect relationship.[38] Indeed, that

[35] After 1919 the Romanian state sought to reduce disparities in prosperity between its Romanian and foreign ethnicities through positive discrimination in state bureaucracy, expropriations and other land reforms designed to redistribute wealth. Several hundred thousand Hungarians, Turks and Germans left Romania as a result of these reforms, which saw them excluded from jobs and disadvantaged in business (Hitchins, 1994, 338).

[36] Writing in 2006, Iulia Patrut describes how, far from being a *terra deserta* devastated by Turks when the Banat Swabians arrived in the 17th century, Banat was a thriving multi-ethnic region governed by the Ottoman Empire, home to Hungarians, Romanians and Serbs, all of which groups also claim credit for 'civilizing' Banat (Patrut, 2006, 106-07). By 1600 the region's main city of Timişoara had mosques, monasteries, schools and a central bazaar, as attested by Turkish travellers who recorded their impressions of the town (Patrut, 2006, 106). A whole genre, *Siedlererzählungen* was popular in the years of agricultural reform after the First World War, with the trope of arrival added to the existing features of *Heimatliteratur* (Patrut, 2006, 111).

[37] This can be seen in 'Rote Milch' in *Drückender Tango*, in which the grandmother describes her wedding, presumably in the 1920s, at which '[Die Männer] vor der Scheune […] zwischen Flaschen [saßen] und […] durch die Einöde und Dämmernis Soldatenlieder [sangen]' (*Tango*, 36).

[38] The main things to change as a result of nationalist and fascist rhetoric during the interwar period and the Second World War was the discourse of conflict between the Swabians and neighbouring ethnic groups, who had lived together relatively peacefully until then. Hobsbawm mentions this phenomenon among *Aussiedler*, saying that he 'know(s) no case before the nineteenth century where a major political problem arose because these Germans found themselves living under non-German rulers' (Hobsbawm, 1992, 47). Fascist organisations in Romania capitalised on memories of forced Magyarisation decades before to develop a narrative of repression and victimhood (Totok, 1988, 18).

the villagers were seduced by Nazi rhetoric (as she contends) in the first place is best understood as a result rather than just a cause of their xenophobia and experiences of authoritarianism at home. In *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel* Müller discusses this directly:

> Viele Grenzer waren Dorfjungen, durch den Armeedienst zum ersten Mal für lange Zeit von ihren Dörfern weggerissen, autoritätsgläubig und leicht zu dressieren. Denn sie waren ungeübt im eigenen Denken, wurden im Handumdrehen bedingungslos untertänig und zu allem bereit. (*Teufel*, 20)

She further demonstrates this sense of continuity through the remarks made by the grandparent figures in her village tales and the repetition of experience in successive generations. This is especially noticeable in connection with the World Wars, which are the main focus of remembrance in her stories.

As well as providing manpower for the armies of the Third Reich, the Eastern Banat, as a region of Hungary, was a recruiting ground for the Dual Monarchy in the First World War. This period is glorified by the grandfather generation in a way that closely mirrors their sons' celebration of the Second World War. In *Barfüßiger Februar* the narrator's grandfather reminisces about that time, saying 'Der erste Weltkrieg, das war ein Weltkrieg […] Und wir, die jungen Männer waren in der Welt' (*Februar*, 11). He and the blacksmith reminisce about their experiences, which the child narrator recalls as a series of words that gradually shift in relevance until they come to refer to the Second World War: 'Der Schmied trank Schnaps und sagte "Kriegsgefangenschaft" und "Heldenfriedhof". Und Großvater sagte durch den roten Tropfen Wein am Rande des Glases "Strategie" und "Mostar", sagte er, "der Wilhelm liegt in Mostar"' (*Februar*, 13).[39] I will explore the importance of the Second World War and its veneration in the village in more detail during my discussion of *Fasan*.

Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt: An Exception among Müller's Village Tales

Published in 1986, while Müller was under an official *Veröffentlichungsverbot* from the Romanian government, *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* is a novel of

[39] This reference to Mostar likely relates to the fate of Müller's maternal uncle, Matz, who was killed in Bosnia during the Second World War. Mostar was the site of a battle between the SS Division Prinz-Eugen and Yugoslav partisans in early 1943 (Casagrande, 2003, 245). The campaign, which continued into the summer of 1943, saw war crimes committed against civilians and the summary execution of prisoners and was investigated as part of the Nuremberg Trials (ibid, 258-59).

emigration (Krause, 1998, 150, 152; Zierden, 1998, 78).[40] It features the Windisch family - mother Katharina, father (known simply as Windisch) and daughter Amalie - who spend the majority of the text waiting for permission to emigrate to West Germany. Their experience represents that of many Banat Swabians and Romanian Germans more widely, many of whom emigrated to West Germany at this time. Assisted by an agreement struck between the West German and Romanian states in 1978 (following on from a secret arrangement beginning in 1967), around 14,000 ethnic Germans per year emigrated until the collapse of the regime, totalling roughly 200,000 between 1967 and 1989 (Deletant, 1999, 119; White, 2002, 183n).[41] As this novel suggests, leaving was often complicated by protracted bureaucratic processes and corruption at the local level so that families could wait for long periods for their exit visas.

Being located in this historical moment sets *Fasan* apart from Müller's other village tales, which primarily take place in a period (presumably the 1960s)[42] when village life seemed to be characterised by continuity rather than change. In *Niederungen*, *Drückender Tango*, *Barfüßiger Februar* and even *Herztier*, the village itself represents a constant, with the villagers' zealous attachment to tradition and reliance on agriculture contributing to a sense of timelessness.[43] The village in *Fasan* is in a state of flux, having being catapulted into what Eke describes as 'eine unmittelbare Heterochronik' (Eke, 1991, 78). The exposure to a changing world caused by the prospect of emigrating to the West and the change in conditions in the village brought about by the influx of new, non-German inhabitants create a sense of modernity encroaching into the static village space. This conflict between the present of the village and the present of the rest of the world (to

[40] The ban began automatically after Müller submitted an application to emigrate in October 1985. This came roughly six months after she was banned from travelling outside Romania (Kegelmann, 1995, 51; Krause, 1998, 150, 152). She had previously managed to pressure the *Securitate* into allowing her to visit Germany three times for awards ceremonies on the premise that if she did not attend, journalists would come to visit her in Romania (*Apfelkern*, 175; Glajar and Brandt, 2013, 44).

[41] This agreement, which existed as an open secret since 1967, was modelled on a previous arrangement between Poland and the Federal Republic by which ethnic German *Aussiedler* were allowed to 'return' to Germany in exchange for a fee paid to the Polish government (Deletant, 1999, 119). In Romania the 'head tax' varied from DM4,000 to DM10,000 but averaged DM8,000 (Cinopes, 2010, 58; White, 2002, 183n; Garton Ash, 1993, 238 cited Brandt and Glajar, 2013, 3). A similar amount was also demanded from those hoping to emigrate by officials who used the opportunity to extort bribes (Deletant, 1999, 109-10; Traub and Ihlau, 1987, 154). Ceauşescu is reported to have joked that the Germans and Jews were Romania's best export after crude oil (Radtke, 1994, 19; Kalnoky, 1996).

[42] I base this analysis upon the text's autofictionality and Müller's age. She left for grammar school in 1968, aged 15.

[43] In *Herztier*, the village is no longer the primary setting and much of what takes place there is communicated through the memories of the protagonist, who has left the village to study in the city. However, a sense of continuity and stasis is still created both through these memories (again of the 1950s-1960s) and through the continued presence of her parents in the village.

which the village feels 'past' in comparison) is recognised by Windisch as the divergence of his fate from those of his neighbours: 'Seit Windisch auswandern will, sieht er überall im Dorf das Ende. Und die stehende Zeit, für die, die bleiben wollen' (*Fasan*, 5). The petrified nature of village life, now linked to its situation within communist Romania and the lack of progress (or other options) rather than just a more positive sense of continuity and tradition, becomes visible to Windisch as he waits to leave.

Another feature that marks *Fasan* out from other texts is this gendered issue of employment, which is a less visible facet of village life here than in other texts. Unlike in the stories set in the 1950s and 1960s, where the impact of communist land reform and the interference of the state in village life are less obvious, the presence of the authorities is felt constantly throughout the text and is felt in a loss of autonomy in the realm of work.[44] Although characters in Müller's other village texts regularly complain about the communist government and policies such as nationalisation (called *Enteignung* by the villagers), the state is seldom seen to interfere or even exist in daily life within the community. An exception is the appearance of a corrupt government vet in *Niederungen*, who gives permission for the father to slaughter a calf he has maimed in order to claim that it be exempted from the quota given up to the government (*Niederungen*, 61-62). In his professional life as the village's miller, Windisch has little authority and is revealed to be eminently replaceable. A new, Romanian miller, described as 'Ein Walache mit einem kleinen Hut aus einer Wassermühlengegend' (*Fasan*, 100-101), eventually comes to replace him in both his professional role and his home.

One element of the loss of control which is particularly prominent is the strong presence of Romanian villagers, something not seen in any of the other village tales. There, Romanians appear as peripheral characters, such as the vet in *Niederungen* (61-62), but are not a part of daily village life. In *Fasan*, however, Romanians are not only mentioned but are seen to speak and interact with the ethnic German characters as equals, disturbing the integrity of the village as a German space. The proximity of non-Germans in this text obliterates the prized purity of the village as a bastion of Germanness and introduces a plurality in cultural practice that undermines the idea of German superiority, not particularly because the German characters accept the possibility of there being alternative ways of doing things (they still criticise Romanian farming methods) but because their Romanian "inferiors" exhibit an unsettling lack of interest in them or their opinions. In a key scene, which takes place in the chapter entitled 'Zehn Lei', Germans

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and Romanians enjoy drinks in a local tavern when a conflict arises between Windisch's friend the carpenter and a fellow customer:

> "Den ganzen Sommer haben sie die Pelzleibchen an", sagt der Tischler. An seinem Daumen hängt Bierschaum. Er taucht den Zeigefinger ins Glas. "Die Drecksau daneben blast mir Asche ins Bier", sagt er. Der Rumäne halt die Zigarette im Mundwinkel. Sie ist naß von seinem Speichel. Er lacht. "Nix mehr deutsch", sagt er. Dann auf rumänisch: "Hier ist Rumänien."
> Der Tischler hat einen gierigen Blick. Er hebt das Glas und trank es aus. "Bald habt ihr uns los", schreit er. (*Fasan*, 63-64)

This scene encapsulates the change in symbolic, as well as practical relations that takes place between Germans and Romanians in *Fasan*, in which a Romanian "reply" is given to the Banat Swabians' prejudices. The reference by the carpenter to the 'Pelzleibchen' (sheepskin jerkin), which forms part of Romanian traditional dress and has been much commented upon in ethnographies of the region, represents the "othering" of Romanians based on such external characteristics (Livezeanu, 1995, 146). The difference here is that the speaker is immediately confronted with a real, live Romanian and quickly reminded of his own position. The imagined beleagurement which underpins the Banat Swabians' xenophobic attitude in other stories is transformed here into real outsider status, with a German character rejected and designated as foreign by a Romanian.

Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt also differs from the other village tales in a formal sense, with several features which are important for interpreting the novel. Firstly, although the novel is divided into episodic chapters which resemble the stories presented in Müller's three linked short story collections *Niederungen* (1982), *Drückender Tango* (1984) and *Barfüßiger Februar* (1987), their closer temporal relationship makes the text appear more novelistic than any of those. The chapters also follow a mostly linear narrative (with a few notable exceptions that I will discuss later on), with the reader following the Windischs' progress towards emigration against the backdrop of village life. The text is therefore much simpler than other village stories by Müller in terms of its structural coherence, with the focus on temporality caused by the end of the village reflected in the linear form of the narrative. The 'poetische Entgeschichtlichung' of *Niederungen* and other works is replaced by a sense of progress and pace (Eke, 1991, 81).

A third important characteristic which marks *Fasan* out from other works is the naming of the central characters and the consistent use of an omniscient narrator. Through this the text offers a more holistic representation, with the simpler format and consistency in narration contributing to a greater impression of urgency to reveal a plot – the story focuses on "real" events rather than individual subjectivity or fantasy – than can be found in other stories (where the authority lies in the texts' autobiographical style and subjectivity). In *Niederungen*, where the narration shifted between an unnamed child narrator and an omniscient narrator who at times appeared to be the grown-up incarnation of that child, the division between knowledge and imagination, narrative fact and what was known to the characters is less distinct, meaning that characters' thoughts and behaviour are less easily interpreted. The combination of free indirect style and character interaction in *Fasan* leaves the reader in little doubt as to the "truth" which the story presents. Related to this, and perhaps the most important feature of *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*, is Müller's use of marked dialogue, which is absent from her other village writing. The use of speech marks further clarifies what is character knowledge and what information is provided by the narrator, as well as what is actually discussed by the characters. As I will discuss, the use of the omniscient narrator serves to undermine the veracity of the characters' statements at important points in the story.

The various differences which mark out *Fasan*'s setting and form from Müller's other village tales make it a notable exception within her early writing. As I will discuss in my final chapter, the issues of emigration and the attendant state corruption and damage to village life in Romania were topics which Müller repeatedly drew to the public's attention in the late 1980s. Her concern for this cause and its urgency at the time, as well as the necessity of smuggling the manuscript out of Romania, may offer partial explanations for her choice of a shorter and more explicit form of writing, as well as her departure from autofictional writing (to which she returned in *Reisende auf einem Bein* (1989), *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* (1992) and *Herztier*). It was also her first single-story volume. However, the repeated references to the past and the breaks in continuity with regard to tradition and communicative memory are also suggestive of her desire to document the end of a memory culture, as Banat-Swabian emigrants gave up their space-dependent culture and were subsumed into wider discourses on German identity. Müller's pessimistic view on the ability of Banat-Swabian culture to survive in its current form (or indeed the desireability of that prospect) can be read as a reply to the efforts of the

Landsmannschaften to preserve it in Germany through the same narrow traditions that were clung to in Romania.

Memories as an Anchor for Personal and Collective Identity

The village in *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* shares many of the features of those in other Müller texts, and Windisch, as the protagonist, is in many ways a typical village patriarch in the model of the unnamed father from *Niederungen* discussed in Chapter One. He exhibits an attachment to old-fashioned modes of masculinity, exercises (or attempts to exercise) his primary authority within the Windisch household, and reacts extremely negatively to instances in which his wife or daughter's behaviour exceeds his notions of what is decent or appropriate. However, Windisch also finds himself in a situation unlike any of the other archetypal fathers in Müller's village tales in that his authority as a patriarch is challenged in various ways both within his community, and at the level of the narrative. These challenges arise because of the prospect of emigrating and the changing conditions in the village and are mirrored in the doubt Müller creates surrounding his credibility as a remembering subject and the future prospects of the stagnant memory culture he represents.

As changes to the village contribute to a growing identity crisis in Windisch, he seeks reassurance from his male friends. Together, they attempt to rationalise what is happening and prepare themselves for the watershed moment of moving to Germany. One of the themes which emerges in their discussions, and in the exchanges between Windisch and his family members, is that of wartime experience, which serves as a means of comparison with the current situation. This begins with the night watchman's remark that if the owl which lives in the village, and whose landing on a house is believed to portend a death, should die and be replaced by a young owl, then young people will die: '"Dann ist es wieder wie im Krieg"'(*Fasan*, 68). Windisch takes up this idea and repeats it when Amalie's boyfriend Dietmar dies (*Fasan*, 94), as well as when he and his family must finally leave the village, '"Ich weiß," sagte Windisch, "Abschiede sind schwer. […] Jetzt ist es wieder wie im Krieg", sagt er. "Man geht und weiß nicht ob und wie und wann man wiederkommt"' (*Fasan*, 104). The war functions as a common frame of reference for all the men of Windisch's generation, and they use it as an anchoring-point to talk about the process of emigration as well as a means of reassuring themselves of their ability to cope. Kürschner continues this pattern when he reports back from the Federal Republic by letter,

saying that the biggest problem is, '"Eine Krankheit, die wir alle kennen aus dem Krieg. Das Heimweh"' (*Fasan*, 80).

The reason for the repeated deployment of the war as a frame of reference can be seen as two-fold in this case. Firstly, the war era was the last time in which a significant proportion of these characters left the village and experienced the wider world and secondly, the Second World War is of central importance to the self-understanding of the community as a whole. This can be seen in its use as a marker of time; several chapters begin with variants on the phrase 'Vor dem Krieg' (*Fasan*, 32, 58), or references to the war, such as the chapter 'Zwischen den Gräbern', which begins with the phrase 'Windisch war aus der Kriegsgefangenschaft ins Dorf zurückgekommen' (*Fasan*, 46). The effect of this is to divide village history into "before" and "after", which heightens the sense of a mirroring of what happened in the war with what is happening in the contemporary setting, with life divided into the "up to" and imagined "after" of emigration.

The war, and the role people played in it, is also an important factor in social standing within the village, such as when Katharina and Windisch discuss Kürschner:

> '"Ein Held war er nie", seufzte Windisch, "er war bloß ein Schinder. Im Krieg hat man nicht gegen Eulen und Kröten gekämpft." (Kürschner obsessively practices his taxidermy techniques.) […] "Er war nie in der SS", sagte Windischs Frau, "er war nur bei der Wehrmacht. Nach dem Krieg hat er wieder Eulen und Störche und Amseln gejagt und sie ausgestopft."' (*Fasan*, 30)[45]

This emphasis on the past can be seen on a more personal level too, most obviously in the history of the relationship between Katharina and Windisch. Their marriage is a product of bereavement – both were engaged to marry other people who died as a result of the war – and the post-war desperation for a return to normality: 'Windisch war aus der Kriegsgefangenschaft ins Dorf zurückgekommen. […] Windisch hängte seinem Leben rasch an sie. […] Windisch wußte, daß er nicht gestorben war. Daß er zu Hause war' (*Fasan*, 46-47). The fates of these two characters are entirely determined by the events of the war and the immediate post-war period. Their lives are built in response to what had

[45] It is notable that the characters reverse the usual hierarchy of guilt versus cleanliness in associating the Wehrmacht with cruelty and gratuitous violence. Kürschner's sadism – before the war he skinned a buck alive in the in the middle of the village – is used implicitly to prove the contrasting, upstanding behaviour of the SS recalled by Windisch and the use of the term 'Schinder' hints at his also having been a 'Menschenschinder' (*Fasan*, 29-30; Midgley, 1998, 32). Similarly, at the end of the novel, Windisch's appearance upon his return from Germany is commented on negatively by the character dürre Wilma, 'Der hat einen Wehrmachtanzug an…' (*Fasan*, 111).

happened to them and their loved ones. As individuals, they and other characters are shown to suffer the effects of their experiences, with grief and trauma impacting their day-to-day existence in the present. A prominent example of this is Kürschner, who is unable to sleep when he visits his son Rudi in the mountains. Kürschner feels the mountains inside his head as an oppressive presence and reminder of his time as a prisoner of war, saying of his ability to predict the end of tunnels when he passes through them, '"Ich hab das aus Rußland […] So viele ratternde Nächte und so viele blitzhelle Tage", sagte der Kürschner, "hab ich nie erlebt. Ich hab in der Nacht, im Bett die Tunnels gehört. Sie haben gerauscht. Gerauscht wie die Loren im Ural"' (*Fasan*, 21-22).[46] The impact of this kind of individual wartime experience on the Windischs' relationship is something that I will discuss in a later section.

The war also marks the physical landscape of the village, in which the *Kriegerdenkmal* is an important landmark.[47] The very first paragraph of the opening chapter of the novel 'Die Tiefe Stelle', contains a description of the monument which conveys the position of the war within the village's collective memory: 'Um das Kriegerdenkmal stehn Rosen. Sie sind ein Gestrüpp. So verwachsen, daß sie das Gras ersticken' (*Fasan*, 5). This image of the roses which decorate the hallowed site of memory growing at the expense of the fresh grass underneath is redolent of the stifling effect of a narrative of heroism on subsequent generations, whose members' identity is supposed to centre around events of which they were not part. The fresh grass seems to signal the potential for renewal and a fresh approach, stifled by the restricting and hopelessly tangled roses. Another potential interpretation of the image of the grass may be gleaned from reading it against Müller's other works, especially *Herztier* (1994), in which the father obsessively mows his lawn in order to repress the past and specifically his potential guilt as a former SS man (*Herztier*, 21; see Chapter Four). In that reading, supported by the association between them and the white fog which rises up to cover the village, the roses in *Fasan* may also symbolise the suppression of knowledge of German culpability. They

[46] Kürschner continues: '"Ich hab die Berge in der Nacht im Kopf gespürt […] Überall wo man hinschaut […] sind Berge. Auf dem Weg zu dem Bergen sind Tunnels. Das sind auch Berge. Sie sind Schwarz wie die Nacht. Der Zug fährt durch die Tunnels. Der ganze Berg rattert im Zug. Man kriegt ein Brummen in die Ohren und einen Druck in den Kopf. Mal ein sackdunkle Nacht, mal ein blitzheller Tag […] und das ständig im Wechsel. Das hält man nicht aus' (*Fasan*, 21). The ominous sense created in this passage, and his description of the tunnels as mountains suggests that they stand for more than their physical presence (in the present) and are part of his psychological landscape, a product of his experience as a POW. The later image of clouds as a 'graues Gebirg voll mit Heimweh' seems to mirror this image in which mountains function as a metonym for psychic oppression (*Fasan*, 105).

[47] The memorial is mentioned five times in *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* alone (5, 50, 69, 98, 110), and features in other village tales.

prevent the growth of the fresh plants which could threaten their dominance and undermine the narrative of heroism. It is significant that later in the text the war memorial appears again, swathed in fog, and that the roses have brown edges. The impression here is of the roses dying back due to the decline of the village community which sustains both them and the myth of wartime glory (*Fasan*, 50).

The war memorial, along with the ritualised remembrance of the past shown to take place in the regular meetings of SS veterans in other works, represent an example of the cultural aspect of collective memory described by Assmann, in that they are reliant on the public representation of one notion of history. Formalised remembrance of heroism at weddings and *Kerweihe* contrasts with the silence of the villagers about the crimes of National Socialism and provide a counterpoint to Müller's description of the monument in Oberwischau in *Barfüßiger Februar* and her other texts about Jewish suffering. The songs sung by the old soldiers celebrate the same myth of heroism represented visually in the memorial, with both expressions (song and sculpture) contributing to a collective narrative of the past which transcends any one individual's experience. What becomes clear in *Fasan* is that the village's cultural memory related to the war is space-dependent and therefore under threat. With dwindling numbers of German villagers and the absence of group activities presented in other village tales, memory rituals such as the singing of SS songs can no longer have the same effect, while the decision to emigrate means removing to a space (as yet unknown) in which the memorialisation of the past is different. As Halbwachs argues, space must play a role in the ability of subjects and groups to remember, with a shared space allowing groups to 'enclose and retrieve their remembrances' (Halbwachs, 1980, 157 cited Whitehead, 2008, 137). Characters who leave the village can no longer orientate themselves around the war memorial or rely on the presence of fellow group-members. As the group disperses, the collective memory which operated in the village space can no longer exist as something universally understood within the characters' immediate environment. Memory relies on the village for its continued existence, but the reverse – that the village as an imagine community relies on memory for its survival – is also true. The way of life of the village is predicated upon certain ideas about the past and adherence to traditions which rely in part on the authority of certain forms of collective memory, and efforts to maintain this memory are failing. In the following section I will discuss the relationship between the village's social structure and the collective past, in order to consider ways in which the past is instrumentalised to uphold authority and how the village relies for its existence on memory.

As mentioned above, the men of the village hark back to the past as a way of coping with the present as individuals, but their use of the past to influence others is even more noticeable. One aim of memorialising the past is to promote a narrative about the community which serves both propagandistic and justificatory purposes. Painting a picture of the village as innocent, heroic and unfairly disadvantaged, the stories the parents' generation tells also provide a resource for supporting the authority of its inherently patriarchal power structures through narratives of male heroism, and for promoting certain modes of behaviour through ideas about tradition.

The past is manipulated through selective discussions and the maintenance of a particular view of village identity and memory. For example, although the narrative of heroism which Müller criticises throughout her oeuvre features prominently in *Fasan*, there are lacunae within it which consistently undermine its credibility. The men talk of war incessantly but never of fighting directly (apart from in Windisch's vague statement 'Im Krieg hat man nicht gegen Eulen und Kröten gekämpft' (*Fasan*, 30), and recall missing home without ever discussing why they left. Similarly, the sense of victimhood which emerges in their discussion of the post-war expropriation of farmland and their perceived general mistreatment by the Ceauşescu state does not usually extend to a discussion of the more obvious instance of Banat-Swabian suffering, the post-war deportations.[48] There are various potential reasons for these gaps, which range from personal disinclination to the fear of attracting unwanted attention, but they result in one agreed version of Banat-Swabian history which excludes the possibility of guilt and silences other experiences.

Throughout her village tales Müller exposes these selective processes in both subtle and more direct ways, particularly through her representation of strictly delineated spaces within which different topics are more or less acceptable. Gender is the most obvious determining factor in what is discussed in different spaces, with women's stories often providing a counterpoint to the narratives of heroism which are prevail in male-dominated private and (also male-dominated) public spaces. These stories concern female experiences of life events such as marriage, but also a female perspective on history. One example of

[48] For a discussion of how the *Securitate* monitored the topic of deportations as late as the 1980s, see Spiridon (2009, 371-76).

this is 'Drosselnacht' from *Drückender Tango*, in which a grandmother recalls the outburst of nationalist enthusiasm that led her son to volunteer, and ultimately die, for the Nazi armed forces. She expresses a cynical, alternative view to that of the war as a time of heroism and glory, saying: 'Und für die Welt war [das Dorf] nur ein Angebot im Krieg' (*Tango*, 16). The deportations are another example of a topic which is discussed in private and predominantly female spaces in the village tales, reflecting both the relatively taboo status of deportees in post-war Romania, where their suffering was seen both as a potential criticism of communism and a reminder of Romania's fascist past (see Chapter Two), and the gendered nature of that experience.[49] Through the contrast between public celebrations of male heroism and private discussions of female victimhood Müller demonstrates the male bias within village memory, which negates the female experience of war. Female memory in Müller's work functions as a corrective to what is said by men and through it Müller creates a picture of victimhood through war which rests on universal female, non-combatant experiences and is both more sympathetic and lent more credibility than the male view. I will discuss the division between male and female memory in relation to *Fasan* in the next section.

As demonstrated by the taboo surrounding the deportations, it is also important to recognise the effect of the contemporary political context on the Banat-Swabian remembrance culture, and the way in which the demands of the narrative present contribute to the group's memorialisation of the past. Memories – their selection, communication and how they are remembered – are visibly affected in the village by the antipathy of the community towards the communist government as well as their fear of reprisals. This may explain the prominence of memories related to the war as a turning-point and the confiscation of villagers' land under the terms of nationalisation, as well as the fading into the background of pre-war memory. Ultimately all the memories discussed are an assertion of identity on both the collective and individual level; they are part of the story the villagers tell about themselves and their community and this story is told at least in part in opposition to an implied alternative version of events belonging to the outside world. The focus on expropriation and wartime suffering (represented in the male-dominated discourse by *Kriegsgefangenschaft*) eclipse the unarticulated memories of German crimes and the decision to go to war not just because of an aversion to accepting the possibility of guilt in a moral sense but because the Germans react against perceived

[49] The deportations took place in January 1945, before the men had returned from the front, and affected those between the ages of 17 and 45, which meant that women formed the overwhelming majority of the people deported (Müller, 2012).

hostility from the Romanian state towards them in the role of perpetrators.[50] Müller discusses this reactionary mindset in her essay 'Die Insel liegt innen – die Grenze liegt außen',

> Diese deutsche Minderheit wurde als Insel der Nazifritzen gesehen und empfand sich selber als Insel der schuldlos von den Rumänen Bestraften. Waren doch die Rumänen mit Antonescu genauso Hitlers Verbündete. Wie jede Bauernbevölkerung in ihrem Naturell schon wortkarg genug, wurden diese Bauern durch das, was man Geschichte nennt, zusätzlich stumm gemacht. Sie wurden demütig nach außen, werkelten wie bedingungslos Dressierte auf dem Staatsacker, der bis vor kurzem ihr Eigentum gewesen war. Und als innere Kompensation wurde der Mythos der Überlegenheit gestrickt, abseits jedes Vokabulars, das dem Sozialismus hätte in die Quere kommen können (*König*, 162).

Memories cherished by the villagers tie into older narratives of heroism and the general veneration of the essential "German" identity which can be seen in the village. Müller's characters allude to their identity as settlers and hero/victims within Banat, connecting this to myths of Germans as civilisers in the region which, although they have been widely discredited, retain currency even today (Patrut, 2009, 105-107; Guţu, 2009, 458). The stories they tell support and create a mythology that stands in for formal history and cultural memory promoted through state institutions. As Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities*, narration is the natural recourse of groups who face an inability to remember as well as a sense of tradition and continuity (Anderson, 2006, 205). Confirmation of these grand narratives, which are beyond the range of living memory, is sought in the case of Müller's villagers through indirect means, namely the daily habits and traditions of the community. Even the most insignificant examples of social practice – habits of dress (*Fasan*, 63), specifics of animal husbandry (*Fasan*, 73), hairstyles and so on – are coded as vital expressions of identity and, crucially, continuity with the unknown mythologised past and therefore essentialised "Germanness". German separateness and

[50] It is important to emphasise here that this has as much to do with Banat-Swabian perceptions as the real political situation. Although Germans were used as scapegoats in the early post-war years, branded as the sole perpetrators and made an example of by the Soviet authorities, by the early 1950s their position in Romania was being normalised. Internal exiles were allowed to return from the Bărăgan Steppe and after Ceauşescu came to power he publicly expressed regret for the 'falsche Maßnahmen' that had been taken against the Germans (Spiridon, 2009, 371; Glajar, 2004, 119). Criticisms of Müller's work expressed the view that *Niederungen* was welcomed by the Romanian state as a text which reinforced the idea of Germans as fascists and overlooked Romanian guilt (Haupt, 1981 cited Krause, 1998, 134; Müller, 2009a).

superiority are “proved” to be innate, both in the present and throughout history through the celebration of qualities such as cleanliness, piety and hard work, which are projected onto, and buttressed by, the deeds of the Banat-Swabian past. The villagers uphold the idea that because something has always been done it must continue to be done, with any deviation from what is seen as tradition (a broad category in the case of the village) regarded as a threat both to the community’s continuity and its essential correctness.[51]

Founding myths, traditions and more recent history are all relied upon as a source of authority and means of control in the village. Rather than having any kind of clear demarcation between different eras or history and tradition, the Past is called upon almost indiscriminately as a nebulous, all-justifying presence, with master narratives such as German settlement used to explain present conditions, and outsiders' style of dress interpreted as signalling some larger historical truth. As Bauer writes, ‘Traditionen und Normen werden dekontextualisiert und in enthistorisierte, damit also auch nicht mehr hinterfragbare Wertvorstellungen verwandt, die stillschweigend und unreflektiert in den Dienst genommen werden, um sich gegen Neuerungen und Veränderungen zu wappnen’ (Bauer, 1997, 268). The war and its aftermath, remembered by living individuals, is positioned alongside this artificial timelessness surrounding tradition and the essentialised past of the community to make it part of one identity-defining story, even though even memories of it have been created or altered in response to much more recent events.

The Second World War’s primacy within village memory can be attributed both to its potency as an event within living memory and as a canvas onto which long-established ideas about Banat-Swabian identity can be projected. The natural authority of the older generations as transmitters of historical consciousness within the village, who make use of their knowledge of the past to bring up children in the “correct” fashion and instil in them a sense of collective identity, is enhanced by their ability to remember the war. The parents and grandparents in Müller’s village tales can use the recent past and their lived experience, alongside foundational myths or traditions, to add weight to their arguments, with every chastisement or demand implicitly linked – through the focus on the past more broadly – to the war, and the community’s martyrdom in its aftermath. The references to

[51] The regular *Kerweihe* and other celebrations featured in Müller’s village tales must be seen in the light of the dwindling German population. Events such as this, designed to encourage socialisation between villages and foster the future cohesion of the minority, increased during the 1970s and 1980s, and continue to be held to this day both in Romania and in other countries in which Banat Swabians have settled (Luca Holden, 2011, 90). Müller alludes sardonically to the thinking behind these events in ‘Dorfchronik’, where she mentions dances allowing young people from different villages to meet and seek a marriage partner, ‘falls sich die Eltern davon überzeugen lassen, dass die beiden zwar nicht aus demselben Dorf, aber immerhim Deutsche sind’ (*Niederungen*, 130-31).

the history of the village in *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*, must therefore also be read as a means for the older generation(s) to assert their authority within the community. When Windisch declares to his daughter Amalie that something is or will be 'wie im Krieg', this is also a claim to credibility. He demonstrates his knowledge over the world beyond the village, such as when he talks about having previously flown in an aeroplane (*Fasan*, 106) and creates a direct connection between himself and the mythologised heroism of the war, as well as the Swabian past more broadly. The power to invoke the past gives the older villagers the authority to overwhelm any potential resistance on the part of the younger generation.

This tendency to assert authority through associations with the past, although obviously geared more towards the promotion of male experience and patriarchal authority, is displayed by senior characters of both genders in the village setting. The communication not just of memory *per se* but of the established structures of power within the community through narrative and the authority of pastness is portrayed in Müller's writing as central to childhood *Erziehung*. However, in *Fasan*, where the child narrator of *Niederungen* is succeeded by the assertive young woman Amalie, this process is represented differently. In the next section I will discuss how this transmission of memory, and therefore village identity, is shown to fail in the text and how Müller dismantles the credibility of memory narratives more broadly through the relationship between Windisch and Katharina.

The Failure of Memory Transmission in the Banat-Swabian Village

As I have discussed, memory in the village setting Müller portrays does not rely on standard transmitters of cultural memory such as books, or on the kind of formalised history taught in schools. Rather than deferring to an established or more encompassing narrative, such as a "Romanian-German" view of the past or (even less likely) a national history, the Banat-Swabians in Müller's texts have a collective memory which relies on interpersonal transmission and an extremely localised perspective. Informal networks and the direct sharing of experience from person to person are the primary means by which information about the past is preserved in the village setting, as exemplified by *Fasan*.

The face-to-face narration of what happened in the past is one of the main shared activities the reader witnesses taking place in Müller's village tales. Friends, such as Windisch and Kürschner, and family members talk about their own experiences and pass

on what they have heard from others, incorporating these stories into their own image of the past. These isolated instances of transmission create a cumulative picture for the reader, both in terms of their own knowledge and their impression of the villagers' perspective on history. The way the reader learns about the villagers' memory culture through the "witnessing" of dialogue mimics the way that memory is passed from person to person in the village and the picture of memory which these snippets produce gives a sense of village discourse on the past which appears complex and authentic.[52] The narratives of the past the villagers identify with, such as heroism and victimhood, are made to appear deeply flawed but their individually personal experiences, crucially, are not universally devalued or called into question in the same way. Müller uses the memory culture of the village against itself, placing the reader in the position of another, sceptical listener around the table but creates instances in which fragments of believable, moving testimony break through the self-aggrandising, partial narratives about the past.

One of the main moments of transmission Müller represents is that between parent or grandparent and child, with many instances in which stories of the past are shared, especially from mother to daughter. Sometimes all three generations are present during the sharing, such as in *Drückender Tango*, where the grandmother talks about her wedding night, and how much she feared getting married (*Tango*, 36).[53] What is noticeable in these scenes is the declarative way in which the stories of the past are told, without being questioned or responded to. The authority of the older characters as remembering subjects is not and presumably cannot be challenged because of their position in the family, and the child characters absorb what they have heard without speaking. This is a further demonstration of the interrelatedness of authority and memory and represents a potential source of the rigidity of village remembrance. The effects of silent absorption without meaningful discussion can be seen in the reactions of the child narrator in *Niederungen*

[52] Karin Bauer calls into question to efficacy of this quasi-documentary reproduction of village memory culture, arguing that the dominance of male voices means that women's experience only appears when mediated by men (Bauer, 1996, 24). However, her assertion that, in *Fasan*, 'die unqualifizierten Projektionen der Männer zu einem anscheinend objektiven Bild der Wirklichkeit werden' overlooks the way that Müller constantly allows the male characters to undermine their own assertions and the passages narrated omnisciently, as well as the role of the reader in interpreting the silences in the story (Bauer, 1996b, 146).

[53] Günter discusses these multi-generational story-sharing moments as instances which reveal the village's repression of individuality (and the suffering this causes) in its historical dimension, 'Auch die Generationen der Eltern und Großeltern mußten demnach bereits erfahren und hinnehmen, wie die Bedürfnisse der Individuen der Ökonomie der Dorfgemeinschaft untergeordnet werden, und blind vor ihrem eigenen Weinen, sind sie offenbar nicht in der Lage, die Wiederholung des Leidens an ihren Kindern zu bemerken oder gar zu verhindern (Günter, 1991, 50).

discussed in Chapter One, and how she imaginatively recreates the past when what she has been told fails to coalesce into a complete or convincing picture.

Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory is helpful in discussing the function and significance of these kinds of stories in Müller's village tales. Hirsch argues that the repeated sharing of certain memories or apocryphal stories about the past leads to their becoming engrained and that where there is a deep personal connection to what is being remembered (because of who is remembering it), such information can take on the *characteristics* of personal memory, 'not recall but imaginative investment, projection and creation' (Hirsch, 2012, 5). This can be seen in various episodes in *Niederungen*, *Drückender Tango* and *Barfüßiger Februar*, as well as in Müller's non-fiction reflections on her mother's experience as a forced labourer in the Soviet Union; family members' stories offer a way to imaginatively access the past, especially where little cultural memory (in Assmann's definition) is available. I will discuss the alternative routes to the past, such as postmemory (Hirsch) and prosthetic memory (Landsberg) further detail in Chapter Three.

Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt also contains instances of intrafamilial story-telling, with Windisch and Katharina telling Amalie about the history of their neighbours, the Kürschners. Amalie differs from the child narrators of many of Müller's other village tales and this is certainly true when it comes to her unwillingness to listen passively to their narratives of the past. She does not appear to identify with that past at all, or afford her parents respect either as remembering subjects (whose knowledge gives them authority) or as survivors of suffering. For this reason, the 'investment' Hirsch identifies as integral to postmemory does not develop, with complex and dramatic consequences. In a scene which is central to this shift in memory-related power relations, the older Windischs' attempt to talk to Amalie is shown to be fruitless as she continues to paint her nails and shows no sign of interest.

> "Dann ist die Enteignung gekommen", sagte Windisch. Amalie strich sich roten Nagellack auf die Fingernägel. "Alle Bauern haben gezittert. Aus der Stadt sind Männer gekommen. Sie haben das Feld vermessen. Sie haben die Namen der Leute aufgeschrieben und gesagt: Alle, die nicht unterschreiben, werden eingesperrt. Alle Gassentoren waren verriegelt", sagte Windisch. "Der alte Kürschner hat das Gassentor nicht verriegelt. Er hat es weit geöffnet. Als die Männer gekommen sind, hat er gesagt: Gut, daß ihr's nehmt. Nehmt die Pferde, dann hab' ich sie los."

> Windischs Frau riß Amalie die Flasche Nagellack aus der Hand. “Das hat sonst keiner gesagt”, sagte sie. Sie hatte sich im Zorn eine kleine blaue Ader hinters Ohr geschrien. “Hörst du überhaupt zu”, hatte sie geschrien. (*Fasan*, 28-29)

Katharina’s angry response to Amalie’s inattention comes at a moment where Windisch has shifted from telling the story of Kürschner’s ancestors to touching on an experience which was common within the village and which, as I have discussed, holds a particular place in their collective imagination. Her anger may be explained through this, as a reaction to Amalie’s lack of interest, not in the story of her neighbours but in the shared memory of expropriation. The way in which Katharina and Windisch cooperate to tell the story in this passage is also indicative of the importance they attach to communicating their memories, with Katharina chipping in to confirm and supplement Windisch’s account as if she were trying to build up its credibility to their daughter.

Amalie continues to behave as if she is uninterested in what they are trying to communicate, and their dialogue is punctuated twice more by sentences describing her actions:

> Windisch lehnte sich am Schrank. “Ein Held war er nie”, seufzte Windisch, “er war bloß ein Schinder. Im Krieg hat man nicht gegen Eulen und Kröten gekämpft.
>
> Amalie kämmte sich vor dem Spiegel.
>
> “Er war nie in der SS”, sagte Windischs Frau, “er war nur bei der Wehrmacht. Nach dem Krieg hat er wieder Eulen und Störche und Amseln gejagt und sie ausgestopft. Und alle kranken Schafe und Hasen aus der Umgebung geschlachtet. Und die Felle ausgegerbt. Sein ganzer Dachboden ist ein Ludergarten für das tote Vieh”, sagte Windischs Frau.
>
> Amalie griff nach dem Fläschen mit dem Nagellack. Windisch spürte das Sandkorn hinter der Stirn, es zog von einer Schläfe zur anderen. Eine roter Tropfen aus dem Fläschen fiel auf dem Tischtuch.
>
> “Du warst in Russland eine Hure”, sagte Amalie zu ihrer Mutter und schaute auf den Fingernagel. (*Fasan,* 30)

The juxtaposition of Windisch and Katharina’s earnest and urgent relation of collective narratives about the war with Amalie's lack of response is striking. She rejects the past that

is being given to her by refusing to listen and focuses instead on the "here and now" of her appearance, undermining Windisch's assertion of his authority through his knowledge of fighting and the superiority of the SS by exhibiting no interest in it. Her lack of identification with her parents' experiences is also demonstrated in her utter indifference to the realities of deportation. She parrots her father's words and uses her mother's past as a weapon, a move that illustrates the lack of effective communication between mother and daughter regarding the past and the villagers' exploitation of the past as a means of control or censure. For Amalie, her mother's experiences are only a sterile myth to be repeated, she has not incorporated any of what she has been told into her own memory in the way Hirsch describes and does not empathise with her parents. Müller also alienates the reader from what is being said as the Windischs are interrupted, ignored and suddenly cut off, preventing any deep involvement in the story they are telling. This alienation develops during the passage, with the beginning of the story about the Kürschner family appearing uninterrupted and therefore coded as more convincing.

In a seemingly new development in the community as Müller portrays it, *Fasan* shows present concerns taking precedence over the narratives of the past. Amalie's attention is not only not where her parents desire it to be but appears, in light of the rest of the book, to be specifically engaged in the present. In the passage above she is preoccupied by her appearance and it is revealed subsequently that her appearance has become important for them all. She intends to give in to blackmail by the priest and militiaman and have sex with them in exchange for their cooperation in applying for passports, going against the strict morality of the village. Across *Fasan* as a whole, social mores, positions of prestige, knowledge, customs and authority which made up the village and in which memory played a central role are simply overwhelmed by the issue which is now paramount to both the community and the Windisch family: emigration.[54] All that Windisch and Katharina are able to pass on to Amalie (within the remit of respectability) is no longer required; the continuity created by communicative memory is broken.

[54] Strict rules of behaviour that were upheld rigidly are now broken. Windisch's friend the night watchman goes so far as to marry a Romanian milkmaid, a decision which seems to shock his contemporaries. The night watchman's choice to marry a milkmaid is also significant given their particularly low social standing within the village and non-conformity to Banat-Swabian ideals of womanhood. This departure by the night watchman from the social mores is accentuated by his appearance. Not only is the night watchman wearing what appears to be peasant clothing, 'Er hebt den schwarzen Hut. Windisch sieht sein Hemd und seinen Rock', he is also visibly dirty ('Windisch sieht den Dreckstreifen an seinem Hemd.') and his wife is walking barefoot (Fasan, 110-111). The overall impression given by this interaction seems to owe something to the colonial trope of a man 'going native', with the night watchman taking on characteristics of the 'native' Romanians and lapsing into a state of dissolution.

In addition to representing the failure of memory transmission between characters, brought about by a combination of changes to the community (because of mass emigration and the arrival of outcomers) and growing divisions between the generations (resulting from new social and economic conditions), Müller also undermines the effectiveness of memory sharing at the level of narration, that is, between characters and the reader. The text contains elements which mirror Amalie's rejection of Windisch as a remembering figure by discrediting his reliability as a remembering subject. She does this through the use of the omniscient narrator, whose interventions stand out within this dialogue-centred novel. The chapters 'Zwischen den Gräbern' (*Fasan*, 46-47) and 'Die Grassuppe' (*Fasan*, 89-91) are entirely narrated in the omniscient voice and are important in analysing this aspect of memory in *Fasan*. Both concern the aftermath of the Second World War and focus on the Windisch parents, with 'Zwischen den Gräbern' focusing on them meeting after they returned to the village in around 1950 and 'Die Grassuppe' describing Katharina's experiences as a slave labourer in Russia.[55] Here, in contrast to *Niederungen* and other texts where she uses images and subjective fantasy to contrast 'immer wieder fassadenhafte Selbstbilder mit den Realitäten', Müller gives authority to the narrator to reveal what took place (Zierden, 2002, 31).

Throughout the text, Windisch cruelly reproaches and denigrates Katharina for having 'been a whore' during her five-year imprisonment in Russia after the war, and these two chapters are instrumental in revealing both the origins of this judgment and the extent to which Windisch's attitude towards Katharina's past has changed over time. The chapter 'Die Grassuppe' comprises a description of Katharina's imprisonment and the way in which she was able to gain protection and food through her relationships with men in the camp which refutes Windisch's accusations (Midgley, 1998, 30). The passage, which is the only section of the novel in which Katharina is called by her first name instead of 'Windischs Frau', follows a simple, fairy tale-like structure (Bauer, 1996, 25). The passage of years in the camp is marked each time by the arrival and melting of the snow, followed by a sentence which reveals Katharina's situation at the end of winter:

> Als der Schnee zum ersten Mal geschmolzen war […] Katharina hatte ihren Wintermantel verkauft für zehn Scheiben Brot. Ihr Magen war ein Igel. […]

[55] The naming of Russia is an example of how Müller's texts published abroad were able to be more explicit than the ones published in Romania. In the Kriterion edition of *Niederungen*, 'Russland' was changed to 'ein fernes, fremdes Land' in order to meet state requirements (Spiridon, 2002, 104n; Vogel 1989, vi cited Spiridon, 2009, 380).

Dann war der zweite Schnee gekommen. Katharina hatte eine Wolldecke. Die war am Tag ihr Mantel. Der Igel Stach. […]

Als der Schnee zum zweiten Mal geschmolzen war […] Katharina verkaufte ihre Wolldecke für ein Paar Scheiben Brot. Der Igel zog für ein Paar Stunden seine Stacheln ein. […]

Dann war der dritte Schnee gekommen. Das Pelzleibchen war Katharinas Mantel.

Als der Schnee zum dritten Mal geschmolzen war, verkaufte Katharina ihr Pelzleibchen für eine Schale Zucker.

Dann war der vierte Schnee gekommen. Die grauen Wollsocken waren Katharinas Mantel.

Als der Schnee zum vierten Mal geschmolzen war, verkaufte Katharina ihre grauen Wollsocken für ein Schüssel Maismehl.

Dann war der fünfte Schnee gekommen. Katharinas braunes Stoffkleid war ihr Mantel.

Als der Schnee zum fünften Mal geschmolzen war, blühten gelbe Rispen im Gras. (*Fasan*, 89-91)

Her gradually worsening circumstances are marked by her being forced to sell her clothes and by the decreasing quantities of food she can exchange for them. The extremity of her situation is made clear through repeated references to the pain in her stomach caused by hunger and the brief amounts of time for which this "hedgehog" can be warded off by food. The compression of time is given greater impact by the brevity and bareness of the language with which Katharina's five year imprisonment is described, redoubling the sense of urgency and suffering for the reader.

Katharina's various "protectors", men with whom she has a sexual relationship and who assist in her survival, come and go in the background of her fight for survival. Each of these men dies during the following winter, leaving Katharina to find a new protector, and the progression from cook to doctor to gravedigger shows the direction in which life in the labour camp is moving. This objective narration of Katharina's sexual relationships in the camp contrasts dramatically with the abuse she suffers later within her own family as a result and elicits sympathy for her by demonstrating these actions – both selling her clothes and seeking male benefactors within the hierarchy of the camp – to have been necessary for her survival. Sexual pleasure is shown to play no role in her choice, with the

only benefit described aside from that of the food needed for survival being warmth, something which all the men give her and which can be read literally, as a life-saving resource during winter, or more broadly, as human contact in the midst of suffering.

Karin Bauer criticises the lack of female voices in *Fasan*, arguing that female historical experience remains 'die Geschichte hinter der Geschichte […] voller […] unterschlagener, für das Verständnis des Textes aber notwendiger Information' because the focalisation through Windisch robs women of the chance of reply (Bauer, 1996b, 146; Bauer, 1996, 24). However, her analysis overlooks this omnisciently-narrated passage, which is not only given a greater sense of authenticity than any of the men's high-handed declarations about the past, but also reads as the account Katharina herself would have given. The repetition of details marking the passage of the seasons (the snow and the thaw) and memorable events (when precious items had to be traded) mean that this passage seems to reflect the way in which Katharina herself would remember it, while the relative importance attached to different elements within the text, such as clothes, food, people and weather through how often and in what way they are mentioned seem to reveal the hierarchy in which they stood for her personally. The memories in it replicate the priorities of the situation, in a manner that foreshadows the narrator Leo Auberg's reflections on what it takes to survive camp life in *Atemschaukel*. The anonymity of the men she sleeps with, remembered only by their occupation and what they called her, works against Bauer's assertion that even her history represents her only in relation to men (Bauer, 1996, 25). They are incidental, not a sign of her lack of autonomy but a means of survival and never fully-fledged characters in their own right (*ibid*). Although women's voices in *Fasan* remain marginalised, their experience does not; Müller's omniscient narrator provides Katharina's silenced perspective and implicitly criticises the way she is vilified without setting up an overly simplistic opposition between male and female memory.

In 'Zwischen den Gräbern', the meeting of the Windisch parents and their first sexual encounter are described by the omniscient narrator but focalised, more obviously than is the case with Katharina in 'Die Grassuppe', through the character of Windisch. The reasons for their marriage are exposed in the same understated language which marked the other, similar passage:

> Windisch war aus der Kriegsgefangenschaft ins Dorf zurückgekommen. Das Dorf war wund von den vielen Toten und Vermißten gewesen.
>
> Barbara war in Rußland gestorben.

> Katharina war aus Rußland zurückgekehrt. Sie wollte Josef heiraten. Josef war im Krieg gestorben. Katharina war blaß im Gesicht. Ihre Augen waren Tief.
>
> Katharina hatte wie Windisch den Tod gesehn. Katharina hatte wie Windisch ihr Leben mitgebracht. Windisch hängte sein Leben rasch an sie. […] Windisch wußte, daß er nicht gestorben war. Daß er zu Hause war. […] Daß er im Krieg und in der Kriegsgefangenschaft nicht wußte, wo das Dorf lag und wie lang es ihn noch geben wird. (*Fasan*, 47)

This extract is the closest the reader comes in *Fasan* to any realistic reflection on male war-time experience, a subject usually obscured by the community's grand narratives and corresponding lacunae described earlier in this chapter. The sentence that brings Katharina and Windisch together as witnesses and survivors casts a new light on Windisch's experience of warfare by relating it directly to his having "seen" death, a contrast with the sanitised, even more abstractly-described War as it exists in village memory. With its honest discussion of emotions felt in the immediate post-war period, and the fear which existed then, this passage also serves to undermine Banat-Swabian grand memories of the war and stories of heroism presented elsewhere in Müller's oeuvre. Rather than returning as the conquering hero, or even the defeated warrior, Windisch returned to the village as a fearful and uncertain young man, bereaved, vulnerable, and desperate to come home.

These two chapters dismantle Windisch's authority as a transmitter of memory by undermining both his knowledge (when it comes to Katharina) and his consistency (in remembering his own thoughts and feelings accurately). The view he appears to have of Banat-Swabian history and his own family's past differs dramatically from the picture which Müller paints through the passages narrated in the omniscient voice and the memory culture of the village is called into question in this gap between what he remembers and what it is implied he should remember. Narratives surrounding the war and concepts of village masculinity and authority seem to have superseded Windisch's personal memories of his own experiences and the desire to reassert a sense of agency could explain a desire to forget uncertainty and suffering (if not victimhood) at both the community and individual level. The jarring difference between Windisch's present attitude and his re-remembering of what he thought and felt when hearing about Katharina's experience at the time demonstrates the influence of the village's social mores and moral strictures. In the passage immediately preceding 'Zwischen den Gräbern', Müller exposes the mutability of his memory of the past most starkly: "Windisch wird hart, wenn sie von der Bodenvase

redet.[56] Er denkt an die Zeit nach dem Krieg. “In Rußland hat sie die Beine für ein Stück Brot gespreizt”, sagten die Leute nach dem Krieg. Windisch dachte damals: “Sie ist schön, und der Hunger tut weh”’ (*Fasan*, 46).

Read alongside the chapters mentioned above, this quote is highly significant in that it exposes, in a manner far more direct than in Müller’s other works, the falsehood of much of village memory. Windisch, it is revealed, refuses to remember what happened honestly, and his memory is affected by conditions in the present. His initial sympathy for Katharina has been replaced by a cruel tendency to falsify her past by branding her a whore and omitting the reasons for her taking the step of entering those sexual relationships. The implicit suggestion made in the quote, that Windisch’s view has been changed by his investment in the village’s social structure, questions his integrity, and his credibility as a communicator of his own experience is compromised by the way his is revealed to edit the past. Through all this, the character of Windisch is marked as completely unreliable and all that he has said in the book is thrown into question. Conversely, however, his assertions that the situation they face is ‘wie im Krieg’ and has somehow happened before, which appear nonsensical at first, find some confirmation in the hidden history of Katharina’s survival in a Soviet labour camp *after* the war. As was the case with Katharina then, Amalie is being forced into a position where her sexuality is her only bargaining chip in a setting controlled by men. This, combined with the specific detail of the iron bed frame that recurs in the post-war and pre-emigration experiences of the two women, contributes to a sense of blurring between past and present as history repeats itself (*Fasan*, 89-90, 103; Bauer, 2013, 158; Eke, 1991a, 87)

Although he is an unreliable character, Windisch’s memory and the emotional insight the reader gains into his mindset in the passages set in the immediate post-war mark him out from Müller’s other patriarchs, who are likewise discredited but in a different, less empathetic fashion. The father in *Niederungen* is characterised in such a way as to undermine the village narratives of heroism but without the reader being given much insight into his mentality. His celebrations of war in songs and ideological statements are contrasted with his present-day violence and drunkenness and the child narrator’s fantasies of his guilt provide the deciding measure of his character. In *Fasan*, Müller in one way goes further, even though Windisch is less of an extreme character, by directly contradicting his views and exposing him, essentially, as a liar. The grandiose narratives

[56] The *Bodenvase* arises in the text both as a symbol of Windisch’s failure to provide and his fear of the incentives which might tempt his female relatives to behave immorally.

and sterile reminiscences of war he is willing to share are rejected by his daughter within the story and are discredited by Müller in the eyes of the reader, doubly discrediting the narratives in which he and the village are invested. At the same time, the potential for a more genuine form of memory and, by connection, a vibrant, non-self-destructive Banat-Swabian memory culture, represented in the key passages of 'Die Grassuppe' and 'Zwischen den Gräbern', goes unrealised. If Müller's earlier texts relied on a rejection of village culture based in subjective revulsion and non-specific feelings of fear as an accusation against the parent-generation, *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* represents both a more assured and explicit distancing from that culture and an epitaph to its impending demise.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, the collective past plays a central, identity-defining role in the Banat-Swabian village of Müller's writing life for both individuals and the community as a whole. The remembrance of the past, and particularly of the Second World War, props up the power structures which are in place within the closed society of the village and is used by members of the older generations to assert their authority and justify the strictures placed upon individuals within the group. Historical events and the way they are remembered also determine the relationship of the village to the outside world, although contemporary circumstances are shown to play a role in the ongoing creation of shared memory.

In *Fasan*, the impact of present circumstances on representations of the past and on memory culture is thrown into sharp relief as the insular security of the village is undermined by changes to local conditions. The dissolution of the community brought about by emigration and the "intrusion" of outsiders into their space means that the older villagers cling to shared memories as a source of self-confirmation, even as they prepare to leave behind the physical space in which their remembering processes are founded. This sense of an end, and an end to a collective memory culture in particular, is compounded by the failure of communicative memory represented in microcosm within the Windisch family, whose moments of unsuccessful transmission reveal the dependency of village remembrance on the continuity of village life. The mutual relationship between memory as constitutive to the village as an imagined community and the village as a real community

upon which an imagined past relies means that the end of the village Müller represents is total. The weakness in village society, which is revealed when the boundaries and enclosing narratives upon which it depends are removed or cease to be relevant, is mirrored in the character of Windisch, whose authority, both as patriarch and remembering subject, is destroyed as his view of the past is exposed as unreliable and obsolete. In *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*, Müller progresses from the broad rejection of village culture through metaphor and fantasy to an incisive critique of its limiting and destructive memory culture. She captures not only the end of the Banat-Swabian community's present but the end of its past and the ability of its members to exploit it.

In Chapter Three, I continue my examination of how Müller's writing functions as memory work designed to combat this futile, inauthentic collective memory. Fighting against the silences and distortions of the memory culture in which she was raised, she endeavours to recover aspects of the Banat-Swabian past which are taboo, both in her fiction – where she involves her reader in a sustained effort to read between the lines – and in her non-fiction, which openly advocates for an engaged and ethical approach to the past. Using theories of postmemory and prosthetic memory, I discuss how Müller and other authors of her generation turned away from family stories and village memory, developing an approach to memory rooted in historical research, imaginative reconstruction and the literary excavation of the rural Banat landscape to uncover the hidden history of the Romanian Holocaust.

Chapter Three: Landscapes of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: Haunted *Heimat*, Guilty Fathers and Memory Work in Romania 1965-1995

As I hope to demonstrate throughout this thesis, the history and legacy of National Socialism is of fundamental importance to Herta Müller's literary project. Her frequent discussions of the Nazi regime, its legacy and the role her community played in supporting it highlight the significance of historical knowledge of fascism to her personal development and ethics and her fictional texts are permeated with reflections on the period. These works take up the legacy of fascism at the narrative and thematic levels and must be seen as valuable examples of German and Romanian memory work and analysed in the light of wider debates. In this chapter, I discuss ways in which Müller's work contributes to discourses of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany and Romania and how her approach to memory – also idiosyncratic – was also strongly informed by the context in which she was writing and the shared effort among contemporaries and friends to uncover the legacy of the Holocaust in Romania within the restrictions placed upon its discussion.

There is a tendency in scholarship to focus solely on the barriers the Romanian communist regime presented to Müller's art but I argue that she was also part of a vibrant literary community which, though under constant threat from the government, engaged in valuable and progressive forms of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Banat-German literature from the 1970s-1980s responds to the trends of memory literature in the Federal Republic and growing interest in the Holocaust across the world, but also to specific local conditions, using imaginative reconstruction, documentary style and testimony as starting points for remembering the Romanian-German past. Müller builds on this tradition to produce texts which seek to break the silences of the post-war period. Her representations of haunted landscape, found in works including *Barfüßiger Februar*, *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* and *Herztier*, and constructed using prosthetic memory (Landsberg) must be recognised as part of a distinct space-based response to the history of fascism which emerged in Romanian-German writing of the 1980s, and anticipates later writing of the 'Eastern Turn' in its focus on the Second World War from an Eastern European perspective. By resorting to a form of memory based on imagination and sensory stimuli Müller and other authors such as Christian Maurer, Franz Hodjak and Horst Fassel were able to bring local histories of violence to life in subjective, first-person narratives that render the suffering of victims of fascist violence visible. Examining these efforts, of which Müller's writing is a clear culmination, allows the motivations and techniques

which underly her approach to the past to emerge more clearly, and demonstrates that, although inspired by Western authors, she also responds to particular Romanian-German trends that are worthy of greater attention.

As I argued in Chapter Two, Müller's texts portray collective memory as an unreliable and restricted means of accessing the past and respond critically to the biased, sanitised narratives of the Banat-Swabian community. But if *Fasan* illustrates how one might read between the lines of such narratives to decipher the truth of events, the texts discussed here, most notably 'Überall wo man den Tod gesehen hat: Sommerreise in Maramuresch', dispense with individual testimony, instead marrying historical knowledge with subjectivity and sensation. While the narrative of self-exoneration against which Müller writes is fairly easily identified in her "village tales" and personal observations about the Banat-Swabian community, the means she chooses to oppose it are non-narrative, sensory and subtle. The uncanny vision of the world she creates throughout her work originates in these early efforts to conceive of and communicate the legacy of the Holocaust as an awareness or troubling presence in the rural spaces of Romania.

In order properly to contextualise my analysis of this development I first connect Müller's literary reflections on the history of her community to national and international memory discourse. Romanian-German literary culture, the influence of which upon her work should not be underestimated, changed rapidly after Ceauşescu's rise to power in 1965 as ideas about proper responses to the Nazi past, which were developing in response to the trials of "everyday perpetrators" in the West, began to filter through into local debates. Sterile, simplistic accounts of war which celebrated communist heroism or exonerated the Romanian Germans as dupes of Hitler (Franz Keller's 'Durst', gave way after 1965 to more complex treatments, by authors such as Franz Hodjak, which would create the climate in which Müller developed her approach to memory. She and her contemporaries were heavily influenced by writers of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* from across the German-speaking world**,** such as Thomas Bernhard, Günter Grass and Volker Braun, as well as by the intergenerational conflict and general foment associated with the student movement of 1968 (Spiridon, 2002, 141). Through analysis of newspapers, literary journals and other texts I will offer a picture of the public discourse within which Müller came to creative maturity, exposing the links to wider German culture and world events and reflecting on the aspects of this collective memory she would later challenge in her own writing as well as possible inspirations to her.

After outlining what could be called the mainstream of literary approaches to the past in the late 1960s, I analyse the work of Müller's contemporaries, particularly the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, whose interest in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and confrontation with the parent generation has been rather overlooked in scholarship. Better known for their outsider position and persecution at the hands of the Ceauşescu state, the members of the *Aktionsgruppe* first attracted the attention of the regime not because of any rebellious act against its structures but because of their biting public criticisms of former Nazis (including in some cases their own fathers), and disrespect towards other members of the literary establishment in the Banat. Their writing on the past, which can be grouped into trends such as writing against the father (such as Balthasar Waitz's 'Unser Brunnen'), depictions of veterans' trauma (Horst Samson's 'Pünktlicher Lebenslauf') and pieces concerning local history (Werner Söllner's 'Verkehrte Zeit'), all represent a new, often ironical and darkly humorous approach to the history of fascism. Without open communication between different generations, the young writers of Müller's generation reconstruct the past using their own methods and represent its impact on their day-to-day lives. Her association with them was a driving force, along with knowledge of her father's history in the SS, behind her own engagement with the legacy of National Socialism.

In the final section, I examine the specific landscape-focused approaches to memory which emerged in texts from the period 1976-86 and consider these through the theoretical lens of prosthetic memory. Müller and her contemporaries often saw themselves as "breaking the silence" or unearthing traces of past crimes in their communities and did not rely on the questionable collective memory of their family or ethnic group. As in Müller's approach to personal memory (described in Chapter One), they promoted imagination as a means to bridge the gap and allow access to the past through emotion and sensation, and actively educated themselves about the events of the war. Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory, a mode of "remembering" others' experiences through cultural memory and a focus on common human sensations and sense memory, provides a useful framework for discussing this approach. These texts seek to overcome the taboo surrounding the Holocaust which stemmed not only from the German community but from the Romanian regime, which repressed the history of violence on Romanian soil. Müller's contributions to this trend anticipate her later work to uncover the murderous legacy of the Ceauşescu regime in texts such as *Fuchs* and *Herztier* and form an important stage in her development of techniques for representing sense-based, uncanny memory, a central feature of texts such as *Herztier* and *Atemschaukel*.

'Vater ist ein todtrauriges Tier'[57]: Müller's Personal Preoccupation with National Socialism

The subject of her father's wartime service in the Waffen-SS is a topic to which Müller returns consistently in interviews and has discussed at length in her essay collections. She identifies his membership not only of the broadly-defined perpetrator collective – those who supported Hitler – but of the SS, one of the Nazis' greatest instruments of power, as a driving force behind her own determination to resist the pressure to collaborate with the *Securitate* and go along with the Ceaușescu regime. She says that his guilt alerted her to the consequences of moral compromise: 'Aus der Beschäftigung mit seiner Schuld […] habe ich die erste Warnung für mein eigenes Leben gezogen: Mitschuld ist niemals Folge, sondern Gleichzeitigkeit in dem, was man tut' (*Falle, 8*). His youth and inexperience were no excuse in her eyes for his actions and the example of his mistake drove her to make different choices:

> Zu allererst wollte ich nicht so werden wie er damals mit 17 Jahren war, weil man alle Jahre danach an ihm sah, wie das nie mehr aufhört, wenn man sich verstrickt hat. (Preisrede Walter Hasenclever cited Pahlke, 2010)

> Als ich dann 17 war, habe ich mir gedacht: In diesem Alter ist er mit der SS in den Krieg gezogen. Ich wusste ja, dass auch ich in einer Diktatur lebe. Ich wollte nicht so sein wie er. (Beyer and Schmitter, 2014, 127)

> Er war für mich das erste Beispiel von einem zuerst ahnungslos und später dumpf und gleichgültig – wie aus dem Nebeneffekt des einfachen Lebens heraus – mitschuldig gewordenen Menschen. (*Falle*, 8)

Josef Müller (1926-1978) volunteered for service in the SS as a seventeen year-old and is known to have served in the 10th SS Panzerdivision Frundsberg, which saw action for the first time in Ukraine in 1944. He rose to the rank of *Oberscharführer* and was one of an estimated 700,000 Romanian-Germans who served in the Nazi armed forces, predominantly in the SS (Saliste, 2009; Hillgruber, 2010; Pahlke, 2010; *Onkel*, 85-86; Schuster, 1987, 147-51 [no specific page given] cited Totok, 1988, 34). Of the estimated

[57] *Niederungen*, 93.

70,000 Romanian-Germans who fought for Hitler, around 55,000 did so in the SS (Schuster, 1987, 147-151 [no specific page given], cited Totok, 1988, 34). By the end of 1943 every tenth soldier in the Waffen-SS was Romanian-German (Schieder and Conze, 2004, 51E). [58]

The Hitler regime found mass support among the Romanian-Germans, who had become increasingly interested in the *völkisch* ideology of nationalism and pan-German identity following the First World War (Totok, 1988, 18). Ideas about *Lebensraum* echoed their own mythology of settlement and longing for reconnection with the motherland; *Großdeutsche* ideology which had previously been used as a means of expressing the desire for autonomy and responding to Magyarisation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century nowsuddenly seemed like a realisable political aim (*ibid*, 18, 25). The Romanian Germans came to see themselves as innately connected to the *Reichsdeutsche* and wanted to participate in their fight for a great German empire. Young men from across Romania, especially in the centres of German culture in Transylvania and the Banat, clamoured to join in the great adventure (as they saw it), and any who were seen to hesitate were brought into line by the scrutiny of their communities (Schieder and Conze, 2004, 56E).

The common conception of the Waffen-SS as somehow "clean" in comparison to the SS proper (because it was also a regular fighting force) does not stand up to scrutiny and a large number of men from the Waffen-SS were deployed in the concentration camps, of whom a disproportionate number were ethnic Germans and other recruits from outside Germany (Milata, 2009, 263). Hans-Werner Schuster gives a figure of 40,000 members of the Waffen-SS as having served in KZ-Wachmannschaften and Einsatzgruppen or Totenkopfverbände, with service on the front line and in regular fighting units no guarantee of exemption from other, non-military tasks such as ethnic cleansing:

> Durch den Einsatz der Waffen-SS sind die Rumäniendeutschen auch mit den scheußlichsten Verbrechen des Dritten Reiches verbunden. Dem gleichen

[58] The rush of volunteers from Romania began in spring of 1940 in the form of the *1000-Mann-Aktion* organised by Werner Lorenz, the German head of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (*VoMi*), the organisation for *Auslandsdeutschtum* under Hess later incorporated into the SS as the *Reichskommissar für die Festigung des Volkstums* (Schieder and Conze, 2004, 35E). The campaign for recruits, organised quietly from October 1939 and sold to the visa authorities, to whom Lorenz applied for 1000 visas, as a scheme to provide labour in Germany, was a great success (Schieder and Conze, 2004, 51E). Müller's maternal uncle Matthias was one of many ethnic Germans who deserted from the Romanian armed forces to serve in the SS (Müller, 2009b; *Onkel*, 94-95). These deserters often joined columns of German soldiers on manoeuvre in Romania (Schieder and Conze, 2004, 51E).

> Dienstherren unterstellt, die gleiche Uniform und das gleiche Soldbuch tragend, waren Auswechslungen zwischen Konzentrationslager-Wachmannschaften und Waffen-SS-Personal (vor allem Verwundete und Frontdienstuntaugliche) möglich. […] Darunter befanden sich auch Rumäniendeutsche, insbesondere ältere Jahrgänge (etwa 35-jährige), die gar nicht mehr wehrpflichtig waren. […] Einzelne Rumäniendeutsche sind darüber hinaus auch in rein militärische Verbrechen des Dritten Reiches verwickelt. (Schuster, 1987, 147-151 [no specific page given] cited Totok, 1988, 34)

As Müller's texts reveal, Romanian-German SS veterans were respected in their community despite their involvement in some of the most deplorable actions of the German armed forces, including its "non-military" activities in the camps and campaign of ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia (especially the notorious actions of the Prinz-Eugen Division) (Goldsworthy, 2007, 95). In *Fasan*, Windisch and his wife express the opinion that the SS was superior to the Wehrmacht, and elsewhere in Müller's texts characters appear proud of their connection to the SS (*Fasan*, 30; *Niederungen*, 137, 167-70 ['Herr Wultschman']; *Tango*, 48-49). The demise of dreams of a greater German empire, associated loss of status and active punishment of the Germans by the Soviets all contributed to a feeling of dismay at the defeat of Hitler and resentment towards the ethnic Romanians who had, after all, also supported a fascist government (Rădalescu, 2008, 188). The crimes of the Nazis and the problems they caused the Romanian-Germans through schemes such as forced resettlement and interference in local politics were obscured by these feelings (Schieder and Conze, 2004, 41E-49E). Rather than remaining completely silent on the subject of the Nazi era, Müller's family discussed it frequently, omitting the issues of the Holocaust and war crimes from their discussion:

> Was das Dritte Reiche anbelangt, also davon hat man sich im Grunde genommen nicht distanziert. Ich habe das als Kind mitgekriegt […] es gab in der Familie direkte Bezugspunkte dazu. Ich hörte als Kind immer wieder, daß wir den Krieg, also *wir* den Krieg verloren haben […] Ich habe von Konzentrationlagern, von Judenverfolgung nicht eher gehört, als ich von zu Hause weg und in die Stadt gekommen bin. (Hensel, 1987, ZB 2, Müller's emphasis)

As I discussed in Chapter One, Müller's first shocking confrontations with the history of Holocaust took place at school and continued through books, several of which she has named as particular influences. However, the large proportion of Banat-Swabian men recruited to the German armed forces meant that she was far from alone in the disquiet she felt about her father and the unrepentant attitudes of her community. Members of the *Aktionsgruppe*, such as Horst Samson, and other writers of her generation were responding to similar family histories, with Richard Wagner declaring that 'die Generation meines Vaters war zu 90 percent in der Waffen-SS' (Sienerth, 2008; Broos, 1993, 20 cited White, 2002, 184n). Young authors embarked on a collaborative fact-finding mission, helping each other to access historical and literary texts that would explain the history that had been kept from them and how the National Socialist regime (and thereby other regimes) came about.

> Was ich las, waren Texte, die in keinem Schulbuch vorkamen, nicht im Studium der Germanistik, in keiner Bibliothek. Sie waren teils aus dem Goethe-Institut aus Bukarest, teils auf versteckten Wegen beschafft von den Freunden, den jungen Literaten der "Aktionsgruppe Banat" […] Sie gaben mir Bücher: Gedichte, Prosa, Theater und Essays. Brecht, Celan, Jandl, Pastior, Fühmann, Solschenizyn, Mandelstam, Achmatowa, Brodsky, Daniil Charms, Marieluise Fleißer, Theodor Kramer, Thomas Bernhard, Handke, Jonke und Uwe Johnson – wie es kam. Und Standardwerke über die Mechanismen von Diktatur: das *LTI* von Klemperer, *Der SS-Staat* von Kogon, von Canetti *Masse und Macht*. (*Onkel*, 78)

The issue of the Nazi past; the necessity of discussing it, the implication of close family members in its horrors and the tensions this produced were central preoccupations of a significant section of the German literary community in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s. Addressing this situation resulted in a search for novel methods to explore these various aspects of a difficult past.

This desire to break the silence of the past and confront the parent generation with the crimes that had been committed in their name (or even by them) mirrored that of thousands of children of former fascists across the German-speaking and other Axis countries. Such concerns formed an important part of the student movement around 1968 in West Germany especially. There the slogan 'Väter sind Täter' was held up on placards and young people began to rebel against the now thoroughly-undermined moral authority

of their parents, sometimes directly confronting them in the family home over the issue of guilt and their role in the Third Reich (Fuchs, 2006, 183). Many would later come to write about this tension and the voyage of discovery they embarked upon as a result of collective guilt. Spiridon compares Müller's work to the trend of father literature, first-person texts describing confrontations with fathers who were former Nazis, which became especially popular in the late 1970s (Spiridon, 2002, 164). These kinds of international trends certainly seem to have influenced Müller and her contemporaries and they were clearly aware of influential texts and debates in other German-speaking countries. This came about through access to foreign books – Müller describes how she and her friends took it in turns to visit the Goethe Institut, which had established a branch in Bucharest in 1979 –, the vibrancy of the German-language literary scene and the commitment of a small group of teachers in schools and universities across the Banat and Transylvania, as well as a changing international climate (Müller, 2009a; *Onkel*, 78, 178; Praxenthaler, 2002, 68).[59]

In the following section I will offer an overview of the kinds of discussions and literary interventions which took place across the era in German-speaking Romania, paying attention to the international spread of cultural memory products such as films, plays and books alongside local debates and developments. I will identify trends in the German-Romanian literature of the 1960s-1970s, working chronologically to outline the kinds of texts which inspired and outraged the young generation of authors in the 1970s-80s. I will argue that the discourses of German literature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* gradually began to affect the Romanian-German literature of the 1960s, with new approaches gradually supplanting *Heimatliteratur*, and the appearance of increasingly open discussions of the Holocaust in news and literature. By doing so, I aim to supplement understandings of the context in which Müller developed her interest in the Nazi past. Explorations like these begin to answer the question of how, when her parents and neighbours refused to discuss National Socialism, she was able to develop such a keen awareness of cultural and philosophical responses to it. International news stories and literary texts and discussions from within Romania all point to ways in which Müller was driven to write, both because she was inspired by figures such as Paul Celan and because she felt provoked by the texts she and her contemporaries regarded as falling short of a full critical response to the past.

[59] A *DAAD-Lektorat* (*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*) teaching post was established for the first time at the University of Bucharest in the early 1970s, and in 1985 there were three *DAAD-LektorInnen* in Romania, the only country apart from Yugoslavia in Eastern Europe to have any (Praxenthaler, 2002, 68).

Romania has a complex relationship with the history of fascism. The rise of chauvinism within the various national ethnicities of the newly formed country after 1919 meant that "homegrown" Romanian fascism in the 1930s was mirrored by internationally-orientated fascist movements among the German and Hungarian populations of the country (Griehsel, 2009). Processing of the fascist past in the aftermath of the Second World War has also highlighted this tension between national and ethnic discourses and histories, with mutual accusations and scapegoating obstructing meaningful development towards the kind of coherent, contrite national memory culture that has emerged in reunified Germany (Kelso and Eglitis, 2014, 492; Fuchs, 2006, 175-76). As was the case in most formerly fascist communist countries, the ruling elite in Romania constructed a narrative in which responsibility for fascism lay in the West and anti-fascism became the dominant theme of wartime history (Petrescu, 2013, 64; Mark, 2010 66-67 cited Kelso and Eglitis, 2014, 493). This placing of responsibility outside the state was exacerbated by two factors: the switching of allegiance from Germany to Russia which took place in late 1944, and the convenient presence of minorities onto which to shift the blame (*ibid*). As Herta Müller has often noted, not least in her Nobel Prize interview, it was the Germans and Hungarians above all who were blamed for the actions of the Nazis and the negative consequences of the war for Romania (Govrin, 1999, 272, Griehsel, 2009; *König*, 122; *Onkel*, 125). This narrative of German and Hungarian guilt provided the pretext for the punishment of these groups and especially Germans (the wealthier demographic) through expropriations, deportations and internal exile after the war.

When considering the discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* among the German-speaking Romanians it is important to bear in mind this history of state silence surrounding the culpability of ethnic Romanians. Efforts to uncover and publicly debate German guilt ran the continuous risk of being criticised as pandering to the state and its scapegoating of Germans (an accusation levelled at Müller when she published *Niederungen*), while discussion of pre-1944 Romanian collusion with the Third Reich was a deeply-held taboo (Kelso and Eglitis, 2014, 492).[60] Resistance on the part of certain sections of the German community to discussing German guilt or entering into discourses of contrition must be read against this background, as well as issues of shame and denial.

[60] Müller was accused of being an agent of the *Securitate*, defaming the Banat Swabians at the behest of the communist government (*Apfelkern*, 50).

The dominance of the Communist Party and especially the censorial activities of the *Securitate* in the sphere of literary production and journalism also makes it more difficult to analyse or contextualise interpretation of the interventions on the Nazi past in terms of both why they were made and the impact they had. We can only know what was admitted to print or deemed suitable for discussion during public roundtables and other events; it is difficult to judge to what extent the participants in these discussions or writers in the 1960s-70s had the taboo, ethnic *Romanian* fascist past in mind when they discussed the Second World War, for example.[61] However, the purpose of this survey of the Romanian-German cultural sphere and literary scene is to build a picture of the landscape Müller entered and the kinds of statements and literary interventions which *were* represented there. The volume of texts published during the 1960s-1980s which address the history of fascism point to a lively interest in memory, especially among younger authors, and her engagement with memory is informed and inspired by this literary context.

As was the case in the Federal Republic, discussions about individual guilt and responsibility in relation to the Nazi past seem to have come to the fore in German-speaking Romania in the wake of the Auschwitz Trials (1963-65). Ideas about who bore the responsibility for Nazism were evolving internationally against the backdrop of the SS- and Auschwitz-Trials around 1960 and the emergence of ideas such as Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil' (*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963) and Alexander and Margerete Mitscherlitschs's 'Unfähigkeit zu trauern' (1967). The focus on the Nazi leadership in historical and cultural analyses of Nazism in the first decade after the war was supplemented and developed through this new discourse of *Mitläufertum* and the recognition of continued fascistic elements in German society. The popular Timişoara newspaper *Die Wahrheit* (renamed *Neue Banater Zeitung* in 1969) reported on the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (21.02.65, 16.12.65) and other trials of guards and commandants from camps such as Sobibor (24.06.65, 17.10.69, 14.5.70), Treblinka (24.12.64, 4.2.65) and Sachsenhausen (29.04.65) closely. The bringing to justice of former Nazis in West Germany was an important news topic in the mid- to late-1960s in Romania, with regular articles on both the pursuit of high-ranking officials, such as the head of the Berlin Gestapo (10.12.69) and the prosecution of lower-ranking figures such as members of the Wehrmacht and SS. The frequency of articles seems to increase following the extension of the statute of limitations for crimes associated with the Nazi era in early 1965

[61] In the texts I examine, war crimes committed by Romanian forces, such as the Pogrom in Iaşi, are seldom mentioned but tracking references to these might be an illuminating direction for future research.

(21.02.65), while the trial for war crimes of members of police commando units (16.07.65), SS companies (13.12.66, 21.01.70, 03.04.70) and Wehrmacht soldiers (09.01.70) reflected the shift in focus internationally towards "everyday" perpetrators and the role of "normal" individuals in the Third Reich.

These articles firmly locate the remaining perpetrators of Nazism in the West, which is represented as the tainted Other to the "purged and purified" communist bloc. The trials featured and individuals named in *Die Wahrheit* are exclusively West German and Austrian, although the crimes they committed range in location. Another theme in media coverage of this period is the continued presence of fascist elements in West Germany. Articles about everyday perpetrators often contain their current professions, such as the bishop of Munich Matthias Defregger who was implicated in the trial of Wehrmacht soldiers for war crimes (09.01.70), while others describe the ways in which high-ranking Nazis were allowed to escape justice. Nazis who fled to South America via Spain and Casablanca (04.03.65), war criminals being granted early release (19.11.66), and the activities of neo-fascist agitators (13.12.66) and politicians in the Federal Republic (06.05.69) are all covered in detail and with concern. In contrast to this, the Banat is celebrated for successfully overthrowing fascism and winning on the "internal battlefront" to bring about denazification (08.02.70). An extended article on this process appears in May 1970 as part of the 25th anniversary of liberation and talks about the purging of Nazis from Banat, celebrating how the populace had refused to cooperate with the National Socialists (07.05.70).

Müller's awareness of National Socialism developed during this era, when stories of escaped war criminals being brought to justice appeared in the local paper on a regular basis. Her father openly boasted of how his lack of blood type tattoo (not all SS men were given one) had allowed him to evade prosecution by pretending to be a regular soldier in 1945, and the widespread media interest in SS men at large in the late 1960s and early 1970s (just when she was learning about the war) must have had an impact on Müller. Her texts display a keen awareness that unpunished perpetrators and unreconstructed Nazis were not, as was presented in the press, a problem found solely in the West.

Notably absent from these discussions of truth and justice in the mid-1960s is any reflection on the ideology behind war crimes or remembrance of victims, especially Jews. Although the trials included camp guards from extermination camps such as Sobibor and Treblinka, the Final Solution is not referenced. Similarly, in the regular pieces on international commemorations and the opening of monuments at Auschwitz (21.01.65)

Dachau (10.09.68) and Mauthausen (6.5.69) the focus is on communist victims. However, this does change as the decade wears on, with articles about the victimisation of Jews by the Gestapo (11.12.69) and the SS (21.01.70), written either openly or euphemistically. One article from the spring of 1970 describes Austrian SS-men on trial in Graz and Salzburg as having targeted 'Männer, Frauen und Kinder' and 'Ärzte, Richter und Intellektuelle' in those cities (03.04.70), for example, a phrasing suggestive of attacks targeting Jewish civilians.

The timing of this shift in focus and language used in news reports coincides with greater recognition of Jewish suffering worldwide, symbolised in events such as the double award of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Nelly Sachs and Schmuel Agnon in 1966 and Willy Brandt's spontaneous genuflection at the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1970. The widely publicised work of Simon Wiesenthal in pursuing fugitive former Nazis, which is regularly covered in the *Neue Banater Zeitung* from 1968 onwards, seems to have been another focus of public attention around the world. When, in 1968, news came that Wiesenthal had discovered both Josef Mengele and Martin Bormann in South America, it was covered closely in the publication (20.11.68), as was his pursuit of them throughout the early 1970s (16.02.71, 26.02.72, 19.03.72).[62] In 1970 *NBZ* published an interview with Wiesenthal alongside extracts from his book *Die Mörder unter uns*, both of which directly discussed race and the targeting of Jews by the Nazis (Marin, 1970, 4). A few months later, commemorations of the liberation of the Banat include discussion of the resistance of interethnic fighters, including Jews, to the forces of fascism (07.05.70) and in an article on SS trials in Munich in 1972, Jews are explicitly named as victims of ethnic cleansing for the first time in *NBZ* (08.03.72).

Müller identifies going away to school in 1968 as a watershed moment in her awareness of the Nazi past but a survey of news and literature of the time shows that she did so at an exceptional time. Growing international interest in the Holocaust and a temporary relaxation of government control over literature in Romania meant that Müller accessed a public sphere more open than ever before to the discussion of collective guilt.

[62] Müller alludes to the history of former Nazis resettling in South America in *Herztier*, where Edgar mentions two uncles who moved abroad (to Brazil and to Austria) after the war: 'Edgars Onkel waren ferngebliebene SS-Soldation. Der verlorene Krieg trieb sie in fremde Richtungen. Sie hatten bei den Totenkopf-Verbänden Friedhöfe gemacht und trennten sich nach dem Krieg. Sie trugen im Schädel die gleiche Fracht. Sie suchten einander nie wieder. Sie griffen nach einer Frau aus der Gegend und bauten mit ihr in Österreich und Brasilien ein spitzes Dach, einen spitzen Giebel, vier Fenster mit grasgrünen Fensterkreuzen, einen Zaun aus graugrünen Latten. Sie kamen der fremden Gegend bei und bauten zwei schwäbischen Häuser. So schwäbisch wie ihre Schädel, an zwei fremden Orten, wo alles anders war' (*Herztie*r, 65-66).

As this openness spread, narratives about the past were contested and debated by different generations of Romanian-German authors, especially in the Timişoara literary scene she would become part of as a teenager. A brief overview of the kinds of interventions being made in the literary journal *Neue Literatur*, the most important literary forum in German-speaking Romania, is helpful here (Spiridon, 2002, 151).[63]

Stories and poems which deal with the Nazi era directly tend to focus on the experience of soldiers and POWs, positioning them as innocent witnesses or tools in the plans of others. Franz Keller's piece 'Durst', an extract from his novel *Proletenmichel* (*Neue Literatur* 6, 1965, 37-47), is exemplary of this trend, focusing as it does on a naïve Wehrmacht soldier who is a committed follower of Hitler but is unable to fathom why he is reprimanded for giving water to a female prisoner and her child. Telling details, such as the Hungarian that is spoken by the prisoners and the huge and sudden influx of them, suggest to the reader that he is taking part in the mass deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in 1944, but the naïve reactions of the soldier to the violence he witnesses seem designed to absolve him of responsibility within the story.

> Gierig trank das Kind ein Paar Schluck Wasser, bis ein Gewehrkolbenhieb die Flasche in tausend Stücke zerspringen ließ. Die Frau schrie erschrocken auf, das Kind weinte, Michel begriff nicht, was geschehen war, der Posten, ein SS-Mann, fluchte und drängte die Menschen nach vorne. Es war das Werk nur weniger Sekunden, die aber genügten, um vor Michel ein Abgrund aufzureißen, in dem menschliches Gefühl und Würde und vieles andere versanken. (44)

His inability to comprehend the reasons for the SS-man's cruelty or reconcile that cruelty with his understanding of his own duties as a soldier are challenged by his commanding

[63] I rely heavily on *Neue Literatur* in my analysis of literature from Romania for several reasons. Firstly, it was the most important national organ of literary production, secondly, it was where the authors I am interested in tested their ideas before publishing them in single-author texts and thirdly, it was published monthly and so responds to developments in debates quickly. However, it is important to note that *Neue Literatur*, as a journal produced in Bucharest, was subject to greater interference from censors and (after 1977) editorial intervention than local publications (Spiridon, 2002, 135). The texts it contains are therefore likely to be more restrained in their content than those published in more local and therefore ideologically open publications such as *Echinox* (still published today by students in Cluj) (Kegelmann, 1995, 23). Müller's generation also sought freer expression in individual publications. During Richard Wagner's brief tenure as leader of the AMG-Kreis (September 1981-December 1983) printed the first piece of Romanian-German *Samizdat*, *AMG-Info*, on the theme 'Wir Rumäniendeutschen – 1981', texts written in response to a growing generational conflict in the circle. (Totok, 1988, 140). The Nazi era and collective guilt were also an important theme in the small but significant *Samizdat* of the GDR. Cristian Lotz analyses texts from the describes *Samizdat* of the 1970s-80s as a 'zweite Öffentlichkeit' for addressing the legacy of the Holocaust. (Lotz, 2010, 237)

officer, who upbraids him for his weakness, '"Keinem Kinde, einem Judenbengel, wenn Sie es wirklich nicht wissen sollten, Sie Kamel." […] Also das war es. Die junge Frau war eine Jüdin, die mit anderen Hunderten den Weg in irgendein KZ ging' (46). The inhumane attitude of the commander contrasts with the empathy the narrator feels for this mother and child, and the low-ranking soldier argues back on the basis of human feeling, before saying: "Das tut ein Wehrmachtsangehöriger nicht, verstehen Sie?" (46).

This exchange in which the narrator stands up for human decency and contradicts his commanding officer contrasts problematically with the earlier scene of a soldier being sent on a suicide mission for refusing to be part of a firing squad:

> Zum Erschießungskommando sollten sich Freiwillige melden. Nicht einer meldete sich. Es wurden sechs Leute bestimmt. Einer davon weigerte sich. Und da man nicht zwei erschießen wollte, wurde er sofort zum Strafbataillon "Himmelfahrtskommando" versetzt. Dort standen die Chancen sehr hoch, die Veilchen bald von unten zu riechen. (40)

The other regular soldiers around him are predominantly either injured or 'Kriegssatt' (as in the case of those forced into *Strafbatallionen*) and display a universal disillusionment with Hitler. The narrator's continued belief in the Führer and final victory make him the object of ridicule, which in turn reveals the cynicism of the Wehrmacht soldiers unwillingly present in the campaign. The problematic distinction Keller makes between the Wehrmacht soldier narrator who believes in Hitler and the SS-men who carry out his racial policy seems to reject the idea of everyday perpetration or excuse it through the innocence of the soldier. Although his piece exposes the history of ethnic cleansing and deportation of Jews, situating the Wehrmacht at sites where this took place, Keller insists on these war crimes as externally imposed by the SS and focuses on the potentially fatal consequences for those who refused to cooperate rather than the universally disastrous consequences for those targeted.

Texts like this, which focus on the experience of "innocent" soldiers, follow a formula which is repeated throughout the post-war era, of focusing on the perspective of individuals against the background of the Second World War *without* thematising their personal moral responsibility. Müller's generation criticised this stance as mealy-mouthed and insufficiently critical, however this reading undervalues the allusions works by authors such as Franz Liebhardt and Erwin Wittstock make towards controversial issues like

collective guilt and the fate of Jews during the Second World War, which were more controversial in those days (Spiridon, 2002, 92; 252-53). Paul Schuster recounts how his critical novel *Fünf Liter Zuika* (1962), which concerned the fascist era in the Banat, was watered down by the intervention of the censor, who insisted on the introduction of a positive character, for example (Schuster cited Spiridon, 2002, 88). Other texts from the decade appear similarly unresolved in their reflections on the past, even while appearing to argue for collective memory work, such as Rolf Marmont's more modern poem 'Vorschlag', published in *Neue Literatur* in 1966 (1-2, 76-77):

> Als die große Suppen der Geschichte mißglückten,
> Mußten wir sie auslöffeln.
> Uns dafür noch bedanken.
>
> Als die Oberköche sahen, daß ihre Brühen anbrannten,
> Peischten sie die Küchenjungen
> Und versteckten danach ihre Hände hinter dem Schurz des Scheins
>
> Als ein Volk seinem Ulcus davon hatte,
> Taten die Suppenhelden beschäftigt
> Und meinten, sie wußten von nichts.
>
> […]
>
> Topfguckerei soll von heute keine Schande mehr sein.
> Hebt die Deckel von den Töpfen
> Und tüchtig 'reingeguckt'
> Ob da nicht wieder
> Ein Medusenkopf liegt.
> Überläßt die Vergangenheit die Schuld der Versäumnis.
> Laßt neue Kochbücher drucken.

The last stanza of the poem reads as a strong call for investigating and coming to terms with the past, reassessing history and breaking the taboo on what took place under fascism.

However, although he talks about 'the guilt of negligence' Marmont also situates culpability for the past firmly at the top. The contrast he sets up between 'Oberköche' or 'Suppenhelden' and 'Küchenjungen' makes a distinction between the ideologically invested and politically responsible, who caused the problems and took no responsibility, and their underlings who were victimised by them when things started to go wrong and, he implies, made to face the consequences of their superiors' actions along with the wider population. The poem hints at the resentment among the German population for having to live with these consequences and the burden the Nazi past is to them but does similar things to Keller's story in assigning blame to the higher ranks and exonerating the 'Küchenjungen' or lower ranks as well as painting the Germans ('Küchenjungen') as victims. The image of Medusa's head may be Marmont's way of thematising the difficulty of approaching the past directly, as he suggests.

Although there seems to have been little appetite for discussions of collective guilt in *Neue Literatur* in the mid-1960s, texts such as Keller's and other more critical interventions around this time in the mid-1960s do take up the theme of Jewish experience, which was marginalised in contemporary news reporting. The award of the Nobel Prize to Nelly Sachs in 1966 is celebrated with the reprinting of her poem 'Chor der Geretteten', and the accompanying article discusses her celebrated prose work *Landschaft aus Schreien* (*NL*, 11-12, 1966, 64). The first issue of 1967 is largely dedicated to the recently deceased Jewish Banat writer Alfred Margul-Sperber and contains poetry translated from Yiddish, including Rachel H. Kom's 'Bei den Toren des Gaskammern' (108-09) and 'Inschrift auf einem Waggonbrett' by Awrom Suzkewer (Abraham Sutzkever) (111), as well as poems by Oskar Pastior (32-34). A series of commemorative articles comment on the suffering Margul-Sperber endured as a second class citizen under fascism and the threat of deportation, as well as 'das Leid des deutsch schreibenden Dichters an der Vergewaltigung seiner Sprache' (Schuster, 1967, 4-5). Alfred Kittner describes how Margul-Sperber responded to the rise of Nazism ('die braune Peste') in his work, blending visions of the Burning of the Reichstag with the development of Hitler's war strategy in one poem and using another, 'Ein Neger erringt den Olympiarekord für die USA', to refute racial theory using the example of Jesse Owens (*NL*, 1-2, 1967, 25). A similar commemorative section was produced for Paul Celan following his death in 1970 (*NL*, 5, 1970, 96-102). The *Kulturspiegel* review section also reports on some of the important literary events of wider *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, such as the success of plays like Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (*NL*, 3-4, 1966, 157-8) and Rolf Hochhut's *Der Stellvertreter* (*NL*, 6, 1965,

152) in the Federal Republic and the publication of prose works such as Siegfried Lenz's *Deutschstunde* (NL, 4, 1969, 104-107). Non-fiction works like Jean-Francois Steiner's *Treblinka* and films such as Mikhail Romm's documentary *Der gewöhnliche Faschismus* (*NL*, 6, 1965, 153), or American productions *Judgement at Nuremberg* (Stanley Kramer, 1961) and Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* (1964) are also mentioned (*NL*, 7-8, 1967, 157), painting a picture of a cultural scene in Romania which kept abreast of developments in the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* debate abroad.

The extent to which these foreign works were widely available to read or watch in Romania is hard to gauge. However, it is clear that Ceauşescu, who came to power in 1965, was keen to appear to foster cultural development among Romania's minorities and the regime sought to emphasise its openness to translations and works produced in languages such as German. A 1975 UNESCO brochure produced by the Romanian Government emphasises the strength of literary production in languages other than Romanian:

> The efforts made by the Romanian State to stimulate and give prominence to the culture of the national groups have had remarkable success in the publication of books. During the years 1966 to 1973, 4,752 titles were issued (over 26 million copies) in Hungarian, German, Serbo-Croat, Ukrainian and other languages as well. In 1973 640 titles (4,026,000 copies) in the languages of national groups were published. In 1973 the publishing house Kriterion alone issued 166 titles – over 1 million copies. (Dodu Balan, 1975, 25)

The government's concern with appearing open, especially to minorities whose welfare was monitored by other countries, was such that these translations formed a kind of 'cultural alibi' and the extent to which these books were made available for sale or reflected the interests of the public varied (Glajar and Brandt, 2013, 40).[64] It has been noted that publications such as *Neue Literatur* were censored much less harshly than Romanian-language equivalents because of the dearth of translators and the time it therefore took to make a proper evaluation, as well as the lack of interpretative skills among censors (Constantinescu, 2009, 85; Petrescu, 2013, 67; Spiridon, 2002, 158). The

[64] There was a great increase in available literature under Ceauşescu, who responded to German authors'' complaints (during a meeting in 1968) that there was too little good-quality German literature available by expressing his support for diversity in literature and scholarship (Weber, 2010, 287). However, his Mao-esque Cultural Revolution of 1971 saw the freedoms of his earlier rule gradually removed and some books removed from bookshops. Others had their publication cancelled (ibid, 292-93).

Romanian censors of the 1960s-1970s were also in general less harsh than their equivalents in the GDR, for example, although this changed with the transition from centralised censorship to the publisher-based model in 1977 (Spiridon, 2002, 160, 158).[65] German citizens were furthermore allowed to receive packages from other German-speaking countries and even travel there, with customs officials and border guards unlikely to be able to evaluate foreign literature accurately.[66] German plays by politically attuned foreign authors such as Bertolt Brecht, Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt were on the official list of acceptable titles, along with translations of works by Harold Pinter, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller (Dodu Balan, 1975, 37). The curricula of German high schools in the 1970s contained recent literature, including texts thematising collective guilt and the Second World War, although copies of the texts themselves were sometimes substituted for summaries written by teachers due to lack of resources (Weber, 2010, 259).[67] A 1981 standard text for the final year of high school (XII Class) contains significant sections on the literature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, including discussions of works by Dieter Noll and Jurek Becker in the GDR, *Gruppe 47* and a full chapter on Paul Celan which mentions concentration camps explicitly (Aescht et al, 1981, 159, 178-183). Celan's poems appear to have become standard texts by the 1970s, with an *Experimentallehrbuch* intended for the IV Class (final year of primary school) from 1975 including him alongside a description of the cultural impact of the Nuremberg Trials (Engel et al, 1975, 95-96, 207, 216). The 1981 book also contains excerpts of important postwar West German writing, including Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* and Heinrich Böll's *Billiarden um Halb Zehn* (both 1959).

[65] From 1977 onwards the responsibility for censorship was placed with publishers, editors, writers and others involved in literary production (Spiridon, 2002, 158). Prior to that the seal of approval given by the state was final and binding, and specific demands for alteration were made. There was now no specific person with literary expertise with whom publishers could negotiate. Editor-in-chief of Kriterion Verlag, Hedi Hauser describes the ministry responsible for literature (the Council for Cultural and Social Education) as worse than the censor, because it could demand changes at any time, even after books were in print (Hauser quoted in Spiridon, 2002, 159). Müller's *Niederungen* was under review for three years before its publication in 1982, even though a number of excerpts from it had already been published from 1977 onwards (ibid, 104n).

[66] In his *biographie. ein muster* (excerpts of which were published in *Neue Literatur*), Johann Lippet describes previously banned books becoming available and his narrator searching libraries and begging relatives abroad to bring him books, 'und ein verwandter aus dem ausland/sagte mir bei einem besuch/was die bücher kosteten/als ich die werke aller schriftsteller verlangte/die wir/in der elften klasse/durchzunehmen/hatten' (Lippet, 1978, 11).

[67] As noted above, the issue of collective guilt where it applied to the *Germans* was not a politically sensitive issue to the communist government, even while the Romanian fascist past remained taboo. To what extent the discussion of individual culpability and fascism pursued in German texts had an impact on attitudes to the Romanian past is, of course, impossible to know.

Neue Literatur, which was available in schools, libraries and universities across Romania, was undoubtedly an important source of literature from abroad and a means to keep up to date with cultural debates and trends, including the interrogation of the collective past. In 1966 it published an article by Rolf Seeliger (West Germany) on 'engagierte Poesie' in the Federal Republic which reproduced (in their entirety) Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge', Christoph Meckel's 'Hymne' ('Ich lebe in einem Land, das verliebt ist in den Tod') and 'Früher Mittag' by Ingeborg Bachmann:

> Sieben Jahre später,
> in einem Totenhaus,
> trinken die Henker von gestern
> den goldenen Becher aus.
>
> Die Augen täten dir sinken.
> Schon ist Mittag in der Asche
> krümmt sich das Eisen, auf den Dorn
> ist die Fahne gehißt, und auf den Felsen
> uralten Traums bleibt fortan
> der Adler geschmiedet. (1953)

These works reflect the transition from describing the Nazi era itself to writing by authors of a younger generation which responds to its cultural and social legacy. Images of a country or imaginary landscape ('Felsen uralten Traums') tainted by Nazism combine with the figure of the perpetrator to present a picture of Germany as a land petrified, where the younger generation respond in horror to the actions of their predecessors and see little hope for the future: 'der tausende Enkel meiner Hoffnung kam um / Der letzte Schild meiner Zuversicht ist zerborsten' (Meckel, 1960 cited Seelinger, 1966, 147)

Although Müller often asserts that growing up as she did meant that she was not exposed to the troubled history of her community or ways to come to terms with it, a more complete survey of culture and public discussion reveals that, among the cultural elite at least, there was quite an interest in such issues. By the late 1960s authors were writing texts influenced by the *Gruppe 47* which reflected on wartime experience and attempted to bear witness to the crimes of Nazism, although these maintained a distinction between fellow traveller and active perpetrator (most often a cartoonish SS commander), and shied

away from confronting the ways in which average soldiers and civilians were implicated in the history of National Socialism. As I will discuss in the next section, the arrival of the *Aktionsgruppe* in the 1970s exploded these comforting narratives in favour of a merciless confrontation with the older generation. As their interventions and the active encouragement they received from certain prominent figures in the literary scene prove, Müller and her attitude did not appear out of the blue but rather as the product of a specific moment in which *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was of central interest. This was true not only among elites but also, thanks to the controversy surrounding writers like Müller, in German-speaking living rooms across Romania.

'Und einen solchen Vater will DOCH keiner von uns haben'[68]: Generational Conflict and the Influence of *Aktionsgruppe Banat* on Romanian-German Memory Debates

Although the official thaw which followed the Prague Spring was short-lived, it set in motion a cultural flowering in the German-speaking community which was only gradually dismantled over the next two decades.[69] As my analysis of *Neue Literatur* and school textbooks from the era demonstrates, some German literature from the Federal Republic was accessible and the subject of discussion in Romania. The decentralisation of publishing to smaller presses, such as the minority-language focused Kriterion (established 1969), as well as the establishment or overhauling of publications such as *Die Wahrheit* (which became the *Neue Banater Zeitung* and gained new cultural and dialect supplements) imbued the literary scene with new energy (Spiridon, 2014, 61). Influential figures such as Anemone Latzina, Paul Schuster and Gerhardt Csejka (editors of *Neue Literatur*) and Nicholas Berwanger (editor of the *Neue Banater Zeitung*) used the new constellation to try to revitalise German literature in Romania, bringing in young authors and reaching out to schools to find new talent (*ibid*, 63). The exposure these individuals gave young writers through competitions, dedicated special issues and regular slots in the

[68] (Grosz, 1974, 6).

[69] Ceauşescu's criticised the Soviet Union following the Prague Spring in 1968 and seemed committed to opening up to the West. He relaxed censorship and allowed writers to travel to promote their work abroad (Oskar Pastior escaped during one such sanctioned trip) (Krause, 1998, 49; Weber, 2010, 284; Totok, 1988, 51). But by 1971 restrictions were returning, with the regime beginning to see the turn to interiority and subjectivity as a threat. Ceauşescu returned from a visit to Maoist China and announced a restalinisation of culture around the central idea that literature and art had to serve the working classes, summarised in the so-called *Juli-Thesen* (Krause, 1998, 64; Spiridon, 2002, 150; Weber, 2010, 292).

literary supplements led directly to the emergence of authors such as the members of *Aktionsgruppe Banat*.[70]

Right from the beginning, this process of renewal and experimentation held critical reflection and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* at its heart. The tentative responses to the burden of the Nazi past in the 1950 and 1960s developed into searing critiques of village life, relations and culture by younger writers in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* is remembered for its clash with the communist government, it was not critical of the regime initially and its members focused their disapproval on the structures of village society and failure of older generations to respond ethically to the guilt question. Willem Totok links the *Aktionsgruppe* directly with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*:

> Es wird nicht nur mit Tabuvorstellungen gebrochen, sondern auch die unbewältigte – faschistische Vergangenheit der Elterngeneration direkt angesprochen. […] Die politische Auseinandersetzung mit der Generation, die an den "Endsieg" Hitlers geglaubt und in deren Köpfen sich faschistisches Gedankengut konserviert hatte, stieß innerhalb der deutschen Minderheit, die sich offen provoziert fühlte, auf Ablehnung. (Totok, 1988, 66-67)

Addressing the theme of the Nazi past was actively encouraged by Latzina, Berwanger and others and the famous 'literarische Agitationsreise' around German-speaking schools in Banat organised by Paul Schuster and *Neue Literatur* in October 1970 included 'die Kriegsbeteiligung der Väter' as one option on a questionnaire they gave out to students asking them which topics they wanted to see written about (Weber, 2010, 279; Spiridon, 2014, 63-64). That this was seen as a priority can be traced back to debates of the late 1960s in which writers too young to have been active participants during fascism such as Dieter Schlesak called for greater transparency and the breaking of taboos around the past:

[70] Müller was first published in a supplement of the *Neue Banater Zeitung* as a schoolgirl but her way into a literary career was less direct. She was initially put off from participating in the local Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn literary circle – where the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* took refuge after they were forced to disband – by some of the other authors, whom she saw as arrogant (Berwanger, 1985, 24). However, the Banat literary establishment still played an important role in the figure of *NBZ* editor Nicholaus Berwanger. He encouraged her to write and participate despite her reservations (Schuller, 1985 cited J. Müller, 2014, 45). Her first prose piece appeared in *Neue Literatur* in 1979 and the journal published her work regularly up until her *Veröffentlichungsverbot* in 1986.

> Doch jeder ist auf besondere Weise zu der Gegenwart gekommen, […] auch die deutsche Nationalitätengruppe [hatte] einen eigenen Weg, verschlungen und widerspruchsvoll, ja oft schmerzhaft, bis zu unserer Gegenwart. Das wäre zu untersuchen, das halt ich für die grundsätzlichste Frage. […] So komme ich, wenn ich schreibe, um die Frage der persönlichen Vergangenheit nicht herum. […] jede Gegenwart ist nur durch die Tiefe der Jahre fruchtbar und wirklich, ohne Erinnerung und Gedächtnis ist sie platt. […] Was fange ich mit der Schönheit von Kindheitserinnerungen und mit dem Elternhaus an, ohne meine Eindrücke, meine Erziehung zu werten? Ohne die Haltung einer bestimmten bürgerlichen Schicht auf ihre Verwendbarkeit oder auf ihre Schädlichkeit zu untersuchen? Hat sie uns ein glaubhaftiges Geschichtsbild hinterlassen, verwendbaren Normen? Ich glaube nicht. Im Gegenteil: wir sollten vieles davon entmythologisieren, zeigen, wohin ihre Haltung geführt hat. Das, was im zweiten Weltkrieg geschehen war, diese soziale Schicht war daran mitschuldig (Neue Literatur [Redaktion], 1967, 113-14).

The public discussion between young authors from the region that resulted in the formation of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* made clear that they were eager to take up the challenge outlined by Schlesak and pushed to the fore by the editors of *Neue Literatur*. They were determined to question the entire cultural tradition of German-speaking Romania:

> Auch registriert man das Bemühen um die Förderung einer neuen Schriststellergeneration und darüber hinaus den Versuch, den Themenhaushalt der Region zu veränderen […] Neue Themen sollen in der Region salonfähig gemacht werden, wie die Kriegsbeteiligung der Väter, die Einstellung zu Tradition und Brauchtum. Über Modernisierungsprozesse und Tabubrüche sollte die kulturelle Tradition der Region in ihrem Selbstverständnis und auch neue Identitätskonstruktion angestoßen werden (Spiridon, 2014, 65).

There was an explosion of both writing on and public discussion of the Nazi past during the 1970s as the young authors who had been inspired to write came to maturity, with the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* leading the way in developing a literature of intergenerational conflict. Their work was influenced by Anemone Latzina and Bertolt

Brecht,[71] and focused on the structural relations of fascism and its aftermath. One source of inspiration for their local, subjective form of reflection was the *Lyrik-Welle* or Saxon School of the 1960s and 1970s, in which East German poets such as Sarah Kirsch, Volker Braun and Inge Müller began to write about the past in a highly personal fashion, considering the individual as the product of history (Mabee, 1993, 207). They:

> no longer wanted to give harmonious depictions of GDR reality but to uncover contradictions and problems in their society. […] To express their own relationship to art and history, they insisted on their right to assert their subjectivity in all aspects of their writing: "Historical consciousness is self-consciousness," a slogan coined by their spokesperson Volker Braun, became a guiding principle for the group. (Braun, 1976, 139 cited Mabee, 1993, 207)

The *Aktionsgruppe* articulated similar concerns in their concept of 'engagierte Literatur', a literature which was ultimately Marxist and in that sense supportive of the Romanian regime but acted as a critical friend in confronting problems in everyday reality, including the failure of the older generation of Germans to face up to the Nazi past (Totok, 1988, 66-67).[72]

Texts dealing with father-son and father-daughter relationships appear in *Neue Literatur* throughout the 1970s and 1980s but especially from 1977 onwards, a year which saw the publication of a long passage from Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) in the journal (Wolf, 1977, 63-81). These have been explained as both an act of generational rebellion in line with the "Revolution in Blue Jeans" of the early 1980s (a Romanian 1968 moment) and as a response to the Second World War (Cărtărescu, 1999, 364 cited Constantinescu, 2009, 84; Spiridon, 2002, 222). Texts followed which emulated West German father literature but with a local focus and inflection (Spiridon, 2002, 222-23). Poetry such as Richard Pietrass's 'An den Vater' focused on the return of the father after the war in neutral terms: 'Bist fröstelnd an die Fronten gelaufen hast keine Kugel verloren. / Ach, wie bist du wiedergekehrt geblendet / scheitelhoch geschoren' (Pietrass, 1978, 69). Equally vague is Horst Samon's 'Mein Dorf' in which the village is

[71] 'Es brechtete in den siebziger Jahren augenfällig von Temeswar über Klausenburg und Hermannstadt bis Bukarest' (Motzan, 1999, 146).

[72] Ceauşescu's anti-Soviet stance was a central reason for Romanian-German authors' general commitment to socialism and willingness to support the state. Werner Söllner opined: 'Kein Intellektueller Rumäniens – gleich welcher Nationalität – wird je den 21. August 1968 vergessen […] Es war damals keine Schande, der Kommunistische Partei Rumäniens beizutreten' (Söllner quoted Solms, 1990, 131 cited Krause, 1998, 51).

personified as a parent and the uncomfortable history of the Germans in Romania alluded to in a metaphor about upbringing: 'vielleicht war es zu verständnisvoll, vielleicht zu schweigsam' (Samson, 1977, 27-28). Later, with the repression of Ceauşescu's neo-Stalinist *Juli-Thesen* hitting home in the German literary scene, there was a turn to *Neue Innerlichkeit* which led to engagements with the Nazi past becoming more personal and family-focused as well as more sardonic and fragmentary (Motzan, 1999, 156).[73] Excerpts from Johann Lippet's 'biographie. ein muster' described the death of his father without direct reference to the Nazi past and Balthasar Waitz's 'Unser Brunnen' and Willy Ehrmann's 'Krista' similarly focus on traditional gender roles and the fear engendered by the father in the traditional Swabian family, as well as violence within the home (Lippet, 1978, 11-16; Waitz, 1980, 16-17; Ehrmann, 1980, 19-20). Waitz's story, which Spiridon identifies as falling within the Austrian and Swiss tradition of 'kritische Dorfgeschichten', brings humour to the tension between traditional patriarchal village society and the younger generation's desire for freedom (Spiridon, 2002, 163). In it the tyranny of a domineering, violent (although in this cases not explicitly Nazi) father is overthrown by a mother, grandfather and two children who plot to drug their paterfamilias and throw him down their well:

> Mit pfiffigem Gesicht sah [Großmutter] uns zu, wie wir ihn hinaus zu dem Brunnenloch schleppten. Wir schwankten mit Papa hin und her. Wir Partner in einem Tanz. Großmutter kicherte. […] Wir sagten alle "Leb wohl". […] Die Sonne ging unter und wir saßen vergnügt beim Abendessen. Mamma summte, sie summte sich mit einem Liedchen darüber hinweg. Großvater hat sich die Füße gewaschen und trug ein weißes Hemd. […] Es war wieder eine schöne Menge Idealismus in unserem Haus. (Waitz, 1980, 17)

Although the Nazi past is not mentioned in 'Unser Brunnen', more directly confrontational approaches did also appear, such as the poem 'Vision 1' by Klaus Konjetzsky, a dreamlike lyric in which the narrator imagines himself on a stage against a backdrop of the rural landscape: 'Sie schauen mich an, wie wir / damals die schuldigen Väter, / die wir fragten: "Und ihr? / Habt ihr die Zäune nicht gesehn? / Und nicht die Schüsse gehört? / Habt euch

[73] 'Wo früher in gezielter und dialektischer Rede die Vergesellschaftung des einzelnen und die Humanisierung der Gesellschaft gefordert wurde, werden nun Entfremdungserscheinungen in einem balkankommunistischen Absurdistan, einer restlos verwalteten Welt registriert oder würgende Ausdrucksnöte in brüchigen Satzfiguren thematisiert' (Motzan, 1999, 158).

da rausgehalten, wie?" (Konjetsky, 1980, 41). Both this, with its image of a narrator being forced onto the stage, and the disturbing undertones of incest in Karin Gündisch's 'Aus einem Buch über Astrid' are reminiscent of Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* in their approach to the past, a work which seems a likely intertext to Müller's *Niederungen* (Gündisch, 1984, 7-17).[74] Gündisch's text concerns the father-child relationship from the first-person perspective, with a narrator who rejects her father after he returns from prison. He is authoritarian, unkind and manipulative, and the narrator contrasts his behaviour with the love she feels for her uncle, a softer character.

Like the father books in West Germany, these texts on the family unit brought debates of the 1960s about everyday perpetration and the failure of denazification into the private sphere. Anne Fuchs argues that this resulted from the confrontational approach of the 1968-generation, which broke with the previous dominance of questions of strategy and the loss of the war as topics of discussion in the home, 'carried the question of moral responsibility back inside the family unit […] [and] helped to undermine the authoritarianism of the paternal generation who had modelled their identity on the idea of the "clean" soldier as hero' (Fuchs, 2006, 183). A similar schism can be seen between the wartime texts of authors such as Keller and the texts by younger authors from the late 1970s on. The *Aktionsgruppe*'s shift from Brecht-inspired critiques of structures and societal norms in the abstract to the representation of lived experience meant that their writing on intergenerational conflict follows a similar progression (Motzan, 1999, 157). In their texts, but also in debates and public readings, authors such as Richard Wagner, Ernest Wichner and Albert Bohn attacked their community and the authors who represented it head on, criticising the lack of critical engagement with personal guilt as a symptom of fascistic tendencies in Banat-Swabian culture.

As was the case in West Germany, texts dealing with personal guilt through the lens of the family and autobiography were poorly received by literary critics of the parent generation. In the Federal Republic father literature was branded as a political tool agitating against the establishment or represented as a kind of tantrum or act of 'oedipal revenge' on the part of a younger generation unhappy with the post-1968 settlement (especially the anti-radical restrictions of 1972) (Baumgart, 1984, 21 cited Figge, 1993, 279; Frühwald, 1983 cited Figge, 1993, 276; Schneider, 1984, 3-51). In Romania,

[74] Müller's 'Grabrede' from *Niederungen* also has this first element of being forced to perform, with the narrator answering to the community for her father's crimes. The nightmarish association of the father in that story with rape of a Russian woman is reminiscent of the 'Dritte Mann' chapter of *Malina*, especially in the imagery taken from opera.

responses were similarly hostile and seemed to relate, as in Germany, to the idea that the representation of 'historically existing fathers' was too provocative and held the potential to damage individuals' reputations (Figge, 1993, 276; *Apfelkern*, 50). There was a concern among older writers about offending the reading public and bringing their community into disrepute. Nicholas Haupt epitomises this position:

> Es mag vieles unrichtig gewesen sein bei uns Schwaben in der Vergangenheit. Aber die totale Entwurzelung, die den Grundton bei den Arbeiten des AMG-Literatur-Kreises in der verflossenen Saison (1972) bildete, hat man mich aufs tiefste erschreckt. […] [es] ist verständlich, dass die Herausstellung dieser Schreibenden […] in noch gesunden Schichten unserer deutschen Bürger Missmut, Ablehnung und empörten Widerspruch ausgelöst hat. (Haupt, 1981 cited Krause, 1998, 134-135)

The scandal around Herta Müller's short story 'Das schwäbische Bad', which erupted in 1981 and was renewed by the publication of *Niederungen* by Kriterion in 1982 and by Rotbuch (West Berlin) in 1984, is a case study of how such attempts to write about the community's fascist past tended to meet with considerable resistance (Heinz, 1985, 113-112).[75] Critics and members of the public who wrote in to newspapers about the story saw it as an attack on their communities, with Anton Söllner calling it a 'Selbstzerfleischung' and Müller labelled a 'Nestbeschmützerin' (Totok, 1988, 58; Söllner, 1980 cited K.H., 1980, 2; Totok, 2009; *Apfelkern*, 50). The furore around the story, including concerns about the personal nature of her work and perceived attacks on the reputation of the Banat Swabians coincided with Müller's receipt of the prose prize of the Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn circle and was only exacerbated by Richard Wagner's inflammatory Laudatio to her during the prize giving:

> Die Deutschen, unter denen wir aufwuchsen, hießen Vater und Mutter und Tante und Onkel. Unter ihnen waren auch die ersten Nazis unseres Lebens. Sie saßen abends bei der Kartenpartie, knallten die Trümpfe hin und sprachen von Verrat und

[75] Although the scandal surrounding 'Das schwäbische Bad' is well-known, this had been preceded by a furious response to Johann Lippet's *biographie. ein muster* (1980) and the critical representation of the village it contained. Lippet escaped the campaign of vilification Müller experienced – although he did receive hate mail and anonymous threats from his home village of Wieseschdia – because he made a public apology (Krause, 1998, 129-30).

> verlorenen Schlachten, und der Konjunktiv half ihnen über das Nachdenken hinweg. (Wagner, *NBZ* 07.06.1981 cited K.H., 1981, 2)

Wagner and Müller's uncompromising approach to the issue of collective guilt and revisionist tendencies in Banat ruffled feathers in a literary establishment where writers who had formerly supported Nazism continued to work and be celebrated.[76]

However, writing on the family and father figures was not exclusively unsympathetic. Young authors also wrote about the impact of war on those who fought. The shock of return from war and changes in fathers' personalities are dealt with from the perspective of a returning veteran in Pauline Schneider's 'Fremde Sohn' (1985). The short story focuses on a man who returns from four years of fighting to find his wife has had another man's baby, and raises the child as his own. His homecoming is marked by alienation:

> Endlich ist die Wiedersehnszene zu Ende. Man geht ins Haus. Die Kinder sind da, doch sie schauen den Vater wie einen Fremden an. Vier Jahre, ja beinahe fünf, eine lange Zeit für Kinder. Das Bild des Vaters wurde in dieser Zeit verwischt, die Worte der Mutter konnten es nicht heraufbeschwören. Drei Kinder. Schließlich kommt es zu einer Umarmung mit diesem Mann, der so übel riecht und für sie nichts anderes übrig hat, als das Kratzen seiner unrasierten Wangen (Schneider, 1985, 20).

The father, who is suffering from a brain injury, remains traumatised, dreaming of being trapped in a bomb crater and crushed under piles of earth and fails to restore a feeling of closeness to his children and wife. Paradoxically, his closest bond is and remains the one that he shares with the son who is not biologically his:

> (Sein Vater) ist gefallen, das weiß er nun. Gefallen im Krieg. Und manchmal steigt in ihm ein kaum wahrnehmbares Gefühl des Mitleids hoch, der Kameradschaft zu diesen anderen, ein merkwürdiges Gefühl menschlicher Anteilnahme für den Vater dieses kleinen Kindes, den Mann, dessen Knochen irgendwo in einem Massengrab verfaulen (*ibid*).

[76] These included Heinrich Zillich, Hans Kehrer (an alias of Stefan Heinz), Erwin Wittstock and Irene Mokka, who had all published nationalist literature with fascist themes. Zillich's work was even presented to Hitler as a birthday present in 1937 (Totok, 1988, 29-31).

The internal life of the veteran forced to relive experiences and suffering aftereffects of combat with which their immediate relatives cannot empathise, recurs in this and other texts, not least Müller's *Niederungen*, parts of which were published in *Neue Literatur* in abridged or draft form between 1979 and 1985. There the narrator witnesses the grandfather, mother and father's traumatised behaviour without understanding where it came from (see Chapter One), while in *Fasan* (1986) Windisch is similarly disorientated and alienated on his return from war (*Fasan*, 46-47). His re-entry into village life is shown to rely on the objects and customs of the community and his marriage to Katharina is an act of self-affirmation (*Fasan*, 47; see Chapter Two).

Other writers also take up the issue of trauma and PTSD, such as Richard Wagner in his poem 'Kriegsende' about Vietnam veterans (Wagner, 1974, 32), or Horst Samson in 'Pünktlicher Lebenslauf', dedicated to his neighbour, Hans, on his sixtieth birthday:[77]

> nachts setzt sich nachbar hans
> den stahlhelm auf
> steckt sich ein gebetbuch
> in die brusttasche
> und fährt mit einem schwarzen nsu
> durch einem minenfeld bei narwa
> in richtung Leningrad
> morgen um fünf
> ist er wieder da (Samson, 1990, 162)

This focus on the imagined internal life of veterans arises, as in the case of the child narrators' terrified projections in *Niederungen*, as an attempt to overcome a lack of communication. Trying to humanise soldiers is a way to engage with the reality of fascism's impact on the families and communities of German-speaking Romania and move away from superficial images of villains and naïve fellow travellers popular in works by older authors. Challenging the idea of Nazism as something external, these authors presented the complex nature legacy of the Second World War in society as something which needed uncovering.

[77] Samson later revealed that the poem was about his father, a former SS courier on the Eastern Front who struggled to recover from the war, 'den er immer öfter und entschlossener ein Verbrechen nennt' (Samson, 2010, 30).

A similar concern can be seen in writing about events from local history, another important trend in German-Romanian writing of the new generation post-1968. Stories about the war set in the immediate area, "chronicles" of village life and accounts of family history all recur during the 1970s and 1980s, when there was a trend for writing literature with a factual background and documentary style (Spiridon, 2002, 129). Müller's piece on the fate of Jews in the province of Maramuresch is a prime example of this. However, the young authors' work contrasts drastically with that of traditional writers on the same subject. While authors such as Hans Kehrer, Ernst Kulcsar and Josef Puwak published relatively conformist stories offering 'gesellschaftliche Panoramabilder der Kriegsjahre' in the towns and villages of Transylvania and the Banat, the members of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* produced cynical and often darkly humorous accounts of the same period (Spiridon, 2002, 67).[78] The former stories added to the discussion of the past in that they contain scenes of war crimes, military brutality and the persecution of the disabled and Jews (in the case of Kulcsar especially[79]), but they also tend to exculpate the Germans through particular characters or unlikely acts of heroism. Kehrer's play *Narrenbrot* (1974), published in sections in *Neue Literatur*, displays the most problematic elements of the texts of the era, presenting a heroic SS officer Eberwein, who stands up to his cruel superior officer Windisch and tries to speed up the evacuation of Germans from Banat and protect the inhabitants of a local psychiatric hospital. The marked contrast between the domineering, cruel and powerful commander in Kehrer's play and the defeated and bitter former soldier Windisch in Müller's *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* suggests the choice of name in the latter is a reference or rebuttal to the character designed by Kehrer. His Windisch is also a fictional figure, designed to represent the real leader of the evacuation force in Banat in 1944 (Reichrath, 1981, no page numbers available). Kehrer's piece firmly locates responsibility for the failed mission to evacuate Banat Germans with the upper echelons of the army, as well as profiteers, whilst painting the local SS as moral men doing their duty and focusing on the suffering of civilians.[80] In

[78] Dark humour is a hallmark of work by Müller and her contemporaries, mirroring the trend for laconic poetry about Germany's history in the GDR (Kegelmann, 1995, 74).

[79] Kulcsar's titular protagonist witnesses Jews in Sibiu being forced to clean the streets and his Jewish neighbours becoming pariahs within the local community. When he joins the Pimpfen and the Deutsche Jugend (HJ) he is encouraged to join in harassing them, and later attacks his neighbour's son. However, his strict, moral grandmother criticises the mistreatment of their fellow citizens, and the boy himself sees the error of his ways and is apparently forgiven by his victim (Kulcsar, 1980, 12, 16, 24).

[80] The play also features the arrest of communist agitator Matthias Schmidt, who voices the only mention of the concentration camp in the piece, as a reproach to Windisch over the activities of the Nazis (Kehrer, 1974, 27). The wooden representation of Schmidt, who speaks in clichés, as well as the failure to show or acknowledge his death may have prompted Richard Wagner's piece on Schmidt the following year (Wagner

contrast, Richard Wagner's 'Heimatliches' describes civilians under the same bombardment in detached and unsympathetic terms:

> Der Vater, in Sonntagsstaat, steht an der Treppe und horcht. Man hört eine schreckliche Detonation. Die Druckwelle wirft den Vater zurück in den Raum. Er bleibt auf dem Kellerboden sitzen, wischt sich den Staub aus dem Gesicht. Hinter ihm sitzen auf einer Holzbank an der Wand Mutter und Tochter. Die Mutter ist schwarz gekleidet. Um die Hände hat sie einen Rosenkranz geschlungen. Der Rosenkranz erweckt den Eindruck einer Fessel. Sie blickt auf ein Bild, das sie mit den Fingerspitzen festhält und das den Sohn in SS-Uniform darstellt (Wagner, 1980, 7).

This relatively detached description of the suffering of Germans (which was intensified to melodrama by Kehrer) is followed by criticism of the changing narrative of the war in the decades that followed. In a sequence set in the 1960s, the characters meet again, this time with 'Vater' and 'Mutter' promoted to 'Opa' and 'Oma' and sitting in wheelchairs: 'Der Sohn, der ja bloß in der Wehrmacht gewesen sein soll, betritt als beliebter Westonkel im Westsakko, eine Westzigarette rauchend, den Raum' (*ibid*, 8). This lie about the son's wartime service points to the division between the "clean" Wehrmacht and the "dirty" SS, a common idea seen in texts such as Keller's from the 1960s.

The emerging discourse of collective responsibility and drive to break taboos also gave rise to texts focused on the lives of individuals who were failed by their communities during the war. In his 1974 piece 'Was mit Herrn Buchwald geschah', which is not confirmed to be either fact or fiction, Albert Bohn, another member of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, explores the fate of a teacher. Herr Buchwald resists cooperating with the local Nazi organisations despite being pressured into changing jobs (to teach at a German-only school) and criticised for resisting the new ideology only to suffer the consequences of his German identity once the war was lost. When he is imprisoned as a Nazi agitator by the communists, his fellow villagers do not speak up for him and when he returns from prison to find his wife and daughter gone (possibly killed in reprisals) no one will take him in: 'Herr Buchwald klopft mit erstaunlicher Ausdauer. Er klopft an jedes Haus. Keiner öffnet

1975, 40-44). Despite his success in the Stalinist era and later on, Kehrer had served in the Romanian army and written fascistic poems glorifying the soldier; William Totok criticises him as a 'Jungnazi, der sich 1945 geschickt der Deportation in die UdSSR zu entziehen wußte [und sich] […] schmerzlos in einen Stalinisten [verwandelte]' (Totok, 1988, 40).

ihm, Herr Buchwald verläßt das Dorf' (Bohn, 1974, 21). The narrator meets with anger when he enquires about Herr Buchwald, with the villagers saying 'Sie sollten das Fragen sein lassen. Wir wollen hier kein Verhör,' but he argues that remembering and asking are a duty of those left behind (*ibid*, 18). Bohn also makes the connection to other undiscussed aspects of wartime history, implicitly pointing to actual victims of the Nazis in the final lines of his story: 'So. Jetzt werde ich schweigen und dir zuhören. Denn was du sagen wirst, hätte schon lange gesagt werden müssen. Nicht für Herrn Buchwald, nicht für seine Frau, auch für (seine Tochter) Marianne nicht. Sondern für andere' (*ibid*, 21).

Richard Wagner's freeform poem 'Matthias Schmidt oder Die Vergangenheit der Wörter' problematises the representation of crimes such as Matthias Schmidt's execution by authors such as Kehrer (see above) and also addresses injustice as the consequence of silence: 'einer wurde erschossen damals als er aus dem Fenster sprang/die ihn erschossen haben leben noch/leben noch oder sind eines natürlichen Todes gestorben/haben Familie/werden in Ehren gehalten' (Wagner, 1975, 41) The narrator of the poem is sceptical about the 'Behauptungen' of those who call Schmidt's murder an act of desperation at the end of the war and looks for the truth behind their words:

> am äußersten Rand der Gegenwart dort wo sich die Vergangenheit
> ins Gesunde frißt
> den furchtbaren Geruch spüren am ganzen Körper
> den schrecklichen Geruch von Wahrheit
> Wahrheit die auf leisen Sohlen kommt
> aus dem Ei der Vergangenheit bricht
> ausbricht
> rennt
> davonrennt
> bis zum Drahtverbau gelangt
> keuchend an der Grenze unserer Gespräche steht (*ibid* 42-43)

The departure in literary form from the authors of the 1960s in such texts is striking. Younger writers sought to find a means of expressing ideas and writing about the past that was free of cliché and independent of the local traditions of *Heimatliteratur*. For this reason, Wagner called their new way of writing 'anti-rumäniendeutsch' and members of the group responded negatively to any attempts to name previous writers from Banat and

Transylvania as influences, with the exception later on of Franz Hodjak and Anenome Latzina (Spiridon, 2002, 242-43).[81] Their village-set poems and stories are unerringly modern in style and subvert traditional themes of *Heimatliteratur* such as family and the cycles of nature, as well as events like weddings, *Kerweihe* and village dances (*ibid*, 169). A particular focus of criticism was the work of Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn in the early twentieth century, which was seminal in the Banat-Swabian community (*ibid*, see Chapter Two). In the 1970s-1980s several authors subverted the image of the column of arriving settlers popularised by his epic poem 'Der *große* Schwabenzug' (1913) to explode the mythology of the community and reassess its history:

> 'Verkehrte Zeit'
> Alle Uhren im Land bleiben stehn. […]
> Bei den Standesämten herrscht
> Andrang. Dann packt Mutter die Koffer, liebt Vater
> nicht mehr und fährt zu Großmutter, die sich mit freundlichem
> Augenaufschlag vom Sterbebett erhebt. Unsre Bekannten
> erbleichen, in vager Befürchtung: Niemanden mehr haben unsre
> Väter
> erschossen, zu ihren Eltern sprechen sie
> mit Worten, die sie gelernt haben, später, von
> uns. (Söllner, 1980, 6)

Söllner's poem goes on to show the reversal of stereotypical Banat-Swabian history, with buildings retreating into the land and the settlers gliding back up the Danube, but the focus remains the watershed of their involvement in National Socialism: 'Wer ein Gewissen / besitzt, erinnert sich dunkel / an später. Wer ein Herz hat, läßt sich nicht liegen' (*ibid*, 7). Müller's image of the *deutsche Frosch* also comments critically on the settler pedigree to which the Banat Swabians lay claim, presenting their attachment to tradition and stifling behaviour norms as a burden they brought with them (Apel, 1991, 20-24; Günter, 1991, 37-53; Zierden, 2002, 30-38; Glajar, 1997, 521-540; Bauer, 1996, 257-278; Parry, 2011, 93-113; Schuster, 2004).

[81] Werner Söllner, a contemporary of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, exclaimed during a roundtable discussion at the event 'Nachruf auf die rumäniendeutsche Literatur' that in the 1970s they would have thrown chairs had anyone suggested they were inspired by Hodjak (Solms, 1990, 127).

Bohn's enigmatic injunction to speak 'für die andere', Wagner's imagery of the truth as a subject trying to break free, and Söllner's imagery of the Nazi past as regrettable future all evoke the memory of fascism's victims and the bloody history that looms large over the present. The idea of knowledge of the past inhabiting the fringe of present-day society and the potential for activating awareness (as well as the moral imperative to do so) come across strongly here, as they do in Müller's work (see Chapter Five). The constant references she makes to marginalised individuals whose experiences go undiscussed, both in the present and the past, must be seen as part of this trend to write "history from below" in the wider Romanian-German literary scene of the 1970s-80s.

Testimony by international Jewish authors, such as Carl Zuckmayer (1977, 90-98),[82] along with poetry and prose about the Holocaust by writers such as Celan, Margul-Sperber and Sachs meant that Nazi genocide was an established theme in *Neue Literatur* in the 1970s-80s, when local testimony was also published. Claus Stephani was a particularly dedicated collector of the latter, publishing the collections *Oben im Wassertal* (1970) and *Erfragte Wege* (1975) which contained testimony from Holocaust survivors. One such text, 'Schmerz bis in den Tod', recorded in the local dialect of Oberwischau in Maramuresch, appeared in *Neue Literatur* and inspired fiction by Franz Hodjak (Stephani, 1984, 43-47).[83]

> Es war gwesn im Jahr zweiundvierzig, genau vor unsre Ostern, da hat man vun überall uns zusammengenommen und wegfiert: die, wo habn gwohnt in der Judngass, im Ghetto, hat man gnommen zaerscht. Jo, in Wischau was gwesn a Ghetto, erscht nur mit eine Gassn, zuletscht met mehrere. Sie habn unsre Leit zusammtriebn – die Soldatn, wos sein kommen von Sigeth. Dann warn gwesn Transportn: erschtr, zweitr, drittr, värtr; Ostern war der erschtr. (*ibid*, 44)

Focusing on a Romanian Holocaust survivor was a significant step, given the political sensitivity of Romanian cooperation with deportations and ethnic cleansing and the tendency to see the Holocaust as something completely external.[84] Müller quotes directly

[82] Müller references this excerpt from Zuckmayer's *Als wär's ein Stück von mir*, which concerns the author's flight from Austria into Switzerland and the chicanery of the border guards when relating her own story of immigration to Germany (Müller, 2013).

[83] Stephani accuses Hodjak of lifting lines verbatim from this testimony by Baila Rosenberg-Friedman for his novel *Capesius, der Auschwitz Apotheker* without acknowledging the source or being true to the material (Stephani, 2013).

[84] Oberwischau and Sighet came under the administration of fascist Hungary in 1940, so Stephani is not documenting crimes of Romanian forces (which would have been politically unacceptable), however this testimony does recognise the presence and experience of Jewish survivors in Romania. Holocaust denial

from this testimony in her own piece on Oberwischau, discussed in the final section of this chapter (*Februar*, 106)

As this section has explored, the literary discourse with which Müller was surrounded as a young writer was one in which the processing of the collective past was a central concern. From the initial steps towards a public discussion of the Holocaust and calls for a new critical reflection on the German minorities' role in fascism in the late 1960s, to the increasingly direct and controversial challenges to the self-exonerating mythologies of collective memory in the 1980s, responses were complex and varied. A red thread running through the developing discourse of the younger generation is the tension between internationalism (in young authors' deep engagement with German authors from the West and the GDR) and locally-inflected memory work as well as critical responses to previous local literature. The thaw of 1968-71 and turn towards *Neue Innerlichkeit* in German literary circles accelerated the processing of the past and the breaking of taboos by personalising the great debates of recent history, 'parallel zur Rehabilitierung des Alltäglichen, der zunehmenden Psychologisierung in der Personengestaltung' (Spiridon, 2009, 376). Authors such as Müller were at the forefront of this change, which, even while confined to the German minority literature scene, was significant in Romania as the first effort to come to terms with collective guilt on a personal level. These interventions are important in the history of German memory work too, as both part of the ongoing diversification of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and an example of German memory work from the East, from the regions of Europe in which hands-on violence and ethnic cleansing took place openly and on a mass scale (Snyder, 2009). As I shall discuss in the following, final section, the awareness of face-to-face, non-mechanised killing by *Einsatzgruppen* and other fascist organisations in the history of Romania and the East more broadly is an important aspect of the Romanian-German authors' response to the Nazi era. Memories of fascism focus on spatial awareness and a sense of haunting which is both highly localised and of great international resonance, pre-empting later work by *Aussiedler* authors in the post-2000 era. Müller's use of prosthetic memory based on uncanny representations of

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and rejection of responsibility for war crimes were and are common positions adopted by politicians and public figures in Romania and the German-Romanian community (Kelso and Eglitis, 2014, 492-494). The latter was roundly criticised by William Totok for denying local soldiers' involvement in ethnic cleansing: 'So wie ein Dr. Waldheim hatten auch unsere Soldaten mit den von Deutschen begangenen Mordtaten an Frauen und Kinder nichts zu tun' (Hönig, 1986 cited Totok, 1988, 56) and for denying the Holocaust, 'Es verschlägt einem die Sprache, wenn man die Erinnerungen des ehemaligen Funktionärs der faschistischen Deutschen Volkspartei Rumänien und späteren Gauleiter der zogenannten Zone Bergland, Hans Ewald Frauenhoffer, liest, der es fertigbringt, den Holocaust als eine Lüge der Sieger darzustellen' (Totok, 1988, 56).

space both in Romania (*Fuchs*, *Herztier*, *Atemschaukel*) and Germany (*Reisende*) can be traced back to this early spatial turn in Romanian-German writing.

'nichts wiegt plötzlich schwerer als die erde, die uns an den schuhen klebt'[85]: Prosthetic Memory and the Romanian Holocaust in Müller's Writing

As my discussion of Romanian-German writing on the Nazi past and the family in the aftermath of the Second World War makes clear, the authors of Müller's generation saw themselves as writing against a pervasive silence on certain issues. German guilt, the fate of Jews and other persecuted people, and the moral culpability of their communities in the Banat and Transylvania were all topics which went undiscussed among older relatives and members of the cultural establishment for various reasons. That the young writers' work was concerned with exposing taboos is made clear in the variety of negative and angry responses they faced in the German literary and wider minority community in Romania.[86] These responses had real consequences for the writers in question, both because of the network of informers who surrounded them in organisations like the *AMG* and because of the influence of the *Landsmannschaften* in West Germany, where most of them would emigrate in the 1980s (*Apfelkern*, 50-51). The hostility of certain members of the literary establishment in Banat, combined with the eager intervention of the *Securitate*, meant that rebellion – in this case against the traditions and structures of the German minority rather than the state *per se* – had drastic consequences for the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, Müller and other authors (Petrescu, 2013, 65-66.[87]

Faced with a collective amnesia over the past and unwillingness to discuss the Holocaust, Müller and her contemporaries redoubled their efforts to uncover the troubled history of their community and engage with the international history of fascism. As Müller has discussed in the case of the mass deportations of Germans to the Soviet Union in 1945, learning about the past was, for her generation, only possible through attending to

[85] (Hodjak, 1973, 5)

[86] The awarding of the AMG prize to Müller in 1981 followed a shift in power to the younger generation; for the first time ever the young outnumbered the old and Lippet, Wagner and Samson were elected to the organising committee (*Vorstand*) (Krause, 1998, 130). The extreme tension this caused saw young authors become *personae non grata* in wide sections of the community.

[87] Although the pretexts for particular acts of intimidation by the *Securitate* varied – from refusal to co-operate, to possession of certain books, to playing Wolf Biermann records – the very fact that the young authors were on their radar stemmed in part from their iconoclasm in the Banat-Swabian community and the negative responses to it (Kegelmann, 1995, 50). Similarly, the *Securitate*-orchestrated campaign of hate mail and defamation directed against Müller in the Federal Republic was only successfully mobilised because of her challenge to the Banat-Swabian community (*Apfelkern*, 168-9). Müller emphasises the symbiotic relationship between the *Securitate* and the *Landsmannschaften* in *Cristina* (2009).

submerged and incomplete forms of communicative memory. Snatches of conversation, incomprehensible and significant remarks ('Eine warme Kartoffel ist ein warmes Bett', *Kartoffel*, 66) and the day-to-day witnessing of her mother's behaviour were the means by which Müller gained partial access to the history of forced labour camps and would form an important basis, along with her later work with Oskar Pastior, for *Atemschaukel* (Müller, 2012; *Onkel*, 125). Müller also interviewed an older Swabian couple from Nitzkydorf about their experiences in the camps, although she found they seldom possessed the words to express their experiences (*ibid*; Tudor, 2011, 140-50).

In Chapter Two I introduced the idea, taken from Hirsch, that stories and ideas about the past can enter into the second generation subject's memory despite the subject having no indexical basis for that memory (Hirsch, 1997, 22). However, Ernst van Alphen, a theorist who problematises the idea of transmission, challenges this position, arguing that it is the *lack* of effective communicative memory or personal connection which necessitates imaginative reconstruction of the past by children of people such as Holocaust survivors, a situation recognisable in Müller's experience (Van Alphen, 2006, 486). He quotes child of Holocaust survivors Eva Hofmann's work on psychological disturbance in the second generation, which makes a firm distinction between memory and what Hirsch terms postmemory:

> The Holocaust, in my first, childish reception, was a deeply internalised but strangely unknown past. It has become routine to speak of the 'memory' of the Holocaust, and to adduce to this faculty a moral, even a spiritual value. But it is important to be precise: We who came after do not have memories of the Holocaust.
> Even from my most intimate proximity I could not form'memories' of the Shoah or take my parents' memories as my own. Rather, I took in that first information as a sort of fairy tale deriving not so much from another world as from the center of the cosmos: an enigmatic but real fable. (Hofmann, 2004, 6 cited Van Alphen, 2006, 484,)

This description is recognisable in the perception of Müller's child narrators, who are aware of a pervasive threat in their environment and the behaviour of their parents but are left to make sense of this disturbing element of their reality without sufficient information. In *Drückender Tango* the child narrator describes the impact of these stories:

> Und an die Märchen denk ich, Mutter, die hast du mir erzählt. Bei jedem Märchen zerriß deine Unterlippe, bei jedem Märchen froren deine Hände, wenn ich weinte und du weitersprachst vom Schnee. So kalt, hast du gesagt, so kalt wie Rußland kann kein Land, kann nur ein Lager sein. So schneeig ist ein Märchen nicht. So böse kann, hast du gesagt, kein Wolf, kein Drache sein. So böse sein, kann nur ein Mensch (*Tango*, 47)

Although the reader can deduce the origins of the child's fear through the references to war, deportation and abuse, the child herself fantasises about connections with the resources at her disposal, including fairy tales (see Chapter One). Müller's personal, obsessive interest in the Nazi past can be seen as a product of her childhood, which allowed her to have fundamental *knowledge* of the past without sufficient *information* to make sense of it. Her experience of putting together the pieces of witnessed behaviour and conversation to reconstruct her parents' experience prior to her birth supports the hypothesis of Van Alphen, who problematises Hirsch's ideas. Rather than seeing the intensive investment in the past on the part of children as a result of their bond to their parents, Van Alphen argues that 'this deep connection with the past is a *displacement* of the connection with the parents' (Van Alphen, 2006, 487, my italics).

Postmemory is a strong feature in Müller's early writing set in the village, as the access her narrators have to the past is limited to what they are told by their parents and other villagers. However, as I discuss in Chapter One, the narrator in texts such as *Niederungen*, *Drückender Tango* and *Barfüßiger Februar* senses the truth of the past by witnessing the trauma symptoms of her parents and observing the violence and hypocrisy of the village, which undermines the authority of the parents' generation and complicates the vision of the collective past. Postmemory is part of the child narrator's imaginative reconstruction of the past; repeated stories (what Van Alphen terms 'obsessive telling') combined with a childish lack of understanding lead her to fill in the gaps with her own horrified fantasies (Van Alphen, 2006, 478). One of these partial stories told to her by her mother about the experience of forced labour in Russia becomes the basis for her understanding of the war:

> In Russland haben sie mich geschoren. Das war die kleinste Strafe, sagte sie. Ich taumelte vor Hunger. Nachts kroch ich in ein Rübenfeld. Der Hüter hatte ein

> Gewehr. Wenn er mich gesehen hätte, hätte er mich umgebracht. Das Feld raschelte nicht. Es war Spätherbst, und die Rübenblätter waren schwarz und zusammengeklappt vom Frost. (*Niederungen,* 11-12)

A later report, spoken to the narrator at her father's funeral, becomes part of her concept of the past and activates her postmemory repertoire of images from her mother's stories.

> In einem Rübenfeld hat er eine Frau vergewaltigt, sagte das Männchen. Zusammen mit vier anderen Soldaten. Dein Vater hat ihr eine Rübe zwischen die Beine gesteckt. Als wir weggingen, hat sie geblütet. Es war eine Russin. [...] Es war Spätherbst, sagte das Männchen. Die Rübenblätter waren schwarz und zusammengeklappt vom Frost. (*Niederungen,* 9)

The commonalities between the scenes, in the setting, the time of year, the cold and violence or the threat thereof imply that this could be or have become the same event, witnessed from opposite sides. The father's sadistic violence is contained in the image of the guard with a gun, and the mother's fear seems like a precursor to the fear and suffering of the unnamed Russian woman. The narrator's limited knowledge and inherited frame of reference tie the scenes together in an act of reconstruction based in postmemory but not a direct product of it:

> Es lagen immer nur Männer im Krieg. Ich sah lauter Frauen mit verrutschten Kleidern und zerschundenen Beinen auf dem Schlachtfeld liegen. Ich sah Mutter nackt und erfroren in Russland liefen, mit zerschundenen Beinen und grünen Lippen von Futterrüben. (*Niederungen*, 102)

The guilt of the father and the victimhood of the mother come together through postmemory to become two sides of the same coin. The narrator imaginatively reconstructs the past and the shared setting brings her parents together into a more direct victim-perpetrator relationship, the word *Schlachtfeld* replacing *Rübenfeld* to retrospectively erode any distinction between the two and the horrific ambivalence of the phrase 'grünen Lippen' pointing to both of the previous scenes equally (Eke, 2011, 63). This connection between the two settings is expressed through the repetition of visual details but is located,

as Hirsch argues, in sensation and fantasy rather than the visual repertoire of cultural memory (Hirsch, 2012, 4). Postmemory only achieves visual forms belatedly through exposure to images that conform to or supplement the earlier sensual and fantastical dimensions gained from listening to stories, so it is the victim/perpetrator dynamic and the balance of fear and violence that causes the narrator to unite the scenes, rather than any real knowledge of what the respective fields looked like (*ibid*). In real life, Müller's mother's incomplete and subjective accounts of her forced labour in Ukraine functioned as a jumping-off point for reconstructing that history in *Atemschaukel*; images of the camps and concrete details about their operation provided a later resource for filling the lacunae in her mother's stories (Müller, 2012).

Where the sharing of memories between generations does not take place, either because of trauma or because of the death of parents, access to the past is obscured and in the case of events such as the deportations of Germans, the discussion of which is politically sensitive, neither historiography nor cultural memory offered any supplementary resources. In other cases, objects aiding memory, such as the photographs and personal effects described in postmemory theory may not be available. However, as Müller's writing makes clear, this does not mean that no transmission takes place. Recent theories of memory offer frameworks for understanding this transmission, which is fundamental both to Müller's writing and the work of her contemporaries in the 1970s and 1980s.

Prosthetic memory theory, pioneered by Alison Landsberg, argues for the existence of memory based in a 'deep personal attachment to the past event through which one did not live' and bases this in the potential for activating an 'experiential' memory of another person's life based in second witnessing and the absorption of cultural representation (Landsberg, 2004, 3). Since memory is a fundamentally bodily experience, she argues, physical, visceral reactions to others' memories trigger the creation of a new memory which has no indexical relationship to the events which form the direct subject of the first memory but is nevertheless an authentic response to them. Landsberg cites the example of Art Spiegelmann's *Maus*, in which the father's compulsive hoarding and counting of mundane objects points to his experience in the concentration camps and the denaturalisation of everyday objects for his son Artie in light of this knowledge and witnessed behaviour (Landsberg, 1997, 70-71). Artie sees the damage in his father's body but also comes to experience physical objects, such as pills and wire, differently (*ibid*). Müller records similar effects between her and her mother over compulsive activities such

as the careful peeling of potatoes (Müller, 2012; *Onkel*, 129; see Chapter One) and cleaning, and describes similar behaviours in Oskar Pastior, whose shovelling and compulsive seeking of food impacted her understanding of those activities' significance (Müller, 2012; *Onkel*, 169).

Outside the realm of interpersonal relationships, this creation of prosthetic memory is possible through literature, film and museum spaces, and Landsberg argues that the rise of mass media has unlocked the potential for deep affective responses to unrelated histories (Landsberg, 2004, 9). She takes the example of piles of shoes in the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. as remembering objects, which enable the creation of prosthetic memories in those confronted with them through physical, bodily experience (Landsberg, 1997, 79-80). The shoes are authentic, individualised markers of absent people but also relatable and mundane; the visitors to the museum are wearing shoes themselves and are confronted with the sensual details – cracked leather, signs of wear, and smell – of others' shoes (*ibid*). Their bodily memories of shoe-wearing, present awareness of the physicality of their own and the unknown victims' shoes and imaginative ability to reconstruct the context and sensation of those shoes' removal combine to imprint this alien experience into their own bodily memory (*ibid*). Landsberg identifies piles of personal objects such as shoes as part of the 'emerging iconography of the Holocaust', in which they stand for 'absent bodies', people whose absence 'produces a kind of cognitive dissonance' (Landsberg, 1997, 71, 79).[88] This prosthetic memory creation is possible through film and literature too, argues Landsberg, particularly in scenes where the reader is drawn to identify bodily with the subject in question (as in the details of frost and cold in the *Rübenfeld* setting in *Niederungen*). She cites the impact of *Schindler's List* (Stephen Spielberg, 1993) and *Roots* (Alex Haley, 1976) as films which allow viewers to identify

[88] It is important to note here, and in relation to Müller's use of Holocaust imagery, that such "iconography" is related to the history of the concentration camps, from which testimony and images such as piles of shoes made during their liberation have come. The extermination camps (Treblinka, Majdanek, Belzec, Sobibor, Auschwitz II-Birkenau) and the open fields of Eastern Europe in which the majority of people were killed during the Holocaust have left much less of a legacy in cultural memory and representation (Snyder, 2009). Only a small number of people survived them and, with the exception of Auschwitz and Madjanek) they were destroyed almost entirely during 1943 (after the German defeat at Stalingrad). Auschwitz represents a special case among the Operation Reinhard camps, in that the extermination camp Auschwitz II-Birkenau lay in close proximity to concentration camps (and therefore witnesses) and was not successfully demolished. Although Majdanek also functioned as a concentration camp and survived mainly intact, most of its inmates were murdered as part of Nazi efforts to cover up their crimes (Snyder, 2009). Landsberg's suggestion of abiding with physicality and sensation and responding to representation may, paradoxically, offer a means to recover or reinvigorate Holocaust memory and reintroduce the marginalised histories of the extermination camps through sensual imaginations of the victims' final journeys and moments. Müller's preoccupation with the agricultural field, which I will discuss further in Chapter Five, might represent an example of how this can be done.

affectively with the Other in scenes of physical and psychic suffering (Landsberg, 1997, 63-64; Landsberg, 2004, 103-106). The return to the bodily is the key for this transfer, with both Haley and Spielberg providing bodies with whom the viewer can identify as a potential counterpart (Kunta Kinte and the middle-class Jews in Schindler's factory respectively) and whose vulnerability can be appreciated (Landsberg, 2004, 103-106, 124-25). Müller does similar things (see Chapter Five) in order to draw in her reader into affective investment, returning to bodily experience and subjective perception of detail to provoke a 'visceral response' and promote recognition between her reader and historical subjects (Landsberg, 2004, 100).

In the case of literature by Romanian-German authors of the 1970s-1980s, physicality and bodily experience emerge as essential elements of memory construction and are presented in several ways. Primary among these is an interaction with the landscape, specifically sites of mass death during the Second World War.[89] In the following, I shall offer some examples of texts focused on place and memory in Romania, including Müller's 'Überall, wo man den Tod gesehen hat: Eine Sommerreise in Maramuresch', and highlight the postmemory and prosthetic memory aspects of these. It is in these early efforts to remember the Holocaust through 'experiential memory' that we can track the development of Müller's peculiar relationship with the world of things and the significance of mundance surroundings, including objects, to her creation of meaning. Her imaginary universe is one in which all all apparently innocuous things are rendered threatening and the security of the divide between animate and inanimate objects is erased in all times and spaces but it is from the memory of the Holocaust and her struggle to process it that this denaturalisation of the world originates.

As I have discussed, the Holocaust was to a large extent taboo in communist Romania. Coverage of war crimes trials and concentration camp memorials in the press focused exclusively on communist fighters' experience, and the subject of Jewish suffering emerged only after the end of Stalinism in Romania, in the late 1960s. The roots of this taboo – aside from the ideological understanding of the Second World War as a conflict between capitalism and communism – can be traced to the political impossibility of discussing Romania's fascist past or drawing parallels between it and the contemporary

[89] Recent scholarship on the Holocaust has responded to the 'spatial turn' in humanities research in the late 1990s and sought ways of theorising the impact of massacres, ghettos and concentration camps on the European landscape. Brett Ashley Kaplan's work on postmemory and landscape looks at sites such as Berchtesgaden and the symbolic space of the German forests, as well as artistic responses to these, while Martin Pollack and Timothy Snyder focus on the hidden history of massacres, mass graves and amnesia in Eastern Europe (Pollack, 2014; Synder, 2011; Kaplan, 2011; Bartov, 2015).

regime (Balogh, 2008, 190). As far as communist historiography was concerned, Romanians had fought fascism from the beginning and had thrown off a puppet government to become a Soviet ally in late 1944 (Hitchins, 1994, 502).[90] The reality that Romanians had actively participated in anti-Semitic and anti-Roma violence, including the killing of 280,000-380,000 Jews, mostly not under the direct orders of the Nazis, had no place within this narrative (Hausleitner, 2013, 186).[91] In this context, the choice by authors such as Hodjak, Samson and Müller to respond to sites of mass murder on Romanian soil must be seen as highly political and controversial. They were in effect bringing the Holocaust, an event represented as exterior and other in official discourse, home to Romania for the first time.

The setting of an agricultural landscape, which recurs with striking regularity in these authors' works, can be traced to the history of South Eastern Europe as a theatre of war and the localised, non-mechanised methods of killing associated with the Holocaust in that region.[92] Timothy Snyder calls the countries between the former Soviet Union and Germany the 'bloodlands' because of the extent of killing carried out there by both sides, and his identification of the semi-abstraction of those countries in the Western imaginary is useful in discussing Romanian memory (Snyder, 2011). Nazi sites of atrocity in Eastern Europe have not been turned into sites of commemoration as frequently as they have been in the West and the extensive ethnic cleansing which took place in countries such as Romania, both under orders from the Nazis and spontaneously, is remembered less coherently than the well-documented and concentrating killing which took place in the Nazi camp system. Chaotic outbursts of localised violence, such as the Sărmăşu Massacre,

[90] Even during the process of switching sides, the Romanian authorities tried to promote a narrative in which they were heroic resisters of fascism and supporters of the Allies. During negotiations to arrange their entry into the Allied sphere of influence, the Russian chair of the meeting, Vyacheslav Molotov, reprimanded the Romanian representatives harshly every time they made this claim as a reason for a more favourable treatment, saying that they had supported Hitler and were only surrendering because they had been defeated (Hitchins, 1994, 502-03).

[91] As Totok discusses, this denial of involvement was also prevalent among the Romanian-German communities who had fought with Hitler. Rejection of responsibility for the Holocaust remains a trend in Romania today. An official rehabilitation process for Antonescu was initiated in 1997, President Iliescu presented medals of honour to former Nazis as recently as 2003, and the desire for approval from the international community (not least via entry to the EU) has been identified as the primary driving force behind any admissions of culpability (Hausleitner, 2010, 71; Sharif, 2004, 75; Kelso and Eglitis, 2014, 495). These admissions have been superficial and partial, leading to accusations that contrition on the part of the Romanian government is only for show, and there remain vocal groups who deny the Holocaust as anti-Romanian propaganda (Hausleitner, 79, 84).

[92] Snyder has pointed out that the predominant method of killing in the Holocaust as a whole was that of shooting or other manual methods. Operation Reinhardt and similar campaigns of ethnic cleansing carried out by *Einsatzgruppen* have been overshadowed by the more visible and traceable killings of the concentration camps such as Auschwitz [Although its satellite Auschwitz-Birkenau is regarded as an extermination camp] (Snyder, 2009 cited Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 6-7).

and more systematic but similarly non-mechanised killings of Jews in Maramuresch, Bucovina and Bessarabia, carried out in cooperation with Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* mean that the Holocaust in Romania and other countries does not entirely match the narrative of deportation, imprisonment and killing with labour or gas familiar in Western contexts.[93] Although many people were deported from northern Romania, the remains of many others were buried in the countryside and remain there still, concealed beneath the surface. Even with efforts to disguise traces of these crimes - Nazi troops using the verbs 'beirodeln' (usually meaning the digging into the earth of weeds in order to destroy them) to describe the disposal of human remains, and 'aufforsten' to refer to the planting of lupins and fast-growing trees to disguise mass graves – it is possible to read the landscape for them (Pollack, 2014, 21).[94]

Franz Hodjak's poem 'sărmăşel, cluj' is the earliest example of this kind of writing responding to sites of mass violence. The first-person perspective is that of a chance visitor to a site where forty villagers were murdered by retreating German troops in 1944, who is forced to reflect on the presence of history in an unassuming rural setting:

> vor dieser seltnen erde unverhofft ergriffen
> von all dem unbegreiflichen: dunkel
> weht es uns an
> aus diesem ringsum friedlichen gras
> auf diesem abgelegenen hügel
> unter diesem freien himmel (der
> allerdings nicht immer frei gewesen) (Hodjak, 1973, 5)

Hodjak's tone is not sentimental and the poem contains few specific details of what took place, rather it captures a moment of contemplation and focuses on the effects of place and historical knowledge on the subject in the present. This contemplation is marked by the

[93] Deportation dominates memories of the Holocaust in Germany yet the conception of the Holocaust as something that happened 'elsewhere' does not reflect the reality. Events such as *Kristallnacht*, massacres of forced labourers and the T4-programme killings of disabled people form an increasingly important strand in commemoration. The *Stolpersteine* project commemorating the removal of Jews from their homes in German towns and cities is a prominent example of how efforts are being made to reintegrate the history of the Holocaust into the German landscape. Around 400,000 Jews were deported from Maramuresch in 1944 as part of the extermination of the Hungarian Jewish population but the majority of Jews killed by Romanian forces were starved, shot or otherwise murdered without recourse to the Nazi camp infrastructure.

[94] Vasily Grossman was the first to describe the use of lupins to cover up evidence of extermination camps in his 1944 article 'The Hell of Treblinka' (Grossman, 2011).

mechanisms of prosthetic memory, with the first-person speaker focusing on the physical details of his surroundings, which present continuity with the sensory context in which the villagers were killed. The lonely hill, peaceful grass and sky all appear timeless, recalling what someone might have seen there 1944, while the mud which clings to his shoes serves the dual purpose of adding potentially shared sensory impressions and creating an uncanny connection to the manner of the villagers' death:

> nichts wiegt plötzlich schwerer
> als die erde
> die uns an den schuhen klebt
> vierzig dorfbewohner einfach
> lebend darin eingescharrt (*ibid*)

Hodjak also introduces the guilt question through a physical metaphor, again based in the reality of what the speaker can see, 'für gelegentliche betrachter freilich / trennt der hochgezogene zaun / viel zu streng / unschuld von schuld.'(*ibid*)

This evocation of the guilt question is particularly noteworthy when read in conjunction with Hodjak's second piece on Sărmăşel, from 1977. In a short prose piece, 'reiseintermezzo', the narrator describes an unscheduled tour stop and his confrontation with the same site. This later piece includes more details about the surroundings and, through a reported conversation with an old villager who witnessed the massacre, the events of 1944. The narrator reports a conical monument with graves surrounded by a low wall immediately next to a road and a small but steep hill behind (Hodjak, 1977, 26) However, even a cursory investigation of the setting Hodjak describes reveals that this text presents a hybrid of monuments near Sărmăşel Mare, and several other elements within the text point to it really being about a site at nearby Sărmăşu, where 126 Jewish villagers from both villages were murdered (Butnaru, 1992, 159). There is a conical monument in Sărmăşel but it is dedicated to the fallen of the war of 1848, and the concrete wall, graves and hill close to a road precisely match pictures and other descriptions of the Sărmăşu monument (Nagy-Talavera, 1990, 40-62, no exact page reference available). The description of the night of the massacre given by the old villager also corresponds to testimony of the Sărmăşu massacre, most notably in the details of the victims having to dig their own graves at the top of the hill and the continual screams during the night (*ibid*;

Butnaru, 1992, 159-60).[95] Although the text names villagers without specifying their ethnicity and gives their refusal to provide supplies to retreating soldiers as the reason for their murder (which could have happened, although I can find no evidence to support this), the setting and events Hodjak alludes to are definitely those of the Sărmăşu massacre. Without directly mentioning the Jewish identity of the victims and naming unspecified 'hitlertruppen' rather than the Hungarian Gendarmerie that actually carried out the killing, Hodjak provides a record of one of the worst acts of mass killing in Northern Transylvania (Hodjak, 1977, 26).[96] The implicit commemoration of the Jews of Sărmăşu and Sărmăşel is confirmed in the imagery that occurs to the narrator:

> kleine umfriedung, betonzaun, ganz gewöhnliche platen. dahinter gräber, in der mitte der hinteren front ein denkmal, konisch, nicht zu hoch, schlicht. es gibt also nicht viel zu sehn. keine daumenschrauben, keine feuerzange, keine gaskammern, keine verbrennungsöfen. hier hatte der menschliche geist notgedrungen unter verzicht auf alle mittel der technik seine genalität mittels einmaliger improvisation unter beweis gestellt. doch das weiß man noch nicht' (Hodjak, 1977, 26).

The uncertainty Hodjak inserts at the end of this opening passage supports the hypothesis that the massacre the piece alludes to is Sărmăşu by suggesting that the narrator is already aware of what took place *before* listening to the testimony of the old man. Like the poem 'sărmăşel, cluj', 'reiseintermezzo' ends with a moment of reflection that evokes the issue of collective responsibility:

> und jetzt noch, behauptet der batsch, sollen diese schreie in ganz besonders hellen und klaren nächten zu hören sein. und man sitzt schließlich wieder im bus, wirft noch einen kurzen blick zurück auf den hügel und wird den letzten satz des batsch vielleicht ein leben lang nicht mehr los. man bedauert es, daß die stimmen nur selten, nur in ganz besonders hellen und klaren nächten zu hören sind (Hodjak, 1977, 27)

[95] Although 'reiseintermezzo' describes villagers buried up to their necks and left overnight as the reason for the screaming, witnesses to the massacre at Sarmas described ongoing screams of pain mixed with automatic and non-automatic gunfire throughout the night (Hodjak, 1977, 27; Nagy-Talavera, 1990 40-62, no exact page reference available). Exhumation of the bodies in early 1945 revealed that victims had been beaten and dismembered before death (ibid).

[96] Not naming Hungarians as the culprits is an important choice, since the dominant Romanian account of the Holocaust in historiography focused on the actions of Horthy troops in Northern Transylvania, to the exclusion of the actions of Romanian troops in Bucovina and Transnistria (Govrin, 1999, 272).

The discovery of sites of mass violence through travelogues (fictional or real) is an approach replicated by other authors in this period, although few are so directly concerned with the theme as Hodjak. Several Romanian-German authors of Müller's generation produced poems and short stories about travel to Germany (West and East) and the sense of historical haunting in the cityscapes of Berlin and Dresden (which I will discuss further later) and other pieces appeared set in Hungary and Yugoslavia (Serbia). Another notable example of a travel text which alludes to Romanian Holocaust history is Horst Fassel's 'jassy – der vorstoss der rückschau' (1977), which mentions the infamous pogrom at Iaşi in late June 1941 as part of a wider historical-geographical survey of the city: 'die synagogue am tîrgul cucului und der zeigefinger des mager gereckten obelisken: pogrom, 1941. jüdenfriedhof auf dem berg' (Fassel, 1977, 80). Mentioning the Iaşi Pogrom, which saw the murder of over 13,000 people by Antonescu's forces, even in such a brief sentence, was a bold choice as it concerns war crimes committed predominantly by Romanians, and under Romanian command.[97] Evidence used in the 1946 trials of Antonescu and some of the perpetrators of Iaşi was suppressed under communism, with the 'Schwarzbuch' summarising the incident removed from libraries during the 1950s (Hausleitner, 2010, 77). These documents were not reprinted until the 1990s and Romania's persecution of Jews during fascism remained a largely silent history (*ibid*; Butnaru, 1992; Govrin, 1999; Schlesak, 2005).[98]

Müller's 1986 piece 'Überall wo man den Tod gesehen hat: Sommerreise in Maramuresch' follows a similar model to the texts by Hodjak and Fassel. It combines mundane details of travel with an awareness of history's marks on the landscape and the haunting of the present by the horrors of the past. However, Müller goes much further in her evocation of this horror, focusing on the denaturalisation of life in the present, rather than the details of past brutality as Hodjak does. Entering the province of Maramuresch becomes a journey into death as every sight and sound is transformed into an indicator of past violence through the lens of historical knowledge (Eke, 1991a, 66):

[97] The *SS* were involved in the pogrom and collaborated with the Romanian security service (*SSI*) in persecuting Jews but the planning and execution of the action in Iaşi was carried out by Romanian army and intelligence officials (Hausleitner, 2010, 73).

[98] Govrin (1999) offers an illuminating account of efforts by Israeli historians and memory activists to improve recognition of Romania's part in the Holocaust by donating books, writing letters and attending meetings during the 1980s (Govrin, 1999, 267-288). In hearings in the late 2000s over the question of whether former officials of the fascist government could be rehabilitated, the Iaşi Pogrom was referred to as 'socially discriminatory measures taken against some Jews on 30 June 1941' (Shafir, 2004, 75).

> Hinterm Bahnhof stellt ein Berg sich quer in ihren Weg, lockt sie wie Schlangen in sein nasses, dunkles Maul. Wie durch ein Grab fährt jeden Tag der Zug durch diesen Tunnel. Die Schlangen kriechen und dem Zug schreit wund das Rad, geht in die Knie, quietscht schrill, wie Eisen schreit in Rost und Dunkelheit. […] Dunkel warten alle Fenster, als ob jedes Abteil, zwischen dem Licht dahinter und davor, ein fahrendes, aus der Erinnerung herausgetriebenes Gedächtnis wär (*Februar*, 101).

The evocation of body horror and suffering, of screams, collapse, consumption and live burial, anticipates the history Müller's narrator has gone in search of and is coloured by knowledge of the Holocaust.[99] The train itself creates a link between the present-day and the history of deportation through the narrator's observation of the play of light between the cars and to the lesser-known history of violence on Romanian soil through the implied consumption of people by the earth itself.

The narrator is dissatisfied with the peaceful space of the Jewish graveyard in Oberwischau, which does not contain traces of the memory she searches for: 'Denkmäler, Friedhöfe, Kirchen. Zweimal war Himmler persönlich in Oberwischau, hat das Judenghetto besucht und die Todeslisten überprüft. Unfälle, Krankheiten. *Die Wiesen wiegen sich*' (*Februar*, 115, my emphasis). The listing of the first three words in contrast with the mention of Himmler underlines the prosaic appearance of outward signs of memory and their inability to communicate the reality of what took place in Maramuresch. 'Unfälle, Krankheiten', registers the normality of the majority of the deaths made visible through headstones while the contrasting 'Die Wiesen wiegen sich' signals an alternative space of remembrance for the people who the graveyard cannot authentically represent.

Eke observes how the uncanny atmosphere Müller creates is heightened by the contrast between uncontrolled horrific details and the contained, static sites of remembrance the narrator visits and makes a contrast between 'tamed memory' and the everpresence of death (Eke, 1991a, 66). The memory the narrator seeks and experiences cannot be tamed and she instinctively reads into the landscape all that is silenced and moderated in the commemorative sites. In one unnamed village near Sighet (likely Câmpulung laTisa), a graveyard becomes a space of ill omen, full of hidden signs that allude to the history of the Jews in the region:

[99] These kinds of descriptions are a product of concentrationary memory, which I explore in Chapter Four. This particular scene is comparable to the representation of the train journey in *Atemschaukel*, which evokes the Holocaust for different purposes (see Chapter Five).

> Und unterm Himmel, eingeschlossen in hohe, gemauerte Zäune seh ich die jüdischen Friedhöfe. Graue Steine im Wiesengras am Straßenrand. Zwei Männer mähen die rotbraunen Rispen wie Haar. Menschen wie Gras. Wilde Margareten mit weißen Zähnen, blaue Glocken und Blätter wie Pfeile. Wie ist dieser Kreislauf der kleinen, dunkelroten Kirschen in den Friedhofsbäumen. Große Krähen sitzen auf den Ästen und spucken blutige Kerne aus. (*Februar,* 104-05)

Despite their presence in a walled cemetery, the grave markers appear marginal and overlooked, obscured by a grass that evokes the image of human hair. This obvious reference to the cultural imaginary of the Holocaust, along with the more immediately threatening image of the potentially man-eating crows in the trees above signal the unnaturalness of the deaths whose traces the narrator is seeking. The doubled image, of a peaceful village graveyard and of a horrorscape in which birds and plants are carnivorous and complicit in the destruction of human beings, serves to highlight the disparity between the *Schein* and *Sein* of the Romanian borderlands, which Müller renders as sites of mass murder and unlawful killing.

Prosthetic memory is an important means by which she accesses or renders visible the history of the Holocaust in 'Sommerreise'. The text features numerous references to sensation – of the wind, grass brushing against skin, visual cues such as the grass/hair – and the narrator makes a visible effort to attend to the physical experiences offered by her surroundings. The continuity provided by the rural setting, little changed since the 1940s, means that this interaction with the environment affords the narrator some kind of connection with those who lived in this setting and an abstract knowledge of them. In the above graveyard scene, however, the only "knowledge" she is able to access comes through the sensual: 'Wie schmecken die Kirschen, wie schmeckt dieses Heu. Woher sind die schwarzen Heidelbeeren, die ich von einer Bäuerin mit dunkelblauen Händen kauf. Ich eß. Meine Zähne sind schwarz und *der Mund ist mir bitter*' (*Februar,* 105, my emphasis). In the absence of any direct trace of the unknown people she wishes to remember and the failure of formal commemorialisation to satisfy her desire for connection to them, the bitterness of the berries becomes a substitute. The possibility that her consumption of the fruit somehow makes her a cannibal further reinforces the disgust and unease she experiences.

Müller's effort to disrupt and subvert the innocuous and even idyllic space of the Maramuresch countryside is motivated not only by an effort to uncover the history of the Holocaust in Romania but also to reveal the endurance of violent potential in the people who inhabit these spaces. The ethnic German inhabitants of the town, some of whom, like her, have a family connection to Nazism ('Sein Vater war, wie alle hier, in der SS', *Februar*, 105) , are portrayed in a way that harks back to Nazi ideology surrounding the Heimat, their very cornfed appearance and simple attitude confirming their susceptibility to fascist thinking:

> Sie sprechen deutsch. Auch wenn sie lachen, auch wenn sie schweigen [...] Zwei blonde Mädchen gehn vorbei, haben für den Spaziergang in den Kleinstadtabend weiße Söckchen an. Die Zipsermädchen sind deutsch geblieben: sie gehen eingehakt, sie flüstern und kichern. Sie schauen mit den immerblauen Augen den Soldaten nach. (*Februar*, 105-06)

This description of the quintessentially Aryan girls, unburdened by the critical awareness which motivates the narrator, is made even more uncomfortable through its positioning between a series of historical facts ('Da steht der große schwarze Stein, das Denkmal für 38000 Juden aus der Maramuresch, die im Mai 1944 nach Auschwitz deportiert und vergast worden sind.' *Februar*, 105) and a quotation from Jewish testimony: '"Sehens, die Deitsche warn gute Leit, bevor is kommen der Hitler. (...) Als is kommen der Hitler, alles is wordn anderscht: pletzlich war aso a groißer Haß da"' (*ibid*).[100] At no point does Müller allow the superficially peaceful and wholesome atmosphere of the rural *Heimat* to gain traction; even the children in these spaces are untrustworthy.

The memory of the Holocaust breaks through into the present throughout 'Sommerreise', as a submerged layer accessible to those who look closely, and ties sights and sounds in the present to that hidden history. This technique comes especially strongly to the fore when the narrator's attention turns to teenagers in another of the towns she visits, whose Coca Cola T-shirts and jeans with zips disguise a hidden layer of experience:

> Die Reisepässe sind rar. Die Landesgrenze ein Stacheldrahtgelände, von Soldaten und Hunden bewacht. Jeder, der durch diesen Mittag geht, hat gehört von

[100] This is a quotation from the testimony of Baila Rosenberg-Friedmann collected by Claus Stephani discussed earlier in this chapter (Stephani, 1984, 45).

> Fluchtversuchen, von Gleichaltrigen, die erschossen, von Hunden zerrissen, totgeprügelt worden sind. Keine Friedhöfe, keine Denkmäler gibt es für sie. Da muß ich […] mich selber fragen: wohin verschwinden die Körper, die die Flucht versuchen. (Februar, 117)

Although the beginning of this passage is clearly concerned with contemporary conditions and the threat of death facing anyone who tries to escape Communist Romania, the language Müller uses becomes more ambiguous as it continues. The possibility emerges that teenagers in this border town in Maramuresch may also have heard about the deaths of people their age during the Holocaust, or at some other time, and the narrator's question, 'wohin verschwinden die Körper, die die Flucht versuchen?' resonates with multiple layers of historical awareness.

In her later work, she continues to be preoccupied with this question, focusing on rural fields and rivers,[101] which become sites in which the violence of the Ceauşescu regime shows through:

> Mähdrescher sind hoch, sagt der Fahrer, das ist gut, wenn man oben sitzt, sieht man im Weizen nicht die Toten liegen. [...] auch der Weizen ist hoch, sagt er, von den Hunden der Soldaten sieht man nur die Augen. Nur für die Flucht ist der Weizen zu klein. [...] wenn man GOTTESACKER sagt, meint man den Friedhof, sagt er. Ich war auf dem Mähdrescher, drei Sommer war ich an der Grenze, beim Ernten allein auf dem Feld, und zwei Winter beim Ackern, beim Ackern nur in der Nacht. Das Feld stank süß, zum Weizenfeld müßte man GOTTESACKER sagen. (*Fuchs,* 73)

Here once again, the borderlands provide a space ripe for subversion and alienation. The unidentified bodies and use of plants and landscape management to cover up the crimes of a violent and oppressive regime read as an iteration of previous sites, killings and

[101] Pollack suggests that the Danube should be thought of as a mass grave. The river's function as a place to disguise murders is recognised in the well-known memorial in Budapest called 'Shoes Next to the Danube', which recalls the massacre of Jews by the city's fascist forces, one of many that took place along its length during the Second World War. In his *The Last Hundred Days*, Patrick McGuiness portrays the Danube in the Iron Gate gorge system as a site of murder, with people trying to flee the country cut apart by barbed wire, metal spikes and serrated saws at 'emplacements' and their deaths passed off as accidental drownings (McGuiness, 2011, 230-31, 226-27). The unnamed river in *Herztier* (not named as the Danube and likely the Bega River, one of at least six other rivers that form part of the Western border) also touches upon the bodies recovered from the river, which disturb the surface of everyday reality in the city by revealing the deaths of escapees: 'Zwischen Winter und Frühjahr hörte ich von fünf Flußleichen, die sich hinter der Stadt im Wassergestrüpp verfangen hatten' (*Herztier*, 114).

concealments perpetrated by the fascists.The idea of Romania as a haunted space in which the physical evidence of politically-ordained murder waits to be uncovered is not limited to the specific, buried history of fascism alluded to in Müller's and Hodjak's texts but continues into the present and the nameless victims still being concealed in the innocuous, anonymous countryside. Ceauşescu is another maker of graveyards (*Herztier,* 183). I shall discuss the importance of the Holocaust in Müller's representations of Communist Romania, and selection of images more broadly in my discussion of *Herztier* (Chapter Four).

By beginning to uncover layers of history, texts such as those written by Müller and her contemporaries show:

> The present […] to be haunted by a past which is not immediately visible but is brought progressively into view. The relationship between present and past therefore takes on the form of a superimposition and interaction of different temporal traces to constitute a sort of composite structure, like a palimpsest, so that one layer of traces can be seen through, and is transformed by, another. Second, the composite structure in these works is a combination of not simply two moments in time (past and present) but a number of different moments, hence producing a chain of signification which draws together disparate spaces and times. (Silverman, 2013, 3)

The texts by Müller and Hodjak reveal memory to be a palimpsest, bringing together banal details of contemporary Romanian society with the histories of violence woven into its physical fabric. In penetrating the surface of a regime invested in keeping its country's fascist past obscured and allowing silenced suffering to be heard in the present, the authors are setting up a process of interconnection or 'chain of signification' that is not limited to the specific past moments of atrocity and physical confrontation with them in the present. Instead they open up the potential for further layers, not least the contemporary communist regime, which is similarly guilty of unlawful killings and cover-ups. Roxane Compagne and Antje Janssen-Zimmerman observe the ambivalence of imagery of confinement and death Müller's Maramuresch essay, which points to the suffering of the Romanian people in the 1980s as well as the historical suffering of the region's Jews (Compagne, 2010, 49; Janssen-Zimmerman, 1991, 238-41). I will discuss the ways in which Müller juxtaposes

different histories of oppression and state violence in more detail in my analysis of *Atemschaukel* as a text indebted to Holocaust writing (Chapter Five).

In terms of where they draw their inspiration and their relationship with memory, these Romanian Holocaust texts are complex. Postmemory, the adoption of others memories which are rendered real through stories, appears superficially to be an important aspect of Hodjak's 'reiseintermezzo' (in the interview with the old man) and is represented throughout other texts of the period. However, although these shared stories might appear to overcome official silence on the fate of the German minority, they cannot compensate for the lack of honesty in communicative memory between generations, as people refuse to speak about shameful subjects. In many instances it might be more useful to speak of a negative postmemory, a mode of remembering based on the gaps and inconsistencies in the accounts given by previous generations. Prosthetic memory is revealed to be the more productive mode of accessing the past in the examples from Hodjak and Müller given above and, I would argue, in Müller's work as a whole. In the case of 'reiseintermezzo', the story that the old man tells the narrator in Sărmăşel does not communicate the real story of Sărmăşu, the displaced centre of the text, and focuses on the unknowable and unrecoverable experience of the victims. Similarly, in Müller's text, the knowledge brought to bear on the monument in Maramuresch is not linked to testimony or collective memory culture in Romania. The deep emotional investment Landsberg describes as necessary for prosthetic memory is predicated upon historical knowledge and ethical commitment (although this may also stem paradoxically from familial attachment in Müller's case), while confrontation with the landscape, and banal iterations of bodily experience (mud sticking to shoes, eating a berry) provide the "visceral" impetus for forming a connection with the historical Other.

The haunting of landscape is an important motif in Müller's work, in which some landscapes in particular function as prompts for prosthetic memory. Most striking is the recurring setting of the agricultural field, which appears as a space of anonymous suffering and death from *Niederungen* to *Atemschaukel* (see Chapters Four and Five). She shares with other authors of her generation (such as Hodjak, Kuhn, Maurer) a preoccupation with the mass graves of German soldiers, such as her uncle Matz, who fought for the Nazis, and other burial places such as graveyards, fixating on the physical presence of human remains in the landscape as a means of denaturalising everyday reality. The creation of a negative, death-centred image of the countryside was a challenging move on the part of these authors, functioning as a challenge and direct counter-image of the *Heimat*. Critics have

discussed the way these kinds of texts resemble the Austrian and Swiss "tradition" of *anti-Heimatliteratur*, which uses the motifs of sentimental, local texts (including the land and traditional customs) to subvert and criticise traditional communities' shortcomings (Von Hoff, 1998; Spiridon, 2002, 163; Bozzi, 2005, 58). Müller has frequently been compared to Thomas Bernhard and Josef Zoderer, two of the most prominent authors in this (anti-)tradition (Bozzi, 2005, 42; Haupt-Cucuiu, 1996, 145-153; Parry, 2011; Schuster, 2004, 55).

The counterpoint to this awareness of the Romanian countryside as a potential mass graveyard is knowledge of the older generation's involvement in the history of Nazi ethnic cleansing. Christian Maurer, writing in the 1970s-80s, produced a travelogue of Vojvodina in the Serbian Banat – a site of widespread ethnic cleansing and mass murder of partisans during the Second World War – under the title 'Fünf Entwürfe zu unmöglichen Denkmälern', which reflects upon this history (Maurer, 1980, 25-26).[102] Some Romanian-Germans, such as Müller's father, served on the Eastern Front, where similar campaigns of mass murder took place. Her recurrent metaphor 'Friedhöfe machen', which she and her narrators use to describe the activities of their fathers, is rendered less euphemistic in light of this knowledge.[103]

Taken against this background, the wealth of Romanian-German writing on haunted landscapes and sites of mass murder is exceptional within German literature in that it deals with such atrocities as local rather than situating them "elsewhere".[104] Although authors in Germany and Austria have responded to these aspects of the history of Nazism, the physical execution of the Holocaust took place mainly in other countries to the east and south and is therefore at one remove from collective memory and awareness of space in those countries (Snyder, 2009). German writing from Romania creates a close

[102] This is an important history in terms of the question of Banat-Swabian guilt due to the preponderance of Swabians from both sides of the Serbian/Romanian border in the *Division Prinz-Eugen*, which was deployed in the area.

[103] Müller's use of the same phrase to describe Ceauşescu in *Herztier* (183) points to the commonalities between the two systems and their methods of killing, as I shall discuss below and in Chapter Four.

[104] Literature on sites of mass murder in the West, excluding testimony from camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald that were situated in Germany and Austria and accounts of *Kristallnacht*, is fairly limited. A prominent exception to this is Elisabeth Reichart's *Februarschatten* (1984), about the so-called 'Mühlviertler Hasenjagd' of February 1945 in which civilians from villages near Linz in Austria participated in a three-week hunt of escaped Soviet prisoners of war from a satellite camp of Mauthausen. Martin Pollack's *Kontaminierte Landschaften* (2014) undermines the idea of mass graves as something external to Western Europe by examining Austrian examples of massacres and mass burials, such as at Rechnitz in 1945 (which became the subject of the 2008 Jelinek play *Rechnitz (Der Würgeengel)*). Susan Silas's photographic exhibition *Helmbrecht's Walk* (1998) seeks to reinscribe memories of forced marches of concentration camp prisoners through Germany near the end of the war with a particular focus on the mythical space of the German forest as a site of concealed violence (Kaplan, 2011, no page reference available).

connection to this history by simultaneously responding to trends in German literature and complicating and extending the reach of memory work. It reverses the polarity of setting, focusing on what is normally seen as the periphery of the Third Reich and the execution of Hitler's Final Solution from a first-hand perspective, exposing the realities of the Eastern Front. In doing so, this literature anticipates the themes and approaches of the 'Eastern Turn' of the post-2000s as well as the writing of authors of migration literature, such as Şenocak, who write about the Second World War and the Holocaust from the perspective of other countries' collective memory (Haines, 2008, 141).

A further contribution to German memory work emerges from this centre-periphery sensibility and change in perspective, namely the perception of Germany from outside. The theme of haunted landscape is introduced to the German "motherland" in travelogues from Berlin and Dresden, which focus on the submerged history of fascism,

> unter den linden die wurzeln
> reichen tief
> in dürftiges erd-
> reich hinunter, stoßen auf
> längst erstickte luft-
> schutz keller, ausgebrannte
> munitionslager, verottete
> massen gräber, stahl-
> helme,
> koppeln (Maurer, 1978, 5)

In this poem, as well as in similar works by Bohn, Söllner and others, the uncanny awareness of Germany's past colours its perception in the present. Without easy contact between the metropole and German communities in Romania, imaginary constructions – including of the GDR – are still centred on the Nazi era and the layers of history beneath modern cities (Krause, 1998, 166). This 'palimpsestic' understanding of history, which is evident in German city texts like Müller's *Reisende auf einem Bein* (which I discuss in Chapter Five) and essay writing, in which she discusses her encounters with the cities of Nuremberg and Coventry (Müller, 2013, 99; *Apfelkern*, 39).

> Mein Vater war lange tot und ich aus Rumänien weg, da kam ich nach Coventry. Das von Goebbels erfundene Wort "coventrisieren" für "dem Erdboden gleichmachen" stand buchstäblich in der Luft wie die Kirchruine, die an diese Heimsuchung erinnern […] Solche Orte der Heimsuchung gibt es viele, und dann muss ich mir denken: Überall wo ich hinkomme, war mein Vater schon gewesen. (*Apfelkern*, 39)

Müller presents a dualistic vision of Germany throughout her writing as both the ultimate source of Nazi ideology and as a country that can afford to be more complacent about its past because of its subsequent stability and comfort in comparison to countries in Eastern Europe. Bringing her uncanny perception to bear on the modern West German landscape, as she does in *Reisende* and various journalistic pieces shortly after 'Sommerreise' was written, she pierces the self-satisfied surface of the "motherland" with the perspective of the periphery. Germany may be distanced from the traces of its crimes but the immediacy of their presence in Eastern Europe can shatter this illusion. Her writing, along with other Holocaust writing by Romanian-Germans writing such as 'reiseintermezzo', refuses to accept the past as passed and provokes reflection on the geo-history of the fascist era and its resonance in the present (Silverman, 2013, 3).[105]

Müller's 'Sommerreise' must be read above all as a protest against existing memory culture, and differs from Hodjak's similar – if much less provocative – comment on the failure of collective memory in communist Romania in that it focuses more on general knowledge of the Holocaust and its imaginary burden rather than local specifics. As in the scene in the graveyard in Oberwischau, she often resorts to what Landsberg calls the 'emerging iconography' of the Holocaust to drive home her message:

> Da steh ich vor dem weißen, fangarmigen Kerzenleuchter, der nicht zucken kann. Meine Finger sind schwarz vor den Heidelbeeren. Und wenn ich jetzt sterben müßte, wär mein Haar keine Bürste, meine Knochen kein Mehl. Mein Tod wäre deutsch wie der Tod meines Vaters (*Februar*, 105).

[105] Like *Reisende*, Werner Söllner's 1975 poem 'imaginäre begegnung in Berlin mit R.P.' brings the Nazi past into productive tension with the contemporary situation of the divided Germany. Söllner evokes the threat of future violence against the backdrop of the 'eingeäschert' and 'auferstanden' capital: 'doch da die sonne wieder einmal untergeht im westen […] wissen wir: jeder schatten/verdunkelt die sonne/[…] das vertrauen reichen wir von hand zu hand/(wie ein heißes eisen oder eine schon/ zischende granate (Söllner, 1975, 29)

Müller makes the connection between her father's past as an SS-man and the history of her country, controversially placing both in direct relation to the mass extermination of Romania's Northern Jewish population and issues an indirect challenge to the communist regime, 'Kein Reisführer weist auf dieses Denkmal hin. Ich bin gedemütigt von meinen deutschen Vater und noch einmal erniedrigt und betrogen vom Schweigen der rumänischen Geschichte' (*ibid*). That Müller published this piece abroad (in *Zeitmagazin*[106]) whilst under *Veröffentlichungsverbot* in Romania redoubles its provocation and is symbolic of the mounting pressure on Romania to recognise its past (see for example, Govrin, 1999) (Eke, 1991a, 66n; Kegelmann, 1995, 82). From the publication of this early critical text onwards, Müller has continued to agitate for a process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Romania, criticising the lack of will to investigate and process the fascist past (*Apfelkern*, 99; Böhm, 2014).

Conclusion: Imaginative Reconstruction and Confronting the Past

This chapter has reaffirmed the importance of coming to terms with the past as a theme in Müller's work and central concern of her early development whilst exposing her work's indebtedness to the wider discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German-speaking Romania and beyond. Her emphatic rejection of her community's stance towards their association with National Socialism in the past – which stressed heroism, deception by Hitler and disproportionate punishment by the communists – must be seen in light of contemporary discussions of collective guilt and work by Müller and her contemporaries of the second generation is informed by concepts such as 'the banality of evil' and the increasingly public discussion of the Holocaust. As I shall argue in Chapter Five, Holocaust testimony texts are an important influence on Müller's narrative approach and her selection of images to represent the past of the soviet labour camp in *Atemschaukel*, but her aesthetic is also based in a local, spatial understanding of Romania's history.

Without recourse to reliable historiography or open discussion of the Holocaust in Romania and surrounding countries, Müller and contemporaries such as Franz Hodjak and Christian Maurer used place and local memory to evoke a prosthetic memory of the violence and killing which took place in Romania between 1941 and 1944. This writing responded to pan-German themes of uncovering everyday perpetration – seen in the father

[106] 27.6.1986, 39-50

books and texts such as Elisabeth Reichart's *Februarschatten* (1984) – and to the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*'s interest in details of their environment to develop a mode of perception for rendering the Holocaust visible. Bodily experience, confrontation with the landscape and research into local memory provide a means for accessing the past which has been concealed and bringing it into the present.

This approach is exemplified in Müller's 'Überall, wo man den Tod gesehen hat: Eine Sommerreise in Maramuresch', which brings together her father's possible crimes with her challenge to the Romanian government's shirking of responsibility with regard to the past. The text foreshadows her later work on the hidden victims of the Ceauşescu regime, who are represented in their absence through descriptions of the landscape as a space in which state violence and cruelty are concealed. In focusing on such concealment and the theme of victimhood, Müller creates a palimpsest in which Holocaust memory and a critique of silence emerge to function as an implicit attack on contemporary Romanian memor culture. I will develop the idea of haunting in Chapter Four in my discussion of 'concentrationary memory', which offers a framework for understanding the permeation of Müller's textual universe by knowledge of the Nazi past not only through interactions with space but also at the level of gesture, image and affect. There I shall also demonstrate how features of Müller's work already established in 'Sommerreise', such as unnatural representations of the countryside and the use of motifs such as carnivorous plants and cannibalism, come to occupy the centre of her imaginary universe and her effort to uncover the effects of dehumanisation.

Chapter Four: Terror, Obscene Consumption and Visual Dimensions of Cultural Memory in *Herztier* (1994)

The visual is of paramount importance to Müller's writing. Both within her personal reflections on perception and in her fiction, where images function as imperfect but productive keys to accessing deeper meaning, visual details are the primary method by which the themes of her writing are communicated. Whatever the context, nothing – object, plant, animal, physical feature – is ever guaranteed to be or remain innocuous. Everyday encounters with surroundings become a hall of mirrors in which every detail has a potential meaning and even agency. Scholars of Müller's work have long recognised prioritisation of imagery over other aspects of representation such as plot or characterisation and proposed various theoretical frameworks to explain its origin and effect. In this chapter I will outline the importance of an as yet unexplored dimension of her visual creativity, cultural memory, and explore its function in the complex networks of images that form the foundation of her novels. I will argue that cultural memory, specifically a post-Holocaust 'concentrationary memory', is a central force in Müller's construction of images. This means that history – in the form of semiotic resonances, structures and motifs as well as factual details – is a constant presence in her imaginary project. *Herztier* provides a fertile testing ground for this thesis and the applicability of ideas of the concentrationary across Müller's oeuvre because it combines the dual settings of the Banat-Swabian village and the communist city, spanning the pre- and post-1987 texts. It equals in complexity Müller's later masterpiece *Atemschaukel* and stands alongside the 2009 deportation novel as a text in which her aesthetic and narrative dexterity reaches its fullest expression. Throughout her web-like fictional world, which exceeds *Herztier* but is most clearly visible within it, reality and imagination converge in the paranoid perception of her narrators, who probe for meaning and a route to understanding the sensations of terror that dominate their lives.

In the first of four sections I examine Müller's deployment of images, and introduce three of the concepts she uses to explain the peculiar narrative perspective found in her fiction. Attention to detail, associative leaps and affective impact are all important aspects of her written style and speak to a mode of storytelling in which sensation, intuition and individual images are prioritised over plot and other more standard forms of exposition. Literary surrealism offers several useful points of contact with Müller's techniques, such as montage, poetic juxtaposition and paranoid interpretations of mundane objects and occurences, which I shall explore in connection with her own literary concepts.

Close analysis of Müller's works reveals their high degree of complexity and interdependence, which is especially important at the level of imagery. Although the episodic and fragmented nature of her texts has been attributed to trauma (Marven, 2005, 57), the recurrence of images is carefully designed to produce meaning on a third level, beyond plot or individual image. Building on ideas of montage and "free" association my second section argues that Müller's texts imitate the workings of individual interpretation, creating a repertoire of images which occupy the same space as the kinds of cultural memory discussed in semiology or psychoanalytic theories of the collective unconscious (for example by Carl Jung), intimately linked to meaning. Complex metaphorical relationships based in affective connections and structural affinities mean that the networks of images Müller creates move beyond simple semantic fields and are best described as a personal semiotics or 'Grundregister', represented across her writing life. I shall develop these ideas through the example of the handkerchief, an important image across her work as a whole (Eddy, 1999, 331).

In the third section I examine the connection between Müller's semiotic universe and cultural memory in more detail, highlighting the importance of existing patterns of signification in the creation of her images and image networks. Historical knowledge and shared cultural imagination of the Second World War, fundamentally important to her own imaginary resources (see Chapters One and Three), emerge as foundational to the written worlds she creates. Critics such as Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman argue that the Western post-war imaginary is saturated by the knowledge of the Holocaust and the unprecedented dehumanisation to which it gave rise and put forward the term 'the concentrationary' to account for the omnipresence of this history in the present day. Even where it is not directly concerned with the Nazi past, Müller's work is permeated with an awareness of the barbarism it unleashed, and her representations of structural violence in the Banat-Swabian village, communist Romania and other contexts reproduce the affective impact of the abjection and damage unleashed on the collective human imaginary in the twentieth century by Nazism. Like the Benjaminian Angel of History, Müller's narrators are overwhelmed by the wreckage of the past, with every moment and gesture inflected by the knowledge of fascism and its dehumanising violence.

Finally, I move on to apply the analytic frameworks developed in the previous sections to *Herztier*, exploring the repertoire of images and associations Müller creates there in light of her other works. I argue that images of parasitism, grotesque consumption and threatening hunger dominate the novel, subverting the natural cycle of life and

everyday activity of eating to reveal both the structural violence of totalitarianism and the haunted horrorscape of life after fascism. The image of the butcher bird ties together the associative networks of consumption and cruelty, providing a mise en abyme for dictatorship, dehumanisation and futility in the face of exploitative political regimes.

Müller's intricate webs of images centre on death, violence and grotesque body horror but contain a unique creative potential. Radically open to meaning and alert to the hidden currents of history, they invoke the agency of the individual in their implicit injunction to awareness and involvement of the reader in the act of meaning creation. Müller's texts are vigilant against the damage wrought on people by the abuse of power and initiate their reader into this perspective, contributing to the possibility that present, and future, such abuses will be detected and prevented. As such, although they are grounded in the past and in memory they hold the tentative promise of a better future.

Accessing Deeper Truth: Estrangement and the Surreal in Müller's Narrative Style

One of the most striking aspects of Müller's technique is her use of the gaze, more specifically the interrogative, paranoid and fantasising gaze which she sustains across the first person narrators of the majority of her texts. Their darting awareness and unexpected attention to all kinds of sights and sounds drives the pace of Müller's prose, initiating the reader into a peculiar, off-kilter perspective on both the mundane and the terrifying aspects of reality. Hyperrealistic images and sense impressions are combined with flights of fantasy and surreal interpretations of the narrators' surroundings to produce a vision of the world in which imagination and possibility are as "real" as what can be seen and described objectively. In the following, I will outline three theoretical frameworks through which Müller has tried to articulate the methods she uses in her narration, which she calls 'die erfundene Wahrnehmung' (*Teufel*, 9-31). 'Der fremde Blick', 'der Zeigefinger' and 'der Irrlauf im Kopf' are not coherent theories yet they offer starting points for untangling Müller's complex ideas and techniques when it comes to perception. I will consider each of these, combining them with non-identical but corresponding ideas from the Surrealist tradition. Critics such as Bettina Brandt identify a number of surrealist features in Müller's writing, including its anti-nationalism, use of an apparently autobiographical narrator, child narrators, great sensitivity to and scepticism regarding language, the 'erstaunte Blick' and dreamlike qualities, and I share their belief that Surrealism is an important source of inspiration as well as a useful framework for understanding her works (Brandt, 2006, 75;

Tudorică, 1997, 92-98). This introductory exploration of narrative form provides a foundation for my discussion of imagery and memory in later sections.

The 'fremde Blick', a fundamental and often misunderstood aspect of Müller's reflections on 'erfundene Wahrnehmung', represents her determination to probe beneath and beyond the surface of experience and signification (*Teufel*, 9-31). It is a critical outsider position which renders the everyday alien and subjects it to scrutiny. Rather than being based in her experience of emigration to Germany, Müller describes the alien gaze as a product of oppressive systems of thought and behaviour – including state power and the repressive environment of the Banat-Swabian village – which made her their enemy, a pattern replicated in her narrators. They are forced into an outsider perspective by the worlds they inhabit and take in their surroundings with a fearful, paranoid perception. The 'alien gaze' is also a dismantling gaze, which does not take for granted existing systems of meaning, including the relationship between signifier and signified. Müller writes in detail about her difficulty in accepting this relationship as straightforward and the awareness she developed as a child of how this difficulty was not shared by those around her:

> In der Dorfsprache, so schien es mir als Kind – lagen bei allen Leuten um mich herum die Wörter direkt auf die Dingen, die sie bezeichneten. Die Dinge hießen genauso wie sie waren, und sie waren genauso wie sie hießen. Ein für immer geschlossenes Einverständnis. Es gab für die meisten Leute keine Lücken, durch die man zwischen Wort und Gegenstand schauen und ins Nichts starren mußte, als rutschte man aus seiner Haut ins Leere. (Müller, 2002, 6)

The 'alien gaze' of her narrators allows Müller to undermine the accepted certainties of language and meaning, resulting in a destabilising of relationships and interpretative possibilities. This decoupling of words and their meaning is achieved in part through her reliance on a directly visual, as opposed to the explanatory-descriptive mode of narration, and the preponderance of inconclusive metaphors. The decoding of these and other images is always deferred, and Müller leaves the reader to draw their own interpretations (although this process is not entirely unguided, as I shall discuss).

However, despite Müller's grounding of the concept in her own lived experience, it is important to note that the 'alien gaze' is above all a position, one that Müller encourages her reader to adopt through her puzzling visual universe. Salvadore Dalí's term 'critical paranoia', which he used to explain how free association and other surrealist practices

could become a method of 'irrational knowledge', is a useful point of comparison here; he proposes a critically-engaged openness to unconscious associations and images (see Iribas, 2005, 241). The intensification of perception and tendency to make unexpected and factually erroneous connections found in the paranoic's fantasy become tools for achieving insight into the cruelty and immorality of power relations, and of those who seek to dominate the world through ideas.[107] When Müller talks of an 'ausgedachte Angst', or critics talk of a 'gehetzter Blick' or 'selbstgebauter Ekel', they attempt to name a similar technique (Müller, 2002, 7; Wagner, 1981 cited Eke, 1991, 14; Nousek, 2013, 261).[108] Like Dalí, Müller's representations of society are not random or unreal but based on the actual historical conditions that create the unease she expresses through her writing (Schmidt, 1998, 58).[109] She picks up on the false opposition of surreal and real in relation to her work, commenting, 'ich weiß auch nicht, wo das Surreale anfängt. Für mich ist Surrealität nicht etwas anderes als Realität, sondern eine tiefere Realität' (Müller, 1998, 18).

The way Müller problematises the opposition between reality and surreality echoes the position of many other practitioners who saw surrealism as a way to access reality, rather than a retreat or deviation from it. Surrealist movements were commonly highly political, a dimension of their history which is not necessarily reflected in everyday understandings of surrealist art and literature (Tudorică, 1997, 94). The determination to perceive differently represents a refusal to accept existing modes of thought and to reveal the absurdity of accepted social and political situations. The constructed non-comprehension of Müller's narrator in *Herztier* can be read in this light as a purposeful 'delirious madness, the inability to comprehend the absurdity of the situation in the final phase of dictatorship' (Eke, 2013, 101). Surrealist art also takes up politics as its subject

[107] Dalí does not use 'paranoid' in the modern usage, *i.e*. related primarily to fantasies of persecution, instead going back to the earlier, more generalised concept of a 'reasoning madness'. Paranoia for Dalí is 'a condition in which the paranoic interprets images, ideas or events as being connected – when outside observers would not accept the connection' (Elder, 2013, 353). Jamer Hunt argues for the reevaluation of the paranoic-critical method as a critique of the rational and received wisdom because it 'allows one to reinscribe the temporal and spatial contests that get sloughed off in the agonistic coming to presence of scientific and humanistic realities' (Hunt, 1999, 21).

[108] Bruce R. Elder describes the paranoic's manner of experiencing as 'a novel form of syntax', highlighting the submerged structure that underlies their associations (Elder, 2013, 363).

[109] George E. Marcus defends the paranoid position as an aspect of social thought in his work on the anthropology of conspiracy theories. He argues that, far from deluded or insane, the paranoic in the post-Cold War world is responding to realities – the paranoid rhetoric of the opposing sides and the conspiratorial workings of international politics – and is therefore rational: 'The legacy and structuring residues of that era make the persistence of, and even increasing intensity of, its signature paranoid style now more plausible, but indeed, an expectable response to certain *social facts*' (Marcus, 1999, 2, his emphasis). He also suggests that the Holocaust might represent a similar impetus to the Cold War in producing a change in interpretation, an idea which is developed by theorists of concentrationary memory.

matter, re-presenting the contemporary situation through its challenging and complicating perspective. In Romanian surrealism, representing real, horrific events through poetic imagery was a typical approach, just as earlier practitioners of the surreal, such as André Breton, responded critically to the rise of fascism (Eddy, 2013, 85; Gąsiorek, 2015, 511).

In light of her interest in the insufficiency of words and mundane modes of perception, it is unsurprising that critics have often related Müller's work to deconstruction, citing her rejection of systematic thinking and awareness of the gap between word and meaning as proof of a profound commitment to 'Dekonstruktion' and 'Sprachskepsis' (Eke, 1997, 481, 482). Eke quotes Müller in her early career as saying: 'Ich sehe die Menschen, wie sie angeblich frei handeln und dabei nicht wissen, dass sie es unter bestimmten Zwängen tun, dass sie in einem Mechanismus drin stecken, dass sie mit der Freiheit von Marionetten handeln' (Müller, 1982 cited Solms, 1990, 303 cited Eke, 1991, 12). [110] Müller's focus on details, of individual perspective, objects, images and momentary impressions, provides a possible means for dismantling enforced systems of meaning such as those of the Ceauçescu state and resisting the totalitarian modes of thinking upon which they rely (Moyrer, 2010, 80; Johannsen, 2008, 204). Where regimes claim a monopoly over logic and present themselves as fully rationalised societies, a mode of perception which undermines this purported harmony may be powerfully non-conformist. 'Hinsehen bei Herta Müller kann Zerstören heißen, Zerlegen, aus dem Zusammenhang reißen, Trennen, Sezieren,' writes Apel, while Haines describes a 'micro-politics of resistance' which is practised 'by attending stubbornly to the particular, the individual, the local, the detail' and represents a means of 'asserting the baseline value of gut opposition in the face of monumental power' (Apel, 1991, 23; Haines, 1998, 109, 122).

However there are some limitations to the usefulness of focusing on deconstructive impulses within Müller's writing and on 'différance' as the end in itself in terms of what she wishes to uncover through her use of language. Firstly, focusing, as Eke has, on Müller's interest in the insufficiency of language as 'der Impuls' underlying her linguistic and aesthetic choices risks moving away from the strongly moral drive which underlies her writing (Eke, 1997, 481). Her writing is never solely a playful linguistic exercise and neither does her manner of dismantling the world into individual elements reduce the horror it induces (Eke, 2013, 103; Apel, 1991, 23). Resisting the logic of 'inhuman and deadly social and political orders' does not reduce their threat, nor does questioning the

[110] Müller's choice of words here is interesting as it echoes Hannah Arendt's writing on totalitarianism: 'Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity' (Arendt, 1948, 761 quoted Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 16).

relationship between language and meaning erase the effectiveness of the systems which steer our perception (Haines, 1998, 109). Similarly, critics like Nousek who wish to place Müller's 'interrogation of stable categories' and rejection of systematic thinking at the centre of her literary project struggle to account for Müller's assertion of the existence of a deeper objective truth and is, despite her writing and subject matter, in some ways a utopian thinker with her own system of belief (Nousek, 2013, 258). Her work contains an implicit hope for, if not faith in, the moral potential of human beings which cannot be accounted for in an analysis only of its negative aspects (Haines, 1998, 109-110). There is a real sense of searching in Müller that is not limited to a desire to see through existing structures but rather looks to a notional space beyond everyday perception and the cruelties of modernity. Apel rightly places her within a Romantic tradition of seeking wholeness in a world of alienation, even though she does not share the nostalgic idea that this wholeness might have existed in some bygone era (Apel, 1997, 114).

Another framework which critics have used to analyse Müller's narrative perspective is the idea of the flâneur, the wandering and purposely superficial gaze described by Benjamin in his *Arcade Projects*. Haines suggests that the protagonist of *Reisende auf einem Bein*, Irene, moves through Berlin as an atypical (female) flâneur, whose detachment results in a rhizomatic and fragmentary perception of her surroundings. However, Müller does more than transform the surface of observed reality into fragments of time, going beyond the step from everyday looking (hinsehen) and flâneuristic capturing of the surface (sehen) to a more intensive examination of individual impressions (Eke, 2013, 104.) The connections she makes between disparate images and semantic fields, as well as the sense of the absurd and the fantastical in her work lend themselves to an analysis in terms of the surreal, as does her frequent use of mundane objects, which is reminiscent of the art of those such as Magritte, who brought alienation into the everyday. Apel discusses how Müller's work follows 'dem mystischen Impuls, die Dinge selber reden zu lassen' and the individual image or captured impression is the most important unit of meaning in her work (Apel, 1991, 25).

Thus far, scholarly writing on Müller's use of images has focused predominantly on objects as conveyors of meaning within her work. Those familiar with the author's fictional texts and essayistic writing are well acquainted with certain objects which have great significance to Müller, such as the handkerchief (see below), the fox fur rug (*Fuchs*, 157) or the potato (*Kartoffel*, 66), while even objects which occur only once in a single novel take on metonymic functions which secure their importance within the work (for

example the bag of Hungarian sweets the narrator gives to her landlady in *Herztier*) (*Herztier*, 150-51).[111] In her essay 'In jeder Sprache sitzen andere Augen', Müller writes about how her feelings were often dispersed onto objects, apparently arbitrarily, and she often has recourse to objects as a way of exploring her ideas, such as in her Nobel Prize lecture, where the handkerchief ('Taschentuch') forms a metonymic link between reflections (*König*, 7-39; Müller, 2009b).

In her Paderborn Poetics Lectures, Müller signals the importance of objects to her work, saying: 'Immer waren mir die Gegenstände wichtig. Bis heute gehören sie zu dem, was und wie ein Mensch ist, untrennbar dazu' (Müller, 2002, 9). Johannsen develops the importance of objects in her analysis of Müller, arguing that 'Jeder Raum (...) nicht mehr und nicht weniger als das Verhältnis der Komponente, die sich in ihm befinden und ihn entsprechend bilden, zueinander (ist)' (Johannsen, 2008, 203). Other scholars analyse her objects as containers of memory, citing the different banal objects within and across stories as a route into the history of the object or the complexities of Müller's own memory respectively (Nousek, 2013, 255; Moyrer, 2013, 184, 185). This focus is perhaps related as much to the current popularity of analysing objects in relation to theories of postmemory as to Müller's actual use of them. Although inanimate objects are undeniably important within her created spaces and evocations of the past, the visual images which circulate through her works also include animals, birds and other living elements which are of great importance. Furthermore, a focus on objects overlooks the recurrence of visual motifs or features that are more abstract, such as deformity, decay, colouration and reflectivity.[112] Sounds, smells and textures also play a role in Müller's created environments, evoking 'subtle affiliation(s)' between scenes and captured images (Nousek, 2013, 260). Any attempt to catalogue Müller's use of the external world to communicate meaning would therefore need to include all aspects of the sensory.

The emergence of the affiliations she creates between different moments is a process of selection Müller describes in her concept of the 'Zeigefinger im Kopf', which Eke deems to be the 'Zentralmetapher' of her work (Eke, 1997, 486). Originating in her 1990 Paderborn Poetics Lecture 'Wie Wahrnehmung sich erfindet', the 'Zeigefinger' refers to how everything that we understand about the world is captured only in retrospect:

[111] 'Frau Margit las jedes Wort auf der Tüte […] ihre Augen tränten. Es war Freude, aber eine, die sie erschreckte, die ein verpfuschtes Leben zeigte und, daß es für die Rückkehr nach Pest viel zu spät war […] Die ungarische Tüte blieb neben Frau Margits Bett liegen. Sie öffnete sie nie. […] Sie aß die Bonbons nie, weil sie im Mund verschwunden wären'.

[112] See for example Michel Mallet on the function of colour in Müller's work (Mallet, 2014, 166-78). Bauer writes about the importance of reflectivity as a symbol of forbidden self-awarenesson in *Teufel* (Bauer, 1997, 266-67).

'Manchmal glaube ich, jeder trägt im Kopf einen Zeigefinger. Der zeigt auf das, was gewesen ist. Das meiste, was wir sagen, erzählen, woran wir denken, wenn wir mit uns allein sind, ist gewesen. […] Nicht nur das Erzählen. Auch das, was wir selber sind (Müller, *Teufel*, 9-10). This retrospective aspect of describing and comprehending present experience is a fundamental component of the restless, interrogatory gaze of her narrators:

> Die Wahrnehmung, die sich erfindet, steht nicht still. Sie überschreitet ihre Grenzen, da, wo sie sich festhält. Sie ist unabsichtlich, sie meint nichts Bestimmtes. Sie wird von Zufall geschaukelt. Ihre Unberechenbarkeit trifft jedoch die einzig mögliche Auswahl, wenn sie sich wählt. Der Zeigefinger im Kopf bricht ständig ein. Wir erwarten dieses Einbrechen und sind nie darauf gefaßt. Es ist Unruhe, die sich von selber auslöst. Eine mechanische, präzise Unruhe. Sie weiß wohin sie mit uns geht. Nur wir, wir wissen es nicht. (*Teufel*, 19)

This image of the highly specific, disorientating, yet always appropriate breaking into the present of the retrospective finger of the past is indeed fundamental to her project. It has a personal dimension, in that it 'zuerst nach innen zeigt, auf die subjektive Erfahrungsstruktur, bevor er nach außen, auf die Gegenstände der Wahrnehmung weist', bringing personal experience to bear on each given moment and driving associate leaps between times and contexts (Eke, 1997, 486). However, it also has a broader dimension, in that it functions as 'an exhortation and a symbol of attentiveness, reminding the reader of the role played by the past in directing our thinking and feeling, speaking and writing' (Kohl, 2013, 19). It resembles paranoia, but in a specific historical-critical form. This latter dimension, in which awareness of the past beyond personal experience is a driving force in perceiving and interpreting the present, is crucial and, I argue, not solely predicated on an automatic response but on a cultivated and moral practice of attention which Müller promotes through her writing. The tension between coincidence and inevitability is an important idea, which I will discuss further in relation to cultural memory.

The Zeigefinger concept offers insight into the way Müller organises the appearance of images in her texts. They enter as a deluge of disparate parts but a submerged and mysterious organising principle or syntax lies behind them. This drawing of attention towards underlying patterns and structures of meaning is an important element of Müller's work with collage, too, which she uses to draw attention to them. Her appearances in documentaries and public discussion of collage points to a performative

element in her artistic practice, using disparate parts to create a new whole that remains hermeneutically open; meaning is not produced but not confined.[113] Even though the source of the 'mechanische, präzise Unruhe' in her work is obscured, the selection of images and their placement in relation to each other is *in itself* meaningful: it exposes the contours of the logic that underlies meaning creation (*Teufel,* 19). Surrealism offers useful, although not precisely corresponding, examples of techniques for communicating a hidden logic and using apparently randomised images to engage and problematise the innate human need to create narrative, namely in the technique of montage and practice of free association.

Critics of Müller's writing often fall back on vocabulary associated with the analysis of film narratives, in particular montage. Writing in 1983, Motzan identified a 'bewegte Optik' and 'filmische Sequenzen', which form a 'kombinatorische[] Demontage' in her writing and Annemarie Schuller describes Müller's prose as comprising 'Wahrnehmungssplitter' (Motzan, 1983, 68, cited Eke, 1991, 16; Schuller, 1985 cited Eke, 1007, 482). The montage analogy is productive in multiple ways, most obviously in attempts to account for Müller's disjointed style and the sense of restless movement within the 'erfundene Wahrnehmung' of her narrator protagonists. 'Ihr Kennzeichen ist die parataktische Reihung, die additive Fügung, das Stakkato von Sätzen und Absätzen, von synkopisch geschrittenen Bildfügungen und abrupten Bildbrüchen, das den Text zerdehnt und den Erzählfluß ins Stocken geraten läßt', writes Eke (Eke, 1997, 482). Her development of plot also uses montage, with episodes tacked together in 'eine additive Reihung von Situationen' whose relationship is often established only in retrospect (Becker, 1991, 32). There are echoes of film montages in the fragmented city scenes of *Reisende auf einem Bein*, and certain images seem to function as metaphors for the viewer experience, such as in *Barfüßiger Februar*, where the view from a train communicates the dismembered and speeded-up vision Müller provides: 'Das Abteil fuhr. Die Scheibe hetzte Bilder' (Eke, 1997, 487; *Februar*, 5).[114] In addition to the conceptual usefulness of linear or syntagmatic montage to exploring the style of Müller's writing and description (or lack of it), a helpful metaphor can be found in the idea of vertical or paradigmatic montage, to which I will return later in relation to cultural memory (Saxton, 2010, 221).

[113] *Herta Müller: Ein Porträt* (Klammer, 2013) *Das ABC der Angst* (Jansen, 2015).

[114] A similar scene arises in the short story 'Faule Birnen' in *Niederungen*, where the child narrator observes the outside world as segmented images seen through the window during a car journey (*Tango*, 17) and in 'Überall, wo man den Tod gesehen hat', in which train carriages become flashes of memory punctuated by the light that falls between them (*Februar*, 101). The latter image is reminiscent of film reel itself.

The effects of montage on the film viewer are replicated in the effect that the disjointed and (apparently) isolated scenes and images of Müller's writing have on her reader. The placing together of different fragments removes any reliable hierarchy of importance within the text, dismantling any security about which moments are relevant to the plot and what must be attended to (Eke, 1997, 486; 2013, 102). Mimicking the workings of free association, the attention of the narrator moves unpredictably between apparently disparate impressions and objects. The reader must open themselves to non-intuitive shades of meaning and the potential that any detail highlighted by Müller might become suddenly more significant as the "montage"continues. Furthermore, the experience of montage is built as much around lacunae as around scenes and images, with each amputated scene and isolated image raising questions about context and the events to which the viewer/reader is not allowed access. Müller's vignettes of homeless people and other vulnerable individuals in *Herztier* are a prime example of this, as the moments of their lives she captures serve to convey the fabric of Romanian society without offering insight into the precise circumstances of each individual. These spaces for reflection are crucial to the relationship Müller builds with her reader and to her effort to convey deeper truths; as Apel writes: 'Nur in dem Zwischenräumen, im Trennungsverfahren selbst, verbirgt sich unintegrierbar das Wahrheitsversprechen, der Gedanke eines Unerzwungenen, der aber als ortlos und unwirklich erkannt wird' (Apel, 1997, 118). Müller sums this up in her essay 'Wie Wahrnehmung sich erfindet': 'Das, was fällt und aufschlägt oder kein Geräusch macht, das was man nicht aufschreibt, spürt man in dem, was man aufschreibt' (Müller, *Teufel*, 19). That this 'deeper' dimension of communication is both imbued with a sense of authenticity and held in the realm of the hypothetical is important (Eke, 1991, 18). Müller's style teaches her reader how to adopt her narrators' mode of perception and emulate the interrogative gaze which lies at the heart of her own ethical engagement with the world. The refusal of closure and certainty at the level of plot and the variety and multivalence of her textual images evoke 'a process of creativity which is deliberately intuitive and mutable', a *practice* of perception which probes the nature of reality (Kohl, 2013, 24).

This roving narrative perspective and unpredictable accumulation of meaning emulates the surrealist practice of free association. However, like that practice, the freedom and unpredictability of Müller's 'bewegte[] Optik' is illusory (Motzan, 1983, 68, cited Eke, 1991, 16). Free association is limited by the sum of the subject's knowledge, so the reader is limited by the repertoire of images they have available to them. Müller's texts

represent a similarly finite, if not neatly closed-off imaginary universe. Müller talks about the recurrence of images within her writing as a natural part of perception:

> Ich glaube, es gibt bei jedem Menschen ein Grundregister, das sich eingeprägt hat, das man sich nicht bewußt, aber wahrscheinlich durch die gefühlsmäßige Veranlagung angeeignet hat. Und es ist wahrscheinlich bei jedem Menschen anders. Und dieses Grundregister ist etwas, was wiederkommt. (Eddy, 1999, 331)

Müller continually refers back to this foundational repertoire of images, one which, crucially, becomes familiar to her reader and functions as a kind of key or framework to draw conclusions in parallel to the narrative itself. Images such as grass (which I shall discuss in detail) or the mulberry tree (e.g. *Herztier* 9, 11) recur so regularly as to almost become predictable; the attentive reader begins to experience the deployment of an image as a kind of déjà vu. Schuller's use of the term 'Rythmuseinheiten' goes some way towards capturing this sense of inevitability in Müller's image world, the way in which recurring motifs can feel like a completion of an earlier passage or metaphor (Schuller, 1985 cited Eke, 1991, 17). The effect of this – the repertoire of images and their semi-predictable return in certain contexts – is to mimic the workings of involuntary memory in the form of association and inculcate in the reader a sense of familiarity, not only with the images in question but with the affective undercurrents which demand their return. The guiding logic of the association begins to place the reader's own cultural and personal memory in a new light, echoing Benjamin's observation in his *Arcades Project*, that in the age of mass media and mass culture it is possible to have a mediated memory that one nevertheless experiences as real or genuine (see Landsberg, 2004, 19). The image world of Müller's texts are drawn into a symbiosis with the reader's cultural memory, which supplements and is affected by the *Grundregister* imprinted onto their awareness during reading (Eddy, 1999, 331). Her memory world becomes part of their own as images are rendered marked and the patterns and affects conveyed through their deployment provide a model for further reflection.

The final concept important to Müller's work with visuality and pre-verbal experience is that of the 'Irrlauf im Kopf', to which Müller has returned repeatedly as the defining effect produced in the reader by good literature. In her piece 'Wenn wir schweigen, werden wir unangenehm, wenn wir reden werden wir lächerlich', written for the 2001 Tübingen Poetic Lectures, Müller describes the origin of this idea in the wordless

alienation which attended her childhood fears and the necessity she felt to hide the 'Irrlauf' of her thoughts from her family and community:

> Ich dachte immer in der Landschaft an den Tod, kannte vom Besuch der Toten den grünlichen Knorpel an den Ohren, wo die Pflanzen schon die Zähne drin haben, ungeduldig mit der Verwesungsarbeit loslegen, mitten im schönsten Zimmer der Häuser, nicht erst im Grab. […] Es war ein Versagen, das 'Normale, so groß aufzureißen, daß es mit nichts mehr zu füllen war. […] Der Irrlauf mußte versteckt werden. (Müller, 2002, 8-9)

This erratic thinking, the slipping beyond the socially acceptable interpretation of the everyday, is a hallmark of the literature which she deems the most powerful and valuable and becomes a primary preoccupation in her own writing (Kohl, 2013, 29). Trying to capture the slippage which occurs with the intrusion of thoughts about suffering, power relations and, later, state terror – primarily thoughts relating to the threats to the individual and their body – becomes an ongoing goal which cannot be achieved through words alone.

> Ich weiß im Reden und Schreiben bis heute nicht, wie viele, und welche Wörter man bräuchte, um den Irrlauf im Kopf gänzlich zu decken. Ein Irrlauf, der sich von den für ihn gefundenen Worten gleich wieder entfernt. Und wie schnell müßten die Wörter parat stehen und sich abwechseln mit anderen, um den Irrlauf einzuholen. Und was heißt Einholen. Das Denken spricht doch mit sich selber völlig anders, als Worte mit ihm sprechen. (*ibid*)

This sensation of wordless revelation is something more than a moment of shock in which words cannot capture thoughts, it is rather a transitory sensation or progression of thought in which perception changes and habitual associative and interpretative practices are pushed aside. This experience is indeed beyond words, yet certain phrases, images and juxtapositions might allow access to them. 'Going astray in the head' in response to literature enables the reader to consider the slippage between the mundane and the fantastic which Müller describes, creating a moment of stasis in the realm of affect and

emotion which resembles a kind of negative sublime.[115] She believes that this 'deautomisation of ideas and perceptions' has a transformative power: (Eke, 2013, 102)

> Das Kriterium der Qualität eines Textes ist für mich immer dieses eine gewesen: kommt es zum stummen Irrlauf im Kopf oder nicht. Jeder gute Satz mündet im Kopf dorthin, wo das, was er auslöst anders mit sich spricht als in Worten. Und wenn ich sage, daß mich Bücher verändert haben, dann geschah es aus diesem Grund. (König, 20)

Surrealist thought offers a compelling basis for understanding both the 'Irrlauf im Kopf' and the one related aspect of Müller's use of images: juxtaposition. Where words fail, the combination of multiple unrelated images can communicate the sensation, emotion and wordless reflection of a situation. In the example above, the green of plants and the green of the decomposing ear resonate with each other in order to convey Müller's youthful noncomprehension of death. The classic example of surrealist juxtaposition and its inexplicable affective power taken from Lautréaumont could be replicated with any number of images in her writing. In his *Chants de Maldoror* (1869) Lautréaumont makes the analogy, 'beau […] comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie', an image later taken up by André Breton in his conceptualisation of surrealism (Lautréaumont, 1874, 289; Brandt, 2006, 76). Important here is that the image and its components are not where the power lies, rather it is the effect that the image produces as the juxtaposed objects 'aufeinander prallen' that provokes the viewer or reader's reaction (Bischof, 1997, 212 cited Brandt, 2006, 76). As Brandt writes:

> Diese Stärke gewint das surrealistischen Bild erst dann, wenn das Bild im Kopf des Lesers oder Betrachters einen Schock auslöst. Dieser Schock wiederum geht von den unterschiedlich gepolten Kräften der beiden Bestandteile des Bildes aus und ist desto stärker, je größer die Stärke des Spannungfeldes ist. (Brandt, 2006, 76)

[115] Following Lyotard, Steve Vine complicates the association of the sublime with beauty and invigoration in his reading of *Mrs Dalloway*, arguing that the traumatised subject cannot preserve the distance to the object necessary for self-protection in the positive Burkean vision of the sublime, instead experiencing fear, despair and the haunting of the present by the memory of danger and what the sublime moment seeks to overcome, *i.e.* death. The resulting 'terrible sublime vision' can pierce the surface of social systems (in this case interwar England) and reveal the horror beneath. (Vine, 2012)

The visual image, and especially the challenging surrealist image, can have a greater impact than a more complete description, in which ease of comprehension removes the tension and potential for shock described above.[116] It can also do more to communicate the sensation and the nature of a situation than the bare rehearsal of details. For example, in *Herztier*, when the narrator remembers her childhood fear of having her nails trimmed, the images she arrives at in her paranoid fantasy convey what is not said about the stifling and compulsive nature of the mother-daughter relationship:

> Das Kind weiß: Die Mutter muß in ihrer angebundenen Liebe die Hände zerschneiden. Sie muß die abgeschnittenen Dinge in die Tasche ihres Hauskleids stecken und in den Hof gehen, als wären die Finger zum Wegwerfen. Sie muß im Hof, wo sie keiner mehr sieht, die Finger des Kindes essen. […] Sie hat in den Schrank geweint. Sie hat sich die Wangen gewischt mit einer Hand. Die andere Hand hat sie dabei aus der Tasche des Hauskleids in den Mund gesteckt. Immer wieder. (*Herztier*, 14-15)

The nightmarish conjunction of love and the need for comfort with mutilation, confinement and fear is unreal and extreme, yet the reverberation of images is redolent of primal fantasies and the range of complex emotions which attend familial relations. The uncanny relatability of such dreamlike sequences is powerful in much the same way as the unexpected evocativeness of Lautréaumont's umbrella and the sewing machine: they point to something universal in human experience. Müller makes use of what art theorist Aby Warburg calls *Pathosformeln*, 'symbols encoding emotional intensity' which represent a 'storehouse of pre-established expressive forms' and in which collective memory (in an anthropological and semiotic sense) resides (Erll, 2010, 9; Hirsch, 2012, 22). The 'Irrlauf' is not a flight of fancy but rather a tapping into the undercurrent of reality usually disguised by mundane habits of perception.

Importantly, these moments of revelation and de-automisation are linked fundamentally to pastness, and can be conceived as one consequence of the attentive and critically-engaged 'Zeigefinger'. The awareness of threat and hidden meaning in mundane situations described by Müller as the root of her alienation is predicated upon experience

[116] This "shock" is also present in the neologisms Müller creates, bringing together unassociated objects to create challenging, highly visual, images such as the 'Herzschaufel' or 'Hasoweh' (not strictly neologisms, since the Herzschaufel is a term for a round-point shovel and Hasoweh the name of a brand of gas but sufficiently alien to produce a similar response) in *Atemschaukel*.

and historical awareness. Personal, collective and cultural memories form the foundation for her denaturalisation of the familiar since connections, once made, haunt present perception. In her first exploration of the idea, Müller gives an illustrative example of a man from her village who committed suicide while suffering from terminal cancer:

> Er hielt die Schmerzen nicht mehr aus, verabredete sich mit dem Tod. In seinem Hinterhof stand ein Maulbeerbaum, darunter eine Leiter. Jedes Jahr hat er seine Hühner angelernt, auf dem Baum zu schlafen. Sie stiegen jeden Abend auf der Leiter in die Krone, setzten sich in Reihen auf die Äste und schliefen. Durch das Anlernen, das wochenlang dauerte, war er den Hühnern sehr vertraut. Die ließen sich im Schlaf nicht stören, als er sich nachts in seinem besten Anzug an ihren Baum erhängte. […] Alle Jahre danach begann der Irrlauf in meinem Kopf, wenn ich den Baum sah. Ich dachte immer den einen Satz: Sie haben dieselbe Leiter benutzt, die Hühner und er. (Müller, 2002, 14)

This passage offers both an example of Müller's personal grappling with the *Irrlauf* in her own life experience and an example of how she produces these moments of wordless reflection. The image of the formally dressed man in the depths of despair contrasts with that of his well-tended, sleeping chickens and the two reverberate with each other to convey the incomprehensibility of the situation. The affective impact of the scene exceeds the bare rehearsal of the details to evoke complex emotions and associations to do with duty, trust and the relationship between the individual and the state, whose indifference to this man's chronic pain is emblematically tangled up with his treatment of his chickens.[117] The moment is inscribed and interpreted by the reader in light of historical knowledge of Ceauşescu's Romania, associations from cultural memory and semiology, and personal experience of similar instances in which formerly innocuous places become marked in memory by what has occurred there.

The fundamental importance of the past, not only thematically to Müller's writing project but also to its texture and poetic dimensions, cannot be understated. Her dismantling of existing structures of thought and claims to truth, search for depth in the everyday and quest to capture the fleeting sensation of knowledge beyond language in the

[117] He cares well for the chickens and their trust of him is poignant given his subsequent suicide in their tree. However their ultimate fate, hinted at in the phrase 'jedes Jahr' gives his training of them a sinister dimension. Similarly, their reliance on him and the homely image of them lining up in rows to sleep safely above ground does not eliminate their indifference towards his fate. Cosiness and routine are fundamentally linked to the contrasting fields of death and exploitation.

'Irrlauf im Kopf' are all facilitated by collective and cultural, as well as personal memories. Pastness lies at the heart of the individual images and metaphors which make up her narrators' uneasy perception and form the building blocks of her writing. In the next section I will analyse how these images function and how they are organised to create the 'mechanische, präsize Unruhe' which marks Müller's texts (*Teufel*, 19).

Circulating, Accumulating, Weaving a Web: the Movement of Images In and Between Texts

As I argued in my first chapter, Müller's prose is reliant on the structures and universal experiences of individual memory. Her choice of genre and literary influences, as well as the themes found in her texts all centre on issues of remembering, while the episodic and nonlinear narration echoes the unpredictability of memory as experienced day-to-day, moments in which the past springs to mind even though it is not actively being remembered. Her writing relies on the interplay of impression, association and sensation for its effect, mechanisms that reflect the arbitrary but non-random objects and images which become triggers for our remembrance and metonyms for our experience. Müller brings this impressionistic quality of memory to the fore and replicates it in her writing, where details of past events are remembered by her narrators as partial pictures, ranging from incomplete visions to disproportionately well-remembered details. Her writing is concerned as much with the sensation of memory as with its content, and the highly-subjective bodily (including visual) experiences which punctuate her work – the sight of a reflection in a pond, shivers down one's spine, the smell of rain – uncover the complexity of the relationship between memory and the sensory, adding to the immediacy and relatability of different captured moments.

Müller's prose also relies on memory in a more mundane sense, in the high degree of attention her narratives – not only nonlinear at the level of plot but also unpredictable in terms of how semantic relationships are created – require from the reader. Close reading reveals how intensively interlinked and meticulously designed Müller's novels are; metaphors and other associative configurations continue across and beyond her fiction to permeate the entirety of what I term her 'writing life'. The 'exhortation' to attentiveness Kohl describes as one function of the 'Zeigefinger' takes on a practical dimension in the rigour Müller demands from her readers as they try to orientate themselves within her writing. Deciding what is significant – what contributes to understanding the plot or to the underlying themes of her work – is intentionally challenging and subjective because of the

poetic density of images and epigrammatic nature of much of her writing. Short sentences, sparse description, and unexpected juxtapositions and shifts in attention confound any attempt reliably to pick out the sentences or textual images which might offer resolution. The sense of profundity that might usually attend the use of these devices in more descriptive prose seems ever present, with numerous phrases teasingly suggesting a sense of depth and insight which is always deferred. The beauty and intensity of these phrases and of Müller's composition more generally mean that almost each sentence could be taken as symbolic of the whole but would, however, lose all meaning when taken out of context. It is the processes of interrelation through images within Müller's writing that allow the reader to find some degree of resolution and permit the plot from texts such as *Herztier* to emerge fully. Returning to Marven's description of *discours* and *histoire*, the *discours* is the channel Müller uses for communicating the most essential concerns of her writing.

Critics have drawn attention to the multiple ways in which Müller creates meaning through the "movement" (recurrence) and gradual development of particular images. Analogies implying that her work is like a map ('eine geschriebene Landschaft, die deutlicher wird', 'a trail of connections') or a mesh ('lose verfugtes Gitterwerk') aim to capture its schematic quality and the way meaning emerges in a series of steps (Apel, 1997, 120; Moyrer, 2013, 185; Eke, 1997, 483). The three main patterns which I identify in relation to Müller's images and the emergence of meaning are accumulation (the way in which an image becomes more decipherable through its use in a new context or the revelation of new information related to it), circulation (in which an image brings meaning to a new context) and juxtaposition (in which two dislocated images reverberate against each other, creating a new affective reaction). The intricacy of texts such as *Herztier* reduces the usefulness of this as a strict analytical framework, however, and it is more helpful to think of these categories in terms of guiding ideas in a method of close reading that takes the full complexity of individual images and their respective semantic fields into account. With the possibility of decoding or judging the significance of an image emerging unpredictably in relation to its first appearance, association is the principle upon which Müller's work, and the three methods described above, rely. In the entanglement which ensues, processes of metaphoric transfer, the creation of a relationship between disparate semantic fields by the narrator or the encapsulation of events or phenomena in metonyms are given precedence in the production of meaning. Quasi-intuitive lines of association

contribute as much to the reader's understanding of the narrator's imaginary universe as the progression of the plot. [118]

Müller's Nobel Prize lecture, in which she recalls the changing significance of the handkerchief in her memory, is a masterclass in the use and reuse of images we see in her work. It is also an example of how she brings meaning or offers partial resolution to her fiction through non-fiction; the handkerchief had appeared as a prominent symbol in *Niederungen*, *Herztier* and *Atemschaukel*, but her lecture, and the essay 'Wenn wir schweigen werden wir unangenehm – wenn wir reden werden wir lächerlich' derived from her 2001 Tübingen Poetics Lectures (*König*, 74-105), create new connections through the processes of cumulation, circulation and juxtaposition described above. I will briefly outline the emergence of meaning surrounding the handkerchief both pre-2009 and in Müller's speech as an example of these processes. The handkerchief is, I propose, best understood as a fluid symbol relating to issues of mutual vulnerability and empathy and therefore represents resistance to the dehumanising pressures of oppression.

Müller identifies the origin of the handkerchief's symbolic function as beginning in the daily life of her family, and the routine reminder from her mother to take one to school. She describes this in her lecture as a substitute for explicit declarations of love and caring, which would not have been possible in her highly traditional community or for her mother, who was traumatised by her experience in the labour camps. This revelation reflects the way the handkerchief first appeared in *Niederungen*, where it functions as a metonym for the practical, unsentimental emotional labour carried out by women in the village. Müller represents Banat-Swabian women as a homogenous mass for whom 'weiße, gebügelte Taschentücher' are part of their uniform (*Niederungen*, 66). The duty of women to mourn and take care of the practicalities of death are also reflected in the handkerchief, which is a necessary tool but also a symbol of the emotional difficulty of the women's lives: 'Sie sind heute morgen fürs Weinen aus den Betten gekrochen, haben fürs Weinen gefrühstückt und zu Mittag gegessen' (*ibid*). Müller reveals that handkerchiefs were used in the preparation of bodies for burial: 'Wenn im Dorf einer zu Hause starb, band man ihm sofort ums Kinn herum ein Taschentuch, damit der Mund geschlossen bleibt, wenn die Leichenstarre fertig ist' (Müller, 2009b). This practical consideration of human dignity and the unsentimental,

[118] The deceptiveness of choice for the reader is perhaps the most complex aspect of Müller's writing. What feels like free association or imaginative reaching for a conclusion is steered by the constellation of images and the cumulative meaning she creates through the placement and repetition of images. As Haines observes, this submerged order within Müller's works contradicts her rejection of systematic thinking; the wandering eye of the 'Zeigefinger', whose 'Unberechenbarkeit […] jedoch die einzig mögliche Auswahl [trifft]' seems to be Müller's way of rationalising this internal structure (Haines, 1998, 116-7; Schmidt, 1998, 72).

dutiful emotional labour of the women is echoed in Müller's descriptions of responses to death in the city, suggesting it to be an instinctive gesture: 'Wenn am Wegrand […] einer umfiel, fand sich immer ein Passant, der dem Toten das Gesicht zudeckte mit seinem Taschentuch - so war das Taschentuch seine erste Totenruhe' (*ibid*).

The associations of mourning and day-to-day confrontations with sorrow and death are carried through the handkerchief into *Herztier*, where the narrator observes her Jewish neighbour, Herr Feyerabend: 'Er schlurfte und zog ein weißes Taschentuch aus der Tasche. Ich zog den Kopf ins Zimmer, als könnte das weiße Taschentuch spüren, daß so eine wie ich einem Juden nachschaut' (*Herztier*, 143).[119] The handkerchief here again takes on a metaphorical relationship to the private experience of sorrow, this time with the sense of a specific, historically-based cause. The familiar object repels the narrator because of her feelings of inherited guilt for German crimes against the Jews, which are evoked in the contrast between the phrase 'so eine wie ich' and the unblemished whiteness of the delicate handkerchief.[120] Müller's association of the handkerchief with the history of the Second World War recurs and is cast in a new light in her Nobel lecture, where she reveals the fate of her Uncle Matthias, a zealous National Socialist. When Matz was killed by a landmine in the Balkans, his parents received a photograph of his remains as proof of death before his burial in a mass grave. Müller creates a gruesome visual metaphor by making the tiny photograph of a shroud holding body parts into a "handkerchief":

> Und wie kommt ein Leichentuch im Gras dazu, auf einem Photo wie ein Taschentuch auszusehen. Und wie kommt ein Leichenfoto des Sohns dazu, der Mutter als Lesezeichen im Gebetbuch zu dienen. […] Der im Krieg von einer Mine zerfetzte Sohn meiner Großmutter ähnelt auf dem Taschentuch im Gras einer Handvoll angefaultem, vom Wind zusammengetriebenem Laub. Wie traut sich ein Frontfoto als Todesmeldung Leichentuch und Taschentuch, Mensch und Laub zu verwechseln. (*König*, 90)

[119] Herr Feyerabend appears to be a survivor of persecution, as his remarks about the use of the greeting 'Tschau' – that it reminds him of the Hitler era – and the information given by his neighbour Frau Margit that he only has 'his Elsa' (Frau Grauberg), who is afraid to openly admit her own Jewishness, further imply (*Herztier*, 143-44). Whiteness continues and is complicated as a motif in the passage which follows this moment, in the milk and down of the thistles which remind him of his wartime experience (*Herztier*, 143-44).

[120] On the very next page, when the narrator is summoned to an interrogation, her effects are listed: '1 Adreßbuch, 1 gepreßte Lindenblüte, 1 gepreßtes Kleeblatt, 1 Kugelschreiber, 1 Taschentuch, 1 Wimperntusche, 1 Lippenstift, 1 Puder, 1 Kamm, 4 Schlüssel, 2 Briefmarken, 5 Straßenbahnkarten, 1 Handtasche' (*Herztier*, 144).

The use of the impossibly small (the handkerchief) as the vehicle for the terribly wounded and dismembered body creates a juxtaposition that has an impact beyond the statement of the facts, while the mundanity of the photograph as an object contrasts with the horrific nature of its subject matter to reveal the uncanny haunting of her childhood by this familial loss.[121] Guilt, innocence and the idea of private grief in contrast to public history or collective memory are all evoked in these two passages, tying the handkerchief into a nexus of grief and unresolved emotions to do with blame and pointless suffering that begins to circulate within Müller's image-world of the war.

The example of Matz brings a sense of ambivalence to the handkerchief, as a symbol both of day-to-day caring (his mother carries his photo with her as a memento of her beloved son) and of the extension of that caring, grief. Openness to others, whether in showing respect to the dead or loving a family member, has an effect upon the person choosing to make these gestures and enter into these relationships.

The handkerchief's associations with sorrow, duty and the perils of opening oneself to others comes together in Müller's account of her betrayal by a friend, Jenny, who began spying on her for the *Securitate*. Bidding farewell to her friend after their dramatic rupture in Berlin (where Jenny revealed herself to be an informer), Müller recalls:

> Ich habe sie nach zwei Tagen zum Kofferpacken aufgefordert und zum Bahnhof gebracht. Und ich verweigerte an diesem Bahnsteig das Taschentuch zum Abschiedwinken, das Taschentuch zum Weinen. Das Taschentuch zum Knoten machen, damit ich nichts vergesse, brauchte ich nicht – der Knoten war ja im Hals. (*König*, 79-80)

The powerful juxtaposition of the knot as an everyday prompt for remembering and the knot of grief in the throat evokes the sorrow of betrayal and the loss of a past relationship.[122] Müller's refusal to use the handkerchief as a symbol of caring or comfort

[121] This alignment of the photograph with the everyday object of the handkerchief and routine of prayer corresponds with Marianne Hirsch's description of photos as 'points of memory' connected to the feminine, daily, intimate and embodied aspects of life (Hirsch, 2012, 22).

[122] The typical German expression for a lump in the throat is 'einen Kloß im Hals haben' – the contrast between 'Knoten' – 'knot' and 'Kloß' – literally 'dumpling' is even greater than that in English between 'knot' and 'lump'. The innocuous and soft dumpling becomes something connoting tension, complexity and entanglement.

represents her difficult but necessary detachment from her friend, while the presence of the imagined knot demonstrates the complexity of emotions involved.[123]

These developing connotations of vulnerability are reinforced in *Atemschaukel*, which brings together the function of the handkerchief as a mundane, feminine object established in *Niederungen* with the historical associations of *Herztier*. In an episode in *Atemschaukel*, which Müller reveals in her lecture to have been a direct borrowing of an experience from her friend Oskar Pastior, the handkerchief once again appears as a gesture of caring. Whilst imprisoned and starving in a labour camp in Ukraine in the aftermath of the war, Pastior went from house to house in a nearby Russian village trying to sell pilfered coal and was invited in to eat soup by an older woman. The woman, who had a son the same age as Pastior also carrying out forced labour, although in his case in a *Strafbattalion*, gave him an unused handkerchief made of delicate white batiste, that was 'eine Schönheit, die den Bettler *umarmte und verletzte*. Eine Mixtur, einerseits Trost aus Batist, andererseits ein Meßband mit Seidenstäbchen, den weißen Strichlein auf der Skala seiner Verwahrlosung (Müller, 2009b, my italics).' Leo Auberg, Pastior's fictional counterpart, receives the handkerchief as something at once soothing and painful, a visual embodiment of caring and the mundane comforts of familial relationships which are so distant from his experience of the labour camp. The handkerchief is a reminder of humanity and common vulnerability in a situation where vulnerability is an extreme, solitary experience.

The gesture of caring present in the covering of a dead stranger's face or the gift from the Russian woman to an enemy stranger in lieu of her absent son evoke the investment human beings have in each other's lives. This investment is instinctual but susceptible to being overlooked or actively undermined by regimes for which such empathy and such gestures work against methods of oppression and control. The handkerchief in Müller's writing brings home the common humanity and shared vulnerability of human beings, which is at once reducible to body parts on a sheet and as complex as the knot in the throat which accompanies betrayal. It is indomitable in its everydayness and therefore a locus of resistance to uncaring mechanisms of power. Müller reflects:

[123] Müller was relieved to discover from her *Securitate* file that her friendship with Jenny had not been orchestrated from the beginning. She visited her grave after reading the file and smoked a cigarette there as a gesture of forgiveness (*Onkel*, 63; *Apfelkern*, 159; conversation with staff from West University of Timişoara).

> Ich habe, seitdem ich diese Geschichte kenne, auch eine Frage: Ist HAST DU EIN TASCHENTUCH überall gültig und im Schneeglanz zwischen Frieren und Tauen über die halbe Welt gespannt. Geht sie zwischen Bergen und Steppen über alle Grenzen, bis hinein in ein riesiges mit Straf- und Arbeitslagern übersätes Imperium. Ist die Frage HAST DU EIN TASCHENTUCH nicht einmal mit Hammer und Sichel, nicht einmal im Stalinismus der Umerziehung durch die vielen Lager totzukriegen? (Müller, 2009b)

Beginning as a metonymic symbol of familial duty, the handkerchief takes on a historical dimension through its deployment in scenes related to the Second World War and deportation. Relying on the primary metaphor of acts of practical caretaking – cleaning, covering, waving – as gestures of love, Müller universalises that loving impulse bound to duty to include all spontaneous acts of compassion, which reflect a different, moral duty. At the same time, the handkerchief carries with it the vulnerability these ties that bind us entail, evoking the sorrow of betrayal and loss in the morally compromised figures of Matz and Jenny/Tereza. As an example of Müller's metaphors, it usefully demonstrates their circulation – bringing meaning to new situations, as in the case of the handkerchief in the hand of Herr Feyerabend; accumulation – growing complexity as new associations are revealed, as in Müller's retrospective explanations about her Uncle Matz; and juxtaposition, as in the irreconcilable visual metaphors of the shroud and the lump in the throat.

'Den Mais brechen und die Leichen liegen lassen'[124]: Cultural memory and the Concentrationary in Müller's work

Echoes of the Nazi era and the crimes perpetrated in the name of fascism across Europe are a constant presence in our visual culture and shared semiotics(Saxton, 2008, 4 cited Silverman, 2012, 212n). Antoine de Baeque calls images of the Nazi camps the unconscious bedrock of modern cinema, and collective awareness of the past burdens the cultural imaginary when it comes to certain objects, images and processes(Baecque, 2008, 1279-1281 cited Silverman, 2013, 9, 176). In films and literature both directly concerned with and apparently unrelated to the history of Nazi atrocities, a semiotics of the concentrationary comes to light in the realm of everyday objects and the built environment as:

[124] (*Herztier,* 69). I will return to the extract in more detail later on.

> European civilisation, even in its most banal manifestations, reveals traces of the horror of the Holocaust. The architecture of buildings, the smoke from the factory chimneys, a landscape, mundane objects, scars on the body, recall, in Proustian fashion, the death camps, as if the thin veneer of everyday life is liable, at times, to dissolve into the overwhelming trauma of genocide. (Silverman, 2006, 7)

In the immediate postwar period, as well as more recently, scholars and philosophers have called attention to this phenomenon and argued that it represents the real and continuing consequences of fascist totalitarianism, perceptible in the changed nature of representation but mimetic of a permanently damaged society. Müller participates in this tradition of vigilance and anti-totalitarian agitation in the aftermath of the Holocaust, engaging across her writing life with a sense of the past haunting the present at the level of image and being reiterated in contemporary politics. Critics such as Spiridon have identified the connection between Müller's interest in the history of war and collaboration and her preference for 'Bilder und Metaphern aus dem semantischen Raum des Thanatischen' but it is not simply death which haunts her work (Spiridon, 2002, 223). Rather it is the killing, corruption and violence unleashed by fascism which produces a landscape of horror, a death world concealed behind everyday objects and human interactions.

The term 'concentrationary memory' is a useful means to describe the political and aesthetic practices of those adopting an awareness of this submerged horror. Based in the thought of David Rousset, Jean Cayrol and Hannah Arendt, concentrationary memory revolves around the active rejection of the past as passed. Instead, theorists of concentrationary memory hold to the idea of the dehumanising violence of the Holocaust as 'a permanent presence shadowing modern life', and of the present as 'disfigured, tainted permanently by the presence of death and oblivion' (Pollock and Silverman, 2014, xvi; Silverman, 2011, 201). Within this frame, attention is paid to instances in which the past can be seen bleeding through into the present, in terms of images, affects, behaviours and structural qualities. Concentrationary memory's urgent engagement with the present, in which the post-Holocaust slogan 'Never again!' is supplemented with the monitory admonition, 'Watch out!', is combined with the desire to uncover buried history and

overcome the intentional suppression of memory perpetrated by totalitarianism (Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 11; Ackerman, 2014, 32). [125]

One essential element within this stream of thought, which also explains why the present is regarded as disfigured by the legacy of the Holocaust specifically (as opposed to violent history more generally), is the identification of the Nazi camps as a moment of irrevocable change. Like the opening of Pandora's box, the dehumanising activities of the National Socialists and the new world of suffering they created within the camp system unleashed a fresh potential for extremes of violence on the world. Doing "that" to people, seeking, as Arendt puts it, to destroy not only human lives but the humanity in living humans was a terrible novelty and created a world in which 'everything is possible' (Rousset) in those terms (Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 11; Rousset, 1947 cited *ibid*, xv).[126] Arendt writes:

> The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also to serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behaviour and transforming human personality into a mere thing, something that even animals are not (Arendt, 1976, 438).

Once more, the agenda of concentrationary memory differs from other strands of post-Holocaust thought by arguing that the threat and power of the Holocaust lies in the 'gesture of innovation' rather than its uniqueness as an event (Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 11). This innovation has made 'a new model that becomes a future possibility: that of total domination'; the previously unthinkable has entered into our accepted reality (*ibid*). The utilitarian logic of a system in which human beings as human beings are 'superfluous' (Arendt) means that people: 'are treated as, and feel themselves to be, mere things, cogs in vast machines of production, or are trained and manipulated to 'perform' in ways that are predictable and manageable, be that as consumers or workers within a logic of abstract profitability' (*ibid*, 15). Another strand to this transformation of humans into

[125] Arendt describes the camps as 'holes of oblivion', which were 'organised and planned… explicitly to make people disappear, to destroy people's capacity of memory' (Arendt, 1987, 26 cited Ackerman, 2014, 32). In light of this, the project of concentrationary memory – to remember and feel for the realities of the past outside the confines of historical discourse and sanctioned collective memory practices – is also a direct confrontation with the aims of the Nazi regime.

[126] 'Normal men do not know that everything is possible' is a line from Rousset's 1947 autobiography *L'universe concentrationnaire* and was used by Arendt as the epitaph to part three of *On the Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cavarero, 2007, 47).

automatons, totally dominated by the system, is the way that the logic of utilitarian (in)humanity can be camouflaged by everyday interactions. Agamben highlights the example of Primo Levi's story of the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz, the members of which were made to play a game of football against a team made up of SS representatives. This illusory suspension of the rules of the camp system and the appearance of the meeting of equals on the sports field is, for Agamben, a true embodiment of what he terms the 'Grey Zone' and of the horror of a structure which can be 'occluded' and 'passed off as normal' under the right circumstances (Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 18). The status and condition of the inmates working in the *Sonderkommando* are not altered by this superficial shift in relations but rendered all the more grotesque and inhumane by the forced performance of the men as equal competitors. Concentrationary memory can highlight instances in which this kind of structural and submerged violence surfaces and is inflicted upon people within modern society, pointing to its novelty and menace.

The obvious political intent of such moves, the desire radically to 'open up the becalmed aftermath of the war to the persistence of horror' and thus '(jolt) our faulty memory, which sees the concentrationary as passed (…) into recognition of humanity's new state of concentrationary contamination' is sustained within artistic production, best described in terms of Cayrol's 'Lazarean art'.[127] (Silverman, 2011, 205) Cultural products which practise concentrationary memory show the permeation of the present by the past through a denaturalisation of the everyday, which is revealed to be a 'husk or stage-set hiding unimaginable horror' (*ibid*, 203). Only by breaking through this veneer can one reveal what Cayrol terms the 'fils invisible' (invisible thread) that ties human life to the omnipresence of death and inhumanity (*ibid*, 200). Through a fearful imagination, or 'fearful anticipation' of what might come to pass in the post-Holocaust world, practitioners of Lazarean art are able to render the familiar other, shocking and agitating the present with the potential of the future (contained in images of the past) (Arendt, 1948, 744, 746 cited Silverman, 2013, 12). This anticipatory imagination 'knows that death lurks behind the most banal of images… and it is aware of man's capacity, now that "everything is possible", to turn fellow humans into everyday objects (fabric, fertilizer, soap)' (Cayrol, 1997, 39 cited Silverman, 2013, 44); denaturalising the everyday is a means for spreading this troubled awareness and combatting the return of the concentrationary.

[127] 'Lazarean' was chosen by Cayrol because it encapsulated the invasion of death into the everyday and the way in which the presence of death can go unseen. Once resurrected, Lazarus appeared to those around him to be once again a living man but he had experienced death and was forever marked by this knowledge.

In terms of form, filmic and literary works which depend on concentrationary memory are diverse but tend to focus on creating a sense of the uncanny in day-to day-life. Silverman describes Lazarean art as 'an attempt to tailor modernist devices (similarity, discordance, juxtaposition, simultaneity, conjoining the fantastic and the banal, and so on) to the new needs of a post-Holocaust art' (Silverman, 2006, 10). Revealing history at unexpected moments, shocking the audience out of patterns of thought, and bringing the unseen, violent underbelly of daily life to bear on familiar scenes are all central strategies of such works, which dismantle stable borders between the present and its "others" in terms of space, time and subjectivity. Metaphor, and metaphorical imagination are the primary means by which these strategies succeed, as comparison – in terms of the tension of difference as well as the shock of similarity – brings the concentrationary and the present together:

> At its core, the significant device for achieving this collision of worlds, or reinserting the past in the present and of creating this atmosphere of a landscape haunted by hidden (or repressed) meaning is the simple one of metaphor: the conjoining of distinct elements (and their respective contextual or metonymic associations) through a shared characteristic. (…) The metaphorical imagination – association through similarity – here created a palimpsest-like effect in which one scene is visible behind, or within, another. (*ibid*, 8-9)

Concentrationary memory, and to an even greater extent the formal and aesthetic practices of Lazarean art, are central to Müller's literary project. The promotion of vigilance in light of the past, the shock of revelation arising from the 'Irrlauf im Kopf', the reliance on metaphorical imagination and the enduring sense of horror beneath or behind (but never at a remove from) everyday experience are characteristic of her work, which betrays an extreme sensitivity to the concentrationary universe both historically and in the present.[128]

Throughout Müller's writing one perceives a preoccupation with the inherited semiotics of dehumanisation and new possibilities for the destruction of the human ushered into existence by the concentration camps. From her teenage confrontation with Nazi crimes in the work of Eugen Kogon and Jewish authors of testimony (see Chapters

[128] In Chapter Five I will explore in greater detail the ways in which Müller creates links between the concentrationary universe (*i.e*. the camps themselves) and life in other regimes, including Ceauşescu's Romania for the purpose of criticism. Here my focus remains on the role of the concentrationary, and cultural memories of the Nazi era more broadly in her creation of images and affects, rather than on comparison itself.

One and Three), to her denaturalised perception of everyday cliché, such as the saying 'Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund', which she links to the theft of prisoners gold teeth by the Nazis, Müller demonstrates a hyperawareness of the permeation of the present by the past which contributes to the melancholic, death-centred quality of her writing (Hensel, 1987, ZB2; *Falle*, 36-37). She has spoken of the way objects associated with her father were rendered uncanny after she learned about the Holocaust as a teenager:

> Nur es ist mir in der Zeit schon, als er vor dem Tod war, immer öfter eingefallen. Er ist von einem Krankenhaus ins andere überwiesen worden und auf dem Weg sind wir zum Friseur, weil er sich das Haar scheiden lassen wollte. Ich saß dabei; als ich das Haar fallen sah, sind mir die Bilder aus dem KZ eingefallen. Es ist mir ständig was dazu eingefallen, auch früher, wenn er sich die Schuhe putzte, der SS-Drill mit den glänzenden Stiefeln. Ein Tag, bevor er gestorben ist, war das Gesicht ganz spitz geworden, es war eigentlich nur noch ein Knochengerüst, und das hat mich dann an die Menschen auf den KZ-Bildern erinnert. Ich mußte plötzlich diese Identität herstellen und ich sah einen Täter und ein Opfer in zeitlicher Verschiebung nebeneinander. (Hensel, 1987, ZB 2)

This evocation of the past through gesture and physical triggers of memory follows the pattern described by Landsberg in her theory of prosthetic memory (see Chapter Three). Müller's deep emotional investment in remembering the past is combined with cultural memory and physical confrontations with hair, boots and the emaciated face of her dying father to evoke prosthetic memories of concentration camp survivors.

However permeated with horror, Müller's work does not present a passive, pessimistic view of history or an acceptance of the past as passed. Instead it promotes an active, Dalíesque critical paranoia founded in a practice of memory as concentrationary.[129] Bringing knowledge of the past to bear on the present, Müller makes connections between the violence of the universe of the Nazi camps and the features of the concentrationary which continue into Ceauşescu's Romania and beyond. These alert the reader and open up the potential for future resistance to its return. Remaining here with the concentrationary at

[129] Dalí initially called his method 'Paranoid-critical activity: [a] spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectivation of delirious associations and interpretations' (Dalí, 1935, 23 cited Iribas, 2005, 242). He spoke about a 'Paranoid-Critical Revolution' which would shed new light on human society and experience (Descharnes, 1998, 173-4).

the level of obvious symbolism, I will now offer a close reading of images drawing on the cultural memory of Nazi violence in Müller's work.

As demonstrated above in the case of the handkerchief, Müller's images often emerge cumulatively throughout a text and it is thus most rewarding to explore them holistically. However, when it comes to subtle visual reminders of the Nazi past, various isolated examples can also be identified. *Niederungen* sees perhaps the most direct allusions to the concentrationary in its descriptions of everyday life in the village and the haunting of Banat-Swabian culture by violence, both concealed and remembered. This is particularly noticeable in Müller's descriptions of the men in the village, who are old enough to have taken part in Nazi atrocities. In one passage, the treatment of stray dogs arouses cultural memories of the fascist era:

> Ihre kleinen spitzen Köpfe wackeln beim Laufen, und es drehen sich wässerige, ausdruckslose Vogelaugen darin. Es ist immer Angst in diesen Hundeaugen, in diesen Hundeschädeln. Fußtritte bekommen die Hunde sowohl von den Männern als auch von den Frauen. Doch sind die der Frauen nicht so hart, wegen des Schuhzeugs, das sie tragen.
> Die Männer tragen diese harten hohen Schuhe. Ihre Füße stecken darin bis zum Hals, und über den Schuhzungen festgeschnürt sind dicke, rauhe Schnüre.
> Von diesen Tritte sind die Hunde augenblicklich tot und liegen dann tagelang gekrümmt oder ausgestreckt und steif neben den Wegen und stinken unter den Fliegenschwärmen. (*Niederungen*, 24)

Here it is the boots (along with the reader's knowledge of the village men's link to Nazism) which create the associative link with the past. The jackboot is a common synecdoche for the Third Reich and images or marching boots recurs within cultural representations of the fascist era. The men's feet are "up to the neck" in them, tied into the boots with robust laces in a way that suggests their identification with the object and its deadly potential. The boots in this context are also a mundane part of an everyday rural existence but their use to commit violence, albeit against stray dogs, hints at their ability to go further and provokes a sense of danger. The indifference of the villagers to the dog corpses by the side of the road reflects the contradictory behaviour of the men who kill the stray animals presumably to protect the safety and comfort of the community but are apparently undisturbed by the rotting bodies. There is a sense of apathy to suffering in the

scene which adds to its disturbing quality and reflects the absolutist thinking of the villagers Müller describes elsewhere, such as in her essay 'Ticken der Norm'.[130]

The boots return in a moment following the birth of a calf and the delicate spreading of frost on the windows of the family home. The narrator repeatedly notices the delicacy and beauty of the 'Eisblumen', whose intricacy and insubstantiality contrasts with the harsh parental discipline as the mother slaps her for being slow to come to the table.

> Im Schneewinter blieb der Abend hell. Im Schnee glimmerte das Licht in gefrorenen Kristallen. Die Wege sahen aus wie Glaswarenläden. Wo man auch hintrat, zerbrach etwas. Und man ging in schweren hohen Schuhen und in Stiefeln durch das Dorf.
>
> Vater kam zur Tür herein und hatte diese durchsichtigen glänzenden Splitter auf den Stiefeln. […] Wo er gestanden hatte, blieb eine Lache aus zitterndem Wasser auf dem Fußboden stehn, und wo er ging, blieb hinter ihm eine nasse Schuhsohle auf dem Fußboden. (*Niederungen*, 47-48)

The destruction of the delicate ice and the reminders of this destruction that the father carries into the family home are subtly evocative of the earlier scene in which dogs are kicked to death. The actions carried out with the boots contaminate the narrator's perception of the family and the spaces that should be (but are not) safe from violence. The choice of the verb 'zittern' in the description of the puddles left by his boots evokes its meaning when applied to humans in day-to-day speech, 'shivering' in a more figurative sense of responding to fear as well as the literal movement. Read as a concentrationary image this scene also contains reverberations of Nazi violence. The 'Glaswarenläden' touch upon the destruction of property and intimidation that took place under fascist rule, with the forever-marked word 'Kristall' harking back to the specific violent acts of *Kristallnacht*.

Finally, there is a scene which subtly evokes the racist discourses and genocidal methods of the Third Reich, as the men take measures against the spread of a fungus affecting fruit trees:

[130] This rigid division of the world into 'normal' and 'nicht normal', useful and not useful, acceptable and unacceptable is reflected in the aforementioned practical and unruffled approach the mother in *Niederungen* has to killing animals she regards as vermin (Niederungen, 29-30, 76-78). This practicality takes on a disturbing aspect when considered against Arendt's ideas about utilitarian logic and ingrained acceptance of life's value reduced to its function. Müller seems implicitly to question what their pragmatism would lead them to decide if faced with a human life, since they are capable of destroying animals simply because they serve no purpose.

> Und wenn die Obstbäume erkranken, sagen die Männer im Dorf, dass wieder der verfluchte Pilz aus dem Wald da ist. Sie mischen ihre grünen giftigen Spritzmittel, die Bläschen auf den Blättern bilden und den Nerv verbrennen. Die Blätter werden rauh und löcherig wie Siebe. Und an die zerschundenen Ränder binden die Spinnen ihre weißen Speichelnetze an. (*Niederungen*, 24)

This scene creates a feeling of discomfort in the reader. The manner in which Müller describes the use of poison and the narrator's conviction that it is the cure which destroys the leaves rather than the fungus makes the men's actions appear unjustified and even sinister, and the use of the phrase 'verfluchte Pilz' carries unavoidable connotations. Combined with the idea of invasion from outside, the expression evokes the racist propaganda of the Nazi regime and the image of the Jew as 'Giftpilz' which circulated during the era.[131] In juxtaposition with this the 'grünen giftigen Spritzmittel' evoke associations with poisonous gas, although it is most likely the ubiquitous chlorine of WWI, rather than the colourless hydrogen cyanide of Zyklon B from which we draw our cultural image of gas as green. The phrase 'den Nerv verbrennen' reinforces this association in the choice to use the potentially human 'Nerv', as opposed to the less ambiguous 'Blattnerv', to describe the veins in the leaves.

The uncanny sense of haunting which pervades the narrator's description of mundane human activities finds confirmation elsewhere in moments in which the horrors of the present regime (and the historical abuse of humanity it reiterates) burst into daily life. What mainly remains at the level of critical paranoia and imagined connection-making is made shockingly real in moments where the everyday routine of the state fails to obscure the reality of violence that underpins it. The most prominent example of this is the disappearance of some of the narrator's acquaintances who, she deduces, have met their deaths attempting to cross the border.

> Und unten auf dem Boden [der Fabrik] gingen Schuhe, die das Land nur in der Flucht verlassen durften. […] Pauls Schuhe gingen nicht mehr hier. Seit vorgestern kam er nicht mehr zur Arbeit. Durch sein Verschwinden wurde sein Geheimnis

[131] *Der Giftpilz* was a children's propaganda book written by Ernst Hiemer in 1938 which has become notorious as an example of racist propaganda. Its illustrations, by Philipp Ruprecht, combine highly racialised images of Jews with elements from fairytales, including the anthropomorphised toadstool of the title.

> zum Klatsch. Alle meinten seinen Tod zu kennen. Sie sahen in der mißglückten Flucht einen gewöhnlichen Wunsch, der mal den einen, mal den anderen in den Tod riß. […] Ein Tod so billig wie ein Loch in der Tasche: Man steckte die Hand hinein, und der ganze Körper wurde mitgezogen. […] Ungewiß blieb in der Fabrik nur der Todesort: War es Mais, Himmel, Wasser oder ein Güterzug, was Paul, als Allerletztes, von der Welt gesehen hat. (*Herztier*, 141-42)[132]

The recurrent images of agricultural fields bearing evidence of death in texts like *Herztier* and *Fuchs* must be seen as a continuation of Müller's response to the Romanian fascist past I described in Chapter Three.

Occasionally, living victims of the present day concentrationary universe become visible, such as in the episode in which Kurt encounters a man on the run who becomes a symbol of the concentrationary universe at work within the state. Presumably an escaped prisoner, the man appears during a break at the abattoir, asking for help:

> Die Arbeiter hatten Pause und liefen in die große Halle, um sich aufzuwärmen. Kurt ging nicht mit, weil er nicht sehen wollte, wie sie Blut trinken. Er ging im Hof hin und her und schaute den Himmel an. Als er umkehrte, hörte er eine Stimme. Sie verlangte Kleider. Als die Stimme schwieg, sah Kurt einen kahlgeschorenen Mann im Gestrüpp. Er trug nur Winterunterwäsche.
>
> Erst nach der Pause, als die Arbeiter bis zum Hals im Graben standen, ging Kurt wieder zum Gestrüpp. Er pißte und legte eine Hose und eine Jacke hin. Der Kahlgeschorene war weg.
>
> Am Abend ging Kurt noch einmal am Gebüsch vorbei, die Kleider waren verschwunden. Polizei und Armee suchten die Gegend ab. Am nächsten Morgen auch das Dorf. Die Arbeiter im Schlachthaus sagten, auf dem Rübenfeld hinter dem Schlachthaus wurde eine Häftlingsmütze gefunden. (*Herztier*, 114-15)

Here Müller creates the sense of a parallel universe of concentrationary experience breaking through into the everyday, with the disembodied voice, partially-clothed body and shaven head of the man forming a purposely non-specific and delocalised image of a prisoner. The lack of physical details given about the man and the absence of any

[132] This passage's focus on shoes is reminiscent of, and supports, Landsberg's identification of them as part of an iconography of the Holocaust and absent bodies (Landsberg, 1997, 71, 79, see Chapter Three).

knowledge about his identity or other witnesses to his appearance makes Kurt's encounter with him seem unreal, as if the man could have been from any time and place. This momentary interruption of daily routine by the (faceless) face of the regime's victims renders the whole scene uncanny, inviting a reading of what else might go unseen in similarly anonymous spaces across Romania.[133]

The related theories of concentrationary memory and Lazarean art provide a useful framework for analysing Müller's work and especially the way she uses imagery to denaturalise the everyday. She engages in concentrationary memory work, opening up the present to the past and alerting her reader to the submerged horror of human relations. Symbolism related to the Nazi past provides a central resource for her creation of images and the evocation of this horror but Müller uses it to show that that past is not over. The violence and destruction of totalitarianism continues into Ceauşescu's communist regime and the utilitarian thinking which resulted in the innovation of the Holocaust persists, not least in the mentality of the Banat-Swabian villagers. Episodes across her writing life are saturated with the awareness of structural violence and dehumanisation. In the following section I will move on from the discussion of imagery directly related to Nazism to address networks and images which evoke this dehumanising tendency more abstractly. Here the concentrationary resides in the affective, underlying patterns and structures of the text, which create unease and communicate essential truths about the nature of the Ceauşescu regime.

Tracking dehumanisation: Three images from *Herztier*

As explored above, concentrationary memories do not necessitate direct references to the Nazi past or even the concentration camp systems of other regimes. Instead they emerge at moments of dehumanisation, of illusory agency in the face of overwhelming power and in the destruction of the human in the human being. The instrumentalisation of individuals by regimes and other social or economic structures such as capitalism contains within it a violence that was refined to its limit in the camps of the Nazi regime, whose barbaric history finds iterations in present-day social relations. At a textual level, the concentrationary is expressed in combinations of images, silences and affects rather than

[133] Müller's choice of a 'Rübenfeld' as the place where the prisoner's cap is found lying takes on a greater significance when considered alongside the parallel 'Rübenfeld' scenes in *Niederungen* (9, 11-12; 102). In Chapter Five I discuss her use of deterritorialised spaces such as these to create a sense of individual unwitnessed moments of history and the breadth of unknown historical suffering.

communicated through overt comparison. In this section, I will deal with three central image networks from Müller's *Herztier*: grass and weeds, the vampiric, and offal to develop a picture of a theme I term obscene consumption, analysing them in terms of their reliance on cultural memory and in light of the theory of concentrationary memory.

A motif which recurs throughout Müller's texts, with the development of its possible meanings taking place in multiple novels and other works, is that of uncultivated grass, a complex, multivalent symbol in her imaginary universe. As discussed, the destruction of unwanted vermin and invasive plants in *Niederungen* reverberates with the awareness of Nazi theories on race, as well as the implication of the parent generation in the crimes committed to promote racial "purity". The link between weed-like grass and the fascist past is further developed in *Herztier*, where the narrator's father's obsessive mowing of his garden appears to communicate a desire to repress guilt for his former activities as an SS man.

> Ein Vater hackt den Sommer im Garten. Ein Kind steht neben dem Beet und denkt sich: Der Vater weiß was vom Leben. Denn der Vater steckt sein schlechtes Gewissen in die dümmsten Pflanzen und hackt sie ab. Kurz davor hat das Kind sich gewünscht, daß die dümmsten Pflanzen vor der Hacke fliehen und den Sommer überleben. Doch sie können nicht fliegen, weil sie erst im Herbst weiße Federn bekommen. (*Herztier*, 21)

As is the case with other fathers in Müller's works, the father's bad conscience stems from his former service in the Waffen-SS, and the narrator's tense relationship with the father and empathy for the vulnerable plants must be seen in the context of this historical knowledge. She observes: 'Der Vater mußte nie fliehen. Er war singend in die Welt marschiert. Er hatte in der Welt Friedhöfe gemacht und die Orte schnell verlassen' (*Herztier*, 21). The parallel between his tending of their garden and the phrase 'Friedhöfe machen' renders his physical movements – digging, hoeing, weeding – uncanny, suggesting them to be possible iterations of his actions as a soldier and introducing the potential that the expression contains literal truth. The father's will to distance himself from any culpability and repress the past is expressed in this violent need to eradicate the weeds, which mirrors the violence the narrator imagines to have been part of his SS career (Glajar, 2004, 127).

The tension between speaking and silence is also linked to grass in the context of the narrator's moral dilemma, namely whether or not to speak out against the Romanian dictatorship. At the beginning she observes: 'Das Gras steht im Kopf. Wenn wir reden, wird es gemäht. Aber auch, wenn wir schweigen. Und das zweite, dritte Gras wächst nach, wie es will. Und dennoch haben wir Glück' (*Herztier*, 8). Here the grass is related to the restrictions upon free expression, although the ambiguous effect of "mowing" seems to reflect the dual modes of resistance to the regime: speaking out and refusing to participate. If grass here represents the troubled thoughts which cannot be expressed publicly then the ability to speak among friends presents the possibility of relief, but silence is also shown to bring relief. The shared nature of the experience contributes to the moderately positive tone here: the friends have each other's support and an outlet for their opinions. Later on in the text this solidarity is challenged as the group are sent to work in different regional towns. In an exchange with her friend Georg, the narrator responds to his growing bitterness and antipathy towards the people around him by observing, 'Mit dem Wort im Mund soviel vertreten wie mit den Füßen im Gras' (*Herztier*, 98). Grass becomes something that can be damaged, like the ice crystals in *Niederungen*, rather than the insidious invasion of private thoughts that it seems to be elsewhere. Throughout the text, the image of mowing and regrowth creates an affinitive link between the moral struggles of daughter and father, even though their positions and the relative morality of their behaviour remain starkly different.

Elsewhere, the weeds her father cuts appear at a moment of juxtaposition best described in terms of multidirectional memory. The narrator's encounter with her Jewish neighbour Herr Feyerabend, whose personal history is alluded to during their interaction, is one example of this. In their most important exchange, the narrator confesses her father's status as a former SS man:

> Ich hatte ihm, als er ohne Bibel in der Sonne saß, erzählt, daß mein Vater ein heimgekehrter SS-Soldat war und seine dümmsten Pflanzen abhackte, daß es Milchdisteln waren. Daß mein Vater bis zu seinem Tod Lieder für den Führer sang. Die Linden blüten im Hof. Herr Feyerabend sah seine Schuhspitzen an, stand auf und sah in die Bäume. Wenn sie blühen, fängt man an zu grübeln, sagte er. Alle Disteln haben Milch, ich habe viele gegessen, mehr als Lindenblütentee. (*Herztier*, 143)

The juxtaposition of the narrator's father's position as an SS soldier and Herr Feyerabend's memory of eating thistles, along with the earlier reference to the plants that could not escape (until they grew the seed casings later in the year) prompts the reader to imagine the contrasting experiences of both men during the Second World War (*Herztier*, 143-44). The simplicity of the sentence 'Alle Disteln haben Milch, ich habe viele gegessen' is a striking example of the way Müller uses a lack of commentary or direct relationship between words to render her connections more profound. Like the 'rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie', the uncommented placement of this image of the thistles and their milk (Herr Feyerabend's experience of eating them), reverberates with the previous images of the fleeing plants and the frantically destructive father to create a moment of shock (Lautréaumont 1874, 289; Brandt, 2006, 76). This 'Irrlauf im Kopf' relies on constellations of meaning created throughout the text but draws on the historical knowledge of the reader, whose attentiveness to meaning is tested and whose own associative patterns are rendered more visible. This historical knowledge is unpredictable but forms a part of the cultural memory Müller weaves into her images. For a European reader the implicit references she makes to the Nazi past and other aspects of history are fairly reliable but the webs of relations she builds up mean that readers without that knowledge can nevertheless access the affective impact of this unnamed cultural memory or indeed read their own cultural memory into the texts.[134] The consumption of these thistles which are usually seen as weeds is redolent of a struggle to survive and cultural memories of various times throughout history when famine led people to subsist on grass and other barely edible plants, while for the initiated reader the character's Jewishness raises both urgent questions and immediate possible answers as to where and when he might have had to eat thistles. The moment of shock and reflection which this juxtaposition provokes throws the reader back on their own ability to imagine and make connections, opening up a vista of unknown experience for consideration.

Here again the tension between free association and inevitability Müller identifies in her description of the 'Zeigefinger' emerges. The link between Herr Feyerabend's Jewish identity and his having eaten thistles is not made clear and the reader is notionally free to draw their own conclusions and imagine a possible scenario to explain the two juxtaposed elements. However, the information Müller provides, combined with previous appearances of the thistles and the historical background of Romania directs the reader, limiting their deductions in accordance with their own knowledge. Haines and Schmidt

[134] See Sievers (2013) on her popularity in former communist countries and China and South Korea.

observe the contradictory presence of systems of representation in Müller's work which on the surface rejects structures of thought, arguing that the repetition of details invested with metonymic significance in fact creates 'homologizing metaphorical patterns which […] can serve to narrow down, rather than open up meaning' (Haines, 1998, 116-7; see also Schmidt, 1998, 72). This applies to her use of allusions to cultural memory as well. The past may appear nebulous but the known historical background to her texts drives their interpretation.

Müller extends the link to the Nazi past (created in the case of the father and reinforced through the comparative tension between him and Herr Feyerabend) into the realm of the communist regime, where it sets off different reverberations. Pjele, the cruel *Securitate* official who interrogates the narrator and her friends, refers to the narrator during one interview as a 'böse Saat', awakening associations in the reader with biological discourses familiar from fascist thought.[135] She and her friends are an evil weed, naturally disruptive to the political established order and therefore deserving of destruction. The subtle equation of the dissenting young people with the grass which continues to be mown and grow back – both in the narrator's mind and in her father's garden – is disturbing. Those who stick their head above the parapet, whose vulnerability is represented in the fragility of the grasses, run the risk of being cut down without compunction by a regime that will not tolerate difference or spontaneity.

Even though the grass and weeds in most of these scenes are banal elements of the environment, observed by the narrator seemingly coincidentally, their recurring presence and unresolved yet evolving role in the symbolic universe of the text demand greater observation and consideration of the narrator's perspective. Across her fiction, including in examples already mentioned from *Niederungen* and 'Überall wo man den Tod gesehen hat: Somerreise nach Maramuresch', Müller presents plants as carnivorous and insidious, preying on unsuspecting humans and going unnoticed in everyday life. Her non-fiction texts offer further texture to the motif of grass and new possibilities for interpretation. In her autobiographical CD recording *Die Nacht ist aus Tinte gemacht*, Müller describes how she felt a sense of the uncanny in relation to plants and the natural world, fearing that they only tolerated human intervention into their lives – farming and other forms of controlled

[135] This view of human beings as vermin is also evoked in the sentence 'Unsere Herztiere flohen wie Mäuse' (*Herztier*, 89) and the subtle affinity Müller creates between the prisoner Kurt encounters, the rabbit Georg rescues from a cat later in the novel and the failed escapees whose corpses are plowed into the earth (*Herztier*, 214-15). All incidents contain the image of pursuit through an agricultural field and convey the sense of human beings forced to flee a destroying force. The network of images is redolent of the real experience of fugitives hiding in the landscape and their murderous pursuit by the authorities, both in Ceaucescu's time and in other times and places.

cultivation – because they were waiting to receive and feed off the dead bodies of their temporary masters.

> Ich konnte immer, wenn ich von den Toten kam, viele Tage kein Fleisch essen. Ich weiß nicht, warum ich das immer miteinander in Verbindung gebracht habe. Es war ein Ekel, es war eine Art von Angst […] Auch dass die Pflanzen uns fressen… habe ich auf dem Feld den Eindruck gehabt, dass die Pflanzen uns fressen, dass im Grunde genommen jetzt bist du auf dem Feld, du arbeitest und irgendwann bist du auf dem Friedhof… dann wachsen die auf dir und auf den Gräbern. Und wir essen das jetzt, den Mais und den Weizen, und das Gemüse, die Melonen: und wir essen das jetzt und die ernähren uns, aber die ernähren uns doch nur, weil sie uns später haben wollen und weil sie uns später auch auffressen wollen oder so. (Müller, 2009)

The recurrent sense in *Herztier* of the destruction of plants as the destruction of the weak by the powerful is complicated by this grotesque vision of the natural cycle.

A second visual theme within *Herztier* is that of blood-drinking, which emerges most strongly in the episode in which Kurt, who has been sent to work in an abattoir, witnesses the workers consuming cow's blood:

> [Kurt] erzählte jede Woche vom Schlachthaus. Die Arbeiter tranken beim Schlachten warmes Blut. Sie stahlen Eingeweide und Hirn. […] Sie spießten Kuhschwänze auf Haken und ließen sie trocknen. Manche Kuhschwänze wurden beim Trocknen starr, andere blieben biegsam. Ihre Frauen und Kinder sind Komplizen, sagte Kurt. Die steifen Kuhschwänze werden von den Frauen als Flaschenbürsten benutzt, die biegsamen von den Kindern als Spielzeug. (*Herztier*, 2009, 112)

The gruesome image of the workers drinking blood stimulates associations with the legends of vampirism with which Romania is associated. The desire to drink blood is also represented as communicable, as in the story of Dracula, with the children of the workers displaying their literal bloodthirstiness in the endless pictures of animal hearts they chalk onto the walls at school: 'Die [Kinder] riechen, wenn sie abends geküßt werden, daß ihre Väter im Schlachthaus Blut saufen und wollen dorthin' (*Herztier*, 2009, 101). The idea of

blood-drinking as an infectious prediliction and the intertextual allusion to Dracula becomes even more pronounced when Kurt finds himself in danger of joining the cultish workforce he commands:

> Ein Arbeiter hat [eine Eisenstange] mir auf die Hand fallen lassen, sagte Kurt. Das war Absicht. Es hat geblutet. Ich habe das Blut mit der Zunge abgeleckt, damit es mir nicht in den Ärmel rinnt. […] Die haben mich mit der Wunde allein gelassen, sich neben den Graben gestellt und geschaut, wie ich blute. Sie hatten Augen wie Diebe. Ich hatte Angst, die denken nicht mehr. Die sehen Blut und kommen, die kommen und saufen mich leer. […] Darum habe ich das Blut schnell abgeleckt und geschluckt und geschluckt. (*Herztier*, 133-34)

By trying to save himself, Kurt overcomes his previous disgust and drinks his own blood, meaning that he is in danger of erasing the distinction between himself and the blood-drinking workers; he is becoming one of them. However, the extreme and horrific image of the workers as vampires is simultaneously belied by the material conditions of the communist state, in which blood represents a valuable source of nourishment. In this respect the workers' "blood-sucking" is no more disturbing than that of the ubiquitous fleas and lice which Lola carries and which symbolise the poverty of the country (*Herztier*, 13). Kurt's horrified fantasy of infection relates more to the loss of self within the social order than any real fear of the workers, whose blood drinking is just as much a symptom of their malnutrition as anything truly macabre. The representation of blood drinking is a prime example of the potential disadvantages of a Western perspective on interpretations of Müller. The aura of vampirism and connection to Dracula is present in the image but she is also representing a concrete reality.[136]

It is worth noting that the Dracula legend was invoked relatively often by West German writers and journalists in relation to Romania under Ceauşescu, partially because of the coincidence of his appointment as president with the re-release of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in the late 1960s (Olărescu, 2008, 82-83; Petrescu, 2013, 59). If there is a true vampire in *Herztier* then it is the president, whose total domination of the state is feeding

[136] One critic describes the impact of this gap: 'Es sind sehr viele Erfahrungen – Alltagserfahrungen – nötig um zu wissen […] was gemeint ist […]. Nur: ein Leser hier [im Westen] hat nicht den nötigen Hintergrund, um das alles zu wissen (Vogl, 1989, 5 cited White, 2002, 180). Sievers discusses her use of references aimed at a Romanian or non-Western audience, such as red newspapers, which were published on public holidays (Egbers, 1989 cited Sievers, 2013, 187).

off and corrupting its inhabitants (Haines, 2013a, 89, 93).[137] He appears in spectral form in a scene in the student halls of residence, where the narrator, fresh from a discussion about the dictator's rumoured illnesses, opens the fridge:

> Seit Lolas Tod lagen keine Zungen und Nieren im Kühlschrank. Aber ich sah und roch sie. Ich stellte mir vor dem offenen Kühlschrank einen durchsichtigen Mann vor. Der Durchsichtige war krank und hatte, *um länger zu leben, die Eingeweide gesunder Tiere gestohlen*. Ich sah sein Herztier. Es hing eingeschlossen in der Glühbirne. Es war gekrümmt und müde. Ich schlug den Kühlschrank zu, weil das Herztier nicht gestohlen war. Es konnte nur sein eigenes sein, es war häßlicher als die Eingeweide aller Tiere dieser Welt. (*Herztier*, 2009, 70, my emphasis)

Like the vampires of legend, this apparition of the dictator is sustained by draining life from other animals but is itself wasted and deformed. The ugliness of his 'Herztier', his inner self, symbolises his evil nature and the disfiguring effect upon him of the crimes he has committed. The opening of the fridge and the narrator's opportunity to view him (albeit imaginatively) in his "true" state is redolent of moments in films where the vampire is viewed in his coffin during the day: the protective aura of his diabolical power is temporarily reduced and he is revealed as something weak and parasitical (Senf, 2002, 24). This passage sits within the network of imagery of body parts and the consumption of offal, including the blood drunk by the slaughtermen and the items gifted to Lola by her anonymous lovers. Ceauşescu is implicated both directly, as the leader who is responsible for the deprivation in the land, and metaphorically, as the paranormal source of the horror and evil sensed by the narrator. In her imagination he is a man-eater and thief, cannabalising the healthy to survive.

The theme of blood-drinking and parasitical survival ties into Müller's overarching criticism of the communist system in *Herztier*. The dictator's horrific consumption of body parts powerfully conveys the instrumentalisation of human bodies by the regime, literalising the fact that within this system, individuals are valued only for their usefulness. Their labour is channelled into producing goods from which they do not benefit and which instead provide sustenance for others. It is 'pure exploitation, unmitigated by any logic

[137] Critics make a connection between Dracula's medieval, anti-democratic attitudes and his contemptuous instrumentalisation of his subjects and followers, whom he uses as a source of nutrition and discards once they have outlived their usefulness (Senf, 2002, 24). Müller's evocation of the Dracula legend also contains this socioeconomic dimension; the cruelty and domination of common people by the undead nobleman reflects absolutist power of Ceauşescu.

other than use and profit' (Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 15).[138] The vision of workers as vulnerable to the whims and predatory desires of the ruling elites (epitomised by the dictator) is also tied up with their representation as a group. An animalistic drive for survival dominates Müller's view of life in Romania for the working classes, where brutality and impulsive behaviour are evidence of the impact of the regime on the lives and social behaviour of individuals.

For the most part, the city's inhabitants in *Herztier* are represented as an undifferentiated mass, whose characteristics correspond to the prejudices voiced against Romanians by the German villagers in Müller's other works.[139] They are dirty, drunk and engage in casual sex, carrying out their work with minimal enthusiasm and a determination to steal as much as possible:

> Das Proletariat der Blechschafe und Holzmelonen ging nach der Schicht in die erste Kneipe. Immer im Rudel in den Sommergarten einer Bodega. Während sich die schweren Körper auf die Stühle fallen ließen, wendete der Kellner das rote Tischtuch. Korken, Brotrinden und Knochen fielen auf den Boden neben die Blumenkübel. Das Grüne war verdorrt, die Erde aufgewühlt von eilig ausgedrückten Zigaretten. Am Zaun der Bodega hingen Geranientöpfe mit nackten Stielen. An den Spitzen wuchsen drei, vier junge Blätter nach. […] Die Männer torkelten und schrien sich an, bevor sie sich leere Flaschen auf den Kopf schlugen. Sie bluteten. Wenn ein Zahn zu Boden fiel, lachten sie, als hätte jemand einen Knopf verloren. Einer bückte sich, hob den Zahn auf und warf ihn in sein Glas. Weil das Glück brachte, kam der Zahn von einem Glas ins andere. Jeder wollte ihn. (*Herztier*, 37-38)

Often entirely silent, these deindividualised workers seem to exist as brutish automatons, with little interest in anything beyond day-to-day survival and momentary gratification. The violent, animalistic quality which comes across in this description and the delight the men take in physical violence (not to mention their lack of concern for their physical health) is further exaggerated by Müller's use of certain words and descriptions of behaviour like the fighting (above) and eating: 'Auf den Tischen dampfte der Fraß. Da

[138] The workers' exhaustion creates concrete financial gain for the state but the also possibilities for other forms of profit, such as individual enrichment of officials through corruption, the ability to claim that there is full employment for propaganda purposes and the reduction of citizens' capacity for resistance.
[139] By the 1980s, when *Herztier* was set, Romanians formed the majority in all large cities in Romania for decades.

lagen Hände und Löffel, nie Messer und Gabel. Zerren und Abreißen mit dem Mund, so aßen alle, wenn die Kleinigkeiten geschlachteter Tiere auf dem Teller lagen' (*Herztier*, 2009, 37). The use of the noun 'Fraß', taken from the verb 'fressen', which is only usually applied to animals, combined with 'zerren' and 'abreißen' dehumanises the way in which the men eat, and the eager consumption of offal is at once grotesque and realistic. Food shortages in Romania did mean that offal and offcuts were relied upon for sustenance, a fact that Müller turns into an uncanny signal of the regime's monstrousness (*Apfelkern*, 73). The scene reveals poverty and want in the 1980s Romania – also hinted at in the denuded geraniums, a link to Herr Feyerabend and his thistles – in a moment of fearful revulsion.

Although at first glance it is the behaviour of the workers which is most obviously revolting and disturbing, the real horror of Romanian daily life lies, in *Herztier*, submerged beneath daily relations. Returning to the idea of structural violence seen in the *Sonderkommando* football scene picked out by Agamben, it is the illusory nature of free agency in *Herztier* which reveals most about the totalitarian nature and destructive power of the Ceauşescu regime. This comes to the fore in the case of the workers in the wood mill and the abattoir where the narrator's friends Georg and Kurt are sent to work. In both places, the workers keep up a constant campaign of petty theft and fraud in order to supplement their income, but the futility of doing so and the cold comfort of pilfered parquet floor tiles or severed cow's tails in light of the worker's immense exploitation by the regime is laden with pathos. The government is in fact unconcerned by the theft of such trifles (although thieves would surely be brutally punished if caught), which make little difference to the overall balance of power. That the slaughtermen drink blood on the sly or steal barely edible pieces of skin and bone is of little import when they have no share in the meat they are producing and their children eat wildflowers and seeds in the hedgerows to sate their hunger (*Herztier*, 93-94).

Like the "rebellion" of theft and the toys the abattoir workers give to their children, the moments of freedom and pleasure the workers enjoy are also an illusion (*Herztier*, 112). The grotesque image of children playing with amputated cows' tails paints a tragic picture of the people's lack of ability to escape the extremity of their circumstances even as they try to provide a normal childhood for their offspring. A similar sense of inescapable control remains in the scene of the bodega discussed above. Although the initial description seems to demonstrate an almost bacchanalian abandon in the carousing of the men, the domination of their lives by the regime is not diminished but only rendered

invisible; their alcoholism and decision to spend their leisure hours in this way is not only tolerated but passively encouraged by a regime that depends on the apolitical mentality of its citizens. The fear and control which dominate life in the police state quickly re-enter their consciousnesses once the flush of drunkenness fades:

> Wenn sie am nächsten Tag nüchtern blieben, gingen sie ganz allein durch den Park, um sich zu fassen. […] Sie stellten die Füße bedachtig ins Gras und mahlten im Hirn jedes Wort noch einmal durch, das sie im Suff geschrien hatten. Sie saßen kindisch in den Gedächtnislücken des vergangenen Tages. Sie fürchteten, daß sie in der Bodega etwas geschrien hatten, was politisch war. Sie wußten, dass die Kellner alles melden. (*Herztier*, 39)

Awareness of the need to disguise their feelings and protect themselves from the inquisitorial observation of the regime is never truly suspended. Even during apparent moments of freedom, the men are on their guard; fear and suspicion have taken on physical qualities in their bodies: 'der Suff schützt den Schädel vor dem Unerlaubten, und der Fraß schützt den Mund. Wenn auch die Zunge nur noch lallen kann, verläßt die Gewöhnung der Angst die Stimme nicht' (*ibid*). The minor pleasures the state allows its workers protect them from political missteps but are by the same token part of the repression of dissent. Non-privileged citizens are only free to act within the bounds of a system which will never grant them any liberty; they are reduced to creatures whose behaviour is predictable and ultimately controlled; true spontaneity, defined by Arendt as the characteristic most threatening to totalitarianism, has been eradicated (Arendt, 1976, 438). The text's concentrationary awareness emerges in these moments and images of Ceauşescu's Romania at the structural level, rendering the exploitation and oppression of the people which has become normality visible.

A third motif which I have touched on in the discussion thus far is the recurrent use of offal as a multivalent symbol of life in Romania.[140] On one level, the ever-presence of offal is a reflection of reality in a state where all foodstuffs were difficult to obtain and meat was scarce, making the grotesquery of its placement within the text – as a currency to trade for sexual favours, symbol of the dictator and even children's plaything – one of

[140] There are also echoes of the relationship between internal organs and the melancholy tradition, which arises in the work of writers such as Günter Grass. His use of revulsion and food to express melancholic criticisms of daily life would make for an interesting comparison with Müller, for example in the case of the eels in *Die Blechtrommel* (Weber, 1995, 71).

those instances in which Müller's "surrealism" is revealed to be realistic, if unfamiliar to a Western audience. This makes the aura of revulsion surrounding the offcuts ('Kleinigkeiten') in the eyes of the narrator seem disproportionate and therefore purposeful on Müller's part, given how common eating such things was and given that the consumption of offal is relatively normal within German as well as Romanian cuisine: 'Wenn ich den Kühlschrank öffnete, lagen ganz hinten im Fach eine Zunge oder eine Niere. Vom Frost wurde die Zunge trocken, die Niere platzte braun auf' (*Herztier*, 23). Such disgusting detail mirrors the body horror in *Niederungen*'s scenes of animal slaughter (see Chapter 1), where the narrator exhibits an obsessive attention to physical detail and empathetic investment in the fear and pain of the animals. The reduction of bodies to their parts reflects the regime's dehumanisation of its subjects into beasts of labour and the dismantling, alienating effect of its scrutiny. The scene in which the narrator lists her clothes, possessions and body parts responds to this disassembling gaze and the crushing of humanity by the regime. She asserts her agency by reclaiming her body parts as her own: 'Alles war aufgeschrieben in Rubriken auf einem Blatt. Mich selber schrieb der Hauptmann Pjele nicht auf. Er wird mich einsperren. Es wird auf keiner Liste stehen, daß ich 1 Stirn, 2 Augen, 2 Ohren, 1 Nase, 2 Lippen, 1 Hals hatte, als ich hierher kam. […] Ich wollte im Kopf die Liste meines Körpers machen gegen seine Liste' (*Herztier*, 145).

Offal as a symbol of the body in parts is another important line of interpretation when considering its importance within *Herztier*, where it exists in contrast to the repeated image of the 'Herztier' or 'heart-beast', an abstract embodiment of the non-physical aspects of human life. Although never resolved in any way, the symbol of the 'Herztier' arises in moments of human potential, appearing to function as a combination of the "seat of the soul" within the body and the concept of human spirit as a collective attribute. The 'Herztier' can be external to the body and offers a vision of the intangible 'humanness' of each individual; their personality, their potential for action and their moral heart. If the horrific power of the regime reduces humans to their usefulness, labour and physical drives, and changes them from people into predictable bodies or beasts of burden, then the 'Herztier' is what cannot be quantified or utilised, what can resist simply by existing. The tension between the pulling apart of humans by the instrumentalising, dehumanising eye of the state and the "missing piece" of the 'Herztier' and the narrator's scrutiny of it within herself and others can be usefully interpreted in light of Hannah Arendt's idea of spontaneity and the human (Arendt, 1976, 438).

The common theme that binds together these various images is what I term obscene consumption, a theme which recurs across Müller's work. Denaturalised images of eating play into a fundamental sense of wrongness and allow the concentrationary – the memory of other instances in which human behaviour and life was violated and rendered wrong – to bleed into the story. Her narrators demonstrate a thorough and consistent disgust when it comes to the process of eating, an action which might otherwise be seen as the most quintessentially normal of human activities, that points to the horror submerged in the society around them. When touching upon food and eating, her prose becomes almost nauseating, lighting upon details and sensations which evoke all the most disgusting possibilities of eating. This shows in the recurrence of images of rotting fruit and meat in the village tales (Köhnen, 2002, 22), as well as specific incidents such as the butchering of the calf in *Niederungen*:

> Ein Dorf voll fremder Hunde war da im Hof. Sie leckten das Blut aus dem Stroh des Misthaufens und schleppten Klauen und Hautfetzen über die Tenne hin. In der Jauche lagen zwei Augen. In eines biss die Katze mit ihrem Eckzahn. Es knackte, und bläulicher Schlamm spritzte ihr ins Gesicht. Sie schüttelte sich und ging mit steifen Beinen davon. (*Niederungen*, 63-64)

Images of cannibalism, and specifically auto-cannibalism, recur in *Fasan*, such as when the carpenter's mother compulsively devours a melon that seems to represent the female body or in the image of the apple tree that consumes its own apples (*Fasan*, 14-15, 36; Bauer, 1996, 28-9; Bauer, 2013, 162-3).

In *Herztier* this perversion of eating is especially marked. The cannibalism in the narrator's fantasy about her mother eating her fingers, the blood-drinking and reliance on offal of the workers, and the ambiguous symbol of the grass and weeds (as a source of nourishment in extremis and as the malevolent consumer of humans) all revolve around the denaturalisation of consumption, while many smaller examples reinforce the sense of revulsion. The *Securitate* agents who eat "poisonous" green plums have been read by critics as harbingers of death and the father figure in *Herztier* is surrounded by repellent

food-images (Schmidt, 1998, 69; Glajar, 2004, 135).[141] As he lies dying of complications related to his alcoholism in hospital, Müller introduces the metaphor of a force-fed goose to describe him and his liver: 'Seine Leber ist vom Saufen so groß wie die einer gestopften Gans, hatte der Arzt gesagt. […] Der Vater war dürr wie eine Bohnenstange. Nur seine Leber war gewachsen, seine Augen und seine Nase. Und die Nase des Vaters war ein Schnabel, wie bei einer Gans' (*Herztier*, 71, 71-72). The associative possibilities within the adjective 'gestopft' are disturbing. It evokes the practice of the force-feeding used to produce *Foie gras* ('Gänsestopfleber' in German) and therefore images of forced consumption, of the excessive and unhealthy swallowing down of food against one's will.[142] This removal of choice in relation to eating chimes with the compulsive drinking of the alcoholic but takes on another quality in light of the father's history in the SS. Earlier on in the text, the narrator imagines his Nazi past in terms of a blocking of the throat, reminiscent of choking. The physical presence of past violence (imagined by the narrator) here reinforces the pattern of obscene consumption:

> Die Friedhöfe hält der Vater unten im Hals, wo zwischen Hemdkragen und Kinn der Kehlkopf steht. Der Kehlkopf ist spitz und verriegelt. So können die Friedhöfe nie hinauf über seine Lippen gehen. Sein Mund trinkt Schnaps aus den dunkelsten Pflaumen, und seine Lieder sind schwer und besoffen für den Führer. (*Herztier*, 21)

The father's alcoholism seems here to become an active method to repress the past (symbolised in 'den *dunkelsten* Pflaumen') and prevent him from speaking about it, while the idea of his throat being full of graveyards reverberates with the later image of the stuffed/choking goose. There is also a connection to the workers, whose drinking and eating protect them from saying something suspicious.[143]

This associative field of obscene consumption, in which eating becomes a perversion of something natural and automatic is a prime example of the way in which

[141] Previous iterations of the father show him involved in butchering animals (*Niederungen*, 63-64) and imagery of rotting fruit recurs in the story 'Faule Birne' (*Niederungen*, 108-09), in which he cheats on the narrator's mother with her aunt.

[142] Similar episodes of obsessive over-consumption leading to death occur in *Fasan*, where the carpenter's mother dies after eating her melon and Frau Kroner is addicted to lime flower tea (Bauer, 2013, 162). Bauer identifies these compulsions as relating to female experience and the descent into madness they symbolise as the only escape from the confinement of gender roles in the community (ibid).

[143] This image of an object in the mouth or throat blocking speech also arises in relation to the narrator, who experiences a similar sensation during an interrogation: 'Und ich spürte beim Reden, *daß mir etwas wie ein Kirschkern auf der Zunge liegen blieb*. Die Wahrheit wartete auf die gezählten Menschen und den Finger auf meiner eigenen Wange. *Doch das Wort* Tausend *ging mir nicht über die Lippen*…' (*Herztier*, 44, my emphasis).

Müller creates a concentrationary sensibility in her writing. If concentrationary memory and art are concerned with denaturalising daily life by eliminating the falsely comforting distinction between horror and the everyday, then food, as perhaps the most necessary and banal aspect of human activity, is a powerful sphere in which to do this. As Silverman observes in relation to the work of Cayrol, the denaturalisation of everyday actions was a fundamental aspect of the concentration camp system: 'The "doubling" regime of the Lazarean transforms all "known" objects into deceptive surfaces and sites of fear: familiar activities like drinking soup and going to the lavatory are life or death events' (Silverman, 2011, 204). Body functions such as eating, sleeping and going to the toilet are rendered important, difficult and dangerous in the environment of the camps and the literature that describes them, with every previously reflex activity turned into moments of peril or thwarted by the concentration camp system. The comparison Hannah Arendt draws between dehumanisation as perpetrated in the camps and Pavlov's dogs in *On the Origins of Totalitarianism* uses eating as a means to conveys the perversion of humanity that this produced: 'transforming human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not; for Pavlov's dog, which, as we know, was trained not to eat when it was hungry but when a bell rang, was a perverted animal' (Arendt, 1976, 438). A similar energy and affect, to do with compulsion and the human as automaton,[144] is present in Celan's 'Schwarze Milch der Frühe', the impure bastardisation of sustenance which the collective 'we' consumes: 'wir trinken sie abends / wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts / wir trinken und trinken' (Celan, 1975, 41, 42).[145] The repeated use of the verb 'trinken' accentuates the horror, evoking the idea of frenzied consumption and compulsion (external or internal) to internalise the corruption of the camp environment. The collective voice is tainted by the evil that surrounds it as the link between thirst/drinking and life is called irrevocably into question: the action usually most fundamental to survival becomes something which damages and defiles.

Müller's use of food to create a sense of horror within and behind everyday life plays into a collective memory of extremity and the disfigurement of primary human activities by anti-human violence. Eating as an activity and subject of representation is no

[144] This ties into the theme of vampirism Müller creates in relation to the workers, who are at the mercy of the communist regime and her evocation of the Dracula myth. Stiles argues that the horror in *Dracula* proceeds 'not just from the Count's repellent vampirism, but also from the looming threat that human beings might be soulless machines governed solely by physiological impulses' (Stiles, 2012, 6).

[145] 'Todesfuge' is an inspiration and intertext that recurs in Müller's writing. I shall discuss its presence in descriptions of the labour camp in *Atemschaukel* in Chapter Five and Antje Janssen-Zimmerman has pointed to its importance in 'Überall, wo man den Tod gesehen hat' in *Februar* (Janssen-Zimmerman, 1991, 238-41).

longer self-evident and resounds with a concentrationary awareness which is both semantic (food as non-nourishing/corrupted, eating as forced/non-health-giving) and structural (the transformation of the natural into its unnatural opposite *e.g.* 'black milk').[146] A similar effect is seen in the case of the 'Neuntöter', the toy which the friends in *Niederungen* play with towards the end of the novel, and which functions as a kind of metaphorical mise en abyme for the regime and its effects:

> Georg schenkte mir ein grünes rundes Brett mit einem Griff. Auf dem Brett saßen sieben gelbe, rote und weiße Hühner. Durch ihre Hälse und Bäuche liefen Schnüre. Sie waren unter dem Brett mit einer Holzkugel aneinander gebunden. Die Kugel schaukelte, wenn mann das Brett in der Hand hielt. Die Schnüre spannten sich wie die Speichen eines Regenschirms. Ich schwenkte das Brett in der Hand, und die Hühner senkten die Köpfe und hoben sie wieder. Ich hörte ihre Schnäbel auf dem grünen Brett klappern. Auf die Rückseite des Bretts hatte Georg geschrieben:
>
> Anleitung: Bei zu viel Kummer schwenken Sie das Brett in meine Richtung
> Ihr Neuntöter (*Herztier*, 165)

Despite being intended as a humorous gift, the toy, with its strings and weight, evokes the lack of choice afforded the individual within the totalitarian state. The friends nickname it the 'Hühnerqual', a telling appellation which highlights the frenetic and forced movements of the chickens and their lack of autonomy. The chickens are not pecking around in a field (the scene the design attempts to convey) but are trapped and being tortured by the movement of the strings. The affinitive link between the situation of the chickens and that of the people, including the four friends, who are being tormented by the machinations of the state, is driven home by a subsequent scene where they themselves becomes frenzied and fight over the toy:

[146] This kind of post-Holocaust sensibility in relation to food is a prominent theme in science fiction. Works which rely on this perversion of natural consumption and historical knowledge of human beings turned into objects for exploitation include the film *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973), in which mass-produced human meat has become the source of nourishment for the unsuspecting population of a critically-overpopulated future earth and the novel *Under the Skin* (Michel Faber, 2000), in which aliens operate secret farms to produce human meat 'vodsel'. In both, the idea of a parallel world of horror behind the fabric of an everyday consumer society (whether human or alien) is central, with the grotesque factory farming of humans to produce food redolent of the totalitarian destruction of humanity. *Under the Skin* is a compelling indictment of the intensive farming of meat, which, like Müller's contemplation of the slaughtering process in *Niederungen*, brings home the violence and horror which attends human consumption even outside fantastical or extreme circumstances.

> Und jetzt zerre ich wieder an Edgars Arm: Gleich reißen die Schnüre, gib die Hühnerqual her. Alle schrien: Hühnerqual. Georg sagte: Du schwäbische Hühnerqual. Ich schrie nach dem Brett, gleich reißen die Schnüre. […]
>
> Herr Feyerabend stand vom Stuhl auf und ging in sein Zimmer. Edgar hob die Hand über meinen Kopf. Ich sah unter den Hühnern die Kugel fliegen. Sie fressen im Fliegen, rief Edgar. Sie fressen Fliegen, schrie Kurt. Sie fliegen auf die Fressen, rief Georg. Sie waren närrisch, daß der Verstand wie die Kugel an der Schnur durch ihre Köpfe flog. Wie gerne wollte ich über mich hinaus zu ihnen. Nur das Spiel nicht verderben, den Irrsinn nicht stehlen. Sie wissen doch, dachte ich mir, daß uns gleich nichts mehr bleibt, als wer und wo wir sind. Da hatte ich schon Edgars Handgelenk zwischen den Zähnen, die Hühnerqual aus seiner Hand gerissen und ihn am Arm gekratzt. (*Herztier*, 167)

In this intense scene, Müller plays with the idea of free will and reason, creating a parallel between the narrator's friends and the involuntary movements of the chickens. The narrator strives to save the toy from destruction and seems to view it as the means to preserve their sanity by containing the insanity which has the potential to take over their identities. Although their growing agitation and her recourse to violence in order to regain control belies the notion that they are free from the madness of the regime and the effect it has on the 'swinging ball' of their reason, the distinction between them and the chickens is valuable to her.

This parallel between the chickens of the 'Hühnerqual' and their human counterparts recurs towards the end of the novel, as the narrator and her friends reach the limits of their endurance with regard to harassment from the *Securitate*:

> An dem Abend spielte ich lange mit der Hühnerqual. Der Schnabel des roten Huhns reichte nicht mehr hinunter auf das Brett. Das Huhn bog den Hals, als wäre es schwindlig. Es konnte nicht picken. Der Faden, der seinen Hals durch den Bauch heben und senken mußte, hatte sich verheddert. […] Das rote Huhn glänzte störrisch und dürr wie ein Windhuhn. Obwohl es nicht pickte, sah es nicht krank aus, sondern satt und versessen aufs Fliegen. (*Herztier*, 195-6)

If previously the figure of the chicken could be read as an allegory for the controlled and oppressive life of individuals within Romanian society, then this broken one seems to stand for the individual unable to function within the machine or participate in the repetitive activity of 'picken' to which it is limited. There is a striking ambivalence within the image, as the inability to function – which seems at first to endanger the chicken as it appears 'schwindlig' and unable to eat – becomes a liberating factor. Breaking out of the repetition of forced pecking, redolent of the Arendt's Pavlov's dogs and the compulsive 'wir trinken und trinken' used by Celan, the chicken looks scrawny (dürr) and its strings – the centre of its body – are broken but it also less constrained now it is freed from the obscene (because fruitless and forced) pecking of the 'Hühnerqual'. The chicken's 'störrisch' new attitude and the image of a weather cock, which is fixed on a rigid centre, contrast with the vicissitudes of the swinging ball and literal soft "backbone" of the tethered chickens. The red chicken is a broken symbol of rebellion.

The name that Georg chooses for the toy, 'Neuntöter', resonates within the text as a metaphor for the communist state and the situation of the friends who suffer under its conditions. 'Neuntöter' is the German name for a Red-Tailed Shrike, a bird known for its peculiar eating habits. Where most birds of prey hunt, kill and eat their prey as and when needed, the shrike (a songbird) skewers its stunned prey on thorn bushes, barbed wire and other spiked surfaces as a kind of larder, and in order to tear the corpses into more manageable pieces before eating.[147] Shrikes are known colloquially as 'butcher birds' in English because of this habit, which is necessitated by their lack of strong talons and curved beak, which makes tearing apart prey difficult. The use of this name against the backdrop of the 'Hühnerqual' and the gratuitous cruelty of the regime is particularly evocative, as it brings together themes of structural violence and affect surrounding vampirism, constriction, violence and dismemberment in the figure of the shrike's prey which, whether alive or dead, is trapped and exposed. The shrike does not only eat its fill but also captures unlimited victims as an instinctive act of self-preservation, killing to fill its larder. Reading the shrike as a metonym for the totalitarian state underlines the idea that cruelty and violence are intrinsic to the state's operation. Its killing, and drive to have the maximum number of prey animals at its disposal, mirrors the mindless reflex of a regime that represses and punishes its population in order to enforce compliance. The fleeting evocation of the shrike within the web of images regarding obscene consumption and in

[147] 'Neuntöter' is also a general historical term for a revenant or vampire (sometimes werewolf) in Germanic mythology, so called because of the period of time it was said to take for the corpse to reanimate (9 days) or because of the amount of time for which it could wreak chaos (9 years) (Meyer, 1903, 94).

relation to the ‘Hühnerqual’ functions as an epitomising image, linking the visual and structural levels of the text in a moment of interpretative shock. It produces the ‘Irrlauf im Kopf’ which occupies the centre of the vortex of horror surrounding eating and violence in *Herztier*.

Conclusion: The Potential Energy of the Past – Horror and Futurity in Müller’s writing

Müller’s critical paranoia bleeds into every aspect of her writing but especially marks her selection of complex images and construction of affinitive networks of objects and metaphors. With it she renders daily life uncanny and reproduces the affects and sensations of totalitarianism in complex imaginative networks that make them at least fleetingly apprehendable, if not comprehendible. Her motivation in interpreting reality in this way and the resources she uses to produce her images both stem from a markedly post-Holocaust sensibility: her personal interest in the history of fascism and a concentrationary alertness based in this preoccupation. She irritates her readers’ historical awareness productively, evoking the dehumanising cruelty that reached novel depths in the era of Nazism but continues to exist in the contemporary world.

The way in which Müller describes the alteration of her perception and the shift in signification brought about by learning about the Holocaust evokes Benjamin’s Angel of History, powerless to turn away from the past, which appears as an amorphous deluge of horror: ‘Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert’ (Benjamin, 1974, IX). Like Benjamin’s angel, Müller’s narrators are unable to hold the layers of time apart from one another, with meaning and moments of association arising irrespective of time. She shows that the Nazi concentrationary universe is present in contemporary Romania and the cruelties of the past and present represent elements within one continuum of dehumanisation which is not specific to either setting. Her narrators are unable to turn away from the wreckage of the past, which renders every action and object in the present potentially uncanny, haunted by its previous iterations.

However, Müller herself is far from transfixed and any sense of paralysis or helpless horror conveyed by her writing must be taken alongside the active and purposeful core of her memory work. For, as a creator of concentrationary art, she alerts the reader to abuses of power and teaches them to read the signs of the concentrationary pervading

modernity. She dismantles the view of history as passed and creates instead an all-pervading sense of the uncanny, which '(jolts) our faulty memory (…) into recognition of humanity's new state of concentrationary contamination' (Silverman, 2011, 205). In this way her writing also increases her readers' sensitivity to the structures and practices of the concentrationary in the present, using the past to point to the need for vigilance and to provide a reserve of examples which resonate with our cultural memory.

What emerges in this promotion of vigilance and in the images of structural violence in Müller's writing is not only a negative or deconstructive view of the world, however; evil is not explored for its own sake. Encapsulated in the horror-laden images of her writing and the frustrated human lives she portrays is the potential for more. The practice of concentrationary memory contains the possibility that the return of the concentrationary can be prevented, and that human behaviour can change to create a better future. Eshel discusses what he terms futurity in literature, a practice or orientation that 'creates the "open, future, possible" by expanding our vocabularies, probing the human ability to act, and prompting reflection and debate' (Eshel, 2013, 4). Eshel develops Hannah Arendt's thinking on history as a driver in *Between Past and Future*:

> Indeed, Arendt argues, the past is not "as in nearly all our metaphors… a burden man has to shoulder and of whose dead weight the living can or even must get rid of in their march into the future" (Arendt, 1977, 10). Rather, as a "force", the past "presses forward" (*ibid*); it is a resource where we may discover potentialities. (Eshel, 2013, 18)

Following this line of thought, the weight of the past becomes a source of potential energy rather than a force of inertia and suggests an alternative reading of Benjamin's Angel of History. Rather than focusing on the powerlessness and frozen horror of the angel, we can turn our attention to the 'wreckage' of history and reenvision it as a driving, positive force alongside yet apart from the 'storm' of progress in Benjamin's sense of destructive modernity. If Müller's use of the semiotics and cultural memory of the past as a resource for image creation is understood as an engagement with the 'wreckage' to which Benjamin alludes – the calamities of the past and their impact on our collective consciousness – then they are also containers of this 'force' that 'presses forward'.

In the novel way they communicate submerged structures and emotional knowledge, the metaphors and networks of images in Müller's work, such as those

surrounding obscene consumption and the exploitation of the Romanian people, force the reader to reconsider their position in relation to the past afresh and to analyse and question social conditions in the here and now. By offering new insights into human behaviour and analysing the manner in which humanity comes under threat Müller's writing is also constantly uncovering the potential for a different way of being, a world in which the innovative cruelties which have attended modernity are undone through human action. What form this action might take and how it is that Müller incites her readers to participate in it are the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – 'Vor unseren Gesichtern flog der Atem'[148]: Herta Müller's Radical Politics of Empathy and the Prehistory of *Atemschaukel* (2009)

Atemschaukel, the novel whose publication immediately preceded Herta Müller's award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2009, is also, unsurprisingly, the work which has gained her the most public attention. The international success of her tale of German-Romanian deportees and their life in a Soviet labour camp in the Ukraine in the immediate post-war period has broadened awareness of Müller's other works around the globe and enhanced her power as a political commentator in the German-speaking world. High-profile interviews in international newspapers and on television since 2009 mean that her readership is likely exceeded by the number of people who are aware of Müller as a public figure. The press hold her up as an exile, a victim of communist persecution and an outspoken critic of present day and historical human rights abuses. *Atemschaukel* was received by some as falling into this latter aspect of Müller's public activity, with Germany's controversial *Zentrum gegen Vertreibung* presenting Müller with an award for bringing the history of German expellees and deportees to the greater attention of the public (Haines, 2013, 122).[149] The lack of public awareness about German wartime (and post-war) suffering had been the cause of heated discussions since the 1990s, among prominent German historians and literary practitioners on both sides in the debate (Niven, 2006, 8-10). However, despite *Atemschaukel*'s subject matter, Müller's approach to the topic (as well as her choice to distance herself from the *Zentrum gegen Vertreibung* in her acceptance speech) means that it would be overly simplistic to see *Atemschaukel* as a text solely, or even primarily, about German suffering (amz/dpa, 2009).[150]

Atemschaukel remains conscious of the wider historical context in which the deportations it describes took place, situating them within the histories of both European fascism and communism to make them part of a panorama of historical interconnectedness rather than focusing on German suffering as some texts tend to do. The form and content of the novel and the episodes within it are influenced by literary traditions related to these overlapping contexts; the narrative structure taps into Holocaust and *Gulag* testimony in particular. It is a novel through which memory is revealed to be 'multidirectional' and

[148] (*Atemschaukel*, 20).

[149] In 2010 Müller was among the signatories of an open letter to the German government over the political position adopted by the Centre, which failed to recognise the experience of those forced *from* Germany by National Socialism (Kunert and Jahn, 2010)

[150] Müller later published a critique of the privileged status afforded to post-war German refugees within public discourse, contrasting the words *Emigrant* and *Vertriebene*, and pointing to the *Lebensraum* policies that preceded many of the stories of flight (Müller, 2013).

open to imaginative association in a way which challenges norms of representation and rationalist approaches to historiography (Rothberg, 2009). Furthermore, *Atemschaukel* is heavily influenced by Müller's existing imaginative universe; readers familiar with her earlier work read echoes of the Romanian state and the German village in the Banat within her descriptions of the labour camp, its inhabitants and their experiences. Themes in the novel, such as human vulnerability and cruelty, politically-produced suffering and the sustaining power of imagination, have emerged repeatedly across her oeuvre and go beyond the specifics of time and place in the text.

In this chapter, I present *Atemschaukel* as the culmination of Müller's wider interest in representation as a means for creating empathy and her associative bringing-together of disparate times, spaces and experiences for that purpose. Representations of the past and its manifestations in the present which draw forth connections and collapse differences between various historical contexts can disrupt existing conceptions of history and create space both for new perspectives and for the uncovering of marginalised narratives. By doing this they destabilise hegemonic narratives of history and enhance the ethical potential for recognising common human experiences and empathising with (known or unknown) others. Müller rejects any tidy notion of the past as passed, instead deploying a range of images and a narrative stream of consciousness in which history bears down on the subject in the present in a manner reminiscent of Benjamin's Angel of History (Benjamin, 1974, IX; see Chapter Four). *Atemschaukel* is the most sustained among many examples of Müller's efforts to uncover lesser-known or marginalised histories and is highly complex in its approach to historical interrelatedness and empathy.

This chapter is divided into five main sections designed to enable a rereading of *Atemschaukel* in the context of Müller's wider oeuvre and ethical stance. I discuss the central importance of recognition within her writing life and political activism, using Judith Butler's theories of grievability and framing to describe elements of the 1987 novel *Reisende auf einem Bein* and Müller's essay collections. I then explore how the momentary juxtaposition of different historical and geographical contexts in Müller's writing works to complicate existing European, and especially Western European, frames, opening up historical narratives on war and dictatorship to other iterations while also foregrounding the experience of individuals 'überrollt' by such events to create connections and render suffering visible (*Kartoffel*, 4).[151] Developing the theme of empathy, I then examine how

[151] 'Wenn […] ein Politiker, ein deutscher Politiker sagt: "Wir sind ein glückliches Volk", wird es mir unheimlich: Von einem einzelnen, der sein Glück hat, werden andere, die dessen und ihr eigenes Glück

Müller's choice of narrative style facilitates the close alignment of perspective between reader and narrator without allowing cathartic identification to take away from the critical observation of the latter's circumstances and the politically-produced nature of the adversity they often face. Finally, in the last two sections I turn to *Atemschaukel* and offer close readings of the text as a product of intertexts from Holocaust and *Gulag* writing. This analysis, combined with the theoretical frameworks of recognition and multidirectional memory, demonstrates the wider resonance of the novel, which draws together the histories of twentieth-century dictatorships including the Romanian communist regime under Ceaușescu. *Atemschaukel* is best understood not as a stand-alone text on the German deportations but as an open interweaving of diffuse histories and memories. It is both a meticulous history of the Ukrainian labour camps and a complex, multivalent depiction of the violence of all totalitarian regimes.

Recognising the Experience of Others

The issue of recognition is fundamentally important to Müller's ethics and politics. Her fiction, non-fiction and interventions as a public figure frequently focus on the extent to which her experiences and the experiences of others are and should be heard and responded to in the public sphere, as well as how individuals can heighten their awareness of the suffering of others. Her personal quest to be accepted and respected as a dissident upon her arrival in the Federal Republic and her well-publicised struggle to gain access to her *Securitate* file are documented in *Cristina und ihre Attrappe* (*Cristina*; Müller, 2009a) and she takes up various causes in the name of increasing awareness. Recognition also emerges as a theme in her novels through her protagonists' responses to environments in which suffering is ignored or silenced. In the context of Ceaușescu's Romania, Müller reveals how the atomising effects of repression and fear lead to the isolation of individuals and a sense of brutality – a lack of humanity – which she documents with chilling effectiveness (Eddy, 2000, 72).

Theorists trace ideas of recognition within a philosophical discourse of social living and concepts of the human going back to Socrates, stressing the profound implications of seeing one's fellow man as equal (if different) in his or her humanity and experience

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nicht haben, meist übersehen. Doch von einem Volk, das sein Glück hat, werden die, die dessen und ihr eigenes Glück nicht haben, meist überrollt' (*Kartoffel*, 4).

(Anderson, 1995, 16).[152] Levinas is a thinker whose ideas about recognition have had a great deal of impact over recent decades, particularly in his concept of confronting the 'face' of the other as a signifier of man's moral duty to man. Taken from his work *Totality and Infinity* (1961) the face, 'the idea of infinity that exists within me' (and by connection everyone else) is a force that 'invites and obliges me to take on a responsibility that transcends knowledge […] [that] clearly and incontestibly signifies an absolute ethical knowledge that is there from the beginning' (Hand, 2009, 42-43). Müller's confrontation of her reader with the suffering of others in moments of shock (rather than through characterisation and details allowing identification with the person as an individual) can certainly be read in those terms. Conversely, her sense of disquiet about Romanian society under Ceauşescu relates to the fundamental *lack* of recognition of the humanity and experience of others as a result of societal conditions, an idea she touches on in her essay writing. She speaks about instances in which she saw bodies in the street of people who had died and whom nobody had stopped to help, for example (*Apfelkern*, 24-25).

The inhumanity of daily life which Müller witnessed in communist Romania also heightened her awareness of small gestures of recognition. When, for example, a man falls dead in the street in Timişoara and a passerby replaces the newspaper which has been used to cover his face with a more respectful handkerchief, Müller recalls: 'Ich wurde sentimental in der Vorstellung, dass die Anteilnahme trotz aller Roheit dieses kaputten Sozialismus vielleicht doch so plötzlich erscheinen kann wie Falschheit und Denunziation' (*ibid*).[153] The basic concern for others, represented in this stranger's impulse to offer symbolic dignity to the dead man, is a moral foundation within Müller's writing and comes to the fore in instances which reflect her own life experience.

The sense that this intuitive concern for others is also missing in the West permeates *Reisende auf einem Bein* (1989), a novel which explores the underbelly of West German society through the travails of the protagonist Irene, an *Aussiedler* from an unnamed communist country. Müller criticises the lack of political and interpersonal recognition for immigrants through the voice of Irene, who describes people like her as having only a semi-presence in West Berlin, where they make little impact:

[152] Theorists such as Axel Honneth have developed ideas of recognition from a reading of Hegel's *Natural Law* and the thesis that 'the individual intuits himself as himself in every other individual', arguing that the affective sphere provides the means for reuniting individuals divided by social structures (the Law) (Anderson, 1995, 24).

[153] This incident may have been another step in the development of the handkerchief as a symbol in her writing life but is not included in her Nobel Prize lecture.

> In der Flottenstraße hatten die Menschen kein Geräusch in den Schritten. Und die Gesichter hatten in der Flottenstraße die Farbe alter Photos. […] Auch in den Augen stand […] Entfernung. Auch später, wenn die Asylanten nicht mehr in der Flottenstraße gingen. Wenn sie zur Post gingen, zu laut telefonierten, aus einem rauhen Teil der Stadt. Und in ein anderes Land auf Karten Lebenszeichen schrieben (*Reisende*, 30-31)

The implication throughout *Reisende* is that there is a semi-visible world to which immigrants belong, semi-visible because West Germany and its citizens take little interest. This indifference extends to political refugees such as Irene, who is met with scepticism by the authorities and a lack of sympathy from people she encounters. Her building manager asks, 'Wen haben Sie dort?' in reference to the dictator before responding, 'Von dem hört man nichts Gutes', the sole, and even then only token effort from a stranger to recognise what has driven her to seek asylum (*Reisende*, 40). Müller has campaigned for greater public recognition of refugees and specifically the establishment of a museum of exile to record the experience of refugees to and from Germany throughout history (Bischoff, 2016).

Aside from her personal feelings of being unrecognised, Irene also observes hidden, or ignored, injustice in West Berlin itself, noticing the poverty present in the city, and the lack of attention afforded to certain sections of non-immigrant society, such as the homeless and street children. When she first arrives in Berlin, Irene is struck by the flea market on the bank of the canal; it is 'einer der vielen, von der Stadt vergessenen Orte, wo sich die Armut tarnte als Geschäft', and reminds her of the conditions in her home country (*Reisende*, 68). The suffering of those on the margins is more visible to Irene, who has witnessed this kind of poverty and lack of help from government in 'das andere Land' from which she hails.[154] Her perspective provides a view of Berlin from the periphery which undermines the idea of the West as better than the East in real terms, *i.e.* for those who are weakest (Harnisch, 1997, 514).

The idea that those who have witnessed or experienced certain kinds of suffering are better able to uncover (or less willing or able to ignore) others' experiences of injustice plays a role in Müller's interventions into public debates. Her non-fiction writing and

[154] In her 1990 essay 'Das Land am Nebentisch', Müller writes about her own ability to discern which strangers she encounters are from the East, saying: 'Und es war wie ein Schimmer, wie lauter Dinge hinter den Dingen, was mir vor den Augen stand: ein ganzes Land hing an einem Menschen. […] Ich hatte es sofort wiedererkannt. Und ich hätte nicht sagen können wie und woran…' (*Kartoffel,* 10).

interactions with the press also express this concern with noticing and uncovering the struggles of others, often with reference to her own experience.[155] In the early years of her fame in Germany, Müller's vulnerability to persecution in Romania prevented her from being especially outspoken about the regime but interviews published immediately after her emigration to West Berlin in 1987 (a time when she and her associates received death threats and were still monitored by the *Securitate*) saw her boldly criticising all aspects of Ceauşescu's government (Traub and Ihlau, 1987, 157; see Chapter One). She and her friends in the West used the public's interest in them to raise awareness of conditions in Romania and the persecution of those who criticised the regime.[156] Speaking recently, Müller explained her drive to speak out despite the risks: 'Ich wollte nicht um den Preis des Schweigens reisen. Es war mir sehr wichtig, dass man erfährt, was in Rumänien passiert. Wenn ich hätte schweigen wollen, hätte ich auch zu Hause bleiben können' (Müller, 2014, 181).

Since then she has spoken publicly in various countries, including Romania, about the failure of post-socialist governments to bring to justice, or even to remove from positions of authority, those who orchestrated state terror. A 2009 article in *Die Zeit*, 'Die Securitate ist noch im Dienst', was particularly damning of the failure of the Romanian government to cleanse the civil service of former operatives, around half of whom made the transition to work for the new intelligence service, the SRI, after 1989 (Müller, 2009a). Her statements have sometimes led to a direct response from those she argues must be punished, with former *Securitate* officials taking to the press to discredit her account of their harassment of her (Connolly, 2009).

Müller began by mainly criticising the Romanian state and exposing the brutality of Ceauşescu in the West, where his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 had earned him something of a positive reputation (Deletant, 1995, 204-06).

[155] This idea of suffering producing awareness is also one which Müller raises in connection to the Holocaust writers who inspire her. In *In der Falle* she makes the distinction between 'Intakten' and 'Zerbrochenen' with regard to authors like Klüger and Celan. Awareness is also a theme within the work of these authors, for example when Celan describes his poetry as 'gifts to the attentive' (Fioretos, 1994, xv).

[156] In November 1988, to coincide with a visit by Ceauşescu to East Berlin, Müller, her then husband Richard Wagner and friend Helmut Frauendorfer were among the organisers of the *Aktionstage Rumänien*, international days of protest which took place in cities in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom and France in solidarity with the miners of Braşov, who had risen up in protest against the Romanian state the previous year (*Deutsche Welle*, 1988, 5; Klaus Bischoff, 1988, 17). Müller had planned to speak at the demonstration in Leipzig along with Wagner but was refused an entry visa by the GDR authorities, instead appearing in West Berlin while Wagner led the march in Munich (Herbstritt, 2009; dpa/ap, 1988, 6). In days leading up to the state visit by Ceauşescu, meetings of organisers were broken up by authorities in East Berlin (ibid). Müller had already been warned about travelling to the GDR by the *Bundesnachrichtendienst*, which believed she was at risk of being kidnapped by the Romanian secret police (Müller, 2013, 98).

However she would go on to comment in much the same vein about situations around the world, especially those she believed were ignored by mainstream media. These included what she saw as the historical failure of the West to take action against oppressive regimes, such as the dictatorship of Marshall Josef Tito in Yugoslavia and the Islamist regime in Iran (Widmann, 1995). Müller criticised the tendency of Western leaders to euphemise and downplay these leaders' crimes for political reasons (as happened with Ceauşescu) and advocated international intervention (*Kartoffel*, 14). These outspoken criticisms, which are above all calls for greater public and political recognition of the suffering of others, have to date covered topics as diverse as the Balkan War (Grünbein, 1999), racism in Germany, anti-Roma prejudice (*Kartoffel*, 73), censorship in China (Schultz-Ojala, 2011) and, most recently, the persecution of gay people in Russia (Brown, 2014) and racist responses to the refugee crisis (Müller, Hansjörg, 2016; Müller, 2015).[157]

The kind of recognition Müller demands from governments is contentious because of its potential effects on the political *status quo*. Recognition within the public sphere or by certain organisations is, aside from any moral consideration, a form of potential leverage for groups seeking redress for past suffering or legal protection in the present (Wolfe, 2014, 48; Dixon, 2015, 328). Interested parties are therefore generally reluctant to admit responsibility for historical misdeeds, for example in the United States where (belated) apologies offered by states for slavery sometimes included 'explicit disclaimers for their use in reparations claims' (R. Cohen, 2004, 187; A. Davis, 2014, 272). Müller demonstrates a consistent awareness, in both her non-fiction and public interventions of how suffering and the recognition of suffering are politically produced; of who stands to gain from denying recognition (Butler, 2009, 28). This can be seen in her criticism of pragmatism after the Second World War, which saw some former Nazis maintain their positions in West German society, and the silencing of exile experience. Germans who had remained in Germany after 1933 and become implicated in the crimes of fascism were hostile to emigrés and refugees who had not, because they represented an alternative which undermined their self-justifications and challenged the narrative which comforted them: 'Die ehemaligen Soldaten sahen sich vielmehr selbst als Opfer, als verführte,

[157] Müller does not limit her interventions to comments in the press but rather organises and participates in a range of events designed to raise awareness of the causes she champions. In the wake of the attacks on Hoyswerda in September 1991 and the Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots in August 1992, she gave readings at a series of centres for asylum-seekers (Doerry and Hage, 1992, 264). She protested against the treatment of Ai Wei-Wei by the Chinese government by staging public readings of his banned blog posts (Schultz-Ojala, 2011). In 2013, Müller spoke at the concert 'To Russia With Love', which was staged on the anniversary of the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya in protest against restrictions on human rights (Eddy M., 2013).

missbrauchte Generation, die unschuldig in den Krieg zog und geläutert nach Hause kam' (Müller, 2013, 100). The framing of public debate was geared around German suffering, and specifically the wartime of suffering of Germans who had remained under Nazi rule, whose experiences of exile received greater sympathy:

> Wer im Exil war, gilt in Deutschland bis heute nicht als Opfer. […] Diese von Hitler Vertriebenen werden unter dem Begriff Exil oder Emigration verbucht. Das Wort Vertreibung gehört nur den Vertriebenen aus den ehemaligen Ostgebieten. Sie heißen 'Heimatvertriebene'. Und die von Hitler Vertriebenen heißen 'Emigranten'. Es ist ein sehr unterschiedliches Wortpaar: Das Wort 'Heimatvertriebener' hat einen warmen Hauch, das Wort 'Emigrant' hat nur sich selbst. (*ibid*)

In her fiction, too, the willingness of groups to recognise the experience of others is shown to be limited by their own interests, as in the village tales (see Chapters Two and Three), where the crimes of Nazism are displaced within village memory by resentment for being used as scapegoats by the Romanian government.[158]

Within the public sphere, interventions of non-experts into political debates like these are seldom welcomed and Müller's earnest statements are sometimes received with a degree of exasperation by sections of the press (e.g. Thimm, 2010). Müller is not only unapologetic but rejects the self-limiting perspective that one must speak with authority born of expert or first-hand knowledge. She views recognising and judging situations as an ethical imperative and natural response to injustice. Writing in 1995, she makes this point in relation to the idea that people from the West had nothing to add to debates about the former Eastern Bloc, saying:

> Man muß in keiner Diktatur gelebt haben, um über sie zu urteilen. […] Wer seinerzeit die Panzer auf dem Platz des Himmlischen Friedens verurteilt hat, hat sich, ohne Chinese sein zu müssen, unausgesprochen selber einbezogen. Hat von sich erwartet, daß er mit den Demonstranten auf dem Platz stünde. Hat für sich ausgeschlossen, daß er auf dem Panzer oder in dieser Regierung säße. Dafür muß

[158] Language and specifically word choice are identified as important producers or communicators of frames in Müller's writing. This is especially evident in the story 'Dorfchronik' from *Niederungen*, which juxtaposes 'Dorfsprache' with common German usage (*Niederungen*, 125-138).

> sich niemand rechtfertigen: Wenn man dies von sich selber nicht mehr wüßte, hätte man sich moralisch weggeschmissen. (*Hunger*, 29)

To Müller, the refusal to judge – and to allow empathy towards unknown others – leads to ignoring injustice in other countries, on the grounds that it is "none of my/our business" (*Kartoffel*, 14-15, 45-46). Imaginatively placing oneself in the position of another person is a necessary and automatic moral impulse, which needs no justification.

However, theorists of contemporary society are quick to point out that "seeing" one's fellow human being is a complex issue in itself. Despite the instant availability of information in much of the modern world, recognition of the lives and suffering of others remains inconsistent for various ideological and political reasons. Judith Butler has discussed the inconsistency of recognition through the concept of framing, arguing that what people are able to see, to recognise and to conceptualise when it comes to others' experience is dependent upon how their view of the world is limited (Butler, 2009, 1). Selections of stories by the media, political discourses, public discussions and personal ideology are among the factors which determine who is visible and how, and whether, as Butler puts it, their lives are rendered 'grievable' (Butler, 2004, 32-33). In the case of the German memory debates Müller engages with above, *Heimatvertriebene* are conceptualised as victims, whereas people forced to leave Germany after 1933 are seen as having chosen to go; the frames of post-war German discourse were restricted in terms of who was worthy of sympathy. Examples of lives excluded from what is grievable in current Western discourse might include non-Western victims of Islamic terrorism or victims of natural disasters in the Third World, whose suffering is seen to some extent as natural or expected and therefore lesser than the suffering of Westerners in similar scenarios.[159]

Concepts of recognition, framing and grievability are useful in considering Herta Müller's work and its import. The melancholic character of her fiction and her insistence on bringing to light not only her own experience but the historical and present-day suffering of others is an open challenge to the existing frames of what is seen and taken up as a focus of grief. She draws attention to marginal experiences and the common sensations of vulnerability and fear which all who suffer share to varying degrees. In the

[159] Hollywood offers a rich testing-ground for ideas of framing and grievability, especially in historical dramas situated in non-Western countries. Tragic events, such as the 2004 Indonesian Tsunami (seen in *The Impossible*, Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012) are rendered grievable through the presence of white, Western characters whose suffering becomes a substitute for the far greater number of local victims.

following sections I will explore how Müller promotes recognition in her fiction through her mode of narration and how this transmits what I term her 'radical openness' to the reading subject. My reading is informed partially by Judith Butler's essay 'Explanation and Exoneration, or What we can Hear' and by her concept of 'apprehension' from *Frames of War* (Butler, 2004, 1-18; 2009, 4-5).

Multidirectional Memory in Herta Müller's Writing

As I remarked in the introduction to this chapter, Müller has a strong interest in uncovering 'marginal' histories. From a Western perspective, her entire "Romanian" output does this through its representations of daily life under Ceauşescu, of growing up as a member of a German-speaking minority in Eastern Europe, and of political persecution. Müller's life experience is in itself a disruptive force when it comes to recognition within the mainstream, providing a fresh perspective on the Second World War and uncovering the crimes of the *Securitate* even as its members continue to enjoy the perks of their service in post-communist Romania (Müller, 2005a). Similarly, the people Müller elects to write about are people whose experiences do not often appear in history books: the xenophobic and unrepentant Banat-Swabian community of *Niederungen* and *Fasan*, the many women in Müller's works, the gay men (Leo Auberg from *Atemschaukel* and Thomas from *Reisende auf einem Bein*), the disabled minor characters, and, above all, the mass of workers and peasants whose suffering as a result of the events of recorded history is traditionally invisible.

By writing about them, Müller opens up what is commonly understood as history and interrupts the mainstream of collective memory, forcing her reader to recognise the myriad experiences and perspectives which claim their right to be part of even (or especially) the most well-known historical narratives. The Second World War is the most prominent example of a series of historical events that circulates within Müller's work, a '*noeud de memoire*' which reveals the partiality and contingency of historical record (Rothberg, 2010, 4). Her characters challenge simplistic visions of the war and what its meaning is today, in various ways, even as her works respond to the established, Western (German) perspective on events. Her uncovering of lives lived on the "periphery" of the war (in terms of what is remembered in the West) and in which the origins of the war seem distant undermines the idea of the Second World War as something that was immediately cataclysmic for all involved, while her depictions of the aftermath of the war in Eastern

Europe point to the multiplicity of perspectives on the peace. Leo Auberg's parents' and grandparents' discussion of Germany's invasion of Poland over 'Gurkensalat' on their veranda in Sibiu is as far removed from the studio in Berlin where Hitler records his broadcasts as the Olympic Stadium is from the Ukrainian camp where Leo pays for his community's support of Nazism (*Atemschaukel*, 53-54).

Through the introduction of differing perspectives, Müller produces a view of the past which is at once highly localised and transnational.[160] Those who are caught up in the disruptive consequences of international politics are privy only to a tiny part of what is happening at any one time but Müller places these fragments alongside each other, juxtaposing them implicitly and explicitly with the grand narratives of history "from above". Across her works, memories placed in new contexts take on new meanings in a way which reveals the inherent multidirectionality of memory: the 'ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing' to which it is subject and the insufficiency of standard forms of narrative in accounting for these (Rothberg, 2009, 3).

The types of associative connection Müller uses to bring different histories together vary. The instances in *Niederungen* where her narrator imagines her mother as the victim of her father's supposed war crimes (see Chapter Three) are examples of how she uses her narrators' imaginations to make such links. However, she also unites different histories in moments of exchange between characters, for example, in *Herztier*, through the narrator's encounter with Herr Feyerabend, whose personal history is allusively revealed during their interaction (see Chapter Four). With no other comment, the vastly differing experiences of people who otherwise could have been neighbours is juxtaposed in a moment that opens up vistas of historical experience and invites further imaginative exploration. The position of the narrator is also highlighted, as her hyper-awareness of her father's guilt, revealed elsewhere in the text, is brought to bear on the scene. In *Reisende auf einem Bein*, Müller shows the characters of Irene and Thomas in a similarly constructed conversation where a moment of comparison opens up space for reflection. Thomas, newly returned from Israel, remarks that Irene had been right and that one can feel when one is under surveillance (*Reisende*, 158). This is one of few more direct references to Irene's experience in 'das andere Land'. What Irene has told Thomas of living in a totalitarian state has informed his interpretation of what he witnessed in the Middle East and creates meaning within the text,

[160] Testimonial works describing the *KZ*, *Gulag* and Soviet labour camp are inherently transnational, both because those who were interned in them were far from home and diverse in their origins, and because of the way that this kind of literature exists outside of national literatures, breaking traditions and evading categorisation (Toker, 2000, 9).

even though the reader is not privy to the full content of what she has said. These examples demonstrate some of the ways in which Müller creates moments of interconnection, through the narrator's internal reflection, through moments of contrast in conversation, and through interactions which demonstrate how experiences which have been shared can influence others' perception. All of them rely on implicit comparisons of widely differing historical experiences and even imagined experience, yet each serves to create space for association and invites the reader into further reflection.

At a metatextual level, Müller's engagement with Holocaust writers is part of this pattern. Throughout her work it is clear that she takes inspiration from the writing of authors like Primo Levi and Ruth Klüger, and critics have often pointed towards similarities between her writing and that of Paul Celan (e.g. Drace-Francis, 2013, 43). Her 1996 essay collection *In der Falle*, based on her Bonn Poetics Lectures, addresses this relationship to Holocaust writing directly; in it Müller explores the ways in which various authors inspired her and enabled her to rationalise her experiences in Communist Romania. She describes how the stories and scenarios depicted by writers such as Theodor Kramer, Inge Müller and Jorge Semprun informed her perception of Romanian society and the state apparatus, as well as how their words inspired her to remain insistent in refusing the overtures of the *Securitate* (*Falle*, 9). Works by these authors are also revealed as having been a way into understanding her position in relation to the Nazi past, for example when she describes confronting her father with Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge' (*Falle*, 8). The experiences of writers who found themselves in the trap of the Nazi regime, who experienced 'Todesangst' because of who they were or where they found themselves, but who retained their inner sense of morality and identity, were inspirations to Müller when she was being harassed by the Romanian authorities and as she waited to emigrate and continue, in the case of more contemporary authors, such as Ruth Klüger, to reinforce her commitment to exposing the experience of injustice, past and present (*Falle*, 10). She aligns herself with them and makes connections between their experience and her own.

Both Semprun and Klüger are also proponents of comparison for the sake of historical understanding. Klüger especially is explicit in her rejection of the thesis of incomparability which is often attached to the Holocaust and makes connections in her writing between different forms of prejudice as well as the practical methods of different regimes. In one example she links the Nazi-era *Reichsfluchtsteuer* with the crime of *Republiksflucht* in the GDR (*weiter leben*, 20). Klüger and Müller's similar attitude to

memory becomes evident when one compares passages from *weiter leben* with Müller's remarks on recognition and the non-closure of the past her writing displays:

> Im Grunde wissen wir alle, Juden wie Christen: Teile dessen, was in den KZs geschah, wiederholt sich vielerorts, heute und gestern, und die KZs waren selbst Nachahmungen (freilich einmalige Nachahmungen) von Vorgestrigem. (*weiter leben*, 70)

> Wenn man andererseits gar nicht vergleicht, kommt man auf gar keine Gedanken, und es bleibt beim Leerlauf der kreisrunden Phrasen, wie in den meisten Gedenkreden. Und ich schweige und darf nur zuhören und nicht mitreden. (*weiter leben*, 110)

Both writers emphasise the urgency of raising critical awareness of suffering in the present and the usefulness of historical knowledge for achieving this. They promote the future-orientated approach to the past described by Eshel (see previous chapter), in which the 'wreckage' of history is a driver for ethical behaviour. In the following section, I examine the importance of comparison to Müller's ethical engagement.

The Problem of Ethical Comparison

The issue of comparison and its critical and ethical validity is immediately raised by some of the connections Müller makes. Obviously, any suggestion that Romania and Nazi Germany were identical or that Müller's experience of persecution was not qualitatively different from that of someone interned in Buchenwald or Auschwitz would be false. Müller does not make such assertions, however, focusing instead on common sensations and observations and using generalising terms such as 'der Staat' and 'die Diktatur' when referring to the sources of suffering. This has nevertheless been seen by some critics as an irresponsible conflation of historically unique settings and events, with one remarking that Müller 'risks riding roughshod over crucial differences' (White, 1998, 80). Any attempt to make equations, and especially to encroach on the uniqueness of the Holocaust is hugely contentious, especially in Germany.

The rejection of comparison has been dominant in the historiography and critical discussion of the Holocaust and was the central focus of debate within the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. Similar issues, to do with claims of historical suffering and fears of taking attention away from the Holocaust or challenging its singularity, are also central to the controversy surrounding writing about German suffering. Some critics in Germany and in Germanistik criticise texts in which the focus on German wartime suffering takes precedence over representing German guilt because of the potential that Germans emerge as victims and thereby compete for cultural memorial "territory" which rightfully belongs to Jewish and other victims of the Nazis.[161] Even fleeting references to the Holocaust, which draw it into relation with other contexts, similar to the ones made by Müller, have been identified as problematic. In a discussion of Zafer Şenocak's *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (1998) Margaret Littler points to the author's references to German history as insufficiently critical, an instrumentalisation of the Nazi past for artistic effect (Littler, 2005, 258). Dominick LaCapra's criteria for determining what constitutes appropriation versus appropriate representation are one attempt to gain critical traction on this controversial issue (*ibid*, 364).

However, not all theorists reject comparison between the Holocaust and other historical events outright, with some arguing that the Holocaust must be understood in a wider context of racial violence and that comparison is a useful tool in furthering historical understanding. Michael Rothberg is a leading voice in this area and has brought to light such connection-making by various thinkers of previous generations. In his article 'From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory' he quotes W.E.B. DuBois's essay 'The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto', written in response to visiting the Warsaw Ghetto as an example of productive comparison:

> In the first place, the problem of slavery, emancipation, and caste in the United States was no longer in my mind a separate and unique thing as I had so long conceived it. […] I have seen something of human upheaval in this world: the screams and shots of a race riot in Atlanta; the marching of the Ku Klux Klan; the threat of courts and police; the neglect and destruction of human habitation; but

[161] This is a position taken up by proponents of the 'memory contests' thesis of collective memory (see Introduction). Theorists of transnational and comparative memory, such as Rothberg, reject the 'zero sum logic' of this approach, arguing in contrast to theorists such as Anne Fuchs and Ernestine Schlant that the space for differing memories of events such as the Second World War within public discussions and remembrance is not finite (Schlant, 1999; Fuchs and Cosgrove, 2006, 1-21; Rothberg, 2011, 525).

> nothing in my wildest imagination was equal to what I saw in Warsaw in 1949 (DuBois, 1952, 14-15 cited Rothberg, 2011, 527).

Here DuBois considers the history of race laws and persecution in the USA and the racist persecution and destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis alongside each other, creating a comparative relationship which is productive for understanding both settings as at once distinct and sharing a common foundation in pseudo-scientific theories of race. As Rothberg points out, comparison, in the sense of bringing together for examination, rather than in order to equate different historical experiences, is a useful means of expanding historical understanding.[162] Rather than oversimplifying and limiting meaning, comparison can lead to new avenues of investigation. Furthermore, if we accept the hypothesis that human understanding is fundamentally based upon a metaphorical interpretation of new information, then to reject comparison in discussions of history is simply to repress what naturally takes place on an imaginative and cognitive level (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 3; Ortney, 1995, 1-16 cited Schmidt, 1998, 59).

Comparison as connection rather than equation, as a "bringing together" for the purpose of critical and affective engagement with the experience of another, is fundamental to Müller's ethics and to understanding her work. The affinitive relationships she creates between disparate times, places and people serve not to eradicate difference but to illuminate the shared sensations of suffering which can arise in any extreme situation and to point to how this suffering is produced. Her use of encompassing terms like 'der Staat' and 'die Diktatur' must be read as a product of her sensitivity to experiences in common, of the mechanisms and effects of human cruelty at state level, as well as her desire to use terms familiar and imaginable to all of her readers.

The search for this kind of common ground has great ethical potential when it comes to resisting moves towards state violence and oppression, both because it draws upon historical examples and because it points towards the shared nature of human experience and vulnerability in general. Butler explores this idea in her discussion of what she terms 'grievability', arguing that in order to achieve a sense of 'being in common' and eliminate injustice we must return to our own experiences of loss, fear and suffering, must 'hold on' to our vulnerability as an ethical foundation for society (Butler, 2004, 28-30). Butler terms this effort, 'bringing ourselves to grief', a decision to 'attend to […] even

[162] Historians such as Alon Confino have extended this idea into a novel approach to historical research, bringing together events such as the Terror of the French Revolution and the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany in order to achieve new insights (Confino, 2011).

abide by' 'the way in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own' (*ibid*, 29, 28). Gabriele Schwab highlights the revolutionary potential of multidirectional memory for doing this, arguing that 'it is the transference between different collective histories and memories that may facilitate a particular responsiveness to suffering at a distance' (Schwab, 2010, 31). In highlighting vulnerability in relation to state violence and revealing the sensations as well as the factual details which make up experience in her explorations of lesser-known histories, Müller makes moves towards a Butlerian politics of recognition based on shared vulnerability. It is significant that she identifies 'Todesangst' as the feature uniting disparate regimes and historical circumstances. The term captures the hostility of regimes that directly threaten the lives of their citizens but also focuses on those citizens' awareness of their own vulnerability as a physical and psychological phenomenon (*Falle*, 10-11).

Narrating Empathy

The momentary and, on the surface, insubstantial nature of Müller's comparisons, such as those in the conversation between the narrator in *Herztier* and Herr Feyerabend, or between Irene and Thomas in *Reisende*, is also better understood through Butler's particular approach to recognition. As I have argued above, recognition is central to Müller's politics and to her uncovering of history "from below", but the form which recognition takes is also worth defining more closely. For Butler, recognition in imaginative terms (inseparable from politics) is based upon 'apprehension'; it is the momentary, incomplete recognition of common humanity rather than sustained attention which drives ethical engagement:

> 'Recognition' is the stronger term […] 'Apprehension' is less precise, since it can imply marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition. If it is a form of knowing, it is bound up with sensing and perceiving, but in ways that are not always – or not yet – conceptual forms of knowledge. (Butler, 2009, 5-6)[163]

[163] A similar sensation of momentary or imprecise (imagined) knowledge has been mapped onto the reading experience in the term 'appreciation' (Cohen, 2008, 79).

Müller conveys this idea in her remarks about Tiananmen Square when she argues that anyone can invest in and judge situations of which they have no precise knowledge. One does not need to know every detail in order to respond or to make moral judgements, and placing oneself imaginatively in another's shoes is an important ethical gesture. Metaphors of personal identification, whether implicit (as in Butler's use of grief) or explicit (as in Müller's personal judgement of distant situations) are 'entrées to human understanding, […] part of one's commitment to being human, for being human requires knowledge of what it is to be human, and that requires the intimate knowledge of other human beings' (Cohen, 2008, 85). Although it is objectively impossible to fully perceive and understand the experiences of others or to be empathetically connected to the full breadth of human behaviour all at once, openness to others and to the mutual vulnerability of humanness can provide imprecise yet powerful knowledge. Levinas's idea of the face as the emblem of this innate awareness (coupled with the impossibility of truly knowing the Other) informs Butler's thinking and is relevant here (Hand, 2009, 42-43). Ultimately, we must be thrown back upon ourselves (in terms of our memories of personal grief) and our own humanity (including physical vulnerability to others) in order to move beyond existing frames and Butler argues that the politics of recognition must end in an identification with suffering itself (Butler, 2004, 30).

Literature offers great scope for enhancing knowledge of other human beings and allowing subjects to experiment with placing themselves in the position of another. What Ted Cohen calls 'metaphors of personal identification' are an integral part of the reading process; evaluating characters' decisions and impulses as well as the metatextual questions surrounding the author and their creative process is a natural response to fiction. These empathetic activities are no less 'real' than those which take place between human beings in real life, especially when one considers the limits of framing and relatability across the spectrum of human experience. The feelings of distance and powerlessness which may arise in fiction ('I can't do anything to change this') are not alien in real-world contexts, for example (Cohen, 2008, 37). In fact, if one accepts empathy as 'vicarious introspection' or, more simply, […] one person's [attempt to] experience the inner life of another while simultaneously retaining the stance of an objective observer' and therefore 'a value neutral tool of observation', then fiction provides an ideal arena in which to practise empathy (Gardiner, 1989, 2). Imaginatively engaging with characters and experiences beyond our own range of experiences, moral codes and cultural practices is an activity inherent to

narrative fiction, and the ability to imagine in this way is a prerequisite for participating in the morality of life (Cohen, 2008, 73).

Fiction also has the ability to throw the reader back on themselves, to bring them to a consideration of their position and an awareness of the shared experiential sensations of human life. As I argue in Chapters One and Three, Müller does this is by employing techniques which mimic the mechanisms of memory including involuntary memory, free association and interpretations based on cultural memory. The centrality of memory, both in remembering one's own grief and in being alert to the experience and the vulnerability of others, is also undeniable within philosophical thought on recognition, and it is through the mechanisms of memory that Müller invites the reader into greater openness, or 'brings them to grief' (Butler, 2004, 20). Narratives cannot contain the multidirectionality of memory beyond a certain scope, but they can signal and reveal it through interruptions and disruptions. Müller does this through the sudden connections outlined above, momentarily allowing memories of other places and historical situations to interrupt, and therefore bring their own meaning into the story. That which her narratives cannot contain is signalled in these allusions, as it is through other important devices such as unresolved juxtaposition, which trigger the slippage into the realm of affect that Müller terms the 'Irrlauf im Kopf' (Müller, 2002, 8-9; see Chapter Four). By playing on the universality of memory's structure and the sensations of remembering, Müller invites her reader into a greater openness to others and to the common vulnerability innate in human experience.

Müller's entire fictional oeuvre relies on close focalisation through a single character and is dominated by the use of first-person narrators, although there are exceptions. The reader is brought into extreme perceptive proximity to the narrator through the precision of (usually) her description, her reliance on imagination and the insight which is offered into her internal world. Sense impressions and metaphors pepper the narrative, inviting the reader to connect to their own manner of perception and accept or reject the narrators' perspective.[164] This sense of closeness is increased by the tendency for these narrators to be isolated from others within the texts and their paranoid compulsion to

[164] A mouse's belly is 'grau und weich wie Schlaf' (*Niederungen*, 29), 'Die Fensterscheiben gleiten nackt und glänzend von einem Haus ins andre' (*Tango*, 17), 'Die Frisuren der Frauen waren, von hinten gesehen, sitzende Katzen (*Onkel*, 96). As Bannasch notes, metaphors like these are acutely observant without always being effective (in terms of poetic impact). They are equations rather than comparisons (Bannasch, 2011, 129). Lakoff calls these kinds of metaphors, the relevance of which is limited to the two objects they connect, as 'image metaphors' or 'one-off metaphors', as opposed to 'structural metaphors', such as 'love is a journey' or 'time is movement', which represent a line of thought or category under which other metaphors are organised e.g. 'our relationship had gotten off track' or 'seeing the picture took me back to my childhood' (Lakoff, 1991, no page available).

interpret and reinterpret their surroundings (see Chapter Four). However, and perhaps partially because of this apparent paranoia, the relationship between reader and narrator is not identificatory but displays a tension between perceptive proximity and affective distance. Despite being weighed down with fear and marked by a pessimistic outlook, the texts Müller writes are not based on 'emotive empathy' that might offer catharsis to a reader seeking emotional release, and the singular perspective of the narrator, enhanced by her traumatised hypersensitivity to stimuli and to meaning, does not enable easy affective engagement (Bannasch, 2011, 129). Even as more minor events become the source of terror, the cool manner in which horrific events are narrated, and the dispassion with which Müller's narrators negotiate their surroundings mean that her writing is marked by a sense of detachment and the reader is held at a distance.[165] The reliance on metaphor and lack of directly-expressed emotions denies the reader the vicarious pleasures of identification, in which emotional response may descend into catharsis and collapse the distance necessary for critical reflection.

The great precision in descriptions is evocative of one of Müller's greatest inspirations for her later work, Ruth Klüger, whose quasi-novel *weiter leben* (1992), a memoir of her time in Nazi concentration camps and emigration to New York, is marked by a similar directness. Müller describes Klüger's technique as one in which 'die Autorin […] keinen Toten auf die Höhe eines Sockels hinauf[hebt]. Statt dessen in die Höhe des genauen Blicks. Diese Höhe, zu der alle Sinne hinreichen, zu halten, ist schwer' (*Falle*, 31). Through this direct gaze the reader goes beyond descriptions to share in visual impressions and memories which are not rationalised, but which appear in the text in a way which emulates the workings of individual cognition. The traditional hallmarks of trauma literature (see Chapter One), such as disruption and fragmentation, contribute to this, providing shifts in awareness and imaginative leaps which speak to the reader's own experience of fear and vulnerability as well as the uncontrolled nature of memory. The narrators' radical (and unchosen) openness to their own memories and more broadly to the affinitive possibilities of the past are therefore communicated to the reader through a highly naturalistic yet heightened perception.

If we accept the idea that 'apprehension' lies at the heart of ethically important intersubjective relationships, then Müller's mode of narration must be seen as one which

[165] Although these qualities are deemed praiseworthy within ethical discussions of testimony, they are also problematised by critics who see the reliance on a factual tone and precision in description as oppressive features, reproducing the brutal logic of the camp and the one-dimensional reality of the totalitarian world (Haines, 2013, 119; Shopin, 2014, 201).

enhances the potential for such relationships. Her readers are exposed to her narrators' experience in series of fleeting impressions, memories and imaginative flights of fancy which deny anything more sustained or authoritative than apprehension, while the narration itself insistently throws the readers back onto their own perceptive experience through the denial of identification. The empathetic openness demonstrated by Müller's narrators and developed through the immediacy of their perceptive experience becomes a state in which the reader is held. There is no resolution, either in terms of attaining full knowledge or experiencing emotional release. Müller conveys and extends the manner of knowing bound up with sensation to her reader, opening up both vistas of recognisability and the limitless potential for apprehending other human beings.

'Für das Wort Lager war mein Hirn taub': *Atemschaukel,* Intertextuality and the Unalterable Presence of the Totalitarian Past

As I have already suggested, *Atemschaukel* is in some ways a culmination of Müller's interests in recognition and empathy. It reflects many of the gestures towards empathetic interconnectedness made in other texts whilst providing the most sustained and explicit example of Müller "uncovering" a lesser-known history for her audience. Her adoption of a first-person gay male narrator who cannot be confused with Müller herself is a radical departure, even if the story continues to combine biography and fiction (see Introduction). It means that the sense of engagement with history is more pronounced and that the implicit claim to universal relevance is more obvious than in works where events could be seen as being restricted to the experience of one known individual. The text is also extremely complex in its exploration and use of memory as a multidirectional, meaning-creating force; its interaction with literary tradition and use of metonyms saturated in association are especially interesting in this respect. In this section I will extend my discussion of multidirectional and otherwise ambivalent forms of memory with particular reference to *Atemschaukel* and its intertextual relationship to Holocaust literature. I shall argue that the novel maintains an unstable yet creative comparative tension between the world of the labour camp and the concentrationary universe whose symbols, settings and histories are so well known within Western cultural memory. By exploiting the productive potential of 'comparison without equation', Müller creates layers of meaning that make *Atemschaukel* a novel not only concerned with the documentation of particular experiences and sensations but with the sensational and imaginative essence of the totalitarian age.

Like Müller's other texts, *Atemschaukel* exposes the experiences of those living on the periphery, both at a metatextual level (the subject matter is not well known) and within the text, through incidents and utterances which reflect the distance between the setting and the events of "mainstream" (international political) history as it is remembered. In *Atemschaukel* this sense of marginality or distance is mainly created in relation to the events surrounding the Second World War. Müller highlights the limited impact and relevance that the war initially had on the far edges of the German-speaking world by making Nazism something that happened primarily on the radio, and which was not taken seriously.

> Anfang September und wieder die Zeit des kalten Gurkensalats im Schatten auf der Veranda. Auf dem Ecktischchen stand der Blaupunkt, an der Wand daneben hing die große Europakarte. Aus dem Blaupunkt schallte das Taatatataaa, Sondermeldung. Der Vater kippte den Stuhl, bis sein Arm zum Radioknopf reichte, und stellte den Ton laut. Alle hörten auf zu reden und mit dem Besteck zu klappern. Sogar der Wind horchte durchs Verandafenster. Was am 1. September begonnen hatte, nannte mein Vater Blitzkrieg. Die Mutter sagte Polenfeldzug. Mein Großvater hatte, von Pula aus, als Schiffsjunge eine Weltumsegelung hinter sich und war ein Skeptiker. Den interessierte immer, was die Engländer zu der Sache sagen. Zu Polen nahm er lieber noch einen Löffel Gurkensalat und schwieg. […] Im Aschenbecher neben dem Blaupunkt hatte mein Vater, er war Zeichenlehrer, auf Stecknadeln mit bunten Köpfen dreieckige rote Siegesfähnchen montiert. 18 Tage rückte der Vater seine Fähnchen auf der Karte ostwärts. Dann wars, sagte Großvater, mit Polen vorbei. Und mit den Fähnchen. Und mit dem Sommer. Die Großmutter zupfte die Fähnchen von der Europakarte und von den Stecknadeln und räumte die Stecknadeln in ihre Nähschachtel zurück. (*Atemschaukel*, 53-54)

Although this is a representation of one family's perception of war, and Müller's works testify to the high impact Nazism had on others in Romania, the description of the Second World War as something distant and relatively uninteresting to German-speakers complicates a teleological, Western European notion of the war as an unquestionably epoch-defining event which affected all Europeans as a universal catastrophe. Thinking in terms of multidirectional memory the comparative relationship between the events

unfolding in Poland and the family casually listening to news of them on the radio creates a jarring dissonance.

This kind of disjuncture, and the implicit invitation or prompt to imagine contained within it, creates a strong sense of the breadth of historical experience, opening up a potential for empathy which is enhanced by the recognition of the arbitrary way in which people are caught up in events. The narrator Leo's awareness of the war increases when he is confronted with the experience of another, his Latin teacher, who has already been involved in fighting.

> Ein Schüler, der schon oft mit Hagebutten dekoriert worden war, sagte gleich zu Beginn: Herr Lehrer, erzählen Sie, wie es ist an der Front. Der Lehrer biss sich auf die Lippen und sagte: Nicht wie ihr glaubt. Und dann wurde er so starr im Gesicht und zittrig an den Händen, wie wir ihn gar nicht kannten. Nicht wie ihr glaubt, wiederholte er. Und dann legte er den Kopf auf den Tisch, ließ die Arme wir eine Fetzenpuppe am Stuhl herunterhängen und weinte. (*Atemschaukel*, 57)

The appearance of a survivor of battle in Leo's as yet untouched environment creates a sense of approaching danger, while the isolation of an emotionally damaged man in the midst of people for whom his suffering is impossible to understand foreshadows the experience of Leo when he returns from the labour camp. By highlighting Leo's (and later his family's) incomprehension of the survivor and their lack of effort in imagining his experience, Müller places the reader in a position of superiority in terms of knowledge and ethical engagement. They respond to the prompt to 'apprehend', to try to imagine the undisclosed details of the teacher's wartime experience and are later similarly moved by the discrepancy between their knowledge of Leo's life in the camp and his family's lack of interest.

Moments like these, which expose the multiplicity of perspectives on historical events and play on issues of knowing and not knowing, appear throughout the text. As a prisoner in the Soviet Union, Leo observes the wreckage left behind from war: 'Wenn es in der Nacht geregnet hatte, spiegelten sich die ausgebrannten Autowracks und der Panzerschrott in den Mulden' (*Atemschaukel,* 60).[166] More subtle allusions also point to

[166] Reference to the evidence of war in the landscape must be read in light of Müller's recurring setting of the agricultural field, which I describe in Chapters Three and Four. Physical details evoke the memory of the war and the anonymous suffering and death it involved. This engagement with traces and haunted spaces is a hallmark of her work.

the disruption caused by the German invasion of the Soviet Union: 'Das Auto hielt mit einem Ruck, und ich stand bis zu den Hüften in einem kahlen, wahrscheinlich ausgedorrten Obstbaum, voll mit schrumpeligen Kugeln aus dem letzten oder vorletzten Sommer' (*Atemschaukel*, 63). The vague reference to the fruit looking one or two years old invites speculation about the point from which the trees – an important source of food – were neglected, creating an associative link to military activity which is reinforced by the use of the word 'Kugel'.[167]

The Holocaust is an extremely important "presence" within *Atemschaukel* too, although it remains undiscussed for the most part. Leo's allusion to the disappearance of his neighbour ('Alle halbe Jahr kam der Herr Fränkel […] Dann kam er nicht mehr. Mehr wollte man nicht wissen […] Es war leicht, nichts zu wissen') and his remarks about David Lommer ('Er wusste nicht, wieso er als Deutscher auf die Liste der Russen kam […] Er musste dreieinhalb Jahre im Lager zubringen') and Lommer's subsequent release are the only moments in which the topic of Nazi persecution of the Jews is raised but there are many moments in which the shadow of Jewish suffering falls (*Atemschaukel*, 56, 44). The setting of the camp itself makes this inevitable; many of its organisational features and day-to-day routines, such as *Appellstehen*, extreme hunger and ill health, physical labour and life under guard set off associative alarm bells for Western readers who are more familiar with representations of life in Nazi camps than with Soviet labour camps. Symbols associated with the *KZ* are also prevalent: uniforms, numbers, cattle trucks, searchlights, guard dogs, shaven heads and barracks bring their associative meanings to bear on the text. In one shockingly evocative instance, the novel even describes the recycling of human hair, recalling the use made by the Nazis of human hair harvested in the extermination camps (Grossmann, 2011):

> Dass Kobelian die Tote ohne ein weiteres Wort auf den Tisch legte. Dass die Trudi Pelikan anfing, der Toten die Jacke aufzuknöpfen, weil sie glaubte, Bea Zakel warte auf die Kleider. […] Dass die Feldscherin sagte: Erst die Haare. […] Dass Corina Marcu wie durch ein Wunder noch nie kaalgeschoren worden war und die Feldscherin sich jetzt die Haare mit der Nullerschere abschor. Dass Bea Zakel sie ordentlich in ein Holzkistchen legte. Dass die Trudi wissen wollte, wozu das gut

[167] The area in which the camps Nowo-Gorlowka and Krivoy Rog were situated, near to the city Dnjepropetrowsk, were freed from Nazi occupation by the Red Army in October 1943 and February 1944 respectively following the Battle of Dniper (Mawdsley, 2005, 276, 279). The fruit tree scene appears to take place within the first year of internment (1945).

ist, und die Feldscherin sagte: Für die Schneiderei, der Herr Reusch näht uns Fensterkissen, Haare halten den Luftzug ab. (*Atemschaukel*, 208)

However, this is not to suggest that Müller "borrows" from Holocaust literature and the cultural representations of the *KZ* in order to embroider her descriptions of the labour camp or that she makes a fallacious equation between the universe of the Nazi concentration camps and the labour camps of the Soviet Union. Rather it is a consequence of the real organisational similarities between the two systems and the extremity of life within them that such associative affinities can arise at all. The effect of the camp setting and "visual" elements of the text contribute to its overall impression but in specific moments the tension Müller sets up between Leo's experiences and the worlds described in Holocaust literature becomes more explicit, its creative potential more obvious:

> Die russischen Wachsoldaten schrien UBORNAJA. Alle Türen aller Waggons wurden geöffnet. Wir purzelten hintereinander ins tiefer gelegen Schneeland und sanken bis zu den Kniekehlen ein. Wir begriffen, ohne zu verstehen. Ubornaja heißt gemeinschaftlicher Klogang. Oben, sehr hoch oben, der runde Mond. Vor unseren Gesichtern flog der Atem glitzrigweiß wie der Schnee unter den Füßen. Ringsherum die Maschinenpistolen im Anschlag. Und jetzt: Hosen runter. […] Vielleicht wurde in dieser Nacht nicht ich, aber der Schrekken in mir plötzlich erwachsen. Vielleicht wird Gemeinsamkeit nur auf diese Art wirklich. Denn alle, ausnahmslos alle setzten wir uns bei der Notdurft automatisch mit dem Gesicht in Richtung Bahndamm. Alle hatten wir den Mond im Rücken, die offene Viehwaggontür ließen wir nicht mehr aus den Augen, waren bereits auf sie angewiesen wie auf eine Zimmertür. Wir hatten schon die verrückte Angst, dass die Tür sich ohne uns schließt und der Zug ohne uns wegfährt. (*Atemschaukel*, 20-21)

This scene, and the insight the reader has into Leo's fear, evokes other potential outcomes with great immediacy and points towards the instances in which a cattle truck otherwise might have paused in an open field and what might have happened in those cases. The text relies on intertexts and cultural memory to achieve its full effect, with knowledge of massacres carried out by the Nazis and of the millions of people who met their end during

or after a similar journey 'to the East', familiar from the 'ubiquitous scene of the journey to the Nazi concentration camp', mak[ing] this scene deeply disturbing, beyond the confines of the story (Haines, 2013, 120). The fact that the prisoners do not know where they are and the entire setting of the frozen field under a clear sky increases create a sense of anonymity and loneliness which is enhanced by the intense attention to detail. The image of breath freezing in the air brings a sense of corporeal immediacy to a scene in which the characters fear for their lives. The banal physicality of breathing within this extreme situation allows the reader to share in Leo's perception more closely, while the sense of isolation, insignificance and anonymity evoked in the scene make a gesture towards apprehending the innumerable lonely, unknown deaths across history, and the ongoing human sensations – of touch, temperature, sound and sight – which precede them.[168] The breath reminds the reader of the vulnerability they have in common with Leo and the other characters; Müller's use of bodily experience mirrors the emphasis Landsberg places on the physical in her theory of prosthetic memory as 'sensuous memories produced by experience' and 'frameworks within which individuals might experience a sensually immersed, processual form of knowledge' (Landsberg, 1997, 67, 75). The non-specificity of the setting, facelessness of the guards and mass of prisoners juxtaposed with the recounting of specific details by Leo makes the moments described both vivid and uncontainable.

The setting of the scene, an unidentified, "empty" field in '(der) russische(n) Nacht' is also reminiscent of other instances in which Müller tries to communicate the unknowable and anonymous suffering of individuals. In *Atemschaukel* the field lies outside the symbolic world of the 'Gewohnten und Hergebrachten' and represents a passage into a new world of possibility, but in the passages in *Niederungen*, in which the narrator imaginatively reconstructs the lives of her parents it is the shared setting of the frosty *Rübenfeld* in Russia which brings them together into a more direct victim-perpetrator relationship (see Chapter One) (*Niederungen*, 9, 11-12; 102; Eke, 2011, 63). Russia and the East function as metaphors for the unknown, for the place outside the narrator's perceptive frame and as shorthand for the site of extreme violence.[169] Although

[168] In *In der Falle*, Müller reflects on the importance of representing these moments during her discussion of Klüger's *weiter leben*: 'Der Gastod als Ende ist jedem *bekannt*. *Unbekannt* ist, bis er eintritt, für jeden einzelnen die noch vorhandene Zeit bis zum Tod […] Es geht nur noch um den *unbekannten Vorlauf des bekannten Endes*' (*Falle*, 25, her emphasis).

[169] This choice of setting and focus on physicality functions as a prosthetic memory of unnamed events but must be linked to the Eastern European perspective of the Holocaust and the mass killings carried out by both Nazis and Soviets in the 'bloodlands' of Europe (Snyder, 2009; Snyder, 2011). Awareness of these marginalised histories bleeds into such moments throughout Müller's work (see Chapter Three, Chapter

Russia and the Russians are objects of fear for the characters in *Atemschaukel* for different reasons, such as Nazi propaganda, the text shares the sense of haunted landscapes found elsewhere in Müller's work (*Atemschaukel*, 18).[170]

A later passage in *Atemschaukel*, in which the inmates are marched outside at midnight on New Year's Eve without explanation, opens up similar potential avenues for association to those created in the train scene:

> Flankiert von acht Wachsoldaten mit ihren Gewehren und Hunden trieb man uns die Lagerstraße entlang. […] Im hohen Schnee an der Rückseite der Fabrik, wo das Brachland anfing, mussten wir uns vor dem gemauerten Zaun in Reihen aufstellen und warten. Wie dachten, das ist die Nacht der Erschießung.
> Ich drängte mich in die vordere Reihe, dass ich unter den ersten bin, nicht vorher noch Leichen aufladen muss – denn das Lastauto wartete am Straßenrand. […] Da standen wir, vergreist im Gesicht, die Augenbrauen aus Rauhreif. Manchen Frauen bibberten die Lippen nicht nur vom Frieren, sie murmelten Gebete. (*Atemschaukel*, 71)

The descriptions of the scene are once again focused on details such as frozen eyebrows and murmuring lips, and the physical press of the other people against Leo's body suggested by the verb 'drängen' brings a sense of immediacy to the scene which contrasts with the impression of dislocation. The tense shifts half way through the sentence, giving the sense of disruption to the narrative of the older Leo by the immediate sense impressions and concerns of Leo on the night in question: 'dass ich nicht unter den ersten *bin*, nicht vorher noch Leichen aufladen *muss*'.

The prisoners are brought to an unfamiliar space on the camp's borders, lit by an accompanying lorry Leo assumes will carry the bodies. The impression of disorientation created by the darkness, the rush from the main camp and the unfamiliar, snow-covered

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Four) and the choice of the empty field evokes the hands-on killing in Operation Reinhard and similar actions. As Timothy Snyder writes, 'All in all, as many if not more Jews were killed by bullets as by gas, but they were killed by bullets in easterly locations that are blurred in painful remembrance' (Snyder, 2009). Gestures such as the one Müller makes towards the development of a spatial, sensual awareness of this history represent a potential means to bring it back into memory and our frames of recognition. However, "the East" also functions as an abstract, imaginary space to some extent, reflecting its status in German culture and Holocaust memory as an unknowable place.

[170] 'Was in den Worten VON DEN RUSSEN VERSCHLEPPT stecken könnte, ging einem zwar durch den Kopf, aber nicht aufs Gemüt. An die Wand stellen können sie uns erst, wenn wir ankommen, noch fahren wir. Dass man nicht längst an die Wand gestellt und erschossen worden war, wie man es in der Nazipropaganda von zu Hause kannte, machte uns beinahe sorglos' (*Atemschaukel*, 18).

setting is enhanced by the way in which the prisoners revert to an anonymous mass in Leo's description. In the first scene, where he describes people only in vague and general terms, this sense of a mass of people is not particularly striking; he does not yet know his fellow prisoners. However, here, the way Leo still does not differentiate between people despite probably knowing many of them communicates fear and detachment. The lack of individualised identities in the scene facilitates comparison with other settings, familiar to the reader from representations of the Holocaust. The watchdogs, watchtowers and violent rush, combined with the prisoners' apparent conviction that they are to be executed, strongly evoke memories of the Third Reich, a sense which grows stronger when the prisoners are ordered, without explanation, to dig. The organised brutality of the Nazi concentration camps and massacres, in which the prisoners were forced to dig their own graves or participate in the disposing of others' bodies, haunts the scene and Leo's suspicion that he finds himself in a similar situation drives him to push his way to the front of the crowd in hopes of being killed first and is the reason that his fear increases when the group are commanded to dig holes. As in the scene with the train, the landscape becomes almost an accomplice to the imagined action, a sign of the prisoners' isolation and the potential for their deaths to remain unknown: 'Schnee dämpft, dachte ich, das Schießen wird man kaum hören' (*Atemschaukel*, 72). However, importantly, as in the case of the train stop, this turns out to be an innocuous event; the Russians require the holes to plant poplar trees (*Atemschaukel*, 71).

The mounting sense of dread in both scenes is accentuated by the reader's historical knowledge and the *other* prisoners, of *other* camps and *other* deportations which haunt the descriptions offered by Leo. The precedent set by Nazi crimes and their representation in cultural products contributes to a tense atmosphere of foreboding based in the *possibility* that they could be reproduced in this moment, while the return to "normality" (the removal of fear) at the end of both scenes returns the reader to the historical moment at hand. The frisson produced by this delicate introduction and negation of comparison taps into essential sensations of the post-Holocaust imaginary, in which no moment of abjection or terror is entirely discrete from the possibilities created by Nazi methods of destruction.[171] Instead, moments of vulnerability exist as part of a paradigmatic or vertical montage, a

[171] Landsberg argues that 'To be in a position where something absolutely unthinkable, becomes, if only for a fleeting instant, imaginable, might be as close as one could come to understanding the logic of the Holocaust. […] Perhaps the experience of vulnerability might itself be a form of knowledge about [it]' (Landsberg, 1997, 85). Leo seems to experience the situation as an iteration of other events.

series of iterations that are evoked even though they remain unnamed and external to the text (Saxton, 2010, 221).

The multiple temporal perspectives within Leo Auberg's narration further point to the impact of the *KZ* on interpretations of events, with the older Leo, who is the overall narrator, responding to his younger self's lack of awareness and projecting his more complete knowledge of the era onto his memories of the camp. The most striking example of this is the issue of the word 'Lager' itself, which has no meaning to Leo when he is preparing to be deported:

> Eine Patrouille aus zwei Polizisten ging mit der Liste von Haus zu Haus, ein Rumäne und ein Russe. Ich weiß nicht mehr, ob die Patrouille bei uns im Haus das Wort LAGER ausgesprochen hat. Und wenn nicht, welches andere Wort außer RUSSLAND. Und wenn ja, dann hat mich das Wort Lager nicht erschreckt. Trotz Kriegszeit und dem Schweigen meiner Rendezvous im Nacken steckte ich mit meinen siebzehn Jahren immer noch einer hellen dummen Kindheit. Mich trafen die Wörter Aquarell und Fleisch. Für das Wort LAGER war mein Hirn taub. (*Atemschaukel*, 11-12)

There is a strong sense of hindsight in this passage as Leo wonders at his ignorance as a young man and the lack of meaning the now heavily burdened word 'LAGER' held for him. Müller alludes to the word's position within cultural memory and the meanings it carries regardless of contexts, revealing through the perspective of Leo the inseparability of the labour camp from the broader associative field of "the camp".

The heightened awareness which Müller displays towards words and phrases, highlighted in Leo's reflection on the word 'Lager' extends to idiomatic usages. Examples of this include the *Sprichwörter* which she claims "witnessed" and somehow still evoke the crimes committed under National Socialism and the innocent-sounding phrasings which bestow different degrees of value to experience ('Emigrant' vs 'Ausgetriebene') (Müller, *Falle*, 36; Müller, *Spiegel*, 2013).

> Jeder kennt heute den Spruch 'Arbeit macht frei' als Motto einer mörderischen Ironie. Es gab noch andere derartige Sprichwörter auf den Querbalken unserer Baracke. REDEN IST SILBER, SCHWEIGEN IST GOLD war eines. Noch besser war LEBEN UND LEBEN LASSEN. Ein früherer Transport, den es nicht mehr

> gab, hatte diese Sprüche anfertigen müssen. Ich starrte sie täglich an, angewidert von ihrem absoluten Wahrheitsanspruch, den diese Wirklichkeit als totale Lüge bloßstellte. Mir sind deutsche Sprichwörter seither ein Greuel, ich kann keines hören, ohne es mir auf dem Querbalken einer KZ-Baracke vorzustellen… (*weiter leben*, 119)

Müller's thinking here is obviously influenced by Victor Klemperer and by the writing of Holocaust survivors on the function of language under Nazism. Paul Celan was concerned by the 'Dünung wandernder Worte', which he refers to in his poem 'Sprich auch Du' and refused to use words such as 'Rasse' which had been saturated with ideological meaning, for example (Felstiner, 1995, 79-81, 93). A more direct connection arises with *weiter leben*, in which Klüger discusses some of the sayings that Müller would later take up:

> *Arbeit macht frei*, sagten die Mörder. *Reden ist silber, schweigen ist Gold*, sagt man heute noch in dieser Sprache, die den Toten das Zahngold stahl. *Leben und leben lassen*, sagten die Mörder mitten im Handwerk des Tötens. Überlebenden sind auch die weniger deutschlichen Sprichwörtlichkeiten suspect. Redewendungen verabsolutieren. Im Deutschen haben sie die Steigerung ins Töten begleitet. (*Falle*, 36)

The way in which Klüger discusses the horror-provoking effect which these sayings have on her here clearly shows her influence on Müller's approach to language.[172]

As I have previously discussed (Chapter One, Chapter Three), Müller's imaginative universe and writing life have been heavily influenced by knowledge of the Holocaust, and the crimes of the Third Reich are something that she returns to, both in her consideration of her position as a child of an SS man and as a dissident under totalitarian rule. Her literary inspirations include works by several survivors of Nazi concentration camps (Ruth Klüger, Primo Levi, Jorge Semprun) and emigrés from anti-Semitic persecution (Theodor Kramer, Carl Zuckmayer) whom she cites as having influenced her

[172] The commonalities in perspective and moral response to the past shared by Müller and Klüger seem to have led to a strong degree of mutual respect between the two. Klüger used a quote from *Die blassen Herren mit den Mokkatassen* (2005) as an epitaph to her memoir *Unterwegs Verloren* (2008) and Müller has spoken publicly about her admiration of Klüger, for instance when Klüger walked out of a meeting of the PEN centre in protest over remarks made regarding the necessity to rehabilitate officials from the East German regime (Machtans, 2009, 236; *Falle*, 38-39). The authors appeared together in a roundtable called 'Formen der Erinnerung' at the Nationalbibliothek in Frankfurt in 2011 (Kegel, 2011).

moral and creative approach. In her efforts to communicate the sensations of persecution, of haunting and of the meaning behind or beyond words, Müller draws on their writing in varying – more and less direct – ways. These range from overall emulations of style and exploration of themes such as the protective powers of literature, to direct intertextual references. In *Herztier*, Müller's novel of political persecution, poetry provides a sense of constancy to the narrator as she struggles to withstand the intimidation of the *Securitate*. She recites lines from poems in order to ground herself and endure the interrogations of Hauptmann Pjele in a similar fashion to the narrator in Klüger's *weiter leben*, who describes reciting Schiller whilst imprisoned in Auschwitz (*weiter leben,* 122-123). Müller writes about this connection in *Falle*, in which she evaluates the instinctive recourse to words as an unsatisfactory yet necessary response to the threat of the camps (*Falle*, 37-38). Some of the poetic phrases which the narrator of *Herztier* creates to rationalise or commemorate her and her friends' experiences are also reminiscent of poetry by Theodor Kramer, another influence discussed in *In der Falle*. Müller mentions his poem 'Die Wahrheit ist, man hat mir nichts getan', which deals with the gradual removal of personal freedom and growing fear in post-Anschluss Vienna, yet is reminiscent of the context found in *Herztier*:

> Die Wahrheit ist, man hat mir nichts getan.
> Ich darf schon lang in keiner Zeitung schreiben,
> die Mutter darf noch in der Wohnung bleiben.
> Die Wahrheit ist, man hat mir nichts getan
> […]
> Ich fahre wir früher mit der Straßenbahn
> Und gehe unbehelligt durch die Gassen;
> ich weiß bloß nicht, ob sie mich gehen lassen.
> Die Wahrheit ist, man hat mir nichts getan. (Kramer, 1960, 111)

More striking still is the similarity between Müller's use of metonym to describe the deaths of the friends in *Herztier* and Kramer's use of the same device in his poem 'Lob der Verzweiflung'. Whereas Müller uses 'der Nuss', 'das Fenster' and 'der Strick' to refer to the deaths by cancer, jumping or being pushed out of the window and suicide by hanging (*Herztier*, 7), Kramer addresses despair directly, saying: Du hast gar viele Namen, / bist unter allen groß,/ heißt Würfel, Messer, Samen, / heißt Branntwein, Strick und Schoß; / du

bist im Klirrn der Scherben, / im Zucken des Gesichts, / du fährst ins träge Sterben / und wirbelst es ins Nichts (Kramer, 1956, 104).[173] Just as Kramer's objects are made into embodiments of hopelessness, Müller's come to stand for death within the story.[174]

In *Atemschaukel*, the influence of Holocaust literature is felt in a way which goes beyond the material factors of imprisonment, such as uniforms and military organisation.[175] Müller draws on stylistic approaches used by writers describing the Nazi concentration camps and makes 'unmistakable' intertextual allusions to their work (Bannasch, 2011, 119). The most prominent examples are some of the extended metaphors used by Leo, which are unavoidably reminiscent of – although determinedly distant from – those used by writers describing the *KZ*.[176] Although the validity of using metaphorical language to explore the events of the Holocaust has often been disputed (because of the duty to bear witness), memoirs, novels and poetry written about concentration camps tend to rely on strong visual images in order to conceptualise the inexplicable (Young, 1989, 90-93). Texts on the camps poeticise them through metaphors such as 'mills' (Billy Wilder, *Death Mills*, 1945) 'hell' (Kogon, *Der SS-Staat*, 1946), 'the bottom' (Levi, *If this is a man*, 1947) and a necropolis and labyrinth (Pahor, *Necropolis*, 1967; *Labyrinth*, 1984) (among many examples) and deploy metaphors to describe their experiences, personify death, and name the perpetrators of Nazi crimes: 'Todesgärtner' (Sachs), 'der weiße Engel' (a nickname for Joseph Mengele).

Celan's 'Todesfuge' is probably the most influential source of metaphors responding to the Holocaust in German-language literature. His images such as 'schwarze Milch' (discussed in Chapter Four) and 'Grab in den Lüften', which arises as an intertextual reference in *Atemschaukel* have come to define imaginative conceptions of the

[173] 'Ich kann mir heute noch kein Grab vorstellen. Nur einen Gürtel, ein Fenster, eine Nuß und einen Strick' (*Herztier*, 7)

[174] Müller credits Kramer with helping her to withstand the pressure of surveillance by the *Securitate*: 'Keine Literatur, die ich kannte, sprach diese Zustände (Verfolgung durch Polizei und Geheimdienst, Abschiede von ausreisenden Freunden, geheime Flucht über die Grenze, mißlungene Fluchtversuche, die mit Gefängnis oder Tod endeten) so unerbittlich und gleichzeitig poetisch aus wie die Gedichte Theodor Kramers. Sie haben meine Ängste, ohne zu täuschen, bestätigt und dadurch erträglich gemacht' (Müller, 1999).

[175] Numerous potential intertexts have been identified from Holocaust literature including Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness* (1992) (Bannasch, 2011, 135; Eke, 2011, 60); Edgar Hilsenrath's *Nacht* (1964) (Eke, 2011, 65); Primo Levi's *If this is a Man* (1948) (Eke, 2011, 61).

[176] As is often the case in Müller's work, metaphors such as 'Hungerengel' and 'Haut und Knochenzeit' are not (just) literary creations but the product of another context. These phrases were invented by Oskar Pastior during his time in the Ukrainian labour camp as a means to capture what he was witnessing and feeling (Müller, Swansea, 2012; Müller, 2013, 127).

concentrationary universe.[177] The line about the cremated dead rising into the sky, 'wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng' (Celan, 1975, 41) is evoked in *Atemschaukel* as Leo imagines the labour camp:

> Ich sah uns alle in einer riesengroßen Schachtel stehen. Ihr Himmeldeckel war schwarzlackiert von der Nacht und geschmückt mit scharf geschliffenen Sternen. Auf der Lagermauer drüben, zwischen den Wachtürmen, war der Schnee ein Katafalk. Darauf stand *ein turmhohes Etagenbett in den Himmel, ein Etagensarg, in dem wir alle übereinander aufgebahrt Platz hatten wie in den Bettgestellen der Barakken*. (*Atemschaukel*, 72, my emphasis)

The metaphors at work here are self-evidently different; the horrific circularity evoked by Celan in which the prisoners are digging their own grave is not reproduced by Müller, who instead introduces the image of a bunk bed made of coffins. The coffin and the reference to a hearse mark the distinction between the two systems. The sense of the dead in the Soviet camp is marked by stasis, represented in the image of the dead neatly stored and fixed in place, rather than the movement and dissipation Celan uses to refer to the fires and chimneys of the Nazi concentration camps. Coffins are suggestive of the dead being recognised and treated as human beings and of a burial in which individuals maintain their identity. The lack of movement and the humanising (although still horrifying) image of the bunk bed also means that Müller does not convey the sense of continuous or targeted murder present in 'Todesfuge', which describes the mechanised production of death.

Precisely because of these differences, the intertextual link Müller creates between the two metaphors is extremely productive.[178] The gentle presence of Celan's words allows this image to transcend the specificities of the situation and circulate within the

[177] The influence of Celan on *Atemschaukel* and Müller's work more broadly has often been discussed (Drace-Francis, 2013, 43; Haupt-Cucuiu, 1996, 132-44; Janssen-Zimmerman, 1991, 238-41). Critics point to the title of the former author's poems *Atemwende* (1967) and *Atemkristall* (1965) as foundations of the neologism 'Atemschaukel' created by Müller and Pastior (Bannasch, 2011, 118; Braun, 2011, 33n; Haines, 2013, 126). Müller denies employing devices taken from Celan's poetry in *Atemschaukel*, claiming that she would not have dared to use the work of someone she so admires (Müller, 2012).

[178] A similar creative tension can be found between the well-known Celan metaphor of 'black milk' and the deployment by Müller of 'weiße Milch' as an imaginative protection from trauma: 'Wenn mir nachts die Gegenstände heimsuchen und mir im Hals die Luft abdrosseln, reiße ich die Fenster auf und halte den Kopf ins Freie. Am Himmel steht ein Mond wie ein Glas kalte Milch, sie spült mir die Augen' (*Atemschaukel*, 34; Schmidt, 2012, 126). Milk is also a practical saviour for Leo and Albert Gion, who are offered a ration of half a litre once a month to keep them healthy while they are assigned to work in the cellar (Abert's previous work partner in the cellar, Yuri, died from exposure to poisonous substances – probably lead, the absorption of which is slowed by calcium). This is a further example of the way Müller reinserts reality into metaphor and imagination (*Atemschaukel*, 88).

wider context of visual conceptualisations of organised death, arousing associations and affective affinities which create meaning within the scene. For the knowledgeable reader, this effect is accompanied by the questioning and exploration of these connections; the tension between similarity and difference opens them up to considerations of sensation and universality and invites thought about the relative position of two markedly different narrators who try to conceptualise what they are experiencing.

Müller's use of another metaphor in relation to the experience of *Appellstehen* in *Atemschaukel* raises similar associations with authors writing about the *KZ*.[179] Disassociation from the body and the sense of merging into the surrounding natural environment, most often the sky, are repeatedly used by Leo as a means to escape the reality of the camp and find support in his exhaustion. During the *Appell*, this need for support is at its most extreme:

> Wenn das Fleisch am Körper verschwunden ist, wird einem das Tragen der Knochen zur Last, es zieht dich in den Boden hinein. […] Ich übte beim Appell, *mich beim Stillstehen zu vergessen und das ein- und Ausatmen nicht voneinander zu trennen*. Und die Augen hinaufzudrehen, ohne den Kopf zu heben. Und am Himmel eine Wolkenecke zu suchen, an die man seine Knochen hängen kann. (*Atemschaukel*, 27)

Mentally detaching from his body, "forgetting himself", helps Leo to endure the physical suffering of roll call, relying on the external world to provide strength and the internal world to recede. Leo's image of giving himself over to the external power of the sky is reminiscent of scenes written by the author Jorge Semprun. In his autofictional novel *Oh What a Beautiful Sunday* (orig. *Quel beau dimanche!* 1980), Semprun describes Fernand Barizon, a friend of the narrator, who stands exhausted during the *Appell* in Buchenwald. Barizon uses a similar conceptual means of escape to that employed by Leo, harnessing the cold to distance himself from reality:

> And so, every morning on the *Appellplatz*, *Fernand Barison lets his thoughts drift. It's like an internal breathing*.

[179] Roll call is an important feature of the concentration camp and its representation. Other main features of both the *KZ* and the *Gulag* as represented in *Atemschaukel* include extreme hunger, the ritual of exchanging bread and conversations about food (Eke, 2011, 56).

> Whatever one may think, it's the winter that makes this morning meditation possible. Even when it's snowing.
>
> There you stand, numb with cold. Your body begins, all by itself, to live through a gentle, diffuse agony. Before long, you can hardly feel it any more. Or you feel it as a distance, detached from yourself.
>
> Your body has become a magma of tissues and placental vessels. It has become maternal. It keeps you warm, paradoxically, in a cocoon of protective numbness. And you yourself are no more than a single solitary flame of meditation, or memory: a darkened residence where only a single, tutelary lamp burns. It is what is called a soul, no doubt, if one cares for ready-made words. (*Sunday*, 55)

Here, the extreme cold allows Barizon to regain access to an "inner life" and temporarily escape his situation as he gives himself over to the sensations of his body and the meditative detachment of his mind from them. Although he is suffering, Barizon is liberated from thought and pain, existing as an essence within the cocoon of his exhausted body, just as Leo allows himself to recede and the visual anchor of the sky to take over responsibility for his body and provide an escape for his mind. For both men, the imaginative transferral of strength onto physical externalities – the distant sky and the freezing, disassociated body – allows their inner being to suspend the struggle with the suffering they experience and retreat temporarily from the demands of their surroundings. The shift in the uses of pronouns, from 'ich' to 'man' and from 'Fernard Barizon' to 'you' to 'one' further signals the respective characters' increased detachment from the scene. The generalising effect of the third person reads both as a strategy of emotional distancing and as the characters' awareness of existing among a mass of others who share in their experiences and sensations.

In this passage Müller again creates a sense of associative interconnection by striking a chord with cultural memories of the Nazi concentration camps. The experience of *Appellstehen*, frequently described in literature and testimony related to the latter setting, creates a space of overlap between vastly different situations, in which physical details and sensations of exhaustion point to the shared humanity and bodily suffering of prisoners across and beyond the experience of being counted. In *Atemschaukel*, the immediacy of physical stress and the limited perspective of Leo as he is made to stand among a crowd of people are vividly described, with the focus on sensation and the isolation brought about by exhaustion making him appear detached once more from the

group. The ultimate solitude of this shared experience enhances the sense of disembodiment and individual struggle for survival, describing in detail the strategies used to remain standing in the moment of total bodily exhaustion. Through the vivid impressions of acute tiredness and weakness, as well as the imaginative responses to these sensations, the reader is brought to their own bodily experience and the imaginative exploration of Leo's position, a move which promotes abstract empathy with all those brought to the limit of their endurance in similar ways (if in different circumstances). The world of the *Gulag* and the world of the KZ are placed in a relationship of productive tension, driving the reader to appreciate the structural and affective resemblances between the two in terms of their effects on the body as well as their position as (exceptional, specific) iterations within a wider history of state violence.

'Von der Schranktür schaut uns allen Stalin ins Gesicht'[180]: *Atemschaukel* and the Ceauşescu state

Although the imaginative universe of the Holocaust is perhaps the most important reference for *Atemschaukel*'s multidirectional memory and the symbols and scenarios by means of which it helps the reader to comprehend the experience of the *Gulag*, there is another important presence. Romanian communism, its impact and the aftermath of its collapse are, as I have mentioned, important topics for Müller. She has advocated greater awareness and consideration of Communism in the West and described in great detail her experiences of oppression under the totalitarian regime in Romania. In *Atemschaukel*, the characters seldom mention the system within which they are carrying out forced labour, focusing on the nationality of their captors without discussing ideology. However the presence of Communism and of Stalinism, its most extreme and brutal form, is the reason the camps exist and that they are there. *Atemschaukel* is informed by the vast universe of the *Gulag*, which preceded and exceeded the narrow window of time represented in the text. Although the characters in the novel are, by dint of their Romanian nationality and status as temporary forced labourers, in a different position from inmates of the *Gulag* proper, they experience the same deprivations and are exposed to the same logic and ideology.

Critics discussing *Atemschaukel* have recognised its indebtedness to *Gulag* literature by writers such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov, Angela Rohr and

[180] (*Atemschaukel*, 40)

Osip Mandelstam and the incidents and experiences their works describe (Eke, 2011, 56; Bannasch, 2011, 141; Haines, 2013, 129).[181] Once again, the shared subject matter in the labour camp and *Gulag* is a product of overlapping circumstances: the hunger, cold and exhaustion of political prisoners was a result of the same system and would necessarily involve similar sensations. The two Soviet models of camp – the *Gulag* and the temporary labour camp for foreign prisoners – are also obviously more similar in terms of the position of the inmates than the labour camp and the *KZ*. As various historians and critics who reject the comparison of the two systems observe, inmates were more expendable in the Nazi camps, which were designed to kill, whether actively (extermination camps) or through the conditions (concentration camps), even though inmate labour was a valuable commodity (Applebaum, 2004, 71-72). Although *Gulag*s and Nazi concentration camps both revolved around unsustainably harsh forced labour, death was incidental rather than innate to the *Gulag* and labour camps of the Soviet Union, which were a system designed for the long-term support of the economy from which 90 percent of prisoners emerged alive (Snyder, 2011, 381, xiii).[182] Others have problematised this distinction by pointing out that class in the Soviet Union (which was externally attributed) was, similarly to Jewishness or homosexuality (often also externally attributed), a label which reflected who a person *was* rather than what they did and that the communist authorities *did* seek to exterminate the bourgeoisie and members of the intelligentsia in times of crisis (Todorov, 1999, 8).

Despite such questions, there is a long tradition of comparing the *KZ* and the *Gulag* for political purposes and in historiography. The most famous political use of comparison between the two camp environments came from David Rousset, a survivor of Neuengamme and Buchenwald, who publicly exhorted *KZ* survivors to protest against the *Gulag* system of the Soviet Union and was attacked by the French Communist press as a result (Toker, 2000, 38). Rousset's emphasis on the common features of the concentration camp and his coining of the term *univers concentrationnaire* to describe the totally separate, 'weird kingdom' of the camps has had a great influence on subsequent thinkers

[181] Eke highlights differences between the universe described by Solzhenitsyn in works such as *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) and *The First Circle of Hell* (1968) and *Atemschaukel*, but remarks on the striking similarities between it and works such as *Kolyma Tales* by Varlam Shalamov (1973), *Im Angesicht der Todesengel Stalins* (1989) and *Der Vogel* (2010) by Angela Rohr (*nom de plume* Helene Golnipa) (Eke, 2011, 56).

[182] *Atemschaukel* seems to contain a higher rate of death but also portrays difficult conditions in the surrounding villages, implying that lack of food is a product of circumstances rather than it being withheld out of malice.

and cultural theorists, including Hannah Arendt (Silverman, 2013, 12; see Chapter Four). Somewhat controversially, he suggested that:

> the enormity of the camp is not due to the fact that people suffered and died in it, but to the fact that people experienced it. It was in the camp that the prisoner suffered complete degradation. A country that permits the existence of concentration camps is rotten to the core. No one is left untouched in such a world, and there lies the greatest misfortune we can ever know. (Todorov, 1999, 32)

Rousset's assertion, summarised here by Todorov, that dehumanisation was the most potent effect of the camp system is echoed in recent scholarship concerned with the ongoing effect of the Holocaust on meaning-creation. The systematic dismantling of humanity and destruction of human life has, critics argue, upset the boundaries of what is possible, changing language and perception irrevocably (Eaglestone, 2014, 20).[183]

Modernity is often described as an era of novelty in terms of war and genocide (because of the emergence of Total War, popularisation of eugenics and development of advanced weaponry) but also in terms of the features these brought with them, such as mechanised death and mass incarceration. Heinrich Böll observed that imprisonment had become 'die Erfahrung des Jahrhunderts', with people all over the world incarcerated in unprecedented numbers in systems of unprecedented scale (Böll, 1973, 227 cited Toker, 2000, 6). The *Gulag* system is implicated in such considerations as a space in which previous limits on the scale of mass punishment, the elimination of political minorities and the destruction of private lives were breached. Although the *Gulag* predated the rise of Communism, and was in many respects a relic of tsarist political repression (as opposed to the newly-created and specifically-designed *KZ*), the scale and purpose of the *Gulag* changed dramatically as it came to be seen as a source of forced labour and therefore a repressive threat to the entire Soviet population (Applebaum, 2004, 71-72). If we accept Tzvetan Todorov's assertion that the camp is a synecdoche and cornerstone of the system

[183] Although the first concentration camps were established by colonial governments (in Cuba by the Spanish imperial government in 1895, by the British during the Boer War and by the Germans in South West Africa around 1904-5), the Nazi concentration camps are the ones which are remembered and the impact of which brought about this sea-change (Applebaum, 2004, 19). In part this may be to do with mass media and awareness of what took place there but must also be connected to what Arendt describes as the Nazi determination to destroy the human within the human (Pollock and Silverman, 2014, 11). Earlier concentration camps were designed to demoralise and destroy populations but were generally to do with gaining a tactical advantage in times of war (e.g. by preventing or subduing colonial uprisings) and on a much smaller scale.

which produces it, in that it is 'more effective than death itself in the creation of state terror […] [and] is the quintessence of totalitarianism in that the society is run according to the same, though somewhat diluted principles,' then how the camp is represented is crucial to the processing of the history of communist terror (Todorov, 1999, 17). Müller said of Romania that it was an island, 'ein nach außen abgeschottenes, nach innen überwachtes Gelände' (*König*, 160). The choice of *Gelände*, the same term used to describe the outer compound in camps, suggests that she envisages an island in the sense of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (1973) rather than a literal island.

A further important (practical) consideration is the vast difference in availability of information, images and other resources for imagining and remembering the *Gulag* when compared to the *KZ*. The long history of the *Gulag* system, combined with the communist state structures which produced and effectively outlived it, mean that its history has only begun to be processed; there is no national monument and there are no photographic recordings of the camps (Applebaum, 2004, 7; Etkind, 2004, 518-20 both cited Haines, 2013, 123-4). The fact that the caesura of 1991 did not coincide with the end of the *Gulag*, which had been gradually wound up from the mid-century onwards, contributes to the lack of political will to investigate its history. Although there was an 'avalanche' of *Gulag* literature in the late 1980s, a time when earlier works by internees ('zeks') began to be re-published through official presses, there remains a dearth of representation when it comes to the *Gulag* which hinders remembrance (Toker, 2000, 67). Images from the Nazi era can provide anchors for imaginatively reconstructing the history of the *Gulag* and of mass imprisonment more broadly, a potential which lies behind the deployment of the former by political agitators such as Rousset and writers such as Semprun. In historical perspective, the "end" of the *Gulag* coming almost ten years after the end of the *KZ*, means that comparisons were made by contemporary observers and witnesses.[184] In his work on Bulgarian labour camps, Todorov quotes a guard at Lovech camp (Sokol Ralchev) who was prompted to reflect on the two systems: 'I'd seen films on the German camps, and I didn't see much of a difference between them and Lovech. The camp was filled with prisoners paralyzed by fear' (Todorov, 1999, 143).

As well as providing an imaginative resource for imagining the lesser-known histories of the exile labour camp and the *Gulag*, Müller's references to *Gulag* literature and conscious collapsing of boundaries between the imaginative worlds of the Soviet and

[184] Of course, this was not the end of mass imprisonment in the Soviet Union and hundreds of thousands of people were kept imprisoned over the following decades of the regime. Psychiatric hospitals were increasingly used as a place to house the politically unreliable from the 1960s on (Applebaum, 2004, 87-91).

Nazi camps enhance *Atemschaukel*'s effectiveness as a critique of the Communist system in general. Direct references to communism or to the Soviet Union and its structures, such as when Leo notices the portrait of Stalin in Tur Prikulitsch's office as he is given the news of his brother's birth, are relatively rare, but the presence of the dictator is felt nevertheless (*Atemschaukel*, 211). Bannasch points to Müller's use of the image of the raspberry, which recurs in Osip Mandelstam's poetry in relation to Stalin, as an example of her intertextual connection to anti-Stalinist writing (*Atemschaukel*, 114; Bannasch, 2011, 141).[185] Eke also observes the presence of Stalin behind the chaotic façade of the labour camp as the creator of the 'Lagerzeit' represented by the broken cuckoo clock in Leo's barrack and alluded to in the chapter title, 'Wie sich die Sekunden ziehen' (Eke, 2011, 66). The false chiming of the clock reflects the 'empty' time of the camp, outside of real life (*ibid*). As conditions in the camp worsen, the clock – placed in their barrack by an unknown agent – becomes a symbol of what is being done to the inmates; the ticking of the clock and the dangling weights are mirrored in the image of the 'Atemschaukel' and the swollen palates of the hungry inmates:

> Ich bin kurz vor dem Zusammenbruch, im süßen Gaumen schwillt mir das Zäpfchen. Und der Hungerengel hängt sich ganz in meinen Mund hinein, an mein Gaumensegel. Es ist seine Waage […] Er lässt meinen Atem schaukeln. […] Und die Sonne scheint mir hell mitten durch die Zirbeldrüse. (*Atemschaukel*, 87)

The reference to the pineal gland, the brain's centre for determining sleep patterns based on circadian rhythms and the passage of the seasons, seems significant here as the gland – famously shaped like a pine cone and therefore a mirror to the decorative weights on the clock – both relates to the quantification of time and has been culturally understood as the seat of the soul (Descartes).[186] The hunger angel's weighing scale, Leo's soft palate and uvula, swings along with his breath in a similar way to the pendulum below the cuckoo clock, suggesting the connection between the threat of starvation, the loss of humanity and

[185] The raspberry is a motif in Mandelstam's writing but it best known from the epigram he wrote to Stalin, which ends in the lines which suggest that he consumes the deaths of his subjects as if they were raspberries. 'Что ни казнь у него, - то малина./ И широкая грудь осетина.' lit. 'And every punishment is a raspberry/ to the broad-chested Ossete' (Mandelstam, 1933).

[186] The gland has also historically been thought of as the mythical 'third eye', the source of knowledge beyond the empirical. In the 20th century, French writer and philosopher Georges Batailles employed the pineal gland as a symbol of the blindspot of European rationalism, an organ of excess and delirium (Batailles, 1985, 79-90).

the passage of time. In this time outside time ('die Lagerzeit') the life and soul of the prisoners hangs in the balance.[187]

Müller is a vocal advocate for greater transparency and a proper process of restorative justice in the former Eastern Bloc, and *Atemschaukel* constitutes an important contribution to memory debates in this field. However, the stylistic and symbolic links between *Atemschaukel* and her other work point to the relevance of experiences and sensations it represents to the memory of the later Ceauşescu regime, as well as the Stalinist regime in Romania at the time in which the novel is set. Allusions and connections to Müller's own experiences, such as the image of the handkerchief (see Chapter Four), the threat of persecution by the regime and the alienation of the narrator from his family and friends mean that a reader familiar with Müller's writing life and biography is drawn to make comparisons and reflect on the relevance of her experience in the writing process. As Haines observes, 'the whole novel […] is recognisably an extension and intensification of Müller's previous work,' and contains scenes, phrases and details which return to her previous fictional output (Haines, 2013, 126). When, for example, Leo itemises the objects he carries with him to the camp, echoes can be heard of the scene in *Herztier*, where the protagonist lists her body parts during an interrogation (*ibid*). The strategies of endurance (if not resistance) and search for emotional and mental anchors which mark Leo's struggle to survive in the camp are markedly similar to those of Müller's protagonists trying to remain sane in Ceauşescu's Romania, implying that the political production of their suffering – as well as the sensational similarities between it – is somehow connected. This is a similar approach to the connections she makes elsewhere between the Nazi past and the Banat-Swabian village and the Romanian state, for example in *Niederungen*. In addition to affinitive links based in subjective experience, *Atemschaukel* also makes reference to prison camps in Romania itself, bringing the structural foundations of Leo's experiences closer to the world Müller describes elsewhere:

> Damals, kurz vor dem Lager und *genauso nach meiner Heimkehr* bis 1968, als ich das Land verließ, hätte es für jedes Rendezvous Gefängnis gegeben. Mindestens fünf Jahre, wenn man mich erwischt hätte. Manche hat man erwischt. Sie kamen direkt aus dem Park oder Stadtbad nach brutalen Verhören ins Gefängnis. *Von dort ins Straflager an den Kanal*. Heute weiß ich, vom Kanal kehrte man nicht zurück.

[187] Leo subsequently dreams of the weights, hung around the necks of sheep in a landscape full of abandoned luggage (*Atemschaukel*, 152).

> Wer trotzdem wiederkam, war ein wandelnder Leichnam. Vergreist und ruiniert, für keine Liebe auf der Welt mehr zu gebrauchen. (*Atemschaukel*, 9, my emphasis)

This parallel universe of punishment and suffering *within* the state is immediately reminiscent of the experiences of the protagonists of books like *Herztier* and *Heute wäre ich mich lieber nicht begegnet*, as well as those of Müller and her associates themselves. The threat of being snatched off the street and held without trial or any recourse was one which continued to exist for all people in Romania for decades after the danger of the Soviet camp had passed for Germans; as Leo recognises, the punishment for homosexuals continued. In contrast to the impersonal, almost arbitrary way in which Leo and other ethnic Germans were deported to the labour camp, the communist state, whether in Romania or in Russia, would continue to brutally punish individuals it deemed outside acceptable norms of behaviour, whether politically or personally. Significantly, it is the prisoners here in Romania, rather than Leo and his fellow survivors, that he identifies as being irrevocably 'ruined' by the communist system.

Conclusion: Making Meaning in the Echo Chamber

Atemschaukel is a novel with a highly complex relationship to history and memory. On the surface, it contains a scrupulously researched and sensitive portrayal of a little-known episode of European history. However, in its form and style, *Atemschaukel* is also an important contribution to the literature of memory, exposing the affinitive and imaginative connections through which cultural memory is constantly produced, complicated and expanded. It is not, therefore, only a history of the German deportees from Romania; neither is it only a vision of the immediate post-war period in Eastern Europe. It is a work which represents the 'echo-chamber' of history within which it exists and the cultural traditions of which it is a product (Eke, 2011, 55).[188] Drawing on existing imaginative resources, the story it presents is rooted in and produced through the knowledge of other historical times, places and imaginative spaces, and points, through its focus on sensation and subjective perception, to the vulnerability common to vastly different contexts. The metaphor of an echo chamber is particularly apt as it evokes the touching of surfaces,

[188] '*Atemschaukel* (entfaltet) seine Wirkung […] im Echoraum der 'großen' Shoah – und Gulag-Romane.' (Eke, 2011, 55). Eke seems to be drawing on Barthes's use of the term 'chambre d'écho', from his writing on intertextuality.

movement, reverberations and fading or recurring impressions which operate in the space of cultural memory.[189]

The novel presents memory as multidirectional (Rothberg, 2009): an ever-changing imaginative sphere in which meaning is produced through interaction and imaginative exchange. Both thematically and in individual moments, different times are shown to 'touch' in such a way as to expand our understanding of the past without the commitment or cementation brought by equation. Leo Auberg standing *Appell* is not the same person as Fernand Barizon in *Oh What a Beautiful Sunday*, nor is he a product of the same political circumstances or open to the same threats. Yet both Auberg and Barizon are young men trying to withstand the exhaustion and demoralisation brought upon them by hostile regimes, whose sense impressions and descriptions of bodily endurance return their reader to the minute-by-minute experience of survival in extremis. Similarly, the intertexts Müller chooses are concerned with experiences markedly different from that of her protagonist, and subjects who have been actively deprived of their humanity, yet the possibilities – for suffering, for abjection, for cruelty – which are opened up within them and the crucial record of the mechanisms of oppression they represent enhance the understanding of power relations in the twentieth century, and beyond. By creating moments of tension in which the overlapping and contradictory layers of memory and meaning are felt, Müller drives her reader beyond memory as subject to the politics of identity and towards a memory of greater complexity, coupled to a practise of apprehension and universal empathy.

Atemschaukel presents not only a record but a prompt to imagine and explore the experiential possibilities of others, whether represented in the text or implicit in the universe of experience and suffering to which it alludes. The frozen breath of a crowd in an anonymous field, the unpicked fruit in the trees or the nameless Russian mother who waits for her son all invite the reader momentarily to apprehend the vistas of experience which remain unknown and unknowable to them, yet constitute the majority of human history. The injunction to imagine with empathy is also present within Müller's narrative style, where the careful balance between perceptive proximity, precision and the denial of

[189] Another useful term for analysing the way in which the momentary coming together of different histories can produce a kind of interpretative energy or provide insights into other, unrelated historical events is Andreas Huyssen's idea of 'triangulation', used to discuss the relationship between German, Jewish and Turkish immigrant history (Huyssen, 1995, 81 cited Minnaard, 2012, 124). Leslie Adelson accounts for the interaction of German and immigrant memory with her equally useful concept of 'touching tales', pointing to the underappreciated commonalities underlying Turkish and German culture as well as the affective impact of German history (particularly the Holocaust) on Turkish-German literature of migration (Adelson, 2008, 20; Minnaard, 2012, 124).

identification creates an openness to the experience of others based on the common frameworks of sensation and memory. Müller succeeds in bringing her reader to an appreciation of the universal humanity underlying every individual experience and moment, returning them to their own bodily vulnerability and the great personal and collective losses which underlie our perception of history. This resort to the physical, the anthropological dimension of collective memories, becomes the ideal conduit for recognising the other because, as Landsberg puts it, the 'nerves and skin remember' what we cannot access consciously (Landsberg, 2004, 105). Müller makes lives grievable even before they are fully imagined, capturing the essence of the past in fleeting images and sense impressions that only emphasise the resounding voids that fall between them.

In her early review of *Atemschaukel*, Ruth Klüger touched upon this special quality and the impact of the novel on German memory culture:

> Die Lager sind ja eine menschliche Grenzerfahrung, die wir in ihrer Andersartigkeit gern in einem Dachspeicher unseres Gedächtnisses verstauben lassen. Müller holt sie aus dieser Verdrängung heraus, gliedert sie mit ihrer Sprachkunst in unsere Kultur ein und macht sie der Trauer zugänglich. (Klüger, 2009 cited Braun, 2011, 35)

Beyond this "history from below" of post-war Romania it is not only the 'Lager', but the 'menschliche Grenzerfahrung' itself that Müller renders grievable in *Atemschaukel*, as she does throughout her oeuvre, by bringing her reader to a sense of common vulnerability. In doing this she unlocks a potential for solidarity beyond groups and identities which has powerful ethical implications. Her writing provides proof of Butler's thesis that the politics of recognition must end in an identification with suffering itself (Butler, 2004, 30).

Conclusion: Müller's Memory Project as a Call for Empathy in the (post-)Totalitarian World

Herta Müller's writing life is underpinned by the processes of personal, collective and cultural memory, which are represented at the formal and thematic level of her works. Her imaginary universe is saturated with the past, both in terms of rich historical detail (from her own life and from the history of Central and Eastern Europe) and the imaginary pasts which possess her characters and their real-life counterparts. Although she rejects the idea of her writing as autobiographical, Müller's own life experience is a fundamental and acknowledged part of her fiction, and her statements made in non-fiction, interviews and newspaper essays intersect with her novels to complicate the boundary between fact and fiction.

Remembering is at the heart of Müller's texts, with texts such as *Niederungen*, *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*, *Herztier* and *Atemschaukel* focusing on characters' recall of earlier events, but it also determines the structure of her writing. Flashbacks, framing narratives and the intrusion of certain images of captured moments of sensation from the past reveal the experiences which have brought characters to their present condition and mindset, whilst also breaking down clear distinctions between past and present. Her aesthetic is dominated by pre-verbal aspects of remembering, by memory as an experience. Sensation and visuality take precedence over narrative across Müller's oeuvre, with single, emblematic images used to express the essence of past experiences and interwoven into networks that reveal their underlying structure.

Critics have tended to analyse Müller's works in terms of trauma theory in order to account for the autobiographical and fragmentary nature of Müller's prose, as well as her focus on bodily experience. Müller's experiences as an object of *Securitate* harassment are seen as foundational in these traumatic interpretations, as the source of personal trauma and the key to interpreting her work. I contend that memory of the fascist past of her community and country is an equally if not more important foundational history and that focusing on it reveals offers fresh insights. In line with this shift in perspective, I propose that memory, rather than trauma, is the guiding concern and organising principle of Müller's writing, and that trauma, although a likely route into the development of Müller's aesthetic (and a valuable theoretical framework), is not the dominant mode in Müller's writing as a whole.

The most powerful aspect of memory upon which Müller draws is external to her writing, the indefinable and elusive reservoir of cultural memory, which informs the structure and content of her work. The semiological inheritance of the past and specifically the imagery surrounding the Second World War and Nazism are of enormous importance to her writing and form the basis of much of its imaginary universe. Meanwhile, the images which Müller herself creates complement and imitate the structure of historically-based image networks through the way they circulate and reverberate through the texts. She speaks to the cognitive space occupied by cultural memory, creating a personal semiology or *Grundregister* which accesses the same imaginative processes of interpretation and empathy as do the direct visual "quotations" from past events.

Müller's aim in resorting to memory as the primary theme and structural basis of her writing can be deduced from her personal politics and the way in which she uses memory across her work. The sensations of memory as a structure are universal; remembering is the primary experience of all human beings and the content of memory is valued as containing truth, even though its literal veracity as a record of past events is doubtful. Müller uses memories of the past to reveal the underlying structures of experience and human interaction, connecting different moments, images and sensations in a way which moves beyond the limiting factors of narrative, context and objectivity. Her writing uncovers the shared affective and sensational basis of experience which precedes its rationalisation or shaping into something expressible to others, opening her readers up to a universal human mode of perceiving which she positions as a means of accessing deeper truths of the past and the present.

Her isolated images and the networks they sit within encourage the creation of connections or "stories" which expose meaning whilst simultaneously preserving their own contingency, both by being the product of self-consciously interpretative acts on the part of the reader and through the recurrence of images and sensations from other contexts. Interconnectedness enhances the impression of truthfulness and essential verisimilitude to lived experience whilst undermining the truth claims of any single narrative. Müller shows that it is memory as momentary experience and the recognition of patterns that allows us to appreciate our shared humanity and interconnectedness to other people.

Ultimately, Müller's work is about empathy: the universal humanity of all people and the removal of unnecessary barriers which prevent us from appreciating it. Memory, as the foundational means by which people make sense of the world, provides a route into universal experience, while collective and cultural memory provide a wealth of examples

through which to demonstrate both the breadth of experience which cannot be captured in narrative history and the essential, paradoxical interconnectedness of each of these unique experiences. Through the shared perceptive framework of bodily existence and the structural commonalities between disparate moments and acts, the distant and troubling experiences of the past Müller evokes become immediate and relevant to the present day and to all human experience. Her works are tightly woven webs of meaning and interpretation whose threads extend beyond the text and her wider writing life; they are boundless exercises in empathy, exploring human life, consciousness and violence in all their endless iterations.

The size of her ambition and deep moral conviction in appealing to such universal ethical ideas has led to misunderstandings and dismissals from some quarters. Writer and critic Cristian Tudor Popescu commented in 2009, 'When she got the prize she spoke about the dictatorship, but not about literature, as if she were Nelson Mandela. The Nobel Peace prize would have suited her better' (Popescu, 2009 cited Connolly, 2009). Yet Müller's aims are on that scale. She believes in the power of human beings to escape the patterns of exploitation to which her work bears witness and glimpse an alternative future, both personally and as a collective, bound by mutual recognition.

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