

Glocal Eco-politics and Overflowing Dramaturgy: Karin Beier's Production of Elfriede Jelinek's *Das Werk / Im Bus / Ein Sturz*

A significant number of Elfriede Jelinek's plays - from *In den Alpen* and *Kein Licht* to *Sonne, los jetzt!*, *Luft*, and *Asche* - deal with human and ecological catastrophes caused by man's hubristic attempts to conquer nature through technology (see Thiériot and Schenkermayr). *Das Werk* (2003) addresses the construction of the gigantic hydroelectric power station of Kaprun in the Alps, which was first planned in the 1920s, launched by the Nazis in 1938 and completed after the war - hailed ever since as one of Austria's major technical achievements. What was repressed in this nationalist glorification is that Austria built Kaprun with the help of thousands of forced laborers taken from the streets of Eastern Europe and later with prisoners of war, who had to work under extreme and inhumane conditions, malnourished and with insufficient equipment. According to official figures, around 160 workers died during Kaprun's construction but, as Jelinek explains, these were just the postwar figures, and overall figures, especially during the Nazi era, are much higher (Jelinek, "Nachbemerkung" 257-8). As Jelinek writes, "Kaprun wurde mit Geldern des Marshall-Plans fertiggestellt und zog einen langen Rattenschwanz an nationalen Mythen nach sich, die aber buchstäblich auf den Gebeinen und der Ausbeutung von Getöteten beruhten" (258). *Das Werk* received a successful world premiere directed by Nicolas Stemann at the Vienna Akademietheater in 2003. In this article, however, I focus on Karin Beier's trilogy production *Das Werk / Im Bus / Ein Sturz*, premiered on 29 October 2010 at the Schauspiel Köln, as an impressive example of eco-political theatre.

When in 2009 the Historical Archive of the City of Cologne collapsed due to political negligence, irresponsible engineering, and corrupt construction practices in the subway building site below, dramaturg Rita Thiele suggested to director Karin Beier that they restage *Das Werk* at the Schauspiel Köln in this new context. They contacted Jelinek with this idea, asking her for permission to also stage *Im Bus*, a short excerpt from the text *Todkrank* that deals with an accident in Munich where a bus fell into a sink hole due to similarly corrupt subway construction practices. Moreover, they enquired whether she could contribute a new text about the collapse of the Historical Archive in Cologne, offering to supply her with news clippings and other relevant research. Jelinek was happy to oblige since the collapse of the city's historical archive affected its historical memory - a topic central to her work (Thiele interview). The resulting trilogy production, I argue, is not so much conducting a rational argument but working *affectively* as a disruption of political discourse as usual

through an engagement with Greek tragedy as well as through an 'elemental' dramaturgy that uses particularly water in an affective way. It is notable that Jelinek's increasing preoccupation with ecological subject matter coincides with her increasing turn to archaic forms such as Greek tragedy. Thus, it is striking, as Thiériot and Schenkermayr observe, that all seven theatre texts since *In den Alpen* that deal with ecological catastrophes repeatedly quote ancient tragedies, as well as mythological works and fairytales (Thiériot and Schenkermayr, 230). As Silke Felber has shown in her recent study *Travelling Gestures: Elfriede Jelineks Theater der (Tragödien-)Durchquerung* (2023), Jelinek's theater texts since *Ein Sportstück* (1998) have consistently engaged with Greek tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides. "Der verfremdende Blick auf the Mythen fungiert in Jelineks Theatertexts als Basis für die darin verhandelten virulenten Thematiken unserer Zeit" (Felber, 291). Jelinek's approach to the aesthetics of Greek tragedy, as Felber argues, is, however, not just characterized by an engagement with the myths themselves but is emphatically marked by references to the theatrical form of Greek tragedy and its constitutive elements (Felber, 291). Thus, Felber shows, for example, that Jelinek's text *Kein Licht. Ein Epilog?*, published a year after the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, is a rereading of Sophocles *Antigone* that employs the "Formzitat der Klage", the resistant female "Kulturtechnik" of lament that lives on in Greek tragedy (Felber 65-66).

As I hope to show with respect to *Das Werk/Im Bus/Ein Sturz*, Jelinek's formal engagement with Greek tragedy is ultimately aimed at a reactivation of theatre's role in fostering democratic citizenship, including ecological citizenship (see Bourban 2023). In my discussion of Beier's production, I will analyze its creation of an ecological tragic, as well as at times comic and absurdist experience in relation to its deliberate resonances and dissonances with ancient Greek tragedy, before turning to its viscerally affective elemental and overflowing dramaturgy that would eventually see the whole stage flooded. First, however, I shall consider the wider institutional and political context in which Karin Beier was working at the time.

Stadttheater: Polis and Theatre

Karin Beier is one of the most formidable German directors of her generation and even more so a celebrated *Intendantin* (Artistic Director and Chief Executive), not least for turning the Schauspiel Köln from a relatively provincial municipal theatre into Germany's 'Theatre of the Year' twice in succession (in 2010 and 2011). No less than eight productions were invited to the Berliner Theatertreffen during her

directorship of the theatre from 2007 - 2013. Beier's own three and a half hours staging of *Das Werk/Im Bus/Ein Sturz* (2010) was not only invited to the Theatertreffen but went on to being voted *Theater Heute's* 'Inszenierung des Jahres' for 2010, with chief dramaturg Rita Thiele being elected 'Dramaturgin des Jahres 2010'. Its success can only be fully understood within the larger context of Beier's work as *Intendantin* of the Schauspiel Köln. As Gerhard Preusser argues, the German institution of the locally oriented *Stadttheater* has in many respects become a 'curiosity' in a globalized and heavily mediatized world - with the consequence that it has become a challenge to make both 'theatre for the city' which creates local identifications for its audience and theatre that references an international cultural frame (Preusser 132-3). Preusser praises Karin Beier and Rita Thiele for setting a glowing example in Cologne how to tackle these twin challenges (135).

Like Jelinek herself in her writing, Beier has a strong ongoing investment in Greek tragedy in her directing. Her recurrent return to Greek tragedy, together with the fact that she and Thiele expanded on *Das Werk* to create a powerful postdramatic Greek trilogy of sorts, in which the world premiere of *Ein Sturz* was conceived as a kind of "Satyr-spiel" (Thiele, *Katerstimmung*, 180), persistently evokes the city as a political community in the sense of the *polis*. As Hans-Thies Lehmann states, 'from the beginning the articulation of the tragic was closely connected to basic questions of the political, the *polis*, to history, power and conflict. [...] Where we find the tragic, we hit upon the political' (Lehmann, 90). The ancient Greek term *πόλις* (*polis*) referred to the city-state (e.g. Athens), and the theatre acted a vital space where political issues important to the *polis* were articulated and citizens were mentally and emotionally 'trained' in ethical and political considerations of citizenship. Considering our contemporary metropolitan societies and mediatized existences, it is no longer possible for theatre to embody the ancient Greek assembly of the *polis* as a community physically present to itself. Nevertheless, Beier clearly aspires to an ideal of the *Stadttheater* where the theatre as a public institution plays a major role in appealing to active citizenship by responding to current and historical political issues, either directly or indirectly.

In Cologne civic responsibility for Beier also extended to political activism. At the time, a major political issue, which also forms an important backdrop to the production and reception of *Das Werk / Im Bus / Ein Sturz*, involved the theatre itself, namely the building complex that houses the Schauspiel Köln and the Oper Köln. When Beier took up her position, the city council was planning to renovate the opera house but to

demolish the theatre and build a brand-new one. With projected costs having shot up and severe cuts to the original plans having been announced, however, it became clear that the theatre would not gain anything from a slimmed down version of a newbuild but risk having its artistic programming budget cut back. A citizens' initiative, *Mut zur Kultur*, formed and demanded a refurbishment of the original historic postwar building designed by Wilhelm Riphahn instead. While *cultural* sustainability was at the forefront of this initiative, refurbishments and reuse of materials are also more ecologically sustainable than demolitions and newbuilds, which have a much larger carbon footprint (see Baker Brown 2024). Beier became a key spokesperson for this campaign, which eventually won the day with a vote in the City Council in March 2010 overturning the previous decision for a slimmed down newbuild. The following year Beier was awarded a civic prize for her political engagement in Cologne and was praised for having "in beachtenswerter Weise Position für die demokratische Stadtgesellschaft eingenommen", showing "dass man verändern kann, wenn man sich einmischt" (Höbel, 131).

The idea for *Das Werk / Im Bus / Ein Sturz* arose when Beier and Thiele were looking for a playtext "mit dem wir Stellung beziehen wollten zu den Dingen, die in Köln geschahen. [...] Wir wollten thematisch dranbleiben" (Beier in Höbel 151-152). In a wider sense, the production is a contribution to the debate about political responsibility and the precarious state of democracy in late capitalism. *Ein Sturz* responds not just to the catastrophic collapse of the Historic Archives, caused by large construction companies cutting corners in the engineering of the subway site below and the city council neglecting its duties of oversight, but to the wider problem of an infiltration of politics by neoliberal capitalist interests. The latter was exemplified by Cologne's corrupt city politics at the time, in which the council was engaged in privatizations and the widespread practice of 'cross border leasing' city assets to US investment banks.¹

Beier and her team created an evening that used a vast arsenal of performance forms crossing high culture and popular culture forms, tragic and comic forms, choric and individual modes of performance, as well as quasi archaic forms juxtaposed with technologically mediated forms. Moreover, Beier and her creative team put their very own stamp on borrowed

¹ A book that describes these practices in detail and which informed Jelinek's text *Ein Sturz* is Werner Rügemer's *Colonia Corrupta: Globalisierung, Privatisierung und Korruption im Schatten des Kölner Klüngels* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2002).

or cited staging forms, especially through their combination with what I shall describe as an affectively elemental and overflowing dramaturgy. Above all, the creation of a carefully crafted *Gesamtkunstwerk* of a new trilogy with 'glocal' ecological relevance represents a highly original directorial and dramaturgical feat.

Oikos, Logos and Techne: *Das Werk* (Part I)

The ecological thinking embedded in postwar and contemporary theatre has come into sharper focus with the anthology *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Ecology, the Environment and the Greening of the Modern Stage* (2015). In their introduction editors Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh follow Michel Serres, Timothy Morton, Arne Naess and Félix Guattari in distinguishing 'ecology' from the 'environment' and progressive ecological thinking from 'environmentalism'. To "think in environmental terms alone", they argue, "is to perpetuate, unwittingly, the ideology of the Enlightenment subject who gazes at the environment from the outside, as if it were some aestheticized or intellectual object" (Lavery and Finburgh, 20). It not only keeps 'nature' or the 'environment' at a safe distance from the human subject but also divorces it from economic, technological and social questions rather than regarding these as part of a wider ecology. Lavery and Finburgh argue, for example, that "it is impossible to imagine an effective ecology that would not [...] critically interrogate the role that orthodox ideas of 'race', gender and sexuality have played in defining our perceptions of 'nature' and vice versa" (Lavery and Finburgh 21). Both Jelinek within her text and Beier within her production, I contend, consider this wider ecology and engage in forms of 'ecological thought' that "thinks big and joins the dots", as Morton puts it (Morton, *Ecological Thought* 18). They connect ecological catastrophes with the mechanisms of exploitation and economic neoliberalism that seek profit maximization at every cost and at the same time expose the ideological discourses used to justify these mechanisms and cover up past and present crimes.

The term "Oecologie" was "coined in 1866 by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel [...]. It derives from the ancient Greek οἶκος (*oikos*; house, household, also dwelling place, family) and λογος (*logos*; word, language, language of reason)" (Schwarz and Jax 145). Jelinek's *Das Werk* resonates with all these meanings - in addition to more metaphorical meanings of *oikos* such as home in the sense of a romanticized national *Heimat* -, as it probes the language and logic people use to talk about their home and 'natural environment' which they transform through technology. Patriarchal gender relationships are as much part of this ecology as people's

exploitative relationship to nature and to the 'others' from outside 'home' who are employed to achieve its transformation. Jelinek is concerned with "social ecology", as championed by Murray Bookchin, as much as with an ecology of the relationship between humans and non-human life forms. It is a kind of ecological thinking she shares - albeit in a different form of playwriting - with British playwright Caryl Churchill; like Churchill's, too, hers could be described as a 'dark ecology' (Aston 59). This concept was first coined by Morton in 2004 and further explored in *Ecology without Nature* (2009) and in subsequent books. In his book *Dark Ecology* (2016) Morton refers to it as a bleak "ecological awareness, dark depressing" that is informed by 'ecognosis', which he describes as "like knowing, but more like letting it be known" as well as "a knowing that knows itself" (Morton 2016, 5).

'Dark ecology' rejects traditional ideas of 'Nature' being separate from the existence of humans, instead acknowledging their interconnectedness in a larger ecological web. The "concept of Nature", Morton argues in an interview, "is a sort of anthropocentrically scaled concept, designed for humans, so it's not strictly relevant to thinking about ecology. In fact, it might even be, for various reasons, a bit of a disaster. The first way in which it's a bit of a disaster is that it separates the human from the non-human world by sort of an arbitrary aesthetic screen" (Jiménez de Cisneros 2016). In Jelinek's work, too, 'nature' is generally dealt with as a suspect ideological concept that is implicated in manifold ways in violent power relationships in areas such as tourism, sports, environmental conservatism, the relationship between the sexes, and the Holocaust (see Van der Steeg). Her work has consistently exposed the mythologization of 'nature' and sought to demythologize it at every turn. However, whereas Morton's call for a progressive form of ecological thinking goes as far as wanting to dispense with the concept of 'nature' altogether (Morton, *Ecology without Nature*), Jelinek's own critique takes the form of inhabiting existing discourses and exposing their ideologies from within. In *Das Werk*, she states ironically: "Und den Begriff Natur wollen wir diesmal aber ganz weit fassen, damit auch die Technik noch hineingeht" (165), indicating a much broader 'ecological' approach than one that concentrates on the natural environment in isolation from and binary opposition to technology. In the following, I will analyze how this kind of ecological thinking is evident in the first part of the trilogy, *Das Werk*. For the first part of *Das Werk* Jelinek stipulates as speakers only 'Geißenspeter' and 'Heidis'. Her characteristically open stage directions comment ironically on the romanticized pastoral *Heimat* image of the Alps as propagated by Johanna Spyri's popular children's book *Heidi*:

Etliche Geißenpeter in ihrer Geißenpetertracht treten auf und hüten ihre Geiseln, die fröhlich um sie herumspringen. Sie müssen nicht gehütet werden, denn sie bleiben ja freiwillig bei uns, weil es hier so schön ist. Doch die Peter tun brav ihren Job, aber weil sie ja nicht viel zu tun haben, [...] teilen sie sich den folgenden Text untereinander auf. Wie sie das machen, ist mir inzwischen so was von egal. (Jelink, *Das Werk* 91)

In her production Karin Beier avails herself of the directorial freedom granted by the author and starts instead with a single male performer (Thomas Loibl) in front of the closed curtain, giving a speech that he variously addresses to Heidi or the public, or the public as Heidi. With masterful rhetorical skill, shifts in tempo, rhythm and register, his diction and mannerism recall the steely determination and romanticizing enthusiasm of the engineering heroes in postwar films and novels that heightened the myth of Kaprun.² He introduces us to the building site as a "Kampfplatz": "Kommen Sie her und schauen Sie sich die Technik an, wie sie über die Natur siegt! Und dann schauen Sie sich den Menschen an, wie er über Mensch und Technik siegt, bis nichts mehr übrig ist" (93). The text here riffs off Oswald Spengler's *Der Mensch und die Technik* (1931), Spengler being one of the authors Jelinek acknowledges among her intertextual sources (91). Spengler's deeply pessimistic and in many ways prescient vision of the fate of 'Faustian man' of Western civilization at the hand of his own technology, is a motor for this opening speech, which heightens Spengler's divide between man and nature while at the same time undermining the tone of his earnestly fatalistic prophesy tinged with nihilistic heroism. It not only tops Spengler's dark vision of Faustian man's hubris towards nature with an awareness of the human capacity to dismiss pessimistic ecological prophets - a stance that was taken by the Nazis towards Spengler when they ostracized him - but also extends his analysis by pointing to the patriarchal, sexist gender discourse that is part of this masculine thinking of man versus nature. While Spengler brushes over gender and passes off the generic word *Mensch* as seemingly inclusive of all humans, the speaker here implies that 'der Mensch' indeed means the masculine gender, embodied by him as a 'Techniker' or engineer. The speaker compares Heidi by turns to the machines he has to control -

² These postwar novels and films about Kaprun include *Hoch über Kaprun* (1954), *Die Männer von Kaprun* (1955), *Kaprun: Bezähmte Gewalten* (1964) and *Das Lied von Kaprun* (1954) (see Janke 131).

"Warum funktionierst du noch immer nicht, Heidi? Filter verstopft, Turbine festgefressen? Unrunder Lauf? Woran liegt es?" (103) - and to the natural element that is his biggest challenge, namely water: "Du als Frau wirst ja oft unterschätzt, ähnlich dem Wasser, das sehr stark ist, aber man merkt es nicht gleich" (112).

The opening speech also introduces us to the darkest side of this 'ecology': labour relations, especially to the foreign workers who were sacrificed to build the dam: "Menschen bauen gerne hohe Dinge, und den Wall brauchen wir nötiger als das, was uns blutig ins Haus gebracht und vor die Füße geschmissen wird: Tote, Tote, Tote" (103-4). The dead as the embodied repressed memory of the victims of Kaprun are returning to haunt this house (oikos) as unwanted guests - "außer", as the text cynically adds, "sie gingen noch einmal für Kost und Logis zu uns nach Hause und machten unsre Taten" (104). With the introduction of the workers as (un)dead figures Jelinek points to historical continuities in the exploitation of the workers between World War II and postwar times as a largely hidden social dimension to the battle of 'man against nature'. The dead victims are literally concealed in the walls of the dam, as the speaker hints: "Mit der Hand, der Waffe und dem persönlichen Denken ist der Mensch schöpferisch. Zuerst macht er Tote, dann macht er Beton, aber er hat schon oft beides gleichzeitig gemacht! Tote in Beton. Beton in Toten. Stell dir vor, Heidi!" (102).

Lavery and Finburgh invoke Lyotard's theorization of the 'oikos' as the 'secluded' as a way of thinking "the meaning of ecology as an ethical and political discourse", noting that he "associates it with 'an otherness, an ignored guest who causes some trouble' and whose fate is to remain 'secluded', 'hidden', resistant to communicative language" (Lavery and Finburgh 26). Lyotard states that "in Greek, there is a very clear opposition between *oikeion* and *politikon*. The *Oikeion* is the women, whose sex is *oikeion*, the children, whose generation is also *oikeion*; the servants, everything that can be called 'domesticity' [...]. In the final analysis *oikeion* is everything that is not *öffentlich* [public]" (Lyotard 101). Far from being the place of safety, the *oikeon* as the secluded space, for Lyotard is "the shadowy space of all that escapes the light of public speech, and it is precisely in this darkness that tragedy occurs" (102). This reading of the *oikeion* resonates profoundly with Jelinek's work here and elsewhere (e.g. in *Abraumhalde*). Whenever Jelinek invokes the 'house' or 'home' in *Das Werk*, however, the *oikos* has to be thought of not just in the narrow sense of the domestic sphere but also in the wider sense of a mythologized national home or dwelling place. Thus, she called both *In den Alpen* and *Das Werk* 'Heimattexte' (Janke 138). Another difference to

Lyotard, I would argue, is that Jelinek does not think this *oikeion* in ontological terms as "a relation with something that is inscribed at the origin in all minds, souls or psychic apparatuses" (Lyotard 103) but as historically and politically contingent - and therefore changeable. Here, as in many of her other works (e.g. *Wolken. Heim*) Jelinek seeks to give voice to that which has historically been 'secluded', hidden away and repressed in public discourse by drawing out the 'unheimliche' dimension of the *Heim/Heimat*. Thus, in the opening speech of *Das Werk*, she articulates how the repressed memory of Kaprun's exploitation of workers re-enters the home with the *unheimlich* element of the 'Strom', electricity that has been converted from the stream of water. Electricity is the uncannily alienated form of manual labour: "Und wären's nur die Waschmaschinen und Trockner, die angetrieben warden, Menschenheere wurden Jahre lange für sie angetrieben" (105). As such, electricity can also haunt the house with the memory of the arduous forced labour that went into producing this modern commodity. It can re-invite the ghostly unwanted guest: "Halten Sie Ihr Haus fest, sonst trägt der Strom es Ihnen davon. Halten Sie Ihr Haus fest, sonst fliegt Ihnen noch jemand hinein" (105). The tension between secluding and revealing, concealing and unconcealing runs right through this production. It is paralleled by the taming versus the gradual rise and eventual overflow of water.

Upon the speaker's last line "und dann kamen die Menschen um das Wasser zu zähmen" (115), the curtain opens to reveal a simple scenography by Johann Schütz: at twelve tables on a wide landscape stage, men and women in formal office wear, some of them wearing Heidi and Peter masks iconic of the Japanese anime series *Heidi, Girl of the Alps*, sketch designs and playfully conduct experiments with water.. The performers pour water from plastic bottles into cups, from one plastic cup into another, or into their mouths. We are looking at seemingly 'tamed' water, water in its already commodified bottled form. At this stage any spills are contained, mopped up by a cleaner. The speeches of the five Heidis move from faux naïve ignorance to a keen thirst for engineering knowledge or sudden philosophical insights into engineering as the continuation of war by other means: "Der deutsche Ingenieur ist insgesamt [...] ein ganzes Rudel von Männern, die sich zufällig einmal nicht bekämpfen, sondern etwas anderes tun wollen, das in der Zukunft auch noch halten soll[...] (126). The Heidis perform both the position of the engineers' loyal wives who over-identify with his work and an incisive analysis of this position. When one of them muses whether her own children will become the victims of civilization, it quickly becomes clear that the mothers are implicated in the atrocities by preferring their own children to work in the German car industry and to

sacrifice 'foreign children' instead: "Ex und hopp. Das rechnet sich besser als wenn wir sie gut ernähren würden, die fremden Kinder. Diejenigen, die schon heute Sklaven sind, stehen bereits fest" (138). Here as elsewhere, the play seamlessly moves between the Kaprun context and twenty-first century realities, indicating historical continuities and allowing the audience to draw connections with child labour under globalized capitalism.

Meanwhile, water as a motif gradually builds in the production on several different dramaturgical levels, creating an aquatic dramaturgy. On the visual level its presence intensifies as the performers' water experiments get bolder and actors turn into living fountains spewing water, shower each other with water from the bottles or pour it onto tables, while at one point an actress desperately tries to mop up puddles with her dress. On a linguistic level, the mentions of water as a potential threat increase and intensify, sometimes through choric repetitions of "Wasser, Wasser, Wasser" that are not in the original text. Finally, on a musical level, musical interludes with a water theme occur with increased frequency. The cleaner (played by Rosemary Hardy, an English soprano) suddenly sings Schubert's line "Vom Wasser haben wir's gelernt"; and when one Heidi, complaining about "die Technisierung der Landschaft und der Leidenschaft," desires "dich, liebes Wasser, wenigstens noch einmal gehört [zu] haben" (139), the whole ensemble stops in its tracks and solemnly intones the line 'Des Menschen Seele gleicht dem Wasser' from Franz Schubert's *Gesang der Geister über dem Wasser*. This song, inserted by Beier, is key to the production's conceptual approach, as it underscores the connection between water as a fluid and changing medium and our affective responses (or soul). Here it allows the memory of the invisible dead - the 'spirits' in the song's title - to surface from the shadows of the *oikos*. Moments later, this memory is suppressed when the women don colourful swim caps and dance an aquatic ballet.

Beier's collaboration with composer and musician Jörg Gollasch on the musicalization of the dramaturgy is a key aspect of the production. As David Roesner explains, musicality "also comes into play with respect to rhythm and structure: adapting Jelinek's rhizomatic prose for *Das Werk*, for example required [Beier and Gollasch] to actually come up with and assert a structure in the editing process, which, as Gollasch reports, often followed musical, rather than narrative consideration" (Roesner 249). The experience of the resulting dramaturgy in *Das Werk*, I would argue, is no longer one of discrete building blocks or even a solid structure but rather of a fluidly transforming composition. The dramaturgy itself and the way it works with the text could therefore be said to create its own aquatic connotations, since the overall dynamic effect of its fluently changing

performance registers, temperatures and tempi, rhythms and pitches is, as one reviewer puts, that of the text "permanently washing around the scenic arrangement: at one point oratorio, at another a *Dadamax* revue, a hearing or colloquium with tirades by the male pack creatures, [or] a tender monologue by Susanne Barth as a Jelinek representative" (Wilink).

The latter monologue occurs like a switch to another TV channel with the performer suddenly appearing out of nowhere, wearing a cardboard deer mask (Jelinek means 'little deer' in Czech) in front of a projected image of Jelinek herself. The Author "schaltet [sich] ein" and hopes "einer schaltet [sie] wieder aus" (169) to save electricity, the metaphors reminding us that by extension the fluency we may experience in the dramaturgy is also that of our electricity-powered digital age. In a Heideggerian statement, the Author talks about technology's inherent problem with risk calculation: „Also ich berechne jetzt den Stau, und ich berechne die Staumauer, aber wo die Berechenbarkeit zum Zeichen des Seienden geworden ist, ist das Unversehentliche die Regel" (170).³ Hinting that writing is also a *techne*, the Author ends by stating: "Ich will aber doch auch etwas erfinden und das Wesen des laufenden Wassers auf meine Seite bringen. Also, wie wär's mit uns, liebes Wort und liebe Sprache? Sind wir nicht füreinander geschaffen wie das Wasser für den Damm?" (171). What is remarkable here is that the author does not exempt herself from the wider ecology that is her subject. Rather word and language (*logos*) are processed by the *techne* of writing to 'power' her ecological critique.

After the Author has been 'switched off', the scene transforms when a monologue about bottled "Biowasser" is juxtaposed with a Michael Jackson-esque robotic choreography to a percussion soundscape that uses repeated breaths, text fragments such as "Ja natürlich" and a real pneumatic drill. The scene is now anything but 'natural' and the imbrication of nature and technology fully comes to the fore. While this transformation is going on, a large chorus of men assembles upstage.

Tragic Chorus and Comic Relief: *Das Werk* (Part 2) and *Im Bus*

³ In her afterword Jelinek writes that the victims of Kaprun and of the later Gletscherbahn accident appear to illustrate Heidegger [in his essay 'The Question Concerning Technology']: "Das Wesen der Technik ist als ein Geschick des Entbergens die Gefahr" and "Die Bedrohung des Menschen kommt nicht erst von den möglicherweise tödlich wirkenden Maschinen und Apparaturen der Technik. Die eigentliche Bedrohung hat den Menschen bereits in seinem Wesen angegangen" (Jelinek, 'Nachbemerkung' 258-9).

Elfriede Jelinek dedicated *Das Werk* posthumously to Einar Schleeff with the explanation that she had tried to write something about 'the worker' (Jelinek Nachbemerkung 258), a prominent theme within Schleeff's work. In the text Jelinek indicates as speakers for the second part of *Das Werk* only 'Hänsel and Tretel, two workers from the ARMY OF WORKERS' (189).⁴ The stage directions envisage that these figures are joined by a "Ballet der Bäume", men dressed up as artificial trees, and by an army of snow flakes who perform 'eine Art Kinderballet' (189). Like the Peters and Heidis, the workers thus appear partially in "parodistischer, allogisierender Form" (259), implying that a proud, organized work force has become almost as mythical as the Alpine myth of a pure and innocent snowy landscape that covers up the history of Kaprun. As their own homage to Einar Schleeff and his urgent call for a return of the to contemporary theatre, Beier and her dramaturg Thiele (a seasoned Schleeff dramaturg) stage Jelinek's requiem to the forced labourers and prisoners of war in the second part of *Das Werk* as an enormous chorus scene. Instead of Jelinek's allegorized staging suggestion, this staging gives presence to the ghosts of the workers. For the chorus Beier recruited a well-known local gay men's choir called Die Zauberflöten (a salacious name that chimes well with both Jelinek's penchant for puns and double entendres and Cologne's carnival spirit). The community choir was also a way of involving members of the local community, taking recourse to the ancient Greek custom of the Chorus being made up of volunteers from the *polis*. Furthermore, the Zauberflöten as an association of gay people in this context also represent the victims of fascism. The chorus, lined up behind the ensemble of actors, stays in position for more than thirty minutes, assuming a haunting memory of the masses of workers.

Fig. 1 The chorus in *Das Werk*, including Die Zauberflöten, Cologne, with the ensemble of actors at the front (from left to right: Kryzstof Rackowski, Thomas Loibl, Michael Weber, Manfred Zapatka, Laura Sundermann, Julia Wieninger, Caroline Peters, Kathrin Wehlisch, Susanne Barth, Lina Beckmann, Rosemary Hardy). Cologne, October 2010. Photo: Klaus Lefebvre.

The 'secluded' tragic within the *oikos/Heimat* had already made itself heard at various points in the previous part when poignant moments were created through the isolated tolling of tubular bells or the solemn singing of lines from *Song of the Spirits over the Waters*, as mentioned previously. It now makes itself heard more loudly when Rosemary Hardy sings Anton von

⁴The 'army of workers' (*Arbeiterheer*) is a reference to Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (1932), whose idea of a faceless mass of workers Jelinek critiques.

Webern's *Der Tod* with the large chorus behind her humming as an eerie background choir. Jelinek's text is layered in when the actresses begin by whispering "Es ist etwas Grauenhaftes passiert, und aus Pietät ist jetzt einmal Schluß mit Lustig" (190), before the male actors start by speaking the above cited stage direction about Hänsel and Tretel and the ARMY OF WORKERS. Significantly Beier maintains the sense of the 'secluded' tragic that cannot be put into words because the Zauberflöten choir does not perform as a *Sprechchor*, as Schleeef's choruses typically do. Rather they echo individual words or syllabi of the text spoken by the actors in front of them or create an affective soundscape using rhythmic breathing, stomping, beating hands against chests, etc. that charges the actors' spoken words with a strong physical presence of that which cannot be represented. The actresses' artificially high voices as 'snowflakes' are juxtaposed with a crescendo of a low humming by the male chorus - acoustically creating the impression that the snowflakes are covering up a hidden history. The scene is evocative of the *oikos* as the secluded and secluding domestic sphere (home or Heimat) that hides its terrible secrets from the public. Susanne Barthes as the Author whispers: "Das sich Verbergende windet sich und will noch nicht auftreten" (198). When at one point the first bars of Bertolt Brecht's and Hanns Eisler's Solidarity Song "Vorwärts! Und nicht vergessen" are being hummed by the chorus, it is one of the actors who first sings the lyrics as if remembering a long-forgotten song, so that when the whole chorus joins in, it appears like a ghostly memory of united workers. This particular use of the chorus, together with the durational quality of the scene, creates a strongly affective presence, the emphasis on gestures and sonorous voice recalling the pronounced physicality of the ancient Greek chorus and its powerfully sensual form of communication.

After the stage is cleared of the chorus to the sound of a factory siren, only the actresses are left behind on the battlefield of the stage. The scene stages Jelinek's short 'Epilog' to *Das Werk*, based on Euripides' *Trojan Women*, about the undead mothers' mourning of the dead workers: "Die Mütter erscheinen auf der Dammkrone und sagen ebenfalls, was sie zu sagen haben. Aber keiner hört ihnen zu." (p. 239). Jelinek's use of Euripides acts like a citational echo rather than a dramatic reenactment to both comic and tragic effect. As Felber analyses, Jelinek here employs a paratragic procedure, first employed by Aristophanes, which thrives on the interplay of tragedy and comedy (see Felber, 243-244). Beier's congenial staging picks up on Jelinek's paratragic strategy with a semi-improvised scene in which the actresses repeatedly assume tragic roles such looking for their dead sons with the help of theatrical devices such as chalky

make-up, dry ice 'smoke', and gestural and vocal pathos: "Mein Sohn. Mein Kind". Tragic moments are repeatedly ruptured by improvised lines, as when one actress (Lina Beckmann) approaches another who is singing an operatic aria (Rosemary Hardy) for help with moving a man's lifeless body and finally shouts at her in desperation: 'Hör auf damit, hör damit auf. Bitte lass das! Hör damit auf, du Singsau!' Later, the same performer, having just lamented her son's dead body, interrupts another who is trying to muster a suitably tragic pose for an Edith Piaf chanson: 'You're smoking? You're smoking a cigarette here?!' Teetering on the tragic-comic edge between acting and (non)-performance, the whole scene epitomizes Jelinek's (self-)reflective desperation in lines such as the following (spoken by a knitting Julia Wieninger): "Und jetzt soll ausgerechnet ich eine Sängerin von so argen Taten sein. Nein, das kann ich nicht. Das ist mir nicht zuzumuten. Ich bin ja selber tot. Was glauben Sie denn, dass ich in so einem Zustand auch noch singen kann?!" As so often in Jelinek productions, the scene provides both comic relief and simultaneously throws into stark relief the seriousness at the heart of it.

Comic relief is also provided by Beier's realization of the short second part of the trilogy, *Im Bus*, when a trio of men in construction worker outfits with carnivalesque accessories such as fake breasts and stag horns loudly interrupt the scene of the mourning mothers. They banter about the Munich disaster that saw a bus fall into their subway construction site through a sink hole, killing three men and turning the workers themselves from diggers into gravediggers. The scene anticipates the themes of capitalist greed and corruption in the construction industry leading to urban environmental catastrophes that will also be the focus of *Der Sturz*. Ending on the song "Bitte sterben Sie nicht!", with the women now belly dancing, the scene takes place just before the intermission and is conceived as a kind of *Kehraus*, the last dance at the end of carnival that simultaneously clears the stage.

Sprachstrom* and Overflowing Dramaturgy: *Ein Sturz

Jelinek's form of writing has been described as a 'Sprachstrom', "ein nicht abreißen wollender unruhiger Fluß, der sich ohne Halten in seine Richtung ergießt und den ganzen Abraum fehlgelaufener Körper- und Völkerpolitiken vor sich herschiebt" (Gropp 33). Similarly, Thiele describes Jelinek's writing as a 'Wasserfall' that deliberately overwhelms the audience and demands a different form of receptivity from the audience:

Dieser Überfluss, dieser Wasserfall von Texten, der da auf einen niederrauscht, konstituiert ja auch ein ganz anderes Verhältnis des

Zuschauers zum Text. Das heißt ich muss da lernen [...] Bedeutung nicht daraus abzuleiten, dass ich jedes Wort oder jeden Satz verstehe, sondern ich muss mich diesem Fluss sozusagen auch anheimgeben. Ich muss mich dem zur Verfügung stellen, und dann tun sich Assoziationsfelder auf. (Thiele, personal interview)

Despite these natural metaphores, there is nothing 'natural' about Jelinek's *Sprachstrom*, rather, as Monika Meister writes, "Jelineks Sprache ist maschinell, ist eine Art Maschinensprache. Das heißt: das Schreiben selbst wird als Technik gehandhabt, [...] ihre Texte sind als mediatisierte Literatur zu bezeichnen" (Meister 56). The final part of the trilogy, *Ein Sturz* is conceived by Beier and Thiele as a kind of 'satyr play' to *Das Werk* (Thiele, *Katerstimmung* 180) and stages the encounter between Jelinek's now literally 'machinic' *Sprachstrom* and the performers on a gradually literally overflowing stage.

One of the first official statements by Cologne's mayor on the collapse of the City Archives had suggested that it may have been caused by a *Naturgewalt*. Taking this idea literally, the "wir" of the city folk addresses itself neither to rulers, gods or fellow citizens in the audience, "sondern appelliert immer wieder an Erde und Wasser, die verhängnisvolle Vereinigung zu unterlassen und spricht damit 'unbewußt' seine Wahrheit aus: die Verdrängung und Verwerfung jeglicher Verantwortung" (Thiele, "Katerstimmung" 179). As Thiele further diagnoses (with reference to Schleef), "der Chor in Elfriede Jelinek's *Ein Sturz* ist krank," not least because it has no opponents: "die Mächtigen der Stadt, die Stadtväter, die Banken, die Zeitungen, die Firmen: Sie haben sich unter den Chor gemischt" (178). Using Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* as her ancient intertext, Jelinek confronts us with a modern corrupted and dysfunctional *polis*. Her scathing parody of tragedy spells out a dark ecology: "Wo einst die Götter thronen [...], wird heute den Menschen die eigene Stadt mittels cross border leasing unter dem Hintern weg verkauft. [...] Sie gehört, um eines nebulösen Steuervorteils willen, irgendwelchen Herrschern in der Ferne (Jelinek, "Glücklich ist..." n.p).

In Beier's staging, the language throughout this part comes exclusively from loudspeakers - often from laptops, radios or telephones carried around by distracted office workers who pay no attention to it. None of the actors speak - an image that epitomizes a situation where nobody takes personal responsibility anymore, where all responsibility has been relegated to a bureaucratic apparatus. In contrast, Earth and Water are here personified in an archaic, animist way that is reminiscent of the original satyrs. Naked and vulnerable, having transformed herself in front

of us into Earth with the help of ochre powder paint, her wet hair molded into satyr horns, Kathrin Wehlisch skittishly moves across the stage trying to get the attention of oblivious office workers. A machinic voice from a laptop admonishes her to stay in her place, while casually stating that the construction companies can now double their costs for the subway construction due to additional pumping operations. Meanwhile, water rises in a rectangular hole in the stage floor until it overflows and spreads across the stage. The secrets of the *oikos* of Cologne's corrupt polis is gradually emerging for all to see.

Later on, Earth and Water (personified by Krzysztof Raczkowski in blue paint) enact a violent union of the elements in a visceral *pax de deux*, incited by machinic voices with pornographic commentary. The choreography by Valenti Rocamora i Tora, I suggest, can be read as an example of 'choreographing empathy' which, as Susan Foster explains, 'entails the construction and cultivation of a specific physicality whose kinesthetic experience guides our perception of and connection to what another is feeling' (Foster 2). The fact that Earth is anthropomorphized heightens our kinesthetic empathy with her, as she slips and slithers in the water, is lifted by Water and balances precariously on his back, is laid out on a table and shoved into the water headfirst, dragged out again, rolling and splashing in the water that now covers the entire stage until she is pushed into the water hole, left gasping for air.

Fig.2 Kathrin Wehlisch (bottom) as Earth with Julia Wieninger, Lina Beckmann and Laura Sundermann as citizens in masks in *Ein Sturz*. Photo taken at the Hamburger Theater Festival, Hamburg, 2 October 2011. Photo: Ulrich Perrey, DPA/AFP via Getty Images.

Taken together, the simultaneous experience of Jelinek's *Sprachstrom* and Beier's overflowing dramaturgy is that of an overtaxing of one's cognitive apparatus, which is processing the associations created by the text while hurtling down the linguistic river, and a concurrent overwhelming of one's affective apparatus, which is often going through a process of kinesthetic empathy, in the last scene empathetically 'drowning' with the raped Earth. The fact that Jelinek's text is 'unheard' by the humans who carry on with their work and office parties further drives home her darkly pessimistic 'ecological thinking'. As one local reviewer concluded, "Karin Beier und Elfriede Jelinek haben Köln eine vergiftete Katharsis geschenkt, eine Seelen-Reinigung mit Dreckwasser. Wir sind die Stadt, wir tragen die Schuld" (Bos).

Conclusion

As we have seen, *Das Werk / Im Bus / Ein Sturz* confronts us with a 'dark ecology' that resonates with Morton's 'ecological thought', a "thinking of interconnectedness" that joins the dots between ecology and economy, the global and the local, and which "includes thinking about democracy" (Morton *Ecological Thought* 7) and one's own role in it. In a talk given a month after the opening of the production, Beier begins by stating that theatre is undoubtedly superfluous and expensive, especially the contemporary German theatre landscape (Beier 17). She then reflects on the impact of theatre, starting with her own first experience attending the theatre at age fifteen, when she vividly felt the urge to get up and intervene in the action:

Der Impuls hat mich geradezu zerrissen, aufgewühlt, aus der Reserve gelockt. Das war eine Aufforderung: Du kannst eingreifen, du musst eingreifen! Mach es! Ruf was! Die Vereinbarung, dass das Publikum still zuschaut, während die da oben spielen, weckt im Theatre die unbedingte Lust, sich einzumischen. So werden Affekte, Leidenschaften, Gedankenprozesse, Erregungen evoziert und provoziert, wie, so scheint mir, an keinem anderen Ort. (19)

She arrives at the conclusion that in a world where everything is judged by its cost-effectiveness and profitability, theatre's "Überflüssigsein ist sein Überfluss, seine Aufgabe" (24). Even though Beier does not refer to *Das Werk / Im Bus / Ein Sturz* in this talk, her wordplay here is pertinent for thinking about the overflowing dramaturgy of the production. Only through the production's shocking excess in flooding the vast stage of the Schauspiel Köln does it have the capacity to deeply affect its spectators, cause them to reflect on their civic and democratic responsibility and awaken in them the desire to intervene in the ecological politics of their city. By flooding the very house ('oikos') of the theatre, the polis is summoned to take up the mantle of its ecological citizenship.

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