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Theorizing and 'Playing' Sport in Elfriede Jelinek: Some Notes on *Ein Sportstück*

ABSTRACT: In *Ein Sportstück* (1998) kulminieren Elfriede Jelineks Gedanken zum Thema Sport, obwohl die Autorin auch in früheren Stücken und Romanen das Motiv bereits eingesetzt hatte. In diesem Aufsatz werden soziologische, philosophische sowie auch dramaturgische Zusammenhänge des Sports erforscht und Überschneidungen mit den Bereichen Medien, Religion und Geschlechterpolitik analysiert. Jelineks Kritik am Sport muß daher als ein vielfältiger und bedeutungsvoller Bestandteil ihrer gesamten Gesellschaftskritik angesehen werden. Bei Jelinek ist der Sport weder Ausdruck noch Motor der Zivilisierung, er ist vielmehr der Inbegriff des Krieges zu Friedenszeiten. Letzten Endes ist Sport für Jelinek auch Symptom einer faschistoiden Begeisterung für den starken gesunden Körper und einem Gefühl der „Zugehörigkeit“ förderlich, welches soziale, individuelle und psychologische Gewalt auslösen muß. Letztere Perspektive gewinnt bei Jelinek durch Anspielungen auf die rechtspopulistische Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs mit ihrem sportlichen, telegenen und damals noch amtierenden Führer Jörg Haider eine österreichische Dimension.

Ein Sportstück (1998) is by no means the first of Elfriede Jelinek's works to have dealt with the theme of sport. It is merely the publication in which sport receives its most central treatment.¹ In the following discussion I wish to interpret Jelinek's deployment of sport and its

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1 Elfriede Jelinek, *Ein Sportstück* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1998). Some reference will also be made to the following Jelinek texts: *Die Klavierspielerin* (Reinbek, 1983), *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* (Cologne, 1987), *Totenauberg* (Reinbek, 1991), and *Stecken, Stab und Stangl*, in *Stecken, Stab und Stangl, Raststätte oder Sie machens alle, Wolken. Heim: neue Theatertexte* (Reinbek, 1997). Page references are given after quotations in the text.

intersection with sociological, philosophical and dramaturgical theories of sport. Jelinek's writing engages with sport in a series of inter-connections with the media, religion, gender, and with the social and political dimensions of the practice and spectacle of sport. In Elfriede Jelinek, sport is not the civilizing force of Eliasian social enquiry,² but the embodiment of war in peacetime and, ultimately, a symptom of proto-fascist enthusiasm for the strong, healthy body and condemnation of the weak and the sick. This latter perspective gains an Austrian dimension in Jelinek's critique of the current political situation in Austria and the growth in popularity of the right-wing, populist party, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), with its fit, telegenic former leader, Jörg Haider.

As with most of Jelinek's recent plays, there is no plot as such in *Ein Sportstück*. The author merely suggests that there should be two opposing crowds of people and that the setting could be a sports stadium with a fence to separate the two sets of fans. 'Von ihren Übergriffen handelt im Grunde das ganze Stück, vielleicht aber auch von was ganz andrem', the reader is informed (p. 8). The text of the play consists mostly of a series of monologues delivered by a number of typified figures with names such as 'Opfer', 'die Frau' and 'Sportler', as well as by slightly more individuated characters such as 'Andi', 'Hektor' and 'Achill', and the author's own alter ego figure, 'Elfi Elektra'. A highly ironic authorial voice, as well as literary reworkings of elements of the author's own biography, can be heard, however, not only in Jelinek's stage persona, but in many of the other characters' texts. Towards the end of the play, the delivery of text is attributed merely to a string of individuals called 'anderer Täter', or 'Andrer' such that the blurring of divisions as to who is speaking, and indeed between the perpetrators and their victims is made complete.³

Jelinek's is no simplistic argument about the increasingly violent nature of modern sports, although many of the darker sides of contem-

2 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners* (Oxford, 1978).

3 Daniela Bartens points out that Jelinek thereby ironizes the supposed otherness of individuals and underlines the ideological 'Gleichschaltung' of the individual subject in modern society. See Daniela Bartens, "'Mein Vater, mein Vater, warum hast du mich verlassen?': Eine Lesart von Elfriede Jelineks *Ein Sportstück*", *manuskripte* 39 (1999), 114–20 (p. 118).

porary sporting practices are incorporated into the text, such as the destructive use of performance enhancing drugs or the fatal accidents on and off the piste or football field. The primary function of sport in the play is as a symptom of the ills of modern, mass consumer society. Mass mediatization has produced a uniform public, or society, in which individuality has been subsumed by the all-pervasive logic of sameness. The presence and power of sport is satirized in *Ein Sportstück* in the ubiquitous 'uniform' of sports gear – one of the Sportler laments the fact that his opponents are also 'sporting' the 'Golfkriegsfrisur' and the same steel-toed jack boots (p. 162). The definition of sport by a 'victim' in the play carries the author's unmistakable ideological argument: 'Der Sport ist die Organisation menschlicher Unmündigkeit, welche in siebzigtausend Personen gesammelt und dann über ein paar Millionen daheim vor den Bildschirmen ausgegossen wird' (*Ein Sportstück*, p. 49). Sport, then, has become a kind of vicarious mode of living, replacing rational thought and substituting for a more reflective engagement with the present and with the past. A comical illustration of this idea can be seen in the choice of television programmes facing the mother in Jelinek's novel *Die Klavierspielerin*: 'Ist die Tochter aus dem Haus, dreht sie den Fernseher für das Vormittagsprogramm auf [...] Was schauen wir uns jetzt an? Alfred Dürer oder Abfahrt Damen?' (p. 132). Jelinek underscores this as a false choice between an educational arts programme about the sixteenth-century painter *Albrecht Dürer* or the drama of Austria's national sport, skiing.

It is more particularly the past of the mass murders of the Holocaust and of National Socialism which obsesses Elfriede Jelinek. Allusions to the persecution and murder of the Jews, for example, abound in Jelinek's writing. Acts of violence become infused with moments and images of cultural memory such that Jelinek does not need to spell out the associations with the crimes of National Socialism. The 'Opfer' of *Ein Sportstück* is described as doing menial cleaning activities in between being kicked and shoved around (p. 66), and talks also of how his gold fillings had been ripped from his mouth (p. 74). The Holocaust is described euphemistically as a kind of strict, demographic 'diet', or 'Abmagerungskur, in der wir alles aufs Spiel gesetzt hatten, an die Hunderttausend [...] durch unsere Auslöscheimer verloren, nur damit wir

jetzt erneut spielen dürfen, aber auf einem anderen, glücklicherweise ganz neu hergerichteten Feld' (*Ein Sportstück*, p. 29).

In the context of Jelinek's preoccupation with the crimes of fascism, sport must be understood in her writing as a kind of substitute form of community, a legacy of the sense of cultural belonging promoted by the National Socialists and legitimized in the theories of Martin Heidegger. Matthias Konzett explains that 'the illusion of collective identity, that figured so prominently in fascist ideology, as Jelinek's severe analysis shows, has not been critically and fundamentally questioned. It has merely been displaced onto the consumer who lays claim to a distorted sense of community by obsessively substituting leisure for reflection, spectacle for history and amnesia or melancholy for mourning'.⁴ In his readings of *Totenauberg* (1991) and *Ein Sportstück*, Konzett argues that Jelinek sets about debunking sports as a new form of Heideggerian 'Geist', a new 'spirituality', which is 'unmasked in its reactionary obsession with authentic possession of nature and self-determination that feeds not only consumerism but actively contributes to the cultural alienation of those who do not or cannot share this spirit of leisure, health and fitness'.⁵ In Jelinek's play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* (1987) the latter category is gendered as woman, who is, by definition, 'sick'. It is the pair of healthy, sporty husbands, who subdue and try to control the women's sexuality in the name of 'hygiene' and whose cries for 'Mehr Platz!' are overlaid with fascist connotations.⁶ The tennis game between Dr. Heidkliff and Dr. Benno Hundekoffer is one of many sporting allusions in *Krankheit*. It is comically juxtaposed to the doctors' bloodthirsty description of driving a stake into Benno's vampire wife's body: 'Ja! Ja! Ja! Ja! Das Knirschen des Pfahls beim Eindringen in den Knochen, der sich windende Leib' (p. 48), and it points forward to the tennis game between Achilles and Hector in *Ein Sportstück*, showing that sport is already a thematic undercurrent in Jelinek's writing. True to stereotyped notions of passive femininity and

4 Matthias Konzett, *The Rhetoric of National Dissent in Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek* (Rochester NY, 2000), p. 115.

5 Konzett, p. 112.

6 See also Katrin Sieg, 'Postmodern Inversions: Elfriede Jelinek', in *Exiles, Eccentrics, Activists: Women in Contemporary German Theater* (Ann Arbor, 1994), pp. 160–73.

active masculinity, in the novel *Die Klavierspielerin* it is Walter Klemmer, the music pupil and would-be lover of the piano teacher, who is the active, testosterone charged sportsman. Klemmer's chosen sport is white-water canoeing, an apt choice for Jelinek to infer his outdoorsy, untamed or elemental potency (*Die Klavierspielerin*, p. 200). By contrast, Erika is the weak, indoors type, who spends her time in the pursuit of art and, when the opportunity allows, shopping. There are references to women athletes in *Ein Sportstück*, but the central role of woman in Jelinek's piece is as the abandoned mother, a kind of sports pacifist, mourning the absence or death of her sporting son, a warrior in the sports war: 'Dann kehrt er heim, mein Fürst, der Krieg ist günstig ausgegangen. Ich bin dagegen, daß es überhaupt einen Krieg gegeben hat und sitze ganze Mörderstunden vor dem Fernseher, um zu heulen und zu klagen. [...] Man läßt mich nur dabei zuschauen. Gemein. Wir Frauen. [...] Ganz vom Berg der Tragik erdrückt!' (pp. 34-35).

Jelinek does not just make literal the popular saying of the non-sporting, 'Sport ist Mord', she also reverses the equation, as Juliane Vogel has remarked.⁷ Murder, as legitimized through war, is expressed as a sporting activity, for example in the 'sports competition' of the Bosnian war, presided over by its U.N. 'referee' (*Ein Sportstück*, p. 147). But in Jelinek's framework murderous crimes of peacetime are also expressions of a sporting mentality, or expressions of a proto-fascist mindset. The sense of belonging to a community which is promoted by sport finds its sinister expression in the xenophobia of the community which produces graffiti such as 'Roma, zurück nach Indien!', Jelinek argues, and leads her to the provocative if at first sight baffling condemnation of racist murderers as 'Sportler [...] Vielleicht sogar Wehrsportler bzw. Abwehrsportler' (*Stecken, Stab und Stangl*, p. 29).

If sociologists of sport are divided as to whether the practice of sport has become less violent and aggressive or more so, and as to whether its influence in society is a civilizing one, Elfriede Jelinek's portrayal of sport leaves little doubt as to her position. The idea that sport provides some kind of safety valve to society and that its forms of violence are mostly symbolic and rational (e.g. the jeering of spectators, and the tackling of opponents in rugby) is not one with which Jelinek

7 Juliane Vogel, 'Harte Bandagen: Vorläufige Anmerkungen zu Elfriede Jelineks *Ein Sportstück*', *manuskripte* 39 (1999), 121-25 (p. 122).

would have much sympathy. Robert Pearton summarizes this view of sport as part of ‘the civilizing process’, advanced by sociologist Norbert Elias in his book of the same name:

Elias [...] argues that there has been a long-term shift in the patterns of violence expression and control in modern industrial societies. This shift has led to a lessening in the desire to attack others, a raising of the threshold of repugnance with respect to displays of physical violence, and an internalization of a taboo on interpersonal violence as part of long-term socialization processes. Sport may be seen as a barometer of such a process.⁸

James Curtis comes to a more negative conclusion and remarks that, ‘while reading *The Civilizing Process*, I could not help thinking of all the contrary evidence [...] from the past few years: the slaughter of Jews in Nazi Germany; [...] and the massacres at My Lai and in other places in Vietnam, to name but a very few’.⁹ Curtis makes analogies between war and sport, arguing that it is equally as wrong to see modern sports as more civilized because the violence in them is channelled and expressed in more prescribed ways as it is to see a war as somehow more ‘civilized’ if it is motivated by rational and utilitarian objectives (territory, raw materials) and not by affect (hatred and anger).¹⁰ The one influence for *Ein Sportstück* which Jelinek cites in her acknowledgements is a work of criminological enquiry by Herbert Jäger entitled *Makrokriminalität: Studien zur Kriminologie kollektiver Gewalt*. Jäger is concerned to explore the criminological basis for judging acts of collective violence, and points out that it is normally acts of individual, deviant violence which are stigmatized and not, for example, ‘kollektiv legitimierte Massentötungen’. Jäger cites reports from the enquiry into the massacre

8 Robert Pearton, ‘Violence in Sport and the Special Case of Soccer Hooliganism in the United Kingdom’, in *Sport and Social Theory*, ed. Roger Rees and Andrew W. Miracle (Champaign, Illinois, 1986) pp. 67–83 (p. 71).

9 James Curtis, ‘Isn’t it Difficult to Support Some of the Notions of *The Civilizing Process*? A Response to Dunning’, in *Sport and Social Theory*, pp. 57–65 (p. 60).

10 See also Bertolt Brecht’s condemnation of ‘den widerlichsten Typ des Soldaten: den, der aus Berechnung tötet, aus Pflichtgefühl, auf Grund zwingender Argumente’, quoted in Uwe Baur, ‘Sport and the Subjective Experience of Physical Movement in Musil’s Work’, *Musil in Focus*, ed. Lothar Huber and John J. White (London, 1982), pp. 115–30 (p. 125).

at My Lai which reveal the thrill and adventure derived from encountering but escaping death as experienced by some of the U.S. fighters in Vietnam.¹¹ This theme of survival also finds expression in Jelinek and builds on the ideas of the novelist, dramatist and social thinker Elias Canetti, whose analysis of the relationship of the individual to the mass resonates in *Ein Sportstück* in what is for Daniela Bartens a 'radicalized' form.¹² Achilles comments to his tennis partner, Hector, that 'nur die Nähe des Todes verleiht meinem Leben Befriedigung. Deshalb bin ich Krieger geworden' (p. 124). Even the armchair sportsman can experience the vicarious thrill of survival when watching the downhill skier crash to her death. The butcher character of Jelinek's play *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* (1995) comments that 'eine unserer tüchtigsten Abfahrtsläuferinnen [...] in einen Pfahl hineingestürzt und [hat] sich dabei den Kopf abgerissen [...] Unwillkürlich nahmen für einen Augenblick auch wir Millionen Fernsehzuschauer Abschied vom Leben' (pp. 24–25).

It is no surprise that Jelinek should have chosen two warriors from Greek mythology to be the tennis players of her 'Zwischenspiel' and that she should have insisted on the use of a Greek chorus in the staging of her play. As Mario Leis reminds us, 'der Sport wurde und wird immer wieder mit der griechischen Antike in Verbindung gebracht. Diesmal [in *Ein Sportstück*] wird dieses handelsübliche Programm nicht benutzt, um den Sport zu rechtfertigen, vielmehr wird er demontiert'.¹³ Although Friedrich Nietzsche did not write directly about sport in his writing, the implications of his thought for understanding the value and 'drama' of sport have been convincingly explored, and it is with Nietzsche's celebration of Greek culture that philosophers of sport have located the function of sport as spectacle and as sublimation. According to Lawrence J. Hatab, 'Nietzsche distinguishes between a brutal drive to annihilate and a modified drive to defeat in a competition. [...] Nietzsche gives a cathartic spin to sublimation by suggesting that without the full range and

11 Herbert Jäger, *Makrokriminalität: Studien zur Kriminologie kollektiver Gewalt* (Frankfurt a.M., 1989), p. 22 and pp. 70–71.

12 Bartens identifies textual parallels with Elias Canetti, *Masse und Macht* (Frankfurt a.M., 1980). In addition, intertextual references to Kleist's *Penthesilea*, to Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*, and to Sylvia Plath's poem 'Daddy' are also explored in Bartens, "'Mein Vater, mein Vater, warum hast du mich verlassen?'" and in Vogel, 'Harte Bandagen'.

13 Mario Leis, *Sport in der Literatur* (Frankfurt a.M., 2000), p. 75.

extent of their cultural contests, the Greeks would have regressed into “the abyss of a horrible savagery of hatred and lust for destruction”.¹⁴ Elfriede Jelinek’s spin is to see sport not as a guarantor of peace and civilization but as a manifestation of society’s ‘lust for destruction’. The text of *Ein Sportstück* enacts this destruction, however, in an ironic and rational way. The characters in the play kick and beat their victims on the ground, they play football with torn-off shins attached to trainers, but, as the stage directions are at pains to tell us, this is done in a random and very casual way (‘eher nebenbei und wie unbewußt’, p. 142). Violence is not presented in a dramatic, emotional, or instinctive way. Jelinek’s staging of sport, and indeed her entire theatre aesthetics, run counter to the view that sport itself can be seen as a kind of dramatic form, with a narrative of highs and lows, an unfolding of information about the characters or antagonists, and an element of suspense until the final resolution of the drama.¹⁵

None of these precepts of traditional drama hold true for Jelinek’s ‘texts for the theatre’.¹⁶ However, the original production of Jelinek’s *Ein Sportstück* by Einar Schleaf at the Burgtheater in Vienna paradoxically conformed more to a Nietzschean view of spectacle as Dionysian act of ritual and a celebration of the redemptive potential of the mass community. Theatre critic Franz Wille describes the effect as follows: ‘Bei Schleaf nach Nietzsche der Traum eines erlösenden Gemeinschaftsgefühls, bei Jelinek das immer noch selbstbewußte Subjekt, dessen zivilisatorischer Fortschritt allerdings bei jeder Fußball-Übertragung ins Wanken gerät’.¹⁷ If Wille finds the frictions here productive ones, then Gita Honegger is one proponent of the other widely held view that ‘Schleaf’s mega-mise-en-scène dangerously (re)activates what it ex-

14 Lawrence J. Hatab, ‘The Drama of Agonistic Embodiment: Nietzschean Reflections on the Meaning of Sports’, *International Studies in Philosophy*, 30 (1998), 97–107 (pp. 100–01). Hatab cites Nietzsche’s posthumous fragment ‘Homer’s Contest’.

15 See Joseph K. Kupfer, ‘Waiting for DiMaggio: Sport as Drama’, in *Rethinking College Athletics*, ed. Judith Andre and David N. James (Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 109–19.

16 Jelinek comments ironically of her dramatic trilogy *Macht nichts. Eine kleine Trilogie des Todes* (Reinbek, 1999) that ‘diese Texte sind für das Theater gedacht, aber nicht für eine Theateraufführung’ (‘Nachbemerkung’, p. 85).

17 Franz Wille, ‘Modell Münchenhausen oder Ein fester Griff ins Offene’, *Theater heute*, Jahrbuch (1998), 68–81 (p. 71).

poses'.¹⁸ The mass choreography and hour-long sporting sequences and tableaux of naked athletes were rejected, too, by fellow dramatist Franz Xaver Kroetz as 'proto-fascist': 'Ich bin in Wien bei Einar Schleef's *Sportstück* in der Pause gegangen, weil ich mir dachte: "Dieser präfaschistoide Scheißdreck, dieser Dilettantenschmarrn da oben, der interessiert mich nicht.'" ¹⁹ The production by Hans Peter Cloos in Berne (September 2000) was criticized for lacking changes in pace and certainly had nothing of the mass spectacle of Schleef's production. Arguably, however, the uniformity of pace more faithfully reproduces Jelinek's even-tempo text, even if it does not promote the creative frictions so productive in the play's première.²⁰

In a further set of Nietzschean reflections on sport, Steven Galt Crowell posits the seductive power of the sporting spectacle on the fan community, arguing that 'by belonging to the team the populace attains the purity of a *Volk*, and because of its Dionysian (affective) unity, the fan-community is an irresistible target of demagoguery.'²¹ Crowell's illustration of 'demagoguery' is the exhortation of Houston taxpayers to fund a new stadium for their baseball team. The demagogue of Jelinek's recent drama is the former leader of the FPÖ Jörg Haider, whose political

18 Gita Honegger, 'Beyond Berlin, Beyond Brecht: Offenbach, Horváth, Jelinek, and their Directors', *Theater*, 29 (1999), 4–25 (p. 15).

19 'Ich kann nur mit Hirnwut schreiben', interview with Sven Michaelsen, *Stern*, 9 September 1999, pp. 62–68 (pp. 62–64). Many of Jelinek's novels have also been criticized for promoting the very argument Jelinek is at pains to satirize or to decry. The most famous example of this would be the anti-pornography novel *Lust* (Reinbek, 1989).

20 The lack of pace in the performance of what was a radically cut text is criticized by Noeme Gradwohl, 'Schwer verdauliche Sportlerkost', *Berner Zeitung*, 12 Sept. 2000, p. 38, and Benedikt Scherer, 'Lauter Hygiene und runde Muskeln', *Tagesanzeiger*, 12 September 2000, p. 67. Both the Berne production and the production in Mannheim by Barbara Bilabel in 1999 were staged in sports or former sports venues. The Bernese location chimed in perfectly with the sinister overtones of Jelinek's text, staging the action in a rather dilapidated *Reithalle* below a graffitied road overpass and next to a dark car park with obvious nighttime drug-peddling function. Mannheim's ice stadium, on the other hand, seems to have produced its own irony in drawing its audience from the community of ice-hockey fans. See Iris Hanika, 'Eisstadion Mannheim, 0:0', *Du*, 10 (1999), 30–33.

21 Steven Galt Crowell, 'Sport as Spectacle and as Play: Nietzschean Reflections', *International Studies in Philosophy*, 30 (1998) 109–22 (p. 111).

‘movement’ is parodied and made into literal, athletic ‘Bewegung’: ‘Hier zum Beispiel sehen Sie gleich den Herren von dieser einen Bewegung, welche uns derzeit besonders bewegt, wie er mit verschwitztem Marathonband, keuchend wie Christus am Kreuz [...] auf der Straße steht’ (*Ein Sportstück*, p. 26). Jörg Haider’s sporting pastimes (running, skiing, mountaineering) add to his cultural currency as a fit, dynamic leader and are used to full effect in his media self-presentation. Publicist Armin Thurnher’s coinage, ‘die Feschisten’, sums up the impact and logic of the new, fresh, fit image of Austrian politics:

Als Feschisten [...] bezeichne ich Leute, die ihr Aussehen und ihre Körper bewußt als fit und neu gegen die abgeschlafften Körper der alten politischen Säcke positionieren. Sie bedienen sich dabei der alpinen Siegersymbolik und deren Milieus [...] Ihr Ziel ist nicht die Erneuerung, sondern die Abschaffung der repräsentativen Demokratie. Es gilt nicht mehr der Ausgleich von Interessen zugunsten der Schwächeren, der Anderen, der Fremden. Gelten soll das Diktat des Siegers, des physisch Stärkeren.²²

Jelinek’s description of the saviour figure and leader of the ‘movement’ is one of many instances in her writing where sport and religion are deliberately conflated. Indeed, in Jelinek’s analysis, religion functions in a similar way to sport, as an institutionalized distraction from proper political debate and as another promoter of a false sense of community. Jelinek ironizes the celibacy of the Catholic church – a gift to God of doing absolutely nothing – but she admits that representing Jesus is not an easy thing to do: ‘Wie soll man jemanden ordentlich vertreten, der an sein eigenes Fitneßgerät genagelt worden ist? Das ist nicht leicht’ (*Ein Sportstück*, p. 180). This idea is prefigured in *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* where a character adopts the enthusiastic commentary style of a live television broadcaster to describe the accomplishments of ‘einer unserer ältesten und beliebtesten Profisportler’, Jesus Christ: ‘Wie der da hängt, daß der das aushält! Nicht zu glauben!’ (*Stecken, Stab und Stangl*, pp. 37–38). Of course, describing sport as a kind of modern-day religion is

22 Armin Thurnher, ‘Apartes Österreich: Notizen aus den paradoxen Tagen vor und nach der Wende in Österreich’, in *Österreich: Berichte aus Quarantänen*, ed. Isolde Charim and Doron Rabinovici (Frankfurt a.M., 2000), pp. 33–45 (p. 42).

itself nothing new,²³ but ironizing the cross and the crucifixion as a multi-gym exercise machine is certainly provocative.

It is abundantly clear from the above reflections that Elfriede Jelinek has none of the personal investment and enthusiasm for sport of some of her fellow writers.²⁴ If her compatriot Robert Musil criticized the commercialization and institutionalization of sport, it was from a position of enthusiasm for the value of sensual and instinctive self-expression through sport played for its own sake. I feel sure, however, that the target for Jelinek's scorn is entirely in accordance with Musil's own, which has been summarized by Uwe Baur as 'the other kind of sport [...] which is not practised for its own sake but with hygienic, economic or even military aims in mind'. 'What both commercialized sport and military training have in common', Baur glosses, 'is the promotion of vitality and aggressiveness under the ideological guise of a humanizing influence'.²⁵ It is precisely this equation that Jelinek makes when she has her chorus ask: 'Wie wollen Sie einem jungen Mann klarmachen, daß er in den Krieg ziehen soll, wenn er vorher keinen Sport getrieben hat?' (*Ein Sportstück*, p. 25). *Ein Sportstück* is a concentrated attack on the idea of sport as a humanizing or civilizing influence and as such it must be seen as the culmination of Elfriede Jelinek's preoccupation with sport. There can be little doubt, however, that in Jelinek's writing the theme of sport will play on.

23 Eric Dunning calls top-level sporting events 'essentially religious', explaining that 'although they are nontheological and in that sense secular, such events are religious ceremonies in the sense that they form a medium and focus for collective identification.' Eric Dunning, 'The Sociology of Sport in Europe and the United States: Critical Observations from an "Eliasian" Perspective', in *Sport and Social Theory* (see note 8), pp. 29–56 (p. 43).

24 See Leis, *Sport in der Literatur*, for a range of themes and responses to sport in literature of the twentieth century.

25 Baur, 'Sport and the Subjective Experience of Physical Movement in Musil's Work', p. 128 and p. 125.