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Germany's Poetic Miscreants on the Road:

From Beat Poetics to Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy

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by

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*to my wife, Lisa,
and our daughter, Marina*

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Germany's Poetic Miscreants on the Road: From Beat Poetics to Rolf Dieter

Brinkmann, Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy

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West German poets Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy became associated with the American Beats in the minds of readers and critics in the 1960s and 70s through their work as poets, essayists and anthologists. This association was due chiefly to Brinkmann's activities as a programmatic adapter of the work of American Beat and New York School poets for German literature. This dissertation examines the specific impact these adaptations had on the poetry produced in West Germany in the 1970s.

The adaptations these authors made of their American sources were part of a larger rebellion against the poetic norms of the 1950s that were promulgated in the late 1960s. This rebellion mirrors in many ways the rebellion of American poets against poetic norms in place in the U.S. 1950s. Thus, in order to properly understand the literary program of Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy, this work elucidates the various poetic rebellions against the influence of T. S. Eliot and New Criticism in the American 1950s. It then examines the programmatic adaptation of American poetic and pop culture sources in the work of Brinkmann. Specifically, it employs Siegfried Kracauer's theory of the

“mass ornament” in an examination of Brinkmann’s adaptations of American poet Frank O’Hara in the development of his poetics of the surface. It then examines the appropriation of an American poetic idiom in the work of Born, Theobaldy and Brinkmann by analyzing both their writings on poetry and selected poems by each. It concludes with a consideration of the impact these three poets had on the poetry of the *Neue Subjektivität* movement of the 1970s and beyond.

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Chapter 1

Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy:

A Challenge to the Status Quo

1. New voices: West German Lyric Poetry in the Postwar Period

As in German society as a whole, German writers in the era immediately following World War II felt the need to rebuild their language and national literature, to reclaim their language by eliminating euphemisms and distortions that were the argot of Nazi ideology. During the period of National Socialism, German literature was torn by the divide between writers who fled Germany and continued to write in exile, those who remained within Germany in *innere Immigration* and ceased to write, and those who were officially sanctioned by Goebbels and the Nazis. After the war, the writers who had been in *innere Immigration* and those who returned from exile experienced the need to purge their language and literature of literary tendencies established by writers who had functioned as little more than aesthetic propagandizers working for the National Socialist government. The twelve years of Nazi censorship effectively created a caesura in German literature, after which lyric poets, like other writers, experienced a *Nachholbedarf*, a need to recoup losses and to come to terms with the styles and expressive options denied them during the period of National Socialism. This period immediately after the war became known

under Wolfgang Iser's critical epithet of *Kahlschlag* (Best 438), or "clear-cutting," as most German writers felt that their literature could only be saved by beginning anew.

This caesura confronted the postwar generation of writers with the difficult task of relocating their collective literary voice, both within the historical context of the German canon and within the mainstream of international literature. The partition of Germany created a further schism in the idea of a German language canon, as writers of the East and the West were placed under different ideological and aesthetic demands. West German lyric poetry of this period became associated with the spare lyrics of Günter Eich's "Inventur," which echoes the minimalist tradition of the twenties and became a template for *Kahlschlag* lyric, or the magical realism represented notably in the work of Paul Celan with its antecedents influenced both by Expressionism and the pronounced hermeticism of high Modernism. In the twenty years that followed the war, Eich, Celan and the rehabilitated Gottfried Benn, an Expressionist who had remained in "inner exile," continued to exert significant influence on the rebuilding of the German lyric tradition. At the same time, the German reception of international modernism became codified not only in the volumes of poetry produced by Eich, Celan, Benn, Ingeborg Bachmann and others, but also in essays, speeches and scholarly works on poetry, such as Benn's "Probleme der Lyrik" (1951), Hugo Friedrich's *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (1956), and Celan's acceptance speech for the Büchner prize.

In the mid 60s, a generation of younger poets arose who wished to challenge the modernist and hermetic tendencies that had by then become the dominant stylistic mode of West German lyric. Impetus for these changes in poetic consciousness could be seen in the little magazines of the late 60s and is visually and verbally suggested with publications such as *Luchterhand Loseblatt Lyric* and *Tintenfish* (King 71-75). Unlike the recouping magazines of the 50s, these new venues introduced emerging international voices writing in innovative and experimental “post-Modernist” veins and contemporary GDR poets such as Günter Kunert. Within this milieu, a small group of outsiders in West Germany were developing their own ideas about the course German lyric poetry would take in the decades to come.

One of these self-styled dissidents, Jürgen Theobaldy, proclaimed 1970, the year of Paul Celan’s death, as the pivotal year in postwar German lyric poetry. According to Theobaldy, Celan saw himself as a type of poetic prophet [*dichterischer Seher*]; with his death, younger poets would turn away from this stylized stance. In so doing, they rejected the heuristic championed by Hugo Friedrich in *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* and exemplified by poets such as Celan as characteristics of “modern” lyric: the “magic of language” [*Sprachmagie*], “silence” and the “shadow-empire of words” [*Schattenreich der Worte*] (Theobaldy, *Veränderung* 9). Instead, poets who came of age in the late 60s would turn to what Theobaldy considers “reality” [*Wirklichkeit*]: a reality that reflects the distrust these poets felt toward what they considered the inherent elitism of the

hermetic lyric of Celan and Gottfried Benn, a visceral reality that can be grasped by readers who write no lyric poetry themselves (30).

Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Karl Markus Michel identified an equally radical change in the constituents of lyric and the literary enterprise as a whole in 1968. In volume 15 of Enzensberger's influential *Kursbuch*, a literary journal devoted to cultural criticism that supported the widespread student protests of 1968, he and Michel proclaimed the now much celebrated "death of literature" [*Tod der Literatur*]. In "Gemeinplätze, die Neuste Literatur betreffend" (Enzensberger 187-97) and "Ein Kranz für die Literatur" (Michel 169-86), Enzensberger and Michel claim that literature as it had been heretofore understood could play no role as a possible mechanism for social change, and was therefore no longer relevant. Instead of viewing literature as a vehicle of aesthetic expression, whether in hermetic modes or otherwise, and regardless of the social content of that literature, younger writers should abandon literature altogether and focus their attention and talent on effecting social change via propaganda, Agitprop and street protest. Many writers involved in the student protests, such as Peter Schneider and Uwe Timm, took up this call.

The juxtaposition of these contemporaneous yet conflicting agendas on the part of two recognized poets from different postwar generations reflects the broader conflicts that arose in German literature, and particularly in lyric poetry, in the mid-1960s. By that time, influenced both by radical social change and the cyclical literary impulse to rebel

against modes of writing that begin to be seen as authoritative, various groups of young writers began to protest against the paradigmatic voice of international modernism and hermeticism that had become the pro forma template for postwar West German lyric poetry.

Of these, the three most influential were the avant-garde concrete poets such as Ernst Jandl; the politically engaged poets such as Enzensberger; and those who, like Theobaldy, wished to fashion a “readerly” poetry based on an intimate evocation of reality through personal observation and the documentary “authenticity” of the poet’s voice.

All three groups shared an ideological perspective but differed in their stylistic techniques. The avant-garde turned away from the isolated hermeticism of literary modernism and toward the spontaneity and experimental flair of Dada by primarily attending not to form or content, but rather to the semantic juxtaposition of sound and meaning and the aural effects of words themselves as a means of unmasking social hypocrisy via lyric poetry. Though a voice of protest can be found in many of the poems produced by this group, such as Ernst Jandl’s “vater komm erzähl vom krieg” (1976), an inherent quality of fun co-exists with the critical content of these poets’ work.

The politically engaged lyricists, of whom Enzensberger and Erich Fried were the most prominent, protested the social elitism of literary modernism. They incorporated the language of ideology and social dissent in their work in order to critique societal

norms, which they attributed to the short-sighted vision and exploitive economic goals of the middle class.

The third group, which includes poets such as Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born, Jürgen Theobaldy, Günter Herburger, Rolf Eckart John, F. C. Delius, and older, more established writers, such as Dieter Wellershoff and Walter Höllerer, protested not so much the social as the literary and intellectual elitism they detected in the poetry of modernism. For them, lyric poetry had lost its relevance by becoming an artistic enterprise unto itself. Underlining this perceived loss of relevance, Theobaldy states that “the hermetic poem of the postwar years was no longer directed at anyone”¹ (*Veränderung* 9-10). As the poet Enzensberger had previously done in his anthology of international poetry, *museum der modernen poesie*, and as Höllerer had done in his poetry and theoretical work beginning with the publication of *Transit* (1956), these poets sought to broaden the perspective of West German lyric by turning to contemporary international, and particularly American, poetry. Ludwig Fischer, in a *Festschrift* essay dedicated to Höllerer, comments on the eclectic internationalism of Höllerer and the younger poets he and Hans Bender published in *Akzente*, noting that this movement drew its influences “from afar, most prominently and continuously from the USA, but also

¹ “Das hermetische Gedicht der Nachkriegsjahre war an niemanden mehr gerichtet.” Throughout this work, unless a poem is being considered, the English translation of quotes from the German will appear in the body of the text, and the German original will appear in a footnote. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German throughout this text are the author’s, and all emphases in quoted material are found in the original sources.

from Poland, from Italy, from Yugoslavia, from the Scandinavian countries”² (93). In the models of contemporary American poetry, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy found not only new terrain that allowed them to expand their own work, but also poetic forms that stood in contradistinction to the intellectual elitism that they sought to counteract. This terrain was also broadened by their sensitivity to the rapid development and nascent globalization of popular culture during this time. Brinkmann especially sought to incorporate elements of the various popular subcultures, from mainstream rock groups like the Rolling Stones and the Doors to underground comics and even advertising, in his work.

The reception of pop culture in the work of Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy is part of a broader attention to and incorporation of elements of the postwar German society they observed around them. Although Baudelaire “initiated a poetry of the modern city,” celebrating “Paris as a whore” (Hamburger 267), Modernist poetry in large rejected the societal mechanisms of the city, turning its imagination rather towards nature, “the norm to which poetry has returned again and again” (269). Writing on the relation of lyric poetry to society, Adorno states that the “precipitation of the historical relation of subject to object...will be more perfect, the more the poem eschews the relation of self to society as an explicit theme and the more it allows this relation to crystallize involuntarily from within the poem” (160). Adorno’s essay “The Lyric Poet and

² “verschaffte sich die Bewegung bei den jungen Autoren und bei dem etwas älteren Thesenverfasser von weither, am heftigsten und anhaltendsten aus den USA, aber auch aus Polen, aus Italien, aus Jugoslawien,

Society” can thus be read as an attempted reconciliation between lyric poetry as “high art” and a Marxian emphasis on the dialectical understanding of that very “relation of self to society.”

A much more explicit examination of “the relation of self to society” begins to appear in lyric by poets across the international scene wishing to break out of the modernist tradition. For these poets, this examination begins with the foregrounding of self as subject in lyric poetry: quite the opposite of Adorno’s aesthetic program. Such an examination was a necessary component of the work of the politically committed poets of the 60s. However, the inclusion of historical and societal relations retains a critical element in the work of political poets: through the historical and dialectical analysis of modern society, even within the poem, they hoped to effect political change. In the work of the young German poets of the late 60s who took their American counterparts of the 50s as models and who were later grouped critically under labels such as *Neue Sensibilität*, *Neuer Realismus* and *Neue Subjektivität* (Theobaldy, *Veränderung* 17), the reception of societal elements within the poem displays neither the celebratory nature of Baudelaire nor the dialectical examination of the political poets, but quite simply, a “renewed understanding of societal reality”³ (Merkes 1).

aus skandinavischen Ländern.”

³“erneute Erkenntnis gesellschaftlicher Realität.”

2. The West German Modernist Aesthetic of the 1950s

As stated, although the aim of the *Kahlschlag* writers was to free postwar West German writers from the detritus of the Nazi assault on literature, and young writers positioned their works as having been completed on a *tabula rasa*, the West German poetic aesthetic of the immediate postwar period was nevertheless strongly informed by a rather conservative modernist interpretation. This interpretation rested largely on four works and attendant circumstances: Emil Staiger's *Grundbegriffe der Poetik* (1946); the works of Gottfried Benn's postwar rehabilitation from having been a Nazi sympathizer and a writer in *inneres Exil*, most notably his 1951 speech at the University of Marburg, *Probleme der Lyrik*; Hans Egon Holthusen's and Friedhelm Kemp's widely read anthology, *Ergriffenes Dasein: Deutsche Lyrik des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (1953); and the Romanist Hugo Friedrich's enormously influential study, *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (1956).

In *Grundbegriffe der Poetik*, Staiger defines the "basic concepts of poetics" as the epic, the lyric and the dramatic, and connects the modern heritage of these concepts to antiquity: "This type of consideration defines itself as the inheritance of antiquity"⁴ (7). As such, Staiger informs the reader that his examples will lean heavily on German and

⁴ "Diese Art der Betrachtung stellt sich dar als Erbe der Antike."

Greek poets (11). His stated goal in this work is “to differentiate the poetic genres and to work each out for itself”⁵ (23).

Thus, while younger poets are attempting to begin anew on a clean slate, Staiger sets out to reconnect them not only to Germany’s pre-Nazi intellectual past, but also to intellectual traditions that have their roots in antiquity. As such, Staiger creates an intellectual milieu for poetry that is not only inherently conservative, but also intensely inwardly focused. He thereby even circumvents the earlier attempts by the French and Anglo-American modernists, Dadaists, Futurists, etc., to “make it new.” Staiger concretizes this conservative ethos in his definition of the “idea” of lyric poetry:

Unity of the music of the words and their meanings, immediate effect of the lyric without expressed understanding (1.); the danger of dissolution, tempered by the rhyme and other kinds of repetition (2.); the renunciation of grammatical, logical and visual context (3.); the poetry of loneliness, which is only heard by like-minded individuals (4.): All of this means that in lyric poetry, no distance at all exists.⁶ (51)

Staiger goes on to illustrate these principles with examples by Goethe, Verlaine, Mörike, Clemens Brentano, Eichendorff, C. F. Meyer, Hebbel, Annette von Droste, Keller, as well as poets from Greek antiquity and, with a tip of the hat to modernist poetry, Rilke.

⁵ “die poetischen Gattungen zu scheiden und jede für sich herauszuarbeiten.”

⁶ “Einheit der Musik der Worte und ihrer Bedeutung, unmittelbare Wirkung des Lyrischen ohne ausdrückliches Verstehen (1.); Gefahr des Zerfließens, gebannt durch den Kehrreim und Wiederholungen anderer Art (2.); Verzicht auf grammatischen, logischen und anschaulichen Zusammenhang (3.); Dichtung

When Gottfried Benn held his speech “Probleme der Lyrik” at the University of Marburg on 21 August 1951, he was by no means a benign presence: his early sympathy for National Socialism, which became an “inner emigration” in 1936, made him a controversial figure in postwar West German literature. This lecture, however, along with his postwar collections *Statische Gedichte* (1948), *Trunkene Flut* (1949), *Fragmente* (1951) and *Destillation* (1951) reestablished his reputation to such an extent that Dieter Wellershoff was moved to write: “There is hardly a young German poet who, no matter how idiosyncratic and unmistakable his language may be, was not influenced by Benn” (11).⁷ As such, Benn’s *Probleme der Lyrik* had an effect on the postwar generation of West German poets at least as decisive as those declarations of a new beginning.

Benn’s appreciation of the modern poem is certainly more up-to-date than that of Staiger’s, but it is very strongly rooted in the aesthetic of High Modernism. “The new poem, lyric poetry, is an artistic product,”⁸ Benn writes, noting that this definition encompasses the categories of “consciousness” [*Bewußtheit*], “critical control” and “artistic control” [*Artistik*] (7). Unlike Staiger (but like Friedrich after him), Benn recognizes a “neue Lyrik,” the origins of which he locates in France (8-9). To support his contention that this “new lyric poetry” is in essence an artistic product, Benn cites the

der Einsamkeit, welche nur von einzelnen Gleichgestimmten erhört wird (4.): Alles bedeutet, daß in lyrischer Dichtung keinerlei Abstand besteht.”

⁷“Es gibt wohl kaum einen junger deutschen Lyriker der, so eigenartig und unverwechselbar seine Sprache sein mag, nicht von Benn beeinflußt worden ist.”

⁸“Das neue Gedicht, die Lyrik, ist ein Kunstprodukt.”

importance of the critical interest in the process of writing poetry in the essays of Valéry, Eliot, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Pound, Poe and the Surrealists (7).

However, Benn's conception of *Artistik* reflects an essentially arch-conservative position. Benn defines *Artistik* as a central concept of modern poetry: "*Artistik* is the attempt of art, within the general decay of contents, to experience itself as content and to build a new style out of this experience, it is the attempt to set a new transcendence against the general nihilism of values: the transcendence of creative delight"⁹ (12). Benn's definition of *Artistik* in poetry is thus the modernist hermetic poem, which is not dialogic in nature, but rather exists as an isolated instance of artistic "transcendence," in communication only with itself. On this point, Benn approvingly quotes American poet Richard Wilbur: "To whom is a poem directed...and it is a noteworthy answer that a certain Richard Wilburns (sic) gives to this question: a poem, so he says, is directed to the muse, and this is among other reasons also there to veil the fact that poems are directed at no one"¹⁰ (14). Benn thus set the stage for the hermetic poetry that characterized West German lyric poetry in the 1950s, the hermetic poetry of artistic transcendence against which Brinkmann, Born, Theobaldy and their counterparts in the next generation would so vehemently protest.

⁹ "Artistik ist der Versuch der Kunst, innerhalb des allgemeinen Verfalls der Inhalte sich selber als Inhalt zu erleben und aus diesem Erlebnis einen neuen Stil zu bilden, es ist der Versuch, gegen den allgemeinen Nihilismus der Werte eine neue Transzendenz zu setzen: die Transzendenz der schöpferischen Lust."

¹⁰ "An wen ist ein Gedicht gerichtet...und es ist eine bemerkenswerte Antwort, die ein gewisser Richard Wilburns (sic) darauf gibt: Ein Gedicht, sagt er, ist an die Muse gerichtet, und diese ist unter anderem dazu da, die Tatsache zu verschleiern, daß Gedichte an niemanden gerichtet sind."

The “new” West German lyric poem was thus beginning to look a lot like the old French and Anglo-American “new poem,” that in the U.S. had by now been critically defined in both theory and practice by the New Criticism. The West German critical reception of the modernist hermetic poem was further defined by *Ergriffenes Dasein* and Friedrich’s *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik*. Successful anthologies by their very nature tend to define lyric poetry for the generation that embraces them. Although Holthusen’s programmatic “Tabula rasa” appears in this volume, *Ergriffenes Dasein* hardly makes a bold break with the past, as he and Kemp defined lyric poetry for the postwar generation with names such as Hofmannsthal, George, Borchardt, Carossa, Hesse, Bergengruen, and Huch, among others, as opposed to, for instance, Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp, Jakob Hoddiss, or August Stramm. Although *Ergriffenes Dasein* does include the work of younger writers such as Karl Krolow, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Walter Höllerer, Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, it is nevertheless strongly rooted in German prewar intellectual traditions. As such, *Ergriffenes Dasein* was able to connect to the humanist traditions that predated the Nazis. By doing so, however, Holthusen and Kemp create a new tradition in which German poetry develops unaffected by the work of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Poe, Eliot and LaForgue. Instead, for them, the newness of modern poetry traces its intellectual roots back to Nietzsche (357), and its pioneering voices are Hofmannsthal and George: “The decisively new, that which continues to influence later

work, appears to have first entered the world through Hofmannsthal and George: an epoch-making ethos of form with independent thematic material”¹¹ (398-99).

Where Holthusen and Kemp ground the modern poem in the work of Hofmannsthal and George, Hugo Friedrich locates the birth of the modernist lyric poem in nineteenth-century France. It is difficult to overstate the importance and influence of *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik*; it continues to be in print as a paperback and, as Best notes, “it ascended almost to the status of cult book”¹² (455). *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* is a critical attempt to elucidate the structure of what had become known as the modernist poem. Friedrich was a Romanist, and French and Spanish exemplars of the modern poem are well represented in his study. Friedrich dedicates a chapter each to critical analyses of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, the latter two of whom he defines as “the founders and still today leaders of modern lyric poetry in Europe”¹³ (9). He goes on to define the style of the modern poem as being essentially indebted to the innovations of Rimbaud and Mallarmé: “From Rimbaud and Mallarmé the laws of style of today’s poets are illuminated, and from today’s poets the astounding modernity of those Frenchmen are once again illuminated”¹⁴ (9).

In the fifth chapter, Friedrich investigates the lyric poetry of the first half of the twentieth century according to, among others, the following critical rubrics: “the

¹¹ “Das entscheidend Neue und in die Zukunft Wirkende scheint erst durch Hofmannsthal und George in die Welt getreten zu sein: ein epochemachendes Ethos der Form und eine eigenständige Thematik.”

¹² “...und fast zum Rang eines Kult-Buchs aufstieg.”

¹³ “die Gründer und noch heutigen Führer der modernen Lyrik Europas.”

indeterminate function of the determinants”; “dehumanization”; “the magic of language.”¹⁵ He also includes individual sections on Valéry, García Lorca, T. S. Eliot, Saint-John Perse, and other poets in this vein. The book ends with a short anthology and close readings of four poems. In other words, the idea of “lyric poetry” is equated with the hermetic modernist poem for his 1950s West German audience, a poetic worldview that essentially overlaps with that of T. S. Eliot and the New Critics. In creating this worldview, one that would come to dominate the West German reception of lyric poetry in the 1950s, Friedrich, Holthusen and Kemp, Benn and Staiger largely or completely ignore Dada, Surrealism, Italian Futurism, and much of German Expressionism: voices that had already challenged this worldview in European and Anglo-American poetry in the early twentieth century.

3. Sowing the seeds of rebellion: the West German 1960s

Adorno’s commentary on the relationship between the poet and society was typical of the postwar West German intellectual milieu regarding lyric poetry. After Baudelaire, Modernist poets eschewed the topos of modern society, or any notion of their playing a role in that society, viewing themselves instead as aloof, intellectually elite outsiders. Jürgen Theobaldy quotes Benn’s *Probleme der Lyrik* to exemplify this posture, writing that poets such as Benn are “lonely, socially uninteresting existences, who surrendered

¹⁴ “Von Rimbaud und Mallarmé aus erhellen sich die Stilgesetze der Heutigen, und von den Heutigen aus erhellt sich wiederum die erstaunliche Modernität jener Franzosen.”

their poems to an imaginary realm of art that in truth, of course, was and is socially produced"¹⁶ (Theobaldy, *Veränderung* 10). The idea of poetry as an area within "art" whose production, along with that of all art, is inescapably tied to the society within which it is produced, preoccupied both the political poets and those who would become known under the rubric of "New Subjectivity" [*Neue Subjektivität*]. Though these latter poets differed in the extent to which they involved themselves in political agitation (Theobaldy, for example, being much more politically active than Brinkmann, who categorically rejected all collectives and groups, regarding himself rather as an "outsider against the state" (Urbe 12)), they by and large did not view their poetry as a means to political ends. Postwar West German society, including the private and political relationship these poets had with that society, enters their poetry not through the examination of historical relations or dialectical analysis meant to effect change, but rather via personal observation and perception. Though some may have privately been involved in protests and demonstrations, as poets they were more concerned with re-establishing the link between poetry and the society in which they produced it rather than using it to bring about change.

These two groups, the political poets and those of "New Subjectivity," shared an ideological perspective in that they opposed the societal isolation of hermetic lyric and that the "relation between self and society" posited by their poetry was much more

¹⁵ "Die Unbestimmtheitsfunktion der Determinanten"; "Enthumanisierung"; Sprachmagie."

explicit than Adorno's "involuntary crystallization." Quite simply, there existed within the hermetic poem of the modernist tradition no space for these poets to realize their political or artistic goals. The political poets, in calling attention to specific societal relations within their lyrical work, wrote in a German tradition whose natural antecedents were Kurt Tucholsky and Bertolt Brecht. The latter group, however, who included mundane and even banal observations of their quotidian world in their work, has no natural antecedents within the German canon: observation without sublation, perception without artistic distance, was dismissed by most critics out of hand as "unpoetic."¹⁷ The manifestations of society, as well as the particular relationship of self to society, that appear in the work of poets such as Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy, are however pronounced features in the work of many American poets who became known in the 50s, figures including Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley. Brinkmann in particular sought to emulate this "American style," creating a template that he thought would solve the dilemma posed by the increasingly reified elitism of the "high art" poem.

The ultimate movement, if it may be called such, spearheaded by Brinkmann was in many ways anticipated and even precipitated by Walter Höllerer, who in the 1960s was co-editor with Hans Bender of the widely read literary journal *Akzente*. In April of 1965

¹⁶ "einsame, gesellschaftlich uninteressante Existenzen, die ihre Gedichte einem imaginären Bereich von Kunst überantworteten, der in Wahrheit doch gesellschaftlich produziert war und ist."

¹⁷ In his discussion of Brinkmann's work, Jost Hermand dismisses Brinkmann's literary idol, Frank O'Hara, with the curt remark: "Simpel will man sein, banal" (31).

Höllerer published his “Thesen zum langen Gedicht.” Comprised of sixteen aphorisms, “Thesen zum langen Gedicht” is not so much an argument for particularly long poems, but rather a carefully camouflaged polemic against the modernist hermetic poem of the 1950s, then already in decline.

In its preoccupation with the spatial appearance of a post-modernist poetry, Höllerer’s “Thesen” are in many ways spiritually related to Charles Olson’s “Projective Verse” (15-30) as well as the poetic practices of the Black Mountain poets, the Beats, and William Carlos Williams. In fact, in the “Überlegungen, die für lange Gedichte gelten können,” quotes that frame this issue of *Akzente* in front and back, both William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson are well represented (Höllerer also includes quotes by Henry Michaux, Ezra Pound, Apollinaire, Marinetti and Tadeusz Różewicz). These quotes serve not only to introduce the reader to those poets whose style influenced Höllerer’s “Thesen,” but also to introduce a more eclectic and anti-canonical internationalism than that of Friedrich’s *Struktur der modernen Lyrik*.

Höllerer argues not so much for a lengthening of the poem as for a lengthening of the line, away from the densely packed, highly metaphorical “Preziosität und Chinoiserie” (129) of the short, hermetic poem. Like Olson, Höllerer emphasizes the importance of breath to the “long poem”; like the Beats before him and Brinkmann and colleagues after him, Höllerer calls for poems in which “elements of the moment” [*Augenblickselemente*] and individual perception are foregrounded (128). These elements create “connections

between object, reader, author, poem” (129). The inclusion of banal observations would also serve to help free the poem from the academy, and to help overcome what had come to be the clichés of the hermetic poem, such as “silence” and “muteness” (130). Finally, Höllerer suggests that the “long poem” be considered a “prerequisite for short poems”¹⁸ (130).

Ironically enough, Höllerer’s “Thesen” provoked an essay exchange with Karl Krolow regarding the physical length of poems. More importantly, Höllerer’s “Thesen zum langen Gedicht” served as an announcement to writers such as Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy that *Akzente* would be a friendly venue for their work and, indeed, they became frequent contributors. Fischer comments on the importance of Höllerer’s “Thesen” to this younger generation, noting that they provided “direction for a movement in how lyric poetry was written that first began to gain literary ground in the Bundesrepublik with the first poetry publications of Nicolas Born, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, F.C. Delius, Günter Herburger, Johannes Schenk, Volker von Törne and some others”¹⁹ (93).

This group of writers, specifically Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy, are the ones on which I will focus in this dissertation. To do so I will first examine their American models, poets such as Frank O’Hara and Allen Ginsberg, who emerged in the 50s and

¹⁸ “Das lange Gedicht als Vorbedingung für kurze Gedichte.”

¹⁹ “Bewegungsrichtung lyrischer Schreibweisen, die in der Bundesrepublik erst begannen, sich literarisches Terrain zu erschließen, mit den ersten Gedichtveröffentlichungen von Nicolas Born, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, F.C. Delius, Günter Herburger, Johannes Schenk, Volker von Törne und einigen anderen.”

became known under labels such as the New York School and the Beats. Like their German counterparts, these poets rejected overly intellectual, hermetic and academic modes of lyric that remained prominent models in American poetry from the rise of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot through New Criticism.

In turning away from hermeticism and Modernist forms, many American poets in the 50s sought freer, more open forms, modes of expression less constricted by formalism, and a less academically or aesthetically rigorous voice. The rejection of Modernism finds its most radical extreme in the work of Frank O'Hara, whose "Personist" poems assume a chatty, conversational voice. There was no single school or movement that developed into a successor, in terms of influence, to New Criticism. Rather, as James Breslin points out, many smaller groups of poets, including "the Beat poets, the Confessional poets, the Black Mountain, New York, and Deep Image groups proposed a range of alternatives to the established mode, and they provided the leading sources of the new paradigms for poetry that became visible in the late 50s and early 60s" (xv). Though these disparate groups in no way represented a unified voice or vision, "they agreed in their renunciation of the well-made symbolist poem and in their search for poetic forms that could capture temporal immediacy, for the language of a 'breakthrough back into life'" (xv). The Black Mountain Poets, who included Charles Olson, Denise Levertov and Robert Creeley, formed a poetics based on breath that owed not a little to the expansive line of Walt Whitman. Olson's poetics, as developed in tracts such as "Projective Verse" (1950), were

tied intimately to his notions of space and a mythic, primal America. The New York School bonded over a shared enthusiasm for Abstract Expressionism in painting and a desire to translate those visual images to poetry. At an opposite extreme, the Beats rejected both the academy and academic modes of thinking such as notions of “schools” and “movements” to pursue methods of literary expression that would reflect the strivings for personal freedom they experienced in their lives.

The work of these poets, like that of their West German successors, was initially rejected based on the critical standards of the time in which it appeared. This rejection was based partly on expectations created by the successes of their immediate generational predecessors. Breslin describes this problematic with an impish sense of humor:

When the third generation of twentieth-century American poets—writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, Gary Snyder, W.S. Merwin, Robert Bly, Adrienne Rich, Louis Simpson—began to write in the 1950s, they were faced with a dilemma that the first generation of modern poets had not had to confront. The problem for the new generation was, in fact, the existence of the first, their perverse refusal (in any sense) to die. (1)

This “first generation of modern poets” was exemplified by T. S. Eliot. His presence was so overwhelming that “a particular phase of modernism—that identified with Eliot and the New Criticism in America—had achieved a powerful hegemony which successfully domesticated modernism” (Breslin 13). The poetic paradigm established by

Eliot and Pound and the critical standards of New Criticism became virtually synonymous. Literary criticism had in general begun to flourish in the 50s, focusing as it did on “elucidating a fairly limited number of texts already established as canonical. And in the criticism of poetry, the New Criticism, with its insistence on ironic tension as value and explication as method, achieved a dominance that was virtually unchallenged” (15).

The American avant-garde of the 50s, the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, responded to this situation by writing lyric poems, like O’Hara’s “A Step Away From Them,” that went completely against the critical grain. This boldness is not insignificant, as the prominence of their literary forbears was such that by striking out in such a completely new direction, they faced permanent literary ostracism. Breslin locates this revolt in a normal dynamic of periodic literary disruptions. He argues that there is no consensus on the degree to which American literary history forms a continuity, indicating that both Hyatt Waggoner, in *American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present* (1968), and Harold Bloom, in *A Map of Misreading* (1975), locate continuity in American poetry “in the persistent influence of Emerson,” while Roy Harvey Pearce, in *The Continuity of American Poetry* (1961), locates this continuity “in the dialectical relation between ‘Adamic’ and ‘mythic’ poets” (xv). Rather than forming a “continuity,” Breslin argues that the history of American poetry instead forms “a series of discontinuities, eruptions of creative energy that suddenly alienate poetry from what had come to seem its essential

and permanent nature” (xiii-xiv). Within this schematic, then, the work of Ginsberg, Olson, Creeley, Levertov, Snyder and O’Hara can be more easily naturalized.

The dilemma faced by the German voices emerging in the 1960s is parallel to that faced by their American counterparts of the 50s: “the perverse refusal” of their immediate predecessors “(in any sense) to die” (Breslin 1). These predecessors, German poets writing in the immediate aftermath of the war, also enjoyed the same luxury of T. S. Eliot’s generation of American poets: the luxury of being the “first generation.” However, if the history of American poetry is to be understood as a series of discontinuities, as I believe Breslin correctly argues, these discontinuities still operate within the context of a larger, cyclical historical dynamic. Thus, the “expansive line” of Olson and the Black Mountain poets, and Ginsberg’s and even O’Hara’s radical linkage of poetry with the subjective reality experienced by the poet, can be traced back to Whitman. As opposed to this, the disruption represented by the first generation of postwar German poets is complete: as suggested by the *tabula rasa* motif of the *Kahlschlag*, German poetry could no longer even remotely be understood as a “continuity.” As a result, the work of these poets became orthodoxy. This orthodoxy then became reified in circles such as the *Gruppe 47*, who commanded immense respect among both publishers and the educated reading public, but who continued to propagate the elitist standards that Brinkmann and many others of his generation found stultifying and antagonistic to creativity.

In rejecting both the hermetic lyric favored by this first generation as well as the explicit linking of literature to politics, Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy found natural allies in their American predecessors. However, though these American authors certainly found a German audience, most conspicuously through Walter Höllerer's work as editor of *Akzente* and as an anthologist, the literary milieu they worked to establish had no organic precedence in the German canon. Thus, by assuming a voice that was essentially foreign to the German canon, the poetry of Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy became all the more exposed to being rejected as "unpoetic."

In the following chapters I elucidate the specific influence the 1950s and 60s generations of American artists had on Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy, and how these young West German writers adapted the stylistic and aesthetic approaches of these American writers to establish and further their own agenda for lyric poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s West German literary scene. I focus on these three writers for two principle reasons. The first is their close proximity to one another, both in age and aesthetic orientation. Brinkmann and Born both first worked together in Köln in a circle of writers known under the rubric *Kölner Realismus* and organized around Dieter Wellershoff, house editor for Kiepenheuer & Witsch (Kammermeier 74). With this group, Wellershoff attempted to establish a vanguard of younger writers who would challenge the hermetic poem through a poetics based on the perceptions and observations of the writer as subject and grounded in the everyday. Born and Brinkmann continued to show

the seminal influence of their work as part of Wellershoff's *Kölner Realismus* group in their later work. Though not part of this group, Theobaldy was very close to their agenda aesthetically. Furthermore, he was one of the few West German writers to remain close to Brinkmann up to the latter's death (indeed, he was with Brinkmann in London when he was fatally injured by a bus).

Second, the work of these three writers had a definite impact on the development of the "New Subjectivity" movement in the 1970s. Brinkmann's influence was the most pronounced: *ACID* (1969) introduced an entire generation to the activities of underground American writers, artists and musicians, and the posthumously published *Westwärts 1 & 2* (1975) became a bestseller. Of the three, Brinkmann also remains the most influential today, with a growing body of critical literature devoted to him. For these reasons, most of the attention of this dissertation will be focused on him. However, it is incumbent to place Brinkmann within the context of his literary generation, not only to illustrate the influence he had among his contemporaries, but also to demonstrate some of the limitations of his agenda. By considering Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy together, I hope to deconstruct some of the myths concerning Brinkmann's image as absolute outsider, as well as to restore Born and Theobaldy to a more prominent position among their contemporaries.

I argue that Rolf Dieter Brinkmann modeled his poetics on those of his American literary influences in order to spearhead a revolt against ossified poetic norms in 1960s

West Germany that mirrored that of his American antecedents. In order to demonstrate this, I first analyze the American literary traditions and developments that gave rise to the rebellions precipitated by groups such as the New York School and the Beats. Situating these most important influences of Brinkmann historically will provide a template for understanding the pressures that animated much of Brinkmann's own literary career. In the third chapter I will demonstrate how Brinkmann modeled much of his own poetic theory on Frank O'Hara and the Beats in order to launch a rebellion against the predominant literary paradigm that he hoped would emulate the success of theirs. In the fourth chapter, I will demonstrate how Brinkmann, along with his two closest colleagues in this rebellion, Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy, fashioned three visions of a liberatory poetics that they used to counter the prevailing literary modes of the West German 1960s and 1970s. I will do this both by examining their writings on poetry through the lens of this liberatory thrust, and by analyzing key poems from each of them from this period in order to demonstrate how the poem becomes locus of the liberatory theme. Finally, I will examine the contemporary state of lyric poetry in Germany in a consideration of how successful or unsuccessful Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy were in their attempts to alter the course of postwar West German poetry.

4. The critical reception of Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy

Medard Kammermeier published the magisterial *Die Lyrik der neuen Subjektivität* in 1986. As indicated by her title, she traces the development of the larger movement of

“New Subjectivity” to which Born, Theobaldy and Brinkmann are habitually critically assigned. She examines the “decline of the hermetic poem” in the mid-1960s, situating this decline in the larger historical context of the student movement, and traces the development of the poetic movement of the 1970s based on individual perception and the empirical and autobiographical facets of the “New Subjectivity” poem. She includes close readings of poems by significant members of this group: Hugo Dittberner, F.C. Delius, Ludwig Fels, and Theobaldy.

Christa Merkes provides a somewhat more closely trained perspective on the movement she refers to as “new realism” in *Wahrnehmungsstrukturen in Werken des Neuen Realismus: Theorie und Praxis des Neuen Realismus und des nouveau roman—eine Gegenüberstellung* (1982). As indicated by her title, Merkes defines “Neuer Realismus” in terms of Robbe-Grillet’s *nouveau roman*. After elucidating the intellectual history of the development of the *nouveau roman* and its reception by Dieter Wellershoff in West Germany, she investigates the role this reception plays in the writings of Wellershoff, Brinkmann, Born, and Günter Steffens.

Sibylle Späth has made two important contributions to scholarship on Brinkmann. *Rolf Dieter Brinkmann* (1989), part of Sammlung Metzler’s “Realien zur Literatur” series, provides a short examination of each of Brinkmann’s works in chronological order. As such, it serves as an academic introduction to the works of Brinkmann to the interested reader. In *‘Rettungsversuche aus dem Todesterritorium’: zur Aktualität der*

Lyrik Rolf Dieter Brinkmanns (1986), Späth provides textual analysis of Brinkmann's works in order to situate them within the larger intellectual framework in which they were conceived, thus illustrating their relevance to postwar West German literature.

Burglind Urbe, in *Lyrik, Fotografie und Massenkultur bei Rolf Dieter Brinkmann* (1985), examines Brinkmann's particular use of photography in his work. She also analyzes selected prose texts and provides interpretations of individual poems to illustrate the intersections of mass culture and photography in Brinkmann's oeuvre.

In *Das Kunstverständnis in den späteren Texten Rolf Dieter Brinkmanns* (1986) Holger Schenk examines recurring leitmotifs, such as the idea of authenticity, the aesthetics of the everyday, sensuality, passivity and resignation, in the late works of Brinkmann.

Thomas Groß concentrates on Brinkmann's posthumously published "collage texts" in *Alltagserkundungen: Empirisches Schreiben in der Ästhetik und in den späten Materialbänden Rolf Dieter Brinkmanns* (1993). Groß examines the collage-prose texts, *Rom, Blicke, Erkundungen für die Präzisierung des Gefühls für einen Aufstand* and *Schnitte* as experiments in form, and attempts to illustrate their relevance both to Brinkmann's oeuvre and the broader intellectual currents of the late 60s and early 70s.

Karsten Herrmann, in *Bewußtseins erkundungen im 'Angst und Todesuniversum': Rolf Dieter Brinkmanns Collagebücher* (1999) also examines these three posthumously published collage books. Herrmann connects *Rom, Blicke, Erkundungen* and *Schnitte* to

three crises in Brinkmann's literary *Weltanschauung*—those of “perception,” that of the “occidental consciousness” and of “language”—and ultimately links these books to Brinkmann's idea of “literature as life program,” situating them in the tradition of literary experimentation, from Dada and Surrealism to William S. Burroughs' cut-up and fold-in methods.

In a similar vein, Michael Strauch investigates Brinkmann's montage technique in *Rolf Dieter Brinkmann: Studie zur Text-Bild-Montagetechnik* (1998). Strauch analyzes Brinkmann's aesthetic of “sensual experience as flash-photo”²⁰ (43-69) against the intellectual background of his reception of the nouveau roman, then details Brinkmann's elucidation of this aesthetic in what Strauch describes as his “text-picture-montages” (71-92).

Gerhard Lampe, in *Ohne Subjektivität: Interpretationen zur Lyrik Rolf Dieter Brinkmanns vor dem Hintergrund der 'Studentenbewegung'* (1983) considers the question of subjectivity and the role it plays in Brinkmann's production as lyric poet. He contextualizes his investigation within the historical framework of the student movement.

Antonius Naaijens investigates aspects of subjectivity in the work of Brinkmann, Born and others in his *Lyrik und Subjekt: Pluralisierung des lyrischen Subjekts bei Nicolas Born, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Paul Celan, Ernst Meister und Peter Rühmkorf* (1986). More specifically, he develops a theoretical definition of the idea of lyrical

²⁰ “Das Problem der ‘sinnlichen Erfahrung als Blitzlichtaufnahme.’”

subjectivity from the perspective of structuralism, and examines these authors' works from this perspective.

In *Die andere Modernität: Strukturen des Ich-Sagens bei Rolf Dieter Brinkmann* (1997), Claudia Schwalfenberg investigates the provocative question of Brinkmann's "modernity." She does this by first developing the intellectual context of Brinkmann's literary connection to that most modern of West German poets, Gottfried Benn. She then investigates Brinkmann's "relationship to reality, which is concretized in his *Ich-Sagen*"²¹ (1) in his early prose, his poem "Vanille," and the volume *Westwärts 1 & 2*.

Gerd Gemünden considers the question of "Americanization" in Brinkmann's work from the perspective of a broader intellectual framework. His *Framed Visions: Popular Culture, Americanization, and the Contemporary German and Austrian Imagination* (1998) considers the question of Americanization in the works of the writers and filmmakers Brinkmann, Jelinek, Fassbinder, Wenders, Achternbusch and Treut. In the case of Brinkmann, Gemünden analyzes his reception of Andy Warhol and "Pop Art" and the contribution this reception made to Brinkmann's "surface poetry."

In *too much: Das lange Leben des Rolf Dieter Brinkmann* (1994), Gunter Geduldig and Marco Sagurna collect biographical snapshots from a variety of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances from Brinkmann's hometown of Vechta. Geduldig also compiled, along with Claudia Wehebrink, a comprehensive bibliography of all primary and secondary

²¹ "die Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit, die sich im Ich-Sagen konkretisiert."

literature, including articles in the popular press, related to Brinkmann, entitled succinctly *Bibliographie Rolf Dieter Brinkmann* (1997). A collection of some of Brinkmann's personal correspondence is also widely available. Hartmut Schnell, Brinkmann's best friend during the latter's year in Austin, Texas, collected Brinkmann's letters to him under the title *Briefe an Hartmut* (1999).

The first international symposium on the life and work of Brinkmann was held in Vechta in 2000. Many of the presentations were subsequently collected under the title *Rolf Dieter Brinkmann: Blicke ostwärts-westwärts*, edited by Gudrun Schulz and Martin Kagel, which volume includes an astounding variety of perspectives on Brinkmann's prose, poetry, aesthetics, reception of various strains of literary and popular culture, and his life.

The intellectual contexts and aesthetics of Jürgen Theobaldy's prose writings were investigated by Michael Kamper-Van den Boogaart. In his dissertation, *Ästhetik des Scheiterns*, Kamper-Van den Boogaart considers Theobaldy's work alongside that of Botho Strauß and Uwe Timm.

Rowohlt Literaturmagazin has dedicated a half volume to the work of Nicolas Born (volume 21, 1988), edited by Martin Lüdke and Delf Schmidt, and a complete volume to the work of Brinkmann (volume 36, 1995), edited by Maleen Brinkmann. Each contains both primary works and essays on each author. Additionally, volume 71 of *text+kritik*'s

Zeitschrift für Literatur (July, 1981), edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, is dedicated to Brinkmann.

Chapter 2

American Models: The Orthodoxy of New Criticism and its Rejection by Frank O'Hara and the Beats in the 1950s

1. Historical Parallels

In their attempts to refashion West German lyric poetry in the 1960s, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Nicolas Born, and Jürgen Theobaldy were actually staging a rebellion that mirrored that of their American literary forebears. In fact, American poetry as understood and practiced in the 1950s was as monolithic as West German poetry was to become by the 60s. Though the generation of West German poets who began writing after the war (or who, like Benn, were rehabilitated in the period after the war) struggled to begin anew on a literary *tabula rasa*, they had by the 60s erected a theoretical bulwark against which younger poets, like Brinkmann, began to chafe. Similarly, younger American poets who came of age in the 1950s labored under a very strict guideline for how poetry should be written and understood: namely, the Eliotic program of New Criticism.

In this chapter I will show how two separate groups of American poets who came to prominence in the 1950s—the New York School of poets, including Frank O'Hara, and the Beats—developed a poetic aesthetic that would not only free them from existing strictures about how American poetry was practiced and understood, but which would also serve as a template for their West German colleagues. Though their approaches to

literature differed significantly, the Beats and the New York School were each rebelling against the same overarching aesthetic: namely, a guideline defined by the influence and reception of T. S. Eliot and the theoretical and poetic work of the New Critics.

My choice of these two groups serves multiple purposes. First, despite the continued proliferation of their detractors, O'Hara and Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, though not necessarily having set out to do so, have achieved canonical status in American literature; that is to say, their voices were and continue to be heard beyond the coterie of their respective groups. Second, O'Hara and the Beats had a profound influence on the work of Rolf Dieter Brinkmann: the Beats on his understanding of literature as lived experience, and O'Hara on his actual poetic practice.

Brinkmann's approach to fashioning a poetics closely followed that of O'Hara and the Beats: each challenged the "literary system" by consciously remaining outsiders to that system, and by writing poems that in both form and content rejected that system. Consequently, the poetry of O'Hara and the literary model of the Beats are fundamental to my thesis that Brinkmann chose O'Hara and the Beats as influences both because they provided successful models for challenging an orthodoxy and because they had been able to enjoy literary success on their own terms. The radical expression of individual subjectivity in their work, as opposed to the detached subjectivity of an extra-individual literary persona (Eliot, St. Vincent Millay), provided Brinkman with a suitable model for developing a liberating poetics. He could emphasize personal liberation by positing it as

an alternative to the “dialectical liberation,” that is, the broader social liberation of a class or group, pursued by the more explicitly political poets whose work achieved a broader readership in West Germany during the 1960s (Brecht, Enzensberger).

To investigate and analyze the poetics offered by O’Hara and the Beats without a consideration of the context in which they worked would be remiss. In this case, the context is provided by the extraordinary influence and prestige enjoyed by T. S. Eliot and the New Criticism in the 50s. Therefore, I will first develop this context by demonstrating how the poetic practice of Eliot, and the theoretical framework for understanding poetry constructed by Eliot and the New Critics, became orthodoxy by the 1950s. I will then analyze how O’Hara and the Beats developed an alternative vision to this orthodoxy. In the following two chapters I will explore how Brinkmann, Born, and Theobaldy adapted O’Hara and the Beats in a similar battle with poetic orthodoxy in the West Germany of the 1960s.

2. Permanent Revolution: T. S. Eliot and the New Criticism

The poetic careers of Thomas Stearns Eliot and Ezra Pound became synonymous with literary Modernism in the London of the 1920s. Literary Modernism in turn became characterized by a shared sense of crisis, which extended across the arts. This sense of crisis was, however, not merely representative of an artistic crisis: the rapid pace of geopolitical and technological change that accelerated during the *fin de siècle* period, only

to culminate in the wanton carnage and destruction of the first World War, also lent an air of anxiety to the early years of Modernism. In their *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation*, Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley assert that the crisis of Modernism was linked to a crisis in science and philosophy, a crisis that “was essentially epistemological; that is, it was related to radical uncertainty about how we know what we know about the real world” (13). Though a source of despair, this crisis was also “an incentive for innovation in the arts” (13).

It is in the context of this artistic and philosophical crisis that Eliot’s reactionary relationship to literary tradition, and particularly to that of Romanticism, can be understood. In his *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965*, James E. Breslin finds an emphasis on novelty to be fundamental to Modernism: “Among literary movements modernism is unique in defining itself not so much as a new world view (‘romanticism’) or the revival of an ancient one (‘neoclassicism’) but as an absolute break with the past, including its own past” (10). In this respect, Modernism had much in common with other avant-garde movements around Europe, from the Italian Futurism of Marinetti to the Dada of Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara.

This emphasis on novelty notwithstanding, the literary judgments and taste cultivated by Eliot and Pound were informed by a variety of traditional and canonical sources, from pre-Elizabethan dramatists to the troubadours of Provence. The influences both men chose

to emphasize, however, reflect their orthodoxy as arbiters of literary taste.¹ This orthodoxy is particularly evident in Eliot's critical writings, in which he develops literary ideals that would inform a generation of poets and critics. An examination of Eliot's essays reveals a highly nuanced reading of the role of tradition for the writer; of Eliot's understanding of novelty and freedom as they relate to art; and of Eliot's hostile rejection of all things Romantic, which he aims to supplant with a more Classicist orientation in Modernist art. The development of these ideas in Eliot's essays deserves consideration, as these are the ideas that would form the nucleus of the New Critical understanding of literature.

Although novel approaches to literary expression and visual presentation were an important preoccupation for Modernist artists—and Eliot is no exception in this regard—innovation by no means meant supplanting the traditional canon with the new works of genius. Rather, for Eliot, the traditional canon is an organic whole that retains its wholeness, in slightly altered form, as newer works are produced. In an ideal situation, the extreme focus on novelty experienced by the Modernists would hardly be necessary. As Eliot notes in his “Reflections on *Vers Libre*,” however, we hardly live in an ideal society: “In an ideal state of society one might imagine the good New growing naturally out of the good Old, without the need for polemic and theory; this would be a society with a living tradition. In a sluggish society, as actual societies are, tradition is ever

¹ “Mr. Eliot's version of English literary history is as much an orthodoxy as Matthew Arnold's was a generation before” (Hough 35).

lapsing into superstition, and the violent stimulus of novelty is required” (*Selected Prose* 32).

Since tradition is not a living presence in actual society, its acquisition becomes ever more important if the artist is to be capable of “the violent stimulus of novelty.” In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot writes that tradition is obtained only “by great labour,” but that it is nevertheless “nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year” (*Selected Prose* 38). For Eliot, tradition becomes the order formed by the great literary monuments, an order that infuses literature present and past with a sense of simultaneity. When a truly novel work of art is introduced to this “ideal order,” “the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new” (38).

For Eliot, the acquisition of tradition bestows moral authority upon the artist, a moral authority that is essentially ascetic. There is no freedom in art, only labor and self-sacrifice. Of the former, Eliot notes of *vers libre*, in which the poet perceives himself as freed from metrical restraints by the inherent rhythm of language, that it “has not even the excuse of a polemic; it is a battle-cry of freedom, and there is no freedom in art” (32). Rather, the production of art demands an ascetic surrender on the part of the artist. What happens to the artist, he writes, “is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the

moment to something that is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (40).

Thus, for Eliot, the work of the artist—at least of the ascetic, self-disciplined artist—assumes a quasi-religious dimension. Likewise, Eliot describes the critic’s work with similar moral overtones. For Eliot the poet, criticism remained a central component of his artistic enterprise; indeed, in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot remarks, “but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing” (37). However, possibly out of allegiance to his *métier* as poet, Eliot warns critics against exceeding what he sees as their mandate. An illustrative example of Eliot’s approach to criticism, found in his essay “*Hamlet*,” could serve as an epithet for New Criticism: “*Qua* work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it according to standards, in comparison to other works of art; and for ‘interpretation’ the chief task is the presentation of relevant historical facts which the reader is not assumed to know” (*Selected Prose* 45-6). Eliot maintains this humility in “The Function of Criticism,” noting that “[c]riticism... must always profess an end in view, which, roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste” (*Selected Prose* 69). In other words, as Eliot again makes clear at the end of this essay, the role of the critic is to teach the public what to like:

I have had some experience of Extension lecturing, and I have found only two ways of leading any pupils to like anything with the right liking: to

present them with a selection of the simpler kind of facts about a work—its conditions, its setting, its genesis—or else to spring the work on them in such a way that they were not prepared to be prejudiced against it.

(75)

In other words, the job of educators is to teach students to appreciate why a work is worthy of their regard. The suggested critical approaches used to ensure the development of “correct” taste would have tremendous influence on New Criticism.

Eliot’s critical writings are further marked by a pervasive hostility to Romanticism, which he rejected in favor of Classicism. Equating Romanticism with emotionalism and subjectivity, his rejection of the movement’s precepts is at times sneeringly scornful, at times sardonic, but always apodictic. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” the word “emotion” and the phrase “expression of personality” are code terms for Romanticism. He employs these terms in a sweeping indictment of Romantic emotionalism: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (43). In “The Function of Criticism,” the idea of an “inner voice” is Eliot’s metaphor of choice for Romanticism. Defining Classicism against Romanticism, Eliot writes that the difference between them is “the difference between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic” (70). As opposed to the inspiration of the Romantic “inner

voice,” the supporters of Classicism “believe that men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves” (70).

In “The Metaphysical Poets,” Eliot suggests that Romanticism represents a false line of development that followed from a “dissociation of sensibility.” According to Eliot, this “dissociation of sensibility” set in during the seventeenth century and resulted in a “sentimental age” that developed under the influence of Milton and Dryden: “The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected” (*Selected Prose* 65). Against this Eliot champions their forebears, such as Chapman and Donne, admiring in their poetry the “direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling” (63). Eliot suggests that, as a result of the depredations of Romanticism, literature was displaced from its true course. He identifies in the metaphysical poets a virtue that can be considered “something permanently valuable, which subsequently disappeared, but ought not to have disappeared” (63). For a possible return to the intellectual subtleties of metaphysical verse, Eliot prescribes the “difficulty” that has come to characterize Modernist literature: “Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning” (65).

It is worth noting that for Harold Bloom, the rejection of Romanticism in Eliot's literary syllabus is particularly revealing: "Eliot's declared precursors form a celebrated company: Virgil, Dante, the French Symbolists, and Ezra Pound. His actual poetry derives from Tennyson and Whitman, with Whitman as the larger, indeed the dominant influence," adding that "English and American Romantic tradition is certainly not the tradition that Eliot chose, but the poetic family romance, like its human analogue, is not exactly an arena where the will dominates" (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 1). Bloom substantiates his claim with ample textual analysis, implying that the "absolute break with the past" noted by Breslin was more programmatic than anything else. Bloom's argument notwithstanding, Eliot's *perceived* hostility to Romanticism would be a factor in the anti-Romantic stance later adopted by the New Critics.

The impetus to Eliot's ascension to literary authority nonpareil was his poem *The Waste Land* (1922). Published in the aftermath of WWI, its depiction of a bleak, post-apocalyptic landscape of materiality and spiritual longing seemed to speak directly to the generation of writers and artists who had just survived the unprecedented butchery of the First World War. Indeed, the influence of *The Waste Land*, and the concomitant literary authority bequeathed on Eliot, can hardly be overstated.²

Referring to the work's influence, Brooker and Bentley note that "by the 1930s it was being treated by many as the poem of the century, as a text that serious readers could

not ignore” (3). An anecdote related by Northrop Frye tells of two camps in an English department at a Canadian university that had decided to offer a course in twentieth-century poetry. It indicates the sea change brought about by Eliot’s poem: “there were those who felt that twentieth-century poetry had begun with Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in 1922, and those who felt that most of the best of it had already been written by that time” (22). Harold Bloom is more succinct, writing simply that *The Waste Land* is “indisputably the most influential poem written in English in our century” (*Modern Critical Interpretations* 1).

As for its author, Perkins notes a level of influence and authority bequeathed on Eliot almost unheard of in today’s literary environment: “For twenty-five years T. S. Eliot exercised an authority in the literary world not possessed by any writer before him for more than a century. By the end of the 1920s his poetry was an inescapable influence on younger poets, and his criticism shaped their work even more persuasively, if only because they read the authors he praised” (3).

The true scope of Eliot’s importance to twentieth-century literature, particularly as it developed in America, can be found in the school of criticism that emerged around his work, the New Criticism. Although the rise of New Criticism was based largely on Eliot’s critical influence, it also aided the ascendancy of Modernism, in that it “acclimated readers to the perplexing verse of Eliot and his contemporaries, and eventually

² Of course, *The Waste Land* owes much of its power to Ezra Pound’s red pen. To appreciate the full impact of Pound’s edit of Eliot’s *magnum opus*, see *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the*

revolutionized the study of literature” (Schwartz 210). Most of the leading voices of New Criticism were themselves poets, and the poets who were not critics wrote poems more and more for those critics. The “well-made poem” (or, to use the title of Cleanth Brooks’s 1947 book, “the well wrought urn”) became standard, as poetry and criticism gradually became mutually incestuous.

Though the term ‘New Criticism’ was introduced by John Crowe Ransom’s book *The New Criticism* in 1941, it is now generally associated with a group of poet-critics who were heavily influenced by Eliot. Its most important early voices—William Empson, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate—wrote what Perkins calls “the poetry of critical intelligence” (7). Even at the beginning, the poetry of the New Critics owed a greater debt to criticism, both Eliot’s and their own, than it did to poetry. As Perkins notes, “so far as it descended from Eliot, this style was shaped more by his criticism than by his poetry” (7-8). I. A. Richards, Richard Blackmur, Yvor Winters, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks would also come to be associated with the movement (Perkins 8). As it took hold in American English departments, New Criticism developed a similar degree of authority regarding the understanding and writing of poetry in the United States. As their poetry reflected their critical values and understanding, poetry and criticism as practiced by the New Critics grew into a symbiotic relationship (see Perkins 74-109, Breslin 1-22).

New Critical doctrines took form in books such as I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929) and *Understanding Poetry* (1938), edited by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. In *Practical Criticism*, Richards does exactly what Eliot prescribes for the teaching of poetry in "The Function of Criticism": he "spring(s) the work on [students] in such a way that they were not prepared to be prejudiced against it" (see Eliot, *Selected Prose* 75). The book is built around "protocols" Richards collected from his students at Cambridge who were reading English. Each week, Richards distributed four poems to his students without reference to authorship, period, or origin. He even updated the orthography of older poems when he deemed it necessary. Their assignment was to read each poem several times and to return their comments—which Richards called the "protocols"—to Richards at the end of the week (3-5). The foundation of *Practical Criticism* is formed by thirteen of the poems Richards had distributed, along with an array of associated protocols for each. The reader is invited to participate in the experiment by not looking up authorship of a poem (buried in an appendix) until after having formed his own mental "protocol."

At the outset of *Practical Criticism*, Richards outlines three goals for the book: "to introduce a new kind of documentation to those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture"; "to provide a new technique for those who

wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry”; and “to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we now use in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read”

(3). His unstated intention is both typically New Critical and more succinct: to teach his readers how to read poetry correctly. Presenting the poems without reference to authorship or origin not only fulfills the New Critical dictum of valuing the literary work over all other considerations, it also forces students and readers to focus on a work’s semiotics and formal features without regard to the author’s background or the context in which the work was written, possible influences from its literary period, the work’s reception, and its mode of transmission. For Richards, the poem is but a purely aesthetic “mode of communication,” and the only function of literary criticism is to serve as a “means to the attainment of finer, more precise, more discriminating communication” (11).

In other words, for Richards, the critic has no other role than to insist on the primacy of the literary work as an aesthetic standard. As Eliot earlier remarked, “there is no method except to be very intelligent,” (55) so Richards places the entire onus of critical thinking on reading habits: “That is why good reading, in the end, is the whole secret of ‘good judgment’” (305). If what is communicated by modern poetry is not understood by a broad audience, the fault lies not with the poetry, but with the audience: “Not a tenth of the power of poetry is released for

the general benefit, indeed, not a thousandth part. It fails, not through its own fault, but through our ineptitude as readers” (321). In the end, *Practical Criticism* is an attempt to correct this ineptitude.

Likewise, Cleanth Brooks’s and Robert Penn Warren’s *Understanding Poetry*, which was “an almost universally used anthology for college students” (Perkins 78), is more devoted to teaching students how to read poetry as an exercise in art appreciation rather than how to think critically about that poetry, or how to think about a particular poet’s place in literary history. Consequently, the textbook part of *Understanding Poetry* consists of sections on narrative poems, descriptive poems, metrics, tone, imagery and theme. The included poems are arranged to illustrate the topic under discussion, with some commentary on how the topic is illustrated in the individual examples. Some poems are even followed by study exercises so that the student can work through these topics himself. The anthology part of this book consists of a group of “Poems for Study” that are “presented without any critical apparatus or discussion” (434).

The editorial choices made by Brooks and Warren are telling. Though they include poems by older Modernists, New Critics, and younger poets writing in this mode (Yeats, Auden, Eliot, Allen Tate, William Empson, Robert Lowell, Delmore Schwartz, among many others), the work of William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara and Allen Ginsberg remains

conspicuously absent, even in the 1960 edition. Based on the strength of Eliot's influence, as well as books such as *Practical Criticism* and *Understanding Poetry*, then, the precepts of New Criticism had, by the 1950s, become not only orthodox for both the reading and writing of poetry (see Perkins 76-81, Breslin 15), but exclusionary as well.

As early as the end of the 1940s, however, the eventual avenues of revolt against New Critical strictures began to appear. Poets such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, who had been "more or less eclipsed" by Eliot (Perkins 11) and thus receded into the background, were beginning to reemerge as important voices in the 40s and 50s. Of their importance, Donald Allen writes in the preface to *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* that "following the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams," younger American poets have created "a large body of work" that has "built on their achievements and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem" (xi). Pound's embrace by this generation is ironic, given that he is inexorably linked to Eliot in the period of High Modernism. However, his years spent as a marginalized figure, and his continuing insistence on innovation in his work, led to his work being linked by this generation to the "total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse" (Allen xi).

Pound's reputation, severely damaged by his championing of Mussolini and Italian Fascism, would be rehabilitated in the years following the war: his *Pisan Cantos* (1948),

written while in a POW camp in Pisa, won the Bollingen Prize in 1949. The *Pisan Cantos*, along with the first book of William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* (1946) and Charles Olson's manifesto "Projective Verse" (1950) prefigured a growing rebellion against the Modernism of Eliot and the New Criticism. It was in this milieu of rebellion against academic norms that Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, and the Beats came into their own as writers. Indeed, as we shall see, this rebellion was already in full bloom by the time Allen Ginsberg gave his famous Gallery Six reading of "Howl" in 1955.³ By the end of the 50s, even Robert Lowell, a gifted poet who had championed New Critical values in his earlier work, had turned in *Life Studies* (1959) "from the style of Ransom and Tate to a poetry of direct self-disclosure" (Schwartz 213).

The revolt against Modernism and New Criticism was prompted by their exclusionary practices and institutional dominance. Their virtual hegemony is well illustrated by the initial reaction of James Breslin, a champion of Frank O'Hara's work, to first reading that poet's "A Step Away From Them" as a graduate student in 1959. New Critical approaches to reading had rendered him incapable of recognizing the work as a poem. In Breslin's words, "mythical resonance, literary allusion, paradox, irony, tension, buried metaphoric systems, authorial distancing—all the certain certainties of critical discourse in the 50s—were missing.... It was not that 'A Step Away From Them' was a bad poem; it was no poem" (xiii). This anecdote illustrates the daunting challenge

³ Perkins refers to a "revolt against Modernism" having taken place "between roughly 1954 and 1964" (10).

facing readers of the 50s who encountered poetry that rejected the tenets of Modernism and New Criticism.

3. A Movement of Individual Voices: The Beats and The New York School

The Beats and the New York School of poets were part of the wide array of groups and individual poets who challenged the New Critical orthodoxy with a radically different approach to poetry, and who gained wider recognition in the late 50s and early 60s.

Though the two groups had contact with each other and were generally sympathetic to each other, their poetic sensibilities differed significantly. Neither of these groups was bound by a strident manifesto or a rigidly defined set of assumptions regarding poetry.

The core of the Beats was formed around the friendships that developed between Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Neal Cassady, and John Clellon Holmes in New York City in the late 1940s. The Beat movement eventually came to be associated with poet and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "City Lights" bookstore and the San Francisco Renaissance. Like the Beats, the New York School was defined more by friendship, geography, and distaste for academic verse than by an ideological poetics. John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara formed the core of the group, which included Kenneth Koch and James Schuyler. As indicated earlier, the New York School poets are in fact better known for their shared enthusiasm for Abstract Expressionist art than for a binding poetic theory.

Members of both of these groups had a significant impact on the poetic practice of Brinkmann, Born, and Theobaldy. With the Beats these German poets shared the rejection of 50s political and societal conservatism and the idea that literature should largely reflect the type of life led by the writer. It was O'Hara and the New York School, however, who provided Brinkmann with the theoretical apparatus for injecting lived experience into his actual writing. In the remainder of this chapter, I will concentrate on these themes as the shared legacy of the New York School and the Beats: namely, the poetic practices developed by O'Hara and the New York School, and the manner in which the Beats foregrounded their lives as the framework of their messages. In subsequent chapters I will demonstrate how these specific influences operate in the writings of Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy.

4. The Poetics of Personal Experience

Of the New York School, Frank O'Hara (1926-66) remains the most important representative (Ashbery's continuing productivity having taken on dimensions that resist classification), and his work had a tremendous impact on the young Rolf Dieter Brinkmann's approach to poetry. After settling in New York in 1951, O'Hara worked for *Art News* and then the Museum of Modern Art, where he eventually became associate curator of exhibitions of painting and sculpture. He published only two volumes of poetry during his lifetime, *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957) and *Lunch Poems* (1964),

and a short tongue-in-cheek polemical essay, “Personism: A Manifesto” (1961).

O’Hara’s work also resists easy classification, and critics have continued to deploy the term “New York School,” a geographical grouping first made by Donald Allen in his groundbreaking anthology, *The New American Poetry* (1960), more as a convenience than as a claim about coherent poetics.⁴

In fact, in his introduction to *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara* (first published under the editorship of Allen in 1971), John Ashbery complains that this term “applied to poetry isn’t helpful, in characterizing a number of widely dissimilar poets whose work moreover has little to do with New York, which is, or used to be, merely a convenient place to live...” (x). An examination of O’Hara’s work will reveal the exact opposite of Ashbery’s claim: that it in fact has very much to do with his adopted home. However, in that the term “New York School” implies a certain ideological approach to poetry or an assumed set of aesthetic guidelines, Ashbery’s point is well taken.

O’Hara’s work resists easy classification because, even today, it contradicts in style and substance almost all received notions a person could have about what poetry *is* or *should be*. Nevertheless, by the time of his death O’Hara was well-known and admired by many American poets of the succeeding generation. Marjorie Perloff writes that O’Hara had become “an underground celebrity” by the 1960s, and that “young poets began to besiege him with letters and phone calls” (*Frank O’Hara* 169). This homage is

⁴ Allen denotes John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and Frank O’Hara, “the New York Poets,” as one of the “five large groups” of the then younger American poets (xii-xiii).

undoubtedly due in large part to O'Hara's famous generosity and likeability, but it is also due to the fact that O'Hara fashioned the most radical departure from New Criticism and academic verse among all of the rebel poets writing in the 50s.

More than one scholar has critiqued O'Hara's legacy by observing that his work lacks the serious tone of Charles Olson's, the earnest spirituality of Ginsberg's, the soul-laid-bare confessionalism of Robert Lowell, as well as programmatic or ideological features. Breslin points out that in times of "crisis and renovation," poetry often "become[s] a programmatic activity" (210), and the work of Olson, Ginsberg and Lowell, and other leading poets of the 50s, though written in the spirit of resistance to the programmatic aesthetic of New Criticism, largely bears him out. O'Hara and the other writers associated with the "New York School," however, "remained the least polemical, the least interested in committing themselves to a theory of poetry" (210).

In fact, it is probably O'Hara's programmatic lack of program that makes him so elusive for critics. In her book, *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters* (1977), Perloff begins with O'Hara's "The Critic" as epigraph, in which the critic is "the assassin / of my orchards...meting out / conversation like Eve's first / confusion between penises and / snakes." This is a poem certain to be popular among other poets, but it is one that also carries the implicit warning to not pigeonhole O'Hara's work with the designation of "school" or "movement."

Instead of a programmatic idea, O'Hara's work conveys his particular passions: Abstract Expressionist art, modern music and dance, sculpture, the Russian literature of Mayakovsky and Pasternak, French Surrealism, Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams, his many friends and lovers, the movies, and time spent wandering the streets of New York. His poetic approach to these passions, which he later famously described as "I do this, I do that," is nevertheless also difficult to classify. Breslin describes the difficulty facing O'Hara's would-be critics very elegantly:

In reading the *Collected Poems* the critic is alternately confronted with poems that embarrass him out of interpretation by their simplicity and with poems that proliferate interpretations by their opacity and multivalence. In thinking about the one the critic does not quite know how to start, and in thinking about the other he does not quite know how to stop. (211-12)

O'Hara's "statement on poetics," included in the appendix of *The New American Poetry*, stands out even among this group as particularly unpretentious and matter-of-fact. Whereas Whalen refers to his poetry as "a picture or graph of a mind moving" (Allen 420), Snyder relates the rhythms of his poetry to the rhythms of physical work and the life he is leading (420), Duncan writes on topics such as "Suffering," "Christianity," and "Science" (400-07), and Ginsberg comments on breath and the long line in *Howl* (414-18), O'Hara begins his three paragraph statement thus: "I am mainly preoccupied with the

world as I experience it, and at times when I would be dead the thought that I could never write another poem has so far stopped me” (419).

He goes on to express his disregard for “fame and posterity”; “clarifying experiences”; “bettering anyone’s state or social relation”; and for “any particular technical development in the American language” (419). Rather, to a much more radical degree than even Kerouac (whose “spontaneous prose” reflects a certain programmatic attitude toward literature), O’Hara reveals an absence of poetic posturing: “My formal ‘stance’ is found at the crossroads where what I know and can’t get meets what is left of that I know and can bear without hatred” (419-20). Or, expressed more succinctly: “What is happening to me, allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid, goes into my poems” (419).

The only other “statement of poetics” that O’Hara left behind is his witty and blatantly parodic “Personism: A Manifesto.” As in a true literary manifesto, O’Hara defines Personism by what it opposes. However, he does this by speaking in the first person singular instead of plural, as would befit the description of a new movement, thus mocking the style of the manifesto: “I don’t believe in god, so I don’t have to make elaborately sounded structures...I don’t even like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff” (*Complete Poems* 498). He also mimics the manifesto through overly grandiose statements:

I'm not saying that I don't have practically the most lofty ideas of anyone writing today...Personism, a movement which I recently founded and which nobody knows about, interests me a great deal, being so totally opposed to this kind of abstract removal that it is verging on a true abstraction for the first time, really, in the history of poetry...It's a very exciting movement which will undoubtedly have lots of adherents...In all modesty, I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it.

(498-99)

Though "Personism," as O'Hara defines it, sounds more like an anti-polemic meant to merely mock manifestoes and movements, it is nevertheless a very lucid statement of the poet's approach to literature and poetry: though his prolific career suggests a person who indeed takes his own poems very seriously, O'Hara consistently avoids grandiloquent ideas about his writing as "literature," a "legacy," or "poetry." Nonetheless, O'Hara also makes clear that he is mocking the reader who doesn't "get" his poems, the reader who would claim that his work is *not* poetry: "Nobody should experience anything they don't need to, if they don't need poetry bully for them. I like the movies too. And after all, only Whitman and Crane and Williams, of the American poets, are better than the movies" (498).

When O'Hara claims to find only Whitman, Crane and Williams better than the movies, we can take him on his word. O'Hara was famously diffident about collecting his

own work; Breslin writes that the correspondence between O'Hara and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who had invited O'Hara to submit a book-length manuscript (*Lunch Poems*) that took O'Hara four years to compile, demonstrates "an active resistance to collecting his poems" (211). After O'Hara's death, it took Donald Allen five years to track down all of his poems for the *Collected Poems*, some of which were scattered about O'Hara's apartment, stuck between underwear, or sent to friends without O'Hara having made a copy for himself. Allen's initial volume nevertheless stretches to over 500 pages, and he published a second volume of poems that were discovered subsequently.

What both the theoretical stance of "Personism" and his carelessness with his own work demonstrate is that O'Hara did not attribute a transcendent meaning to poetry. He did not intend his poems to be organic works of art for art's sake or to serve as statements about broader human concerns; they were rather an organic part of his personal life. Paradoxically, it is precisely this quality that made his work so appealing to readers such as Brinkmann. Dispensing with all notions of deeper meaning or interconnectedness, O'Hara famously states in "Personism: A Manifesto": "You just go on your nerve" (498). The poem becomes an extension of lived experience.

As the name of his "movement" implies, for O'Hara poetry was simply another means of relating directly to people (or, in this case, his readers): "[Personism] . . . puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages"

(499). Like his work as associate curator at the Museum of Modern Art, his friendships, and his parties, Frank O'Hara's poems were simply another extension of his life.

Many of the poetic qualities O'Hara describes in these two statements are evident in "A Step Away From Them," which appeared in *Lunch Poems* (15-17) and is one of the poems Brinkmann translated for his German version of O'Hara.

A Step Away From Them

It's my lunch hour, so I go
for a walk among the hum-colored
cabs. First, down the sidewalk
where laborers feed their dirty
glistening torsos sandwiches 5
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
on. They protect them from falling
bricks, I guess. Then onto the
avenue where skirts are flipping
above heels and blow up over 10
grates. The sun is hot, but the
cabs stir up the air. I look
at bargains in wristwatches. There
are cats playing in sawdust.

On 15

to Times Square, where the sign
blows smoke over my head, and higher
the waterfall pours lightly. A

Negro stands in a doorway with a
toothpick, languorously agitating. 20

A blonde chorus girl clicks: he
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of
a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a 25

great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.

I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S
CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of
Federico Fellini, *è bell' attrice*. 30

And chocolate malted. A lady in
foxes on such a day puts her poodle
in a cab.

There are several Puerto

Ricans on the avenue today, which 35

makes it beautiful and warm. First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?

And one has eaten and one walks, 40

past the magazines with nudes
and the posters for BULLFIGHT and
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,
which they'll soon tear down. I

used to think they had the Armory 45

Show there.

A glass of papaya juice

and back to work. My heart is in my
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

(CP 257-58)

At first glance, "A Step Away From Them" seems less a poem and more a conversation O'Hara is having with an unseen interlocutor. It is as if someone has sent a film crew out with O'Hara to document his lunch hour wanderings from work at the museum, and the poem is his commentary. Throughout the poem, O'Hara maintains what

is known as his “chatty” style, a conversational tone that lessens the distance between poet and the object of his poetry: “They protect them from falling / bricks, I guess” (lines 7-8); “A lady in / foxes on such a day puts her poodle / in a cab” (lines 31-33); “I / used to think they had the Armory / Show there” (lines 44-46).

Though one poem hardly represents the full character of O’Hara’s opus, he often employs this type of rhetoric, one that both engages the reader and disarms the critic (or, to paraphrase Breslin, embarrasses him out of interpreting the poem). Furthermore, it radicalizes the position of the poet vis-à-vis the poem: instead of adopting a “persona” with which to create a work of art that will yield “meanings,” O’Hara uses a first-person narrative to relate the immediacy of experience.

However, as Feldman points out, it would be a mistake to interpret the immediacy of O’Hara’s poems as that of a photographic immediacy: “The poems are not like photographs, they do not seek to impose a composition on the momentary, but they do try to record the instant at which experience is gathering itself into something that deserves the artist’s attention, a confluence of feeling and perception that is suffused with a sense of its own passing away” (37). In other words, the “snapshots” presented in O’Hara’s poems are rather liminal moments that highlight the transitory nature of lived experience.

Breslin has written that O’Hara “titled so many of his works ‘Poem’ precisely because he was aware that many of his readers would deny them the status of poetry”

(216). I disagree with this assessment: as witnessed by the poet's theoretical claims and the cavalier attitude toward his own work once it was completed, it seems incongruous to assume that O'Hara cared what any particular reader considered "poetry." Rather, what seems to have mattered to O'Hara is the role of poet as chronicler. Of this, Feldman notes the following commonality with Pasternak, whom O'Hara admired: "the belief in the primary importance of the artist's role, apart from any ideology or set of moral principles" (36). As such, his work represents an even more radical departure from Modernism than that of the Beats or any of the other contemporary groups that still clung to a certain theory, no matter how oppositional.

And yet, such an explanation detracts from the artistry and effectiveness of O'Hara's work, implying as it does that any written sequence of events is a "poem." In "A Step Away From Them," O'Hara uses the short line to convey what must surely have been experienced as a much too short lunch-hour walk; in other poems, such as "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul," O'Hara employs the long line just as effectively. "A Step Away From Them" gives the mid twenty-first century reader a palpable feel for the *Zeitgeist* of postwar New York: the bustling construction and movement of an expanding economy, the uneasy coexistence of the old and the new ("and the posters for BULLFIGHT and / the Manhattan Storage Warehouse, / which they'll soon tear down. / I used to think they had the Armory / Show there," lines 42-46), and references to a ubiquitous eating culture that was becoming linked in the public

consciousness with “the American Way of Life”: cheeseburgers, malteds, and Coca-Cola. The easy, casual tone of the poem also masks the traditional poetic techniques that make “A Step Away From Them” so engaging: the dactyls of lines 5 (“glistening torsos sandwiches”) and 13 (“at bargains in wristwatches. There”), which enhance the reader’s sense of perpetual movement; the enjambment in lines 7-8 (“They protect them from falling / bricks, I guess”), which gives the reader the vertiginous experience of being among New York’s famous skyscrapers; and the troches and consonance of line 39 (“earth as full as life was full, of them?”), which underscore the solemn tone invoked by death.

Ultimately, after reading “A Step Away From Them,” the reader is still left with a puzzle: Who is referred to by the title’s pronoun: O’Hara’s colleagues at the museum? The unknown “they” who will tear down the Manhattan Storage Warehouse? O’Hara’s dead friends? Everyone on the streets of New York that afternoon? Though “A Step Away From Them” appears to be a simple inventory of what O’Hara saw during that particular afternoon stroll, it places the reader squarely within lived experience in all of its complexities.

Like Frank O’Hara and the New York School, Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg rebelled against the formulaic intellectualism of academic verse promoted by the New Critics in the 1940s and early 50s. Though the “Beat Generation” is now associated in the minds of most readers with Kerouac’s *On the Road*, Ginsberg’s *Howl*, and William S. Burroughs’ various works, most critics include here the group of poets

assembled around Ferlinghetti's City Lights press who participated in the San Francisco Renaissance. The lifestyles and values associated with the Beats first gained national attention with the publication of John Clellon Holmes's *Go* (1952). This novel, which chronicles the lives and wanderings of Holmes' intellectual/hipster friends in New York City, made the author famous, catapulting him to the position of spokesman for the "Beat Generation." In his putative capacity as generational spokesman, Holmes published the essay "This is the Beat Generation" in the November 16, 1952 edition of *The New York Times Magazine*.

In this essay, Holmes does not describe a generation of artists or intellectuals defining themselves against the times, but rather includes the entire generation of young people who survived the Great Depression and the Second World War. This generation includes the copywriter, the hot-rod driver, daredevils of all sorts, young Republicans, even the graduating class of ex-GI's looking to "become a comfortable cog in the largest corporation it could find" (10). He characterizes the generation as being "bright, level, realistic, challenging" (10). And it is precisely the notion that the Beats represented a generational reaction, as opposed to a bohemian movement confined to the margins, that not only allowed Holmes to feel comfortable in speaking for such disparate groups, but also allowed what now seems a small coterie of writers to feel that they were participating in a movement with broad implications for society at large.

Attributing the generational label to Kerouac, Holmes defines the term “Beat” as implying “the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and ultimately, of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness. In short, it means being undramatically pushed up against the wall of oneself” (10). As opposed to the Lost Generation of the 20s, to which this generation was being compared, Holmes defines the Beat Generation as not being nihilistically faithless and disillusioned, but rather as desperately seeking faith in whatever it could find: “*How* to live seems to them much more crucial than *why*” (19).

Holmes saw in this generation, which had survived both the Depression and the Second World War, two possible responses to their experience: to utterly conform, or to engage in extremist behavior as a means of affirming life: “the hot-rod driver invites death only to outwit it. He is affirming the life within him in the only way he knows how, at the extreme” (19). The Beat hipster has no desire to change society so that it conforms to his desires: “For in the wildest hipster, making a mystique of bop, drugs and the night life, there is no desire to shatter the ‘square’ society in which he lives, only to elude it. To get on a soapbox or write a manifesto would seem to him absurd” (22). Rather, for John Clellon Holmes, the Beat contingent of its larger generation is characterized by a desperate search for a life-affirming faith at the fringes of mainstream society.

Despite Holmes’ pronouncements, it was not until the publicity surrounding the famed “Gallery Six” reading in October of 1955 in San Francisco, at which “Howl” was

first read, and the subsequent publications of *On the Road* and *Howl*, that “Beat” became linked to a literary ideal. The qualities associated with this ideal were, rather than a physical location on the fringes of society, an aesthetic position: that of spontaneity in writing, literature as lived experience, and a thoroughgoing indictment of 1950s mainstream American society. The Beat literary artist was a hipster who shared these ideals, dropped out of society, and wrote about his experiences. It was Kerouac who most forcefully advanced the notion of spontaneous prose as the only appropriate literary vehicle with which to capture these values and experiences.

The construct of “spontaneous prose” in theory and in practice is one of the most intractable myths associated with the Beats and their work. This myth surrounds Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, though a cursory glance at his *Selected Letters: 1940-1956*, edited by Ann Charters, reveals repeated efforts on Kerouac’s part to revise this novel. Thus, when he writes Neal Cassady on May 22, 1951 that “From Apr. 2 to Apr. 22 I wrote 125,000 [word] full-length novel averaging 6 thous. a day, 12 thous. first day, 15,000 thous. [*sic*] last day” (315), this represents but his latest effort to revise the work he had begun in 1948. And though he continued to revise even this “spontaneous” revision (see 326, 333) until the novel was finally published in 1957, he insistently referred to his working style as “spontaneous prose,” as in the following from a letter written in 1955: “...and am so glad that I self-taught myself...to write SPONTANEOUS PROSE so that though the eventual LEGEND will run into millions of words, they’ll all be spontaneous

and therefore pure and therefore interesting..." (515).⁵ For Kerouac, the notion of "spontaneous prose" seems more a metaphor for his notions of purity and authenticity than to a line-in-the-sand refusal to revise a work that has not been published.

A similar myth of "visionary outpouring" has adhered to Ginsberg's "Howl." Of this, Marjorie Perloff, an admirer and defender of Ginsberg's work, dismisses the notion outright that "Ginsberg's poetry is straight transcription of visionary speech:...Ginsberg has been making this claim for years" (*Poetic License* 201). In fact, his reaction to Kerouac's 1951 version of *On the Road* is an outright rejection in which he refers to the book as "great but crazy in a bad way," mocks Kerouac's "junkyard" prose, and admonishes Kerouac that "jeez, Joyce did it, but you're juss crappin around thoughtlessly with that trickstyle *often*, and it's not so good" (Kerouac 372-4). Yet a few short years later, in his dedication to "Howl," Ginsberg calls Kerouac a "new Buddha of American prose" and credits him with "creating a spontaneous bop prosody and original classic literature. Several phrases and the title of *Howl* are taken from him" (*Howl* 3), thus planting the seed for the myth of spontaneous outpouring that has always been associated with "Howl," a myth Ginsberg allowed to spread.

Of course, the version of Ginsberg's "Howl" we read today is no more the first draft of that work than is Kerouac's *On the Road*. In his chapter on Ginsberg's "Howl," Breslin, also a great admirer of this poem, authoritatively debunks this myth, concluding

⁵ In all quotes of Kerouac, the emphasis appears in the original.

that: “The notebooks, manuscripts, and letters in the Ginsberg Archives make it abundantly clear that the writing of ‘Howl’ was hardly the spontaneous act that Ginsberg has many times claimed it to be: Ginsberg worked on it hard enough to make it *seem* that the poem was a spontaneous outpouring” (96). The origins of this myth should be clear enough: for the Beats, and particularly Kerouac, spontaneous action in their lives symbolized absolute freedom, and they wanted their literary works to conform to this ideal. As long as the works had the *appearance* of spontaneous composition, they would fulfill the criterion of literature as a reflection of lived experience.

5. Brinkmann’s Problems in Adapting American Models

Breslin argues persuasively that the outburst of creative activity in the 50s represents one of the many “discontinuities” in the history of American literature, outbursts that alter not only assumptions about but also the reception of poetry (xiii-xiv). He sees the eruption of creative energy under discussion here as having been ushered in by Ginsberg’s “Howl” (1956), Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* (1959), and the 1960 publication of Donald Allen’s anthology, *The New American Poetry*. The Beats and the Confessional poets, whom Ginsberg and Lowell respectively represent, as well as the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, and the Deep Image poets “provided the leading sources of new paradigms for poetry that became visible in the late 50s and early 60s” (xv).

In many respects, their rebellion against Eliot and New Criticism forms a parallel to the German rebellion of Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and *Neue Subjektivität*. In both cases, a group of young poets began to systematically challenge orthodox assumptions about poetry. And, in both cases, the challenge came not from a single group, but from many disparate groups who, oftentimes, had little to say to each other. A fundamental difference between the Beats and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and the German *Neue Subjektivität* is the source of their intellectual stimulus. In mounting their challenge, the Beats focused on rescuing poets who had been marginalized by the orthodoxies of New Criticism. Thus they were able to turn to pre-Modernist and Modernist Anglo-American poets such as Blake, Whitman, Crane, Pound, and Carlos Williams, poets who were viable alternatives to Modernism as defined by the New Critics. Using quite another tactic, the New York School, a group of New York poets centered around John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara, turned to an extra-literary source for poetic inspiration, Abstract Expressionist art. In other words, though these poets were rebelling against the High Modernist canon and New Criticism, their rebellion did not represent a full-scale attack on the Anglo-American intellectual tradition *per se*.

In contrast to these American efforts at fine tuning their lyric traditions, then, Brinkmann's rebellions represented not only an attack on postwar West German poetry, but extended to an attack on the canon of German literature itself. By drafting American sources in his challenge to West German orthodoxy in poetry, Brinkmann created a

number of difficulties for himself. First, Brinkmann's primary American intellectual influences, Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs, are arguably the least "intellectual," i.e. academic, of the poets who took part in the "creative eruption" in the 50s.⁶

A second difficulty that Brinkmann created for himself was that, merely by having turned for inspiration to American writers and, worse yet, popular culture during the Vietnam era, he encountered the paternalism of leftist West German intellectuals whose rejection of American politics often assumed the guise of a more general anti-Americanism. Perhaps the most extreme example of this rejection is Martin Walser's rebuke that Brinkmann and Fiedler were creating "a tonic for consciousness for the newest form of fascism"⁷ in their work.

Brinkmann's third difficulty, and possibly the most damning of all, is that he challenged the West German intellectual establishment with the model of American bohemian culture. Even more injurious, he did so during a postwar period in which, due to the influence of Hollywood and a burgeoning international "pop culture," West German intellectuals were already feeling extremely sensitive to and insecure about the "Americanization" of Europe.

⁶ In his *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom refers to Allen Ginsberg not as a poet, but merely as a "professional rebel," and does not even mention "Howl," which is indisputably one of the most influential American poems written in the second half of the twentieth century; Frank O'Hara and William S. Burroughs he does not mention at all.

⁷ "Bewußtseinspräparate für die neuste Form des Faschismus." Note that the German "Präparat" is the equivalent of the medicinal or pharmacological meaning of "preparation" in English.

His critics notwithstanding, Brinkmann continued with his efforts to make postwar West German poetry less hermetic and more readerly by “Americanizing” it. He set about Americanizing his own verse by conferring on his own life the oppositional status the Beats enjoyed as outsider figures. Instead of relating artificial structures and created, impersonal personae, both the Beats and the New Subjectivity poets sought to infuse their literary works with the personality of lived experience. This alone would have sufficed to make of an American poet in the 50s or a German poet of the 60s a fringe figure. The Beats underscored this status by identifying with the “losers” in the comfortably affluent America of the 1950s: thieves, drug addicts, hoboes and wanderers, spiritual seekers, and the occasional railroad brakeman, the “angelheaded hipsters” of their generation. This, of course, also meant incorporating the language used by this class in their works: profanity was no longer contextualized, as in Steinbeck, but was an organic part of the lived experience related in their works. Absolute freedom of expression was a concomitant part of absolute freedom.⁸ This had the added bonus of making their work all the more “shocking,” thus guaranteeing their notoriety and supporting their claims to authenticity. All of these characteristics figured prominently in the works of Rolf Dieter Brinkmann. The most important aspect of Beat writing for Brinkmann, Born, and Theobaldy, however, was that artificial literary constructs be done away with, and that

⁸ At the beginning of a 1968 *Firing Line* interview with William F. Buckley, Jr., Ginsberg complains that the producer implored him before going on-air “not to say any dirty words...on the program, which presents a moral problem, you know, in that there is a political function to the language of everyday use—the language we actually speak to each other and off the air” (*Spontaneous Mind* 78).

the writing directly reflect the life of the writer. These aspects of “americanization” in their work will be explored in the following two chapters.

Though the idea of spontaneity in poetry was certainly important to Brinkmann and the writers around him, I have found no indication that they subscribed to Kerouac’s theory of “spontaneous prose,” that is, the notion that the literary work be the result of a spontaneous outpouring on the part of the writer and that the first draft is the only acceptable version of the work. Rather, though the spontaneous activity of life itself can form literature, it is the subconscious experience of the poet that orders that activity into a poem. In their work, both the Beats and Frank O’Hara effectively eliminate the layer of mediation between poet and poem, and thus reader and poem, bringing the reader closer to the poet’s lived experience. It is precisely this conflation of “poet” and “reader” that had such a great impact on the young Brinkmann. In the next two chapters, the adoption of these American models in both the theoretical and poetic work of Brinkmann, Born, and Theobaldy will be elucidated.

Chapter 3

Rolf Dieter Brinkmann's Reception of American Literary Culture

1. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann: Literary Miscreant

As discussed in the opening chapter, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann achieved recognition as a German poet with his first publications in 1961. However, he remained an outsider to the German literary establishment throughout his career until his death in 1975. One of the most striking aspects of his work is the degree to which he modeled his poetry not on a German or European literary tradition, but rather on American poets who became known in the 1950s.

Much like the Beats' relationship to mainstream American literary culture, Brinkmann positioned himself as an outsider to the West German literary establishment and to West German society at large. His rejection of society and his literary contemporaries was so thorough that his accidental death on a London street was met with an almost eerie lack of comment on the part of his former colleagues. In the quarter century since his death, his importance to German letters has been assessed and reassessed: having survived Martin Walser's 1971 dismissal of him as fascistoid, he has, in the interim, come to be recognized as a poet, prose writer, essayist, anthologist (*ACID*)

and publisher (*Der Gummibaum*) who played a significant role in defining West German lyric poetry in the 1970s.¹

Rejected by many of his peers during his lifetime, Brinkmann's reception since his death has steadily improved. His experiential poetic style, with which he strove to engage readers with his own thoughts and perceptions as a human being, has emerged as an influential aesthetic principle. The precepts of Brinkmann's poetic style crystallized for German audiences in his posthumously published *Westwärts 1 & 2*, in which poems mimic the "filmic" mental processes through which Brinkmann thought "reality" was ultimately perceived; they function as meditative "snapshots" gleaned from what he largely viewed as a chaotic and malevolent society.²

Like both Höllerer and Enzensberger, and many other of his contemporaries in the 60s, Brinkmann was an "internationalist" in that he sought to bring as many disparate influences to bear on West German poetry to pull it out of the *Sackgasse* of isolationism. The most enduring influences on his work were those of Frank O'Hara and the New York School of poets, William S. Burroughs, the *nouveau roman*, critic Leslie Fiedler and the

¹ Consider, for example, the assessment of Heinrich Vormweg, once Brinkmann's ideological opponent, twenty years after Brinkmann's death: "Rolf Dieter Brinkmann wäre jetzt 55 Jahre alt. Wie hätte er weitergelebt und –geschrieben? Was Brinkmann hinterlassen hat aber allein schon stellt so dringliche, bis heute unbeantwortete Fragen, daß es derlei durchaus mögliche Spekulation nicht braucht, um die fortdauernde Aktualität dieses Autors zu erkennen" (27).

² As with many of his publications, *Westwärts 1 & 2* includes prominent displays of snapshots taken by Brinkmann, which frame the collection like prologue and epilogue. This framing device suggests to the reader that the poems found inside the volume function as mental photographs. Burglind Urbe has suggested that Brinkmann's fascination with photography can be linked to his theories of "surface art": in waiving any claims on its spatial or temporal surroundings, the photograph, like Brinkmann's poems, yield a "surface" of interaction between the poet as subject and the reader (182).

Pop Art of Andy Warhol's Factory. These influences continued to play a role in the evolution of Brinkmann's style until his death in 1975.

To understand the antecedents of his aesthetic program, one need only turn to Brinkmann's own analysis of the American poets whom he chose as his models. In this chapter I turn to an examination three seminal essays in which Brinkmann details the literary and critical impulses that led him to turn his attention away from postwar West German literature and toward that of younger, anti-establishment American writers of the 1960s: the afterword to his translation of poetry by Frank O'Hara, "Die Lyrik Frank O'Hara's"; the afterword to the anthology *ACID*, published by Brinkmann and Ralf-Rainer Rygulla, "Der Film in Worten"; and the afterword to his anthology *Silverscreen*, originally entitled "Notizen 1969 zu amerikanischen Gedichten und zu der Anthologie 'Silverscreen.'" All three of these essays appear in the collection of Brinkmann's writings published by his wife, Maleen Brinkmann, in 1982 under the title *Der Film in Worten*. For the sake of general accessibility, all quotes are taken from this volume.

2. Brinkmann's Theory of the Poem: "Die Lyrik Frank O'Haras," "Der Film in Worten," and "Notizen 1969 zu amerikanischen Gedichten und zu der Anthologie 'Silverscreen'"

In his essays "Die Lyrik Frank O'Haras," "Der Film in Worten", and especially in "Notizen 1969 zu amerikanischen Gedichten und zu der Anthologie 'Silverscreen'" (henceforth referred to as "Notizen"), all originally published in 1969, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann presents an argument for the existence and continuance of lyric poetry in modern life that draws on both the American poets and underground movements he championed, as well as on Siegfried Kracauer's explications of the role of the photograph and the mass ornament in society.

Brinkmann published a translation of O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* in 1969, for which he wrote the essay under consideration here, "Die Lyrik Frank O'Haras." As illustrated by this essay's focus on a single poet, O'Hara was the most important influence on Brinkmann's poetic practice and theory. For Brinkmann, O'Hara's work represents at one and the same time the antithesis to the strains of postwar German poetry that he vehemently opposed and a validation of his own efforts to lead it in a less transcendent, anti-metaphorical direction that emphasizes the quotidian beauty, and drabness, ugliness, and barbarity that confront poets, people who read poetry, and those with no knowledge or interest in poetry.

In this essay, Brinkmann attempts to elucidate the relevance of O'Hara's work to his German audience, for whom O'Hara's witty conversational style and emphasis on the trivial details of everyday life were undoubtedly foreign, being completely out of place in what they would have thought of as "poetry."³ Indeed, as Brinkmann points out, American critics had much the same reaction to O'Hara. He begins the essay by citing an appraisal of O'Hara's work published in the journal *Poetry* in 1966, which decries "the lacking gesture of artifice-artfulness which, in accord with internalized convention, has for so long now belonged in the poem"⁴ (*Film* 207). However, Brinkmann notes that two years after his death, O'Hara's recognition even extended to *Newsweek*. Tellingly, at the same time O'Hara is being praised by the national press in America, Brinkmann's efforts are still being rejected by most German critics and poets for many of the same reasons offered by *Poetry* in its rejection of O'Hara.

In "Der Film in Worten," though he does not use the same terminology as Kracauer, Brinkmann presents a case for including elements of the mass ornament in lyric poetry. In this essay, his argument is with the modernists, who would eschew all elements of modern society as degraded and low, and with the political poets, for whom the mass

³ Consider Jost Hermand's one-sided and rather undialectical rejection of the entire gamut of the countercultural and pop scene of the 1960s and 70s in which, in the context of "analyzing" Brinkmann's contributions, he writes dismissively of O'Hara: "In and of themselves, there is nothing at all special about [O'Hara's] poems: a bit of everyday realism, full of gag-like comic strip elements, indiscriminate corporate slogans [*Firmenzitate*], the harmless enjoyment of a cola. But that is exactly what makes O'Hara so attractive to these circles. One wants to be simple, banal" (31). Such commentary, reflecting as it does an *a priori* dismissal as opposed to a "critical analysis," says in fact nothing at all about why other poets may have been attracted to O'Hara's work.

⁴ "den fehlenden künstlich-kunstvollen Gestus, der verinnerlichter Konvention nach nun schon lange zum Gedicht gehört."

ornament is but another spectacle promulgated by the distraction factories meant to divert the masses from recognizing that which is in their own best interest. As such, both groups, wishing to bypass the mass ornament altogether, fall into Kracauer's category of privileged intellectuals who do not recognize the facts as they are. Brinkmann follows Kracauer's most optimistic hopes: that there is in fact potential for the liberation of human consciousness to be found in both the technologically (and poetically) reproduced image and in the mass ornament of rock music.

ACID is not a literary anthology in the traditional sense, but rather a serious attempt to represent all facets of both a literary and extra-literary counterculture that positioned itself as an alternative to the mainstream of American "high culture." The range of *ACID* is astonishing, representing an almost encyclopedic compendium of the work of little-known poets and prose writers who participated in and appealed to others participating in this counterculture. Just as important, it revealed a sovereign grasp of American popular culture and its more academic reflexes—of mainstream comic strips and parodies of same, literary theory and commentaries written in the style of theory for the alternative press, rock music, and the Pop Art world orbiting Andy Warhol's Factory. It includes poetry by Joe Brainard, Ron Padgett, Michael McClure, a collaborative comic strip by Frank O'Hara and Joe Brainard, essays by Leslie Fiedler and Andy Warhol, an interview with Frank Zappa, short stories by Charles Buckowski and William S. Burroughs. In all, there are 93 contributions from different media.

Whereas Brinkmann's essay on O'Hara is more of an explication of that poet's (and, to a large extent, Brinkmann's own) poetic technique, "Der Film in Worten" is as much programmatic essay about the state of literature as an explanation of underground American literary and pop cultures. The essay takes as its departure a statement by Jack Kerouac, later criticized by Enzensberger in his essay "Die Aporien der Avant-Garde," in which, much as in his novels *On the Road* (1955) and *Dharma Bums* (1958), Kerouac's philosophy of literature and philosophy of life become indistinguishable:

Surrender to every impression...Be always insanely spiritually absent...Strike as deep as you want to strike...Eliminate literary, grammatical and syntactical obstacles...Don't think immediately of words, when you interrupt yourself, so that you can better see the picture...The book in script-form is the film in words!⁵ (*Film* 229)

For Brinkmann, the spontaneity and even wildness of Kerouac's words represent an alternative literary consciousness that is closer to "reality": a reality that often melds literary imagination with the sensual experiences afforded by popular culture. In *Lyrik, Fotografie und Massenkultur bei Rolf Dieter Brinkmann*, Burglind Urbe traces Brinkmann's concept of reality [*Wirklichkeitsbegriff*] to his philosophy of language [*Sprachkritik*] and locates it in two manifestations: the conventional form that Brinkmann

⁵ "Gib dich jedem Eindruck hin...Sei immer blödsinnig geistesabwesend...Schlage so tief, wie du schlagen willst...Beseitige literarische, grammatische und syntaktische Hindernisse...Denke nicht gleich an Worte, wenn du dich unterbrichst, um das Bild besser sehen zu können...Das Buch in Drehbuchform ist der Film

views as socially constructed discourse⁶ (11), and a second, “which is formed by the intensity of the experience of the details of the everyday and which through the expansion of consciousness leads to the sublation of the cultural and societal deformations of individuals”⁷ (11). The intensity of Brinkmann’s experience with the everyday lends his concept of reality a filmic nature; or, as Urbe states quite simply: “What we call reality is for Brinkmann a film”⁸ (11).

In “Notizen,” written just months after “Der Film in Worten”, Brinkmann offers his most persuasive argument for this aesthetic principle. While *ACID* represents an attempt to convey the spirit of the underground movement, including its poetry, with an encyclopedic scope, *Silverscreen*, for which “Notizen serves as afterword, is a more traditional anthology of poetry, with poems by Frank O’Hara, Charles Bukowski, Michael McClure, Paul Blackburn, Douglas Blazek, Aram Boyajian and Robert Sward. Some of the poems, Brinkmann notes, were being published for the first time anywhere. Whereas in “Der Film in Worten” Brinkmann attempts to link the spirit of a massive and diverse underground scene to its poetry, in *Silverscreen* he concentrates on the poetics of the poets represented.

“Notizen” is composed of seventy-five numbered sections, eleven of which are photographs with and without captions. The textual sections are sometimes effusive, and

in Worten!” The English in the text is the author’s translation of Brinkmann’s translation of Kerouac from English into German. Unfortunately, Brinkmann did not provide a citation for this quote.

⁶ “Produkt der Sprache und ihrer Konditionierung von Wahrnehmung und Denken,” 11.

sometimes employ the stylistic simplicity of aphorisms. Throughout “Notizen,” Brinkmann recursively elucidates his themes of the poem as snapshot or surface art that is simply “there,” the expression of individual subjectivity on the part of the poet in his encounters with the everyday, and the poem as location of the liberation of consciousness.

Careful reading of these three essays reveals that Brinkmann’s poetic theory is based on three broad themes: the idea of poem as snapshot and “surface art;” the emphasis on the poet’s subjectivity and “participation” in his everyday environment; and the expansion of consciousness of both poet and reader. Based on a close examination of these essays, I will present the argument that Brinkmann’s poetics are derived primarily from his very specialized reception of American poetic practice. Furthermore, I will employ Kracauer’s essays “Die Photographie” and “Das Massenornament” to illustrate that, though he vehemently opposed “political poetry,” Brinkmann was in fact advancing his own version of a liberationist poetry as an alternative to poetry with a more pronounced political agenda.

⁷ “der durch die Intensität der Erfahrungen mit den Details des Alltags geformt wird und der durch Bewußtseinsweiterung zur Aufhebung der kulturellen und sozialen Deformationen der Individuen führt.”

⁸ “Was wir Wirklichkeit nennen, ist für Brinkmann ein Film.”

3. Siegfried Kracauer's Essays "Die Photographie" and "Das Ornament der Masse"

That Brinkmann was so hostile to poetry as practiced by the political left in West Germany during the late 1960s should not be taken as emblematic of an expressly apolitical viewpoint on his part. In fact, Brinkmann shared many of the same goals as his more politically engaged colleagues, even if he resolutely rejected the use of literature as a means of political engagement. For Brinkmann, rather, the act of writing was in and of itself a political act, the creative activity of which he considered demeaned by the inclusion of expressly political content. Rather, as I will argue here, Brinkmann based his own brand of political poetics on his adaptation of American poetry and popular culture and his reading of Siegfried Kracauer.

That Brinkmann read and admired Kracauer is clear. In "Der Film in Worten," Brinkmann wittily refers to Kracauer's grandmother, a photograph of whom Kracauer discusses in the essay "Die Photographie," writing: "'The future belongs to the young!' says my grandmother, whose name is 'Crinoline'" (*Film* 237).⁹ Kracauer's name also appears in a list of people to whom the anthology *ACID* is dedicated along with the names of the anthologists; other writers and thinkers Brinkmann and Rygulla admire (such as Buckminster Fuller, Leslie Fiedler, Herbert Marcuse, Gottfried Benn); and pop

⁹ "'Der Jugend gehört die Zukunft!' sagt meine Großmutter, die 'Krinoline' heißt." 'Krinoline' refers to the fashionable style of nineteenth-century dress Kracauer's grandmother is wearing in the photograph. At the end of "Der Film in Worten", Brinkmann quotes Kracauer directly: "Ist die Großmutter verschwunden, so ist doch die Krinoline geblieben," (Kracauer, 37; Brinkmann, 247).

culture figures such as Lee Marvin, Elizabeth Taylor, Jim Morrison, Mick Jagger and many others. As such, this list reflects Brinkmann's notions of surface, in that names associated with intellectual prominence are interspersed with others associated with glamour or rock music. What I will argue here is that Brinkmann fashioned an expressly political poetics that, though it eschewed poetry with political content, nevertheless strives toward the same goal of his politically engaged colleagues: the liberation of human consciousness.

For the political poets, the liberation of human consciousness could only be achieved through social revolution and political liberation, thus causing many of them to forsake literature altogether as an ineffective means of bringing about social change. Brinkmann viewed the liberation of consciousness as an end unto itself, which could be attained through participation in creative activity. I will argue that Brinkmann adapted Kracauer's notions of the picture [*Bild*] and the surface [*Oberfläche*], the underground writings he and Rygulla collected for *ACID*, and the culture of rock music into a poetics based on visual images, surface manifestations of culture, sensuality, activity, production, reception. I maintain that Brinkmann believed that this approach to creative activity, which destroys all boundaries between "high" and "low" culture, as well as between "depth" and banality, would lead to the liberation of human consciousness. In order to demonstrate how Brinkmann's conception of this theory functions, it will first be

necessary to examine Kracauer's essays "Die Photographie" and "Das Ornament der Masse" in some detail.

In "Die Photographie," Kracauer explores the transformative power the photographic image has had on modern consciousness. He begins by considering a photograph of a popular film diva of the time. The picture shows the star in front of a luxury hotel on the Lido in Venice. Kracauer comments on the technical apparatus of the picture, noting that the diva, the hotel, and the waves washing ashore are brought to life by the resolution of millions of tiny dots. Relating the surface manifestation of photographic technology to the scene that it captures, Kracauer notes: "But with this picture, the net of dots is not meant [to be shown], but rather the living diva on the Lido. Time: present"¹⁰ (21).

Kracauer notes the similarity of effect between this picture and a photograph of his grandmother, which, though its subject is 24 years old, is itself 60 years old. Both pictures transport the viewer to the present as it was when each was taken. Very old photographs, in presenting a moment of arrested time, give the impression of a disjunctive and recursive temporal surface. This present time of the latter picture has a curious effect on the grandchildren when they view it 60 years later:

They laugh but at the same time are overcome by a creepy feeling, as through the ornamentation of the dress, from which the grandmother vanishes, they feel they are glimpsing an instant of elapsed time, which

¹⁰ "Aber mit dem Bild ist nicht das Punktnetz gemeint, sondern die lebendige Diva am Lido. Zeit: Gegenwart."

passes without returning. Time has not been captured in the picture with the smile or the chignons, but photography itself, it seems to them, is a portrayal of time. If only photography could give them duration, they would not just preserve themselves beyond time, much more—time would create pictures out of them.¹¹ (23)

Thus, photography does not so much portray the seamless passage of time as it promotes a false sense of simultaneity through the multiplicity of images: it creates surface which transects time, creating the impression of an ongoing present. Opposed to this, memory [*Gedächtnis*] incorporates neither the complete spatial dimensions of its contents, nor the passage of time in its entirety, but rather fragments of both: “Compared to photography, [memory’s] records are porous”¹² (24). However, from the perspective of pictures formed in memory [*Gedächtnisbilder*], photography is also fragmentary, as it does not incorporate “the understanding, . . . to which they [the pictures formed in memory] refer and at which they cease being fragments—, thus, from their perspective, photography appears to be a mass, which in part consists of remnants”¹³ (25).

¹¹ “Sie lachen und zugleich überläuft sie ein Gruseln. Denn durch die Ornamentik des Kostüms hindurch, aus dem die Großmutter verschwunden ist, meinen sie einen Augenblick der verflossenen Zeit zu erblicken, der Zeit, die ohne Wiederkehr abläuft. Zwar ist die Zeit nicht mitphotographiert wie das Lächeln oder die Chignons, aber die Photographie selber, so dünkt ihnen, ist eine Darstellung der Zeit. Wenn nur die Photographie ihnen Dauer schenkte, erhielten sie sich also gar nicht über die bloße Zeit hinaus, vielmehr—die Zeit schüfe aus ihnen sich Bilder.”

¹² “Im Vergleich mit der Photographie sind seine Aufzeichnungen lückenhaft.”

¹³ “den Sinn, . . . auf den sie bezogen sind und auf den hingerichtet sie aufhören, Fragment zu sein—, so erscheint die Photographie von ihnen aus als ein Gemenge, das sich zum Teil aus Abfällen zusammensetzt.”

Ultimately, the meaning of pictures formed in memory “is coupled to their truth content.”¹⁴ (25). Once these pictures become tied to impulsive drives, however, this truth content becomes obscured by the ambiguity of the memory. It is only apparent to “liberated consciousness, which realizes the obsessive power of the drives”¹⁵ (25). When the heightened emotional content associated with the impulses meets the liberated consciousness at a particular picture called forth out of memory, this picture takes on a greater meaning than all other such pictures. With such pictures are associated not mere memories, but rather contents [*Gehalte*] (25). All other pictures formed in memory are reduced to these pictures, as it is here that the “unforgettable” [*das Unvergeßliche*] resides, and where the liberated consciousness believes the locus of truth associated with memory will be found. This picture, according to Kracauer, can be considered the last picture of a person, that person’s history: “All characteristics and definitions that are not related in a particular sense to what the liberated consciousness believes to be truth are omitted from this history”¹⁶ (25-26). This history, formed in the consciousness through the process of memory, is not maintained by the photograph: “The history of a person is buried under the photograph as if by a blanket of snow”¹⁷ (26).

The power of modern photography is so great, however, that Kracauer believes it can alter human consciousness. He notes that daily newspapers contain ever more

¹⁴ “ist an ihren Wahrheitsgehalt geknüpft.”

¹⁵ “das freigesetzte Bewußtsein, das die Dämonie der Triebe ermißt.”

¹⁶ “Aus ihr fallen alle Merkmale und Bestimmungen aus, die sich nicht in einem bedeutenden Sinne zu der von dem freigesetzten Bewußtsein gemeinten Wahrheit verhalten.”

photographic content, and that the proof of the validity of photography in modern life can be found in “the increase of *illustrated newspapers*”¹⁸ (33). The increase of photographic content in such media serves as a nexus that influences the individual’s consciousness, as the contemporary photograph “portrays a trusted appearance of the *contemporary* consciousness”¹⁹ (29). As such, Kracauer maintains that contemporary photography has become “an as generally understandable means of expression as language”²⁰ (29). However, the “assault” of the photographic image on modern life is so striking, writes Kracauer, that “it perhaps threatens to annihilate decisive traits of existing consciousness”²¹ (34). This results in a sort of cultural amnesia present in the age of the photograph, in which consciousness is shaped not by knowledge, but by images presented without a contextual narrative: “Never before has a time known so little about itself. The institution of illustrated magazines in the hand of the ruling society is one of the most powerful means of assault against knowledge... Their [the pictures’] *juxtapositions* systematically shut out the context that opens itself to consciousness”²² (34). Ultimately, the mass presence of photographic content in the media represents for Kracauer a fear of death: “Through their quantity, the photographs seek to banish the

¹⁷ “Unter der Photographie eines Menschen ist seine Geschichte wie unter einer Schneedecke vergraben.”

¹⁸ “die Zunahme der *illustrierten Zeitungen*.”

¹⁹ “[bildet] eine dem *gegenwärtigen* Bewußtsein vertraute Erscheinung ab.”

²⁰ “ein so allgemein verständliches Ausdrucksmittel... wie die Sprache.”

²¹ “daß er das vielleicht vorhandene Bewußtsein entscheidener Züge zu vernichten droht.”

²² “Noch niemals hat eine Zeit so wenig über sich Bescheid gewußt. Die Einrichtung der Illustrierten ist in der Hand der herrschenden Gesellschaft eines der mächtigsten Streikmittel gegen die Erkenntnis... Ihr *Nebeneinander* schließt systematisch den Zusammenhang aus, der dem Bewußtsein sich eröffnet.”

remembrance of death, which is present in every picture formed in memory”²³ (35). The world as photographable present “seems to be snatched from death; in truth it is sacrificed to death”²⁴ (35).

Kracauer points out that pictorial portrayals have always been symbolic. Only with the domination of nature “has the picture lost its symbolic power”²⁵ (36). However, the continuing role played by the photographic image within the capitilistic production process can go in one of two directions, depending on the continuance and stability of nature [*Naturbestände*]:

If nature were enduring, then the consequential emancipation of consciousness would be the destruction [of the production process]; that part of nature unpenetrated by it would take its place at the table that it had left. If however it is not enduring, then the liberated consciousness is given an incomparable chance. With the remains of nature [*Naturbeständen*] unmixed as never before, it [the liberated consciousness] can prove its power over them. The turn to photography is the roulette game of history.²⁶ (37)

²³ “Die Erinnerung an den Tod, der in jedem Gedächtnisbild mitgedacht ist, möchten die Photographien durch ihre Häufung verbannen.”

²⁴ “scheint dem Tod entrissen zu sein; in Wirklichkeit ist sie ihm preisgegeben.”

²⁵ “verliert das Bild seine symbolische Kraft.”

²⁶ “Hätte sie Bestand, so wäre die Folge der Emanzipation des Bewußtseins seine Tilgung; die von ihm undurchdrungene Natur setze sich an den Tisch, den es verlassen hat. Hat sie aber nicht Bestand, so ist dem freigesetzten Bewußtsein eine unvergleichliche Chance gegeben. Mit den Naturbeständen unvermischt wie nie zuvor, kann es an ihnen seine Gewalt bewähren. Die Wendung zur Photographie ist das *Vabanque-Spiel* der Geschichte.”

Kracauer thus leaves an opening for the liberatory potential of the photograph. Though in the hands of a ruling elite it can become just another tool of the distraction factories to further apathetic acceptance of the status quo, there remains nevertheless the possibility that it can further the liberation of human consciousness. The ubiquitous presence of the photographic image has forced what Kracauer terms the “storehousing of consciousness”²⁷ (38) that will necessarily force a dialogue between consciousness and nature in every area: “To have conjured up the decisive dialogue in every area: exactly this is the roulette game of the historical process”²⁸ (38). As a result, the remains of nature, dissolved in the photographic image, “are placed at the disposal of consciousness”²⁹ (38-39). Ultimately, the liberatory potential of photography depends on the organization of society, and how that society uses this new technology: “The game indicates that the valid organization according to which the received remains of the grandmother and the film diva will one day enter the general inventory is unknown”³⁰ (39). In the mean time, photography serves as a repository of what once was: “If the grandmother has disappeared, then at least the crinoline remains”³¹ (37).

In the essay “Die Photographie,” Kracauer uses the example of the prevalence of photography in modern society to illustrate how modern consciousness can become

²⁷ “Einmagazierung des Bewußtseins.”

²⁸ “Die entscheidende Auseinandersetzung auf jedem Gebiet heraufbeschworen zu haben: dies genau ist das Vabanque-Spiel des Geschichtsprozesses.”

²⁹ “sind dem Bewußtsein zur freien Verfügung überantwortet.”

³⁰ “Das Spiel zeigt an, daß die gültige Organisation unbekannt ist, nach der die in das Generalinventar aufgenommenen Reste der Großmutter und der Filmdiva einst anzutreten haben.”

³¹ “Ist die Großmutter verschwunden, so ist doch die Krinoline geblieben.”

fixated on a surface that levels both temporal and spatial dimensions. He leaves the door open as to whether the photographic image can ultimately have a liberatory effect, though he clearly thinks it has the potential to have a leveling effect on consciousness. In the later essay, “Das Ornament der Masse,” Kracauer demonstrates how this surface functions in mass culture. Taking leave of the photographic image, he uses instead an example of the mass spectacle—in this case, the dance revue known as “The Tiller Girls”—to indicate how consciousness can be shaped by a particular event.

Though likely to be dismissed by intellectuals as but another strategy of the “distraction factories” to keep the masses placated and happy, Kracauer instead views mass spectacles such as that of the Tiller Girls as a more relevant starting point for contemporary historical analysis than that of an epoch’s critical judgments. Heading his critics off at the pass, he begins this essay by stating:

An analysis of the insignificant surface expressions of an epoch provides a more striking method of determining its place in the historical process than the judgments of that epoch about itself. As the expression of contemporary tendencies, these latter fail to provide a convincing witness to the total condition of that time. On account of their lack of self-consciousness, these surface expressions grant immediate access to the fundamental content of what actually exists. Conversely, the interpretation of these expressions is coupled to a knowledge of what exists. The

fundamental content of an epoch and its unnoticed impulses illuminate each other reciprocally.³² (50)

Referring to the Tiller Girls as a “change in taste in physical culture”³³ (50), Kracauer alludes to the growing prominence of the mass spectacle in modern society. As mass spectacle, the dance revue can be reconstructed in its geometric exactitude all over the world. Unlike ballet, the mass ornament is no longer an expression of natural impulses or human spirituality: “The exuberance of organic forms and the radiance of spiritual life remain rejected”³⁴ (53). Rather, it represents a geometric entity whose exactitude can be understood rationally as a “purpose unto itself” [*Selbstzweck*] (52). The ornament formed by the spectacle is carried by the masses who form the spectacle’s audience. As in the capitalist production process, each member of the masses performs a partial function, and each is equally replaceable. They exist not as individuals, but only as a mass witness to the spectacle: “As a member of the mass alone, and not as individuals who believe themselves to be internally formed, each person represents a partial piece of a figure”³⁵ (51). The combination of mass and ornament creates a pattern of unimaginable dimensions, a hermetic system: “The masses, which bring the ornament into being, are

³² “Der Ort, den eine Epoche im Geschichtsprozeß einnimmt, ist aus der Analyse ihrer unscheinbaren Oberflächenäußerungen schlagender zu bestimmen als aus den Urteilen der Epoche über sich selbst. Diese sind als der Ausdruck von Zeittendenzenzen kein bündiges Zeugnis für die Gesamtverfassung der Zeit. Jene gewähren ihrer Unbewußtheit wegen einen unmittelbaren Zugang zu dem Grundgehalt des Bestehenden. An seine Erkenntnis ist umgekehrt ihre Deutung geknüpft. Der Grundgehalt einer Epoche und ihre unbeachteten Regungen erhellen sich wechselseitig.”

³³ “Auf dem Gebiet der Körperkultur,... ist in der Stille ein Geschmackswandel vor sich gegangen.”

³⁴ “Verworfen bleiben die Wucherungen organischer Formen und die Ausstrahlungen des seelischen Lebens.”

not included in the ornament. As linear as it is: no line escapes the components of the mass to penetrate the entire figure”³⁶ (52).

The mass ornament represents an appropriate starting point for an analysis of the present epoch as it reflects the present situation in its entirety: that of the capitalist production process that, not having its origins in nature, destroys all natural organisms which are its means. As the individual is not an organic part of the mass ornament, neither is he an organic part of the production process. The individual and community are replaced by calculability. Like the ornament, the production process is also a purpose unto itself: to produce products meant not to be owned, but to yield unlimited profits. As in the ornament, the workers who take part in the process fulfill a partial function without realizing the whole (52-53).

Grounded in the reality of the organization of society, Kracauer insists that “the *aesthetic* enjoyment of the ornamental mass movements is *legitimate*”³⁷ (54). The masses are made up of factory and office workers, and the form assumed by the mass ornament mirrors the societal form made up by these same workers. Thus, intellectuals who would criticize the mass ornament as mere distractions are actually unable to appreciate the degree to which the ornament conforms to reality. In fact, it is the *realism* of the mass ornament that places it above “artistic” events cherished by intellectuals: “However low

³⁵ “Als Massenglieder allein, nicht als Individuen, die von innen her geformt zu sein glauben, sind die Menschen Bruchteile einer Figur.”

³⁶ “Das Ornament wird von den Massen, die es zustande bringen, nicht mitgedacht. So linienhaft es ist: keine Linie dringt aus den Massenteilchen auf die ganze Figur.”

the value assigned to the mass ornament may be, it stands on account of its degree of reality above the artistic productions that cultivate discarded higher feelings through archaic forms. It may mean nothing more than this”³⁸ (54-55).

Kracauer indicates that the rationality of the mass ornament is that of the system of production that it mimics. Through its mastery of nature, the capitalistic epoch is one on the way to demystification [*Entzauberung*]. This exploitation frees humankind from the strictures of nature and makes room for the furthering of reason. However, the *ratio* that governs the capitalist system is not reason itself, but rather an obscured reason that does not take into account the parts of the system, the individual workers, that make it possible: “There is not one single place where the basis of the human is the basis of the system”³⁹ (57). Rather, this system is based on the abstractions of profit, leading it to a state of rationalizing too little, not too much. As such, industrial society is based on a system of reason that itself contradicts the furthering of reason: “The thought transmitted by this system contradicts the consummation of reason that speaks from the basis of humankind”⁴⁰ (57). The continued growth of the system leads to increasing levels of abstraction, from which the highest degree of utility can be drawn. The more firmly

³⁷ “das *ästhetische* Wohlgefallen an den ornamentalen Massenbewegungen [ist] *legitim*.”

³⁸ “Wie gering immer der Wert des Massenornaments angesetzt werde, es steht seinem Realitätsgrad nach über den künstlerischen Produktionen, die abgelegte höhere Gefühle in vergangenen Formen nachzüchten; mag es auch nichts weiter bedeuten.”

³⁹ “noch ist an irgendeiner Stelle der Grund des Menschen der Grund des Systems.”

⁴⁰ “Das von ihm getragene Denken widerstrebt der Vollendung der Vernunft, die aus dem Grunde des Menschen redet.”

grounded this abstraction becomes, the farther the human is left behind, remaining at the mercy of the powers of nature from which he was supposed to be liberated (57).

The mass ornament, like the production process in toto, is thus not composed of individual entities, but rather partial entities shaped by the rationality of the system into the organic whole of the ornament. Thus, when examined from the perspective of reason, the mass ornament “reveals itself as a *mythological cult*”⁴¹ (60). The primacy of reason in the ornament is appearance: the underlying abstraction of the system separates humanity from reason, and the ornament takes the form of “primitive nature” (60). However, Kracauer maintains that this primitive cult remains superior to the cultural events sought out by privileged intellectuals who reject the mass ornament, unable to recognize it as a sign of the prevailing economic system. The mass remains superior to these intellectuals to the extent that “it recognizes the raw facts as they are”⁴² (61).

Hence, the mass ornament, in all of its irrationality, and despite the fact that it replicates a fundamentally exploitive system, remains the model through which any attempts to imbue mass existence with authentic reason must go. Any attempts to bypass the ornament will represent either irreality, as is the case with intellectuals who do not recognize the facts as they are, or a retreat to the mythological substance of earlier times. Although the mass ornament does not present a rational basis for the further development of reason, it is the very real fundament on which mass existence is based,

⁴¹ “offenbart...sich als *mythologischer Kult*.”

⁴² “sie im Rohen die Fakten unverschleiert anerkennt.”

and thus the basis for the dialectical increase of reason in society. But the process to increase reason must go “through the middle of the mass ornament, not away from it. It can only proceed when thought reduces nature and produces individuals as reason itself would”⁴³ (63).

With the essays “Die Photographie” and “Das Massenornament,” Kracauer has presented a précis of mass and popular culture and how they function in modern society. The photograph, through the technological ease of its reproduction, has become a binding and universal touchstone for all consumers of mass media. Instead of enhancing memory, it has come almost to supplant memory, creating a thoroughgoing surface of images to which consumers react. The plurality of voices in journalistic analysis can be easily washed away by the focused urgency of a single photograph. (Consider, for example, how the entire controversy surrounding the Elián Gonzalez saga was reduced to a single Pulitzer Prize winning photograph, or how the spectacle of Janet Jackson’s “wardrobe malfunction” at the 2004 Superbowl was reduced to a single image freeze-framed by millions of consumers of Tivo and thereafter traded on the Internet.) At the same time, the mass ornament creates a global surface of social interaction concentrated on an easily replicated spectacle, made accessible by means of its familiarity. Kracauer’s description of the revues staged by the Tiller Girls can be expanded to include almost all manifestations of mass culture, from rock concerts and music festivals to film openings

⁴³ “Der Prozeß führt durch das Ornament der Masse mitten hindurch, nicht von ihm aus zurück. Er kann nur vorangehen, wenn das Denken die Natur einschränkt und den Menschen so herstellt, wie er aus der

and large scale sporting events. Even prominent museum exhibitions, such as the Sensation show or the treasures of King Tut, and the throngs they draw, can be understood as manifestations of the mass ornament. The pattern of the ornament is created by the masses that flock to these events. In creating the patterns that define these events as entertainment, the masses are not composed of individuals, as each member of the mass can easily be replaced by someone else who could perform the function of creating the pattern, much as members of an assembly line become interchangeable. However, Kracauer suggests that the photograph does present humanity with some liberatory potential. Kracauer's dialectical consideration of mass entertainment leads him to rebuke intellectuals who consider themselves "above" the spectacle of the mass ornament and reject it in favor of marginalized cultural events. Though they may be cultivating themselves, they do so with yesterday's norms. The photograph and the mass ornament are ubiquitous in modern life, and if history is to continue to progress dialectically, aspects of these forms of expression must be preserved in the process of sublation. Any attempt to elevate society must go through these forms of mass expression, as attempts to ignore and bypass them betray a fundamental denial of the facts as they are.

4. A Thoroughgoing Surface: The Poem as Pictorial Representation

Brinkmann's primary poetic focus remains on the everyday, as it is precisely through the confrontation with the everyday that the poet resists the metaphorical excesses of elitist poetry and remains grounded in what he considers reality. Why, then, should Brinkmann define reality by the visual image? Because, as had Kracauer before him, Brinkmann considers the multiplicity of images in late twentieth century industrial society as the most powerful orientation point of human consciousness. Kracauer remained cautious that this multiplicity of images could become a new tool of the industrial elite for enslaving the masses. Where Kracauer advises caution, however, Brinkmann sees opportunity: the opportunity for the creative, critical individual to create his own reality through the manipulation of these images. This new reality is projected upon the surface, or mass ornament, of modern society, through which individuals are connected like so many dots into a new constellation. This surface becomes "reality" as ever newly defined by the manipulation of the visual. For poems to be relevant, Brinkmann believes they must embrace the visual projected by this reality and interact with it in the creation of new images. The idea that reality is defined by the visual image and that the poem should strive to be more like a picture are consistent throughout both his theoretical writings and his poetry.

Brinkmann's version of reality, his adherence to "things as they really are," is of course, as Urbe has pointed out, simply that: his version. Yet, in the American poets he

presents in *Silverscreen*, and in the Beats who preceded them, he has found contemporaries who share that vision, whereas in his European contemporaries and predecessors, he found none. Thus, in his theoretical discussions of them, his tone reflects the zeal of the converted. His presentation of them is both the enthusiastic presentation of exciting new voices who perceive and practice poetry in a radically different way from that in which it was done in Europe and a spirited defense of his own vision of how poetry ought to be conceived. Although “Der Film in Worten” contains no photographs (which is atypical for Brinkmann), “Notizen” consists of seventy-five aphorisms, eleven of which are reproduced photographs. The pictures are scattered seemingly randomly throughout, and are drawn from the multimedia resources familiar to all. They include close-ups of women in various stages of undress; Elvis with his parents; a Volkswagen Beetle; Jim Morrison of “The Doors”; stills from movies; a picture done in the style of Roy Lichtenstein; and a close-up of a woman’s mouth, birth control pill poised on the tip of her tongue. Inclusion of such seemingly random and noncontextualized pictures underscores Brinkmann’s insistence that our surface reality is composed most predominantly of images.

Instead of describing what he means by what he calls surface [*Oberfläche*], Brinkmann attempts to replicate this notion through elliptical references in “Der Film in Worten” and through the aphoristic style of “Notizen.” In short, when Brinkmann says *Oberfläche*, he also means *Wirklichkeit*, reality: the exact multifarious manifestations of

culture, sometimes profound, often trivial, that Kracauer describes at the beginning of “Das Ornament der Masse.” All such manifestations, especially those such as the Tiller Girls, or the version of the Tiller Girls popularized during Brinkmann’s time, the mass rock concert, represent nodes of the collective subconscious with which all people interface. As such, for Brinkmann they are all important, and the individual’s interface with these manifestations should be the stuff of poetry, supplanting that which had been traditionally considered “poetic” and which Brinkmann believed to have become a collection of clichés that robs poetry of its potential vitality.

Brinkmann favorably endorses the liberatory potential of the picture cautiously assigned it by Kracauer in “Die Photographie.” In a culture saturated by the visual image, Brinkmann sees the *Bild* as a starting point for contemporary poets, and devotes several of the aphorisms of “Notizen” to demonstrating how the poets included in *Silverscreen* have adapted their poetry to emphasize the visual. In the fifth aphorism of “Notizen,” Brinkmann goes a step beyond Kracauer, positing that all of life itself is “*a complex connection of pictures*”⁴⁴ (*Film* 249). For him, this is a characteristic of the human condition that has taken on new significance as a result of methods of technological reproduction. The individual’s choice is not whether or not to accept this reality, but whether the individual passively consumes this reality or seeks to engage it in the creative construction of his own reality: “It comes down to which pictures we live *in* and *with*

⁴⁴ “*ein komplexer Bildzusammenhang.*”

which pictures we couple our own pictures”⁴⁵ (249). Creatively adapting this reality to one’s own needs and desires is for Brinkmann the key to the liberatory potential of the image. Thus, he claims, as he does in “Der Film in Worten”, that the work of the poets in *Silverscreen* represents a “unified sensibility” (250), one that undermines national divisions in literature and that has even begun to develop into a “global sensibility” (251). Brinkmann defines this sensibility in terms of its poetry, in which “*pictures* are presented, other ideas (images), *sensual experience as a flashbulb snapshot...*”⁴⁶

Uncharacteristically, he even connects this global sensibility to the international student rebellions of the late 60s. Characteristically, he also interprets these rebellions as being driven by the reception of images propagated by society and the creation of new images: “It is *a* rebellion against the filthy pictures that draw other filthy pictures behind them and have been understood for so long now as the only ‘true’ picture”⁴⁷ (*Film* 251). Thus, Brinkmann understands the rebellions not simply as being driven by student demands, but as a democratic movement for a more attractive and humane reality in which to live. The reality against which the rebellion is directed consists of a “filthy picture” that forms a societal master narrative: it is composed of “the murderous contest to be competitive, the senselessly committed acts of violence, the effacement of the individual

⁴⁵ “Es kommt darauf an, *in* welchen Bildern wir leben und *mit welchen Bildern wir unsere eigenen Bilder koppeln.*”

⁴⁶ “*Bilder* gegeben werden, andere Vorstellungen (images), *die sinnliche Erfahrung als Blitzlichtaufnahme...*” Unless otherwise indicated, all ellipses in the translations of Brinkmann are found in the original.

⁴⁷ “Es ist *ein* Aufstand gegen die dreckigen Bilder, die andere dreckige Bilder nach sich ziehen und so lange als einzig ‘wahre’ Bilder verstanden wurden.”

in the daily terror”⁴⁸ (251). However, the exponential proliferation of images gives the individual the power to resist becoming a passive consumer of this societal master narrative. Rather, he should actively rearrange these received images in order to construct new pictures with which to fight the influence of the master “filthy picture.” The underlying purpose of this rebellion is the creation of new images that will form an improved reality.

As the student demonstrators work to replace society’s “filthy picture” with new pictures of expanded freedoms and rights, the poets work to restore the beauty of everyday objects by reimagining them. For Brinkmann, any new societal freedoms will be worthless without an expanded sense of beauty in the everyday. The poets do this by recontextualizing the objects of the everyday: “The objects of daily life are rather removed from their miserable, stifling context, they are released from their usual interpretations, and suddenly we see how beautiful they are...”⁴⁹ (*Film 251*). Writing of the poems he has anthologized in *Silverscreen*, Brinkmann insists that the primary difference between these poems and those written in Europe is that “one no longer thinks (and lives) in words, but rather in pictures”⁵⁰ (268). However, the pictures created by the younger poets depart from literary theory and intellectualism to inhabit the space projected by the mass ornament. He compares the collaborations of Ted Berrigan and

⁴⁸ “den mörderischen Wettlauf, konkurrenzfähig zu sein, ...die besinnungslos hingegenommenen Gewaltakte, ...das Auslöschen des Einzelnen in dem alltäglichen Terror.”

⁴⁹ “Die alltäglichen Dinge werden vielmehr aus ihrem miesen, muffigen Kontext herausgenommen, sie werden den gängigen Interpretationen entzogen, und plötzlich sehen wir, wie schön sie sind...”

Ron Padgett to light shows during rock concerts, light shows that are projected onto an inner screen: “They are *artificially produced series of pictures*, which however do not depart into highly exquisite Freudian surrealisms and *literary symbolism*”⁵¹ (256).

More importantly, however, the images presented by these poems create new vistas for individual subjectivity: the subjectivity of the reader as well as the poet. Through the re-presentation of the everyday world shared by both poet and reader in the poem, the reader also rediscovers the beauty of the everyday, and thereby enhances his own subjectivity. The individual does not have to strive to find the beautiful in works of art or intellect, neither does he have to seek out the ugliness buried in societal conditions: each is omnipresent in the everyday objects by which we are surrounded: “Ugliness does not reside in the extraordinary, but rather in the known, as the beautiful does not reside in the extraordinary, but rather in the everyday”⁵² (*Film* 268). By reawakening the reader’s recognition of the beauty of the everyday, Brinkmann believes the poet gives him an outlet for developing his own subjectivity that the “filthy picture” of the master narrative has attempted to crush.

Brinkmann insists that the anti-theoretical tendency he has identified in the modern American poem is what gives it the same sense of presence as that of the photographic image. Though all photographically reproduced images form a part of the surface of mass

⁵⁰ “[es] nicht mehr in Wörtern gedacht (und gelebt) wird, sondern in Bildern.”

⁵¹ “Es sind *künstlich hergestellte Bildreihen*, die dennoch nicht in hochexquisite, freudianische Surrealismen und *literarische Symbole* ausweichen.”

society, a single photograph taken out of this context represents a single moment in time. Likewise, individual poems taken out of the context of literary history should, according to Brinkmann, function much as do snapshots: they allow the reader to see through the poet's eyes. He sees this ideal perfected by the American poets he has studied and anthologized: "What is *surprising* about the new American poems is *that they are above all simply there*"⁵³ (*Film* 248). This lack of an artistic or theoretical context contradicts the European poem, which he sees as existing before an omnipresent theoretical background: "We look at poems through theories and perceive then nothing more than proofs for our theories. That is very boring"⁵⁴ (248).

In Brinkmann's writings on literature, the poem as snapshot intersects the mass ornament in its replication of the visual propagated by popular entertainment, most particularly in the field of rock music. As Urbe points out, Brinkmann, as opposed to virtually all West German intellectuals of his time, never entertained the *a priori* idea that mass culture is inferior to "high culture" (9). Rather, he inverts this conventional dialectic, finding popular culture the more liberating force, both artistically and socially. Brinkmann focuses his imagination on the multiplicity of visual images in the popular realm, which he uses to create an "art of the surface" which, for him, forges the most intimate possible connection to "reality." As such, Brinkmann's understanding of the intellectual's role vis-

⁵² "Das Häßliche steckt nicht im Außergewöhnlichen, vielmehr in dem Vertrauten, so wie das Schöne nicht im Außergewöhnlichen steckt, sondern im Alltäglichen."

⁵³ "Das Überraschende der neuen amerikanischen Gedichte ist, daß sie zunächst einfach nur da sind."

à-vis “reality” is similar to that expressed by Kracauer in the previously discussed opening paragraph of “The Mass Ornament” (50).

At the beginning of “Der Film in Worten,” Brinkmann succinctly sums up what he considers the reality of popular culture in a simple statement followed by a question: “The pictures multiply. And who’s speaking?”⁵⁵ (*Film* 223). As posited by Brinkmann, this reality represents a changed author function in the sense of Foucault. Writers can no longer claim to reach an audience when they address high culture alone. Those speaking are artists who have seized the popular imagination—Brinkmann cites Bill Haley, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, the Doors—and artists responsive to the ever-changing trajectories of popular culture. Those not speaking are writers who withdraw themselves from this popular culture—artists who speak only to each other but fail to have relevance in what Brinkmann considers the expanded realm of consciousness presented by mass culture.

In “Der Film in Worten,” which is focused more explicitly on the intersection of literature and mass culture than is “Notizen,” Brinkmann sees in his American counterparts a greater willingness to participate in the structures of mass culture, and attributes to them greater relevance than to his German colleagues, for whom a cognitive gulf between high culture and mass culture remains in place. In mass culture, particularly in the form of rock music, Brinkmann finds potentials for crafting a literary consciousness

⁵⁴ “*Wir sehen durch Theorien auf Gedichte und erblicken dann nichts anderes als Belege für unsere Theorie. Das ist sehr langweilig.*”

both receptive to a wider range of sensual experience and more relevant to shared human experience. Brinkmann repeatedly returns to the idea of “sensual experience,” calling for its integration into literature through the rejection of artistic templates imposed by tradition. Through the incorporation of sensual experience into literature, the writer is able to respond to the artifacts of mass culture and the everyday world, incorporating them as they are into his work without the concomitant search for a hidden symbolic meaning. For Brinkmann, this is the breakthrough song about by Jim Morrison’s rock group, The Doors: “...released from existing models of understanding, the imagination turns to what is immediately present and tangible and escapes in a hole in time: Break on through to the other side, The Doors, 2 minutes, 25 seconds, 27.1.69”⁵⁶ (*Film 223*).

The breakthrough occurs when the artificial distinction between high and low culture is collapsed and the vulgar and profane, as artifacts of sensual experience [*sinnliche Erfahrung*], take precedence over the reproduction of linguistic abstractions in literary art. For Brinkmann, these pictures reflect a concrete reality that demands to be realized by the artist in his work. For this to be possible, the writer must abandon the traditional understanding of the tension between content and form and give himself over to the experience of life as a never-ending sequence of images that he then transcribes as “script.” As such, he will leave the “usual addition of words” behind him and instead

⁵⁵ “Die Bilder häufen sich. Und wer spricht?”

⁵⁶ “Losgelöst von vorgegebenen Sinnmustern wendet sich die Imagination dem Nächstliegenden, Greifbaren zu und entschlüpft durch ein Loch in der Zeit: Break on through to the other side, The Doors, 2 minutes, 25 seconds, 27.1.69.”

“project ideas”: “‘the book in script-form is the film in words’ (Kerouac)... a film, in other words, pictures... flickering and full of jumps, recordings on highly sensitive film strips, surfaces of arrested feeling”⁵⁷ (*Film 223*).

Brinkmann reads the work of his American contemporaries as being stamped with a “unified sensibility,” a sensibility that, he maintains, makes this literature more appropriate than that of his European counterparts in responding to a *Zeitgeist* that views societal restructuring as a necessity (*Film 223-24*). He differentiates here between the “unified sensibility” [*einheitliche Sensibilität*] of America’s younger writers and “American society,” against which he, like so many of the writers he cites, also protests, noting official and governmental wrongdoing, from police aggression to violence against protesters (224). In this regard he speaks of the Beat poet’s confrontation with the United States’ failure to curb corporate power: a confrontation that he considers vastly more effective than that of West Germany’s leftist writers with their nation’s National Socialist past.

By taking the present as their starting point, and using only contemporary materials in their work, Brinkmann also believes that the Beats, as well as the rebellious counterculture of the 60s, avoid the propagation of literary and cultural clichés. By way of contrast, he views the European cultural tradition as a burden for writers wishing to break free from “dearly held prejudices” [*liebgewordenen Vorurteile*] (*Film 224*). The lack

⁵⁷ “‘Das Buch in Drehbuchform ist der Film in Worten’ (Kerouac)... ein Film, also Bilder—also Vorstellungen, nicht die Reproduktion abstrakter, bildloser syntaktischer Muster... Bilder, flickernd und

of a lengthy cultural tradition has also allowed these writers greater degrees of freedom and spontaneity than their European counterparts. Much like Goethe's famous poem regarding the relative remove of historical burdens ("Amerika, du hast es besser" (739)) Brinkmann's essay points here to a German need to divest itself of constricting traditions.

Brinkmann locates the possibilities for "expansion"—*Erweiterung*—and freedom in literature in the lyric poem, especially in the poet's ability to relate surface manifestations of cultural phenomena in a minimum of space⁵⁸ (*Film* 233). The concepts of "surface" [*Oberfläche*] and "surface-descriptions" [*Oberflächenbeschreibungen*] have an almost mystical quality in Brinkmann's writings: they are concepts to which he returns repeatedly to relate the idea of an open lyric form freed from boundaries set by modernist hermeticism. Relating the qualities of *Oberflächenbeschreibungen*, Brinkmann writes that they are "non-linear," "discontinuous," "collage-like," contain "narrative interpolations," and are "full of invention, picture" (233): in other words, Brinkmann's *Oberflächenbeschreibungen*, with their emphasis on the visual, contain the hallmarks of what is now considered "post-modern literature." The book of poetry that interacts with the surface manifestations of the mass ornament is to resemble more of a multi-media

voller Sprünge, Aufnahmen auf hochempfindlichen Filmstreifen Oberflächen verhafteter Sensibilität."
⁵⁸ "In [der Lyrik] findet eine maximale Raumausdehnung bei minimalem Wort- und Zeitaufwand statt."

scrap book (as, in fact, does *ACID*), in which the author collects the “most heterogenous material relating to a theme”⁵⁹ (233) and connects it together.

Mass culture, popular entertainment, and the preponderance of the visual image in late twentieth-century industrial society are for Brinkmann no “roulette game of history,” as they were to Kracauer, but rather a liberating force for both the artist and the individual. Didacticism has no place in his *Oberflächenbeschreibungen*: instead, they offer the reader “a space in which wandering around is simply fun again”⁶⁰ (*Film* 233). In turning to the sensual impulses of their immediate environment, such as rock music (which Brinkmann describes as “a sensual experience provoked by the handling of highly technical apparati”⁶¹ (239)), the 60s generation of American writers has rejected the old alternative from which writing had always gotten its critical impulses: that between “civilization” and “nature.” As a result, this generation is not plagued by the same “guilty conscience” as that of the postwar generation, famously formulated by Brecht in his proposition that a conversation about trees is almost criminal in that it ignores social inequities.⁶² This guilty conscience results for Brinkmann in a suppressed consciousness among postwar West German authors, leading to work written in bad faith. In an ironic allusion to Adorno, Brinkmann writes that “the guilty conscience...is less symptomatic...for the proclaimed backwardness in the sphere of literature than for the

⁵⁹ “heterogenstes Material zu einem Thema”

⁶⁰ “ein Raum, in dem herumzuspazieren einfach wieder Spaß macht.”

⁶¹ “durch Handhabung hochtechnischer Geräte provoziertes sinnliches Erleben”

behavior of a certain state of consciousness, that in this country [the BRD] reveals itself [in literature]....”⁶³ (239). Brinkmann’s *Oberflächenbeschreibungen* will not only free the writer from the cultural constrictions of a literary tradition: for him, they expand and liberate the consciousness of both writer and reader by a route that bypasses consideration of “state” and “society” altogether.

5. “Aktion ist mitten-in-dem-Bild-sein”: Subjectivity, Personal Interest and Participation in the Poem

Brinkmann develops his idea that the “participation” of the poet in life, and the emphasis of this participation in the poem, form the basis of poetic subjectivity in his essay “Die Lyrik Frank O’Haras.” For Brinkmann, O’Hara represents a correction in the line of development of modern American poetry begun by William Carlos Williams, a line from which the Black Mountain poets were steering. O’Hara’s great appeal for Brinkmann is that he experiences no “problematic of speaking”⁶⁴ (*Film* 208): there is no trace of the modernist *angst* regarding the inability of the poet to express himself in O’Hara’s work. Brinkmann locates O’Hara’s relevance in his rejection of any movement that returns poetry to the elitist exclusivity of modernism, as well as his embrace of a

⁶² “An die Nachgeborenen”: “Was sind das für Zeiten, wo / Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist / Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!” (143-5).

⁶³ “das schlechte Gewissen...[ist] weniger symptomatisch...für die proklamierte Rückständigkeit des Bereichs Literatur als vielmehr für das Verhalten eines bestimmten Bewußtseinszustands das sich hierzulande darin zeigt.”

⁶⁴ “Problematik des Sprechens”

poetic form open to the trivial and banal observations of everyday life, including the “daily produced images and headlines of the boulevard press...”⁶⁵ (208).

Of essential importance to Brinkmann in O’Hara’s work, a tendency that he follows in his own work, is that the poet be the center of action in the poem: “action is being in the middle of the picture”⁶⁶ (*Film* 208). In O’Hara’s poetry one will not find “linguistic theories” or generalized philosophical themes. The poet has neither a “higher” auratic understanding of the world, nor is he trying to “transcend” it; rather, he subjectively experiences the sensations of the world of which he is a part as they swirl around him. After citing disconnected lines from O’Hara’s poetry as if they were so many sensational headlines, Brinkmann observes that such lyric poetry is based on the intensified personal, but not literary, interest of the author in the world with which he is confronted, an interest that is in no way reflected by a “higher” purpose or idea in his work. Rather, such poetry draws its power from “the degree of direct psychic and physical participation”⁶⁷ of the author in his world (208-09). The basis of O’Hara’s poetry is not a “theory of language,” but rather, “the intensified personal and fully ‘unliterary’ interest of the author in the environment with which he is confronted”⁶⁸ (208).

Brinkmann attributes O’Hara’s ability to place the subjective, unliterary interest of himself as individual rather than poet in the center of the poem to his “Americanness.”

⁶⁵ “täglich produzierten Bilder und Schlagzeilen der Boulevardpresse...”

⁶⁶ “Aktion ist mitten-in-dem-Bild-sein”

⁶⁷ “der Grad direkten physischen und psychischen Beteiligtseins”

Though based upon the European tradition from which Brinkmann took great pains to separate himself, Brinkmann views American approaches to art and poetry as having become completely independent of continental traditions. Brinkmann draws support for this view from a monograph O'Hara wrote on Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock. Brinkmann quotes his own translation of a section of O'Hara's monograph that notes the aspect of that painter's work that relates the physical reality of the artist and his activity in expressing this reality, an active participation in art and reality that makes symbol and metaphor superfluous. In quoting O'Hara on Pollock, Brinkmann is offering his own interpretation of O'Hara's work through that poet's interpretation of Pollock. He views O'Hara's/Pollock's ability to locate the work of art fully within the context of the artist's expression of his physical reality as an avenue of artistic expression closed off to European artists, negated by the European tendency toward reflection. Brinkmann draws the conclusion that not only has European art stagnated as a result, but also that this inborn emphasis on reflection has led European artists and critics to automatically take a paternalistic attitude toward American art. Seeking to undermine this paternalism, Brinkmann claims that this uniquely American approach to art has nothing to do with "blind naïvity or euphoric optimism," but rather with the righting of the European dialectic that considers action inferior to philosophical reflection (*Film* 209).

⁶⁸ "das gesteigert persönliche und noch völlig 'unliterarische' Interesse des Autors, mit dem der Umwelt begegnet wird..."

To reiterate O'Hara's significance as a poet who does not "transcend" quotidian reality, but rather revels in it, much like the French Surrealists before him and the Pop Artists after him, Brinkmann considers the poem known as "Lana Turner has collapsed!"⁶⁹ O'Hara wrote this poem on the Staaten Island ferry on his way to a poetry reading after seeing this tabloid headline and subsequently read it as his first offering that evening. In this poem, O'Hara lists the trivial details he observes while he is "trotting along" to meet someone: it is raining, then it is snowing, the friend he is meeting thinks it is hailing, but, no, it is really snowing, then he spies the headline: "LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!" He compares his wintry New York reality to that of Hollywood, where it neither rains nor snows. Without a trace of irony, O'Hara concludes: "I have been to lots of parties / and acted perfectly disgraceful / but I never actually collapsed / oh Lana Turner we love you get up." The strength of this poem lies in the intense emotional reaction O'Hara as person experiences upon learning of Lana Turner's collapse. Turner becomes a fictional member of his social circle; placing himself in Turner's situation, O'Hara exonerates her of any potential disgrace, exhorting her to return to the party where she is loved. By conveying this reaction in poetic form, it is placed on equal footing with his reactions to the artistic offerings of the Abstract Expressionists he so loved: the pop world and the art world are constellations in O'Hara's emotional and intellectual environment, and as such they receive equal attention.

⁶⁹ entitled simply "Poem" (*Collected Poems* 449).

In these ways O'Hara demystifies poetry by showing that even the "poet" can experience an emotional reaction to the sufferings of a film star who lives in a world utterly foreign to his urban environment. For Brinkmann, it is precisely this "surface" of the day's experiences and sensations, not transcendent epiphany, and certainly not Marxist political poetry and its dialectical critiques of society, that reveals the true depths of human emotion. As Gerd Gemünden writes, Brinkmann "proclaims an aesthetics of the surface that validates the beauty and significance of the everyday" (*Framed Visions* 43). This aesthetics joins verbal elements with visual images in an effort to elucidate the beauty of objects as they exist in the world. However, unlike Rilke in his *Dinggedichte*, Brinkmann does not focus on individual objects, but rather on the multiplicity of objects that confront one every day. For the poet, there is beauty in banality, and it is the poetry that seeks to sublimate the everyday in a "transcendent" moment that is untrue. Brinkmann insists that intellectual ideas and the reality with which the poet is confronted are not a means for exposing social inequities, but are rather inseparable and form the raw material of the poet's work: "Reality as given and ideas are not separable from each other, such that one could be refuted or even 'unmasked' by the other according to a common model that is 'critical of society'"⁷⁰ (*Film* 210). O'Hara's work epitomizes this ideal for Brinkmann: the poem is the poet.

⁷⁰ "Reale Gegebenheiten und Vorstellungen sind nicht voneinander ablösbar, so daß eins durchs andere widerlegt, gar 'entlarvt' werden könnte nach einem gängigen 'gesellschaftskritischen' Muster."

The realization that Brinkmann attributes to O'Hara and subsequently seeks to emulate is that he is a man who experiences life in all of its richness, fullness, triviality and banality, one who happens to write poetry without elevating any of these experiences over the other, and not a "poet" who withdraws himself from the nuisance of the trivialities and banalities of everyday life. In O'Hara's poetry, Brinkmann remarks notably on "the total fastening of subjective interest and objective facts to a continuous *surface*"⁷¹ (*Film* 210-11): a surface in which the "depth of the banal"⁷² (210) is realized by the inclusion of quotidian detail. The "depth of the banal" in O'Hara's work functions as a reminder that poets, in fact, do not inhabit a sphere removed from worldly concerns and trivial pleasures:

...as if 'poets' lived only with the most precious intellectual valuables, in a world without hit songs, headlines and movie billboards, without whole page advertisements for Cinzano, Rank Xerox and arden for men, without automobile accidents and personal disasters, lunch and sales for watches, without skirts that are blown high over exhaust grates...⁷³ (211)

Brinkmann takes great pains to clarify his unwavering belief that O'Hara's "openness" is in no way a "literary trick" intended to give his poems some

⁷¹ "die totale Verklammerung von subjektivem Interesse und objektiven Gegebenheiten zu einer durchgehenden *Oberfläche*"

⁷² "Tiefe des Banalen"

⁷³ "als lebten 'Dichter' nur mit kostbarsten gedanklichen Wertgegenständen, in einer Welt ohne Schlager, Schlagzeilen und Kinoplakate, ohne ganzseitige Reklamen für Cinzano, Rank Xerox und arden for men, ohne Autounfälle und persönliche Disaster, Mittagessen und Sonderangeboten an Armbanduhren, ohne Röcke, die über Luftschächte hochgeblasen werden..."

“autobiographical flair” (*Film* 213). Rather, it reflects a radical reconstellation of the poet’s relationship to society, the historical evolution of literature, and the concept of literary fame. O’Hara, as does Brinkmann, categorically rejects “the old pose of the poet” as ahistorical outsider to contemporary society: “for literature, the only real time is the present”⁷⁴ (213). The only possible way for poetry to be contemporary is to react to contemporary stimuli without the concomitant “bad conscience” of the intellectual, and without simply reproducing those stimuli (213). This “old pose of the poet” represents nothing more than a “lofty but hollow and authoritarian gesture” of the “intellectual” who exists at an elevated remove from society—“the poet is someone, who stands above something!, yeah, yeah...”⁷⁵ (213). By rejecting contemporary stimuli, or including them only via the elitist gesture of existential removal from them or via the dialectical analysis of society, the poem rigidifies more and more “to a mere aesthetic form”⁷⁶ (213).

O’Hara’s poems exist for Brinkmann fully in the everchanging immediacy that they present, an immediacy that conflates both poetic object and subject into a single “superficial” moment of existence. They operate much like the snapshot, another of Brinkmann’s favorite media of expression. (Like much of his work, Brinkmann’s essay on O’Hara contains many snapshots, without accompanying commentary, embedded within the text: a picture of O’Hara walking down the street, dressed in suit and overcoat, cigarette dangling from his mouth; a picture of O’Hara bloody and disheveled,

⁷⁴ “die einzig reale Zeit [für Literatur ist] die Gegenwart.”

⁷⁵ “pathetisch-hohle[r] autoritäre[r] Gestus...der Dichter ist jemand, der über etwas steht!, jaja...”

presumably taken after he was fatally run over on Fire Island; stills from Hollywood movies and glamour shots of stars; an overhead view of O'Hara's beloved New York City; *Playboy's* first and most famous gatefold, that of Marilyn Monroe.)

Brinkmann returns repeatedly to the immediate presence of O'Hara's poems, their singular precision and exactness, presented without the excesses of a "literary-theoretical program" or an "expressly sociological or displayably useful political ambition"⁷⁷ (*Film* 215). The immediacy of their presence gives O'Hara's poems a "surprisingly unforced" feel, that Brinkmann points out should not be confused with what literary critics so enthusiastically label as *Natürlichkeit*, the sort of literary cliché that he feels keeps both poet and critic artificially separated from "reality," and that leads to "to the dependence of literature on critics"⁷⁸ (215). The "moment of surprise" in O'Hara's poems has nothing to do with critical labels such as *Natürlichkeit*, but rather in their unusual juxtaposition of details, and their engagement with O'Hara's cityscape environment.

Brinkmann sees a marked difference in O'Hara's poems and others that express personal interest and participation and through these means involve the reader. He reads in O'Hara's poems the "total participation" [*Gesamtbeteiligung*] (*Film* 217) of the poet in life, such a complete involvement in all of life's details, from the trivial to the emotional to the intimately personal, that the fullness of O'Hara the person necessarily crystallizes within each poem. In other words, poetry is no longer once or twice removed from life:

⁷⁶ "zur bloßen Kunstform."

⁷⁷ "ausdrücklich soziologische oder plakativ verwendbare politische Ambition."

the poet's life and the poet's work become inseparable. O'Hara's own tongue-in-cheek, though thoroughly serious, description of his poetic method as "I do this, I do that" allows him, Brinkmann maintains, to include "everything possible" in his poems, from the references to personal friends by their first names to his reaction to the death of the great jazz singer Billie Holiday. It is this full spectrum of activity on the part of Frank O'Hara as revealed in his poems that for Brinkmann lends them the iconographic character of woodcarvings and differentiates them from other poems that take participation as their point of departure (216-17).

Brinkmann also interprets O'Hara as belonging to a larger movement in American art that has finally broken away from continental traditions and redefined itself as something particularly and uniquely American. This is not to say that American poets no longer look to their European colleagues for inspiration—O'Hara makes frequent references in his work to French Surrealists such as Reverdy, Prévert and Char, which Brinkmann admits. However, he refers to these references as "notices" [*Anzeigen*] (*Film* 219) that, like advertisements, draw attention to themselves, but makes clear that these *Anzeigen* cannot be understood as "the wish of an American intellectual to be European on account of a particular European sensitivity to culture"⁷⁹ (219).

Rather, these references represent an almost unavoidable reflex on the part of artists who have been taught to take their cues from Europe. Of much greater significance,

⁷⁸ "zur Abhängigkeit der Literatur von den Kritikern."

asserts Brinkmann, is the expression in the U.S. of a unified artistic consciousness—“of an independent, specifically American literature”⁸⁰ (*Film* 219)—despite the occasional, recognizable European influence. To underscore this point, Brinkmann refers to the enthusiasm of this generation for William Carlos Williams, the “rediscovery” of Walt Whitman, adding that “for the first time, and without hesitation, [these poets] engaged the American environment with an independent sensibility”⁸¹ (219). This is of course a rather iconoclastic judgment of the development of American literature, the pre-contemporary history of which Brinkmann exhibits little knowledge or understanding. However, what is germane to Brinkmann’s argument is what *he* sees in the Beats and the writers of the New York School, including O’Hara: namely, a broader movement of writers propagating and expanding a particularly American form of art and who are positioning themselves, consciously or not, at the vanguard of progressive literature.

This aspect of the American scene, or at least as he has interpreted the American scene, is of particular significance to Brinkmann, as for his entire career he had turned his back on most of the German cultural tradition (Gottfried Benn and Andreas Gryphius being the notable exceptions (Späth, *Rettungsversuche* 19-25; 60-61)) and consistently sought models outside the traditional European cultural realm. For Brinkmann, the German literary scene exists in a state of reification, as the artist behaves “in accord with

⁷⁹ “der Wunsch eines amerikanischen Intellektuellen, Europäer zu sein wegen der besonderen abendländischen Empfindlichkeit für Kultur...”

⁸⁰ “von einer eigenständigen, spezifisch amerikanischen Literatur”

market forces” [*marktgerecht*] with respect to his “products” (*Film* 219) even as he is finishing them. This process is enforced for Brinkmann by exclusive and much publicized literary circles such as the *Gruppe 47*. In contrast to the American scene described by Brinkmann in “Der Film in Worten,” in which unknown authors grouped around smaller presses and shut out of the market place continue to write in an ever more experimental vein (while bestselling authors continue to churn out material for the larger publishing houses), the *Gruppe 47* was able to position itself as an arbiter of literary taste while maintaining the support of the largest publishers and the attention of the media. Being recognized by the *Gruppe 47* could thus serve as a stepping stone toward wider recognition as a literary author. Brinkmann views this situation with cynicism, writing that, once younger West German writers understood this process, “it was only logical that younger writers purposely wrote texts for these meetings, a striking example of the indirect training of younger authors by the older ones...”⁸² (219).

Opposed to this sacrifice of young writers to the literary establishment, he sees in the American scene young poets who write neither for acceptance by their elders nor for acceptance by the market: but rather who write because writing is understood as an expression of one’s personal activity and involvement: “that one has *done* it, is

⁸¹ “man...nahm zum ersten Mal ohne Zögern mit eigenständiger Sensibilität die amerikanische Umwelt auf.”

⁸² “war es nur logisch, daß jüngere Autoren eigens Texte für diese Veranstaltungen schrieben, ein treffendes Beispiel für die indirekte Abrichtung der jüngeren Autoren durch ältere...”

important, writing is understood as doing”⁸³ (*Film* 219). Writing is thus dictated by life as lived by the writer, not literary examples and expectations. An essential aspect of this American approach to writing, as Brinkmann perceives it, is that it does not involve the same degree of hand-wringing on the part of its young poets over whether what they have written is “literature.” Here he quotes O’Hara’s “Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul” from *Lunch Poems*: “but it is good to be several floors up / in the dead of night / wondering whether you are any good or not / and the only decision you can make is that you did it” (O’Hara, *CP* 328-29).⁸⁴

The ideas of *Tun* and *Beteiligung* are for Brinkmann linked inextricably to that of subjectivity. Instead of creating art for the sake of its cultural significance, Brinkmann stresses the investment of the artist’s individual personality in the work of art. To underscore this point, he quotes in “Notizen” the motto of the column “Under Shelley’s Poet’s Tree” from the magazine *Other Voices*: ““Under Shelley’s tree Newton’s law doesn’t apply—only Berrigan’s. Ted Berrigan’s law states that anything that happens in the life of the poet is interesting.”” (*Film* 253). For Brinkmann, such a radical emphasis on subjectivity dissolves existing systems of interpretation and demythologizes accepted notions of culture. What distinguishes the quality of such individual and seemingly anti-artistic efforts is the degree of intensity of each poet’s involvement with his material:

⁸³ “daß man sie *getan* hat, ist wichtig, Schreiben wird als *Tun* begriffen.”

⁸⁴ It should be noted, as is obvious from O’Hara’s poem, that a lack of hand-wringing over the “literary” quality of one’s writing does not preclude hand-wringing over one’s personal appreciation of the quality of the work—regardless of what standard one uses to measure that quality.

“The question is: What do *I* write on the piece of paper? That happens in the one single *instant* in which the poem is written. *How* that happens (in other words: style!) results from the intensity of the author, the degree of his involvement with the *material* in front of him; it is a *combination of the moment*”⁸⁵ (249).

At the heart of this radical emphasis on individual subjectivity as enhanced by his idea of “participation” is the wish to bury notions of “The Poet” and “The Author.” For Brinkmann, the high modernist poem advocated by, for example, Hugo Friedrich in *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* extinguishes the subjective reading experience as the poet disappears behind the façade of the poem. The distance thus created between poet and reader further enhances the authoritative stature of the poet. Of this type of poetry, Brinkmann comments: “*There*, in the poem, where *the whole world and God* is dealt with, the concrete details are also *disposed of*, no room remains for the individual. So, what should then become of poems? And what should then become of the individual?”⁸⁶ (*Film* 253). In the turn towards postmodernism, with its renewed emphasis on subjectivity, Brinkmann sees the potential that the cultural mystification of “The Poet” and the authority attached to that label can be undermined.

⁸⁵ “Die Frage heißt: Was schreibe *ich* auf das Blatt Papier? Das geschieht in dem einen *Augenblick* wo das Gedicht hingeschrieben wird. *Wie* das geschieht (also: Stil!), ergibt sich aus der Intensität des Autors, den Grad seiner *Beteiligung* an dem vorhandenen *Material*; es ist eine *momentane Kombination*.”

⁸⁶ “*Dort*, in dem Gedicht, wo *die ganze Welt und Gott* behandelt wird, werden auch die konkreten Details *erledigt*, es bleibt kein Raum für den Einzelnen. Also, was sollen dann noch Gedichte? Und was soll dann noch der Einzelne?”

Nothing short of a “*dismantling of the cultural definitions ‘author’ and ‘reader’*”⁸⁷ (*Film 255*) can reawaken an authentic subjective reading experience. Instead of reading poetry because it is an edifying experience, Brinkmann encourages the reader to question not only the poet behind the poem, but also his or her own expectations: “What are *your* expectations regarding poems? Are they *your* expectations?”⁸⁸ (254). For Brinkmann, such a reevaluation of expectations on the part of the reader allows the reader to develop his own subjectivity, by turning receptivity into productivity. He refers to two pictures that are juxtaposed in the text of “Notizen,” the close-up of a young woman’s made-up eye and a shot of two film stars embraced in a kiss, and asks: “*In which picture do you live? Create your own picture!*”⁸⁹ (259). By approaching literature as he would any of society’s ubiquitous images, the reader subverts literature’s attempts to fulfill a convention: “When all styles are at hand, what matters is *your own style*”⁹⁰ (259). Thus, the higher degree of personal participation and involvement on the part of the poet in turn engages the reader’s sense of participation and involvement. Only when individuals accept foreign expectations and give them as their own can literature continue to be invested with traditional authority.

His idea of participation and involvement extends to the interactions between poet and reader in non-traditional forums. These include the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s

⁸⁷ “*Abbau der kulturellen Definition ‘Autor’ und ‘Leser’*”

⁸⁸ “Wie sehen *Ihre* Erwartungen gegenüber Gedichten aus? Sind es *Ihre* Erwartungen?”

⁸⁹ “*In welchem Bild-Schnitt leben Sie? Beschaffen Sie sich Ihr Bild!*”

⁹⁰ “Wenn alle Stile zur Hand sind, kommt es auf *Ihren* Stil an.”

Church in the Bowery, the congregation of poets around the little mags and independent publishers, and even the distribution of poems to passersby on the street. Brinkmann notes the salutary effect such involvement has on the poetry, as well as on the reading experience, narrowing as it does the gap between poet and reader. Brinkmann does not believe that cultural artifacts should define themselves as something apart and higher than the popular, but rather that they should compete with the popular for the public's attention. The distribution of poems and readings on the street represent "the effort *to popularize literature*, to lessen the gulf between 'high cultural achievements' for a small élite and 'low' entertainment products"⁹¹ (*Film 261*).

Such "new forms of circulation"⁹² (*Film 261*) for literature, and the greater degree of individual subjectivity represented by what Brinkmann calls *Beteiligung*, are concomitant to the anti-theoretical strain in his American colleagues, which Brinkmann welcomes. The growth of little mags and publications in smaller presses counters the slow, stately development of poetry as art. It also undermines the theory that the seeds of the end of literature are carried within that slow, stately development. If there is to be a "death of literature," Brinkmann believes it can only be the death of traditional conceptions of literature: "Of course one must ask which end is meant and which literature. (That of

⁹¹ "das Bemühen, *Literatur zu popularisieren*, die Kluft zwischen 'hohen Kulturleistungen' für eine kleine Elite und 'niederen' Unterhaltungsprodukten zu verringern."

⁹² "neue Verkehrsformen"

which one can only speak as ‘Literature’ ...)’⁹³ (266). That death will finally bring about the “desublimation of the art of poetry” [*die Entsublimierung der Gedicht-Kunst*] and a renewed interest in “tiny, banal objects without regard for whether [such interest] is a ‘culturally’ suitable undertaking”⁹⁴ (267). Ultimately, for Brinkmann, the heightened sense of “participation” on the part of the author is key to narrowing the gulf between “literature” and “life” and renewing the interest of both reader and writer in these “tiny objects,” the cultural artifacts of everyday life.

⁹³ “Doch ist zu fragen, welches Ende gemeint ist und welche Literatur. (Die, von der man nur als ‘Literatur’ sprechen kann...)”

⁹⁴ “winzige, banale Gegenstände ohne Rücksicht darauf, ob es ein ‘kulturell’ angemessenes Verfahren ist.”

Chapter 4

Three Visions of Liberation: The Poetry of Nicholas Born, Jürgen Theobaldy and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann

1. Converging sources, diverging paths: Nicolas Born, Jürgen Theobaldy and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann

Nicolas Born and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann began refining their poetry for publication under the tutelage of Dieter Wellershoff at Kiepenheuer & Witsch in Cologne, whose theoretical program included an enthusiastic reception of both American critic Leslie Fiedler and Robbe-Grillet's theory of the *nouveau roman*. Under this arrangement, Brinkmann, Born and Günter Herburger initially became known under the sobriquet *Kölner Realismus* (Kammermeier 74). Born, Theobaldy and Brinkmann would go on to become important theorists of the type of poetry now referred to as *Neue Subjektivität*: Born in his essays and speeches, collected in *Die Welt der Maschine*, as well as in his capacity as co-editor with Jürgen Manthey of Rowohlt's *Literaturmagazin*; Theobaldy as an anthologist (*Und ich bewege mich doch: Gedichte vor und nach 1968*) and as co-author with Gustav Zürcher of *Veränderung der Lyrik*; and Brinkmann as anthologist (*Silverscreen*), collector of documents of the American underground scene (*ACID*), and as theorist (*Der Film in Worten*).

Following is an analysis of the poetics of each of these three poets. Though Born and Theobaldy were not as overtly programmatic as Brinkmann in adapting American sources for a West German audience, they adapted many of the same sources as Brinkmann, and all three had a common goal: to ultimately undermine the modernist hermetic poem in West German verse. In constructing their individual poetics, the concept of liberation becomes a prominent motif in their work. “Liberation” was of course a significant theme in the 60s, being associated with political engagement and the various liberatory movements, the most significant in West Germany being the *Studentenbewegung*. Brinkmann, as we have seen, fully eschewed any hint of political orientation in his work; though Born and Theobaldy shared some of his misgivings concerning the idea of “political verse,” their positions are more nuanced. As such, the motif of liberation takes on a different meaning for each poet. I will both analyze their poetics and particular poems by each in order to illustrate how they adapted their sources in the construction of different shades of the same trope of liberation: for Born, this becomes a trope for his utopian thinking; for Theobaldy, a trope for the liberation of the poem itself; and for Brinkmann, a trope for the liberation of the self.

2. The Poetics of Societal Liberation: Nicolas Born

Though it may seem a disservice to him, it would not be an extreme exaggeration to state that Nicolas Born’s theory of literature can be summarized as a reaction to the

conformity of the Adenauer era, as well as wariness of the growing Western military-industrial complex. In other words, at least superficially, Born's thinking dovetails comfortably with that of many of his cohorts writing in the 1960s. Throughout his essays, as well as his poetry, Born posits an alternative, utopian "reality" to what he sees as an increasingly degrading and degraded *Wirklichkeit*. The tropes Born repeatedly employs are *Wünsche*, *Sehnsüchte*, *Utopie*, *Offenheit*, *Freiheit*, *Träume*, *Phantasie*, and *Befreiung*.¹ In his earlier poems, these tropes often take the form of mildly sardonic political protests against the existing political system. As his association with Brinkmann grew, these same tropes migrated into poems that were less political and more concerned with the individual's perception of reality. His concern, however, was always the same: the establishment of "counter-pictures" [*Gegenbilder*] to what he agreed with Brinkmann was an objectionable reality.

Born's theoretical program is laid out most succinctly in his essay "Die Welt der Maschine" (*Welt* 12-29) and in his aphoristic introduction to his third collection of poems, *Das Auge des Entdeckers* (*Welt* 86-92). "Die Welt der Maschine" first appeared in the Rowohlt Verlag's *Literatur Magazin* 8 (1977) dedicated to "Die Sprache des Großen Bruders" and is now more widely accessible in the collection of Born's essays and speeches published under the title *Die Welt der Maschine*. Though "Die Welt der

¹ "wishes, yearnings, utopia, openness, freedom, dreams, imagination and liberation."

Maschine” is an example of utopian literature in its reaction to the enveloping ubiquity of technology, it also serves as a unique primer on Born’s literary instincts.

For postwar German intellectuals, the signifier “machine” ultimately referred to the “annihilation machine” [*Vernichtungsmaschine*] of the Nazi concentration camps. Born sees in the triumph of machines in industrial society the rise of a “Megamaschine” to which individual subjectivity is inexorably subjugated (12-15). This process forces him to pose the question: “Is the general materialistic formula our actual nature?”² (15).

Throughout the rest of the essay, Born details an absolute and hermetic system, one to which the human “faculties for perception and experience”³ (17) are sacrificed. The system is closed in that even what would seem to be its weaknesses serve a purpose:

“But in a closed system nothing more is lost. The sick and criminal, from the perspective of an undisturbed market, serve once more as the justification for a growing security and medical industry”⁴ (19). The apotheosis of this system is the nuclear

“*Megamaschine*”(15, 23) in which the seeds of a universal *Vernichtungsmaschine* are carried.

For Born, the industrial megamachine has produced populations of addicted consumers. These consumers in turn resemble the products they consume, use up and discard: “As a refrigerator or television is used up after a few years, so humankind has

² “Ist die allgemeine materialistische Formel unsere eigentliche Natur?”

³ “Sinne für Wahrnehmung und Erfahrung”

also become a factor measured against time”⁵ (27). Though Born’s tone is that of resignation, he does see the potential, however small, of resisting the machine. Though what little resistance there is is in a desperate situation (24), it must still succeed in accomplishing its most improbable of tasks: “shaking awake a sick and addicted mass of consumers.”⁶ (24).

Born’s calling as a poet fulfills a role in creating a resistance to the machine. In the afterword to his second collection of poems, *Wo mir der Kopf steht* (1970), he admits that writing poems cannot change the world. It does, however, fulfill a task that was not merely contemporaneous, but rather one of literature’s age-old tasks: “No poem causes a measurable change in society, but poems, when they hold to the truth, can be subversive.”⁷ (84). In “Die Welt der Maschine,” written seven years later, Born is able to articulate the *raison d’être* of poetry’s subversive nature more forcefully. Ultimately, in order to resist and eventually overthrow the machine, humankind will have to endure the shock of an *Entziehungskur*.⁸ The end result of this treatment is also the foundation of the poet’s *métier*: “Perhaps as a result of this shock we will rediscover language.”⁹ (29).

⁴ “Aber in einem geschlossenen System geht nichts mehr verloren. Kranke und Kriminelle im Sinne eines ungestörten Marktes dienen wiederum als Rechtfertigung für eine wachsende Kontroll- und Medizinalindustrie.”

⁵ “Wie ein Kühlschrank oder Fernsehgerät nach einigen Jahren verbraucht ist, so ist auch der Mensch zu einem Kalkulationsfaktor auf Zeit geworden.”

⁶ “eine kranke und süchtige Masse von Verbrauchern wachzurütteln.”

⁷ “Kein Gedicht bewirkt eine meßbare Veränderung der Gesellschaft, aber Gedichte können, wenn sie sich an die Wahrheit halten, subversiv sein.”

⁸ treatment for drug addiction; literally, “withdrawal cure.”

⁹ “Vielleicht finden wir unter diesem Schock die Sprache wieder.”

Born's third collection of poetry, *Das Auge des Entdeckers* (1972), reveals a subtle but definite shift in his literary practice. The afterword to this collection consists of a metatextual conversation between pessimistic quotes regarding literature's societal role taken from Born's 1972 essay "Ist die Literatur auf die Misere abonniert?" (*Welt* 47-54), and more optimistic, impressionistic answers prepared for this volume of poetry. Each page of text presents two columns, the left of which consists of italicized quotes from the essay, with the "answers" on the right. Born the social critic is thus pitted in debate against Born the poet. Many of the quotes from Born's essay posit the same arguments that Born makes throughout his prose: namely that reality is a closed system that suppresses individuality, and that one of the roles of literature is to propose utopian alternatives to this reality. The following quote is representative of this: "Our better possibilities have to be presented and portrayed; reality must be measured against the better possibilities, not the other way around"¹⁰ (88). The answers reflect Born as poet, trying to construct these utopian *Gegenbilder*: "Each individual is also every other. Simultaneously and in full consciousness of this. We train the telescopes on ourselves. Each one is every other at all times, the absolute identity"¹¹ (88).

What Born does in the poems of *Das Auge des Entdeckers* is to explore this "absolute identity" that is interconnected to "every other." By the year *Das Auge des Entdeckers*

¹⁰ "Unsere besseren Möglichkeiten müssen besser ausgestellt und dargestellt werden; an den besseren Möglichkeiten muß die Realität gemessen werden, nicht umgekehrt."

¹¹ "Jeder eine ist auch jeder andere. Gleichzeitig und bei vollem Bewußtsein. Wir richten die Teleskope auf uns. Jeder ist rund um die Uhr jeder, die absolute Identität."

was published, 1972, Brinkmann had already both established himself as a significant new voice in West German poetry and retreated from a literary world he considered inauthentic.¹² At the same time, many of the tendencies Brinkmann valued in poetry, those tendencies that he connected to authenticity in lyric poetry—perception, observation, the every day, the experience of the individual unfiltered through a poetic lens—were being embraced by poets of the nascent *Neue Subjektivität* movement. Thus the interconnectedness between individual consciousness and the group consciousness of humanity as an organic whole represents a movement away from the 60s idea of a political consciousness, in which the individual consciousness is tied to that of his class, and in which the classes are in perpetual conflict.

Manfred Voigts, a Germanist who interviewed Born in 1979,¹³ noted a shift in Born's work between the years 1967 and 1978 from poems that were “more directly and immediately politically oriented”¹⁴ (93) to poems that “fall under the category of nature poetry rather than under that of politically engaged lyric poetry”¹⁵ (93). At first resisting this line of questioning, Born responds to Voigts's pressing that in the 60s he viewed the poem “as an object to be used...as another version of reality, which is directly confronted

¹² So quick was Brinkmann's rise in and so thorough his retreat from the literary world that the posthumous publication of his *Westwärts 1 & 2*, the volume which truly gave Brinkmann a lasting voice in German poetry, caught many of his colleagues by surprise, assuming as they had that he had given up poetry.

¹³ The interview appeared in *Konkursbuch 4* (1979) and appears in *Die Welt der Maschine* (93-114).

¹⁴ “direkter und unmittelbarer politisch orientiert”

¹⁵ “eher unter den Begriff Naturlyrik fallen als unter den der politisch engagierter Lyrik”

with actual reality”¹⁶ (93-94). In other words, the poem was a means to an end, a way of realizing utopian ideals, ideals borne of protest against existing reality. By the late 70s, when Born spoke to Voigts, his view of the poem changed to that of a “location for the preservation of glances, thoughts, feelings, relationships, of descriptions of the relationships”¹⁷ (94). In other words, the location of Born’s utopian confrontation with reality had shifted from the public sphere, where this confrontation had failed to bring about concrete change in the 60s, to the private sphere, the individual. The arc of Born’s development as a poet thus follows the arc of development of the *Neue Subjektivität* movement, which saw a retreat from a confrontational poetics to that of individual perception.

Das Auge des Entdeckers was published on the apex of Born’s developmental arc. Though its title suggests an eye trained on the outside world, Born’s comment in the aphoristic title essay—“we train the telescopes on ourselves”—suggests an eye that is turned inward. As such, the philosophical underpinnings of this work are in accord with his reception of his most important American influence, William S. Burroughs. Unlike Brinkmann, who seemed capable of absorbing the entire American scene and intent on transplanting it wholesale to German soil, Born rather sought out confirmation in other authors of his private literary vision. In Burroughs Born found another seeker of utopian

¹⁶ “als Gebrauchsgegenstand...als eine andere Version von Wirklichkeit, die direkt konfrontiert wird mit der tatsächlichen”

¹⁷ “Ort des Aufbewahrens von Blicken, von Gedanken, von Gefühlen, von Beziehungen, von Beschreibungen der Beziehungen.”

literary landscapes. For Burroughs, however, this vision was always on the inside. Instead of confronting accepted reality with a utopian vision in an effort to alter accepted reality, Burroughs assumed (much like Brinkmann) that accepted reality was a sham, and that the seeker had to turn inward for the realization of private utopias. Burroughs famously began this inward seeking with drugs and continued it with his cut-up and fold-in methods of writing.¹⁸ That Born's essay on Burroughs was written in the same year he published *Das Auge des Entdeckers*, a volume in which Born turns his poetic concentration inward, does not seem coincidental.

Born wrote a short essay on his reading of Burroughs called "Reisen im inneren Universum" (*Welt* 41-46). It does not seem to have been published before being included in *Die Welt der Maschine*, as it appears in the list of sources with the note "Year not noted, probably 1972." Though at first glance this essay seems to fulfill the same function as many of Born's short pieces on different contemporary American authors¹⁹—to briefly introduce them to a German audience—in essence it is a short description of Born's personal reading and reception of Burroughs. Furthermore, Born's reading and reception of these American authors—the dates given for these essays range

¹⁸ It is important to note that as early as 1965 Burroughs had distanced himself from the idea that drugs could serve the artistic process. When asked in an interview whether the "visions of drugs" and the "visions of art" mix, Burroughs responded, "Never. The hallucinogens produce visionary states, sort of, but morphine and its derivatives decrease awareness of inner processes, thoughts and feelings... They are absolutely contraindicated for creative work, and I include in the lot alcohol, morphine, barbiturates, tranquilizers—the whole spectrum of sedative drugs" (Plimpton 5).

¹⁹ These pieces include a commentary on Kenneth Koch, whose poems Born translated into German; very short essays on Ron Padgett, Charles Bukowski and Donald Barthelme; and a short essay entitled "(Amerika). Über das parodistische Element im amerikanischen Gedicht." All of these appear in *Die Welt*

from 1972 to 1976—coincides with the refocusing of his utopian orientation inward (i.e., his removing himself from the political collective and adopting the stance of the American individualist, whose protest of the existing order tends more to the existential rather than to active mobilization), and his increasing association with the *Neue Subjektivität* movement.

Born's reading of Burroughs, his publication of *Das Auge des Entdeckers*, his readings of other contemporary American poets and translation of Kenneth Koch all came between the years of 1972 and 1976, a period that saw a disillusioned retreat by those on the left who had participated in the failed student revolutions of the 1960s. Though these revolutions certainly resulted in a more pluralistic and open society, they failed in achieving any sort of fundamental, radical or structural change in the West German economic and political establishment. Thus, the inward turn taken by Born in his poetry coincides with this retreat. However, instead of admitting defeat, for Born this turn represented a repositioning of his liberatory and utopian tendencies. Instead of actively seeking to improve reality by confronting it with the best possible world, Born relocates the battle for liberation and utopia to the landscapes of the mind. In this, Burroughs is his immediate inspiration and example.

Born begins his essay by quoting a remark Burroughs is supposed to have made to a "Schriftstellerkongreß": "The future of writerly activity does not lie in an orientation to

der Maschine (142-55), though only the piece on Kenneth Koch gives any indication of having been published separately (as the afterword to Born's translation of Koch).

time, but rather in a thrust into space”²⁰ (41). Born attributed a “programmatic meaning” to this quote, which it most certainly has, though perhaps not for the reasons Born cites. According to Born, with this quote Burroughs refers to “the necessity of breaking out of the control system of language, which in all of its methods of publication reflects and covers reality, as if it were—like money—its general equivalent”²¹ (41). Burroughs was certainly concerned about the overt veneration of language as such shown by many of his contemporaries. In a 1965 interview with Conrad Knickerbocker of *The Paris Review*, in explaining some of the objections to his “cut-up” method of composition²², Burroughs remarked, “This is one objection to the cut-ups. There’s been a lot of that, a sort of a superstitious reverence for the word. My God, they say, you can’t cut up these words. Why *can’t* I?” (Plimpton 10). However, Burroughs’ overriding preoccupation while working via the medium of cut-ups was with overcoming the strictures of temporality, and infusing the literary work with something of the sense of simultaneity found in the operations of the mind. Or, as Burroughs simply states in the *Paris Review* interview, “In a sense it’s traveling in time” (13).

²⁰ “Die Zukunft der schriftstellerischen Tätigkeit liegt nicht in der Orientierung an der Zeit, sondern im Vorstoß in den Raum.” The English is the author’s translation of Born’s translation of Burroughs’ remarks from English into German. Unfortunately, Born does not provide a source for this quote.

²¹ “die Notwendigkeit, auszubrechen aus dem Kontrollsystem der Sprache, die in all ihren Publikationsarten die Wirklichkeit spiegelt und deckt, als sei sie—wie das Geld—deren allgemeines Äquivalent.”

²² Burroughs literally cut up and rearranged textual compositions in an effort to undermine the Aristotelian linear narrative, and to “make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway,” (Plimpton 12). He cites American poet and friend Brion Gysin as the creator of cut-ups and cites *The Waste Land*, as well as the work of Tristan Tzara and Dos Passos as early examples of this method (10-15).

In other words, Born has read Burroughs to support his own ongoing programmatic preoccupation, that which he pursued throughout his literary career: “the need to break out of the control system” not only of language, but of society in toto. Later in this essay, Born again finds evidence of the societal control system, this time in the writings of both Burroughs and Ginsberg. Their intentions, he writes, are “namely to break out of the prisons of the self and likewise out of the prisons of societal control systems”²³ (44). Though Burroughs’ oeuvre is certainly infused with a healthy streak of anti-authoritarianism, and though the Beats rebelled against the society in which they wrote, this rebellion was always that of the individual against the collective: the tendency of this rebellion was toward existential freedom, not necessarily the idea of freedom posited for an entire group. As such, it is telling that the Beats indocrinated themselves to rebellion through drugs,²⁴ and not through an overarching philosophical or ideological bent.

The spirit of the Beats was not in and of itself political: it was *experiential*. Brinkmann understood this; Born did not. What Born does in his reading of the Beats is to attribute a political meaning to their work in order to draw the specific conclusions he seeks. Born applies the template of his political interpretation of the Beats to give

²³ “nämlich auszubrechen aus den Gefängnissen des Ich und glicherweise auch aus den Gefängnissen gesellschaftlicher Kontrollsysteme”

²⁴ The influence of drugs on Burroughs’ work is of course inescapable, *Junky* (1953) and *Naked Lunch* (1959) standing as they do as monolithic reminders at the beginning of his career. Less well known is the fact that he later disavowed the usefulness of drugs to art, telling Conrad Knickerbocker that “junk narrows consciousness” (Plimpton 9), that he regarded addiction as an illness (6), and that its only benefit to him as a writer “(aside from putting me into contact with the whole carny world) came to me after I went off it” (9). Ginsberg’s attitudes toward drugs range from enthusiastic to ambivalent, though they remained a part of his “cosmic search” (Portugés 109-26).

himself permission to do what he wants to do: to turn inwards. The Beats were not *dialectic*, they were “rejectionists.” They were not interested in societal utopias, but rather *personal* utopias. As Burroughs notes in conclusion to his *Paris Review* interview, “You know, they ask me if I were on a desert island and knew nobody would ever see what I wrote, would I go on writing. My answer is most emphatically yes. I would go on writing for company. Because I’m creating an imaginary—it’s always imaginary—world in which I would like to live” (Plimpton 30). Burroughs never shared the younger Born’s illusion that his writing—his positive pictures, his alternative utopias—could ever change the world in which he lived: as he states, “it’s always imaginary.” Otherwise this literary theory, if we may call it such, parallels Born’s perfectly. For the West German political left, this sort of thinking would have been considered thoroughly undialectical: it accepts the artist’s status as cultural reject as part of the status quo. Thus, Born’s attribution to the Beats of broader political impulses forms part of a larger justification for doing what he wants: to abandon the explicitly political for the personal, to “train the telescope on himself.”

Born published *Marktlage* (1967), *Wo mir der Kopf steht* (1970), and *Das Auge des Entdeckers* (1972) with Kiepenheuer & Witsch in Cologne. He wrote the thirty-one poems in *Marktlage* during the years 1965 to 1967, and the twenty-nine poems of *Wo mir der Kopf steht* between 1967 and 1970. *Das Auge des Entdeckers* represents the zenith of Born’s poetic output: this volume contains forty-nine poems, many of them

substantially longer than those of the previous two volumes, written in the years 1970 to 1972. After 1972, Born began to focus more on the essay and the novel: he followed the publication of *Die erdabgewandte Seite der Geschichte* (1976) with the very successful novel *Die Fälschung* in 1979. Born's volume of collected poems, *Gedichte* (1978),²⁵ includes only twenty poems from the years 1972 to 1978, provisionally included under the title *Keiner für sich, alle für niemand*.

As should be expected from the discussion of Born's poetics and political and social philosophies, political engagement, though never a true pillar of Born's poetic output, played a much larger role in his early work than it ever did in Brinkmann's. Certainly, as opposed to Brinkmann, though he concentrated throughout his career on the traits such as *Wahrnehmung* and *genaues Hinsehen* that typified *Kölner Realismus*, Born was much more sympathetic to the politically engaged poets. This sympathy is more evident in his earlier collection, *Marktlage*, than it is in his later work. Nevertheless, Born's version of engagement was much more closely tied to the liberatory vision of his social and personal utopias than it was to the more practical matter of building a viable political movement. Even his most engaged poems are suffused with a caustic irony not well-suited to movement building.

An analysis of the poem "Selbstverantwortung," from *Marktlage*, and "EIN MITTAG IM DORF MACHT NOCH KEIN GEDICHT," from *Das Auge des*

²⁵ The poems under discussion here are cited from this volume.

Entdeckers, will illustrate the migration of Born's liberatory ideal of the utopia from the socio-political to the personal in the evolution of his work.

Selbstverantwortung

Jeder sein eigener Volksempfänger
jeder sein eigenes Kaufhaus
Konserven für den Winter der kommt
jeder sein untöbbarer Held im Verkehr
sein eigener Fisch an der Angel 5
jeder sein saloppes Ärgernis
verlogen verschwiemelt
jeder sein scheinheiliger Mörder
wenn er an der Reihe ist
es auf ihn zukommt unvermeidlich 10
wo er sich gerade eingeordnet hat
aufgerückt ins Licht
ungeachtet der Schmarotzer
an den Öffnungen des Leibes
den sie auffüllen als Gegenleistung 15
mit Fraß.

Wozu an dieser Stelle Kleinigkeiten
 daß die Kinder überfüttert sind mit falschen Daten
 daß die Erde Papst und Krupp gehört
 der Himmel den Starfightern 20
 die Nordsee der NATO.
 Klein beigegeben
 wieder und wieder kochen
 die Bohnensuppe mit Speck.
 Einmal steht jeder vor der Frage ob 25
 er selbst fährt oder sich fahren läßt.²⁶ (12)

At first glance, “Selbstverantwortung” creates an immediate impression of strident militancy. In the first eight lines, Born launches an attack on the capitalist Romantic ideal of individualism, and seemingly also on the conservative ethic of *Selbstverantwortung*, or self-sufficiency. In a society in which individuals value care of the self above all else, the individual no longer has to take into consideration the consequences his actions have for others. These conditions create the anti-dialectic of the perfect consumer society. In such a society, each individual becomes a self-contained island: “sein eigener

²⁶ “Self-sufficiency”: “Each his own Volksradio / each his own department store / preserves for the winter that’s coming / each his immortal hero in traffic / his own fish on the line / each his lazy annoyance / mendacious and bloated / each his self-righteous murderer / when it’s his turn / when it comes to him, unavoidable / right where he had gotten settled / pulled into the light / the parasites not noticing / on the openings of the body / that they fill in compensation / with grub. // Why bother with such details / as children being stuffed full of false dates / or that the earth belongs to the Pope and Krupp / the heavens the

Volksempfänger...sein eigenes Kaufhaus...sein untötbarer Held im Verkehr”²⁷ (lines 1-4).

Born immediately undercuts the subversively dry humor of the fourth line with an image made famous more recently by the band Nirvana on the cover of their album *Nevermind* (1991)²⁸: “sein eigener Fisch an der Angel”²⁹ (line 5). In the next eleven lines, this hero-consumer is betrayed by the lies upon which this society is built, bloated with consumption (“jeder sein saloppes Ärgernis / verlogen verschwiemelt”³⁰) and is transformed from an “immortal hero” into a hypocritical murderer and parasite: “jeder sein scheinheiliger Mörder /.../ ungeachtet der Schmarotzer / an den Öffnungen des Leibes / den sie auffüllen als Gegenleistung / mit Fraß”³¹ (lines 8, 13-16).

In lines 17 to 24, the poet resigns himself to the fact that it is impossible to resist or even contend creatively with such a society. This is a stunning reversal for a seemingly politically militant poem, as the reader expects a creative contrast to be posited against the undialectic status quo. Contrary to expectations, Born informs the reader that resistance is futile: the earth belongs to the Pope and Krupp, the oceans to NATO, and even space has fallen to the imperialism predicated by a consumer society. Children learn

starfighters / the North Sea to NATO. // You're out of trump / just keep cooking / your bean soup with lard. / Sooner or later everyone faces the question / of whether they're driving or being driven.”

²⁷ “his own Volksradio...his own department store...his immortal hero in traffic.” Note that Born deliberately chooses a loaded word in *Volksempfänger*: it refers to radios that were promoted by the Nazis because they were cheap and because they could only receive authorized stations.

²⁸ Nirvana's album cover features a baby swimming in clear, blue ocean water, being lured by a dollar bill affixed to a fishing hook. Tragically, the band's lead singer, Kurt Cobain, seemed unconditionally intent on proving the absolute destructive power posited by this image of commercialism.

²⁹ “his own fish on the line”

³⁰ “each his lazy annoyance / mendacious and bloated”

³¹ “each his self-righteous murderer /.../ the parasites not noticing / on the openings of the body / that they fill in compensation / with grub.”

this consumerism in school, where they are overfed (“überfüttert,” line 18) the false dates of this society’s historical *Siegeszug*. The only response to such a nightmare is to continue playing the bad cards one was dealt (“klein begeben,” line 22) and eating one’s “bean soup with lard” (line 24).

In the last lines, however, Born turns this fractious and destructive individualism on its head with an aphorism that posits his ideal of utopia: “Einmal steht jeder vor der Frage ob / er selbst fährt oder sich fahren läßt”³² (lines 25-26). Born does not appeal to a political movement to overthrow this reality, but rather to the individuals in this society to make better choices. Though this seems hopelessly idealistic, this ending nevertheless reveals a fundamental distrust in the ability of new mass movements to replace the old order with something better. At the same time, Born ironically reclaims the ideal of *Selbstverantwortung* from those who defend the status quo for those who would resist it.

It is of course impossible to characterize a collection of thirty-one poems by examining one poem, but “Selbstverantwortung” nevertheless typifies the ironic distance Born maintains in *Marktlage* from direct political engagement. The following poem, from *Das Auge des Entdeckers*, reveals an abandonment of even this careful program for self-examination in favor of the precise observation of the visual appearance of the world surrounding the poet that typifies the work of *Kölner Realismus*.

³² “Sooner or later everyone faces the question / of whether they’re driving or being driven.”

EIN MITTAG IM DORF MACHT NOCH KEIN
GEDICHT

hier haben wir es aber schon
es ist aus dem Fenster gesehen und auch
von innen 5
ein braunes altes Sofa kommt vor
das war schon die Stelle mit dem Sofa
es wird nie richtig anwachsen
wie auch die Schwarzwaldtanne nicht anwächst.
Der Ort ist übel 10
was machen wir damit wenn wir in den Städten
das NEUE LEBEN anfangen
wenn wir die Städte platzen und auffliegen lassen
zugunsten einer Liebesgeschichte?
Jetzt muß ich aufpassen daß ich nicht anwachse 15
eine graue Dachrinne geht um das Haus so wie du
um mich herumgehst als wäre ich angewachsen:
“Soll ich die Gardinen heute waschen
oder morgen oder geht es noch?”
“Laß doch Mutter ich fahre ja morgen wieder.” 20

Sie sieht erstaunt auf: "Morgen schon wieder?"

Ich streife sie mit einem melancholischen Blick

dann die Teppichstange im Garten auf der jetzt drei

kleinere Vögel angewachsen sind.

In diesem Augenblick schaltet sich im Keller

25

die Heizung an.

"Es wird gleich wieder wärmer" sagt sie

und dabei geht eine große Wärme von ihr aus.³³ (130)

The opening lines of the poem create an atmosphere in which the potential for poetry can be found at any time during the poet's daily experience. This is the quotidian poem par excellence, in which the poet lives an existence surrounded by poems waiting to be written down. Even though "a small-town afternoon doesn't make a poem, I'm going to write one anyway," Born declares at the outset. He then stresses the primary importance of the poet's perception of the world around him: "es ist aus dem Fenster gesehen und auch / von innen"³⁴ (lines 4-5). In other words, lived experience is poetic experience.

³³ "A SMALL-TOWN AFTERNOON DOESN'T MAKE A POEM / but here we go anyway / it's seen from the window and also / from inside / an old brown sofa appears / already the part with the sofa / it'll never really take root / just like the Black Forest pine won't take root. // This place is bad / what are we going to do with it / when we start our NEW LIFE in the cities / when we blow the cities to kingdom come / for the sake of a love story? / I have to watch out that I don't take root / a gray gutter goes around the house just like you / go around me as if I had taken root: / 'Should I wash the curtains today / or tomorrow or are they still good?' / 'Leave it mother I'll be leaving tomorrow.' / She looks up, surprised: 'Tomorrow already?' / I stroke her with a melancholic look / then the clothesline in the yard on which three / smaller birds have taken root. // In this moment the heater / comes on in the basement. / 'It'll be warmer in a second' she says / as she radiates a comforting warmth."

³⁴ "it's seen from the window and also / from inside"

The prominent image of this poem is created by the verb “anwachsen,” or “to take root.” It occurs five times in key positions throughout the poem: “das war schon die Stelle mit dem Sofa / es wird nie richtig anwachsen / wie auch die Schwarzwaldtanne nicht anwächst”³⁵ (lines 7-9); “Jetzt muß ich aufpassen daß ich nicht anwachse / eine graue Dachrinne geht um das Haus so wie du / um mich herumgehst als wäre ich angewachsen”³⁶ (lines 15-17); “dann die Teppichstange im Garten auf der jetzt drei / kleinere Vögel angewachsen sind”³⁷ (lines 23-24). Between the first cluster of lines in which this image appears and the second, Born considers the superfluity of this small town life in which trivial existence has taken root, wondering what will become of it when the revolution succeeds in establishing a “NEW LIFE” (line 12) in the cities. However, between the second and third clusters of lines in which the image of taking root reoccurs, the poet is himself taking root, having an exchange with his mother about household chores while also expressing a melancholic ambivalence about this life (“Ich streife sie mit einem melancholischen Blick,”³⁸ line 22).

The word “anwachsen” reveals the poet’s deep ambivalence toward direct political action, even if he also displays a deep ambivalence toward taking root himself. The fact that this small town life will be made completely superfluous by the revolution makes him ambivalent about the revolution rather than this superfluous existence. In other

³⁵ “already the part with the sofa / it’ll never really take root / just like the Black Forest pine won’t take root.”

³⁶ “I have to watch out that I don’t take root / a gray gutter goes around the house just like you / go around me as if I had taken root”

words, no existence, no matter how trivial it may seem, can be considered superfluous; for the poet, the triviality of the everyday trumps the ideology of the movement.

The poem ends with an image of warmth, in which the heat comes on in the basement and his mother radiates personal warmth for her son. Although not exactly a rebuke of the earlier “Selbstverantwortung,” “Ein Mittag im Dorf macht noch kein Gedicht” nevertheless posits a reinterpretation of the types of choices individuals can make. Certainly this small town life is in no way a rejection of the status quo; it rather seems to represent an embrace of the status quo. Yet, despite the brutal reality created by a consumer society, it is still possible for the individual to create his own utopian sphere. Whereas the earlier Born would doubtless have rejected this image as one of false consciousness, the later Born seems to insist that, even if the revolution never occurs, it is imperative for the individual to create an atmosphere that makes his personal existence worthwhile. For Born, the image of utopia has moved from the broader political spectrum to the intimacy of the individual.

3. Liberating the Poem: Jürgen Theobaldy

In *Veränderung der Lyrik* (1976), co-written with Gustav Zürcher, Jürgen Theobaldy sets out to explain how and why West German poetry underwent a fundamental change from the mid- to late 60s. In so doing, Theobaldy also develops and defends his own

³⁷ “then the clothesline in the yard on which three / smaller birds have taken root.”

³⁸ “I stroke her with a melancholic look”

particular literary aesthetics. *Veränderung der Lyrik* consists of five essay-length sections, each written by one of the respective authors: sections one, two and five, written by Theobaldy, are entitled “Anmerkungen zum Ende der hermetischen Lyrik,” “Ein neuer Ansatz: die unartifizielle Formulierung,” and “Persönliche Erfahrungen und gesellschaftliche Perspektiven;”³⁹ Zürcher contributes chapters on *konkrete Poesie* and the political poetry of the 60s. Thus, in contradistinction to Born’s speculative and monograph-style short essays, and Brinkmann’s sprawling, aphoristic and multi-perspectival writings on literature, Theobaldy has given us a more traditional, academic defense of the poetics practiced by the three of them, complete with hypothesis, supporting arguments and conclusion.

Theobaldy’s hypothesis is that, beginning in the mid-60s, the readership of hermetic poetry had continually sunk (*Veränderung* 17) and it had faded in importance (24) due in part to a rapidly changing West German socio-economic situation to which this literature remained impervious. Theobaldy attributes the strong postwar interest in hermetic poetry to a “compensatory reaction” to failed hopes for both a socialist Germany or a “third way” between capitalism and communism (10). However, as the postwar socio-political situation continued to evolve, hermetic lyric poetry remained static and entrenched.

³⁹ “Remarks on the end of hermetic poetry;” “A new beginning: the unartificial formulation;” and “Personal experiences and societal perspectives,” respectively.

According to Theobaldy, even before the political poets placed the entire bourgeois literary enterprise into question, hermetic poetry had already become an “esoteric code” that had become universally “available” [*verfügbar*]: in other words, a literary cliché no longer appealing to readers. However, sinking readership only served to confirm the modernist stereotype of the poet as an “exquisite outsider” (17), and thus further entrench hermetic poetry in its accepted conventions. Nevertheless, this poetry was no longer an “adequate poetic expression” (14) for the changing times, leading to the rise of new poetic forms in the 60s that would inevitably supplant the modernist, hermetic lyric.

These forms include *konkrete Poesie*, political poetry, and the form practiced by Theobaldy, Born, Brinkmann and Herburger, and elucidated and defended by Theobaldy here: “a new objective poetry, that the critics had by the beginning of the 70s already supplied with the sobriquet of ‘new sensitivity’ or ‘new subjectivity’ or which they referred to as a ‘new realism’”⁴⁰ (24-5). Theobaldy describes this new poetry in the chapter entitled “Ein neuer Ansatz: die unartifizielle Formulierung,” the latter phrase having been borrowed from Born. To a certain extent, Theobaldy’s essay can be read as an advertisement for Brinkmann’s, Born’s, Herburger’s and his own work: they knew each other well, were grouped together under Dieter Wellershoff’s tutelage at Kiepenheuer & Witsch in Cologne under the rubric “Kölner Realismus,” and thus had a mutual interest in seeing each other’s work succeed. All of their work, concerned as it was

with an engagement with the everyday through lyric poetry, was both directly and indirectly precipitated by Walter Höllerer's *Thesen zum langen Gedicht*, which he published in *Akzente*, and the anthology he edited and published in 1965, *Theorie der modernen Lyrik*. As an arbiter of poetic taste, Höllerer leans heavily on the international avant-garde and its antecedents then sowing the seeds of a nascent postmodernism: Poe, Whitman, Pound, Majakowski, Neruda, Charles Olson and William Carlos Williams all figure prominently in the latter. Many of the themes Höllerer discusses in the afterword of *Theorie* find their echoes in Theobaldy's writings: the importance of the *Alltagssprache* is stressed; the prominence of anti-hermetic and anti-ideological poetry in the new literature is indicated; literature is understood as being socially determined; a poetry based on individual perception (*Wahrnehmung*) implies the direct social critique largely missing from the esoteric, hermetic poetry of Modernism (*Theorie* 419-xxx).

Theobaldy refers to the importance of Höllerer's impact on his peers and himself, suggesting that replacing the adjective "long" with "new" in Höllerer's *Thesen zum langen Gedicht* would give a good indication of the sort of poetry being written by Theobaldy and his peers: "one thus has a relatively exact description of the tendencies that begin to stand out in poetry around the end of the 60s and that, as the 70s begin, predominate"⁴¹ (27). As co-editor (with Hans Bender) of the immensely influential literary journal

⁴⁰ "eine[r] neue[n] gegenständliche[n] Lyrik, die die Kritiker anfangs der siebziger Jahre mit dem Etikett der 'neuen Sensibilität' oder der 'neuen Subjektivität' versahen oder bei der sie von einem 'neuen Realismus' sprachen."

Akzente, Höllerer's position of authority was of course unique; while these poets wanted to challenge the mainstream, they also nevertheless wished to be published. Höllerer's blessing thus left them with the feeling that they could do both. Theobaldy continues that Höllerer's *Thesen* "reopen for the poet that space for linguistic, formal and thematic innovations that had been all but squeezed out of the hermetic poem"⁴² (27).

The "new poems" these poets were writing coupled this anti-metaphorical stance with an anti-elitist stance. This stance was maintained in the types of poems these poets were writing, the way they were writing them, and most particularly, in the type of language they were using. This latter included the ordinary language of direct speech and slang, of course, but also specialized languages such as that of the drug subculture. Theobaldy writes that drugs entered West German poetry as thematic material in the early 1970s (144); its obvious antecedent is the direct reference to drug experience by the Beats in their work. According to Theobaldy, West German poets had nothing new to offer regarding this theme: "Actually a large part of the West German 'Underground Poetry' would be unthinkable without its American example. Many of these poems read like translations from American, even in those poems in which the experience with drugs and a life among societal outsiders is very authentic"⁴³ (144-5).

⁴¹ "so hat man eine relativ genaue Beschreibung jener Tendenzen, die sich in der Lyrik gegen Ende der sechziger Jahre abzeichnen und die anfangs der siebziger Jahre bestimmend werden."

⁴² "öffnen dem Lyriker für sprachliche, formale und inhaltliche Neuerungen wieder jenen Raum, der sich in den hermetischen Gedichten allzusehr verengt hatte."

⁴³ "Tatsächlich ist ein Großteil dieser westdeutschen 'Underground-Lyrik' ohne ihr amerikanisches Vorbild nicht zu denken. Viele dieser Gedichte lesen sich wie Übersetzungen aus dem Amerikanischen, auch da, wo die Erfahrungen mit Drogen, mit einem Leben in gesellschaftlichen Randgruppen ganz authentisch ist."

More important was the use of ordinary language by these poets in their work, as it is here that they picked their most effective battles with elitism. Theobaldy illustrates these poets' use of the language of everyday experience, "the unartificial formulation," by comparing Gottfried Benn's well-known poem "Bauxit" with a short poem by Günter Herburger. In "Bauxit," Benn features the language of the business world as a prominent motif, but in so doing he brings it into confrontation with poetic language. Ultimately, this confrontation serves to illustrate how limited and banal the language of the business world is. According to Theobaldy, Benn's poem only serves to underscore the perspective from which the poet encounters the world: elitist [*elitär*] and fundamentally Romantic (29). Theobaldy insists, though, that the Romantic ideal of individual genius has been historically compromised by the time Benn writes his poem: "This Romantic perspective can however no longer be continuously maintained by Benn 150 years later. The lyrical self must problematize its perspective as outsider; this perspective no longer allows for an unclouded enjoyment of self and the world"⁴⁴ (29).

By Herburger's time, the poet is no longer an "exquisite outsider," but himself one of the unwashed masses. Thus Herburger and colleagues write poems directly in the vernacular, the need for linguistic confrontation having been obviated by their chosen poetic *Ausgangsposition*. This point of departure undercuts the elitism of the poet and makes possible a more egalitarian, more readerly poetry. As Theobaldy writes,

⁴⁴ "Jedoch ist diese romantische Ausgangsposition 150 später von Benn nicht mehr ungebrochen durchzuhalten. Das lyrische Ich muß sein Außenseitertum problematisieren, einen ungetrübten Selbst- und

Herburger's poem "thus has no exquisite theme, the poet rather trusts that his object will be known to most... With that this poem, contrary to Benn's, makes room from the very beginning for an egalitarian relationship not only with the reader but also with that about which it speaks"⁴⁵ (30-1).

The ultimate importance of all of this for Theobaldy is the introduction of more democratic ideals into the art of the poet. Theobaldy and peers, both in Germany and across the world, stood at the end of a literary process that probably began with the translation of the Bible and the saying of Mass in the vernacular: that is, taking literature out of the hands of a small coterie of specialists and making it available to the widest possible audience. In the particular genre of poetry, however, opposing dialectics seem to have been at work: while on the one hand poets such as the Beats, the New York School and Theobaldy and his West German colleagues worked to make poetry, the most elite of the literary genres, as accessible as possible to the largest possible audience, poetry nevertheless continued to be marginalized by a wide array of forces within the popular sphere: first jazz, then rock, and finally pop music; television, newspapers and popular magazines; comic books and, today, Internet "content" such as blogs, gossip and pornography; and, then as now, the novel. The curious result of this dialectic, "poetry slams" notwithstanding, is that poetry is once more in the hands of a small number of

Weltgenuß läßt diese Haltung nicht mehr zu."

⁴⁵ "hat also kein exquisites Thema, vielmehr vertraut der Lyriker darauf, daß sein Gegenstand sehr vielen bekannt ist...Damit rückt das Gedicht, anders als bei Benn, von vornherein in ein egalitäres Verhältnis sowohl zum Leser als auch zu dem, über den es redet."

specialists.⁴⁶ In a sense, Theobaldy and his peers, as well as the Beats and the New York School before them, were fighting the last spectacular battle against this inevitable creep toward the cultural margins (as well as back into the academy) by poetry.

Whereas in *Veränderung der Lyrik* Theobaldy was able to provide an academic treatment of the type of poetry he and his cohorts were writing, much of his correspondence with Hans Bender while Bender was co-editor of *Akzente* is an enthusiastic description and even defense of his poetics. Bender's *Akzente* correspondence is found in the Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln and includes letters by Born, Brinkmann and Theobaldy concerning works submitted to *Akzente* for publication. While Born and Brinkmann were to the point in their correspondence regarding their submissions (Brinkmann was notably laconic), Theobaldy was effusive regarding his submissions and his thoughts on poetry in general.

In a letter written on September 13, 1977, one of his earliest and longest letters to Bender, Theobaldy launches into an extended dissertation addressing questions of artistic merit in the “new poetry” that interest him, as well as the question of whether this new poetry represents a new *lyrisches Ich*. Important to note here is that the aesthetic value of the poems doesn't interest Theobaldy, merely the fact that poets are now writing differently than they had a few years earlier:

⁴⁶ It is important to note here that in chain stores such as Border's, which seemingly have *everything*, one is nevertheless hard pressed to find any but the most widely distributed quarterlies devoted to poetry. Or, as simply put by Charles McGrath in a story on the relatively new medium known as “graphic novels” for *The New York Times Magazine*, “You can't pinpoint it exactly, but there was a moment when people more

Why don't the poets to whose poems more attention is currently being paid connect back to the poetry of Celan or Krolow, what do they do instead, are they merely descendants of Brecht and, if not, why not, why do they write differently in 1970 and later? These questions interest me, and not how many of the poems now being debated can be considered aesthetically perfect answers to these questions. (Bender, Nr. 437, 60)⁴⁷

His position as an editor of a prestigious literary journal often placed Bender in a somewhat precarious dilemma with respect to his correspondent. Himself an established poet, well respected by both the younger and older generations, with a keen eye for talent, Bender was an enthusiastic supporter of the younger poets and the new directions poetry was taking. However, in his capacity as editor, Bender *was* interested in questions of aesthetic value. In a letter to Theobaldy on December 2, 1972, Bender expresses disappointment in some of Theobaldy's submissions to *Akzente*: "The poems seems too talkative to me. The language then becomes that of newspapers... Even ordinary language must also be organized. Much could be said about this"⁴⁸ (Nr. 437, 3).

or less stopped reading poetry and turned instead to novels, which just a few generations earlier had been considered entertainment suitable for idle ladies of uncertain morals."

⁴⁷ "Warum knüpfen die Lyriker, deren Gedichte zur Zeit stärker als andere diskutiert werden, nicht an der Lyrik Celans oder Krolows an, was machen sie stattdessen, sind es deshalb schon bloße Epigonen von Brecht und wenn nicht, warum nicht, warum schreiben sie 1970 und später anders? Diese Fragen interessieren mich und nicht, wieviele der zur Debatte stehenden Gedichte ästhetisch einwandfreie Antworten darauf bedeuten." Hans Bender's correspondence while editor of *Akzente* is privately archived in the Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln; it appears in the bibliography of this work under Bender. In order to find particular letters in this archival collection, one must know the *Bestand* number (1375), to whom or from whom the letter was written, the date of the letter, the number ("Nr."), and the page number. The author is grateful to Hans Bender for his permission to research his private correspondence.

⁴⁸ "Mir sind die Gedichte zu gesprächig. Die Sprache ist dann eine Zeitungssprache... Man muß auch die gewöhnliche Sprache organisieren. Darüber wäre viel zu sagen."

Almost defensively, Theobaldy devoted much space in two successive letters to Bender to defending the anti-aesthetic of his poems. It is almost as if, in trying to convince Bender of the correctness of his aesthetic position, Theobaldy creates the aesthetic of the anti-aesthetic that he would go on to articulate in *Veränderung der Lyrik*. In a letter sent just ten days after Bender's (December 12, 1972), Theobaldy shoots back:

Did you know that there are people who spend years bent over aesthetic theories, compose dissertations, deliver clever presentations in graduate seminars and are nevertheless hardly interested in primary literature, and in poetry not at all? That has been one of my experiences. On the other hand, people who otherwise don't read poetry really enjoy these volumes. That was the goal of my activities from the very beginning! Sure, like many others I also dream of a modern folk poetry, a poetry that doesn't demand of the reader an elite level of education as a prerequisite and nevertheless satisfies aesthetic categories more complex than those of a hit song, or those with which a Carossa poem could be justified, for example.⁴⁹ (Nr. 437, 4)

⁴⁹ "Wußten Sie, daß es Leute gibt, die sich jahrelang über ästhetische Theorien beugen, Doktorarbeiten verfassen, kluge Beiträge im Oberseminar liefern und sich doch kaum für Primärliteratur interessieren, schon gar nicht für Gedichte? Das ist eine meiner Erfahrungen. Andererseits kommen die Hefte recht gut bei Leuten an, die sonst keine Gedichte lesen. Dies war von Anfang an das Ziel meiner Aktivitäten! Ach ja, ich träume wie viele andere auch von einer modernen Volkspoesie, einer Poesie, die vom Leser keinen elitehaften Bildungsstand als Voraussetzung abfordert und die doch ästhetischen Kriterien genügt, die komplexer sind als jene des Schlagers oder jene, womit sich ein Carossa-Gedicht z.B. rechtfertigen ließe."

In other words, Theobaldy seeks to convince Bender of the merit of exactly the qualities Bender has criticized in his poems. In a letter to Bender in the following year (August 1, 1973), Theobaldy continues his defense on a personal level, writing: “I am a very ordinary person. In my poetry I wish to express myself clearly and simply, and not in a manner that others could hardly understand”⁵⁰ (Nr. 437, 7). Thus, though a stance against the metaphorical excesses of what they called hermetic poetry was common to Born, Theobaldy and Brinkmann, Theobaldy pursued this program to its most logical extreme.

And what does such a poetics look like in its practical application? Consideration of Theobaldy’s *Blaue Flecken* (1974) reveals a poet of relaxed frankness, subtle wit, an easygoing nature and, naturally, a genially direct style that avoids metaphorical complexities. Included in *Blaue Flecken* are poems that celebrate life’s simple pleasures (“Es ist beinah poetisch” 25), Beat-inspired adventures (“Abenteuer mit Dichtung” 9; “Nach Marseille” 18), romantic yearning and frank sexuality (“Harte Eier” 10; “In Heidelberg im Januar 1973” 45; “Flucht um die Erde in acht Minuten” 60), and even allusions to German and Austrian literary icons such as Thomas Mann (“Die Erdbeeren in Venedig” 50), Rilke (“Rilke Abende” 70; “Vom Vorübergehen der Stäbe” 74, in which white collar workers are substituted for Rilke’s panther) and Trakl (“Trakl stapft am Waldrand entlang” 55-6).

⁵⁰ “Ich bin ein sehr gewöhnlicher Mensch. In meiner Poesie möchte ich mich klar und einfach ausdrücken und nicht in einer Weise sprechen, die andere kaum verstehen können.”

In pointed contrast to Brinkmann's work, Theobaldy also reveals at least a passive interest in the student movement of the late 60s and early 70s. Though Theobaldy was not one of the spiritual or political leaders of the movement, he, like many of his generational counterparts, was only too happy to participate in the strikes, protests and sit ins, as he reveals in many of his poems. The nature of his participation seems almost social in nature, as suggested by poems such as "Samstag-Gedicht" (31), in which he reads in the newspaper about a demonstration he had taken part in while sitting on the edge of his bathtub, or "Ostern in Esslingen" (24), in which he casually relates participating in a sit-in that blocked delivery of the *Bild-Zeitung*. Unlike Brinkmann, Theobaldy found relevance to poetry in the movement, insofar as it gave the overtly political poets a broader social milieu with which to work in their poems. As he wrote to Bender in a letter from March 21, 1975,

I also consider the influence of the extra-parliamentary opposition, the student protest movement, very important. It released the politically engaged poets from their abstract-enlightening position and made possible the connection between a political understanding and personal experience. Compared to this, the insistence: from now on only Agitprop! could only lead one into a dead end.⁵¹ (Nr. 437, 11)

⁵¹ "Ebenso halte ich den Einfluß der Außerparlamentarischen Opposition, der studentischen Protestbewegung für sehr wichtig. Sie lösten die politisch engagierten Lyriker aus ihrer abstrakt-aufklärerischen Position und ermöglichten ihnen die Verbindung von politischer Einsicht und persönlicher Erfahrung. Dagegen mußte die Konsequenz: ab jetzt nur noch Agitprop! in eine Sackgasse führen."

In other words, the student protest movement freed the politically engaged poets to write the sort of poetry Theobaldy and his colleagues were already writing.

The poems in this collection seem most concerned with the notion of the liberation of the poem itself, the idea that the poet is free to write poetry about any topic of his choosing. Thus, even in perhaps the most stridently political poem of this collection, Theobaldy makes this point subtly but powerfully. “Worüber man nicht schreiben kann”⁵² (48) is a poetic description of napalm, including the devastating effect this chemical concoction has on the human body. This poem, which begins “Über Napalm kann man nicht schreiben / die Poesie ist romantisch,”⁵³ is almost *Agit-Prop* in its effect, as if confronting the genteel reader of poetry with the reality of the use of napalm by the United States (which he never names directly) in the Viet Nam War will finally spur the reader to leave his desk and take up action. However, in his notes to the poems, Theobaldy makes clear what occasioned his writing of “Worüber man nicht schreiben kann”: “

Since napalm continues to be used by war-making imperialist powers, unfortunately only the actual occasion of this poem has survived: Günter Grass’s polemic against engaged poetry, as it relates to the war in Viet

⁵² “What one can’t write about”

⁵³ “One may not write about napalm / Poetry is romantic”

Nam. In that same year, 1967, Peter Handke's essay 'Die Literatur ist romantisch' also appeared.⁵⁴ (93)

Theobaldy's most strident side is not reserved for the "war-making imperialistic powers," but rather for those who would lecture poets on what they may or may not write about.

Whereas Born's liberatory impulses are focused on society, and Brinkmann's are concentrated on the individual (and most particularly his individual self), Theobaldy's liberatory impulses are always located in the poem itself. For Theobaldy, there are no restrictions on what a poet should choose as his thematic material, or how that poem should appear: the poem itself is liberated to incorporate all human voices and impulses. The poem in *Blaue Flecken* that perhaps best encapsulates Theobaldy's liberatory impulses is "Harte Eier."

"Harte Eier"

Ich habe mich oft gefragt
wo der Begriff 'harte Eier' herkommt
aber ich habe es nie herausgefunden
Jedenfalls ist es das Gefühl
einer Verhärtung der Hoden

5

⁵⁴ "Da Napalm von kriegführenden imperialistischen Mächten weiterhin eingesetzt wird, hat leider nur der aktuelle Anlaß dieses Gedichts überlebt: die Polemik von Günter Grass gegen engagierte Lyrik, bezogen auf den Krieg in Vietnam. Im gleichen Jahr 1967 erschien auch Peter Handkes Aufsatz: *Die Literatur ist romantisch*."

wenn du lange nicht gefickt hast

So zwischen 16 und 20

habe ich oft 'harte Eier' gehabt

als ich fast nur Mädchen kannte

die es nicht vor der Verlobung tun wollten – 10

nicht vor der *Verlobung* verstehst du?

Indirekt sprachen sich alle

für 'harte Eier' aus: der Pfarrer natürlich

(er hatte wahrscheinlich die 'härtesten Eier')

der Lehrherr (weil Lehrlinge frisch 15

und ausgeschlafen im Büro erscheinen müssen)

der Trainer (denn 'harte Eier' geben dir

den richtigen 'Biß' im Wettkampf)

und mein Vater sagte: 'Gelobt sei

was *hart* macht!' und schickte mich 20

bleich und spreizbeinig ins Büro

Poesie ist eine Art Widerstand

und ich wußte daß ich eines Tages
ein Gedicht über 'harte Eier' schreiben würde
Meine Jugend war nicht ohne Kämpfe 25
ich hatte Verse im Kopf
und 'harte Eier' in der Hose.⁵⁵ (10)

In this poem, Theobaldy uses a colloquial manner and even directly addresses the reader in a poetic discourse on masculine sexual frustration. Theobaldy's conversational tone, and the use of the informal, second-person personal pronoun *du* (which is very odd in German, which tends toward the third-person singular pronoun *man* when conveying generalities colloquially) are very reminiscent of Frank O'Hara. Indeed, Theobaldy would have come to know O'Hara's work through Brinkmann's translations of his work, and even quotes Brinkmann's translation of O'Hara's "St. Paul and all that" in the opening lines of his "Nach den großen Dingen nachts" (26).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "Blue Balls": "I've often wondered / where the phrase 'blue balls' comes from / but I never figured it out / In any case it's the feeling / of a hardening of the testicles / when you haven't fucked for a while // More or less from 16 to 20 / I often had 'blue balls' / when almost all the girls I knew / wouldn't do it until they got a ring / do you comprehend? until they were *engaged* // Everyone was indirectly in favor / of 'blue balls': the pastor naturally / (he probably had the 'bluest balls') / the apprentice boss (as apprentices are expected / to arrive fresh and well-rested in the office) / the coach (since 'blue balls' give one / the right 'bite' in competition) / and my father said: 'Praise all / which *hardens* a man' and sent me / pale and bow-legged to the office // Poetry is a form of resistance / and I knew that one day / I'd write a poem about 'blue balls' / My youth was not without its struggles / I had verses in my head / and 'blue balls' in my pants"

⁵⁶ Theobaldy named another poem in this volume "Gespräche mit Barbara" (57). In this poem, neither the titular Barbara nor their mutual friend "Alfred," whom Theobaldy casually mentions in line 32, are ever fully identified. Such casual use of the first names of people known only to the poet is such an obvious trademark of Frank O'Hara (and so atypical of Theobaldy), that Theobaldy could only have been alluding to having read and appreciated his friend Brinkmann's translation of O'Hara into German.

However, Theobaldy addresses the problem of masculine sexual frustration with language normally encountered in the locker room. “Harte Eier” would be the equivalent of the English “blue balls,” and just in case the reader thinks the poet is making a clever play on words, Theobaldy disabuses him of this notion in the last three lines of the first stanza: “Jedenfalls ist es das Gefühl / einer Verhärtung der Hoden / wenn du lange nicht gefickt hast”⁵⁷ (lines 4-6).

The use of such language serves several purposes in Theobaldy’s poem. In the second and third stanzas Theobaldy shifts the tone of his poem: rather than being a complaint about sexual frustration, “Harte Eier” becomes a mild critique of an essentially conservative society. Though sexual frustration is a personal problem, the locus of the problematic is in a society in which everything that brings about this condition is praiseworthy. Thus, Theobaldy’s sexual frustration results from his piety, health, fitness and virtue. Yet, if such a dire physical condition (“einer Verhärtung der Hoden,” line 5) is a result of these virtues, Theobaldy suggests that perhaps these virtues be called into question.

Theobaldy also pokes mild fun at the sexual revolution of the 60s. If the advent of the birth control pill brought about free love in the larger cities and cultural meccas, the trickle down effect in Theobaldy’s *Dorf* has been rather mild: although young women no longer insist on waiting until marriage for sex, they still insist on at least a contract for marriage.

⁵⁷ “In any case it’s the feeling / of a hardening of the testicles / during long stretches between fucks”

Thus, the conservative conventions of the small town are still stronger than the forces unleashed by sweeping change in the media centers.

Ultimately, however, this is not a poem about the sexual revolution, nor conservative conventions, nor masculine sexual frustration: it is a poem about the freedom of the poem. When Theobaldy uses that rather crude German verb “ficken” in line 6, “wenn du lange nicht gefickt hast,” it is not to shock, but rather to assert the freedom of the poet to use whatever language he sees fit to convey the intended emotion of his poem. The unconventional use of the pronoun *du* underscores this freedom. By introducing such language and usage into his work, he is working to liberate the poem from all of the same conventions that constrained his sexual enjoyment. Theobaldy the poet gladly sacrifices his sexual freedom for the freedom he acquires for his poetry.

The key lines of the poem are those that open the last stanza: “Poesie ist eine Art Widerstand / und ich wußte daß ich eines Tages / ein Gedicht über ‘harte Eier’ schreiben würde”⁵⁸ (lines 22-4). Theobaldy knew he would one day write a poem about “harte Eier” as it was a theme that was important to him and, though seemingly crass, this crassness nevertheless does not eliminate it from his potential material for poetry. In fact, the inclusion of such material in the poem is not only its source of *Widerstand* to these conventions but its liberation from them. Interestingly enough, Theobaldy has chosen to keep his thematic material, “harte Eier,” in quotations throughout the poem: he is not

⁵⁸ “Poetry is a form of resistance / and I knew that one day / I’d write a poem about ‘blue balls’”

writing about a physical condition, but rather the spiritual malaise of conformity and convention, most particularly in the poem itself. Thus, in this very anti-metaphorical poet, “harte Eier” becomes a metaphor for everything that opposes the liberatory potential of the poem. However, Theobaldy deflates this metaphor with his typical wit in the last lines: “Meine Jugend war nicht ohne Kämpfe / ich hatte Verse im Kopf / und ‘harte Eier’ in der Hose”⁵⁹ (lines 25-7). The virtues of the poet are the opposite of the virtues of society, the virtues that harden a man. As such, the poet remains unfulfilled and incapable of finding satisfaction, either physical or spiritual, in such a society. However, for Theobaldy, this is but a small price to pay for the freedom he experiences in verse.

4. “Ein Teil befreiter Realität”: Surface and Subjectivity as Personal Liberation in the Poetry of Rolf Dieter Brinkmann

Rolf Dieter Brinkmann’s activity as a poet, as well as his abiding interest in popular culture, was always predicated on realizing and increasing the potential of individual liberation in modern society. His argument with both modernist and the political poetry was that he found both of these forms, which either rejected or completely bypassed the mass ornament, ultimately constricting to what he saw as the purpose of art: to aid in the process of liberation of the individual. The hermetic poem remained for him an

⁵⁹ “My youth was not without its struggles / I had verses in my head / and ‘blue balls’ in my pants”

irrelevancy, as the very idea of beauty and art on which it is predicated is far removed from life as most people know it. At the same time, Brinkmann's disavowal of political poetry betrays a more fundamental rejection of politics per se. Brinkmann's general approach to politics is typified by the anarchist strain of his formulation *Gesellschaft=Staat* (Urbe 60). Politics has no place in poetry because politics has no place in the lives of people at all. For Brinkmann, politics cheapens poetry just as it cheapens everything else. The release of the latent beauty in the mundane was for Brinkmann intimately tied to his notions of the liberation of the individual from society.

Ironically, Brinkmann's thought is thus characterized by the same liberationist tendencies that characterize the efforts of both the political poets and the student demonstrators. At the root of Brinkmann's thought, as well as of his poetry, is a desire for the liberation of human consciousness. As Urbe puts it, "Being does not determine consciousness for Brinkmann, but rather language—and both then create reality, the liberation of which is of fundamental importance to him"⁶⁰ (22). As such, his poetry takes on an unintended political dimension. Instead of focusing on the systemic transformation of society, Brinkmann was concerned with the transformative potential of the individual. The key to this transformative potential lay for Brinkmann in his idea of subjectivity.

⁶⁰ "Nicht das Sein bestimmt für Brinkmann das Bewußtsein, sondern die Sprache—und beide schaffen dann die Realität, an deren Befreiung ihm durchaus gelegen ist."

Thus, Brinkmann begins “Der Film in Worten” with a programmatic statement that does not so much call for a revolution in the concept of literature, but, more in the vein of Enzensberger’s proclaimed *Tod der Literatur*, states this change as a *fait accompli*: “Familiar literary models of representation become blurred: the space expands, altered dimensions of consciousness”⁶¹ (*Film 223*). Not only is literary consciousness exploring a wider space of changed dimensions, but so is the popular consciousness, driven by forces ranging from jazz, then rock music, to recreational drugs. The task of the writer can no longer be to construct utopias separated from this reality through abstraction, but to both affect and be affected by this expanded consciousness in the popular realm.

Commenting on the particular editorial selections he and Ralf-Rainer Rygulla had made for *ACID*, he notes that these writers, unlike their European counterparts, do not automatically equate political content with progressive writing. Such a decision removes politics from the sphere of everyday existence and relegates literature to a secondary role. For Brinkmann, equating political with progressive writing is “all too cheap (and primitive)”⁶² (*Film 228*). Rather, politics and literature are cohabitant modalities of quotidian life, and for literature to serve the ends of politics acts as a disservice to

⁶¹ “Bekannte literarische Vorstellungsmuster verwischen sich: der Raum dehnt sich aus, veränderte Dimensionen des Bewußtseins.”

⁶² “allzu billig (und primitiv)”

literature. The act of writing is its own political end, irrespective of content.⁶³ Such an outlook renders overtly political literature redundant and superfluous.

Brinkmann stridently rejects the notion that the work of the artists represented in *ACID* could be considered part of an “avant-garde.” He views “avant-garde” as a strictly critical term with which the academy proscribes the boundaries of progressive art, and therefore propagates traditional tendencies. Commenting on Enzensberger’s criticism of Kerouac’s statement that literature should be a “film in words,” Brinkmann notes that such criticism “betrays a blinded consciousness, because it is an academic consciousness that can only react to words (concepts)”⁶⁴ (*Film* 229). These are the very notions the Beats reject in favor of a uniquely personal and individual expression, without the concomitant anxiety over what is and is not art. As such, arguments that it represents avant-garde art are irrelevant to Brinkmann.

What Brinkmann admires in the American writers he favors, and the Beats in particular, is that they attempt to retain spontaneity and creativity in literature by rejecting all proscriptive norms detailed by a “tradition” that can only be delimiting. At the same time, they have opened the field of literature to a great variety of impulses from their environment—pop culture, music, and painting—heretofore considered “unliterary.”

⁶³ In his personal recollections of Brinkmann for publisher Rowohlt’s retrospective *Literaturmagazin*, published twenty years after the poet’s death, Heinrich Vormweg notes that writing was for Brinkmann “die große rettende Möglichkeit. Für den jungen Brinkmann war dies das einzig und allein sinnvolle Mittel, sich selbst und das unüberschaubar Wirkliche um sich her wahrzunehmen so wie es war und erkennend in es einzudringen, so den Weg zu finden” (15).

⁶⁴ “verrät ein erblindetes, weil akademisiertes Bewußtsein, das nur noch an Wörter (Begriffe) zu reagieren versteht.”

The rejection of tradition and the academy, and the turn toward impulses not previously considered appropriate to literature, frees them from the reflexive propagation of literary clichés, and allows them to include popular materials, such as their reception of the Jazz scene and their particular and unfiltered likes and interests, in their work. Opposed to this, Brinkmann largely views postwar West German literature as little more than an endless, cliché-laden repetition, precisely because these writers have shunned contemporary materials.⁶⁵

In Brinkmann's polemical view, by breaking with European tradition and opening their art to influences outside the realm of what is normally considered literary, Kerouac, Burroughs and Ginsberg have removed "Literature" from the realm of fetishism. It then follows that their writings can be enjoyed by the same people who enjoy the products of a burgeoning mass culture. Their relevance lies not so much in their having fundamentally *changed* literature, but in their having expanded the *idea* of literature to incorporate the preexisting artifacts of the culture surrounding them. The expansion of individual consciousness is reflected in their art, which has become "a self-referencing expansion of

⁶⁵ The following wholesale endorsement of the surface manifestations of the mass ornament and concomitant wholesale rejection of postwar West German literature on the basis of the exclusion of same is, as should now be obvious, typical of Brinkmann: "...Während die Literaturprodukte der BRD gegen Ende der fünfziger Jahre nicht einmal Verweise auf aktuelle Gegenstände enthalten, die genormtes Verhalten löchrig machten—die Stirnlocke Bill Haleys, das wunderbare, wirre, aufregend schöne Geschrei Little Richards, Buddy Hollies (sic) Balladen oder den Rock Elvis Presleys, der schon 1957 acht goldene Schallplatten erhielt...sondern sich mit dem Bekannten weiterhin aufblähten wie fränkische Kirschgärten, nordische Flechte, die Heiterkeit eines Sommernachmittags (unter hohen Bäumen), etc., ließ sich die Beat-Generation wenigstens von den Stars der Jazz-Szene anregen..." (*Film* 229-30).

art, whose forms oriented themselves to existing materials”⁶⁶ (*Film* 230). In other words, they have reached back to the calculatedly antiartistic tendencies of Dada and Surrealism, the idea of “found art,” Apollinaire’s technique of composing poems from random snatches of conversation heard in the streets: tendencies developed in Europe, but which were always viewed as existing outside the mainstream of European art.

Literature no longer being a fetishistic object for the Beats, as Brinkmann interprets them, the “author” also loses his fetishistic status. Beat authors write not only in a variety of genres—one no longer thinks of the “poet,” the “novelist,” etc.—, they write and work in a variety of media. Instead of limiting their talent to a single genre, Brinkmann notes that the younger American writers now strive for multiplicity in their work, forsaking the artificial concept of the literary work that had been imported from Europe.⁶⁷ In other words, the much commented upon rebellions of the Beats are not merely an adolescent or even artistic pose, but rather Brinkmann regards them as a liberating force for all writers, freeing their work from the restrictions and expectations of publishing houses and literary circles such as the *Gruppe 47*. Instead of working exclusively in preexisting genres, Brinkmann asks: “Why not use existing genres...*however one pleases*, instead of using a genre or an area to please the publisher

⁶⁶ “eine sich andeutende Erweiterung der Kunst, deren Formen sich nach dem vorgefundenen Material richteten.”

⁶⁷ “Der Typus Schriftsteller selber veränderte sich: Vielseitigkeit wurde zu einem erstrebenswerteren Ideal als Einsichtigkeit, d.h. die Beschränkung der Begabung, auf einem Gebiet ausschließlich tätig zu sein, denn die Festlegung auf eine Gattung (Roman, Lyrik, Essay)--wodurch sollte sie begründet sein außer durch eine leichtere wirtschaftliche Verwertung? Warum irgendwo haltmachen?” (*Film* 230).

or ‘officially’ the public?...’⁶⁸ (230). The pleasure of the author as individual thus takes precedence over the labor-intensive production of a “work of art.”

Brinkmann sees these young writers as having awoken from a “narcotic” that proscribed not only traditional genre distinctions, but the Cartesian separation of mind and body. The liberation of the artistic consciousness follows for Brinkmann from the dissolution of this separation: “Intellectual spontaneity is coupled with physical spontaneity—this flaring up of a renewed sensual consciousness (or conscious sensuality) attempts to create new forms of expression—the starting point of writing is the subject, head and body together...”⁶⁹ (*Film* 234-5). They have begun, he writes, to turn away from the tendency, which he describes as an “autonomous compulsion that has become unconscious reflex”⁷⁰ (234) to use their work to render the usual “sociological, psychological or in some other way ‘humanistic’ contribution”⁷¹ (234). The sensual experience of mind and body together in the physical world is the starting point of Brinkmann’s notion of subjectivity.

In the final pages of *Der Film in Worten*, as in the last aphorism of *Notizen*—a close-up photograph of a woman’s parted lips, birth control pill poised on her tongue—Brinkmann links this changed consciousness regarding literature among American

⁶⁸ “Warum sich nicht der vorhandenen Gattungen bedienen..., so wie es einem selber gefällt, anstatt eine Gattung oder ein Gebiet zu bedienen, so wie es dem Verlag und ‘offiziell’ dem Publikum gefällt?...”

⁶⁹ “Intellektuelle Spontaneität wird mit körperlicher Spontaneität gekoppelt—das Aufflackern erneuten sinnlichen Bewußtseins (oder bewußter Sinnlichkeit) versucht, neue sinnliche Ausdrucksmuster zu schaffen—der Ausgangspunkt des Schreibens ist das Subjekt, Kopf und Körper zusammen...”

⁷⁰ “unbewußt gewordener, verselbstständigter Zwang”

⁷¹ “soziologischen oder psychologischen oder sonstwie ‘geisteswissenschaftlichen’ Beitrag.”

authors to the sexual revolution and what he sees as its emphasis on androgyny. More specifically, the disintegration of rigid traditional genre distinctions is directly linked to the dissolution of rigid traditional sexual behavior (and, therefore, to an expanding consciousness regarding literature as well as self).⁷² In other words, by turning the literary imagination away from the contradiction civilization-nature and toward the self, the writer's consciousness of literature becomes inexorably linked to self-consciousness of the most intimate aspects of individual existence. As such, "literature" shows itself to be just as discontinuous as "identity." The idea of genre, for Brinkmann, is continuously mutated within each text, just as the idea of sexual identity has been mutated by the sexual revolution. The fluctuations of genre and of human sexuality are incorporated into Brinkmann's notions of surface: "The permanent mutation of the individual genres, which can be recognized on the surface, is the fluctuation between the gender poles masculine-feminine, which is then again concretely admitted into the mutating movement of an individual text..."⁷³ (243).

If Brinkmann perceives his West German colleagues as lagging behind these American authors, the root of the problem is not to be found in their writing, but rather in consciousness itself. The politically engaged poets link the idea of consciousness to the societal and cultural "superstructure," and only radical upheaval in the superstructure can

⁷² "Die Auflösung bislang geltender starrer Gattungseinteilungen, die zwar schon von vereinzelt Autoren der ersten Jahrhunderthälfte gehandhabt wurde, doch erst jetzt als Faktum erkennbar ist, muß im Zusammenhang mit der Auflösung starren sexuellen Rollenverhaltens gesehen werden" (*Film* 240-41).

bring about a significant change in consciousness. For Brinkmann, there is no collective consciousness, only the consciousness of individuals who live on the surface of the superstructure, or mass ornament. Thus, liberation can only be achieved in the consciousness of the individual, and the path to this liberation goes directly through the mass ornament. He calls on his West German colleagues to abandon their guilty conscience and follow the American example, an example that indicates “that the realization that one can do anything with writing, is the realization of a tiny piece of liberated reality”⁷⁴ (240).

His posthumously published volume of poetry *Westwärts 1 & 2* (1975) best exemplifies Brinkmann’s notion of a radically liberated consciousness in poetry. It is a sprawling work of 184 pages, including sixty-one poems. The volume is bookended by several of Brinkmann’s own black-and-white photographs. Although originally published by Rowohlt’s “das neue buch” series shortly after Brinkmann’s death in 1975, the publishing rights were revoked by his widow, Maleen, over a dispute with the publisher, and *Westwärts 1 & 2* was subsequently not available for purchase for over two decades. When Rowohlt was finally allowed to republish the volume in 1999 it featured *Westwärts 1 & 2* on the cover of its quarterly trade magazine.

⁷³ “Die an der Oberfläche zu erkennende permanente Mutation der einzelnen Gattungen ist das Fluktuieren zwischen den Geschlechtspolen männlich-weiblich, das wiederum in die mutierende Bewegung eines einzelnen Textes selber konkret eingelassen ist...”

⁷⁴ “daß die Realisierung jenes Bewußtseins, mit dem Schreiben alles machen zu können, die Realisierung eines winzigen Teiles befreiter Realität ist.”

The poems in *Westwärts 1 & 2* vary widely in terms of length, thematic material, appearance and quality. It contains both his much anthologized “Die Orangensaftmaschine” (24) and “Einen jener klassischen” (25), as well as poems that seem to be little more than random thoughts scribbled down in a rage, such as the easily parodied “Im Voyageurs Apt. 311 East 31st Street, Austin” (76). Many of the poems are marked by a stark, meditative power, while others seem merely to imitate the structure of popular songs.

The thematic centerpiece is formed by the two long poems, “Westwärts” (42-47) and “Westwärts, Teil 2” (48-60). Like Goethe’s *Italienische Reise*, these poems are positioned to function as Brinkmann’s “texanische Reise” of self liberation and artistic rejuvenation, though in many ways they betray the fundamental sense of alienation that seemed to accompany Brinkmann no matter where he was. An examination of the first of these two poems will illustrate the functioning of Brinkmann’s ideal of a liberated consciousness, and thus liberation of the self, in his work.

“Westwärts” consists of three numbered parts.⁷⁵ The first of these is written in Brinkmann’s field style: the text is splayed across the page, sometimes with sequential lines continuing down and across the page, sometimes with little clusters of text opposing each other across the page. However, these clusters are not meant to suggest a dialogue or a meta-textual commentary; rather, they suggest the continual and random thought

⁷⁵ The full text of “Westwärts” appears in the appendix.

processes of stream-of-consciousness. The poem opens with the line: “Die wirklichen Dinge, die passieren... keine Buchtitel, Inhalte, Zitate”⁷⁶ (*Westwärts* 42). This line suggests that literature as commonly understood has little to do with “die wirklichen Dinge,” but is rather a self-reflexive exercise, and that the only true poetry is found in these “real things.”

The poem then follows Brinkmann as he travels westwards toward Austin, Texas, where he was to be the writer-in-residence for a semester in The University of Texas’ German Department. He changes planes in London and walks alone through the terminal. Throughout the poem, he interjects lines such as the following, to suggest that poetry is a continual, ongoing process: “Auf einmal, da war ich, an dieser Stelle, in meinem Leben. / Einige Zeilen weiter hob das Flugzeug ab”⁷⁷ (42). The poem becomes indistinguishable from his lived experience; its existence in print represents his decision to record this experience in verse.

Once Brinkmann arrived in the U.S., he was arriving where he had no family or friends. Although America was an important trope in his poetic and essayistic imagination, and though he did derive true inspiration from American artists, writers and musicians, it remained an utterly foreign continent to him. Just as important, however, as previously discussed, Brinkmann found it advantageous to American writers that they were not weighed down with the artistic traditions of their European counterparts. Thus,

⁷⁶ “The real things, they happen...no book titles, contents, quotes”

⁷⁷ “Suddenly, there I was, at this point, in my life. / A few lines later the airplane lifted off”

once he touches down in New York, Brinkmann records the feeling of having left not only his own life, but these traditions behind: “Beobachtung: ich schaute / auf das Flugfeld und hatte plötzlich das Gefühl, ich / hatte keine Vergangenheit mehr”⁷⁸ (42).

Brinkmann changes planes in New York and continues flying westwards, recording his thoughts. These sometimes consist of wordplay (“und wie fällt man in / die Liebe?”⁷⁹ (43)), sometimes sudden realizations (“Fleisch einführen / verboten”⁸⁰ (43) as he unwraps a self-packed sandwich over Nashville), and sometimes humorous (“Zur Problematik des / Dichterischen heute dachte ich die Frage, wer / mag schon die Bauern Südoldenburgs besingen?”⁸¹ (43)). Throughout this, he reminds the reader that these are not merely random details, but rather the poetry that is happening continually in all of our lives: “Die Wörter / ziehen uns weiter, / westwärts”⁸²). He finally finds his way to his motel room in Austin, records the name and address of the motel for the reader, and ends the first section: “&dann fing ich noch einmal mit der Zeile an, / Auf einmal, da war ich, an dieser Stelle, / in meinem Leben”⁸³ (44).

The second part of “Westwärts” consists of fifteen three-line stanzas and an ending couplet. It opens with an image of people sitting in a park. The openness of the outdoors beckons the poet, but the divisions of culture that keep people separated and isolated are

⁷⁸ “Observation: I looked out / at the airfield and suddenly had the feeling / that I no longer had a past”

⁷⁹ “And how does one fall / in love?”

⁸⁰ “Importing meat / forbidden”

⁸¹ “Regarding the problematic / of the poetic I wondered today, who / really wants to celebrate the farmers of Südoldenburg in verse?”

⁸² “The words / pull us on, / westwards,” 44.

⁸³ “And then I began once more with the line, / Suddenly, there I was, at this point, / in my life”

physically manifest: “und / man denkt, das ist Zärtlichkeit, / die mit dem Hinausgehen kommt. / Aber die Zäune behalten sie, / jeder für sich”⁸⁴ (44). He sees people sitting in the park, enjoying the outdoors, but no one speaks, forcing him to ask himself: “Wer hat davon / geträumt, unter einem südlichen / Baum nachmittags?”⁸⁵ (45). The following stanzas continue with images of transience: “Was angeschaut / werden kann, ist längst geschehen”; “bis der plötzliche / Windstoß durch die verlassene / Wohnung dringt”⁸⁶ (45).

Brinkmann ends this section with imagery that blends dream and reality. “Nun muß / er im Traum sprechen und spricht”⁸⁷ (45) he writes, though it is unclear who this “er” is. This unknown speaker, who “gives information / about the country,” is answered, however, by:

Polizisten in Grün, Striche, Sätze

Gebrauchsanweisungen für die Sätze

und Bilder im Traum, der die Dinge

schreibt und schreibt, bis zum

Ende, wo sich keiner mehr

⁸⁴ “and / one thinks, this is tenderness / that comes with going outside. / But the fences keep them / each to himself”

⁸⁵ “Who / dreamed that, under a southern tree / during the afternoon?”

⁸⁶ “What can be / seen has long since happened”; “until the sudden / burst of wind penetrates / the abandoned apartment”

⁸⁷ “Now he must / speak while dreaming and he speaks”

rührt, auf dem Papier.⁸⁸ (45)

It becomes clear that the images of potential happiness, of the freedom of being outdoors, ultimately of liberation, are replaced by those of isolation, desolation, loneliness. It is as if the newly freed individual has been reclaimed by the restrictions of culture. Thus, reality takes on a nightmarish quality: unable to truly know freedom, the individual's existence becomes the image of a text inscribed in a dream.

In the third section, the poet finally makes it to the west, but the west is a disappointment of banality (Brinkmann quotes the period bumper stickers “‘Think Trees’ / ‘I break for Animals’,”⁸⁹ (46)) and emptiness (“‘ich / in diesem enormen / Raum, / ‘der Westen’ / Dreck”⁹⁰ (46).) However, he also finds financial stability through his post at the university (“‘Ich sah plötzlich meinen / Namen auf den Schecks”⁹¹ (46)) and friendship (“‘Für Hartmut: ‘Fetzen von Gedichten fliegen herum’”⁹² (46)). Before a caesura in the third section of “‘Westwärts,” Brinkmann develops an image of contentedness and peace: “‘die hübschen, einfachen / Dinge, / im Westen, / Zitat: God works in wonderous / ways”⁹³ (46). The infernal restlessness created by Brinkmann's

⁸⁸ “Policemen in green, dashes, sentences / and pictures in the dream / that writes and writes the things until / the end, where no one moves / anymore, on paper.”

⁸⁹ Brinkmann's misspelling of “brake” as “break,” as well as his misspelling of *Harper's Bazaar* as *Harpers Bazar* a few lines down from this, imply a degree of linguistic alienation in his new home that accompanied and perhaps intensified the emotional alienation he was experiencing.

⁹⁰ “I / in this enormous / space / ‘The West’ / filth”

⁹¹ “Suddenly I saw / my name on the checks”

⁹² “For Hartmut: ‘Shreds of poems are flying around.’” His friendship with Hartmut Schnell is one of the few solid friendships the notoriously difficult Brinkmann was able to form during his time in Austin. See Schnell's correspondence with Brinkmann, *Briefe an Hartmut*.

⁹³ “the simple, pretty / things, / in the West, / Quote: God works in wonderous / ways.”

earlier image of life itself as a poem that never ceases (and thus never allows its recorders rest) is broken by Brinkmann's Faustian "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!"⁹⁴

After this caesura (marked in the text by a black line across the page), Brinkmann ends "Westwärts I" in a subdued voice. He is once again at an airport, preparing to return home after his year in the West: "Über dem sommerlichen Flugfeld / Fliegen, / Würde ich zurückkommen? / Wo?"⁹⁵ (46). Thus, though he had finally found stability, friendship and contentedness, the necessity of his departure reawakens his characteristic ambivalence towards the lived experience about which he writes. Unlike Goethe's Faust, whose insatiable curiosity drives him and Mephistopheles onward, Brinkmann seems rather pushed onward (or backward, as the case may be) by events external to himself. The aspect of contentedness that Faust discounts as an impossibility when he makes his famous deal, Brinkmann rather recognizes as possible but transient.

Brinkmann's image of the West, as well as his image of personal and poetic liberation, is fractured to a quiet image of emptiness by the end of "Westwärts." He ends the poem spiritually subdued: "Ich starrte auf die Buchstaben, / Hier, in der Gegend, mit den / wandernden Häusern, / nachts. / das war der Westen, / als ich den leeren, weiten Parkplatz überquerte"⁹⁶ (47).

⁹⁴ see Goethe's *Faust I*, line 1700.

⁹⁵ "Over the airport in summer / Flying, / Would I return? / Where?"

⁹⁶ "I stared at the letters on the page, / Here, in the region, with the / travelling houses, / at night. / that was the West, / as I crossed the wide, empty parking lot."

For Brinkmann, the poem of lived experience does not relate the spontaneous burst of energy of the Beats, nor the relaxed *flaneur* aura of Frank O'Hara's work. Rather, here it relates a mood of emptiness and resignation. Brinkmann's poetry throughout forms its own metaphor of liberation, but this becomes liberation *from* self as much as it is liberation of self. The work of the Beats and that of Frank O'Hara were such seminal influences for Brinkmann, as it provided him a template with which he could counter both the hermetic poetry of the West German 50s and the politically engaged poetry of the 60s. Together, he Born and Theobaldy used this template to forge their poetry of lived experience, the everyday, personal feelings and observations that became characteristic of the *Neue Subjektivität* movement of the 70s. Though their individual interpretations of liberation are very different, it ultimately becomes a trope for their liberation from the strictures of hermeticism in lyric poetry.

For Brinkmann, this liberation is captured in the mythical metaphor of going West. This is not a liberation that merely occurs in the form of his poetry: he is also liberated, from his past, from his professional and personal ties in West Germany, and from the concept of culture that Europe represented for him. Going west provided him with the same sort of *tabula rasa* sought by the *Kahlschlag* writers. That this image would end with the emptiness and resignation of the poem "Westwärts" is itself a commentary on Brinkmann's artistic methods and beliefs. Poetry is not an artificial creation rendered by the artist, but is rather everything that is external to the self, being felt and seen by the

recording angel at all times. Whereas the modernist poet is a creator who produces art from the void, Brinkmann creates a mirror image, in which poetry is a neverending reality happening continuously around the artist; at the center of it all, the poet is the void.

Thus, the image formed by the book, poems and idea *westwärts* becomes a metaphor *of and from* self, as the poet moves away from the European bastion of history and culture into the land of “pop,” where art has become de-historicized. For Brinkmann, personal experience and poetic experience become one. However, the ultimate emptiness of personal experience reflects the reality of personal and poetic experience. He insists through his work that the modernist invention of the poet-creator as a personality with a “rich inner life,” or any of a thousand other descriptive clichés, is the invention of a falsehood. The poetry based on personal experience becomes for Brinkmann the only true poetry. That his ambivalence towards art continues to reassert itself in his art as emptiness and isolation is ironically perhaps the fullest possible expression of the isolation and alienation that often characterize modernism. For Brinkmann, to have ever pretended otherwise is an illusion.

Chapter 5

To What Extent did Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy Americanize West German

Lyric Poetry (and does it matter)?

Two recent anthologies paint very different pictures of the vibrancy of lyric poetry in today's Germany. *Lyrik von Jetzt* (2003) seeks to present the work of the current "younger generation" of German poets. Edited by two members of this group, Björn Kuhligk and Jan Wagner, it is a collection of four poems each from 74 poets. The two prerequisites stated for the selection of this group are that each poet be born in 1965 or later, and that they currently be active through either recent publications or in appearances at readings.

The picture of this scene developed by Gerhard Falkner in his introduction is one of vibrancy, freshness and excitement. Instead of being choked off and eventually supplanted by newer forms of communication and culture, as the culture critics seem to endlessly prophesy, Falkner describes a scene in which lyric poetry has been fostered and nurtured by the very same. Describing this phenomenon, he writes: "The new generation, the generation that introduces itself here in such fullness, has a propensity for connection and a range of observation that only recently even became possible due to the hypertrophy of communication that did not previously exist"¹ (8). These new technologies and new forms of living are creating a new cultural scene away from the

traditional locations of culture: “While poetry readings in literary centers [*Literaturhäusern*] often remain phenomenally empty...cafés, clubs, movie theaters and other performance venues developed in Berlin out of the still somewhat dusty playgrounds of the alternative culture of the 90s that, though not always, were often full to bursting when poems were being read”² (9). According to Falkner, this vibrancy is partially a direct result of new technologies: those giving the readings, or those attending particularly engaging readings, are able to use forms such as instant text messaging to quickly gather a crowd of likeminded young bohemians. However, a further reason is given that could have been formulated by Brinkmann or any loosely associated member of the American Beats or the San Francisco Renaissance and that could be considered a broader indictment of the “culture industry” at large: “One hears poetry at those places where one would otherwise have gone anyway”³ (9). In other words, once a culture is dead—be it chamber music, jazz, schools of painting, or poetry readings—it is consigned to the symphony hall, the museum, or the *Literaturhaus*, respectively.

Thus, these readings take on the form of a living culture, in which the participants, both poets and listeners, are likely to linger and socialize long after the formal “reading” is over. And the poems themselves, rather than taking on the formal structures of high art,

¹ “Die neue Generation, die Generation, die hier zum ersten Mal in solcher Vollständigkeit sich vorstellt, besitzt eine Verknüpfungsdichte und einen Beobachtungsumfang, der erst durch die Hypertrophierung von Kommunikation in allerletzter Zeit überhaupt möglich wurde und die es so bisher nie gegeben hat.”

² “Während die Lyriklesungen in Literaturhäusern oft phänomenal leer bleiben...entstanden in Berlin aus den von den 90er Jahren noch etwas staubigen Spielstätten der Alternativkultur Cafés, Clubs, Kinos und andere Auftrittsorte, die nicht immer, aber oft zum Bersten voll waren, wenn Gedichte gelesen wurden.”

³ “Man hört Gedichte dort, wo man sonst vielleicht sowieso hingehen würde.”

assume a posture that will be familiar and recognizable to listeners in the audience: “And finally these poems often revolve around something that has a seamless recognition value with simultaneous real-time qualities of excitement. Consequently, these events are not accompanied by the mimicry of existential depression, but rather curiosity and concentration”⁴ (9-10). Finally, rather than having to set themselves apart as “art,” the modalities of these poems coexist easily and comfortably with the broader cultural moment in which the poets participate: “The structure of the poems is intelligent, mixed throughout with the multilinguistic nature of pop culture—the grooves, the freezes and the loops—the correspondences come as tunnel vision or dry reporting”⁵ (11) These are approaches to poetry of which Brinkmann would have approved.

As opposed to this, *Die Lieblingsgedichte der Deutschen* (2003), edited and with an afterword by Lutz Hagedstedt, describes a very different reality. The selections presented in this anthology are the result of polls conducted by Westdeutscher Rundfunk and the Patmos Verlag via radio, flyers and the internet. Hagedstedt also indicates an enthusiasm for lyric poetry similar to that described by Falkner: “The fear that there would not be enough participation, that the interest in lyric poetry is too small, was shown to be

⁴ “Und schließlich geht es in den Gedichten oft um etwas, das nahtlosen Wiedererkennungswert bei gleichzeitig realzeitlichen Wallungswerten besitzt. Folgerichtig werden diese Veranstaltungen nicht von der Mimik seelischer Niedergeschlagenheit begleitet, sondern von Neugier und Konzentration.”

⁵ “Die Struktur der Gedichte ist intelligent, durchmischt von der Multilingualität der Popkultur—den Grooves, den Freezes und den Loops—die Korrespondenzen kommen als Tunnelblick oder Trockenmeldung.”

groundless...over 900 poems by almost 300 authors were nominated”⁶ (166). And yet, *Die Lieblingsgedichte der Deutschen* seem to have been compiled on a different planet from those found in *Lyrik von Jetzt*. The youngest poet represented is Ingeborg Bachmann, who was born in 1926. Of the 49 poets (not including “anonymous”) whose work appears, only eight were even born in the twentieth century. It goes without saying that neither Brinkmann, nor Born, nor Theobaldy is represented; not even the work of major postwar voices Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Sarah Kirsch, Ernst Jandl or Günter Kunert, nor that of current media darling Durs Grünbein, merited inclusion by the respondents. The Germans seem to best like their poets dead.

Hagestedt defends the conservative choices of the readers: “Their, with permission, ‘conservative’ selection only confirms the trend...that after the opening in the 60s and after the broadening of the canon through the inclusion of new, experimental manners of writing and types of texts...there resulted a renewed consciousness of the traditional core area of high literature”⁷ (168). In other words, it is only natural that a period that involved a broader appreciation of a variety of art forms and a heretofore unseen inclusivity on the part of artists and the purveyors of culture would be followed by a reactionary backlash. He continues: “This core area...continues to resist the pressure of diffusion of this new poetry with remarkable solidity—a confirmation for all those who

⁶ “Die Sorge, es würde nicht genug Beteiligung geben, das Interesse an Lyrik sei zu gering, erwies sich als unbegründet...Über 900 Gedichte von knapp 300 Autoren wurden nominiert.”

⁷ “Ihre mit Verlaub ‘konservative’ Auswahl bestätigt nur einen Trend...daß nach der Öffnung in den 60er Jahren und nach der Erweiterung des materialen Kanons durch Hereinnahme neuer, experimenteller

attribute to contemporary poetry a specific weakness of structure”⁸ (168). Hagedstedt has thus pulled off the neat trick of defending conservative choices with... conservative values.

What, then, did Brinkmann and his cohorts accomplish? If we consider the poets represented in *Lyrik von Jetzt*, quite a lot, actually. First and foremost, apparently more than just small coterie orbiting university-sanctioned venues seem to be enthusiastically involved in the writing and reading of poetry. Furthermore, as Brinkmann ardently wished, these young poets have rejected the model of training themselves to write in modes of which the older generation would approve, and thereby confirm their own poetic succession, but rather mix freely with the broader culture around them, thereby allowing their work to partake in that culture, and target their immediate friends and colleagues with their work, not necessarily the masters of the *Literaturbetrieb*. In other words, as Brinkmann put it: “Why not use existing genres...*however one pleases*, instead of using a genre or an area to please the publisher or ‘officially’ the public?...”⁹ (*Film* 230).

It is important to note that Brinkmann does not exist as some sort of prophet or father figure for those writing today; his name only even appears in the anthology in the

Schreibweisen und Textsorten...wieder eine Rückbesinnung auf den traditionellen Kernbereich der schönen Literatur erfolgte.”

⁸ “Dieser Kernbereich...widersteht bis heute dem Diffusionsdruck neuer Poesie mit bemerkenswerter Festigkeit—eine Bestätigung für alle jene, die der Gegenwartslyrik eine spezifische Strukturschwäche attestieren.”

⁹ “Warum sich nicht der vorhandenen Gattungen bedienen..., so wie es einem selber gefällt, anstatt eine Gattung oder ein Gebiet zu bedienen, so wie es dem Verlag und ‘offiziell’ dem Publikum gefällt?...”

form of the stipendium named for him and awarded each year by the city of Cologne (and received in 2002 by the poet Hendrik Jackson (Kuhligk 373)). Furthermore, Brinkmann, and Born, and Theobaldy, wrote within the context of a more general cultural movement away from artistic exclusivity and elitism and toward inclusivity and eclecticism. Thus, the fact that younger poets include in their work “the grooves, the freezes and the loops” (Kuhligk 11) of a ubiquitous popular culture is not solely due to the revolutionary storming of the barricades by the young Brinkmann. However, his appeal to this popular culture during his lifetime was definite, influential, noticed. If he could be vilified during his lifetime as “a front garden gnome of the US pop scene”¹⁰ by Yaak Karsunke (Urbe 7) and as “faschistoid” by Martin Walser (36) during his lifetime for seeking to open the cultural doors to pop culture, it would certainly not be untoward to now extend him some credit for doing the same.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Brinkmann, and the American Beats before him, was to loosen the stranglehold of the *Literaturbetrieb* on notions of what constitutes literary art. Younger artists of today seem quite adept at availing themselves of all forms of expression present—multimedia, computer graphics, comics, popular graphics, and a variety of formats for the writing and presentation of poetry—without undue worry whether their contributions constitute art. Looked at in another light, all of this simply represents merely the latest incarnation of innovation, that bugbear which is

¹⁰ “Vorgartenzwerg der US-Pop-Szene”

continually decried and denounced by succeeding generations of cultural critics. What is notably different today is the growing autonomous power of the cultures surrounding these arts to sustain themselves without having to appeal to the “culture industry” for recognition.¹¹

Brinkmann saw the value of cross-pollination between popular culture, songs, graphic arts and poetry, just as Frank O’Hara saw the value of cross-pollination of poetry and Abstract Expressionism before him: their value lies in their status as *different* modes of cultural expression. Brinkmann refers repeatedly to Jim Morrison’s band “The Doors” in his writings, not because he wished Morrison’s texts to be read alongside Goethe’s, but because they had a positive effect on his own poetic production. And whereas popular culture was so denigrated in West German intellectual circles of the 1960s that Brinkmann’s endorsement of it was considered radical, it would today arouse indignation only among the culturally benighted. Karsunke’s attack on Brinkmann came from a leftist perspective: his endorsement of an American inflected popular culture was equated with *laissez faire* industrial capitalism and the war in Viet Nam. Today, however, such judgments are confined to reactionary conservatism.

¹¹ One could almost use a person’s stand on the debated literary canonization of Bob Dylan as a litmus test for where that person stands in these ongoing culture wars (much as, perhaps, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* was the litmus test for a previous generation). Hagedstedt mentions dozens of songs by popular recording artists submitted for consideration in his anthology, and briefly refers to said Dylan discussion, without weighing in one way or another. Such discussions entirely avoid the point that as a popular musician, Bob Dylan has sold millions of albums and seemingly touched millions of lives, up and down the intellectual food chain. Why should he even need formal recognition by the cultural powers that be? It would simply subvert anything he previously did to subvert the cultural status quo.

And yet...in the broader culture, in that culture which yearns for anthologies such as *Die Lieblingsgedichte der Deutschen*, all of the work not only of Brinkmann, Theobaldy and Born, but of all artists across the political and cultural spectrum who sought to challenge the status quo in art, seems to have largely gone unnoticed. In the spring 2004 volume of *Akzente*, Kornelia Koepsell has published a poem cycle called “Im Ring,” which takes as its thematic material boxing matches involving Sven Ottke, Dariusz Michalczewski and Vladimir Klitschko. It is important to note that these poems are not a dialectically engaged renunciation of the barbarity of boxing, but are rather poetic engagements with these particular boxing matches. Theobaldy also bragged in a letter of March 18, 1977 to Bender of having written a poem about the Foreman-Young fight, “because his [Foreman’s] laid-back boxing style in the fight against Ali really impressed me” (Bender, Nr. 104, p. 210). Theobaldy wished to make a rebellious statement with this boast, as boxing was a part of the broader degenerate culture that had no place in poetry. Today, poems about boxing have finally found their home in Bender’s old journal—a journal which, of course, is only read by the upper echelons of the intelligentsia. And yet, does this really represent a new situation for the arts?

A final consideration of the impact of Brinkmann, Born and Theobaldy would be that of their canonical status. Regarding this, Brinkmann’s position seems to be safe. The recent spate of scholarly books devoted to him notwithstanding, Brinkmann seemingly achieved this status with the appearance of the short, brilliant “Einen jener klassischen”

in *Westwärts 1 & 2* (25), subsequently included in the Reclam anthology *Deutsche Gedichte* (Bode 344). Having but one poem anthologized, even out of an entire lifetime's output, guarantees a poet of being read in perpetuity. As it did for this author some years ago, "Einen jener klassischen" will continue to serve as a portal for readers to Brinkmann's oeuvre. Almost perversely, this final, posthumous recognition by the masters Brinkmann spent a lifetime trying to infuriate assures that his work will continue to be read.

Though Born's "Da hat er gelernt was Krieg ist sagt er" is anthologized in the same Reclam edition as Brinkmann's "Einen jener klassischen" (338-41), the case with him and Theobaldy is not as clear. Certainly less scholarly attention has been paid to them, perhaps undeservedly so. Theobaldy is the sole remaining survivor of the three of them, and continues to be productive as a writer and, much as the German reading public, we literary critics also tend to best like our poets dead. But perhaps there are other reasons for Brinkmann's relative ascendancy. As Peter Handke put it in his characteristically polemical manner:

When I think about Nicolas Born, I sometimes ask myself why his poems, which, in their way, are just as fresh, wild and perfect in form as those of his friend Brinkmann, do not attract the same clamor as those of the latter. However, Nicolas Born will probably continue to be read, preserved and carried forward, though not by those who need and thus misuse a great

poet as a standard bearer *against* something, but rather by other readers, quiet and patient, who, when they avoid screaming ‘Nicolas Born!,’ know exactly what they’re doing.¹² (138)

Perhaps, as Handke indicates, the various controversies surrounding Brinkmann have served more to ensure his literary reputation and continued scholarly reputation just as much as or even more than his actual work. As such, Brinkmann the personality assumes an ascendent position vis-à-vis his generational colleagues. Perhaps, though, as Handke alludes, those readers who consider the poem before the poet will continue to read, value and preserve the work of both Nicolas Born and Jürgen Theobaldy.

¹² “Wenn ich an Nicolas Born denke, frage ich mich manchmal, warum über seine Gedichte, die doch, auf ihre Weise, ebenso frech, wild und formvollendet sind wie jene seines Freundes Brinkmann, nicht auch so ein Geschrei herrscht wie über die Lyrik des letzteren. Wahrscheinlich aber wird Nicolas Born genauso immer weiter gelesen, aufbewahrt und weitergetragen, doch eben nicht von Leuten, die einen großen Dichter als Bannerträger *gegen* etwas brauchen und mißbrauchen, sondern von anderen Lesern, schweigsamen, wartenkönnenden, die, wenn sie es vermeiden, ‘Nicolas Born!’ zu schreien, schon wissen, was sie tun.”

Appendix. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann's "Westwärts"

Westwärts

Die wirklichen Dinge, die passieren...keine Buchtitel, Inhalte, Zitate.

1 Sonne brüllt am Tag, Unterholz, verkrüppelte Vegetation,
sandverwehte Straßen,

in London steige ich um.

Ein kalter Wind weht durch die Halle. Das

Transparent schaukelt, Fortschritt, Frieden

Kartoffeln im Komputer.

Dann werde ich durchsucht.

Mich fröstelt.

Am Gebäude wächst eine Wiese vorüber.

Auf einmal, da war ich, an dieser Stelle, in meinem Leben.

Einige Zeilen weiter hob das Flugzeug ab. Die nächste Zeile
hie, eine matschige Winterdammerung in New York, bleiche
rosa Wolken fern und

nah ein Neger in Uniform vor der Tur,
der mit dem Kleingeld spielt.

Beobachtung: ich schaute

auf das Flugfeld und hatte plotzlich das Gefuhll, ich
hatte keine Vergangenheit mehr.

	(Die Negation
Ich schaute	der Zustande ringsum
	reichte nicht langer
durch die glaserne Wand.	aus.)

Auch das ging vorbei,

westwärts. (Anschnallen!)

(Drehtüren, Maschendraht,

Autobusse: "Ei läi in äh Field

Nun kamen

off tohl Grass samwär.")

andere Brechungen,

Zeilen.

Der Unterhaltungsteil hat

angefangen.

Die beste Entfernung für zwei Personen ist,

ein Meter zwanzig zu suchen,

überdrüssig der Bäume,

überdrüssig der Stadt,

Musik: Oh, sweet

nothing

Washington ist nichts

anderes, beim Drüberfliegen,

nachts, als eine Menge Funzeln in der

und wie fällt man in
die Liebe?

Dunkelheit,

und hier bin ich wieder,

abgeschnallt.

Ich bin nicht bereit zu glauben,
daß die Augen der Spiegel dessen sind, was man sieht.

(Hier wächst Gras!) & ich kaue

Fleisch einführen
verboten.

ein belegtes Brötchen aus Köln

über Nashville, Tennessee.

Zur Problematik des

Dichterischen heute dachte ich die Frage, wer
mag schon die Bauern Südoldenburgs besingen?

(...grünt Natur, fressen Tiere

Meine erstaunliche darüberhin)

Fremdheit!

Die nächsten Kapitel wurden überflogen.

Und

tiefer,

im Halbschlaf sagt jemand,

dösen

“Mensch, wo willst du denn

Abflammende Nacht,

an Land gehen?”

westwärts,

rotierender Sternhaufen,

Trampelpfade.

Steindickichte, Motten

verschollen.

Tänze,

wo kommst du her? Direkt aus

der Mitte von nirgendwo.

Natürlich nicht!

Die Wörter

ziehen uns weiter,

westwärts,

wohin? (Wer ist

Romananfang:

wer?) Und

(my heart went

boom)

die Mythologie der vier Himmels

als ich über den dichten

Richtungen bricht zusammen,

Rasen ging.

in verschiedenen Farben.

“Sprechen Sie Deutsch?”

Hier ist eine Wüste, dachte ich im Motel, nächste Zeile.

Eine tote Palme stand neben dem Swimming Pool.

(Villa Capri

Motor Hotel, 2400

Kleenex aus dem Schlitz

N. Interregional

Highway, Austin

in der Wand, zum Abwischen der Liebe,

wessen?

Der Aufwischneger bringt Bierdosen

& dann fing ich noch einmal mit der Zeile an,
Auf einmal, da war ich, an dieser Stelle,
in meinem Leben.

2.

Die Bäume glühten in dem kleinen
vertrockneten Park, dessen Farbe
verblichen war.

Wo über dem Hundekot ein Stern blitzt,
ist die Tür offen, hinauszugehen, und
man denkt, das ist Zärtlichkeit,

die mit dem Hinausgehen kommt.

Aber die Zäune behalten sie,
jeder für sich. Mit brüchigen

Blättern, raschelnd, auf dem
ärmellosen Pullover, kommst du?
Und so eine Liebe steckt abwesend

den Finger in die elektrische
Kaffeemahlmaschine und blutet im
Haus. Menschen sitzen im Gras, quer,

sagen nichts, Gewächse. Wer hat davon
geträumt, unter einem südlichen
Baum nachmittags?

Er hat sich im
Zeitrafferstil die Hände gewaschen.
So stecken sie immer

den Finger in den Traum,
blühen in dem Bezirk kurz an der
Gesellschaft entlang, möchten

fliegen, sitzen. Was angeschaut
werden kann, ist längst geschehen,
und irgendein Ich verbraucht die

Preise. Die Luft ist dort sonderbar.
Sie trägt nur eine Empfindung von
Wärme, wo jeder geht, bis der plötzliche

Windstoß durch die verlassene
Wohnung dringt, und sie wächst zu,
tu dir nicht weh! Zwiebeln im Auge,

Leberwurst auf der Brust, eine schwarze
Lakritzstange im Bauch, die Kinder
Spiele abgeholt. Hat jemand

seinen Staubmantel mit den
Ausweisen am Haken vergessen? Nun muß
er im Traum sprechen und spricht,

gibt Auskunft

über das Land. Was antwortet, sind

Polizisten in Grün, Striche, Sätze

Gebrauchsanweisungen für die Sätze

und Bilder im Traum, der die Dinge

schreibt und schreibt, bis zum

Ende, wo sich keiner mehr

rührt, auf dem Papier.

(& das tägl. gewöhnl. Leben,

immer noch ungesichert,

“zuviel auf den Straßen

3.

herumgelatscht, wa?” oder auf

Achse/lange Gespräche nachts

“Du schaffst es,” angenommen. Da bin

in vergammelten Parks)

(als das Farbfernsehen

zu Ende war,)

ich

“Think Trees”

in diesem enormen

“I break for Animals”

Raum,

kosmische

Rock 'n Roll Musikstation,
“der Westen” in der Nacht,
“oh bähbie”
Dreck,
Oder nimm die Variationen, die in den
ausgesparten Zwischenräumen
Eine Fortsetzung sind,
wollte sich bei mir nicht (du steigst
einstellen, um)
“die Äpfel, Bill,
westwärts die Äpfel,” wie Hart Crane
in den weißen Gebäuden rief.
vierundzwanzig
Stunden geöffnet, westwärts, (Und du entwischt ihnen
wirklich durch die
als ob das Innere der Seele Lücken.)
nur ein paar umgekippte Sommerschuhe sind,
die mitten im Zimmer liegen, die später in

einem Roman wieder
auftauchen.

große U Totem Kompanie,

Harpers Bazar,

Ich sah plötzlich meinen

International Vogue,

Namen auf den Schecks.

der Shit

Für Hartmut: "Fetzen von Gedichten fliegen herum,"

ist da

(anschnallen,

unbekannt.

abschnallen),

& Packpapier, braun,

verschnürt,

ich muß mich jetzt rasieren,

die hübschen, einfachen

Dinge,

("wie'n Filzvogel vorm

im Westen,

Spiegel?" wer kapiert das

richtig)

Zitat: God works in wonderous

ways.

Über dem sommerlichen Flugfeld ("Bloody Marys")

Fliegen,

Würde ich zurückkommen? aber kein Flugzeug,

Wo? sonntags.

Ich begann zu schwitzen.

Beschreibung: Der Mond war flach, die Blätter hart. Ein

totes Stinktier stank in die Nacht, wie

eine ganze chemische Fabrik.

Mußte man in der Gegenwart immerzu sich erinnern,

an sich selbst? Man war doch kein Gespenst,

Wohnwagen, Schlangen

Hier, in der Gegend, mit den

Gras, schwarze große Vögel,

wandernden Häusern,

krächzende Automaten im Februar.

nachts.

Ich starrte auf die Buchstaben,

das war der Westen,

als ich den leeren, weiten Parkplatz überquerte.

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