

**Autobiographical Writing and the
Representation of Illness – a Disability
Studies Perspective on Contemporary
German Literature (2007-2013)**

Nina Schmidt

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Germanic Studies

University of Sheffield

—May 2016—

Abstract

This thesis is motivated by a notable new wave – intensifying from 2007 onwards – of autobiographically inspired writing on illness/ disability, death and dying in the German-speaking world. By taking this writing seriously as literature, it examines how the authors of such personal narratives come to write of and negotiate their experiences between the poles of cliché and exceptionality, in text and in the wider public realm.

Identifying shortcomings in the approaches hitherto displayed to texts that have arisen out of personal experiences with illness/ disability, the introduction makes methodological suggestions as to how to better read these new illness narratives from the stance of literary scholarship. The thesis goes on to demonstrate the value of a literary disability studies approach to autobiographical illness writing in its four main chapters, which present close readings of five examples of contemporary illness narratives, namely: Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebete* (2011), Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht* (2009), Verena Stefan's *Fremdschläfer* (2007), and – in the final, comparative chapter – Christoph Schlingensiefel's *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein! Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung* (2009) and Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur* (2010-2013).

Each chapter analyses narrative strategies, aesthetic forms and experimentations with genre that can be observed in this kind of life writing. Its grounding in the field of disability studies gives the thesis an innovative perspective on each of the texts, and helps to identify gaps and contortions in the dominant readings of the analysed texts – readings which tend to disregard the illness experience at their centre or contest the texts' literary quality.

This thesis shows that when sharing their stories publicly with a wide audience, authors do so with a distinct awareness of the precarious subject position they take up in the public eye; a position they negotiate consciously and creatively in their literature. Writing the liminal experience of serious illness along the borders of genre(s), frequently moving between fictional and autobiographical modes, they carve out for themselves a space from which it becomes possible to speak up and share their personal story in the realm of literature, to political ends.

Contents

<i>Dedication and Acknowledgements</i>	7
<i>Abbreviations</i>	9
Introduction	
Contemporary German-language Illness Writing as Literature. Analysing Narrative Strategies, Aesthetic Forms and Experimentations with Genre through the Lens of Disability Theory	11
Chapter I	
Autofiction, Disgust, and Trauma: Negotiating Vulnerable Subject Positions in Charlotte Roche's <i>Schoßgebete</i> (2011).....	61
Chapter II	
Looking beyond the Self – Reflecting the Other: Staring as a Narrative Device in Kathrin Schmidt's <i>Du stirbst nicht</i> (2009).....	93
Chapter III	
Intertextuality and the Transnational in Verena Stefan's <i>Fremdschläfer</i> (2007): Writing Breast Cancer from Beyond the Border	121
Chapter IV	
Confronting Cancer Publicly: Diary Writing in <i>Extremis</i> by Christoph Schlingensiefel and Wolfgang Herrndorf	147
Conclusion	199
Bibliography	209

Dedication and Acknowledgements

In loving memory of my nan
Valeria Elisabeth Schmidt (née Zelter),
better known as 'Oma Liebling'
(1923-2016)

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my supervisors Dr. Caroline Bland and Prof. Sue Vice – for taking me on as their PhD student and for putting their trust in me when they hardly knew me. Your encouragement and guidance throughout the years has meant everything.

I would like to thank The University of Sheffield for providing my Faculty Scholarship, and the School of Languages and Cultures for its support of PhD students. I have benefited from the School's dedicated Postgraduate Research Travel and Development Fund on a number of occasions. Thanks must also go to the University's Learned Societies Fund.

Thank you to everyone in the Germanic Studies Department at Sheffield and those who are affiliated with it, for your interest in my work and your support.

For the small grants that, at various points during my research, made it possible for me to engage with the wider academic community in the UK and beyond, I am grateful to both the Association for German Studies and Women in German Studies. I am indebted to WiGS for their members' moral support and valuable advice as much as for any financial help.

I have had some wonderful years in Sheffield thanks to all the great people I have met here. Love goes out to you all. To my friends within academia and, maybe more so, those outside it: thanks for sticking with me. Thank you to my family. Sadly, my nan did not get to see me complete this thesis but her encouragement always inspired, despite her wondering 'wie du dir das alles merken kannst, was du da liest'.

To James: I blame you for having embarked on this PhD. But I love you anyway. You are the best.

Lastly, sincere thanks to all of 'my' authors whose texts have set into motion this research. I can only hope to have done your writing justice.

Abbreviations

In the main chapters, a number of primary texts will be referenced in parentheses. Their titles will be referred to in shortened form, as follows:

Wolfgang Herrndorf's <i>Arbeit und Struktur</i>	<i>AS</i>
Charlotte Roche's <i>Schoßgebete</i>	<i>SG</i>
Christoph Schlingensief's <i>Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung</i>	<i>So schön</i>
Kathrin Schmidt's <i>Du stirbst nicht</i>	<i>DSN</i>
Verena Stefan's <i>Fremdschläfer</i>	<i>F</i>
Verena Stefan's <i>Häutungen</i>	<i>H</i>

Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of German-language quotations provided in this thesis are my own.

Introduction

Contemporary German-language Illness Writing as Literature. Analysing Narrative Strategies, Aesthetic Forms and Experimentations with Genre through the Lens of Disability Theory

Consider how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change that it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to view, what precipices and lawns sprinkled with bright flowers a little rise of temperature reveals, what ancient and obdurate oaks are uprooted in us by the act of sickness, how we go down in the pit of death and feel the waters of annihilation close above our heads and wake thinking to find ourselves in the presence of the angels and the harpers when we have a tooth out and come to the surface in the dentist's arm-chair and confuse his "Rinse the mouth-rinse the mouth" with the greeting of the Deity stooping from the floor of Heaven to welcome us - when we think of this, as we are so frequently forced to think of it, it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature.¹

It is an impressive, paragraph-long sentence with which Virginia Woolf sets out to explore the relation of illness to literature, and creativity more generally, in 1925. Motivation for her then to write *On Being Ill* was to lament the lack of attention paid to illness. The literary world, she claims, has not explored illness adequately. In her elegant ways, and loaded with poetic imagery – maybe to prove exactly that it is possible to write illness 'literarily', although the role models may be lacking – Woolf emphasises the extraordinary point of view the experience of illness and pain can give writers (and other artists); grounding them in rather than enabling them to transcend the body. Dropping out of 'the army of the upright',² thrown back onto their own physicality, the ill writer not only recognises nature's indifference, but can also appreciate illness, for the intensity of feeling it brings, and as a liberating force in the social realm. In this sense, she does 'romanticise' the illness experience, with a view to valorising it. As much as Woolf suffered with illness personally (though this remains strictly between the lines in *On Being Ill*), she ultimately celebrates it in this essay, for broadening a writer's horizon.

In an article for *The New York Times*, Judith Shulevitz has pointed out an element of hyperbole in Woolf's central claim that illness has not been given its deserved place in literature, citing as counterexamples Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924) and Woolf's own *Mrs Dalloway*

¹ Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield: Paris Press, 2002; orig.: London: Hogarth, 1930), pp. 3-4.

² Woolf, *On Being Ill*, p. 12.

(which came out in 1925).³ Virginia Woolf's opening question is nonetheless a valid one, both in and beyond her time. And indeed she does not pretend there is no literature dealing with the topic of illness, but asks why there is not more of it, and why it has not come to occupy a more central place in literary history. This certainly is not 'a silly question', as Shulevitz provocatively dismisses it.⁴ Lastly, Woolf's point of criticism may be better understood when considering the essay's title. Not called 'On Illness' but *On Being Ill*, it stresses illness as lived experience (the stance from which Woolf too was writing her piece). Was it less illness as a general literary theme, and more specifically personal explorations of illness as lived experience that Woolf had failed to find in literature?

Over eighty years later, we find the artist and cancer diarist Christoph Schlingensiefel intervening in the German feuilleton debate that unfolded in 2009 on the (non-)place of illness narratives in literature.⁵ This was undertaken in reaction to an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* which had presumptuously set out to explain 'warum wir keine Krebsliteratur mehr lesen wollen'.⁶ Schlingensiefel responded thus:

ich lasse mir [...] von niemandem sagen, dass ich ihn mit meinen äusserungen, tagebuchaufzeichnungen zu diesem brutalen einschnitt verschonen soll. [...] ich habe in der härtesten zeit meines lebens nach literatur ausschau gehalten, die mir erklärt wie andere in diesen momenten gefühlt haben . und obwohl ich susan sonntag [sic] kennenlernen durfte, waren mir ihre bücher leider gar keine hilfe, sondern fast zwanghaft analysierte texte zu tuberkulose, krebs und aids. Distanzierte texte, die ihre eigene ohnmacht neutralisieren sollte.⁷

Under attack by the journalist Richard Kämmerlings, Schlingensiefel justifies his cancer diary publication and general media presence – on the topic, and as an ill person – by pointing out

³ Judith Shulevitz, 'THE CLOSE READER; The Poetry of Illness', *The New York Times*, 29 December 2002 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/29/books/the-close-reader-the-poetry-of-illness.html>> [accessed 17 January 2016]. Looking at the broader development in literature at the time, indeed it could be said that it was exactly during the modernist period that illness and disability were inscribed into culture, a time when many writers and artists rediscovered their appreciation for the grotesque; developing a liking for what Tobin Siebers, for visual culture, called *Disability Aesthetics*. Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2010).

⁴ Shulevitz, 'THE CLOSE READER; The Poetry of Illness'.

⁵ I will come back to this debate further below. The kind of illness 'narrative' I have in mind and which is discussed in contemporary Germany is written, although illness experiences can be and are also being shared orally, through dance, painting, and many other ways; and not all 'illness writing' is strictly speaking narrative in structure.

⁶ Trans.: 'why we don't want to read any more cancer literature'.

⁷ Trans.: 'I won't have anyone tell me to spare them my remarks, my diary recordings concerning this brutal caesura. [...] During the toughest time of my life I was on the look-out for literature that would explain to me how others have felt in these moments. And despite having had the honour of meeting Susan Sontag, unfortunately her books were of no help to me at all, but were merely obsessively analytical texts about tuberculosis, cancer and AIDS. Distanced texts designed to neutralise her own powerlessness.' Quotation from the online comment section beneath the article by Kämmerlings. Richard Kämmerlings, 'Krebsliteratur. Der Schleier über den letzten Dingen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 14 August 2009 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/krebsliteratur-der-schleier-ueber-den-letzten-dingen-1841182.html>> [accessed 20 October 2014].

what he saw as a distinct lack of illness narratives in late 2007/ early 2008 (a time just ahead of the new wave of German-language literature on illness that motivated this thesis, and into which Schlingensief's own diary publication falls). Those who doubt the veracity of Woolf's finding for her time (that illness was a neglected theme in literature around 1925) would certainly find Schlingensief's words here difficult to believe, and suspect him to be exaggerating in his typical manner. The additional comment he makes on Susan Sontag's writing on illness (which is just as canonical as Woolf's), however, clarifies what type of literature Schlingensief was searching for: namely the kind that, being informed by personal experience, invites identification and, beyond that, contemporary texts (although this remains implicit). He could not track down such writing at the time he was first diagnosed with lung cancer. This gap, it seems, was felt by other people as well. In subsequent years, the German-speaking world saw the publication of a series of German-language, literary texts grounded in the personal experience of illness and/or disability, including Schlingensief's own, by authors rediscovering the autobiographical and meeting a need in our contemporary times.

These texts have been met with unusual public and critical attention, for two possible reasons: because they constitute the first resurgence of a larger number of personal illness writings since the literature of the *Neue Subjektivität* [New Subjectivity] of the 1970s, and because they attend to a variety of illnesses/ disabilities, thus broadening the focus of the cancer and HIV/AIDS literature of the 1980s and 90s. They are widely published and read, as their inclusion in the *SPIEGEL*-Bestsellerliste indicates. Many of these texts receive increased attention from the review sections of German newspapers as well as from jurors of literary prizes. Among the new illness narratives are titles such as Helmut Dubiel's *Tief im Hirn. Mein Leben mit Parkinson* (2006), Verena Stefan's *Fremdschläfer* (2007), Ulla Berkéwicz's *Überlebens* (2008), Kathrin Schmidt's prize-winning novel *Du stirbst nicht* (2009), Miriam Pielhau's *Fremdkörper* (2009) and Jürgen Leinemann's *Das Leben ist der Ernstfall* (2009). Furthermore one can point to Sandra Schadek's *Ich bin eine Insel*, Christoph Schlingensief's *Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung*, Georg Diez's *Der Tod meiner Mutter* and Tilman Jens's *Demenz. Abschied von meinem Vater* – all published in 2009 – as well as Jens's sequel to *Demenz*, a rebuttal of the ferocious public backlash against it, entitled *Vatermord. Wider einen Generalverdacht* (2012). The resurgence also includes poetry such as Christian Sighişorean's volumes *Rose und Gebrochen Deutsch* (2009) and *VerLetztes* (2011).

Other yet more recent texts are Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebete* (2011), Arno Geiger's *Der alte König in seinem Exil* (2011), Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur* (2010-2013) and Alexander Görsdorf's *Taube Nuss: Nichtgehörtes aus dem Leben eines Schwerhörigen* (2013).

The comedian Gaby Köster wrote *Ein Schnupfen hätte auch gereicht. Meine zweite Chance* (2011) together with colleague and friend Till Hoheneder – and has since published a second book, *Die Chefin* (2015), which is a novel with a stroke survivor and wheelchair user as protagonist. David Wagner's *Leben* – the expansion of the short story *Für neue Leben* (2009) – was published in 2013 and won that year's Leipzig Book Fair Prize. Even more recently, Richard Wagner's *Herr Parkinson* (2015) came out, and in November 2015, former foreign minister Guido Westerwelle's *Zwischen zwei Leben* was published, the result of his collaboration with journalist Dominik Wichmann about his leukaemia. The list could go on.⁸ It includes what traditionalists would class as popular literature as well as what has been praised as high art, and it spans a whole range of writing styles from the prosaic to the poetic, and from non-fictional writing (documentary, essayistic, journalistic, diaristic writing, memoir) to more fictional/ novelistic forms (autofiction, experimental autobiographical novels). These texts have been published by a variety of publishing houses, including many respected imprints. Although work by first-time writers does get published, it is conspicuous that professional writers (academics, journalists, literary authors) and celebrities dominate the picture, the latter with a tendency to produce collaborative narrative.

Nonetheless: there is considerable diversity in this 'wave', not least in the types of illness experiences these writers address. Although cancer narratives still dominate the picture, writers today equally allow themselves to write about psychological trauma and the shock of bereavement (Berkéwicz, Roche), becoming disabled after a stroke (Köster, Schmidt), going deaf and life with a cochlear implant (Görsdorf), Alzheimer's disease as well as other forms of dementia (Geiger, Jens), autoimmune diseases and organ transplants (David Wagner) or how neurodegenerative conditions such as ALS or Parkinson's disease affect them (Dubiel, Schadek, Sighişorean, Richard Wagner). Within the texts listed above, there are examples of writing centring on illness that the authors themselves have experienced first-hand, but also of 'auto/biography', that is 'life writing that focuses on the relation between the writer and a significant other'.⁹ Diez, Jens and Geiger all offer examples of such texts. Brought about by a parent's suffering from illness, they chart the mother's or father's illness progression, and often their dying from their distinct perspective as their parents' children. Through the prism

⁸ It would extend even further if one were to widen the scope of one's view to include other European languages and cultures; such prolific and well-known authors as Henning Mankell (a friend of Schlingensiefel's and Operndorf-supporter) and fantasy writer Terry Pratchett come to mind immediately as two examples of prominent writers from outside the Germanic realm who have written personally about their illness – to political ends.

⁹ G. Thomas Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects. Ethics and Life Writing* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell UP, 2004), p. ix.

of that relationship, they thematise generational change and – although to varying degrees – the demands of their conflicting roles as child, carer, and writer.¹⁰

In order to explore contemporary German-language life writing and its aesthetics of illness adequately, a corpus of texts had to be selected that could be subjected to closer literary analysis. Realising that auto/biographical texts would require a distinct theoretical approach – one that would consider the ethics of writing another’s story as much as one’s own (in the way that, for instance, G. Thomas Couser’s study *Vulnerable Subjects* does) – and that in cases of collaborative writing such as Westerwelle and Wichmann’s, authorship would be difficult to determine, I decided to focus on autobiographical representations of illness. Not aiming to write a thematic study of one particular illness but rather to look for larger, structural similarities and differences across diverse representations of illness (in the makeup of the texts themselves as well as their reception), I selected texts representing a variety of illness experiences. This was done also to reflect the diversity I see in this wave of illness writings, despite some similarities in, above all, their socio-political motivation to share what are still deemed ‘private’ stories with a wider audience, as well as in the writers’ preferences for certain life-writing genres and writing strategies as they come out in this thesis.

Forming the basis of this PhD thesis are, to list them in the order of their publication, Verena Stefan’s *Fremdschläfer* (2007), Kathrin Schmidt’s *Du stirbst nicht* (February 2009), Christoph Schlingensiefel’s *Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung* from April of the same year, Charlotte Roche’s *Schoßgebete* (2011), and, lastly, Wolfgang Herrndorf’s *Arbeit und Struktur* (first published online 2010-2013). They represent a range of life-writing genres, encompassing autobiographical novels as well as autofictional and diaristic writing. The only one of my texts to be translated into English, to date, is Roche’s novel which was published as *Wrecked* in 2014. However, all of the other chosen texts have been translated into at least one other language – and indeed often more than one.¹¹ Each of the illness narratives considered here will be analysed for the narrative strategies, aesthetic forms and experimentations with genre that I

¹⁰ An example for an auto/biographical text that focuses particularly on the demands of caring for one’s ill and dying parents is the provocatively entitled *Mutter, wann stirbst du endlich? Wenn die Pflege der kranken Eltern zur Zerreißprobe wird* [Mother, when will you finally die? When caring for your ill parents becomes an endurance test] by Martina Rosenberg.

¹¹ *Fremdschläfer* was published in French as *D’ailleurs* (Montréal: Hélio trope, 2008). Schmidt’s Buchpreis-winning novel has so far been translated into Italian, Czech and Greek. The rights to publishing Schlingensiefel’s *Tagebuch* in translation have been sold to publishers Maarten Muntinga in the Netherlands and Kirja kerrallaan in Finland. Wolfgang Herrndorf’s diary has been translated into Dutch and published as *Leven met het pistool op tafel: een Berlijns dagboek* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Cossee) in 2014. The fact that these texts are picked for translation demonstrates their impact in the German cultural sphere, and their potential impact beyond the German-speaking world.

observe in this kind of life writing. By grounding my (distinctly literary) analyses in the field of disability studies, I am able to identify gaps and contortions in the hitherto dominant readings of these texts – readings which often effectively disregard the illness experience at their centre and/ or contest their literary quality.

On the basis of these five texts published between 2007 and 2013, I examine how illness/ disability as an aspect of identity is developed in and beyond narration, between cliché and exceptionality, both in the text and beyond it, in the wider public realm. Most, if not all, contemporary authors of illness narrative can be presumed to feel the eyes of the public already on them at the time of writing, and the other writers whose texts I deal with in this thesis have likely felt a similar lack of precursors to Schlingensiefel (whom I quoted at the outset). Aware of the ways in which a life writer's 'exercise in self-attention' stimulates the readerly imagination,¹² I examine how the authors – who are 'known' authors or artists at that – are able to create a space within which they can move publicly as they address themes of illness/ disability typically still understood as private matters. This approach draws particular attention to each text's formal features, and enables me to explore representations of (altered, and altering) selves in illness, and to trace authors' attempts to 'make sense' of illness (or their refusal to do so), privileging the perspective of personal experience. I interrogate each writer's motivation to thus share illness in the first place; a motive that is linked to both an author's needs when touched by illness as well as to the knowledge gained from the illness experience. To share the latter with the reading public – against convention, and despite the artistic and personal risks this involves – is recognised here as an ethical act.

A political conviction worth emphasising underlies the inclusion of representations of both psychological and physical illnesses in my corpus. The disability studies stance that I take up as a scholar resists applying the diagnostic gaze of the doctor onto the selected literary texts. Instead, from the perspective of lived experience, I would like to open up such medical/ diagnostic categories to an extent. Through my choice of texts, I position myself against a Cartesian body-mind split that is still at work in the popular imagination and that continues to keep the topics of mental and physical health apart, be it on the neatly arranged display tables of bookshops or in scholarly analyses. Cutting across this dualism, I aim to highlight that clear demarcations cannot be drawn between psychological and physical impairments, and that

¹² Rosamund Dalziell, 'Shame and Life Writing', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 2, L-Z (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 807-809 (p. 808).

indeed often, if not always, in a person's experience of illness, the psychological and the physical are closely intertwined.

Before delving into the individual literary analyses of each text in the main body of this thesis, in the remainder of this introduction, I will provide a brief overview of the history of autobiographical writing as it pertains to this study. I will then comment on the 'occasion for autobiography' that illness provides,¹³ before giving a short introduction to the history and objectives of disability studies, a field I identify with as a literary scholar. After introducing some of the most relevant terminology from the field, it will be explained why disability studies constitute a fruitful framework when dealing with illness narratives. I will then sketch out the media reactions that were to be observed in the context of the new German illness writings, focusing on the culmination of a feuilleton debate on the (non-)place of illness/ disability in German 'literature' in 2009 (in order to introduce the reader to the issues I see here). The debate will briefly be evaluated from the perspective of disability studies and life writing research. I will then move on to exploring how German Studies scholarship has so far addressed illness narratives, when it has done so at all. Mindful of the secondary literature that has been produced in English-language literary studies, I go on to point out the shortcomings I see in the approaches displayed in the realm of German-language literary studies, and suggest that alternatives need to be found to analyse, in an unbiased, detailed manner, the illness narratives in my corpus (as well as other examples of the genre in the future). The thesis as a whole aims to demonstrate what this approach could look like, builds on some fruitful theories from the fields of autobiographical, life writing and disability studies research, and aims to pave the way for future work in Germanistik from a literary disability studies point of view.

From Autobiography Proper to 'the Autobiographical'

From an admittedly Eurocentric point of view, the emergence of modern autobiography is generally linked to 'the emergence of the modern subject',¹⁴ with the associated rise of notions of individuality and agency across Enlightenment Europe. Philosophically, one can link the rise of autobiography to 'man' becoming 'embedded in the world' during the 18th century, as 'no longer simply a subject of knowledge, but also an object of [his own; N. Sch.]

¹³ Arthur W. Frank, 'Illness and Autobiographical Work: Dialogue as Narrative Destabilization', *Qualitative Sociology*, 23.1 (2000), 135-156 (p. 135).

¹⁴ Helga Schwalm, 'Autobiography', in *the living handbook of narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn and others (Hamburg: Hamburg University, last revised 2014) <<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/autobiography>> [accessed 9 September 2016] (para. 9 of 28).

investigation'.¹⁵ The study of human psychology has its origins in that time, branching off from philosophy to become a separate discipline. The introspective self-scrutiny advocated by the pietist movement grew in popularity from the late 17th century – and further contributed to the spread of autobiographical writings; diary-writing, for example, was taken up by many pietists. As being able to read and write in the vernacular languages of Europe became more common, and the diversity of the texts in circulation extended beyond religious pamphlets and catechisms, a new appreciation of authorship itself can be observed. The wider sociohistorical context allowing for the advent of autobiography as a genre is one of secularisation, the rise of literacy and the development of the book into a mass-produced, more easily affordable commodity.¹⁶

Although nearly as difficult to define and as large and complex a category as fiction, designating a text as an autobiography typically evokes ideas of one that

is characterized by autodiegetic, i.e. 1st-person subsequent narration told from the point of view of the present. Comprehensive and continuous retrospection, based on memory, makes up its governing structural and semantic principle. Oscillating between the struggle for truthfulness and creativity, between oblivion, concealment, hypocrisy, self-deception and self-conscious fictionalizing, autobiography renders a story of personality formation, a *Bildungsgeschichte*.¹⁷

Canonical texts exemplifying this prototype are numerous, with Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782-1789) and Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811-1833) among the most widely cited. Autobiography, at this point, and in this narrow form, was a form of expression reserved for a select elite of largely white, male figures.

Since then, the autobiographical field has diversified dramatically in authorship, thematical foci and form(s); originally a highly exclusive form of expression, autobiography has been destabilised, then rewritten as an inclusive genre. It has become what we can aptly describe as a widespread cultural practice. In this process, it has shed much of its certainty about the author's sense of entitlement to self-expression and diverged from the traditional teleological

¹⁵ Dennis Schep, 'I Problems: Blindness and Autobiography', *European Journal of Life Writing*, 4 (2015), 17-35 (p. 18). This extends to administrative, legal and medical contexts too, within which aspects of people's lives became more commonly recorded – in the form of statistical data or as criminal/ medical case studies.

¹⁶ For a more extensive summary of the literary history of autobiography, see, from a Germanist's perspective, Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie*, Sammlung Metzler, 323 (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Metzler, 2000), pp. 100-201; for an English-language publication on the development of the genre from Saint Augustine until today, see: Linda R. Anderson, *Autobiography*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁷ Helga Schwalm, 'Autobiography' (para. 2 of 28).

trajectory. Politics, especially the politics of representation, has come to have a strong influence on autobiographical writing.¹⁸

As they emerge from the diverse rights and protest movements of the 19th and twentieth century, autobiography's new voices problematise – within the genre – some of its founding myths: these new voices question the idea of a unified/ coherent self, of authorly autonomy, and of the transparency of language, memory and history. Additionally, the autobiographical subject can be observed to become re-embodied, especially in texts that have as their main focii gender and/ or race, or, of course, illness/ disability. In short, autobiography – formerly a self-assured expression of cultural dominance – becomes a highly self-conscious genre, a medium for 'writing back', to employ a term from postcolonial studies, and thus a 'prominent ground for cultural critique'.¹⁹

All this has implications for the form(s) more recent life writing takes: most autobiographical writers of the 21st century (especially those previously confined to the margins of the literary field) produce texts that appear open and processual rather than stable or final, just as their content is decidedly 'intersubjective',²⁰ or 'relational'.²¹ They are rarely easy to describe using just one genre label.

Engaging in the autobiographical without necessarily being autobiographies in the classic sense, these texts tend to focus on aspects or stages of a life rather than any narratable whole. Life writing scholarship has of course recognised these shifts, and in academic language, 'the autobiographical' today refers to more than autobiographies in the narrower sense,²² as it better describes this development, as well as the general breadth and heterogeneity in the content and form of contemporary autobiographical endeavours. Life writing scholarship's growing interest in realms other than the strictly literary, such as the medial, digital and virtual worlds as other important arenas in which contemporary selves are being negotiated,²³ must also be understood in relation to favouring this more open term.²⁴

¹⁸ To suggest further reading on this, Sidonie Smith writes of the genre's transformation in her article 'Self, Subject, and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-century Autobiographical Practice', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 9.1 (1990), 11-24.

¹⁹ Smith, 'Self, Subject, and Resistance', p. 21.

²⁰ Term used by Smith, pp. 6, 11.

²¹ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell UP, 1999), see esp. chapter 2 'Relational Selves, Relational Lives'.

²² So does the term life writing, which extends to letters, diaries, blogs, and more.

²³ Often, these worlds can and do intersect.

²⁴ See, for example, the breadth of topics covered by the articles making up a recent edited volume on autobiographical forms: Carsten Heinze and Alfred Hornung, *Medialisierungsformen des (Auto-)Biografischen* (Konstanz/ München: UVK, 2013).

Even when keeping one's focus on the literary world, one must recognise that the autobiographical today has entered much contemporary writing; it wilfully ignores genre boundaries and wanders between fact and fiction. The currency that terms like 'autofiction' (Dobrovsky) or 'autobiografiction' (Saunders) have gained in recent years reflects this development, as well as the need, and difficulty, to find new words in order to grasp the diversification and hybridisation of such writing. As Max Saunders highlights in relation to the way modernist writers approached autobiography, a text's 'autobiographical dimension can be covert, unconscious, or implicit'.²⁵ Speaking of 'the autobiographical', then, allows scholarship to read texts that position themselves ambiguously between fact and fiction from the vantage point of life writing studies.

In the particular case of this thesis, to do so enables me to bring together texts that at first sight do not seem to have much in common – yet, significantly, the discourse around them is strikingly similar, as will be shown later in this introduction. This indicates that the debate these illness narratives have incited hinges on their relationship, however fictionalised or ultimately unclear it may be in some cases, to an author's own life experience. It also allows me to relate to each other not only different life-writing genres (from the autofictional to the autobiographical novel to the diary genre), but texts by professional authors and first-time writers (whose experience of illness/ disability has turned them authors), in other words, to relate what is thought of as high literature to products of pop culture.

While it is not the aim of this thesis to advance the theoretical debate on autobiography's status as a genre,²⁶ it remains to position this study towards the debate. For my purposes here, it seems advisable to conceptualise 'autobiography-and-fiction as a system or set of discursive and formal practices' in the way Saunders does.²⁷ Saunders makes the pertinent observation that the autobiographical 'gains its significance [only; N. Sch.] according to its relation to the term "fiction" (whether opposed or combined)',²⁸ with writers developing 'an increasing awareness of this system' through the centuries.²⁹ Instead of propagating an either-or position, then, Saunders suggests that '[p]erhaps [...] we should speak of the *autobiographic effect*, or the *fictional effect*, and recognize that particular works can produce first one then the other'.³⁰

²⁵ Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), p. 5.

²⁶ A debate that is ongoing ever since the publication of Paul de Man's provocative essay 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN*, 94.5 (1979), 919-930.

²⁷ Saunders, *Self Impression*, p. 524.

²⁸ Saunders, *Self Impression*, p. 524.

²⁹ Saunders, *Self Impression*, p. 524.

³⁰ Saunders, *Self Impression*, p. 526.

The following section deepens these reflections on the autobiographical in combination with a focus on the experience of illness/ disability as a crucial motivator (personally, politically, and ethically) for engaging in life writing.

Illness and the Attraction of the Personal

‘Die Leute überleben schwere Krankheiten mehr als früher, und dann kann man auch hinterher drüber schreiben.’³¹ This is author Kathrin Schmidt’s terse explanation for the rising number of German-language publications of personal illness narratives. Schmidt is right to correlate the advances of modern medicine and our growing life expectancy to the proliferation of these kinds of texts. Yet there may be more to it (and indeed her remark falls short of explaining the occurrence of autothanatographical writings, which make up two of the five texts dealt with in detail in this thesis). Despite its commonness, the experience of illness has not lost any of its shock value in contemporary society. It has not been normalised. As the medical sociologist Arthur W. Frank emphasises, the experience of a lasting disease or impairment takes most people by surprise – regardless of the age at which they experience it.³² In Havi Carel and Rachel Cooper’s recent philosophical definition,³³ for the individual confronted with it, ‘illness [and/ or its diagnosis, as I am tempted to add; N. Sch.] disrupts the lived experience of one’s body, leading to an overarching existential disruption of the ill person’s way of being in the world and their life world’.³⁴ Illness, in other words, creates fissures in one’s story of the self, in both the internal narrative and how one presents to the world. It initiates, to echo Woolf, ‘spiritual change’.³⁵

Across the disciplines, the ill person thus fundamentally unsettled – thrown back on their messy, mortal bodies, coming up against the limits of their agency that tend to go unrecognised in times of relative health – has been found to evince a storytelling impulse in reaction. Frank, for example, declares: ‘[i]llness is an occasion for autobiography.’³⁶ This alone does not yet, of course, give any clues about author’s intentions, hopes or desires in addressing their illness experience through life writing (nor concerning this writing’s effect

³¹ Trans.: ‘People are more likely to survive serious illness than they were in the past, meaning you can write about it afterwards.’ Gerrit Bartels, ‘Überlebensgroß’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 15 October 2009, p. 25.

³² Frank, ‘Illness and Autobiographical Work’, p. 135.

³³ Informed by an engagement with phenomenology, and influenced by the work of S. Kay Toombs.

³⁴ Havi Carel and Rachel Cooper, ‘Introduction’, in *Health, Illness and Disease. Philosophical Essays*, ed. by Carel and Cooper (Durham: Acumen, 2012), pp. 1-20 (p. 8).

³⁵ Woolf, *On Being Ill*, p. 3.

³⁶ Frank, ‘Illness and Autobiographical Work’, p. 135.

once published). For life writing scholar Kay Cook, an explanation for the rise in illness narratives lies in our strong identification with our physical bodies:

Clearly, as in no other time in history, the body is the self, and the ill individual's narrative seeks to gain control – or wrest it from the medical establishment – of the illness through creating discourses that counter, among other challenges to identity, the jargon of the medical world.³⁷

Cook understands the formulation of illness narrative as reassurance of oneself or one's language and with that one's agency, in more or less direct distinction to the medical world (and its respective language). In his 1997 book *Recovering Bodies*, G. Thomas Couser sees the wish to contribute to a condition's destigmatisation as a particularly powerful motivating cause for illness narrative.³⁸ At the time of writing, he may have specifically had AIDS narratives and their politics in mind. Published illness writing, therefore, is as much as born from the personal as it is politically motivated, and outward-facing. Thinking across the spectrum of illnesses/ disabilities, Couser further writes: 'One common purpose [of personal illness narratives] is to invalidate cultural narratives of invalidism.'³⁹ To look ahead, this still seems to match at least some of what the German-language authors read in this thesis do.

The sociologist Frank understands autobiographical narrative as a 'means of repair' for lives disrupted in the way Carel and Cooper describe.⁴⁰ Ignoring the mechanistic (and slightly simplistic) assumption underlying his phrasing of 'repair', Frank here (and elsewhere) clearly stresses the therapeutic element of autobiographical work; he values illness narratives for it. When people do turn towards attending to illness autobiographically – and many do not – they are frequently assumed to have such therapeutic intentions by those who take an academic interest in such writing. At least this is what appears from the survey of the largely English-language scholarship on the matter, which has paved the way for the approach taken in this thesis.⁴¹

³⁷ Kay Cook, 'Illness and Life Writing', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 456-458.

³⁸ G. Thomas Couser, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (Madison/ London: U of Wisconsin P, 1997), p. 8.

³⁹ Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Frank, 'Illness and Autobiographical Work', p. 135.

⁴¹ The notion that illness narrative is therapeutic reaches back to the 19th century and Freud's 'talking cure', at least for psychological illness. For physical illness, the idea gained momentum from 1988, when Arthur Kleinman published *The Illness Narratives*; a book which emphasised the importance he saw for medical practitioners in listening to patients' accounts and which highlighted the storying of the illness in dialogue with the patient as therapeutic. From there, it runs like a golden thread through the academic writing on illness narratives, especially when undertaken from the perspective of medical sociology (e.g. Frank) or the medical humanities (e.g. Hawkins). Aside from this, a whole field of scholarly work, namely that of bibliotherapy, rests firmly on the belief in the therapeutic functions of writing the ill self and reading about others' experiences. Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives. Suffering, Healing & the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, 'Writing about Illness.

The therapeutic interpretation crops up, furthermore, in German literary critics' writing about autobiographical illness narratives of the 1970s and feuilleton reactions today. It must be treated with care, I argue, when aiming to take the texts under examination seriously as valid objects of literary studies, for this topos has the potential to harm a person's story, by restricting its meaning to the writing individual's life. Although from a medically informed perspective, such emphasis on the therapeutic effect of illness narrative is often intended as an entirely neutral, even a positive point (out of my authors, as we will see, Charlotte Roche and Christoph Schlingensiefel in particular invest in the idea of writing as self-healing), the connotations become less positive when the term is taken up by literary criticism. As will be shown, the label 'therapeutic' then marks such texts out as inward-looking, if not narcissistic. This isolates both text and author from the cultural context from which they emerged, and closes down avenues of interpretation (especially regarding the cultural work that they do, or tracing what has motivated the textualisation and publication of someone's experiences) rather than encouraging their intellectual exploration.

Another interpretative model that appears regularly is that of the confessional.⁴² We read of it in *On Being Ill*, too: illness, according to Woolf, 'enhances our perceptions and reduces self-consciousness. It is the great confessional; things are said, truths are blurted out which health conceals'.⁴³ Woolf, from the perspective of a creative writer, sees illness as an enabler for autobiographical writing. She adds a psychological dimension to it when highlighting an

Therapy? Or Testimony?', in *Unfitting Stories. Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma*, ed. by Valerie Raoul and others (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007), pp. 113-127.

⁴² The confessional is a paradigmatic subgenre of the autobiographical: Saint Augustine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's autobiographies, both bearing the genre designation in their titles, are landmarks in the development of the field. According to Dominic Manganiello, Augustine's *Confessions* from around the year 400 'established the prototype confessional autobiography' (p. 228). With the story of his conversion to Christianity being the highlight and indeed the trigger of the self-narrative, it is due to Augustine that the confessional as a genre or model in life writing studies, up until today, evokes connotations of religion, sin and redemption; the focus of the narrative, however, being on God (and praising God) rather than having the individual at its centre. Rousseau shifted this emphasis dramatically in his *Confessions* (completed in 1765, first published 1781), with the text marking 'the secular transformation of the genre' (p. 228). Rousseau's confessions are being made to the reader, not God (p. 229). Dominic Manganiello, 'Confessions', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 228-229. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, in *Reconstructing Illness*, contends that contemporary 'pathographies' (i.e. illness narratives) have replaced stories of religious conversion popular in earlier eras. She highlights the extent to which mythical thinking pervades the illness narratives in her corpus, and identifies the main metaphors used in storying and coping with illness, namely that of battle, journey, and death and rebirth. Her thesis has been very influential on subsequent research into narratives of illness/ disability. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Reconstructing Illness. Studies in Pathography*, 2nd edn (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1999). Kay Cook points out that '[h]istorically, [...] illness narratives were closely linked with spiritual and mystical autobiographies and [illness] constituted the central event – the vision or the conversion – in the narrator's life.' Cook, 'Illness and Life Writing', p. 457.

⁴³ Woolf, *On Being Ill*, p. 11.

element of recklessness in the ill writer's endeavour. Doing so, Woolf promises the reader of personal illness narratives rare, truthful, and potentially provocative, insights: the currency in which autobiographical writing trades. At the same time, she undersells the artfulness and narrative strategies of autobiographical writing – the phrasing that truths are 'blurted out' instead supports notions of immediacy, intimacy, indiscretion even.

Writers, like Woolf above, do like to play with the idea of the confessional as a mode of relating their experiences. It is one way of generating readerly interest in writing about illness. Traces of this can be seen in Roche's *Schoßgebete*, for example; not least because it attracts a readership. Yet, the mode may not be as dominant in illness writing as the available secondary literature to date suggests. That the idea looms so large in the critical discourse is both understandable, and problematic. It is understandable, in fact, it seems logical to expect autobiographical illness narratives to take a confessional shape '[i]n a society where health is upheld, paradoxically, both as a normative, regulating category and as an ideal state of personal utopia.'⁴⁴ This applies to both the cultural realm of the United States, on which Einat Avrahami's research focuses, and the Germanic one investigated here, as well as other western contexts. Avrahami infers therefore that 'the decision to disclose a seriously debilitating illness is itself transgressive, verging on admittance to a state of sin,' Avrahami infers.⁴⁵ However, in so far as it is bound up with the myth that ill people have somehow deserved their illness, on account of behaviours, lifestyle or attitude (this, it would seem, is what needs confessing), the continued centrality of the confessional mode to our readings of illness narratives is problematic. This is because it (re-)locates illness to the individual – in ways that in the past, for instance, the idea of the 'cancer personality' did. Furthermore, conceptualising illness narrative as confession hierarchises the relationship of author and reader in a manner antithetical to what we find in the contemporary illness narratives examined here. These texts instead stress the equality and similarity of autobiographical author and readership. This is writ large particularly in the poetics of Verena Stefan and Christoph Schlingensiefel (explored in Chapters III and IV).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Einat Avrahami, *The Invading Body. Reading Illness Autobiographies* (Charlottesville/ London: U of Virginia P, 2007), p. 76.

⁴⁵ Avrahami, *The Invading Body*, p. 76.

⁴⁶ Picking up, like me, on the pervasiveness within scholarship of the 'confessional' as a structure for or motivation behind personal illness narratives, Avrahami makes it central to her analysis of Harold Brodkey's *This Wild Darkness. The Story of my Death* (1996). She details how in his account, the author navigates the confessional mode 'both in earnest and as a literary ploy' (p. 76). He is drawn to it in two ways: firstly as an AIDS sufferer who 'internalized abjection' and secondly as an author who seeks an audience (p. 77). For more, see: Avrahami, *The Invading Body*, pp. 73-96.

None of this is to deny that narrating illness can be therapeutic or confessional in part, but as published life writing texts, illness narratives must be expected to be both inward- and outward-looking. Above all, we must consider illness narratives, like any other literature, as multidimensional, and complexly motivated. Analysing the German-language texts at its heart, this thesis aims to approach them in a way that, with Avrahami, we could call ‘unpatterned’, or open-minded.⁴⁷ For the researcher, this means employing ‘a modest, self-conscious mode of reading’ – the kind that is aware of the master plot of personal illness narratives and the most prevalent myths relied upon in storying illness, but does not force them onto a text at all cost.⁴⁸ Such reading cannot allow itself a bias towards one type of emplotment at the expense of others, in the way that, for example, Frank ends up doing in his work. Narratologist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan cogently sees through this tendency of his and, in contrast to Frank’s model of the ‘phoenix narrative’ (which is the one he favours), ends her article on ‘Illness and Narrative Identity’ in a defence of fragmented and chaotic writing, and illness narratives ‘without epiphanies’.⁴⁹ Rather than forcing the narratives at the basis of this thesis into a preconceived interpretative framework, then, the methods employed here foreground each author’s individuality and the complexity of each text even as they detect and make sense of the larger cultural patterns negotiated within them.

With *Recovering Bodies*, Couser was the first English-language literary studies scholar to write against the idea that autobiographical art centring on illness, death or disability was ‘undiscussable’.⁵⁰ He argued that ‘to refuse even to consider [illness narratives or autothanatographies] as potential art seems a form of denial, an arbitrary ruling out of an important, if threatening, aspect of human experience’;⁵¹ and worse, it manifests a disregard for voices – people – relating such experiences. The problem that Couser identified in the U.S. cultural context in 1997 still holds true for the German literary sphere twenty years later. While in contemporary Germany the eyes of the publishing world and the media affiliated with it have very much turned towards illness narratives in recent years – leading to wider public attention and boosting sales figures for many of the books, but showing only limited understanding of the illness experiences at the heart of these texts and their autobiographical

⁴⁷ Avrahami, *The Invading Body*, p. 96.

⁴⁸ Avrahami, *The Invading Body*, p. 96.

⁴⁹ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, ‘The Story of “I”’: Illness and Narrative Identity’, *Narrative*, 10.1 (2002), 9-27 (p. 24).

⁵⁰ Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, p. 290.

⁵¹ Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, p. 290.

relevance – literary scholarship has as yet kept at a safe distance from these new personal narratives of illness/ disability.

As a work of literary scholarship, this thesis begins to make up for this negligence. It will read the texts in its corpus unequivocally as literature, and, by tracing narrative strategies, aesthetic forms and experimentations with genre in storying illness, it will attend to exactly those elements of the texts which are often assumed to lack sophistication in autobiographical writing about illness/ disability. What underlies the research presented here is the conviction that much of a text's force of expression is carried by its formal features. It is essential to examine these in connection with and as meaningful for the content of the illness narratives – precisely because of the texts' autobiographical dimensions and the persistent idea of their art- and formlessness. Doing so, this thesis comes to find that the presence of the implied reader in the mind of the author (or as constructed by the text) influences writing strategies and pushes formal innovation.

The French theorist Philippe Lejeune's work on the autobiographical – from his theorisations on autobiography proper, to his studies on more experimental narratives of the self, popular texts as well as unpublished ones, through to the diary – has triggered much of the critical thinking on the texts discussed in this thesis in terms of their genre affiliation and this affiliation's significance. Lejeune's writing is valuable to this thesis not least because of his relatively early ventures into fields outside of 'high literature', related to his grasp of our propensity for the autobiographical 'as a pervasive social and cultural phenomenon'.⁵² With Lejeune's work in mind, an important focus of the thesis is the question of each text's 'packaging' in terms of genre. In each chapter, I ask: How is a text's genre designation linked to the issues it negotiates, and to the conflicting wishes of, on the one hand, wanting to speak out and be heard about illness, and on the other, protecting one's vulnerable subject position as one does so? Almost as important is the question concerning the effect genre has on our reading of personal illness narratives.

In academic autobiography studies today, looking for any kind of straightforward truth in autobiographical writing is agreed to be a dated approach, and a *cul-de-sac*. However, analysing truth or truthfulness (in a relatively literal/ factual sense) was a major concern of autobiography studies when it emerged as a field in the 1950s and 60s, see, for instance, Roy Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960) – a publication that started to change this.

⁵² Paul John Eakin, 'Foreword', in *On Autobiography*, ed. by Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989), pp. vii-xxviii (p. xvi).

After the deconstruction of such criteria by poststructuralists, there is a consensus within literary scholarship today to see the fictional in any ‘true’ account (if simply by the necessary step of mediation – that is remembering and putting into speech or writing – of the account), as well as to assume that any fiction writing is somewhat grounded in life experience. Nonetheless, the lay reader continues to have heightened expectations when a text signals autobiographical relevance.⁵³ Ideas of truthfulness or authenticity therefore remain relevant in the discussion of autobiographical writing, especially as they influence reception.⁵⁴

Lejeune formulated the ‘autobiographical pact’ in 1975 with all this in mind. The pact describes the special relationship between the writer and reader of autobiographical writing, one that is invested heavily in by both parties. This thesis contends the pact to still be a productive ‘hypothesis and [...] working tool’ when working on contemporary forms of life writing.⁵⁵ Paul John Eakin summarises the original idea thus:

In effect, the autobiographical pact is a form of contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life [or an aspect of it; N. Sch.].⁵⁶

In other words, in the Lejeunian thinking that informs this thesis, autobiographical texts are positioned generically as resting on ideas of truthfulness. These inform the author’s writing as well as fundamentally affecting the way we read texts marked as autobiographical. The discussions sparked by fake memoirs – Trojan horses which violate the idea of the pact – may best bring this out. Autobiographical writers today, of course, tend to be less explicit and more ambiguous about their ‘sincere effort’. This is mirrored in my corpus too – in the context of which such ambiguity and experimentation is pivotal, as first and foremost enabling the publication of one’s negotiations of illness/ disability and dying. Authors can be seen to use

⁵³ Shirley Jordan, ‘Autofiction in the Feminine’, *French Studies*, 67.1 (2013), 76-84 (p. 80); Franz K. Stanzel, ‘Autobiographie. Wo ein Ich erzählt, ist immer Fiktion’, *Sprachkunst*, 37.2 (2006), 325-340 (p. 326); Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie*, p. 65.

⁵⁴ In a German and Austrian context in particular, discussions of truth and truthfulness understandably continue to surface: the relation of fact and fiction continues to be problematised in the case of autobiographies by notable authors and public intellectuals, such as Günter Grass, Walter Jens and others who for a long time kept secret memberships in SS (Grass) or NSDAP (Jens). One symptomatic example of the ongoing discussion and remaining dissent amongst scholars in this respect is narratologist Franz K. Stanzel’s essay in the yearbook *Sprachkunst* (2006), together with the criticism it received from the yearbook’s editor Hans Höller. Franz K. Stanzel, ‘Autobiographie. Wo ein Ich erzählt, ist immer Fiktion’; Hans Höller, ‘Brief zu Franz K. Stanzels Akademie-Vortrag vom 19. Januar 2007: >Autobiographie. Wo ein Ich erzählt, ist immer Fiktion<’, *Sprachkunst*, 37.2 (2006), 341-342.

⁵⁵ Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Pact (bis)’, in *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989; orig.: in *Moi aussi*, Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp. 119-137 (p. 120).

⁵⁶ Paul John Eakin, ‘Foreword’, in *On Autobiography*, p. ix.

personal pronouns other than 'I', as well as employing alter ego figures and autofictional writing strategies.⁵⁷

Ambiguity plays out on the level of the paratext too. Refining his work on the autobiographical in the 1980s, Lejeune notes: 'A book can be presented as a novel, at the level of the subtitle, and as an autobiography at the level of the publisher's blurb.'⁵⁸ Today this and similar strategies are widely practised. It is not a coincidence that the covers of *Schoßgebete*, *Du stirbst nicht*, and *Fremdschläfer* all bear the word 'Roman' [novel]. The designation may have to be taken less literally now than ever before. Yet an 'abandonment of a notion of pure genres', as we can currently observe it, 'does not mean an abandonment of sensitivity to generic distinctions'.⁵⁹ The general perception seems to be that "'writers' write novels while 'anyone' can write a memoir (or, worse, have one written)", as Couser ironically puts it.⁶⁰ Labelling a text a novel aims less at assigning it a genre than it does a status: its purpose is to convince potential readers of the fact that these texts are of literary value.⁶¹ The term 'novel' promises an enjoyable read, a well-written text that is typically narrative in nature. In this sense, the designation as 'novel' is in the interest of publishers. When insisted on by life writers, it is a signal intended to discourage readers from focusing overly on 'breaches of contract' in the writing,⁶² and appears to suggest replacing factual scrutiny with a sensibility for a different kind of truth in the text: one that emerges from the text as a whole, and as it details the author/narrator's shifts in perspective caused by the events at the heart of the life writing (here: the illness experience).

The texts in my corpus are contemporary expressions of the autobiographical, reflecting the extent to which the genre has evolved and diversified over the past decades, and in ways that were unpredictable, with the texts discussed in the first two chapters stretching in particular the early Lejeunian idea that there must be 'identity of the proper name shared by author, narrator, and protagonist' for a text to be considered autobiographical.⁶³ They are marginal

⁵⁷ See especially the first three texts discussed for examples that veer off traditional usage of a first person-voice, as well as for their use of pseudonyms or alter ego characters. Engaging in more complex disguising of the factual and fictional in and beyond her text, Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebete* is identified in chapter I as an autofiction.

⁵⁸ Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', p. 134.

⁵⁹ G. Thomas Couser, 'Genre Matters: Form, Force, and Filiation', *Life Writing*, 2.2 (2005), 139-156 (p. 145).

⁶⁰ Couser, 'Genre Matters', p. 144.

⁶¹ Lejeune sees this too: Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', p. 124.

⁶² Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', in *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989; orig.: in *Le pacte autobiographique*, Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 3-30 (p. 14).

⁶³ Eakin, 'Foreword', in *On Autobiography*, p. ix. Importantly, Lejeune himself later opened up his definition to accommodate more experimental forms of autobiographical writing that were emerging. In

cases, and deal with the stuff of a real (empirical) person's life in more experimental ways than Lejeune foresaw at his time of writing. However, and this is where Lejeune's writing has not aged in the slightest, the reader who was central to Lejeune's grasp on the autobiographical – and who looms over the author of illness narrative in the form of anticipated criticism and prejudice – remains highly important to my work. It was Lejeune who recognised and stressed that autobiography is 'a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing'.⁶⁴ The thesis at hand is built on the understanding that authors have 'readerly knowledge', just as readers can potentially be autobiographers themselves (and can think like writers).⁶⁵ This particular feature of autobiographical writing, in which reader and writer may be seen to be on an equal footing, will inform my analyses of contemporary illness writings: texts which will be demonstrated at once to trust and mistrust their readership.

(Literary) Disability Studies and its Concerns

The field of disability studies offers a critical perspective enabling the analysis of ostensibly 'normal' or 'natural' images and understandings of illness/ disability and health or ablebodiedness. According to Lennard J. Davis,

the first task at hand is [...] to see that the object of disability studies is not the person using the wheelchair or the Deaf person but the set of social, historical, economic, and cultural processes that regulate and control the way we think about and think through the body.⁶⁶

The field cannot be aligned with a specific academic subject; yet as becomes clear from Davis's comment, it is firmly grounded in the arts and social sciences, and somewhat opposed to medical subjects (which do focus much more on the physicality or psychology of the disabled person).⁶⁷ Sociologists, political scientists, historians, literary/ cultural studies and other humanities scholars have all begun to engage with it; the multi- and potential

'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', he opened up the previously fairly rigid criterion concerning the identity of the names: 'The name of the character can be at the same time similar to the name of the author and different: same initials, different names [...]; same first name, different last names [...]'. Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', p. 134. Both Charlotte Roche and Kathrin Schmidt give the protagonists of their illness narratives names that are 'the same but different' in this sense (Chapters I and II).

⁶⁴ Eakin, 'Foreword', in *On Autobiography*, p. xi.

⁶⁵ Eakin, 'Foreword', in *On Autobiography*, p. xxiii.

⁶⁶ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 2.

⁶⁷ When thinking of a subject such as Sonderpädagogik [special needs education], a degree course offered at many German universities, it does become clear which academic subjects have an affinity with the critical thinking that underlies disability studies as a field, and which less so. Markus Dederich, himself professor of rehabilitation sciences, sees contradictory intentions ultimately keeping apart the fields of disability studies and Sonderpädagogik, for example. For more, see: Markus Dederich, *Körper, Kultur und Behinderung. Eine Einführung in die Disability Studies*, Disability Studies: Körper – Macht – Differenz, 2 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), pp. 51-54.

interdisciplinarity of the field certainly is a particular strength. To the literary/ cultural scholar, the analysis of representations of illness/ disability both today as well as throughout history, in the media, everyday life, low and high culture is of central interest. Literary researchers with a disability studies consciousness are interested in representations of illness/ disability as the site of 'a [...] dynamic interchange between culture, author, text, and audience'.⁶⁸

Advocates of disability studies approaches know that disabilities – in the sense of impairments – are a common (rather than extraordinary) statistically proven given. Beyond that, they see disability in its relationality, and recognise its social construction as an important dimension of disabled experience. Someone's impairment as such (especially when it is a stable, manageable disability) does not necessarily have to pose a problem, neither for the individual, nor for medicine or society at large. Yet it becomes a problem when the world in which we live posits 'health' or 'ablebodiedness' as the norm, although disability historians have shown that this norm continues to undergo change, just like the meaning that is ascribed to various disabilities. This impacts – in pervasive ways – upon the world we inhabit: architecturally, economically and in people's behaviour towards and judgement of each other, in the workplace as well as in any other social setting. Ill/ disabled people thus become marginalised, and are being further disabled in consequence – in more insidious ways than can be explained by the reality of their impairment alone and the limitations this may bring.

Early disability studies, more directly oriented alongside activism, was steeped in a dogmatic 'social model' view of disability (as diametrically opposed to the 'medical model' it aimed to free itself from), and neglected to pay adequate attention to the real physical limitations and experiences of suffering or pain, as well as the possibility of an early death that some illnesses/ disabilities bring. In a self-reflexive step, the discipline has corrected its own repression of the (suffering) body and overcome early, simplistic argumentation for or against certain explanatory 'models' of disability.⁶⁹ Critical disability studies today continues to complicate the picture of illness/ disability, and does better justice to a wider variety of conditions and the experiences intertwined with them.

⁶⁸ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, 'Representation and Its Discontents. The Uneasy Home of Disability in Literature and Film', in *Handbook of Disability Studies*, ed. by Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, Michael Bury (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 195-218 (p. 203).

⁶⁹ For more, see, for instance: Bill Hughes and Kevin Paterson, 'The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards a sociology of impairment', *Disability & Society*, 12.3 (1997), 325-340; Tom Shakespeare, 'The Social Model of Disability', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 214-221; Tom Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2014).

Disability studies scholars from across academic subjects reject the conception of illness/disability or health in any absolute terms. They ask and challenge their readership to part with dichotomous conceptualisations of illness/disability on the one hand and a utopian concept of health on the other (as a way of thinking that perpetuates the culturally imagined essential difference between people living with and without illness/disability), and instead posits them as dimensions on the continuum of life that can, and do, overlap. Many disability studies scholars therefore point out that any nondisabled person can find themselves in the place of the disabled other relatively suddenly, for example through injury, disease, or as an effect of ageing. This is what makes the topic threatening to the nondisabled (or temporarily able-bodied), and in fact a strange 'minority' subject. Couser states pointedly that '[u]nlike racial and gender minority status, disability is a minority status that anyone may assume unexpectedly at any time'.⁷⁰ Social scientist and disability activist Tom Shakespeare calls disability 'a universal experience of humanity', and Davis points out that most disabilities are acquired 'by living in the world' rather than being congenital.⁷¹ To raise this point serves to highlight the irony of our societal – as well as critical – avoidance of disability.

To engage with disability studies is also to politicise one's research. As the last of the civil rights movements to enter the academy, the field has much in common with other minority studies. Having emerged from activists' efforts directed at securing fundamental human rights and demanding participation in the public discourse about dis/ability, ideas surrounding disability rights and disability inclusion first gained traction in the scholarly discourse of the U.S. and UK in the 1990s.⁷² Disability studies scholars have since demanded the analytical consideration of disability as a marker of identity alongside the more established recognition of class, gender and sexuality, ethnicity and race, and religion. (Post-)structuralism and (post-)modernism, body theories and Foucauldian analyses have informed much of the work of the field; critical thinking around stigma, pathology and norm(al)ity and deviance is inherent to it.

In parallel to disability activism entering and transforming the academy, in the English-language realm (and particularly the U.S.-American one), a significant number of

⁷⁰ G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies. Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2009), p. 9.

⁷¹ Davis's sentence continues: 'but also by working in factories, driving insufficiently safe cars, living in toxic environments or high-crime areas.' Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 8; Shakespeare, 'The Social Model of Disability', p. 221.

⁷² Carol Poore explains: 'This new direction in research and teaching about disability has been developed mostly by disabled scholars in the United States and in Great Britain rather than in a country such as Germany where disabled people have been excluded much more strictly from the regular educational system.' Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007), p. 300.

autobiographical life writing texts appeared that negotiated illness/ disability publicly; some highly critical of the institutionalisation their authors experienced (one example is *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) by Susanna Kaysen), others questioning the underlying normalising rationale of treatment options offered by the medical establishment (such as Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980)), or focusing in on the disablism their authors experienced in everyday life and its far-reaching effects on the individual's psyche (Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face* (1994)). The emergence of such texts coincided with a call, issued by early disability studies scholarship, for a stronger commitment to social realism in disability representation (that is, encouraging more accurate depictions of life with disability), and prompted a rising interest in autobiographical narratives by literary scholars.⁷³

In Anglo-American cultural and literary studies, disability studies has since established itself as a valid and powerful research perspective. How successfully it has done so may most easily be demonstrated by pointing out the number of handbooks available for it now: the *Handbook of Disability Studies* from 2001, *The Disability Studies Reader* (now in its fourth edition), and most recently the *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* from 2012, are the three most relevant to literary studies' interests.⁷⁴ Moreover, the field has generated its own journals – with the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, founded by David Bolt in 2006,⁷⁵ being the most relevant for literary disability studies – and dedicated book series, out of which The University of Michigan Press's *Corporealities: Discourses of Disability* is the most notable one.

In German-speaking universities, disability studies have not yet established themselves to the same extent.⁷⁶ Within the arts and humanities, and more specifically within German cultural/ literary studies, little identification with the field can be observed so far. One reason why German academia resists the approach so far may lie in disability studies' activist origins, being

⁷³ Mitchell and Snyder, 'Representation and Its Discontents', p. 200.

⁷⁴ Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman and Michael Bury, eds, *Handbook of Disability Studies* (London: Sage, 2001); Lennard J. Davis, ed, *The Disability Studies Reader*, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013); Carol Thomas, Nick Watson and Alan Roulstone, eds, *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁷⁵ Running initially under the name *Journal of Literary Disability*.

⁷⁶ The critical perspective offered by Disability Studies has entered some American Studies departments in Germany. Apart from that, it has been taken up primarily by social scientists, with Anne Waldschmidt and Theresia Degener having founded the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Disability Studies in Deutschland - Wir forschen selbst* [working group disability studies in Germany – we do research ourselves] in 2002. For a more extensive assessment of the state of disability studies in German academia than can be offered here, see: Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, pp. 299-306, from the perspective of an arts and humanities scholar; see also the special topic section of a 2006-issue of the *Disability Studies Quarterly* headed 'Disability Studies in German Speaking Countries', guest-edited by Swantje Köbsell and Anne Waldschmidt. Beth Haller and Corinne Kirchner, eds, 'Education', a special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 26.2 (2006).

something which rests uneasily with German academic traditions. Elizabeth C. Hamilton's article 'From Social Welfare to Civil Rights. The Representation of Disability in Twentieth-Century German Literature', Carol Poore's *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, the Edinburgh German Yearbook's fourth volume *Disability in German Literature, Film, and Theater*, Pauline Eyre's PhD thesis 'Permission to Speak: Representations of Disability in German Women's Literature of the 1970s and 1980s', Petra-Andelka Anders's thesis on representations of disability and mental illness in contemporary German feature films, as well as Allison G. Cattell's thesis on Expressionist drama are notable exceptions.⁷⁷ With the exception of Anders's work, all of these publications are, however, contributions from English-language German Studies. All five have offered inspiration and motivation for my own PhD research, and have begun to demonstrate forcefully the value of and breadth of thinking in disability studies for Germanistik. Despite these exceptions, one can rightfully note a 'conspicuous absence' of a literary disability studies within today's German literary studies, to borrow David Bolt's words from 2007. For the UK context, he observed at the time that

the presence of disability is neither denied nor acknowledged. All literary scholars analyse works in which disability is present, yet few engage with the subject on any level, let alone one that's critically informed by the discipline of disability studies.⁷⁸

These words are today an apt description of the situation I have observed in German literary studies.

Having applied a disability studies perspective to the autobiographical texts at the heart of this thesis, my research further demonstrates the indispensability of disability studies-informed approaches to representations of illness/ disability for contemporary literary studies. As will be demonstrated in the following sections of this introduction, the perspective of disability studies provides me with an interpretative framework from which to make sense of the

⁷⁷ Elizabeth C. Hamilton, 'From Social Welfare to Civil Rights. The Representation of Disability in Twentieth-Century German Literature', in *The Body and Physical Difference. Discourses of Disability*, ed. by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997); Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*; Eleoma Joshua and Michael Schillmeier, eds, *Disability in German Literature, Film, and Theatre*, Edinburgh German Yearbook, 4 (Rochester: Camden House, 2010); Pauline Eyre, 'Permission to Speak: Representations of Disability in German Women's Literature of the 1970s and 1980s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, U of Manchester, 2009); Petra-Andelka Anders, *Behinderung und psychische Krankheit im zeitgenössischen deutschen Spielfilm*, KONNEX - Studien im Schnittbereich von Literatur, Kultur und Natur, 9 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014); Allison G. Cattell, *Disability Drama: Semiotic Bodies and Diegetic Subjectivities in post-WWI German Expressionist Drama* (Waterloo: U of Waterloo, 2014), published online: <https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/bitstream/handle/10012/8417/Cattell_Allison.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁷⁸ David Bolt, 'Literary Disability Studies: The Long Awaited Response', presented at the Inaugural Conference of the Cultural Disability Studies Research Network (Liverpool John Moores U, 26 May 2007), published online: <<http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/bolt-Long-Awaited-Response.pdf>>, p. 2.

'nervousness' displayed by the contemporary literary scene in Germany concerning the centrality of illness/ disability in contemporary life writing, and the absence of studies into such writing in German literary scholarship to date.⁷⁹ Not least, on a very practical level, the field of disability studies gives me a precise yet sensitive and carefully-considered language for presenting the findings of my analyses.

Terminology

The language used throughout this thesis is sensitised by disability theory. Commonly employed terms that appear in this thesis are illness/ disability, impairment, disease, as well as ablebodiedness, ableism and disablism, some of which have already been used above. I do not tend to use the term sickness much, yet in instances that I do, this is in order 'to denote the social attitudes and perceptions of a disease'.⁸⁰ As there is significant overlap between illness and disability, I often use the term 'illness/ disability'. Although many disabilities are not illnesses, illnesses do constitute a large proportion of disabilities (and are often legally and medically recognised as such). More politicised is the distinction that disability studies scholars make between disability and impairment. Impairment, like disease, is medically loaded terminology. Both encompass recognised diagnostic categories of abnormality, and as such describe pathology. Impairment – denoting 'physical limitation' – is the word that is more closely related to relatively stable, physical disability,⁸¹ whereas disease – describing the 'biological processes taking place in a diseased organism' – is the one more closely tied up with illness.⁸² Yet disease can also cause impairment.

In this thesis, disability and illness are the terms used when discussing the subjective lived experience of medical conditions and the way they affect aspects of one's being in the world (including aspects that go beyond one's experience of one's bodily limitations, if any such physical limitations are present at all, such as the experience of prejudice and discrimination). Those schooled in the so-called social model of disability rate the limitations imposed by society – encountered by the disabled person in the form of disadvantages – as more significantly disabling or debilitating than any impairment. Indeed they define the term 'disability' as meaning first and foremost 'social exclusion'. It is from this vantage point that

⁷⁹ I am borrowing the term 'nervousness' from Quayson, yet identifying less a crisis of representation than a crisis of academic/ critical reading practices for the contemporary Germanic realm. Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness. Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007).

⁸⁰ Carel and Cooper point out that this is in keeping with other scholars' use. Carel and Cooper, 'Introduction', p. 8.

⁸¹ Shakespeare, 'The Social Model of Disability', p. 215.

⁸² Carel and Cooper, 'Introduction', p. 8.

Davis writes: ‘As soon as we use the term “disabled” we add a political element: suddenly there is a disabler and a disabled.’⁸³ In this thesis, it is assumed that intrinsic (physical) and extrinsic (social) limitations, that is, both impairment and disability, are interrelated in complex ways, and that both deserve acknowledging.

As Ato Quayson clarifies, distinctions such as the one between impairment and disability (in the way that the social modelists understand it) seem so clear-cut only in theory. In practice, illness/ disability and impairment intersect. Quayson reminds us that

it is almost impossible to keep the two [terms] separate, since ‘impairment’ is automatically placed within a social discourse that interprets it and ‘disability’ is produced by the interaction of impairment and a spectrum of social discourses on normality that serve to stipulate what counts as disability in the first place.⁸⁴

Bearing these definitions in mind and trying to use the terms accordingly nonetheless gives an indication of which aspect of illness/ disability is being discussed, and fosters analytical precision in the researcher. A challenge for German-language research in the future will be to agree on and establish a similar vocabulary in speaking about illness/ disability from a disability studies stance.

In instances where ‘ablebodiedness’ is used, this is to be read always as ‘presumed or imagined ablebodiedness’ by those who identify as nondisabled. Many in the field also use the expression ‘temporary ablebodiedness’ – it stresses that at some point over a lifetime most, if not all, people will find themselves disabled. Lastly, David Bolt helpfully distinguishes the relation of ableism to disablism. He marks out a subtle difference between the two terms, both of which are often used, and explains they are ‘two sides of the same ideological coin: [ableism] renders people who are not disabled as supreme; [disablism] refers to attitudes and actions against people who are disabled.’⁸⁵ With Bolt, we can think ableism as corresponding to disablism in the way that patriarchy relates to misogyny, or – to add to his another example – heteronormativity to homophobia. The usefulness of ableism as a term (and that of all disability studies vocabulary, for that matter) lies in that it helps ‘call attention to assumptions about normalcy’.⁸⁶

⁸³ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 10.

⁸⁴ Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, p. 4.

⁸⁵ David Bolt, ‘Epilogue: attitudes and action’, in *Changing Social Attitudes Toward Disability. Perspectives from historical, cultural, and educational studies*, ed. by Bolt (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 172-175 (p. 172).

⁸⁶ David Bolt, ‘Introduction’, in *Changing Social Attitudes Toward Disability. Perspectives from historical, cultural, and educational studies*, ed. by Bolt (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-11 (p. 3).

Disability Studies as a Framework for the Analysis of Illness Narratives

This thesis, as may be clear already, subscribes to a wide, inclusive definition of disability as encompassing not only what is conventionally taken to be prototypical physical disability but also many mental, chronic and terminal illnesses. This understanding acknowledges the fact that any definition of disability frays at its edges, and that rather than fixating on all too strict a category that excludes less obvious circumstances of life, it may be worthwhile maintaining an openness to the term. The lived experience for many is that illness, impairment and disability can and do all intersect. Crucially, it is this flexible understanding of illness/ disability that enables me to interrelate all of the texts in my corpus in the first instance and in a meaningful way and make them speak to each other, instead of isolating them by diagnosis, or by author. Both my corpus of texts and my definition of disability reflect the fact that there is diversity in disability.

In the public imagination, a rather arbitrary line has been drawn between ideas of illness and of disability; a dividing line that Susan Wendell, for example, wants to highlight as porous when she speaks instead of the 'healthy disabled' and the 'unhealthy disabled' in an article aiming to raise awareness of the difficult place people with chronic illnesses find themselves in within disability activism and theory.⁸⁷ The permanently and relatively predictably impaired who are not on the look-out for any kind of 'cure' and neither want nor need much medical treatment fall into her first category. The second term encompasses the situation of those whose conditions do require medical attention because they are in flux, and are unpredictable in outcome. Someone who is 'unhealthy disabled' may suffer pain, and may not only have to learn to live with, but find themselves dying from, illness.

As we will see when turning to the close analysis of life writing examples in the main part of this thesis, this complicates the negotiation of their illness/ disability for the 'unhealthy disabled': it is a complex task to incorporate the (continuously changing, sometimes life-threatening) story of illness into one's life story, and reconcile it with one's sense of self. It is less easy to claim illness as a facet of one's identity, with it being a less likely (but nonetheless a valid) source of disability pride. Wendell comes to find that '[i]llness is equated with impairment, even by disability activists and scholars, in ways that disability is not; hence there

⁸⁷ Susan Wendell, 'Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 161-173. Wendell previously published a book-length study on the topic: Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body. Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York/ London: Routledge, 1996).

is anxiety to assure nondisabled people that disability is not illness'.⁸⁸ This in fact makes it pressing for disability studies to attend to the complex story of illness and think through illness and the suffering it (also) brings. This process would further refine the insights gained by disability studies as a field thus far.

Petra-Andelka Anders highlights the usefulness of disability studies in this context: she suggests to bring to bear a disability studies framework on the analysis of mental illness and health in film, as the challenges filmmakers find themselves confronted with are effectively the same when representing physical disability as when portraying a character with mental health problems.⁸⁹ The stigma that mental illnesses carry is, in her view, also comparable. Anders writes of 'die Ängste, die Faszination und der Unterhaltungswert' that surround both (prototypical physical) disabilities and mental illnesses,⁹⁰ and that warrant critical investigation in either case.

Lastly, it is a pragmatic decision to point out how blurred the lines between understandings of illness and of disability are: if literary disability studies are still a rather marginal practice, then a field we could call 'literary illness studies' is so far non-existent.

The Reality of Illness/ Disability in Contemporary Life Writing

The texts in my corpus deal with experiences as diverse as suffering from psychological trauma, living with various kinds of cancer, and becoming disabled after a stroke, yet they all take illness/ disability 'for real'.⁹¹ That is, the works covered in this thesis have one crucial thing in common: illness/ disability does not (or not primarily) serve as a metaphor or allegory – as a 'narrative prosthesis', in David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's sense, that propels forward a storyline, and in the way that we know it especially from fiction – but is instead dealt with literally and autobiographically, either in retrospect as a liminal experience or in the experience of dying as an existential threat to the authorial self.

The term 'narrative prosthesis' circumscribes the fact that disability in literature has traditionally been used as a narrative device, namely as either a 'stock feature of characterization' (think of Achilles, Quasimodo and Captain Ahab) or else as 'opportunistic

⁸⁸ Wendell, 'Unhealthy Disabled', p. 165.

⁸⁹ Anders, *Behinderung*, p. 443.

⁹⁰ Trans.: 'the fears, fascination and entertainment value'. Anders, *Behinderung*, p. 64.

⁹¹ Pauline Eyre, 'From Impairment to Empowerment: A Re-Assessment of Libuše Moníková's Representation of Disability in *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin*', in *Disability in German Literature, Film, and Theatre*, ed. by Eleoma Joshua and Michael Schillmeier, *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, 4 (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), pp. 197-212 (p. 212).

metaphorical device'.⁹² In other words, disability in narrative typically serves to mark a character, and differentiate him or her from the 'normal' rest. When used metaphorically, it is often employed as a 'signifier of social and individual collapse'.⁹³ When using the phrase 'narrative prosthesis', literary disability scholars therefore emphasise literature's discursive yet rarely acknowledged dependency on illness/ disability.

This narrative crutch upon which authors steady themselves, often without reflecting upon the practice, transports ideological convictions and helps bring out the contrast between the normal, good and (morally) right, and the disabled other. Illness/ disability gives stories impetus in a more fundamental sense too: in light of the fact that disability demands explanation in our social climate, one could say that it initiates narration first and foremost. Mitchell and Snyder therefore state that 'disability usually provides the riddle in need of a narrative solution'.⁹⁴ Mitchell and Snyder's criticism does not aim at representation per se, but is levelled at the fashion in which illness/ disability tends to be dealt with. They observe: 'while stories rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions.'⁹⁵ And if these dimensions cannot be recognised, the social marginalisation of people living with illness/ disability can hardly move into focus.

Similarly, both the literary critics in the media and literary scholars have typically read into or interpreted the representation of illness/ disability, rather than taking it (also) as the representation of lived reality – a negligence that in the German academic reception has not been made up for until today.

All of the texts in my corpus do recognise the social and political dimensions of the experience of illness beyond the individual meaning illness/ disability comes to take on. We have to look no further than to the preface of Schlingensiefel's cancer diary to find that the socio-political dimension is of crucial importance to him, as it is to all of my authors. Making this point particularly explicit, he addresses a cultural dictum of silence and retreat surrounding illness when he states: 'So viele kranke Menschen leben einsam und zurückgezogen, trauen sich nicht

⁹² David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 2000), p. 47.

⁹³ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 47. For an example from the canon of German literature, consider the symbolic role of the character Oskar Matzerath in Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* (1959). For more, see: Hamilton, 'From Social Welfare to Civil Rights'.

⁹⁴ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 61.

⁹⁵ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 48.

mehr vor die Tür und haben Angst, über ihre Ängste zu sprechen' (*So schön* 9).⁹⁶ In the preface, the artist further clarifies that his concern was not to produce a polemic against an illness named cancer, but that he had wanted to support what he terms the autonomy of the ill. Linked to that, the preface expresses his hope to counter the 'Sprachlosigkeit des Sterbens' [speechlessness of dying] that he detects in society (*So schön* 9). This inclination to speak about the contemporary context outside of literature, however, does not detract from these texts' status as works of literature. While this should go almost without saying, this position is not necessarily shared by others working in German literary studies. Before turning to the approaches of scholarship to the topic, I will summarise and evaluate the German media's reaction to this most recent wave of illness narratives.

The (Non-)place of Narratives of Illness/ Disability in Contemporary German Literature as Determined by Literary Critics in the Media

In recently published personal illness narratives, of which this thesis analyses a small corpus, we find an intense actual engagement with illness/ disability. This verisimilitude may be precisely the reason why the existential stories in my text corpus have produced notably extreme responses in the literary review pages of the German-language press,⁹⁷ amounting to a veritable feuilleton debate. The turn this debate took exhibits a societally manifest uneasiness with the topics taking centre stage in the contested texts.⁹⁸ 'Lasst mich mit eurem Krebs in Ruhe. Ich kann es nicht mehr hören. Und lesen',⁹⁹ complains for example the journalist Richard Kämmerlings, in an article in the German broadsheet *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in August 2009. He finds himself to be 'unpleasantly affected' by what he calls 'Boulevardstoff'

⁹⁶ Trans.: 'So many ill people live lonely and withdrawn lives. They don't dare go out anymore and are scared to talk about their fears.'

⁹⁷ Articles which contributed to the debate were (in order of publication): Kämmerlings, 'Krebsliteratur'; Michael Angele, 'Wer hat geil Krebs?', *der Freitag*, 3 September 2009 <<http://www.freitag.de/autoren/michael-angele/wer-hat-geil-krebs>> [accessed 7 May 2015]; Iris Radisch, 'Metaphysik des Tumors', *Zeit Online*, 19 September 2009 <<http://www.zeit.de/2009/39/Krebsbuecher>> [accessed 8 October 2014]; Dirk Peitz, 'Die Ich-Erzähler', *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 October 2009 <<http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/immer-mehr-autoren-berichten-in-ihren-buechern-von-sich-selbst--und-von-ihren-krankheiten-die-ich-erzaehler,10810590,10671790.html>> [accessed 20 October 2014]; Christoph Schröder, 'Die Kunst der Krankheit. Wir kommen nicht von uns los', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 24 October 2009 <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/die-kunst-der-krankheit-wir-kommen-nicht-von-uns-los/1621152.html>> [accessed 20 October 2014]; Thomas Macho, 'Wer redet, ist nicht tot', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19 November 2009 <<http://www.nzz.ch/wer-redet-ist-nicht-tot-1.4036808>> [accessed 26 September 2015].

⁹⁸ It is one which lasts beyond this particular feuilleton debate, as much newer articles demonstrate when they repeat similar arguments to those used in 2009. One example for such a more recent article (triggered by Henning Mankell's cancer writing) is Ulrich Greiner's 'Man sollte diskret sterben', *Zeit Online*, 31 January 2014 <<http://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2014-01/mankell-krebsdiagnose-literatur-krankheit>> [accessed 9 May 2016].

⁹⁹ Trans.: 'Please do go away with your talk of cancer. I don't want to hear – or read – another word about it.' Kämmerlings, 'Krebsliteratur'.

[tabloid matter].¹⁰⁰ Indeed, a subheading within the article even speaks of literature's 'Kontamination mit dem Boulevard'.¹⁰¹ It is a phrase that introduces a metaphor of medicine that is here bound up with aesthetic value judgements, and that situates the topic of illness where most critics believe it belongs: outside the walls and beyond the gateway to the citadel of literary quality.

In strong words, Kämmerlings reasons that at a time when cancer is all around us, as 'Volkskrankheit' touching everyone's life, it need not also be dragged into public discourse. He is convinced that people go into detail about illness (and in particular cancer), whether on TV or in books, merely for sensational effect, as supposedly 'jeder weiß, was damit verbunden ist, welche medizinischen Prozeduren, welches Leiden, welches Hoffen und Bangen'.¹⁰² This view denies personal stories any cultural, let alone aesthetic value. The underlying reproach of Kämmerlings's article is that those who do decide to confront cancer publicly must be attention-seekers and shameless, egotistical people. The reader of his article is left to wonder why – if, as Kämmerlings insists, there is no notion of taboo, no silence that needs breaking – these new, decidedly personal narratives have the power to provoke him so much that he concludes: 'Lasst uns mit eurem Krebs, eurem Schlaganfall, eurer Leberzirrhose, eurer Schweinegrippe in Ruhe. Erzählt von dem, was zählt, und nicht von Tumormarkern. Erzählt vom Leben. Das Ende kennen wir schon.'¹⁰³ The persistent ranking in the bestseller lists of a large proportion of these personal narratives stands in contrast especially to his concluding claim, and hints at the fact that readers must be reading these texts for experiential value, if nothing more. The popularity of this kind of literature in our current cultural moment reveals that the issues it addresses are central to many in the wider society.

Critical attention reached a climax in October 2009 when Kathrin Schmidt was awarded a literary prize for *Du stirbst nicht*, a literary reworking of her stroke and subsequent experience of disability (Chapter II). Interestingly, this text, which is labelled a novel, is spared Kämmerlings's wrath, and it is telling that this is because the story of convalescence culminates in what appears to be a happy ending, with the protagonist Helene preparing to leave the space of the clinic.

¹⁰⁰ In the article, Kämmerlings asks the rhetorical question: 'Was aber berührt nun an diesen Beispielen [...] so unangenehm?' [What is it in these examples that we find so unpleasant?]

¹⁰¹ Trans.: 'contamination by the tabloid press'.

¹⁰² Trans.: 'everyone knows what this involves, the medical procedures, the suffering, the hope and worry'.

¹⁰³ Trans.: 'Leave us alone with your cancer, your stroke, your liver cirrhosis, your swine flu. Tell us about what really matters, and not about tumour markers. Tell us about life. We already know how it ends.'

Michael Angele, journalist with *der Freitag*, takes a similarly provocative line to Kämmerlings in his article contributing to the discussion, titled ‘Wer hat geil Krebs?’.¹⁰⁴ Perceiving exhibitionist tendencies in the life writing of authors such as Schlingensief, Leinemann and Roche, he attests to a lack of humility on their part and alleges that their decision to make their stories public was motivated by financial gain and psychological neediness. In short, there is no understanding on his part for authors of personal illness narratives and autothanatographers either. He asks: ‘läge wahre Größe nicht [...] im Verzicht?’,¹⁰⁵ and goes on to plead, with biting sarcasm: ‘Wenn die eigene Krankheit schon öffentlich gemacht werden muss, dann bitte mit dem Anspruch, es nicht unter dem Rang von Kunst zu machen (Merke: es könnte das letzte Werk sein!).’¹⁰⁶ The first person to reply to Angele’s article was Schlingensief himself, a day after learning that his remaining right lung has been found to be full of new metastases. He feels compelled to clarify: ‘mein text entstand ohne literaturanspruch, ohne verleger im nacken ! ich habe nachts , wenn die angst kam, alles in dieses band gesprochen.’¹⁰⁷ Over the days and weeks that followed, Angele’s comment triggered a remarkable 236 online reactions – thus receiving a lot of attention of the kind its author denies the writers of illness narratives.

When the tough matter of real life gets too close to literature, German critics from across the political spectrum – from the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine* through to the liberal newspaper *der Freitag* – display surprising agreement. Their deprecatory reactions reveal more about the socio-psychological processes at work in the non-disabled reader/critic than they do about the quality of the individual texts. With sociologist and disability scholar Bill Hughes and his research into the affective responses displayed towards ill and disabled people especially, we can read their adverse words as typical defensive responses. They are ‘a form of violence bred from our fear of and anguish about our alienation from the human condition’.¹⁰⁸ As ableist sensibilities are shaken by authors who address head-on ‘the harsh inevitable realities of suffering, loss, pain and death’ in a form that stresses as central their personal, first-hand experience and that cannot be cushioned, more safely, as fiction, these

¹⁰⁴ Trans.: ‘So who’s gagging for cancer?’. Angele, ‘Wer hat geil Krebs?’.

¹⁰⁵ Trans.: ‘Wouldn’t true greatness be revealed by self-restraint?’

¹⁰⁶ Trans.: ‘If you really do feel the need to publicise your illness, then please don’t do it with aspirations of creating art (NB: this work could be your last!).’

¹⁰⁷ Note that Schlingensief’s idiosyncratic spelling has been retained in the quotation. Trans.: ‘My text came about without claiming to be literature, without a publisher breathing down my neck! At night, when the fear closed in, I just spoke onto this tape.’

¹⁰⁸ Bill Hughes, ‘Fear, Pity and Disgust. Emotions and the Non-disabled Imaginary’, in *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, ed. by Carol Thomas, Nick Watson and Alan Roulstone (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 67-77 (p. 69).

writers and their texts become 'objects of fear and disgust'.¹⁰⁹ Othering the authors as they challenge what Hughes terms 'the non-disabled imaginary' includes relegating their texts to the margins of literature. Charges of egocentrism and of banality as levelled by the critics turn into something negative the offering of authenticity that all of these personal narratives – as life writing about illness and dying – make; that indeed many make artfully so, as will be shown in the analyses to follow.

When journalist Tina Klopp in 2015 claims that '[f]ür viele westliche Künstler bleibt [...] nur der Rückgriff auf individuelles Leid: Krebs statt Holocaust, Magersucht statt Nachkriegshunger',¹¹⁰ she relegating the artistic turn towards the public negotiation of illness and of dying into a stopgap. Instead of considering such autobiographically inspired work a new cultural phenomenon worth investigating more closely, she believes it to originate from a dearth of topics available to a sheltered younger generation of artists, with illness being one of the few topics that can give their work gravitas, as she sees it. The wider socio-political context and topicality of these publications – comprising debates around the rising cost of health care, abuse scandals in nursing homes, lack of funding for hospices, and a continuous lack of clarity marking the German legislation on assisted dying (last revised by the Bundestag in November 2015) – is not recognised.

Through my disability studies lens, attempts to fence off the supposedly literary from supposedly sub-literary texts become apparent as exclusionist practices. Dismissing the texts as fashionable 'Bekennnisliteratur' [confessional literature],¹¹¹ as Klopp and others do, undermines them, by questioning their quality, and precludes the necessity to analyse them in depth. This thesis will demonstrate that writers of illness narratives employ a whole range of autobiographical genres and narrative strategies. It reveals these narratives to be sophisticated writing at the forefront of contemporary literature. In this context, it is noteworthy that the German language lacks a literary category or term, such as creative non-fiction, that would help to explain the nature and achievement of these personal narratives. Critic Dirk Peitz, while regarding the phenomenon with favour, therefore ends up circumscribing them as 'eine Reihe neuer Sachbücher [...], die sehr persönliche Geschichten

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, 'Fear, Pity and Disgust', p. 69.

¹¹⁰ Trans.: 'for many western artists, all that remains is falling back onto individual suffering: cancer instead of the Holocaust, anorexia instead of post war-hunger.' Tina Klopp, 'Todgeweihte leben länger. Über die Interpretation von Künstlerbiografien', *Deutschlandfunk*, 31 May 2015 <http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/kunst-todgeweihte-leben-laenger.1184.de.html?dram:article_id=317368> [accessed 1 February 2016].

¹¹¹ Angele, 'Wer hat geil Krebs?'

über [beispielsweise; N. Sch.] Krebserkrankungen erzählen'.¹¹² Indeed the majority of the texts falls between the two categories 'Belletristik' [belles lettres/ fiction] and 'Sachbuch' [non-fiction] that the *SPIEGEL*-Bestsellerliste allows for.¹¹³ Being difficult to categorise as writing that deconstructs the fact-fiction binary which traditionally keeps apart non-fictional from fictional writing, many of today's illness narratives sit uncomfortably between these categories and are thus also in their formal features difficult for readers, and maybe especially reviewers, due to their failure to conform.

German Studies Scholarship and its Attitude towards Illness in Literature

Following on from Woolf's words cited at the very beginning of this introduction, one could find it 'strange indeed' that the representation of illness 'has not taken its place' among the 'prime' interests of literary scholarship. Mitchell and Snyder have long proven that images of illness/ disability are everywhere in literature (including, even especially, the literary canon), yet these images have circulated within our cultures without attracting much scholarly interest, and in German-language academia considerably less so than in the English-language realm. The question is how to approach German-language illness writings, especially those of autobiographical nature, as a literary scholar despite the persistent critical idea that they are lacking in literary quality: an argument often put forth by those whose notions of privacy or decency are violated by the author's going public with illness, and which a priori closes down any in-depth examination of such texts.

In 1989, Thomas Anz published his habilitation dissertation on the usage of 'gesund' [healthy, sane] and 'krank' [ill, diseased] as normative terms of value judgement in the literary discourse.¹¹⁴ With the help of Anz's comprehensive work, one can trace the historical development of our tendency towards medical imagery.¹¹⁵ He delineates the way in which, hand in hand with the medicalisation of western society, the 'soziale Autorität' [social authority] of medical knowledge continuously increases.¹¹⁶ 'Medizinische "Wahrheiten" und

¹¹² Trans.: 'a range of new non-fiction books [...] which tell very personal stories about [for instance; N. Sch.] cancer'. Peitz, 'Die Ich-Erzähler'.

¹¹³ This indicates: if 'creative' books of fiction and 'factual' non-fiction are the two most established understandings of types of writing in the German public/ cultural sphere, lyric poetry and dramatic art lose out to (commonly book-length) prose in the public attention, as does anything like life writing that would have to be characterised both as creative/ artistic writing yet non-fictional in essence.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Anz, *Gesund oder krank? Medizin, Moral und Ästhetik in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989).

¹¹⁵ Although, as Sander Gilman has criticised, the study omits analysis of the Nazi escalation of such rhetoric, as well as ignoring relevant English-language research on the topic. Sander L. Gilman, 'Review of *Gesund Oder Krank? Medizin, Moral Und Ästhetik in Der Deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*', *The German Quarterly*, 64.4 (1991), 603-605.

¹¹⁶ Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. XI.

Begriffe entfalten verstärkt seit dem 18. Jahrhundert eine normative Kraft, von der kaum eine Entscheidung über den Wert menschlicher Verhaltensweisen, Einstellungen und Lebensformen unberührt bleibt.¹¹⁷ At its most basic, health is ‘Basiswert’ [base value], and illness ‘ein Übel’ [an evil, a malady], with which one is cursed for wrong (e.g. immoral, irrational, criminal) conduct.¹¹⁸ Over the course of his book, Anz highlights the fact that literary and meta-literary discourses are as little able to evade the effect of this as ethical, political or judicial discourses. Beginning with what may have become the most influential medical case study in literature, namely the descent into madness of Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz as first described by Johann Friedrich Oberlin,¹¹⁹ the examples Anz analyses demonstrate the persistent use of ‘gesund’ and ‘krank’ as ideological figures of thought; shapeshifting throughout the centuries, but carrying lasting argumentative potency from the age of Goethe to late modernity. Peaking under National Socialism, such loaded rhetoric remains in use through to the 1980s, when Anz was writing, and, I would add, beyond.

Anz examines, amongst other aspects, the close association of the terms illness, morality, and guilt (tracing it in Büchner’s *Lenz*, Goethe’s *Werther*, Susan Sontag), illness and society (Nietzsche, Freud, Otto Gross), as well as madness and femininity (the paradigmatic example here being Wolf’s *Kassandra*). In meta-literary terms, he is particularly interested in those moments in literary history in which certain connotations can be noticed to change, for example, when the stigmatisation of mental illnesses gives rise to the glorification or idealisation of these illnesses (as can be observed in the context of the Neue Subjektivität and Antipsychiatrie). Importantly, however, Anz does note that in such cases of inversion, the dichotomy within which illness and health are conceptualised remains.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Trans.: ‘Increasingly since the 18th century, medical >truths< and terms unfold a normative power from which hardly any decision about the value of human behaviours, attitudes and lifestyles remains untouched.’ Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. XI.

¹¹⁸ Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Georg Büchner later bases his novella *Lenz* (written 1836) on Oberlin’s descriptions; both Kathrin Schmidt and Wolfgang Herrndorf (out of the contemporary authors whose texts this thesis deals with in detail) refer back to Büchner’s *Lenz* as an exemplary literary portrait which sensitively animates Oberlin’s case study. The original moralistic interpretation of illness by Oberlin, taking Lenz’s ‘Wahnsinn als selbstverschuldete Folge normwidrigen Verhaltens’ [madness as a self-inflicted consequence of behaviour that is outside the norm], mitigates considerably in Büchner’s retelling. Foreshadowing modernism, Büchner’s narrative instead questions this logic. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 7.

¹²⁰ Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 52. Judith Ricker-Abderhalden’s research into illness writing of the late 1970s/ early 80s confirms this; she finds that many authors at the time rhetorically positioned society as ill, and themselves (or the protagonist of their narrative, in the case of fiction) as sane (a sanity that paradoxically was brought about by the experience of terminal illness). For more, see: Judith Ricker-Abderhalden, ‘Schreiben über Krankheit. Bemerkungen zur Zerstörung eines literarischen Tabus’, *Neophilologus*, 71.3 (1987), 474-479.

Yet it becomes apparent that Anz cannot escape from the impulse to which the critics of the feuilleton pages have more recently succumbed. This is apparent in the way he deals with the autobiographical literature of the 1970s with which our contemporary wave of illness narratives can most obviously be aligned: as over the course of the decade during which ‘die kulturelle Produktion von Theorien, Metaphern und Geschichten über Krankheiten geradezu mythische Qualitäten erhalten’,¹²¹ certain conventions of writing and speaking about illness take shape and solidify. Observing this, Anz goes on to characterise the literature as having a clear ‘Authentizitätsanspruch’ which may indeed not be surprising for life writing, yet is used by Anz to suggest that this is at the cost of writing artfully.¹²² He reads the texts as ‘Verständigungstexte’ in search of like minds,¹²³ that is, as self-help books rather than as ‘literature’, and claims that what guided the production of this type of text was above all ‘[d]as soziale Prinzip gegenseitiger Hilfe in einer Leidensgemeinschaft’.¹²⁴ In a very practical sense, he asserts, this autobiographical literature was intended by their authors ‘als Lebenshilfe und Therapie’, which he exemplifies through a discussion of Karin Struck’s *Klassenliebe* (1973).¹²⁵ From a disability studies stance, the determination that such writing was above all therapeutic must be recognised in its double-sidedness: suggestions of inwardness and an overstated emphasis on suffering and victimhood go hand-in-hand with it, and disable the texts’ function as literature which would contribute to a wider public conversation on the universal issues of illness/ disability and dying, rather than – isolated from it – circulating among the hands of a readership of like minds only.

Anz does observe that these texts, focussing in on the experience and meaning of illness in unusually personal ways, cannot easily be classified as novels or reports, literature or

¹²¹ Trans.: ‘the cultural production of theories, metaphors and stories about illness were endowed with quasi-mythical qualities’. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 57.

¹²² Trans.: ‘aspiration to be authentic’. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 60.

¹²³ Trans.: ‘texts that seek [mutual] understanding’ or ‘texts that assume a shared social or cultural understanding’. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 64. It is a label that is used for life writing texts by, for instance, women, authors from the LGBT community, or disabled people, and it tends today to be used interchangeably with other, similar terms such as ‘Betroffenheitsliteratur’ or minority literature (in an equally pejorative sense). Describing such literature as ‘Verständigungstexte’ puts the emphasis on the aspect of communication that these texts are supposed to achieve as they relate an author’s experiences of hardship or social oppression. As querying Google Books’ Ngram Viewer confirms, ‘Verständigungstext’ is a term that entered literary critics’ vocabulary in the late 1970s, and was used widely throughout the 80s. Anita Konrad criticises all of these labels in an article analysing the effects of talking about literature by authors with a migration background in these terms: Anita Konrad, ‘Minderheiten – Literatur?’, *STIMME von und für Minderheiten*, 55 (2005) <<http://minderheiten.at/stat/stimme/stimme55c.htm>> [accessed 17 February 2014].

¹²⁴ Trans.: ‘the social principle of mutual support within a community of suffering’. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 64.

¹²⁵ Trans.: ‘as counselling and therapy’. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 70.

record.¹²⁶ He even notes that for many who work professionally with literature, and who are ‘über die Differenzen zwischen Dichtung und Wahrheit, Literatur und Dokument zu wachen gewohnt’,¹²⁷ a provocation lies in exactly in these genre crossings.¹²⁸ Yet ultimately, Anz passes judgement on this type of literature as he targets especially a young, not yet established generation of authors including Maria Erlenberger, Fritz Zorn, Claudia Storz, Peter Schneider, and Karin Struck. He concludes in unequivocally derogatory words:

Viele der hier genannten Bücher werden vermutlich bald völlig vergessen sein oder nur noch als Zeitdokumente überleben. Manche dürften in ihrer literarischen und intellektuellen Anspruchslosigkeit nur deshalb einen Verleger gefunden haben, weil ihre Inhalte als marktgängig eingeschätzt wurden. Krankheit und Tod [...] wurden jedenfalls in den siebziger Jahren für die nachrückende Generation zu den beliebtesten Einstiegsstoffen in die literarische Praxis.¹²⁹

For Anz, this is sufficient assessment, and he then moves on to those texts that seem to be of more interest to him – a few select examples of autobiographical literature by more established writers as well as fictional texts. Despite having set out with his monograph to examine value judgements – the mission statement reading: ‘Zeigen wollte und will ich in erster Linie, wie bestimmte, historisch variierende Vorstellungen von Gesundheit und Krankheit eingehen in verbale Akte der Wertung und Normvermittlung [...]’¹³⁰ – he himself in the end cannot resist the temptation to take a judgemental position against the autobiographically motivated illness narratives that were central to the New Subjectivity of the 1970s. By doing so, he suggests that a more in-depth examination of these particular texts is not merited, at least not from a literary studies stance.

We observe that autobiographical approaches to the topic of illness provoke unease in the literary scholar, and rejection on the grounds of such approaches’ alleged literary inferiority. Anz’s reaction, then, is eerily similar to those displayed in the feuilleton discussion from

¹²⁶ Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 63.

¹²⁷ Trans.: ‘used to watch over the differences between poetry and truth, literature and document’. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 63.

¹²⁸ He remains vague here, and does not pursue this point further.

¹²⁹ Trans.: ‘Many of the books named here will most likely soon be forgotten entirely or only survive as documents of their age. In their literary and intellectual simplicity, some will have only found a publisher because their content will have been marketable. In any case, illness and death [...] became one of the most popular topics in the 1970s for the next generation in order to break into creative writing.’ Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 66. (Anz lists many more examples of texts that would fall into this category, see p. 65.) Expressing a similar stance, yet to her credit, doing so in much less polemical language, Ricker-Abderhalden writes of a comparable set of texts as ‘nur in einem beschränktem Masse Literatur’ [only in a limited sense literature], and as ‘in einem Grenzbezirk zwischen Fiktion und Fachliteratur, zwischen Roman und Reportage angesiedelt’ [situated in a borderland between fiction and specialist literature, between novel and report]. Ricker-Abderhalden, ‘Schreiben über Krankheit’, p. 474.

¹³⁰ Trans.: ‘I want to show above all how certain, historically varying ideas of health and illness influence verbal acts of judgement and the mediation of norms’. Anz, *Gesund oder krank?*, p. 199.

around 2009 (a whole twenty years on), in the sense that he declares the autobiographical writing of illness which arose in the 1970s to be sub-literary. Corina Caduff's most recent book *Szenen des Todes* demonstrates that this cultural bias against personal narratives of illness and dying persists amongst literary scholars until today, even amongst those who, like Caduff, take a firm interest in the proclaimed new visibility of death in contemporary culture.¹³¹ In a chapter dedicated to 'Schreiben über Sterben, Tod und Tote', she finds contemporary authors and publishers disinhibited in disseminating personal cancer stories.¹³² She commends those texts that, in her view, display 'Diskretion und Zurückgenommenheit von personaler Darstellung' above the rest and – overall – thoroughly denies life writing about illness any literary value.¹³³ This recurring critical impulse within German literary criticism of policing the borders of literature where the representation of illness and the personal mode converge may be part of the reason why the texts of the New Subjectivity (many of which Anz mentions in his 1989 book) did not achieve canonisation, and have instead largely been written off by scholarship. That, in turn, can explain why Schlingensiefel could not find any personal illness narratives in the new millennium.

For this thesis, the consequence to be drawn methodologically from the observations above is to approach the selected contemporary personal illness narratives in a decidedly objective and scholarly manner: where Anz suspects opportunism, as a disability studies scholar, I see a considerable number of individual contributions amounting to a cultural phenomenon worth examining more closely. Exactly because of their autobiographical relevance, this thesis takes an interest in questions of genre (a point that Anz raises, yet does not deepen) and in writers' formal strategies. In other words, it approaches its text corpus as literature, not as minority literature (appealing exclusively to ill/ disabled people), self-help or confessional writing. As such, the texts are read for form as much as for content, and the picture that will emerge from this is certainly not one of simplicity or uniformity; much rather, with the reader in mind, the texts examined here appear concerned with accessibility, but this does not preclude writerly accomplishment.

Academic Nervousness in the Face of the Real?

¹³¹ Corina Caduff, *Szenen des Todes. Essays* (Basel: Lenos, 2013); Thomas Macho and Kristin Marek, eds, *Die neue Sichtbarkeit des Todes* (München/ Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2007).

¹³² Caduff, *Szenen des Todes*, pp. 151-172.

¹³³ Trans.: 'discretion and restraint in personal representation'. Caduff, *Szenen des Todes*, p. 166.

When illness moves into the focus of Germanistik, scholars tend to display either a historic interest (often in the representation of a specific condition, typically in fiction),¹³⁴ or they focus on an individual (and typically canonised) author whose own illness experiences have clearly influenced their oeuvre.¹³⁵ As important as such studies are, it is notable that generally, autobiographical illness narratives are shied away from. When they are being dealt with – and this is an impression that my contextual analyses of the reception of the texts in my corpus will confirm – the autobiographical element is suppressed. The result is that illness is read allegorically, that is, it is abstracted from and taken as ‘really’ standing in for something else that the literary scholar then goes on to illuminate, to the detriment of the text, and neglecting the wider discussion to be had about illness/ dying. As Cattell agrees, when academics in German literary studies deal with representations of illness/ disability at all, they tend to focus their analytical efforts on ‘the ways in which disability is used to represent abstract concepts’.¹³⁶ In a similar way to authors’ historically largely symbolic use of illness/ disability,¹³⁷ then, German-language scholarship traditionally neglects to consider stories of illness/ disability (be they fictional or not) – also – as (potential) depictions of the reality of lived experience. It is an oversight that this thesis hopes to address.

The edited volume *Krankheit schreiben. Aufzeichnungsverfahren in Medizin und Literatur* is a case in point for my argument here.¹³⁸ This publication is representative for an area of research called ‘Literatur und Medizin’ that has gained considerably more traction in German-language academia than literary disability studies have (and more than it may ever do).¹³⁹ Led

¹³⁴ Frank Degler and Christian Kohlroß, eds, *Epochen/ Krankheiten: Konstellationen von Literatur und Pathologie* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 2006); Katrin Max, *Liegekur und Bakterienrausch: literarische Deutungen der Tuberkulose im „Zauberberg“ und anderswo* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012).

¹³⁵ Kafka is the paradigmatic example here: Sander L. Gilman, *Franz Kafka. The Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Johannes Groß, *Kafkas Krankheiten* (Marburg: LiteraturWissenschaft.de, 2012).

¹³⁶ Cattell, *Disability Drama*, p. 175. Prototypical examples of this tendency are works such as: Andreas Dawidowicz, *Die metaphorische Krankheit als Gesellschaftskritik in den Werken von Franz Kafka, Friedrich Dürrenmatt und Thomas Bernhard*, *Germanistik*, 42 (Berlin: LIT, 2013); Steffi Ehlebracht, *Gelingendes Scheitern. Epilepsie als Metapher in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008).

¹³⁷ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*.

¹³⁸ Yvonne Wübben and Carsten Zelle, eds, *Krankheit schreiben. Aufzeichnungsverfahren in Medizin und Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013). The volume has a clear historic focus; it keeps its distance to our present age. Instead it centres on specific conditions, historical figures and associated cases from around 1900. In those chapters that deal with literary authors at all, it addresses only the work of canonised (male) authors. The ‘recording techniques’ it takes a major interest in are those of the medical professionals; the way literature writes or rewrites illness is subsidiary to the volume’s composition.

¹³⁹ Fitting in with what in Anglo-American academia is included in the ‘medical humanities’. For more on the disciplinary or ideological divide between the medical humanities and disability studies approaches, see: Diane Price Herndl, ‘Disease versus Disability: The Medical Humanities and Disability Studies’, *PMLA*, 120.2 (2005), 593-598.

by researchers such as Bettina von Jagow and Florian Steger,¹⁴⁰ the field is rooted in the history and ethics of medicine more than in literary studies, albeit attempting to speak across subject disciplines. Researchers working from this perspective stress medicine as a practised art,¹⁴¹ and tend to take an interest in potential exchanges between the practices and knowledges of medicine and literature. Those taking up this stance often work from a historical perspective, read with the syllabi of medical schools in mind, and suggest utilising literature as a means to give medical education a more reliable ethical grounding. They analyse the representation of medicine in the literary and artistic worlds, or examine the genres of medical writing with the tools of literary studies. Many engaging with the field do, however, ultimately display one-sided interests. Privileging the doctor's perspective (already endowed with power and authority) over that of the ill, such scholarship tends to turn to the writing doctor for insights.

By contrast, this thesis does not limit itself to the investigation of a particular illness/ condition, but sets out to explore the work of several authors writing the ill self publicly across a range of experiences and mediations. Tracing writers' politics of patienthood and authorship in a cultural context which still only gives little of its attention to the inside, lived perspective of illness/ disability, this thesis consciously focuses its attention onto what in German literary studies is an under-researched area, despite an increasing amount of contemporary literature coming out that addresses illness from a personal stance.

In the course of this, the work presented here hopes to widen disability studies' focus beyond the borders of the English language as called for by Pauline Eyre in a recent article, in which she writes that 'the predominantly Anglophone world of disability studies has thus far been impaired by a lack of engagement with the literature and culture of Europe where English is not the first language'.¹⁴² Methodologically situated between Anglo-American and German literary studies, it hopes to mediate the value of a disability studies approach from this position. Just as it may be time for literary disability studies to look beyond English-language cultures, as Eyre suggests, it is, I contend, high time for German literary studies to open up to

¹⁴⁰ Joint editors of *Repräsentationen: Medizin und Ethik in Literatur und Kunst der Moderne* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004); *Literatur und Medizin: ein Lexikon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005); *Was treibt die Literatur zur Medizin?: ein kulturwissenschaftlicher Dialog* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

¹⁴¹ See, for instance: Dietrich von Engelhardt and Felix Unger, eds, *Ästhetik und Ethik in der Medizin*, edition weimar, 4 (Weimar: VDG, 2006).

¹⁴² Pauline Eyre, 'Impaired or empowered? Mapping disability onto European literature', in *Changing Social Attitudes Toward Disability. Perspectives from historical, cultural, and educational studies*, ed. by David Bolt (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 99-108 (p. 99).

methodological approaches informed by disability studies, and pay the texts examined here the critical attention they deserve.

Overview of Chapters

Sensitised by its readings in disability studies, this thesis recognises the cultural significance of the work the individual primary texts do in their negotiations of illness/ disability, self and society. What is more, it naturally understands these texts to be literature, in an unqualified sense, and as such of interest to literary scholarship – especially as they have recently come out in such short succession. Recognising the texts’ relationality, that is their being in dialogue with both literary history and popular culture, as well as their place within our contemporary world and within an author’s previous work, this thesis’s methodology is one of careful contextualisations of each examined text. Instead of isolating the illness experience, and the writing to which it led, this work contends that answers to questions such as why and how an author decided to confront illness publicly can only be explored adequately by reading each text decidedly in its context.

Certain types of response, some of which I have drawn out from media reactions and comments of scholars above, surface time and again. Such responses can be suspected to be ‘socially conditioned, politically generated’.¹⁴³ One example is feelings of repulsion toward the ill/ disabled or dying person; on a societal level, Davis suggests, such negative feelings translate into ‘actions such as incarceration, institutionalization, segregation, discrimination, marginalization, and so on’.¹⁴⁴ The disability studies reading of my corpus offered here therefore furthermore combines the findings of close readings with observations concerning readerly reactions to the texts.

Instead of presenting the texts in the chronological order in which they were published, the progression of this thesis is guided by the question: how explicitly is the relation of the portrayal of illness to the author’s own life experience being made? The analysis begins with the most ambiguous text in this respect, Charlotte Roche’s *Schoßgebete*, a text that I identify as an autofiction, and from there moves on to Kathrin Schmidt’s *Du stirbst nicht* and Verena Stefan’s *Fremdschläfer*. Both are autobiographical novels, but Stefan’s book is the more classic life writing text, its protagonist sharing the author’s name (*F 92*). Lastly, in a comparative chapter, analysis turns to the two diaries by Christoph Schlingensiefel and Wolfgang Herrndorf, which – as indicated by their genre – take up the most explicitly personal and immediate

¹⁴³ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 13.

stance out of the five texts, and were written directly at the time of their author's experience of illness and of dying (not retrospectively).

Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebete*¹⁴⁵

Charlotte Roche's popular novel *Schoßgebete* tells the story of the everyday life challenges of Elizabeth who is portrayed as suffering from a complex psychological trauma caused by the death of her brothers. It is this tragedy that forms the narrative's nucleus, and it is through this crucial aspect of the storyline that the novel is indelibly linked to Roche's own life experiences. Reading Roche's second book publication as a narrative that traces and articulates the trauma of her multiple bereavement, two strategies employed by the author will be examined more closely: the first is the use of an autofictional narrative mode, which, I argue, undermines the assumed referentiality of the much-talked about novel at the same time as it establishes it.¹⁴⁶ This grants Roche a poetic licence that enables agency, which helps the author/narrator to evade traumatic passivity and silence and allows her to belatedly take control of this part of her life story as a celebrity; thus reclaiming it from the tabloid newspaper *BILD* which reported extensively on the accident in 2001, exploiting it for sales. Autofiction emerges as a mode of writing eminently suitable for the storying of illness and traumatic loss.

The second focus of the chapter, intertwined with the first, is Roche's employment of an aesthetics of disgust in *Schoßgebete*, and what this suggests about the relationship between the text and its readership. Thinking back to disability scholar Bill Hughes's article 'Fear, Pity and Disgust. Emotions and the Non-disabled Imaginary', we are reminded of the role affect plays in the negotiation of such taxing themes as illness/ disability and death, and, what is more, the role of disgust specifically as a reaction that invalidates the ill/ disabled as other.¹⁴⁷ Roche, more than aware of this, incorporates and preempts potential readerly reactions of disgust in her subversive aesthetic representation of the 'sickness' of her protagonist's mind and lifestyle in *Schoßgebete*.

¹⁴⁵ Parts of this chapter have been published, in earlier form, in an article I wrote for the inaugural edition of *Auto/fiction*. Nina Schmidt, 'Autofiction and Trauma: Negotiating Vulnerable Subject Positions in Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebete*,' *Auto/Fiction* 1.1 (2013), 61-86.

¹⁴⁶ My application of the term autofiction goes back to Serge Doubrovsky, who developed the concept in direct reaction to Lejeune's theoretical work on autobiography. Setting out to trouble Lejeune's suggestion of the autobiographical pact, Doubrovsky presented him with his novel *Fils* in 1977, therein testing out how far it was possible stretch the boundaries of autobiography's need for referential truth. Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', p. 135.

¹⁴⁷ Hughes, 'Fear, Pity and Disgust', pp. 72-75.

As both a physical and an emotional primal response, disgust typically finds expression in an open-mouthed face, with the tongue protruding,¹⁴⁸ and can, at its most extreme, cause retching and feelings of nausea. Disgust at its most archetypal or typical is encountered when one is confronted with what is considered dirty, poisonous, otherwise dangerous, abnormal, or diseased. Disgust can often also take on a moral significance, and in this is less instinctive (as a form of built-in self-protection) but similarly visceral. In my analysis of Roche's writing, disgust is of interest as 'a physical, visceral aversion that becomes a culturally powerful – and manipulable – aesthetic response'.¹⁴⁹ My approach to it is informed most noticeably by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on the grotesque and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.¹⁵⁰ I speak of an aesthetics of disgust to stress that disgust is created consciously in literature or other art, purposefully complicating the writer-reader relationship. The term aesthetics – in this chapter, as in the overall thesis – is used in its most neutral (contemporary) sense, denoting 'the distinctive underlying principles' of a text, rather than encompassing only philosophies or representations of the beautiful and sublime as worthy of artistic, and scholarly, attention.¹⁵¹

Together, the autofictional mode and the aesthetics of disgust Roche employs in telling this highly personal story help her to position herself and her text ambivalently towards, yet just out of reach of, publicly voiced reactions to its publication. Often stressing the fact that she does not regard herself an author,¹⁵² which rhetorically in fact heightens her claim of authenticity, Roche remains unperturbed by criticism of her writing as non-literary. As can be

¹⁴⁸ A facial expression that Daniel Kelly and others term the gape face. Daniel Kelly, *Yuck! The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust* (Cambridge: MIT, 2011), pp. 64-66.

¹⁴⁹ Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring disgust: the foul and the fair in aesthetics* (New York/ Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ This is because I see their work as having formed the decisive starting point for disgust theory in the arts and humanities. Bakhtin must be credited for developing the psychology or sociology of disgust into part of the carnivalesque. In doing so, he draws our attention to other facets of the grotesque in art that accompany, and, to him, outweigh, the outright disgusting. As a linguist, psychoanalyst and literary scholar, Kristeva has been looking for the causes and workings of disgust in both literature and beyond, reading the experience of disgust as a threat of psychic regression. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

¹⁵¹ The quotation is from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which distinguishes between three meanings of the term aesthetics: 'The philosophy of the beautiful or of art; a system of principles for the appreciation of the beautiful, etc.; the distinctive underlying principles of a work of art or a genre, the works of an artist, the arts of a culture, etc.' Traditionally, disgust has been dismissed as an emotion not worthwhile contemplating or representing through art, with Kant going so far as to claim for it to refuse representation. Florence Vatan, 'The Lure of Disgust: Musil and Kolnai', *The Germanic Review*, 88 (2013), 29-46 (pp. 29-31).

¹⁵² Felicitas von Lovenberg, 'Ein Gespräch mit Charlotte Roche: Ich bin keine Frau, die andere Frauen verrät', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 10 August 2011 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/ein-gespraech-mit-charlotte-roche-ich-bin-keine-frau-die-andere-frauen-verraet-11104662.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2> [accessed 9 January 2016].

supported by the results of my analysis, the writing and publication of *Schoßgebete*, for Roche, served the function of formulating trauma in her own words, and communicating the experience to a readership willing to empathise with its narrator figure across difference. Yet, as the fruitful analysis underlines, this does not diminish the text's literariness (its constructedness, and its inherent value as writing of its individual and cultural moment – regardless of readers' tastes or sensibilities), or indeed its complexity.

In relation to wider genre discussions, this first chapter finds that in German literary studies, the term autofiction is still strongly indebted to the French tradition. Yet as scholars are beginning to recognise more and more German-language literature as autofictional, this is starting to have an effect on the understanding of the theory.¹⁵³ Generally, one would hope that autofiction studies will not develop the same purely elitist tunnel vision that marked the initial history of autobiographical research as well as trauma studies. Instead it should from the start read the marginal, and the new, drawing upon popular literature (such as Roche's *Schoßgebete*) as well as the canon.

Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht*¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, for example, identifies the autofictional mode across a range of texts: she finds it in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's oeuvre, Walter Benjamin's *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, and Günter Grass's divisive memoir *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*. The edited volume »...all diese fingierten, notierten, in meinem Kopf ungefähr wieder zusammengesetzten Ichs« *Autobiographie und Autofiktion* (2012) discusses Swiss writers Robert Walser, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, and Paul Nizon from a perspective informed by autofiction theory. Innokentij Kreknin focuses on stagings of the authorial self across literary texts and new media in the work of Rainald Goetz, Joachim Lottmann and Alban Nikolai Herbst, identifying them as autofictional. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'AUTOFIKTION ODER: AUTOBIOGRAPHIE NACH DER AUTOBIOGRAPHIE. GOETHE – BARTHES – ÖZDAMAR', in *Autobiographisches Schreiben in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur. Band 1: Grenzen der Identität und der Fiktionalität*, ed. by Ulrich Breuer and Beatrice Sandberg (München: iudicium, 2006), pp. 353-368; Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Autofiktion – Theorie und Praxis des autobiographischen Schreibens', in *Schreiben im Kontext von Schule, Universität, Beruf und Lebensalltag*, ed. by Johannes Berning and others, *Schreiben interdisziplinär*, 1 (Berlin: LIT, 2006), pp. 80-101; Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven der Autobiographieforschung in der Literaturwissenschaft', *Bios – Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen*, 23.2 (2010), 188-200; Peter Gasser, 'Autobiographie und Autofiktion. Einige begriffskritische Bemerkungen', in »...all diese fingierten, notierten, in meinem Kopf ungefähr wieder zusammengesetzten Ichs« *Autobiographie und Autofiktion*, ed. by Elio Pellin and Ulrich Weber (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), pp. 13-28; Innokentij Kreknin, *Poetiken des Selbst. Identität, Autorschaft und Autofiktion am Beispiel von Rainald Goetz, Joachim Lottmann und Alban Nikolai Herbst*, *Studien zur deutschen Literatur*, 206 (Berlin/ Boston: de Gruyter, 2014).

¹⁵⁴ An earlier, shorter version of this chapter has been published in a volume of conference proceedings: Nina Schmidt, '[E]ndlich normal geworden?' Reassembling an image of the self in Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht* (2009)', in *Norms, normality and normalization: papers from the postgraduate summer school in German Studies, Nottingham, July 2013*, ed. by Matthias Uecker and others (Nottingham: Nottingham eprints, 2014), pp. 65-78.

Disability often is, as Davis phrases it, ‘a specular moment’.¹⁵⁵ In the chapter on Kathrin Schmidt’s ‘Erinnerungsroman’ [novel of memory] *Du stirbst nicht*, the physical act of staring that occurs between the visibly ill/ disabled person and the onlooker constitutes the main focus of the analysis, and is probed for its effect on both the diegetic level (that is, between characters) and beyond (namely between author and readership of illness/ disability narrative). If not because of one’s noted functional limitations, disability – from the outside – is determined visually, on the basis of one’s appearance: ‘The missing limb, blind gaze, use of sign language, wheelchair or prosthesis is seen by the “normal” observer.’¹⁵⁶ Davis stresses the dominance and violence this gaze can exert on the (visibly) disabled person – and the ‘powerful emotional responses’ this gaze is accompanied with.¹⁵⁷ To understand ideological constructions of disability and normalcy (his term), Davis stresses that ‘attention must be paid to the violence of the response [of the supposedly ‘normal’] – in a way more than to the object of the response [i.e. the disabled person; N. Sch.]’.¹⁵⁸ Studying normality is therefore key to understanding disability – and Schmidt’s text addresses questions of ab/normality most directly out of all in my corpus, and most didactically so.

This chapter, in order to approach the narrative device of staring in Schmidt’s novel, adapts Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s theoretical considerations of ‘staring’ for literary analysis.¹⁵⁹ Building on previous scholarship on manifestations and effect of the gaze, and the discourse about the gaze within disability studies (as exemplified in Davis’s notion rendered above), Garland-Thomson broadens our understanding of visual encounters in her work on staring as natural impulse and social necessity. She does so by (re-)focusing her attention on the stare as inducing an interchange of looks, and triggering identity work in those involved. Garland-Thomson stresses that ‘[w]ho we are can shift into focus by staring at who we think we are not’.¹⁶⁰ This thesis contends that this idea widens interpretative possibilities for cultural/ literary studies, and may be an especially a valuable approach when working on autobiographical literatures, as Garland-Thomson’s framework allows us to recognise agency in the position of those typically confined to the position of objects.

¹⁵⁵ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 12. Davis harks back to Erving Goffman’s notion of stigma here. Goffman too contended it is most often on the visual plane that stigma is played out.

¹⁵⁶ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁷ He writes: ‘These responses can include horror, fear, pity, compassion, and avoidance.’ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009).

¹⁶⁰ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 6.

The close analysis reveals the visual in *Du stirbst nicht* to be the dominant plane of protagonist Helene's subjective experience and consciousness; possibly because her vision remains unimpaired by the stroke she suffered, just as her creator had. Her ways of seeing are found to be closely linked to issues of self-image or self-perception, and externally determined image, as well as attitudes toward the disabled other (which, as Helene awakens from coma at the onset of the narrative, is also found within the self). In its frank appraisal, staring is found to be a crucial means for the author's alter ego to reflect upon the situation she finds herself in, and it enables the character to reassemble an image of her self over the course of this narrative. The novel takes the shape of an Entwicklungsroman, and can be taken to 'provide the public with controlled access to lives [or a life; N. Sch.] that might otherwise remain opaque or exotic to them' – thus fulfilling a major function, at least in Couser's view, of disability life writing.¹⁶¹

However, in fact, Schmidt's text does not stop there. It invites but simultaneously troubles the reader's stare and the emotional repertoire of responses the encounter with impairment/disability brings to the fore. The use of staring as storytelling technique by Schmidt again raises profound questions about the relationship of the autobiographical author of illness narrative and its readership, the media and scholarship included (as does Roche's use of autofiction and disgust in *Schoßgebete*). Beyond providing a revealing close reading of the text itself, this chapter therefore investigates what the effect of normative reading practices is on a text that has the lived experience of illness/disability at its centre, once it is exposed to a large, mainstream readership in the way *Du stirbst nicht* has been since winning the Deutscher Buchpreis in 2009. With Jürgen Link and his theory of normalism in mind, we recognise that the prize confers upon it the status of exception, and that this is a strategy that reels in the stretched boundaries of 'normal' – re-establishing an essential difference between Helene and those who see themselves as able-bodied, on the one hand, and Schmidt and her readers, on the other.¹⁶² It is in this context that Schmidt's vehement rejection of her book as therapeutic – and as 'Betroffenheitsliteratur', that is, as texts of interest to a small section of the reading public only, written by those concerned for those concerned (in both senses of the word) –

¹⁶¹ G. Thomas Couser, 'Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 456-459 (p. 458).

¹⁶² Jürgen Link, *Versuch über den Normalismus: Wie Normalität produziert wird*, 3rd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 355-357 for more on 'Das Paradox der Normalitätsgrenze'. For an article that considers Link's 'These von der flexiblen Normalisierung' (p. 5) from a sociological vantage point, testing it against the reality of disabled people's negotiations of their place in society today, see: Anne Waldschmidt, 'Flexible Normalisierung oder stabile Ausgrenzung: Veränderungen im Verhältnis Behinderung und Normalität', *Soziale Probleme*, 9.1 (1998), 3-25.

must be understood.¹⁶³ The hasty assumption on the side of reviewers that illness writing is always (only) therapeutic writing is found to be disabling, as it confines Schmidt's novel, against its ambitions, to the sidelines of contemporary literature.

Verena Stefan's *Fremdschläfer*

The restrictive label of 'Betroffenheitsliteratur' that Schmidt so vehemently rejects is one all too familiar to Verena Stefan. Her 2007 book *Fremdschläfer* is the third text analysed in this thesis. It deals with the life writer's breast cancer experience as a mature woman, alongside and in its connection with other themes such as migration and personal relationships. The issues which labels such as 'Betroffenheitsliteratur' create for authors will be explored further in the chapter on Stefan's illness writing. Monique Wittig's theorisations of the struggle for recognition maintained by the minority author in the literary field are helpful in doing so – and can further elucidate Davis's remarks concerning the 'violence' done to the ill/ disabled person in society, and which I transferred to the situation of the author of illness/ disability life writing whose work is being denied access to the realm of literature, at least in the Germanic context.¹⁶⁴ For the thesis as a whole, what can be drawn from Wittig's essay is encouragement, methodologically, to read each of the texts in my corpus in the context of its individual production, its author's work thus far, and the literary field it moves in; thus precisely not reducing its complexity to one 'minority' issue. This enables me to respect the complexity of each piece of writing analysed within the thesis, even when it is analysed with specific view to the representation of experiences of illness/ disability.

Like Schmidt in 2009, Stefan too had once been exposed to the full force of normative reading practices that the preceding chapter exposes, in fact possibly more aggressively so. In one review from 1976, for example, Stefan's autobiographically-inspired debut *Häutungen* (the text with which she rose to fame as an author) was attacked as the '*Krankengeschichte einer schweren Neurotikerin*', its author labelled '*ein zutiefst verstörter Mensch*' [emphasis in the

¹⁶³ Chantelle Warner points out that the descriptor 'ambiguously refers both to the affected nature of the experiences and the emotional response elicited from the book's readers' (p. 27). For more on the term, see: Chantelle Warner, *The Pragmatics of Literary Testimony. Authenticity Effects in German Social Autobiographies* (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013); Konrad, 'Minderheiten – Literatur?'.

¹⁶⁴ Monique Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', *Feminist Issues*, 3.2 (1983), 61-69.

original].¹⁶⁵ In contrast Anne Betten, more recently, has called it a 'Kultbuch'.¹⁶⁶ Both reactions reveal that it clearly hit a nerve at the time of the 'Neue[] Frauenbewegung' [new women's movement] and 'Neue Subjektivität',¹⁶⁷ to name the two related movements (one social, one literary) with which *Häutungen* is typically associated. More than thirty years later, the life writer then indeed tackles illness autobiographically in *Fremdschläfer* (having published it in 2007). In Stefan's own words, the book and its interwoven strands deal with '(im)migration, dislocation and connection to place and space viewed from inside the body, its visceral and cultural codes'.¹⁶⁸

Again, as in previous chapters, the analysis of *Fremdschläfer* too centres on questions of narratability. It traces the narrative strategies and aesthetic forms that allow Stefan to write of cancer personally, and what is more, explores what traditions a writer can build on, which texts one can engage with, when there is no real tradition (at least not a recognised one) of writing illness autobiographically, as is the case in the Germanic cultural realm. The focus in analysing Stefan's breast cancer narrative *Fremdschläfer* lies on how she – today a resident of Canada – writes breast cancer 'from beyond the border', literally and metaphorically so. By means of intertextuality she situates herself and her text in a tradition of Anglo-American writings above all, and by referencing texts by Virginia Woolf, Susan Sontag, and Audre Lorde, for example, and who have all written progressively about illness, Stefan distances herself from the German-language literary circuit and its critics. The chapter demonstrates that for the second-wave feminist, it is typical that only the written word has the power to trace and make fully real the experience. Assessing Stefan's position on the international stage as a writer today, she is found consciously to take up what I call a transnational stance with *Fremdschläfer*.

Starting from her feminist position, with this text she 'work[s] to reach the general';¹⁶⁹ in other words, she writes it to address much wider social topics, touching on the experience of various sections of society. Knowingly writing from a privileged situation, Stefan thus produces a

¹⁶⁵ Trans.: 'case history of a severe neurotic'; 'a most deeply disturbed person'. As quoted in Andrea Spiegl, 'Gross, schlank, blond, attraktiv. Schweizer Schriftstellerinnen der 1970er', *literaturkritik.at*, 23 September 2013 <<http://www.uibk.ac.at/literaturkritik/zeitschrift/1111216.html#Dreizehn>> [accessed 18 Oct 2013].

¹⁶⁶ Anne Betten, 'Entwicklungen und Formen der deutschen Literatursprache nach 1945', in *Sprachgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung*, ed. by Werner Besch and others, 2nd edn, vol. 4 (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 3117-3159 (p. 3141).

¹⁶⁷ See, for instance: Betten, 'Entwicklungen und Formen der deutschen Literatursprache nach 1945', pp. 3138, 3140.

¹⁶⁸ See 'working notes' to Verena Stefan, 'Doe a Deer', *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, 4 (2006) <www.triviavoices.com/doe-a-deer.html> [accessed 14 October 2013].

¹⁶⁹ Wittig, 'The Point of View', p. 68.

deeply political and ethical text that we could call multidirectional in the way it addresses illness, im/migration, and more, finding the universal in the individual (and familial) life story and vice versa. Consequentially, *Fremdschläfer* is a text that offers itself up to a diverse readership.

Christoph Schlingensief's diary *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein!* and Wolfgang Herrndorf's diary/blog *Arbeit und Struktur*¹⁷⁰

The final, comparative chapter returns to a specific autobiographical genre: that of the diary. It is an important form of expression for illness writers – particularly so when there is severe uncertainty as to how much longer one has to live. Both Christoph Schlingensief and Wolfgang Herrndorf broke new ground for their artistic work by turning to the diary genre; this raises the question: what promises does the diary form specifically hold for the self in (terminal) illness? As well as addressing previously formulated research questions, this concluding, longer analysis traces the particular investment made by the dying author in end-of-life writing.

The comparative analysis of the two diaries brings out both parallels and differences in each writer's motivation behind writing illness, their practice of doing so, and each diary's reception. Beyond that, the chapter contributes to contemporary diary research by doing ground work in exploring its suitability – and provocative potential – as an outward-facing genre for writing the ill and dying self. Building above all on the work of Philippe Lejeune as collected in the edited volume *On Diary*, and identifying with contemporary research approaches such as Kylie Cardell's,¹⁷¹ this chapter recognises the diary as a mode of writing and of living.

Schlingensief's cancer diary was published in 2009 – one year before he died from the illness that he documented in what he published as his diary. The first half of the chapter brings out that this genre ascription was a deliberate one and, what is more, highlights that it reflected much of Schlingensief's beliefs in his artistic life and absolute commitment to his work. For

¹⁷⁰ Parts of this chapter have been published, in preliminary form, within an article for a special issue of *Oxford German Studies* on 'Writing in extremis'. Nina Schmidt, 'Confronting Cancer Publicly: Christoph Schlingensief's *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein! Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung*', *Oxford German Studies*, 44.1 (2015), 100-112.

¹⁷¹ Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009); Kylie Cardell, *De@r World. Contemporary Uses of the Diary* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2014). Building on Lejeune, my final comparative analysis takes into account the sociology and history of the diary genre as well as the individual contexts of the two texts specifically, hoping to break through preconceptions about the form, replacing these instead with findings from close literary analysis. Cardell's study must be highlighted as key for having formulated contemporary, public uses of the diary form; having begun to examine its place as a published genre in popular culture today, and with that the meaning it takes on as a mode of self-expression in times of the Internet and in various (often oppressive) contexts and conflicts.

Schlingensiefel, the desire to record and disseminate his own experience of illness in diary form seemed to override the risk of a potentially hostile reception. However, as will be demonstrated in the chapter, not only was the relevance for the artist of expressing himself in diary form missed by the majority of critics and scholars commenting on his late period, but what is more, the diary, as representative of a marginal literary form, has been neglected altogether in the otherwise large (and currently growing) scholarly interest in Schlingensiefel's late work. The work presented here aims to rectify the omission observed in Schlingensiefel scholarship, and in fact argues that his diary sets the direction for the artist's subsequent prolific late work.

Both in the analysis of Schlingensiefel's diary as in that of Herrndorf's, which follows on from it, it is investigated how the diary as a form is suited to the task of writing the dying self publicly, and in which ways the use of the diary as an exploratory space maps on to, or departs from, either author's previous work. In each case, the analysis is carried out from a stance that is aware of the effect that the terminally ill author's nearness to death has on the (contemporary as well as posthumous) reception of the author's end-of-life writing. It pays particular attention to the material transformations that each text undergoes as their author's illness unfolds, and the media that both Schlingensiefel and Herrndorf experiment with.

The second part of the chapter complements the observations made in relation to Schlingensiefel's published diary with an analysis of author Wolfgang Herrndorf's diary/blog *Arbeit und Struktur* (2010-2013). Like Schlingensiefel, Herrndorf is currently beginning to attract scholarly interest. And although admittedly, there is little scholarship on Herrndorf's texts to date, it is telling that there is only one other contribution on *Arbeit und Struktur* so far.¹⁷²

In my analysis of *Arbeit und Struktur*, I trace why and how Herrndorf, in a prolonged state of 'livingly dying' (that we can observe to become more and more common in the 21st century),¹⁷³ writes cancer in the everyday genre of the diary. Additionally, his choice of publication via the online blog is discussed,¹⁷⁴ and the transformations (material, and otherwise) that the evolving

¹⁷² Maximilian Burk, '„dem Leben wie einem Roman zu Leibe rücken“. Wolfgang Herrndorf's Blog *Arbeit und Struktur*', in *Wolfgang Herrndorf*, ed. by Annina Klappert (Weimar: VDG, 2015), pp. 85-99.

¹⁷³ Marcy Westerling, 'livingly dying. notes & essays on daily life with terminal cancer' <<http://livinglydying.com/>> [accessed 17 December 2015].

¹⁷⁴ Frank Fischer, 'Der Autor als Medienjongleur. Die Inszenierung literarischer Modernität im Internet', in *Autorinszenierungen. Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*, ed. by Christine Künzel and Jörg Schönert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 271-280. Reading Fischer, what becomes clear is that both the choice of the diary genre and that of the Internet as place of publication, until very recently, disqualified texts from consideration as 'literature' in most German-language critics' eyes.

diaristic text undergoes over time are examined. In a way that can be compared to Schlingensief breaking out of and questioning the medium of the theatre in his *Tagebuch*, Herrndorf critically thinks through the relation of *Arbeit und Struktur* to other literature, of both the canonised and popular kind. Besides anticipating posthumous reading practices, the author makes a last literary point with *Arbeit und Struktur*: in it, Herrndorf demonstrates the kinship of the fictional and the non-fictional in a way that only life writing, and maybe particularly end-of-life writing, can do. *Arbeit und Struktur* thus chips away at the demarcation of 'low' and 'high' literature which continues to operate in German culture.

Both authors display a wariness of cultural elitism in their diaristic illness projects, and set out to reach a diverse audience. They see value in their illness narratives which goes beyond the personal. In other words, their autothanatographies are not merely 'therapeutic' for them, as is commonly assumed, implying an inwardness. My analysis reveals each diary to be put to a multitude of uses by their creators, as outward-facing, complex texts daring to engage in a wider societal conversation about illness, death and dying in the 21st century. In contrast to similar illness writing from the 1970s and 1980s (much of it in diaristic form),¹⁷⁵ which was typically published after the author's death, Schlingensief and Herrndorf bring their readerships into their present, knowingly overtaxing them when confronting them with their suffering and dying. The Internet as a place of publication helps such more prompt publication, which in turn heightens the illness diaries' provocative effect.

To summarise, the analysis offered in this thesis examines how the different authors rise up to the challenge of writing illness at once personally and publicly. It does so by tracing which aesthetic strategies and narrative forms or genres the authors consider in storying illness, and explores how they use, stretch and, at times, redefine these. Doing so, this thesis provides an important disability studies perspective on contemporary German literature – especially that which arises from autobiographical experience – dealing with themes of illness/ disability and dying, and demonstrates ways in which literary scholarship can read these texts more adequately.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Noll and Fritz Zorn have been named as authors of such texts; others that come to mind here are Hildegard Knief, Brigitte Reimann and Maxie Wander, for example. For more names of authors and texts, and more in-depth commentary on the writing of the 1970s and 80s than can be provided here, see, for example: Ricker-Abderhalden, 'Schreiben über Krankheit'; Christa Karpenstein-Eßbach, 'Krebs – Literatur – Wissen. Von der Krebspersönlichkeit zur totalen Kommunikation', in *Epochen/ Krankheiten. Konstellationen von Literatur und Pathologie*, ed. by Frank Degler and Christian Kohlroß, *Das Wissen der Literatur*, 1 (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 2006), pp. 233-264.

Chapter I

Autofiction, Disgust, and Trauma: Negotiating Vulnerable Subject Positions in Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebiete* (2011)

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.

Judith Lewis Herman in *Trauma and Recovery*

‘Dieser Roman basiert auf einer wahren Begebenheit. Darüber hinaus ist jede Ähnlichkeit mit lebenden oder toten Personen sowie realen Geschehnissen rein zufällig und nicht beabsichtigt.’¹ The reader encounters this legal statement on opening Charlotte Roche’s 2011 novel *Schoßgebiete*, published in English as *Wrecked*, before turning the page to start reading what has been another huge success for its author after her debut *Feuchtgebiete* [*Wetlands*], which is said to have sold around 2 million copies.² While such disclaimers today seem fairly standard, upon finishing this text, which bears the description ‘novel’ on its cover, the reader is struck by the necessity, but also the inapplicability, of the legal disclaimer which refutes the close and complicated relationship of fiction and fact as presented in *Schoßgebiete*.

This chapter focuses on exactly this intertwined relationship by reading the narrative as an autofiction, as coined by literary theorist and author Serge Doubrovsky when describing his own experimental text *Fils*.³ Historically, the concept emerged ‘at a time of severely diminished faith in the power of memory and language to access definitive truths about the past or the self’, as Johnnie Gratton highlights.⁴ In literary scholarship, the term has been applied widely since, generally describing a ‘variante de l’écriture autobiographique [...], qui tend à abolir la frontière entre la fiction et la non-fiction’.⁵ My understanding of autofiction is

¹ Trans.: ‘This novel is based on one true event. Beyond that, any similarities to people living or dead as well as to any real events are purely coincidental and not intended.’ Charlotte Roche, *Schoßgebiete* (München: Piper, 2011).

² Charlotte Roche, *Feuchtgebiete* (Köln: DuMont, 2008); Charlotte Roche, *Wetlands* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009).

³ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils: roman* (Paris: Galilée, 1977).

⁴ Johnnie Gratton, ‘Autofiction’, in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 86-87 (p. 86).

⁵ Trans.: ‘variation of autobiographical writing [...] which tends to remove the border between fiction and non-fiction’. ‘Autofiction’, in *Dictionnaire des termes littéraires*, ed. by Hendrik van Gorp and others (Paris: Champion, 2001), pp. 54-55 (p. 54). Claudia Gronemann imported the French concept of autofiction into German-language autobiography studies around the year 2000. Claudia Gronemann, *Postmoderne/postkoloniale Konzepte der Autobiographie in der französischen und maghrebischen Literatur. Autofiction – Nouvelle Autobiographie – Double Autobiographie – Aventure du texte* (Hildesheim/ Zürich/ New York: Georg Olms, 2002).

informed by the psychoanalytic connotations autofiction has for Doubrovsky, and recognises an element of play – and within that opportunities for cross-media performance – in the autofictional mode, one that is consciously exploited by authors today such as Roche. Autofiction here is seen as a form of life writing that proves very contemporary, being much more fluid and harder to grasp than other forms of (more conventional) autobiographical writing. Isabelle Grell, a leading literary scholar of autofiction, speaks in this context of autofiction's 'transparence énigmatique'.⁶ Beyond merely identifying *Schoßgebete*'s autofictional qualities, the analysis to follow formulates reasons for Roche's use of this narrative mode, and probes its intersection with a bold aesthetics of disgust that is employed to narrate this equally personal and fictional story. Disgust is understood as 'a physical, visceral aversion that becomes a culturally powerful – and manipulable – aesthetic response'.⁷ Consequently, this chapter reads disgust as a figure for a problematised author-reader relationship. It is here that the autofictional writing mode and disgust find common ground. Finally, this chapter comes to suggest autofiction as a mode of writing eminently suitable for the storying of illness, death and trauma.

Schoßgebete portrays three days in the life of the homodiegetic narrator. Accordingly, the chapters are named 'Dienstag', 'Mittwoch' and 'Donnerstag'. These three days are representative of first-person narrator Elizabeth Kiehl's everyday life: she and her husband Georg have sex, she cooks dinner at night, and they watch porn when their daughter Liza is away. On the Thursday, Elizabeth and Georg visit a brothel. Elizabeth narrates daily appointments with her psychotherapist and thus introduces the reader to her troubled psyche. Her fears and suicidal thinking, her many neuroses, and sexual desires loom large throughout these three ordinary days. They are all linked to the tragic event at the heart of the novel, which is the death of the protagonist's brothers in a car accident. Central to the narration are Elizabeth's reflections on the difficult relationship with her mother, who was the driver but survived the accident, and her thoughts on the near-symbiotic relationship with her husband. Overall, *Schoßgebete* in many ways reads like a confession or apology – it is a minutely detailed account of Elizabeth's struggle with life.⁸

⁶ Isabelle Grell, 'Pourquoi Serge Doubrovsky n'a pu éviter le terme d'autofiction', in *Genèse et autofiction*, ed. by Jean-Louis Jeannelle and Catherine Viollet (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2007), pp. 39-51 (p. 51).

⁷ Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring disgust: the foul and the fair in aesthetics* (New York/ Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), p. 7.

⁸ Both confession and apology are classic functions of autobiographical writing since antiquity: Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie*, Sammlung Metzler, 323 (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Metzler, 2000), p. 4.

The accident is the one true event to which the book's paratext refers; it is central not only to Elizabeth's but also to Charlotte Roche's life. Due to the author's high public profile, when picking up the book the majority of Roche's readership will have known that her own brothers died in a car accident on the way to her wedding in 2001. This complicates any straightforward reading of *Schoßgebete* as a novel; at the same time, and as will be explored further below, its fictional dimension should be respected. Throughout the analysis, the narrator will therefore be called Elizabeth, even if many readers might be tempted to take her name as standing in for Charlotte Roche herself. In keeping with the fictional name for the largest part of my discussion, the analysis hopes to show appropriate respect for both the author and the narrative she created, and grant it the space it demands. In my reflections on this, I, as a reader, am already unmasked by the effect of autofiction.

This chapter approaches the novel as an autobiographically motivated illness narrative, or more precisely as a trauma narrative. *Schoßgebete* has not yet been adequately recognised as such,⁹ partly because initial readings of Roche's second book publication were skewed by expectations of continuity between it and her first novel. This is to be attributed, at least partly, to the choice of the book's title, which through use of rhyme makes a deliberate connection to Roche's first publication *Feuchtgebiete*.¹⁰ Marketing strategies employed in the advertisement of the text reinforced such ideas of similarity, for instance by matching the design of *Schoßgebete*'s book jacket with that of Roche's debut. Furthermore, both book titles play with allusions to the genital area. Since *Feuchtgebiete*, the media likes to call Roche 'Sexautorin', her books are branded 'Sexromane', and the language she employs has been attacked by literary critic Ruthard Stäblein as 'Schumpfddeutsch' [shrunken/ stunted German]. Just like *Deutschlandfunk*'s critic Denis Scheck, Stäblein finds Roche's literary language too colloquial and contracted. The unison critical verdict seems to be that her novels are trivial,

⁹ The existing scholarly work on Roche's texts mostly concentrates on *Feuchtgebiete* and tends to centre on discussions of gender, the female body, the author's pop feminism, her use of pornographic imagery and performative aspects of her public appearances. Particularly notable are Maria Stehle's application of Judith Butler's concept of rebellious speech to Roche's debut novel and her public negotiation of it, and further Claudia Liebrand's article 'Pornografische Pathografie', because it recognises the role of illness in *Feuchtgebiete*. Maria Stehle, 'Pop, Porn, and Rebellious Speech', *Feminist Media Studies*, 12.2 (2012), 229-247; Claudia Liebrand, 'Pornografische Pathologie', *Literatur für Leser*, 34.1 (2011), 13-22. For further reading, see Margaret McCarthy, 'Feminism and Generational Conflicts in Alexa Hennig Von Lange's *Relax*, Elke Naters's *Lügen*, and Charlotte Roche's *Feuchtgebiete*', *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty First Century Literature*, 35.1 (2011), 56-73; Carrie Smith-Prei, "'Knaller-Sex Für Alle": Popfeminist Body Politics in Lady Bitch Ray, Charlotte Roche, and Sarah Kuttner', *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty First Century Literature*, 35.1 (2011), 18-39.

¹⁰ Interestingly, this was done only with view to Roche's German-language audience. The official English-language title of the text – *Wrecked* – shifts the emphasis away from the protagonist's sex life and onto the central car accident.

verge on the pornographic in content and are stylistically weak.¹¹ Roche's self-presentation as not being an author (in the sense of literary author) willingly adds to this, yet must be noted to in fact heighten readers' perceptions of Roche's texts as authentic.

The little scholarship there is to date that deals with *Schoßgebete* does not focus on the text in its own right. Instead, in the case of Hester Baer's article, for example, attention is directed to the way it contributed to public debates led in Germany around 2011 concerning the state of feminism.¹² Emily Spiers takes the more historicising approach, examining 'intergenerational feminist relations' from Alice Schwarzer to Roche and other 'new' feminists, on the basis of Roche's and others' books.¹³ With Baer and Spiers thus engaging in discourse analysis (rather than in-depth analysis of the text itself), *Schoßgebete* is not analysed as a piece of literature, or as a stand-alone text. Spiers insinuates this not to be worthwhile when she writes that '[a]part from the narrative strands that deal with the familial trauma [...], the novel's general aesthetic is pornographic kitsch.'¹⁴ This reaction dovetails with the feuilleton critics' verdict, and by stressing its aesthetic as simple and unappealing, in short, as sub-standard, an academic engagement with Roche's second novel and the difficult topics of illness, death and loss that it negotiates is foreclosed. The analysis that follows will re-centre attention to the text itself and these main themes. In contrast to previous scholarship, through 'unpatterned' close reading it will pay particular attention to the mediation of the protagonist's psychological trauma and preoccupation with the body, sex, and death, and comes to find a number of complex narrative strategies and forms of aestheticisation at work in *Schoßgebete*.¹⁵

The neologism 'Schoßgebete', literally translating as 'lap prayers', bears strong associations with the female body and sexuality.¹⁶ Yet besides these sexual connotations, the word evokes

¹¹ Kulturzeit 3sat, 'Kulturzeitinterview über das Buch "Schoßgebete" von Charlotte Roche mit Denis Scheck', *YouTube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBm2wLvEqA>> [accessed 14 December 2012]; Ruthard Stäblein, 'Langatmige Beichte in Schrumpfdeutsch', *SWR* <<http://www.swr.de/swr2/literatur/charlotte-roche-schossgebete/-/id=6891032/nid=6891032/did=8445458/1tIszgk/>> [accessed 11 December 2012]; Christian Buß, 'Sexautorin Charlotte Roche: "Meine Therapeutin hat mir das Leben gerettet"', *Spiegel Online Kultur*, 7 August 2011 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/sexautorin-charlotte-roche-meine-therapeutin-hat-mir-das-leben-gerettet-a-778812.html>> [accessed 25 January 2013].

¹² Hester Baer, 'Sex, Death, and Motherhood in the Eurozone: Contemporary Women's Writing in German', *World Literature Today*, 86.3 (2012), 59-65.

¹³ Emily Spiers, 'The Long March through the Institutions: From Alice Schwarzer to Pop Feminism and the New German Girls', *Oxford German Studies*, 43.1 (2014), 69-88 (p. 69).

¹⁴ Spiers, 'The Long March through the Institutions', p. 82.

¹⁵ For more on 'unpatterned reading', see the section on 'Illness and the Attraction of the Personal' in my introduction.

¹⁶ German 'Schoß' translates into English as lap, or – more poetically – as womb or bosom.

religious connotations too: it is a dark-humoured pun on the German noun 'Stoßgebet' – a quick, short last-minute prayer uttered in a situation of sudden danger.¹⁷ Therefore, the novel's title already alludes to the more complicated, existential meaning sex takes on for the protagonist of *Schoßgebete*, and the differences between Roche's debut and its successor. The autobiographical dimension of *Schoßgebete* is very strong and presents a major development in comparison to Roche's less personal, more programmatically feminist first novel.

What unites both publications, however, is a sociopolitical commitment underlying Roche's writing that few reviewers or cultural critics recognise, and which expresses itself in a sustained interest held across both texts in exploring the repressive potential of culturally prevalent ideas about health and illness, and linked to this, notions of hygiene. Doing so openly in her books, Roche's writing upsets powerful cultural notions of decency and privacy concerning the physicality of the body, and our vulnerability to illness (mental and physical illness alike). When Tony Paterson writes that *Feuchtgebiete* unfolds into 'an at times excruciating account of how a young woman systematically goes about breaking almost every sexual taboo',¹⁸ this may be true, yet – as is symptomatic of many of the book's reviews – he seems to miss the fact that *Feuchtgebiete* first and foremost is the story of a girl who is hospitalised for an injury sustained through self-mutilation, and who is portrayed as suffering from a childhood trauma (nor does he ask himself how the text's sexual explicitness relates to that narrative).

The following discussion of *Schoßgebete* as an autofictional trauma narrative is written with these important resonances across Roche's writing in mind.

Trauma in Literature, and *Schoßgebete* as Trauma Narrative

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, literary scholars began to theorise the characteristics of trauma as displayed in literary writing by tracing and making sense of its transformation into aesthetic textual representations. Cathy Caruth's working definition of trauma from 1991, which served as the basis for her influential works on trauma theory throughout the decade, is still a useful starting point: 'In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the

¹⁷ A now rarely used equivalent in English for such a prayer is the religious term ejaculation, which – for a contemporary audience – connects back to the sexual connotations of the title. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ejaculation as '[t]he putting up of short earnest prayers in moments of emergency; the hasty utterance of words expressing emotion'. It was commonly in use from the 17th to the 19th century.

¹⁸ Tony Paterson, 'Charlotte Roche: Troubled mind of a taboo-buster', *The Independent*, 27 August 2011 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/charlotte-roche-troubled-mind-of-a-taboo-buster-2344746.html>> [accessed 9 January 2016].

often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.’¹⁹

This definition reflects now generally accepted assumptions Caruth drew from earlier findings in psychology and neuroscience, as well as the 1980 definition for posttraumatic stress disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the *DSM-III*.²⁰ Departing from this, she has shaped what is still today the most influential understanding of trauma in literary studies. Central characteristics of trauma can be deduced from this definition: the event that causes the trauma is understood in some way to be *overwhelming*, for example because of its suddenness or scope which overtly challenges its unprepared victim (and it is therefore *catastrophic*). The delayed response with accompanying symptoms is central, as this response constitutes the actual trauma. This had already been observed, for example, by French psychologist Pierre Janet and his contemporary Sigmund Freud, who borrowed the term latency or *Nachträglichkeit*, or ‘belatedness’, from medical discourse on infectious diseases, in relation to the incubation time Freud perceived it took until trauma manifested itself in symptoms.²¹ The phenomena, lastly, are ‘uncontrolled’, ‘repetitive’ and generally ‘intrusive’, because they come to haunt the traumatised person over and over again, against his or her will. The victim in Caruth’s view is doomed to passivity, and has to endure these repetitions. Caruth further explains that trauma ‘is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is otherwise not available’.²² She sees the main task of an ethical literary studies approach as listening to these attempts to tell of a traumatic reality.²³ Nevertheless, Caruth’s emphasis constantly lies on the paradoxical side of this endeavour: just as trauma demands ‘our witness’,²⁴ at the same time trauma defies it, because traumatic testimony is always ‘enigmatic testimony’.²⁵ Trauma – in her

¹⁹ Cathy Caruth, ‘Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, and the Possibility of History’, *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991), 181-192 (p. 181).

²⁰ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd edn (Washington, D.C.: APA, 1980), pp. 236-239.

²¹ Caruth, ‘Unclaimed Experience’, pp. 186-187.

²² Cathy Caruth, ‘Introduction: The Wound and the Voice’, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, ed. by Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), pp. 1-9 (p. 4). The trope of the wound is no coincidence: etymologically, the Greek noun *trauma* originally described a physical wound before it became to signify a (metaphorical) wounding of the mind.

²³ Caruth, ‘Introduction: The Wound and the Voice’, p. 9.

²⁴ Caruth, ‘Introduction: The Wound and the Voice’, p. 55.

²⁵ Caruth, ‘Introduction: The Wound and the Voice’, p. 6. Caruth’s choice of words here is reminiscent of Grell’s characterisation of autofiction as bearing a ‘transparence énigmatique’ (referred to at the outset of this chapter), already indicating the autofictional mode as potentially fitting for the representation of stories of trauma.

understanding – ‘resists simple comprehension’,²⁶ which is why, in Caruth’s view, it can always only be an attempt to tell us.

In relation to this, it has often been said that trauma is unspeakable. Judith Lewis Herman clarifies what this means: ‘[c]ertain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*’.²⁷ Understanding the nuanced use of the adjective here is important – it helps illuminate the theory, as well as potentially giving an answer to the question of why literature, especially from the twentieth century onwards, has become the primary site to attempt a storying of trauma. The fact that one might hardly bear speaking aloud about traumatic experience might be exactly what prompts so many to try to put their experiences into written words first, shutting out all awareness of a later audience or readership,²⁸ and at least in the process of writing trying to concentrate on the self, in an attempt to gain a sense of control this way. Yet we must be aware that simultaneously, in the act of finding words for trauma, the writing subject takes up a precarious position, and in a struggle for words constantly fears for their inadequacy.

Peter Gasser highlights the fact that autofictional writing consciously addresses the gap between a life’s experience and the writing thereof,²⁹ in contrast to more traditional autobiography which aims for a smooth, teleological narrative. This holds at least as true for trauma narratives, at the very centre of which is a gap or – to use a term more widespread among trauma theorists – a void, and this constitutes a first significant parallel between the writing of trauma and the autofictional mode.

Trauma’s effects (which equal the metaphorical ‘wound that cries out’) are what a victim of trauma suffers from, rather than the event itself. An event admittedly triggers the traumatic reaction, but it can be a very common event, like, for instance, Freud’s example of an accident, which Caruth also uses for illustration.³⁰ What is decisive is that, subjectively, the event is

²⁶ Caruth, ‘Introduction: The Wound and the Voice’, p. 6.

²⁷ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 2nd edn (London: Pandora, 2001), p. 1.

²⁸ Interestingly, Charlotte Roche details that she does exactly this: ‘when I write, I try not to think about that this is going to get published – obviously this does not completely work. But I want to be brave when I write. Because I write about things I feel embarrassed about and have issues with’ (my translation). NDR, ‘NDR Talkshow 26.08.2011 - Charlotte Roche (1/2)’, *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V71mDxERvIw>> [accessed 9 January 2016].

²⁹ Peter Gasser, ‘Autobiographie und Autofiktion. Einige begriffskritische Bemerkungen’, in »...all diese fingierten, notierten, in meinem Kopf ungefähr wieder zusammengesetzten Ichs« *Autobiographie und Autofiktion*, ed. by Elio Pellin and Ulrich Weber (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), pp. 13-28 (p. 23).

³⁰ Cathy Caruth, ‘Introduction: Trauma and Experience’, in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 3-12 (p. 7); Caruth, ‘Introduction: The Wound and the Voice’, pp. 6-7.

considered overwhelming. This has often been misunderstood: in the 1980s, the DSM edition that Caruth, like others, referenced deemed it 'essential' that an event triggering the trauma had to be 'outside the range of usual human experience'.³¹ Considering that, for instance, rape or domestic violence are tragically frequent rather than extraordinary isolated cases, this unfortunate wording was criticised by feminist therapists like Judith Lewis Herman or Laura S. Brown until its revision by the American Psychiatric Association in the mid-1990s. Importantly, Brown highlighted that women run a higher risk for trauma due to the social realities in which they live.³² Brown specified that the then dominant notion of what constitutes traumatic stressors supported the social and political status quo which discriminated against women as well as people from minority groups. It is generally accepted among scholars today that such 'common' events (that members of disadvantaged sections of society are being disproportionately exposed to) can be at the source of a person's trauma. Additionally, and this constitutes another shift of opening up in the professionals' grasp on trauma, psychotherapist Jeffrey Kauffman in *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma* outlines how mourning and grieving in consequence of a beloved's death have been found to be more frequently traumatic in the last few decades.³³

That the traumatic truth, to return to Caruth's definition, is 'otherwise not available' alludes to an understanding of traumatic memory that can again be traced back to Janet: traumatic memory is separated from regular or narrative memory, and cannot actively be retrieved or dominated (by narration).³⁴ While 'the images of traumatic reenactment', for example in the form of flashbacks or nightmares, remain absolutely literal, 'accurate and precise',³⁵ paradoxically, as Caruth feels it important to stress, the victim of trauma at the same time may suffer from amnesia – a manifestation of the fact that conscious or active retrieval of the traumatic memory is impossible.³⁶ Literality of repetition and dissociation of the memory of the event thus form a paradoxical pair.

³¹ APA, *DSM-III*, p. 236.

³² Laura S. Brown, 'Not Outside The Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma', in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 100-112.

³³ Jeffrey Kauffman, 'On the Primacy of Pain', in *The shame of death, grief, and trauma*, ed. by Kauffman (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 3-24 (pp. 12-13).

³⁴ Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 158-182 (p. 160).

³⁵ Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction: Recapturing the Past', in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 151-157 (p. 151).

³⁶ Caruth, 'Introduction: Recapturing the Past', p. 152.

On the whole, therefore, Caruth views the structural elements of trauma as defining, which becomes apparent when she states that

[the] pathology [of trauma] consists [...] solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.³⁷

Due to its belatedness, in Caruth's line of argument, trauma 'is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time'. It is therefore not locatable, appearing 'outside the boundaries of any single place or time'.³⁸

In summary, the outlined perspective suggests that the trauma's structure is above all a structure of paradoxes which underlie all traumatic symptoms: a traumatising event is perceived as overwhelming, yet this is realised only belatedly. Trauma is incomprehensible, yet demands a listener. It is there, in the form of flashbacks or nightmares, yet not there, as is expressed in the symptom of amnesia, or present only in leaving a void, and it therefore dominates a person's life. Not fully understanding it, not having been able to work through it, the trauma dominates a person's present, and is anything other than past, even while – in a distorted way – referring to a past event.³⁹

In *Schoßgebete*, narrator Elizabeth tries to describe the effect of trauma on her life:

Ich bin gefangen in den Tagen, in denen das passierte, ich komme einfach nicht drüber hinweg. Der Film im Kopf spielt sich immer wieder von Neuem ab. Vielleicht hört das ja mal auf. Glaube ich aber nicht.⁴⁰ (SG 116)

³⁷ Caruth, 'Introduction: Trauma and Experience', pp. 4-5.

³⁸ Caruth, 'Introduction: Trauma and Experience', pp. 8-9.

³⁹ To recommend further reading, Hawkins very concisely summarises trauma studies' history: Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, 'Writing About Illness. Therapy or Testimony?', in *Unfitting Stories. Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma*, ed. by Valerie Raoul and others (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007), pp. 115-19. Herman does so at more length in her milestone publication *Trauma and Recovery* (cited above). For an overview on the emergence of trauma theory in cultural studies and a contextualisation of Caruth's understanding of trauma, especially for more in-depth remarks on Caruth in relation to Paul de Man and Shoshana Felman's work, see Luckhurst and Ramadanovic: Roger Luckhurst, 'Mixing memory and desire: psychoanalysis, psychology, and trauma theory', in *Literary Theory and Criticism. An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 497-507; Petar Ramadanovic, 'Introduction: Trauma and Crisis', *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism*, 11.2 (2001) <<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.101/11.2introduction.txt>> [accessed 9 January 2016]. Among the Yale School scholars, especially de Man has had his influence on Caruthian theory, most notably his identification of a paradoxical 'gap between reference and representation' (Luckhurst, p. 501) with view to language. This idea that language undermines its own meaning in the act of stating it is one that Caruth transferred to trauma theory.

⁴⁰ Trans.: 'I am trapped in the days in which it happened, I simply cannot get over it. The film in my head plays itself over and over again. Maybe sometime that will stop. But I do not think so.'

The feeling of being trapped in time perfectly matches the notion that trauma invalidates any temporal limits. It also dooms Elizabeth to passivity, against her will. The traumatic memories are indeed uncontrolled. Furthermore, the 'film' she sees before her inner eye is repetitive and intrusive. With the theory in mind, the use of the film-metaphor for unprocessed traumatic memories seems particularly apt because the memories of the phone calls she receives on the day of her family's accident and the events they trigger, as well as the images of the accident, remain absolutely literal to Elizabeth. They have become indelible in the traumatic process. One might object that this cannot be true as she was not at the scene of the accident when it happened, therefore has no real images of it, yet through not only empathy but indeed identification with everyone in the crashed vehicle, she has imagined these images for herself, as will become clear in the analysis below. The quotation above gives an indication of the nightmare in which the narrator of *Schoßgebete* lives, since from her perspective, surviving in a traumatised state is worse than death (SG 108-9, 115, 238). It matches, too, the narrator's recurring suicidal thinking.

This chapter argues that *Schoßgebete* is primarily a symptomatology of Elizabeth's trauma of bereavement which manifests itself in the protagonist's suffering from multiple fears and neuroses as well as clinical depression. The opening lines of the first chapter serve to illustrate this, and set the scene for what is to come:

Wie immer vor dem Sex haben wir beide Heizdecken im Bett eine halbe Stunde vorher angemacht. Mein Mann hat ganz hochwertige Heizdecken gekauft, die reichen auf beiden Seiten vom Scheitel bis zur Sohle. Für mich muss man da etwas mehr investieren. Ich habe wahnsinnige Angst, dass so ein Ding anfängt zu glühen und ich nach dem Einschlafen bei lebendigem Leibe verbrenne oder am Rauch erstickte.⁴¹ (SG 7)

The novel is a minutely detailed protocol of Elizabeth's every-day life that leaves no room for secrets. The apparently trivial (here: the electric blankets) has its place in the narrative, and is aligned with serious insights into the narrator's psyche in a stream-of-consciousness style. This method of describing her every move and thought is her only way to slowly approach and access the memories she fears so much – those she can only indirectly allude to in between the lines of this opening paragraph. '[D]as, was passiert ist' [that which happened] (SG 80) is encoded, and Elizabeth evades it for as long as possible. Looking for a language to talk about the unspeakable, the trauma at the centre of the novel, the narrator feels compelled to narrate herself from every possible angle. It is significant that she confesses to the first of her many

⁴¹ Trans.: 'As always before having sex, we switched on both electric blankets in the bed half an hour before. My husband has bought high-end electric blankets; they reach from top to toe on both sides. To please me, you must spend a little extra. I am terribly scared that such a thing will start to smoulder and I will burn to death after falling asleep, or suffocate in the smoke.'

phobias in these early pages of the novel, although the reader will not yet understand its purport. It is her fear of fire or smoke that stems from her brothers' burning to death after a car accident; the reader only learns about the accident which haunts her more than a hundred pages later. First, it seems, the narrator's main concern is to confide her every-day survival struggles. This begins with a detailed 15-page description of sexual intercourse with her husband, which is followed by a graphic account of a visit to the bathroom, and includes the equally detailed description of her every move in the kitchen when preparing dinner. Elizabeth clearly feels the compulsion to tell, maybe more so to display herself, that is both her psyche and her body.

Foregrounding the 'Unsexy', Sick, and Oozing Body

After a long stream-of-consciousness-passage in which she shares her thoughts about anal sex, the narrator of *Schoßgebete* confesses: 'Ich hasse es, alleine zu sein mit diesen Gedanken, immer so ekelhafte Gedanken, entweder Tote oder anal, was anderes gibt's wohl nicht in meinem Kopf?' (SG 274).⁴² It is insinuated that Elizabeth's obsession with sex is, to a degree, a symptom of her trauma, providing a way to suppress – however temporarily – any thoughts of her dead brothers, or fears of the premature death of any more of her loved ones, or her own suicidal fantasies. Distracting herself by consciously thinking of sex and thus preventing an anxiety attack, the narrator evaluates wryly: 'Das funktioniert wenigstens' (SG 197).⁴³ But sex does not offer salvation. Instead, sex as represented in *Schoßgebete* has the qualities of a drug, functioning as a tranquilliser. The time of day when Elizabeth and her husband have sex is 'der einzige Moment am Tag, wo ich richtig durchatme' (SG 7), she observes.⁴⁴ For once, the physical gains advantage over the psychological, overlaying her multiple fears: 'Nur wenn ich die Angst mit Hypersexualität überlagere, bin ich angstfrei' (SG 107-108).⁴⁵ And it works, temporarily, as in a Bakhtinian reversal this narrator's emotional centre is located in her guts – her 'Gedärme' (SG 199) – and thereby in the body's lower stratum. Instead of displaying attempts to transcend corporeality, Elizabeth's bodily needs and functions reassure her in a way that says: 'Ich bin auch noch da, wenigstens ein bisschen' (SG 160).⁴⁶

⁴² Trans.: 'I hate to be alone with these thoughts, always these disgusting thoughts, either dead people or anal [sex], there does not seem to be anything else in my head?'

⁴³ Trans.: 'At least that works.'

⁴⁴ Trans.: 'the only moment of the day that I can breathe freely'.

⁴⁵ Trans.: 'Only by blanketing the fear with hypersexuality am I free from fear.'

⁴⁶ Trans.: 'I am still here, at least a little'. The narrator states this in the context of her feeling hungry and the family's decision to have pizza and beers in the hospital on the day after the accident.

This is what makes sex so central to Elizabeth's life, and consequently to the narrative. Sex is valued for the temporary relief it brings, yet it has no lasting healing effect: after the sex act, death returns. The reader learns from Elizabeth that her sleep at night is the sleep of a corpse – 'Leichenschlaf' (SG 123, 237). Night after night, to fall asleep, she needs to take up this pose, with her folded hands resting on her chest (SG 123). With Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* in mind, we instantly read the human corpse as epitomising abjection. It is the self turned to waste,⁴⁷ and emblematic for what most of us, barring Elizabeth, cannot accept: the fact that the dead body's corporeality is ours, too, that the self is, after all, an embodied and therefore mortal self.⁴⁸ Elizabeth knows from her extraordinary experience that death is as unavoidable as it is uncontrollable, and at times death truly tempts her as it promises 'a relief from the burden of individual selfhood'.⁴⁹ In its materiality and concreteness, the corpse posture Elizabeth takes on bears the potential to deeply disturb its onlooker, including *Schoßgebete's* reader, while for her it has a calming effect. Elizabeth is constantly, maybe over-aware of the fragility of life and our bodies. She is thus clearly positioned in difference to the implied reader.

The unreliable, mortal and unclean body, which, as Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* brings to mind, is often equated with the female body, is the ultimate site of abjection in western culture. The abject, put in a nutshell, makes its subject aware, above all, of its 'relation to death, corporeality, animality, materiality – those relations which consciousness and reason find intolerable'.⁵⁰ Yet necessarily these relations take centre stage when it comes to dealing with topics of illness, disease and disability, and they are consequentially not repressed by Elizabeth.

***Schoßgebete* and the Autofictional Mode**

Regarding interrogations of the nexus of autofiction and trauma, it becomes clear that there is yet much scholarly work to be done when one considers Shirley Jordan's review article on the state of research in French literary studies on autofiction in general, and French female autofictional writing in particular.⁵¹ For German writing, no parallel survey article exists at all.

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Grosz explicates with recourse to Lacan: 'Although the ego is formed through a recognition of its body in the mirror phase, it recoils from the idea of being tied to or limited by the body's form'. Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions, Three French Feminists* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 77.

⁴⁹ Korsmeyer, *Savoring disgust*, p. 129. Examples of passages in which Elizabeth is actively wishing for death: SG 65, 168.

⁵⁰ Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p. 73.

⁵¹ Jordan gives an overview of the studies already carried out on women's autofiction as well as examples of French writers whom she considers to deserve attention in this respect. She then goes on to point out

Much groundwork is needed, not only to pay women's autofictional writing choices and strategies the attention they deserve, but also to address trauma narratives (maybe especially those by women) in the autofictional mode.⁵² Johnnie Gratton tentatively connects the upsurge of published autofictions to the traumatic experiences of the twentieth century in his entry 'Autofiction' in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*. However, in-depth analyses of the relation of autofiction and trauma are hitherto desiderata, particularly outside of French literature.

What we can observe in literature today is that the boundaries of factual truth (as authenticity) and fiction (as inauthentic) are actively being dissolved by authors. This goes hand in hand with the growing interest of literary scholarship in the theory of autofiction, and scholarship's attempts to understand if and how it translates into practice.⁵³ While the notion of a dichotomy of fact and fiction has a long tradition,⁵⁴ particularly those with an interest in autofiction begin to dismiss it as 'irrelevant' to contemporary literary studies, with Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf leading the way within German literary studies.⁵⁵ Concerning the terminology within German-speaking academic discourse, one notices that scholars follow the French labelling of such literatures as *autofiction*, the term that Doubrovsky coined and that,

the – even fewer – studies that are concerned with autofictional trauma writing, all by French literary scholars, focusing on French-speaking authors. Shirley Jordan, 'Autofiction in the Feminine', *French Studies*, 67.1 (2013), 76-84.

⁵² Asked about it in an interview, Doubrovsky himself speculated on why so many of the contemporary writers who take up the autofictional mode are female authors: 'Il y a effectivement plus de femmes "autofictionneuses". Pour la première fois, elles peuvent s'assumer dans leur désir. Ainsi, Catherine Millet n'y va pas par quatre chemins en racontant qu'elle aime les partouzes. Les femmes ont besoin de se déshabiller et que ce ne soit pas toujours un homme qui le fasse, comme Zola avec *Nana* ou Flaubert avec *Madame Bovary*. Je crois que c'est une libération historique, quitte à choquer certains. Il y a un besoin de vérité.' [There are indeed more female 'autofictionists'. For the first time, they can be at ease with their desire. This is why Catherine Millet doesn't beat around the bush when talking about her penchant for orgies. Women need to strip off and it should not always be a man who does it for them, such as Zola with *Nana* or Flaubert with *Madame Bovary*. I think that this is a historically significant liberation [on the part of the female writers; N. Sch.], which risks shocking certain people. There is a need for truth.] 'Serge Doubrovsky: "Écrire sur soi, c'est écrire sur les autres"', *Le Point*, 22 February 2011 <http://www.lepoint.fr/grands-entretiens/serge-doubrovsky-ecrire-sur-soi-c-est-ecrire-sur-les-autres-22-02-2011-1298292_326.php> [accessed 26 March 2016].

⁵³ In German-language autobiography studies, autofiction has emerged in recent years as one of the 'hot topics' incurring intensified research interest in the field, alongside that of memory and its relation to autobiography, and spatial theory and autobiography. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven der Autobiographieforschung in der Literaturwissenschaft', *Bios – Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen*, 23.2 (2010), 188-200.

⁵⁴ Arnaud Schmitt, 'Making the Case for Self-narration Against Autofiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 25.1 (2010), 122-137 (pp. 122-123); Frank Zipfel, 'Autofiktion. Zwischen den Grenzen von Faktualität, Fiktionalität und Literarität?', in *Grenzen der Literatur. Zu Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen*, ed. by Simone Winko and others (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 285-314 (p. 286).

⁵⁵ Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Autofiktion – Theorie und Praxis des autobiographischen Schreibens', in *Schreiben im Kontext von Schule, Universität, Beruf und Lebensalltag*, ed. by Johannes Berning and others, *Schreiben interdisziplinär*, 1 (Berlin: LIT, 2006), pp. 80-101 (p. 100).

for instance, Gérard Genette, Vincent Colonna, or Philippe Lejeune have come to use, rather than trying to find new terms for it, as is the case in the American realm with the neologisms ‘surfiction’ or ‘factual fiction’, to name just two.⁵⁶

To begin with, conventionally, an autofictional text must make a highly ambiguous offer to the reader, and position itself as both referential and fictional in equal measure.⁵⁷ Certain elements in *Schoßgebete* accordingly seem to authenticate the story to a lay reader, signalling a high degree of factuality: besides the centrality of the car accident to the plot, real people’s names and lives have found their way into the stream-of-consciousness-style narration of the protagonist Elizabeth; ‘rein zufällig’ [purely coincidentally] so, if we are to believe the opening legal statement. Most notably among them is Alice Schwarzer, the iconic figure of second-wave feminism in Germany.⁵⁸ Secondly, the story is further authenticated by the stream-of-consciousness narration being organised into three chapters named according to the three days of the week that *Schoßgebete* covers, a structure which invokes the diary genre’s immediacy. Thirdly, the novel’s style is colloquial, suggesting thoughtless spontaneity and thereby again authenticity. Lastly, the novel’s first-person narrator Elizabeth Kiehl is designed in easily recognisable biographical proximity to Charlotte Roche herself: at the time of publication, Roche was 33 years old, exactly Elizabeth’s age in the novel. Not only are both the author and her heroine of mixed German-English family background, but they both are mothers, stepmothers, and daughters of divorced parents. Roche’s celebrity status ensures that most German readers will have noticed these inherent similarities – and they may have chosen to read the book because of them.

However, other elements position the narrative much more ambiguously in between the autobiographical and the fictional: above all, with the cover of the novel clearly stating ‘Roman’, any hastily assumed referentiality is undermined.⁵⁹ Then, there is the issue with the names: the attentive reader notes that Elizabeth is being spelt with an English ‘z’ rather than ‘s’, as would be more common for the name’s German variant. Roche’s and her heroine’s likeness is thus in a sense carried into the choice of name for the protagonist, without them matching exactly, which – at least according to more traditional understandings – would exclude *Schoßgebete* from the realm of autobiographical writing. Roche’s character instead

⁵⁶ Schmitt, ‘Making the Case for Self-narration Against Autofiction’, p. 123.

⁵⁷ Zipfel, with recourse to Marie Darrieussecq’s work: Zipfel, ‘Autofiktion’, pp. 304-305.

⁵⁸ In reaction to this, Schwarzer published a furious open letter to Roche on her website aliceschwarzer.de. This letter, ‘Hallo Charlotte’, is not available online anymore.

⁵⁹ Note, however, that this has tradition: Dostoevsky’s *Fils* and many subsequent autofictional publications in French have similarly been labelled ‘roman’.

bears a name that, with Lejeune, can be said to be ‘at the same time similar to the name of the author and different’,⁶⁰ fittingly so for an autofiction, as this defies the reader to make Lejeune’s alluring autobiographical pact all too easily, but simultaneously allows for it.

With autofiction being a writing mode that abandons or transcends the idea of any boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, ultimately it can not be sufficient to list and weigh up against each other the fictionalising and authenticating strategies of any one text. To truly identify *Schoßgebete* as an autofictional text, I will therefore demonstrate in the following discussion of key passages how it transgresses the limits of fiction and non-fiction on the level of the text, thereby – to an extent – dissolving them.

One of autofiction’s main characteristics, as expressed in prototypical texts like *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), is its programmatic self-reflexivity as a linguistic construct aware of its mediality.⁶¹ Self-conscious use of language and the recognition and exploitation of language’s performativity is highly typical of autofictional writing. Furthermore crucial, I would add, is the autofictional mode’s awareness of its ‘effects on the world outside the text’.⁶² In *Schoßgebete*, this reflexivity is particularly acute in its media awareness, and is expressed in the text’s cutting depiction of the workings of the tabloid press.

As an alias or stand-in for the German *BILD Zeitung*, tabloid paper and largest-selling newspaper within Germany, Roche’s novel features the *Druckzeitung*, hardly veiling its real-life reference point. Its fictional name is a sarcastic pun: while ‘drucken’ as a verb is ‘to print’ in German, the noun ‘Druck’ can also mean ‘pressure’. It is known that alleged *BILD*-journalists terrorised Roche after her family’s fatal car accident in 2001, and tried to blackmail her into granting them an interview about the accident.⁶³ In *Schoßgebete*, Elizabeth is similarly threatened by *Druckzeitung*-reporters, re-experiencing, almost re-enacting what Roche went through: a journalist rings her about the accident, believing he is the first one to speak to her and thus the first to deliver the harrowing message of her relatives’ deadly accident. From a trauma studies perspective, this re-writing of the experience is highly significant.

⁶⁰ Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Pact (bis)’, in *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989; orig.: in *Moi aussi*, Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp. 119-137 (p. 134).

⁶¹ Wagner-Egelhaaf, ‘Autofiktion’, p. 97.

⁶² Egan, Susanna, *Burdens of Proof. Faith, Doubt and Identity in Autobiography* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier, 2011), p. 17.

⁶³ The lasting dispute that involved several court proceedings is well-summarised on *BILDblog*, a watchblog specialised in addressing and making public erroneous media reports and unethical methods of journalists, especially focusing on the tabloid paper.

On pages 136-139, Elizabeth minutely narrates her feelings towards the *BILD/Druck*-newspaper, personified as '[d]iese Bestie, das Böse' (SG 136).⁶⁴ She expresses an anger beyond words about the methods they employ: '[m]ich am Telefon für eine Geschichte, für Auflage, in dem schwächsten Moment meines Lebens zu vergewaltigen' (SG 137).⁶⁵ Full of revenge, she swears, switching into English, to '[t]rack them down and smoke them out of their holes' (SG 137). While one might argue that any autobiographical text is more acutely aware of its extratextual consequences than 'pure' fiction, it is crucial to note that this passage from *Schoßgebete* culminates in advice directly and urgently addressing the reader, advice that is as valid in the fictional world as it is in the real world it blatantly references: 'es gibt nur was zu drucken, weil zu viele noch mit ihnen reden. *Haltet alle dicht!* [...] Mach den Mund auf, und du bist selber schuld' (SG 138; emphasis mine).⁶⁶ The provocative rape metaphor is repeated several times in this context (SG 163-166), and Elizabeth again addresses the reader directly when condemning the tabloid press's output as 'Emotionsporno' [emotional porn] (SG 166):

Jeder hat die Wahl: zu den Anständigen gehören und so was vermeiden oder zu den Unanständigen gehören und die Sensationsgier befriedigen, tatsächlich, nachweislich auf Kosten anderer!⁶⁷ (SG 166)

The narrator thereby transgresses all boundaries between fact and fiction, mirroring the factual in the fictional and vice versa. In its seeming artlessness, and straightforward, often colloquial language, the textual construct that *Schoßgebete* nevertheless reverberates with questions to the reader: do we give in to *BILD*-like voyeurism and read the text as 'really' autobiographical in nature, thereby applying an almost pornographic gaze of pleasure, or at least amazement, to the sight of the traumatic other-that-cannot-be-me? If so, does one take part in the metaphorical rape of the narrator and, by extension, the author and her family? Or shall we instead avert our gaze, attempting to console ourselves it is only fiction – yet is it? Lastly, the question is: can we transform our gaze into empathy, regarding the other, however temporarily, as someone who could (also) be me? Whichever path a reader chooses, *Schoßgebete* manages to make the reader feel highly self-conscious and more than just uneasy as he or she becomes a witness to this text, or story, or life.

⁶⁴ Trans.: 'this beast, the evil'.

⁶⁵ Trans.: 'To rape me on the phone for a story, for sales, in the weakest moment of my life.'

⁶⁶ Trans.: 'There only are stories to print because too many people still talk to them. *Hold your tongue, everyone!* [...] If you open your mouth, it's your own fault.'

⁶⁷ Trans.: 'Everyone has the choice: to be one of the decent people and avoid that stuff or to be one of the indecent people and satisfy one's desire for sensation, in actual fact and demonstrably at the expense of others.'

An in-depth engagement with the text pivots on such questions as these. *Schoßgebete*, despite its confessional qualities, its stream-of-consciousness style, its minutely detailed description of Elizabeth's life and the tragedy that is at the centre of it, aims precisely not to be 'emotional porn'. The aesthetics of disgust employed by Roche underlines this further. As is argued in the following, the text's aesthetic of disgust serves to test its readership's capability for empathy.

Schoßgebete's Aesthetics of Disgust and its Alienating Effect

Roche commences the novel with an elaborately described sex scene that, I would like to claim, is above all a gatekeeping scene, preventing an all-too-easy identification with the narrator/protagonist:

Ich rutsche langsam mit dem Gesicht in seinen Schritt. Und rieche seinen männlichen Geruch. Ich finde, der ist nicht sehr weit weg vom weiblichen. Wenn er sich nicht direkt vorm Sex geduscht hat, und wann macht man das schon, wenn man so lange zusammen ist wie wir, hat der eine oder andere Urintropfen schon angefangen zu gären zwischen Eichel und Vorhaut. Es riecht wie in der Küche meiner Oma, nachdem sie auf dem Gasherd Fisch gebraten hat. Augen zu und durch. Es ekelt mich ein wenig, gleichzeitig aber erregt mich dieser Ekel.⁶⁸ (SG 8)

The author presses every button to elicit disgust in the reader – having her narrator talk about smells, sex, urine, decay, and foods. This detailed description of the sexual intercourse between Elizabeth and her husband Georg goes on for 16 pages and, following on from the passage quoted here, is – seemingly randomly – interspersed with thoughts about her relationship to Georg and their age difference, amongst other topics, introducing the reader to her realm of thoughts and how she copes with every-day life. The reader is neither spared 'Schmatzgeräusche' [squelching sounds] (SG 9) nor 'Spucke' [spittle] (SG 9) and must bear with the protagonist contemplating her urge to gag when attempting to swallow sperm (SG 10). As a reader, one has to submit oneself to Elizabeth's descriptions of sexual preferences or techniques that, of course, may not be for everyone, and that, in this detail, deliberately provoke repulsion in the reader. By being thus confronted with an aesthetics of disgust from page one of the book, the reader is guided to feel a similar exhaustion Elizabeth does, who admits:

⁶⁸ Trans.: 'With my face I slowly slip into his crotch. And smell his male odour. I think, it is actually not so far off the female one. If he does not shower right before having sex, and when, if ever, do people do that when they've been together for as long as we have, then one or two drops of urine will have started fermenting between glans and foreskin. It smells like it does in my nan's kitchen after she has been frying fish on the gas cooker. Take a deep breath and get to it! It disgusts me slightly, whilst at the same time this disgust arouses me.'

Das ist auf Dauer ganz schön anstrengend: ein Bein im Leben, ein Bein im Grab, die ganze Zeit auf dem Sprung, ich kann mich nicht entscheiden, weder für das eine noch für das andere.⁶⁹ (SG 279)

Disgust is a complex, and a demanding aesthetics. It is an ambivalent feeling,⁷⁰ and in this comparable to Elizabeth's subject position, being torn between life and death and not able to commit to either. In this, it is a serious emotion, one that puts the reader in the protagonist's shoes, at least in terms of her stress levels, yet is also confrontational, potentially asking much of its reader when confronted with passages such as: 'Wenn Menschenfleisch brennt, riecht es nach gegrilltem Bauchspeck, hab ich mal gelesen' (SG 274).⁷¹ The confusion of the categories human/animal within this statement, and its allusion to the taboo of cannibalism transgresses moral boundaries and thus elicits disgust. Elizabeth equates the human body to meat – which after all it is; a thought that – precisely because of its truth value – we collectively suppress.

Schoßgebete takes seriously the demand originally raised by Doubrovsky that autofiction be absolute, that it is ruthlessly candid, intimate and revealing, instead of all too pre-selective in what it narrates (as classic autobiography is).⁷² Roche's strategic use of disgust guides the reader in understanding: this book is trying to be anything but Kitsch, which the narrator defines as '[d]ie Verneinung von Tod und Scheiße' (SG 131).⁷³ Instead *Schoßgebete* is brutally frank about these potential sources of disgust. It is all about death, shit, and sex, and focuses in on these matters along with Elizabeth's troubled psyche.

In order to disable self-consciousness, embarrassment and shaming mechanisms as much as possible for her to be able to tell her story in the first place (a story which in extensio may be seen as Roche's), the narrator figure Elizabeth – informed by her daily therapy sessions – almost seems to apply a medical gaze to herself, analysing her behaviour as if it were someone else's. An aesthetics of disgust lends itself towards this taking up of the more objective medical gaze, as, to a degree, it others the self, and in Elizabeth's case helps her view her actions and

⁶⁹ Trans.: 'In the long run, this is pretty exhausting: One foot in life, one foot in the grave, the entire time on the hop, I cannot make up my mind, neither for one thing nor for the other.'

⁷⁰ The strange power that disgusting art can exert on its onlooker or reader, respectively, is described by Korsmeyer as its 'magnetism' (see *Savoring disgust*, esp. chapter 5), a term that tries to catch exactly how one can simultaneously be drawn to and repelled by the abject. Kristeva too discusses this in *Powers of Horror* (see esp. chapter 1). Within intellectual thought, disgust's alluring, fascinating side is perhaps most evident in Bakhtin's positively biased re-writing of the sensation and its function in art and culture in his essays on the grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

⁷¹ Trans.: 'I once read that when human flesh is burning, it smells of barbecued pork belly.'

⁷² Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Autofiktion', p. 97.

⁷³ Trans.: 'the denial of death and shit'.

thoughts as if from the outside; from a distance that enables both Bakhtinian laughter where others are long repelled, and a lingering at the brink of abjection without completely losing control.

With this in mind, Elizabeth's description of herself preparing dinner early on in the novel must be taken as poetological commentary:

Aus dem Kühlschrank nehme ich den Wirsingkopf, das schönste Gemüse überhaupt. Mit einem großen, sehr scharfen Messer schneide ich den Wirsing in der Mitte durch und gucke mir die Schnittfläche genau an.⁷⁴ (SG 24)

In a Kristevan reading, this violation of tenuous boundaries towards the beginning of the novel attunes the reader to what is to come. Elizabeth acts as her own surgeon, and fearlessly tries to operate on her open wound that is the traumatic experience of her brothers' deaths. While this might seem an individual matter, a blow of fate, she does not refrain from putting her suffering, her marital life and the expectations that she is confronted with as a mourner, patient, woman, mother, and lover into societal contexts (SG 71). For example, she discusses her pronounced atheism (SG 274), or disclosing secret fears like that of the 'looming danger of sexual abuse', which she feels women and children are exposed to.⁷⁵ She thereby denaturalises the darker mechanisms of western society, and draws attention to what – like Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* – she sees happening 'under the cunning, orderly surface' of civilisation, as well as under the surface of the self that encounters abjection, as is metaphorically expressed in the image of cutting open the cabbage.⁷⁶ The implied reader is invited along to watch the operation, but will have to expect to see some bloody entrails.

Autobiographical Writing in Suspicion of the Self

According to Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, critical reflections of autobiographical narcissism are another programmatic feature of the autofictional mode.⁷⁷ Possibly in anticipation of reviewers' uncompromising attitudes to the publication of her second novel as a writing celebrity, so again arising from an evident media awareness, Roche has her narrator figure Elizabeth reflect on exactly this narcissism, as is expressed in the following, to quote just one example:

Ich rede über den Unfall, all die blutrünstigen Details, *kann mir aber selber kaum glauben, dass das wahr ist, was ich da erzähle*. Es erzählt aus mir raus. Ich werde das Gefühl nicht los, dass

⁷⁴ Trans.: 'From the fridge I get the savoy cabbage, the most beautiful vegetable ever. I cut the savoy right through its centre with a large, very sharp knife, and inspect the cut surface thoroughly.'

⁷⁵ In the original, the narrator speaks of 'virtuelle Gefahr des sexuellen Missbrauchs' (SG 177).

⁷⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 210.

⁷⁷ Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Autofiktion', p. 98.

ich alle *anlüge* mit dieser Geschichte. [...] Ich bin eine Hochstaplerin. Eine Wichtigtuerin. Will mich nur mit einer *erfundenen* Geschichte in den Mittelpunkt oder Vordergrund oder was auch immer drängen.⁷⁸ (SG 121-122; emphasis mine)

Prior to the quoted passage, the narrator describes being on the phone to her father, who brings her the shattering news of the accident. This is a key passage as Elizabeth expands on her obsessive-compulsive need to talk about the event that is at the heart of much of her suffering, while simultaneously critically portraying herself as an attention-seeking 'liar'. If lying is the telling of imaginary or fabricated stories (that is fiction-making), yet the story could not possibly be any more real, then *Schoßgebete* could not have been written in any other than the autofictional mode in order to tell the paradoxical story of a trauma. In other words, the autofictional mode and the space it creates, the in-between zone of fact-and-fiction, facilitates, if not primarily enables, the transformation of death and trauma into story.

When first-person protagonist Elizabeth states that she can hardly believe the truth of what she then must retell to the relatives surrounding her, this is simultaneously an expression of trauma. In these reflections of Elizabeth on the first time she put the accident into narration, the reader learns that the information given to her by her father cannot be processed by her in that moment; it is marked by belatedness. It remains to be ever-present as traumatic memory that cannot be organised into the mind's schemes,⁷⁹ and therefore hovers over the rest of her life 'like an intruder or a ghost', as Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer had already suggested at the turn of the twentieth century.⁸⁰

If in contemporary times 'the writing of the self is suspicious',⁸¹ as Armine Kotin Mortimer puts it, and which can be seen as one reason for the observable upsurge in publications of autofictions (in a shift away from straightforward autobiographies), then it must be stressed that the writing of the shattered, traumatised self is all the more so self-conscious, or 'suspicious' of itself. The writing of the traumatised self might indeed best be written under the guise of fiction, where one can dissociate the narrator from oneself, as Charlotte Roche did in the case of her creation Elizabeth. While dissociation as well as re-enactment are two symptoms of trauma we have traced for Elizabeth Kiehl in relation to Charlotte Roche in *Schoßgebete*, Suzette A. Henke, who has looked into trauma in women's life-writing from a

⁷⁸ Trans.: 'I am talking about the accident, all the gory details, *yet can hardly believe myself that what I am saying is true*. It narrates itself out from inside of me. I cannot rid myself of the feeling that I am *lying* to everyone in telling this story. [...] I am a fraud. An exhibitionist. With an *imaginary* story I simply want to take centre stage, or push myself to the fore, or whatever.'

⁷⁹ Note, too, that the passage, despite being set in the past, is narrated in the present tense.

⁸⁰ Luckhurst, 'Mixing memory and desire', p. 499.

⁸¹ Armine Kotin Mortimer, 'Autofiction as Allofiction: Doubrovsky's *L'Après-vivre*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 49.3 (2009), 22-35 (p. 33).

perspective informed by psychoanalysis and scriptotherapy, nonetheless comes to the conclusion that what she calls ‘veiled autobiographical narrative’ can effect a therapeutic recovery from trauma.⁸² Autofiction therefore is both risk and promise: it entails the risk of again having to re-live one’s trauma, but also promises to empower its writer, to help conquer the trauma and tame it in the process of putting the unspeakable into words and thus give it fictional, narrative structure.

Performing the Self

When considering Roche’s media appearances (or, maybe more aptly, performances), it is worth noting that Roche was mainly known for her work as a television presenter before publishing her first novel *Feuchtgebiete* in 2008. In interviews and videos from around the time of *Schoßgebete* in 2011, Roche has taken her autofiction beyond the written text, thereby truly merging a ‘reality’ and fiction that, she seems to imply, should be no longer separated. In an online book trailer produced by her publishers, Roche declares her intentions for writing the book as primarily self-centred, playing down the effect that critics’ and readers’ feedback could have on her.⁸³ It is first and foremost she who must find the book funny, extreme, honest and truthful.⁸⁴ In the video, she further emphasises that the novel is a full-blown soul striptease on her part: ‘ein kompletter Seelenstriptease meinerseits’, as she puts it. This once more perfectly conforms to Doubrovsky’s dictum not to hold back but to reveal everything. Crucially, in this performance, Roche establishes even more intimacy between herself and her protagonist extra-textually by stating that now that *Schoßgebete* is published, all that is left for her to do is to sit at home and await death – a sentence readers might expect from Elizabeth, who regularly imagines her suicide or otherwise premature death (*SG* 65, 168, 108-109, 115, 238).⁸⁵ In performances such as these, Roche truly embodies the autofiction, moving in a space opened up by the text, and going beyond the real and imagined life contained therein. While she thus underlines the resemblances between herself as author and her character Elizabeth Kiehl in the novel, even toys with the idea of their inseparability, she uses other public performances to complicate any simple autobiographical readings of the text.

In a chat show hosted by Markus Lanz in August 2011, Roche again established intimacy between Elizabeth and herself by speaking in her character’s voice, stating, for instance, that

⁸² Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects – Trauma & Testimony in Women’s Life Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 53.

⁸³ Piper Verlag, ‘5 Fragen an Charlotte Roche zu “Schoßgebete”’, *YouTube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag4amSRETSY>> [accessed 4 December 2012].

⁸⁴ She uses the adjectives ‘lustig’, ‘krass’, ‘ehrlich’, ‘wahrhaftig’ in the German-language video.

⁸⁵ The author’s exact wording in the video is: ‘Ich sitze dann zuhause und warte auf den Tod.’

she is reliant on sex as a means to help her relax.⁸⁶ The narrator of *Schoßgebete* is found to make this kind of comment on pages 7, 14 and 107-108. After Lanz reads out a passage of the novel, however, Roche thwarts the audience's imagination by countering: 'Nur um das jetzt noch mal zu sagen: Man veröffentlicht ja nicht seine intimen Details, das ist ja falsch, es ist ja nicht so, dass man keine Geheimnisse mehr hat.' And she reinforced a few minutes later: 'Damit muss man erst mal klarkommen, dass jeder denkt, alles was in dem Buch steht ist hundertprozentig echt. Das ist nicht so.'⁸⁷ But of course, she does not detail 'the way it is' – thereby keeping up the tension created by the autofictional space in which she writes and acts. The word tension here is to be understood decidedly positively: in the autofictional realm, it enables agency, a creative way of dealing with issues otherwise 'unspeakable', and it provides a protective mask for an author negotiating vulnerable subject positions in the public arena. Identification of author and narrator simultaneously is and is not encouraged.

The question why Roche felt the compulsive need to address her trauma in such an ambivalent manner and in the public realm can possibly be answered by thinking back to the *Druckzeitung*-allegory: to prevent others from further exploiting the story of the accident, as a public persona she must mark this story as her story and be the one who eventually, after ten years, puts it in words in *Schoßgebete*.

Anticipating the Media as Regulatory Body

The media response to Roche's second novel has been extensive, and – as both provoked and foreseen by its autofictional mode and use of an aesthetics of disgust – echoes a wide-ranging array of reactions. In two of the largest German newspapers, *Stern* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, two male reviewers condemn *Schoßgebete*: unable to recognise or place any of the book's narrative strategies and experimentations with genre, Thomas Steinfeld calls the book 'unerheblich', 'trivial', and even 'verlogen' – mainly because he openly dislikes its sexual explicitness and because he perceives the relation of author and narrator figure negatively as confused, literally speaking of 'Verwirrung'.⁸⁸ Carsten Heidböhmer's article in *Stern* carries as subtitle: "'Schoßgebete" dreht sich vor allem um die Autorin – die ihr Familienunglück zur Schau stellt',⁸⁹ thereby accusing Roche of exactly the kind of egocentrism and narcissism the

⁸⁶ ZDF, 'Charlotte Roche bei Markus Lanz (18. August 2011)', *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26I7h2u5ntY>> [accessed 18 January 2013].

⁸⁷ Trans.: 'Just to say this one more time: you don't publish your intimate details. That isn't correct, it's not as if you don't have any secrets any more. [...] For starters, you've got to be able to deal with the fact that everyone thinks all that is written in the book is a hundred per cent true. That isn't the way it is.'

⁸⁸ Trans.: 'insignificant', 'trivial', 'mendacious'.

⁸⁹ Trans.: '*Schoßgebete* above all revolves around its author – who puts on display the calamity of her family.'

novel, as an autofiction, is trying to avoid. Heidböhmer deems the novel's content as not appropriate for publication, even wondering if it was morally right of Roche to do so. And he ultimately passes judgement, more on the author than on the actual book: 'So bleibt der schale Nachgeschmack, dass Roche – um den Erfolg ihres Debüts zu wiederholen – bereit ist, alles zu tun. Und dabei nicht einmal auf ihre von schrecklichem Unglück heimgesuchte Familie Rücksicht nimmt.'⁹⁰

In this, he disregards the fact that her family's tragedy is essentially her tragedy, too, hence denying her any kind of agency. I read reviews of this kind – grounded in their author's conviction of moral superiority rather than in an argument for or against reading a text – as incidents of policing, if not of discrimination. Steinfeld and Heidböhmer's reviews exemplify the media's regulatory structure with its tendency to dismiss the abnormal or heterodox, to police new discourses about sex or death or illness, and to defend the societal – and literary – status quo.⁹¹ Yet because of the novel's inherent autofictional self-reflexivity, reproaches like these, of inauthenticity and immorality, cannot be taken fully seriously as they have been anticipated and countered within the novel itself even before they occurred (see, for example, SG 121-122). Reproaches that could otherwise have harmful potential are thus weakened in their effect, and are already rebutted in the self-conscious genre that autofiction is.⁹²

Roche knowingly risks such hostile readings as those of the two reviewers cited above as someone who sees the benefits of working through her experiences in narration. The following section demonstrates how autofictional detachment enables narration and is a coping mechanism for dealing with the intrusion of the traumatic real.

Autofictional Detachment

It takes *Schoßgebete's* narrator Elizabeth a long time to address the source of her trauma so central to the novel. The reader follows her drawing closer to it over more than a hundred pages. Yet the accident and its horrific outcome again and again infest her thoughts, and consequently the narration as it unfolds – demanding a listener. While the main plot from 'Dienstag' to 'Donnerstag' is in decidedly chronological order, the narration of the car accident is anything but that. In the face of trauma, this logical order breaks down. Instead, it is narrated

⁹⁰ Trans.: 'Thus one is left with the sour taste that Roche – to repeat her debut novel's success – is willing to do just about anything. And in doing so, she has no regard at all for her disaster-stricken family.'

⁹¹ In the article 'Pop, Porn, and Rebellious Speech', Stehle, focusing on female writers and performers employing sexually explicit language, has written about this mechanism much more extensively than can be done here.

⁹² Kotin Mortimer, 'Autofiction as Allofiction', p. 33.

in snatches, which Elizabeth alternately tries to block out (SG 122) or dwells upon obsessively, in order to assure herself it ‘really happened’ and until she feels as if she, too, had been there (SG 151):

Mein Mann denkt, ich gucke fern, aber ich grübele wieder mal heimlich über den Unfall nach, ich lasse den immer gleichen Ablauf Revue passieren, als wäre ich dabei gewesen. Um mir immer wieder zu sagen: ‘Ja, Elizabeth, so war das, damit musst du jetzt klarkommen, das ist die Wahrheit, das ist wirklich passiert.’⁹³ (SG 110)

The unassimilated traumatic experience simply does not seem ‘real’; it is indeed outside the range of Elizabeth’s experience. Yet, eight years after the accident, the urge to take on this nightmare ‘jetzt’ [now] (SG 99) in the narrative present seems more pressing than ever.

Only after narratively revisiting phone calls she had to make on the day, the subsequent trip to the site of the accident in England, the call she received from the *Druckzeitung*, and so on, the narrator begins to reconstruct the events of the accident themselves. They truly possess her; not having been there, the narrator cannot really know any of it for sure. In the reconstruction that Elizabeth attempts regardless, she depends on fictional strategies to fill the gaps as much as on the facts she has been gathering ever since from survivors and from police files, as is made clear to the reader (SG 141). Thus twice detached, that is in a first step by creating a narrative alter ego, and secondly, by having Elizabeth only indirectly know the course of events of the day of the accident, the autofictional mode gives Roche the necessary space to build a story of her family’s accident that is both real, and is not real – and that, in this mode, finally no longer resists narration.

Through short sentences, sometimes consisting of just one word, the reader becomes immersed in the story. In the present tense, Elizabeth, in this narration, shows a level of detail that goes together with her wish to have been there, to truly know what has happened (articulated e.g. SG 151, 153-154). She pictures her mother taking her shoes off like she always does when driving on a hot summer’s day (SG 141), thereby implying knowledge from experience. Based on the police reports, she can describe the traffic – ‘Es ist viel los auf der Autobahn, aber der Verkehr fließt’ (SG 142) – as well as the moment of the accident in which a truck driver on the other side of the motorway crashes into a traffic jam ahead.⁹⁴ He does so ‘[u]ngebremst’ [without braking] (SG 142), she tells the reader, which in turn is knowledge she gathered from witnesses. The moment her mother drives her car into the crash, with the sons

⁹³ Trans.: ‘My husband is thinking that I am watching TV, but yet again I am secretly brooding over the accident, reviewing the ever-same course of events as if I had been there. To tell myself over and over: “Yes, Elizabeth, that’s how it was, you better deal with that now, this is the truth, this really happened.”’

⁹⁴ Trans.: ‘It is busy on the motorway, but traffic is moving.’

on the back seats, Elizabeth believes: 'Im Radio im Auto meiner Mutter läuft "Lucky Man" von The Verve' (SG 142).⁹⁵ Tracing this intertextual reference, one finds that this 1997 song by the Britpop band culminates in the line 'Gotta love that'll never die'. This imagined detail of the circumstances of the accident is a declaration of Elizabeth's love for her dead brothers. Her sentences become even shorter, turning into ellipses, as she attempts to imagine what the moments after the crash must have been like for Rhea, the girlfriend of one of her brothers: 'Stille. Lange. [...] Rauschen im Kopf. Alles in Zeitlupe' (SG 142).⁹⁶ Narrating how her mother and Rhea can escape the deadly vehicle, Elizabeth draws a striking comparison to another indelible image, one that she carries with herself since childhood:

[Rhea] robbt sich wie die kranken Gorillas im Nebel aus dem Film, den wir viel zu jung gucken mussten, damit wir Tierforscher werden oder wenigstens Umweltschützer, mehrere Meter weit vom Auto weg.⁹⁷ (SG 142)

Awaking from unconsciousness, Elizabeth says of her mother:

Sie sitzt und sitzt und sitzt. Und wundert sich über die Stille im Auto. Sie dreht sich *nicht* um. Sie guckt *nicht* ihre Kinder an. Sie ist *keine* Mutter mehr, die sich um ihre Kinder kümmern kann. Sie kann sich *nicht* mal selber retten. Sie ist wie ein schwer verwundetes Tier.⁹⁸ (SG 143; emphasis mine)

In Elizabeth's fantasy, they emerge from the tragedy as wounded animals. Rhea, just functioning and with animalistic survival instinct, can save herself from the ensuing fire. The mother is not in any state to do so. The multiple negations indicate that her mother is not the mother Elizabeth knew any more. She lost her ability to be that person under these circumstances, to be someone who can take care of her children. She is reduced to her wounded shell. Crucially, at the end of this detailed reconstruction of the accident, Elizabeth confesses:

Für mich, in meinem Kopf, ist das Schlimmste: dass wir alle nicht wissen, ob meine Brüder, als sie in Flammen aufgegangen sind, noch gelebt haben oder ob sie von dem Aufprall schon tot waren. [...] Das verfolgt mich täglich. Tagsüber und nachts in meinen Träumen. Ich werde es nie rausfinden [...].⁹⁹ (SG 144)

⁹⁵ Trans.: 'On the radio in my mother's car they play »Lucky Man« by The Verve.'

⁹⁶ Trans.: 'Silence. For a long time. [...] Noise in the head. Everything in slow-motion.'

⁹⁷ Trans.: '[Rhea] crawls away from the car for several metres, like the sick gorillas in the mist in that film we had to watch way too young, so that we would become animal researchers or environmentalists at least.'

⁹⁸ Trans.: 'She sits there, and sits there, and sits there. And wonders at the silence in the car. She does *not* turn around. She does *not* look at her children. She is *not* a mother anymore who can take care of her children. She *cannot* even save herself. She is like a seriously injured animal.'

⁹⁹ Trans.: 'To me, in my head, the worst is: that none of us knows if my brothers were still alive when they went up in flames, or if they were already dead from the collision. [...] That haunts me daily. In the daytime and at night in my dreams. I will never find out about it [...].'

Despite all her research, nobody was able to give her this crucial bit of information. The one thing she does not dare imaginatively reconstruct is what haunts her most. How much did they have to suffer? This is the missing piece, the source of her pain.

Missing also are the brothers' bodies. There are no corpses as these were consumed by the fire. The narrator yearns for them, believing the tragedy would be easier to understand, more straightforward and simpler to integrate as a memory if it was not for this circumstance which she perceives as unnatural and therefore all the more cruel:

Ich beneide jeden, der jemanden verliert, wenigstens aber einen toten Körper hat, zum Anfassen. Zum besseren Begreifen. Damit das lahme Gehirn verstehen kann, diese Person ist jetzt tot. Das Leben kommt nicht wieder in diesem toten Körper zurück. Niemals. Guck, fass ihn an.¹⁰⁰ (SG 151)

Elizabeth's futile belief that 'anfassen' [to touch] would provide opportunities to 'begreifen' [to grasp or understand] indicates that, for the narrator, words in themselves are not enough for beginning to understand the death of her loved ones. Visual and kinaesthetic cues are needed to literally grasp a message as drastic and indeed outside the range of comprehension as the message of the simultaneous, premature death of all of one's siblings. While it might be a false hope that things would be easier to process if only there were dead bodies to prove the facts, Elizabeth will never be able to find out.

Out of this lack emerges what is by far the most striking passage of the novel: Elizabeth reveals to the reader a figment of her imagination that stands in for the missing bodies of her brothers in a story within the story that can in many ways be said to bear magic realist traits (SG 151-154). She sets the scene thus, imagining a second life for the three of them:

Sie leben jetzt im Wald von Belgien, bei all den Tieren, die noch nicht von uns brutalen Fortschrittswirtschaftswachstumsautofahrern überfahren wurden. Der Unfall hat sie natürlich sehr mitgenommen, sie sind seitdem verrückt, können sich an nichts erinnern [...].¹⁰¹ (SG 151-152)

She embellishes this story subsequently, creating a parallel world for her brothers in which, secluded from most influences of the modern world which Elizabeth criticises by means of the neologism 'Fortschrittswirtschaftswachstumsautofahrer', they almost live happily ever after. Having introduced the animal-simile when describing Rhea and the mother, it turns up again

¹⁰⁰ Trans.: 'I envy everyone who loses someone, but at least has a dead body – to touch. To better grasp things. So the sluggish brain can understand, this person is now dead. Life will not return into this dead body. Never. Look, touch it.'

¹⁰¹ Trans.: 'They now live in the woods of Belgium, with all the animals that have not yet been run over by us brutal progress-economic-growth-drivers. The accident of course has had its effect on them, they have been insane since then, cannot remember anything [...].' The accident occurred whilst driving through Belgium.

here as the brothers in this story are likened to forest animals, forever ‘unschuldig, klein, natürlich’ (SG 155),¹⁰² as the narrator’s faith in mankind is irretrievably lost. This ‘Land, in dem sie wohnen’ (SG 153) is complete with a functioning societal structure (her oldest brother being the leader of this community of three), and a currency to facilitate trade amongst them.¹⁰³ They have all you need in life (SG 152), Elizabeth stresses. Time passes as it does in the ‘real’ world, and over the years, the fractured skull of one of the younger brothers heals well, his pain ceases. Nonetheless, the reality of the accident even breaks into this fantasy, and just as Elizabeth cannot let go of it, neither can her brothers free themselves of its grip: ‘Durch seine langen, dreckigen, verfilzten Haare spürt mein Bruder noch den Knochenhubbel von damals’ (SG 154), Elizabeth, omniscient narrator of this story within a story, knows about one of them.¹⁰⁴ The most significant consequence of the accident is the following: ‘Alle drei haben [...] ihre Sprache verloren und verständigen sich nur durch Blicke. Sie verstehen sich eigentlich blind, denn sie sind Überlebende’ (SG 152).¹⁰⁵ The effect of trauma has freed them not only of their memories, but also of language. Understood positively, this relieves them from remembering the actual incident. Read more negatively, however, this void binds them to the accident: the only time that something like communication through language occurs between them is in their joint humming of ‘Lucky Man’ in moments of distress (SG 153), with the accident being the zero hour of their wildlife existence.

Imagining her brothers’ afterlife thus is similarly tainted for Elizabeth, as it both consoles her and continues to distress her. This can be inferred from the way she closes the story: ‘Ja, so ist das da in dem belgischen Wald. Und niemand kann mir das Gegenteil beweisen. Weil mir niemand die toten Körper zeigen kann. Weil nichts mehr da ist zum Beerdigen’ (SG 154).¹⁰⁶ This striking tale, featuring her dead brothers in animal form, can in some sense be regarded as a fable; yet it is one, poignantly, without a ‘useful lesson’,¹⁰⁷ and provides no sense of closure for Elizabeth. Trauma will not lessen its grip on her, but the autofictional detachment the narrator displays here helps her to cope with the intrusion of the real. The autofictional

¹⁰² Trans.: ‘innocent, small, as nature made them’.

¹⁰³ Trans.: ‘land in which they live’.

¹⁰⁴ Trans.: ‘Underneath his long, dirty, matted hair my brother still feels the bony bump from back then.’

¹⁰⁵ Trans.: ‘All three of them have lost their language and communicate solely via eye contact. In actual fact, they understand each other blindly [i.e. intimately], for they are survivors.’

¹⁰⁶ Trans.: ‘Yes, that is the way it is in that Belgium forest. And no one can prove me wrong. Because no one can show me the dead bodies. Because nothing’s left to bury.’

¹⁰⁷ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a fable is a ‘short story devised to convey some useful lesson; esp. one in which animals or inanimate things are the speakers or actors’.

mode initiates, at least in the case of *Schoßgebete*, a ‘continual leaving’ of the site of trauma,¹⁰⁸ made possible by the poetic licence it grants narrator and author.

Conclusion

This chapter has pursued a twofold objective: to highlight why *Schoßgebete* as a trauma narrative might be best represented in the autofictional form it takes, and to explore the reason for, and effect of, a striking aesthetics of disgust employed by Roche to tell this personal story publicly. In more than one way, *Schoßgebete*’s form has thus been substantiated as contingent on its content, the story of trauma it begins to tell.

In *Schoßgebete*, disgust helps to expose the myth of our bodies as clean and proper, as controllable by us transcendental beings. As an author, Roche generally writes against the idea that women – and indeed also men, yet to a lesser degree – are a ‘sexy presentation space’, as she has suggested in an English-language interview.¹⁰⁹ Probably derived from the German term ‘Präsentationsfläche’, this German-English hybrid word is telling, beyond what Roche literally intended to say: it directs the reader who has proven themselves worthy to see through the novel’s surface.¹¹⁰ Elizabeth’s body is central to the narrative that *Schoßgebete* tells, but only insofar as the external – that is her body as space or canvas – guides the way to the internal world of the novel’s protagonist, and to reading *Schoßgebete* as the story of a wounded mind.

Access to the more personal aspects of the novel, then, is granted only to those readers who withstand the initial impulse to turn away and put the book down, and who instead show a willingness to accompany the narrator/protagonist into a world of pain and illness that is, by its nature, likely to be at times disgusting and disturbing. Elizabeth deliberately does not make it easy for the reader to like her, still less to identify with her, constantly marking herself as the disgusting and sick other, displaying grotesque behaviours and reasoning. In a 2011 interview from around the time of the book’s publication, Roche significantly comments on her writing strategy thus: ‘Ich will, dass die Leute sich an den ekligen Sachen vorbeigraben. Und dahinter, da ist die Charlotte [...]’.¹¹¹ She favours clearly those who are willing to put up with the demanding aesthetics of disgust, those that are capable of empathising, if not

¹⁰⁸ Caruth, ‘Introduction: Trauma and Experience’, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Oltermann, ‘Interview: Charlotte Roche’, *GRANTA* <<http://www.granta.com/New-Writing/Interview-Charlotte-Roche>> [accessed 3 December 2012].

¹¹⁰ Which are those readers who bear with Elizabeth through this opening sex scene and the repeated bold encounters with the unsexy, ill, oozing bodies throughout the narrative.

¹¹¹ Trans.: ‘I want people to dig past the yucky stuff. And behind all that, there is Charlotte [...]’. NDR, ‘NDR Talkshow 26.08.2011’.

sympathising, with Elizabeth. The fear of being rejected plays into the choice of this complex aesthetics, and matches the narrator's panicky behaviour, innermost fears and feelings of self-disgust and shame. Evocative of Elizabeth, in an autofictional move, Roche in the same interview also stated: 'Ich möchte so wahnsinnig gerne geliebt werden. Ich will, dass die Leute mich mögen!'¹¹² As a celebrity writer borrowing so heavily from her own experiences, Roche is highly aware of the gaze of others she exposes herself to, and controls this gaze via disgust. Moreover, through her use of autofictional strategies she problematises the reader's gaze onto the personal tragedy of which the book tells.

Autofiction, we have seen, can – to an extent – enable those in vulnerable subject positions to speak. By undermining any readily assumed referentiality of the novel, it creates the necessary space to accommodate the paradoxes and contradictions that define the traumatic experience at the centre of *Schoßgebete*. It helps disable both external and internal mechanisms of censorship,¹¹³ and thus primarily enables the transformation of death and trauma into story. The dialectic of the autofictional mode, unintentionally yet fittingly expressed in *Schoßgebete's* legal disclaimer, perfectly mirrors the central dialectic of trauma: 'the will to deny horrible events', Judith Lewis Herman has highlighted in her work, is as strong as 'the will to proclaim them aloud'.¹¹⁴

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Roche phrased her motivation to write about the accident thus: 'weil ich das Gefühl hatte, das muss jetzt raus. Ich habe bis heute nicht getrauert, kein bisschen'.¹¹⁵ This kind of 'formulation' can be a first step toward recovery from trauma.¹¹⁶ Work like Henke's confirms literature as a platform able to initiate communication and healing, and psychotherapists such as Herman moreover emphasise the importance of an understanding listener and healing relationships for a continual leaving of the site of trauma. Ultimately, this therapeutic relationship is what Roche – through the novel's publication and encounters with readers – seems to be looking for. Fittingly, the reading tour was the most important aspect of the publication of her second novel to her. As she said in a TV interview, she hoped it would enable her to show her wound ('Hier ist meine Wunde!'), connect with people, and start a healing process (literally 'Heilung').¹¹⁷ This is both a brave and risky

¹¹² Trans.: 'I want to be loved so badly. I want people to like me!'

¹¹³ Zipfel, 'Autofiktion', p. 301.

¹¹⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Trans.: 'I had the feeling that I had to get it out. I've still not grieved, not even a bit.' Buß, 'Sexautorin Charlotte Roche'.

¹¹⁶ Hawkins, 'Writing About Illness', p. 117. She draws on Robert J. Lifton's research on Hiroshima survivors in making this point.

¹¹⁷ NDR, 'NDR Talkshow 26.08.2011'.

business. Autofiction theory's claim that its writer can fulfil for themselves the 'Traum der literarischen Selbsterschaffung',¹¹⁸ and can create a new existence – 'eine neue Existenz' – may be daring, but it is also an incentive for writers to try to do so.¹¹⁹ Yet the achievements of the text do not stop here.

Beyond its personal importance for the author, the social critique offered in this 'disgusting' novel is apparent: the isolation and marginalisation of the main character as woman, mourner, and patient in the medical system demonstrates plainly the consequences which ensue when everything to do with the body, every deviation from utopian norms in society is hushed-up and continues to be surrounded by taboo. It is precisely the unruly body that is the site where issues of femininity, illness, and death converge. It is therefore at the centre of this novel and all its entangled themes, as it is the body, as Bakhtin put it, that 'fecundates and is fecundated, that gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying.'¹²⁰



Turning to Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht*, the next chapter deals once again with a text that was written and published with considerable temporal distance to the author's own experience.¹²¹ Commenting on the years that lapsed between her stroke and the book publication that resulted from it, Schmidt stresses she had never planned to write about it at all. Yet, with the encouragement of a friend, she stuck with it, having one day intuitively started to put into words the extraordinary experience of awaking from coma:

Eines Tages war es einfach über mich gekommen, mal aufzuschreiben, wie ich aus dem Koma erwacht war, und ich habe 30 Seiten in Ichform geschrieben. Einer Freundin gefiel das gut, und die sagte: 'Mach doch die erste Seite zur letzten!' Auf der ersten Seite riss die Gehirnarterie, und so hatte ich den langen Weg vor mir, die Heldin zu diesem Anfang zurückzuschicken, dass sie sich erinnert, wie dieses Aneurysma geplatzt war.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Trans.: 'dream of literary self-creation'.

¹¹⁹ Gasser, 'Autobiographie und Autofiktion', p. 25; similarly: Wagner-Egelhaaf, 'Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven der Autobiographieforschung in der Literaturwissenschaft', p. 197.

¹²⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 319.

¹²¹ Kathrin Schmidt, *Du stirbst nicht* (München: btb, 2011; orig.: Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009). The title can be translated either as 'You're not dying' or 'You won't die'.

¹²² Trans.: 'One day it just came over me to write down how I awoke from coma, and I wrote 30 pages, in the first person. A friend liked it a lot, and said: "Why don't you make the first page your last!" On the first page the brain artery ripped, and so I had ahead of me the long way of sending the heroine back to this beginning, in order for her to remember how this aneurysm burst.' Kathleen Fietz, Kristina Pezzei and Detlev Schilke, 'Montagsinterview Kathrin Schmidt: Ich wusste schnell wieder, wer ich bin', *taz*, 4 January 2010 <<http://www.taz.de/!46202/>> [accessed 4 June 2013].

Like Roche, Schmidt too employs an alter ego-protagonist, creating a fictive yet recognisable name for the character, and in doing so borrows a narrative strategy from autofictional writing. The book is, however, best described as an autobiographical novel. This is, above all, because its autobiographical and its fictional elements remain relatively clear-cut – they are clearly distinguished by its author in interviews, for example. Schmidt's means of complicating the relationship with her readership is a different one to Roche's and is reflected in practical narratological decisions made from the point of view of professional authorship. Exactly which narrative devices and strategies Schmidt employs in the text, and what narrative work the more fictional and the more directly autobiographical strands do in this very personal novel, will be the focus of the following analysis.

Chapter II

Looking beyond the Self – Reflecting the Other: Staring as a Narrative Device in Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht* (2009)

und aus dem spiegel steigt / der erste schrei.¹

from the poem 'ob sommer, ob winter' by Kathrin Schmidt
(in *Blinde Bienen*)

Du stirbst nicht won Kathrin Schmidt the Deutscher Buchpreis in 2009, and attracted more media attention to her person than any of the poetry and novels for which she had won several prizes previously in her career. It is the writer's second novel after suffering a brain haemorrhage in 2002 which put her in a coma and meant she would regain consciousness after two weeks, at the age of forty-four finding herself hemiplegic, having undergone major surgery, and – suffering from Broca's aphasia – unable to speak.² The narrative begins with Schmidt's alter ego-protagonist Helene Wesendahl waking up to find herself in exactly this state. The author bestows much verifiable biographical data onto her protagonist,³ and by giving her the surname Wesendahl, she creates a name that is literally 'close to home'; Wesendahl being a district of Altlandsberg, which lies to the north-east of the author's home city Berlin. In a complimentary step, the reader of *Du stirbst nicht* confirms the resemblance of author and protagonist that is thus suggested through their crucial contextual knowledge of Schmidt's own stroke, which – not unlike in the case of Roche's trauma writing – may indeed have driven them to pick up the text in the first instance.

Despite this resemblance – or perhaps precisely because of it – Schmidt can be observed to closely guard her professional identity as an author, especially once having won the Buchpreis

¹ Trans.: 'and from the mirror the first cry rises.'

² Aphasia is an impairment of language owing to brain damage, for example as the result of a stroke, an infection, a brain tumour or a traumatic brain injury, such as the aneurism that burst in Schmidt's head. Aphasia can affect all language abilities, both one's production of language as well as one's processing of others' speech (be it written or spoken). Fluent and non-fluent aphasia are the two most frequent forms of aphasia – the latter is associated with damage in the Broca's Area of the brain, and manifests itself in vocabulary and pronunciation problems, which are particularly severe when trying to find verbs. People with aphasia further experience problems producing grammatical sentences.

³ The character and its creator share year of birth, have worked in the same professions (as psychologist and writer), both lived in the GDR, and are mothers of five children. For more, see, for example: Nina Schmidt, 'Kathrin Schmidt', author page for the *Centre for the Study of Contemporary Women's Writing*, 2014 <<http://modernlanguages.sas.ac.uk/centre-study-contemporary-womens-writing-ccwww/languages/german/kathrin-schmidt>> [accessed 21 May 2016]; 'Schmidt, Kathrin', in *Munzinger Online/ KLG – Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* <<http://www.munzinger.de/document/16000000689>> [accessed 8 May 2013].

for *Du stirbst nicht*. Against the backdrop of an increasing number of publications of autobiographically inspired illness narratives, Schmidt insisted her book was different, effectively arguing for it to be considered as real or proper, that is serious, literature.⁴ Indeed, for Schmidt, the majority of the other texts do not qualify as literature (in a traditional sense). The author is frank in her explanation of why she dissociates herself from fellow illness writers such as Christoph Schlingensiefel, Georg Diez or Jürgen Leinemann,⁵ all of whom also published in 2009, and in conjunction with this rejects an understanding of her novel as an example of writing as therapy:

Ich habe das nicht als Therapie angesehen. Ich wollte einfach wieder schreiben; ich wollte einfach keine Rente. Schreiben als Therapie, das würde ich nicht unterschreiben. Ich verstand mich ja auch als professionelle Schriftstellerin. Schreiben als Therapie ist behaftet mit Möchtegern-Schreiben. Ich wollte nicht um jeden Preis wieder schreiben, sondern richtig schreiben können.⁶

Making this statement, Schmidt reveals a high level of awareness of the fact that in the Germanic realm, both reviewers and academic readers often still dismiss writing that is too closely based on autobiographical experience as ‘bloßer Verarbeitungsversuch’ in a distinct derogatory sense.⁷ What this furthermore shows is that in the contemporary public perception and discussion, autobiographical writing continues to be equated with non-aestheticised (ergo naïve and even trivial) forms of writing. The specific narrative strategies Schmidt employs in representing her personal illness experience in novel form, which will be explored in this chapter (most notably that of staring as a narrative device), are conscious of and somewhat haunted by this discourse. At the same time, their complexity and accomplishment exposes the logic of that discourse as inconsistent.

Possibly because of Schmidt’s concern for literary value, *Du stirbst nicht* is labelled, unconventionally, as ‘[e]in Erinnerungsroman ganz eigener Art’ in the publisher’s description.

⁴ Gerrit Bartels, ‘Überlebensgroß’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 15 October 2009, p. 25.

⁵ Bartels, ‘Überlebensgroß’, p. 25.

⁶ Trans.: ‘I didn’t regard it as a therapy. I simply wanted to write again; I simply didn’t want retirement. Writing as therapy, I wouldn’t subscribe to that. Because I took myself to be a professional author. Writing as therapy is tainted with “wannabe”-writing. I did not want to write again at all costs, I wanted to be able to write properly.’ Walter Fabian Schmid, ‘Kathrin Schmidt im Gespräch: Das ist ein anderes Schreiben, als es vorher war’, *Poet 7* (2009), pp. 183-191 (p.182). She repeatedly expresses such concerns about being pigeonholed as ‘Betroffenheitsliteratur’ or self-help literature across various interviews. See also, for example: ‘Literaturpreis für Kathrin Schmidt: “Schreiben war immer meine Fluchtburg”’, *Thüringische Landeszeitung*, 25 September 2013 <<http://www.tlz.de/web/zgt/kultur/detail/-/specific/Heimkehr-durch-die-Raeume-meiner-Kindheit-und-Jugend-922015597>> [accessed 4 April 2016].

⁷ Trans.: ‘mere attempt at working-through [a blow of fate]’. Marina Neubert, ‘Lebendig begraben’, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 27 March 2009 <<http://www.morgenpost.de/printarchiv/kultur/article1062623/Lebendig-begraben.html>> [accessed 3 June 2013].

On the back of the book it is advertised in large font as '[d]ie atemberaubende Geschichte einer Heilung'.⁸ Noticeably, we are dealing here with an illness narrative that, in order to be taken seriously on the literary book market, is not explicitly marketed as such.

Another aspect of the reception of *Du stirbst nicht* which Schmidt feels the need to contest, is some critics' allegorical interpretation of the autobiographical illness experience at the centre of it. Contemplating her resistance to the label 'Ostschriftstellerin' and the fact that she tends to be pigeonholed as one,⁹ Schmidt states:

[Es gibt] Rezensenten [...], die diesen ganzen gesundheitlichen Zusammenbruch als Metapher für die Wende in der DDR lesen. Das finde ich schrecklich, und ich weiß überhaupt nicht, wie die darauf kommen. Und ich werde auch gefragt, warum ich denn auch in diesem Roman viel über die DDR geschrieben habe. Ich finde nicht, dass ich viel über die DDR geschrieben habe, und ich habe ja nun mal kein anderes Leben. Ich kann ja kein anderes Leben erfinden.¹⁰

This statement is crucial for two reasons: first of all, Schmidt explicitly calls for *Du stirbst nicht* to be read in its own right as an illness narrative, discouraging too much abstraction from it. Her request matches that of literary disability scholar Pauline Eyre, whose guiding concern is to ask both academic and lay readers to 'look beyond the impaired values of hegemonic reading practices [of reading disability as a trope; N. Sch.] toward the empowering possibilities of reading disability for real'.¹¹ Eyre thus concludes an article on Libuše Moníková's 1983 novel *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin* which she reads – against the normative grain – as an investigation into the lived reality of disability, highlighting that she is unwilling to limit the depiction of disability in the novel to the metaphorical realm. Polemically, the disabled scholar thereby turns the tables and calls normative readings 'impaired', outraged precisely by their tendency to not lend sufficient weight to the depiction of disability in literature.

Secondly, Schmidt in this statement explicitly identifies the book as highly reliant on her own life experiences ('ich habe ja nun mal kein anderes Leben'), with much in there that is 'real'. This applies to both her life in the GDR as well as the complex experience of becoming ill and

⁸ Trans.: 'unique novel of memory'; 'the breath-taking story of a healing'.

⁹ Trans.: 'writer from the East of Germany'.

¹⁰ Trans.: [There are] reviewers [...] who read this whole breakdown in health as a metaphor for the *Wende* [the 'turnaround', German reunification] in the GDR. I find that terrible, and have absolutely no clue how they come up with that idea. I also get asked why I have written so much about the GDR in this novel, too. I don't think I have done that, and, after all, I have no other life. I cannot possibly invent another life for myself.' Kathleen Fietz, Kristina Pezzei and Detlev Schilke, 'Montagsinterview Kathrin Schmidt: Ich wusste schnell wieder, wer ich bin', *taz*, 4 January 2010 <<http://www.taz.de/!46202/>> [accessed 4 June 2013].

¹¹ Pauline Eyre, 'From Impairment to Empowerment: A Re-Assessment of Libuše Moníková's Representation of Disability in *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin*', in *Disability in German Literature, Film, and Theatre*, ed. by Eleoma Joshua and Michael Schillmeier, *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, 4 (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), pp. 197-212 (p. 212).

living with disability that informs Schmidt's writing in (and since) *Du stirbst nicht*. It clearly places the book on one shelf with other autobiographical writing. Accordingly, the author gives herself little artistic freedom in writing the main character's biography: 'Ich habe lange überlegt, welchen Beruf sie haben könnte [...] Aber es ging nicht anders. Sie musste Schriftstellerin sein, auch auf die Gefahr hin, dass mich nun alle Leser mit ihr verwechseln.'¹² In conversation with the magazine *Psychologie Heute*, she stresses that had she not made Helene a writer, 'hätte sich die Schere zu weit geöffnet zu meinem eigenen Erleben'.¹³ Notwithstanding this, strikingly, she also says in the very same interview that she sent her protagonist 'auf eine Reise weit von mir weg'.¹⁴ And in another interview, Schmidt admits that she could not help but share with Helene many of the crucial features of her own biography, concluding elusively: 'Die Geschichte [...] ist biografisch grundiert, aber doch eine andere Geschichte. Das ist komisch verschränkt.'¹⁵ In these careful considerations, a tension inherent to the author's public negotiation of the book's reception comes to the fore: there is both the need to mark it as authentic in its representation of the author's life experience (and above all, the far-reaching experience of illness), and the urge to ensure the autobiographical novel is perceived as substantial and meaningful beyond the author's individual life, that is as a piece of writing worthy of being called literature – rather than 'Betroffenheitsliteratur'.¹⁶

Schmidt, we note, understands her role as that of the professional writer – whereas Roche (whose personal narrative *Schoßgebete* is analysed in the previous chapter) explicitly does not: 'Ich fühle mich nicht als Schriftstellerin, auch wenn ich jetzt zwei Bücher geschrieben habe'.¹⁷ While for Roche, *Schoßgebete* is a means to formulate trauma as well as to connect with others, and in this way functions as a step towards recovery, Schmidt seems to reject both of these

¹² Trans.: 'I have contemplated for a long time which profession she might have [...] But there was no other way. She had to be an author, despite the risk of now having all my readers confuse her with me.' Jörg Magenau, 'Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Leben', *Literaturen* 10.4 (2009), pp. 54-59 (p. 56).

¹³ Trans.: 'the gap to my own experience would have widened too far'. Anne-Ev Ustorf, 'Es ist ein großes Glück, dass ich diesen Beruf hatte, als ich erkrankte. Kathrin Schmidt im Gespräch', *Psychologie Heute*, January 2011 <http://www.ustorf.de/dateien/Interview_Kathrin_Schmidt.pdf> [accessed 4 October 2013].

¹⁴ Trans.: 'on a trip far away from me'. Ustorf, 'Es ist ein großes Glück'.

¹⁵ Trans.: 'The story [...] has a biographical basis, but is nonetheless another story. That is strangely interlaced.' Elmar Krekeler, 'Wie ich die Sprache wiederfand', *Die Welt*, 14 October 2009 <http://www.welt.de/welt_print/kultur/article4840308/Wie-ich-die-Sprache-wiederfand.html> [accessed 23 September 2013].

¹⁶ Britta Bürger, 'Im Zustand der Sprachlosigkeit', *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, 13 October 2009 <http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/im-zustand-der-sprachlosigkeit.954.de.html?dram:article_id=144692#> [accessed 12 February 2016].

¹⁷ Felicitas von Lovenberg, 'Ein Gespräch mit Charlotte Roche: Ich bin keine Frau, die andere Frauen verrät', *Frankfurter Allgemeine* <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/ein-gespraech-mit-charlotte-roche-ich-bin-keine-frau-die-andere-frauen-verraet-11104662.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2> [accessed 9 January 2016].

more personal intentions for her text. Moreover, Schmidt's appraisal by critics is wholly different, since not one accused her of the commodification of her illness experience. Certainly helped by winning the Deutscher Buchpreis, reviewers and scholars instead draw parallels between Schmidt's Helene Wesendahl and Kafka's Gregor Samsa (both wake up to an alien body, isolated from the world that surrounds them), and they assess Schmidt's writing in its eloquence as reminiscent of, for example, Günter Grass's style, thus elevating her to the rank of an author who will make a lasting impact on the literary landscape of Germany.¹⁸

In contrast to the default first-person voice that, if we agree with Schmidt, the 'wannabe-writers' would conventionally take up, her novel, in its published form, is narrated in the third person and predominantly internally focalised.¹⁹ This unusual combination of narrative voice and perspective produces a noteworthy tension as a detached voice narrates the highly intimate thoughts, feelings and memories of Helene (and, as the reader speculates, in extensio, Schmidt). This gives the impression that she has stepped outside her own body, spinning her 'Erinnerungsfaden' [thread of memory] or 'Halteleine' [guiding rope] (*DSN* 39, 74) from an emotional distance, with the ultimate aim of recovering her memory and language competency. Analogous to the nature of the impairment Helene finds herself with on awakening, conversations (other than remembered ones) take up little room in *Du stirbst nicht*; much of what the reader learns, Helene herself cannot communicate, at least not in conventional ways.

The protagonist's linguistic recovery from aphasia is reflected in the vocabulary and grammar of the narrating voice, mirroring Helene's very limited ability to stay conscious or even open her eyes at the beginning of the novel. Gradually, from there, the language used to tell Helene's story becomes more complex as her memory returns, her awareness of her

¹⁸ Katrin Hillgruber, 'Erinnerungsroman: Aufschlussreiche Sprachbefreiung', *Spiegel Online Kultur*, 20 April 2009 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/erinnerungsroman-aufschlussreiche-sprachbefreiung-a-619620.html>> [accessed 18 September 2013]; Anja Hirsch, 'Steh auf und erinnere dich', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 April 2009 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/kathrin-schmidts-roman-du-stirbst-nicht-steh-auf-und-erinnere-dich-1792428.html>> [accessed 4 June 2013]; Sonja E. Klocke, 'Kathrin Schmidt, *Du stirbst nicht*: A Woman's Quest for Agency', in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), pp. 228-242 (p. 228).

¹⁹ Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* needs to be acknowledged as a model here, at least for Schmidt's choice of narrative structure and perspective: in Wolf's piece of fiction, Rita Seidel wakes up from coma, having had a mysterious accident at her factory workplace that can be interpreted as a suicide attempt. From this moment of crisis, little by little she begins to review her relationship with Manfred, his decision to leave for West Berlin and her ultimate decision to stay in the East just as the Wall is built. Just like in *Du stirbst nicht*, this is narrated in the third person, with two levels of storytelling interlacing: that of the narrative present in the hospital, and that of the remembered past, retrospectively assessed. Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1963).

surroundings increases, and her body and mind recuperate. Longer paragraphs as well as more diverse and sophisticated vocabulary are introduced as the novel progresses.

Making her way hand over hand along the thread of memory, thus regaining knowledge of her life before the aneurism burst, Helene discovers that she and husband Matthes were living through a major marital crisis. One reason was her feelings for transgender Viola who was born male (formerly named Viktor) and transitioned to female.²⁰ Schmidt identifies these aspects of the autobiographical novel as purely fictitious ('frei erfunden'), but equally emphatically asserts the depiction of the illness experience as accurate: 'Ich habe mich aber natürlich ganz exakt erinnert an die Zeit des Aufwachens und an die ersten Schritte im Krankenhaus'.²¹ The author thus asserts one of the defining criteria of autobiographical writing from a general reader's point of view, that of truthfulness or authenticity.²² Both the fictional and the more closely autobiographical strands of *Du stirbst nicht* will be analysed in the main body of this chapter.

On a purely technical level, authenticity, directness and immediacy are reinforced, for instance, through the frequent use of free indirect discourse, smudging further the already fine line between narrator and protagonist, and, as such, feed into the production of experientiality.²³ From time to time, however, this is resisted and the narrator's voice becomes surprisingly overt, which then disrupts the illusion of sharing in someone's perception or consciousness. Examples for both immersive and distancing narrative strategies will be given in the close analysis to follow.

The main part of this chapter, therefore, will bring together the different aspects of the story Schmidt tells by analysing the ways of seeing presented in *Du stirbst nicht*. These, I claim, are

²⁰ Viktor/Viola is strongly reminiscent of another 'Vatermutter' of Schmidt's, namely the character Lutz/Lucia in the author's debut novel *Die Gunnar-Lennefsen-Expedition* (1998). For more on Lutz/Lucia's function within the novel, see: Sonja E. Klocke, 'Die frohe Botschaft der Kathrin Schmidt? Transsexuality, Racism, and Feminist Historiography in *Die Gunnar-Lennefsen-Expedition*', in *Sexual-Textual Border-Crossings. Lesbian Identity in German-Language Literature, Film, and Culture*, ed. by Rachel MagShamhráin and others, *Germanistik in Ireland*, 5 (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 2010), pp. 143-158.

²¹ Trans.: 'But of course I remembered the time of waking up and my first steps in the hospital most accurately.' Krekeler, 'Wie ich die Sprache wiederfand'. She makes a similar assertion in conversation with Walter Fabian Schmid for *Poet*. Schmid, 'Kathrin Schmidt im Gespräch', p. 181.

²² Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie*, Sammlung Metzler, 323 (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Metzler, 2000), pp. 40-42.

²³ The narratologist Monika Fludernik stresses the creation of 'experientiality' (or 'Erfahrungsqualität', 'Erfahrungshaftigkeit') in narrative as central to the definition of narrative, hoping to move scholarly attention away from the plot or depiction of events and onto the mediation of the cognitive processing of events or experiences by a human or anthropomorphic character. According to Fludernik, it is experientiality, above all else, that makes a story imaginable for the reader. For more, see: Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1996).

closely linked to issues of self-image or self-perception, and externally-determined image, what I would call 'Selbstbild' and 'Fremdbild' in German, as well as attitudes toward the disabled other. I aim to demonstrate that seeing, or more specifically staring, in its frank appraisal, is a crucial means for Helene to reflect the situation she finds herself in upon awakening at the start of the novel, and enables her to reassemble an image of her self over the course of *Du stirbst nicht*. My findings from the close analysis will inform my assessment of extra-textual aspects of the novel, with which I will conclude.

Conceptualising Staring

In her 2009 publication *Staring: How We Look*, cultural critic and leading disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson tackles the stare as a physical response.²⁴ While offering no precise definition, she approaches the stare from a number of perspectives: she traces its cultural history (understanding it as having emerged in parallel with modern diagnostics and medicine), explains how it initiates a social relationship between a 'starer' and the person being stared at (whom she calls 'staree'), and under which circumstances staring can be a form of knowledge gathering – thus attempting to free it from its condemnation as being entirely negative, and above all voyeuristic (as which it is portrayed, for instance, in Sartre's prototypical keyhole example). Indeed, the driving force behind the book is to highlight the more positive facets staring can offer. Garland-Thomson's exploration relies, to a large extent, on examples (mainly from the U.S. context) of disabled people as presented or displayed through history, in art, and the media; from being forced to participate in circuses or freak shows, being exhibited on the market place, to more contemporary and positive examples such as their recent role in fashion photography.

The underlying assumption is that, as a natural bodily impulse and social necessity, staring can hardly be suppressed. Garland-Thomson stresses that staring is 'fundamental to our survival as social beings', and emphasises that '[t]o navigate the [...] social landscape of modern life, we need to read others'.²⁵ Visibly impaired people, in this cultural climate, are bound to attract stares. Even those who do not voluntarily expose themselves to the public gaze must envisage being made the object of others' quasi-automatic – and potentially disabling – stares in

²⁴ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009).

²⁵ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, pp. 17 and 49. To be seen is, of course, of equal importance (p. 75).

public.²⁶ They must plan for this imperative to represent the self, be prepared to react to others' stares that they incur for the simple reason that they live as extraordinary bodies.

Garland-Thomson's book is written in contrast to traditional understandings of the act and effect of staring, such as that of Susan Sontag, which condemns staring as voyeuristic and intrusive per se, and informs her last book *Regarding the Pain of Others*.²⁷ Garland-Thomson seeks to redefine the staring act as an opportunity 'to rethink the status quo', and she further stresses: '[w]ho we are can shift into focus by staring at who we think we are not'. Staring begins 'when ordinary seeing fails', in other words, 'when unfamiliar people take us by surprise'.²⁸ The starrer is not mastering the situation, but rather failing to meet the social demand to stay in control of one's eyes, to be able to avert them.²⁹ Despite the discriminatory damage this can do to anyone whose physique is perceived as deviating from the norm, the involuntary response of staring can be used to good effect, so it is claimed, and ideally turns into a conscious act of connection with another (that of 'beholding'). It is for this reason that Garland-Thomson characterises the stare as 'both impersonal and intimate' – it 'makes things happen between people', as it is a two-way encounter.³⁰

Overall, the stress is on the dynamic, engaging aspects of this 'interchange' of looks which for those involved is uneasy and illuminating in equal measure. In all this, Garland-Thomson wants the stare to be understood in difference to the much-theorised gaze, because the stare is less predetermined in its effects. The scholar puts in a nutshell: 'We may gaze at what we desire, but we stare at what astonishes us.'³¹ The gaze, to her, is only one type of stare, and closely associated with the objectification or colonisation of an other. *Staring* does not reject previous academic insights into visual culture or how we regard the other, as explicated by those investigating it from feminist/ psychoanalytic (Laura Mulvey), Marxist (John Berger) or postcolonial perspectives (such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Saïd).³² But *Staring* departs from

²⁶ And there are, of course, a significant number of disabled people who voluntarily search the limelight too. *Staring* knows of many such disabled starees by choice who purposely expose themselves to the public eye (such as, for instance, the New York-based artist and photographer Matuschka).

²⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003).

²⁸ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, pp. 6 and 3.

²⁹ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, pp. 22-23.

³⁰ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 33.

³¹ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 13.

³² Garland-Thomson's book agrees, for example, that there is pleasure in looking as well as pleasure in being looked at (Mulvey, p. 423) – however, this is not its central concern, nor can pleasure be staring's only effect. It does not deny the extent to which the gaze permeates western patriarchal society. Similar to others, it takes as its basis the paradox displayed by the starrer (or cinemagoer, in Mulvey's work) of oscillating between othering and identifying with the staree (or object of one's gaze) and the difficulty of finding a balance in both impulses. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in

former examinations of our visual behaviour in that it is open to a wider range of interpretative possibilities: traditionally, for example, masculinity is seen as occupying the active role in theorisations on the gaze, with femininity accordingly signifying passivity. To transfer these assumptions into the realm of dis/ability, one would assume an unimpaired or able-bodied viewer as the active subject (including being the one who initiates the looking), the disabled person on the other hand as passive 'spectacle' and at the receiving end of others' stares (as object). Be it women, minority groups, or disabled people: starees are not only in positions to-be-looked-at (Mulvey's term) but it is inherent to Garland-Thomson's concept of staring that it ascribes them agency too.³³

Acknowledging disability, according to Garland-Thomson, is 'one of the best opportunities to understand how we stare'.³⁴ The effects of our staring can be manifold and, importantly, they are not only negative. They include domination (as in the case of the asymmetrical gaze), stigmatisation, disgust and shame, yet Garland-Thomson contends that they can also elicit curiosity, adoration, and a sense of allegiance with another person.³⁵ Ultimately, Garland-Thomson suggests that the often so negatively connoted act of plain staring bears the potential to turn into the positive act of complex beholding (as mentioned briefly above): an engaged self-consideration on the part of the starrer at the sight of the other that also results in recognising the other more fully, and as an individual. In Garland-Thomson's words, the starrer thus 'bring[s] visual presence to another person'.³⁶

It is striking that neither *Du stirbst nicht*'s discussion in the press nor any of the academic work on the book to date acknowledges the crucial role of looking in it. Instead, the vast majority of reviews and interviews focus on the protagonist's (and author's) loss and subsequent reclamation of her extraordinary linguistic abilities. Scholarly articles on the text go in a similar

Contemporary Literary Criticism. Literary and Cultural Studies, 3rd edn, ed. by Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (New York/ London: Longman, 1994), pp. 422-431.

³³ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. For more on 'staring as dominance', as Garland-Thomson titles her subchapter on the gaze, see *Staring*, pp. 40-44. Here, Garland-Thomson herself discusses the relevant literature on the male as well as the postcolonial gaze, including Berger's, Fanon's, Saïd's, Foucault's, and Sartre's work.

³⁴ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 20. The exhibition 'Der [im-]perfekte Mensch', curated by the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden in 2000/ 2001, too displayed a great interest in the stare. This seems to confirm Garland-Thomson's claim. A significant part of the exhibition, which was a landmark for an emerging disability studies in Germany, was devoted to the 'Blick' [look, gaze] and its various dimensions. For more, see, for example: Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007), p. 300.

³⁵ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 39.

³⁶ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 194. For more detail, see her concluding chapter in *Staring*, or its reprint: Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Beholding', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, 3rd edn, ed. by Lennard J. Davis (New York/ London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 199-208.

direction. Sonja E. Klocke, being one scholar who has published on *Du stirbst nicht* so far, explores the interplay of body, memory, and language in the novel, reading it as ‘a woman’s quest for agency and positionality’.³⁷ Deirdre Byrnes in her 2013 article examines memory, language and identity in *Du stirbst nicht*, highlighting as crucial an understanding of the hospital as a transformative liminal space – a ‘space of possibility’ – from which, as Byrnes sees it, the protagonist writes herself ‘back to life’.³⁸ What gets little attention in either article is the autobiographical dimension of Schmidt’s illness narrative – one that is crucial to my reading of Schmidt’s *Du stirbst nicht*. Both instead emphasise that the novel is ‘much more than a tale of illness and recovery’ (Klocke).³⁹ In Byrnes’ article, we find the assertion that ‘the novel clearly offers itself as an allegory for political transition’,⁴⁰ which likewise has the effect of reassuring an academic audience that *Du stirbst nicht* is not merely, as it seems, an illness narrative, implying that such a text would not deserve the kind of scholarly attention she has granted it. In short, both Klocke and Byrnes display a tendency to prioritise allegorical readings.

In the following close reading of the text, I will apply Garland-Thomson’s understanding of staring to Helene’s ocular behaviour in *Du stirbst nicht*, as it allows me to see hitherto unnoticed facets of her interaction with others (largely visual, I argue) in grappling with her self. Her exposure to others’ stares will also become relevant. I am thus testing out a focus on the stare as a potentially fruitful framework for analysis in literary disability studies. To begin with, I will concentrate on a few selected passages in the novel in which the protagonist displays fears of having lost her ‘image’, and those striking episodes where she feels compelled to behold her image in front of a mirror.

Staring at the Mirror Image – Searching for a Sense of Self

From the very first chapter, while still hardly conscious, the protagonist is strikingly concerned with her ‘image’, that is her physical appearance and the impression she gives others. Not being able to speak to her sons standing at her bedside, Helene wonders how they might be

³⁷ Klocke, ‘Kathrin Schmidt, *Du stirbst nicht*: A Woman’s Quest for Agency’, p. 228.

³⁸ Deirdre Byrnes, ‘Writing on the Threshold: Memory, Language and Identity in Kathrin Schmidt’s *Du stirbst nicht*’, in *German Monitor 76: Transitions. Emerging Women Writers in German-language Literature*, ed. by Valerie Heffernan and Gillian Pye (Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 169-185 (pp. 172, 169). In a chapter of her book on constructions of gender in the contemporary European novel, Yuan Xue focuses on the importance for Helene’s recuperation of remembering Viola. Unfortunately, Xue’s work appears flawed both in some of its basic interpretation of the plot, as well as in particular in the – unconsciously? – prejudiced language with which it discusses Helene’s disability. Yuan Xue, *Über den Körper hinaus. Geschlechterkonstruktionen im europäischen Roman seit Ende der 1990er Jahre* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), pp. 94-115.

³⁹ Klocke, ‘Kathrin Schmidt, *Du stirbst nicht*: A Woman’s Quest for Agency’, p. 228.

⁴⁰ Byrnes, ‘Writing on the Threshold’, p. 173.

reading the facial expressions that she assumes she is displaying. She realises: ‘sie hat kein Bild von sich’ (*DSN* 13).⁴¹ The worried thoughts that follow revolve around an ominous ‘they’ who Helene believes to have stolen her image: ‘Die haben ihr das Bild von sich geklaut!’ (*DSN* 13).⁴² The situation is fundamentally frightening. Her ‘image’ that she feels she needs to see will occupy the protagonist’s mind from then on throughout the novel. As Garland-Thomson states, drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis and phenomenology: ‘We stare to know, and often we stare to know ourselves. Perhaps, as Jacques Lacan (1977) suggests, our first [...] stares are at ourselves’.⁴³

Garland-Thomson here is alluding to Lacan’s psychoanalytic formulation of the mirror stage: the stage in childhood development in which, according to Lacan, one begins to gain an understanding of oneself as an individualised embodied subject, and object to others. Naming the register in which these identificatory developments take place ‘the imaginary’ stresses ‘the importance of the visual field’ in this.⁴⁴ If we follow Lacan, children enter this phase of development between six and 18 months of age. They are then able to recognise themselves and identify with their (‘ideal’) image as interpreted from the reflections of the ‘mirror’, in this way for the first time ‘establish[ing] a relation between the organism and its reality – or [...] between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*’.⁴⁵ They are thus prepared to enter next the symbolic systems of language and culture, in other words, a larger social order. However, this sense of mastery over an imaginary ‘I’ the child has now begun to acquire remains illusory, because it is premature (if not entirely unattainable), as they want to see a unified self ‘where there is [only] a fragmented, chaotic body’.⁴⁶ This rift between one’s self-perception and reality causes the subject to henceforth be ‘an alienated and paranoid construct – always defined by/ as the other’.⁴⁷ Against the background of Lacan’s culturally pervasive mirror stage, I choose to speak only of a ‘sense’ of self that Helene is striving for in relation to her quest for an image. The protagonist of *Du stirbst nicht* noticeably negotiates Innen- and Umwelt throughout the novel,

⁴¹ Trans.: ‘she has no image of herself’.

⁴² Trans.: ‘They have stolen her image of herself!’

⁴³ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ Darian Leader and Judy Groves, *Introducing Lacan* (Cambridge: Icon Books UK, 1995), p. 22.

⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, ‘The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I’, in *Écrits. A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977; orig.: Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 1-7 (p. 4). The German terms have been retained in the translation; one might be able to translate them as ‘inner world’ or ‘the world within’, and ‘environment’ or ‘the surrounding world’.

⁴⁶ Dino Felluga, ‘Modules on Lacan: On Psychosexual Development’, *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacandevlop.html>> [accessed 18 June 2013].

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions, Three French Feminists* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 22.

striving to harmonise Selbst- and Fremdbild(er). From a Lacanian perspective, this may seem a virtually impossible endeavour, yet can equally be understood as an inherently human one.

On awakening in her hospital bed, Helene senses a conspiracy, imagining the hospital staff to be making an attempt on her life. Hardly in control of her bodily movements when responding to an itch on her head, she manages to raise an arm and scratch, only to find:

Aber da, wo es juckt, hat sie keine Haare. Was ist mit den Haaren passiert? Deshalb haben sie ihr Bild von sich geklaut! Ha, sie wird es zurückerobern, das verspricht sie sich. Mit aller Kraft beginnt sie, die Finger über die Kopfhaut zu ziehen. Sie kommen nicht weit. Kleine metallene Panzersperren stecken im Schädel, sie versucht, zwei oder drei herauszubrechen. Plötzlich spürt sie die Flüssigkeit an den Fingern. Sie kostet. Das ist Blut!⁴⁸ (DSN 17)

The passage above, employing free indirect discourse, conveys an immediacy that makes the events described so vivid and tangible that disgust is elicited in the reader who is made to witness her doing harm to herself. But for Helene, this is a crucial moment. It is her first attempt to regain – against the odds – the image of herself she feels she is lacking. The tone is set, as she pledges resistance. Her senses of touch and taste enable her to get a first impression of the changes that her body has undergone as a consequence of the burst aneurism – of which, at this point in the novel, she is not yet fully aware.

Overall vaguely surprised to be still alive, yet also strangely detached from what is going on, Helene discovers what she assumes is a photo of herself on the table in the corner of her room. Bits of it she can see clearly; others, like her eye colour that she cannot make out from the distance, she instead has to imagine, letting her gut feeling guide her to believe it is blue (DSN 20). Helene's relief at having thus reassembled a provisional image of herself in her mind becomes obvious: 'Sie ist so froh, dass sie ihr Bild wiederhat' (DSN 20).⁴⁹ Amalgamating fact and fiction, her creativity helps her to achieve this.

Weeks later, having long left the intensive care unit, a mirror helps Helene to grasp the changes she suspects are happening to her:

Heute hat man die Panzersperren aus dem Schädel gezogen. Sie hat nichts gemerkt. Es waren gar keine Panzersperren, sondern Metallklammern. Man scheint sie am Kopf operiert zu haben. Warum? Keine Ahnung. Als sie sich auf die Toilette schieben lässt, ist sie begierig auf einen Blick in den großen Spiegel. Bislang hat sie den nicht einmal bemerkt! Darüber wundert sie sich. / Das ist sie. Nichts zu deuteln. Auf der linken Schädelhälfte fehlen die Haare. Nein, das stimmt nicht ganz: Zwei, drei Millimeter sticht das neue Haar hervor. Eine feine rote Linie zieht sich

⁴⁸ Trans.: 'But there, where it's itchy, there is no hair. What happened to her hair? That's why they've stolen her image of herself! Ha, she will reclaim it, that she promises herself. With all the strength she possesses she begins to pull the fingers across the scalp. They don't make it very far. Little metallic tank barriers are plugged into her skull, she tries to break off two or three. Suddenly she feels liquid on her fingers. She tastes it. That's blood!'

⁴⁹ Trans.: 'She is so glad that she has got her image back.'

vom Haaransatz in der Stirn in hohem Bogen bis vors Ohr. Beidseits der Linie von vielleicht fünfzehn Zentimetern Länge sind dicke rote Punkte zu sehen. Sie rühren von den Klammern her und erinnern an abgehackte Alleebäume, deren Stümpfe nur knapp aus dem Boden ragen. Ein Stumpf hat sich entzündet, er schmerzt. / Interessant, muss sie denken. / Broca-Aphasie, denkt es sie plötzlich.⁵⁰ (DSN 30-31)

Presenting the first of many encounters with mirrors in the novel, this passage is significant as it enables Helene to recognise herself, but also to register changes. Lacking information about her condition, the mirror image helps her to examine her body in more detail. Enabling her to scrutinise her looks and new circumstances more closely than before, she thus gains a clearer picture of how others must see her. At the same time, in its use of war imagery the passage, with its references to tank barriers and avenues of felled trees, conveys how she feels about herself. Her body, the implied reader is to understand, has become a battleground. Her mirror image further enables Helene to identify one of these 'stumps' as 'inflamed'. She only feels this pain once she visually registers the inflammation; as Lacan might say, the visual (and the linguistic too) here constructs the bodily. While this indicates that her overall numbing has begun to vanish, it seems that still, her body is more physical shell (Körper) to her than lived body (Leib), to put it in the phenomenological nomenclature.⁵¹ Finally, she can synthesise from the observations made in the mirror, and by skill of interpretation, it strikes her that she is suffering from aphasia. Grammatically, the sentence which conveys this sudden realisation is interesting, as, unusually, the active agent in it is the personal pronoun 'es'. This serves to highlight the unexpected manner in which this shred of memory returns to Helene. The medical term comes unbidden, and surprises in its precision. With her language skills and memory severely impaired, the visual cues are what Helene is dependent on. They anchor her in an experience that is otherwise overwhelmingly disorientating.

Negotiating the Disabled Self

Having gained a rough understanding of her situation, her image as externally determined by others – her Fremdbild – starts to concern Helene more as time goes on and she starts

⁵⁰ Trans.: 'Today the tank barriers were pulled out of her skull. She has not noticed a thing. They weren't tank barriers after all but metallic staples. It seems she has been operated on the head. Why? No idea. When she has someone wheel her to the toilet, she is eager to catch a glimpse in the large mirror. Up to now she has not even noticed it there! That surprises her. / That's her. No doubt. On the left half of her skull the hair is missing. No, that is not quite true: two or three millimetres long, the new hair sticks out. A fine red line runs from the hairline on her forehead up to her ear, in a wide arc. On both sides of that line of about fifteen centimetres length big, red dots are visible. They are from the staples and remind her of an avenue of felled trees, the stumps of which only just protrude from the ground. One stump is inflamed, it hurts. / Interesting, she cannot help but think. / Broca's aphasia, it thinks her [sic; in the sense of: occurs to her] suddenly.'

⁵¹ For more on phenomenology's philosophical distinction between Körper and Leib, see, for instance: Emmanuel Alloa and others, eds, *Leiblichkeit. Geschichte und Aktualität eines Konzepts*, UTB, 3633 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

receiving more visitors. Seeing her sisters, for instance, she is worried they might think she is as crazy as the 'zwei verrückten Alten' [two crazy oldies] (DSN 38) she shares a room with. In a particular moment of crisis, Helene's mind again focuses on her physical appearance. This is after a visit by her husband leaves Helene feeling infantilised, shamed, and misunderstood. Contemplating her anger, which stems from her helplessness towards him, she reflects on her appearance and the feelings this triggers:

Furchtbares Gefühl, dämlich (und vor allem offen) lächelnd anderen ausgeliefert zu sein. Jetzt erst glaubt sie zu bemerken, dass sie tatsächlich über Gebühr lächelt: Die kleinste Freude zieht sofort den Mund breit, sie merkt es inzwischen daran, dass Speichel läuft. Und die Freude hört damit so leicht nicht auf. Sie ist ein Breitmaulfrosch. Sucht das Gesicht im Spiegel der Waschnische auf. Nein, Glupschaugen sind ihr noch nicht gewachsen. Die Finger sind nicht trommelschlegelförmig verändert, ebenso wenig die Zehen. Ein bisschen grün sieht sie aber aus. Siehst du, Helene: grün vor Wut. Sie lächelt, und da überkommt es sie auch schon wieder, das rauschbrausende Wüten. Hilflosigkeit [...].⁵² (DSN 81)

Her disabled state both shames and angers her – because she cannot keep pace with (and thus feels inferior to) the able-bodied, and due to a lack of control over her own embodied self. At first the reader finds Helene blaming what she perceives as – and worse, what she believes must appear to others as – her grotesque bodily (re)actions: the smile is too wide, saliva trickling from her mouth. However, searching for her image in the mirror makes her realise she is not yet quite the monster she fears herself to be. By finding her mirror image, Helene creates a dialogic situation (in her mind, addressing her opposite as 'du') – one in which various senses of self, old and new, are negotiated through attentive looking. The mirror helps her to focus on herself, and forget about others. If only for an instant, it means she can be kinder to her body, which, as is becoming clear, plays a significant role in her self-conception.

Helene's struggle with the different aspects of her self that account for a sense of identity is at the fore of *Du stirbst nicht*, and is negotiated throughout the text. 'Wenn sie jetzt eine *Behinderte* ist?' (DSN 112) is the central question the talented writer and formerly eloquent intellectual dwells on.⁵³ Unsure about how to feel about this label, she soon realises that the answer to this question is not in her control. The eyes of others posit people like her as either within the realms of the 'normal', or else as a disabled spectacle, regardless of how able or

⁵² Trans.: 'A terrible feeling, to be at others' mercy, grinning stupidly, and so openly. Only now does she believe to notice that she is indeed smiling excessively: the smallest pleasure pulls her mouth wide, she notices this by now because saliva is dripping. And the pleasure does not stop at this. She is a wide-mouthed frog. Searches for the face in the mirror above the sink. No, she did not yet go goggle-eyed. The fingers are not deformed to little drumsticks, nor are her toes. But she does indeed look a little green. See, Helene: green with rage. She smiles, and there, it overcomes her yet again, toxically roaring rage. Helplessness [...].'

⁵³ Trans.: '[What] if now she is a *disabled person*?'

limited one might feel in a given moment and context, instead depending on how visibly the deviation from the 'healthy' norm manifests itself.

Another significant narrative setting besides that in front of mirrors is in the communal spaces of both the hospital and – later in the novel – the rehabilitation centre in which Helene learns to take her meals. At one of her first breakfasts in this semi-public realm, she sits opposite a young man with spasticity. She observes him struggling to have his meal, and is disgusted particularly by the saliva that is dripping from his mouth. This ableist (even disablist) reaction to the young man is interrupted by her catching a glimpse of herself in a reflection on a wall unit, which makes her realise:

Ach ja, ihre rechte Hand kann ja auch nichts mehr halten! Sie wird nicht mehr Klavier spielen können, nicht nähen oder stricken, und das Gesicht sieht auch anders aus als noch vor einem Monat. Hoch ausrasiert links, wächst erster Haarflaum nach, sie sieht seltsam aus, und, da!, auch aus ihrem Mund tropft Speichel.⁵⁴ (*DSN* 45)

The literal reflection triggers an intellectual one, abruptly bringing her judgemental train of thought to a halt. Having him sit opposite her, he becomes a mirror image to her, too; much more so than she would like him to be. Initially condemning him as an incapable, repulsive other, she is forced to realise that they have more in common than separates them.

Staring at ourselves is always, to an extent, staring at a stranger. The view in the mirror offers, as Garland-Thomson phrases it, 'a sight we at once doubt and trust'.⁵⁵ For Helene, in a time of limited agency, the encounter with her mirror images is particularly intense, sometimes threatening – thus confronted, at the sight of the disabled other within the self, both protagonist and reader alike have to reassess their accustomed assumptions about human variation and 'normality'.

Staring at Others – Learning through Empathetic Engagement

In parallel to an analysis of Helene's self-reflections vis-à-vis mirrors, then, her staring at other disabled, ill, or otherwise extraordinary people around her is illuminating. These other 'deviants' (such as fellow patients) become physical, and visual, reference points for Helene. I argue that for the protagonist, moments of beholding other extraordinary bodies trigger a

⁵⁴ Trans.: 'Oh yeah, her right hand can no longer hold on to anything either! She won't be able to play the piano, or sew or knit, and her face, too, looks different to how it did a month ago. In the high shaved patch on the left, a first bit of fluff is growing again, she looks weird, and, there!, from her mouth, too, saliva is dripping.'

⁵⁵ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 52.

learning process about what it means to be human, enabling her to reflect on her own changing identity as she shares in their disabled experience.

A highly significant character in the novel, and an important point of reference in the protagonist's routine in the clinic, is 'der Schadhafte' [the defective man], as she dubs him in her mind.⁵⁶ About their first encounter on the hospital corridor, we read:

Vor ihr ein *schadhafter* Mann – kann man so sagen? Von der Kalotte fehlt links ein großes Stück, wie eingeschlagen sieht der Schädel aus, es pulsiert heftig unter der rosa Haut, sie spürt keinen Ekel, eher will sie ihn fragen, was ihm geschehen ist, da sieht sie, dass ihm ein Arm fehlt, und um den Kohl fett zu machen, fehlt ihm auch ein Unterschenkel, hat man ihm etwa einen Fuß ans Knie genäht? Nun wird ihr doch übel, aber der Schadhafte sieht es nicht, er dämmert, seine Augen sind nur einen Spaltbreit geöffnet, und was dahinter schimmert, ist weiß. Wenn sie jene Hälfte seines Kopfes anschaut, die ganz geblieben ist, kommt sie zu dem Schluss, dass er sehr jung sein muss und gut aussehend. Gewesen. / Gepfriemelt in der Flickschusterei. / Sie schämt sich auf der Stelle. [...] Wahrscheinlich hat sie es noch gut getroffen mit dem, was ihr zustieß.⁵⁷ (DSN 117)

Helene stares overtly, not able to restrain herself. She is certainly not in control of this impulse, taking in every distressing detail of the body she finds herself confronted with, such as the throbbing under his scalp. This is emphasised stylistically by the extensive use of subordinate clauses and commas. Her thoughts, just like her eyes on his body, are racing. Taken by surprise, Helene's eyes demand a narrative that can make sense of the sight of the young man – 'ihn fragen, was ihm geschehen ist' – to be able, to an extent, to normalise the sight he presents. When eventually she is overcome by feelings of disgust, due to being confronted with excessive, Frankenstein-esque abnormality, she feels guilt and the urge to check, crucially, if he notices that he has been made the object of her stare and thus become a grotesque attraction. The man himself, however, is barely conscious and not aware of Helene, who does draw a lesson from this one-sided encounter. For her, indeed, it serves as 'an occasion to rethink the status quo',⁵⁸ as she comes to assess her own situation in comparison to his. To

⁵⁶ Schmidt's protagonist is generally quick to come up with nicknames for other patients around her, and these are telling. Apart from 'the defective', there is also 'hängende[s] Augenlid' [droopy eyelid] (DSN 176). As *partes pro toto*, these nicknames (although most certainly to be taken with a pinch of salt) negate their bearers any individuality. Instead they turn impairment into all-consuming stigma, and reveal some of the societally prevalent ableist mindset Helene's thinking is also steeped in, at least at the beginning of the novel, which denotes the beginning of the protagonist's learning process.

⁵⁷ Trans.: 'In front of her a *defective* man – you could say? A large piece on the left of his cranium is missing, his skull looks as if has been bashed in, it pulsates eagerly under the pink skin, she does not feel any disgust, rather she wants to ask him what happened to him when she sees that he is missing an arm, and – this takes the biscuit – he is missing a lower leg, too, did they sew a foot onto his knee? Now she does feel sick after all, but the defective does not see it, he is dozing, his eyes only slits, and what shines through from behind is white. When looking at the half of his head that remained intact she concludes that he must be very young and good-looking. Used to be. / [Now he looks like] A botch job from the tinker's workshop. / She immediately feels ashamed of herself. [...] She has probably been lucky with what happened to her.'

⁵⁸ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 6.

reassemble an image of her self, she seems in need to negotiate a new subject position in relation to both healthier and less healthy people around her. Feeling isolated in the unfamiliar medical environment, as if enclosed by a glass sphere ('gläserne Kugel um sich herum', *DSN* 123), she begins to find a way out of isolation both through her unimpaired ability to see, revealed in the description above, and through her explicit efforts to train her memory.

Helene's need for a narrative concerning 'der Schadhafte' is satisfied only much later in the novel, when she comes across a newspaper article about the man, complete with a photo in which a baseball cap and leather jacket disguise the worst of his injuries. This is her opportunity to learn about his life before. She finds out that he had been the victim of the 'U-Bahn-Schubser', as the local paper calls the perpetrator who pushed people into the path of underground trains. Comparing him to her son Bengt as they are both musicians, it hits her 'wie unglaublich es war, auf diese Weise um sein Leben gebracht zu werden und doch am Leben bleiben zu müssen' (*DSN* 289).⁵⁹ The article makes her empathise much more strongly and more easily with him than when they had their first encounter – the freak she initially saw in the 'defective man', as Helene's later realisation suggests, could well have been her son.

However, this realisation on Helene's part is not an ad hoc one; it develops over the course of several staring encounters between the two. One takes place in the rehabilitation centre, with Helene and the 'defective man' sitting on opposite sides of a table over dinner, each mirroring the other. Surprised to see him again, Helene notices that: 'Seine Augen dämmern nicht mehr unter der fehlenden Kalottenhälfte, sondern schauen Helene an. / Füllen sich mit Tränen. / Na, prost Mahlzeit' (*DSN* 170).⁶⁰ This second meeting, involving – importantly – an exchange of looks, is thus much more intimate than the first. However, not one word is said. The only communication they have is of a visual/ physical nature. Helene, still openly curious about him,⁶¹ imagines various scenarios of how to console him, how she could help him eat – all the while ceaselessly staring at his face and hands in particular. Realising she is no more dextrous in her bodily movements than he is, and at a loss as to how to put her arm around him without touching any of his severely wounded body parts, the situation becomes unbearable for her,

⁵⁹ Trans.: 'how unbelievable it was to be cheated of one's life that way but still have to remain alive'.

⁶⁰ Trans.: 'His eyes aren't dozing anymore below the missing half of the cranium, instead they're looking at Helene. / They fill up with tears. / That's just great!'

⁶¹ She notes: 'Ob man ihm tatsächlich den Fuß verkehrt herum ans Knie genäht hat, kann sie jetzt nicht überprüfen.' [She has no chance to check in this moment if they indeed sewed his foot onto his knee the wrong way round.] (*DSN* 170)

and she abruptly breaks off the intimacy of the relational stare: 'Auf einmal hat sie keinen Appetit mehr. Sie lässt alles stehen und liegen und flieht' (*DSN* 170).⁶²

Another intense scene can serve to highlight just to what an extent his presence and the pain he goes through demand Helene's attention. Sharing the sports hall in their physiotherapy sessions, Helene cannot help but stare continuously at the young man's efforts to try walking one-legged, and do other exercises that emphasise the permanent injuries that, to him, are still shockingly new. Surprised, she notices that she psychosomatically feels his pain (*DSN* 180). Reencountering and closely observing him during a swimming lesson they each have with their therapists, she comes to the conclusion: 'dass ihm der Lebensmut fehlt, soll er ein toter Mann sein für eine Weile' (*DSN* 183).⁶³ While never having communicated in an ordinary way, she believes having a 'Verbindung' [connection] (*DSN* 183) with him. The stare has established a relationship. Eventually she does learn his name – it is Wojciech Kostrzynski – and notices his continuing refusal to speak, which, although deliberate on his part, matches her difficulties with speech (*DSN* 200-201). Like her, he has a preference for silently watching what is going on around him, missing nothing (*DSN* 201). It is left to the reader to recognise these characteristics of Helene's behaviour in the 'defective' other as traits that they share.

Naming this character Wojciech is a way, for Schmidt, to relate *Du stirbst nicht* to the high literary canon: that she is thus alluding to the Georg Büchner play *Woyzeck* is obvious, and constitutes an ambiguous reference considering that in the play, the eponymous hero takes part in a doctor's dubious medical experiments which have serious effects on his mental health. Later on, Schmidt's text makes explicit reference to *Lenz* and thus to a second piece by Büchner that deals with the 'madness' of its protagonist (or, indeed, society around him), maybe even more distinctly so than *Woyzeck*. Towards the end of the novel, the reader encounters Helene drafting an opening speech for a friend's public reading of the novella. This provides an opportunity, for Schmidt, to slip into her text a metaliterary commentary on its place within contemporary literature, and its relationship to literary history. Within this draft, Helene highlights the fact that Büchner's literary case study of *Lenz* was based on a medical one, that is, on true events that fascinated the author so much he reimagined them. Helene then goes on to emphasise: '*Nicht fiktional, ist die Geschichte doch eine der modernsten Erzählungen der deutschen Literatur*' (*DSN* 344).⁶⁴ Via the author figure Helene, the novel's actual author

⁶² Trans.: 'She has suddenly lost all appetite. She drops everything and flees.'

⁶³ Trans.: 'that he is lacking the will to live, let him be a dead man for a while'; this is alluding to a children's game where one floats on the water (in a swimming pool or the sea) on one's back for as long as possible, as if 'dead'. A less literal translation could be: '[...] let him do star floats for a while'.

⁶⁴ Trans.: '*Albeit non-fictional, the story is one of the most modern narratives of German literature*'.

Schmidt can thus be seen to make a clear statement on using her own illness experience for *Du stirbst nicht*; the fact that she writes autobiographically, for Schmidt, does not contradict her literary ambitions for the novel. Any literary references we encounter in *Du stirbst nicht* must be read as highlighting these ambitions.

In relation to the important mirror figure of Wojziech, Helene displays the sort of staring Garland-Thomson wants to see emphasised, demonstrating the full range of complexities in our ways of seeing. On the basis of his experience more than that of her own, Helene comes to fully realise 'the truth of our body's vulnerability to the randomness of fate'.⁶⁵ It may be a rare kind of staring, yet Helene can transform the plain impulse to stare into active empathetic engagement with the young man, and can thus begin to depart from the normalist/ ableist attitudes that pervade western culture. What is more, via Helene's staring at him and others on the diegetic level of the novel, the implied reader gets the valuable opportunity to share in this (in)sight alongside her.

Seeing Viola

Only a third into the book does Helene recover some memories of Viola (*DSN* 125),⁶⁶ her former lover, which from then on dominate her world of thought. She recollects the first time they met, in a café, for an article the writer was working on. Helene's memory of their first meeting is dominated by a tense interchange of looks:

Der Kerl in Viola faszinierte sie, sie empfand Scham darüber, wie sie vorhin Schuld empfunden hatte, Scham und Schuld, geschwisterliche Verfühlungen. [...] Viola schaute zum Fenster hinaus. / Wahrscheinlich litt sie an Rosazea. Um den Mund herum zeigten sich stecknadelkopfgroße Eiterpusteln, die auf der entzündlich aufgetriebenen Haut residierten, als wüssten sie, dass ihnen nur schwer beizukommen war. Wenn diese Situation hier Stress war, würde sich die Hautreaktion vermutlich verstärken. Zu Scham und Schuld gesellte sich Mitleid. [...] Unangenehme Konstellation. Viola trug das Kinn hoch, die Augen blickten so in der Tat von oben herab auf das platte Volk ringsum, und dass ihnen nichts entging, schien Helene eine mühselig erlernte Fähigkeit zu sein. Die Violaaugen huschten. Flitscherten. Flitzten. Schwirrten. Hasteten. Holten aus. Schlugen zu. Solch einen Schlag bekam auch Helene zu spüren, als sich ihr Blick wider Willen an Violas Brüsten aufhielt, die nicht groß, aber wirklich da waren, sogar einen BH konnte man an der rückseitigen Einkerbung erkennen. Wenn sie solch intuitives

⁶⁵ Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Besides Wojziech, Viktor/Viola is another intertextual character in *Du stirbst nicht*; one whose name amalgamates several cultural and historical references. It is evocative of Viola/Cesario in Shakespeare's comedy of errors *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* as well as the 1933 Reinhold Schünzel film *Viktor und Viktoria*, one of the last German crossdressing comedies typical for the Weimar Republic, about a female cabaret star who pretends that she is in drag to get more work during the Great Depression. However, in *Du stirbst nicht*, Viola's fate is much more tragic than comical. The name Viola is further reminiscent of the 'Damenklub Violetta', a night club popular with lesbians and transvestites in 1920s Berlin.

Gestarre immer aushalten musste, verwunderten weder Rosazea noch Kinnhaltung. Sie hätte sich ohrfeigen können.⁶⁷ (*DSN* 134-135)

Being transgender and an experienced staree, Viola gives Helene an initial opportunity to look at her while she gazes into the distance. Helene avails herself of the moment, and scrutinises Viola's outward appearance. Fascinated, she cannot avert her eyes, all the while going through various awkward emotions. The longer Helene stares, the more her observations gain in depth. Helene's stare dominates at the beginning, but in her curiosity, she, too, is vulnerable. Viola signals this by bluntly catching her out in the staring process – indicating that it is time for Helene to avert her eyes. Understanding this, Helene ultimately comes to feel empathy for Viola – realising what violence she must have been doing to her by staring at her for so long. Thus the first of many powerful lessons from Viola is learnt.

As Helene recalls it from the hospital bed, Viola's story – that of a transgender person deciding to undergo treatment for a male-to-female sex change, being forced to divorce from her wife, and ultimately tragically falling in love with Helene – unfolds in symmetry to Helene's day-to-day experiences in the confinements of hospital and rehabilitation centre. Helene only fully understands Viola's life in the public eye and the difficulties she had accepting herself, as well as being accepted by others, in retrospect, from the position of disability, and after Viola has died in what might have been a suicide. Rather than equating transgenderism with disability, the novel exploits the similarities of the marginalised positions both transgender and disabled people find each other in when in public. In her attempts to evade the constraints of culturally dominant bi-genderism, Viola had faced issues not unlike Helene's in the narrative present of the novel. Helene, at this point, needs to reassess all she had taken for granted – her relationships, professional identity, physical and intellectual capabilities among it. As an unruly patient, unwilling to identify herself as incapacitated other, Helene tries to evade static, incongruous labels like 'behindert' in a similar way in which Viola longed to evade rigid ascriptions of gender norms.

⁶⁷ Trans.: 'The bloke within Viola fascinated her, she felt shame about it, just like earlier she had felt guilty, shame and guilt, the siblings of missentiments. [...] Viola looked out of the window. / Probably she was suffering from rosacea. Around her mouth pus-filled spots the size of pinheads showed up, residing on inflamed and chafed skin, as if they knew they were hard to defeat. If this situation here was stressful, the skin reaction would probably become worse. Shame and guilt were joined by pity. [...] An unpleasant constellation. Viola held her chin high, the eyes were thus indeed looking down onto the common people all around, and that they did not miss a thing, to Helene, seemed to be a learnt skill. The Violaeyes darted. Flitted. Raced. Bustled. Scurried. Reached back. Struck. Such a blow, Helene, too, had to endure when her eyes, against her will, stopped at Viola's breasts. Which weren't large, but truly there, even a bra was to be identified due to the indentation on her back. If she always had to endure such intuitive staring, neither rosacea nor chin posture were surprising. She could have slapped herself across the face.'

Throughout the novel, Helene can be found to creatively experiment with various terms she makes up for herself, such as 'Invalidin' [invalid] or 'Schadhafte' [defective] (*DSN* 337), as she begins to work out how the aneurysm and the consequences it brings impact on her identity. The protagonist cannot seem to find satisfactory words to describe her altered subject position – but this should not be put down to her aphasia. Much rather, Helene must be taken as wary of the negative effects of calling someone disabled in an ableist world. Trying to grasp linguistically what she comes to think of, tentatively, as her 'Zustand' [state] or 'Unvermögen' [inability] (*DSN* 313), one notes that neither illness, accident, nor stroke of fate seem quite adequate terms to her. For this reason, that which lies at the heart of Helene's struggles to reassemble an image of herself is referred to as 'Es' in what is a key passage (*DSN* 90-91). 'Es' is all of the suggested – a blow of fate, the cause for her lapse into coma, her physical dysfunction – and more: it is a higher power at the mercy of which Helene finds herself, signifying a void in her memory, and holding Helene in its tight grip; having assaulted her, as she sees it, so suddenly and unexpectedly.

Just as Viola had learnt to negotiate others' stares, Helene now finds herself in a position in which the discrepancies between her Selbst- and Fremdbild have become apparent, and problematic. Both characters submit themselves – more or less voluntarily – to the power of medical institutions, despite being uncertain of the outcome. Helene now too is a sight to be stared at as she violates normative expectations (albeit in a different/ involuntary way to Viola): dribbling, in a wheelchair, with limited agility, her head shaved and marks of her operation all over her body.

Remembering how she got to know Viola better, Helene realises anew:

dass Viola nicht allein dastand, obwohl sie, Helene, sie bislang angestaunt hatte wie einen dreibeinigen Kometen, der mitten unter ihnen niedergegangen war. Ein Sonderfall, eine exzeptionelle Singularität! Aber das stimmt nicht, sie hatte nur keine Augen für sie, bis sie eine von ihnen kennenlernte [...].⁶⁸ (*DSN* 186)

The narrative strand revolving around Viola continues to bring to the fore the productive side to staring – Helene comes to correct her gender binarism,⁶⁹ and, finding herself positioned as extraordinary, develops her own sensitivity to the extraordinary in others. It is for exactly this reason that this fictional narrative strand is included in the autobiographical illness narrative,

⁶⁸ Trans.: 'that Viola did not stand alone, despite her, Helene, so far having gaped at her as if she was a three-legged comet which fell amidst them. A special case, an exceptional singularity! But that wasn't true, she simply had no eyes for them until she met one of them [...]'.

⁶⁹ '[V]on dem sich ja doch niemand lösen kann, so frei er sich auch wähnt,' as Viola says in an email to Helene. [From which nobody can ultimately break away, no matter how free one thinks oneself.] (*DSN* 152)

the authenticity of which Schmidt otherwise vouches for. Learning to behold Viola as the individual she is, as someone not too dissimilar to herself (and by no means extraterrestrial, as likening her to a comet implies), Helene learns much from having stared at her initially. Just as this and other passages of the book criticise thinking of gender in absolute binaries and suggest, in a literary way, for the reader to acknowledge gender as a 'variable construction of identity',⁷⁰ *Du stirbst nicht* as a whole criticises dividing the healthy and unhealthy, the able-bodied and disabled, into two diametrically opposite categories with no gradation in between. Viola becomes a belated ally for Helene, so much so, in fact, that Helene dreams up Viola's consoling presence and imagines her to be making supportive comments in a moment that her own speechlessness threatens to frustrate her (*DSN* 285).

In literary form, Schmidt thus calls for what Garland-Thomson in the article 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory' asks for as a scholar: that disability studies and gender studies be allies, and integrate one another's findings in their enquiries.⁷¹ In this respect, *Du stirbst nicht* indicates an expansion of the socio-cultural themes that have been at the heart of Schmidt's writing up until its publication. While the body, gender, and sexuality have been subject to literary exploration by Schmidt before (she tackled them from a distinctly feminist stance), these themes and their relation to 'normality' are recognised as transferable in *Du stirbst nicht* and are hence integrated into the autobiographical novel as they are found to support the illness experience's insights.

While Helene is strangely detached from her body, perceiving it as (faulty) machine or apparatus for most of *Du stirbst nicht*, Viola brings back emotions into Helene's life. Vacillating between happiness, pain and grief when thinking of Viola, the narrating voice therefore comes to conclude about Helene: 'Sie lebt noch in ihrem Körper, eines hängt mit dem anderen zusammen, trotz der sich mehrenden Metallteile in Kopf und Brust' (*DSN* 238).⁷² In this way, the memories of Viola that return to Helene significantly contribute to the protagonist's reconvalescence and her ability to create a coherent image of her self.

⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/ London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002; orig.: New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 9.

⁷¹ Garland-Thomson, 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory', *NWSA*, 14.3 (2002), 1-32. The fields intersect in their interest in the socio-historical embeddedness of representations of bodies, the effects of culture on real/ material bodies as well as the formation of identities. They share critical attitudes towards understandings of normality and difference, and are equally keen to analyse power structures at work between people/ in society. A further shared feature of disability and gender studies is their historic emergence from and continuing proximity to political activism.

⁷² Trans.: 'She still lives in her body, one is connected to the other, despite the multiplying metal pieces in head and chest.' (NB: Helene has a pacemaker.)

Transcending Binary Thinking

The 'primacy of vision' that Garland-Thomson points out as an uneasy one in today's social world is neatly encapsulated in a short paragraph describing Helene's visit to the opticians.⁷³

Matthes takes Helene there to get her new glasses:

Der Optiker hat einen Spiegel wie einen dreiflügligen Altar. Darin kann sie sich von der Seite sehen. *Was sieht sie?* Der Haarwuchs auf der linken Seite ist noch spärlich, vielleicht einen knappen Zentimeter lang. Er ist völlig grau. Silbernen stehen die Borsten zu beiden Seiten der Narbe vom Kopf ab. Sie dreht den Kopf: Auf der anderen Seite glänzt es kastanienbraun. Sie stellt sich vor, wie es aussähe, wären die Haare wieder gleich lang: links grau, rechts braun, der Gedanke beginnt ihr zu gefallen. Sie dreht einige Male den Kopf.⁷⁴ (DSN 166; emphasis mine)

Being publicly confronted with a mirror in this scene, at the altar of vision which society collectively worships, Helene can be found to reassess her appearance. While she still is an unusual sight, she comes to like the two colours her newly-growing hair displays, as her turning her head – the classic movement of self-admiration – indicates. The new and old senses of self may not be entirely reconciled, but, so this signals, they do find their space in the same body. Employing this image, Helene, or for that matter, Schmidt, acknowledges the 'dual citizenship', to echo Susan Sontag's eloquent metaphor, that she holds 'in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick'.⁷⁵ What is striking about this passage on a technical level is the disruption of the narrative flow caused by the narrating voice overtly asking: 'What does she see?' Rather than sharing in Helene's perspective or consciousness at this point, the implied reader is placed in the role of external observer; similar maybe to that of Matthes or the optician on the diegetic level, or indeed that of the author during the novel's conception (extra-textually). Thus disturbing the reader's immersion in the text for the moment, the implied reader is thrown back on themselves – confronted with the question: What do *you* see in Helene? – and is left to contemplate possible answers. This and other passages demonstrate the novel's didactic intentions.

Overall, the book's trajectory is that of an Entwicklungsroman. Towards the end of the novel, the reader can observe Helene in an unfamiliar role. It is that of staree, negotiating two elderly

⁷³ This is on account of the priority we assign it, being 'celebrated and scorned, pronounced to be manipulative, liberating, rapacious, pornographic, gendered, or dominating'. Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, p. 25.

⁷⁴ Trans.: 'The opticians has a mirror like an altar triptych. In it she can see herself sideways. What does she see? On the left, hair growth is still sparse, maybe just short of a centimetre. It's completely grey. The bristles on both sides of the scar, silver, protrude from the head. She turns her head: On the other side it glistens chestnut brown. She imagines what it might look like if her hair was back to one length: grey on the left, brown on the right, she begins to like the thought. She turns her head a few times.'

⁷⁵ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Books, 2002; orig.: New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1989), p. 3.

women's stares at the bus stop, when Helene's scar and the fact that she can't stop dribbling attract their attention:

Eine schaut sie mitleidig an, die andere ist bemüht, wegzusehen. Schade. Dass sie noch immer ein seltsamer Anblick für andere ist, vergisst Helene wieder und wieder. Dabei trägt sie die Schädelnarbe unter der Mütze verborgen, es kann also so schlimm gar nicht sein, aber wahrscheinlich sind die beiden alten Dünnen noch leichtfüßig zugange, und es fehlt ihnen die Vorstellung, eben das nicht zu sein. Jetzt bemerkt sie aber doch den Speichel, der sich vor ihrem Mund abgesetzt hat, und kann die Alten besser verstehen.⁷⁶ (DSN 320)

Still getting used to this new role of hers, Helene displays a fair amount of understanding towards the starers. Not too long ago, she was one of them, with a much more restricted way of seeing. 'Lack of imagination' narrows their view of others, and of life; this is Helene's, and, we may speculate, Schmidt's conclusion. Less poetically, one may identify an impulse to avoid, out of fear, the abnormal sight Helene presents; an impulse which seems to override any capacity for empathy in the two women.

Helene, on the other hand, begins to be more comfortable in her skin. Gradually, she rediscovers composure and contentment despite her new restrictions (DSN 319, 330). What is more, she begins to believe in her physical recovery, to the extent that she imagines herself to be able to physically sense it happening:

Plötzlich nimmt sie ein neues, unbekanntes Ziehen im Kopf wahr, eigentlich sitzt es genau an der Stelle, an der sie den Titanclip verortet, sie muss an einen seltsam schmerzfreien Wadenkrampf denken, der sich nach oben verlagert hat, ins Hirn. Es heilt, denkt sie begütigend, es heilt ... [...] Es ist, *als nehme sie das Fitzchen Metall endlich als zu sich selbst gehörig wahr*, als fühle sie seine Existenz.⁷⁷ (DSN 333; emphasis mine)

Although one may want to note, critically, an element of magical thinking here, Helene's optimism as displayed at this point illustrates the overall spirit at the conclusion of the novel. *Du stirbst nicht* ends with an emphasis, maybe an over-emphasis, on reconciliation – Helene and Matthes' married life improves, the protagonist becomes reconciled with her body, and is kinder to herself. To some extent her self-image, as conflicting and multi-dimensional as it may be, is restored. In fact, it may be yet more fitting to say that as a result of the illness experience, her self-image has expanded over the course of the novel, and with it her capacity

⁷⁶ Trans.: 'One of them looks at her with compassion, the other is careful to look away. [What a] Shame. Helene forgets time and again that she is still a strange sight for others. And yet she keeps the scar across her skull hidden under her hat, so it can't really look that bad, but probably these two slender old women are still light on their feet, and they can't imagine what it would be like if they weren't. But now, however, she notices the saliva around her mouth and she can understand the two oldies better.'

⁷⁷ Trans.: 'Suddenly she picks up on a new, unknown tugging sensation in her head, in actual fact residing exactly in the place where she locates the titanium clip, it makes her think of a strangely pain-free cramp in the calf muscle which has shifted upwards, into the brain. It's healing, she thinks placatingly, it is healing ... [...] It's *as if she were finally accepting the shred of metal as part of her self*, as if she were feeling its existence.'

– or her imaginative faculties, in keeping with the narrator’s words – for seeing and understanding others.

Through engaging in acts of staring, and experiencing what it means to be both on the giving and the receiving end of a hard look, Helene has grown as a person and has come to question culturally pervasive ideas of ‘normality’:

Wie hatte Matthes gesagt, als sie ihn auf sprachliche Defizite ansprach, die sie immer wieder bei sich bemerkt? *Ach Helene, du bist doch nur endlich normal geworden ...* Das war ein Satz, der einerseits vermutlich seine Hochachtung vor ihrem Sprachvermögen ausdrückte. Andererseits fühlte sie sich durch ihn seltsam bedroht, ohne dass sie genau sagen konnte, warum.⁷⁸ (DSN 287)

The idea of a return to normality is illusory, as the highly talented writer was never ‘normal’, if normal is taken to mean ‘average’. Matthes’s statement underlines pervasive socio-cultural assumptions about disability as abnormal, which – from a disability studies’ perspective at least – have been shown to be ideological constructs, most notably by Lennard J. Davis in his seminal publication *Enforcing Normalcy* (1995).⁷⁹ What Matthes says is threatening because it implies a disregard of her personhood in illness. Lastly, as a societal ideal and impossible prescriptive goal, and by devaluing alternative visions for a possible future, Matthes’s notion of normality is confining and regressive.

As I hope to have demonstrated, the text makes the complexity of the challenges involved for Helene in negotiating a new identity very clear, and portrays its protagonist – in contrast to her husband – as someone who has begun to outgrow such modes of simple binary thinking.

Conclusions – Seeing the Bigger Picture

While most autobiographical writing today subverts rather than adheres to the criteria formerly deemed typical of the genre, it retains a crucial difference to fiction: as a writer’s ‘exercise in self-attention’,⁸⁰ it creates or elicits a stronger response in the reading public. Each of the writers I deal with in my research has experienced this, but – as is demonstrated in each chapter of this thesis – what is more, each of the authors already prepared for it in the writing process.

⁷⁸ Trans.: ‘How did Matthes put it when she addressed the linguistic deficits she noticed in herself again and again? *Oh Helene, all that happened is that you finally became normal ...* As a sentence, on the one hand, this presumably expressed his deference to her language competency. On the other, she felt strangely threatened, without exactly being able to say why.’

⁷⁹ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995).

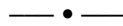
⁸⁰ Rosamund Dalziell, ‘Shame and Life Writing’, in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 2, L-Z (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 807-809 (p. 808).

Kathrin Schmidt finds an explicitly literary way of dealing with the great resonance that she, to an extent, anticipated as an author writing illness autobiographically. Among other strategies, such as deciding against a first-person voice (which, in a first draft, she had experimented with) and making use of an alter ego-protagonist under a fictional name, Schmidt's key strategy in *Du stirbst nicht* is to address the human stare. Beyond their intradiegetic functions, the stares and their reflections cannot be confined between the book's covers. Extra-textually, they function as commentary on its author's exposure to the public eye. Words, as Schmidt has her protagonist claim, can indeed be 'seltsam nackte Lemminge' [strangely naked lemmings] (*DSN* 130), generating uncontrollable meanings beyond their writer's intention, leaving one dangerously exposed and vulnerable. *Du stirbst nicht* therefore holds up a mirror to all of us both as readers and as starers who desire some kind of insight into an 'authentic', near-fatal illness experience. In so doing the text may make us uncomfortable, but it can also encourage us to reflect on our own normative behaviours and assumptions as we accompany Helene in the process of reassessing old certainties, as well as Schmidt in revisiting the illness experience creatively. Subtly but effectively, the implied author as staree thus ultimately deflects attention away from herself, eliciting an introspective response from the reader. In this, *Du stirbst nicht* bears the potential to unsettle our confidence in the validity of the images we form of others.

In hindsight, one knows that Schmidt did not have much to fear in daring the step into the autobiographical narrative realm by publishing *Du stirbst nicht*. Critical appraisal of the book was generous, and, since winning the Buchpreis, Schmidt's reputation and renown have only increased. However, it seems that in the wake of its success, *Du stirbst nicht's* story is already being recast, smoothed out, and generally made more harmless than the text suggests. Both its author and the press have participated in this normalisation process that occurred post-publication, but for diverging reasons. When the press praised *Du stirbst nicht* as the story of a healing, taking the book as a 'testimony to her success',⁸¹ talking of a rebirth or a miracle, they situated Schmidt as the 'exceptional singularity' (*DSN* 186) she would not want to be – at least not for her illness (or the relative recovery from it). In general, the reviews legitimised the book as a strong candidate and later deserving winner of the Book Prize on the basis of the experience's authenticity and alleged difference. Many a critic praises the overall tone of the book, particularly because, as they read it, its protagonist is 'nie verzweifelt, nie

⁸¹ Matthias Weichelt, 'Kathrin Schmidt: You Are Not Going to Die', trans. by Isabel Cole, *Litrix.de German Literature online*, August 2010 <<http://www.litrix.de/buecher/belletristik/jahr/2010/stirbstnicht/buchbesprechung/enindex.htm>> [accessed 23 September 2013].

deprimiert'.⁸² Schmidt, in interviews, then added to this process, by stressing how quickly and easily she adapted to the situation she found herself in, thus drawing a line under the experience, and under the text that has arisen out of it. One can find evidence that she did so in order to keep the public focus on her writerly achievements rather than drawing it to the detail of her personal illness history.⁸³ It is up to the attentive reader to assess the experience of illness/ disability in this book in its full complexity, and thus to find what the text is actually communicating by stripping it of the heroic gloss that it has already gained since its publication.



The stereotyping that Schmidt struggles with in relation to *Du stirbst nicht* is one all too familiar to the life writer Verena Stefan, author of the third text analysed in this thesis. The Swiss-German writer herself was once exposed to the full force of normative reading practices of the kind I have been tracing in relation to Schmidt's text. The issues which labels like that of 'Betroffenheitsliteratur' create for authors will be explored further in the next chapter. Indeed, like Schmidt, Stefan in her 2007 text *Fremdschläfer* prepared for certain critical reactions in explicitly literary ways.⁸⁴ Whereas *Du stirbst nicht* in the previous chapter was found to deflect the reader's gaze through the thematisation of staring (and its use as narrative device), Stefan's breast cancer narrative prepares for publication in a different way: its intertextual references become a strategic means of preempting the anticipated judgement passed on *Fremdschläfer* by German cultural critics. The text can be said to contribute to Stefan's loosening of ties with the realm of German-language literature.

First rising to fame in the 1970s, Stefan emerged as a published author, at 28 years old, with a book that became one of the most widely read texts of the 'Neue[] Frauenbewegung' [new women's movement] and 'Neue Subjektivität' [New Subjectivity],⁸⁵ to name the two movements (one social, one literary) with which her debut *Häutungen* is typically associated.⁸⁶

⁸² Trans.: 'never desperate, never depressed'. Elmar Krekeler, 'Bester Roman des Jahres: "Du stirbst nicht"', *Die Welt*, 14 October 2009 <www.welt.de/welt_print/kultur/article4840309/Bester-Roman-des-Jahres-Du-stirbst-nicht.html> [accessed 4 June 2013].

⁸³ See, for example: Fietz, Pezzei, Schilke, 'Montagsinterview'.

⁸⁴ Verena Stefan, *Fremdschläfer* (Zürich: Ammann, 2007).

⁸⁵ See, for instance: Anne Betten, 'Entwicklungen und Formen der deutschen Literatursprache nach 1945', in *Sprachgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung*, ed. by Werner Besch and others, 2nd edn, vol. 4 (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 3117-3159 (pp. 3138, 3140).

⁸⁶ Verena Stefan, *Häutungen* (München: Frauenoffensive, 1975). First published in English as *Shedding* in 1978 by an American publishing house (New York: Daughters), and a year later in the UK (London: The Women's Press).

Much of the (often heavily autobiographical) writing that arose from this context in the 1970s, and in particular that published by female authors, was (and sometime still is) referred to derogatorily as 'Betroffenheitsliteratur'.⁸⁷ Undeterred by such strategies of exclusion (including personal attacks), Stefan continued to publish (auto-)biographical texts ever since, as well as becoming versed in other non-fiction and fiction writing. With *Häutungen*, the foundation had been laid for a writer's life.

Out of the texts discussed in this thesis so far then, Stefan's breast cancer/ migration narrative *Fremdschläfer* is also the most straightforwardly autobiographical text – yet, as should go without saying, it is no less artistic for it. As in previous chapters, the analysis to follow traces questions of narratability. Which narrative strategies and aesthetic forms allow Stefan to write cancer at once personally and publicly? Additionally, in turning to this early example of contemporary illness narratives, it is explored what traditions a writer can build on, which texts one can engage with, when there is not much of a tradition (at least not a recognised one) of writing illness autobiographically in the Germanic cultural realm. In contrast to Schmidt, who through intertextual references can be observed to align *Du stirbst nicht* with a predominantly German-language literary canon, Stefan's use of intertexts in writing illness autobiographically is diametrically opposed to any such localisation. Lastly, it is worth noting that *Fremdschläfer* is not Stefan's first work dealing with illness and death through literature. Already in 1993, Stefan published an auto/biographical account about her mother's dying in the form of *Es ist reich gewesen. Bericht vom Sterben meiner Mutter*, inspired by and in response to her mother's diaries.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Compare my assessment of literary scholars' reactions to personal illness narratives from the time in the introduction to this thesis, see especially the section on 'German Studies Scholarship and its Attitude towards Illness in Literature'.

⁸⁸ Verena Stefan, *Es ist reich gewesen. Bericht vom Sterben meiner Mutter* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1993). Allyson Fiddler translates the German title (of which no English translation has been published) as 'There were Riches: On the Death of my Mother'. Allyson Fiddler, 'Subjectivity and women's writing of the 1970s and early 1980s', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. by Graham Bartram (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 249-265 (p. 256).

Chapter III

Intertextuality and the Transnational in Verena Stefan's *Fremdschläfer* (2007): Writing Breast Cancer from Beyond the Border

After many years as a rabid separatist another need took over in my life: to be present, visible, audible in society at large; in brief, to be generally human.

from 'We Live as Two Lesbians' by Verena Stefan

At the Solothurner Literaturtage in 2008, Verena Stefan publicly recalled her first encounter with the strange and striking word *Fremdschläfer* [alien sleeper] which a friend had read to her from a newspaper, and which ultimately became the title of the book she was then working on.¹ As the author takes care to explain in a postscript inserted in the back of the 2007 publication, it is a Swiss bureaucratic term ('bürokratischer Begriff', F 218) denoting asylum seekers who are caught staying overnight at a place different to the one they have been assigned. The term's strangeness resonated strongly with Stefan and its potential polysemy tempted her to use it for the book she was working on at the time.²

Most readers will know the author for her debut text *Häutungen* – simply described as a 'buch[.]' (H 3) by Stefan herself in the foreword accompanying it, and, equally loosely, labelled 'AUTOBIOGRAFISCHE AUFZEICHNUNGEN GEDICHTE TRÄUME ANALYSEN' on its first page.³ In 1975 and the following years, in the wake of the second-wave feminist movement, *Häutungen* became a bestseller, and Stefan's name has since been closely associated with the radical autobiographical turn of the time. Considering its impact, one could rightfully call it the *Feuchtgebiete* of its time.⁴ As the fluid genre labelling indicates, the text combines diary-style passages with essayistic and poetic writing. *Häutungen* did two things: firstly, it denounced

¹ Stefan has continued to publish since. In 2014, *Die Befragung der Zeit* came out – a fictional text based on Stefan's grandfather's story who, as a doctor in the Bernese region of Switzerland, was arrested repeatedly for illegally performing abortions in the 1940s and 50s. Verena Stefan, *Die Befragung der Zeit* (München: Nagel & Kimche, 2014).

² Ingo Arend, 'Eine undurchsichtige Größe', *der Freitag*, 9 May 2008 <www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/eine-undurchsichtige-grosse> [accessed 10 December 2013].

³ Trans.: 'autobiographical notes poems dreams analyses'.

⁴ Christa Binswanger and Kathy Davis indeed draw this parallel and highlight aspects in which the books are comparable: both *Feuchtgebiete* and *Häutungen* tell the coming-of-age story of a girl or young woman, respectively. They do so using a vocabulary and style specifically developed by each authors in an attempt to find an independent language to describe the female body as well as to express female sexual desires and pleasures in a new way. The media in both cases pushed discussions revolving around notions of taboo and assessments of the books as either advancing or setting back feminist concerns. Christa Binswanger and Kathy Davis, 'Sexy stories and postfeminist empowerment: From *Häutungen* to *Wetlands*', *Feminist Theory*, 13.3 (2012), 245-263.

all-too-common sexist and abusive behaviour towards women and the patriarchal societal structures that render women powerless. Secondly, from a highly personal perspective, the book described Stefan's path to lesbian love, beginning with her renunciation of men,⁵ and leading to the gradual rediscovery of her 'verloren gegangene eigenkörperlichkeit' (H 17).⁶ The reader witnesses the self-realisation of the protagonist as an independent woman; towards the end she finds herself able 'to "shed" the constraints of patriarchal heteronormativity'.⁷

In telling these autobiographical experiences, Stefan memorably experimented with language, searching for what she called 'eine weibliche sprache' (H 4) to tell her story adequately. She did so in the hope of being able to use this female language as a corrective to the ways in which the societal status quo was (and, one may like to argue, still is) perpetuated in German everyday expressions. While its sales figures alone prove just how strongly the slim volume resonated with many women's experiences,⁸ the publication also attracted criticism, some of it quite aggressive: Dieter Bachmann, reviewing *Häutungen* in the Swiss magazine *Die Weltwoche* in 1976, called it a '*Krankengeschichte einer schweren Neurotikerin*',⁹ emphasising he believes its author is '*ein zutiefst verstörter Mensch*'.¹⁰ It is striking that Bachmann uses allusions to mental health issues as an insult and apparently legitimate basis from which to dismiss the work.¹¹

32 years later, Stefan's again highly autobiographical book *Fremdschläfer* takes as its topic her experience of immigration into Canada and works into it the discovery, subsequently, of a lump inside her breast. At first sight ostensibly ignoring all risk in writing illness autobiographically, Stefan in *Fremdschläfer* narrows her focus to her life with cancer, 'um nah

⁵ A chapter centring on this is titled 'Entzugserscheinungen' [withdrawal symptoms] (H 59).

⁶ Trans. roughly as 'lost familiarity with and lacking agency over one's own body'.

⁷ Binswanger and Davies, 'Sexy stories', p. 246.

⁸ Allyson Fiddler describes *Häutungen* as a 'phenomenally successful' book, adding that '[i]ts first print run sold out in a matter of months.' Fiddler, 'Subjectivity and women's writing of the 1970s and early 1980s', p. 250. As Binswanger and Davies note, '[b]y the end of 1977, 150,000 copies had been sold and in 1985, the book was still a German bestseller (Rasper, 1997: 409). By 1994, 300,000 German copies had been sold and *Häutungen* had already been translated into seven European languages as well as Japanese.' Binswanger and Davies, 'Sexy stories', p. 259.

⁹ Trans.: 'case history of a severe neurotic'.

¹⁰ Trans.: 'a most deeply disturbed person'. Qtd. in Andrea Spiegl, 'Gross, schlank, blond, attraktiv. Schweizer Schriftstellerinnen der 1970er', *literaturkritik.at*, 23 September 2013 <<http://www.uibk.ac.at/literaturkritik/zeitschrift/1111216.html# Dreizehn>> [accessed 18 October 2013].

¹¹ Over the years, more reasonable criticism of the book emerged, too. See, for instance: Joanne Leal, 'The Politics of "Innerlichkeit": Karin Struck's 'Klassenliebe' and Verena Stefan's 'Häutungen'', *German Life and Letters*, 50.4 (1997), 508-528. Leal criticises *Häutungen*'s ending for offering only a private solution (with the main character retreating from society) and reads it as one of political resignation. Others have grappled with Stefan's radical feminism as unwittingly reinscribing a biological determinism into gender relations, and thus ultimately reaffirming gender stereotypes.

heranzuholen, was unerreichbar ist, lautlos, schwerelos' (F 121).¹² In contrast to *Häutungen*, *Fremdschläfer* was labelled and marketed as a novel.¹³ I believe it could equally, and indeed maybe more adequately, be referred to as another volume of 'autobiographical notes poems dreams analyses', as over the course of her writing career, Stefan has remained committed to the principle of life writing and faithful to her personal poetics. Sharing this impression, Ruth Klüger refers to Stefan's writing in *Fremdschläfer* as 'Prosagedichte' [prose poetry].¹⁴

The diagnosis of breast cancer along with the ensuing treatment to combat what feels like a foreign body inside her cause a new sense of dislocation for the author just as she was settling into Canadian life. Yet another layer of meaning is given to the overarching motif of the 'alien sleeper' through Stefan's retrospective assessment of a piece of family history: making use of documents from the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern and merging them with childhood memories, she integrates into the book the story of her father's displacement and life as a Sudeten-German in Switzerland after the Second World War. Categorized as Austrian, then Czech, and eventually German in Switzerland, he remained a foreigner – 'Ausländer' (F 70) – for the rest of his life, readily identifiable by his non-Swiss accent, and always threatened with deportation by the Swiss authorities. He thus is the original alien sleeper to whom the title refers, although his experience precedes the coinage of the term in the 1980s (F 218). Freeing the term of its specific legal context, Stefan herself too, with a little poetic licence and taking the unusual compound noun literally, identifies as a 'Fremdschläfer', having moved to Canada primarily to be with her lover, whom she gives the fictional name Lou in the book. The fact that Lou is a woman also informs this self-designation; a little tongue-in-cheek, it may be a way of highlighting the lesbian author's, and with it her narrator's, awareness of being different to the hetero-norm.

In Stefan's own words, the book and its interwoven strands deal with '(im)migration, dislocation and connection to place and space viewed from inside the body, its visceral and cultural codes'.¹⁵ She reveals that the breast cancer experience that constitutes the main focus of this analysis, and that is such a central and prominent theme of the novel in its published form, was not meant to be included originally. The author's decision ultimately to incorporate

¹² Trans.: 'to bring closer what is out of reach, soundless, weightless.'

¹³ For a discussion of the genre designation 'novel' and its possible functions in the context of life writing, see the introduction to this thesis, section 'Illness and the Attraction of the Personal'.

¹⁴ Ruth Klüger, 'Einwandern, auswandern, wandern', *Die Welt*, 6 October 2007 <http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article1239740/Einwandern-auswandern-wandern.html> [accessed 17 February 2016].

¹⁵ See 'working notes' to Verena Stefan, 'Doe a Deer', *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, 4 (2006) <www.triviavoices.com/doe-a-deer.html> [accessed 14 October 2013].

it into the manuscript was based on her realisation that the illness represents, as she put it, 'yet another experience of dislocation in which one has to emigrate temporarily to the country of illness'.¹⁶ We realise that illness in *Fremdschläfer* is at once a trope and a powerful and painful reality.

Stefan's initial doubts about including the illness in her narrative are reminiscent of comments made by Kathrin Schmidt about her hesitation to write illness personally at all (see previous chapter). Monique Wittig's essay 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?' is helpful in understanding the statements made by Stefan – and potentially also those by Schmidt – of initial doubts about including autobiographical illness experiences in one's work.¹⁷ Wittig, in the essay, reflects on the decisions 'minority writers',¹⁸ as the French writer and theorist calls them, are confronted with making in regard to their texts and their anticipated reception.

Writing in the early 1980s, Wittig sets out the situation an author finds herself in when homosexuality is a theme in a piece of literary writing. As a risky subject matter, and in this way comparable to the representation of personal experiences of illness or disability in literature today, it may come to 'monopolize the whole meaning' of a complex piece of work, with readers focusing on just this one aspect. Through such biased reception, if read as 'symbol' or 'manifesto' of one position rather than a multi-layered piece of writing, a text's potential polysemy comes to be disregarded, alongside its literary value and its 'relationship to other past or contemporary texts'. An author's more complex and ambitious aim however, if we accept Wittig's presupposition, is to '[want] above all [to] create a literary work' with which 'to change the textual reality within which it is inscribed'. This fails when the text is read in a limited way as merely the social commentary it may – also, but not exclusively – convey. The consequence of such a discriminatory reading practice is, according to Wittig, such that one's readership is reduced to the small group of people who share the minority identity aspect with the author. Ultimately, the reading public determines what gets read. Biased reading thus turns these texts into 'Betroffenheitsliteratur', limiting their relevance to those whom it may

¹⁶ See 'working notes' to Stefan, 'Doe a Deer'.

¹⁷ Monique Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', *Feminist Issues*, 3.2 (1983), 61-69. Wittig has had a strong influence on Stefan throughout her writing career. Stefan regularly uses Wittig's theorisations to explain her choice of words in the last lines of *Häutungen* – having put 'der mensch [instead of 'the woman'; N.Sch.] meines lebens bin ich' [the person of my life is me] (*H* 124) – and in the 1980s, together with Gabriele Meixner, Stefan translated *Lesbian Peoples. A Dictionary* by Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig into German.

¹⁸ Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', p. 65. Wittig consciously uses the description 'minority writer' rather than homosexual writer to keep the category, and with it her argument, open for appropriation. Authors can find themselves pigeonholed as a 'minority writer' for a variety of reasons. Stefan, in the case at hand, fits this description as a person who is ill, but also as a foreigner in Canada, as a lesbian writer among heterosexuals, and, not least, as a female writer in patriarchy.

directly concern.¹⁹ The text then disappears from the wider public's sight through what Anita Konrad describes as 'Ausgrenzung durch Anerkennung' [exclusion through acknowledgement] – getting 'the silent treatment', as Wittig puts it.²⁰

By including her personal illness experience in *Fremdschläfer*, Stefan exposes herself to the risks outlined by Wittig; however it can be argued that she uses her personal experiences of migration and illness as starting points from which she 'work[s] to reach the general'.²¹ The polysemy of the word 'Fremdschläfer' makes it possible for Stefan to address universal issues through the medium of her particular experience.²² For the thesis at hand, which of course has an explicit thematic focus on the representation of experiences of illness and disability, what can be drawn from Wittig's essay is encouragement, methodologically, to read each of the texts in the corpus in the context of its individual production, the literary field it moves in and, not lastly, in its own right as literature.

This chapter, in exploring Stefan's representation of her cancer experience, therefore centres around three interrelated aspects: the role of intertexts in *Fremdschläfer*, the authorial and narratorial positioning its intertextuality enables, and Stefan's assumptions about her readership as manifest in the autobiographical text.²³ I will first situate *Fremdschläfer* within the tradition of breast cancer narratives with which it is aligned, and without which it would not have been written in the existing form. It will be discussed in particular how through citation, Stefan aligns her account with the female pioneers of illness (often cancer) narratives, to what ends this is done, and in which ways she departs from their precursory texts. I aim to demonstrate that for Stefan, writing is the only possible way to confront the disease, as only the written word has the power to trace and make fully real the illness experience – both for herself and her readership. I will conclude by assessing Verena Stefan's position on the international stage as a writer today: 32 years after *Häutungen*, I aim to show how and why she consciously takes up a 'transnational' stance with *Fremdschläfer*.

¹⁹ Trans. roughly as 'literature of concernment'. For more on the term 'Betroffenheitsliteratur' and similar labels, as well as the ways in which they can prove problematic for authors, see the introduction to this thesis, especially the section 'German Studies Scholarship and its Attitude towards Illness in Literature'.

²⁰ Anita Konrad, 'Minderheiten – Literatur?', *STIMME von und für Minderheiten*, 55 (2005) <<http://minderheiten.at/stat/stimme/stimme55c.htm>> [accessed 17 February 2014]. All other quotations in this paragraph from Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', p. 65.

²¹ Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', p. 68.

²² Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', p. 65.

²³ In this focus, my analysis of Stefan's *Fremdschläfer* varies significantly from Sonja Klocke's work on the text. Klocke's chief interest lay in the 'significance of the female body for the ways in which immigration, cancer, and kinship are linked', as she makes explicit. Sonja Klocke, "'Committed from Head to Toe?': Cancer, Immigration, and Kinship in Verena Stefan's *Fremdschläfer*", *Women in German Yearbook. Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture*, 26 (2010), 117-135 (p. 118).

Women and Cancer – Cultural Connotations

When the narrative voice in *Fremdschläfer* comes to state: ‘Mit Krankheit kennst du dich aus. Von Krebs weißt du nichts’ (F 103),²⁴ she alludes to cancer’s exceptional status as ‘more’ than a disease. With its particularly frightening connotations, of presumed and real effects on the body and on female identity, breast cancer especially is symbolically laden. It therefore stands out even from the range of cancer types. It bears all the common cancer connotations – that of a body turning against itself, killing from the inside, quietly. Additionally, however, breast cancer largely affects women; it therefore is ‘Frauenkrankheit’ (F 28). Up until the recent past, receiving a diagnosis of breast cancer entailed social stigmatisation and marginalisation for the women inflicted with it.²⁵ In some cases (and places), this still pertains today.

For our western context, Thatcher Carter reminds us of the shame that historically went along with any physical examination of a woman’s body by a (typically male) doctor: ‘For centuries, female patients refused to show their breasts to their doctors without a layer of clothing between them.’²⁶ This modesty the women displayed, conforming to social expectations, made diagnosis difficult, if not impossible. Residues of it, as well as additional effects of persisting gender biases in the doctor-patient relationship continue to affect the accuracy of diagnoses and the options for treatment subsequently offered until today.

On the one hand, thanks to the widening out of schemes for preventive screening as well as medical advances in diagnosis and therapies, the number of breast cancer deaths in Europe has been falling since the 1990s (after peaking in that decade). Nonetheless, in 2013, breast cancer was still the primary cause of cancer deaths in women, although culturally, at the same time, attitudes towards breast cancer seem to have begun to shift towards it being perceived as an illness you can live with.²⁷ Writing in 2010, Brenda L. Blondeau and Eva C. Karpinski (editors of a special issue of *Canadian Woman Studies* on ‘Women and Cancer’) note with relief that the stigma around cancer ‘has been lifted and a new public discourse has developed in response to its epidemic proportions’.²⁸ On the other hand, Blondeau and Karpinski also still

²⁴ Trans.: ‘You are familiar with illness. Of cancer you know nothing’.

²⁵ For more on the stigma of breast cancer, see, for example: Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor & Aids and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Books, 2002; orig.: New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1989); G. Thomas Couser, *Recovering Bodies. Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1997), esp. chapter 3: ‘Self-Reconstruction. Personal Narratives of Breast Cancer’.

²⁶ Thatcher Carter, ‘Body Count: Autobiographies by Women Living with Breast Cancer’, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 36.4 (2003), 653-668 (p. 653).

²⁷ All medical/ statistical information in this paragraph from M. Malvezzi and others, ‘European cancer mortality predictions for the year 2013’, *Annals of Oncology*, 24.3 (2013), 792-800.

²⁸ Brenda L. Blondeau and Eva C. Karpinski, ‘Editorial’, *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 28.2/3 (2010), 3, 5 (p. 3).

find that ‘we often neglect to investigate the environmental causes of this epidemic, its social determinants, its alternative treatments, and the different methods of its prevention’.²⁹

In the cultural imagination, breast cancer remains more emotive than uterine and ovarian cancers because it affects a more visible – and displayed – body part. Its origin and centre sit squarely in the female breast, a highly symbolic body part, the place that contains, as Stefan puts it, ‘das ganze Leben’ [all of life]: ‘Erotik, Stolz, Scham, Begehren, Lust, [...] Stillen, Nählen, Genährtwerden, Fürsorge, Gewalt, Belästigung, Verletzung, Konkurrenz, Neid, Liebe, Trennungen, Kinder, Attraktivität, Altern, Angst’ (F 29).³⁰ *Fremdschläfer*, as this quotation indicates, is a text that is highly aware of these discourses surrounding the female breast, and sketches them out in a few concise yet evocative words.

In between doctor’s appointments, Verena (that is, the narrative persona in the text) notices in passing: ‘das Leben ist ganz zu Körper geronnen. Mit Stumpf und Stiel bist du aus dem Ideenparadies vertrieben worden’ (F 29).³¹ Instead of leading to self-transcendence, she finds, cancer does the opposite. Stefan echoes Susan Sontag here, who stressed in *Illness as Metaphor* that as a particularly aggressive yet often insidious illness, cancer ‘attacks’ the body and ‘reveals that the body is, all too woefully, just the body’ – rendering the illness scandalous.³² Breast cancer as a specific form of cancer remains a troubling condition, and for many women poses a severe threat to their identity, for undergoing treatment and most likely losing one’s hair, possibly one’s breast, can feel like losing one’s femininity.

Traditions in Breast Cancer Writing, and their Diversification

Cancer stories arguably form the largest and most established subgenre of illness narratives today. Susan Sontag’s famous essay – tellingly more a sociocultural polemic than a personal narrative – constitutes one of the early interventions in the way cancer diseases were discussed in public, its author being wary of the harmful effects of the metaphors that ran through this discourse on people who are living with a cancer diagnosis. In the 1970s and 80s, when breast cancer narratives (together with other cancer narratives) first emerged to form a genre in their own right, most mainstream autobiographical literature dealing with the difficult topic followed a chronological master narrative dictated by the medical regimes of diagnosis

²⁹ Blondeau and Karpinski, ‘Editorial’, p. 3.

³⁰ Trans.: ‘eroticism, pride, shame, desire, lust, [...] nursing, nourishing, being nourished, care, violence, harassment, injury, rivalry, jealousy, love, separations, children, attractiveness, ageing, fear’.

³¹ Trans.: ‘Life has been completely reduced to the body. You have been expelled root and branch from the paradise of ideas.’

³² Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 19.

and treatment, and were often set almost exclusively in the space of the clinic. In terms of their style, the available scholarship tends to perceive these publications as reminiscent of self-help books, classing them as documents of psychological 'self-healing'.³³ Considering their depth, Ulrich Teucher claims that 'many of these narratives remain on a linear, descriptive level'.³⁴

Narratives of this kind usually end on a positive note, as, for instance, Couser, DeShazer and Herndl have observed, that is, with the recovery of the subject from cancer.³⁵ Herndl, in the context of making this observation, rightly asks: 'but are such narratives [of recovery and healing] unproblematically true? What are their political consequences?'³⁶ As Teucher highlights, writing in 2007, more crafted and poetic accounts too are to be found among what we might want to call first-wave cancer narratives, and which – at least according to the scholarship – otherwise adhered to a societal imperative for optimism. Teucher himself picks out Maja Beutler's text *Fuss Fassen* from 1980 as one such clearly literary and less conciliatory account which, as he stresses, does not strive for closure but complicates the cancer experience by remaining 'open-ended'.³⁷

From the mid-1990s, and there are more prominent examples for this in the Anglophone literature than in the German-language realm, the trend towards publication of personal breast cancer stories intensified. DeShazer attributes this to the success of the women's movement, the general increase in both diagnoses of and deaths from breast cancer, and the rising media presence of cancer as a topic.³⁸ More and more women have since come to express their illness story in writing, claiming for themselves the sovereignty to represent and interpret their experience with cancer as they see fit.³⁹ The types of cancer stories continue to

³³ Diane Price Herndl, 'Our Breasts, Our Selves: Identity, Community, and Ethics in Cancer Autobiographies', *Signs*, 32.1 (2006), 221-245 (p. 229). Herndl explains the psychological dynamic she sees at work in what are largely narratives of recovery: when recasting their role as writer/ helper, authors who were affected by breast cancer and have been reliant on help themselves as they underwent treatment distance themselves from their patient role as they provide to others the support they have received.

³⁴ Ulrich Teucher, 'The Incomprehensible Density of Being. Aestheticizing Cancer', in *Unfitting stories: narrative approaches to disease, disability, and trauma*, ed. by Valérie Raoul (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007), pp. 71-78 (p. 73).

³⁵ Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, p. 40; Mary K. DeShazer, *Fractured Borders: Reading Women's Cancer Literature* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005), p. 4. For Herndl, in 'Our Breasts', working on more recent breast cancer narratives (also from the U.S. context), the canon has been less homogenous: 'Typically, these narratives do end on an upbeat note, but often that tone is shown to be provisional, subject to unpredictable change' (p. 232).

³⁶ Herndl, 'Our Breasts', p. 222.

³⁷ Teucher, 'The Incomprehensible Density of Being', p. 74.

³⁸ DeShazer, *Fractured Borders*, pp. 1-10.

³⁹ See the diversity in autobiographical writings by, for example, Musa Mayer, Christina Middlebrook, Susan Wendell, Barbara Rosenblum, Treya Killam Wilber, as discussed by Einat Avrahami in *The*

diversify accordingly, as does their plotting. Autothanatographies like that of Maxie Wander (published posthumously in 1979) or of Ruth Picardie (published posthumously in the late 1990s) now as a matter of course form part of the range of cancer narratives, and stand alongside those that end with the authors' thematisation of their survival.⁴⁰

The contemporary literary scene has most recently seen online narratives being added to the now diverse spectrum of (breast) cancer literature (typically in blog form, but also in the realm of social media). Additionally, new ways of representing breast cancer, and also other illnesses, are sought in the form of the graphic novel; just two examples of this for breast cancer are the memoirs *Cancer Made me a Shallower Person* (2006) and *Cancer Vixen* (2006).⁴¹ However, as Teucher points out, 'the ready availability of cancer narratives, whether published or unpublished, should not be allowed to obscure the fact that many patients choose, for good reasons, not to talk or write about their experiences'.⁴² This pertains until and beyond today. As scholars and as readers, we must be all the more respectful of the relatively small group of those affected by cancer who, against all difficulties, have put their experiences into words, and sometimes images, for others to share.⁴³

In writing her cancer experience, Stefan too makes use of typical motifs recurring in breast cancer narratives. Naturally, the reverberating shock of discovering a lump in one of her breasts leaves Verena feeling betrayed by the body she thought she knew so well. Questions like the following are repeatedly asked in the text: 'Wie ist es gewachsen, unsichtbar, im Inneren, was spielt sich jetzt, grade jetzt im Inneren ab, innen im Körper [...]?' (F 24) – an urgency and disquiet spread in the protagonist's anticipation of her self as failing body.⁴⁴ In

Invading Body. Reading Illness Autobiographies (Charlottesville/ London: U of Virginia P, 2007), chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Maxie Wander, *Tagebücher und Briefe* (Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1979), later republished entitled *Leben wär' eine prima Alternative: Tagebücher und Briefe*; Ruth Picardie, *Before I say Goodbye* (London: Penguin, 1998).

⁴¹ Miriam Engelberg, *Cancer Made me a Shallower Person: a Memoir in Comics* (New York: Harper, 2006); Marisa Acocella Marchetto, *Cancer Vixen: A True Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006). For more, see, for instance, Dina Georgis's review of six postmillennial graphic memoirs by women about their personal cancer experience: Dina Georgis, 'Bearing Cancer in Graphic Memoir', *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 28.2/3 (2010), 105-109.

⁴² Teucher, 'The Incomprehensible Density of Being', p. 73.

⁴³ For a recent study of postmillennial breast cancer narratives (albeit, like the large majority of scholarly work, discussing exclusively English-language examples), and the ways in which these 21st-century narratives differ from older ones, see: Mary K. DeShazer, *Mammographies. The Cultural Discourses of Breast Cancer Narratives* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2013).

⁴⁴ Trans.: 'How did it grow, invisibly, inside her, what is happening now, right now, on the inside, the inside of her body [...]?' Such questions are repeated, especially throughout the first part of the book. On page 41, for instance, one reads: 'Was ist es, das in dir gewachsen ist, warum hast du nicht gemerkt, daß sich ein Knoten bildet, zu dem du augenblicklich Fremdkörper sagst?' [What is it that has grown inside you, why haven't you noticed that a lump was forming, one that immediately you call a foreign body?]

Fremdschläfer, we read of both the moment Verena first discovers the lump as well as her experience of the medicalisation of and alienation from her body that ensues with the medical treatment. But *Fremdschläfer* goes beyond the portrayal of these stages of illness and treatment. The fears of the total disintegration of one's life, and the life writer's thoughts on death are given intense expression. Stylistically, the text breaks with some of the most conventional storytelling practices: it neither aims to narrate strictly chronologically, nor does it portray the breast cancer experience in isolation. In terms of the illness topic, the experience intersects with that of its author's migration to Canada and the process of settling in there, as well as interweaving with memories of her upbringing in Bern – it thus provides a way into reassessing family history too. Together this makes *Fremdschläfer* – though the oldest text in my corpus – a very contemporary narrative.

In the following, the multiple ways in which the book is aligned with the illness writings of literary predecessors such as Virginia Woolf, Susan Sontag, and Audre Lorde is highlighted. I aim to point out in what ways Stefan draws on and builds upon these prominent early counterhegemonic examples of illness narrative, each of which took issue with an aspect of the dominant socio-cultural ideology informing attitudes towards illness/ disabilities. Woolf's text aimed to give illness its rightful place in literature, and begins the search for an adequate language to express the experience of medical conditions in literary ways.⁴⁵ Sontag took on the task to expose what she saw were harmful stereotypes surrounding the person suffering from cancer (as expressed in culturally disseminated myths and metaphors).⁴⁶ Lorde was the trailblazer for any woman with breast cancer who wanted to resist the silence imposed on her with diagnosis, and who doubted the use and need for a prosthesis post-mastectomy.⁴⁷ And Lucy Grealy confronts the able-bodied with the discriminatory ways in which they treat people with visible differences (in her case, the result of numerous facial operations) by telling her own illness narrative that began when she was still a child – in some ways suffering from others' behaviour towards her more than from the facial bone cancer she was inflicted with, and the treatment that came along with it.⁴⁸ My goal is to show subsequently how Stefan both references and departs from these Anglophone forerunners, finding her own idiosyncratic ways of portraying her illness experience in literary form.

⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield: Paris Press, 2002; orig.: London: Hogarth, 1930).

⁴⁶ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*.

⁴⁷ Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1985; orig.: San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1980).

⁴⁸ Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994).

The Writer as Reader – Stefan’s Self-Positioning in a Transnational Genealogy of Women Writing Illness

Fremdschläfer clearly engages with other representations of illness that predate it. All of the works thus taken up in the book are by female writers, and, like Stefan, a number of their authors identify as lesbian. The influence of and engagement with these intertexts in *Fremdschläfer* underlines the importance that must be ascribed to them in having paved the way for Stefan’s own 2007 publication. As a contemporary approach to writing breast cancer autobiographically, it can operate in the way it does only because of its ‘relationship to other past or contemporary texts’, as Wittig had theorised with regard to so-called minority literature, and as especially feminist writers like Stefan are aware.⁴⁹ For my reading of Stefan’s book, it is therefore significant exactly which authors and texts the Swiss-German writer adopts as her foremothers.

Stefan cites from the preface to Susan Sontag’s influential essay *Illness as Metaphor* explicitly, picking up on words that resonate with her own decision to draw parallels between the illness experience and her migration to Canada. On pages 104-105 of *Fremdschläfer*, a German translation of the following sentences from the following English original is given:

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.⁵⁰

Sontag in turn may have taken inspiration from Virginia Woolf, as Woolf, at the start of *On Being Ill*, uses a similar image when musing about ‘the undiscovered countries’ disclosed to the ill.⁵¹ Stefan contends that, like moving from one country to another, cancer has a

⁴⁹ Wittig, ‘The Point of View: Universal or Particular?’, p. 65.

⁵⁰ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 3. Despite the fact that Sontag later called the one-page preamble ‘a brief, hectic flourish of metaphor, [composed] in mock exorcism of the seductiveness of metaphorical thinking’ (p. 91), today the preface is the most widely-cited part of the book – proof, at the very least, for the intuitive appeal of metaphorical thinking. Sontag nonetheless held on to her opinion, as voiced in the main part of the essay, that it is ‘sometimes correct to be “against” interpretation’ (p. 91). The determination with which she avoided a personal tone in writing the essay can be interpreted as her own coping mechanism, as indeed Christoph Schlingensiefel did (see introduction). Later scholars highlighted that Sontag, with *Illness as Metaphor*, was buying into a myth herself, namely that of metaphorlessness: Barbara Clow, ‘Who’s Afraid of Susan Sontag? or, the Myths and Metaphors of Cancer Reconsidered’, *Social History of Medicine*, 14.2 (2001), 293-312. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins provides the needed corrective to Sontag’s polemic when she insists that ‘myths about illness may be enabling as well as disabling’. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Reconstructing Illness. Studies in Pathography*, 2nd edn (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1999), p. 24. In Audre Lorde’s text *The Cancer Journals*, which Lorde wrote at virtually the same time as Sontag hers, we can observe the benefits of metaphorical thinking at work: the image of herself as ‘warrior poet’ (p. 26) fighting a battle against cancer helps Lorde to conceive of herself as more than just passive victim. It is a more potent and liveable subject position for her.

⁵¹ Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield: Paris Press, 2002; orig.: London: Hogarth, 1930), p. 3.

disorienting effect. Aware of the cultural baggage the cancer-word carries, *Fremdschläfer* expresses it thus: 'Man sieht, daß das Wort Krebs eine Flut von Ängsten und Gefühlen auslöst, so daß man Begriffe, Regionen, Gebiete verwechselt, sobald es im Raum steht. Man ist sofort topografisch und räumlich verwirrt' (F 104).⁵² She has only ever been similarly 'confused' or disoriented in the initial period of her time in Canada. The self in cancer is once again hit by foreignness:

Wie heißt das Land, die Gegend, in die es dich jetzt verschlagen hat? Wie bist du hierher gelangt? Niemals würdest du Postkarten abschicken aus diesem Land. Ein Land ohne Briefkästen, ohne Tauben. Die Flüsse fließen vom Meer weg⁵³ (F 103)

Looking for points of comparison in her life preceding the breast cancer diagnosis to the experience of the illness, Stefan, the life writer, aestheticises cancer in *Fremdschläfer* in ways that were 'unimaginable' to Sontag.⁵⁴ In *Illness as Metaphor*, however, while written in order to eradicate metaphorical uses of the cancer word, Sontag herself noted the strong topographical element circulating in the discourse about cancer:

Metaphorically, cancer is not so much a disease of time as a disease or pathology of space. Its principal metaphors refer to topography (cancer 'spreads' or 'proliferates' or is 'diffused'; tumors are surgically 'excised'), and its most dreaded consequence, short of death, is the mutilation or amputation of part of the body.⁵⁵

Stefan picks up on the topographical/ spatial imagery, and adapts it to her own circumstances in *Fremdschläfer*. It is a means of, retrospectively, integrating the illness experience and the migration story into her life narrative, in a manner that makes both manageable. For Stefan, it is a natural step to seek such similarities, and relate various life experiences in the echo chamber of her personal memory. In a self-reflexive manner, the book's narrative persona Verena expresses this belief – albeit in a different context – when she observes: 'Man ist ja stets versucht, die Dinge, die man zum ersten Mal sieht, mit Dingen zu vergleichen, die man

⁵² Trans.: 'One sees that the word cancer triggers a flood of fears and emotions, to the effect that one mixes up terms, regions, territories, as soon as it appears. Immediately, one is topographically and spatially confused.'

⁵³ Trans.: 'What is the name of the country, the region where you have ended up now? How did you get here? Under no circumstances would you ever send postcards from this country. A country without postboxes, without pigeons. The rivers flow away from the sea'. Note Stefan's stylistic decision against putting full stops at the end of many paragraphs in *Fremdschläfer*. This gives their final sentences a distinctly unfinished, reverberating quality.

⁵⁴ Sontag's exact words: 'Cancer is a rare and still scandalous subject for poetry; and it seems unimaginable to aestheticize the disease'. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 20. For the German literary realm, Judith Ricker-Abderhalden proved her wrong as early as 1987, when she was able to look back on a variety of German-language illness writings (in challenging, literary/ poetic form) from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Judith Ricker-Abderhalden, 'Schreiben über Krankheit. Bemerkungen zur Zerstörung eines literarischen Tabus', *Neophilologus*, 71.3 (1987), 474-479.

⁵⁵ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, p. 15.

kennt, damit man nicht von zu viel Unbekanntem überwältigt wird' (F 21).⁵⁶ When taken as poetological commentary, these words gains immense significance. For her own cancer writing but also in the place of others', by pointing out the psychological benefit of our tendency towards comparative thinking, the statement offers an explanation for the appeal and continuous use of metaphors in grasping and communicating illness.

With Woolf's 1925 essay *On Being Ill*, lines of which form the epigraph to the second part of the book, the author shares the conviction that illness cannot be regarded in isolation.⁵⁷ It changes everything for the life writer, giving a whole new perspective when '[a]ll day, all night the body intervenes', as Woolf put it. And Woolf goes on, expounding the conviction that mind and body are inseparable, as '[t]he creature within can only gaze through the pane – smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body [...] for a single instant [...]'.⁵⁸ The ill in *On Being Ill* are the 'refuseniks',⁵⁹ and as their lives are slowed down, they begin to see differently to the people that surround them, 'able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round, to look up – to look, for example, at the sky.'⁶⁰ In Stefan, this sentiment reads: 'Ich darf leben wie eine Wildblume' (F 126).⁶¹ In illness the writer can capitalise on this deceleration of perspective, and draw creativity from the experienced intensification of being. Stefan, from a standpoint recalibrated by illness, takes the liberty of working creatively around the curious term *Fremdschläfer* to approach, and rewrite, her life story so far. Like Woolf's own text, *Fremdschläfer* is as much about the process of (life-long) writing and reading as it is about being ill.

Woolf's influence further makes itself felt in the form of a stylistic decision Stefan took for *Fremdschläfer*: she adapts the English writer's habit of finding alternatives to using the personal pronoun 'I' for herself.⁶² *Fremdschläfer* accordingly vacillates between 'du', 'man', and (though less often) 'wir', instead of speaking of an 'ich'. It indicates that the text can be read as a retrospective dialogue of the writer with her self in illness, as well as signalling Stefan's awareness of the representative status of her breast cancer story. Stefan writes not from the position of exceptionality, but as one of many women being confronted with breast

⁵⁶ Trans.: 'One is always tempted to compare things one sees for the first time to things one is familiar with, so as to not be overwhelmed by too much of the unknown.'

⁵⁷ In the epigraph, Stefan quotes the following of Woolf's words (in her own translation): 'Here we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable.' Woolf, *On Being Ill*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Woolf, *On Being Ill*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Hermione Lee's term in the introduction to *On Being Ill*, p. xxviii.

⁶⁰ Woolf, *On Being Ill*, p. 12.

⁶¹ Trans.: 'I can live like a wild flower.'

⁶² Hermione Lee's observation in her introduction to Woolf's essay, p. xxxii.

cancer at some point in their lives. *Fremdschläfer* thus offers itself up to appropriation by its readers, and, by not exclusively speaking as 'I', reduces the dominance of the autobiographical narrator figure.⁶³

Unlike *On Being Ill* or *Illness as Metaphor*, *Fremdschläfer* is much more explicitly steeped in its author's own personal history and life experience; it makes this public. This may well be the biggest difference to Woolf's and Sontag's guarded authorial positions which, by talking about being ill in the abstract rather than relating it to, and thus unveiling, their personal lives with illness, aimed to keep separate their immediate, personal confrontations with the difficult topic from their intellectual grappling with it.

It was Audre Lorde in *The Cancer Journals* who wrote about cancer as personally and poetically as Stefan does in *Fremdschläfer*, and who first stressed the fact that her personal diary excerpts represent shared, not unique, experiences. The poet, activist and academic believed that only by speaking up as a myriad of voices could the silence and isolation be broken that surrounded women with breast cancer diagnoses in 1970s America. *The Cancer Journals* crucially voiced Lorde's firm belief that there is not one uniform correct or 'normal' response to the experience of breast cancer. The slim book holds an important place in the history of breast cancer narratives for thus addressing and critically assessing the normalising discourses surrounding mastectomy and the pressure exerted on women to opt for reconstructive surgery, exposing the gender normativity behind societal images of the ideal female form. One can only guess how much of a role model Lorde, as a strong lesbian woman writing autobiographically about breast cancer, was for Stefan when writing *Fremdschläfer*. Throughout her life, Lorde saw herself perceived as 'other in every group I'm part of',⁶⁴ and she lived and wrote from that stance: 'Growing up Fat Black Female and almost blind in america [sic] requires so much surviving that you have to learn from it or die.'⁶⁵ Stefan similarly always found herself assigned the place of the other: 'Vor vierzig Jahren sagten wir, Frauen sind die Fremden im Patriarchat. Als Lesbe wird dieses Fremdsein verstärkt, manchmal auch unter Frauen.'⁶⁶

⁶³ My interpretation here runs counter that of Sonja Klocke, who reads *Fremdschläfer*'s shifts in pronoun usage as introducing gradations of distance (increasing from the first to second to third person). Klocke takes the supposed need to establish emotional distance between the narrating and the experiencing persona as decisive of this idiosyncratic use of personal pronouns. Klocke, "Committed from Head to Toe?", p. 125.

⁶⁴ Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ Trans.: 'Forty years ago we said women are the 'others' in patriarchy. As a lesbian this feeling of being alien is amplified, sometimes also among women.' Heide Oestreich, 'Schriftstellerin Verena Stefan. "Ich

Beyond building upon the discussed intertexts in literary ways, we realise that Stefan relates to the named authors on a personal level. The memory of Lucy Grealy, too, made an impact on Stefan. In *Fremdschläfer*, it halts the narrative voice in a moment of self-pity when enduring treatment: ‘Man hat *Anatomy* [sic] *of a Face* gelesen. Dieses Kind hat zwei Jahre Chemotherapie überlebt, [...] Man hat vier Behandlungen vor sich, alle drei Wochen eine, das scheint lächerlich dagegen’ (F 134).⁶⁷ Verena Stefan the writer is also, and equally importantly, a reader, crucially connecting herself with selected female authors of earlier illness/cancer narratives. She builds on them as she incorporates and carries forward their ideas and observations. However, it is highly significant to note that Woolf, Sontag, Lorde and Grealy are all authors from the Anglophone cultural sphere. No lines of reference to German-language, or indeed European, authors are drawn: as an author/reader crossing borders, literally as well as intellectually, Stefan appears to be looking for new connections.⁶⁸

An Illness Narrative with an Awareness for a New Audience

The genealogy of feminist writing on illness and death suffuses Stefan’s text. Knowing her literary foremothers to be behind her helps her fulfil a need she at times felt as a cancer patient undergoing treatment: ‘Du spürst das Bedürfnis, kahl und knochenfarben auszusehen, du möchtest sichtbar machen, was sich im Unsichtbaren abspielt’ (F 117-118).⁶⁹ To make these changes apparent, her medium of expression is, as a writer most naturally, the written word. In *Fremdschläfer*, the narrating voice grasps her metaphorical migration into cancer country thus:

Du beginnst, einen Pfad zu treten, fußbreit, einen Fuß vor den anderen. Es ist *nicht* abenteuerlich. Du fragst dich, ob der Pfad, den du trittst, in die Unterwelt führt. Du spürst *kein*

bin keine Frau. Punkt.’”, *taz*, 10 May 2008 <<http://www.taz.de/Schriftstellerin-Verena-Stefan/!17049/>> [accessed 18 October 2013]. On the subject of the lesbian woman as other in Stefan, read also the following autobiographical short story: Verena Stefan, ‘We live as two lesbians’, *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, 11.2 (2010) <<http://www.triviavoices.com/we-live-as-two-lesbians.html>> [accessed 8 January 2014].

⁶⁷ Trans.: ‘You have read *Anatomy* [sic] *of a Face*. This child has survived two years of chemotherapy, [...] You have four treatments scheduled, one every three weeks, that seems laughable in comparison.’

⁶⁸ One example for a text from the German-language context which one might expect to be referenced in Stefan’s writing is *Fuss Fassen* by fellow Swiss-German author Maja Beutler, a personal cancer narrative from 1980 which Teucher analyses in his article referred to above. Beutler in fact even shares her hometown Bern with Verena Stefan. As this example demonstrates, however, Stefan seems to have consciously avoided establishing such all too obvious lines of reference.

⁶⁹ Trans.: ‘You feel the necessity to appear bold and bone-coloured, you want to make visible what is taking place inside you.’

Verlangen, das Terrain auszukundschaften. Du kommst dir *nicht* wie eine Heldin vor⁷⁰ (F 118; emphasis mine)

Feeling particularly close to death at this moment in the narrative, the desire to be visually identifiable as a cancer patient stems from wanting to bring in line her outward appearance with her inner feelings. At the same time, as an author, Stefan knows that her subject matter – that of describing her ‘journey’ – does not make for a classic story, in the sense of being entertaining, as the negations in the above quotation indicate. All the more important, then, are considerations of her readership in writing *Fremdschläfer*. These considerations are influenced by Stefan’s own role as reader, as well as other experiences of being part of an audience: living through the ordeal of chemotherapy, Verena remembers a visit to the museum, seeing exhibited

jenes Objekt, von dem sich alle schnell wieder abgewandt haben, als sie in die Glasvitrine auf ein Konglomerat aus Haut, Knorpel, Fettgewebe spähten, das [...] zwischen zwei Plexiglasscheiben eingeklemmt war. Eine Fotografin hat ihre amputierte konservierte Brust ausgestellt. Wie abstrakt dieses Objekt anmutete, damals, wie es tatsächlich ein weit entferntes ausgestellt Objekt war, sicher hinter Glas verwahrt⁷¹ (F 155)

Her own change of perspective could not be communicated more drastically than with the aid of this memory. What seemed so far removed from her own life at the time of the museum visit – the touch of cancer, a potential amputation of part of her breasts – has become a threateningly large part of it. This further makes clear the challenge *Fremdschläfer*’s narrator – and author – sees herself confronted with in sharing her personal illness in writing: remembering how quickly people turned away from the museum piece, the question that surfaces is how to gain an audience or readership, how to connect across diverging lines of experience in the first place, so as to make real for those not inflicted with breast cancer the experience that may seem as vague and distant to them as the exhibited breast did to her back then.

Even in facing such difficulties, the firmly held belief underlying *Fremdschläfer*’s conception is that there is something in her experience that would attract a readership, including those who may identify as healthy or able-bodied. I believe this comes through clearly in the narrative. Observing birdwatchers, Verena notices: ‘Die Menschen stellen sich mit Ferngläsern und

⁷⁰ Trans.: ‘You begin to tread a path, only as wide as your foot, placing one foot in front of the other. It is *not* adventurous. You wonder if the path you are treading leads into the underworld. You do *not* feel any desire to explore the terrain. You do *not* see yourself as a heroine’.

⁷¹ Trans.: ‘the object from which everyone turned away again quickly after they had peered in at the conglomeration of skin, cartilage, fatty tissue, which [...] was squashed in between two panes of perspex. A photographer had exhibited her amputated conserved breast. How abstract this object appeared to be, back then, how it really was a distant exhibition piece, kept safely behind glass’.

Kameras mit lang ausgezogenen Objektiven auf, um nah heranzuholen, was unerreichbar hoch ist, lautlos, schwerelos' (F 121).⁷² The narrator here ascribes to people an innate curiosity, if not a potential for sympathy that draws them towards imagining others' lives and experiences. And if it was not for autobiographical narratives like *Fremdschläfer*, one might wonder, narratives which originate from a willingness to share and make accessible an experience that is otherwise 'out of reach', in the sense of not being lived experience for at least part of the readership, what else would have the power to bring closer and make a little more comprehensible the 'soundless, [and] weightless' experience that is cancer?

Gaps of experience may exist between an author writing from a perspective of, for instance, illness and her readers as yet untouched by such an experience, yet *Fremdschläfer's* reflections on the turbulent life story of the author's father further illuminate the belief held by Stefan that these can be narrowed. His life story strongly informs Stefan's views on 'fremd sein' [being foreign] and 'Heimat' [home country], and her understanding of her own (however privileged) status as immigrant in Canada. On the story of his displacement, and its presence in the family's communicative memory, Verena states:

Wie oft hat man das erzählt bekommen, hat zugehört, weggehört, nachgefragt, wieder vergessen, wieder nachgefragt, zugehört, wieder nicht alles verstanden, die Reiseroute, die Himmelsrichtungen nicht verstanden, wohl aber die Angst⁷³ (F 78)

The teller-listener or author-reader relationship, as it comes across here, is one that is certainly not without challenge. True understanding of another's extraordinary experience requires a constant engagement with that person's story. It necessitates repeated retelling of painful personal histories, and repeated attentive listening. An active role is demanded of both parties. More important, for Stefan, than fully understanding the facts of the story of another, is to try and grasp the experience of the other emotionally – to get an idea of how that person must have felt, if only for a moment. Consequently, in *Fremdschläfer*, precise communication of the feelings of the person with cancer to the reader is paramount: 'Hinter den Wörtern, den gefühlten Wörtern, steckt die eine wirkliche Angst, ausgeliefert zu sein an eine Übermacht, gegen die man nichts ausrichten kann, die mitten im Leben einfach Hand anlegt' (F 61).⁷⁴

⁷² Trans.: 'The people position themselves with binoculars and cameras with long lenses, to bring closer what is out of reach, soundless, weightless.'

⁷³ Trans.: 'Many's the time one has been told this, has listened, failed to listen, asked for details, has forgotten again, and asked again, has listened, and again not fully understood, the travel route, one has not understood the direction, but the fear was understood'.

⁷⁴ Trans.: 'Behind the words, the felt words, there is the real fear of being at the mercy of a greater power, against which you cannot do a thing, which grabs hold of you in the midst of life'.

Fremdschläfer emerges to be a highly crafted retrospective assessment of Stefan's breast cancer in the light of her life story that uses the moment of illness to meditate on the motivation for and power of writing and reading in general.

Writing her Way Home

The tactics Verena employs to make Canada home, to find her way around, geographically as well as linguistically, fail her in her transition to the 'country of illness'. Linguistically, the jargon of the clinic she finds herself confronted with is a foreign language all over again:

Du mußt neue Wörter lernen, *ganglions*, *lymphnodes*, oder alte Wörter vergessen, dir Namen merken, weil sie plötzlich in den Körper eingeschrieben sind, Orte aufsuchen, an die du nie für dich selbst gedacht hast. *Cancer station. Oncology. Krebsstation. Centre du sein. Breast center. Die Brust hat ein eigenes Zentrum.*⁷⁵ (F 29)

The 'ungebetene' [unbidden] (F 42) medical terminology invades her life without her consent, and, unprepared as she feels, overchallenges her with its consequences, 'allen voran das Wort bösartig' (F 42).⁷⁶ In the face of the situation, the eloquent writer denies herself any talent with words: 'Bin ich zur Analphabetin geworden? Ja.' In the same breath, however, she dedramatises: 'Lerne ich schlichtweg, ein unliebsames Wort in meinen Text einzufügen? Ja.' The text that is her life will from now on contain the word 'cancer'. Without a doubt, this signifies a break for her, and induces changes in how she goes about her life and her writing: 'Muß ich ein Hurenkind einbringen? Ja' (F 123).⁷⁷ But that she must and will write is beyond question.

Expressing her fundamental confusion with a geographical metaphor, the narrative voice notes: 'Auf dem Parkplatz vor einem Krankenhaus ist auf keine Achse, keine Linie mehr Verlaß' (F 74).⁷⁸ Her sense of direction, literally as well as metaphorically, is lost in the space of the clinic. The treatment regime a young doctor draws out for her on a straight and strict timeline, however, does not present a valid alternative. Instead, grasping her individual experience in writing, working to make language meaningful again and by doing so shaping her 'eigene[] Wahrheit' [own truth] (F 73), is a means of resistance for Stefan. Alongside reading her feminist predecessors, and walking the streets of her new home Montréal, life writing is a

⁷⁵ Trans.: 'You must learn new words, *ganglions*, *lymphnodes*, or forget old words, remember names because suddenly they are inscribed into your body, frequent places you have never thought of for yourself. *Cancer station. Oncology. Centre du sein. The breast has its own centre.*'

⁷⁶ Trans.: 'above all the word malignant'.

⁷⁷ Trans.: 'Did I become illiterate? Yes. Do I simply learn to insert a disagreeable word into my text? Yes. Will I have to integrate a widow line? Yes.'

⁷⁸ Trans.: 'In the car park in front of a hospital there is no relying on any axis, any line.'

tactic, in Michel de Certeau's sense of the word, that is actively employed to regain a degree of orientation and a sense of agency in her life with cancer.

Stefan's affinity to de Certeau's socio-philosophical writings, and in particular to his key work *Arts de faire* (1980), shines through here.⁷⁹ It is appealing for the weight it lends to the practices of the 'ordinary man' or 'common hero',⁸⁰ that is the ordinary person, consumer, or, for that matter, the faceless patient. De Certeau recognises an individual's agency when seeing subversive potential inherent in one's (often overlooked) everyday decisions, without denying people's being bound into the dominant and at times repressive systems of power and thought of one's contemporary society. As Ian Buchanan puts it, de Certeau in *Arts de faire* is 'looking [...] for [...] subtle movements of escape and evasion',⁸¹ and he finds them in the acts of reading, talking, walking, dwelling and cooking, which he highlights as 'tactics' that are utilised by us all: means of creatively resisting, or at least bending, the power structures we find ourselves moving in (and as opposed to the 'strategies' employed by institutions). Buchanan, on these grounds, praises de Certeau for having valuably complemented Foucauldian theorisations to provide us with 'an adequate account of the other'.⁸²

The important connection of Stefan's work to de Certeau's, and its appeal to her as she engages in 'writing from below', is established from the very beginning of *Fremdschläfer*. Using a quotation from *Arts de faire* as the epigraph to the first of three sections that constitute the book, Stefan opens up her story with his words: 'Die Geschichte beginnt zu ebener Erde, mit den Schritten.'⁸³ Where this story ends or leads to – as opposed to where it begins – is not at all clear at the outset. In a nutshell, this epigraph contains Stefan's poetics of writing illness (one that in many a sense could be called Certeaudian): it is processual, creative writing, unfolding to both writer and reader (between whom there is no hierarchy, as they both start walking 'on ground level') as it is written. It is a writing that underlines that everyone's ordinary yet individual story is worth being heard. This kind of storytelling values the micro- over the macro-perspective. Exploring her experiences on equal terms with the reader by writing the experimental text that became *Fremdschläfer* expresses the wish to regain a kind of familiarity

⁷⁹ Published in English as *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley/ Los Angeles: U of California P, 1984; orig.: *L'invention du quotidien: 1. arts de faire*, Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980).

⁸⁰ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, qtd. from the book's dedication.

⁸¹ Ian Buchanan, 'Introduction to Part III: Other People: Ethnography and Social Practice', in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 97-100 (p. 100).

⁸² Buchanan, 'Introduction', p. 100.

⁸³ In the English translation of *Arts de faire*, this reads: '[The] story begins on ground level, with footsteps.' de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 97.

over her own recent past, striving towards a 'kartografierte Vertrautheit' (F 13).⁸⁴ Word for word (or step by step), Stefan's narrator regains the desired sense of orientation in the process of tackling the challenge that is writing illness, and the question of how to incorporate it – effectively, and appropriately – into her life writing.

That this is no simple task she sets herself is made transparent in the shape the final text takes. It is interspersed with meta-passages about the difficulties of the writing process. Furthermore we find repeated expressions of the fear that she may lose the thread of the narrative that is her life: 'Jetzt aber entgleitet dir alles, das Manuskript, der Sommer, das Leben. Ich weiß den Text nicht mehr, denkst du, betäubt, wo bin ich stehen geblieben, was ist gerade dran?' (F 49).⁸⁵ Knowing how to write equals knowing how to live. This provides insight into how existential and innate a matter life writing is for Stefan. It is nothing less than a lifeline for the author.

As a consequence, only in and through writing can she face up to illness, and reorient herself when all other guidance seems lost. Key to the book is its opening sentence, the one that, in an interview on Swiss radio,⁸⁶ Stefan herself calls the most important sentence in *Fremdschläfer*: 'Du kennst dich aus, abgeschirmt, mit geschlossenen Augen, im Dunkeln' (F 7).⁸⁷ This is a statement that identifies the realm of the written word as a well-known, safe space, one that the writer can navigate under the most limiting circumstances. Half asleep, the narrator seems to hear 'eine Stimme, die [...] um ein Zuhause weiß' (F 7),⁸⁸ and upon awakening, she has conceived, indeed simply 'sees', a beginning to her text: 'du siehst durch einen schmalen Spalt am unteren Rand der Augenbinde, wie der Text beginnt' (F 7).⁸⁹ In an interview, Stefan makes explicit the fact that is only alluded to here: 'Sprache, das geschriebene Wort ist tatsächlich meine wichtigste Heimat, eine, die mir immer geblieben ist.'⁹⁰ Other kinds of 'Heimat', this implies, have turned out not to be so reliable.

Conclusion

⁸⁴ Trans. roughly as 'mapped' or 'charted familiarity'.

⁸⁵ Trans.: 'But now everything is slipping away from you, the manuscript, summer, life. I don't know the text anymore, you think, dazed, where did I stop, what is next?' Very similarly, in the phrase 'Dein Text könnte abreißen' [Your text might break off] (F 159), text equals life.

⁸⁶ Hardy Ruoss, 'Verena Stefan: Fremdschläfer - die Autorin im Gespräch mit Hardy Ruoss', *SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen*, 8 November 2007 <<http://www.srf.ch/sendungen/reflexe/verena-stefan-fremdschlaefer-die-autorin-im-gespraech-mit-hardy-ruoss>> [accessed 17 October 2013].

⁸⁷ Trans.: 'You know your way around, shielded, with your eyes closed, in the darkness.'

⁸⁸ Trans.: 'a voice [...] that knows of home'.

⁸⁹ Trans.: 'through a slim crack at the bottom edge of the sleep mask you see how the text begins'.

⁹⁰ Trans.: 'Language, the written word is indeed my most important homeland, one that has always remained with me.' Oestreich, 'Schriftstellerin Verena Stefan'.

Even the small wooden house from which the narrator composes the final part of her story is not meant to last (F 177). Situated on a hillside, surrounded by Canadian woods, we learn early on that Verena feels: ‘das Haus könnte jederzeit den Hang hinabrutschen’ (F 177-178).⁹¹ It is a magical place, close to nature, from where she can cast back her mind to the story of her father, whose right to reside in Switzerland always remained provisional. Eventually, upon anticipating her partner asking ‘wie es weitergeht’,⁹² the storyteller decides: ‘At this point of the story, [...] beginnt das Haus, den Hang hinunterzurutschen’ (F 214).⁹³ The magic realist ending that ensues from this sentence demonstrates once more, via narration itself, the power of the written word, and not least the power of Stefan’s very own storytelling. It is the only unambiguously fictional part of the ‘novel’, and an assertion of her agency as life writer. In opting for this ending, the author skilfully evades the possibility that *Fremdschläfer* will follow the cancer script (of recovery, and closure) some readers might still expect. As an open ending, it departs from the illness experience but comments on cancer’s lasting and unpredictable effects nonetheless – if only via the narrative voice’s satisfaction with the transitoriness of life that leaps from these final, light-hearted pages.

As someone so rooted in text, that is, in both her own and others’ writing, Stefan can do away with material homes. Moreover, she can be seen to emancipate herself from any all-too-narrow, static national affiliation. 32 years after *Häutungen*, she renounces the German-language literary and cultural context of her debut.⁹⁴ Instead Stefan has turned into a strength the homelessness that has marked her identity from birth, and that was reinforced by the vociferous critical reactions to *Häutungen*.⁹⁵ As a feminist and lesbian writer who for the longest time has found herself placed paradoxically in- and outside the canon, she not only accepts but embraces her liminal status in the German-language literary scene – and orients herself instead toward a much more international, feminist scene.⁹⁶ Thus her experience calls to mind Virginia Woolf’s dictum that ‘in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I

⁹¹ Trans.: ‘the house could slide down the hill anytime’.

⁹² Trans.: ‘how it will go on’.

⁹³ Trans.: ‘At this point of the story, [...] the house begins to slide down the hillside.’

⁹⁴ As is made clear in its preface, *Häutungen* arose from its author’s desire to ignite a socio-political debate in Germany (i.e. precisely to intervene in the German context), finding that ‘its content, in this country, [is] overdue’. In the original, the passage reads: ‘Beim schreiben dieses buches, dessen inhalt hierzulande überfällig ist, [...]’ (H 3; emphasis mine).

⁹⁵ Although born in Switzerland, due to her Swiss mother’s marriage with a German, Stefan was officially a foreigner to the country herself (F 195).

⁹⁶ Stefan’s work today certainly needs to be read in the context of not just German but English- and French-language literatures too, as she inserts her voice in these literatures in translation, having been published in *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism* (in English) and with excerpts of *Fremdschläfer/ D’ailleurs* (in French) having appeared in *Women and Cancer*, a special issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 28.2/3 (2010).

want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.'⁹⁷ Stefan might, with Woolf, have discovered an element of freedom in her marginalisation as a writer. This at least comes through in statements such as the following, in which Stefan reflects on her peculiar standing as an author since the 1970s: 'I have since added geographical dislocation to that already ambiguous status when I moved to Montreal in 1998.'⁹⁸ Note how Stefan consciously phrases this in active rather than passive terms. The publication of *Fremdschläfer* marks her transformation into a writer who actively takes up a transnational stance.

From this stance, she can carry forward the work begun by Audre Lorde (and continued by other female writers, scholars and activists worldwide since) of bringing into question the normalised breast cancer discourse as it presents itself today, and of diversifying this discourse by adding her own experience and literary voice to it. Carter highlights its lack of diversity as a major shortcoming of the popular breast cancer discourse in western societies today, still finding – with regret – 'only limited types of representation in the public arena'.⁹⁹ She identifies 'the public breast cancer patient' today as 'almost exclusively heterosexual, white, married, middle class, thin, and thirty'.¹⁰⁰ Even though the silence that surrounded breast cancer in the past has been broken, we realise that certain stories are still privileged over others. *Fremdschläfer*, or *D'ailleurs*, as it was published in French translation – as the life writing of an ageing woman, and an immigrant to Canada at that – provides readers with an alternative to the mainstream.¹⁰¹

Remembering the divided responses *Häutungen* received, ranging from euphoric to hostile, Stefan, somewhat sarcastically, summarises what she sees as the wrongs of the German literary circus:

Einige sagten: Aber das ist keine Literatur, das ist ein Bekenntnis, ein besseres Tagebuch. [...] Für mich war es ein literarisches Experiment, ich habe mit Sprache und Form experimentiert. Ich bin sicher durch die feministische US-Literatur beeinflusst gewesen. Im deutschen Literaturbetrieb gibt es immer Aufpasser und Aufpasserinnen, die dir sofort sagen, was du falsch gemacht hast. Man ist nicht sehr experimentierfreudig. Man gesteht einer Frau nicht zu,

⁹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own & Three Guineas* (London: Vintage, 1996; orig.: London: Chatto & Windus/ Hogarth, 1984), p. 229.

⁹⁸ Verena Stefan in an interview with Jeremy M. Davies from *Dalkey Archive Press*, July/ August 2010, in slightly altered form to the original, currently retrievable only from <ginsterplantagenet.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/verena-stefan-poet-author-from-another.html> [accessed 3 February 2014].

⁹⁹ Carter, 'Body Count', p. 657.

¹⁰⁰ Carter, 'Body Count', pp. 657-658.

¹⁰¹ Verena Stefan, *D'ailleurs*, trans. by Louis Bouchard and Marie-Elisabeth Morf (Montréal: Hélio trope, 2008).

ein Experiment zu machen. Das ist auch sehr deutsch: Darf man das? Ist das richtige Literatur? Nein, das ist falsche Literatur.¹⁰²

With *Fremdschläfer*, another literary experiment, this time from the margins because of illness, she tactically places herself out of reach of that kind of criticism – and beyond the border. From her transnational standpoint, German critics' assessment of the books she writes loses significance. It frees her from having her texts classified as right or wrong, labelled as a success or failure. This particular position Stefan finds for herself, which strengthens her in her continuous autobiographical work, may go some way towards explaining why chronologically, her 2007 book was among the first to be published in this new wave of illness narratives that can be observed to have washed up on the German literary shore. Orienting herself towards the Anglo-American literary scene, Stefan was able to find many examples of autobiographical illness/ disability narratives there.

The increase, internationally, in the number of breast cancer narratives has brought them a larger and more diverse readership than ever before. It must therefore be stressed that this readership no longer consists exclusively of 'vulnerable readers', as Herndl suggested.¹⁰³ Nor does Couser's claim in *Recovering Bodies*, that 'breast cancer narratives are written primarily for an audience at risk, especially perhaps for women struggling to comprehend and to cope with their diagnoses', seem plausible anymore when considering newer publications such as Stefan's.¹⁰⁴ This limited (and worse, limiting) view on breast cancer or any other illness narratives as therapeutic or 'Betroffenheitsliteratur' is, I believe, now obsolete. My suspicion is it may have always been too short-sighted – yet this remains for another study to explore adequately.

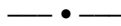
Today, there is certainly a wider public interest in illness narratives, in Germany as elsewhere. As this chapter has shown, Stefan is aware of both the subjectivity as well as the commonality of the illness experience that she portrays in *Fremdschläfer*. While far from aiming to be a bestselling author, she accordingly reaches out for a larger and more diverse audience than ever – writing for readers from across the spectrum of dis/ability, and with varying degrees of

¹⁰² Trans.: 'Some said: But that is not literature, that's a confession, an elevated form of diary. [...] To me it was a literary experiment, I experimented with language and with form. One influence was certainly US-feminist literature. In the German literary scene there are always watchdogs who tell you right away what you've done wrong. People there do not like to experiment. They do not grant a woman the right to experiment. That's very German too: Is that allowed? Is that proper literature? No, that's not proper literature.' Oestreich, 'Schriftstellerin Verena Stefan'.

¹⁰³ Herndl, 'Our Breasts', p. 241. On the basis of her analyses of breast cancer narratives published between 1997 and 2002, Herndl stresses that cancer narratives are aimed at an audience that shares the cancer experience, the implied reader being 'almost always assumed to be another woman with breast cancer or someone close to a woman with breast cancer' (p. 231).

¹⁰⁴ Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, p. 37.

personal experience with illness (including, but not limited to, forms of cancer). In her experimentality in approaching breast cancer in personal narrative, Stefan writes on a par with contemporary Anglo-American (and indeed any international) autobiographers who approach cancer through life writing, and try and find new forms for it. Verena Stefan thus significantly contributes to the continuing development of the growing genre of personal illness writing – a genre that, one could speculate, in its universal topic and fundamental, ‘generally human’ concerns intrinsically disregards national boundaries itself.¹⁰⁵



Having previously analysed texts written from a position of relative health by their authors, and with some distance from the time of acute illness, the following chapter has at its centre two examples of writing about what turns out to be terminal illness.¹⁰⁶ More precisely, both texts – Christoph Schlingensief’s *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein!* and Wolfgang Herrndorf’s *Arbeit und Struktur* – are diaries.¹⁰⁷ Rather than suggesting an absolute difference between the two kinds of writing, it seems more adequate to point out only a difference of degree between illness narratives like those discussed in chapters I to III and what may be labelled end-of-life or autothanatographical writing. This difference can reflect in a stronger focus on death and dying in the latter (and linked to this, may mean a more obvious engagement with ideas of leaving a legacy). Typically, however, it is a difference that is created in the posthumous negotiation of a text; it is from a later readership’s position of hindsight that illness writing which ends with the death of the author is marked as having been on a relatively clear trajectory towards death seemingly all along.¹⁰⁸

The effect is a disregard for the ambiguity and uncertainty so typical of living with serious illness. It runs the risk of producing reductive readings because it does not recognise the volatility of the writer’s situation, and effectively irons out the ever-changing circumstances of

¹⁰⁵ Stefan, ‘We live as two lesbians’.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Writing’ and ‘text’ are to be understood in the widest possible sense, as there are many forms in which lives find shape in a digitised society. In their incorporation of media (audio, video, photography) and use of the Internet, Schlingensief and Herrndorf are very contemporary examples of diaristic self-expression.

¹⁰⁷ Christoph Schlingensief, *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein! Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung* (München: btb, 2010; orig.: Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009); Wolfgang Herrndorf, *Arbeit und Struktur* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2013). Schlingensief’s title translates into English as ‘It can’t possibly be as beautiful in Heaven as it is here! A diary of cancer’, Herrndorf’s as ‘Work and Structure’. In their spelling, quotations from *Arbeit und Struktur* follow the book version of the diary.

¹⁰⁸ Considering the immediacy of blogging is one way of troubling this perspective, because authors signal with every post that they are still alive; the act of writing, in blogging, conveys life.

living with illness; circumstances which make it such a challenge to try and write illness as it unfolds in the first place. At worst, such reading practice establishes a clear-cut difference between the readership which defines itself as healthy or able-bodied on the one hand, and the writer who is constructed as doomed to die all along on the other.

As literary scholars of illness narratives (and as disability studies scholars all the more so), we have to reflect on this effect, and remain sensitive to our position in time with regard to the genesis and development of the particular text we analyse. This is especially important when researching autothanatographical diaries, as most such research is carried out after the author's death, from a retrospective point of view; a position from which it can be all too easy to neglect the diary's daily rhythm. Apart from gaining a deeper understanding of someone's writing in the light of their fluctuating health/ illness, with this awareness it becomes possible to analyse critically a text's history of reception, which in turn can reveal a great deal about the cultural place that a text has been, or is being, assigned. I hope to demonstrate what such a detailed and time-sensitive approach may look like in the following, final chapter of my thesis.

An initial observation that can be made is that a life writer's choice of medium for artistic expression seems influenced, to a degree, by their sense of how much time remains to them. It is conspicuous that writers and other artists who, upon diagnosis with a potentially fatal illness or in relation to their impending death, feel more distinctly pressed for time, tend to employ short or more instant forms of expression such as poetry (Robert Gernhardt), photography (Hannah Wilke, Jo Spence), blogging or diary writing. Here I shall analyse the diary genre and its media, and consider what it offers autothanatographers.

Chapter IV

Confronting Cancer Publicly: Diary Writing in *Extremis* by Christoph Schlingensiefel and Wolfgang Herrndorf

Ich halte das Tagebuch wie einen Kompass vor mich hin.¹

Isa in Herrndorf's *Bilder deiner großen Liebe*

Christoph Schlingensiefel and Wolfgang Herrndorf have produced what in the German-language context are two of the most widely-read illness narratives of recent years.² This chapter's starting point is the hypothesis that it is no coincidence that both their texts are more specifically diaries. It will argue that part of the reason why each author with his respective book and blog has caused such a stir is to be found in this choice of genre, or writing mode. The diaries make accessible their suffering and their thought-world in medias res, and in the mode of the everyday. As a genre rooted in the mundane, being a widespread cultural practice as much as a literary art form, the diary form is provocative because it brings difficult topics closer to a readership than they might like. Crucially, it magnifies the transgressive nature of narrating the experiences of serious illness, and of dying. In the following, the aim is to show that the diary may be particularly suited to the task of writing the ill and dying self and to examine more closely why this is the case. In doing so, the diary will, however, be identified as a challenging format too – for both author and reader alike.

There has been little exploration to date of the diary as a genre for writing the ill and potentially dying self. To be sure, Philippe Lejeune and others have pointed out that the activity of keeping a diary is one often taken up in times of crisis, or pain and suffering.³

¹ Trans.: 'I am holding the diary up in front of me like a compass.'

² Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Tagebuch* (hardcover) was the fourth best-selling book on 4 May 2009; in week 39 of 2010 it still ranked 24th in the *SPIEGEL*-Bestsellerliste. Its paperback version was in fifth place overall in week 40 of 2010. Following its hardcover publication in early December 2013, Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur* ranked twelfth in the *SPIEGEL*-Bestsellerliste by 23 December 2013. It remained one of the most-sold books on the German-language book market throughout 2014 – remaining in the top 20 for the first half of the year, and in the top 50 for the second half of 2014. Interestingly, while Herrndorf's diary was included in the 'Belletristik' list [belles lettres/ fiction], Schlingensiefel's was considered a 'Sachbuch' [non-fiction], indicating neither book to be a neat fit in its assigned category. (All data from buchreport.de.)

³ Philippe Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Genèses du Je: Manuscrits et autobiographie*, Paris: CNRS, 2000), pp. 187-200 (p. 193); Burkhard Meyer-Sickendiek, 'Der Schmerz im Tagebuch', in *Affektpoetik. Eine Kulturgeschichte literarischer Emotionen*, by Meyer-Sickendiek (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), pp. 424-453.

However, as Kathryn Carter has also asserted, what exactly it is in the diary form that suits autothanatographical expression has not yet been subject to detailed consideration.⁴

The diary holds a special place on the margins of not only the literary field generally but also life writing more specifically. From this outsider position it can represent the most controversial kinds of autobiographical subject-matter, using to its advantage the fact that throughout history and up until today, the diary form has been employed when 'writing back' from a disadvantaged position, and is closely tied to readers' expectations of immediacy, intimacy, and, linked to this, an impression of authenticity and confession. Charges levelled against diarists have included that of narcissism, while their readers have been belittled as voyeurs. The scholarly discourse is not immune to such preconceptions, and literary scholars especially have long avoided the diary.⁵ A persistent misconception about the diary is that it is formless and therefore artless. Hand in hand with this belief, common in popular and scholarly understanding alike, goes the assumption that the diary is a monologic and private text type. Only in recent years have a growing number of literary researchers started to question the simplistic and prejudiced view with which diaries have been regarded, when they have been analysed at all.⁶ Beyond addressing the immediate research question of Schlingensiefel's and Herrndorf's motivation for deciding to share their experiences of illness and nearing death publicly, and investigating their choice of genre, this chapter therefore aims to add to the scholarship which takes the diary form seriously as an object of investigation in literary studies.

⁴ Kathryn Carter, 'Death and the Diary, or Tragedies in the Archive', *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, 40.2 (2006), 42-59 (p. 56).

⁵ Literary scholarship came to the diary as an object of study in its own right comparatively late. Within psychology, especially since the psychoanalytic movement, interest in the diary arose out of the hope to be able to trace the inner workings of the human mind and reveal the unconscious; historians appreciate diaries as original sources. Sociologists use diaries both to gain insight into the lived social reality of sections of society and, though this is a more recent trend, as research tools in themselves. Christiane Holm, 'Montag Ich. Dienstag Ich. Mittwoch Ich. Versuch einer Phänomenologie des Diaristischen', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, *Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 10-50 (p. 10); Kenneth Plummer, *Documents of Life: an introduction to the problems and literature of a humanistic method*, contemporary social research series, 7 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983).

⁶ Trailblazers to be named here are Peter Boerner, as having produced one of the first systematisations of the diary (its phenomenology, history, and modern form) for German Studies, and Philippe Lejeune, for his more philosophical and experimental analyses of diaries' emergence, aesthetic and functions, and for having introduced the diary as a valid subject for scholars of life writing internationally. Researching Holocaust diaries, Alexandra Zapruder has discussed the dangers that come with imposing preconceived ideas of such diaries onto individual texts, obfuscating their design and content. In the context of WWII and the Holocaust, she has exposed the tendency to glorify victims' diaries as reflecting readers' needs. Another recent publication in English to be highlighted is Kylie Cardell's *De@r World. Contemporary Uses of the Diary* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2014). Peter Boerner, *Tagebuch* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969); Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009); Alexandra Zapruder, *Salvaged Pages. Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust* (New Haven/ London: Yale UP, 2002), pp. 1-12.

In contemporary literary scholarship there is some engagement with the aesthetics of the diary, in an endeavour to revise the superficial picture so many have of the text type. This work has not only revealed the genre to be a more complex and artful one than previously thought, but also uncovers the diary's heterogeneity in form and use across time and place. Scholars like the contributors to *@bsolut? privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog* call into question assumptions about the diary form as used either for intimate confessions of a self, deemed private and unintended for others' eyes, or – to name the other extreme – as exhibitionistic ego-narratives.⁷ They point out, too, the inherent dialogic nature of the diary that has long gone unremarked: at the very least, a diary is a form of dialogue with oneself across time.⁸ Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine the diaries of better-known figures, in particular, to have been written without a potential readership in mind. However, any concerns over such a readership – imagined or real – fade into the background compared to what Lejeune identifies as '[t]he real problem' for diarists: 'The real problem is less the danger posed by the gaze of the outsider than that of writing in the face of tomorrow, in the face of emptiness, in the face of no one, in the face of death.'⁹ This rings particularly true for end-of-life diarists such as Schlingensiefel and Herrndorf, and suggests there is more to the link so casually established here of the diary writing practice to death and dying. It raises the question of whether diaries are in fact outward-facing, anticipating publication.

Rachel Cottam calls the diary 'a capacious genre',¹⁰ as defining features and generic conventions are notoriously difficult to pin down for this protean form. Possibly with this in mind, Lejeune offers a minimal definition (of structural, not historical or thematic nature) with

⁷ Helmut Gold, '@bsolut privat!? Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 6-7.

⁸ This is an understanding many contemporary researchers of the diary now share, see by way of example: Günter Butzer, 'Sich selbst schreiben. Das Tagebuch als Weblog avant la lettre', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 94-96.

⁹ Philippe Lejeune, 'The Diary as "Antifiction"', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Poétique*, 149, 2007), pp. 201-210 (p. 204). The work presented in this chapter is most indebted to that of Philippe Lejeune. Although his exploratory research into the diary (collected in the volume *On Diary*) does not have a particular focus on autothanatology as such, it provided a valuable springboard for the ideas underlying this chapter, and does include considerations of diaries' endings and the diarist's death.

¹⁰ Rachel Cottam, 'Diaries and Journals: General Survey', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 267-269 (p. 269).

his succinct observation: 'a diary is a *series of dated traces* [série de traces datées]'.¹¹ Martin Lindner suggests a more extensive, but equally formal definition:

*Ein Tagebuch besteht [...] aus einer Reihe (1) von graphisch und inhaltlich klar voneinander abgesetzten Teiltexen (2) ohne direkten Adressaten, (3) die explizit oder implizit datiert und chronologisch geordnet sind, (4) die explizit oder implizit auf Ausschnitte einer außertextuellen 'Wirklichkeit' verweisen (5) und in denen das schreibende Subjekt, das durch den 'diaristischen Pakt' mit dem Autor identifiziert wird, explizit oder implizit präsent bleibt.*¹²

Yet even a definition like Lindner's, aiming to be descriptive and impartial, may not achieve consensus easily: the point about the addressee is being made in order to delimit the diary from correspondence such as letters; however, counterexamples such as Anne Frank's addressee Kitty come to mind. Even though she is fictional, the addressee Frank constructs in her formative diary writing matters, in the sense that it informs both her writing process and our reading of it.

When investigating autothanatographical diary writing, the diary's close ties with a particular construction of time appear to be a particularly important factor in shaping texts and also their reception. No other genre is so sensitive to time passing, or records and incorporates it quite like the diary. As Lejeune indicates: 'The main thing is how the diary relates to time and supports truth-seeking',¹³ emphasising his view that regards the act of dating diary entries as a pseudo-legal assurance of authenticity. It is a legacy of Lejeune's work on autobiography.¹⁴ As explained in the essay 'The Diary as "Antifiction"' that the quotation stems from, he comes to find that such authorial signals of commitment are taken to the extreme in diary writing. (Lindner, raising the notion of a 'diaristic pact' in the quotation above, is obviously influenced by these findings too.) In relation to his definition of the diary as a '*series of dated traces*', lastly, Lejeune also makes a point of stressing the diary as an evolving, dynamic text. Indeed

¹¹ Philippe Lejeune, 'The Continuous and Discontinuous', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Signes de vie. Le pacte autobiographique 2*, Paris: Seuil, 2005), pp. 175-186 (p. 179). In his use of the term 'trace', Lejeune, without offering further comment at this point, also brings in the idea that diarists invest much of themselves into the diaristic text, and that their 'having been present' has a lasting impact in a near-physical sense (like a footprint).

¹² Trans.: 'A diary consists [...] of (1) parts of text which are clearly separated from each other both in layout and in content. It is (2) without a direct addressee, and is (3) dated explicitly or implicitly, and ordered chronologically. (4) The diary's parts explicitly or implicitly refer to an extra-textual 'reality'. (5) The writing subject remains present either explicitly or implicitly, and is identified with the author through the 'diaristic pact'.' Martin Lindner, 'Ich Schreiben im Falschen Leben. Tagebuch-Literatur seit 1950: Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur am Leitfaden der Diaristik' (unpublished habilitation dissertation, Universität Passau, 1998/ last revised 2005), n.p. (section headed 'Vorschlag einer formalen Definition der Textsorte "Tagebuch"').

¹³ Lejeune, 'The Diary as "Antifiction"', p. 204.

¹⁴ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1989).

he understands it to be an occupation more than anything static or complete: 'Like correspondence, the diary is first and foremost an activity. Keeping a diary is a way of living before it is a way of writing.'¹⁵ In other words, the diary is or becomes text from a reader's point of view only. For its author, it always remains a mode of writing, and of living. This observation is highly relevant in the context of autothanatographical diary writing.

Schlingensief's *Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung*

Christoph Schlingensief (1960-2010), a director of film, theatre, and opera, and a performance and installation artist, had a firm reputation as the *enfant terrible* of the German arts scene. It is a label that reflects public reactions especially to his early films and art actions like *Mein Filz, mein Fett, mein Hase, 48 Stunden Überleben für Deutschland* (1997), during which he was temporarily taken into police custody for putting up a poster declaring 'Tötet Helmut Kohl' [Kill Helmut Kohl]. Schlingensief, always out to attack complacency, testing the limitations on artistic freedom, continued to challenge the public over the years to come: through his satirical lens, he questioned the harmonious official narrative of German reunification (in *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker*), the veracity of German 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' (*Terror 2000*),¹⁶ as well as the effectiveness of the work of the United Nations (*United Trash*), and the absurdity of political election campaigns (*CHANCE 2000*). By having prostitutes, drug abusers, and homeless people take centre stage in his art actions and theatre productions, as well as featuring ill/ disabled people such as Angela Jansen (*Kunst und Gemüse*) or his *Freakstars*, asylum seekers (*Bitte liebt Österreich*) or ex-neo-Nazis (*Hamlet*), Schlingensief created a public space for those at the margins of society. However, by the time Schlingensief was asked to direct the Wagner opera *Parsifal* at the Bayreuther Festspiele 2004-2007, a major feature of German high culture, the dubious label *enfant terrible* had begun to appear out of date. The invitation arguably serves as proof that Schlingensief and his work had become an established part of German 'Hochkultur'.¹⁷

The artist had always invested much of his person into his work and vice versa, including appearing on the theatrical stage in all of his plays since spontaneously doing so in a performance of *100 Jahre CDU – Spiel ohne Grenzen* (1993) as replacement for Alfred Edel, lamenting the actor's death on stage. In the words of curator Klaus Biesenbach: 'Von diesem

¹⁵ Philippe Lejeune, 'The Diary on Trial', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *L'Autobiographie en procès*, special issue of *RITM*, 14, 1997), pp. 147-167 (p. 153).

¹⁶ Trans.: 'coming to terms with the past'.

¹⁷ Catherina Gilles shares this view in *Kunst und Nichtkunst. Das Theater von Christoph Schlingensief* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), p. 153.

Moment an war der Filmemacher Schlingensiefel als Performer Schlingensiefel in einen einzigartigen Real-Theater-Künstler mutiert.’¹⁸ This made it increasingly difficult to speak meaningfully of any kind of separation between the spheres of supposedly (personal) life and (public) work. When diagnosed with cancer in 2008, for Schlingensiefel the question thus was not whether it would be appropriate to incorporate the experience, and the diary material it yielded, into his work but rather when and how to do so. As someone whose work, especially his early performances, often relied on media interventions and the involvement of audiences or reactions of passers-by to gain momentum, Schlingensiefel anticipated a mixed public reaction, and charges of commodification. In the diary, which is a transcribed selection of audio recordings from his first year with cancer,¹⁹ he reflects at an early stage on the appropriation of his personal illness experience for his work. He questions the artistic productions he had made about his father’s death the year before,²⁰ referring to himself as ‘Verwertungsanlage Schlingensiefel junior’ (*So schön* 152).²¹ For dealing with his own serious diagnosis, he realised he had a moral obligation to process his experience publicly – just as he had ‘used’ other people’s stories in his art:

Wenn es jetzt um mich geht, dann darf das nicht fehlen, schon aus Gerechtigkeitsgründen nicht [...]. Aber es darf eben auch nicht zu einem Zeitpunkt stattfinden, wo die Verwertungsanlage noch gar nichts kapiert hat von dem, was sie erlebt hat.²² (*So schön* 152-153)

The period in which Schlingensiefel received his first intensive treatment, covered in the published diary from January to April 2008, could be considered a time of incubation, metaphorically speaking. The act of diary-keeping was a crucial part of beginning to grasp the reality of his diagnosis with all its possible consequences, and fostered the kind of introspection revealed in the quotation above. The diary looks inwards, however, to prepare

¹⁸ Trans.: ‘From this moment onwards the filmmaker Schlingensiefel as performer Schlingensiefel had mutated into a unique artist of real-world theatre.’ Klaus Biesenbach and others, eds, *Christoph Schlingensiefel* (Köln: Walther König, 2014), p. 21.

¹⁹ It is not known if or to what extent the diary entries were edited. What is clear is that the published diary presents the reader with a selection of the material, as the whole of the transcripts are said to take up between one (Diez) and three (Schors) bulging ring binders, amounting to text of 450 pages (Diez). Horst Willi Schors, ‘Der Tod als Bühnenstück’, *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 22 September 2009, n.p.; Georg Diez, “‘Ich habe den Tod gespürt, er saß in mir. Ich habe gekämpft.’”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, 38 (2008) <<http://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/texte/anzeigen/26434/1/1>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

²⁰ Schlingensiefel used the art action and later documentary film *Die Piloten – eine Talkshow in sechs Folgen, die nie ausgestrahlt wird* (2009) as a forum to discuss his fears of losing his father, who lay in hospital dying at the time. Exhibitions that dealt with his father’s death were to follow: ‘18 Bilder pro Sekunde’ in Munich (Haus der Kunst, 25.5.-16.9.2007) and ‘Querverstümmelung’ in Zurich (Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 3.11.2007-3.2.2008).

²¹ Trans.: ‘the Schlingensiefel Jnr. recycling plant’.

²² Trans.: ‘Now that it’s about me, this [i.e. using his illness experience for his art/work] must be included, out of fairness alone [...]. But then it can’t take place at a point in time when the recycling plant has not yet understood any of what it has been experiencing.’

its author for stepping out of the role of passive patient and back onto the stage and screen, in order to become more present and harder to ignore than ever. It launched his late work which had a great impact on German cultural consciousness due to the artist's deliberate reframing of his work in the light of his experience of illness.²³ Schlingensiefel had grappled with illness, disability, and death before as he addressed individual and societal wounds. Concerning his own life and death and the threat of cancer from within, however, he records that his confrontation with these issues is different, perhaps more authentic: 'jetzt ist es anders' (*So schön* 159).²⁴

Against this backdrop, it is all the more striking that scholarship on Schlingensiefel's late work hitherto seems largely to ignore *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein!*.²⁵ This, to some extent, fits in with a widespread lack of engagement with this text type or genre as outlined in the chapter's introduction. The first half of this comparative chapter begins to redress this omission by investigating how Schlingensiefel turned to the diary form as suited to the task of writing the dying self, and how the use of the diary as exploratory space maps on to his previous work, or departs from it. In the analysis, *So schön* will be identified as central to the creative period of the artist's final years.

The year 2009 saw a striking new wave of autobiographically motivated narratives about illness/ disability and death peak on the German-language book market. Besides Schlingensiefel's diary, Georg Diez's *Der Tod meiner Mutter* and Tilman Jens's *Demenz* came out, both about a parent's illness and dying. Jürgen Leinemann's *Das Leben ist der Ernstfall* and Kathrin Schmidt's autobiographical novel *Du stirbst nicht* (discussed in depth in Chapter II) are

²³ Conceptually, the diary stands at the very beginning of that period. Other – theatrical – works honing in on the artist's illness experience include: *Der Zwischenstand der Dinge* (which had a private showing to invited guests only at the Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin in July 2008, and three public ones in November 2008), *Eine Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir. Fluxus-Oratorium von Christoph Schlingensiefel* (premiered as part of the Ruhrtriennale in September 2008), *Mea Culpa – Eine ReadyMadeOper* (opened at the Burgtheater Wien in March 2009), and *Sterben lernen! Herr Andersen stirbt in 60 Minuten* (which premiered at the Theater Neumarkt in Zürich in December 2009). While producing these stage works, Schlingensiefel also set up his *Schlingenblog* and the online forum *Geschockte Patienten*. Additionally, his long-term vision *Operndorf Afrika* was initiated then. It runs to this day.

²⁴ Trans.: 'it's different now'.

²⁵ The diary passes unheeded in the following examples of academic work on Schlingensiefel's late work: Kaspar Mühlmann, *Christoph Schlingensiefel und seine Auseinandersetzung mit Joseph Beuys*, Europäische Hochschulschriften: Kunstgeschichte, 439 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2011); Sarah Ralfs, "'Wir sind eins' – TOTAL TOTAL. Selbst-Inszenierungen in Christoph Schlingensiefels späten Arbeiten', in *Der Gesamtkünstler Christoph Schlingensiefel*, ed. by Pia Janke and Teresa Kovacs, Diskurse – Kontexte – Impulse, 8 (Wien: Praesens, 2011), pp. 307-326; Sandra Umathum, 'Die Kunst des Abschiednehmens. Überlegungen zu Christoph Schlingensiefels Inszenierung von eigenem Sterben und Tod', in *Theater und Subjektkonstitution: theatrale Praktiken zwischen Affirmation und Subversion*, ed. by Michael Bachmann and others, Theater, 33 (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), pp. 253-262.

examples of writing about one's own illness experience that were published in 2009.²⁶ Texts of this kind had last seen comparable popularity in the late 1970s, when they appeared within the context of the *Neue Subjektivität* [New Subjectivity]. The German-speaking media soon picked up on and discussed this trend as well as the individual books, and often the integrity of their authors (or perceived lack thereof). The underlying reproach in many of the feuilleton responses is that those who do decide to confront cancer or other serious illness publicly must be attention-seekers and shameless, egotistical people, who somehow capitalise on their illness, and those who consume their stories are voyeurs. This comes through, for example, in Michael Angele's description of illness narratives as 'dieser gern gelesene Exhibitionismus' [popular exhibitionism], and his coinage of the word 'Anerkennungsfalle' [tribute trap], into which he believes authors walk.²⁷

As outlined in more detail in the general introduction to the thesis, German literary criticism dismisses illness narratives, and particularly autothanatographies, as confessional literature ('Bekennnisliteratur') or as tabloidesque ('Boulevard');²⁸ both terms are employed in a derogatory manner and indicate that critics struggle with the content of these new narratives about illness/ disability and dying as much as with their documentary yet highly personal mode, which is still generally deemed artless. In contrast to that stance, this chapter (as well as this thesis as a whole) is built on the conviction that contemporary autobiographical narratives, including those with illness as their focus, can do cultural work of similar importance to that achieved by fiction.

While Schlingensief's introspective diary shows features of the confessional, in that its subject is speaking to himself but also to an implied readership which may pass judgment on him, it is reductive to read it solely as that. Close reading of Schlingensief's published diary entries reveals that the recordings serve a variety of purposes: in documenting his hospital days, test results, and treatment decisions, the records are empowering as they enable the patient to go over new developments as they unfold each day. They also help him to anticipate and manage

²⁶ For further examples, see the introduction to this thesis.

²⁷ Michael Angele, 'Wer hat geil Krebs?', *der Freitag*, 3 September 2009 <<http://www.freitag.de/autoren/michael-angele/wer-hat-geil-krebs>> [accessed 7 May 2015].

²⁸ This is evidenced in the feuilletons of the newspapers, and it also matches the attitude towards personal illness writings of German-language literary scholarship. Terms quoted here as used in: Angele, 'Wer hat geil Krebs?'; Richard Kämmerlings, 'Krebsliteratur. Der Schleier über den letzten Dingen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 14 August 2009 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/krebsliteratur-der-schleier-ueber-den-letzten-dingen-1841182.html>> [accessed 20 October 2014]; Dirk Peitz, 'Die Ich-Erzähler', *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 October 2009 <<http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/immer-mehr-autoren-berichten-in-ihren-buechern-von-sich-selbst--und-von-ihren-krankheiten-die-ich-erzaehler,10810590,10671790.html>> [accessed 20 October 2014].

his own death from an early stage, by registering thoughts on his will and ideas for a comprehensible legacy. Recording his feelings on a daily, and sometimes hourly, basis furthermore helps manage the author/subject's immediate emotional reaction to this confrontation with a serious diagnosis, and the gradual realisation of what this may mean for his life and his work. The act of speaking into the dictaphone therefore can be said to be therapeutic, too – yet it certainly cannot be limited to this or any other single function.

Going Public with Cancer: Risks and Reasons

If in the twenty-first century, in a post-postmodern setting, autobiographical endeavours of any kind seem to pose a challenging task, writing in the face of illness and near death amplifies dramatically the issues one deals with in life writing. Especially in the aforementioned cultural climate, autothanatographers are rightfully paranoid, haunted writers. A large number of people diagnosed with cancer remain silent about their physical, psychological and emotional condition, the medical progression of their disease, and their experience of social exclusion from a seemingly able-bodied society. This not only creates a burden of representation for diarists like Schlingensiefel, but also exposes these writers to the danger of being known primarily for their illness. And it leads to situations such as the one faced by Schlingensiefel in Munich in September 2009: at the restaging of *Mea Culpa*, it pains the director to receive furious final applause, which he interprets as an audience bidding him farewell prematurely. He notes the situation with irony: 'klar, ich tue ja auch selbst alles dafür: Gefühlte zehn Krebsbücher hab ich geschrieben, alles Bestseller, dazu sechzig Theaterstücke, Krebsoperen, auch alles Bestseller. [...] Es ist schon eine Selbstentfremdung, die da stattfindet.'²⁹ Given the risks involved in taking up such a precarious subject position in the public eye, the question that needs to be addressed is why Schlingensiefel not only recorded, but also disseminated his cancer diary so widely?

The decisive impetus for beginning the recordings, and for returning to the dictaphone night after night, seems to lie buried in the self-critical suspicion: 'vielleicht habe ich auch nicht richtig gelebt, vielleicht habe ich nur sehr viel Hektik verbreitet' (*So schön* 30).³⁰ It is a torturing thought and initiates a search for meaning. In various subsequent entries, the author returns to this nagging concern:

²⁹ Trans.: 'sure, I encourage this myself: I have written what feels like ten cancer books, all of them bestsellers, on top of that 60 plays, cancer operas, again all bestsellers. Well, that's how it is now. It is indeed [a process of] self-alienation that is taking place.' Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Ich weiß, ich war's*, ed. by Aino Labrenz (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2012), p. 30.

³⁰ Trans.: 'maybe I haven't lived right, maybe I have just caused [literally: spread] a massive fuss'.

Mein Problem ist, dass ich nicht genau formulieren kann, was ich in meinen Arbeiten getrieben habe, was mich in meinem Leben geritten hat. [...] Ich weiß nicht, was ich den Leuten erzählen soll. Ich weiß auch nicht, was ich mir selbst erzählen soll.³¹ (*So schön* 42)

Schlingensiefel at this point knows that some sort of narrative will be requested of him as a public figure, but he also needs one for himself, and the recordings offer a testing ground for this narrative, however tentative and fragmentary it remains. This lack of clarity ('Klarheit', *So schön* 31) is a driving force behind the recordings, and the plotless diaristic form he chooses to adopt allows for this challenging search. It enables him to follow a circular rather than linear movement, revisiting thoughts he develops in earlier entries, discarding some, repeating and developing others.

The diarist, captured on tape in his own recording, declares his failure: 'Ich bin nicht mehr der, der ich bin. Bin nicht der, der ich war. Ich bin nicht der, der ich werden wollte' (*So schön* 68).³² What underlies this triple negation, suggesting a Nietzschean influence,³³ is the painful insight that he might not be granted the necessary time to yet attain self-realisation. However, in recognising this failure there lies the chance of recasting himself in his role as artist and public figure. Schlingensiefel therefore calls this opportunity for a change of course a 'schmerzhaftes Geschenk' [a painful gift] (*So schön* 163). Addressing himself as 'du' and by name, which signals his accountability, Schlingensiefel sets himself a challenging task: 'Du musst aus dem, was du jetzt hast, Fülle spüren, aus dem Weiterwurschteln und Basteln. [...] Vielleicht schaffst du es ja, Christoph' (*So schön* 234).³⁴ In some sense, the illness experience can be said to have re-politicised Schlingensiefel's creative work; having given him a cause to fight for from a distinctly personal stance, and thereby reinvigorating his interventions in contemporary socio-political discourse.

In rethinking his approach to this 'life/work', his engagement with Joseph Beuys, who had been a constant reference point throughout his career,³⁵ crucially serves to give direction. Referring to Beuys' installation piece *Zeige deine Wunde* in a recorded entry dated

³¹ Trans.: 'My problem is that I can't exactly put into words what I strove for in my works, what has driven me in my life. [...] I don't know what to tell people. I also don't know what to tell myself.'

³² Trans.: 'I am no longer who I am. I am not who I was. I am not who I wanted to become.'

³³ This appears to be a reference to Nietzsche's *Ecce homo. Wie man wird, was man ist* (written 1888/ published 1908).

³⁴ Trans.: 'You must make the most out of what you have now, out of muddling on and being creative. [...] Maybe you will make it after all, Christoph.'

³⁵ For a thorough study of Beuys's place in Schlingensiefel's thinking, see: Mühlemann, *Christoph Schlingensiefel*.

‘Donnerstag, 21. Februar’ (*So schön* 194),³⁶ Schlingensief explores the place of sorrow and suffering in contemporary society. He speculates that because suffering (‘Leid’) has lost its value, and is conventionally not shared but silenced, being confronted with his potentially terminal illness causes people to be very uneasy around him. He wonders:

Diese Leute haben doch auch alle ihre Einschnitte, ihre Wunden. Warum zeigen wir sie uns nicht gegenseitig? Beuys sagt: ‘Zeig mal deine Wunde. Wer seine Wunde zeigt, wird geheilt. Wer sie verbirgt, wird nicht geheilt.’³⁷ (*So schön* 197)

Schlingensief applies this to his own situation thus: ‘Ja, das ist es vielleicht: Wer seine Wunde zeigt, dessen Seele wird gesund. Denn der Krebs ist weg, aber der Einschnitt bleibt’ (*So schön* 197).³⁸ Appropriating Beuys, he thinks beyond the personal, too: caesuras (‘Einschnitte’), as Schlingensief makes explicit, may constitute anything from the break-up of a relationship to the loss of a loved one, an accident as well as a serious diagnosis like his own (*So schön* 196). He thus explicitly opens up the conversation that he feels needs to be had, instead of closing it down. ‘Zeige deine Wunde’ becomes a maxim Schlingensief vows to act on – and which will resurface in the late phase of work which starts with the diary. Like a mantra, this belief in admitting and sharing one’s wound publicly will work its way through his processing of his being ill and dying, both on and off stage, from then on.

As Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw observe,³⁹ when giving testimony, be it of the AIDS crisis or the Holocaust, and also when publicly recounting the experience of cancer:

we bear witness individually for ourselves, our own sake, but always in relation to others (again, both individually and in the name of a community). In that process, the act of testimony also becomes a speech act and draws meaning from its effects on the listener [...], whose empathic response can be palliative, if not curative.⁴⁰

In Schlingensief’s case, the act of testimony is quite literally a speech act. Resuming an active role by speaking, recording and listening back to one’s own voice can be assumed to afford some initial relief to the cancer sufferer. There is no denying that autothanatography is very

³⁶ The title of Beuys’ work translates as ‘show your wound’. Beuys’ piece too was generally understood as being highly autobiographical in meaning, with the artist having suffered a heart attack in 1975. Mühlemann, *Christoph Schlingensief*, p. 95.

³⁷ Trans.: ‘These people all have their own incisions, their wounds. Why don’t we show them to each other? Beuys says: “Go on, show me your wound. Those who show their wound will be healed. Whoever hides theirs will not be healed.”’

³⁸ Trans.: ‘Yes, maybe this is it: The soul of those who show their wound will heal. Because the cancer is gone, but the incision remains.’

³⁹ They base this observation on research done in the field of trauma studies, and in particular on Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s seminal *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York/ London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁰ Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw, ‘Introduction: Extremities’, in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. by Miller and Tougaw (Urbana/ Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2002), p. 11.

much about the 'auto', the self that finds itself literally and possibly very suddenly in extremis, and has to deal with this. The autothanatographical endeavour often starts out as a form of self-care. Accordingly, finding a means of expressing the ill and potentially dying self through the recordings is indeed consoling for Schlingensief:

wenn ich noch denke, wenn ich noch aktiv bin, dann leide ich nicht. [...] Und wenn ich über die Ausrangierten, die Weggesperrten nachdenke, dann leiden vielleicht auch sie nicht mehr. Das ist das Grundprinzip: Solange ich über mich und andere nachdenke, leide ich nicht. Und umgekehrt: Solange man über mich nachdenkt, leide ich nicht.⁴¹ (*So schön* 60)

In his own words, the artist grasps intuitively what research into psychic trauma confirms. The self cannot be regarded in isolation from its social context, especially when knowing there are others out there suffering just the same. The healing of the Beuysian – or traumatic – wound can only truly begin once it is shared, via publication, not only with other ill people but also with a wider public. This act of sharing, and the response it triggers, has the potential to endow the experience of illness and dying with particular significance. The role of mediator between the terminally ill and the ablebodied, which Schlingensief assumes over the course of the diary, lends a moral purpose to his act of confronting his personal illness so publicly. The private and the public function of keeping, and disseminating, a record of illness and dying are thus intricately linked.

As autothanatographer, Schlingensief discloses on several occasions that his thoughts on his own work are being recalibrated by the life-threatening illness:

Vielleicht muss ich Sachen machen, die sich noch stärker auf die Gesellschaft beziehen. Am Ende, egal wann, will ich sicher sein können, dass meine Arbeit einen sozialen Gedanken hatte. Dass meine Projekte der Frage nachgegangen sind, warum manche Systeme Zwänge brauchen und andere nicht, wie diese merkwürdigen Zwänge funktionieren, und vor allem, warum manche Leute in diesen Systemen nicht vorkommen.⁴² (*So schön* 32-33)

He brings to the fore a desire to continue the social concerns of his creative work, but now with renewed vigour, despite the uncertainty of how this will affect it (*So schön* 146). His cancer diary becomes a repository for visions of how his work could be reshaped: his 'Afrika-

⁴¹ Trans.: 'while I still think, while I am still active, I do not suffer. [...] And when I think about those who are outcast, who are incarcerated, then maybe they don't suffer anymore either. That's the basic principle. As long as I think about myself and others, I do not suffer. And vice versa: as long as someone thinks about me, I do not suffer.'

⁴² Trans.: 'Perhaps I have to do things that are even more relevant to society. In the end, no matter when, I want to be certain that a social dimension underlies my work, in the sense that my projects questioned why some systems need coercion and others do not, how these strange coercions work and, above all, why some people do not have a place in these systems.'

Idee' (*So schön* 204) that will develop into the *Operndorf Afrika* in Burkina Faso,⁴³ and his reflections on whether and how well other ill or traumatised people out there cope (*So schön* 87-88, 104-105), which eventually initiates his setting-up of the *Geschockte Patienten*-forum,⁴⁴ must suffice as just two examples. Both these projects leave the theatrical stage and are socio-political as much as artistic endeavours.

In rethinking the trajectory of his work, Schlingensiefel also begins to question whether theatre is the best medium for it. On 1 April 2008, after visiting the ensemble who are rehearsing *Jeanne D'Arc* at the Deutsche Oper, Schlingensiefel records the following entry: 'Überlege, ob und wie ich diese Arbeit unter den neuen Bedingungen weitermachen und das Erlebte sinnvoll für die Bühne transformieren kann. Vor allem frage ich mich, ob die Bühne der richtige Ort ist, um Begegnungen zwischen Menschen zu erzeugen' (*So schön* 213).⁴⁵ It seems fitting that this radical questioning of the social relevance of the theatrical world is voiced in a new medium. If theatre, at its worst, can be ephemeral and socially exclusive, the diary – although initially seemingly private and 'of-the-moment' – signals inclusivity and can function as a lasting repository of ideas, once it is shared with the wider public in book form. Both characteristics of the diary genre match the artist's desire to expand his sphere of action into the wider social realm, and will be explored further below.

The Diary Form and its Suitability for Autothanatography

Committing his thoughts onto tape and later publishing them as text, Schlingensiefel remained accountable to the radical alterations of his perspectives through cancer. His entry from 3 March 2008 demonstrates this when it ends in the promise, to both himself and the implied reader: 'Eins ist klar: Wenn die Sache hier gut läuft, dann werde ich alles dafür tun, nicht zu vergessen, wer ich in den letzten zwei Monaten gewesen bin. Das darf ich nie mehr vergessen. Amen' (*So schön* 201).⁴⁶ Spelling it out in this way works against the risk of forgetting, or abandoning, his commitment. Concluding that day's entry using the Judeo-Christian formula 'Amen' [so be it] affirms his intentions.

⁴³ The Opera Village is a non-profit project initiated by Schlingensiefel; located near Ouagadougou, it will eventually be a self-sufficient village with a festival hall at its centre, complete with a hospital and a school that puts a special emphasis on the practice of the arts.

⁴⁴ Still online under <<http://www.krank-und-autonom.de/>> [accessed 9 October 2014] and <<http://www.geschockte-patienten.org/>> [accessed 9 October 2014], respectively.

⁴⁵ Trans.: 'Thinking about whether, and how, I can continue this work under the new circumstances and if I can transform this experience for the stage in a meaningful way. Above all I am wondering if the stage is the right place to generate encounters between people.'

⁴⁶ Trans.: 'One thing is clear: if this goes well, then I will do everything I can in order not to forget who I have been for the past two months. I must never forget that ever again. Amen.'

Like any diarist, Schlingensief is concerned with conveying truthfulness and sincerity, underlining his authenticity by dating – and thus validating – each entry. The author of a diary, as writing subject, therefore can be said to become ‘auf eine Weise Teil des Textes, wie es bei den anderen literarischen Formen (ausgenommen den Brief) nicht der Fall ist’, as Lindner has indicated.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the diary is not unmediated reality and, in writing, a diaristic persona is created. In the case of Schlingensief, this persona maps onto his public persona already familiar to his readers. With every entry anew, the diary puts special emphasis on the tacit agreement of trust that necessarily exists between author and reader. The writer endows the diaristic text with signs of authorial intention, and the reader picks up on these in combination with the author’s ‘proper name’ on the cover of a book or manuscript.⁴⁸ The diarist’s unique presence – as author/narrator and protagonist – is thus constantly in the foreground. Here, too, the choice of medium seems to suit Schlingensief, as an artist who had always sought ways of stressing his full commitment to his work – a tendency that intensifies in his late period.

Highly conscious of its limits, the diary never claims greater validity than for the moment in which the entry is composed. In this sense, it may be the most humble form of autobiographical creativity. It does not attempt to be more than a collage of impressions or snapshots, and resists any larger narrative arc. When Susanna Egan notes that the diary form ‘replaces chronology and teleology with a continuous present tense’, she rightly finds this form apt for autothanatography.⁴⁹ For Schlingensief, to go beyond the moment often seems impossible: ‘Das Schlimmste ist, glaube ich, dass alles Fiktive, alles für die Zukunft Erträumte ausgeträumt ist. Im Moment ist alles endlos real und damit komme ich nicht klar’ (*So schön* 188).⁵⁰ His diary writing is bound to always be provisional, and vulnerable to being overrun by the progression of disease that the writing subject knows he cannot in any way control or even foresee. This is part of what Egan has in mind when she stresses the difficulties autothanatographers face: when writing in extremis, she says, ‘the adequacy of linguistic (therefore linear) narrative breaks down, the body provides no familiar (therefore readable) signs, and the positioning of the individual in time lacks a forward trajectory’.⁵¹ In this regard,

⁴⁷ Trans.: ‘in a way part of the text that is not the case with other literary forms (except the letter)’. Lindner, n.p. (section headed ‘Vorschlag einer formalen Definition der Textsorte “Tagebuch”’).

⁴⁸ Paul John Eakin, ‘Foreword’, in *On Autobiography*, by Philippe Lejeune, ed. by Eakin, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1989), pp. vii-xxviii (p. ix).

⁴⁹ This, however, remains Egan’s only remark on the suitability of the diary form for autothanatographical expression. Susanna Egan, ‘The Life and Times of Autothanatography’ [Workshop Discussion Paper], *Pain and Suffering Interdisciplinary Research Network* (2001) <<http://www.english.ubc.ca/PROJECTS/PAIN/DEGAN.HTM>> [accessed 9 October 2014].

⁵⁰ Trans.: ‘Worst of all is, I think, that all that’s fictitious, all the dreams for the future have been vanquished. At the moment everything’s endlessly real and I can’t cope with that.’

⁵¹ Egan, ‘The Life and Times of Autothanatography’.

the gaps between the recordings are as significant as the content of the autothanatographical diary entries themselves, standing in for all that may resist formulation.

While Schlingensief's writing, then, is bound to the moment both in (diaristic) form and in (autothanatographical) content, the decision he made every single day to record an entry in itself expresses what to many must be an astounding hopefulness (or simulation of it) in the face of a life that has become 'endlos real'. Every diary entry posits a 'wager on the future',⁵² as Lejeune puts it; in other words, the entries are wagers on being read, and re-read, at least by one's older self. In the case of the autothanatographical diary, this creative expression of hope is especially significant; once the writing subject has no more future, there is, consolingly, hope for a future embodied by an anticipated readership.

Lastly, in this context it is important to note the diary form's accessibility, not least in Schlingensief's use of ordinary, spoken language. The closing sentences to many of the chapters can illustrate what is meant by that. They read: 'Schon anstrengend alles' (*So schön* 35), 'So eine unendliche Kacke' (*So schön* 39), or they end in Schlingensief bidding 'Gute Nacht' (*So schön* 131, 156), in cases when he recorded an entry late at night.⁵³ (Not unimportantly, sharing this detail about the time of day of the recording situation heightens the intimacy between the diarist and his audience.) The diary is an inclusive form which aims at minimising the gap between the author and his readership; after all, all readers could potentially be diarists themselves. For the artist who had always insisted that his work had to bear relevance to people's lives, or in his own words, 'an der Trennung von Leben und Kunst kratz[en]',⁵⁴ the diary form in which 'life and literature meet' seems a natural choice.⁵⁵

A logical step, in this light, also is the decision to transcribe the diary recordings. While accepting the loss of 'Lebensspuren' [signs/ traces of life], such as the tone of Schlingensief's voice, what is gained through this change of medium is the wide reach of a book which can be mass-produced and easily circulated.⁵⁶ Printed and bound as a book, the *Tagebuch einer*

⁵² Philippe Lejeune, 'Rereading your Diary', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Pour l'autobiographie*, Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 324-326 (p. 324).

⁵³ Trans.: 'Knackering, all of it'; 'Such bullshit, and no end in sight'; 'Goodnight'.

⁵⁴ Trans.: 'chafing at the separation of life and art'. Schlingensief, *Ich weiß, ich war's*, p. 51.

⁵⁵ Jeremy D. Popkin, 'Philippe Lejeune, Explorer of the Diary', in *On Diary*, ed. by Popkin and Julie Rak (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009), pp. 1-15 (p. 2).

⁵⁶ Arno Dusini argues that such reductions go along with any editing of original diary material. Arno Dusini, *Tagebuch. Möglichkeiten einer Gattung* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2005), p. 55.

Krebserkrankung forms a lasting, widely available and durable way of documenting and circulating Schlingensief's first intense months with cancer.

The Reader – Implicated beyond the Page

The relationship between the diarist and his readership is a highly charged one; the reader ultimately shares in the vulnerability - that is, the mortality - of the author. Confronted with their own fears and anxieties, the reader can, however, employ 'self-protective forms of resistance that say "not me", "not really", "not yet"'.⁵⁷ This type of reaction, at its most extreme, can break into more aggressive expressions of rejection too, as has been exemplified par excellence in the feuilleton reviews discussed previously.⁵⁸ Writers such as Schlingensief therefore find themselves in an unfavourable position that requires them 'to persuade a reading public that this profoundly disturbing experience is not obscene'.⁵⁹

It follows that, without any consolation in prospect, the implied reader in this diary is the opposite of an ideal reader. Consequently, Schlingensief can be found to elaborate on certain points, trying to win over the imagined reader with the arguments he presents. This reader is often referred to in the collective as 'die Leute': 'Ich höre die Leute schon reden: Der wilde Schlingensief, der Provokateur, das Enfant terrible ... natürlich wahnsinniger Überlebenswille ... wahnsinnige Anstrengungen ... hat bis zum letzten Atemzug gekämpft ... am Ende dann doch in der Klinik soundso ...' (*So schön* 49).⁶⁰ Obvious discontent is expressed in anticipation of his suffering from cancer being turned into a clichéd narrative. Schlingensief fears yet simultaneously dares to envisage a 'news story' that he may not identify with. Elsewhere too, especially when he comes to talk about intimate topics such as the relationship with his partner Aino, his faith, or extreme emotional states of anxiety or depression, this critical reader figure is conjured up to be argued against: 'Das mag für viele Leute furchtbar klingen, aber ich kann nur sagen: [...]' (*So schön* 168).⁶¹

⁵⁷ Susanna Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill/ London: U of North Carolina P, 1999), p. 197.

⁵⁸ And, at more length, in the introduction to this thesis, see especially the section 'The (Non-)place of Narratives of Illness/ Disability in Contemporary German Literature as Determined by Literary Critics in the Media'.

⁵⁹ Egan, *Mirror Talk*, p. 197.

⁶⁰ Trans.: 'I can already hear the people talk: that crazy Schlingensief, the provocateur, the enfant terrible, ... incredible survival instinct, obviously ... such amazing effort ... fought until his last breath ... but in the end then in the clinic blah blah...'

⁶¹ Trans.: 'This may sound terrible to many people, but all I can say is: [...]'. This rhetorical structure of arguing against a critical reader figure reappears several times in the text (e.g. *So schön* 177, 200).

Self-consciously, Schlingensiefel assumes that his reader will outlive the author and have the last word. This is what the vulnerable writer, as autothanatographer, has to accept when setting out as diarist. Schlingensiefel does so in order to bear his own approaching death, which he can only imagine being able to do in 'ein[em] Akt von Arbeit, Schmerzen, Produktivität, Leiden, Erzählen' (*So schön* 63).⁶² Planning to keep his voice in the public discourse, he declares defiantly: 'Ich finde, das muss ich mir erlauben dürfen' (*So schön* 63).⁶³ The autothanatographer, as endangered subject, is both highly sensitive to the critical readership he anticipates and assertive in insisting on his right to direct his demise on the public stage, even instrumentalising it for purposes close to his heart, such as the *Operndorf Afrika*.

The Impossibility of Ending the Autothanatographical Project

The printed *Tagebuch* stops dramatically, in the midst of a situation of extreme uncertainty for its author/subject. In the last three entries from December 2008, preceded by a significant gap from 20 April to 3 December, Schlingensiefel reacts to the discovery of new metastases in his remaining right lung. Nearing the last few pages of the published diary, the reader is suddenly confronted with the following lines: 'Guten Morgen. Es ist halb neun, und das Logbuch von Mister Spock tut jetzt hier Folgendes kund: Was bisher geschah, ist nicht wichtig, aber was heute geschehen wird, das ist wichtig' (*So schön* 251).⁶⁴

Talking of himself in the third person, and mockingly taking on the role of the other-worldly Star Trek-character Spock, is Schlingensiefel's attempt at injecting some humour into the way he delivers this grave piece of news. It is also a distancing strategy that enables him to make the announcement in the first place. Fashioning himself ironically as the half-human, half-alien character famous for his logic and stoicism highlights the diarist's own lack of wisdom with regard to the situation he finds himself in that morning. The statement supersedes all that came previously, and demonstrates once more the challenges involved both in writing and reading Schlingensiefel's autothanatographical diary, as well as the volatility of the autothanatographical project as a whole, which constantly threatens to overwhelm both its author/subject and the empathetic reader. These dramatic lines belie any assumption that

⁶² Trans.: 'an act of work, pain, productivity, suffering, narration'.

⁶³ Trans.: 'I think I have to allow myself that much.'

⁶⁴ Trans.: 'Good morning. It's half past eight, and Mr. Spock's log announces the following: what happened so far is not important; but what will happen today, that is important.' The Star Trek-reference shows too how familiar and comfortable the artist was with pop culture. He frequently mixed elements of it with high culture in his work.

publication could offer a sense of closure to the complicated and constantly evolving story of illness and dying.

Recorded before setting off to hospital for a further CT scan, the book's very last words are: 'Und jetzt fahren wir gleich los' (*So schön* 255).⁶⁵ They mark the beginning of an even more precarious phase of Schlingensief's life with cancer, as its writer is well aware. The way the *Tagebuch* breaks off recalls the crisis that provoked it and broke into Schlingensief's life just as abruptly. Although this particular volume of diary entries stops when the recordings are prepared as a product for the book market, what is signalled to the reader, importantly, is that Schlingensief's crisis of nearing death – and hence his diary-keeping activities – continue. At around this point, he begins to use his personal *Schlingenblog* as a diaristic space, thus breaking out of the medium of the book into a more immediate way of sharing his journal.⁶⁶ Schlingensief's relentless end-of-life writing practice seems to confirm what Lejeune had stressed in his theoretical work on the diary: 'It is as diary that autobiography is unfinishable.'⁶⁷ To draw a line under a certain stage of one's life is something which can be done more easily in other forms of autobiographical writing. The diary can only break off, but never be concluded; it ends in abandonment of one's writing, or in death. Activity on the blog consequently only ceases once its author/producer dies, with the last entry dating from only two weeks before Schlingensief's passing in August 2010.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Trans.: 'And now we are about to set off.'

⁶⁶ The original URL was <<http://www.peter-deutschmark.de/blog>> but is no longer accessible. Parts of the original blog can be found at <<http://schlingenblog.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 9 October 2014] and <<http://www.peter-deutschmark.de/schlingenblog/category/schlingenblog/>> [accessed 9 October 2014] – with the oldest available entry dating back to 25 November 2008. The last diary entry shared in *So schön* dates to 27 December 2008; the blog from then on seems to take over as sole vehicle for publication. Whereas I see no contradiction in regarding the blog as artful and simultaneously recognising its diary form, Lore Knapp reads the *Schlingenblog* as an 'artblog', and perceives it to resemble more 'dem Lit-, dem Fach- oder dem Reiseblog' [the literary, specialist or travel blog] than a personal blog or diary. It must suffice to point out that the blog does, however, carry all the defining features of the text type as outlined, with the help of Lejeune and Lindner, in this chapter's introduction. Lore Knapp, 'Christoph Schlingensiefs Blog: Multimediale Autofiktion im Künstlerblog', in *Narrative Genres im Internet: Theoretische Bezugsrahmen, Mediengattungstypologie und Funktionen*, ed. by Ansgar Nünning and Jan Rupp, Handbücher und Studien zur Medienkulturwissenschaft (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2012), pp. 117-132 (p. 117).

⁶⁷ Lejeune's standpoint here is that as autobiographer, 'I am always at the endpoint of my story', i.e. writing with a conclusion in mind (however artificially construed). More distinctly looking back than the diarist, the autobiographer reviews their life up to the point they begin the writing process, dealing less with the present (though potentially writing up to it), and more with the past: 'if something escapes you, it's the origin, not the ending'. Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', p. 191.

⁶⁸ I am using the term author/producer to emphasise that it is not just the uploaded content that bears Schlingensief's hallmarks, but that the conception of the blog as a whole (including layout decisions) and the maintenance of the site were in his hands.

The move to the online blog has several advantages. Firstly, it provides a more immediate way of sharing an entry with an online community. Secondly, its electronic form makes it easy to keep for Schlingensief, who now increasingly works on it alongside other projects, as much as it makes it easy to follow – from any location, at any time. Finally, the blog enables its author to keep a diary which incorporates the use of many media, in a way which would not be possible in book form. This suits Schlingensief, who takes to using the space as a kind of multimedia scrapbook, adding over the course of its existence pictures, scanned newspaper clippings, and what he calls a ‘Video-Tagebuch’ [video diary] function. The *Schlingenblog* accompanies its author’s rehearsals for *Mea Culpa*, and provides a realm in which the artist continues to push himself to critically evaluate his own belief systems. It also serves him as a place where he can commemorate friends’ deaths by posting obituaries for actor Achim von Paczensky, for instance, or for Wolfgang Wagner. The blog, like the audio recordings previously, is a tool serving various concerns: it enables Schlingensief to continue to participate in contemporary debates, such as the Helene Hegemann-plagiarism scandal, but also, in the light of his declining health, to develop his thoughts on an afterlife and to continue to confront squarely his own dying beyond the book publication of his *Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung*.

In the later autobiographical book *Ich weiß, ich war’s*, a collage of material which looks back on his work/life more explicitly and along thematic lines, Schlingensief remarks: ‘man kann so einen ersten Bericht nicht so stehen lassen, das geht nicht. Das erste Buch kommt mir inzwischen wie eine zwar völlig ehrliche, aber auch wie eine sich selbst blendende Aufzeichnung vor.’⁶⁹ The autothanatographical diary does not age well, as Schlingensief’s own subject position as dying author continues to alter dramatically as time passes. Yet its ‘errors’, as the diarist perceives them later, are valuable in the sense that they were true to his perspective at the time; *So schön* remains an important document testifying to Schlingensief’s first year of living with cancer.

The blog post that came to be Schlingensief’s last bears a striking equation in its convoluted title: ‘07-08-2010- DIE BILDER VERSCHWINDEN AUTOMATISCH UND ÜBERMALEN SICH SO ODER SO ! – "ERINNERN HEISST : VERGESSEN !" (Da können wir ruhig unbedingt auch mal schlafen!)’.⁷⁰ In the post, the diarist touches on the large gap between this and his previous

⁶⁹ Trans.: ‘You can’t have such a first account as a stand-alone piece, that’s impossible. Looking back, the first book seems to me to be an entirely honest, but equally self-deceptive account.’ Schlingensief, *Ich weiß, ich war’s*, p. 19.

⁷⁰ Trans.: ‘07-08-2010- THE IMAGES DISAPPEAR AUTOMATICALLY AND OVERWRITE THEMSELVES ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ! – “TO REMEMBER IS : TO FORGET !” (In which case we can certainly go to sleep for a change!)’. In all quotations from the *Schlingenblog*, Schlingensief’s idiosyncratic spelling and spacing has been retained exactly as in the original.

entry, regretting this silence. He goes on to admit that he has just deleted a recently posted video, wondering: 'wen soll das das [sic] interessieren?'.⁷¹ As readers we do not know what news the author has had that day – we only learn that there were 'wieder infos zu neuen dingen' – but a deeply felt sadness and disillusionment are expressed in the short post.⁷²

'Erinnern heißt vergessen' had already played a role in the printed *Tagebuch* (*So schön* 146). In a long entry dated 'Dienstag, 5. Februar', Schlingensief discusses this phrase. It is a leitmotif that guided his work for quite some time, for instance when directing the opera *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in 2004, and in creating the exhibitions '18 Bilder pro Sekunde' and 'Querverstümmelung' not long after his father's death in 2007.⁷³ Schlingensief is fascinated by the insight that – if every act of remembering is unique, never quite the same as before – this means: 'dass jede Erinnerung eine Übermalung des Ereignisses ist und je nach Übermalung eben auch viel vergessen wird' (*So schön* 146).⁷⁴ This paradox stays with the artist as he confronts his father's, and then his own, illness and dying. In February 2008, at the very beginning of the autothanatographical process, he wonders: 'wann und wie ich die Übermalung meiner eigenen Guillotine in Angriff nehmen kann' (*So schön* 146).⁷⁵

Interim Conclusion

The first half of this chapter has demonstrated why the diary form seemed to provide Schlingensief with the most clear-sighted way of expressing himself autobiographically as life-threatening illness and ultimately the reality of his own death encroached upon him. It aimed to highlight the publication of selected diary entries in *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein!* as constituting the beginning of a new creative period, rather than an end to Schlingensief's artistic achievements. With the diary, Schlingensief entered into a new phase of engaging in the politics of the personal.

This is in contrast to the situation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the German-language literary scene last witnessed a similar upsurge in very personal writings on illness and death, many of them composed from a diaristic stance. Generally, these were published posthumously, such as Brigitte Reimann's diaries and her exchange of letters with Christa Wolf towards the end of her life, or Maxie Wander's diaries and letters, published for the first time in 1979 on the initiative of her widower Fred Wander, a fellow writer who edited the material

⁷¹ Trans.: 'who is supposed to care about this?'

⁷² Trans.: 'again info on new things'.

⁷³ The titles of the exhibitions can be translated as '18 frames per second' and 'cross-mutilation'.

⁷⁴ Trans.: 'that every act of memory overwrites the original event and that much is forgotten accordingly.'

⁷⁵ Trans.: 'when and how I can begin the task of overwriting my own guillotine.'

himself. Publication often depended on having such literary connections. For example, it was Adolf Muschg who pressed for the publication of Federico Angst's *Mars*. The furious reckoning came out under the pseudonym Fritz Zorn, and was a literary sensation in 1977. Another Swiss author, Max Frisch, made sure that his close friend Peter Noll's *Diktate über Sterben & Tod* (1984) – composed by Noll after taking the controversial decision to refuse medical treatment for his cancer – were published posthumously.

While all of these writers, in a more or less direct way, will have had a future reader in mind when they decided to begin their autothanatographies, Schlingensiefel brings this readership into his present, knowingly overtaxing them when confronting them with his suffering and dying:

Ich will in dem Zustand, in dem ich jetzt bin, jemand anderem begegnen und sagen: Schauen Sie, hören Sie! Und der autonome Betrachter reagiert, indem er vor allem mit sich selbst umgehen muss. Dann ist das nicht Christoph Schlingensiefels Leidensweg, sondern viel mehr. Ob das dann noch richtiges Theater ist – wen interessiert's? Und wenn die Leute das nicht wollen, wenn sie sagen, ich sei ein Terrorist, der ihnen zu nahe tritt, dann ist das eben so. Dann ist das auch eine Reaktion.⁷⁶ (*So schön* 243)

It is a highly charged relationship that writer and reader enter into by means of the diary. The 'terrorist' writer holds the power to challenge previous certainties as held by the reader (and as such presents an external menace); he can fundamentally unsettle them (by bringing about a feeling of internal terror). This may take readers to the limits of what they can bear.

Ensuing from the diary recordings, the contemporary observer saw Schlingensiefel carry his experience of living with illness and nearing death beyond the printed page into what shows as well as back onto the theatrical stage, doing readings and interviews, all in order to reach out to as diverse an audience as possible. In doing so, he wilfully ignored any boundaries of high and low culture, any distinction between what is art or life, to open up the public conversation he felt needed to be had about illness and dying. As much as he managed his own illness and dying on the public stage, by entitling his final blog post 'Erinnern heißt vergessen', however, Schlingensiefel did pass the baton on to others. It is up to others to interpret his oeuvre as a whole, as well as his late work in particular. It is up to others, too, to keep the conversation going about illness and death, its place in society, culture – and indeed in literature.

⁷⁶ Trans.: 'I want to encounter another person in the state that I am currently in and say: Look, listen! And the autonomous viewer reacts by primarily having to deal with himself. This then makes it so much more than Christoph Schlingensiefel's *via dolorosa*. If this is still proper theatre – who cares? And if the people don't like it, if they tell me I'm a terrorist, offending them, then that's the way it is. Then that's also a reaction of some sort.'

Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur* – Creative Productivity in Extremis

Wolfgang Herrndorf took up the project of the autothanatographical illness diary where Christoph Schlingensiefel left off, having received his own cancer diagnosis in the year of the artist's death. Herrndorf, too, refused to die 'still, lautlos, wortlos und handlungslos' (*So schön* 241), as the Catholic *Die Tagespost* had suggested Schlingensiefel should do instead of discussing his suffering in the public sphere.⁷⁷ While there is only one explicit reference to *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein!* in Herrndorf's online diary,⁷⁸ important parallels can nonetheless be drawn between the two authors. Both Schlingensiefel and Herrndorf carried on with their creative work until they died, and by making use of the defiant diary format each asserted his right to participate in the contemporary cultural scene, rather than letting himself be forced into taking up any kind of 'sick role' as demanded by the *Tagespost* article; a request that is indicative of widespread social attitudes towards the ill. What is more, both Schlingensiefel and Herrndorf clearly dealt with their experience of (terminal) illness in their work from then on. Finishing two novels and starting a third one alongside keeping his diary, *Arbeit und Struktur*, Herrndorf too exhibited remarkable drive and productivity in relation to impending death.

The second half of this chapter shifts the analytical focus from Christoph Schlingensiefel's to Wolfgang Herrndorf's illness diary. By drawing some parallels between the two cancer diaries, and comparing them through the prism of their genre, common concerns shared by the two autothanatographers and their writing will become clear – in their initial motivation for turning to the diary form to process their experience of illness and of dying, their decision to go public with cancer in this form, and the 'rhetorical stance' they adopted as diarists.⁷⁹

Herrndorf, a painter by training and self-professed 'Behelfsschriftsteller' [amateur writer] (*AS* 115) started his online diary in the wake of his admission to a psychiatric hospital for hypomania, which he had developed in reaction to receiving diagnosis of an aggressive type of brain tumour, a so-called glioblastoma. Over the first part of *Arbeit und Struktur*, the cancer diagnosis, in fact, appears secondary to the psychological fall-out caused by it, and its

⁷⁷ Trans.: 'silent, without a sound or word or action'. This is not a direct quotation from the article by Johannes Seibel, but Schlingensiefel's own paraphrase of its content, published in the newspaper on 11 September 2008. An excerpt from Seibel's original article has been reprinted in *Der Gesamtkünstler Christoph Schlingensiefel*, p. 330.

⁷⁸ The diary was begun in March 2010 and is still accessible online under <<http://www.wolfgang-herrndorf.de/>> [accessed 16 October 2015].

⁷⁹ Cardell, *De@r World*, p. 97.

circumstances are narrated only once, more than half a year into the diary.⁸⁰ This sets the tone for the text which – without downplaying or glossing over the physical effects of cancer on Herrndorf's body – is in large part a study of the human mind in extremis. In this, *Arbeit und Struktur* reflects a very contemporary dilemma, that in this form was unknown to previous generations: the ability of medicine today to diagnose terminal illness relatively early on, and even to be able to manage it over a significant period of time, has led to a prolonged phase of what may be termed 'livingly dying'.⁸¹ From the inside perspective, Herrndorf in *Arbeit und Struktur* explores whether it is at all possible to adjust to living with the concrete knowledge of one's own imminent extinction. In doing so, the diarist/author was his own experimental subject. The novelist thus rendered productive a situation which he neither wanted nor had planned for, and regained a limited sense of control over the illness by making use of the chance – and challenge – to document and deal with it on a daily basis.

Arbeit und Struktur, as the then relatively unknown author programmatically named his illness diary, soon attracted the attention – and imagination – of an ever-growing readership.⁸² The diary was edited posthumously as a book by Kathrin Passig and Marcus Gärtner, who quote Herrndorf's description of brain tumours as the Mercedes of illnesses, and his specific glioblastoma as the (yet more exclusive) Rolls-Royce. Herrndorf concluded the provocative statement self-consciously, and not without irony, thus: 'Mit Prostatakrebs oder einem Schnupfen hätte ich dieses Blog jedenfalls nie begonnen' (AS 444).⁸³ The severity of his diagnosis certainly gave the diary impetus and endowed it with a certain kind of status. In a diary entry reflecting on a telephone conversation with a friend, Herrndorf insists that there is something essential he believes they share as people suffering from a terminal illness: 'Man wird nicht weise, man kommt der Wahrheit nicht näher als jeder. Aber in jeder Minute beim

⁸⁰ Herrndorf holds off from narrating the moment of diagnosis in any detail until he decides to make the blog freely available online in September 2010; he then incorporates it into the beginning of a series of 'Rückblenden' [flashbacks] (from AS 97 onwards), which he writes in order to provide a more narrative back story to his diary, that by its nature began in situ. These passages serve as orientation for a general reader outside of the author's closer circle of friends and family, and prepare the diary for a wider readership that, one can infer, he expects from this point.

⁸¹ Blogger Marcy Westerling used the phrase to describe her life since diagnosis with ovarian cancer. She credits Christopher Hitchens to have inspired her to use it. Marcy Westerling, 'livingly dying. notes & essays on daily life with terminal cancer' <<http://livinglydying.com/>> [accessed 17 December 2015]. The editors of a special issue on death and dying in contemporary (largely German-language) literature describe the 'Ausdehnung des Sterbeprozesses' [extension of the process of dying] in this context. Anna Katharina Neufeld and Ulrike Vedder, 'An der Grenze: Sterben und Tod in der Gegenwartsliteratur. Einleitung', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 25.3 (2015), 495-498 (p. 495).

⁸² The majority of whom took first notice of Herrndorf as the author of *Tschick* and distinguished winner of the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis 2011 (category 'Jugendbuch').

⁸³ Trans.: 'If I'd had prostate cancer or a cold, I would have never started this blog.'

Tod zu sein, generiert eine eigene Form von Erfahrungswissen' (AS 227).⁸⁴ To share some of this knowledge appears to be one reason – a deeply caring and ethical one – that drove Herrndorf to write about cancer publicly.

The title *Arbeit und Struktur* points towards what became Herrndorf's self-prescribed antidote to the mental and physical suffering he had to endure, living with the glioblastoma. In the time the diary spans, the world he created in *Tschick* especially becomes his refuge; the labour of writing this book for adolescents and then *Sand* and *Bilder deiner großen Liebe* – which remained unfinished – bound him to and structured his life in the present.⁸⁵ Yet it was with the diary that Herrndorf explored new creative avenues, and the illness was central to this writing: *Arbeit und Struktur* came to be his only published life-writing text. This late turn to an autobiographical genre at a time when the author was seeking to express himself in and through illness warrants investigation in itself. For Herrndorf, publicising his autothanatographical diary online as a work-in-progress constituted a radical departure from his perfectionist pre-cancer ways of working.

The author addresses his diary's relation to other cancer narratives by inserting poems made up entirely of the titles of published cancer books (AS 47, 199, 314, 408). As a professional author, Herrndorf was highly conscious of literary genres and the (writerly) conventions and (readerly) assumptions associated with them. Texts referred to in this playful manner range from fellow sufferers' published diaries to parents' memoirs of their children's untimely deaths, and include Schlingensiefel's *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein!* (AS 199). Herrndorf's own eponymic mantra *Arbeit und Struktur* concludes each composition, not unlike the final lines in a Shakespearian sonnet. Hinting at the large number of such texts in circulation, what becomes clear is that the urge to write about one's personal experiences of illness and dying is as strong in unknown, first-time writers as it is in people with some kind of public profile and, in the case of Herrndorf, a distinct sense of authorship. In G. Thomas Couser's terminology, both 'somebodies' and 'nobodies', but maybe particularly the latter, as Couser has speculated, produce autobiographical writing about 'some body'.⁸⁶ Herrndorf's

⁸⁴ Trans.: 'One doesn't become wiser nor does one come closer to any kind of truth than anyone [else]. But to be with death every single minute generates its own form of empirical knowledge.'

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Herrndorf, *Tschick* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2010); *Sand* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2011); *Bilder deiner großen Liebe. Ein unvollendeter Roman* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2014). *Tschick* has since been translated into English and published as *Why We Took the Car* (London: Andersen, 2014; New York: Arthur A. Levine, 2014). The rights for his other texts have been sold to publishers around the world, and English translations of several of his texts, excluding the diary, are currently in preparation.

⁸⁶ G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2009), p. 2.

title collages point towards the popularity of such texts with a general readership; his juxtaposition of these titles with his own suggests a sameness between these texts, at least superficially. Yet Herrndorf's diary does not entirely fit in. Six of the titles appropriated by Herrndorf contain the word 'Himmel' [heaven]. Those which do not mention heaven still have Christian connotations, referring to paradise, or employing ideas of rebirth, angels, and images of rainbows. With the barren and concise formulation 'Arbeit und Struktur' always concluding the assemblages, Herrndorf consciously makes his cancer diary stand out from and contrast with his perception of the rest. Even though he sets his work among the ranks of this kind of illness writing, he also struggles with the association; one reason is that his text does not share the sentimentality that the others' titles at least seem to suggest, nor the Christian values that they imply.

At first sight, it may seem that *Arbeit und Struktur*, conceived as a blog and published in hardcover book form only posthumously, has undergone a medial transformation exactly opposite to that of Schlingensiefel's diaristic endeavour, which moved into the blogosphere only once the book was published. Despite putting different media to use at different times, upon closer examination it becomes clear that the development of both texts is actually very similar when one considers their gradually growing reach. We saw that for Schlingensiefel, having started out with voice recordings made when alone in his hospital room, the book publication of selected recordings was an intermediate stage, and a way to cement his commitment to his work when he found himself in the midst of treatment regimes. It was an effective way of addressing audiences that might not have necessarily been familiar with him previously – something that was important for the artist with a view to his works' desired social relevance. In Herrndorf's case, a private and at first access-restricted blog intended originally as nothing but a 'Mitteilungsveranstaltung für Freunde und Bekannte in Echtzeit' (AS 405) was made available to a wider online public only in a subsequent step, before eventually reaching out into the offline sphere after the author's death.⁸⁷ The motivation to thus incrementally widen access to the diary for an interested readership has its roots in the belief that there is value (literary, and otherwise) in the diary that goes beyond the personal. Without this growing conviction Herrndorf would not have published the text, a point I will explore further below.

In fact, from early on Herrndorf's blog carried features that, in its aesthetics, moved it close to the manuscript for a book publication; a manuscript that, however, was soon tried out on an online public rather than being kept under wraps. Although each entry was labelled with a

⁸⁷ Trans.: 'way of notifying friends and acquaintances in real-time'.

date and time of writing, they were grouped into chapters from the start. Even when it was available solely in blog form, *Arbeit und Struktur* had already been furnished with a preface. Furthermore, from the point that the evolving text was first made available, on the blog's landing page there was an indication, too, as to where to begin reading: 'Um das Blog in Gänze zu lesen, beginne man bei dem Eintrag Dämmerung.'⁸⁸ For the reader's convenience, the author hyperlinked the comment so that it would lead directly to the preface.

Herrndorf was to maintain the diary/blog for three-and-a-half years, up until a few days before his death on 26 August 2013, when – realising he would not have much longer to live – he committed suicide with a pistol. He first considered this option soon after learning of his diagnosis, and repeatedly returned to it in the diary as his 'Exitstrategie' (e.g. AS 50, 79, 87). During this time, and unlike Schlingensief in the final years of his life, Herrndorf decided to withdraw from the media and public in all but one way. *Arbeit und Struktur* became the sole channel through which he communicated publicly and his principal means to engage with news reports and comment on current debates, both those of an intellectual/ literary kind, as well as those concerning socio-political issues such as the liberalisation of German law on assisted dying that he pressed for. In what was both a self-protective and time-conscious manner, the author channelled all of the energy and time that remained to him into his writing.

Chronicing the Ill Self Online

Like Schlingensief before him, Herrndorf puts the diary form to a multitude of uses. Besides the blog being a platform for Herrndorf's observations of daily life from the radically altered perspective of terminal illness, and becoming his only medium of communication, it is also a free, impartial space for developing his 'Exitstrategie', and – linked to that – a way of managing impending death. In a very practical sense, *Arbeit und Struktur* becomes an extension of Herrndorf's 'Patientenverfügung' [living will] (AS 334). More personally, the writer memorialises the things and people he loves through it, sharing memories of his childhood or those that put in a nutshell the nature of a friendship, as well as posting short death notices for others (not unlike the obituaries that can be found on the *Schlingenblog*). *Arbeit und Struktur* frequently celebrates moments of connection with nature, and the author's love for the city of Berlin. It functions furthermore as Herrndorf's reading log as he runs 'Projekt Regression' (AS 39), re-reading his favourite books from when he was younger, and becomes important, not least, as a platform for his poetology.

⁸⁸ Trans.: 'In order to read the blog in full, start with the entry dawn.'

With life having forcefully demonstrated its finite nature, it is Herrndorf's declared aim to finish the half-written novels that now haunt him in their incompleteness (AS 104-105). Narrating retrospectively the days after his first operation in the flashbacks, he asserts that he had the ambition straight away: 'Ich werde noch ein Buch schreiben, sage ich mir, egal wie lange ich noch habe' (AS 107).⁸⁹ In this regard, the blog becomes a tool to track the progress he is making with his fiction writing during the prolific time that his final years with cancer will become.⁹⁰ This reminds one of similar tendencies of making the self accountable that we have observed in Schlingensiefel's *Tagebuch*, and that applied to his late work generally. It is so important to both diarists because their work is integral to their sense of identity. Herrndorf spells out the task he sets himself in the space of the diary, thus displaying his commitment in a form not dissimilar to a contract or 'pact' in Lejeune's sense:

13.3. 2010 11:00

Gib mir ein Jahr, Herrgott, an den ich nicht glaube, und ich werde fertig mit allem. (geweint)⁹¹
(AS 22)

This short entry from early in the blog is central to all that was yet to follow. It is not a coincidence that it is among the most-cited from *Arbeit und Struktur*. It was the reader of the diary/blog as much as Herrndorf himself who could check in real time if the author achieved the goals he had set himself.

Considering the writerly milieu Herrndorf frequented, one can see reasons for why it may have been a fairly obvious choice for him to write and publish *Arbeit und Struktur* online. Herrndorf was close to the capital's 'digital Bohemia' and a member of the creative network *Zentrale Intelligenz Agentur* [Central Intelligence Agency].⁹² Prior to writing this individual blog, Herrndorf had contributed to the communal literary blogs *Wir höflichen Paparazzi* [We, the polite paparazzi] and *Riesenmaschine* [Megamachine].⁹³ Lastly, he was a great admirer of

⁸⁹ Trans.: 'I am telling myself that I will write another book, no matter how long I have got left.'

⁹⁰ In this, Herrndorf's usage of the blog points back at the cultural practice of book-keeping that contributed to the development of the practice of diary writing as we know it today. See, for example: Philippe Lejeune, 'Counting and Managing', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Le Journal intime. Histoire et anthologie*, Paris: Textuel, 2006), pp. 51-60.

⁹¹ Trans.: 'Give me one year, oh Lord, who I don't believe exists, and I will finish it all. (crying).'

⁹² Compare the tongue-in-cheek self-ascription in Sascha Lobo and Holm Friebe's popular non-fiction book *Wir nennen es Arbeit: die digitale Bohème oder: Intelligentes Leben jenseits der Festanstellung* (München: Heyne, 2006).

⁹³ *Wir höflichen Paparazzi* was a literary internet forum where those invited to join put into writing their coincidental encounters with celebrities; the site had been moderated by Herrndorf's fellow Rowohlt-author Tex Rubinowitz. Texts are still online and retrievable under <<http://www.hoeflichepaparazzi.de/index.html>> [accessed 30 June 2015]. *Riesenmaschine* was another literary collaborative blog project which focused on the subject of inventions and trends, analysing contemporary culture and its products in a humorous, satirical fashion. It too is still online

Rainald Goetz, who as early as 1998/99 wrote and published the experimental diary *Abfall für alle* online – he was the first high-profile German-language author to close in a radical fashion the gap between production and reception of his daily writing in this way, until, after the course of one year, Goetz announced – with characteristic grandeur – that he had achieved self-realisation: ‘Schließlich war, ein Traum, der wahr geworden ist, das Buch entstanden, das ich bin.’⁹⁴ Among contemporary authors, Goetz must be mentioned as one of Herrndorf’s main inspirations. Goetz’s *Abfall*, indeed like Schlingensiefel’s *Schlingenblog*, is an example of an author writing the self online that preceded (and, in the case of Goetz, can be seen to have directly influenced) the genesis of *Arbeit und Struktur*. What unites all three blog authors is a radical approach to their artistic work that deliberately extended its reach into their lives as a whole. Each artist/writer, in the space of his respective blog, self-reflexively and daringly questioned and measured the private/public self against all-encompassing principles, openly probing current projects for their value, taking their own poetology as rules to live by.

In relation to other, more traditional forms of writing and publishing, however, (literary) blogs – despite and including the above-mentioned high-profile examples – are still niche products, catching the eye of only a small section of the reading public.⁹⁵ In this sense, keeping a diary online blurs the lines of presumed privacy and publicity all the more.⁹⁶ Linguistically too, the medium of the blog in particular offers itself up as a platform for keeping a diary, as the personal tone adopted by most bloggers naturally comes very close to that of the diarist.⁹⁷ The Internet, as a virtual space, epitomises a private/public space into which, in fact, all diaries are written. Publication in this realm therefore seems apt when dealing with delicate subject

<<http://riesenmaschine.de/>> [accessed 30 June 2015], but currently only used actively once a year when the *Riesenmaschine* is put to task to try and predict the winner of the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis.

⁹⁴ Trans.: ‘At last, a dream come true, the book that I am, came into being.’ Quotation from the blurb. Rainald Goetz, *Abfall für alle. Roman eines Jahres* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999). The ‘novel’, as the diary was called when published in book form, forms part of a five-part cycle titled *Heute Morgen. Geschichte der Gegenwart*. For more on German-language writers’ first big literary online projects from the mid-1990s (driven especially by those authors associated with ‘Popliteratur’, such as Goetz), and critics’ reactions to them, see: Frank Fischer, ‘Der Autor als Medienjongleur. Die Inszenierung literarischer Modernität im Internet’, in *Autorinszenierungen. Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*, ed. by Christine Künzel and Jörg Schönert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 271-280.

⁹⁵ It was from the time of its publication in book form that a wider reading public engaged with Herrndorf’s autothanatographical diary.

⁹⁶ Klaus Schönberger speaks of online blogs reaching ‘Mikroöffentlichkeiten’ or ‘Teilöffentlichkeiten’ [micro or partial public spheres] in this context, Jan Schmidt of ‘persönlichen Öffentlichkeiten’ [personal public spheres]. Klaus Schönberger, ‘Von der Lesewut zur Schreibwut?’, in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 112-14 (p. 113); Jan Schmidt, ‘Die A-List und der Long Tail. Persönliche Öffentlichkeiten in der Blogosphäre’, in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 115-117.

⁹⁷ For more on how bloggers tap into the diary’s aesthetic, see: Cardell, *De@r World*, pp. 95-101.

matter such as personal illness.⁹⁸ The large number of personal blogs and online diaries by ill and dying people of all ages (and from all walks of life) available on the Internet today seems to confirm that impression. Their number also demonstrates that a widespread desire to speak and be heard is felt by many ill people, most of whom do not lead lives in the public eye. Although Herrndorf, as a writer with a public profile, was the first online illness diarist to reach a larger audience in German, he should be read in the context of both the multitude of lesser-known illness blogs, and as standing alongside other professional writers who have confronted illness in this way, such as Ivan Noble and Tom Lubbock in the UK, for instance.⁹⁹

In the diary's early phase, the medium of the Internet gave Herrndorf – as the blog's author/producer – crucial independence from Rowohlt, the publishing house to which he was contracted, thus helping him keep the diary separate from his other writing. This separation between diary/blog (as his more personal pursuit) on the one hand, and his fiction writing on the other (as his professional occupation) dissolved over time. Yet, as Herrndorf started out on *Arbeit und Struktur*, it seemed particularly relevant to the professional author that the online diary does not have to meet the same normative expectations, considering style or 'literariness', as does the classic book. It can be a freer, looser, more experimental text – never completed, always ongoing, as long as its author is alive. As much as the diary/blog has endless potential, though, it is a text of the present, for two reasons: on the one hand, each post is available online for an audience to retrieve within split seconds of its having been uploaded; on the other, its ephemeral URLs, and with them all content, can be moved or deleted in the blink of an eye.

The blog's ultimate rootedness in the present fits in with the drastic change of perspective the glioblastoma brought about for Herrndorf, as can be assumed for many others confronted with a terminal diagnosis. Only by consciously refocusing on the present can he keep his fear of death in check, asserting that 'in der winzigen Sekunde der Gegenwart' he is 'unantastbar'

⁹⁸ For more on the appeal of blogging about one's experience of illness, see: Anthony McCosker, 'Blogging Illness: Recovering in Public', *M/C Journal*, 11.6 (2008) <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/104>> [accessed 4 September 2015].

⁹⁹ BBC journalist Ivan Noble, who was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2002, began to write a personal column on BBC online post-diagnosis. After his death, his illness writing was published in book form together with emails he had received from readers in response, as *Like a Hole in the Head: Living with a Brain Tumour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005). Noble calls this book his 'diary' (p. 18). Tom Lubbock too was a journalist who wrote in *The Observer* about his life with a glioblastoma. Herrndorf came across Lubbock's writing online and references it twice in *Arbeit und Struktur* (AS 158-59, 179). Lubbock's words and finally his death affected Herrndorf deeply as he discovered that he had much in common with the professional writer and art critic, not least the type of tumour they both suffered from. Also posthumously, Granta published Lubbock's 'memoir' entitled *Until Further Notice, I am Alive* (London: Granta, 2012), consisting of excerpts from the journal Lubbock had kept since diagnosis, plus a reprint of a substantial article on the illness experience he wrote for *The Observer* in 2010.

[untouchable] (AS 110).¹⁰⁰ Laconically, the diarist proclaims: 'Es beginnt: Das Leben in der Gegenwart' (AS 111).¹⁰¹ For the terminally ill author, who cannot rely on an imagined future any longer, the immediacy and independence offered by both online self-publishing and the present tense genre of the diary correspond to his needs as autothanatographer. Lastly, the diary form's inherent lack of plot proves to be an advantage as illness progresses and Herrndorf becomes less and less physically able to keep the diary regularly, ultimately relying on friends to help him upload new posts; posts which become shorter and sparser, before the blog as a whole falls silent just days before its author's death.

In the face of his relatively sudden rise to fame, and despite being able to control the form and shape of his diary's online presentation, Herrndorf soon had to deal with the fact that he could not entirely control the direction the text was taking. The impact of this will be discussed below, following consideration of the functions of *Arbeit und Struktur's* preface as a site of authorial self-reflexivity.

Herrndorf's Self-positioning as Natural Diarist in 'Dämmerung'

Although at first just a sideline to his fiction writing, contemporary readers soon observed Herrndorf's diary/blog transforming into a literary project all of its own – growing in importance and itself becoming work for the author. From the blog's very beginnings, the author strives to demonstrate his choice of the diary form as a natural one. Close reading of its preface reveals the crucial importance the diary had for him from the start, indicating the central position it would take up in Herrndorf's oeuvre as a whole. Entitled 'Dämmerung' [dawn], the preface relates Herrndorf's earliest memory ('erste Erinnerung an diese Welt'), as the writer declares, from around the age of two. It provides *Arbeit und Struktur* with what in German I would call an 'Urszene', a scene of origins, as it celebrates the intensity of sensory impressions experienced when waking up, and literally coming to one's senses. Herrndorf describes how, as a toddler, he experienced this feeling in perfect harmony with his surroundings – a blank slate: 'Mein Körper hat genau die gleiche Temperatur und Konsistenz wie seine Umgebung, wie die Bettwäsche [...]'.¹⁰² Metaphorically, this memory can be read to extend to a description of the birth of the author, as well as hinting at his return to the bed of death.

¹⁰⁰ Trans.: 'the tiny second that is the present'.

¹⁰¹ Trans.: 'Now launching: Life in the present.'

¹⁰² Trans.: 'My body has exactly the same temperature and consistency as its environment, the same as the bedding [...]'.²

The description of this particular morning conveys a feeling that can be described as ‘having fallen through the cracks of time’. Despite the author programmatically positioning himself as a nostalgic writer in the second paragraph – ‘Mein Blick war von Anfang an auf die Vergangenheit gerichtet’ – neither the past (that he cannot remember) nor the future (that he cannot yet imagine) comes close to the significance of the child’s vivid present, his being in the moment as described in these opening lines.¹⁰³ According to the adult Herrndorf, the sensation of waking up is one that he consciously relished despite his young age: ‘ich wünsche mir, dass es immer so bleibt’.¹⁰⁴ The final words of the one-page preface stress the consistency of this life-affirming desire over time: ‘[...] und immer wollte ich Stillstand, und fast jeden Morgen hoffte ich, die schöne Dämmerung würde sich noch einmal wiederholen’.¹⁰⁵ It seems to predestine Herrndorf as diarist and explains his motivation for returning to the blank page (even if it is a virtual one), time and again. Lastly, the image of dawn and the daily recurrence of that in-between time, being neither night nor day, is one heavy with meaning in relation to the act of diary-writing from the in-between place that is terminal illness, the fleeting dawn being a cipher for the transience of life.

The (momentary) being outside of time that the autothanatographical diarist programmatically strives for also signifies a coming-to-life in text. In ‘Rückblende, Teil 8: Fernando Pessoa’ (AS 135-140), the author recounts a psychotic episode (that will eventually lead to his hospitalisation) in which he is trying to recover a text he imagines having written, and in his frenzied, manic state he believes he has found ‘die Weltformel’ [the theory of everything]. Slipped into the middle of this account – easily missed – we find the following lines: ‘Aber vielleicht ist es ein literarischer Text? Ja, natürlich, das ist die Rettung: *Ich* bin in meinem eigenen Text, [...]’ (AS 136; emphasis mine).¹⁰⁶ In the face of the absurdity of having knowledge of one’s impending death, writing *Arbeit und Struktur* becomes a truly existential – or existentially metafictional – task. The author himself lends strength to my argument here when he closes his flashbacks and returns to the day-by-day mode of the diary thus: ‘PPS: Überflüssig zu erwähnen, daß der bei Holm von mir verzweifelt gesuchte Text später doch noch aufgetaucht ist: Es ist dieser Text’ (AS 149).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Trans.: ‘From the beginning, my gaze was directed at the past.’

¹⁰⁴ Trans.: ‘I wish for it to always stay this way’.

¹⁰⁵ Trans.: ‘[...] and I always wanted everything to come to a halt, and almost every morning I hoped for the beautiful dawn to break one more time.’

¹⁰⁶ Trans.: ‘But maybe it is a literary text? Yes, of course, that’s the salvation: *I* am in my own text, [...]’.

¹⁰⁷ Trans.: ‘PPS: Needless to say that the text I so desperately looked for at Holm’s did appear later on: It’s this text.’

There are several other passages in the diary that mention Herrndorf's struggles to say 'I' (AS 272-73, 290, 331), in times of emotional crisis, as a consequence of depersonalisation, and as he goes on to lose certain abilities that he had always considered to be almost innate. Keeping the diary that is *Arbeit und Struktur* helps consciously 'Ich zu sein und zu sagen' (AS 331).¹⁰⁸ In this light, it is unsurprising that the diary would become central as the illness progresses. Indeed, it becomes a major focus of Herrndorf's creative work; it comes closest to the idea of an author being, breathing, living in the text, and is aptly described by the author as 'Roman in Form einer Endlosschleife, [...] Text, der mich so glücklich und verzweifelt macht und der sich selbst und alles andere und die ganze Welt erklärt, [...]' (AS 139).¹⁰⁹

The Diary Develops a Dynamic of its Own

Over time, as Herrndorf comes to invest more time and creative energy into *Arbeit und Struktur*, the promise of personal as of writerly autonomy that the diary form has initially held for Herrndorf proves to be an illusion. This is a gradual realisation that the author/narrator in turn feeds back into the continuously evolving text, exploiting the fact that he can react so speedily in the medium of the blog. Along with Herrndorf himself, the diary's growing readership was thus confronted with at least some of the dangers the author recognised in his public confrontation with cancer.

A first example is the early commodification of Herrndorf's blog by his publisher Rowohlt, which used it for marketing purposes, and did so without the author's consent or knowledge (AS 96). It is a violation of boundaries for the author at a time when he is far from deciding if and how the diary texts will ever be published outside the online sphere. It constitutes the first of a number of incidents that bring home to Herrndorf his exposure and vulnerability as the author of an ongoing illness narrative of which he is also the protagonist and therefore – almost unavoidably – the ultimate tragic hero, whose nearness to death has a profound effect on the reader's imagination.

Rightly anticipating some interest in his person from when he first set up the blog, Herrndorf from the start had restricted ways for his readers to make contact with him. In the site notice, he specified: 'Keine Anfragen, keine Interviews, keine Lesungen, keine Ausnahmen. Bitte schicken Sie mir keine Bücher, keine CDs und nichts, was über Briefformat hinausgeht.'¹¹⁰ This

¹⁰⁸ Trans.: 'to be me and say I'.

¹⁰⁹ Trans.: 'novel in the form of an infinite loop, [...] text that makes me so happy and so desperate and that explains itself and everything else and the whole world [...]'.

¹¹⁰ Trans.: 'No enquiries, no interviews, no readings, no exceptions. Please do not send me any books nor CDs and nothing larger than a standard letter.' In reaction to Herrndorf's death, the site notice has been

message was supported by Herrndorf disabling the comment function that is built into most blogging software when setting up the blog, leaving no opportunity for readers to directly 'reply' to any of Herrndorf's entries.

As expected, and in parallel to his shooting to fame as the author of *Tschick*, by November 2010, Herrndorf nonetheless notes: 'Bekomme jeden Tag Briefe und Karten, die ich nicht mehr beantworten kann. Grüße an dieser Stelle' (AS 156).¹¹¹ This happens despite having discouraged most forms of direct communication (although not letters): the diary's availability seems enough of an argument for many to get in touch with the author. More than once, Herrndorf does use the blog to signal receipt of and thanks for the letters sent to him by other cancer sufferers, old acquaintances and school children (who share with him their opinion of *Tschick*). In an indirect way, his carrying on with the blog, post by post and day by day, is a reply to these letters in itself, and testimony to the encouragement that, although Herrndorf may not admit this explicitly, he draws from many of them.

As the illness progresses and the diary grows in content and in popularity, the pressure grows for the celebrity patient to be on guard concerning his privacy and sense of self. In November 2011, an outraged Herrndorf therefore repeats his terms of non-communication: 'Keine Anfragen, für alle, die Schwierigkeiten haben, das zu verstehen, bedeutet: Keine Anfragen' (AS 270).¹¹² This warning precedes an eloquent diatribe about the homeopathic treatment regimens or religious belief systems forced upon him by the 'mad' out there, as he calls them. They get in touch, unsolicited, via 'Brief, Mail, Telefon' [letter, email, telephone] (AS 312), having a serious impact on the programmatic 'Struktur' (emotional and otherwise) that Herrndorf yearns for and hoped to establish for himself by taking up the regular writing practice that is the diary: 'Und wieder ist mein Tag unterbrochen, wieder ist meine Arbeit unterbrochen, wieder stehe ich in meiner Wohnung und weiß nicht, wo ich war' (AS 312).¹¹³ He had not planned for these disruptions, and had underestimated the desire for contact the blog would instil in so many of his readers. Ironically, it is his success as a writer and diarist in engaging a readership so imaginatively that we see backfiring here. The imagined intimacy that prompts so many to get in touch must be directly attributed to *Arbeit und Struktur's* diary form, depicting life as it happens in all its banality and personal detail. A portrayal such as

changed several times; the statement referred to here, which was relevant only as long as the blog's author was alive, has since been removed.

¹¹¹ Trans.: 'Every day I receive letters and postcards that I cannot reply to anymore. Saying hello here instead.'

¹¹² Trans.: 'For anyone who has trouble understanding this, no enquiries means: no enquiries.'

¹¹³ Trans.: 'And yet again my day has been interrupted, again my work has been interrupted, again I am standing in my flat and don't remember where I was up to.'

Herrndorf's minimises the gap between reader and writer, bringing into the everyday sphere the experience of terminal illness that is unimaginable for a large section of the readership, and that for those themselves suffering from cancer, or another serious illness, evokes memories of comparable experiences. For Herrndorf, the scope of the intrusions he experiences is unexpected. As an effect of keeping the illness diary in real-time and so publicly, they infringe on his selfhood, or sense of autonomy, with each incident causing him to become more 'paranoid' (AS 390).

The media reports at that time which cast Herrndorf as a hard-working hermit and terminally ill prodigy add to this pressure and skew his self-representation by focusing upon the ill health of the author more than on his writerly achievements. His productivity continued to be hailed and admired, yet a certain fascination with the severity of the glioblastoma in his head in many cases diverted journalists from discussing Herrndorf's new publications in much depth.¹¹⁴ The reasonable fear of the writer in this context is that he will become famous for his illness instead of his literature, and reminds one of Schlingensiefel's conflicted feelings at the raging applause for him at the restaging of *Mea Culpa* in Munich. As a friend remarks with dry wit that Herrndorf enjoys and therefore shares in an entry: 'Die Sensation überwiegt die Konzeption, sagt Julia über Leben und Blog' (AS 253).¹¹⁵

All in all, this culminates in recurring entries expressing thoughts of abandoning the online diary; as they are rendered, they hint at the extreme emotional struggle involved in keeping a diary in the face of impending death:

23.2.2013 14:47

Würde die Arbeit am Blog am liebsten einstellen. Das Blog nur noch der fortgesetzte, mich immer mehr deprimierende Versuch, mir eine Krise nach der anderen vom Hals zu schaffen, es hängt mir am Hals *wie mein Leben wie ein Mühlstein*. Ich weiß aber nicht, was ich sonst machen soll. Die Arbeit an 'Isa' tritt auf der Stelle.¹¹⁶ (AS 392; emphasis mine)

¹¹⁴ See, for example: Martin Schulte, 'Schreiben für die Unsterblichkeit', *sh.z Schleswig-Holsteinischer Zeitungsverlag*, 9 December 2011 <<http://www.shz.de/incoming/schreiben-fuer-die-unsterblichkeit-id1878506.html>> [accessed 9 December 2015]. After Herrndorf's suicide, the media responses took on yet another quality, interpreting his literary production through the lens of his suicide, falling back on conventional cultural interpretations of authors' suicides. For more on these culture patterns, see: Marie-Isabel Matthews-Schlinzig, 'Der Suizid des Autors: Texte und Reaktionen (am Beispiel von Édouard Levé, André Gorz und Heinrich von Kleist)', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 25.3 (2015), 589-602.

¹¹⁵ Trans.: 'The sensation is larger than its conception, says Julia about life and blog.'

¹¹⁶ Trans.: 'Would love nothing better than to end my work on the blog. The blog [is] only the continued, more and more depressing attempt at ridding myself of one crisis after the other. *It is a millstone round my neck just like my [own] life*. Yet I don't know what else to do. Work on 'Isa' is stagnating.' 'Isa' is Herrndorf's working title of the manuscript that, in accordance with Herrndorf's wishes at the end of his life, would later be published (in unfinished form) as *Bilder deiner großen Liebe*.

At a point where its effectiveness as a means of self-empowerment is exhausted, the remedy becomes a burden in itself, and – as a ‘millstone’ – Herrndorf likens the diary to his life generally. Yet he sees no alternative to it, especially as he has vowed to work until the end. The diary project has at this point in time superseded all other writing projects.

Elsewhere, Herrndorf repeats his severe doubts about the blog:

19.4.2013 17:26

Den ganzen Tag lang über nichts anderes als darüber nachgedacht, das Blog einzustellen, nicht zum ersten Mal, die mühsame Verschriftlichung meiner peinlichen Existenz.¹¹⁷ (AS 405)

This time, however, and not coincidentally, another author/diarist’s words sound through these lines. They are those of Thomas Mann, who noted a year before his death: ‘Ich sollte aufhören, dies nutzlose, leere Tagebuch zu führen, aus Scham vor meiner gegenwärtigen elenden Existenz.’¹¹⁸ A sense of disillusionment and exhaustion comes across from both Herrndorf’s and Mann’s reflections on their nonetheless tireless diaristic activity, reflecting each writer’s state of mind at a bleak point in their lives, marked by illness and by old age, respectively, both nearing death. Herrndorf practically paraphrases Mann, albeit substituting the pivotal shame (in Mann) with the sense of tribulation that he feels, and replacing Mann’s misery with his own awkwardness and pain. The citation establishes a connection between the two authors and life-long diarists, neither of whom could imagine a life without their writing work.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, it indicates Herrndorf’s wider knowledge of diary literature, from which a reading of *Arbeit und Struktur* cannot be separated.

Herrndorf’s threats of ending the blog fit in with the more drastic impulse that overcomes him irregularly to destroy diary material, along with other items of his work (both drawings and paintings, and unpublished written work). This too, links him to other diarists from literary history. Although present in many diarists, the urge to destroy the memory archive that is the diary, at the same time as one expands it, may be particularly strong in autothanatographical writers. *Arbeit und Struktur* in this sense echoes Schlingensiefel’s forlorn words from late in his *Schlingenblog*, asking: ‘wen soll das das [sic] interessieren?’¹²⁰ Partly to record, partly to make

¹¹⁷ Trans.: ‘Spent the whole day thinking about nothing but finishing with the blog, and not for the first time. The arduous textualisation of my awkward [and/ or, in an older sense of the word: painful] existence.’

¹¹⁸ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher 1953-1955*, ed. by Inge Jens (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995), p. 242. Trans.: ‘I should stop keeping this useless, empty diary, for I am ashamed of my current miserable existence.’

¹¹⁹ For more on Mann’s diaries, see: T. J. Reed, ‘Mann as diarist’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 226-234 (p. 227).

¹²⁰ Trans.: ‘who is supposed to care about this?’

clear (and maybe to boast about) what did or did not fall prey to his destructive frenzies, Herrndorf tends to report about these acts of destruction afterwards in his blog (e.g. AS 232). In the face of his own anticipated death, Herrndorf cannot bear the thought of leaving older diaries or copies of personal letters behind. As the author's outlook on life, work and the blog changes, so too does his assessment of his past life and his previous work – many a time, the self-declared nihilist finds nothing is worth keeping. From the perspective of illness, his old diaries and letters especially make Herrndorf despair for his younger self's melancholy and aimlessness as he was drifting through life, until settling in Berlin. As can be gathered from the fragments published in the appendix to the book version of *Arbeit und Struktur*, about his Berlin years, the author on the other hand states emphatically: 'Hier bin ich der Mensch geworden, der ich bin' (AS 430-431).¹²¹ We notice that Herrndorf directly references Nietzsche's *Ecce homo* here, but in stark contrast to Schlingensiefel, who also does this as he feels a loss of his self through illness, Herrndorf recalls Nietzsche to assert that he feels he has found his true self and calling in the city. The tragedy, for Herrndorf, lies in having found his place so late in life.

Intellectually, Herrndorf somewhat anticipates that the diary will develop a dynamic of its own in the way outlined above. He is aware of what he succumbs to when setting out on *Arbeit und Struktur*, namely: 'die sich im Akt des Schreibens immer wieder einstellende, das Weiterleben enorm erleichternde, falsche und nur im Text richtige Vorstellung, die Fäden in der Hand zu halten' (AS 292).¹²² The illness diary demonstrates the author's essential interconnectedness with others, and remains ever aware of life's ultimate uncontrollability. It makes a mockery of illusions of autonomy so dear to us from the perspective of 21st-century individuality and hegemonic ableism – illusions that the writer Herrndorf too is keen to protect). This comes out, for example, in the consolatory poem he thinks up one night in the first months with cancer: 'Niemand kommt an mich heran/ bis an die Stunde meines Todes./ Und auch dann wird niemand kommen./ Nichts wird kommen, und es ist in meiner Hand' (AS 111).¹²³ The verse is designed to reassure the atheist author of his independence and agency. He recites it to himself whenever feeling overwhelmed, exactly because he, being subject to illness, is not in control of the course of events. Closely tied to this poetic assertion of autonomy are flash-forwards, as imagined by the author, of his suicide by firearm.

¹²¹ Trans.: 'Here I became who I am'.

¹²² Trans.: 'the notion, which regularly sets in during the act of writing, of holding the reins; a wrong assumption that massively helps with surviving, although it is right only within the text'.

¹²³ Trans.: 'No one can get hold of me / until the hour of my death. / And even then no one will come. / Nothing will come, and it is in my own hands.'

That Herrndorf as cancer sufferer is not exempt from ableist ideas – and that indeed these may have influenced the point in time at which he decided to take his own life – comes across when, in reaction to an epileptic attack, he attempts to define the limits of a life worth living: ‘Menschliches Leben endet, wo die Kommunikation endet, und das darf nie passieren. Das darf nie ein Zustand sein’ (AS 224).¹²⁴ This statement’s danger lies in its generalisation beyond the fears of the individual author. It relies on vague concepts: what, for instance, is meant by communication? Does it include touch and its perception? We can assume that Herrndorf defined communication much more narrowly, thinking primarily of his ability to express himself (and eloquently so), both orally and in writing. In the diary, Herrndorf actively negotiates and develops his views on difficult issues, yet does so always in the light of his own constitution. He employs the diary to engage in public discourse from a position of radical subjectivity.

In writing *Arbeit und Struktur*, Herrndorf relinquished the powers he had as a novelist (over a cast of characters, the plot, and the end of a story). Instead, as diarist he had to accept, as Lejeune describes it from the inside perspective, that ‘[w]e are writing a text whose ultimate logic escapes us; we agree to collaborate with an unpredictable and uncontrollable future.’¹²⁵ This highlights the experimental nature of all diaristic texts, as well as the vulnerability of their authors – and gives an idea of the immense difficulties (psychological, physical, and emotional) involved for the autothanatographical diarist. *Arbeit und Struktur* was a tightrope walk for its author/subject. Herrndorf could not bear the thought of leaving any work behind unfinished yet he knew that, by its nature, he would do exactly that in the case of the autothanatographical diary. Emotionally, this stretched Herrndorf to his limits as he wrote himself closer to his death, tracking his own decline, a day at a time.

Herrndorf’s Literary Sensibility

The magical power of literary words is addressed in *Arbeit und Struktur* when Herrndorf writes about a significant change that he notes in himself when beginning to read again in hospital, in the days after the first operation:

Ich bin Schriftsteller, und man wird nicht glauben, dass Literatur mich sonst kaltgelassen hätte. Aber was jetzt zurückkehrt beim Lesen, ist das Gefühl, das ich zuletzt in der Kindheit und Pubertät regelmäßig und danach nur noch sehr sporadisch und nur bei wenigen Büchern hatte: dass man teilhat an einem Dasein und an Menschen und am Bewusstsein von Menschen, an etwas, worüber man sonst im Leben etwas zu erfahren nicht viel Gelegenheit hat, selbst, um

¹²⁴ Trans.: ‘Human life ends where communication ends, and that must never happen. That must never be the state of affairs.’

¹²⁵ Lejeune, ‘The Diary as “Antifiction”’, p. 208.

ehrlich zu sein, in Gesprächen mit Freunden nur selten und noch seltener in Filmen, und daß es einen Unterschied gibt zwischen Kunst und Scheiße. Einen Unterschied zwischen dem existenziellen Trost einer großen Erzählung und dem Müll, von dem ich zuletzt eindeutig zuviel gelesen habe [...] ¹²⁶ (AS 104)

Rediscovering his readerly enthusiasm for literature inspires him to confront his own unfinished projects as a writer. In an indirect way, the above passage explains much about his own aims as author, and why literature has become his medium of choice for artistic expression. Within the imaginative space of the written word, Herrndorf hopes to enable his readership to have that special experience that he so values as a reader himself, aiming to make it possible for others to share in a character's consciousness and life-world. To him, a text qualifies as 'Kunst' [art] when it succeeds in offering such an experience upon interplay with a receptive reader's imagination. For the reader, the engagement with art thus defined presents a rare and precious opportunity for experiencing empathy and immersion across difference. Herrndorf himself, for example, finds it in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*: 'Meine Lieblingsstelle immer noch ihre einsame Wanderung. Wie sie fast verhungert, wie sie übernachtet zwischen Felsen und Heidekraut. Wo man sieht: ein Mensch. Und auch 150 Jahre nach ihrem Tod ist es immer noch: ein Mensch' (AS 59). ¹²⁷

Remarkably, in his role as reader, Herrndorf here blurs the lines between the image he has of the historical figure of Charlotte Brontë and the fictional heroine she created: from praising the text's ability to bring to life its eponymous heroine ('sie') and her struggles, he swiftly moves to assert the novel's longevity as a work of art by pointing out 'her' death so long ago as not having had an effect on *Jane Eyre's* literary potency. It is Charlotte Brontë's death, however, and not *Jane Eyre's*, which he refers to in making that point. We can infer that to Herrndorf, it appears secondary if a character is fictional or, as is indeed the case in the diary *Arbeit und Struktur*, if he/she finds a real-life referent in the author as life writer. This is consistent with Herrndorf's radical belief system that he develops during his illness. In various diary entries, he asserts: 'dass dieses Universum nicht existiert. Oder nur in diesem Bruchteil

¹²⁶ Trans.: 'I am an author, and you won't believe that literature would have left me cold in the past. But what returns now when I read is the feeling that I last had regularly in my childhood and in puberty, then only very sporadically, and only with very few books: the impression that one shares in an existence, in being human, and in the consciousness of other people. That is something that you don't have much chance to experience otherwise in life, only rarely, if we are honest, in conversations with friends and even more rarely when watching films. And the realisation that there is a difference between art and crap. A significant difference between the existential solace of a great narrative und the rubbish that I have recently been reading too much of.'

¹²⁷ Trans.: 'My favourite passage still her lonely walk. The way she almost starves, and spends the night between rocks and heather. Where you realise: a human being. And even 150 years after her death it still is: a human being.'

dieser Sekunde' (AS 57).¹²⁸ And in a similar vein: 'Es gibt uns nicht. Wir sind schon vergangen' (AS 421).¹²⁹ From this point of view, Herrndorf further relativises any distinction between any kind of text-external reality and that contained in literary writing. Ultimately, it is a consoling thought for the ill author that time did not take a toll on *Jane Eyre's* literary power nor its popularity. In Charlotte Brontë, Herrndorf finds an author who – in her readers' imaginations – in some sense 'lives on' through her literary legacy. Not least, this points forwards to potential workings of the posthumous reception of Herrndorf's own writing.

Herrndorf's criteria for what kind of writing is of literary value, we note, are markedly different to the mainstream critics' that seem so intent against considering illness narratives as literature: they are certainly not divided along deceptively clear-cut boundaries of fictional and non-fictional genres, nor are they to do with the subject matter of a text. Much more relevant, to Herrndorf, are a text's accessibility or readability, as well as a thought or an emotion's validity over time; in other words, a piece's potential – both in form and in content – to remain relevant beyond its specific moment.

Herrndorf has, however, no illusions about the difficulty of conveying something of one person's 'Bewusstsein' to another relying solely on the medium of language. He thinks this through in relation to himself, writing – and waiting, moribund – as a dying man. As he attempts a definition of this key term in his poetics,¹³⁰ the near-impossibility of realising what he strives for as diarist, recording and sharing some of his own inner landscape, is acknowledged:

5.7. 2011 20:26

Warten. Wenn man stirbt, stirbt das Bewusstsein. *Was ist das Bewusstsein?* Man spürt es nicht. Um es zu spüren, fehlt das Organ. Ein paar Gedanken, die sich vergeblich selbst untersuchen, ein paar Ideen vielleicht, zu weiten Teilen ein Ramschladen, das meiste secondhand. Irgendwo ein *Buchhalter*, der die Inventarliste schreibt, die immer wieder angefangene und nie vollendete Sicherungskopie des ganzen Unternehmens, flüchtigen Medien, *Tagebüchern*, Freunden, Floppy Discs und Papierstößen anvertraut in der *Hoffnung*, sie könne eines Tages auf einem ähnlich fragwürdigen Betriebssystem wie dem eigenen unter Rauschen und Knistern noch einmal abgespielt werden.¹³¹ (AS 214; emphasis mine)

¹²⁸ Trans.: 'that this universe doesn't exist. Or merely in this fraction of this second.'

¹²⁹ Trans.: 'We do not exist. We have already passed on.'

¹³⁰ The term first crops up in the preface as the author describes his younger self as 'durch einen sonderbaren Zufall zu Bewusstsein gekommen' [having become conscious through a peculiar circumstance]; see the section on 'Dämmerung' above.

¹³¹ Trans.: 'Waiting. Your consciousness dies when you die. *What is consciousness?* You can't feel it. We lack the organ to feel it. A few thoughts, which analyse themselves to no avail, a few ideas maybe, but in large parts a junk shop, most of it second-hand. Somewhere there's a *bookkeeper* who is making an inventory; the backup copy of the whole enterprise that is started again and again and never completed; fleeting media, *diaries*, friends, floppy discs and stacks of paper are entrusted with it in the *hope* that in

As the subject of ongoing debate in the sciences and in philosophy, the question of the nature of consciousness that he puts to himself must by necessity be approached creatively. And this is, of course, exactly where the author's – and generally literature's – strengths lie. For the dying man, it soon turns into the more pressing question of if and how one's consciousness, and individual perspective on the world, can 'outlive' a person's (physical) death. Strikingly, when considering the traces one leaves, Herrndorf is quick to see the act of diary writing as a way of preserving and sharing at least a fraction of one's elusive mental landscape. What is more, he does not only mention the diary verbatim, but also his role as diarist: he is that bookkeeper taking the inventory, producing the faulty backup copy – all in the hope of finding readers willing to engage with the self-reflexive product of one man's short-lived consciousness vis-à-vis death. We are familiar with this hope he puts in the readership from the autothanatographer Schlingensiefel.

In the light of Herrndorf's hardened nihilism, any such expression of hope (to connect with a readership, potentially creating something of lasting value to people) cannot remain uncontested. However tentatively the feeling is expressed in *Arbeit und Struktur* in the first place, its optimism is immediately qualified by the author pointing out the absurdity of his diaristic project, considering the grand scheme of things:

Der Versuch, sich selbst zu verwalten, sich fortzuschreiben, der Kampf gegen die Zeit, der Kampf gegen den Tod, der sinnlose Kampf gegen die Sinnlosigkeit eines idiotischen, bewusstlosen Kosmos, und mit einem Faustkeil in der erhobenen Hand steht man da auf der Spitze des Berges, um dem herabstürzenden Asteroiden noch mal richtig die Meinung zu sagen.¹³² (AS 214)

Approaching the end of his life, he must convince himself of the craft of writing and the powerful effect of reading all the more, employing the primitive tools at his disposal: the hand axe that self-mockingly stands for the writer's pen, or blogger's keyboard.

Despite the difficulties for the autothanatographer outlined here, Herrndorf rejects concerns over voyeurism and reverence that are so typically and readily proffered, as forms of exclusion. From the perspective of the terminally ill author, these appear hypocritical, and are merely a way of policing discourse: 'Denn warum nicht hingucken?' (AS 254),¹³³ Herrndorf asks in

amongst the background noise and crackling they could one day be played back again, on a similarly dubious operating system as one's own.'

¹³² Trans.: 'The attempt to administer the self, to continue writing it, the battle against time, the battle against death, the pointless battle against the pointlessness of an idiotic, non-sentient cosmos, and with a hand axe held high one stands on the top of a mountain to give the asteroid that comes crashing down a piece of one's mind.'

¹³³ Trans.: 'Why shouldn't we look on?'

October 2011 in the context of having watched a documentary about André Rieder,¹³⁴ a man living with manic depression who comes to end his life with the organisation Exit in Switzerland. Discontent with the fact that the film omits showing the man's actual death, the rhetorical question the author poses reveals part of his motivation for having made his own diary available to the online reading public. Having set out to write through illness and until the end, he aims to minimise the gap the documentary leaves as it refrains from showing the moment of Rieder's death.

In its eschewal of screening such images, ultimately circumnavigating the controversial core of its subject matter, the documentary's structure demonstrates the force of the cultural taboos that surround the act of killing oneself as well as the showing of corpses and the moment of dying. Himself more and more concerned with, indeed fascinated by the 'Darstellung der unbegreiflichen Nichtigkeit menschlicher Existenz' (AS 255) as he prepares for his own death,¹³⁵ Herrndorf, by having his diary online, invites 'the gaze of the outsider' (Lejeune) and offers anyone willing to read it a glimpse into life with progressive illness and nearing death.¹³⁶ Doing so connects back to Herrndorf's literary ideals, precisely aiming to enable the reader to get an idea of 'etwas, worüber man sonst im Leben etwas zu erfahren nicht viel Gelegenheit hat' (AS 104).¹³⁷ Reacting to the panel discussion that follows the programme, the diarist notes: 'Pietät mein Arsch. Wenn mit Lebenden einmal so pietätvoll umgegangen würde wie mit Toten oder Sterbenden oder wenigstens ein vergleichbares Gewese drum gemacht werden würde' (AS 255).¹³⁸ Beyond being a comment on the Rieder case, it is a comment too on the irony he sees in his own soaring fame as celebrity patient.

The Diary as a Means of 'Touching Time'

Time becomes a precious resource for Herrndorf, and its passing a major problem. Keeping the diary displays at once an obsession with time, as well as providing a way of writing the self in what could be called suspended time. *Arbeit und Struktur's* preface and the image of dawn that the author conjures up in it suggest as much, and so does the text's growing importance for Herrndorf as he is approaching death.

¹³⁴ The film is not mentioned by title, but it can be assumed to be Hanspeter Bäni's 2011 documentary 'Tod nach Plan'.

¹³⁵ Trans.: 'representation of the inconceivable futility of human existence'.

¹³⁶ Lejeune, 'The Diary as "Antifiction"', p. 204.

¹³⁷ Trans.: 'something that you otherwise in life don't have much chance to experience'.

¹³⁸ Trans.: 'Piety my arse. If only the living were treated with as much piety as the dead or dying or at least were made a similar fuss about.'

In June 2012, Herrndorf logged his thoughts after reading the diary of Anne Frank, the best-known diary of our time.¹³⁹ Reflecting on how as a child, German history to him was ‘vergangenste Vergangenheit’ [a bygone past] (AS 333), his reading of Anne Frank’s diary now, as an adult, gives rise to the exact opposite impression: ‘Jetzt zum ersten Mal die zeitliche Dimension bemerkt: 23 Jahre liegen zwischen dem ersten Tagebucheintrag und meiner Geburt, eine Generation, mehr nicht, ein Wimpernschlag’ (AS 333).¹⁴⁰ The fact that Frank chose the diary form and duly dated her entries is exactly what, to borrow the words of Lejeune, paradoxically ‘immunizes it against ageing’,¹⁴¹ in the sense that it gives Herrndorf the opportunity to pick up on and relate to a specific historical date from his position in the present. Even more so, it enables the reader Herrndorf to experience ‘the feeling of *touching time*’.¹⁴² It is above all for this, its potential for reaching out across differences (temporal, amongst others), that Anne Frank’s diary qualifies as literature, when measured against Herrndorf’s literary ideals. And it explains why Herrndorf himself chose the diary genre for what many would soon see as ‘sein eigentliches Hauptwerk’.¹⁴³

The effect of touching time is precious when it occurs; Herrndorf also writes about the frustration of failing to achieve this, when he himself brushes up against the limits of his imagination. In an entry from November 2010, pervaded by suicidal thoughts, two other historical figures crop up; these are Albrecht Dürer and the life model for Dürer’s 1493 drawing ‘Female Nude (with Headcloth and Slippers)’:

[...] ich denke an Dürer, der tot ist, warum ausgerechnet Dürer, ich weiß es nicht, an einen seit 500 Jahren toten Maler, der seine Badefrau gezeichnet hat, der ihr gegenüber saß und sie zeichnete, der mit ihr redete, kein Mensch weiß, worüber, und sie waren glücklich oder unglücklich, verschämt oder aufgekratzt, verliebt oder gleichgültig, für ein paar Minuten oder Stunden, waren einmal *reale* Wesen in einer *realen* Welt, was man sich *nicht vorstellen* kann.

¹³⁹ Sales figures for Anne Frank’s diary exceed 30 million copies; the text has been published in at least 65 languages. Tine Nowak, ‘Das meistgelesene Tagebuch der Welt’, in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 142-145 (p. 144). In 2009, UNESCO added Anne Frank’s manuscripts to the World Heritage List for documents, the so-called Memory of the World Register.

¹⁴⁰ Trans.: ‘For the first time I have consciously noticed the temporal dimension: 23 years lie between the first diary entry and my birth, one generation, that’s all, the blink of an eye.’

¹⁴¹ Lejeune, ‘The Diary as “Antifiction”’, p. 209.

¹⁴² Lejeune, ‘The Diary as “Antifiction”’, p. 209. Lejeune isolates this characteristic of the diary as one that is essential to its reception; it accounts for the reader’s fascination with it, and ontologically distinguishes it from fiction.

¹⁴³ Trans.: ‘actually his most important work’. Felicitas von Lovenberg, ‘Zum Tod Wolfgang Herrndorfs. Dieses Zuviel ist niemals genug’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 27 August 2013 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/zum-tod-wolfgang-herrndorfs-dieses-zuviel-ist-niemals-genug-12549002.html>> [accessed 18 August 2015].

Ich kann es mir *nicht vorstellen*. Und die Absurdität macht mich verrückt.¹⁴⁴ (AS 160; emphasis mine)

His thinking of Dürer is, of course, not quite as random as Herrndorf makes it out in this passage, the painter being one of the old masters he so admired when studying art in Nürnberg, Dürer's hometown. Albeit able to visualise the drawing, a work of art that has outlasted centuries, what remains distant is an understanding of the artist and his model as people, who once were living, breathing humans just as the diarist himself is in this moment. Unlike in the case of Anne Frank's daily life and thoughts as rendered in her diary, Herrndorf fails at imagining the couple alive on the basis of the image that has remained of their encounter. As a consequence, the famous sketch remains enigmatic, hollow, lifeless. The repeated use of the adjective 'real' and the successive negations of the verb 'vorstellen' [to imagine] indicate the extent to which this bothers him. It drives him insane, as he puts it, because it is exactly what he writes against in *Arbeit und Struktur*: 'Die Unmöglichkeit, sich ein nicht selbst erlebtes Vergangenes vorzustellen, die Unmöglichkeit, sich in ein anderes Lebewesen hineinzudenken, die Unmöglichkeit, sich das Nichtsein vorzustellen' (AS 160).¹⁴⁵ The autothanatographical diary is the author's attempt to chip away at these bounds of the human imagination, counting on the power of literature as a site where memory comes alive – very much with his own readership in mind.

Fact, Fiction, and the Faculty of Imagination – Reaching beyond Genre

In *Arbeit und Struktur*, human inventiveness (expressed both in the form of Herrndorf's admiration for all kinds of inventions and scientific knowledge, as well as his pleasure in his own and also others' literary creativity) comes up against humankind's limited agency in times of illness. Worst of all, for Herrndorf, is to have to endure not knowing any definite facts concerning the course his life with, and death from, illness will take; he receives conflicting prognoses from the various doctors that treat him (AS 30-31) and comes up with contradictory findings when searching the Internet for medical research on the type of brain tumour he suffers from. The only way the diarist can bear the severe uncertainty he faces is through

¹⁴⁴ Trans.: '[...] I am thinking of Dürer, who is dead, why Dürer out of all people; I don't know. A painter who has now been dead for 500 years, who drew his woman before the bath, sat opposite her and drew her, talked to her, no-one knows what about, and they were happy or unhappy, coy or in high spirits, in love or indifferent, for a few minutes or hours, once were *real* people in a *real* world, which you just *can't imagine*. I *cannot imagine* it. And the absurdity of it drives me insane.'

¹⁴⁵ Trans.: 'The impossibility of imagining a past you haven't yourself experienced, the impossibility of knowing what is going on inside another creature, the impossibility of imagining not existing.'

creative play. His rendering of a walk to 'Dr. Fünf's [Dr. Five] (AS 397) on a snowy morning exemplifies what this entails:

Im Laufen mache ich einen Schneeball und werfe ihn mit einer halben Drehung nach einem Laternenmast, an dem ich gerade vorbeigegangen bin, um herauszufinden, ob ich zu den 0,5 Prozent Zehn-Jahre-Überlebenden gehöre. Ein Meter vorbei. Man hat nur einen Versuch, oder? Oder darf ich nochmal? Nein, wie im richtigen Leben, immer nur einmal.¹⁴⁶ (AS 398)

The outcome of the snowball experiment is as valid or deceptive as any other prediction. Other examples of such creative, sometimes literary, play are Herrndorf's editing of false information into Wikipedia in order for it to match the worlds he is building in his fiction (AS 151), as well as his incorporating into a diary entry the life expectancy of three to four years that a doctor predicts to him in a dream (AS 153). The latter is reported in the text in the same matter-of-fact manner as the prognoses Herrndorf wrests from doctors in his waking life. Indeed, from the very beginning of the illness diary, fact and fiction seem to approximate each other, or maybe more fittingly, reach into each other: the author reveals that what helps him settle into life on the psychiatric ward is the fact that a fellow patient strikes him as resembling the fictional character Isa he had created for *Tschick* (AS 9-14). To begin, and to keep writing the diary, upholds a creative perspective on the world that gives the fantastical the same ontological status as the reality that encroaches upon him; a perspective which could be labelled romantic.¹⁴⁷ It is the maximum degree of spirituality that Herrndorf allows himself. It is not a privileging of fiction over fact (that is, not a form of detachment from the world), but rather, it suggests an approximation of the two. *Arbeit und Struktur's* aesthetic is one that suspends 'normal' judgement and gives the realm of a playful, literary speculation as much validity as the empirical world surrounding, or closing in on its author. In this sense, Herrndorf's illness diary demonstrates the kinship of the fictional and the non-fictional in a way that only life writing, and maybe particularly end-of-life writing, can do.

The diary documents Herrndorf's ongoing engagement with the effect of genre ascriptions – reflecting on the potential of autobiographical writing in particular. In this context, he compares Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser* (1785-90) and Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782-

¹⁴⁶ Trans.: 'As I am walking I form a snowball in my hands and, doing a 180-degree turn, I throw it back at the lamppost I just walked past, in order to find out if I belong to the 0.5 per cent ten-year-survivors. I miss by a metre. You only get one chance, don't you? Can I try again? No, like in real life, always just one go.'

¹⁴⁷ At the risk of simplification, I would draw out the following aspects of Herrndorf's diary aesthetic as being influenced by Romanticism: the attempt to conciliate an emphasis on reason with a distinct focus on emotion and individuality, and Herrndorf's aspirations, as I am trying to highlight them in this section, of cutting across traditional ideas of genre and their boundaries (for the Romantics, part of their striving towards an 'Universalpoesie').

1789), and by doing so goes back to texts that are today canonised as two of the first major secular autobiographies. Herrndorf appreciates Rousseau's 'uneinlösbaren Anspruch' [unachievable aspiration] (AS 292) of wanting to show 'a man in every way true to nature',¹⁴⁸ as the famous opening lines have it, but he finds that Moritz's *Reiser* comes much closer to realising this aim. With *Reiser*, Herrndorf notably favours a book that entered literary history for revolutionising both the novel genre and that of autobiography.¹⁴⁹

Thus relating his writing *Arbeit und Struktur* to Rousseau (critically) and Moritz (favourably), and by doing so to the literary history of autobiographical writing that they stand for, Herrndorf comments explicitly on his own approach to the practice of diary writing from the contemporary margins of that tradition, ending in the following ellipsis:

Das Gefasel von der Unzuverlässigkeit des Gedächtnisses und der Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache spare ich mir, allein der berufsbedingt ununterdrückbare Impuls, *dem Leben wie einem Roman zu Leibe zu rücken*, die sich im Akt des Schreibens immer wieder einstellende, das Weiterleben enorm erleichternde, falsche und nur im Text richtige Vorstellung, die Fäden in der Hand zu halten und das seit langem bekannte und im Kopf ständig schon vor- und ausformulierte Ende selbst bestimmen und den tragischen Helden mit wohlgesetzten, naturnotwendigen, fröhlichen Worten in den Abgrund stürzen zu dürfen wie gewohnt –¹⁵⁰ (AS 292; emphasis mine)

– this, one surmises, is what he permits himself to do. For one, the autothanatographer claims his right to speak here. By pointing out that his work as life writer is not so different from his work as novelist, he too moves the diary in the proximity of the novel with this statement. In doing so, he builds on Moritz's remodelling of his own autobiographical story into *Anton Reiser*, a publication with which Moritz sparked a new genre, that of the 'psychological novel', according to the text's subheading. This resonated with Herrndorf who found it apt 'to approach life like a novel' and who, by keeping *Arbeit und Struktur*, takes up the 'Prinzip der Selbstbeobachtung' [principle of self-observation] advocated by Moritz,¹⁵¹ identifying threads and themes which run through his life and feeding these into the diary. This gives *Arbeit und Struktur*, when read as a whole, a certain narrative coherence, and invites readers to treat the

¹⁴⁸ The second sentence of Rousseau's *Confessions* as translated into English by J. M. Cohen and cited above, reads in full: 'My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself.' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1953), p. 17.

¹⁴⁹ Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie*, Sammlung Metzler, 323 (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Metzler, 2000), p. 152.

¹⁵⁰ Trans.: 'I spare myself ramblings about the unreliability of memory or the shortcomings of language, solely the impulse – irrepressible and down to my occupation – *to approach life like a novel*, the notion that again and again sets in during the act of writing of holding the reins, which is wrong, only right in text, yet makes going on living so much easier; and to decide over the long-known and in the mind's eye perpetually pre- and fully-formulated ending; and with words that are well-placed, cheerful, and by their nature, essential to bring ruin on the tragic hero as per usual –'.

¹⁵¹ Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie*, p. 153.

text as 'life fiction',¹⁵² subject to one condition: that they do not repudiate the actuality of the diarist's existence, which Herrndorf strips down to this: 'Im einen Moment belebte Materie, im nächsten dasselbe, nur ohne Adjektiv' (AS 255).¹⁵³

Creative life writing as Herrndorf practises it deconstructs any traditionalist binary thinking about fictional genres on the one hand and non-fictional (e.g. autobiographical) genres on the other – or the novel and the diary more specifically – and rehabilitates the diary as literature. It demonstrates that the diary can be and is put to poetic and to narrative uses. Lastly, it shows that out of the snapshots that are individual entries, over time and as the diarist writes on, unrestrained by genre, an image of a self emerges.

Posthumous Reading Practices and Herrndorf's Selfies

When studying autothanatographical diaries, one must bear in mind that one's reading from a posthumous stance is a very different reading to that of the contemporary blog follower. The latter reads entries in what comes close to real-time, most likely beginning with the latest rather than the oldest post, and of necessity does so discontinuously, in a pattern determined by the rhythm in which entries were published. The reader of the diary as book can be assumed to read a larger number of passages at a time and in chronological order, and – as an effect – may not become aware of days of silence when thus consuming the diary in its printed form. In a sense, the book reader fast-forwards the illness narrative, somewhat overriding a defining characteristic of the diary form, namely the interval between 'Unterbrechung und Wiederaufnahme' [disruption and resumption] of the act of writing.¹⁵⁴ In this respect, posthumous reading habits also move the diary closer to the novel form. This almost inevitable change in reading practice in part stems from the knowledge later readers have of *Arbeit und Struktur's* 'ending', that is the deterioration of Herrndorf's health and his suicide which take place outside the text. And although not all later readers will approach it in book format, to those who do the form of the printed book itself suggests completion and closure. Readers coming to the text after Herrndorf's death on 26 August 2013 therefore necessarily, and unavoidably, wear a different interpretative hat. Herrndorf's role is now confined to that of protagonist in the diary text, as he himself had anticipated.

¹⁵² Laurie McNeill, 'Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks: The Diary on the Internet', *Biography*, 26.1 (2003), 24-47 (p. 45).

¹⁵³ Trans.: 'One moment [you are] live matter, the next, [you're] the same, just lacking the adjective'.

¹⁵⁴ Günter Oesterle, 'Die Intervalle des Tagebuchs – das Tagebuch als Intervall', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 100-103 (p. 100).

Herrndorf, in fact, tested out his becoming a character when writing himself into *Bilder deiner großen Liebe*, the last piece of fiction he was working on in parallel to *Arbeit und Struktur*. Narrator/protagonist Isa renders Herrndorf's cameo appearance as follows: "“Was machst du da?”, fragt ein Mann, der wie aus dem Boden neben mir aufgetaucht ist. Er trägt eine grüne Trainingsjacke.¹⁵⁵ It is his trademark Adidas jacket that makes him so recognisable here, one he can be seen wearing in a widely used author's portrait, for instance. Poignantly, the dying author's fictional self appears to Isa in a graveyard, and strikes up a conversation about commemoration rituals with her. Just like the lines of fiction and reality can come to blur within the diary, then, the author here crosses over into the narrative world of Isa to become a character in his own fiction – if only for a moment, as after a short exchange he disappears again.

On the one hand, then, *Arbeit und Struktur* points out the permeability of the boundaries between fact and fiction, diary and novel. On the other, Herrndorf corroborates the extra-textual referentiality of *Arbeit und Struktur* as a piece of life writing by incorporating photographs into the diary/blog. The majority of the inserted photos are so-called 'selfies'; the angle and quality of the images suggest that they have been taken with the built-in camera of Herrndorf's laptop computer. Most of these snapshots depict the diarist looking straight at the camera lens – thereby complying with a classic feature of self-portraiture.¹⁵⁶ Thus making reference to self-representations in painting is yet another way of dismissing the charges that autobiographical writing incurred within literary studies. After all, in visual art, self-portraiture has been an established, reputable genre for centuries.

In the no-frills shots he takes of himself, Herrndorf displays hardly any facial expression, keeps posing to a minimum, and rarely comments on a picture when he inserts one. This marks them as matter-of-fact, documentary material. The diarist is not exactly inviting, yet allows for readers to have an emotional reaction to these images. He takes the photographs in his flat (AS 70, 269, 345), outdoors (AS 82, 159), and in hospital rooms (AS 174, 265, 297), as can be gathered from the background of the pictures. Most of them have been carried over from the blog into the book publication, too, albeit reproduced in black and white.

¹⁵⁵ Trans.: "“What are you doing there?”, asks a man who has popped up next to me out of nowhere. He is wearing a green tracksuit top." Herrndorf, *Bilder deiner großen Liebe*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁶ Corina Caduff, 'Selbstporträt, Autobiografie, Autorschaft', in *Autorschaft in den Künsten. Konzepte – Praktiken – Medien*, ed. by Caduff and Tan Wälchli, Zürcher Jahrbuch der Künste, 4 (Zürich: Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, 2008), pp. 54-67 (p. 58).

On a documentary level, and as they accumulate over time, the images capture physical changes in the author. These changes are often subtle, but can sometimes be drastic, as when Herrndorf – back home from hospital – holds the back of his head squarely into the webcam, taking a picture that shows off a fresh scar, complete with staples; a result of the latest operation (AS 269). The diarist himself can, with some justification, be seen as the primary beholder of these visual records of illness (and its treatment) that he produces; without taking the picture of the scar, for example, Herrndorf himself would not have been able to view it in the first place. What is more, this and other photos allow Herrndorf momentarily to externalise his viewpoint, and relate to the images as if he were a reader. Adopting Roland Barthes' terminology from *Camera Lucida*, the diarist is tempted by the possibility of taking up the position of operator, spectrum and spectator all at once; in other words, he who takes the 'selfie' image is subject in it, and views it too.¹⁵⁷ With Herrndorf's diary otherwise consisting largely of text, each of these photographic self-portraits – especially in the way they appear to the blog reader as they scroll down, and in full colour – is a calculated disruption to one's flow of reading. Conscious of the media at his disposal, the diarist employs photography in this way to remind his readership that this diary is – now was – lived reality for him.

Through insertion of these images, readers are prompted to consider the ways in which they themselves are implicated in the illness diary. Herrndorf offers a face to his diaristic voice, and thus honours expectations of intimacy that readers bring to life writing, and above all diary texts. Yet it depends on the individual reader if they can pause, linger and endure the gaze that the dying author directs at them from the self-portraits, or if they find themselves quickly scrolling past them. Herrndorf, who made his diary available for anyone to read, and himself to be looked at, is looking back. His insertion of these images can be seen as a way of ensuring a balance between inviting readers who come to his blog from the vastness of the Internet to read his illness story as they would fiction, and visually confronting them with the fact that he is – at least at the time of writing – one of them, one of the living. Part of accepting that likeness with the author means that the reader must accept the more difficult truth of their own mortality. Herrndorf's use of amateur photography in this way echoes Schlingensiefel's more direct provocations of readerships and audiences. Both end-of-life diarists knowingly confronted the public with their thanatophobia. They knew of its shock value. In the words of Walter Benjamin, which Schlingensiefel chose as epigraph to his diary publication: 'Es gibt für

¹⁵⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993; orig.: *La Chambre Claire*, Paris: Gallimard/ Seuil, 1980).

die Menschen, wie sie heute sind, nur eine radikale Neuigkeit – und das ist immer die gleiche: der Tod.’¹⁵⁸

The use of photography in the autothanatographical diary addresses directly the dying author’s anticipated transformation from subject to object. As Susan Sontag has rightly highlighted, ‘[a]ll photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.’¹⁵⁹ Like the diary genre, then, the medium of photography takes issue with time, without being able to halt it. What it can do, however, is to attempt to give reassurance that ‘something [or somebody; N. Sch.] exists, or did exist’.¹⁶⁰ If, in life, the diarist’s self-portraits emphasised the author’s presence, they now, in his death, reinforce his absence. Through the visual aesthetic of pop culture rather than that of high art, Herrndorf’s selfies indicate, too, how the diarist would like to be read, namely with a minimum of ‘elegies, praise, and idealization’ that typically launch a dead celebrity’s ‘posthumous career’ as public negotiations of that person’s after-image begin.¹⁶¹ The decision to tap into and combine the everyday practices of taking selfies and keeping a diary reinforces an important message to later readers: *Arbeit und Struktur* asks us not to endow its author posthumously with sanctity, but instead to engage with the literature he left behind.

Conclusion – Sounding out the Limits of Human Experience at the Margins of Literature

With some justification, *Arbeit und Struktur* could be called the most experimental text of Herrndorf’s oeuvre. Questioning genre boundaries in the way the second half of this chapter on autothanatography has explored, criss-crossing the line from high art to popular culture and back, the diarist discomforts the reader in their urge to classify the text, and asks them instead to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty, both in content and in form. In effect, *Arbeit und Struktur* is a text that suggests to readers that they abandon their diagnostic impulse, their need to categorise that puts them in a position of power over the writer not unlike that of a medical professional – and instead dares them to see themselves as on an equal footing with the author.

¹⁵⁸ Trans.: ‘There is only one radical piece of news for people, the way they are today – and that is always the same: death.’

¹⁵⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York/ London: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 15.

¹⁶⁰ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Joli Jensen, ‘Introduction – On Fandom, Celebrity, and Mediation: Posthumous Possibilities’, in *Afterlife as Afterimage. Understanding Posthumous Fame*, ed. by Steve Jones and Jensen (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. xv-xxiii (p. xx).

In *Arbeit und Struktur*, Herrndorf exhibits his poetological convictions with renewed vigour. Much of what the diary form has to offer intuitively appealed to him at the time of terminal illness: accessibility, precision and clarity come to matter more than ever, as is expressed, for instance, in the stated ambition for the diary to recall, in style, the *Code civil*, that is the sober style of legal texts (AS 444). His dislike for stilted writing as for traditional philosophy (because he viewed it as abstract and irrelevant to people's lives) was amplified from the perspective of terminal illness (AS 313-314, 64). As an author inspired by 'Popliteratur' and Romanticism in equal measure, Herrndorf violates any distinctions between high and low culture in writing *Arbeit und Struktur* – as did Schlingensiefel on and beyond the theatrical stage. Just as Schlingensiefel did in his *Tagebuch*, Herrndorf through *Arbeit und Struktur* expresses a wariness of cultural elitism. In writing autothanatographically, both authors turned to the diary as a tangible, quotidian genre that derives its concerns from concrete reality and everyday life; in each case, this must be understood as a conscious decision informed by (terminal) illness.

It is commonplace to stress the therapeutic value of illness narratives – for literary scholarship, however, this assumption can only be a starting point for investigations into cultural productions arising from personal illness experiences. It certainly should not be the end point. The diaries analysed in the chapter at hand focus on selves 'in crisis', yet they do so in the context of their culture and their time. Acknowledging this is to recognise the diary – and maybe especially the end-of-life diary – as a socially relevant and politically potent genre beyond the personal meaning it can take on for the individual writer and reader. It is no coincidence that Herrndorf's diary/blog fuelled the ongoing debate around liberalising assisted dying in Germany. As it wove the mesh of an individual life, and set forth the challenges of cancer as they affected Herrndorf's everyday life and his literary convictions, it also became the means through which the writer entered into the politics of the personal.

In contrast to Schlingensiefel, Herrndorf withdrew from the media, critics and public in all but this one way. Yet through the means of his diary/blog, he too claimed his right to participate in literary debates and in societal matters generally, and indeed to provoke, such as in the case of the German assisted dying debate. Relatively suddenly finding himself in the limelight of the German literary scene, through the medium of the blog, Herrndorf also exercised his right to influence narratives that had begun to emerge about him as a person, and as an author. Along the way, he asserted the literary value of the diary – and the resulting text *Arbeit und Struktur* is now seen by many as his magnum opus.

As early as June 2011, a little over a year after the blog's inception, Wolfgang Höbel, writing for *Der Spiegel*, hailed Herrndorf's diary/blog as a 'Literaturereignis' [literary sensation] and the accolades continued from then on.¹⁶² Herrndorf, interestingly, was subjected to much less of the doubt and clear rejection that Schlingensiefel, so shortly before him, had to experience when publishing his cancer diary.¹⁶³ Despite the difference in reception, both illness diaries notably triggered extreme reactions. These seemingly arbitrary and contradictory judgements of outright rejection, even hostility, on the one hand, and overwhelming praise on the other can, however, be related to each other.

In the context of Holocaust testimony, Dori Laub has delineated 'hazards to the listening to trauma'.¹⁶⁴ Among the reactions he describes being displayed by overchallenged readers/listeners to difficult stories of personal experiences, we recognise both of the opposing reactions that came to bear on the cancer diaries discussed in this chapter. Laub finds that in some cases, '[a] sense of outrage and of anger' is directed at the victim/narrator – which is very much the reaction Schlingensiefel's text (and his subsequent strong media presence) elicited in a large, or at least very vocal, part of his readership.¹⁶⁵ Astonishingly, Laub even uses the example of disablist reactions to disclosures of serious illness as a point of reference in this context. He explains the psychological cause of such feelings of anger towards an ill person thus: 'We are torn apart by the inadequacy of our ability to properly respond, and inadvertently wish for the illness to be the patient's responsibility and wrongdoing.'¹⁶⁶ This latter tendency that Laub detects (without criticising it) is certainly one that has been at work in popular negotiations of illness – one needs only to recall myths about a supposed Krebspersönlichkeit, or cancer personality, widespread in the 1970s/80s and beyond.¹⁶⁷ It has certainly done much harm to people living with, and dying from, serious illness.

In other cases, Laub points out that the victim/narrator is met with '[a] flood of awe and fear'.¹⁶⁸ His explanation for this reaction, which I find exemplified in reactions to *Arbeit und Struktur*, and which only intensified after Herrndorf's death, goes as follows: 'we endow the

¹⁶² Wolfgang Höbel, 'Warum denn nicht ich?', *Der Spiegel*, 6 (2011), pp. 122-125 (p. 122).

¹⁶³ Although there is a point at which suspicions arise that the illness diary may be a 'Marketingcoup' (AS 321) of Herrndorf's. The allegations were made by Joachim Lottmann in 'Joachim Lottmann vs. Wolfgang Koeppen', *taz.blogs*, 25 April 2012 <<http://blogs.taz.de/lottmann/2012/04/25/joachim-lottmann-vs-wolfgang-koeppen/>> [accessed 15 September 2015].

¹⁶⁴ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 72-73.

¹⁶⁵ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁶ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁷ A cultural belief fuelled by studies in the 1980s on 'Type C'-personality patterns of cancer and HIV/AIDS patients.

¹⁶⁸ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 72.

survivor [or, the cancer diarist; N. Sch.] with a kind of sanctity, both to pay our tribute to him and to keep him at a distance, to avoid the intimacy entailed in knowing.¹⁶⁹ It is a way of avoiding confrontation with one's own fears surrounding mortality, and the limits of one's agency. Albeit expressed in a different manner, this distancing strategy is ultimately also a refusal to engage or empathise with another's pain. This psychological dynamic at work on the side of the readership obscures the complex and multi-layered text Herrndorf's autothanatographical diary has become, and may explain the way in which the media reported on the writer's late achievements.¹⁷⁰

I introduced this chapter by stressing the important role time plays in diaries. Time may be the only element that separates a readership from the experiences captured by these autothanatographical writers. Because as readers we are implicated in their stories more than we would like to admit, in ways both illness diarists have indeed anticipated, our own emotions get in the way of reading or listening properly, and may at worst prevent us from reading their texts adequately, or at all. Reactions that negate the social, or literary, relevance of these autothanatographical diaries must be understood in this light. With Felman and Laub in mind, we might take this as a refusal to act as another's witness.

As Schlingensiefel made clear in the context of the feuilleton debate of 2009,¹⁷¹ he felt there was a pressing need to explore personal narratives of illness and dying in a public space in a way that goes beyond the emotive media coverage of daytime TV but retains the individual aspect lacking in philosophical treatise. By taking up the diary genre, and making it suit their needs and aspirations as illness enters and alters their lives, both Schlingensiefel and Herrndorf count on the power of the personal, and begin to fill the gap in reading matter identified by Schlingensiefel for a contemporary audience. The provocative nature of the cancer diary lies in its mundanity, both in its liminal literary form and in its autothanatographical content. Negotiating their illnesses between the poles of cliché and exceptionality, working with and across different media, as well as through their prompt publishing of at least parts of their diary recordings, the two autothanatographers have demonstrated this genre's potential for the twenty-first century.

¹⁶⁹ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁰ Herrndorf's dissatisfaction with any kind of mythologising of his figure during his life time comes through in statements such as the one recorded in the diary on 12 September 2012, in which (presumably upon reading another such article about his achievements) he retorts, provocatively: 'Ich nenn euch [Journalisten; N. Sch.] doch auch nicht dauernd behindert, nur weil ihr es seid' [I for my part don't constantly call you [journalists; N. Sch.] retarded, just because you are] (AS 355).

¹⁷¹ See quotation at the beginning of my introduction.

Conclusion

This thesis has highlighted life writing centring on illness/ disability and dying as a neglected field of study in German literary and cultural scholarship. In response to this finding, it has developed and demonstrated productive ways of reading this kind of literature, exemplifying in each chapter a number of approaches that could be taken further in the future.

Going against the tendency in the German-speaking world of regarding life writing as artless *per se*, and life writing centring on illness/ disability as all the more so, this thesis brings the tools of literary studies to bear upon a selection of contemporary, personal narratives dealing with these themes. In particular, it interrogates the ways authors capture their experiences in texts, and how they negotiate positions of being in illness and of authorship in a cultural context which, until recently, has not seen a large number of publications telling personally of the interior, lived experience of illness/ disability. By grounding the research in the field of disability studies, I have given the literary analysis of each individual text an innovative perspective, and crucially, this has enabled me to identify gaps and contortions in the dominant readings of these texts; readings which often effectively disregard the illness experience at their centre and/ or contest the narrative's literary quality.

The research presented here found much of the political weight of a text to be carried by its formal features which have typically been overlooked. For Charlotte Roche (Chapter I), for example, I contend that the choice of an autofictional representational mode must be read as governed by the need to reclaim agency over the story of her traumatic bereavement from the media without making herself vulnerable to fresh media intrusions and hurtful publicity. In Kathrin Schmidt's text (Chapter II), the narrative device of staring helps to fulfil the didactic aim of *Du stirbst nicht* to destabilise a readership's ableist/ disablist beliefs about illness/ disability and conditions of speechlessness. For Verena Stefan, intertextuality becomes the means to align herself in *Fremdschläfer* with the positions and values of feminist forerunners who negotiated illness publicly (Chapter III), while the text's de Certeaudian poetics stresses the democratic relationship she strives for in regard to her readership. Lastly, the preference of Christoph Schlingensiefel and Wolfgang Herrndorf for the diary form (Chapter IV) can be explained by the genre's ordinariness and mundanity. By choosing to write illness in this everyday form, both authors implicitly make a point about their strange growth in cultural status as they confront terminal illness publicly, and as it occurs. Having been able to present these revealing findings in each chapter, this thesis hopes to have made a convincing argument

for the necessity of establishing a literary disability studies field within Germanistik. The aim of the thesis ultimately was to show that such contemporary writing about illness/ disability and dying is more reflective and complex in its construction – that is more ‘literary’, if one will – than is generally assumed both in the public discourse as well as within academia. That is to say, such autobiographical writing can be an artistic practice as much as, and at the same time as, being a social practice.

Through the lens of disability studies, arguments against attending to this kind of writing from an academic stance have been recognised as strategies of avoidance. This avoidance has its origins partly in the low/ high culture divide along which traditional German studies scholarship still operates, especially within Germany, but it is markedly aggravated by a widespread uneasiness with confronting the reality of illness/ disability and dying that pervades hegemonic culture as such. The texts this thesis focuses on may be at times difficult reads, yet their intensified rate of publication alone (from circa 2007 onwards) should qualify them as being of interest to literary studies. Together with their widespread reception, these texts’ presence points to the fact that we are living through a moment of cultural change in which it becomes possible, for the first time, to write of illness/ disability personally and reach a large, mainstream audience doing so. This, at least, was the fundamental observation with which I set out on this study, intrigued by the power that autobiographical writing on matters of illness and death evidently holds over a contemporary reading public.

Despite the fact that this thesis has dealt with a different contemporary author and text in each chapter, thematising diverse illness experiences in a range of life-writing genres and across different media, through the unifying methodological approach of disability studies a number of overarching themes have emerged. In the following, I will concentrate on how German illness narratives address and affect their readership, the way in which these texts go beyond binary thinking about ‘factual’ and fictional writing (frequently drawing on features from both), and their questioning of prevalent notions of what is public and what is private, before returning to the authors’ potential reasons for voicing illness autobiographically, despite the risks involved. Lastly, I will assess current developments both in the literature and in academia, and venture an outlook on the future of German illness writing as well as making suggestions for further research.

In the search for literature that can ‘shift prejudices about disability’,¹ Pauline Eyre in the conclusion to her 2009 PhD thesis came to favour fiction over autobiographical writing as more likely to accomplish this aim. She finds it allows for more subversive storytelling, which is more likely to change people’s mindsets. Concerning the latter, she states boldly that ‘mere autobiographical representation of disability is ineffective as a means of engaging with the nondisabled reader, since it enshrines the very difference it sets out to problematize, institutionalizing, in effect, the disabled autobiographer and her narrative’.² She comes to this conclusion on the basis of analysing autobiography and fiction from the 1970s.³ Recalling, for example, my observations regarding the discourse on Kathrin Schmidt’s text *Du stirbst nicht*, especially once its author had been honoured with the Deutscher Buchpreis (Chapter II), Eyre’s concern here can certainly not be dismissed as unfounded. It is, in fact, a worry shared by the large majority of the life writers whose work I examined; accordingly, the question of whether they will be known only for their illness writing from the point of publication onwards, or not be taken seriously anymore as professional writers, looms large in their texts.

Notwithstanding this, in concluding this thesis, I would like to point towards some strengths of the autobiographical mode in the following, which may shed light on the (re-)discovery of it for writing of illness/ disability in recent years. As a rhetorical stance, writers of illness/ disability employ the autobiographical to signal authenticity, commitment to a cause, or as a tactic to draw in the largest possible readership – and sometimes to achieve all this at once.

Displaying a high awareness of the pitfalls of autobiographical representation, the contemporary authors considered in this thesis problematise the author-reader relationship of illness narrative in the texts themselves, both on the level of content and on the level of form. From Roche to Herrndorf, these authors find their own narrative strategies and aesthetic forms to relate illness/ disability to what they know to be a potentially hostile reception. They tend to do so in a very contemporary manner, in the context of reflecting on their lives as a whole (thus avoiding isolating the experience of illness/ disability), and in ways that, in many cases, can be called novelistic. This indicates the authors’ aspirations to produce a piece of writing that will continue to be read; in other words, a work with the impact of ‘literature’.

¹ Pauline Eyre, ‘Permission to Speak: Representations of Disability in German Women’s Literature of the 1970s and 1980s’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, U of Manchester, 2009), p. 214.

² Eyre, ‘Permission to Speak’, p. 215.

³ She regards the two autobiographical accounts she examines – namely Luise Habel’s *Herrgott, schaff die Treppen ab!* (1978) and Christa Reinig’s *Die himmlische und die irdische Geometrie* (1975) – as ‘flawed’ (p. 122), the former for foregrounding the disabled experience to the extent that it takes on undesirable qualities of the medical case study (p. 113), the latter for distracting from its author’s disabled identity to the extent that this identity has been largely overlooked (pp. 110-122).

The authors can be seen to strive to reach diverse audiences: refusing to be pigeonholed, they do not write exclusively for fellow ill or disabled people, nor do they exclusively address those as yet untouched by the issues and questions central to their texts.

Maybe most significantly, each text – though in some ways relating an ‘extraordinary’ experience – at the same time stresses the mundanity of illness/ disability, death and dying. Crucially, the writers discussed here are at pains to demonstrate that they are not ‘other’, and thus approximate their subject position to that of the reader. There is a daring element to this, and it is one which is exclusive to autobiographical modes. Such writing cannot be dismissed by readers as being ‘merely’ fiction, an intellectual game at best. Instead, the reader of a personal illness narrative is challenged to confront their own feelings in relation to the ‘real’ person speaking from between the book’s covers, and must acknowledge that their own life is as vulnerable to illness/ disability as that of the author/narrator, and equally unstable. Especially in the case of narratives of serious and potentially terminal illness (rather than when reading narratives of ‘stable’ disability), doing so means confronting the reality of one’s own eventual death.

Recognising both the realness of illness/ disability as well as its unimaginability for at least a section of their readership, many of the examined texts continue to blur the lines between autobiographical and fictional writing, drawing on techniques from both (consider, for instance, Herrndorf’s ‘novelistic’ diary writing, Chapter IV). Doing so, they make use, not least, of the protective mask that the fictional offers them as vulnerable writers when they need it. What is more, one could say that only by writing closely along the boundaries of fact and fiction does it become possible for a significant number of authors to find an authorial position from which to write personally and yet openly about illness/ disability and, in the case of autothanatography, the liminal experience of one’s own dying.

Strategies I have found to be used by the authors of the texts analysed in this thesis are becoming more common in recent texts. Reminiscent of the legal statement we find placed in front the beginning of Roche’s autofictional narrative *Schoßgebete* (Chapter I), David Wagner’s 2013 novel *Leben* is preceded by the words: ‘Alles war genau so / und auch ganz anders’.⁴ This ambivalent narrative positioning is crucially what gives him the authorial freedom and creative space to begin to tell this story of life, love, loss, and identity based on his own struggles with autoimmune disease and the events surrounding his liver transplant. Richard Wagner, taking

⁴ Trans.: ‘Everything was exactly like this / as well as totally different’. David Wagner, *Leben* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2013).

a similar line, opens *Herr Parkinson* (2015) by stating: 'Ich wäre natürlich das "Ich", aber nicht ganz'.⁵ At the end of this prefacing paragraph, in a playful manner, he notes about the other characters that appear in his text: 'Auch für sie gilt, dass jede Ähnlichkeit mit lebenden Personen zufällig ist, was im Übrigen durch unseren Herrn Parkinson jederzeit bestätigt werden kann.'⁶ The way these authors navigate the autobiographical for our contemporary times thus invites the reader's gaze at the same time as resisting it, making us reflect on the way we stare at difference.

Just as through their texts, many contemporary illness writers question any all-too-rigid demarcation of autobiographical and fictional modes of representation, through the mere act of publication these authors challenge notions of what is deemed public and what is to be kept private. 'So, Schluss ... das darf nicht an die Öffentlichkeit!',⁷ Schlingensiefel laughs dryly as the audio book version of *Ich weiß, ich war's* fades out.⁸ By going public with illness, he knowingly upset widespread cultural sensibilities about the privacy of illness, as did the other authors written about in this thesis. To share what are still perceived to be 'private' stories with a wider audience is to seek to renegotiate these boundaries, as it questions who is served by adhering to them. In the age of the Internet and social media, for illness writers, and maybe especially for autothanatographers like Schlingensiefel and Herrndorf whose texts are analysed in the chapter preceding this conclusion, it applies that 'Menschsein heißt, medial sein wollen'.⁹

Through both traditional (book) and more modern (online/ multimedial) channels, the ill claim the same right as everyone else to participate in both off- and online discourses on matters of concern to them. Their self-image, as well as their life and work more generally may be altered by the experience of illness/ disability (sometimes dramatically so), but despite, or rather exactly because of this, they refuse to be written off prematurely. In many cases, the experience gives authors new political impetus as they come to reassess their place in the world. As I see it, the prevalent interpretative models of the therapeutic and the confessional, which are so often put forward as offering explanations for writing illness in the public realm,

⁵ Trans.: 'I am this "I", as it were, but not quite'. Richard Wagner, *Herr Parkinson* (München: Albrecht Knaus, 2015).

⁶ Trans.: 'For them it equally pertains that any resemblance to living persons is coincidental, which by the way our Mister Parkinson can confirm at any time.'

⁷ Trans.: 'Right, stop here ... this must not fall into the hands of the public!'

⁸ Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Ich weiß, ich war's*, with text inserts read by Martin Wuttke (tacheles, 2012) [on CD], CD 4, track 13, minutes 11.50-12.00.

⁹ Trans.: 'Being human [today; N. Sch.] is to want to be part of the media landscape'. Harro Segeberg, 'Menschsein heißt, medial sein wollen. Autorinszenierungen im Medienzeitalter', in *Autorinszenierungen. Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*, ed. by Christine Künzel and Jörg Schönert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 245-256 (p. 245).

now need to be supplemented by an author's desire to participate in a social media landscape which reflects on illness/ disability. Although this explanation may appeal less to the imagination than the confessional mode, for instance, it may offer a better explanation for the rising number of illness narratives not just in book form, but across all media.

In the relatively small number of texts I was able to look at for this thesis, Büchner's plays *Woyzeck* and *Lenz*, Woolf's *On Being Ill* and Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* featured as canonical reference points. Barring Roche, all of the authors refer to one or more of these. The impact they themselves are now having on following writers proves the cultural significance of the work they have begun anew, for our contemporary times, in their negotiations of illness/ disability, self and society. While it may be too soon to talk about the formation of a 'community' of ill/ disabled writers, many of these recent illness narratives display a newly politicised consciousness about what it means to be ill/ disabled today. As more texts come out, these illness narratives weave a net of diverse experiences and positions, and – taken together – they are developing a language to speak about illness today.

Intertextual ties between the texts – even when they remain unacknowledged – can be observed to be increasing in number and visibility. Christoph Schlingensiefel's handling of his cancer clearly served as example for his friend Henning Mankell once he fell ill, and it strengthened his resolve to write and publish *Kvicksand*.¹⁰ Richard Wagner, giving a sombre outlook on the progression of his Parkinson's at the end of his book takes up the image of 'schwarzes Quadrat auf schwarzem Grund' first used by Herrndorf in *Arbeit und Struktur* (AS 384),¹¹ who coined it in a twist on Kasimir Malevich's famous abstract painting 'Black Square' (on a white background) in order to grasp the nothingness of his anticipated death. My prediction for the future is that texts will begin to relate to and reference each other more explicitly as more personal illness narratives come out, responding to the social, medial, political and economic conditions of their time. What I described as a 'wave' or trend observed at the outset to this thesis will thus transform into a lasting tradition of writing the ill/ disabled or dying self publicly, as, when confronted with illness, we are likely to continue to wonder, as Richard Wagner does in the final words of *Herr Parkinson*: 'Und was dann. / Und was noch. / Und was immer. / Und was auch. / Und was nicht.'¹²

¹⁰ Henning Mankell, *Kvicksand* (Stockholm: Leopard, 2014).

¹¹ Trans.: 'black square on black background'. Wagner entitles the fourth and final part to his book 'Im schwarzen Quadrat'. Richard Wagner, *Herr Parkinson*, p. 131.

¹² Trans.: 'And what then. / And what ever. / And what else. / And what not.' Richard Wagner, *Herr Parkinson* (München: Albrecht Knaus, 2015), p. 144.

Accordingly, it will only become more important that as literary scholars, we develop ways to read these texts well and do them justice. The research presented in this thesis lays bare a curious disconnect between what cultural studies have observed to be a new ‘Sichtbarkeit des Todes’ [visibility of death], with the dead returning into mainstream media, high art and the public discourse,¹³ and academic foci of interest as displayed in German literary studies. In the wake of this new visibility, the potential for a wider conversation about illness and dying beyond perceived boundaries of the private and public realms has opened up. Yet, hitherto, German literary and cultural studies remains more focused on – more comfortable with? – death rather than dying, taking impulses from philosophy and art history in dealing with it in a discourse that will always be theoretical, often relatively abstract, and indeed necessarily fictional. As a discipline, to date, German studies seem less keen to turn towards analysing representations of the more troubling threat of death as we encounter it in this new life writing, and the process of actual dying as autothanatographies relay it, with all its physical and metaphysical pain.¹⁴

At the outset of my research I observed that disability studies are not yet an established field within Germanistik. This remains true as I am closing the thesis. Equally, Eyre’s call for cultural disability studies to widen its scope beyond the English-language context has not yet been met satisfactorily.¹⁵ Meanwhile, a special issue of *Life Writing*, entitled ‘Body Language: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing’ has just appeared, confirming the experience of illness/ disability as a central impulse leading writers to engage in auto/biographical work.¹⁶ While this publication is extremely timely and welcome, its focus – as an English-language journal – is also on English-language cultures. Pointing towards future directions for the study of personal representations of life with illness/ disability, German studies scholars could take impulses from this research and test, explore and advance it by developing a dialogue with narratives from the Germanic cultural realm.

As my final, comparative chapter (IV) indicated, illness narratives do not always necessarily take on a traditional, written form. The autothanatographical diary-keeping of Schlingensief

¹³ Thus argues the influential edited volume by Thomas Macho and Kristin Marek, eds, *Die neue Sichtbarkeit des Todes* (München/ Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2007).

¹⁴ A notable exception (also for its contemporary rather than historic frame of reference) being the recent issue of the *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* entitled ‘An der Grenze. Sterben und Tod in der Gegenwartsliteratur’. Anna Katharina Neufeld and Ulrike Vedder, eds, ‘An der Grenze. Sterben und Tod in der Gegenwartsliteratur’, a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 25.3 (2015).

¹⁵ Quoted in the introduction, section ‘Academic Nervousness in the Face of the Real?’.

¹⁶ G. Thomas Couser, ed, ‘Body Language: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing’, a special issue of *Life Writing*, 13.1 (2016).

and Herrndorf crossed and switched between media in ways that can be expected to become more common over the next few years. And while I had not been able to find much relevant recent research in preparing that chapter, with the recent issue of the *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, there is now a new publication taking a fresh look at the genre from a firm literary studies angle, including a new article on Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur*.¹⁷ Remaining with questions of genre, one area that has only lately attracted the scholarly interest is that of the graphic novel. Although graphic novels currently seem more prevalent in English-language contexts, examples from the Germanic field come to mind that point towards the graphic novel (or comics more generally) as a nascent genre of storying illness/ disability here too.¹⁸

As a final specific research desideratum brought out by the work on this thesis, I suggest revisiting the German-language illness narratives we know about from previous decades, in particular those from the 1970s and 80s. Based on my findings about recent literature, and considering the critical reactions at the time of their publication and later, one inevitably wonders if a subterranean tradition of writing the self in illness has been missed by literary scholarship, because the texts themselves were all-too-quickly dismissed from the sphere of literature. Subjecting these older texts to 'unpatterned' reading from the stance of disability studies today, as I argued in the introduction, maybe even reading them in tandem with more contemporary narratives, might reveal surprising lines of tradition, and would highlight early emancipatory achievements of such illness writing, or throw into sharp relief the differences between illness writing then and now.

In summary, the contribution to knowledge that this thesis presents is both to open up a new theoretical field and to apply its principles to specific texts: the former is achieved by contributing arguments for the establishment of a disability studies approach as a viable and much-needed addition to German literary studies, while the latter comes out in the form of the main content chapters, each tackling a very recent and underexplored literary text. Beyond the borders of its discipline, this thesis also hopes to contribute to our contemporary societal conversation about health and illness, death and dying. Literary studies can contribute practices of close reading and critical thinking to this wider conversation that is all too often

¹⁷ Sabine Kalff and Ulrike Vedder, eds, 'Tagebuch und Diaristik seit 1900', a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 26.2 (2016).

¹⁸ Remembering comics that have come out in the context of the AIDS crisis, such as *Die Verlorene Zukunft* (1992) by Jónsson, Knigge and Goetzinger, we might want to call it a returning genre. An example for a contemporary graphic novel dealing with illness and death is *When David lost his Voice* (2012) by Belgian-born artist Judith Vanistendael, telling of the experience of cancer and loss in the family.

conducted simplistically, and at the expense of those whose voices and insights should be at its centre.

Bibliography

Primary Literature

- Beutler, Maja, *Fuss Fassen* (Bern: Zytglogge, 1980)
- Berkéwicz, Ulla, *Überlebens* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008)
- Büchner, Georg, *Lenz. Der Hessische Landbote* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1988; orig.: written 1836)
- , *Woyzeck. Leonce und Lena* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2001; orig.: written c. 1836-1837)
- Diez, Georg, *Der Tod meiner Mutter* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009)
- Dubiel, Helmut, *Tief im Hirn. Mein Leben mit Parkinson* (München: Kunstmann, 2006)
- Engelberg, Miriam, *Cancer Made me a Shallower Person: a Memoir in Comics* (New York: Harper, 2006)
- Geiger, Arno, *Der alte König in seinem Exil* (München: Carl Hanser, 2011)
- Gernhardt, Robert, *Die K-Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2004)
- , *Später Spagat* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006)
- Görsdorf, Alexander, *Taube Nuss: Nichtgehörtes aus dem Leben eines Schwerhörigen* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2013)
- Grealy, Lucy, *Autobiography of a Face* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994)
- Habel, Luise, *Herrgott, schaff die Treppen ab! Erfahrungen einer Behinderten* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1978)
- Herrndorf, Wolfgang, *Tschick* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2010)
- , *Arbeit und Struktur*, <<http://www.wolfgang-herrndorf.de/>> [accessed 16 October 2015]
- , *Sand* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2011)
- , *Arbeit und Struktur* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2013)
- , *Leven met het pistool op tafel: een Berlijns dagboek* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Cossee, 2014)
- , *Bilder deiner großen Liebe. Ein unvollendeter Roman* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2014)
- , *Why We Took the Car* (London: Andersen, 2014)
- , *Why We Took the Car* (New York: Arthur A. Levine, 2014)
- Jens, Tilman, *Demenz. Abschied von meinem Vater* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009)
- , *Vatermord. Wider einen Generalverdacht* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010)
- Jónsson, Jón S., Andreas C. Knigge and Annie Goetzinger, *Die Verlorene Zukunft* (Hamburg: Carlsen Comics, 1992)

- Kaysen, Susanna, *Girl, Interrupted* (New York: Vintage, 1993)
- Knef, Hildegard, *Das Urteil oder der Gegenmensch* (Wien: Molden, 1975)
- Köster, Gaby, and Till Hoheneder, *Ein Schnupfen hätte auch gereicht. Meine zweite Chance* (Frankfurt am Main: Scherz, 2011)
- Köster, Gaby, and Thomas Köller, *Die Chefin* (München/ Zürich: Pendo, 2015)
- Leinemann, Jürgen, *Das Leben ist der Ernstfall* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2009)
- Lorde, Audre, *The Cancer Journals* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1985; orig.: San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1980)
- Lubbock, Tom, *Until Further Notice, I am Alive* (London: Granta, 2012)
- Mankell, Henning, *Kvicksand* (Stockholm: Leopard, 2014)
- Marchetto, Marisa Acocella, *Cancer Vixen: A True Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006)
- Noble, Ivan, *Like a Hole in the Head: Living with a Brain Tumour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005)
- Noll, Peter, *Diktate über Sterben und Tod* (Zürich: Pendo, 1983)
- Picardie, Ruth, *Before I say Goodbye* (London: Penguin, 1998)
- Pielhau, Miriam, *Fremdkörper* (München: MVG, 2009)
- Pratchett, Terry, *Shaking Hands with Death* (London: Corgi, 2015)
- Reimann, Brigitte, and Christa Wolf, *Sei begrüßt und lebe. Eine Freundschaft in Briefen 1964-1973* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1993)
- Reinig, Christa, *Die himmlische und die irdische Geometrie* (Düsseldorf: Eremiten-Presse, 1975)
- Roche, Charlotte, *Feuchtgebiete* (Köln: DuMont, 2008)
- , *Wetlands* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009)
- , *Schoßgebete* (München: Piper, 2011)
- , *Wrecked* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013)
- Rosenberg, Martina, *Mutter, wann stirbst du endlich? Wenn die Pflege der kranken Eltern zur Zerreißprobe wird* (München: Blanvalet, 2012)
- Schadek, Sandra, *Ich bin eine Insel. Gefangen im eigenen Körper* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2009)
- Schlingensief, Christoph, *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein! Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung* (München: btb, 2010; orig.: Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009)
- , *Geschockte Patienten* <<http://www.krank-und-autonom.de/>> [accessed 9 October 2014] and <<http://www.geschockte-patienten.org/>> [accessed 9 October 2014]
- , *Schlingenblog*, original URL <<http://www.peter-deutschmark.de/blog>>; currently, parts of the blog can be found at <<http://schlingenblog.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 9 October 2014]

- and <<http://www.peter-deutschmark.de/schlingenblog/category/schlingenblog/>> [accessed 9 October 2014]
- , *Ich weiß, ich war's*, with text inserts read by Martin Wuttke (tacheles, 2012) [on CD]
- , *Ich weiß, ich war's*, ed. by Aino Laberenz (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2012)
- Schmidt, Kathrin, *Du stirbst nicht* (München: btb, 2011; orig.: Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009)
- , *Blinde Bienen* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2010)
- Sighișorean, Christian, *Rose und Gebrochen Deutsch* (Rottenburg: Mauer, 2009)
- , *VerLetztes* (Vallendar: Patris, 2011)
- Stefan, Verena, *Häutungen* (München: Frauenoffensive, 1975)
- , *Shedding* (New York: Daughters, 1978)
- , *Shedding* (London: The Women's Press, 1979)
- , *Es ist reich gewesen. Bericht vom Sterben meiner Mutter* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993)
- , 'Doe a Deer', *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, 4 (2006) <www.triviavoices.com/doe-a-deer.html> [accessed 14 October 2013]
- , *Fremdschläfer* (Zürich: Ammann, 2007)
- , *D'ailleurs*, trans. by Louis Bouchard and Marie-Elisabeth Morf (Montréal: Hélio trope, 2008)
- , 'Fremdschläfer/ D'ailleurs', *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 28.2/3 (2010), 139-141
- , 'We live as two lesbians', *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, 11.2 (2010) <<http://www.triviavoices.com/we-live-as-two-lesbians.html>> [accessed 8 January 2014]
- , *Die Befragung der Zeit* (München: Nagel & Kimche, 2014)
- Vanistendael, Judith, *When David lost his Voice* (London: SelfMadeHero, 2012)
- Wagner, David, *Für neue Leben*, *Schöner Lesen*, 85 (Berlin: SuKuLTuR, 2009)
- , *Leben* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2013)
- Wagner, Richard, *Herr Parkinson* (München: Albrecht Knaus, 2015)
- Wander, Maxie, *Tagebücher und Briefe* (Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1979)
- Westerwelle, Guido, and Dominik Wichmann, *Zwischen zwei Leben. Von Liebe, Tod und Zuversicht* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2015)
- Wolf, Christa, *Der geteilte Himmel* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1963)
- Woolf, Virginia, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield: Paris Press, 2002; orig.: London: Hogarth, 1930)
- Zorn, Fritz, *Mars* (München: Kindler, 1977)

Secondary Literature

Albrecht, Gary L., Katherine D. Seelman and Michael Bury, eds, *Handbook of Disability Studies* (London: Sage, 2001)

Alloa, Emmanuel, and others, eds, *Leiblichkeit. Geschichte und Aktualität eines Konzepts*, UTB, 3633 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012)

American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd edn (Washington, D.C.: APA, 1980)

Anders, Petra-Andelka, *Behinderung und psychische Krankheit im zeitgenössischen deutschen Spielfilm*, KONNEX - Studien im Schnittbereich von Literatur, Kultur und Natur, 9 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014)

Anderson, Linda R., *Autobiography*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2011)

Angele, Michael, 'Wer hat geil Krebs?', *der Freitag*, 3 September 2009 <<http://www.freitag.de/autoren/michael-angele/wer-hat-geil-krebs>> [accessed 7 May 2015]

Angerer, Marie-Luise, 'Gender und Performance – Ist leibliche Identität ein Konstrukt?', in *Leiblichkeit. Geschichte und Aktualität eines Konzepts*, ed. by Emmanuel Alloa and others (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), pp. 334-349

Anz, Thomas, *Gesund oder krank? Medizin, Moral und Ästhetik in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989)

ARD, 'Charlotte Roche - THADEUSZ - RBB', *YouTube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7JCsfFtwkM>> [accessed 2 April 2013]

Arend, Ingo, 'Eine undurchsichtige Größe', *der Freitag*, 9 May 2008 <www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/eine-undurchsichtige-grosse> [accessed 10 December 2013]

'Autofiction', in *Dictionnaire des termes littéraires*, ed. by Hendrik van Gorp and others (Paris: Champion, 2001), pp. 54-55

Avrahami, Einat, *The Invading Body. Reading Illness Autobiographies* (Charlottesville/ London: U of Virginia P, 2007)

Baer, Hester, 'Sex, Death, and Motherhood in the Eurozone: Contemporary Women's Writing in German', *World Literature Today*, 86.3 (2012), 59-65

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984)

Bartels, Gerrit, 'Überlebensgroß', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 15 October 2009, p. 25

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993; orig.: *La Chambre Claire*, Paris: Gallimard/ Seuil, 1980)

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008; orig.: London: BBC/ Penguin, 1972)

- Betten, Anne, 'Entwicklungen und Formen der deutschen Literatursprache nach 1945', in *Sprachgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung*, ed. by Werner Besch and others, 2nd edn, vol. 4 (Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 3117-3159
- Biesenbach, Klaus, and others, eds, *Christoph Schlingensief* (Köln: Walther König, 2014)
- Binswanger, Christa, and Kathy Davis, 'Sexy stories and postfeminist empowerment: From *Hütungen* to *Wetlands*', *Feminist Theory*, 13.3 (2012), 245-263
- Blondeau, Brenda L., and Eva C. Karpinski, 'Editorial', *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 28.2/3 (2010), 3, 5
- Böcking-Politis, Cordula, and Carrie Smith-Prei, 'Introduction', in *Sexual-Textual Border-Crossings. Lesbian Identity in German-Language Literature, Film, and Culture*, ed. by Rachel MagShamhráin and others, *Germanistik in Ireland*, 5 (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 2010), pp. 7-10
- Boerner, Peter, *Tagebuch* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969)
- Bolt, David, 'Literary Disability Studies: The Long Awaited Response', presented at the Inaugural Conference of the Cultural Disability Studies Research Network (Liverpool John Moores U, 26 May 2007), published online: <<http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/bolt-Long-Awaited-Response.pdf>>
- , 'Introduction', in *Changing Social Attitudes Toward Disability. Perspectives from historical, cultural, and educational studies*, ed. by Bolt (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-11
- , 'Epilogue: attitudes and action', in *Changing Social Attitudes Toward Disability. Perspectives from historical, cultural, and educational studies*, ed. by Bolt (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 172-175
- Böttiger, Helmut, 'Das Wortkartenhaus', *Die Zeit*, 4 June 2009 <<http://www.zeit.de/2009/24/L-B-Schmidt>> [accessed 5 June 2013]
- Bouson, J. Brooks, *Embodied shame: uncovering female shame in contemporary women's writings* (Albany: SUNY, 2009)
- Boyle, Claire, *Consuming Autobiographies. Reading and Writing the Self in Post-War France* (London: Legenda, 2007)
- Brodzki, Bella, 'Testimony', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 2, L-Z (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 870-872
- Brown, Laura S., 'Not Outside The Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma', in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 100-112
- Buchanan, Ian, 'Introduction to Part III: Other People: Ethnography and Social Practice', in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 97-100
- Bürger, Britta, 'Im Zustand der Sprachlosigkeit', *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, 13 October 2009 <http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/im-zustand-der-sprachlosigkeit.954.de.html?dram:article_id=144692#> [accessed 12 February 2016]

Burk, Maximilian, '„dem Leben wie einem Roman zu Leibe rücken“. Wolfgang Herrndorf's Blog *Arbeit und Struktur*', in *Wolfgang Herrndorf*, ed. by Annina Klappert (Weimar: VDG, 2015), pp. 85-99

Buß, Christian, 'Sexautorin Charlotte Roche: "Meine Therapeutin hat mir das Leben gerettet"', *Spiegel Online Kultur*, 7 August 2011 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/sexautorin-charlotte-roche-meine-therapeutin-hat-mir-das-leben-gerettet-a-778812.html>> [accessed 25 January 2013]

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/ London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002; orig.: New York: Routledge, 1990)

—, 'Wittig's Material Practice: Universalizing a Minority Point of View', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.4 (2007), 519-533

Butzer, Günter, 'Sich selbst schreiben. Das Tagebuch als Weblog avant la lettre', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 94-96

Byrnes, Deirdre, 'Writing on the Threshold: Memory, Language and Identity in Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht*', in *German Monitor 76: Transitions. Emerging Women Writers in German-language Literature*, ed. by Valerie Heffernan and Gillian Pye (Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 169-185

Caduff, Corina, 'Selbstporträt, Autobiografie, Autorschaft', in *Autorschaft in den Künsten. Konzepte – Praktiken – Medien*, ed. by Caduff and Tan Wälchli, Zürcher Jahrbuch der Künste, 4 (Zürich: Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, 2008), pp. 54-67

—, *Szenen des Todes. Essays* (Basel: Lenos, 2013)

Cardell, Kylie, *De@r World. Contemporary Uses of the Diary* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2014)

Carel, Havi, and Rachel Cooper, 'Introduction', in *Health, Illness and Disease. Philosophical Essays*, ed. by Carel and Cooper (Durham: Acumen, 2012), pp. 1-20

Carter, Kathryn, 'Death and the Diary, or Tragedies in the Archive', *Journal of Canadian Studies/ Revue d'études canadiennes*, 40.2 (2006), 42-59

Carter, Thatcher, 'Body Count: Autobiographies by Women Living with Breast Cancer', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 36.4 (2003), 653-668

Caruth, Cathy, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991), 181-192

—, 'Introduction: Trauma and Experience', in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 3-12

—, 'Introduction: Recapturing the Past', in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 151-157

—, 'Introduction: The Wound and the Voice', in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, ed. by Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), pp. 1-9

Cattell, Allison G., *Disability Drama: Semiotic Bodies and Diegetic Subjectivities in post-WWI German Expressionist Drama* (Waterloo: U of Waterloo, 2014), published online:

<https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/bitstream/handle/10012/8417/Cattell_Allison.pdf?sequence=1>

Clow, Barbara, 'Who's Afraid of Susan Sontag? or, the Myths and Metaphors of Cancer Reconsidered', *Social History of Medicine*, 14.2 (2001), 293-312

Cook, Kay, 'Illness and Life Writing', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 456-458

Cottam, Rachel, 'Diaries and Journals: General Survey', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 267-269

Couser, G. Thomas, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (Madison/ London: U of Wisconsin P, 1997)

—, *Vulnerable Subjects. Ethics and Life Writing* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell UP, 2004)

—, 'Genre Matters: Form, Force, and Filiation', *Life Writing*, 2.2 (2005), 139-156

—, *Signifying Bodies. Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2009)

—, 'Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 456-459

—, ed, 'Body Language: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing', a special issue of *Life Writing*, 13.1 (2016)

Crozier, Ivan, 'Sexuality and Life Writing', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 2, L-Z (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 805-807

Cuddon, J. A., 'grotesque', in *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, 4th edn, rev. by C. E. Preston (n.p.: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 367-368

Dalziell, Rosamund, 'Shame and Life Writing', in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 2, L-Z (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 807-809

Darrieussecq, Marie, 'L'autofiction, un genre pas sérieux', *Poétique*, 27 (1996), 367-380

Davies, Jeremy M., [Interview with Verena Stefan], *Dalkey Archive Press*, July/ August 2010, in slightly altered form to the original, currently retrievable only from <ginster-plantagenet.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/verena-stefan-poet-author-from-another.html> [accessed 3 February 2014]

Davis, Lennard J., ed, *The Disability Studies Reader*, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013)

—, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995)

Dawidowicz, Andreas, *Die metaphorische Krankheit als Gesellschaftskritik in den Werken von Franz Kafka, Friedrich Dürrenmatt und Thomas Bernhard*, *Germanistik*, 42 (Berlin: LIT, 2013)

de Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley/ Los Angeles: U of California P, 1984; orig.: *L'invention du quotidien: 1. arts de faire*, Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980)

Dederich, Markus, *Körper, Kultur und Behinderung. Eine Einführung in die Disability Studies*, Disability Studies: Körper – Macht – Differenz, 2 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007)

Degler, Frank, and Christian Kohlroß, eds, *Epochen/Krankheiten: Konstellationen von Literatur und Pathologie* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 2006)

de Man, Paul, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN*, 94.5 (1979), 919-930

DeShazer, Mary K., *Fractured Borders: Reading Women's Cancer Literature* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005)

—, *Mammographies. The Cultural Discourses of Breast Cancer Narratives* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2013)

Diez, Georg, "'Ich habe den Tod gespürt, er saß in mir. Ich habe gekämpft.'", *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, 38 (2008) <<http://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/texte/anzeigen/26434/1/1>> [accessed 14 July 2015]

Doubrovsky, Serge, *Fils: roman* (Paris: Galilée, 1977)

—, 'Textes en main', in *Autofictions & Cie*, ed. by Doubrovsky, Jacques Lecarme and Philippe Lejeune, *RITM*, 6 (Nanterre: Université Paris X-Nanterre, 1993), pp. 207-217

Dusini, Arno, *Tagebuch. Möglichkeiten einer Gattung* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2005)

Eakin, Paul John, 'Foreword', in *On Autobiography*, ed. by Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989), pp. vii-xxviii

—, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca/ London: Cornell UP, 1999)

Egan, Susanna, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill/ London: U of North Carolina P, 1999)

—, 'The Life and Times of Autothanatography' [Workshop Discussion Paper], *Pain and Suffering Interdisciplinary Research Network* (2001) <<http://www.english.ubc.ca/PROJECTS/PAIN/DEGAN.HTM>> [accessed 9 October 2014]

—, *Burdens of Proof. Faith, Doubt and Identity in Autobiography* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier, 2011)

Ehlebracht, Steffi, *Gelingendes Scheitern. Epilepsie als Metapher in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008)

'ejaculation, n.', *OED Online* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/60031?redirectedFrom=ejaculation>> [accessed 4 December 2012]

Elias, Norbert, *The civilizing process: the history of manners and state formation and civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994; orig.: as *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation* in 2 vol., Basel: Haus zum Falken, 1939)

Erikson, Kai, 'Notes on Trauma and Community' in *Trauma, Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 183-199

- Eyre, Pauline, 'Permission to Speak: Representations of Disability in German Women's Literature of the 1970s and 1980s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, U of Manchester, 2009)
- , 'From Impairment to Empowerment: A Re-Assessment of Libuše Moníková's Representation of Disability in *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin*', in *Disability in German Literature, Film, and Theatre*, ed. by Eleoma Joshua and Michael Schillmeier, Edinburgh German Yearbook, 4 (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), pp. 197-212
- , 'Impaired or empowered? Mapping disability onto European literature', in *Changing Social Attitudes Toward Disability. Perspectives from historical, cultural, and educational studies*, ed. by David Bolt (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 99-108
- Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967; orig.: *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris: Seuil, 1952)
- Felluga, Dino, 'Modules on Lacan: On Psychosexual Development', *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacandevlop.html>> [accessed 18 June 2013]
- Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York/ London: Routledge, 1992)
- Fiddler, Allyson, 'Subjectivity and women's writing of the 1970s and early 1980s', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. by Graham Bartram (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 249-265
- Fietz, Kathleen, Kristina Pezzeri and Detlev Schilke, 'Montagsinterview Kathrin Schmidt: Ich wusste schnell wieder, wer ich bin', *taz*, 4 January 2010 <<http://www.taz.de/!46202/>> [accessed 4 June 2013]
- Fischer, Frank, 'Der Autor als Medienjongleur. Die Inszenierung literarischer Modernität im Internet', in *Autorinszenierungen. Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*, ed. by Christine Künzel and Jörg Schönert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 271-280
- Fludernik, Monika, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1996)
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, 2nd edn, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995; orig.: *Surveiller et punir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975)
- Frank, Anne, *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank. 12. Juni 1942 – 1. August 1944*, 33rd edn, trans. by Anneliese Schütz (Frankfurt am Main/ Hamburg: Fischer Bücherei, 1971)
- Frank, Arthur W., *The Wounded Storyteller* (Chicago/ London: U of Chicago P, 1995)
- , 'Illness and Autobiographical Work: Dialogue as Narrative Destabilization', *Qualitative Sociology*, 23.1 (2000), 135-156
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie, *Extraordinary bodies: figuring physical disability in American culture and literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997)
- , 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory', *NWSA*, 14.3 (2002), 1-32
- , *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009)

—, 'Beholding', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, 3rd edn, ed. by Lennard J. Davis (New York/London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 199-208

Gasser, Peter, 'Autobiographie und Autofiktion. Einige begriffskritische Bemerkungen', in »...all diese fingierten, notierten, in meinem Kopf ungefähr wieder zusammengesetzten Ichs« *Autobiographie und Autofiktion*, ed. by Elio Pellin and Ulrich Weber (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), pp. 13-28

Georgis, Dina, 'Bearing Cancer in Graphic Memoir', *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 28.2/3 (2010), 105-109

Gilles, Catherina, *Kunst und Nichtkunst. Das Theater von Christoph Schlingensief* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009)

Gilman, Sander L., 'Review of *Gesund Oder Krank? Medizin, Moral Und Ästhetik in Der Deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*', *The German Quarterly*, 64.4 (1991), 603-605

—, *Franz Kafka. The Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

Goetz, Rainald, *Abfall für alle* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999)

Gold, Helmut, '@bsolut privat!? Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 6-7

Gratton, Johnnie, 'Autofiction', in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 86-87

Graves, Peter J., 'Karen Duve, Kathrin Schmidt, Judith Hermann: "Ein literarisches Fräuleinwunder"?', *German Life and Letters*, 55.2 (2002), 197-207

Greiner, Ulrich, 'Man sollte diskret sterben', *Zeit Online*, 31 January 2014 <<http://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2014-01/mankell-krebsdiagnose-literatur-krankheit>> [accessed 9 May 2016]

Grell, Isabelle, 'Pourquoi Serge Doubrovsky n'a pu éviter le terme d'autofiction', in *Genèse et autofiction*, ed. by Jean-Louis Jeannelle and Catherine Viollet (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2007), pp. 39-51

Gronemann, Claudia, *Postmoderne/postkoloniale Konzepte der Autobiographie in der französischen und maghrebinischen Literatur. Autofiction – Nouvelle Autobiographie – Double Autobiographie – Aventure du texte* (Hildesheim/ Zürich/ New York: Georg Olms, 2002)

Grosz, Elizabeth, *Sexual Subversions, Three French Feminists* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1989)

Groß, Johannes, *Kafkas Krankheiten* (Marburg: LiteraturWissenschaft.de, 2012)

Großklaus, Götz, 'Versuch einer Dekolonisierung des Körpers. Notiz zu *Häutungen* von Verena Stefan – 1986 –', in *Vierzig Jahre Literaturwissenschaft 1969-2009. Zur Geschichte der kultur- und medienwissenschaftlichen Öffnung*, ed. by Götz Großklaus (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 95-103

Haller, Beth, and Corinne Kirchner, eds, 'Education', a special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 26.2 (2006)

- Hamilton, Elizabeth C., 'From Social Welfare to Civil Rights. The Representation of Disability in Twentieth-Century German Literature', in *The Body and Physical Difference. Discourses of Disability*, ed. by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997)
- Heidböhmer, Carsten, 'Trauerspiel statt Sexskandal', *stern.de*, 10 August 2011 <<http://www.stern.de/kultur/buecher/-schossgebete---zweiter-roman-von-charlotte-roche-trauerspiel-statt-sexskandal-3779768.html>> [accessed 21 January 2013]
- Heinze, Carsten, 'Zum Stand und den Perspektiven der Autobiographie in der Soziologie. Sozialkommunikative Konzepte zur Beschreibung einer literarischen Gattung', *BIOS – Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen*, 23.2 (2010), 201-231
- Heinze, Carsten, and Alfred Hornung, *Medialisierungsformen des (Auto-)Biografischen* (Konstanz/ München: UVK, 2013)
- Henke, Suzette A., *Shattered Subjects – Trauma & Testimony in Women's Life Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1998)
- Herman, Judith Lewis, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 2nd edn (London: Pandora, 2001)
- Hillgruber, Katrin, 'Erinnerungsroman: Aufschlussreiche Sprachbefreiung', *Spiegel Online Kultur*, 20 April 2009 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/erinnerungsroman-aufschlussreiche-sprachbefreiung-a-619620.html>> [accessed 18 September 2013]
- Hirsch, Anja, 'Steh auf und erinnere dich', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 April 2009 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/kathrin-schmidts-roman-du-stirbst-nicht-steh-auf-und-erinnere-dich-1792428.html>> [accessed 4 June 2013]
- Höbel, Wolfgang, 'Warum denn nicht ich?', *Der Spiegel*, 6 (2011), pp. 122-125
- Höller, Hans, 'Brief zu Franz K. Stanzels Akademie-Vortrag vom 19. Januar 2007: >Autobiographie. Wo ein Ich erzählt, ist immer Fiktion<', *Sprachkunst*, 37.2 (2006), 341-342
- Holm, Christiane, 'Montag Ich. Dienstag Ich. Mittwoch Ich. Versuch einer Phänomenologie des Diaristischen', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 10-50
- Hughes, Bill, and Kevin Paterson, 'The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards a sociology of impairment', *Disability & Society*, 12.3 (1997), 325-340
- Hughes, Bill, 'Fear, Pity and Disgust. Emotions and the Non-disabled Imaginary', in *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, ed. by Carol Thomas, Nick Watson and Alan Roulstone (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 67-77
- Hunsaker Hawkins, Anne, *Reconstructing Illness. Studies in Pathography*, 2nd edn (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1999)
- , 'Writing about Illness. Therapy? Or Testimony?', in *Unfitting Stories. Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma*, ed. by Valerie Raoul and others (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007), pp. 113-127

Jensen, Joli, 'Introduction – On Fandom, Celebrity, and Mediation: Posthumous Possibilities', in *Afterlife as Afterimage. Understanding Posthumous Fame*, ed. by Steve Jones and Jensen (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. xv-xxiii

Jordan, Shirley, 'Autofiction in the Feminine', *French Studies*, 67.1 (2013), 76-84

Joshua, Eleoma, and Michael Schillmeier, eds, *Disability in German Literature, Film, and Theatre*, Edinburgh German Yearbook, 4 (Rochester: Camden House, 2010)

Kalff, Sabine, and Ulrike Vedder, eds, 'Tagebuch und Diaristik seit 1900', a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 26.2 (2016)

Kämmerlings, Richard, 'Krebsliteratur. Der Schleier über den letzten Dingen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 14 August 2009 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/krebsliteratur-der-schleier-ueber-den-letzten-dingen-1841182.html>> [accessed 20 October 2014]

Karpenstein-Eßbach, Christa, 'Krebs – Literatur – Wissen. Von der Krebspersönlichkeit zur totalen Kommunikation', in *Epochen/ Krankheiten. Konstellationen von Literatur und Pathologie*, ed. by Frank Degler and Christian Kohlroß, *Das Wissen der Literatur*, 1 (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 2006), pp. 233-264

Kauffman, Jeffrey, 'On the Primacy of Pain', in *The shame of death, grief, and trauma*, ed. by Kauffman (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 3-24

Kekes, John, 'Disgust and Moral Taboos', *Philosophy*, 67.262 (1992), 431-446

Kelly, Daniel, *Yuck! The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust* (Cambridge: MIT, 2011)

Kleinman, Arthur, *The Illness Narratives. Suffering, Healing & the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988)

Klocke, Sonja E., "'Committed from Head to Toe?": Cancer, Immigration, and Kinship in Verena Stefan's *Fremdschläfer*', *Women in German Yearbook. Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture*, 26 (2010), 117-135

—, 'Die frohe Botschaft der Kathrin Schmidt? Transsexuality, Racism, and Feminist Historiography in *Die Gunnar-Lennefsen-Expedition*', in *Sexual-Textual Border-Crossings. Lesbian Identity in German-Language Literature, Film, and Culture*, ed. by Rachel MagShamhráin and others, *Germanistik in Ireland*, 5 (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 2010), pp. 143-158

—, 'Kathrin Schmidt, *Du stirbst nicht*: A Woman's Quest for Agency', in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture* (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), pp. 228-242

Klopp, Tina, 'Todgeweihte leben länger. Über die Interpretation von Künstlerbiografien', *Deutschlandfunk*, 31 May 2015 <http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/kunst-todgeweihte-leben-laenger.1184.de.html?dram:article_id=317368> [accessed 1 February 2016]

Klüger, Ruth, 'Einwandern, auswandern, wandern', *Die Welt*, 6 October 2007 <http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article1239740/Einwandern-auswandern-wandern.html> [accessed 17 February 2016]

- Knapp, Lore, 'Christoph Schlingensief's Blog: Multimediale Autofiktion im Künstlerblog', in *Narrative Genres im Internet: Theoretische Bezugsrahmen, Mediengattungstypologie und Funktionen*, ed. by Ansgar Nünning and Jan Rupp (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2012), pp. 117-132
- Kohler Riessman, Catherine, 'Women and Medicalization. A New Perspective', in *The Politics of Women's Bodies. Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*, ed. by Rose Weitz (New York/ Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 46-63
- Kohse, Petra, 'Sich zudecken mit Traurigkeit', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 9/10 April 2009 <www.fr-online.de/kultur/shortlist-deutscher-buchpreis-sich-zudecken-mit-traurigkeit,1472786,2961362.html> [accessed 27 June 2013]
- Konrad, Anita, 'Minderheiten – Literatur?', *STIMME von und für Minderheiten*, 55 (2005) <<http://minderheiten.at/stat/stimme/stimme55c.htm>> [accessed 17 February 2014]
- Kotin Mortimer, Armine, 'Autofiction as Allofiction: Doubrovsky's *L'Après-vivre*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 49.3 (2009), 22-35
- Kotte, Andreas, 'Der Performer als Objekt seiner selbst. Das Prinzip Schlingensief', in *Theater und Subjektkonstitution: theatrale Praktiken zwischen Affirmation und Subversion*, ed. by Michael Bachmann and others, *Theater*, 33 (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), pp. 241-252
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn, *Savoring disgust: the foul and the fair in aesthetics* (New York/ Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011)
- Krekeler, Elmar, 'Bester Roman des Jahres: "Du stirbst nicht"', *Die Welt*, 14 October 2009 <www.welt.de/welt_print/kultur/article4840309/Bester-Roman-des-Jahres-Du-stirbst-nicht.html> [accessed 4 June 2013]
- , 'Wie ich die Sprache wiederfand', *Die Welt*, 14 October 2009 <http://www.welt.de/welt_print/kultur/article4840308/Wie-ich-die-Sprache-wiederfand.html> [accessed 23 September 2013]
- Kreknin, Innokentij, *Poetiken des Selbst. Identität, Autorschaft und Autofiktion am Beispiel von Rainald Goetz, Joachim Lottmann und Alban Nikolai Herbst*, *Studien zur deutschen Literatur*, 206 (Berlin/ Boston: de Gruyter, 2014)
- Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982)
- Kulturzeit 3sat, 'Kulturzeitinterview über das Buch "Schoßgebete" von Charlotte Roche mit Denis Scheck', *YouTube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBm2wLvEqA>> [accessed 14 December 2012]
- Lacan, Jacques, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I', in *Écrits. A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977; orig.: Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 1-7
- Leader, Darian, and Judy Groves, *Introducing Lacan* (Cambridge: Icon Books UK, 1995)
- Leal, Joanne, 'The Politics of "Innerlichkeit": Karin Struck's 'Klassenliebe' and Verena Stefan's 'Häutungen'', *German Life and Letters*, 50.4 (1997), 508-528

Lejeune, Philippe, 'The Autobiographical Pact', in *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989; orig.: in *Le pacte autobiographique*, Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 3-30

—, 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', in *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989; orig.: in *Moi aussi*, Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp. 119-137

—, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1989)

—, 'Autofictions & Cie. Pièce en cinq actes', in *Autofictions & Cie*, ed. by Serge Doubrovsky, Jacques Lecarme and Lejeune, *RITM*, 6 (Nanterre: Université Paris X-Nanterre, 1993), pp. 5-15

—, 'The Diary on Trial', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *L'Autobiographie en procès*, special issue of *RITM*, 14, 1997), pp. 147-167

—, 'Rereading your Diary', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Pour l'autobiographie*, Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 324-326

—, 'How Do Diaries End?', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Genèses du Je: Manuscrits et autobiographie*, Paris: CNRS, 2000), pp. 187-200

—, 'The Continuous and Discontinuous', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Signes de vie. Le pacte autobiographique 2*, Paris: Seuil, 2005), pp. 175-186

—, 'Counting and Managing', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Le Journal intime. Histoire et anthologie*, Paris: Textuel, 2006), pp. 51-60

—, 'The Diary as "Antifiction"', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in *Poétique*, 149, 2007), pp. 201-210

—, 'Diaries on the Internet: A Year of Reading', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009; orig.: in 'Cher écran . . .' in *Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet*, Paris: Seuil, 2009), pp. 299-316

—, *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009)

Liebrand, Claudia, 'Pornografische Pathologie. Charlotte Roches *Feuchtgebiete*', *Literatur für Leser* 34.1 (2011), 13-22

Lindner, Martin, 'Ich Schreiben im Falschen Leben. Tagebuch-Literatur seit 1950: Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur am Leitfaden der Diaristik' (unpublished habilitation dissertation, Universität Passau, 1998/ last revised 2005)

Link, Jürgen, *Versuch über den Normalismus: Wie Normalität produziert wird*, 3rd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006)

‘Literaturpreis für Kathrin Schmidt: “Schreiben war immer meine Fluchtburg”’, *Thüringische Landeszeitung*, 25 September 2013 <<http://www.tlz.de/web/zgt/kultur/detail/-/specific/Heimkehr-durch-die-Raeume-meiner-Kindheit-und-Jugend-922015597>> [accessed 4 April 2016]

Lobo, Sascha, and Holm Friebe, *Wir nennen es Arbeit: die digitale Bohème oder: Intelligentes Leben jenseits der Festanstellung* (München: Heyne, 2006)

Lottmann, Joachim, ‘Joachim Lottmann vs. Wolfgang Koeppen’, *taz.blogs*, 25 April 2012 <<http://blogs.taz.de/lottmann/2012/04/25/joachim-lottmann-vs-wolfgang-koeppen/>> [accessed 15 September 2015]

Luckhurst, Roger, ‘Mixing memory and desire: psychoanalysis, psychology, and trauma theory’, in *Literary Theory and Criticism. An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 497-507

Macho, Thomas, and Kristin Marek, eds, *Die neue Sichtbarkeit des Todes* (München/Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2007)

Macho, Thomas, ‘Wer redet, ist nicht tot’, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19 November 2009 <<http://www.nzz.ch/wer-redet-ist-nicht-tot-1.4036808>> [accessed 26 September 2015]

Magenau, Jörg, ‘Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Leben’, *Literaturen* 10.4 (2009), pp. 54-59

Malvezzi, M., and others, ‘European cancer mortality predictions for the year 2013’, *Annals of Oncology*, 24.3 (2013), 792-800

Manganiello, Dominic, ‘Confessions’, in *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly, vol. 1, A-K (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 228-229

Mann, Thomas, *Tagebücher 1953-1955*, ed. by Inge Jens (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995)

Matthews-Schlinzig, Marie-Isabel, ‘Der Suizid des Autors: Texte und Reaktionen (am Beispiel von Édouard Levé, André Gorz und Heinrich von Kleist)’, *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 25.3 (2015), 589-602

Max, Katrin, *Liegekur und Bakterienrausch: literarische Deutungen der Tuberkulose im „Zauberberg“ und anderswo* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012)

McCarthy, Margaret, ‘Feminism and Generational Conflicts in Alexa Hennig Von Lange’s *Relax*, Elke Naters’s *Lügen*, and Charlotte Roche’s *Feuchtgebiete*’, *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty First Century Literature*, 35.1 (2011), 56-73

McCosker, Anthony, ‘Blogging Illness: Recovering in Public’, *M/C Journal*, 11.6 (2008) <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/104>> [accessed 4 September 2015]

McNeill, Laurie, ‘Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks: The Diary on the Internet’, *Biography*, 26.1 (2003), 24-47

Meyer-Sickendiek, Burkhard, ‘Der Schmerz im Tagebuch’, in *Affektpoetik. Eine Kulturgeschichte literarischer Emotionen*, by Meyer-Sickendiek (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), pp. 424-453

Miller, Nancy K., and Jason Tougaw, 'Introduction: Extremities', in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. by Miller and Tougaw (Urbana/ Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2002)

Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 2000)

—, 'Representation and Its Discontents. The Uneasy Home of Disability in Literature and Film', in *Handbook of Disability Studies*, ed. by Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, Michael Bury (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 195-218

Moritz, Karl Philipp, *Anton Reiser. Ein psychologischer Roman* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1972; orig.: Berlin: Friedrich Maurer, 1785-90)

Mühlemann, Kaspar, *Christoph Schlingensiefel und seine Auseinandersetzung mit Joseph Beuys*, Europäische Hochschulschriften: Kunstgeschichte, 439 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2011)

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Contemporary Literary Criticism. Literary and Cultural Studies*, 3rd edn, ed. by Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (New York/ London: Longman, 1994), pp. 422-431

NDR, 'NDR Talkshow 26.08.2011 - Charlotte Roche (1/2)', *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V71mDxERvlw>> [accessed 9 January 2016]

Neubert, Marina, 'Lebendig begraben', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 27 March 2009 <<http://www.morgenpost.de/printarchiv/kultur/article1062623/Lebendig-begraben.html>> [accessed 3 June 2013]

Neufeld, Anna Katharina, and Ulrike Vedder, eds, 'An der Grenze. Sterben und Tod in der Gegenwartsliteratur', a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 25.3 (2015)

—, 'An der Grenze: Sterben und Tod in der Gegenwartsliteratur. Einleitung', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 25.3 (2015), 495-498

Nowak, Tine, 'Das meistgelesene Tagebuch der Welt', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 142-145

Oesterle, Günter, 'Die Intervalle des Tagebuchs – das Tagebuch als Intervall', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 100-103

Oestreich, Heide, 'Schriftstellerin Verena Stefan. "Ich bin keine Frau. Punkt."', *taz*, 10 May 2008 <<http://www.taz.de/Schriftstellerin-Verena-Stefan/!17049/>> [accessed 18 October 2013]

Oltermann, Philip, 'Interview: Charlotte Roche', *GRANTA* <<http://www.granta.com/New-Writing/Interview-Charlotte-Roche>> [accessed 3 December 2012]

Pascal, Roy, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960)

Paterson, Tony, 'Charlotte Roche: Troubled mind of a taboo-buster', *The Independent*, 26 August 2011 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/charlotte-roche-troubled-mind-of-a-taboo-buster-2344746.html>> [accessed 9 January 2016]

Peitz, Dirk, 'Die Ich-Erzähler', *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 October 2009 <<http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/immer-mehr-autoren-berichten-in-ihren-buechern-von-sich-selbst--und->

von-ihren-krankheiten-die-ich-erzaehler,10810590,10671790.html> [accessed 20 October 2014]

Piper Verlag, '5 Fragen an Charlotte Roche zu "Schoßgebete"', *YouTube* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag4amSRETSY>> [accessed 4 December 2012]

Plummer, Kenneth, *Documents of Life: an introduction to the problems and literature of a humanistic method*, contemporary social research series, 7 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983)

Poore, Carol, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007)

Popkin, Jeremy D., 'Philippe Lejeune, Explorer of the Diary', in *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: Biographical Research Center, 2009), pp. 1-15

Preußner, Heinz-Peter, and Helmut Schmitz, 'Autobiografik zwischen Literaturwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung. Eine Einleitung', in *Autobiografie und historische Krisenerfahrung*, Jahrbuch Literatur und Politik, 5 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2010), pp. 7-20

Price Herndl, Diane, 'Disease versus Disability: The Medical Humanities and Disability Studies', *PMLA*, 120.2 (2005), 593-598

—, 'Our Breasts, Our Selves: Identity, Community, and Ethics in Cancer Autobiographies', *Signs*, 32.1 (2006), 221-245
Quayson, Ato, *Aesthetic Nervousness. Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007)

Radisch, Iris, 'Metaphysik des Tumors', *Zeit Online*, 19 September 2009 <<http://www.zeit.de/2009/39/Krebsbuecher>> [accessed 8 October 2014]

Ralfs, Sarah, "'Wir sind eins" – TOTAL TOTAL. Selbst-Inszenierungen in Christoph Schlingensief's späten Arbeiten', in *Der Gesamtkünstler Christoph Schlingensief*, ed. by Pia Janke and Teresa Kovacs, Diskurse – Kontexte – Impulse, 8 (Wien: Praesens, 2011), pp. 307-326

Ramadanovic, Petar, 'Introduction: Trauma and Crisis', *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism*, 11.2 (2001) <<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.101/11.2introduction.txt>> [accessed 9 January 2016]

Reed, T. J., 'Mann as diarist', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 226-234

Ricker-Abderhalden, Judith, 'Schreiben über Krankheit. Bemerkungen zur Zerstörung eines literarischen Tabus', *Neophilologus*, 71.3 (1987), 474-479

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, 'The Story of "I": Illness and Narrative Identity', *Narrative*, 10.1 (2002), 9-27

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1953)

Ruoss, Hardy, 'Verena Stefan: Fremdschläfer - die Autorin im Gespräch mit Hardy Ruoss', *SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen*, 8 November 2007 <<http://www.srf.ch/sendungen/reflexe/verena-stefan-fremdschlaefer-die-autorin-im-gespraech-mit-hardy-ruoss>> [accessed 17 October 2013]

Russo, Mary, *The Female Grotesque. Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York/ London: Routledge, 1995)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: an Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London/ New York: Routledge, 2003; orig.: Paris: Gallimard, 1943)

Saunders, Max, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010)

Schep, Dennis, '1 Problems: Blindness and Autobiography', *European Journal of Life Writing*, 4 (2015), 17-35

Schmid, Walter Fabian, 'Kathrin Schmidt im Gespräch: Das ist ein anderes Schreiben, als es vorher war', *Poet* 7 (2009), pp. 183-191

Schmidt, Jan, 'Die A-List und der Long Tail. Persönliche Öffentlichkeiten in der Blogosphäre', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 115-117

'Schmidt, Kathrin', in *Munzinger Online/ KLG – Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* <<http://www.munzinger.de/document/16000000689>> [accessed 8 May 2013]

Schmidt, Nina, 'Autofiction and Trauma: Negotiating Vulnerable Subject Positions in Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebete*', *Auto/Fiction* 1.1 (2013), 61-86

—, '[E]ndlich normal geworden'? Reassembling an image of the self in Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht* (2009)', in *Norms, normality and normalization: papers from the postgraduate summer school in German Studies, Nottingham, July 2013*, ed. by Matthias Uecker and others (Nottingham: Nottingham eprints, 2014), pp. 65-78

—, 'Kathrin Schmidt', author page for the *Centre for the Study of Contemporary Women's Writing*, 2014 <<http://modernlanguages.sas.ac.uk/centre-study-contemporary-womens-writing-ccww/languages/german/kathrin-schmidt>> [accessed 21 May 2016]

—, 'Confronting Cancer Publicly: Christoph Schlingensiefel's *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein! Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung*', *Oxford German Studies*, 44.1 (2015), 100-112

Schmitt, Arnaud, 'Making the Case for Self-narration Against Autofiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 25.1 (2010), 122-137

Schönberger, Klaus, 'Von der Lesewut zur Schreibwut?', in *@bsolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog*, ed. by Helmut Gold and others, Kataloge der Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, 26 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), pp. 112-114

Schors, Horst Willi, 'Der Tod als Bühnenstück', *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 22 September 2009, n.p.

Schröder, Christoph, 'Die Kunst der Krankheit. Wir kommen nicht von uns los', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 24 October 2009 <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/die-kunst-der-krankheit-wir-kommen-nicht-von-uns-los/1621152.html>> [accessed 20 October 2014]

Schulte, Martin, 'Schreiben für die Unsterblichkeit', *sh:z Schleswig-Holsteinischer Zeitungsverlag*, 9 December 2011 <<http://www.shz.de/incoming/schreiben-fuer-die-unsterblichkeit-id1878506.html>> [accessed 9 December 2015]

Schwalm, Helga, 'Autobiography', in *the living handbook of narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn and others (Hamburg: Hamburg University, last revised 2014) <<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/autobiography>> [accessed 9 September 2016]

Schwarzer, Alice, 'Hallo Charlotte', *aliceschwarzer.de* [last accessed 15 January 2013; now irretrievable]

Segeberg, Harro, 'Menschsein heißt, medial sein wollen. Autorinszenierungen im Medienzeitalter', in *Autorinszenierungen. Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*, ed. by Christine Künzel and Jörg Schönert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 245-256

'Serge Doubrovsky: "Écrire sur soi, c'est écrire sur les autres"', *Le Point*, 22 February 2011 <http://www.lepoint.fr/grands-entretiens/serge-doubrovsky-ecrire-sur-soi-c-est-ecrire-sur-les-autres-22-02-2011-1298292_326.php> [accessed 26 March 2016]

Shakespeare, Tom, 'The Social Model of Disability', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 214-221

—, *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2014)

Shulevitz, Judith, 'THE CLOSE READER; The Poetry of Illness', *The New York Times*, 29 December 2002 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/29/books/the-close-reader-the-poetry-of-illness.html>> [accessed 17 January 2016]

Siebers, Tobin, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2008)

—, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2010)

Siegel, Elke, '„die mühsame Verschriftlichung meiner peinlichen Existenz“. Wolfgang Herrndorfs „Arbeit und Struktur“ zwischen Tagebuch, Blog und Buch', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 26.2 (2016), 348-372

Smith, Sidonie, 'Self, Subject, and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-century Autobiographical Practice', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 9.1 (1990), 11-24

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson, 'The Rumpled Bed of Autobiography: Extravagant Lives, Extravagant Questions', *Biography*, 24.1 (2001), 1-14

—, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010)

Smith-Prei, Carrie, "'Knaller-Sex Für Alle:': Popfeminist Body Politics in Lady Bitch Ray, Charlotte Roche, and Sarah Kuttner', *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty First Century Literature*, 35.1 (2011), 3-39

Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor & Aids and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Books, 2002; orig.: New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1989)

—, *On Photography* (New York/ London: Anchor Books, 1990)

—, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003)

Spiegel, Andrea, 'Gross, schlank, blond, attraktiv. Schweizer Schriftstellerinnen der 1970er', *literaturkritik.at*, 23 September 2013

<<http://www.uibk.ac.at/literaturkritik/zeitschrift/1111216.html#Dreizehn>> [accessed 18 October 2013]

Spiers, Emily, 'The Long March through the Institutions: From Alice Schwarzer to Pop Feminism and the New German Girls', *Oxford German Studies*, 43.1 (2014), 69-88

Stäblein, Ruthard, 'Langatmige Beichte in Schrumpfddeutsch', *SWR* <<http://www.swr.de/swr2/literatur/charlotte-roche-schossgebete-/id=6891032/nid=6891032/did=8445458/1tIszgk/>> [accessed 11 December 2012]

Stallybrass, Peter, and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986)

Stanzel, Franz K., 'Autobiographie. Wo ein Ich erzählt, ist immer Fiktion', *Sprachkunst*, 37.2 (2006), 325-340

Stehle, Maria, 'Pop, Porn, and Rebellious Speech. Feminist Politics and the Multi-Media Performances of Elfriede Jelinek, Charlotte Roche, and Lady Bitch Ray', *Feminist Media Studies*, 12.2 (2012), 229-247

Steinfeld, Thomas, 'Verlogenheit zwischen den Beinen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 July 2012 <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/charlotte-roches-neuer-roman-schossgebete-verlogenheit-zwischen-den-beinen-1.1129744>> [accessed 21 January 2016]

Teucher, Ulrich, 'The Incomprehensible Density of Being. Aestheticizing Cancer', in *Unfitting stories: narrative approaches to disease, disability, and trauma*, ed. by Valérie Raoul (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007), pp. 71-78

Thomas, Carol, and Nick Watson, Alan Roulstone, eds, *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012)

Umatham, Sandra, 'Die Kunst des Abschiednehmens. Überlegungen zu Christoph Schlingensiefels Inszenierung von eigenem Sterben und Tod', in *Theater und Subjektkonstitution: theatrale Praktiken zwischen Affirmation und Subversion*, ed. by Michael Bachmann and others, Theater, 33 (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), pp. 253-62

Ustorf, Anne-Ev, 'Es ist ein großes Glück, dass ich diesen Beruf hatte, als ich erkrankte. Kathrin Schmidt im Gespräch', *Psychologie Heute*, January 2011 <http://www.ustorf.de/dateien/Interview_Kathrin_Schmidt.pdf> [accessed 4 October 2013]

van der Kolk, Bessel A., and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 158-182

Vatan, Florence, 'The Lure of Disgust: Musil and Kolnai', *The Germanic Review*, 88 (2013), 29-46

Vice, Sue, 'Bakhtin and Kristeva: Grotesque Body, Abject Self', in *Face to Face. Bakhtin in Russia and the West*, ed. by Carol Adlam and others (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1997), pp. 160-174

von Engelhardt, Dietrich, and Felix Unger, eds, *Ästhetik und Ethik in der Medizin*, edition weimar, 4 (Weimar: VDG, 2006)

von Jagow, Bettina, and Florian Steger, *Repräsentationen: Medizin und Ethik in Literatur und Kunst der Moderne* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004)

—, *Literatur und Medizin: ein Lexikon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005)

—, *Was treibt die Literatur zur Medizin?: ein kulturwissenschaftlicher Dialog* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009)

von Lovenberg, Felicitas, 'Ein Gespräch mit Charlotte Roche: Ich bin keine Frau, die andere Frauen verrät', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 10 August 2011 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/ein-gespraech-mit-charlotte-roche-ich-bin-keine-frau-die-andere-frauen-verraet-11104662.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2> [accessed 9 January 2016]

—, 'Zum Tod Wolfgang Herrndorfs. Dieses Zuviel ist niemals genug', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 27 August 2013 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/zum-tod-wolfgang-herrndorfs-dieses-zuviel-ist-niemals-genug-12549002.html>> [accessed 18 August 2015]

Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina, *Autobiographie*, Sammlung Metzler, 323 (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Metzler, 2000)

—, 'AUTOFIKTION ODER: AUTOBIOGRAPHIE NACH DER AUTOBIOGRAPHIE. GOETHE – BARTHES – ÖZDAMAR', in *Autobiographisches Schreiben in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur. Band 1: Grenzen der Identität und der Fiktionalität*, ed. by Ulrich Breuer and Beatrice Sandberg (München: iudicium, 2006), pp. 353-368

—, 'Autofiktion – Theorie und Praxis des autobiographischen Schreibens', in *Schreiben im Kontext von Schule, Universität, Beruf und Lebensalltag*, ed. by Johannes Berning and others, *Schreiben interdisziplinär*, 1 (Berlin: LIT, 2006), pp. 80-101

—, 'Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven der Autobiographieforschung in der Literaturwissenschaft', *Bios – Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen*, 23.2 (2010), 188-200

Waldschmidt, Anne, 'Flexible Normalisierung oder stabile Ausgrenzung: Veränderungen im Verhältnis Behinderung und Normalität', *Soziale Probleme*, 9.1 (1998), 3-25

Warner, Chantelle, 'Speaking from experience: narrative schemas, deixis, and authenticity effects in Verena Stefan's feminist confession "Shedding"', *Language and Literature*, 18.1 (2009), 7-23

—, *The Pragmatics of Literary Testimony: Authenticity Effects in German Social Autobiographies* (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013)

Weichelt, Matthias, 'Kathrin Schmidt: You Are Not Going to Die', trans. by Isabel Cole, *Litrix.de German Literature online*, August 2010 <<http://www.litrix.de/buecher/belletristik/jahr/2010/stirbstnicht/buchbesprechung/enindex.htm>> [accessed 23 September 2013]

Wendell, Susan, 'Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, 4th edn (New York/ London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 161-173

—, *The Rejected Body. Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York/ London: Routledge, 1996)

Westerling, Marcy, 'livingly dying. notes & essays on daily life with terminal cancer' <<http://livinglydying.com/>> [accessed 17 December 2015]

Wittig, Monique, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', *Feminist Issues*, 3.2 (1983), 61-69

Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own & Three Guineas* (London: Vintage, 1996; orig.: London: Chatto & Windus/ Hogarth, 1984)

Wübben, Yvonne, and Carsten Zelle, eds, *Krankheit schreiben. Aufzeichnungsverfahren in Medizin und Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013)

Xue, Yuan, *Über den Körper hinaus. Geschlechterkonstruktionen im europäischen Roman seit Ende der 1990er Jahre* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014)

Zapruder, Alexandra, *Salvaged Pages. Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust* (New Haven/ London: Yale UP, 2002)

ZDF, 'Charlotte Roche bei Markus Lanz (18. August 2011)', *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26l7h2u5ntY>> [accessed 18 January 2013]

Zipfel, Frank, 'Autofiktion. Zwischen den Grenzen von Faktualität, Fiktionalität und Literarität?', in *Grenzen der Literatur. Zu Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen*, ed. by Simone Winko and others (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 285-314