'Drei Wege zu Bachmann': The Topography of Recent Criticism

Author(s): Caitriona Leahy

Source: *Austrian Studies*, Vol. 21, Cultures at War: Austria-Hungary 1914—1918 (2013), pp. 201-215

Published by: Modern Humanities Research Association

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/austrianstudies.21.2013.0201

Review Article

'Drei Wege zu Bachmann': The Topography of Recent Criticism

CAITRIONA LEAHY

Trinity College Dublin

Crisis and Form in the Later Writing of Ingeborg Bachmann. An Aesthetic Examination of the Poetic Drafts of the 1960s. By ÁINE MCMURTRY. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2012. 250 pp. £19.99. ISBN 978–1–907322–39–6.

Walking through History. Topography and Identity in the Works of Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard. By KATYA KRYLOVA. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013. 274 pp. £45.00. ISBN 978–3–0343–0845–8.

Die Waffen nieder! Lay down your weapons! Ingeborg Bachmanns Schreiben gegen den Krieg. Ed. by KARL IVAN SOLIBAKKE and KARINA VON TIPPELSKIRCH. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012. 257 pp. €36.80. ISBN 978–3–8260–4910–1.

Áine McMurtry's *Crisis and Form in the Later Writing of Ingeborg Bachmann* is conceived as a rebalancing of a perceived bias against the biographical in Bachmann criticism. The bias, associated most strongly with Sigrid Weigel's 1999 intellectual biography of the writer, has since then been countered by the release of poetic and other materials from the writer's estate, as well as publications by Hans Werner Henze, Adolf Opel and Frauke Meyer-Gosau.[1] McMurtry's concern is to incorporate the late poetry volumes[2] into what Hans Höller has referred to as an overall 'Werkidee' [unifying theme of the oeuvre].[3] For McMurtry, this involves close analysis of the experience of suffering recorded in the late poetry, an acknowledgement of the aesthetic as well as

[1] Ingeborg Bachmann–Hans Werner Henze, *Briefe einer Freundschaft*, ed. by Hans Höller, with an introduction by Hans Werner Henze (Munich, 2004); Adolf Opel, *'Wo mir das Lachen zurückgekommen ist...'. Auf Reisen mit Ingeborg Bachmann* (Munich, 2001); Frauke Meyer-Gosau, *Einmal muß das Fest ja kommen. Eine Reise zu Ingeborg Bachmann. Biographie* (Munich, 2008).

[2] Ingeborg Bachmann, *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt. Unveröffentlichte Gedichte*, ed. by Isolde Moser, Heinz Bachmann and Christian Moser (Munich, 2000); Ingeborg Bachmann, *Letzte, unveröffentlichte Gedichte, Entwürfe und Fassungen*, ed. by Hans Höller (Frankfurt a.M., 1998).

[3] Cf. Dirk Göttsche, 'Späte Gedichte', in *Bachmann-Handbuch. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2002), pp. 78–82 (p. 80).

Austrian Studies 21 (2013), 201–15

personal impact of 'crisis', and a renewed attention to the role it played in Bachmann's drive to stretch the limits of aesthetic form. Her book approaches this 'late Bachmann' along pathways suggested by Dirk Göttsche in his overview of the 'Späte Gedichte' [late poems]:[4] there are chapters on Cold War Berlin as a location of personal and political crisis, on Bachmann's engagement with Wagner's expression of ill-fated love in *Tristan and Isolde*, and on Gaspara Stampa's existential model — 'to live ardently and not to feel the pain'.[5]

The question of what is meant by 'crisis' is dealt with in the book's introduction, but the account seems insufficient to cope with the myriad of referents it has for McMurtry: it is at once personal crisis, mental breakdown, physical illness, *Sprachkrise* [language crisis], a broad-based 1960s crisis of aesthetics and a personal 1960s crisis of poetry. As such, McMurtry is constantly shifting between the subjective and the intersubjective, the aesthetic and the political, the physical and the metaphysical. The fabric of these interrelations or interweavings is intricate — and that is part of McMurtry's argument — but there remains at least a tension between the various temporalities suggested by crisis as concept: a suddenness one gets over or works through; something that passes of its own accord; or something that occurs not in or as a moment, but in and as duration — not an event, but a state of affairs. Thinking of crisis in these terms produces echoes that resonate with Bachmann and that feature in other ways in McMurtry's narrative: Benjamin's account of modernity as a crisis of the idea of crisis itself — an undoing of the idea that one might get beyond crisis;[6] Hofmannsthal's *Sprachkrise* as a retrospective performance and undermining of a description of the collapse of representation; and finally, Bachmann's *Ein Ort für Zufälle* [*A Place for Coincidences*] (so well analysed here) as an exemplary text of temporality itself in crisis. McMurtry's account is trying to manage two competing impulses in its own argument: one that posits a continuity in the development of Bachmann's aesthetic, and one that is built around the idea of suddenness and its 'urgent' demands. It is, says McMurtry, 'the urgent voicing of present-tense distress' that lends the late prose work its 'impact and radicality' (*Crisis*, p. 17); and it is the purpose of her book to link this private experience with the later, more reflective and refracted notion of 'die Krankheit unserer Zeit' [the sickness of our time] (*Crisis*, p. 18).

A simultaneous strength and weakness of the book is the weight of Bachmann criticism that is brought to bear on the fragile material of the two late poetry volumes. McMurtry's management of her field is deeply impressive; but the

[4] Ibid., p. 79.

[5] McMurtry, *Crisis and Form*, p. 135. Quotations from this book are henceforth marked parenthetically as *Crisis*.

[6] Cf. Walter Benjamin, 'Zentralpark', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. I.2, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a.M., 1991), pp. 657–90 (p. 683): 'Der Begriff des Fortschritts ist in der Idee der Katastrophe zu fundieren. Daß es "so weiter" geht, *ist* die Katastrophe' [The concept of progress is to be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. The fact that it goes on and on *is* the catastrophe].

poems themselves struggle to sustain the force of critical speak that is heaped upon them. This is most obvious in the close readings, where there is little to do other than repeat, lightly glossed, the painful, personal content ('Meine Schreie verliere ich' [I am losing my screams] or 'Abschied' [Leave-taking]) (*Crisis*, pp. 39, 46), and where the gap between the suffering and the aesthetic theory seems widest. But McMurtry's critical scaffolding is certainly formidable. Chapter One on Bachmann's writing in the 1960s follows Christine Kanz and Ingeborg Dusar in its explication of the importance of Georg Groddeck's *Das Buch vom Es* [*The Book of the It*, 1923].[7] Groddeck's understanding of illness, which casts physical symptoms as performers of unsayable truths, appeals to Bachmann's sense that the body speaks; it speaks creatively, representatively — that is to say, on behalf of the community — but often against the rational, censored language of that community. For McMurtry, this 'other' language of the sick body feeds the broader argument that Bachmann's poetic depiction of alcoholism and breakdown is a conscious attempt to forge an aesthetic capable of bringing to language the taboos of social and aesthetic convention. Another intertext in this project (according to Bachmann herself) is Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), which exemplifies the struggle to translate personal, lived experience into the stuff of art and the stuff of society (Plath: 'start with self and extend outwards', *Crisis*, p. 52). McMurtry also draws parallels between Plath's and Bachmann's respective moves from poetry to prose, suggesting that, in each case, it was linked to the increasing, and increasingly political, centrality of lived experience for the writers, and their concomitant efforts to find form for that experience.

McMurtry then moves on to *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [*Dialectic of Enlightenment*] and 'the repression of the physical realm within rational Western culture' (*Crisis*, p. 61), a line of interpretation applied previously to Bachmann by Sigrid Weigel, Marion Schmaus and Georgina Paul.[8] McMurtry's contribution is to integrate the poetic drafts into this framework: 'In the draft entitled "Gerüche" [Smells], Bachmann could be read as experimenting, under the influence of having read *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, with her own status as a woman who figures nature within culture' (*Crisis*, p. 61). Adorno is also invoked as a precursor to Bachmann's familiar insistence that fascism lives on post-fascism. And so, all the ingredients are in place: the politicization (that is to say, generalization) of individual experience, mind-body dualism, male-female dualism, poetry-prose dualism and the afterlife of fascist modes of behaviour. If this all seems like too much to bear for the poetic fragments, the proliferation

[7] Ingeborg Dusar, *Choreographien der Differenz. Ingeborg Bachmanns Prosaband 'Simultan'* (Cologne, 1994); Christine Kanz, *Angst und Geschlechterdifferenzen. Ingeborg Bachmanns 'Todesarten'-Projekt in Kontexten der Gegenwartsliteratur* (Stuttgart, 1999).

[8] Sigrid Weigel, *Ingeborg Bachmann. Hinterlassenschaften unter Wahrung des Briefgeheimnisses* (Munich, 1999); Marion Schmaus, 'Kritische Theorie und Soziologie', in *Bachmann-Handbuch*, ed. by Albrecht and Göttsche, pp. 216–18; Georgina Paul, *Perspectives on Gender in Post-1945 German Literature* (Rochester, NY, 2009).

of interpretative tools is not of McMurtry's making. She does not add to the list, she simply brings together. Where she is most interesting is where she uses Seamus Heaney's criticism of Plath to cast colder light on the phenomenon of the 'universal victim position' (*Crisis*, p. 77). The failure to regard critically the kinds of links that are posited in Bachmann between the narratives of others and the narratives of the self has been highlighted by Weigel and by Irene Heidelberger-Leonard in the past; but McMurtry's approach via a poet whose work largely revolves around the attempt to link the personal — often biographical — to what Heaney terms 'supra-personal dimensions of knowledge' (*Crisis*, p. 78) is apt and fresh. The opportunity, prompted by Heaney, to explore Bachmann's 'crisis' in all its personal, political, aesthetic manifestations, under the generalized heading of 'the poetics of impersonality' was not taken here, but perhaps will be in the future.[9] But then, this path, one must speculate, would lead back to Weigel and her model of tracing the secretion and bequeathing of the biographical in those works Bachmann herself approved for publication. And by her own account, overall, McMurtry is writing against Weigel, whose 'deliberate sidelining of the place of biographical crisis in the author's career must be challenged' (*Crisis*, p. 8).

The second chapter explores Elke Schlinsog's argument in *Berliner Zufälle* [Berlin Coincidences][10] that the Berlin writings from the early 1960s bear witness to 'eine veränderte Wahrnehmung, [...] die auf alles Krisenhafte schaut' [an altered perception concerned with everything to do with crisis] (*Crisis*, p. 88). It includes an informed account of the context of Bachmann's Berlin period, followed by readings of *Ein Ort für Zufälle* and McMurtry's own integration of the Berlin poems into these established paradigms. There is also an account of Bachmann's topographical precursors, Benjamin and Baudelaire, as well as wide-ranging treatment of writing and madness using Büchner, Celan, Foucault and later critics, including Shoshana Felman, Weigel, Anna Parkinson and Eva Lindemann.

Chapter Three looks at love as an aesthetic construct, initially by tracing Bachmann's references to the sixteenth-century Italian poet Gaspara Stampa. Stampa provides Bachmann with a model for refashioning feelings of passion and betrayal in poetry, and thereby refashioning poetry itself. Deploying an interesting reference (via Georgina Paul) to Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, McMurtry argues that, for Bachmann, the work of love, like the work of art, brings the utopian and the traumatic into close proximity, and is rendered present, but not consumable, by means of metaphor, condensation and rhythm. The Stampa references in the late prose are distinguished from their poetic counterparts; once conveying a sense of the overwrought, they are now

[9] The term is borrowed from Maud Ellmann's study of modernist aesthetics: *The Poetics of Impersonality. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Cambridge, MA, 1987).

[10] Elke Schlinsog, *Berliner Zufälle. Ingeborg Bachmanns 'Todesarten'-Projekt* (Würzburg, 2005).

deployed in service of the 'wrought narrative' of 'a self-consciously dramatized form' (*Crisis*, p. 172). For McMurtry, this transformation is part of a greater shift to formal abstraction and more generalized, less subjective claims about society and its discontents.

The final chapter works similarly in terms of methodology and argument. This time the intertextual line that is traced (via Adorno, Nietzsche and Corinna Caduff) from the late poetry to *Malina* is Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. The analysis rests on now familiar ground, aiming 'to illuminate an early stage of a textuality that arises out of personal crisis but develops into a metonymic mode to enable oblique expression of social and cultural critique' (*Crisis*, p. 192). Less obliquely put: 'Through radical formal innovation, Bachmann's prose succeeds in developing a viable aesthetic mode for the expression of crisis where, arguably, the majority of her late poetic drafts do not' (*Crisis*, p. 217). This core thesis is argued consistently and strongly by McMurtry. She is convincing in her reading of the late poetry as directly caused by personal pain, and directly flying in the face of contemporary poetic form, and social and political acceptability. She is also convincing in her reading of the late prose as being formally and ideologically defined by indirectness; despite all the intertextual reference, pointing readers to putative sources, *Malina* disrupts causality while at the same time drawing attention to what McMurtry terms (with strong echoes of Weigel), its 'processes of concealment' (*Crisis*, p. 225). Many Bachmann readers, feeding on a mixture of instinct and knowledge, will agree with both aspects of this argument. If there is a limit to this achievement, it is probably that they might have assumed her claims to be uncontroversial (in any strong sense) at the outset. What stands, however, is the writer's great store of Bachmann knowledge, and the service she has done for those who follow her, not perhaps in casting new light or showing new paths, but certainly in illuminating what underpins where we (diversely) are.

* * * * *

Katya Krylova's paths, on the other hand, are decidedly literal, rather than metaphorical in nature. *Walking through History. Topography and Identity in the Works of Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard* walks the reader through the territory that houses the action (or inaction) of the writers' respective plots, and reads that territory using various sets of interpretative tools. Here, history is *Ge(h)-schichte* [walking through layers]; but as my last sentence demonstrates, even with the best will in the world, there is no escaping metaphor. Walking, housing, plots, territories, tools all seem to breed excessive meaning and the metaphorical ground beneath literal feet shifts threateningly. The reason for this is the nature of signification itself: words' suspension above the reality they signify, their failure to designate and contain, their failure to 'ground' reality, communication, identity. The problem of these failures, as well

as the opportunities afforded by unfettered expression and the possibilities of an undecided reality, were central concerns of Bachmann. So Krylova is right and quick to point to the potency of that metaphor which grounds her own study:

> The recurrent figuration of 'Grund' [base/ground], 'Boden' [ground/soil/floor], 'Ursprung' [origin], 'Ursprungsort' [place of origin], 'Abgrund' [abyss], 'Untergang' [downfall], 'zugrundegerichtet' [ruined, but literally 'directed downwards'], 'zugrundegehen' [to go to ground] and geological/psychoanalytic terminology such as 'Störungsstelle' [fault/problem area], 'Überlagerung' [superimposition] and 'Verschiebung' [displacement], to name but a few, highlights the importance of space and place, and their relationship to the subject, in Bernhard's and Bachmann's narratives, as do terms such as 'Gedankengänge' [thought-paths] and 'Abgrundmensch' [abyssal person].[11]

She returns to these terms repeatedly throughout the course of her book, attending carefully to their interpretative richness.

Krylova's purpose in this is to establish the legitimacy of her concern with topography and, with that, her book's overall claim: namely, that the way in which the environment is inscribed in Bachmann's and Bernhard's works mirrors the psychic states of their characters, who themselves mirror the authors' concern with the collective state of postwar Austria. When we read the *ground*, therefore, we read the individual and we read the country. And when we speak of the *ground*, we speak not just of physical things (earth, landscape, cityscape, architecture), but also of the metaphysical (origins, reason, language itself) and, finally, with Bachmann, Heidegger and Leibniz, of the ungroundedness, or multi-groundedness, of ground itself.

Notwithstanding the potential dizziness of these incessant moves between the material and philosophical aspects of topography, Krylova's theoretical grounds are clearly laid out in her introduction. Her analysis is engendered by and contributes to what is called 'the topographical turn' (*Topography*, p. 18), a set of critical methodologies associated with thinkers such as Pierre Nora, Aleida Assmann and J. Hillis Miller. Her main sources, however, are those of a previous generation, namely, Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud. For Krylova, Freud's *Unbehagen in der Kultur* [*Civilization and its Discontents*] provides her original metaphor — the psyche is structured like a city — while Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* [*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*] 'conceives history as topographically inscribed in the natural landscape' (*Topography,* p. 21). Events, then, are written into and retained within the landscape, but also written into and retained within the psyche; to walk the landscape is,

[11] Katya Krylova, *Walking through History. Topography and Identity in the Works of Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard*, p. 28. Quotations from this book are henceforth marked parenthetically as *Topography*. The translations, where she has provided them, are Krylova's.

therefore, to explore the psyche; and the landscape, as well as the mind, can be a site of traumatic inscription — a *Symptomkörper* [body of symptoms] in search of the talking cure of a walking tour. Krylova, in pointing to all of this, is that curative walker, reconnecting displaced symptoms with their traumatic origins. And her analysis goes further: the landscape is not a passive receptacle of traumatic affects, nor is it a mere mirror of individual and collective trauma; for Krylova, it is 'pathologizing and pathogenic' (*Topography*, p. 22), infecting those who inhabit it. For this reason, as she later argues, protagonists elicit a complex range of what are termed 'psychotopographic' responses to their environments (*Topography*, p. 20). It is the aim of the book to unfurl and ground those responses.

One of the ways in which Krylova pursues this project (which hovers, as we have seen, between grounding and ungrounding), is by using Benjamin's description of 'origin' as signifying a process rather than a finite location. For Krylova, following Benjamin, Bachmann's and Bernhard's protagonists' exploration of their origins will fail to uncover any discrete beginning or end-point, since:

> the search for origin unleashes the dynamic of trying to uncover 'das Ursprüngliche' [the original] within the complex process of origination, something that can never be revealed 'im nackten offenkundigen Bestand des Faktischen' [in the naked and overt existence of the factual] but can only be subject to processes of restoration and reestablishment that for this reason will forever remain incomplete. (*Topography,* p. 26)

From this unstable point of departure, Krylova is able to approach the related questions of individual and national identity.

The book is structured in a clever and reader-friendly way. Between the introduction and conclusion are six chapters featuring three pairs of texts, coupled together for purpose of comparison. Chapters One and Two analyse Bachmann's *Drei Wege zum See* [Three Paths to the Lake] and Bernhard's *Ungenach,* exploring the search for origins and the relationship to *Heimat* and, related to this, the *Habsburgischer Mythos* [Habsburg myth], Joseph Roth and Jean Améry. Nationhood is linked here to melancholy (via Freud and Svetlana Boym) and fantasy (interestingly, if briefly, via Žižek's *Plague of Fantasies*). Chapters Three and Four deal with Bachmann's *Das Buch Franza* [The Book of Franza] and Bernhard's *Frost*, texts that are 'concerned with various forms of topographic subjection and the workings of *Entstellung* [disfigurement] and *Verschiebung* [displacement] with relation to psychotopography and embodied memory' (*Topography*, p. 33). In both texts, says Krylova, 'emblematic' train journeys 'incubate and allegorize traumatic events' (*Topography*, p. 113):

> The particular symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder arising in train accident victims in the nineteenth century became known as 'railway spine', an emblem that is foregrounded in *Frost* in the architectural topography of the train carriage floor with its 'Blutspur' [trail of blood] symbolic of

> an architecture imbued with traumatic legacy, as well as anticipating, in emblematic fashion, the animal rustling episode of the twenty-fifth day [...]. (*Topography,* p. 115)

Apart from attending to various characteristics of traumatic expression here, Krylova also brings Eric Santner's (and others') theorization of 'the creaturely' to bear on *Frost*, where, she argues:

> the particular blurring of boundaries between the human and animal, inside and outside in *Frost* serves to address broader questions of dehumanized humanity in a post-war and post-Holocaust context, a connection strengthened by the text's intertextuality with Kafka's *Der Proceß* [The Trial] in particular, as well as with *Die Verwandlung* [The Metamorphosis]. (*Topography*, p. 33)

Chapters Five and Six focus on Bachmann's *Malina* and Bernhard's *Auslöschung* [Extinction]. The *Malina* chapter (in my view, the strongest in the book) looks at the significance of Vienna itself, as a city where one must 'suffer the past'. Defining this 'pathogenic cityscape' (*Topography,* p. 140), in Krylova's account, are traumatic markers of collective post-war history, personally invested zones of individual destruction and survival, and infusing these, the ubiquitous, haunting presence of the Habsburg Empire. The essence of these mutually dependent spaces — their 'unterirdische Querverbindungen' [underground connections] — is accessed, here, as in Bernhard, through a 'psychotopographic downward directionality' (*Topography,* p. 153), that is to say, by attending to what lies — revealed and revealingly — beneath. Krylova's reading of *Auslöschung* also centres on the metaphor of a downward or backward journey, in which the workings of the past in the present are uncovered. She draws parallels between the dream sequences of the two novels, returns also to the motif of the train journey and to the Kafka influence, before coming to the depiction of Bachmann herself within Bernhard's novel, and the meaning of the now heavily significant title *Auslöschung*. To conceive of writing as simultaneous destruction and preservation brings us back to *Malina*, or *Fanny Goldmann*, or to Freud and his *Wunderblock*. 'Österreich — das ist etwas, das immer weitergeht für mich' [For me, Austria is something that continues, on and on] (*Topography,* p. 249), says Bachmann, says Krylova, before extending her 'peripatetic working through of topography' (*Topography,* p. 250) to present-day Austria, including in her framework the burial of Otto von Habsburg and Vienna's contemporary Holocaust memorials. Krylova's walk through history is, logically, ongoing; the uncovering and re-covering of the past in the present, a process that 'immer weitergeht' [continues, on and on].

Notwithstanding the interesting theoretical as well as literary historical space that Krylova maps out in *Walking though History*, there are two aspects of the book that give this reader pause for thought. The first is straightforward: it is the absence of Joachim Hoell's monograph *Mythenreiche Vorstellungswelt*

und ererbter Alptraum. Ingeborg Bachmann und Thomas Bernhard.[12] Hoell's study addresses a number of Krylova's central questions, and it is difficult to understand his omission. (The book is listed in the bibliography, but not in the index.) My second concern is more complicated, since it relates not just to what might be termed the internal workings of the book, but also to the academic and professional contexts in which it has been produced. The back cover of the book informs the reader that it was the winner of the *2011 Peter Lang Young Scholars Competition in German Studies*. Five publications — 'versions of parts of the book' (*Topography*, p. xiv) — had already appeared in print by the time it was published as a monograph in 2013. Unfortunately, however, the book remains poorly written and poorly edited. It is beset throughout by clumsy English and by errors in expression and translation. If it is the case that promising young academics are forced to publish as they work, and at such a pace that their writing, their ideas and the research that underpins them have little time to develop and settle, and if too little time is devoted to the important processes of pruning, explicating and formal editing, then the academy as a whole will lose out.

* * * * *

Die Waffen nieder! Lay down your weapons! Ingeborg Bachmanns Schreiben gegen den Krieg, edited by Karl Ivan Solibakke and Karina von Tippelskirch is a bilingual (English and German) collection of essays arising out of a conference held at Syracuse University in 2010. Its publication is partly a response to the exhibition *Schreiben gegen den Krieg / Writing against War*, which toured Europe and the US in recent years, and has now also been published in book form.[13] The essay volume is also nicely timed to include early responses to the 2010 publication of Bachmann's *Kriegstagebuch* [War Diary] which, along with the exhibition, has refocused critical attention on the trajectory of the writer's political development. There are various aspects to this political dimension: Bachmann's early postwar experiences in Klagenfurt and Vienna, her self-fashioning in this period and her involvement with Jewish intellectuals; her engagement with politics and her responses to overtly and implicitly political questions (from party politics to feminism) during the 1960s; and finally, her relatively recent integration into the paradigm of *Kunst nach Auschwitz* [Art after Auschwitz]. This last aspect of Bachmann criticism has been fed from many sources, from the publication of the Celan correspondence, to the exploration of links to the Frankfurt School, to broadly conceived post-structuralist readings of her work, to her integration into the all-encompassing

[12] Joachim Hoell, *Mythenreiche Vorstellungswelt und ererbter Alptraum. Ingeborg Bachmann und Thomas Bernhard* (Berlin, 2000).

[13] *Ingeborg Bachmann. Schreiben gegen den Krieg / Writing against War*, ed. by Hans Höller, Helga Pöcheim and Karl Ivan Solibakke (Vienna, 2008).

territory of cultural memory. Each of these approaches is represented in the present volume, the title of which suggests close proximity to Dirk Göttsche's (et al) 2006 collection *Schreiben gegen Krieg und Gewalt* [Writing against War and Violence].[14] However, readers of the Solibakke / von Tippelskirch book will find it lays more focused claim to its title than the very loosely contextualized Göttsche one.

The volume includes seventeen essays, organized into four sections and preceded by a helpful, informative introduction. The first section, according to Solibakke, seeks to ground Bachmann's repeated assertion that violence endures beyond the confines of war, by systematically contextualizing the theme of violence in her work. It begins with one of the outstanding essays of the book, Gisela Brinker-Gabler's '"Weiterdenken": Bachmann, the Public Intellectual', which explores Bachmann's understanding of 'the ties between literary and public responsibility'.[15] Her most important source in this is the essay 'Politik und Physis' [Politics and Physis] (also explored by Áine McMurtry), recently made widely available by its publication in the *Kritische Schriften* [Critical Writings] volume (2005). In 'Politik und Physis', Bachmann characterizes her understanding of politics as organic process rather than singular decision, and as embodied rather than disembodied: 'ein im [Prozess] befindliches Körperwerk dessen Tentakel die anderen [Tentakel] des gesellschaftlichen [Körpers] dauernd berührt, von ihnen abgestoßen und angezogen wird' [an embodied entity in process, whose tentacles constantly come into contact with the other tentacles of the social body, being repulsed and attracted by them] (*Weapons*, p. 23). Brinker-Gabler greatly develops our understanding of what is implied in this metaphor, by tracing the Aristotelean roots of 'physis' as 'phusis' (meaning nature), and its particular inflection in Heidegger to describe the 'self-forming prevailing of beings as a whole' (*Weapons*, p. 23). Furthermore, it is argued, this 'phusis' is intimately connected to Heidegger's version of 'logos', which defines a speaking of, and out of, the 'phusis', that is to say, a speaking that *shows* the 'phusis'. For Brinker-Gabler, the interaction and mutual constitution of 'logos' and 'phusis', so defined, are at the heart of Bachmann's literary-political project: 'She speaks consciously and decisively as "Einzelne," that is, in the singular, as someone who no longer maintains a "we" relationship to the public, but whose relation to the "social as a whole" and whose engagement with it is processual in character' (*Weapons,* p. 24). This engagement defines Bachmann as a public intellectual, argues Brinker-Gabler, whose essay, aside from the merit of its main argument, is full of fascinating supporting references — to Blanchot, for example, and to Rosi Braidotti's 'nomadic subjects' (*Weapons,* p. 27). Both

[14] *Schreiben gegen Krieg und Gewalt. Ingeborg Bachmann und die deutschsprachige Literatur 1945–1980*, ed. by Dirk Göttsche, Franziska Meyer, Claudia Glunz and Thomas F. Schneider (Göttingen, 2006).

[15] Solibakke and von Tippelskirch, *Lay down your weapons*, p. 19. Quotations from this book are henceforth marked parenthetically as *Weapons*.

of these names are deployed in describing Bachmann's 'transnationality' as a writer. For Brinker-Gabler, the transnational impetus describes a kind of will to truth that is continuously in process, that invokes multiple languages and territories, and that happens in the interaction between the singular and the collective, between the centre and the periphery, between literary creativity and political responsibility.

The transnational is also the topic of Sara Lennox's contribution, which she describes as an extension of, and counterpart to, the history of Bachmann readings as constructed in her 2006 monograph.[16] Her essay here counteracts the national bias of that book with a description of the ways in which Bachmann might be read as constitutively concerned with the transnational — for example, in her treatment of the Habsburg legacy. This might prompt the question as to whether there is a specificity to the term transnational that will drive genuinely new insights into Bachmann. Lennox's own question: 'What is the point of Bachmann's attention to the transnational?' (*Weapons,* p. 54) and her answer: 'an emphatic assertion that an entire complex of social circumstances, now conceived to be global, are to blame for the personal unhappiness from which her characters suffer' (*Weapons,* p. 55) tantalizingly side-step the issue.

The second section of the volume, 'Bachmann und das Judentum' features three essays on the Celan relationship, one centring on Jack Hamesh and one on testimony. Each of these essays, albeit in very different ways, translates the biographical into aesthetic influence. Mark Anderson's essay, 'A Delicate Affair: The Young Ingeborg Bachmann', delicately explores Bachmann's early turn from the inward-looking political and aesthetic models of her 1930s youth to the more recognizable values of the mature writer and thinker. In this, he argues for the pivotal influence of her personal relationships with Jack Hamesh, Hans Weigel and Paul Celan, and while casting no aspersions on Bachmann's political or aesthetic integrity, does push for a more critical evaluation of her 'disappointing' rewriting of her own past, both in her fictionalized biographical accounts and her biographically infused fictions. Given the recent focus on the biographical generally in Bachmann criticism (prompted by the release of materials from the writer's estate and reflected in volumes such as McMurtry's and the 2011 edited collection *Mythos Bachmann. Zwischen Inszenierung und Selbstinszenierung* [*The Bachmann Myth. Between Performance and Self-Performance*]),[17] Anderson's timely essay significantly complicates our understanding of McMurtry's 'processes of concealment', not to mention Bachmann's own 'Briefgeheimnis' [secret of the post], its (paradoxical) exposition by Sigrid Weigel and, finally, the remaining, perhaps sublated secrets of the sealed estate.

[16] Sara Lennox, *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters. Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann* (Amherst, MA, 2006).

[17] *Mythos Bachmann. Zwischen Inszenierung und Selbstinszenierung*, ed. by Wilhelm Hemecker and Manfred Mittermayer (Vienna, 2011).

The highlight of the third section of the book flies by these biographical nets, and will greatly please those readers whose preference is for the creatively philosophical approach to Bachmann. Sabine Gölz's '"Böhmen liegt am Meer": Die Heimkehr in den Grund' ['Bohemia lies by the sea': Returning to base] returns to the most important poetic site of Krylova's favoured topographical metaphor — and proceeds to pull the metaphorical carpet from beneath the feet of her fellow critics. 'Grounding' our criticism in the stable earth of deconstruction, deterritorialization, openness and so on, may, Gölz argues, ironically repeat the foreclosing interpretative gestures of other, more positivistically inclined methodologies, producing from the mutually satisfying interplay of literature and criticism simply another version of 'knowledge, nicely browned' (*Weapons*, p. 140). In place of such solid outcomes, Gölz proposes a renewed attention to the destabilizing condition of language itself, as a prerequisite to understanding Bachmann's *Böhmen* [Bohemia, as concept], and her aesthetic practice more generally. Bachmann's texts, argues Gölz, 'haben ein neues Gesetz im Blick. Sie sind auf ein neues Rechtsverhältnis zur Sprache hin geschrieben' [have a new law in their sights. They are written towards a new legal relationship to language] (*Weapons*, p. 138). A new practice — 'eine neue Leseweise' [a new way of reading] (*Weapons*, p. 138) — would resist the impetus to assimilate all otherness to the existing solid ground of 'die Disziplin des Bestehenden' [the discipline of what already exists]; rather, it would, with Bachmann, performatively 'return' *Böhmen* to the fluidity of its own nomadic condition. It might, of course, be countered that this methodology, too, is a methodology; that the claim to repeat Bachmann's own writerly gesture in this readerly approach to her texts is itself a repetition of the authoritative claims of those Gölz criticizes. One might further move to depose the putative sources of Gölz's approach, pointing to the fact that Nomadic Studies, too, defines territory; that language, too, above all in its fictions and metaphors, imperially consumes the material, the experiential, the physical domains. The Bachmann of *Gantenbein* and *Franza* knows this. The Bachmann who never published poems in which the biographical had not yet been consumed and sublated, knows this. Notwithstanding its contentiousness (not to say, instability) in the face of so much critical *Landvermessung* [land surveying], Gölz's utopian plea for a different kind of Bachmann criticism is, literally, vital. It also brings a new, ironic dimension to the 'topographical turn' we encountered with Krylova. What, we wonder, if the topographical turn, the transnational turn, the biographical turn were themselves to be turned in service of something like this:

> was wäre, wenn wir in unseren Lektüren den Akzent auf die performative Dimension, die wirkliche Deterritorialisierung und praktizierte Dekonstruktion verschöben? Wenn wir dem Gedicht nicht mehr ohne Konsequenzen 'zustimmten', sondern uns dann sogleich fragten, welche Veränderungen in unseren Lesegewohnheiten eine solche Zustimmung impliziert? Zu welchen Verschiebungen in unserer literarischen Geographie

> käme es dann? [...] Dann kämen alle Topographien ins Schwimmen [...]. Eine solche Praxis wäre mit dem Literaturbetrieb, wie wir ihn kennen, völlig unvereinbar.
>
> [what if, in our readings, we were to shift the emphasis onto the performative dimension, to actual deterritorialization and practised deconstruction? If we were no longer to 'approve' of poems in an inconsequential way, but rather asked ourselves then what changes to our reading habits would be implied by that approval? What displacements in our literary geography would then occur? Then all topographies would start to flow. Such a practice would be completely incompatible with the literary industry as we know it] (*Weapons*, p. 141)

And here, again, echoes the previously posed question: what kind of criticism is institutionally supported? What kind of 'insights' can be formulated as 'outcomes'? Or to hijack McMurtry's terminology: what kind of crisis would we recognize as such? And in what form can we, possibly, respond? These questions in turn seem to echo in Bachmann's own decision, already indicated in her dissertation, to opt for aesthetic rather than philosophical speaking, and in so doing, to refuse to be bound by circumscribed definitions of sayability itself. Analysis of this moment of decision and the grounds of its making begin Peter Gilgen's essay 'Ingeborg Bachmann's War: Between Philosophy and Poetry'; it is matched by the counter-moment of her decision to depart the land of poetry, marked, here again, in 'Böhmen liegt am Meer' [Bohemia lies by the sea]. Less rhetorical than Gölz, Gilgen's analysis of the full force of philosophical pressure that is brought to bear in the central concept of *Grund* yields very similar conclusions, and further bolsters the sense that in the eyes of contemporary Bachmann criticism, repeatedly focusing on the same point on the map — von Tippelskirch's essay on Kiefer and Giannini's essay on Ungaretti also deal with the poem — here, in *Böhmen*, in her leave-taking of the circumscriptions of poetry, Bachmann is significantly, aesthetically, philosophically, *grounded* — 'ans Meer begnadigt' [pardoned to the sea] by her readers.

Finally, then, we come to the fourth section of the book — 'Interpretationen' — and Solibakke's own fine essay '"Fest steht der Schrei": Zur Krise der Wahrheit in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Ein Wildermuth*' [What stands is the scream: On the crisis of truth in Ingeborg Bachmann's *A Wildermuth*]. Exploring the expression of crisis brings us back to where we began, but Solibakke's approach is very different from McMurtry's. Here, the crisis is not biographical, but rather 'eine Krise der Rechtspraxis, die sich zur allumfassenden Krise der Gesellschaft nach 1945 ausweitet' [a crisis of legal practice which is expanding into an all-encompassing crisis of post-1945 society] (*Weapons*, p. 225), and the form in which this crisis finds expression is the judge's scream. As such, the essay is essentially about the sayability of Bachmann's truth, a dilemma enacted in the incommensurability of past and present. For Solibakke, sayability, the expression of truth, not only leads to the tradition of *Chandos* and *Sprachkrise*,

but also to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, to Adorno, noise and atonality, and finally, with Cornelia Vismann,[18] to the *grounding* of the subject in the human voice within the legal domain:

> Diese stimmhaften Prinzipien beruhen letztlich auf dem Wahrheitsanspruch jener Sprechakte, deren Handlungskompetenz im Rechtsmilieu Ordnungssinn stiftet. Kontrastiv markiert ihr Nichtgelingen in der Wildermuth-Erzählung den Riss zwischen der Aussage als Sprechakt und der Aussage als Wahrheitsmoment, als Aufschrei gegen eine verlogene Gesellschaft.
>
> [These voiced principles rest ultimately on the truth-claims of those speech acts whose agency founds order in the legal realm. In contrast, their failure in the Wildermuth story marks the rupture between the testimony as speech act and testimony as moment of truth, as outcry against an untruthful society.] (*Weapons*, p. 240)

* * * * *

Taken together, these three *Wege zu Bachmann* [paths to Bachmann] allow us to make some provisional observations about the current research interests of her academic readers. The dominant strands identified here in the commonalities between the monographs and the essay collection are: the biographical and its relation to the aesthetic and the political; and the topographical and its relation to a broadly defined transnationalism. As part of this strand — and it remains to be seen if the term itself will yield anything new in terms of insights — the frequency of references to 'Böhmen liegt am Meer' stands out. On the one hand, this reflects an increasing concern with the philosophical foundations of Bachmann's sources and her dialectical understanding of truth-telling in literature and philosophy. On the other hand, it can be used, as shown in particular by Sabine Gölz, to launch a critical practice that is not always already proposed within existing interpretative (and institutional) parameters. This lurch to newness — an imitation of Bachmann's own genre-crossing and utopian impetus — excites in the manner she herself described as arising from acts of reading: 'Es gibt für mich keine Zitate, sondern die wenigen Stellen in der Literatur, die mich immer aufgeregt haben, die sind für mich das Leben [...], weil sie mich wirklich erregt haben. Eben wie Leben' [For me, there are no quotations, only the few places in literature which have always excited me; for me, they are life because they have really excited me. Like life itself].[19] Which is not to say that those readers of Bachmann who gather, assemble, repeat, organize, store and conduct inventories do not have a critical, foundational, not to say *grounding* role to play in Bachmann studies — they evidentially do. But as we look to the further release of materials from the estate, and the prospect of an official biography, it is crucial that a balance be kept between those acts

[18] Cornelia Vismann, *Medien der Rechtsprechung* (Frankfurt a.M., 2011).

[19] Ingeborg Bachmann, *'Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden'. Gespräche und Interviews*, ed. by Christine Koschel and Inge von Weidenbaum (Munich, 1983), p. 69.

of reading that are defined in form and content by institutional sayability, and those which cast themselves against those limits. Bachmann needs both land and sea.