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The Hypertrophied Subject in Thomas Glavinic's *Wie man leben soll* and *Die Arbeit der Nacht*

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Sigrid Löffler's review of Thomas Glavinic's novel *Das bin doch ich* (2007) is particularly harsh. That Thomas Glavinic should use himself as the central character in his novel creates not only an uninteresting novel, in Löffler's estimation, but also reveals Glavinic's contemptible willingness to make a questionable living out of reproducing his insecurities as a writer in his literary works: "Seine Haltung schwankt zwischen Mucken und Sich-Ducken, beides notdürftig mit selbstironischen Grimassen drapiert. Letztlich will er sich's mit niemandem verderben, der ihm noch nützen könnte" (Löffler). The tone of Löffler's direct, negative assessment seems to lurk beneath the surface of many other reviews of Glavinic's novels as a bit of uneasiness in response to the author's deliberate, decidedly post-modern tendency to blur the lines between himself and his characters.¹ Löffler's criticism is based exactly on this irritation: that Glavinic can write a book whose main character is named Thomas Glavinic, waiting to find out if his latest novel, *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, has made it on to the long list of the Deutscher Buchpreis. *Die Arbeit der Nacht* (2006) never made it on to the list, neither in the novel nor in real life, but - much to Löffler's indignation - *Das bin doch ich* made it as far as the short list.

The heart of Löffler's critique gets at what I see as the central concern for Glavinic the author: the inflated self-importance of the main character serves to conceal his arrested self-development. A problematic male character, who resembles more or less Glavinic himself, appears in almost all

1. See for example Bernhard Oberreither's review of *Unterwegs im Namen des Herrn* and Daniela Strigl's review of *Das Leben der Wünsche*. Oberreither's review seems to be asking the question: Is there something more there other than Glavinic playing out his own worries and fantasies in his fiction? The authorial self is amply present, but an actual subject is lacking. It is a mask but there is nothing behind it. Strigl's review detects something "abgründig" in Glavinic's *Das Leben der Wünsche* but she is unable to put into words what that might be. The story is simply too big and got away from him.

of Glavinic's novels. The multiply refracted sense of who Thomas Glavinic might be is compounded by the claim of Thomas Glavinic, the main character in *Das bin doch ich*, that he wrote the Wikipedia entry "Thomas Glavinic" himself, adding in a few errors to make it seem like someone else had written it.² The Wikipedia entry itself refers back to the novel ("Thomas Glavinic"). Additionally, naming the main characters in *Die Arbeit der Nacht* and *Das Leben der Wünsche* (2009) both Jonas gives us another example of how Glavinic creates multiple points of self-referentiality among his own novels and even his (auto-)biography.³ One could postulate that reviewers and critics detect within this playful funhouse mirroring effect something deceitful. Certainly, Glavinic plays with an element of surprise (or the vicissitudes of fate): his characters are often tricked into embarrassing or self-degrading situations or become objects in a series of events beyond their control. Glavinic's *Wie man leben soll* (2004), for example, masquerades as a picaresque adventure,

2. See also Stuhlfauth: "Wenn man Thomas Glavinics Roman *Die Arbeit der Nacht* gemeinsam mit seinem anschließend veröffentlichten Roman *Das bin doch ich* (2007) betrachtet, ergibt sich eine komplexe Verschachtelung der Fiktionalitätsebenen, die mit dem Prinzip der russischen Puppe übereinstimmt. Der äußeren Puppe entspricht der Autor Thomas Glavinic, der in seinem Roman *Das bin doch ich* von einem fiktiven Thomas Glavinic schreibt, der einen Roman mit dem Titel *Die Arbeit der Nacht* veröffentlicht hat, worin sich die Hauptfigur auf einer abstrahierten Ebene als Romanfigur begreift und sich erst im Kern der Protagonist Jonas befindet" (113-14).

3. In his most recent novel, *Das größere Wunder*, which appeared in Hanser Verlag in August 2013, Glavinic once again uses the name Jonas for his main character and the name Marie for Jonas's girlfriend. The description of the book from Glavinic's website indicates that Jonas is a tourist participating in an expedition to the summit of Mt. Everest. During the difficult ascent, Jonas thinks about his past: his travels, his childhood, the fate of his brother Mike, and of course "die magische Begegnung mit Marie, seiner großen Liebe, die sein ganzes Leben verändert" ("Thomas Glavinic bloggt"). The couple Jonas and Marie of this novel are not necessarily identical with the same-named characters in *Die Arbeit der Nacht* and *Das Leben der Wünsche*, though Glavinic returns to similar thematic constellations: an extreme life-threatening situation, childhood memories, and romantic love. (Additionally, it is difficult to miss hearing the similarity between the names Thomas and Jonas.)

whereas *Die Arbeit der Nacht* (2006) appears to follow many of the precepts of the post-apocalyptic narrative or even Robinsonade.⁴ Both novels cloak themselves in genres promising an exciting adventure, but the narratives remain relatively stagnant;⁵ the tension of the narrative is built primarily upon each character's process of devolution, directly in opposition to the development of the main character of the typical *Bildungsroman*, another genre Glavinic's novels only appear to emulate. Although these two novels are stylistically and conceptually quite different from each other, *Wie man leben soll* and *Die Arbeit der Nacht* share an important similarity: the central character is inflated by self-importance both through the content and in the form of the novel. By the same token, his disengagement from his cultural, historical context results in a backwards development, indicated in *Wie man leben soll* by the main character's return to his mother and in *Die Arbeit der Nacht* by the main character's suicide.

Several critics have pointed to Glavinic's preoccupation with self-indulgent "Männerphantasien" to suggest that he is less than a serious novelist.⁶ Binge-drinking, fast cars, food orgies, adolescent daydreams, disaster scenarios, and the eternal search for the ideal woman provide the

4. See for example Stuhlfauth's analysis of *Die Arbeit der Nacht*.

5. See also Annette Keck ("Das ist doch er"), who provides a gendered reading of *Das bin doch ich* focusing on the problematic construction of masculinity in the novel. She understands waiting - a repeated theme in *Das bin doch ich* - as coded feminine, whereby Thomas Glavinic, the character in the novel, is rendered impotent and thus unimportant as he waits to find out if his novel has been named to the long list of the Deutscher Buchpreis. Yet, as a work of "literarische Selbsterfindung" (239), *Das bin doch ich* allows Glavinic to achieve literary success: "das Wissen um die Pluralität des Egos, die Konstitutionsbedingungen von Autor und Werk, um die metaleptischen Effekte literarischer Text [führt] gerade nicht zu einer Schwächung, sondern zu einer Stärkung der Autorposition" (249). Or: Glavinic pulls off a sleight of hand by inflating a main character by means of explicating his meaninglessness.

6 See for example Strigl: "Die Wünsche des Helden mögen ein Eigenleben führen, doch sind sie keineswegs sonderlich original - die erotisch ausgesprochen serviceorientierte Stewardess Marie etwa verkörpert die Männerphantasie schlechthin" (Rev. of *Das Leben der Wünsche*). See also Müller-Funk: "Diese im Roman männlich kodierte Phantasie bestimmt den eigentümlich spannungsarmen Text" (16).

primary plot clichéd, pre-packaged material for many of Glavinic's novels. A review of *Das bin doch ich* points out for example that Glavinic is certainly not the first author to write a novel with himself as the main character (Kämmerlings).⁷ In an interview, Glavinic was asked if he agreed with his critics that he writes "Konzeptliteratur"⁸:

Man wirft Ihnen vor, Konzeptliteratur zu schreiben. Es scheint fast so, als würden Sie sich vor dem Schreiben dramaturgische Extremsituationen definieren, die wie Textaufgaben in der Mathematik funktionieren. Also: "Schreibe einen Roman, in dem Du selbst die Hauptfigur bist!" - "Schreibe einen Roman, in der nur eine Figur agieren kann!" - "Schreibe einen Roman über die Verfolgung eines Mörders aus der Perspektive des Mörders selbst!" - Ist das eine Arbeits- und Schreibstrategie? (Glavinic, "Wir dürfen lügen, das ist schön!")

Glavinic's response - "Ich bin ein Opportunist reinsten Wassers" - does not even attempt to elude the criticism. If anything, Glavinic accepts the notion that his novels are simply revisiting previously traveled terrain.⁹ But I

7. See also Sandra Potsch's article, "Thomas Glavinic's *Das bin doch ich*: Ein Spiel zwischen Autobiografie und Fiktion," for an analysis of the novel as a "Spiel zwischen Fiktion und Wahrheit" (264).

8. The interviewer, Martin Kordic, is clearly not using the term "Konzeptliteratur" to refer to the literary and artistic experimentation of the mid-twentieth century; rather, his meaning is more colloquial in nature, referring to the critique that Glavinic's novels are pre-packaged consumer goods that make ample use of clichés. See for example Stefan Nestler's interview with Glavinic, in which he criticizes the end of *Das größere Wunder* as "kitschig." Glavinic's response confirms this assessment: "Es ist ein Liebesroman. Wenn das jemand kitschig findet, soll es so sein. Ich persönlich habe die Erfahrung gemacht, dass Liebe immer ein bisschen kitschig ist. Es gehört dazu. Ich finde das keinen schlimmen Vorwurf" (Glavinic, "Glavinic: 'Liebe ist immer ein bisschen kitschig'").

9. Another critic describes Glavinic's treatment of the conceptual basis of his novel *Das Leben der Wünsche* as mechanical: "[Es] bleibt der Eindruck, dass hier eine intelligente literarische Versuchsanordnung auf etwas mechanische Weise abgearbeitet wird. Allein dem Autor ist dies nicht anzulasten. Das Sujet des Romans, die Leerräumung der Welt, neigt nun mal zum Mechanischen. Es könnte indes sein, dass sich hier ein Schriftsteller und ein

would like to suggest that Glavinic layers a clever consumption of post-modernist expectations in contemporary fiction over this apparently superficial anxiety- and fantasy-ridden man-world. In *High und Low: Zur Interferenz von Hoch- und Populärkultur in der Gegenwartsliteratur*, Thomas Wegmann and Norbert Christian Wolf provide a helpful framework for exploring the tension between Glavinic's supposedly unoriginal plot conceits and his playful appropriation of self-referentiality in and among his novels. They discuss the tendency of contemporary literature to blur deliberately the lines between high and low culture, detecting a complex interplay between an intended reception of popular literature's appeal to the masses, while at the same time cleverly manipulating or redefining its implied rules. Glavinic's *Das bin doch ich*, along with other recent similarly self-referential novels, Wegmann and Wolf argue (in conversation with Walter Benjamin), is symptomatic of "'Erfahrungsarmut'...oder zumindest Erfahrungsskepsis" (3). In both *Wie man leben soll* and *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, Glavinic thwarts not only the full development of his characters but also the genre, resulting in inflated subjects, who devolve through a process of backwards development. Glavinic appropriates multiple layers of cultural and self-reference, resulting in a palimpsestic commentary on the tension between the cliché-driven mass-market literature and the narrative bankruptcy of post-modernist literature. On the one hand, Glavinic seems to embrace the plot-driven appeal of popular literature, but he frequently leaves plots elements and characters underdeveloped. The reader senses a web of intertextual references as well as genre-specific movements with the text, but one is left with the impression that parts of the original text or the genre that Glavinic is referencing have been erased.

Despite the vexing tendency of Glavinic's novels to combine socially-historically specific references with a socially-historically disengaged, non-developing main character, it is possible, to consider each layer of the palimpsest in Glavinic's novels and to anchor his post-modernist playful deconstruction of the subject in a specifically Austrian context. David-Christoph Assmann offers, for example, a reading of *Das bin doch ich* that sees a strong parallel between the novel's focus on the literary publishing industry in Austria of the early 21st century and the literary culture of the Wiener Moderne of the early 20th century, an example of the doubling effect

Sujet zu gut auf einander eingespielt sind" (März, Rev. of *Das Leben der Wünsche*).

Glavinic creates in the novel (126-27). I think it is entirely plausible to find yet another point of correspondence in the history of Austrian literature. For the purposes of this article, I will bring Glavinic's work into conversation with Robert Menasse's critique of Austrian culture, history, and literature, specifically the tandem of the hypertrophied subject and a problematic relationship to history that Menasse finds symptomatic of Austrian literature of the Second Republic. Menasse's concept of the "Rückentwicklungsroman" (*Sinnliche Gewissheit* 214-15) developed in his own fictional writing will provide an equally important foothold for analyzing in this article the extent to which Glavinic's novels, particularly *Wie man leben soll* and *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, fit this framework.

Robert Menasses' Concept of the Hypertrophied Subject and the *Rückentwicklungsroman*

Even before Thomas Glavinic published *Wie man leben soll*, Helmut Gollner observed in Glavinic's first three novels an obsession with objects, leading to a depleted subject: "Das ist nicht ich-lose Literatur, die gibt es nicht, sondern Literatur des verausgabten Ichs statt des reflexiven" (Gollner, "Thomas Glavinics Weltliteratur" 55). Gollner argues that Glavinic's obsession with objects leads to a "Sammlung des Ichs; von Ich-Stärke" (55). This reading seems problematic; if anything, Glavinic's "depleted subject" (Gollner) bears a closer resemblance to Menasse's "hypertrophied subject" (*Überbau und Underground* 105), not unlike other male characters in Austrian literature after WWII. As Menasse explains, the subject is incapable of developing because of Austria's problematic relationship to its post-WWII history. Menasse's choice of the term "hypertrophiert," a word often found in a medical context, suggests a connection to disease. A hypertrophied organ, for example, grows larger but not more complex, indicative of an abnormal type of growth that compromises its proper functioning. As applied to the literary subject, the term indicates a subject whose function as subject is overdetermined but whose complexity is underrealized. In other words, the subject appears "bulkier" or more important but the appearance of more substance masks a lack of complexity, symptomatic of a lack of engagement with the historical context from which the subject arises, thus emphasizing the subject as subject but leaving incomplete the subject's development within a social-historical context. A quote from an interview with Arno

Geiger might serve as a starting point for understanding this type of character. He says of the main character in his novel *Es geht uns gut* (2005):

Philipp ist ein Zögerer und Zauderer, und ich glaube, das ist schon typisch für meine Generation, die große Schwierigkeiten hat sich zu identifizieren mit Herkunft und Tradition. Dieses Gefühl der Identität weicht dem der Ratlosigkeit. Philipp stagniert auch deswegen, weil er eben nicht weiß, woher er kommt... Es hat auch damit zu tun, dass meine Generation dazu neigt, die Biografie zu verkürzen, das hat etwas mit dem Individualismus zu tun, dass man gar nicht zugeben will, wie sehr man geprägt ist auch von den vorhergehenden Generationen, und ich habe beim Schreiben dann mehr und mehr erfahren, dass es schon ist wie bei einer Kuh, die Knoblauch gefressen hat: Dann schmeckt die Milch halt danach - man nimmt das auf, man nimmt das mit der Muttermilch einfach auf.

(Interview)

If we understand the family as the locus of identity formation, then the individual and the culture by extension develop a "disturbed relationship to reality" when the family itself has no sense of identity or connection to family history or even history in general, a problematic construction Robert Menasse develops in a series of essays, *Überbau und Underground* (1997), and which he finds thematized repeatedly in Austrian literature after WWII. One could argue that two key concepts Menasse develops in his essays - the fragmentation of reality and the hypertrophied subject ("das hypertrophierte Ich") - as symptomatic of an illusory relationship to Austrian history are still relevant for more recent examples of Austrian literature. After providing an overview of Menasse's collection *Überbau und Underground* and his concept of the "Rückentwicklungsroman," I will consider how Menasse's theories belong to a larger philosophical discourse in Austrian literature and history. Finally, I will explore how Menasse's philosophy applies to Glavinic's novels and to what extent Glavinic's work also steps outside of the theoretical framework.

If we return to Geiger's statement characterizing the generations of Austrians born after WWII as cut off from their own history and consequently fixated on their own individuality, we can create a bridge between Glavinic's novels *Wie man leben soll* and *Die Arbeit der Nacht* and Menasse's critique of post-war Austrian literature. At the heart of Menasse's collections of essays, *Überbau und Underground*, is his contention that Austrian literature has a disturbed relationship to reality because the country continues to live

within contradictions created by the tension between nostalgia for the Habsburg past and the inability to confront its National-Socialist past. The essays, many written in the early 1980s and first published in 1990 and reissued in 1998, develop a theoretical model for understanding the aesthetics of Austrian literature of the Second Republic and the "literarische Explosion in Österreich," often referred to in West Germany as the "Verösterreicherung der deutschen Literatur" into the 1970s and '80s. Menasse contends that the political system of the "Sozialpartnerschaft," which has its roots in a pre-democratic Austria, is also the basis of the aesthetics of Austrian literature in the post-war period.

After WWII, Austrians characterized themselves as the first victims of Nazi aggression; therefore, there was a nearly seamless continuity between Austrofascism and the Second Republic.¹⁰ No new basis was established, rather the "new," an *Überbau*, was built over top of the existing, older structures. In an effort to erase memories of the Nazi connections in Austria, Austria's 19th-century past served as a basis for a very conservative post-war government (Menasse, *Überbau und Underground* 123). Over this lay a strong, though indirect warning to stay away from politics, a lesson learned in the destructive wake of the Nazi era. The economic boom of the post-war period was in part a result of the "Lohn-Preis-Abkommen," which created a system of frozen low wages and artificially high cost of food and was an outgrowth of fascist rule. The October 1950 strikes, which were violently suppressed, were seen as a warning that the market economy needed stronger controls and proof that the "Sozialpartnerschaft," consensus building between representatives of various interests (such as unions, industrial organizations) outside of the parliamentary system, was imperative to maintain harmony and economic stability (Menasse, *Überbau und Underground* 124-25). Menasse's critique of this system reads: It is not a democratic process; it creates harmony but at the price of excluding many voices from the decision-making process. The harmonization of class contradictions under the Second Republic's "Sozialpartnerschaft" is also typical of Austrofascism, which itself harkened back to a supposed pre-Enlightenment model of society. This model enforces an apolitical, private regulation of these class contradictions and is therefore perceived as "gut österreichisch" (Menasse, *Überbau und Underground* 76). The

10. Many former Nazis therefore ended up making alliances with returning immigrants from the USA as CIA-operatives (Menasse, *Überbau und Underground* 122).

Austrian willingness to support a non-democratic system clothed in the guise of democratic process is rooted in a long Austrian tradition of the "Herr-Knecht" relationship, which itself survives based on a system of cloaking and complicity.¹¹

I would like to focus on two specific consequences for post-war literature in Austria that Menasse details in his essay. Menasse argues that "Innerlichkeit" is an inadequate characterization of the Austrian literature of 1970s.¹² Rather, this supposed movement inward is part of longer tradition

11. As Menasse explains, the master gives the order, but it is the role of the servant to contradict the order, so that the master must admit that it is wrong to give the order. In this way, he implicates the servant in actually complying with his command. There seems to be an attempt to come down to the servant's level, but the goal is to make the servant do as commanded by appealing to his desire to be complicit in the master's actions. Menasse is of course borrowing Hegel's terminology from *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) quite deliberately. Menasse's response, *Phänomenologie der Entgeisterung: Geschichte des verschwundenen Wissens* (1995), is on the one hand a critique of Hegel, placing Hegel's hierarchy on its head, beginning with "der Geist" and ending with "die sinnliche Gewißheit"; on the other hand, it is also a post-modern trick, similar to Glavinic's layering of fact, fiction, and (auto)biography one on top of the other: Menasse's *Selige Zeiten, brüchige Welt* (1991), follows the fictional character, Leo Singer, as he attempts to write a book to explain the world. Four years later, Menasse publishes Singer's (supposed) work, dedicated to Judith Katz (Singer's lover and muse in *Selige Zeiten, brüchige Welt*), *Phänomenologie der Entgeisterung*. A section entitled "Die Aufhebung der Herr-Knecht-Dialektik" contains Menasse's (ironic) understanding of the way in which the maintenance of appearance is the substance of political and artistic life in Austria of the Second Republic: "Die Anerkennung des Widerspruchs als notwendigen Bestandteil des Lebens und die gleichzeitige Tabuisierung des Widerspruchs verschmelzen in einem selbstbewußten Wir, in dem der Widerspruch institutionalisiert und zugleich ausgeblendet ist" (*Überbau und Underground* 74). The individual must however experience the masking of contradictions as a "zersplitterte Welt" (*Überbau und Underground* 79).

12. After 1945, unlike in Germany, there was no significant attempt in the Austrian literature to come to terms with fascism and the war (*Überbau und Underground* 67); rather, Menasse sees a repetition and replication of the

in Austria: the overarching democratic illusion of the "Sozialpartnerschaft" serves to hide the anti-democratic imperatives that make it possible. This apparent "Innerlichkeit" does not come from a fear of losing radical democratic beliefs and practices (like in the BRD); rather, in Austria it is an expression of social apathy, which comes from complete lack of understanding of political process and a belief in a "Naturgegebenheit" outside of one's self.¹³ In the literature, this leads not so much to a turn inward as to the lack of a synthesized whole self without a relationship to a greater history. For Menasse this is not just about looking inward; the look is outward too, but the literary ego's perception of the world is one that is fragmented and splintered, with the appearance of being whole ("harmonisch verkleistert") (*Überbau und Underground* 94-95). Within this, Menasse detects a problematic doubling of a problematic reality. Thus two characteristics of Austrian literature of the Second Republic emerge: a fragmented relationship to reality and a hypertrophied subject ("Hang zum hypertrophierten Ich"),¹⁴ all of this functioning under the illusion of harmony and wholeness.¹⁵ The

"Herr-Knecht-Verhältnis" in Austrian literature and culture of the Second Republic (*Überbau und Underground* 74), which refers back to the Habsburg mythology (*Überbau und Underground* 76) and completely smoothed over or ignored any reference to Austria's fascist history.

13. As Menasse explains, it is an "allgemeiner Ausdruck einer gesellschaftlichen Apathie, die aus der Ahnungslosigkeit gegenüber dem politischen Gefüge und dem Gefühl seiner 'Naturgegebenheit' abseits von einem selbst kommt. Ein solch allgemeiner literarischer Ausdruck einer gesellschaftlich umfassenden mentalen Situation ist daher auch weitgehend ohne Alternative, hat keine Veranlassung, mit anderen Konzeptionen zu konkurrieren, in die Quere zuschießen, und geht folglich immer mehr in die Tiefe" (*Überbau und Underground* 94).

14. "Die Vermutung liegt nahe, daß der vom antiöffentlichen Charakter des sozialpartnerschaftlich geprägten österreichischen Überbaus bewirkte *Hang zum hypertrophierten Ich* die Scharniere ist, über die das gewachsene kritische Potential der Formstrukturen der österreichischen Literatur so leicht ins Affirmative schwingt" (Menasse, *Überbau und Underground* 105).

15. "Diese Identität von allem und nichts ist, wie wir schon gesehen haben, gewiß ein Charakteristikum der österreichischen Gegenwartsliteratur...: Sie reproduziert die radikale Zersplitterung einer sich in Zerstreuung verlierenden Welt, der das Bewußtsein von der gesellschaftlichen Synthesis

subject is overdetermined or inflated as a means of compensating for a lack of complexity because it has been divorced from its historical context and is consequently incapable of developing.

Austria's problematic relationship to its own history is a topic Menasse returns to repeatedly not only in his essays but also in his novels. Menasse describes his trilogy of novels, *Sinnliche Gewissheit* (1988), *Selige Zeiten*, *brüchige Welt* (1991), and *Schubumkehr* (1995) as "Rückentwicklungsromane," that is, novels that parody Hegel's concept of history. Rather than describe an arc of development, Menasse's novels map a process of regression. As Roman, the first-person narrator in *Sinnliche Gewissheit* explains:

Heute könnte man keinen Entwicklungsroman mehr schreiben, dachte ich, – höchstens einen Rückentwicklungsroman. Ein Roman über den Rückschritt, ja, ein umgedrehter Entwicklungsroman, der am Beispiel des Individuums zeigt, wie dessen Hoffnungen, Fähigkeiten, Talente, während es redlich strebend sich bemüht, dazu verurteilt sind zu verkümmern und...zu banalen, durchschnittlichen Idiosynkrasien werden, mit denen er einen Alltag meistert, oder auch nicht, der lediglich an Beliebigkeiten unendlich reich ist. (Menasse 215)

For Menasse, this backwards development is characteristic of the hypertrophied subject because the Hegelian dialectic is an impossibility in the post-modern world. In her analysis of Menasse's novels, Bärbel Lücke stresses a Baudrillardian reading, which discovers a so-called fractal subject incapable of developing an identity (359). This subject lands in a state of stagnation ("Stillstand") at the very bottom of the Hegelian architecture, the level of "sinnlicher Gewißheit." The devolving subject exists in a continuous state of recurrence and catastrophe, echoing Benjamin's concept of the angel of history. Although the subject believes himself to be progressing, there is only destruction:

Each apparent movement of history brings us imperceptibly closer to its antipodal point, if not indeed to its starting point. This is the end

abhanden kam, und vermag sie nicht in künstlerischer Gestaltung aufzuheben. Gleichzeitig reproduziert sie den ideologischen Schein des Zusammenhanges, den die Sozialpartnerschaft durch die Harmonisierung der Gegensätze produziert, und vermag ihn nicht zu zerstören" (Menasse, *Überbau und Underground* 103).

of linearity. In this perspective, the future no longer exists. But if there is no longer a future, there is no longer an end either. *So this is not even the end of history.* We are faced with a paradoxical process of reversal, a reversive effect of modernity which, having reached its speculative limit and extrapolated all its virtual developments, is disintegrating into its simple elements in a catastrophic process of recurrence and turbulence. (Baudrillard 10-11)

Arno Geiger may not have been thinking about Benjamin or Baudrillard or even Menasse when he described an essentially similar lack of dynamic development in Phillip, the main character in *Es geht uns gut*. The historical scope of Geiger's novel, which finds within the World War II era a critical point of connection to Phillip's problems in the present, however, immediately suggests a connection to Menasse's critique of the literature of the Second Republic. The manifestation of the hypertrophied subject and a problematic relationship to history take on a less explicit but no less evident and potentially cleverer form in Thomas Glavinic's novels, *Wie man leben soll* and *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, as I will discuss below.

Wie man leben soll: "Man entwickelt sich weiter und ändert Meinungen, ohne bewußt nachgedacht zu haben" (177)

In his fourth novel, *Wie man leben soll* (2004), Thomas Glavinic creates in Karl (Charlie) Kolostrum a hypertrophied central character, who becomes - quite literally - larger and larger over the course of the novel. His personal tribulations become ever more grandiose against a backdrop of historical events that receive attention purely as a means for demonstrating Charlie's overdetermined subjectivity. Charlie bears a not-too-distant resemblance to Sigrid Löffler's description of the character Thomas Glavinic - though she certainly means the author as well - in *Das bin doch ich*: a sedentary, complaining brooder, who will gladly play the fool if it will earn approval, who resides opportunistically "zwischen Mucken und Sich-Ducken" (Löffler). Charlie comes from a family with problems: his mother is lazy and alcoholic, and his father has deserted the family (*Wie man leben soll* 11). The mother has little confidence in her obese, socially clumsy son. Charlie is awkwardly unsure of himself. After completing a magazine questionnaire, he comes to the conclusion that he is by nature 87% "ein Sitzler." The novel, which is narrated entirely in the third-person singular "man," begins in 1986, when Charlie is sixteen years old, and ends in 2003 when he is thirty-

three, both years coincidentally united by two catastrophes: the explosion of the space shuttles Challenger and Columbia.

What happens in between is held together by a series of girlfriends (Claudia, Mary, Iris, Laura, Conny), relationships to his various overwrought relatives, and an addiction to self-help books with titles like *So mache ich mir Freunde*, *So komme ich nach oben*, and *Der Weg zu sich selbst*. He also has terrible eating habits, invents grandiose daydreams of success and recognition, and makes up impromptu lyrics to sing along with familiar pop songs. Charlie's self-characterization as 87% "Sitzer" means that he experiences his world passively and that, beyond the typical developmental milestones - first sex, *Matura*, first apartment, university study, finally taxi driver -, Charlie's life is dictated largely by chance and circumstance. And so it happens that he is indirectly responsible for the death of three people: He accidentally electrocutes a family friend when he pulls a switch instead of pressing a button. He scares his beloved, aged great-aunt Ernestine to death when he checks on her in the middle of the night because he is afraid she is dead. He botches an attempted tracheotomy on his girlfriend Laura, who eventually chokes to death on a fish bone. He essentially erases from his personal history any characters who, in a traditional *Bildungsroman*, would have a significant and positive impact on his development. In fact, any successes Charlie experiences are also by chance and are often accompanied first by a humiliation. Charlie's meteoric success at the end of the novel as an overnight celebrity is only the result of being duped. He believes he has been called for casting at ORF to participate in a tv show named, significantly, *Überrascht? Ich bin nicht die Person, für die du mich hältst!* (*Wie man leben soll* 234). Instead, a hidden camera records his attempts to flirt with a petite, attractive woman, who has been planted as a decoy. When he is called back to the talk show, ostensibly to be interviewed about his life as a taxi driver, the video is played back, showing Charlie, at this point in the narrative weighing in at 150 kilos, trying his best to impress the young woman. Despite or perhaps because of the humiliating set-up, the public reaction is positive. "Hervorragend," "super," say friends and family (*Wie man leben soll* 236). He gets offers to be managed. Then Ö3 calls to have him cut a single ("Ich les in deinen Augen") in their studio. After he is turned into a compliant object of aggressive marketing, the single shoots to the top of the charts. The novel ends with a kiss from his approving mother. In sum, Charlie's expanding girth compensates for a lack of character development. His physical growth masquerades as

development but the ending scene in the novel makes it clear that the return to the mother lands him right back where he began.

Glavinic weaves into Charlie's life history between the ages of sixteen and thirty-three in *Wie man leben soll* references to specific historical and political events, yet their sole purpose is to underscore the coincidental nature of Charlie's experiences. History and politics are filtered through Charlie's perspective, meaning that information about the events is often incomplete or remembered only because they coincide with one of Charlie's experiences, rendering his overdetermined individuality even more grotesque. The arc of Charlie's personal story is bookended in the novel by two catastrophes, a disastrous launch and an ill-fated return. Charlie's first sexual experience coincides with the Challenger explosion over the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Florida in January 1986 soon after launching. Charlie's story ends in February 2003 with the explosion of the Columbia over Texas during re-entry into Earth's atmosphere as he celebrates his over-night success as a pop-music star. When Charlie becomes a university student, he briefly becomes involved with the "Verband sozialistischer Studenten" (70), just as the Berlin Wall falls. The Austrian elections in 1990, 1995, and 1999 are duly noted, but without any specific analysis or reflection on their outcomes. Charlie's response to the elections in Austria is characteristically apathetic: "Die ganze Politik kann einem den Buckel hinunterrutschen" and "1999 gibt es wieder Wahlen. Man geht nicht hin" (226). Charlie's experiences between 1995 and 2002 are summarized in two pages as a list of music groups he was listening to in a particular year and a few comments on his job as a taxi driver. For the year 2001, the terrorist attacks on 9/11 are conspicuously absent. In the entire novel, significant political events between 1986 and 2003 in Austria, namely the Waldheim Affair and the rise in popularity and power of Jörg Haider's reactionary party, the FPÖ, are not mentioned at all.

The coincidental alignment of Charlie's two successes, that is, his first sexual experience and his rise to fame, is indicative of the "Zersplitterung der Realität" Menasse observes in contemporary Austrian literature and which Glavinic satirizes in *Wie man leben soll*. Glavinic seems to suggest a relationship between Charlie and historical events, some of which are not even specifically Austrian, lending Charlie's experiences a historical grandiosity they do not truly possess. All of the historical piety usually reserved for both disasters is completely lost against the overdetermined importance of Charlie's experiences. When classmates notice

his new sexually initiated status the next day in school, he remarks: "Sogar das Unglück der amerikanischen Raumfähre tritt in den Hintergrund" (12-13). The two events appear to provide cosmic significance to Charlie's life, but in the end it is simply coincidental, not at all causal.¹⁶ Even his success as a pop-music star at the end of the novel is burdened with the ultimately limited scope of his fame: his single (just one song with the thoroughly banal title "Ich les in deinen Augen") "wird sofort landauf, landab gespielt" (239), that is, confined to the borders of Austria. The coincidental timing of the Columbia explosion with Charlie's fame also suggests that his moment in the spotlight will surely fade.

Charlie greets one of the historically most significant events of the post-WWII era, the fall of the Berlin Wall, with little understanding for its meaning: "Was der Fall der Mauer bedeutet, weiß man zwar nicht genau, weil man jung und Österreicher ist. Beim Anblick der jubelnden Menschen hat man Tränen in den Augen" (70). The multiple layers of meaning contained in these few sentences harken back to centuries of Austrian history and cultural development: On the one hand, Glavinic thematizes Charlie's adolescent self-centeredness and only fleeting interest in events taking place outside of Austria, but Glavinic also implies that for Charlie, a child born well after the end of WWII and a witness to the end of the Cold War, history is personally irrelevant and that historical events taking place in Germany are completely divorced from Austria's fate, a critique later leveled at Austria in the aftermath of WWII when Austria claimed itself to be the first victim

16. As an avid early reader of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (Glavinic, "Der Roman" 309), Glavinic must certainly have been aware that Mark Twain's birth and his death coincided with the appearance of Halley's Comet. In fact, to add another layer of coincidence, the Challenger was scheduled to observe the return of Halley's Comet in March 1986 before it blew up two months earlier. "American satirist and writer Mark Twain was born on November 30, 1835, exactly two weeks after the comet's perihelion. In his autobiography, published in 1909, he said, 'I came in with Halley's comet in 1835. It's coming again next year [1910], and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's comet. The Almighty has said no doubt, "Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together.'" Twain died on April 21, 1910, the day following the comet's subsequent perihelion" ("Halley's Comet").

of Nazi aggression. In this small episode, Glavinic implies that Austrians do not only **not** see themselves as German, but they also have very little understanding for history and can react only emotionally - as a member of the Austrian *Gefühlkultur* - to historical events, consistent with Menasse's contention that a failure to confront the past and nostalgia for the pre-WWII Habsburg Austria define the present.

Most certainly, Glavinic's question, implied in the title of his novel, "Wie soll man leben?" is heavily burdened with its own historical and intertextual references. The moral imperative inherent in the word "soll" finds its most recognizable expression in the Christian tradition in the Ten Commandments. Kant insisted upon the necessity of action based on rationality, underpinned with the moral imperative of the Ten Commandments, thus forbidding lying and illusion. If we search for a specifically Austrian historical-cultural engagement with questions of morality and post-modernism, we can turn to Robert Musil's post-WWI questioning of the biblical imperative. Musil insists that human beings are not primarily in charge of their actions; rather, the anonymity of the (post)modern, highly technologized world is responsible for producing a series of anonymous functions, resulting in a different form of experience which Musil called aesthetic moralism (Feger 89), and the question of what one *should do* becomes much more relativized. At the center of Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930, 1933) one discovers a question quite similar to the one implied in the title of Glavinic's novel: "Wie soll ich leben?" Musil's formulation creates a radical reversal of the biblical imperative "du sollst" because it repositions the role of the individual by positing that the moral imperative from outside the individual directing and guiding him/her to do the right thing does not exist. Moral responsibility cannot be determined scientifically (i.e. rationally), only through art. Thus the idea of the rational right way to act is repurposed as a set of possibilities but not necessarily a better way of living.

In Glavinic's novel, the biblical commandment and Musil's question "wie soll ich leben?" become a mish-mash of meaning, implying both a pre-modern and a post-modern reading of the imperative. Glavinic effects yet another shift of meaning by replacing both the "du" of the biblical commandment and Musil's "ich" with the third-person impersonal pronoun "man," rendering the subject not only extremely distant but also represented merely by a set of possibilities, as posited by Musil. On the one hand, Charlie Kolostrum, the main character in Glavinic's novel, is searching for a better life, a better

way to live, yet the question of morality - in post-Christian Europe - hardly appears to be at the heart of his question. If anything, Glavinic's appropriation of the biblical commandment suggests an ironic reading of the Christian tradition, which has been replaced by a secular, consumer-driven culture focusing on the individual, more like the cultural shifts Musil documents in his essays and in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* in - Musil's characterization - the post-historical present, in which the individual no longer has agency: "Das Ich verliert die Bedeutung, die es bisher gehabt hat, als Souverän, der Regierungsakte erläßt... Denn da Gesetze wohl das Unpersönlichste sind, was es auf der Welt gibt, wird die Persönlichkeit bald nicht mehr sein als ein imaginärer Treffpunkt des Unpersönlichen" (Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* 474). The subject dissolves instead into a series of previously dictated actions and thoughts, rendering the existence of the individual irrelevant. The impersonal "man" takes the place of the subject. As Werner Jung explains: "Die Subjekte der Alltäglichkeit bzw. Zeit überhaupt heißen 'Man' und 'Es'" (155). Thus Musil's question - "wie soll ich leben?" - is an essentially helpless one without a specific answer. For Musil, therefore, irony is the only means by which he can narrate a non-historical historical novel. And immediately, we understand Menasse's critique of Austrian literature of the Second Republic is a response to Musil. Menasse's describes of his own novels, through the first-person narrator Roman in *Sinnliche Gewißheit*, as novels in which the talents and abilities of an apparently capable individual are reduced to "banalen, durchschnittlichen Idiosynkrasien ..., mit denen er einen Alltag meistert, oder auch nicht, der lediglich an Beliebigkeiten unendlich reich ist" (Menasse 215). Musil's view of history (even a personal history) as a "Weg der Wolken" finds its echo in Menasse's view of the individual as an illusory agent and fully at the mercy of happenstance.

Like those of Menasse's characters in *Trilogie der Entgeisterung*, Charlie's personal history seems to map onto the arc of the typical *Bildungsroman*: The naïve main character must enter the world, meet with adversity, then come to a reconciliation with his environment and become part of the social order. This happens through a series of concrete experiences that allow him to learn and mature. At critical points in the narrative, the main character looks back and reflects on his experiences. *Wie man leben soll* is indeed peppered throughout with *things learned*, short sentences set apart from the main text in italics, each one beginning with: "Merke," for example, Charlie's first lesson learned: "*Merke: Wenn man beim Streicheln abrutscht*"

und aus Versehen mit der Hand zwischen den Beinen des Mädchens landet, ist Aufregung unangebracht" (9), and his last lesson learned, some two-hundred and thirty pages later: "*Merke: Wenn einen die Zeitungen feiern, bekommt man zum erstenmal seit langem von Mutter ein Bussi und wird liebgehabt*" (239). If one examines this developmental arc a little more closely, one notices the following: The supposed developmental arc leads not from first sexual encounter to marriage and entry into the social order; rather, Charlie lands in the end back with his mother. One is left with the impression that this is the goal in the first place: to return to the mother, that is, a backward development. One reviewer understands Charlie's last name, Kolostrum, as a combination of "Koloss" and "Monstrum" (Gollner, rev. of *Wie man leben soll*), which has potentially interesting implications for describing the character Charlie, but I would argue that it refers more specifically to his regressive development. Colostrum is of course the first milk that baby mammals receive from their mothers soon after birth. It contains important anti-biotic properties that protect the newborn against disease. The newborn is immunized at birth through the mother's milk. But the *Muttermilch* as a metaphor for his cultural milieu - to return to Geiger's commentary from earlier in this essay - that Charlie has been drinking is belief in illusion. He becomes an ambiguous object of both derision and adulation, without ever coming to the realization that he is being manipulated by circumstance and has no control over his destiny and has learned nothing from previous experiences. This disconnection from reality and from history results in a negative "Stillstand" and finally a regressive development. Benjamin's concept of the catastrophe in history as a moment of pause and then continued development is fully trivialized in Glavinic's novel, or, as Menasse argues in general vis-à-vis Austrian literature of the Second Republic, "verkehrt," that is, turned on its head.

The use of "man" throughout the entire novel to refer to the main character indicates a further and very radical excision of the subject (which can express an opinion, or, as Menasse formulates it, express a *difference* of opinion, impossible in the *Sozialpartnerschaft* aesthetic model [*Überbau und Underground* 74]), mirroring Charlie's loser qualities: he is unable to do anything, indeed believes in his own compliance or servility and actually seeks out situations that will only accentuate and repeat his experiences of humiliation. Repeatedly, Charlie declines to offer an opinion on anything from the personal to the political. When he joins the "Verband Sozialistischer Studenten," "man hält sich in den Diskussionen zurück" (70).

The reunification of the West and East Germany occasions a self-centered, apolitical response: "Man fragt sich, was das ganze Politiktheater soll. Es ist egal, wer an der Macht ist. Zumindest solange es keinen Diktator gibt. Wichtig ist, daß man zu Haus sicher ist, ein paar gute Stunden vor dem Fernseher erlebt und zu zweit einschläft" (84). Menasse's analysis of the Austrian cultural and intellectual landscape detects an "allgemeine[n] Ausdruck einer gesellschaftlichen Apathie, die aus der Ahnungslosigkeit gegenüber dem politischen Gefüge und dem Gefühl seiner 'Naturgegebenheit' abseits von einem selbst kommt" (*Überbau und Underground* 94). Glavinic takes this disengagement to an extreme: Charlie's ballooning physical contours develop inversely to his psychological and social development. His joke is two-fold: First, the self-help books to which Charlie clings require the individual to help himself; in other words, there is no one in the individualistically determined culture at large to turn to for help. Second, there is no "self" to help. Charlie's sense of self is so fragmented and diffuse that no amount of advice will help him to change or to evolve. His so-called lessons-learned are in fact no more than a confession of each humiliation he suffers, but there is little evidence that he learns anything from the experiences.

Charlie is propelled along primarily by chance. His experiences, whether successful or disastrous, are neither his fault nor a direct result of his own actions. There is no dialectic between winning and losing. It is an apparent dialectic, which is actually concealing a lack of movement. At the root of the novel is the inability of the main character to evolve. The title of the novel itself - *Wie man leben soll* - sounds like a self-help book, initially: The way one should live one's life. But an alternate reading suggests: How does one know how is one supposed to live (like this)? Based on this second reading, the issue is less about how to live a good life and more about how simply to survive or even justify one's existence. The epigraph Glavinic chose for *Wie man leben soll* reads almost as a warning: "'Wer mich nicht liebt, darf mich nicht beurteilen' Johann Wolfgang von Goethe" (5).¹⁷

17. Daniela Strigl writes about the epigraph in her review of *Wie man leben soll*: "Man kann es als Warnung verstehen, Glavinics Roman über eine Jugend als bloße Unterhaltung zu konsumieren, obwohl er dazu wahrlich einlädt" (Rev. of *Wie man leben soll*). I agree with her assessment of the epigraph as a warning, but I argue that the warning is not so much a plea to take the story seriously as it is purely self defense.

Holding up the grand master of German literature as a defensive shield is not only a brazen gesture for a young writer but also a warning not to expect too much.¹⁸ In other words, the reader should be none too expectant that Charlie will receive the full *Bildungsroman* treatment. With this epigraph, Glavinic holds himself at a distance from his creation, Charlie, and leaves him in the vulnerable moment of wish fulfillment, a hypertrophied subject, who has become merely the projected wishes of the author and of Charlie's environment.

Die Arbeit der Nacht: "Österreich. Was war das, Österreich?" (311)

Glavinic inflates Charlie in *Wie man leben soll* by means of increasing layers of loosely connected plot elements to compensate for his lack of actual development, but Glavinic reveals the process of backward development of the main character, Jonas, more explicitly in *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, beginning with the first moment when he realizes that he has awoken to a world inexplicably devoid of all other living creatures. Wish fulfillment in *Wie man leben soll* hints at (self)-destruction, but Jonas' apparent suicide is the only possible end to *Die Arbeit der Nacht*.

The end of all life on Earth, except for Jonas, whose name Glavinic most certainly chose to evoke the character's biblical namesake, in *Die Arbeit der Nacht* (2006) is never explained, but if one reads Glavinic's *Das Leben der Wünsche* (2009), whose main character is also named Jonas, as a kind of prequel to *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, then it might be possible to understand the earlier novel as wish fulfillment leading to its only logical conclusion: Jonas alone in the world. At the beginning of *Das Leben der Wünsche*, Jonas meets an unlikely fairy godfather who grants him any wish he desires. As Jonas's life begins to change, everything comes with a price. His experiences telescope toward a state of entropy, ending with moments of complete removal from Earth, suspended bodiless in a vacuum, and finally facing a (wished-for?) cataclysm with his girlfriend, Maria, which will presumably annihilate them both or leave him the only remaining person on earth. The movement of

18. There might be a bit of (deliberate?) subterfuge at work in Glavinic's choice of this Goethe quote: I have not been able to locate definitely the source of this quote. The only source attributing this quote to Goethe is Martin Walser's drama *In Goethes Hand*, a fictionalized account of conversations between Goethe and Johann Peter Eckermann.

this novel is decidedly backward, like *Wie man leben soll*, but the psychological and fantasy elements are more akin to *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, in which Glavinic continues to engage with the same existential question, and the catastrophe at the center *Die Arbeit der Nacht* defines Jonas's subjectivity more so than the coincidental relationship Charlie feels vis-à-vis the explosion of the Challenger at the beginning of *Wie man leben soll*.

The full scale of the unexplained catastrophe that leaves Jonas alone in the world unfolds in pieces. He awakens in his apartment in Vienna on 4 July, initially unaware that anything has changed. His attempts to text his girlfriend, Marie, who is visiting her sister in England, meet with no replies, nor do any of his forays into the city and the surrounding towns, even eventually all the way to England, provide him with a single clue. The reader never does learn the cause of the catastrophe and as such, the primary focus is placed on Jonas's ultimately unsuccessful attempts to create meaning in his solitary existence. Layered over this unsettling scenario is Jonas's confrontation with his alter ego, with the "Schläfer," who surfaces as a malevolent, alienated, destructive force. When Jonas decides to place video cameras around Vienna to record any sort of life he might have missed in his car tours of the city, he also begins to record his nighttime self. "Der Schläfer" begins to wake in the night and stare threateningly into the camera, eventually begins to sleepwalk and do things in the night, which Jonas cannot remember in the morning. The "Schläfer" further undermines Jonas's waking agency by thwarting his intentions or putting him into terrifying situations. He awakes in strange locations. At one point, the "Schläfer" has apparently pulled three of Jonas's teeth while he slept. Towards the end of the novel, Jonas awakes in an enclosed space, panicked that he is in a coffin. Finally, he is able to free himself: the "Schläfer" has locked him into the trunk of his car (342-46). The recordings of nothing happening in the city provide an eerie counterpart to the recordings of the "Schläfer": the empty video recordings and Jonas's *Doppelgänger* mock Jonas's existential crisis by reminding him of his loneliness. Repeatedly watching the "Schläfer" on video leads Jonas to the conclusion: "Es ergab...keinen Sinn" (104). As the only character in the novel, Jonas' importance is one sense overdetermined: without him there is no novel. Yet his subjectivity shrinks over the course of the novel in direct disproportion to his inflated role as the only figure in the novel.

Despite the lack of characters other than Jonas in the entire novel, it creates nonetheless a tense atmosphere of claustrophobia and building horror,

as the layers of past begin to erode without ever being renewed or rewritten in the present. Jonas experiences Vienna in a random, fragmentary fashion, as he races around the city looking for clues: Here is the Ringstrasse, there the Prater; here the Stephansdom, there the Heldenplatz, but in the end none of them signify. Each has a bygone historical association but no particular meaning in the present. The monotony of Jonas's existence, once he discovers he is alone in the world, restricts his experiences to the present. Even Jonas's personal memories of his family and his girlfriend Marie have limited ability to anchor his subjectivity, and eventually his meaning as an individual begins to erode, and his sense of self becomes fragmentary. His only course of action is in the end self-destruction. On 20 August, 47 days after waking to find the world empty, Jonas commits suicide by jumping from the tower of the Stephansdom.

In *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, Glavinic takes the idea of the hypertrophied subject to an extreme, when the Jonas awakens to find himself the only person left in Vienna and indeed, he eventually discovers, the whole world. As the sole survivor of the catastrophe, Jonas appears to be very important, but as a thoroughly unique individual without counterpart, he is insignificant and incapable of development. For Glavinic, the only possibility is disintegration. Even the so-called Austrian culture of death has no meaning when the last person on earth destroys himself because there is no one to witness his demise. Jonas's suicide reads instead like a darkly meaningless replay of the famous Viennese anthem "Wien, Du Stadt meiner Träume" (written in 1912 by Rudolf Siczynski), which ends with an imagined death in the future and a front row seat from heaven of the Stephansdom, much like Jonas final view of famous landmarks of Vienna as he falls. While Siczynski's song affirms nostalgia for Vienna as an identity-forming impulse, Glavinic's post-human world casts Jonas into an existential crisis, for which there is no answer other than erasure.

Throughout the novel, Jonas reflects on Austria's history, repeatedly referencing its current day obsolescence. At the start of the novel, for example, Jonas wonders if there has been a nuclear bomb attack and why Vienna was the target: "Und wer sollte sich die Mühe machen, so teure Technologie ausgerechnet an diese alte, nicht mehr wichtige Stadt zu verschwenden" (16). Yet, one of his first impulses is to drive with ever increasing speed around the Ringstrasse, checking into famous buildings such as the Burgtheater - though only later does it occur to him to check the Stephansdom as a historically important but for him irrelevant community gathering place - for

signs of life. Then he expands his circuit and takes in Austria and parts of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. His initial car journey (chapter 3) takes him west to Salzburg, then south to Villach, then Klagenfurt, finally on to Slovenia and Hungary. "Bei Heiligenkreuz fuhr er über die Grenze. Er hatte das absurde Gefühl, wieder zu Hause zu sein" (42). Glavinic even inserts a bit of self-deprecating Austrian humor into the Jonas's explorations, such as when Jonas expects to find people finally in the small town of Freilassing just over the Austrian border into Germany: "Insgeheim war er davon ausgegangen, spätestens auf deutschem Boden Menschen zu treffen. Er hatte Militär erwartet. Vielleicht Zelte mit Flüchtlingen. Möglicherweise sogar Panzer oder Menschen in ABC-Schutzanzügen. Auf alle Fälle Zivilisation" (38). Jonas even has a moment of uncharacteristically un-Austrian enthusiasm for creating his own social system:

Wenn er die Mehrheit war, durfte er eine ganze Gesellschaftsform verwerfen. Ihm dem Souverän, stand es frei, ... allerhand Törichtes in den Rang eines Grundgesetzes [zu] befördern. Er hatte die Möglichkeit, eine andere Staatsform zu wählen. Ja sogar eine neue zu erfinden. Obgleich das System, in dem er lebte, faktisch Anarchie, Volksherrschaft und Diktatur zugleich war. (117)

But in the end, the concept of borders, of home, of place in general becomes absurd and meaningless: "Österreich. Was war das, Österreich?" (311).

Jonas's reflections on an increasingly receding relationship to Austria and its history, as well as to his personal history, function also on the non-diegetic level of the novel. Certainly, the mounting feeling of doom Jonas experiences has as its source his unraveling subjectivity and his perception that the past is merely a fleeting, fading text just palpable below his present perceptions, but for the reader the greatest source of tension comes from Glavinic's continual but often only partial and fragmentary intertextual references. For example, Glavinic patches together Jonas's personal history from numerous intertextual sources from the Bible to Astrid Lindgren's stories to *Hamlet*.¹⁹ For Jonas and for the reader, a ghost

19. Glavinic wrote that he wishes to send his readers something like subliminal messages through his novel, which will make them feel a bit uneasy and destabilized: "Ich glaube daran, dass ich mich in den Hinterkopf meines Lesers schreiben kann. Ich glaube, dass ich als Autor im Text Signale an das Unbewusste des Lesers schicken muss" ("Der Roman" 310). In *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, Glavinic relates a story from Jonas's childhood, which contains

world takes the place of the real. His world becomes increasingly a night world, where these traces and ghosts reside together, atop one another, just like present-day Vienna, but for Jonas the meaning of the underlying traces of the past become intolerably meaningless because the post-human world does not create the meaningful (even if illusory) *Überbau* of the human world.²⁰

Starting early in the novel, Jonas begins to leave behind "Spuren" (56), or messages such his name and telephone number, as he moves through Vienna, then later through parts of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, finally England and back to Austria, but without a recipient, his traces are unreadable and thus without meaning. The continual confrontation with signs, which do not signify, is irritating and mysterious for Jonas **and** for the reader and is exemplified by two nonsense words. The first one, "umirom," comes to Jonas's in a dream about his dead grandmother. Although he cannot fathom its meaning, he writes the nonsense word out in large letters on tied-together tablecloths and hangs this sign from the Donauturm, but as what? A call for help like the giant "HILFE" Jonas spells out in the Heldenplatz (of all places)? Jonas finds the second word "mudjas!" written on his own forehead one morning (279), which is written backwards for his benefit so that he can see it "correctly" in the mirror. "Er wußte nicht, was Mudjas bedeutete" (279). "Umirom" suggests for the reader an underlying text, e.g.

elements such as the name "Löhneberger," a deep soup terrine, a maid who limps, and the rescue of an assistant waiter, who cuts his hand and suffers blood poisoning. Glavinic explains in "Der Roman" that these are elements borrowed from Astrid Lindgren's *Lönneberga* ("Der Roman" 311). It is not important that the reader understand explicitly where these references come from; more importantly, the reader should sense that "etwas" "sickert...in den Hinterkopf" ("Der Roman" 312).

20. Daniela Hempen's fascinating reading of *Die Arbeit der Nacht* demonstrates a similarity between pre-modern literary depictions of nature and Glavinic's integration of nature into his narrative as a place of terror for the main character, Jonas. Hempen understands Jonas's disintegration in the context of his disconnection from nature. When he becomes cut off from his familiar connections to the 21st century world of technology and human interactions, he is unable to turn to nature as a means of identity formation; rather, he can experience it only as a place of fear, leading to his downfall ("Wolfsvieh, Flügelbär und König Etzels Grab...: Ungezähmte Natur als *locus terribilis* in Thomas Glavinics Roman *Die Arbeit der Nacht*").

"(momento) mori" and "Mudjas!" perhaps "judas."²¹ Both words function like a palimpsest in that they seem to suggest an underlying but never fully developed meaning. It is as if too much has been erased. Glavinic's overwriting of these references has the effect of creating multiple layers, but it is impossible to see an actual pattern of meaning because the references are entirely random or because Glavinic inhibits the development of the meaning contained in the original text.

Jonas's grave-digging expedition (387-88) toward the end of the novel contains yet another incomplete intertextual reference, this time to Hamlet's monolog while holding the skull of Yorick. Near the end of the novel Jonas wonders if the dead are still dead, that is, are their remains still there in the ground or have they disappeared too, along with everyone else? He chooses to exhume the remains of a neighbor from his childhood, a woman who babysat for Jonas on occasion. His choice is not entirely random; he remembers this Juliane Bender most fondly as a woman who believed in spiritism, and he wonders if she might show him the way to the other side, but the excavation of her grave in the Zentralfriedhof leads to a bit of Hamletesque pondering: here is the hand (now a skeleton), which once held mine. In one sense, Jonas is comforted by the physical remains of a woman who once cared for him, but he is left with the difficult task of reconciling the physical world with the otherworldly, that is, the inexplicable yet palpable presence of the absent and of absence. Jonas keeps asking himself if he missed something, some message but there is no message from God nor from beyond the grave.²² Jonas

21. During his trip to England, Jonas discovers the medication "Umirome" (352) listed in a pharmaceutical handbook while he is looking for a medication to keep him from sleeping and turning into the "Schläfer." While the mystery of the name is revealed, the reader is left with very little satisfaction because the connection is on the one hand utterly random and on the other hand unremarkable. More importantly, the manipulating hand of the author becomes once more apparent. He solves the mystery without any concern for Jonas's development; he is simply handed an answer and a medication to keep him moving because allowing him to sleep or come to a stop means the end of Jonas as a character.

22. In the Bible story of Jonah, Jonas's namesake, God gives him the task of delivering a message to the people of Nineveh that they must stop sinning, but when he flees God's command and boards a ship, a storm comes. Only when Jonah is thrown from the ship does the storm stop, and a large fish swallows

reflects on how he had often wished, before becoming the last person on earth, to be recognized for having overcome some particular difficult trial (like his biblical namesake Jonah):

Er hatte sich gewünscht, vor aller Augen durch eine Gefahr gegangen zu sein. Die Auszeichnung zu tragen, eine harte Prüfung bestanden zu haben.

Er hatte ein Überlebender sein wollen.

Ein Auserwählter hatte er sein wollen.

Der war er jetzt. (94)

In the end, it is impossible for Jonas to understand his experience as the sole survivor as meaningful in the way he had imagined because no one is left to recognize him as such.

The novel reads almost like a joke: If the motto of the Habsburg Empire "Alles Erdreich ist Österreich Untertan" is read quite literally, then the last person alive at the end of human civilization must necessarily be Austrian. Thus the grandiose dream of "Alles Erdreich ist Österreich Untertan" finally dissolves into its alternate reading: *Austria erit in orbe ultima* (Austria will be the last [to survive] in the world).²³ As the last survivor, Jonas meditates on the layering of historical time, represented physically by the persistence of the physical markers and landmarks of the past, which are in a continual state of receding. His day-to-day reality is an accumulation of things past, but whose presence lingers physically in the present, which becomes, for Jonas, increasingly dreamlike and unreliable, and finally unreadable. Time and space exist simultaneously, as Jonas reflects as he falls from the Stephansdom: "Zeit war kein Nacheinander, Zeit war ein

Jonah. After praying to be released, Jonah is spit out on to land and must still fulfill his task to warn the people of Nineveh. By the time he reaches Nineveh, the people have already repented and God has forgiven them.

23. Another possible reading is van Gemert's discussion of Menasse's appropriation of this abbreviation: "Vielleicht wäre es, bei einem solchen schillernden Wesen Österreichs, berechtigt, Menasses Österreich-Leitspruch, der sich hinter dem Kürzel A.E.I.O.U. verbirgt, in seinem Geiste richtig zu übersetzen: 'Austria Erit In Orbe Ultimo' hieße dann 'Österreich wird letztendlich in der Welt sein', d.h. 'Österreich ist überall' oder, wohl besser noch: 'Österreich wird in der letzten Welt sein', was im Geist der *Phänomenologie der Entgeisterung* gelesen, bedeuten könnte: 'Österreich wird sich am Ende als das Nichts erweisen'" (van Gemert 325).

Nebeneinander" (394). In a post-human world where borders and nations lack meaning, the uncannily empty world in *Die Arbeit der Nacht* demands the erasure of self, as all of space opens up into a horrifying vacuum.

One could understand Glavinic's Jonas as the consummate example of the hypertrophied subject; as the sole figure of the novel, his role as subject is overdetermined in the extreme. Like other hypertrophied subjects, his lack of relationships and increasingly receding lack of connection to both (Austrian) history and his own family history lead ultimately to his failure to build a new identity without human interactions, as his grasp on reality becomes ever more tenuous and splintered over the course of 47 days. Not even a potentially satisfying explanation for the apocalypse Jonas has survived allows the reader to give meaning to Jonas' simultaneously hypertrophying role as subject and atrophying relationship to history and time.²⁴

Another way of reading Menasse's essays in tandem with Glavinic's novel is to come back to the title of the collection of essays: *Überbau und Underground*. The relationship between these layers immediately implies a spatial orientation and brings to mind also here the evocative metaphor of the palimpsest. The upper layer, the *Überbau* of democratic Austria, barely conceals a contradictory substructure composed of an imagined, i.e. wished-for, but vanished Austrian Empire and a shamefully suppressed history of totalitarianism and genocide. Menasse's understanding of Austrian culture of the 20th century is the revelation of the underlying message of social and political powerlessness entrenched in the Second Republic. Jonas's commentary as he looks out his window one night could apply to Menasse's reading of present-day Austria:

Er blickte nach links, Richtung Innenstadt, wo da und dort
Fenster erleuchtet waren. Der Kern Wiens. Hier hatte sich einmal
Weltgeschichte ereignet. Aber sie war weitergezogen, in andere

24. See for example Müller-Funk: "Die apokalyptische Erzählung im Roman ist narrativ entblößt. Keine sinnstiftende Geschichte passt zu der Situation, die sein Held vorfindet" (Müller-Funk 30). Müller-Funk understands the end of *Die Arbeit der Nacht* not as an actual suicide because this would mean the end of time and thus the end of the narrative, meaning apocalypse, but an apocalypse in the true sense of the word requires a revelation, and this never happens (Müller-Funk 31-32).

Städte. Geblieben waren breite Straßen, edle Häuser, Denkmäler. Und die Menschen, die nur schwer gelernt hatten, zwischen der alten und der neuen Zeit zu unterscheiden. (*Die Arbeit der Nacht* 52-53)

In his essay "Die Verösterreicherung der Welt," Menasse posits that it is not the decline of the world per se that is the problem; rather, the decline of the world of realities is the main issue because nothing retains an inherent meaning. Experience is simply a collection of possibilities in the future. Austria's artistic avant garde represents for Menasse this essentially conservative function, while Austria's preservation of its historical past results in a culture of "Musealität" (van Gemert 143). In Müller-Funk's reading of *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, Jonas becomes a museum of himself because space is socially constructed and has a symbolic function, but without people, it loses this function, and Vienna becomes merely a ruin without people (Müller-Funk 21-22). For Menasse and in Glavinic's novel, the result is a suspended set of possibilities but no real action (van Gemert 315), not unlike Jonas's perception of an increasingly receding past with no relevance to his increasingly telescoping experience of the present.

Glavinic takes the concept of the palimpsest one step further by making the act of erasure of the palimpsest visible: he leaves the incomplete, insufficient nature of the narrative - the sudden disappearance of all life from Earth - unexplained. By the same token, Jonas's attempts to find meaning in his post-human world lead only to the conclusion that there is no more meaning. Rather than contributing to the textual layers of the palimpsest, Jonas can only subtract or erase. In Menasse's concept, the *Überbau* still has a function, albeit a falsifying one: It serves to conceal an unwanted reality. Yet in Glavinic's post-human world, even the function of illusion as meaning in itself is broken. As Mara Stuhlfauth astutely observes in her analysis of *Die Arbeit der Nacht*, the problem of meaning in the novel goes one step further when the reader must necessarily come to the conclusion that Jonas's existential crisis is not about the end of the world per se but about his (potential) end as a fictional (illusory) character in a novel. This becomes particularly evident when Jonas enters the apartment of a writer,²⁵

25. Jonas reads the names of the writer and presumably his wife on the door: Ilse-Heide Brzo and Christian Vidovic (*Die Arbeit der Nacht* 374). Both names are Croatian, just like Glavinic's last name, combined with a more commonly used given name.

whose bookshelves are full of several copies of three books: "ein Schachbuch, ein Krimi, ein Lebensratgeber" (*Die Arbeit der Nacht* 375), in other words Thomas Glavinic's first, third, and fourth novels, *Carl Haffners Liebe zum Untentschieden* (1998), *Der Kameramörder* (2002), and *Wie man leben soll* (2004).²⁶ In Stuhlfauth's analysis, Jonas has stumbled upon his "Geburtsstätte" (112). Glavinic drives home this connection by placing the writer's apartment "nur ein paar Straßen entfernt von der verlassenen Wohnung seines Vaters" (374) and recording Jonas's positive reaction to the apartment. It feels "freundlich" (374), and "[h]ier hatte man in Harmonie gelebt" (376). Glavinic cannot resist a bit of self-critique: a photograph of the writer with his wife and son shows a man who looks "verkniffen" (376), according to Jonas, even though he had every apparent right to be happy. Glavinic even lets Jonas write a bit of the novel himself on the writer's typewriter: "Hier stehe ich und schreibe diesen Satz" (375). Critical for this scene remains the moment of the poetological reflection when the writer Thomas Glavinic steps forward to make his presence as the inventor and also destroyer of Jonas perfectly clear.

Not the End: "'Spielen' ist hier wohl das Schlüsselwort" (Glavinic, "Der Mensch hat viele mögliche Ichs")

Even if Glavinic's critics fault him for writing "Konzeptliteratur" or writing essentially the same book about himself every time, he never has tried to escape this criticism. If anything, he fully acknowledges writing as a process of trying out "mögliche oder abgelegte Ichs von mir" (Glavinic, "Der Mensch hat viele mögliche Ichs").²⁷ For Glavinic, the process of trying out possible self-concepts happens more or less without much reflection: "ich will wirklich nicht zu viel wissen über das, was ich mache, ich will es einfach nur machen" (Glavinic, "Wir dürfen lügen"). Even if Glavinic contends

26. In an interview, Thomas Glavinic was asked why he left out his second novel, *Herr Susi* (2000), from this scene in *Die Arbeit der Nacht*. His simple reply: "Weil es kein gutes Buch ist. Das zweite Buch ist sowieso für fast jeden Schriftsteller ein Problem" (Interview, "'Ich schlafe selten ohne Licht'").

27. Glavinic's proximity to Musil feels quite close: "Keine Ideologie herrscht. Individuelle Teile werden individuell ausgelesen. Man kann es eine unausdrückbare Vielspältigkeit nennen" (*Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom* 34).

that his writing happens somewhat randomly and revisits unoriginal plot conceits, it still makes sense to return to Arno Geiger's observation that his generation has difficulty building its identity based on tradition and connection to the past, leading to stagnation and indecision, because, as Geiger goes on to argue, each generation must necessarily leave its impression on the one that follows. Perhaps Glavinic would like his readers to believe that his "mögliche Ichs" bubble up from an unexplored subconscious, but it is equally plausible to find the subterranean source of Glavinic's "radikale Zersplitterung einer sich in Zerstreuung verlierenden Welt" (Menasse, *Überbau und Underground* 103) in the underground of Austria's particular history in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It is even plausible, given Glavinic's propensity to willingly put his own ego up for humorous dissection, to place his work in another Austrian tradition, namely a strong tradition of comedy.²⁸ In this context, perhaps we can read the following quote from Menasse as a *possibility* rather than as a limitation when we consider the role of illusion in Glavinic's writing: "Österreich ist ein Paradebeispiel für die Hegelsche Definition von Identität, derzufolge Identität nichts anderes sei als die Identität der Nicht-Identität. Mit anderen Worten: Wir sind ehrlich davon überzeugt, nicht zu lügen, solange wenigstens das Gegenteil wahr ist" (Menasse, *Das Land ohne Eigenschaften* 25).

Menasse sees a parallel between his time - the end of the Waldheim era - and Musil's time - the post-WWI era, characterizing both as an "Endzeit" (*Das Land ohne Eigenschaften* 8), arguing that Austria has "einen besonderen Hang zu Endzeiten" (10). As Menasse explains, the Second Republic was built up by a generation that experienced several "Endzeiten" and therefore imbued the Second Republic with the "Endzeit" feel particular to secular Catholicism (10). Glavinic's deliberate trivialization of the historical context in *Wie soll man leben* and the utter erasure of history in *Die Arbeit der Nacht* suggest a continued preoccupation with an "Endzeit" as an apt

28. See for example Stampfl-Yokura's study of *Das bin doch ich*: "Da greift alles ineinander: Satire, Komik wie im Nestroyschen Volkstheater bis zum echten Slapstick. Aber genau diese Übertreibung, diese Verzerrung erreicht die Übertragung. Da macht sich einer zum Hanswurst, aber genau dadurch wird er zu einer literarischen Figur. Hier schreibt nicht einer banal seine eigenen Gschichteln, sondern hier wird eine Kunstfigur erzeugt, in der sich alle Ichs, das reale des Autors wohl auch, aber eben auch alle fiktiven Abspaltungen davon spiegeln" (190).

characterization for Austria and its historical past in the 21st century. Yet for Glavinic, this "Endzeit" does not however mean the end. Instead, as Wegmann and Wolf suggest in their study of contemporary literature, Glavinic pushes out to find a new border, shifting his authorial register continuously between high and low, vexing for his critics who puzzle over how best to categorize or evaluate his writing. The play of illusion is endlessly replicable, and Glavinic clearly finds multiply refracted self-referentiality an endless source of playful storytelling.

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