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# Rethinking Trümmerliteratur: The Aesthetics of Destruction Ruins, Ruination, and Ruined Language in the Works of Böll Grass, and Celan

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*Rethinking Trümmerliteratur: The Aesthetics of Destruction*  
*Ruins, Ruination, and Ruined Language in the Works of Böll, Grass, and Celan*

by

Kurt R. Buhanan

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
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Department of German  
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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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## ABSTRACT

# RETHINKING TRÜMMERLITERATUR: THE AESTHETICS OF DESTRUCTION RUINS, RUINATION, AND RUINED LANGUAGE IN THE WORKS OF BÖLL, GRASS, AND CELAN

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*Trümmerliteratur* – literally “rubble-literature” – is a brand of literature that became important after the Second World War, led by Heinrich Böll, whom I term the apologist of German *Trümmerliteratur*. Typically included under this classification are the writers who began to produce in the years immediately following the war, and in whose work the rubble and ruins of the landscape figure prominently. Böll provided the programmatic framework for the movement in his “Bekanntnis zur Trümmerliteratur,” but his relationship to another type of ruin writing presents a point of friction when he appears to be working in a romantic mode to describe his experience of Irish ruins. This problem was the point of departure for a new thinking of ruins. Discovering the strains of rubble literature in Grass and Celan presents the second part of this study, which dramatically recasts these writers, demanding that the presence and prevalence of ruin images and themes receive consideration. Grass’s hermeneutical ruins, a reading of narrative gaps, presents the first level of ruin, separating the reader from the text’s reliability and authorial immediacy. The next type of ruins that Grass

presents is the violent ruining involved in the the act of writing itself, whether chiseled into gravestones or flecking virginal paper. Similarly, Celan's images of ruins are produced in a form consciously resembling berubbled structures, with dashes and slashes often left jutting dangerously into the space of a wide margin, like the rusty reinforcing steel bars of modern construction. Considering these writers in these terms leads to the question of language and how they attempt to overcome the problem of a language manipulated into complicity in the crimes of totalitarianism. Finally, there is the transparency offered in the porous structure of the ruin. These houses prove incapable of providing the shelter or protection. The inhabitants are exposed, exhibited to the observer with all of the intimate contents of quotidian existence, the low objects of the everyday. Entrance into this interiority is a powerful part of what makes the ruins an interesting object for observation. In this literature of ruins and rubble the reader is offered this transparency, an offer of entrance into society's interiority.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Presenting the Problem of Aesthetic Decay and a Brief Textual History of Ruins

#### I.

Examined objectively, nothing about man's aesthetic interest in ruins is self-evident, nothing about it is natural. Jagged stone and jutting angles, crumbling and incomplete structural symmetries, and the hollow wound of the caved structure injure the eye; restless creaking and groaning and occasional clashes of impact startlingly announce the inexorable progress, or regress rather, of decay's "naturalizing" effects; also less than beautiful are the invasive septic stink, the odor of moldering decay, the gritty dust of the air, frequent rodent (gnawing) infestations, dangerous instabilities, and occasionally even the skeletal remains of previous inhabitants. There is nothing intrinsically beautiful about the object of a destroyed structure, a fallen building, a ruin, and certainly nothing beautiful about the metaphoric extension of this image to mortality and human "ruins."

Of course, this claim rejecting ruins as an aesthetic object must be qualified by some comment on Kantian and Burkean conceptualizations of the beautiful and the sublime, as the dyadic constituents of aesthetic experience. In his third and final work defining critical rationality, Kant asserts, "Es kann keine objective Geschmacksregel, welche durch Begriffe bestimmte, was schön sei, geben. Denn alles Urtheil aus dieser Quelle ist ästhetisch; d. i. das Gefühl des Subjects und kein Begriff eines Objects ist sein Bestimmungsgrund" (*Kritik der Urteilskraft* 93). Having stated this, however, Kant immediately reconsiders the absolute

character of his assertion and suggests the inevitable development of general agreement on ideals of beauty that are not entirely objective but certainly soften the sense of subjectivity's absolute primacy in aesthetic judgment. It may be mere tautology, then, to say that ruins have nothing intrinsically beautiful about them, as beauty is judged against subjective and culturally determined ideals. Nevertheless, the specific aesthetic assertion of the beauty of decay seems a paradox, the first of four considerable problems in beginning an investigation into the aesthetics of ruins of Postwar German literature. The other three are time, subject, and a requirement that (human) life withdraw from the site of ruin. Exploring these fundamental concerns will lead into closer questions about the possibility of art in a world so sullied by its own past.

Returning to the perhaps contradictory sentiment of the beautiful of the spoiled, it must be said that there are certainly other aesthetic projects opposed to a traditional system of symmetry and artistic perfection, where reactions to what is eventually perceived as an indulgent or ignorant aestheticism often assert something like an aesthetic of the ugly or the banal. The subversive quality of this kind of art is its essential and defining characteristic. In the historic development and exploitation of ruin images, though, the picturesque aestheticism long precedes the aspect of political commitment, in any form.

Despite the apparent paradox in a beauty of decay, man's aesthetic interest in decay is consistent. In her eclectic consideration of ruins in *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953), Rose Macaulay suggests, "to be fascinated by ruins has always, it would seem, been a human tendency," (1). In his investigations on *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin proposes that "history does not assume the form of the progress of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay" (178). In the companion volume to the Getty exhibition on ruins, which

titularly borrows Benjamin's words, the foreword states: "Ruins speak to us in ways that things made by Nature cannot" (*Irresistible Decay*, vii). Claire Lyons writes, "ruins are a universal inheritance" (93). For Georg Simmel, the ruin represents "a cosmic tragedy" (259)<sup>1</sup>. In his study on the relationship between text and architecture, Philippe Hamon suggests, "[i]n an inverted way, the ruin [. . .] seems to underlie the very essence of architecture [. . .]. The ruin is a kind of hyperbole of the building, and this despite the fact that it constitutes a sort of reduction" (58). Ruins fascinate us, somewhat perversely perhaps, but indisputably. As Benjamin suggests, our very history is embodied in the iconic images of ruins which remain and represent the zenith of occidental cultural achievement – of course, our term for the Western world, the occident, also etymologically incorporates the fascination with a falling, with decline, though it refers overtly to the sun: this is a culture of ruins. Similarly, German is a language of decline and declension, so a certain morphological interest is demonstrated in a linguistic metaphor of the fall, which communicates grammatical role through graded decline – the German word for case being *Fall* or *Kasus*, both relating to the Latin and Greek words for fall and decline. This is the first problem to be addressed in an essay on ruins, the apparent disconnect of an aesthetic study of something ruined.

What is it, then, that validates images and remnants of destruction for aesthetic consideration? The first and clearest answer is time. Temporal distance enables a culture to transform ruin into an imaginary picturesque relationship with the present. For Simmel, the pastness of the ruin is exactly what it *presences*, "The ruin creates the form of a past life, not according to the contents or remnants of that life, but according to its past as such" (265).

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Simmel's essay are quoted in translation, taken from *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918: a collection of essays, with translations and a bibliography*, ed. Kurt Wolff (1959).

Therefore, modern ruins, or the rubble of more recent violence, fit into a discussion of aesthetics only with some difficulty. These ruins belong to the present, and not the past, and they may be called “premature.” It is usually exactly that maturing process, the application of history’s patina, the time-earned verdigris (*vert de Grèce*), that qualifies rubble for artistic idealization. Politically and economically, in urban planning and development, an abandoned structure is considered an eyesore and an invitation to spreading deterioration. These recent ruins, lacking the luster of age, are rejected from the traditional aesthetic. As Charles Merewether claims, however, “ruins collapse temporalities” (25); the past is presented, but the future is also always anticipated in the ruin, and these temporal parallels are part of what makes the ruin powerful.

Also, regarding the requirement of temporal distance in recognizing the value of ruins, the basic stipulation of time’s legitimating effect of softening maturation is sometimes overlooked, in order to honor the most impressive ruins, even with almost no distancing span of time. Some churches may almost be considered ruins even during their construction, which is protracted enough to create an effect of being perpetually unfinished, and indeed they are sometimes left unfinished for centuries, in the genre of the architectural fragment. Although the motivations for delaying completion of these edifices are most often financial, either avoiding taxation or simply running out of funding for the colossal building projects, the porous quality of these structures presents a significant similarity to the ruin.

Additionally, a tradition of ruins accepts only the ruins of grandiose, monumental, or structurally imposing buildings: former palaces, castles, churches, or burghs. The potential subjects for ruin rumination are limited to such. Even here, though, the aesthetic is sometimes stretched, to include the idyllic cottage, whose structure was never grand or

imposing but which belonged to an accepted aesthetic of national heritage –Anne Janowitz finds this nation-making impulse to be central to the practice of representing ruins (*England's Ruins*, passim). These other ruins, deemed significant, though never grand, inherit the ruin status from historians or anthropologists, who excavate their culture's traces, reading the runes of their ruins as the sole, and therefore scientifically if not spectacularly significant, extant text testifying of a lost society.

Here, it is necessary to comment on the ostensible distinction between ruins and rubble. The common phrase to suggest the separation between the aesthetic fragment and dusty worthlessness is usually a variant of Simmel's "mere heap of stones" (261); Michael Roth borrows this phrase when he describes the ruin as found "in objects that are more than just a 'heap of stones' and less than belonging fully to the present" (1). Simmel suggests the importance of degree of decay in assessing aesthetic potential of the ruined, which must leave enough of a trace to indicate an "upward-leading tendency," whereas "the stumps of the pillars in the Forum Romanum are simply ugly and nothing else, while a pillar crumbled – say, halfway down – can generate a maximum of charm" (265). Clearly, Simmel's distinction – and this is representative of all who make similar claims of exclusivity in the aesthetic inclusion of ruins, derogating the rubble –is absolutely arbitrary, and even he is not sure where he feels like drawing that limiting line. That a ruin aesthetic is forcefully subjective is already contained in the aesthetic acceptance of any degree of decay.

The important exceptions to these aesthetic criteria extend ruins beyond antiquity, beyond classicism, and beyond romanticism. If requirements on ruins' temporality and originary stature may be contravened, then further extensions may be possible. Through the qualification of time and grandeur, a third criterion is often ignored: the means of ruination,

the cause of decline, or the manner of deterioration. A ruined building often stands in its perpetually falling state as a result of conflict, usually violent and terrible conflict. Given time, however, people tend to forget why a burg was ever even built, let alone why most of the walls are rubbled. The history of a ruin is often a graphic history of violence and terror, not the picturesque scene of nature's reclamation, subduing man's promethean overreaching. The sublime quality of ruin is considered in the romantic aesthetics of ruins, but this is an introverted subjectivity that remains ignorant of the horrifying process of tearing down, while achieving a melancholy sense of transience. The consuming violence which caused the clash is mellowed into a sort of vanitas, which merely anticipates the inevitability of decline. Violence, however, is practically omnipresent in ruins. Although economic, political, ethnic, religious, and other displacing forces which evacuate a building's inhabitants are not always intuitively seen as violent, I would suggest that any force which effects a dislocation must be understood as violent. Thus, it is somewhat disconcerting when Macaulay indicates that the epistemological origin of ruinous pleasure was "inextricably mixed with triumph over enemies [. . .] and with the violent excitements of war" (1), but later asserting that the new ruins of Europe cannot belong to this aesthetic, concluding, "*Ruinenlust* has come full circle: we have had our fill" (454).

I readily admit, though, that the direct presence of violence on such a scale as in the case of world war makes the inclusion of these most "premature" ruins particularly problematic, because they represent not only cultural decline but the willful, genocidal ruination of the human species. Although millions may have died in the construction of other architectural monuments (i.e. the Great Wall, or the pyramids), the ruins of the twentieth century's world wars evoke murderous ferocity, and scientific mastery of the art of

eradication, whether by means of atomic blasts or systematic factory-like efficiency. The rejection of ruins which are perceived as bearing too strong a trace of the violence which led to their fall is not new to the wake of world war, however. Simmel raises the objection to any ruin which allows the observer too readily to perceive man's role in the destruction. He continues by pointing to two kinds of man's disqualifying culpability in the ruin product – first is the violent “positive action,” and second is “positive passivity,” “that men *let it decay*” (261).

Simmel's 1911 essay expresses some strong feelings in connection with ruins of these kinds – “problematical, unsettling, often unbearable” –, which he considers disqualified, and he proposes a fourth requirement for ruins: that life withdraw itself from them. In reference to his assumptions about the “two world potencies – the striving upward [of the spirit] and the sinking downward [of nature],” which find their “unique balance” in architecture, Simmel suggests that ruins represent an imbalance in favor of nature, and that man's involvement evidenced in ruins proves that the man is participating in the “gravity” of nature, “as an element of mere nature,” and that he has thus failed to preserve that second potency of a Faustian upward-striving. This is particularly so of “urban ruins, like those, still inhabited” (261). The site of the ruin must distance itself from the sites where living is performed. In fact, Simmel once describes this distance as “profound peace, which, like a holy charmed circle, surrounds the ruin” (265), which allows us to perceive the metaphysical significance “revealed by patina” (262). Roth expands the necessary distance between ruin and life, describing the ruin's state as convalescent (8).

Naturally or unnaturally, the rubble and ruins of the Second World War *were* inhabited. Famous ruins left unrestored after the second world war in Germany, the St.

Nikolai cathedral in Hamburg and the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche in Berlin, are philosophically excluded from the widespread restoration project, to warn and testify of man's catastrophic will to destruction.

The instantiation of the inhuman destruction of the Second World War leads to the final problem of an aesthetic exploration of the ruin image in postwar German literature. Theodor Adorno's famous opening line of his presentation of a theory of aesthetics, to which I alluded in the opening lines of this investigation, expresses the necessarily dubious status of the artistic product after the holocaust (from Greek *holokauston*, meaning 'whole burning'): "Zur Selbstverständlichkeit wurde, dass nichts, was die Kunst betrifft, mehr selbstverständlich ist, weder in ihr, noch in ihrem Verhältnis zum Ganzen, nicht einmal ihr Existenzrecht" (9).

To recount the problems mentioned, an aesthetic consideration of ruins confronts: first, the basic disconnect of aesthetics and ruins, complicated and compounded by the lacking temporal distance and the often humble stature of the ruined object; second, the implicit participation in the discourse of the twentieth century's absolute mastery of annihilation; and third, the resultant fall of aesthetic capacities to produce the beautiful, after widespread abuse of the beautiful for manipulative propagandic purposes (the famous motto for the working National Socialist: *Schönheit durch Arbeit*), which effects a kind of aestheticide, to indulge in neologism. Nevertheless, in 1954 Heinrich Böll presents the Wednesday Discussions audience at the Hauptbahnhof in Köln with the "Rubble Literature Manifesto," or more literally, the "Confession to Rubble Literature" (*Bekennntnis zur Trümmerliteratur*), wherein he advocates a new aesthetics of ruins. Böll earns the Nobel

Prize almost as a representative for the epochal reliance on the ruins as their foundation for narration.

## II.

The first extant example of the Germanic interest in ruins comes in the Anglo-Saxon poem, which has been given the title “The Ruin.” From the Exeter Codex, transcribed in the tenth century, this short piece was probably originally composed in the seventh century and is traditionally supposed to elegize the Roman Bath, which fell to the West Saxons in 577. This dirge was included in the first attempt to anthologize the poetry of the German tribes in England. The first point of ruin in the poem is the fragmentary state of the manuscript. Like other palimpsestic texts, this one is incomplete, leaving philologists guessing at what might fill the gaps in the textual ruins.

The fragment is a type of ruin which has received attention from many critics, as well as the interest of the Romantics, like Schlegel, for whom all of poetry consisted of fragments. Fragments indicate the potential presence of something more, the potential visibility of the invisible. In this way, the fragment diverges slightly from the general sense of ruins that we have as primarily indicating absence, often in melancholy elegy. A textual fragment, such as the partially extant “Ruin” poem, “makes us regret beyond measure that the greater part has been lost, and that even in the extant portion some passages are wholly corrupt through missing words” (Kirkland 367). Philological studies produce sophisticated translations of the remaining portions, but some gaps remain. Similar to these palimpsestic traces are the *Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, which I will address below.

The ruin imagery of the poem is important in its evocation of the Roman culture, a culture that had vanished from England three centuries before the poem was composed. Janowitz also sees this as an exploitation of the Roman ruins, performed in order to serve the

legitimizing impulse which motivates many of the earliest ruinists, i.e. establishing a kind of cultural continuity: “The authority of antiquity was one thread in the fabric of common nationality, and was visibly available in architectural ruin, the physical trace of historical event in the countryside” (Janowitz 3). The poet instantiates images of Roman life, reanimating “roofs sunk in ruin, riven towers fallen, / Gates and turrets lost, hoar-frost for mortar” and imaging “lavish swimming-halls, / The drinking-halls crammed with every man’s delight” and the wonderful image of the baths, “the hot stream broke / Welling strongly from the stone; all was close and sweet / In the bright bosom of the walls; and where the baths lay / Hot at the heart of the place, that was the best of all . . .” (Morgan transl. in Macaulay, 10). More important than the original intentionality of the poem, which was first discovered in 1851, though, is the exploitation of the poem in the modern reception of the piece. The nation-making concerns of Victorian England employ the poem as a link to grand old Rome. The burgeoning nationalism, which Janowitz typically calls “nation-making,” is the focus of her study of *England’s Ruins* as the Romantics linked “Poetic Purposes” to “the National Landscape” (from the subtitle).

Although the status of the *Merseburger Zaubersprüche* as fragments – found on a blank page in a Meßschrift from the tenth century, they are believed to be from the eighth century – fits the consideration of textual fragments, as introduced above, the further implications for these snapshots of Germanic religiosity may not be as clearly evident. It is in the second *Zauberspruch* that I find significant ruin imagery. This incantation calls upon the gods of Germanic mythology, Fol and Wodan, to heal a horse’s twisted ankle. The final word, concluding the spell, definitively connects corporeal ruins with structural ruins, “bên zi bêna, bluot zi bluoda, / lid zi geliden, sôse gelîmida sîn!” (*bone to bone, blood to blood, limb*

*to limb, as though they were mortared!*) The reclamation of corporeal ruins is equated with architectural restoration and reconstruction, employing the mason's mortar to re-erect the horse. These examples from Germanic antiquity, in the case of the *Zaubersprüche* and "The Ruin," show both an interest in the structural ruins, remnants of imperial Rome, as well as a basic metaphorical primacy of the ruin image.

The Medieval interest in ruins became central to religious history, as pagan altars and other lithic groups were cast either as belonging somehow to Christian mythology in order to establish the desired continuity of history, or they were polemically derided as belonging to a decadent tradition of godless revelry and indulgence, which would have served to justify the violent treatment of the "heathen". Ironically, Rome was ruined by the Goths and Vandals, who thus participated in the creation of the iconic site of ruin, and these northern German tribes were later known mainly through their own runic ruins.

In the lyricisms of the first great German poet, Walther von der Vogelweide, there are occasional but significant references which contribute to the discursive development of ruins through the German ages. In the famous poem, "Ich saz ûf eime steine," Walther speaks of three things which won't decay, and his "driu dinc" are *êre*, *varnde guot*, and *gotes hulde*. Walther's penultimate wish is that he could house these three things in a shrine, but he concludes that the sociopolitical atmosphere is too violent, the upheaval immanent, "gewalt vert ûf der strâze". In essence, Walther is asserting the inevitability of ruin by utilizing the common trope of *vanitas*, but it is once again remarkable that he imagines a *shrine* and proceeds to suggest its ineluctable destruction and ruination. In imagining the both the possibility of the shrine as well as its impossibility and ineluctable destruction, Walther

builds and destroys this temple of the Germanic virtues, hybridized with a Christian need for divine grace, effectually enacting the imaginary violence on his own lyric architecture.

The neoclassicism of the Renaissance, signifying the rebirth of antique humanism, is so replete with its focus on the ruins of the past that any exegetical attention given to this period is almost superfluous. To take one example, however, we consider Dürer's famous woodcut "Melancholia I". While many of Dürer's woodprints iconically employ ruins in the background, this piece foregrounds them: A huge polyhedral fragment of stone sits among the other ruins of industry and culture, while the two angelic figures appear rather crazed, obsessively calculating. The ruined chunk of stone lies directly beneath the bat's label of "Melancholia". Smaller, though also next to the ruined slab is a pitcher, which appears to be in the act of breaking, which invokes the Hebrew poet of Ecclesiastes, a biblical book of ruin, "[If] ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities [. . .] all is vanity" (Ecc. 12: 6-8). Dürer presents a history of ruins and anxiety over ruination in this famous woodcut. Janowitz likewise locates a resonant representation of broken pitchers, which she links to the dynamic discourse of ruins (121).

Exploring the physiognomy of the ruin, Benjamin was led to the "baroque cult of the ruin". Benjamin emphasizes the "current stylistic feeling, far more than the reminiscences of antiquity" (178). Even the term *Barock* comes from a reference to fragmentariness and imperfection, *pérola baroca*, from Portugese, meaning irregular pearl (Rothmann, 47).

Conceiving of a fragmented "Vaterland," Andreas Gryphius incorporated more of the sublime than the melancholy picturesque aspect of ruins; he writes a very important ruin

poem, which anticipates the twentieth century Trümmerliteratur. “Tränen des Vaterlandes” presents a berubbed scene of destruction which could as easily evoke the destruction of Dresden – I suggest that Gerhart Hauptmann alludes to this poem in stating, “Wer das Weinen verlernt hat, lernt es beim Untergang Dresdens wieder,” which is further mirrored in Proust’s passage: “the last treasure that the past has in store, the richest, that which, when our flow of tears seems to have dried up at the source, can make us weep again” (Roth 17). “Die Türme stehn in Glut, die Kirch ist umgekehret, / Das Rathaus liegt im Graus, die Starken sind zerhaun, / Die Jungfraun sind geschänd’t, und wo wir hin nur schauun, / Ist Feuer, Pest und Tod, der Herz und Geist durchfähret.” This image of smoldering towers, a fallen church, and a pulverized town hall is both a warning and an aesthetic exploitation of these powerful images from the violence and destruction of the Thirty Years War.

Nevertheless, another wave of classicism swept through the age of Goethe, and Winkelmann’s directive to imitate the ruined products of antiquity, from his study of ruins in his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*, not only reawakened an interest in ruins but also contributed to the eighteenth century interest in follies, in sham ruins, by suggesting that the antiquities be dutifully copied, reproduced. There is also a passage in Winkelmann where he discusses the actual method of imitation, which he describes as necessitating a “Gitter,” in order to enable the imitative artist to perceive difference, depth, and scale. This sort of a “Beobachtungsgitter” is indispensable in attempting to access the otherwise almost inaccessible nuances of a monumental construction, now ruined. This problem will be addressed in the “Language of Ruin,” especially in Celan’s “Sprachgitter”.

Most famously, the Romantics dealt with ruins, in all forms. The philological efforts of the brothers Grimm and Schlegel considered the ruins of language; they imagined a once whole and palatial proto-European language, which they found now ruined and fragmented. They also mined the common folk for decaying fragments of cultural heritage, in fairy tales and folk songs, excavating the figurative ruins of regional oral traditions. Also here, though, is an important sham ruin, when Herder and others laud Macpherson's false fragment *Ossian* (Janowitz 14). The fragment becomes its own generic form of literary production. This aesthetic mode chose the "unfinished," incomplete promise of potential grandeur over the finished product.

Tragically and ironically, Caspar David Friedrich's most famous ruin painting, *Abtei im Eichwald* (1808-10), was destroyed near the end of the Second World War, in Berlin, 1945. The painting invites the gaze into the ruined abbey on a desolated plane, surrounded by skeletal arbor. The monumental impression of the piece is also heightened by the splash of light across a horizon line, which intersects the three circles at the peak of the destroyed church's window. Friedrich's contemporaries followed similar themes in their work of landscape painting, in which ruins are not only prominently featured but are the real subject. For both Friedrich and his contemporary Carl Blechen, ruins did not merely intensify the landscape, in a melancholy representation of home (*Heimat*), but they reinvented the landscape. They were the landscape.

Naturally these ruin sentiments are not absent in the writings of Eichendorff and the other romantic poets. Specific sites of ruins were "immortalized" repeatedly by different poets, above all Heidelberg with its ruined castle, which attracted Goethe, Brentano,

Hölderlin, and Eichendorff. Heidelberg belongs to that famous “romantic path” through Germany, along the Neckar, replete with romantic images of ruins.

As Adorno describes, though, in *Ästhetische Theorie*, with the deterioration of the Romantic comes a loss of the “natural” and the “Kulturlandschaft” (101-2), which loses ground to modernism’s new urbanism. With the rising importance of the industrial in the aesthetic sensibilities of modernism, there is a fascination with the futurological, with the machine. New cities must be built – to a certain extent, the city is an invention of modernism –, and the resultant migration from the rural to the urban leaves the storied countryside abandoned, ruined. When Claire Lyons writes, “Ruins [. . .] are essentially features of modernity” (79), she compares their emerged aesthetic significance with that in antiquity, but she also implies that ruins are essential features of modernity, that modernization necessarily produces ruins. The “modern” must ruin the outdated, making it a relic, in order to validate its own claim to contemporary vitality.

In addition to ruining the traditional in favor of the new and urban, Expressionism, particularly Expressionist film, modernism’s quintessential mode of representation, employs ruinesque architectural values: incongruous angles, splashed lighting as if coming through the cracks and chinks in a deteriorating wall, and a fascination with death, and the destruction of the human structure. Thus, while the populace migrated to the grand urban centers, apparently leaving the ruins in the countryside, the ruins actually moved with them. Visually, these values are represented in films, such as Wiene’s *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (1920), and Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922). The widely accepted view that Lotte Eisner, in *The Haunted Screen*, proposes of these expressionistic films is that they are a

reappropriation of German literary romanticism, especially in Murnau. The technological medium of film, as that of photography, also presents certain similarities with ruin imagery.

In the literature of the first part of the twentieth century, the human ruin becomes an indispensable image, later labeled by the National Socialists as “degenerate.” This new aesthetics relies on the emotive value of expression, rejecting classic formalistic values. Franz Kafka, Alfred Döblin, and Gottfried Benn are representative of the Expressionist style – Benn is problematic, though, in his initial support of the Nazi party; he was later banned, however, and his reception of the Büchner prize suggests the importance of his contribution to the expressionist mode.

Benn’s involvement with the Nazi Party leads into the final evolution of the ruin image, which centers on Albert Speer and the construction of eschatological monuments, anticipating their own destruction. Hitler’s romantic interest in ruins drew him on tours of Greece and Italy, where he and Speer considered the beauty of decay. Hitler wanted his chief architect to construct eternal monuments to the indomitable German nation, although like all monuments, they were intended to re-present the grandeur of Hitler’s Germany after the Third Reich’s inevitable decline. Speer’s essay, “The Theory of Ruin Value” proposed that German construction avoid the use of modern materials, such as rebar, which would rust and detract from the marmoreal, columnar testament of German greatness. The resulting costs, both in time as well as expensive materials and precision of the work– without mortar to solidify the structure, the stones must be laid properly if the stones were to stand for eons to come – became prohibitive, and Hitler and Speer’s expansive dreams for the new face of Berlin and the rest of Germany would never come to fruition. Their assumptions about the new architecture anticipated the necessity of a two-fold ruining, first through the destruction

of the war, which would present a clean slate for new construction, and second through the eventual decay of their monolithic architectural production.

### III.

In view of the problems inherent in the analysis and interpretation of ruins, along with its long history and many evolutionary variations, and the amount of scholarship already produced on the subject –that is the larger subject on ruins, but very little on the “ruins” of the period of German literature following the Second World War –, certain limits must be set in place. Certainly a study limited to three writers, of whom two are novelists and one a poet, will suffer some inadequacies and significant deficiencies. Of course, these limitations must also be necessarily transgressed,

The span of time that I have chosen is rather arbitrary, but conveniently coinciding with the publication of Böll’s *Ansichten eines Clowns*, Grass’s *Hundejahre*, and Celan’s *Niemandrose* in 1963. Other dates might work just as well, perhaps a clear twenty-year delimitation, or 1968, the year when Böll as the last of these three won the Georg Büchner Prize, however it is necessary to draw this line somewhere, and I have drawn it at 1963. The writers I have chosen are meant in no way to be representative, only demonstrative of the different variations contributed by all who participated in the new construction of the thematics and aesthetics related to ruins in the period following the Second World War. Of course, Wolfgang Borchert is at least implicitly included in any discussion of the literature of this period, and his voice will come to us through the short essay by Heinrich Böll “Die Stimme Wolfgang Borcherts,” which demonstrates both Borchert’s and Böll’s commitment to literature of the ruined, rubble and broken.

Beginning with the image of physical ruins present in the oeuvres of these three important writers from this period, I will show their iconographic as well as aesthetic

importance in a literature attempting to re-birth a German culture, to reestablish a great tradition of artistic excellence, while retaining a kind of disappointed knowledge about the world. These are “premature” ruins, hurried through nature’s reclaiming path of decay, falling without the leisure and luxury of the picturesque ruins of the previous centuries, but they still function, partially, in some of the same modes. A discussion of Böll’s ruins is not so strange a thing, but the ruins in Grass and, particularly, Celan are again problematized, because they did not live in Germany when they wrote most of the texts under consideration in this analysis. They were both living in Paris, at least during a good deal of this period, and my claim of their use of ruin imagery is not without qualification; certainly, France felt the destructive effects of the war, but not to a degree comparable to Germany, where rubble and ruins dominated the major industrial, and even some cultural, centers. Besides the absence of ruins in the physical environment of these writers, claims of ruin imagery in Celan’s poetry are difficult to found because it may even be said that Celan is not one who employs imagery in the traditional sense of lyric metaphors, which leads into the second portion of my thesis, namely the language of ruins and the ruin of language.

We will consider the language of ruins and the impulse of the period to present a bare, honest language. This intention was given the name *Kahlschlagliteratur*, implying the perception that they were beginning fresh and raw, almost in an Expressionist style. Whatever merit this self-classification may or may not have, it introduces the problem of language in the aftermath of all that had happened, all that had been done to language, as well as the now problematic potential of language to signify at all. Clearly, Grass and Celan experiment consciously with language, and their reaction to Heideggerian language is an effective isogloss in their respective language of ruins, but Böll’s language is rather common.

He presents no philosophical campaign to reclaim a ruined language from a troubled history of misuse and abuse; his use of language is elegant in its laconic simplicity, and its accessibility serves his *Außenseiter*, welcoming and reacquainting the common reader with a defamiliarized, rubble landscape.

Finally, we consider the panoptical gaze of the postwar writer/narrator, redolent of Benjamin's *flâneur*, who peruses not merely the contents of shop windows but observes the world as if in a ruined state, with all open before him. The title for this third portion of the study, "Glass Houses," comes from Philippe Hamon's investigation of the exhibitory, expositional frenzy of nineteenth-century France. The futurological interest in an architecture of transparency is mimetically reproduced in a literary landscape of homes spat into the streets, amid the debris and rubble. The "glass" houses of the postwar period present the chink in a ruined wall, inviting the reader (the voyeur) to penetrate the private. Of course, every writer acts in this capacity, in a greater or lesser degree, but the incisive strength of these writers' styles and stories enables them to present us with an ichnographic glimpse of man's poetic dwelling, revealing a sort of sketch interiority. Contrastingly, there is also an attempt by all of these writers to recontain the public, that which was published in the name of literature, concealing and returning to the private. Besides Grass's recent headline-stealing revelation about his membership in the SS, significant attempts to conceal the public prevail in the works of these three postwar *flâneurs*, attempting to deal with "das, was geschah" (Celan's veiling mode of referring to the events of WWII) and their own culpability and complicit commitments.

## Chapter 2

### The Apologist of German *Trümmerliteratur*:

#### Böll's X-Ray Eye and the Ruining Gaze

Simply considering the titles of some of Heinrich Böll's books results in a certain realization of the primacy of ruin culture in this Nobel laureate's literary project: *Rom auf den ersten Blick*, *Irishes Tagebuch*, and later *Du fährst zu oft nach Heidelberg*. All of these sites are renowned for their wealth of ruins, and they interested Böll immensely, especially Ireland, which became a second home for Böll's family beginning in 1954, when Böll's literary success finally enabled his family to move into a house of their own. Böll later bought a small house in Ireland, near Keel in 1958 (Vormweg 235). This presents a contradictory, perhaps interdictory romanticizing connection to sites of ruin for a self-proclaimed rubble writer, whose aesthetics of ruins, of a necessity, must establish a certain distance and difference from the preexistent tradition of ruins' aesthetics. A rubble literature in the period following the Second World War certainly participates in the discursive developments of an aesthetics of ruins and the employment of ruins as icons, but this cannot occur without problematizing this relationship.

Upon first arriving in Ireland, Böll describes the scene in Dublin in his *Irishes Tagebuch*, first published in 1957, which continues to enjoy more popularity than any of Böll's other works (Piazza). He begins by suggesting that even hopeless, inveterate aesthetes could not perceive this poverty and filth as painterly: "Regen fällt über die Armut, und Schmutz könnte hier selbst von einem unverbesserlichen Ästheten nicht mehr als malerisch empfunden werden." Böll, however, continues to describe the poverty and filth in very

painterly ways: “In den Slums liegt an manchen Stellen der Schmutz in schwarzen Flocken auf den Fensterscheiben [. . .]. In den dunklen Hinterhöfen, die Swifts Auge noch gesehen hat, haben Jahrzehnte und Jahrhunderte diesen Schmutz abgelagert: das berückende Sediment der Zeit” (*Irishes Tagebuch* 26-7). Not only does Böll describe the filth and poverty in an aesthetic, poetic mode – “Schwarze Flocken” are the titular image used by Celan in a poem which elegizes his mother (*GW* 3/25) –, but he also invokes a literary tradition by suggesting that the Irish writer Jonathon Swift observed the selfsame scene. Ireland’s beautiful decay is the metaphorical basis for most of Böll’s observations in this *Tagebuch*. Böll is also fascinated by a human ruin, whom he encounters in Dublin: “Dem Bettler hingen beide Rockärmel leer vom Körper: schmutzig waren diese Hüllen für Glieder, die er nicht mehr hatte [. . .] und doch war sein schmales , dunkles Gesicht von einer Schönheit, die in einem anderen als meinem Notizbuch aufgezeichnet werden wird” (*Irishes Tagebuch* 26). This example of a human ruin, upon whom violence has been enacted both physically and economically, is recorded as possessing a certain beauty, which Böll suggests will be recorded in someone else’s notebook, attempting to distance himself from the aestheticizing impulse he nevertheless satisfies.

For this study, though, the most important piece of Böll’s *Irishes Tagebuch* is one called “Skeleton of a human settlement” (*Skelett einer menschlichen Siedlung*). Böll’s family attempts an excursion to the beach, but the directions they had received failed to “warn” them about the ruins of this Irish village: “Plötzlich, als wir die Höhe des Berges erreicht hatten, sahen wir das Skelett des verlassenen Dorfes am nächsten Hang liegen. Niemand hatte uns davon erzählt, niemand hatte uns gewarnt” (45). Surprised by the presence of this ruin, the family forgets its destination, preferring to inspect the ruins. Böll

describes them as dilettantish scenery for a ghost movie, later comparing them to a decayed human corpse: “graue Steinmauern, dunkle Fensterhöhlen, kein Stück Holz, kein Fetzen Stoff, nichts Farbigen, wie ein Körper ohne Haare, ohne Augen, ohne Fleisch und Blut” (45). The forces of this gnawing decay are clearly natural: rain, sun, wind, and time (46). Böll then figuratively paints the ruin: “Würde jemand das zu malen versuchen, dieses Gebein einer menschlichen Siedlung [. . .]” (46). He paints a subject into the scene, even determining which shades of brown would constitute the different textures of her face, as well as the white sheep, squatting like lice between the ruins. Contrasting his own Cologne with these painterly, idyllic ruins, though, Böll concludes: “So sah keine zerbombte Stadt, kein mit Artillerie beschossenes Dorf aus; [. . .] hier ist keine Spur von Gewalt zu sehen: Zeit und Elemente haben alles in unendlicher Geduld weggefressen” (47). Böll continues the equation of the ruin with a human corpse, suggesting, “so sieht eine menschliche Siedlung aus, die man nach dem Tode in Frieden gelassen hat” (48). He then remarks that no one would attempt to disrupt these ruins, nobody would plunder them for materials, the “cannibalism” (*ausschlachten*) that predominates in berubbled Germany; but his children immediately undertake to push down the walls, and Böll even spoliates the peaceful, undisturbed ruin of some fragment of a nail. The plundering impulse is not uncommon in encountering ruins, but after Böll’s observation of the ruin resting in peace, it is as if their Germanness and their experience in the crass ruins of the bombed cities has retarded their reverence for the skeletal remains of humanity.

The ostensible distinction between these ruins and Böll’s native ruins is the clear presence of *violence* as the active agent of ruination, in the stead of *time*. This brings back Simmel, Macaulay, and others who object to ruins which too readily evidence human

involvement in the process of decay. Böll imagines a complete disconnect between these ruins and those of his home. Upon investigation, Böll finds that locals cannot even recall how that particular village became ruined, there being so many such sites in Ireland, some ten, some twenty, some fifty or eighty years abandoned, even some houses where the nails in the doors and windows have not yet begun to rust (50). Although Böll emphasizes the importance of time – “vierundzwanzig große Tropfen Zeit pro Tag” (46) – as the central means of ruination in a valid ruin, the temporal distancing as basis for this important qualifying difference is undermined by accepting much more recently abandoned houses into this aesthetic. Where does the past end, and where does the present begin? For almost all ruinists, containment is effected by invoking the role of time, but for Böll, the element of time is considered very fluid, and the temporal presence of violence doesn’t disqualify the ruin, but it does alter the aesthetic value. The romanticizing impulse seen in “Skelett einer menschlichen Siedlung” projects this aesthetic on Ireland, but another variation of the same aesthetic is present in Böll’s other ruins.

One example where the clear presence of destruction does not disqualify the aesthetic object is in Böll’s description of his travels through Poland from the same year as the *Irisches Tagebuch* discussed above. When the guide leads the group to the “ugly” section of Warsaw, where Hitler’s goal was best accomplished of making Warsaw “zu einem ‘Wahrzeichen der Vernichtung’ ” (*Rom* 83), the guide demands that everyone agrees that it is abominable: “Sagen Sie ganz ehrlich, daß Sie es scheußlich finden, bitte, sagen Sie es” (84). The guide misinterprets Böll’s reaction as a groaning of aesthetic horror, but Böll feels the need to correct this misconception: “ ‘Es tut mir leid’, sagte ich, ‘ich kann es nicht so scheußlich finden; es hat eine gewisse Größe . . . ’ ” (84-5). The guide then leads the group to the part of

Warsaw which has been heavily, and violently, reconstructed. This “beautiful” section of the city represents the proud response to the bloody history of the years 1939 to 1944, but it also represented the unsympathetic process through which everything and everyone remaining was obliterated to reinstate former grandeur: “alles, was nach dem Kämpfen noch stehen geblieben war, wurde systematisch weggesprengt, die Bevölkerung aus den Ruinen vertrieben” (83). This “beautiful” elicits the derision that the guide had wanted to hear expressed as a reaction to the “ugly”: “Hier hätte ich viel mehr auszusetzen gehabt: Hier hat man jedes I-Pünktchen aus dem sechzehnten Jahrhundert, jeden Schnörkel aus dem neunzehnten wiedererweckt” (86). This architectural attention to every jot and tittle overlooks the human and historical expense paid during those years between ’39 and ’44, as well as that of the inhabitants driven from their provisional dwellings, into homelessness and *Heimatlosigkeit*, in order to achieve the re-erection of the sentimental image of Warsaw. This artificiality and aesthetic incoherence disturbed Böll.

As Heinrich Vormweg shows in his Böll-biography *Der andere Deutsche*, for Böll the presence of rubble and ruins was not only more topically current, but also closer to the truth than the predominant drive to destroy and forget them:

Nicht nur die Trümmer der Straßen, auch die Trümmer in den Köpfen waren eine Wirklichkeit, von der – wie es für die Bundesrepublik schon bald die Devise in Politik und Ökonomie war – möglichst rasch wegzukommen, sie möglichst erfolgreich zu verdrängen und zu vergessen in Bölls Augen der falsche Weg war. Aus einer zertrümmerten Welt, von den Menschen in der Endphase ihrer Zerstörung und in den Trümmern hat er erzählt. Für ihn waren die Trümmer nicht nur realer,

sondern der Wahrheit näher als der vorherrschende Trieb, sie abzuräumen und zu vergessen. (15)

That ruins have aesthetic value, although they may represent the violence of their ruination in strong dosage, is true in all of Heinrich Böll's writings. The attempt to create distance and separation from the other aesthetics of ruins is an attempt to distinguish himself and his writing from anything that has been produced before, presenting his new aesthetics of ruins; essentially this is merely the latest evolution of the discursive potential of ruin images.

Part of Heinrich Böll's new aesthetics of ruins incorporates elements and metaphors from the photographic and radiographic. The importance of photography in nineteenth- and twentieth-century encounters with ruins is the topic of many ruin critics. In discussing the "framing of ruins," Michael Roth highlights the democratizing medium of photography as one which preserves ruins in their ruined state, halting further decay, in the recorded image (17). Claire Lyons characterizes photography's role in the archeology of ruins as "indispensable," as the sites irresistibly fall and erode (93). Roth also describes the photographic productions during violent scenes of the American Revolution, as well as the aesthetic impulse of many Parisians in the midst of destruction during the Communes, where people attempted to document the ruination "even while the buildings still burned" (13). Robert Ginsberg writes of photography as the "ruining eye," which allows everything to appear as a ruin image (335-9). As perspective is limited to present only certain portions of an object, the further fragmentation and ruination of the referent is implied by the possession of its image, which was meant to preserve it. Of course, the reproduction of the ruin and the pervasive dissemination of its aesthetic values simultaneously invent ruins in broader senses. This is precisely the case with Heinrich Böll.

When Böll writes “Die Stimme Wolfgang Borcherts” as an afterword to Borchert’s collected works, he describes Borchert’s writing in radiographic terminology, inventing something he calls the X-ray Eye (*Röntgenauge*). Böll writes,

Das Röntgenfoto zeigt nicht nur die Stelle, wo das Bein gebrochen, wo die Schulter ausgerenkt war, es zeigt immer *zugleich* die Lichtpause des Todes, es zeigt den fotografierten Menschen in seinem Gebein, großartig und erschreckend. Wo das Röntgenauge des Dichters durch die Aktuelle dringt, sieht es den ganzen Menschen, großartig und erschreckend [. . .]. (120)

Böll compares the generic limits of reportage and the literary imaginative (*Dichtung*), and he suggests that there a report always has some local cause, just as a radiologist always has the broken bone or the dislocated shoulder; however, the X-ray Eye of the poet (*Dichter*) always sees more than just the local: it sees the flash of death, sees man skeletally, awesome and terrible. This ability to anticipate the ruination is what distinguishes the writer. For Böll every good writer, such as Wolfgang Borchert, is a ruinist, eschatologically seeing beyond the topical to the skeletal – Böll’s radiographic reading of Borchert is even reflected in the adaptation of *Draußen vor der Tür* as the film *Liebe 47*, in which the dream sequences are filmed using negative imagery, similar to the expressionistic cinema of Murnau et al.

Böll’s aesthetics of ruins presents all writing as ruin writing, following a similar vein in *Bekanntnis zur Trümmerliteratur*, often translated as ‘Rubble Literature Manifesto.’ In his profession of faith in the literature of rubble and ruins, Böll describes Charles Dickens displaying the quintessence of this *Röntgenauge*, though he doesn’t use the word here: “seine Augen hatten so gut gesehen, daß er sich leisten konnte, Dinge zu beschreiben, die sein Auge nicht gesehen hatte” (*Aufsätze* 341). This principle is repeated in Böll’s “Besuch auf einer

Insel” (1952), in which he describes his visit to the “island” of Berlin; as he crosses the border into East Germany, he remarks that “der eiserne Vorhang ist aus Luft” and not some “zukünftiges Objekt der Verschrottung” (45). Even in denying the corporeality of the “eiserner Vorhang,” Böll suggests the ineluctability of the ruination of this “iron curtain.” Böll’s X-ray Eye sees the invisible, as well as its inevitable finality as an “Objekt der Verschrottung.”

The ruining eye of photography is the next logical object of discussion, and Roland Barthes has produced the seminal cultural study on this ruin-medium. His theoretical writings are referenced in both Philippe Hamon’s study on architecture as text and ruins as exposition, as well as in Michael Roth’s discussion of the framing of ruins; but both Hamon and Roth refer to the same text, Barthes’s *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Hamon examines Barthes’s concept of the ruin as a “negative punctuation of space,” in which the ruin is “a kind of camera obscura of memory, the ruin is responsible for giving meaning to the ‘as is’ of history, for the ruin provokes the pure effect of memory [. . .] and can therefore send the visitor back to the image of his impending death” (62). Hamon continues to describe the “black box of the ruin” as producing an anxiety in the subject, either making him aware of his own artificiality (as in false ruins), or in producing a “threefold erasure” of, first, the architectural object; second, meaning, where the ruin “becomes an illegible *rune*”; third, the subject, who is lost in contemplation of his own ruin (63). The photographic of ruins acts radiographically, seeing the ruin in the yet-whole, anticipating death in life, and turning the subject’s existence into a being-toward-death. The ruining effect of the photograph is the ineluctable result of the reproduction of ruins. Inverting the value of Dorian Grey’s portrait, while simultaneously sustaining the imaginary

of artistically halting the progress of ruination and decay, the ruin photograph, or photographic ruin writing, erases the object, its meaning, and finally the subject.

Roth's invocation of Barthes serves roughly the same purpose, discussing his ideas on photography as establishing the pastness of the past, by making it present. Just as Böll sees the skeletal structure of the human through the *Röntgenauge*, presenting the pastness of the future, Barthes presents the pastness of the past. Again, "ruins collapse temporalities" (Merewether 25). Barthes on photography:

Every photograph is a certificate of presence . . . Perhaps we have an invincible resistance to believing in the past, in history, except in the form of myth. The photograph, for the first time, puts an end to this resistance: henceforth the past is as certain as the present, what we see on paper is as certain as what we touch (87-88). The illusory reclamation of ruins is achieved by "fixing ruins on photographic paper," but the ruins are not *fixed*: "we don't repair them, but we do have the illusion of reclaiming them from further effects of nature and of time – that is, from death" (17). The attempt to wrest the past, or the future, into a perpetuity, to present them through photography, radiography, or writing, is ultimately an illusion. Nevertheless, it is the role of the writer to present these problems, to focus his ruining X-ray Eye and see man "awesome and terrible." As Barthes suggests, the mythical ruin, or the mythologizing into an analogue of ruin, may be our only method of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, of managing the past.

For Heinrich Böll there are two further ruin tropes which occur with significant frequency and emphasis that participate in his rubble literature. The first is the bridge, the metonymic quintessence of culture, linking and connecting; and the second is the church,

both capitalized and lower-case. These recurrent images in Böll's writings embody the ruin motif and present an aesthetics of ruins *and* ruination.

In his important study entitled "From 'Bekanntnis zur Trümmerliteratur' to *Frauen vor Flußlandschaft: Art, Power and the Aesthetics of Ruins*," J.H. Reid discusses the centrality of the bridge theme, making reference in a footnote to Årpåd Bernåth who proposes the significance of bridge-building as a metaphor for the role of art; Reid expands this to include the various roles of the architect, one of which is to destroy (46). Bridges are the scene and subject of a number of Böll's stories, such as "An der Brücke," "Über die Brücke," but representative of these is the figure of the bridge in one of Heinrich Böll's earliest novels, *Wo warst du, Adam?* (1951), in which Böll describes Frau Susan and her small house in Berczaba, near a bridge which leads into Poland. At first she just observes as Jews and gypsies flee over the bridge, or the occasional military vehicle drives across. Then someone detonates the bridge, and the Germans come to investigate but find nothing. Frau Susan thinks it might be the Swortschiks kids, although she finds this sabotage ludicrous. Two weeks later, soldiers come to keep a watch on the ruined bridge; one soldier sits atop the house, binoculars trained on the Polish woods across the bridge, while the others have nothing to do. One of the soldiers, a kind of artist, draws the ruins of the bridge. After three years of this watching, Feinhals comes with a small group of soldiers to rebuild the bridge, only to detonate it again.

Böll's destructive narratives have drawn some criticism, but this ruin-theme is central to understanding what Böll describes in his "Bekanntnis zur Trümmerliteratur" as the role of the postwar writer. In this essay, originally delivered in 1952 as a reading at the Wednesday Discussion series held in Cologne's main train station (Kapczynski 856), Böll grounds his

“Kriegs- und Trümmerliteratur,” in antique traditions of ruin writing, defending this rubble literature against those who discounted and dismissed it: “Merkwürdig, fast verdächtig war nur der vorwurfsvolle, fast gekränkte Ton, dem man sich dieser Bezeichnung [der Trümmerliteratur] bediente: man schien uns zwar nicht verantwortlich zu machen, daß alles in Trümmern lag, nur nahm man uns offenbar übel, daß wir es gesehen hatten” (*Aufsätze* 339). For Böll’s critics, the ruining eye was tantamount to physical destructiveness, and the destruction of culture’s metonym, the bridge, is an important metaphorical ruining act.

Again in *Billard um halb zehn* (1959), Böll presents his cyclical pattern of building-destruction-building-destruction in the story of the multigenerational Fähmel family. The patriarch of the family, Heinrich, receives the commission to build an abbey, which his son Robert destroys during the war and which Robert’s son Joseph is commissioned to rebuild after the war. The structures ruins are inspected by Joseph, who discovers his father’s tell-tale statics chalk marks around the structure. One mark is still visible across a painting. Speaking of his work in demolitions during the war, Robert says:

Das konnte ich, Junge, und ich sprengte also, ich sprengte Brücken, Wohnblocks, Kirchen und Bahnüberführungen, Villen und Straßenkreuzungen, ich bekam Orden dafür und wurde befördert [. . .] weil ich so gut wußte, wie man sprengen muß. Und am Schluß des Krieges war ich einem General unterstellt, der hatte nur ein Wort im Kopf: Schußfeld. (77)

No other passage in Böll exemplifies the senselessness of war quite so strongly as this instance of a general’s mad insistence on preserving the line of sight for firing on a target, the “Schußfeld.” Robert continues, however, to tell the boy Hugo, “ich hätte Sankt Severin in die Luft gesprengt, obwohl ich wußte, daß mein General verrückt war, und obwohl ich

wußte, daß Schußfeld ein leerer Wahn ist” (77). Robert expresses his intention to destroy the church, despite his recognition of the absolute senselessness and meaninglessness of the order to preserve an unhindered field of fire.

Another ruined church is seen in the short description “Besichtigung” (1951), in which a character’s investigation of the ruins is narrated in very painterly strokes. “Steinbrocken lagen herum wie nach einer Felssprengung,” which continues the cyclical pattern of ruins and ruin-making in building, as this is described as similar to the debris present after blasting rocks and crags for the purpose of construction. The descriptions of the hagiographic icons on pedestals around the central nave of the church present a statuary graveyard: ruins of the human form. Some of these even appear to bleed: “zerkrazte Torsi und geschundener Stein, verstümmelt und verzerrt: manche Gesichter grinnten wie wilde Krüppel, weil ihnen ein Ohr fehlte oder das Kinn, Risse durchschnitten ihre Gesichter, andere waren kopflos. Schlimm waren die, denen die Hände fehlten: sie schienen fast zu bluten, stumm flehend” (*Heidelberg* 26). Finally, the narrated figure tries to pray in the midst of the debris and rubble, but he is interrupted by singing voices from out of the earth: “Die Krypta fiel ihm ein, die wohl unbeschädigt war. Die Stimmen klangen dünn, seltsam gefiltert, es schienen nur wenige zu sein” (27). This seems to resonate with Max Frisch’s “Nun singen sie wieder” and Paul Celan’s “Es sind noch Lieder zu singen jenseits der Menschheit,” where the singing voices echo strangely (*seltsam*) through the ruins from the only place unspoiled: the grave.

Of course much of Heinrich Böll’s writings are concerned with the ruined legitimacy and authority of the Church after the official support of Hitler’s Third Reich. This ideological ruin undermines official forms of religiousness, and in “Reisen durch Polen,”

Böll suggests that Germans should pilgrimage to Poland and Ireland, where true faith and feeling still exist (*Rom* 87). This question of ruins and their relationship to authority and legitimacy leads to Heinrich Böll's employment of the icon of ruin.

Iconographic representations of ruins, as well as the aesthetic, also inhabit Böll's writings. This employment of the ruin as an icon traditionally has several variations, including instantiation of the *vanitas* trope and even "an explicit program of action" in the case of Lyons's revolutionary ruins (87); Böll's iconographic representations of ruins usually serve a legitimizing/historicizing function, where he uses the icon of the Roman ruin, with which Köln (*Colonus Claudius*) was replete.

In fact, Böll sometimes uses ruins and violence to trace Cologne's history, as in his description of the Rhine, entitled "Undines gewaltiger Vater" – also from the same year as the *Irisches Tagebuch*, in 1957. Here, as in "Skelett einer menschlichen Siedlung," Böll remarks on the ghostly traces present in ruins, "gespenstische Kulisse"; he sketches Köln's history through archaeological traces of Roman winter quarters, "Spuren römischer Winterlager" on the shore of the Rhine, as well as the luxury of the Roman baths, "noch hat die Neuzeit diesen Luxus nicht ganz eingeholt, der zehn Meter unter den Spielplätzen der Kinder im Schutt der Jahrhunderte begraben liegt" (*Rom* 92). Köln itself is a figurative palimpsest. Ten meters of rubble and debris bury the traces, and the writer excavates the paleontological, archeological, and archeological remains. I will discuss Paul Celan's utilization of *technemes* from these scientific disciplines later in this study, but the layered cultural history of ruins is important in understanding Böll's iconographic employment of the ruin image, as well as his aesthetic project.

Later, in the same piece, Böll proceeds back in time, along the ruinous bellicosity the Rhine has observed over the centuries, embodied in ruined structures and bodies. Böll even anticipates Michel Foucault's designation of the pre-enlightenment, pre-modern European society as being epistemologically determined by the "blood" metaphor, which he calls "sanguinity," which then epistemically shifts to a centrality of sexuality (*History of Sexuality* 148); the "blood" metaphor clearly participates in the bellicose discourse of ruins, as Böll describes the river's flowing history:

Jungen aus Wisconsin, Cleveland oder Manila, die den [zerstörenden] Handel fortsetzten, den römische Söldner um das Jahr Null herum begonnen hatten [ . . . ]; auch die düsteren Ruinen der Raubritterburgen auf seinen Bergen sind nicht Relikten eines sehr fröhlichen Interregnums [ . . . ]. Nicht einmal die Nibelungen, die dort wohnten, wo der Wein wächst, waren ein sehr fröhliches Geschlecht, Blut war ihre Münze, deren eine Seite Treue, deren andere Verrat war. (93)

This employment of iconographic ruins, sometimes imagined present through textual historicity, establishes cultural continuity and the associated legitimacy of this cultural descent. So although there is little visible evidence of the Nibelungs, while Böll observes the ruinous history to which the Rhine has been privy, he imagines traces, inventing ruins in a metaphorized bloody currency of loyalty and betrayal, which metonymically represents a culture of ruination.

Other references to pagan or heathen (*heidnisch*) Germanic origins, like those to the Nibelungs in the passage above, mirror this attempt to establish a sense of cultural continuity, which implies a certain kind of legitimacy, which was described when I began this paper by tracing the cultural-historical and literary development of the ruin image. Lyons signals this

as one of the first ruin-reactions; and she shows that the instantiation of pagan ruins often serves a dialectical function of establishing continuity while also critiquing pagan decadence and highlighting the Christian progress (82).

In the postwar period, the legitimizing effect also extends beyond the ruins of antiquity. The ruins of the Second World War represent a legitimizing experience, without which the cultural context is indecipherable. This is especially apparent in the debate between Thomas Mann and Frank Thiess over the inner and outer emigration. Mann's position was that anyone who remained in Germany belonged to the evil production, and that their work has no legitimacy. Contrastingly, Thiess and Walter Molo defend the position of inner emigration as the only escape available to most Germans under the power of the Third Reich, and their claim on legitimacy in the wake of world war is the common experience of terror and the national galvanization that resulted. Böll's idealization of Hemingway's experience of the First World War even prompted him to join the army and request transfer to the front, always refusing promotion to officer status in order to belong to the *Volk*, to the mass of Germany and the shared experience of ruination: "irgendwie gehöre ich viel mehr und viel inniger in die Masse, die leiden muß, mehr, mehr, tausendmal mehr, als alle die, die zu Roß sitzen [. . .], es wäre ein Verrat an allem, was wir haben mitmachen und erleiden müssen, wenn ich jetzt Offizier werden wollte" (Vormweg 80). The perception of this legitimizing effect of recent ruins, and the experience of ruin, even present ruins, eliminated the outer emigrants, who very seldom enjoyed wide success in Germany upon returning after the war; even more, though, it was among the writers of the period, most of whom belonged to the Group 47, where the outer emigrants were criticized and regarded as disenfranchised, because they returned as foreigners and outsiders, who, in the case of Thomas Mann,

primarily returned to accept prizes and condescendingly shake their heads at the ruined landscape.

To conclude our investigation of Böll's image and icon of the ruin, we have examined his unusual commitment to romantic sites of ruins; these reactions are perhaps inevitable in observation of distant Irish and Roman ruins, as well as ruins belonging clearly and distantly to the past, but a confessed rubble writer's idealization of these picturesque ruins seems problematic. I suggest that Böll's attempt to disconnect his own ruins from these other ruins he admires is an effort to distinguish his new aesthetics of ruin by juxtaposing these variations on the ruin theme. It seems however inevitable that Böll's rubble literature belongs to and participates in the older questions of ruins. Böll's own aesthetics of ruins, based on his theoretical *Röntgenauge* and the ruining gaze, are tempered by his attempts to establish a legitimizing cultural continuity through iconographic employment of ruin images, which collapses the distance discussed above in his own structure of the ruin image.

## Chapter 3

### Aesthetic Destruction: Performing Ruin and the Thematic Centrality of Rubble Objects in Grass's Early Work

While the emphasis in Böll's writing is on a conscious commitment to the rubble literature, Günter Grass, Böll's contemporary and friend from the Group 47<sup>2</sup>, does not display quite this same ruin sentiment, and the iconic element examined above in Böll's writings is wholly absent from Grass's Danzig Trilogy. At the same time, though, ruin images obtain, and the motif of performative ruination exceeds anything in Böll's works, suggesting an aesthetic interest that participates in and modifies the literary mode of the "rubble literature" first propounded by Heinrich Böll.

Before considering the images of ruins in Grass's narratives, we must recognize the importance of Grass's narrative acrobatics, which never presenting a narrator in a straightforward sense. Grass brings a great deal of ambiguity to the role of the narrator, filtering this voice by the means of various modes of ambiguity-engendering dislocation. Most of Grass's narrators come armed with multiple aliases and even multiple personalities, while the narrative voice traditionally disambiguates and forms the raw, chaotic narrative material into a cohesive whole as its primary function. Böll does some of this as well, as in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, for example, where each chapter oscillates between narrators, and the reader is repeatedly required to gain a sense of narrative orientation before

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<sup>2</sup> This *Gruppe 47* was a literary community led by Hans Werner Richter. The group met annually for readings, and the modest awards presented to the writers involved represented a sort of life-preserver in the hungry postwar years; certainly Böll's reception of the prize (1951) offered him an opportunity to continue writing. Grass received the prize in 1958. See Heinz Ludwig Arnold's *Die Gruppe 47* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004).

proceeding. Grass's experiments with the role of narrator present a much more complex problem, however, and one might say that the narrator is the first ruin Grass presents. Narratological theory describes this method of instilling ambiguity into the authorial voice, subverting the authoritative narration, as an "unreliable narrator", Wayne C. Booth's coinage from *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) – just two years after the original appearance of Grass's *Blechtrommel* in 1959. In terms current to the discursive register of the ruin debate, Grass's narrator achieves a kind of presence which simultaneously retains and emphasizes another absence, and the reader necessarily considers the not-said as equally valid with what is said. I shall argue that this reading of omission is hermeneutically identical to a reading of ruins.

The most natural place to begin considering the image of ruins in the Danzig Trilogy would be the act of writing, which becomes Oskar Matzerath's ersatz act of destruction while in the mental institution. Following the in-medias-res structure of Grass's *Blechtrommel*, we begin anachronistically with the incarcerated Oskar, who requests "innocent" or "virginal" paper, a designation which his nurse Bruno naturally resists (11). Because paper is not sold in any condition other than blank, this description emphasizes the teleological purpose Oskar has in mind for the paper, looking forward to the paper's necessary end: sullied, ruined, and blackened with Oskar's narrative of destruction. Jacques Derrida describes all writing as a kind of violence (*Writing and Difference*), but Oskar's own designation of the paper's extant innocence and immaculateness intentionally creates tension in anticipation of the other state into which the paper must fall. This metaphor is fundamental for Oskar's aesthetic production of ruins and destruction, as it produces the narrative which contains his ruin aesthetics, the text of the novel.

Another kind of writing, chiseling into stone, is what Oskar learns after the war's end when he begins a different kind of art: "mein Glück wird fortan auf Grabsteine geschrieben oder zünftiger, in Grabsteine gemeißelt" (580), which Oskar later compares to his destructive art of drumming: "Glück, das zwar nicht meine Trommel, Glück, war nur ein Ersatz, Glück kann aber auch ein Ersatz sein, Glück gibt es vielleicht nur ersatzweise [. . .]. Wie ein Vulkan brach das Glück aus und lagerte sich staubig ab und knirschte mir zwischen den Zähnen" (581). Also this writing is an ersatz art of destruction, substituted for his drum, where the hammering breaks and erodes the stone, loosing the degraded material as dust into the air. This writing, essentially the same as with pen and paper, merely radicalizes the concept of destructive art.

As suggested in the discussion of the ruining act of writing, Oskar's writing while in the sanatorium begins as an ersatz act of destruction in the absence of his musical performances of ruination, whether using his voice or his drum. Oskar's statements of his aesthetics of musical disruption almost sound like a confession to rubble *music*, as an analogue to a rubble literature. Oskar makes the clear distinction between his disruptive drumming, which he performed squatted under grandstands between 1935 and 1938 (157), and some kind of resistance effort. Asserting his commitment to private and aesthetic – "privaten, dazu ästhetischen Gründen" – rather than political concerns, Oskar claims to have achieved a level of artistic perfection equal to his "fernwirkende[s] Glaszersingen" which together constitute his aesthetic of destruction: "Mein Werk war also ein zerstörerisches" (158).

Oskar begins to discover the annihilating power of his voice, that "fernwirkende[s] Glaszersingen" already mentioned above, when people try to take his drum away from him.

His first performance of his musical demolition without any other impetus but an aesthetic one, however, is when he ascends Danzig's Prison Tower (*Stockturm*) and aims his gaze and his voice at the *Stadttheater*. He repeatedly emphasizes the artistic value of this first shattering aesthetic performance. He compares himself to a painter who perfects his own finally found style:

Es galt den Erfolg zu bestätigen. Gleich einem modernen Kunstmaler produzierte ich mich, der seinen einmal gefundenen, seit Jahren gesuchten Stil zeitigt, indem er eine ganze Serie gleichgroßartiger, gleichkühner, gleichwertiger, oftmals gleichformatiger Fingerübungen seiner Manier der verblüfften Welt schenkt. (131)

Oskar succeeds, and consciously portrays himself in artistic strokes, producing painterly ruination and demolition, with stylistic sophistication. It might also be relevant to the discussion of ruins that Oskar compares himself to a *modern* painter – just as Lyons asserts that “Ruins [. . .] are essentially features of modernity” (79), where she emphasizes our modern mode of memorialization, reverencing the ruin, but an underlying implication is that ruins are essential features of modernity, that modernity necessarily produces them. Oskar's particular choice of a modern artist instantiates an art of abstraction, where photography has made the realistic representation obsolete. Oskar also imagines that the world is baffled by the apparently identical different pieces, which the artist presents to the world, finally letting his long-sought style come to fruition. This seems a clear reference to an abstract, modern art that was termed degenerate around the time the narrative presents.

It is also significant that Oskar destroys the theater. Not only does this connect his singing to performative art, but Oskar observes the aspects of the building's particular architecture as eliciting his demolishing song. His description presents the building as a

monument of ruin, which almost perfectly resembles a coffee mill, merely lacking the handle extending from the dome to grind the contents to eerie gravel:

Der Kasten zeigte mit seiner Kuppel eine verteilte Ähnlichkeit mit einer unvernünftig vergrößerten, klassizistischen Kaffeemühle, wenn ihm auch am Kuppelknopf jener Schwengel fehlte, der nötig gewesen wäre, in einem allabendlich vollbesetzten Musen- und Bildungstempel ein fünftaktiges Drama samt Mimen, Kulissen, Souffleuse, Requisiten und allen Vorhängen zu schaurigem Schrot zu mahlen. Mich ärgerte dieser Bau, von dessen säulenflankierten Foyerfenstern eine absackende und immer mehr Rot auftragende Nachmittagssonne nicht lassen wollte.

(130)

The imagined coffee grinder is even described as “classicistic,” underlining what could be called the “ruin value” of the structure, or the anticipated monumental aesthetic stature of the ruined structure. There is also a suggested parallelism between the dramatic performance and a destructive grinding or milling. Oskar projects his violent voice on the structure, as well as his aesthetics of ruination onto the artistic space of the theater.

Although the theater was Oskar’s first *solely aesthetic* act of singing destruction, the first presentation of this kind – “die erste erfolgreiche Darbietung dieser Art” (77) (notice the register of artistic performance in the term *Darbietung*)– occurs shortly after his third birthday. Oskar’s first ruin song has an effect of metonymic destruction, as he sings the face of the clock to pieces. The clock stands as metonym for modern culture, which is ruled by the hands of the clock, just as Oskar remarks: “Es ist aber ein Verhältnis der Erwachsenen zu ihren Uhren höchst sonderbar und kindisch in jenem Sinne, in welchem ich nie ein Kind gewesen bin. Dabei ist die Uhr die großartigste Leistung der Erwachsenen” (79). Also, the

material of glass, though not overly sophisticated, stands for a certain level of cultural and technological progress. Oskar repeatedly destroys glass. In addition to what Oskar perceives as his first aesthetic act of destruction in the case of the theater windows, he also ruins Frau Spollenhauer's glasses (98-101), show windows (161) and the windows of the chocolate factory (485), and Bruno's *Guckloch* (171); these glass-shattering acts of aesthetic destruction also retain the implied purpose of allowing for closer and unmediated observation, which will be addressed in the sixth chapter on ruins as site of exposition.

Oskar's destructive drumming is not only an interruption-effecting rhythm of dissonance, rather he also methodically destroys his drums. When Maria complains that all of Oskar's old ruined drums, the titular image for the chapter *Schrott*, leave little room for the stores of potatoes in the cellar, Oskar requests that his ruined, retired (*ausgedient*) drums be warehoused and catalogued, accompanied with concise biographical entries about the "Lebenslauf" of each drum (267-8). The drums as artifacts parallel the texts which Oskar produces, and their own value as individual ruins must be remembered; the careful numbering which Oskar advises Maria to perform in the ordering of the drums simulates an antiquary's collecting of ruin fragments.

To a certain extent, Oskar is a metaphor of destructive aestheticism. We see him again and again as a ruining artist. In the circus, he uses his destructive talent to great success, polishing his repertoire and improving the content of his production for the sensibilities of the "verwöhnten" Parisians: "Nach kulturhistorischen Gesichtspunkten baute sich mein Programm auf" (432). Oskar shatters glass from different eras, presenting a history of fine craftsmanship in performative ruination. Interestingly enough, Oskar is not only the artist of a rubble aesthetic but the object, when he begins working as a model for the

art academy: “Oskar drückte das zerstörte Bild des Menschen anklagend, herausfordernd, zeitlos und dennoch den Wahnsinn unseres Jahrhunderts ausdrückend aus” (607). The students build a background of ruins behind Oskar, complete with accusing depressions for windows, (re)presenting him as a helpless, undernourished refugee, even imprisoning him behind hyperbolically-barbed barbed wire: “inhaftierten mich sogar, wickelten mit fleißig schwarzer Kohle hinter mir einen übertrieben stacheligen Stacheldrahtzaun ab, ließen mich von Wachtürmen beobachten, die gleichfalls im Hintergrund drohten” (608). Oskar is reproduced by the students in every medium as a kind of human ruin, backgrounded by ruins. Oskar is both the subject and the object in this aesthetic of ruins and ruination, representing both the ruined image of humanity as well as the madness of the century; and I suggest that he both presents, and is represented as, ruin.

Oskar’s final sort of ruin sentiment is his morbidly reverent preservation of the *Ringfinger*. The corporeal ruin of the nurse Dorothea parallels Oskar’s paraphilic interest in nurses, who eventually become nameless, faceless, and anonymous objects (634), despite his recurrent fetishization of nurses, going all the way back to Schwester Inge (84). In describing the discovered ring finger, one recognizes in macabre manner a ruin sentiment of spoliation and aesthetic appreciation for the dismembered, disembodied fragment, which suggests, to this narrator, a particular beauty:

Es gibt Teile des menschlichen Körpers, die sich abgelöst, dem Zentrum entfremdet, leichter und genauer betrachten lassen. Es war ein Finger. Ein weiblicher Finger. Ein Ringfinger. Ein geschmacksvoll bringter weiblicher Finger. [. . .] Es war ein schöner, beweglicher Finger. [. . .] Obgleich Dreck oder besser gesagt Erde unter dem Fingernagel einen Rand zeichnete, als hätte der Finger Erde kratzen oder graben

müssen, erweckten Schnitt und Nagelbett des Fingernagels einen gepflegten Eindruck. (742)

The description of the ruined human body even resembles an architectural ruin, which allows closer observation of building materials and styles. This horrific aestheticizing of dismemberment is the terrible telos of Oskar's ruin sentiment.

In addition to Oskar's aesthetics of destructiveness, there are other ruining influences in the novel. After the attack on the post office, Oskar observes that all the glue-jobs that we call architecture inevitably collapse into ruin: "all die Klebearbeit, die wir Architektur nennen, diesen oder jenen Umständen gehorchend, den Zusammenhalt aufgeben wird" (319). This assumption of the ineluctability of architectural collapse resonates with Philippe Hamon's assertion, that "[i]n an inverted way, the ruin [. . .] seems to underlie the very essence of architecture" (58), as well as Hamon's depiction of the ruin as "a kind of hyperbole of the building, and this despite the fact that it constitutes a sort of reduction" (58). Oskar's application of the term *Kartenhaus* in describing the post office (304), while literally describing the strange and morbid pastime in which these dying men spend their final moments, also suggests the provisional quality of architecture, doomed to fall in upon itself at the slightest quiver of the hand or breath of a breeze.

Aside from casual reference to the rubble remains of specific streets, like the Jülicher Straße, which "zur guten Hälfte aus Trümmern bestand" (626), little mention of the war's ruins is made in this novel. The most obvious image of such ruins in Grass's *Tin Drum* is the image of the concrete bunkers on the beach in Normandy, to which Oskar makes two excursions, first with Bebra before the invasion, and later with the painter Lankes, who had been present the first time.

In the first encounter Oskar has with the bunkers, he begins by presenting the countryside of Normandy in very idyllic terms, complete with “drumming” frogs, and the dew-wet, incredible green of Normandy, broken up by occasional white-brown cows, poplars, and hedges. He reads the motions of the Atlantic as an ancient maneuver: the storming flow, and the retreating ebb (435-6). This militaristic description of the ruining power of nature appears impotent, however, once the group reaches the impregnable concrete of the bunkers, which they are allowed to stroke: “Und dann hatten wir ihn: den Beton. Bewundern und streicheln durften wir ihn; er hielt still” (436). The ebb and flow of the Atlantic has the effect, though, that they must continually detonate some of the bunkers, creating room for more concrete.

Set apart as the only point in the novel which utilizes dramatic textual format to present the dialogue, this scene of ruins has a particular centrality in the *Blechtrommel*. After a discussion between Lankes and Bebra about modern art, where “modern” is understood by both men to be roughly equivalent to “schräge” (440) – participating in Oskar’s description of the modern artist in his first aesthetic act of destruction, of the Stadttheater –, Lankes shows them the ornaments he created to go over the entrance to the bunkers, which exhibit “Formenreichtum” and “strenge Ausdruckskraft” according to Bebra. Lankes describes them as belonging to a style of “Strukturelle Formationen” and later “schräge Formationen” (440-1). Finally, Lankes prophecies that the bunkers will remain as ruins:

Aber die Bunker bleiben, wie ja auch die Pyramiden geblieben sind. Und dann, eines schönen Tages kommt ein sogenannter Altertumsforscher und denkt sich: was war das doch für ne kunstarme Zeit, damals, zwischen dem ersten und siebenten Weltkrieg: stumpfer, grauer Beton, ab und zu dilettantische, unbeholfene Kringel in

Heimatstilart über den Bunkereingängen – und dann stößt er auf Dora vier, Dora fünf, sechs, Dora sieben, sieht meine strukturellen Schrägformationen, sagt sich: Guck mal einer an. Interessant. Möchte fast sagen, magisch, drohend und dennoch von eindringlicher Geistigkeit. Da hat sich ein Genie, womöglich das einzige Genie des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, eindeutig und für alle Zeiten ausgesprochen. – Ob das Werk auch einen Namen hat? Ob eine Signatur den Meister verrät? – Und wenn Herr Hauptmann genau hinsehen und den Kopf schräghalten, dann steht da zwischen den aufgerauhten Schrägformationen . . . [. . .] Na, da steht geschrieben: Herbert Lankes, anno neunzehnhundertvierundvierzig. Titel: MYSTISCH, BARBARISCH, GELANGWEILT. (441-2)

Comparing the bunkers to the pyramids, Lankes asserts their immortality, as well as their value to an imagined antiquarian, who would presumably undertake a cultural anthropological investigation of the “artistically poor” time between the first and seventh world wars. To a certain extent, this seems to satirize this same monumentalizing megalomania of Hitler and Speer, whose “Theory of Ruin Value” assuaged Hitler’s philosophizing desire “to transmit his time and its spirit to posterity. Ultimately, all that remained to remind men of the great epochs of history was their monumental architecture, he would philosophize” (Speer 92). The inscribed title Lankes takes for his pyramidal bunkers is only too fitting for the subsequent scene, in which Lankes is ordered to gun down some crab-gathering nuns on the beach, and Bebra’s group exclaims “MYSTISCH, BARBAISCH, GELANGWEILT!” as they depart.

In the second trip Oskar makes to the bunkers, with the artist Lankes as his companion – Lankes is said to have purchased a *Trümmergrundstück* in Wersten, part of

Düsseldorf (713) –, the validity of the immortalizing predictions about the ruin value of the bunkers is evidenced. The *Betonornamente* remain, betraying Lankes's sculptural hand (718). The rest of the chapter presents four levels of ruin, amid the ruins of the bunkers: first, moral ruin when Lankes has his way with the novice Agnes, whose ripped habit is the second; third, are the "Trümmer" (725) of the fish the group eats for lunch; and the fourth layer of ruin, foregrounded in the midst of the "Schrägformationen" is when the novice Agnes strips down and attempts to drown herself in the ocean, which draws only aesthetic appreciation from Lankes, who pictures the painting and drafts a title: "Flutende Nonnen. Oder: Nonnen bei Flut [. . .]. Ertrinkende Nonnen" (726). Having decimated the group of nuns upon command, though with some resistance, Lankes has since developed a detached aesthetic sensibility for nuns' death on the beach.

Clearly, the predominance of ruin imagery in the *Tin Drum* alone evinces the importance of this image and Grass's participation in the discourse on ruin aesthetics. Oskar's writing and inscribing, drumming and singing, modeling and morbidly dismembering *momento mori*, as well as the other ruin images in the novel all contribute to a discursive and aesthetic interest in the value of the ruin.

*Katz und Maus* (1961), the second piece in the Danzig Trilogy, presents a different kind of ruin aesthetics, although some of the idea of the ruining *artist* is retained throughout the trilogy. Most important in this second volume are activities of reanimation and spoliation. Joachim Mahlke carves out the interior of the "tub" (*Kahn*), the half-submerged Polish minesweeper "Rybitwa" (80). There are three levels of ruin that prevail in this novella, all of which revolve around the *Kahn*: first, the despoiling activity which, unintentionally, wins Mahlke so much admiration; second, the watery site of performance,

where the wreck (*Wrack*) of the minesweeper provides the perfect acoustics for dissonant, garbled aesthetics of ruin; third, the clear equation of the ruin to its narrative.

As the only member of the group of friends with the swimming ability to ensure his safety for the necessary duration under the water's surface while inspecting the machine room, Mahlke repeatedly produces items of spectacular discovery from the wreckage of the minesweeper. Mahlke is described in ruin terms, early in the novella: "Schön war er nicht. Er hatte sich seinen Adamsapfel reparieren lassen sollen" (37); and subsequent descriptions of his Adam's apple cast his disguising attempts not as hiding, but seeking to counterbalance this unusually pronounced feature: "[. . .] und darunter, als einziges Kleidungsstück, reglos der große, ganz große Bonbon, eine Handbreite unterm Schlüsselbein. Es hatte ein Adamsapfel, der, wie ich immer noch vermute [. . .], Mahlkes Motor und Bremse war, zum erstenmal ein genaues Gegengewicht gefunden" (104). This passage employs a vocabulary of machinery and mechanical repair, motors and brakes, and the need for a counterbalance. In a certain sense, Mahlke himself seems described as a broken machine that requires mechanical improvement. Mahlke also resembles a mouse, which is important in the recurrent motif of the cat and mouse dyad but also important as Mahlke is the rodent infesting the sunken minesweeper: to a certain extent, Mahlke is both ruining and the ruin itself.

Mahlke utilizes the screwdriver, hanging from his neck to disguise the disfiguring disproportionateness of his Adam's apple, to assist in his despoiling work. Mahlke applies this screwdriver to salvage joints and screws, decorative placards and headphones from the *Funkerkabine*. Having removed everything of interest, Mahlke later returns the items to a space in the interior which has remained dry (*Fußbodentrocken* [72]). Although the items

themselves are impressive, what the friends find most exciting is the meaninglessness, the conscious destructiveness: “[G]erade das Sinnlose und bewußt Zerstörerische des tagelangen Umzugspiels bewunderten wir” (76). Mahlke creates an exclusive space in the ship’s shattered hull, inaccessible to any of the others – though whispered rumors suggest that some may have gained entrance to his private grotto after Mahlke is expelled from school, but proof is never produced in terms of concrete evidence. This grotesque space is Mahlke’s alone, into which he finally disappears, evading his military commitment.

Emanating from Mahlke’s ruined fortress of solitude are the gramphonic gurglings of “Dadada Daah” (allusion to Beethoven’s famous four opening notes from his Fifth symphony, 77) and Humperdinck, among other operatic composers, which ruined resonance comes to serve as the musical measuring stick for Pilez, the narrator:

Mehrmals, bis die Platten hinüberwaren und nur noch gequältes Gurgeln und Kratzen dem Kasten entkam, bot uns Mahlke dieses Konzert. Bis zum heutigen Tage hat mir Musik keinen größeren Genuß verschaffen können, obgleich ich kaum ein Konzert im Robert-Schumann-Saal auslasse und mir, sobald ich bei Kasse bin, Langspielplatten von Monteverdi bis Bartók kaufe. Stumm und unersättlich hockten wir über dem Grammophon, nannten es: Bauchredner. Lobessprüche fielen uns keine mehr ein.

(78)

This passage presents ruin aesthetics in acoustic production, where the rust of the ship’s hull and the water’s incursion are sensed, the auditory effect an incomparable experience.

Mahlke surprises his friends “mit hohler, nachscheppender, von hier und dort, immer aus dem Inneren des Kahnes kommender Musik” (77), and although Schilling and Kupka, tiring of the heavy genre of the music, yell for “etwas Schrägem,” they effectively receive just that:

a music resounding through ruins, a slanted tonality of underwater refraction and echoing reverberation. Later, Mahlke sits on the rusty protrusion of the boat, naked but for the *Ritterkreuz* – a word the narrator never applies: *der Artikel, der große Bonbon, das Gegenteil einer Zwiebel, das Dingslamdei, der Magnet, des guten Schinkel Ausgeburt, Apparat, das Ding Ding Ding, das Ichsprechesnichtaus* (146), as Pilenz refuses to encounter his referent linguistically. Mahlke sits listening to the “verquälten Resten seiner Unterwassermusik” (103); and the thing, with its “klassizistischem Formgefühl” (104) serves as Mahlke’s figurative fig leaf, though somewhat insufficiently.

The final layer of rubble is the equation of the wreckage and the narrative. In a letter addressed to Mahlke’s aunt, Mahlke, after reporting of the destruction and deteriorated living conditions on the front, inquires as to whether the superstructure of a certain sunken ship is still to be seen: “Und wenn Ihr mal Lust habt und schönes Wetter ist, dann fahrt mit der Bahn nach Brösen raus – aber zieht Euch warm an – und guckt mal nach, ob links von der Hafeneinfahrt, aber nicht so weit draußen, die Aufbauten eines Schiffes zu sehen sind” (134). Mahlke inquires after the *Kahn* as if concerned about the welfare of an old friend; he expresses a certain nostalgia for ruins, even amid the destruction of war. Pilenz first assures Mahlke’s aunt that it is still there and that it would be fairly difficult to steal anyway, “den Kahn wird so leicht niemand klauen” (135); but then he begins to consider: could the ruin of the ship be scrapped? The transition from the possibility of scrapping the tons of steel is a bit rough, but Pilenz finally comes to the thought of the insubstantial structure of narrative, asking: “Gibt es Geschichten, die aufhören können?” (135). In some sense, Pilenz recognizes the textuality of the sunken ship, its structural remains extant only in a limited temporal mode, anticipating that telos of disintegration; this recognition leads to a conception

of the structurality of the text as potentially inviting ruin, but also oriented toward a clear telos of termination. Both are determined to reach a state of finality, of conclusion, and extinguishing disintegration. Not only are there stories which *can* terminate, but every story exists in anticipation of, and oriented toward, its finish. The idiomatic title of cat and mouse can be read, I think, two different ways: first, it instantiates a game of feints and anticipation, cunning maneuvers that are meant to defer the conclusion, as the mouse's agility persistently offsets the cat's powerful pounce, but the second possible reading carries with it implicit reference to that inexorable finality, when the mouse is devoured.

A final note on narrative finality and the stories that cease (*aufhören*). As Grass applies the term "kafkaesk" in the novel, describing Pilenz's writing style (126), it seems appropriate to import Kafka's "Kleine Fabel" (the title applied by Max Brod), which employs the same cast of characters as Grass's *Katz und Maus*, namely a cat and a mouse:

"Ach", sagte die Maus, "die Welt wird enger mit jedem Tag. Zuerst war sie so breit, dass ich Angst hatte, ich lief weiter und war glücklich, dass ich endlich rechts und links in der Ferne Mauern sah, aber diese langen Mauern eilen so schnell aufeinander zu, dass ich schon im letzten Zimmer bin, und dort im Winkel steht die Falle." – "Du musst nur die Laufrichtung ändern", sagte die Katze und fraß sie. (382)

Possibly even a source for Grass's novella in which a mouse, Mahlke, runs willingly into the inescapable trap of Hitler's hegemony, Kafka's fable concisely explicates narrative's ruin: the mouse's initial, exasperated exhalation, "Alas," suggests the ineluctability of the end even in the beginning.

Published in 1963, *Hundejahre* is the third and concluding volume of the Danzig saga. The editor of the multi-narrator production, Eddi Amsel, is an artist whose art is

essentially one of ruins. He creates scarecrows, half-figures suggesting sufficient presence to deceive and dissuade, but he does it solely for aesthetic reasons. Significantly, the first occasion for Amsel's scarecrow creation is the destruction of the windmill: "Denn während noch die Polizei die Brandstätte untersuchte, weil man Brandstiftung vermutete, baute Eduard Amsel seine erste [Vogelscheuche]" (90). The artistic impetus of destruction, Eddi Amsel constructs scarecrow automata, ruins in action, which reenact ruination.

Amsel refuses to wear new clothes, which he claims stick to his skin (94), and he begins wearing old clothes, oversized and torn, "weil sie alt und nicht neu rochen" (95). Amsel and "der Knirscher" – Amsel's nickname for Walter Matern, instantiating Oskar Matzerath's gritty grinding of the gravestones' dust between his teeth (*Blechtrommel* 581) – also discover the ruin of a man, "ein gestürzter Mensch" (102) in a *Hünengrab*. These megalithic gravesites are common objects of ruin sentiment, represented by Caspar David Friedrich and Carl Blechen at the height of German Romanticism. Amsel takes a mirror from his pocket to observe the skeletal remains, then reaches down to take the skull, intending to incorporate the dismembered piece in one of his scarecrows: "An die Weichsel will er den Schädel tragen und einer seiner noch gerüsthaften Scheuchen, womöglich aber der soeben im Staub entworfenen Scheuche draufsetzen" (101). Matern stops Amsel from taking the skull, producing an echoing grinding in the tight acoustics of the grave, communicating to Amsel that he must not take the skull; but when Amsel reaches once again for the skull, Matern repeatedly strikes his "friend," shouting for the first time the slur "Itzich!" (102). Amsel falls parallel to the skeleton, stirring up a cloud of dust, and Matern hits himself twice on the forehead before reaching down to pick up the skull. Amsel, writes: "Wer starrt einen blanken Schädel an und will sich erkennen? [. . .] Wer? Zwei Menschen:

nachdenklich und besorgt. Jeder hat Gründe. Beide sind Freunde” (103). The aesthetic and the anxious perspectives of these two “friends” determines their experience of ruin, although both are interested in the decaying image which seems to reflect the self. Eddi Amsel’s artistic production, the scarecrows and the ballet in which Jenny dances, processes these images of ruin, even presenting them and reproducing them in aesthetic terms; but Matern’s reaction is violence.

An analogous encounter with the ruins of humans presents further evidence of Matern’s aggressive attempt to repress the irrepressible truth of ruin and decay when the group from the anti-aircraft battery is faced with the byproduct of the ruining machine of the Stutthof concentration camp. Tulla exclaims, “Das issen Knochenberg” (403). She immediately begins to offer a bet that they are real bones, human bones, directly from Stutthof, which elicits Störtebeker’s Heideggerian response: “Wir müssen das Zuhaufliegen in der Offenheit des Seins, das Austragen der Sorge und das Ausdauern zum Tode als das volle Wesen der Existenz denken” (403) – this introduces one of the problems of language, with which we will deal more in the next chapter, but the problem in this exchange, where two disparate dialects attempt to deal with the problem of an unthinkable referent, is already apparent. In this scene, Tulla retrieves a skull from the mountain of bones, just as Amsel had attempted, and receives the same blow across the face from the *Feldwebel*, that same *Knirscher* Matern, who had compelled Eddi Amsel with the threat of violence to leave the skull in the *Hünengrab* behind.

The unwillingness to allow closer consideration of the images of decay and destruction characterizes Walter Matern, who consistently attempts to conceal the increasingly obvious reality of ruins. In the first *Materniade*, Walter observes: “Trümmer

sollte man nicht beschreiben,” and then describing a remnant of a wall: “Ist doch kein Kunststück” (480); yet Matern simultaneously retains the irresistible desire for violent ruin, “Es ist eine Lust Laut zu geben in ausgeräumten Ruinen” (481). It is Eddi Amsel’s artistic goal to facilitate these encounters with artistically reproduced ruins and to produce these rubble descriptions, represented quintessentially by the magic eyeglasses (*Erkenntnisbrillen*) manufactured by Amsel which enable the bearer to see the violence and destruction of the past: “aber Brauxels Erkenntnisbrille vermag Vergangenheit gegenwärtig zu machen” (631). These magical glasses create an effect significantly different from the optics of what Böll calls the *Röntgenauge*; instead of seeing the skeletal finality of the object, these glasses present the proverbial “skeletons in the closet.” This presencing of past perpetrations modifies a sense of rubble vision, as this new perceptivity exists in the awareness of prior misdeeds rather than seeing man’s awful finality; it is a backward looking, but skeletal traces are still the object of this gaze, only these are the guilty evidence of otherwise unseen moral infractions.

The last of Amsel’s early scarecrow/sculptures is *der Große Vogel Piepmatz*. According to the original design and sketches in Amsel’s “Diarium,” the Great Bird should be made of rags, coated in tar and feathers: “Mit Teer oder Pech bestrichene Lumpen müssen von außen, und wenn genug da ist, auch von innen, mit großen und kleinen Federn beklebt werden. Aber unnatürlich, nicht natürlich” (107). The uncanny effect of the ragged, unnatural bird, constructed of pitch and feathers causes fishmonger women of the area to fear superstitiously that looking at the thing could result in diverse physical defects, from goiters to miscarriages; the mice in the dike are forced to seek dwelling elsewhere; and even the Weichsel would have forgone the immediate presence of this piece of uncanny installation

art, if it could have: “Die Weichsel konnte keinen Bogen machen, sie hätte sonst” (108).

Because the scarecrow had become a public nuisance (*das öffentliche Ärgernis, der Kinderschreck*), Amsel’s former teacher Olschewski tells him to stop creating the sculptures. “Tags drauf ging es leicht apokalyptisch zu” (110) – Amsel burns all of his materials, housed in Folchert’s barn, including four scarecrows still under construction, and on top of all comes the *Großer Vogel Piepmatz*. While all stand witness to the great destruction, Amsel squeezes his eyes shut in his characteristic mode of observation and has a vision:

[Amsel] verkneift die Äugelchen und sieht etwas. Kein grügelber Qualm, kein schmorendes Lederzeug, kein glühender Funken- und Mottenflug zwingt ihn, aus runden Augen quere Sehschlitze zu machen; vielmehr beschenkt ihn der vielzüngige brennende Vogel, dessen Qualm niederschlägt und über Brennesseln kriecht, mit quicken Ideen und ähnlichen Rosinen. Denn wie das entzündete Tier, Geburt aus Lumpen, Teer und Federn, sprühend, prasselnd und höchst lebendig einen letzten Flugversuch macht, dann strebend in sich zusammenfällt, hat Amsel bei sich und in seinem Diarium beschlossen, später, wenn er mal groß ist, die Idee des Vogel Piepmatz wieder aufzunehmen: Einen Riesenvogel will er bauen, der immerzu brennt, päsert und funkert, der dennoch nie verbrennt, sondern ewig, immer und von Natur, apokalyptisch und dekorativ zugleich, brennt, päsert und funkert. (112)

Amsel is determined, inspired by the ochlocratic destruction of his artistic production, to take up the idea of the *Vogel Piepmatz* again, creating the aesthetic equivalent of eternal ruin: perpetually burning but never consumed, simultaneously apocalyptic and decorative. This scarecrow is the last that Amsel creates for years to come, and this ambitious aesthetic vision of ruin and enduring destruction remain an artistic ideal.

Years later, when Amsel moves into Steffensweg to continue the production of his scarecrows, “Vogelscheuchen, die er aber nicht Scheuchen, sondern Figuren nannte” (238), he develops his aesthetics of ruins to a new level, utilizing as his philosophical, theoretical foundation an example of decayed thought, ruined philosophy, namely Otto Weininger’s *Geschlecht und Charakter*, called “das Standardwerk, Sechshundertseitenwerk, Werksondergleichen, Teufelswerk, Weiningers Werk” in the second section of *Hundejahre* (240), Harry Liebenau’s *Liebesbriefe*. Reading aloud from this text, which rests on an authentic renaissance podium in Amsel’s Steffensweg atelier, Amsel mines the excremental decay of these philosophical foundations for Hitler’s later anti-Semitism. Inspired by these philosophical ruins, Amsel creates a group of scarecrows, complete with SA and SS uniforms: “Er zeigte sich versessen auf Uniformen, besonders schwarze und braune, die mehr und mehr zum Straßenbild gehörten” (251); these uniforms present ruin on multiple levels, as they carry the runic reference to Germanic ruins (*runenbenäht*), but Amsel also prefers them to have traces of blood, rips, and the pile of these uniforms is “Dunghaufenbraun” (257). When Amsel activates the goose-stepping, *Hitlergruß*-extending group of SA-scarecrows, Matern beats out all thirty-two of Amsel’s teeth.

Without spending too much time on the choreographic intricacies of the ballet of destruction which Amsel creates for Jenny Brunies to dance the main role, it must be noted that this danced dramatization of violence, which the two gentlemen from the *Reichspropagandaministerium* find too “sinister” (440), is actually interrupted by bombing, which destroys the theater and costumes and kills some of the cast. The ballet of destruction is ironically destroyed, underlining and reifying the “sinister” aesthetics of ruination.

Another scene worth noting in evaluating the discourse of destruction takes place in the locale “Leichenhalle.” When Matern and Sawatzki eat at this bizarrely themed restaurant, where the dishes are served to resemble human anatomy and the silverware is constituted by surgical implements, Matern begins to laugh: “Zuerst will sich in Matern Grabbegelächter, das bekanntlich Rom kaputtzulachen vermochte, lösen und das Lokal verwüsten; [. . .] Rom und das Lokal ‘Leichenhalle’ gehen nicht in Trümmer” (570-71). Once again, Matern is confronted with ruins, here the mimetic aesthetics of human ruins in an establishment later revealed to be owned by Eddi Amsel, and once again the *Knirscher* attempts to inflict violence and turn the scene to rubble. Amsel’s influence only grows, presenting Matern with inescapable images of ruins.

The final scenes of the novel, beginning at Chez Jenny, pull Matern inexorably through fantasticized images of destruction and ruin, finally landing him in the mines where the scarecrows are produced and where they continually, mechanically enact infernal images of decay, both moral and temporal. The Dantean progression through Brauxel’s (Amsel’s) potash mine presents Matern with the automated mechanics of ruin, performing the mimic, mechanized march of and toward destruction.

In addition to the ruins in Grass’s novels, at least brief mention must be made of some of his earliest poems that take the rubble experience as their central theme. The poem “Die grosse Trümmerfrau spricht,” for example, obviously contains rubble images. The second stanza of this poem from the collection *Gleisdreieck* (1960) begins, “Die Stadt die Stadt. / Hingestreut liegt Berlin, / lehnt sich mit Brandmauern gegen Winde, / die aus Ost Süd West, aus dem Norden kommen / und die Stadt befreien wollen” (*Gedichte* 123). This poem may be described as demonstrating a language of ruins. Simple phrases dominate the poem.

There will be more said on this in the chapter dedicated to the language of ruins, but for present purposes it is enough to suggest that the form of this poem engages the subject of ruins as much as the poetical narrative of the poem's content. The image of these rubble women is an important one in the early postwar years, when men are mostly absent and those present are incapable of the labor necessary to rebuild Germany. In this poem, the *Trümmerfrau* is found dead, having ingested spoonfulls of "toten Mörtel" mixed into her soup daily by an inevitable hand – a fact concealed by the construction managers. The speaker in the poem intends to immortalize the rubble women on all north-facing ruined walls: "Ich ich ich ich / will allen Brandmauern, / die nordwärts schauen, / riesengroß Trümmerfrauen / malen oder einbrennen" (*Gedichte* 125). The poem ends by repeating the line, "Hingestreu liegt Berlin." This poem's rubble imagery is not limited to ruined structures, but includes also an aestheticizing of the surface of the ruin object itself, which artistic production is a further act of vandalistic destruction.

Another example is Grass's poem "Inventar oder die Ballade von der zerbrochenen Vase," which exhibits objects as they are vomited out of the wardrobe: "Der Schrank springt auf und erbricht / die Hüte, erwürgte Krawatten, / die Hemden, wechselnde Haut, / auch Hosen mit brauchbarem Schlitz; / ein Bein ist des anderen Witz" (*Gedichte* 74). This poem displays raw objects as such. In fact, the rhyme of the poem gives the lines a feeling similar to that of a nursery rhyme. The first stanza begins, "Wir wollen uns wieder vertragen, / das Bett zum Abschied zerschlagen; / du hast zwar die Vase zerbrochen, / doch ich hab zuerst dran gerochen – / so kommt unser Glück in die Wochen." Grass uses idioms alongside inherited tropes of ruin like the broken vase, which is a common symbol of ruin and inevitable decay from classical literature. The value of this poem in the discussion of Grass's

ruins is the eighth of the nine stanzas. This stanza describes the task of selling the house together with all of the inventoried contents: “Jetzt wollen wir alles verkaufen, / das Haus mit Inventar, / den Schall der süßen Nachtigall / aus gelben Tapeten befreien, / dem Schrank seinen Inhalt verzeihen.” Of course, the connection to Günter Eich’s poem “Inventur” is apparent, an influential poem that will be discussed in a later chapter, but dealing specifically with the contents of this poem, we read the necessity of forgiving the dresser for its contents, the objects to which we form connections and relationships, the things that partially define who we are. This process resembles that of coming to terms with the history of ruins, forgiving structures for their contents and what is not (or no longer) contained in them.

As we have seen, Günter Grass’s commitment to destructive aestheticism and aesthetic destruction permeates his earliest novels and poems. The image of ruin and ruination often functions as art, and the character of the ruin artist becomes an important trope throughout the trilogy, where the artist produces and admires destruction for purely aesthetic reasons. The presence of this ruin sentiment in the works of a writer few would connect with the movement of *Trümmerliteratur* –a literary mode most often associated with the period of reconstruction directly following the war instead of fifteen years later – attests to the seminal thematic importance of these representations.

## Chapter 4

### Celan's Destructive Poetics: Porous Houses, Rimbaud's Ruin Remastered, and the Demolition of Word Matter

While claims concerning Günter Grass's commitment to a literature of rubble might surprise, assertions as to the prevalence of such an aesthetic thematics in Celan must appear improbable, even untenable. Paul Celan is famous for his rejection of traditional poetic forms and functions, for his philosophical rejection of a poetic language of metaphoric reality, and although these claims – Celan himself makes the statement that there are no more metaphors – may be practically impossible in application, their theoretical validity for Celan's work is unimpeachable. This dismissal of metaphor and traditional poetic functionality almost necessarily precludes him from consideration in an investigation of the aesthetic imagery of ruins. Additionally, Celan lived in France after the war, where, because of France's conciliatory policy of self-preservation, the physical presence of ruins and rubble would have been minimal compared with the omnipresence of these images in every German city; although his occasional trips to Germany for lectures and readings and to accept literary prizes would have offered him vistas of the sprawling rubble of destruction, these encounters were certainly limited. Furthermore, Celan, like both Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass, was involved with the influential *Gruppe 47*, where he would have been exposed to and would have become more than adequately familiar with the programmatic impulses of the *Kahlschlagliteratur* and other literary projects focusing on the attention to and the centrality of a state of ruin. Celan's contribution to the group's meeting even includes the employment of the keyword "Trümmer." The poet's repellent experience, however, at the meeting of the

Group 47 where he read his work would have engendered a fundamental distrust rather than sympathetic inclinations toward these apparently anti-Semitic ex-Nazi literates, who characterized his reading as similar in tone and style to that of cantors in Jewish synagogues (Dor 160), and Celan later remarked that one member of the group even told him, “You recited in the tone of Goebbels” (Lenz 316). The poet’s already fragile psyche only amplified the implications of these comments, and although some of the writers, like Böll, came to Celan’s defense, he came to regard this group as a bunch of Nazis.

Certainly, the brand of *Trümmerliteratur* that I find Celan to demonstrate is different in significant ways from the work of the two authors already analyzed in this study, but the similarities are striking. The first level of ruin imagery consists of the somewhat unanticipated yet distinctly articulated imagery of ruin, broadly – as well as particularly – suggested in Celan’s poems and theory of poesy. The second level I will address is in a resonance between Rimbaud’s versification of the experience of the Paris Commune ruins and Celan’s ruins; and the third level of ruin imagery is the physical and structural presentation, where words break into bits, crumbling and dissolving, while also becoming amalgamated and cemented into neologisms.

In his usage of distinct images of ruin, which begin on the first page of his first authorized volume of poetry, Celan demonstrates his interest in this theme of rubble literature. *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952) begins with a cycle of poems called “Der Sand aus den Urnen.” This important and recurring image of vessels and sand or dirt will be treated later, in connection with the eponymous poem included in this first group of poems, but the first poem, entitled “Ein Lied in der Wüste,” on the first page of the volume, exploits three major images of ruin, centering on the shibboleth of *Trümmer*, which occurs nowhere else in

Celan's poems during the period up to 1963, when *Die Niemandsrose* was published. This singular exploitation of a word charged with programmatic literary impulses – impulses defended that same year (1952) when Heinrich Böll delivered his “Bekenntnis zur Trümmerliteratur” speech – invokes an undeniable imagery of ruin, consistent with the other aesthetics of ruin examined. It is also significant that this “Lied in der Wüste” is one of only four poems that Celan recited in his reading at the 1952 meeting of the Group 47 (Felstiner 64). That the poet would have chosen this poem, with its central image of rubble and ruins, evidences his conscious participation in the Trümmerliteratur: “Auch trank ich aus hölzernen Schalen die Asche der Brunnen von Akra / und zog mit gefältem Visier den Trümmern der Himmel entgegen” (1:11). Blatant use of the word *Trümmer* in such a significant position in Celan's early poetry cannot be overlooked. The drinking of ashes is certainly evocative of death, another kind of rubble image, as included in the quotation, and other ruin images of this premier poem include rusty rings and the wrecked moon (*Zuschanden gehaun ward der Mond*). The rubble is the ruined heaven, where the angels are dead and God blind, and this inclusion of clearly rubblistic rhetoric begins Celan's epochal poetry, adumbrating the relevance of these ruins in the rest of his project and consonant with the contemporary predominance of rubble's rumbling reverberations.

Celan's subsequent diction of destruction leads to the poem “Espanbaum,” where the poet eulogizes his mother. The first line involves a description of nature which seems benign until followed by the paired line owned by the poet, where the mother is described. The first word of these second lines, “Meine” or “Meiner,” indicates the iterative progression through the paralleled structure of the poem, which oscillates between externalities to the extraordinarily personal, and the final pair is therefore all the more compelling, when the

narrative voice states, “Eichne Tür, wer hob dich aus den Angeln? / Meine sanfte Mutter kann nicht kommen” (1:19). The structural ruin of the oaken door removed from its hinges presents a primary sort of ruin, mirrored in the narrator’s mood of detachment, seeming almost to reply to a request at the (un)door to see the mother; the narrator speaks only distantly of his mother, as if only the present physicality of the world allows address. These physical and natural features (*Espenbaum, Regenwolke, Stern, Eichne Tür*) are apostrophized, expressing, through the reiterated object-referentiality, a limit of language. This unhinged quality of life experienced in ruin is represented through an awareness limited to a physical world, broken and fragmented by a force which exceeds comprehension: “wer hob dich aus den Angeln?”

Almost every reference to structural elements, such as the disattached door in “Espenbaum,” suggests fragmentation. Towers (*Türme*) seem to stand lonely, walls (*Mauer*) appear without their characteristically constitutive quality, gates and portals (*Tore*) lead nowhere, and doors (*Türe*) are perpetually open. For brevity’s sake, I will forego attempting to register every appearance of these images, highlighting instead the most remarkable examples of these structural ruins imaged in Celan’s poetry. The clearest example is in “Engführung,” remarkable also in its elliptic visual presentation of absence, but important here in its depiction of a ruined wall: “der verschütteten Mauer” (1:203). The ruined wall, evocative of firing-squad executions, presents a particular kind of ruin, perhaps Celan’s most potent rubble trace of Nazi atrocity, and its uncomfortable aestheticization follows when Celan concludes: “Also / stehen noch Tempel” (1:204). Elevating a crumbled and broken wall to the aesthetic state of a temple, demonstrates Celan’s position among the rubble-writers. Obviously, my characterization of this poetic performance as “aesthetic” implies

Celan's critical allusion to the Temple of Jerusalem, of which the western wall is the only extant remnant. This famous ruin of a wall, known as the "Wailing Wall," is the receptacle of prayers. Cognizant of this reference, however, we may still speak of the aestheticism of Celan's ruin writing, as he reproduces the ruin for artistic purposes. Other examples from "Engführung" of Celan's diction of the destruction still extant in these rubble traces are the thrice-repeated "Asche" and the neologized compound "Porenbau," succinctly expressive of the essence of ruin, as the construction becomes ever more evidently "porous."

Another example is in the poem "Wasser und Feuer," in which the narrator throws the poem's addressee into a tower and then sets it aflame with a word. Eventually, the poem's narrator turns to regard the fire-eclipsed narratee, declaring himself to be a master of dungeons and towers: "So warf ich dich denn in den Turm und sprach ein Wort zu den Eiben, / draus sprang eine Flamme," and later, "ich blick hinüber zu dir, / Feuerumsonnte: / Denk an die Zeit, da die Nacht mit uns auf den Berg stieg, / denk an die Zeit, / denk, daß ich war, was ich bin: ein Meister der Kerker und Türme" (1:76).

While these walls and towers crumble and burn, perhaps the most important image of ruin is the house, man's dwelling place. There are repeated instances where a house, though called a house, appears much more like the "Porenbau" from "Engführung." These porous structures, where it rains and snows, fail to providing shelter and solace from nature's eroding destruction. The first such instance is found in "Erinnerung an Frankreich": "Es fing zu regnen an in unserer Stube, / und unser Nachbar kam, Monsieur Le Songe, ein hager Männlein. / Wir spielten Karten [ . . . ] er schlug uns nieder. / Er trat zur Tür hinaus, der Regen folgt' ihm" (1:28). It started to rain in their Parisian apartment, and Mr. Dream came and played cards with them. The inclusion of the French word for dream suggests one

explication for the intrusion of the elements into the living room, easily excusing the rain as a dream detail, however, in a discussion of ruins, rain in a living room clearly instantiates the necessary practice of squatting, appropriating space deemed by others to be uninhabitable.

Uninhabitability is a key in these ruined dwellings, as in the case of “Zweihäusig, Ewiger,” which contains a fragment of this very word in its opening line: “un- / bewohnbar.” Not only is the word “uninhabitable” implemented, but it is fractured and divided between the first two lines. Again, the rain intrudes, resulting in the new compound, “Regenbett.” Although the poem’s narratee is unclear, partially because of the untranslatable, and perhaps incomprehensible, opening word, *Zweihäusig* (two-dwellingish?), there is a sense that the narrator is addressing the eternal soul, which temporarily inhabits a mortal frame, destined for ruin. Calling the soul uninhabitable, however, produces the (il)logical pronouncement: “Darum / baun wir und bauen. Darum / steht sie, diese / erbärmliche Bettstatt, – im Regen, / da steht sie” (1:247). If the constructed house is the eternal soul’s second house, then it clearly mirrors the first, in inevitable fall and decay, and that is why we build and build, and that is why our pathetic bed stands in the rain. The rubble imagery here is much more complex than a prosaic description of poor living conditions. Instead, the metaphysical space of dwelling is explored, and ruins are the unintended result of all our attempts to build and construct.

There are still two other houses which demand interpretation in connection with this theme of ruins, both in terms of aesthetic ruins and ruined aesthetics. The first house is the “Haus des Vergessens” in the poem “Der Sand aus den Urnen,” the title poem of Celan’s earliest publication in 1948 (later recalled):

Schimmelgrün ist das Haus des Vergessens.

Vor jedem der wehenden Tore blaut dein enthaupteter Spielmann.

Er schlägt dir die Trommel aus Moos und bitterem Schamhaar;

mit schwärender Zehe malt er im Sand deine Braue.

Länger zeichnet er sie als sie war, und das Rot deiner Lippe.

Du fülle hier die Urnen und speisest dein Herz.

This house is described as being moldy green, the inevitable effect of dereliction and the telltale mark of a ruined structure, but it is also important to note that this house is one of oblivion, of forgetting. Every gate and portal (*Tore*) is waving, or blowing, suggesting either a sense of insubstantiality or of the characteristic windy drafts of ruined buildings that are less than air-tight, less than structurally sound. Tying these images of ruin into an aesthetic sensibility is the beheaded troubadour, whose artistic attempts are inaccurate as well as insubstantial: he draws in the sand, and the narratee gathers up the sand, essentially ruining the temporary artwork, and feeds their heart. The status of art is put into question, where a beheaded artist plays a drum of moss and pubic hair and draws with a diseased toe in the dirt, and the consumptive practice of engaging art spells its irrevocable demise. The *Haus des Vergessens* is the site of ruin, as well as ruination, and Celan's use of these aesthetics is finally a suggestion of the possibly ruined status of aesthetics, all the while retaining an implicit resolution: despite the despoiling act of aesthetic engagement, the heart is fed.

While there are other houses which may participate in the thematics of these aesthetic ruins – perhaps the “feste Burg” as “das abendlichste aller Häuser” (1:60), for example –, the final example germane to this discussion is the house in the poem “Mit wechselndem Schlüssel” from the volume *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (1955). This house, like the porous

structures discussed above, is filled with snow, “darin der Schnee des Verschwiegenen treibt,” the snow of the concealed, the unuttered. The house is accessed with a changing key, a changing word, which may drift with the flakes: “Wechselt dein Schlüssel, wechselt das Wort, / das treiben darf mit den Flocken. / Je nach dem Wind, der dich fortstößt, / ballt um das Wort sich der Schnee” (1:112). The snow of the concealed becomes conglomerated around the word, the changing word or key, which accesses the house, where the concealed is contained. Naturally, houses serve to conceal, providing both protection and privacy; but this house, entered through words, suggests similarities with Heidegger’s concept of Language as the House of Being, as discussed in his *Letter on Humanism*. The ruined condition of this particular house will be the focus of the next chapter of this study.

Having demonstrated the ubiquity of these images of structural ruins present in Celan’s first four published volumes of poetry, we will conclude the study of these physical ruins with some final notes, surveying Celan’s poetic landscape for other evidence of rubble writing. It could be claimed that much of the discussion of stones refers to rubble, for example when they are gathered and piled. “Welchen der Steine du hebst” presents an act of gathering up stones, littered with typographic breaks, and equates this act to the speech act. Gathering up stones was the primary labor in postwar Germany, before there were any other jobs, and this clearing of the rubble was simultaneously a sort of ruination, as Celan describes: “du entblößt, / die des Schutzes der Steine bedürfen” (1:129). This laying bare, exposing, unhousing act of lifting stones, generally read as lifting headstones in a graveyard, presents a revelatory glimpse both of the dead and of the little scurrying animals that tend to take up residence under rocks. The image of stones often describe the poetic work, this act

of gathering stones, revealing the concealed through language, both clearing and engendering ruin.

The most important examples of stones in the aesthetics of ruins are the monolithic stones in “Le Menhir,” which is itself a ruin, like the *Hünengrab*, and the synonymous *Rundgräber* in Celan’s poem “Entwurf einer Landschaft.” This poem seems to describe a romantic, perhaps Caspar David Friedrichian ruin painting of a landscape, using words like *Ölgrün* (1:184) and prominently featuring megalithic ancient monuments. These poems also instantiate another kind of stone ruin: “Meer- / mühle mahlte” (1:260), and “meerdurchstäubt” (1:184). These are images of dust and sand, as the irreducible stone-particle produced by the milling process of the sea (*Meermühle*), like the process of life and death (*Mühlen des Todes* [1:35]). The reduction is the ultimate ruination, where stones, a constitutive element of construction, are fragmented into infinitesimality. Invasive dust and soot are characteristic of the dwelling in derelict conditions, as in Böll’s *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* (1953), where Käte Bogner simply cannot manage the dust and grime.

Other examples of the use of this rubble reference to the romantic ruinist’s mode of painterly representation are evoked in poems which exceed the temporal bounds set for this study, that is 1945-1963. The trajectorial implications of Celan’s early work validate at least brief reference, though, to the aesthetic continuation of these images, completely aside from the reality that a number of the poems in later collections have earlier origins, even reaching back into the temporal frame for this study. In *Atemwende* (1967), the poem “Landschaft” seems to participate quite overtly in a similar visualization. The opening line, “Landschaft mit Urnenwesen,” could easily be read as alluding to ruins. The “urn-creatures” or “urn-entities” could anticipatorily present the human frame as resembling an urn, essentially

containing its own ashes, as the seed of death, from birth. Landscape paintings are almost never peopled by human subjects, though, because of their focus on the landscape. The more consistent reading of the urn-entities produces the image of the ruined architectural structure, with its role of housing remains and remnants. Accepting this reading of the “Landscape with urn-entities,” another Friedrichian scene of ruins unmistakably appears, which also decodes the rest of the poem. Just as Böll imagined life into the scene of ruin in his *Irishes Tagebuch*, so Celan’s narrative voice projects the smoky image of quotidian exchanges into the structural urns centered in the “landscape with ruin.” Further, the “madmen’s truffle, the bit of unburied poesy” is the extant ruin, the segments of the building not yet completely overtaken by nature’s encroachment.

The poet’s works are also riddled with other images that could be linked to an imagery of destruction. There are shards (1:29) and shardtones (1:170). “Nachtstrahl” seems to suggest something like Böll’s *Röntgenauge*, and although Celan makes no osteological references he does mention the quintessential site of ruin, Rome, in this poem, along with coffins (1:31). These are perhaps peripheral notes, but they help hash in the details of Celan’s employment of metaphorical ruins in his poems.

More important than some of these perhaps marginal notes on possible ruin images, though, are the references to *Schutt*, *Schuttflur*, and *Schuttkahn*. Taking only the last of these, the rubble-tub or detritus-dingy, we see a rubble vessel piloted by a dead Why at the stern:

Wasserstunde, der Schuttkahn  
fährt uns zu Abend, wir haben,  
wie er, keine Eile, ein totes  
Warum steht am Heck

.....

Geleichtert. Die Lunge, die Qualle  
bläht sich zur Glocke, ein brauner  
Seelenfortsatz erreicht  
das hellgeatmete Nein. (1:173)

The poem is elliptically interrupted, and the second half sees the vessel having discharged its ruin contents. “The lung, the jellyfish billows into a bell, a brown appendage of the soul reaches the brightly-breathed No,” suggesting the marine dumping of rubble and debris, which would naturally flow and billow three-dimensionally into the current, tinging the water an (excremental) brown. The potential of *Fortsatz* to represent anatomical processes suggests the excremental quality of this clearing of the rubble and debris, which may also be connoted by *Wasserstunde*, the time required for water to escape. The artistic act is compared here to bodily functions, and the “brightly-breathed No” seems to represent the taboo on such images, however necessary. Often, poetry must function as a flushing, finally revitalizing process, and the corresponding aesthetics of ruin sometimes serve this function,

just as when Eddi Amsel clothes his scarecrows in ruined and torn uniforms, *Dunghaufenbraun*, in order to demonstrate something of destruction.

In addition to the images of ruins produced in Celan's poetry, there is also the substance of his translations to consider, especially the translation of the important ruinist Arthur Rimbaud. The translator's experience is the most intimate two thinkers may experience, almost like attempting to walk a mile (or recite a poem?) in another poet's lips, to modify the vernacular idiom. Apart from any literary affinities of theme or substance between Celan and Rimbaud, the comparable prevalence of ruins suggests that Rimbaud's period of the Paris Commune participates in the formation of a ruin writing beyond the romantic mode. This new writing of new ruins provides a space for the thinking that defines German *Trümmerliteratur*. Daryl Lee's characterization of this period of ruin employs some of the same keywords. Speaking of the public perception of Paris:

Thus, one of the primary factors that led to the Commune was a fundamental alienation from the "house" experienced "within" by a major portion of that population. This displacement – a virtual exile or homelessness – did much to prompt what Gaillard calls the Commune's desire for the "reconquest" of the city: "les marginaux de 1871 sont des exilés malgré eux qui frappent aux portes de la ville." (Lee, "Rimbaud's Ruins" 71)

This description could as easily be a characterization of the experience of postwar *Heimkehrer*, who stand *draussen vor der Tür* – a phrase invoked by Borchert in the title of his important *Hörspiel*, dramatizing the alienation and sense of homelessness that awaited these men returning to an unfamiliar homeland. This homelessness is also a quality that will be discussed in the next chapter, on the language of ruins. Another description that Lee uses

to describe Rimbaud's surrounding state of ruin is a description of Paris as "porous" (72) – an approximation of ruin and decay that Celan employs as well in the poem "Engführung," as discussed above.

Obviously, Celan's familiarity with the symbolist poet's brief oeuvre must extend beyond the two poems that the later poet translated for publication, "Bateau ivre" and "Elle est retrouvée." It would be unthinkable, perhaps impossible to perform an adequate translation of another writer's work without a sense for the programmatic elements functioning within a given poem, especially a piece so prominent among the original poet's works as is Rimbaud's "Bateau ivre." Celan called this poem "eines der bedeutendsten Dokumente der Weltliteratur" and was so confident of his translation's lasting quality as to expect "den Beifall Studierender."<sup>3</sup>

Understanding Arthur Rimbaud to be one of the most important poets of ruin in the period of the Paris Commune – a time when ruin not only ravaged but was aesthetically reproduced in a number of revolutionary ways – is essential in correctly comprehending the significance of Celan's work with this poet. The historical moment of the Paris Commune ruins offers a significant break with romantic ruinist sentiments, as these new ruins contained so much of the present and so much violence. There exists simultaneously an alluring need to destroy and ruin the monuments of the past, along with the ideological superstructure they instantiate, while monumentalizing the ruins of the present as evoking the dawn of a new day. Lee analyzes this ambivalent sense of the picturesque in the ruins of the Paris

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<sup>3</sup> Gellhaus, Axel ad al. *Fremde Nähe, Celan als Übersetzer*. Marbach a.N.: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1997, p. 264.

Commune,<sup>4</sup> and he also provides commentary on Arthur Rimbaud's specific type of versified ruination.<sup>5</sup> Particularly important for this study is the following assertion: "In short, Rimbaud's poem [Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon cœur . . .]" makes of French verse a ruin, an open ruin, through the walls of which the visionary eye (which recalls the celebrated figure of Rimbaud as "voyant") can perceive something truly new" (Lee, "Rimbaud's Ruins" 78). Lee demonstrates the important ways in which the poetic structure resembles the spatial experience of Paris in ruins, emphasizing the manipulation of the Alexandrine and use of enjambment. Certainly Rimbaud's "Bateau ivre" is characterized by these same poetic "ruination" in terms of enjambment and resisting the strict Alexandrine structure, as well as taking as its object the ruining process of deterioration and decay, and it is therefore remarkable that Celan's translation essentially eliminates these aspects of the poem.

In her analysis of the translation Celan performs, Ute Harbusch suggests that the poet actually normalizes the poetic form in his "Trunkenes Schiff" by eliminating neologisms, avoiding vulgarity, and metrically standardizing the verse into strong rhythmic unity (59-60). Why would Paul Celan, writer of ruin, translate the ruin out of Rimbaud's verse? Harbusch suggests that it is done in order to emphasize another aspect of the poem: the radical metaphoric theme, which also results in ruination. Harbusch writes, "Das Kunstvolle, die Artistik, der Sprachzauber sind Eigenschaften des Originals, die den Übersetzer nicht zur Nachahmung reizen, ja ihn nicht einmal zu einer übersetzerischen Auseinandersetzung anregen, werden sie doch in der Übertragung schlicht verschwiegen" (61). These aspects of Rimbaud's ruining verse are simply outdated, no longer the point of conflict. In 1871,

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<sup>4</sup> "The Ambivalent Picturesque of the Paris Commune Ruins" in *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 2002 Fall; 29 (2): 138-61.

<sup>5</sup> "Rimbaud's Ruin of French Verse: Verse Spatiality and the Paris Commune Ruins" in *19<sup>th</sup> Century French Studies*, 2003; 32 (1-2): 69-82.

Rimbaud's formal refusals produced radical effects, but metrics no longer command the attention in Celan's day. In fact, the strictly metric, rhyming verse that emerges in Celan's translation appears more radical than an accurate reproduction of what are now tired points of poetic transgression.

The privileged element of Rimbaud's poem, then, is the variation on the topos of *navigatio vitae*, which Hugo Friedrich describes as the "absolute metaphor" (Harbusch 64). Rimbaud's poem presents this theme in radicalized fashion so that life is not merely a ship voyage, rather the poem's speaker is the boat itself. Harbusch demonstrates Celan's extension of this theme by disrupting the clear identification of the boat and the speaker, as Rimbaud's original clearly apposes the poetic "I" with the boat; the translation renders these appositions with a sort of hole: "Or moi, bateau perdu sous les cheveux des anses," (69) becomes "Und ich – verstrickt, verloren im Haar geheimer Buchten." Harbusch suggests that Celan pushes Rimbaud's own project beyond what the original achieved by exploiting the dispersed sense of identity implied in Rimbaud's letter to Georges Izambard, in May 1871 – near the end of the Paris Commune – where the famous statement is made, "Je est un autre." Celan rejects the already radical identification of the speaker with the boat, multiplying identity (the speaker is equated with a cork, a plank, etc.) obscuring the straightforward subjectivity. Rimbaud's original ruin is ruined, resulting in a kind of ruin more connected with Celan's writing of ruins.

This enhancement of a past ruinist opens Celan up to his own thinking of formal ruination, a poetical transgression much more radical and revolutionary than the relatively empty resistance to rhymes and metrics offered in Rimbaud's poems. Celan takes this practice of poetic ruination to another level.

Having investigated Celan's images of ruins, from crumbling to uninhabitable structures and diverse other implications of rubble diction, as well as the poet's rethinking of Rimbaudian ruins, we turn now to another level of ruin: Celan's visual presentation of ruin. James K. Lyon describes the visual resemblance of Celan's poetry to the Concretism ephemerally important among Celan's contemporaries, and I have already made reference to some of the most important examples of this visual structure in some of Celan's poems, like the case of "Engführung." Aside from the structure of presentation in some of Celan's poetry is the important value of words, as stated by Max Bense: "The word is not used primarily as a bearer of meaning, but beyond that as elemental creative matter" (qtd. in Lyon, 46). If words are to be understood then as the elemental creative matter, then Celan's dividing of words presents – a practice I call logoclasm – ruins, both in terms of the broken up word matter, as well as the visual image of lines jutting jagged into the uneven right side of these poems, like rusting rebar protruding from a crumbling wall.

Some examples of this level of ruin have already received attention: "un- / bewohnbar" for example, from "Zweihäusiger, Ewiger" (1:247); the repeated elliptical star in "Engführung," and the recurring "Ho- / sianna" (1:195); another such elliptical substitution subdivides "Schuttkahn," as discussed above. Of course, Celan's poetry makes almost no attempt at formal metrics, so when he divides these words, often leaving only two letters of a fragmented word on its own line, the effect is unmotivated by a conformity to the traditional structures of poetic production: the result is Celan's poesy of ruin. The first example of logoclastic poetics as part of an aesthetics of ruins is found in "Huhediblu." This poem contains no fewer than thirty-one dashes, incising both words and thoughts, and producing the visual effect described above, with the perpendicular protrusions intruding into the form

of the poem. Along with the rest of the crumbled word material, we find the word “Dis- / parates” followed by a dash. As is the case with ruins, though, there is also a conglomerating, amalgamating effect produced by the solving of structural materials, where everything is piled together. Similarly, “hühendiblüh, / huhediblu” is the concrete combination of the interjections *hü*, *he*, and *blü*.

As mentioned above, other examples of Celan’s de(con)structive poetics are found in the volume *Atemwende* (1967). Admittedly, this exceeds the temporal bounds set in the introduction as reaching from the end of WWII to 1963, which happily offered a date of coincidental significance for all three writers receiving attention in this study. However, discrete inclusions from outside the bracketed years will merely strengthen my thesis by evincing trajectory and consistent aesthetic sensibility. The first example that deserves attention in relation to the current theme of breaking down and conglomerating of word matter, is the poem “Weggebeizt” (2:31). Here, reference is made to “Strahlenwind deiner Sprache,” which uses the language of atomic destruction, while simultaneously resonating with Celan’s earlier poem “Nachtstrahl,” both of which indicate revelatory radiation similar to Böll’s *Röntgenauge*. Etching through the superficial, “das bunte Gerede des An- / erlebten” is revealed, but also concealed in the “hundert- / züngige Mein- / gedicht, das Genicht” (2:31). As discussed above, Celan insistently divides words, often offering unexpected amalgamations, cementing the dust of the ruined into easy concrete compounds, absolutely understandable while unthinkingly paradoxical. The hundred-tongued oath-poem, the “noem” as “Genicht” has sometimes been translated, the poem that is not one easily evokes the uneasy simultaneity of such disparate potentialities. Etching dissolves, reveals, and aesthetically ruins, enabling new concealment in the structure of language.

Perhaps the most important and memorable example of Celan's ruining poetics is the poem "Keine Sandkunst Mehr" (2:39). With very little exposition, mostly self-reflexive references to his earlier volume *Der Sand aus den Urnen*, Celan immediately instantiates the inevitability of poetic ruin:

Tiefimschnee,

Iefimnee,

I – i – e. (2:39)

Although the poem initially rejects sand art, the poem ends with a sort of snow art that must necessarily resemble the sand art. Artful curves and figures drawn into the sand face imminent destruction, as the wind scatters the grains into unrecognizable anonymity. Only the artist and the immediate viewer/reader/spectator – in "Der Sand aus den Urnen" the poem's narrative voice speaks to a narratee who scoops up the sand, in which the beheaded troubadour had drawn, and feeds their heart – transcend the irreconcilable transience of the insubstantial work of art. Paralleling the inevitable dissipation of the sand art, the snow finally melts, momentarily leaving lumpy, icy traces of a snow art. The prescience of this aesthetic ruination, or decay of the aesthetic, imbues the aesthetic object with its artistic power. There is an erosive quality to this kind of decay, and this image of powerful geological forces effecting ruin has a long tradition.

## Chapter 5

Heidegger's *Haus des Seins* and Postwar Homelessness:

Language's Crystal Clarity, Simplicity, and Unpretending Authenticity

It is the Ultimate of Talk –  
The Impotence to Tell –  
–Emily Dickinson

Having surveyed the images of ruins in the works of Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, and Paul Celan, it is necessary to consider the structure within which this rubble literature is produced. The vehicle of these ruin images is a language consciously concerned with the ruin of language itself, either as a direct result of destruction or as a kind of natural linguistic deterioration. The work of all three of these writers evidences the commonality of their concern over a writing amid the ruins. I would describe the range of reaction among these writers to the ruin of language as spectral, reaching from concerted conservatism in regard to language to radical ruination as a means toward revitalization: Heinrich Böll's rejection of complicated, abstruse language results in a style some might call simplistic, but it is clear that Böll's simplification of language is an assiduous effort to achieve insight, without linguistic obstruction in the relation; Günter Grass's language is seldom simple, even bordering sometimes on intentional incomprehensibility, but his blatant indictments of particular philosophical language demonstrate his derision for a synthesized, artificial employment of language; and Celan's linguistic grappling may be the most characteristic element of his work, always evading clarity in order to achieve it. Somewhat surprisingly, this spectrum of linguistic approaches may be related back to a touchstone, which will function as the point of reference for this chapter. This touchstone is Martin Heidegger, whose view of the

deterioration of language becomes a major point of emphasis in the rubble years under examination.

Although *Sein und Zeit* (1927) significantly addresses language, Heidegger's clearest theorizing on the question of language comes later, beginning with the "Brief über den Humanismus." addressed to Jean Beaufret on November 10, 1946 – clearly falling right into the mix of the earliest Rubble writers. Heidegger writes that "die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins. In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch. Die Denkenden und Dichtenden sind die Wächter dieser Behausung" (G 9:313). First, we have Heidegger's very important formulation of language's structural potential for facilitating ontological *Sein*. Language is a house, a house of being, in the shelter of which man dwells. That is the first element, and it cannot be highlighted enough in respect to a discussion of ruins, and the linguistic state of ruin. The second point that Heidegger makes in this letter is that thinkers and poets serve the primary function of protecting that abode. This suggests language's assailability, its vulnerability, that language itself, the house of man's metaphysical dwelling, requires defenders. Already, on the first page of Heidegger's *Prachtstück*, as Hannah Arendt was fond of calling this splendid piece of thinking (Heidegger, *Basic Writings* 216), language is cast in a register of ruins. The basic assumption is that language exists in the constant anticipation of its ruination, which simultaneously means man's ontological homelessness.

As regards this question of homelessness, linguistic as well as ontological and cultural, Hans Egon Holthusen's study *Der unbehauste Mensch* (1951) describes the problem of language to be "die zentrale urphänomenale Problematik des Menschen, der springende Punkt des Menschseins überhaupt" (137-38). Holthusen's work – which thematizes modern senselessness and disorientation, man's state as exposed and bare – proposes that occidental

culture “bereits untergegangen *ist* [. . .], daß wir uns schon in den Anfängen einer neuen Epoche der Barbarei befinden, die auf das Absterben einer so großartigen Kultur folgen muß” (216). He considers assumptions of the condition of postwar culture as ruined to be foundational. Holthusen also suggests that, having lost sense of self and dignity, there exists for man “gleichzeitig die Chance, sich und den Sinn seines Daseins jeweils zu gewinnen” (217). That the attempt to overcome this *Zertrümmerung* be successful is certainly not something that Holthusen sees as self-evident, however, this *Grenzsituation* may present precisely the decisive opportunity to achieve new vitality, for “Wer nicht verzweifeln kann, der muß nicht leben” (245). Essentially, approaching oblivion offers the sublime instance requisite to achieve transcendence. This basic optimism resides, however faintly, in the work of the three writers Böll, Grass, and Celan, else writing is a pointless pursuit.

The optimism mentioned also lets itself be felt in Heidegger’s work, as he continues to fulfill his self-proclaimed role of guardian of the house of Being. Continuing in Heidegger’s “Letter,” the reader encounters further consideration of the imminent danger of language’s deterioration and dilapidation:

Die überall und rasch fortwuchernde Verödung der Sprache zehrt nicht nur an der ästhetischen und moralischen Verantwortung in allem Sprachgebrauch. Sie kommt aus einer Gefährdung des Wesens des Menschen. [. . .] Der neuerdings viel und reichlich spät beredete Sprachverfall ist jedoch nicht der Grund, sondern bereits eine Folge des Vorgangs, daß die Sprache unter der Herrschaft der neuzeitlichen Metaphysik der Subjektivität fast unaufhaltsam aus ihrem Element herausfällt. Die Sprache verweigert uns noch ihr Wesen: daß sie das Haus der Wahrheit des Seins ist.

Die Sprache überlässt sich vielmehr unserem bloßen Wollen und Betreiben als ein Instrument der Herrschaft über das Seiende. (G 9:318)

Heidegger suggests language's instrumental role in obstructing man's access to Being, and the disrepair into which language falls and has fallen evidences distorted dislocation suffered under Cartesian subjectivity. Devoid of true relationships with things in the world, things that have no objective validity, man's potential to dwell (poetically) in the world has been almost completely lost. Thus, language may not only be insufficient to combat the ruining forces eroding language's capacity to signify, but language itself obstructs the recognition of the peril facing this "House of the Truth of Being." Language's deterioration is a consequence of the domination of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity, particularly because subjectivism limits perceptivity, infinitely isolating experience. Language's reflective function becomes divested of the realm of its referentiality, rendering the house of Being ruined.

Heidegger's thinking about ruins, however, was not merely philosophical. At a time when ruins pervaded Germany, Heidegger makes open allusion to the rubble. In "Bauen Denken Wohnen" (1951), Heidegger's comments on the *Wohnungsnot* bookend his thoughts on man's obliviousness in respect to the ontological function of "dwelling"; one may assume from the significant position of these statements, that Heidegger perceives the presence of ruins as presenting an opportunity to propose a way of thinking about ruins, a kind of *Trümmerphilosophie*. Speaking of derelict structures and ruined buildings, Heidegger writes:

Die genannten Bauten behausen den Menschen. Er bewohnt sie und wohnt gleichwohl nicht in ihnen, wenn Wohnen nur heißt, daß wir eine Unterkunft innehaben. Bei der heutigen Wohnungsnot bleibt freilich dies schon beruhigend und

erfreulich; Wohnbauten gewähren wohl Unterkunft [. . .] aber: bergen die Wohnungen schon die Gewähr in sich, daß ein *Wohnen* geschieht? (G 7:147).

A second and similar comment comes at the end of the essay, framing Heidegger's thoughts on dwelling within the rubble and ruins of the prevalent temporal conditions:

Wie steht es mit dem Wohnen in unserer bedenklichen Zeit? Man spricht allenthalben und mit Grund von der Wohnungsnot. Man redet nicht nur, man legt Hand an. Man versucht, die Not durch Beschaffung von Wohnungen, durch Förderung des Wohnungsbaues, durch Planung des ganzen Bauwesens zu beheben. So hart und bitter, so hemmend und bedrohlich der Mangel an Wohnungen bleibt, die *eigentliche Not des Wohnens* besteht nicht erst im Fehlen von Wohnungen. Die *eigentliche Wohnungsnot* ist auch älter als die Weltkriege und die Zerstörungen, älter auch denn das Ansteigen der Bevölkerungszahl auf der Erde und die Lage des Industrie-Arbeiters. Die *eigentliche Not des Wohnens* beruht darin, daß die Sterblichen das Wesen des Wohnens immer erst wieder suchen, daß sie *das Wohnen erst lernen müssen*. Wie, wenn die Heimatlosigkeit des Menschen darin bestünde, daß der Mensch die *eigentliche Wohnungsnot* noch gar nicht *als die* Not bedenkt? Sobald der Mensch jedoch die Heimatlosigkeit *bedenkt*, ist sie bereits kein Elend mehr. Sie ist, recht bedacht und gut behalten, der einzige Zuspruch, der die Sterblichen in das Wohnen *ruft*. (G 7:163-4)

Heidegger makes identical references to the state of residential emergency in “. . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . .”. In this piece, as in “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” Heidegger considers the metaphysical practice of dwelling as transcending the *Wohnungsnot* of the rubble years (G 7:191). All of these examples demonstrate Heidegger's awareness of the rubble

conditions, a moment he exploits to suggest that man's thinking about dwelling is insufficient. Again, I propose that this philosophizing represents a kind of *Trümmerphilosophie*. Heidegger recognizes the housing shortage, but he also suggests that (modern) man perpetually dwells in a state of ruin.

A variation on Heidegger's theme of ruined language is the common perception among artists and thinkers that the status of German was sullied and spoiled, ruined in effect, after WWII. The manipulation and corruption of language, the perverse linguistics of annihilation in Hitler's Germany are the object of analysis in the work of Karin Doerr and Renate Birkenauer, respectively, in "Nazi-Deutsch: An Ideological Language of Exclusion, Domination and Annihilation" and "Selbstverständliche Begriffe und Schlagwörter aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus." Without citing specific examples of linguistic manipulation, it may be assumed that this perception of the German language as wounded and violated is a well-known problem of the postwar period, and something that most writers of German felt compelled to overcome in one way or another. Böll describes the corruptive quality of language in his first novel *Kreuz ohne Liebe*, first published posthumously in 2003: "Hans Bachem hätte nie zu sagen vermocht, wann dieses Gebäude, aus den Worten Führer, Sieg und Deutschland gebildet, angefangen hatte, in ihm zu wanken [. . .]" (218). Connecting destructive ideological linguistics to the image of a structure, now in ruins, Böll instantiates the postwar problem of language that gave rise to the so-called *Kahlschligliteratur*. Böll, Grass, and Celan all react to this problem, though in distinctly different ways, and Böll presents the logical entry point on the spectrum.

As mentioned, Böll's language resembles in many ways that of the movement known as *Kahlschlagliteratur*, referenced briefly in earlier chapters. This ideal of a clean sweep,

offering a freshly leveled field, attempts to return language to its essential and elemental form. This proved an impossible ideal, though, as language retains traces of which we are often unaware, and even the most conscientious objector often exploits expressions with vestiges of linguistic deterioration and decay. Still, it is clear that the group's deliberate approach toward language, employing a limited linguistic register and limiting form to bare crystal clarity, presents an effort to reinvigorate the language through simplification. There is a pronounced hope of jolting language into reawakened authenticity through unpretending sincerity. Heinrich Böll belongs to this mindset, preferring simplicity in language, allowing the momentum of narrative and the power of his characters and narrative landscape to appear. Böll's critics discount the simple style, which I would describe first as strikingly genuine, and second as journalistic, but I read this style as conscious engagement with the problem of language.

The ideal of new clarity held by Böll and others presents a view similar to Zola's, who formulated the need for clarity and simplicity, demanding "crystal-clear sentences so clear and simple that the ingenious eye of a child could penetrate them, delight in them, remember them. I want ideas so true and bare, that they themselves appear to be transparent as well as solid, like diamonds in the crystal of the sentence" (Hamon 76). Zola's ruined Paris, littered with thrown-down statues and edifices in the brief reign of the Paris Communes (March to May, 1871), is a rough analogue to Germany's state of ruin. Both cases present a literary landscape of language which (de)structurally emulates the rubble and ruins of the physical landscape. Like Zola, Böll held the view that the state of language was something very different from clear, far from transparent and bare. It was obvious after WWII that language had been become impenetrably opaque and dark, that it had been

tainted. The only way to excise this linguistic ulcer was a return to language free of obfuscating intellectualism and esoteric aestheticism.

Günter Eich's poem "Inventur" presents an important example of the revalidated relationship to common words and things, exemplifying the quintessence of this positivistic approach to language by means of a genuine reintroduction to objects. Although the poem's narrator is obviously homeless, his powerful attachment to things – like the nail with which he has scratched his name into his other possessions, and his pencil lead and notebook – presents an existence in the world of relations to things invested with meaning. Especially in the instance of the treasured implements of writing, Eich's poetic speaker appears to have found a home, in language and in the redemptive knowledge of his own power to produce language. More important than habitation, this seems an achievement of Heideggerian dwelling in language as the house of Being.

Dies ist meine Mütze,  
dies ist mein Mantel  
hier mein Rasierzeug  
im Beutel aus Leinen.

Konservenbüchse:  
Mein Teller, mein Becher,  
ich hab in das Weißblech  
den Namen geritzt

Geritzt hier mit diesem  
kostbaren Nagel,  
den vor begehrliehen  
Augen ich berge.

Im Brotbeutel sind  
ein Paar wollene Socken  
und einiges, was sich  
niemand verrate,

so dient es als Kissen  
nachts meinem Kopf.

Die Pappe hier liegt  
zwischen mir und der Erde.

Die Bleistiftsmine  
lieb ich am meisten:  
Tags schreibt sie mir Verse,  
die nachts ich erdacht.

Dies ist mein Notizbuch,  
dies meine Zeltbahn,  
dies ist mein Handtuch,  
dies ist mein Zwirn.

Even in homelessness, unhoused and exposed, Eich's poetic narrator achieves a poetical dwelling. These lines are utterly bereft of adornment. Everything lies exposed – almost everything. The limits of this style are felt, however, at the edge of this exposition. The speaker mentions two things that he attempts to conceal, despite the inventorial intentions of the poem to reveal and disclose: the nail, and “einiges, was sich / niemand verrate.” The simultaneity of absolute exposition and partial concealment is a problem that pervades Trümmerliteratur, and it will be part of the topic of the next chapter.

In Heinrich Böll's work there is a suggestive resonance of linguistic register and topic with the Günter Eich poem, a validation of quotidian being, low and unremarkable. Böll's figures characteristically inhabit the margins where things as such provide a final rung of ontic being, after slipping from society's net of interreferentiality. The things to which Böll's characters usually form attachments are cigarettes and bread. In the short story “Der Geschmack des Brotes” (1955) for example, Böll presents the common image of a character hungering and longing for bread. The language Böll employs makes this an uncommon scene, however, and this language is reduced to the essential truth of the rubble years: “Er aß Brot. Das Brot war alt, sicher eine Woche alt, trockenes Graubrot mit einer rötlichen Pappemarke von irgendeiner Fabrik. Er grub weiter mit den Zähnen” (*Heidelberg* 39). The

sentences tend toward a simplicity characteristic of children, “Er aß Brot. Das Brot war alt.” This uncomplicated language uncovers a vulnerability, though, revealing the house of Being as fitting for its being, but not an ostentatious house of verbosity and loquaciousness, rather the writer necessarily ruins language. In a sense, Böll’s language compensates for the destroyed sense of personal validity and identity in vaunted language, providing a linguistic frame adequate for the subject.

Another example of this urgent simplicity is found in Böll’s story “Aschermittwoch” (1951), in which the main figure, Willi, approaches a former lover for money. Coming into her shop, she greets him eagerly, then asks how he is. His laconic response, “‘Schlecht,’ sagte er heftig, ‘sehr schlecht.’” This exchange continues, and Willi admits that he no longer works for Brecht. It then occurs to him why he came: “Er blickte ihr nachdenklich zu. Nur deswegen war er hergekommen, es fiel ihm jetzt wieder ein. Wegen Geld. Er brauchte Geld” (*Heidelberg* 21). This character is an artist, having worked for Brecht – presumably on stage design, as he comments that “sie haben bessere Graphiker” –, and his observations tend at times toward artistic sensitivity; a description of rain running down a window pane is particularly painterly. Short jolts of language illuminate the pervasive state of ruin, however, and language breaks down, producing a kind of retreat into the neighborhood of uncomplicated clarity. The economy of language expresses more than flowery descriptions, and human Being presents itself, just as devastated as the language in which it dwells.

Perhaps the clearest example of Böll’s simplistic, genuine language is the short story “An der Angel” (1950). This short story depicts roughly the same character who surfaces in Böll’s other work: he is alone and poor, but he throws all of his soul into some tired point of hopefulness. In this case, the story’s protagonist rides the metro every day to the train

station, where he waits on the one-twenty train, because his beloved had telegraphed him that she would come with that train. Three months and four days have passed since the telegram was sent, announcing the potential arrival on the platform, and the story's narrator has travelled to the train station every single day, leaving him without even the money for his return ticket. The story begins in language of desperate straightforwardness:

Ich weiß, daß alles töricht ist. Ich sollte gar nicht mehr dorthin gehen; es ist so sinnlos, und doch lebe ich davon, dorthin zu gehen. Es ist eine einzige Minute Hoffnung und dreiundzwanzig Stunden und neunundfünfzig Minuten Verzweiflung. Davon lebe ich. Das ist nicht viel, das ist fast gar keine Substanz. Ich sollte nicht mehr dorthin gehen. Ich gehe kaputt dabei, das ist es: es macht mich kaputt. Aber ich muß, ich muß, ich muß dorthin gehen . . . (*Wanderer* 174)

The narrator repeats these simple phrases, expressing more of his being in their open inadequacy and unsophisticated, unstyled clarity than in complex formulations and distracting formal complexity.

The title of this story, "An der Angel," implies a feeling a being hooked by an angler, an incredible sense of powerlessness. When the train comes everyday empty, the narrator projects a sinister complicity onto the figure of the signal man on the platform. He says again and again, "Denn der Man mit dem Winklöffel – ich traue ihm nicht. Ich weiß nicht, ob sein Mitleid gespielt ist; vielleicht ist sein Mitleid gespielt" (ibid). Again there are repeated phrases of simplicity, very evocative though perhaps less sophisticated than more complicated language. Indeed, part of the narrator's distrust of the signal man originates in language itself. Each day, the signal man meets the story's narrator with courteousness, "Auch heute keine Verspätung gemeldet, mein Herr," to which the narrator angrily reacts,

“Schon, daß er ‘Mein Herr’ sagt, ist eine Gemeinheit. Ich bin gar kein Herr, ich bin ein abgerissenes armes Schwein, das von einer einzigen Minute Hoffnung am Tage lebt. Sonst nichts. Ich bin kein Herr, ich schieß auf sein ‘Mein Herr’” (177). The employment of the official language of formality is perceived by the protagonist as another type of domination, the instrument of which is language, recalling Heidegger’s description of language as an “Instrument der Herrschaft über das Seiende” (G 9:318).

In “Die Stimme Wolfgang Borcherts,” Böll describes *Dichtung* as ideally resembling reportage. The initial glimpse of the thing is a journalistic report, and it is the responsibility of the writer (*Dichter*) to give a voice to that which cannot speak, to relate events that have not been seen, to examine man radiologically, to tell the story of those who have no story. Thus, Böll’s stylistic determination is, in essence, to follow a newspaper mode. Böll’s literary ideals are feuilletonists, as they understood the curious genre of journalism that came to prominence in the early years of the twentieth century. Joseph Roth, for example, is one of the writers to whom Böll pays tribute.

Heinz Fischer highlights Böll’s tendency toward simple, unpretentious language, taking as a succinct example the short story “An der Brücke” (Fischer 374), in which Böll’s narrator finds freshness for a phrase many would describe as empty and hollow. With the ingenuousness of the simple, almost meaningless, refusal to count the girl to the number of pedestrians who have passed over the bridge, Böll reinvests meaning into an empty phrase: “Ich liebe sie. Es ist ganz klar, daß ich sie liebe” (*Wanderer* 81). The narrator refuses to translate his “kleine ungezählte Geliebte” into statistical matter, and it is this small refusal, this simple rejection that validates his claim, “Es ist ganz klar, daß ich sie liebe.” Böll truly achieves clarity in simplicity. Backgrounded by ruins, Böll’s characters find their way back

into language's clearing, rediscovering language's capacity to express. Fischer calls this Böll's "Renovatio der Sprache" (374).

Another example of Böll's reliance on more "primitive" *Wortgut* is in the expressibility in a cough, in the story "Husten im Konzert" (1952). The speaker suffers neurotic coughing attacks when sitting in concerts with the "wohlerzogene Leute" of the city. The narrator avoids softer, reflective musical performances, which he feels neurotically compelled to interrupt with explosive coughs, disrupting and distracting, even ruining the concert for the other concert-goers; he attends rather "Männerchöre Gesänge wie 'Donnergrollen' oder 'Die Lawinen' [. . .] Kunstwerke, bei denen ein gewisses Quantum an Fortissimo garantiert ist. Aber gerade diese Art der Musik interessiert mich weniger" (*Heidelberg* 29). His reaction to the aesthetic presentation is an uncontrollable need sonically to irrupt into the performance, expressing something which is both beneath and beyond words. This form of expression is revisited in Böll's later story "Der Husten meines Vaters" (1977), in which Böll describes the expressiveness of a slight rasping cough: "Das l'art pour l'art des Hustens und des Hüstelns. Es wäre auch zu überlegen, ob kluge Köpfe nicht den gehüstelten Leserbrief erfinden sollten" (*Heidelberg* 73). This is primitive language, preceding verbal expression, revealing the discursive potential of ruined word matter.

Having considered Böll's simplifying, minimal language as the first and most conservative point on the spectrum of linguistic approaches to a writing of German writing after all that had been inflicted on the German language, we turn now to Günter Grass. Grass provides a strong contrast with Böll's writing style, as his language could never accurately be described as minimal or simplistic. Grass attacks language in a very different way. When

Oskar describes the innocent or virgin paper in the *Tin Drum*, the reader gets a sense of Grass's metaphoric view of the function of language and writing: it is a ravaging, ravishing, destroying act, which results in extraordinary newness, essentially a (re)birth. Thus, despite the disparate methods in motif and style, Grass's use of language has the same ultimate telos as Heinrich Böll's, namely allowing things to appear, enabling us immediately to reengage the world of things and people. While Böll fosters this immediacy by stripping language to its essence, its bare simplicity, Günter Grass attacks language, requiring it to *speak* again, and *speaking* is where Grass begins.

Heinz Fischer's study of the linguistic tendencies of Grass and Böll, mentioned above in describing Böll's simple language, correctly highlights Grass's incorporation of speech into his writing, assuming that both Böll and Grass are not only aware of but consciously engaging and problematizing the "impotence" or even the "death" of the German language in 1945 (Fischer 372). Grass's common employment of idiomatic language lends vitality and vibrancy of expression, easily observable even in consideration of Grass's titles. In what Fischer calls an "idiomatic ballet," Grass parades parodies and retrofitted idioms in order to liberate language from our expectations. There is an eroticization of names, such as *Inge* and *Elke* in Walter Matern's vengeful adventures through the countryside. This linguistic practice begins, "und Namen, entzündet an Ingeloch" (*Hundejahre* 493), after which comes a rush of nominal compounds, all sexually charged, "Ingeknie – Lutschinge – Ingeschrei [. . .]" (ibid); Fusing Borchert's Beckmann with Schiller's *Räuber* Franz and Karl Moor, Matern renders his next visit to Hauptmann Erich Hufnagel, whose daughter Elke becomes the object of Matern's perverse enthusiasm, resulting in a similar sexualization of the linguistic material of the name: "das Elkegemach, um den Füller. Aber da ist er willkommen und vermag sich

am Vater zu rächen, indem er die Tochter: Elkeblut fließt nachweisbar: ‘Du bist der erste, der’” (*Hj* 501). This short passage also instantiates Grass’s practice of fracturing language, allowing the reader to anticipate, essentially producing a reading of ruins. Fragment sentences present meaning in discernible fashion, although important elements are absent. The line clearly implies that Matern will violate Elke’s virginal bed, that the initial act of intercourse will provide bloody proof: “vermag sich am Vater zu rächen, indem er die Tochter: Elkeblut fließt nachweisbar: ‘Du bist der erste, der.” Like the experience of reading a ruin, Grass’s fragmentation of language requires anticipatory reading, filling in the blanks, a strategy that places considerable responsibility on the reader to negotiate language’s rubble.

Some important elements of the early oeuvre of Günter Grass that this study necessarily neglects are his poetic and dramatic works. One poem’s language that deserves at least brief mention, however, in a discussion of rubble language is the piece entitled “Die große Trümmerfrau spricht” from the volume *Gleisdreieck* (1960). This poem is composed of twenty-three stanzas, each of five lines; in the first line of each stanza a single word is repeated, such as “Ich ich ich ich” and “Trümmerfrau Trümmerfrau.” Consisting of concrete imagery consonant with the motif of rubble writing, the poem proceeds through this series of haikuesque stanzas celebrating the discrete thingness of objects, concluding with “Amen Amen. / Hingestreu liegt Berlin. / Staub fliegt auf, / dann wieder Flaute. / Die große Trümmerfrau wird heiliggesprochen” (*Gedichte* 126).

Other portions of Grass’s work are distinctively “spoken,” especially in the case of Grass’s excellent orthographic approximations of regional pronunciation, producing Gutenberg as “Kuddenpäch” (*Hundejahre* 270), and there are many other similar examples where phonetic transcriptions of dialectal German present language that hardly resembles

official orthography while absolutely producing meaning, thus allowing language to escape from officiousness into genuine evocation and communication. Put in other words, Grass produces a naive form of language that manages to speak clearly by evading regulated formality. Also, Grass's narrators often speak conversationally, (conveniently) forgetting things, eliding details, and inserting editorial asides. There are significant departures from this style, though, that form some of the novels' most important connections with language and its state of ruin. The foremost example of this is in Grass's treatment of Martin Heidegger.

Grass's parodic treatment of Heideggerian language in *Hundejahre* is extensive, and its presence is obvious. Heideggerianisms bubble out of the mouths of characters involved in murderous violence, key technical terms from Heidegger's specialized register are employed – although bereft of Heidegger's particular extensions of their lexical values, and the utilization of Heideggerian language comes to exclude other narrative language as the *Dog Years* progresses. This single element of Grass's language becomes so dominant in *Hundejahre* that one must ask, with Sascha Kiefer, “ob das Spiel mit dem Heideggerschen Sprachelementen nicht zu breiten Raum einnimmt und einfach überreizt wird” (249). Grass's criticisms of Heidegger are clear, dramatically demonstrated most succinctly in the case of the rat extermination at the anti-aircraft flak battery: an artificial *Gymnasiastensprache* develops, and Störtebeker exploits this language most effectively by using Heideggerian language to lure the rats to their extermination. Like the flute of the *Rattenfänger* of Hameln, explicitly alluded to in the text (396), Heideggerdeutsch seduces the rats toward their own extermination when Störtebeker whispers “mit eigener aber von des Feldwebels dunkel gefärbter Zunge Rattensätze und ontologische Rattenwahrheiten, die ihm,

so glaubten alle, die Beute in dem Zugriff des Handschuhes lockten und ihm den überschwingenden Entzug erlaubten” (399).

Again, the critique is really quite obvious, even overwhelmingly apparent. Heideggerian language usage may be overly inflated and may obstruct the view of problems themselves, even contribute to the problems – an admission that Heidegger makes, as mentioned above, in the “Letter on Humanism.” Given Heidegger’s confession on this topic, one must ask what it is about Heidegger that compelled Grass to grant the philosopher such extensive treatment. Certainly the question of language

One possible explanation may be found in the problem of Heidegger’s involvement in National Socialism. With Grass’s own belated confession of having belonged to the SS, however, I would suggest that this explanation has only gained validity. Grass’s troubled conscience invents figures like Walter Matern, a violent and unscrupulous character whose ideological rage takes his own best friend as his object; among Matern’s later judgments and condemnations, Heidegger’s resounds most loudly. Perhaps the most compelling answer to the question of why the problem of Heidegger obsesses Grass is that it mirrors Grass’s own problem. Grass’s undisclosed complicity expresses itself in anger toward and condemnation of the famous thinker, who refused to divulge details of his involvement. Seen as a self-reflexive condemnation, Grass’s criticisms of Heidegger transform language into a ruined medium for the exposition of truth. Language’s purpose as a weft of interrelations and cross-connecting referentiality is derailed, and the writer experiences insularity, cut off from language’s authenticity. And it is in this corrupted medium of language that Grass couches self-criticism, in hyperbolized figures, while simultaneously and paradoxically demonstrating language’s ruin and inadequacy. Matern futilely urinates in Heidegger’s mailbox, and Grass

futilely flails at the rubble structure of language that refuses to disclose everything. Grass's language of ruins finally emphasizes frustration with language's own complicity, allowing criminal silence to perpetuate itself while talk fills the room.

The voluminous novel concludes hopefully, however, when Matern and Amsel emerge from the potash mine and bathe in language's newfound simplicity: "Jetzt steige auch ich ins Bad. Das Wasser laugt uns ab. Eddi pfeift etwas Unbestimmtes. Ich versuche ähnliches zu pfeifen. Doch das ist schwer. Beide sind wir nackt. Jeder badet für sich" (744). The brief clarity of these images, in the vehicle of a simplified language, even achieves an idyllic quality. The conscious acceptance of the ruination of language, and the new affirmation of authenticity in language, produce an opportunity to return home into its genuine shelter, for Matern, for Amsel, for Heidegger, and for Grass himself. This second point along the spectrum of ruinist voices lets itself be divided, decrying a discursive tradition of misdirection while simultaneously producing this language, although in parody.

The final and most radical voice along this range of responses to the problem of language's ruin is Paul Celan. Celan's use of language defamiliarizes the reader's own language to such an extent that even noted critics and philosophers misinterpret particular passages of Celan's work because this poet's language can be so unexpected, privileging forgotten connotations of words we think we know. In this sense, Celan is very much like Heidegger, who performs philosophical analysis by citing the ruined state of linguistic materials: the word *bauen* serves as a quintessential example, from the essay "Bauen Wohnen Denken." According to Heidegger's etymological exegesis, the word *bauen* eventually became emptied of its original value, but "eine versteckte Spur hat sich noch im Wort 'Nachbar' erhalten. Der Nachbar ist der 'Nachgebauer,' derjenige, der in der Nähe

wohnt. [. . .] Der eigentliche Sinn des Bauens, nämlich das Wohnen, gerät in die Vergessenheit” (G 7:148-49). This fundamental view of the emptying of meaning and the retention of traces and remnants of meaning and signification in the ruining morphological violence of linguistics is a view also held by Celan.

Celan’s long and problematic relationship with Heidegger, both intellectually and briefly as a personal acquaintance, is the subject of the recent scholarship on this important postwar poet. James K. Lyon explores the extent to which Celan was influenced by Heidegger.<sup>6</sup> Repeated and careful readings of the thinker’s philosophical texts easily demonstrate Celan’s obsession, despite the poet’s open criticisms and denunciations of Heidegger for his failure to apologize for his involvement with the National Socialists. What obsessed the poet more than anything else about Heidegger’s thought is the point of a sympathetic perception of language, primarily as Heidegger formulates this problem in his postwar period.

Celan’s use of language may be described as ruinist by dividing it into three distinct practices. First is the assumption that the vastest portion of language produced in our age, making up the superstructure of the house of Being, is essentially devoid of expression; second, the way to let language return to language is through a destructive production of poetic language, privileging the excavated etymologies of antique or obscure word matter over the empty and hollow presence of modern language; and the third level of ruin imagery is a rhetoric of ruin pronounced through utilization and implementation of technical diction, particularly for this study, geological diction, which parallels the romantic mode of ruin writing where a similar register prevails in presenting the ruin image.

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<sup>6</sup> *Paul Celan & Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951-1970*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

The poet's view of language clearly shows affinities with Heidegger's. Lyon catalogues and documents the crossover, not only of thought but of terms that Celan imports from Heidegger's work, which Celan thoroughly studied until his death. For instance, the term *Gerede*, as found for instance in Celan's "Weggebeizt," is one of Celan's clear borrowings from Heidegger's project. This "idle talk" expresses the same problem introduced by Emily Dickinson: "The Ultimate of Talk – / The Impotence to Tell" (407). Both Heidegger and Celan hold this view that language's expressiveness is severely limited, which in turn limits man's capacity to comprehend the world. This constrained dwelling in the world is a primary point in Heidegger's philosophy, and it certainly resonates with the notion of language's state of ruin as I am addressing it. Similarly, Celan's clear employment of Heideggerian thought in the application of the term *zeltlos*, is another example of this connection, while also illustrating the motif of ruins. Lyon writes:

Further traces of Heidegger's diction and thought surface [. . .]. When he speaks of man as being "tentless" (*zeltlos*), meaning unsheltered, the poet almost certainly is alluding to and taking issue with Heidegger's concept of the house of language that traditionally provided shelter and security to poets. After the Third Reich had almost destroyed the German language for him and others, Heidegger's house of language offered no more shelter or protection to poets who are now exposed "in a state undreamt of till now" (in diesem bisher ungeahnten Sinne). (87)

Lyon addresses a passage from Celan's Bremen speech in 1958 (3:186), which clearly demonstrates the same state of homelessness, the dereliction and ruin of the so-called house of Being, that has been the topic of this analysis.

Both Celan and Heidegger believe attempts must be made to (re)vitalize language, revealing the assumption that the house of Being, of which “die Dichtenden und Denkenden” are the “Wächter” – as Heidegger declares in the “Letter on Humanism” –, and both mine the ruins of antiquated words, holding up etymological fossils. Celan particularly admired Heidegger’s inventive attitude toward language – exactly the point Adorno criticizes most harshly. The poet admired Heidegger’s “revolutionary attempt to create [. . .] new clarity of thought and ideas by disassembling, reassembling, etymologizing, and reinventing German or otherwise standing it on its head” (Lyon 207). This description of mechanical-constructive assembly has a strong ring of language as having an architectural structure. Both men pursue the goal in their “Renovatio der Sprache” to penetrate language’s essence to gain entrance into a consciousness of being, to break through the impenetrability of idle talk and discover what language can tell.

This last point is demonstrated most clearly in Celan’s poem “Ein Blatt.” This poem alludes to Bertolt Brecht’s poem “An die Nachgeborenen,” and the heart of Celan’s poem is the significant rethinking of Brecht’s line, “Was sind das für Zeiten, wo / Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist / Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!” Celan’s reversal sets the line thus: “Was sind das für Zeiten, / wo ein Gespräch / beinah ein Verbrechen ist, / weil es soviel Gesagtes / mit einschließt?” (2:385). There is a criminality to conversation, idle talk that not only includes our silences but our talk’s ultimate impotence to tell, to reformulate Emily Dickinson. Celan’s *Anreicherung* (enrichment) of the language through such technical terms as this one from the vocabulary of the mining industry is an attempt to clear away the rubble of meaningless language while retaining certain of the ruined edifices of language’s past.

Celan's erosive art finds expression in his extensive exploitation of geological technemes. In an article entitled "Paul Celan's Language of Stone: The Geology of the Poetic Landscape," Lyon interprets the ubiquitous images of geological activity as serving several functions, among which the most important for this study is that "they signify the poet's attack on the prostituted, corrupted speech of poets who prefer superficial words to bedrock language" (311). Essentially, this is the erosive power of language, as instantiated in "Weggebeizt": "Weggebeizt / vom Strahlenwind deiner Sprache / das bunte Gerede des An - / erlebten" (2:31). The poems already addressed in the chapter on Celan's use of ruin imagery contain, almost without exception, some specialized technical terms from the earth sciences. Another poem from *Atemwende* presents geological violence even more forcefully. "Wortaufschüttung" comes just two poems before "Weggebeizt," and it begins with a creative compound word that exemplifies Celan's view of language's eruptive geology: "Wortaufschüttung, vulkanisch" (2:29). This poem is pocked by craters and the meteoric impacts that constitute the dynamic generative force of geology. This destruction engenders powerful development, born in the rubble of the preexistent materials.

My interpretation of these geological and erosive images as relating ultimately to ruins is also founded in the historical development of a language of ruins. Romantic ruinists, men interested in the sciences as much as poetry and literature, exported the discursive register of ruins, equipping themselves with metaphorical conceptions for the new science of geology. Heather Sullivan begins her study of ruins in the Age of Goethe with a quote from John Whitehurst:

In his 1778 text, *An Inquiry into the Original State and Formation of the Earth*, John Whitehurst writes of the 'terraqueous globe' that having been 'burst into millions of

fragments . . . must certainly be thrown into strange heaps of ruins . . . .’ Whitehurst is not alone in extending the eighteenth-century fascination with ideas of ruins into early geology. In the rapidly proliferating texts analyzing the history of the earth as a field in its own right, scientists [. . .] describe the entire surface of the earth as a conglomeration of ruins of previous worlds. (Sullivan 1)

This kind of borrowing is a linguistic necessity in new fields of knowledge, where no set of terms exists to describe phenomena still in the stage of analysis. International influence is most easily observable in the borrowing of foreign words to describe things for which our language has no words, just as the new field of a science of the earth employs phrases such as “strange heaps of ruins” to describe the effects of geological upheavals and crashes.

The exchange is neither entirely one-sided nor limited to that initial moment of geology’s burgeoning scientific validity. Subsequent ruinists consistently use technical terms, a vocabulary of earth sciences, to characterize the ruins. Janowitz describes this backwards borrowing in the case of Wordsworth’s poetic fragment *Prelude*, to which critics reacted by drawing from “the fashionable lexicon of the new paleontological science to find an adequate descriptive language [. . .]. Ruin metaphors culled from eighteenth-century ruin sentiment had become, by 1850, only one source of imagery for describing the poem fragment. The vocabulary of the ruin was augmented by images and terms borrowed from Victorian evolutionary, geological, and archeological vocabularies” (Janowitz 127). As Janowitz notes, the language of ruins had become, by 1850, inexorably interwoven with techemes and metaphors founded in scientific language. By 1907, when Georg Simmel wrote his essay “Die Ruine,” nothing had changed. Simmel’s primary metaphor in speaking of ruins is geological: “The ruin conveys the impression of peace [. . .]. On the one side of that

typical conflict stood the purely external form or symbolism of peace: the contour of the mountain as defined by the building-up and the breaking-down” (264). This mountainous dialectic presents ”something unfinishable and formless, which breaks every frame” (264).

Reading Celan’s geological vocabulary as a register of ruins produces yet another layer to the incredibly multivalent oeuvre of this important postwar poet. This consideration of Celan’s language, though, demands more careful treatment of the language of ruins and perhaps the ruin of language. This chapter has repeatedly intruded on this subject, but this appears inevitable in a discussion of Paul Celan. Although language is the medium of all poetry, few poets focus on language to an extent similar to Celan.

The final point on Celan’s language of ruins is the attempt made to create a sort of negative space. This is an important move in contemporary architecture of ruins, namely in the work of Daniel Liebeskind and Lebbeus Woods, both of whom believe “that to build over a place of ruins would be a suppression and a denial of what has come to pass (Merewether 33). Rather than a restoration or final erasure, these architects produce anti-monuments, building true ruin that presents negative space as a “place for the ruins that remain” (ibid). This establishment of the anti-monument, as well as the anti-poem, is precisely what Celan does with the “Niemandrose,” the “Genicht,” and the many uses and variations of “das Nichts.” Celan’s negative entities and his poetic language – the ruined structure of man’s dwelling – are similar to Philippe Hamon’s suggestion that ruins present a threefold erasure: first, the architectural object itself is erased; second, meaning is erased and ruins become meaningless runes; third, the subject is erased, the “contemplative subject becomes absorbed, loses himself” (Hamon 63). This erasive effect of ruins is reproduced in every reading of the three ruinists addressed in this study, all of whom subject language to destructive forces, thus

eradicating the very object of production, which suggests a (potential) loss of meaning, while simultaneously revitalizing the linguistic ruin, enabling it to produce meaning again. Finally, the reader is consumed; each of these writers offers an overwhelming experience of ruin, and somehow these literary ruins manage to tell.

## Chapter 6

### Throwing Rocks in Glass Houses: Ruins and Transparency, Exposition via Destruction, and Temporal Explorations of Heterotopic Space

La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle  
s'expose.

- Paul Celan

Proceeding from the notion of language's crystal clarity, a language that engages and reproduces ruins while emulating them, we come finally to another notion of transparency. In the ruined structure are chinks and holes, sometimes entire walls are missing, allowing an intimate view of things otherwise sheltered and protected. In the sense that ruins invite observation through all the chinks and cracks, these ruins of dwelling present a type of "Glass Houses" to borrow Hamon's term. This architecture of inclusion of exteriorities and exhibition of intimate interiorities is traversed by Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, and Paul Celan in very different ways, however the motif of *exposé*, exposition, and revelation runs through the work of all three. Heinrich Böll produces a New Flâneur – a strolling guide, who instructs how the ruined city may be navigated and understood. Günter Grass develops figures who are more interested in exhibitionism and personal exposure than in guiding instruction, but the spectacle of destruction also enables the viewer to glimpse the transparency of ruins as glass houses. Finally there is Celan's problematic relationship to exposure, which is constituted as much by what is concealed as what is revealed.

Philippe Hamon suggests that the obsessive expositionism that marked nineteenth-century Paris is linked, philosophically and architecturally, to the ruin. Hamon's thinking seems founded in two sources, Benjamin and Hegel. Benjamin appears to be the primary tutelary influence in Hamon's *flânerie*, providing the mode of engaging the work of art or the

object of observation. The Hegelian influence is felt in Hamon's fundamental concept of the architectural as essentially textual, utilizing Hegel's assertion of architecture's primacy (found in the word *arché*), that it is thus the beginning as well as the arche-type of all art in terms of our capacity to psychically inhabit the aesthetic space created by a given work of art. Hamon focuses, in relationship to ruins, on the panoptical mode of viewing, which he suggests both anticipates the ruin and reproduces it in the sense of transparency, facilitating the viewer's entrance into the space in which man dwells.

Much of Walter Benjamin's so-called *Passagen-Werk*, assembled posthumously by Rolf Tiedemann in collaboration with Theodor Adorno and Gershom Scholem, concerns itself with Charles Baudelaire. Thence comes much of Benjamin's theory of the artist's relationship to the big city, exemplified in the character of the flâneur. In Baudelaire's essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (*Le peintre de la vie moderne*), he describes this figure: "Observer, philosopher, flâneur – he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains" (Baudelaire 4-5). Baudelaire invents the icon of a man with artistic sensibilities and a poetic disposition who feels *more*, like a convalescent who must relearn living itself, therefore feeling more intensely than the jaded adults who have repeatedly seen and consequently forgotten. "The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*" (8).

The form and forum of these strolling observers of the modern experience was the early exposé, the feuilleton. Wilmont Haacke's *Handbuch des Feuilletons*, one of the first attempts at a definition of this literary phenomenon, locates this enigmatic form spatially: "Die *kleine Form*. Gemeint ist damit die bisher nicht leicht einzuordnende, in der Presse meistens unter dem Strich beheimatete, höchst mannigfaltige Literaturgattung der kürzeren

Prosastücke [. . .]” (cited in Köhn 10). Haacke’s handbook continues to describe the object of the feuilleton, effectively, as everything – and nothing. In *Reading Berlin 1900*, Peter Fritzsche describes the *Entstehungsgeschichte* of the feuilleton as being inseparably connected with the rise of the modern city, that this “Kleinkunst was essentially kaleidoscopic,” offering exposés and essays on the diverse problems of modern life in the *Großstadt*. Seen anthropologically, the feuilleton initially enjoyed a kind of symbiotic relationship, owing its survival to the influx of millions into the grand urban centers while also ensuring the survival of these millions by offering a kind of initiatory journalism. The flânering feuilletonist acted as a guide, personally discovering and exploring the city in order to expose the unfamiliar for the culturally disoriented reader. All of the constituent elements of human existence were radically altered with the advent of urban living. Time’s pulse was felt in radically different ways; space was stacked vertically instead of spreading horizontally; and human relationships were restricted, as modern work lost its communality.

It should be mentioned that this literary Feuilletonism is not universally perceived as something to be heralded. The term *Feuilletonismus* is sometimes employed ironically to lambast a style of writing that micromanages the meaningless minutiae of a world already too complicated. In *Das Glasperlenspiel* (1943)<sup>7</sup>, Hermann Hesse critically labels the early part of the twentieth century as “das feuilletonistische Zeitalter” (17ff.). The figure of Christian Buddenbrook in Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks* is presented as a sort of flâneur-figure, whose “allzu große Schwäche für die Zerstreungen der Weltstadt” (237), as well as his indiscrete fascinations provoke his siblings to comment, “Er geht so merkwürdig ins Detail, dünkt mich . . . oder wie soll ich sagen! Er sieht die Dinge von einer so fremdartigen Seite

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<sup>7</sup> 1946 in Germany.

an, wie? [. . .] Ist es nicht, wie wenn Einer [sic] im Fieber spricht?" (264) – a picture that precisely matches Baudelaire's convalescent painter of the passing moment, exulting in the little diversions of the cosmopolitan city. This type of flâneur-inspired feuilletonism is often deemed unseemly, superficial, and even vulgar in the utterly common object of these observations. This fascinated interest in fragmented glimpses of existence is in direct opposition to the grand refinement of old society, and in this sense feuilletonism is a precursor to ruin writing, framing the fractured modern reality that some would prefer to suppress. Charles Dickens, one of the most popular writers of this periodical genre, receives clear though unnamed mention in Böll's *Bekanntnis zur Trümmerliteratur*.

Although the connection to the postwar German experience may not appear immediately obvious, consideration of the dramatic alterations to the *Großstadt*, almost unrecognizable after WWII, reveals the need for another sort of guide similar in function to Baudelaire's flâneur but distinct in mode of initiation. No longer is the flâneur an eccentric dandy whose flâneuristic experience is as much performance as apprehension. In fact, the postwar flâneur's inability to walk is an important wrinkle in the new variation on the theme. In his book *The Apocalyptic Vision*, Alan Keele highlights the thematic importance of the limping figure whose characteristic wound is of mythological as much historical value, and I suggest an extension of this theme. This is the art of walking ruined streets mangled by the most destructive war ever known, performed by a limping postwar hero who reinvents urban experience as the experience of exposition, of the indiscrete interest in the details offered by the "glass houses" lying shattered across Germany.

Beginning with Heinrich Böll, we turn first to the last of his novels to fall into the chronological period outlined for this study. *Ansichten eines Clowns*, published in 1963,

centers on the clown Hans Schnier, who reveals himself already in the first pages of the novel to be the prototypical flâneur. The clown Schnier has learned the art of walking in the bewildering urban space of bustling *Bahnen*, taxis, and buildings full of entrances and exits. In his performance, Schnier mimes every sort of strange and sometimes dangerous encounter with the world of machines in motion, automobiles in action, that Le Corbusier despised and denounced in “The Death of the Street” – a chapter in his monumental work of urban vision, *The Radiant City*. The clown is also clearly the ideal flâneur for walking as demonstration, flânerie as performance, stroll as spectacle. His routine demonstrates more than six hundred entrances and exits (Böll *Ansichten eines Clowns* 7). It is an entertaining introduction to the urban art of walking in and out, entering the swirling vortex of the street and exiting. The immediacy of powerful physical laws is experienced in the demonstration of feeling pulled out of one’s seat in the train while attempting to read and understand the City. On the stage, Schnier performs the walk as a kind of pedagogical demonstration; he guides the audience into the otherwise indiscernible practice of streetwalking, instructing the immigrant how to grapple with his new setting. Of course when Schnier injures himself while performing his mimic routine, his flâneuristic demonstration of the art of walking, this inability to walk complicates the demonstrative presentation of walking as artistic performance. Schnier becomes one of the many “hobbling heroes” whose pervasion of postwar German literature is analyzed by Keele (35, *passim*). Not only is the cityscape so radically altered by the widespread destruction, but the guide has lost the ability to walk. Böll offers a modification of the flâneur-figure.

Schnier’s flâneuristic demonstration of the art of walking after he “forgets how to walk,” becomes a traversing of the ruins of memory. He spends the bulk of the novel in his

room, phoning acquaintances whom he might persuade to lend him money. Schnier is ruined, financially as well as physically, and he walks instead through the City of his memory. He peruses remembered streets, shops (*Ansichten* 63), and rooms once inhabited with an almost Benjaminian sense of loss in the face of the ruined city. Here it is necessary to import a term from the epistemological studies by Michel Foucault: heterotopia. This is the site of colliding epistemes, the locus of multivalence. Foucault writes: “Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that” (*The Order of Things* xviii). In heterotopic space, difference is caused to appear. The anticipated homogeneity of adjacency is subverted, forcing opaque continuity into blaring transience in the case of the ruin.

Examples of this heterotopic collision are most evident in the image of ruins from Böll’s early short stories. When, for example in the titular story of the collection *Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa* (1950), where the narrator has been brought to a field hospital, which also happens to have been his former school, he recognizes certain incongruities. The alterations, first ideological and then functional, have rendered the place almost unrecognizable, though “mir kam alles so kalt vor, als hätten sie mich durch das Museum einer Totenstadt getragen, durch eine Welt, die mir ebenso gleichgültig wie fremd war, obwohl meine Augen sie erkannten, nur meine Augen” (*Wanderer* 41). The heterotopic collision allows a new kind of seeing, while restricting the other. The narrator finds himself in a school that has been redesigned to participate in the ideological reeducation, and the walls are hung with “Rassengesichter” which have been placed in adjacent absurdity beside “die drei Büsten von Cäsar, Cicero, [and] Marc Aurel” (36). This juxtaposition allows the ruined state of the school to speak, exposing the incongruence. Another similar example is

the shadow of the cross, which had hung above a door in the Thomas-Schule; attempts had clearly been made to paint over the dark yellow trace of the cross, but this had only rendered the cross “fast noch deutlicher zu sehen” (41). Even in its erased absence, the image of the cross appears, and this temporal anomaly, an ideological anachronism, facilitates the entrance into an awareness of the heterotopic quality of ruins.

The story “Achermittwoch” also utilizes this heterotopic value of ruined space, producing the “easy anachronism” (Roth 9) that typifies the temporality of ruins. Ducking wearily into a house’s entryway, Willi observes the structure:

Der schwarzliche Ölanstrich war nun vollkommen zerkratzt, aber die Holztafel, in der die Namenschilder und Klingelknöpfe befestigt waren, schien unbeschädigt: das Holz war mit Schmutz und Alter getränkt, fast Schwarz, die Klingelknöpfe blankgewetzt, und im Anblick der Schilder fiel er plötzlich durch die Gegenwart durch, zehn Jahre zurück, zwanzig, weit, weit in die Vergangenheit. (*Heidelberg* 19).

Falling into time through the gate of a *Holztafel*, Willi observes the past in the artifact’s presence, which suggests the absence felt through temporal distance. The tendency toward the inclusion of heterotopiae in Böll’s works allows a transcendent temporal transparency. In this sense, Böll significantly resembles uncanny Proustian time. There is something sublime and ineffable about the experience of ruins and the multitemporal weight that inhabits them.

Sublimity – both in a sense of the dangerous encounter with awesome forces, as well as the under-the-threshold experience of near imperceptibility – is a constituent element of postwar exposure and exposition. The sublime encounter with physical dangers was a determining experience of the European experience in the mid-twentieth century, dangers that continued to be imminent concerns in the years following the war. These imminent

dangers, together with the unnavigability of the ruined landscape of postwar Germany, necessitate the guide that Böll's *Trümmerliteratur* offers, leading the reader around the piles of rubble.

In *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* (1953), Böll introduces the character Fred Bogner, who has been thrown out of his own apartment by his wife Käte because of the danger his abusive tendency poses for the children. The reader finds Bogner wandering through the ruins and rubble of the *Großstadt*, observing the action of ruined urban space. The air seems eternally filled with ash, which also causes Käte to scrub and clean everyday without ever seeming to diminish the amount of soot and miniscule bits of rubble that find their way through every crack and crevice. Amid the atmospheric debris there also floats capitalistic advertising, in its grotesque obscenity: rubber birds (storks) are being dropped from a plane overhead, producing "widerliche Wölkchen aus Gummi" (140), proclaiming "VERTRAU DICH DEINEM DROGISTEN AN!" (150). Bogner paints the picture of swirling "Staub" and red-gliding rubber storks sailing through the air of a Great City left in crumbling ruin. The commercial fallout obscures the view of the sky, like the persistent dust and grit still floating in the air, palely staining the light, but these elements of obstruction paradoxically enhance the ruinist's observation – transparency is achieved in opaqueness.

In discussing transparency and exposition in ruins, some brief notes should be made on the traditional medium of transparency: glass introduces the multiplicity of the gaze, as the alignment of lenses produces magnification, while glass backgrounded by silver offers a reflective view. Also, glass is a key material to consider in architectural ruins, as glass is always absent from recently decimated structures. Stones and timber may be gathered and salvaged, but the tiny shards of glass cannot be pieced back together. Another quality of

glass is felt in the beginning of the early twentieth century when modern space becomes less and less dominated by separation, as architects such as Le Corbusier insisted on the inclusion of glass in their designs. Though not new – builders have been incorporating glass since the eleventh century –, the nearly exclusive interest in modern materials like glass and steel is characteristic of modern architecture, like the Bauhaus. This invitation to observation begins to break down what Daryl Lee calls the “inside/outside dialectic” (“Rimbaud’s *Ruin*” *passim*) in a way very similar to the ruin. Opposed in the Third Reich, this sort of modern representation of ruin paradoxically gave way to a building in anticipation of ruin, as developed by Albert Speer with his work on a theory of “ruin value.” The rejection of architectural forms that may be described as resembling ruins in terms of the invitation into the structure’s interior space ironically accepts Speer’s monumental ruin-making.

One final example from Böll demonstrates glass’s power to multiply the gaze. In “Aschermittwoch,” Willi’s perception of the objects on the other side of the glass blends with the objects on this side due to the glass’s slight reflectivity. Not only does glass present transparency, the transparency is also redirected to offer interiority and exteriority simultaneously:

Im Schaufenster über dem bläulichen Kleid der Frau, genau oberhalb ihres blonden, grünlich schimmernden Haares, sah er auch sich selbst: sein Kinn lag auf der schwarzen, harten Kante, die den Schaukasten abschloß, und im muffigen Dunkel des Ladens stand dieses Oval einsam und undeutlich, weißlichgrün wie eine vergessene Maske mit dunklen Augenhöhlen, totem Haar, aus einer Seegrassmatratze gezupft und aufgeklebt. Das einzig lebendige war der sehr hellgraue deutliche Qualm seiner Zigarette, der aus der dunklen Höhlung des Mundes stieg, sich in heiteren Spiralen

nach oben drehte und in der dichten Dunkelheit an der Decke verflüchtigte.

(*Heidelberg* 21)

Interiority presents itself, exhibiting intimacy, while exteriority simultaneously projects itself. The glassy transparency also transforms the street into urban exhibition and exposition, although inhabitants tend to protect their own interiority, hanging *Jalousien* to hinder the intrusion of the exterior while permitting a voyeuristic vista of the city. Even the term “*jalousie*” refers to this original sense of the jealous possessiveness that men held for their wives, but the necessity of offering them diversion in the opportunity to look out on the city and the passersby invents a voyeuristic mode of observation. People on the street are seen but cannot see the hidden observer. Illusions of separation reassure observers on both sides of glass’s transparency, but the quality of ruin that permeates this transparency also encourages the inclination to disregard the illusion of separation, and exteriority and interiority sometimes violently collide. Moments after Willi observes the expository superimposition on the glass, he hears a bright, piercing clangor: “Er hörte ein sehr helles, schneidendes Klirr, Scherben fielen” (19-20). Ruining an architectural representation or approximation of ruin, the window is broken.

In *Die Blechtrommel*, Günter Grass narratively produces countless glass-shattering instances. Having already addressed these acts of destruction in terms of ruining aesthetics in the chapter on Grass’s images of ruins, we consider them now as exhibitiv spectacles, intended to aid the gaze and render visible the suppressed. Differing only in magnitude from Böll’s *Röntgenauge* and Grass’s *Erkenntnisbrille*,<sup>8</sup> the glass-shattering spectacles present the

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Keele’s analysis of glasses and the enhanced vision facilitated by magic lenses in the postwar period significantly informs my investigation of glass in the aesthetics of ruins; see

opportunity for unmitigated observation. When Oskar begins observing show windows, he affirms that he prefers out-of-the-way locales in the half-lit distance from street lamps, “weil das Licht alle, auch den Gewöhnlichsten anzieht, das Halbdunkel jedoch die Auserwählten verweilen läßt” (161); Oskar’s seductive acts of destruction target the chosen, those who allow their gaze almost immediately to rest “auf einem einzigen Ausstellungsobjekt” (162). Oskar’s glass-shattering singing voice then offers the transgressive moment to transcend transparency and transform the glass’s simulated presentation of ruins into authentic ruins by a spoliating act. Oskar later describes this destructive act to himself: “Oskar, du hast all den stillen und in Wunschobjekte verliebten winterlichen Spaziergängern nicht nur die kleinen und mittelgroßen Wünsche erfüllt, du hast den Leuten vor den Schaufenstern auch geholfen, sich selbst zu erkennen” (166). This ruination results in self-recognition. With the removal of the glass’s slight reflectivity, access is granted both to the exhibited objects and the exposed self. Similar to the sight of self re-presented on the surface of the glass in Böll’s story, this extension and amplification of the theme achieves a heightened consciousness and acquaintance with interiority of the self and not merely the show window.

In addition to the exhibiting act of destruction, Grass’s characters themselves transcend the inside/outside dialectic by inserting and insinuating themselves into the multiple interiors: these outsiders, dwarves and demented figures, manage to find their way into society’s interiors. These protagonists, if they can be called such, roam homelessly, unconsciously offering the reader ichnographic and sciographic views of the ruins of Nazi social architecture, much of which still stands after the war. Hamon proposes that the “ruin suggests to the eye a ‘sciography’ or an ‘ichnography’ – a kind of concrete, natural

axonometry of the building” (60). This sort of architectural “elevation” of society’s ruined structure is the result Grass produces in permitting his roguish figures such intimate penetrations, including the explicitly sexual encounters included in the works. An unexpected clarity results, offering the reader not only seductive access to the exhibited object but also the self-recognition mentioned above. Oskar, Mahlke, and Matern are certainly characters of defective moral judgment, but they are not to be condemned because their escapades offer the reader access to interiorities, including his own. Putting down the book, the reader could almost find his own hands glittering with the sparkling dust of the pulverized glass, and he realizes that his own self has been part of the object on display in this exhibition of moral vulnerability, as well as observing something about society and the ruins that mark the contemporary landscape. This presentation of ruin and decay exposes the intersection of these two dimensions, the inside/outside of society and of the reader.

Another use of glass is found in Grass’s *Blechtrommel*. The final three chapters introduce another type of exhibitive transparency, in the object of the *Weckglas*, the preservative jar that houses the ring finger. This section of the novel erupts with clarity when Oskar begins his confessional trajectory. Oskar admits to four murders. Although his claims are subject to the narrative unreliability of the rest of the novel, Oskar’s confessional trajectory leads, in the next chapter, to the worshipful performance of the preserved ring finger inside the glass. This particular exhibit, gruesome and obscene, showcases human ruins within the modern medium of ruin representation, offering another variation on the theme of transparency. The ruin is temporarily halted for exhibition in the preservation offered by the glass jar, and the glass itself demonstrates the other layer of ruin-transparency that has been the object of discussion in the bulk of this chapter – ruins are preserved in a

frame of ruin. In the fervor of Oskar's worshipful performance before the jar, with Vitlar present, Oskar pronounces the insight won through this exhibition: "Die Anbetung eines Weckglases: Ich bete an. Wer ich? Oskar oder ich? Ich fromm, Oskar zerstreut. Hingebung, ohne Unterlaß, nur keine Angst vor Wiederholungen. Ich, einsichtig, weil ohne Gedächtnis. Oskar, einsichtig, weil voller Erinnerungen" (752). The use of the term "einsichtig" turns the *Weckglas* into a third kind of ruin in addition to the exhibited human remains and the broken disparity of interiority and exteriority in the transparent material of glass. Now, the glass offers Oskar an in-sight, a glimpse into his self, like a mirror that returns the gaze to the subject.

The *Weckglas* scene also calls to mind Grass's poem "Familiär," from the collection *Die Vorzüge der Windhühner* (1956). This instance of exhibition has a similar quality in the disgusting display of chemically postponed putrefaction, essentially catching a moment of the process of organic ruin. Both of these passages demonstrate the demented dimension of ruin aesthetics. The poem:

In unserem Museum – wir besuchen jeden Sonntag –  
hat man eine neue Abteilung eröffnet.  
Unsere abgetriebenen Kinder, blasse, ernsthafte Embryos,  
sitzen dort in schlichten Gläsern  
und sorgen sich um die Zukunft ihrer Eltern. (*Gedichte* 40)

There are two exhibits to consider here: the first and most obvious is the museum of embryonic human potential; the second exhibit is the poem itself. Although this seems obvious when articulated, the fact that Grass exhibits this exhibition in the form of a poem is remarkable in the discourse of ruins because this poem's blatant obscenity, an image that

would be censored out of any mass media production, enacts ruining forces on literature itself. The imagery and premise of this poem is so distasteful as to challenge the reader's concept of what poetry may be.

The final point in this discussion of exposure is the problematic question of Celan's poetic revelations, which are so marked by concealment. The epigraph to this chapter is the poet's expression of poetry's role as expository rather than imposing itself in order to control and determine. Celan's exposure in his poetry is certainly less than complete. Rare is the glimpse of the poet behind a language of "interruption," as Ulrich Baer characterizes "the poet who finally *unnames, dismembers, and uproots*" (14). Proceeding through the complex labyrinth of unfamiliar language and invented terms, almost nothing of the poet himself is revealed, much in contrast to the confessional variety of poetry that raged in Celan's day on the scene of American poetry (one considers figures like Lowell, Plath, and Sexton). I would suggest that there may be no more imposing a poet, no other poet more interested in controlling the experience of reading than Paul Celan. It would be going too far to say that he encoded or encrypted his poetry, as this would assume that some interpretive key would unlock all of his work. Certain keys may be discovered, and *ruin images* presents such a key, along with the extensive Heideggerianisms in his poetry, but these are limited devices in comprehending Celan's work. Even here, though, Celan works to obliterate all traces of borrowings (Lyon 195), and the result is a very tight exposure and transparency, if any at all. In a certain sense, all writing is a revealing, yet his obliteration of the personal in his poems renders his poetry quite opaque. This obliterating energy, though, is the revealing act of ruination – the destructive dynamics of Celan's own poetic production demonstrates more about Celan than some prosaic piece of autobiographical straight-forwardness. Celan weaves

of language and poetry a layered defense that he tears to rip out patterns that resemble other weaves, and it is the repeated act of tearing that presents an intimate sense of Celan's troubled psyche and his paranoia. In his unapproachability, the poet indirectly demonstrates his own vulnerability.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion: A Way Forward in the Thinking of Ruins

Es ist unsere Aufgabe, daran zu erinnern, [. . .]  
daß die Zerstörungen in unserer Welt nicht nur  
äußerer Art sind und nicht so geringfügiger  
Natur, daß man sich anmaßen kann, sie in  
wenigen Jahren zu heilen.

- Heinrich Böll

In a certain sense, a conclusion of this study is perhaps unthinkable. I anticipate that I will never completely conclude this project, that I will never cease to consider and reconsider ruins and the literature in which they are represented, particularly the scars of cataclysmic violence that to a great extent determines modern man's experience in the world. This impossibility of conclusive analysis is exacerbated by the limited literature that could be attended to in an investigation of this size. Certainly, there are many other *Trümmerliteraten* whose work contains themes that resonate with the analysis presented in this project – though perhaps more important are the dissonances in these works, which present significant variations on the thematic concerns analyzed in the preceding chapters. In addition to the many other novelists and poets, the most obvious victim of this negligence, inflicted by necessity of brevity, is the genre of dramatic texts: foremost among these dramatic depictions of rubble and ruins are the “rubble films,” and an important vein of recent scholarship on this topic, headed by Robert Shandley, presents a certain kind of thinking about ruins, Germany's cultural reemergence, and the cinema of this revitalization. Dürrenmatt's theatrical theory, in some ways comparable to Brechtian theory, casts the traditional function of theater as ruined. Frisch's tragicomedies of ruin and destruction and Zuckmayer's contributions to the drama of downfall may not be overlooked. And, of course, there is also the dramatic medium of the *Hörspiel*, of which Borchert is an important representative but whose “unbestrittener

Protagonist” is Günter Eich, having mastered “die Technik des akustischen Raum- und Ebenenwechsels” (Holthusen 315).

Perhaps the most important figure that remains to be examined in this context is Bertolt Brecht, whose *Tage der Commune* (1948) reenacts the ruination of the Paris Commune, complete with the problematic enthusiasm for aesthetic destruction that characterized that tempestuous political moment. In the song of resolutions described by the people’s new governing body, Brecht also lyricizes the problem of ruins, with familiar images and themes such as glass and transparency, homelessness, and the squatting appropriation of ruined space: “Haben wir beschlossen, nunmehr schlechtes Leben / Mehr zu fürchten als den Tod [. . .] Wollen wir mal feststellen, daß nur Fensterscheiben / Uns vom guten Brote trennen, das uns fehlt. [. . .] In Erwägung, daß da Häuser stehen / Während ihr uns ohne Bleibe laßt / Haben wir beschlossen, jetzt dort einzuziehen / Weil es uns in unsern Löchern nicht mehr paßt” (852). Resonating with the themes suggested in this study, one of Brecht’s first pieces to be written and performed after his return from exile clearly belongs under the designation of rubble literature. Brecht not only includes scenes of dramatized destruction, but the piece’s last scene presents figures equipped with opera glasses, heightening the sense of the aesthetic observation; they consider the destruction a magnificent theatrical production: “Welch erhabenes Schauspiel! Die Bände, die mathematischen Bewegungen der Truppen! Man versteht jetzt das Genie Haußmanns, Paris mit Boulevards zu versehen. Man hat diskutiert, ob sie zur Verschönerung der Hauptstadt beitragen. Kein Zweifel nun” (874). After this comment, a great explosion is answered by applause among the bourgeois observers, who argue over the chance to look through the opera glasses: “Das Glas, Annette. *Blickt durchs Opernglas. Glänzend!*” Brecht’s postwar

dramatization of ruining violence in the *Tage der Commune* would be another important inclusion in my modified designation of *Trümmerliteratur* as an analysis of *ruination*, violence politically motivated, from another time and place, yet with direct connections to Germany and Franco-German relations. Of course, the scope of this project clearly required limitations and boundaries, but these boundaries remain something of an unresolved point of tension, requiring inclusion and analysis in some future project.

Any possible deficiencies notwithstanding, this project has provided an important contribution to German literary history by extending the perception of rubble literature beyond a few short stories to include some of the most important writers of twentieth-century German literature. It is not surprising that Heinrich Böll's works be marked as a type of ruin writing, as his own defense of the rubble literature provided the programmatic framework for the movement, but Böll's relationship to another type of ruin writing presents a site of friction when he appears to be working in a romantic mode to describe his experience of Irish ruins. This problem was the point of departure for a new thinking of ruins.

Discovering the strains of rubble literature in Grass and Celan dramatically recasts these writers, demanding that the presence and prevalence of ruin images and themes receive consideration. Grass's hermeneutical ruins, a reading of narrative gaps, presents the first level of ruin, separating the reader from the text's reliability and authorial immediacy. The next type of ruins that Grass presents is the violent ruining of the act of writing itself, whether chiseled into gravestones or flecking virginal paper. These fundamental qualities of ruins characterize the literary frame in which Grass produces his images of ruins and the aesthetic acts of destruction found throughout the Danzig Trilogy. In this sense, not only the content of the writing deals with destruction, but the presentation itself concerns itself with

ruins. Similarly, Celan's images of ruins are produced in a form consciously resembling berubbed structures, with dashes and slashes often left jutting dangerously into the space of a wide margin, like the rusty reinforcing steel bars of modern construction. Formal poetics are violently reconceived in the poet's encounter with Rimbaud, the poet of the Paris Commune ruins, as reacting to his contemporaries of the concrete poetry movement that received so much attention in that particular moment.

Rethinking these important writers in conjunction with this theme of ruins and destruction leads to the question of language. How these writers attempt to overcome the problematic case of a language manipulated into complicity in the crimes of totalitarianism divides them into a distinct spectrum of voices. There is at the same time an attempt to produce a new and clearer language that could overcome the lingering burden of language's instrumentalization for annihilation, as well as a revitalizing reintroduction of obsolete words divested of their original value. These attempts to rethink language in reaction to the perhaps inevitability of its deterioration as well as its malicious exploitation produce a linguistic structure for the thinking of ruins in concerted consciousness of the inherited unreliability of language as an artistic medium.

Finally, there is the transparency offered in the porous structure of the ruin. These houses prove incapable of providing the shelter or protection that we expect from them. The inhabitants are exposed, exhibited to the observer with all of the intimate contents of quotidian existence, the low objects of the everyday. Entrance into this interiority is a powerful part of what makes the ruins an interesting object for observation. Although Simmel detests inhabited ruins, every view of ruins presences habitation, whether actual or imagined. It is not the simple structure of the building itself that is interesting, but the life

that once pulsed in that space, the life that lends something of the power of human dwelling to the remaining traces of that vibrant vitality. In this literature of ruins and rubble the reader is offered this transparency, an offer of entrance into society's interiority.

And certainly the themes of rubble literature persist, continuing to produce a thinking about ruins as a problem of significance. Hu Zongjian, a Chinese Germanist, suggests parallels between *Trümmerliteratur* and the so-called *Wundenliteratur* that surfaced in Chinese culture after the agents of the Cultural Revolution fell in 1976. Zongjian suggests that a sort of rebirth of Chinese literature results, mirroring many of the German literature's modification of the ruinist tropes, despite the Chinese absence of architectural traces: "Der vom deutschen Faschismus entfesselte Krieg hatte Deutschland in Trümmer verwandelt. [. . .] Die Kulturrevolution war kein Krieg, aber sie hinterließ auch Trümmer, vor allem geistige, moralische und seelische" (Zongjian 195). Even more recent than the 1976 fall of the "Gang of Four," ruins continue to determine contemporary experience. Huddled in the "shadow of no towers,"<sup>9</sup> we fight the official "War on Terrorism," a phantom fight of ideological collision, a battle born in the rubble of the World Trade Center. Similarly, Germany's corroded iron curtain was finally thrown down after forty years, but the lingering presence of this absent division remains a determining quality of existence in Germany.

Finally, this idea of *Wundenliteratur* offers a possible way forward in the consideration of postwar ruins. The human ruins everywhere evident after the war manifest themselves in literature often right alongside the *Trümmer* already examined in this study. The expansion of a ruin literature to incorporate corporeal ruins, however, would exceed the limits of this project, but Böll's work is riddled with wounded figures, and even Celan

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<sup>9</sup> The title of a recent work by Pulitzer Prize-winner Art Spiegelmann, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, New York: Pantheon, 2004.

concludes the *Niemandrose* with the image of a club-footed god (1:290). Alan Keele suggests that these wounded figures assume prophetic roles as a consequence of their limp, which he connects to mythological and Christian themes of limps, but woundedness may have other implications in a discussion of ruins. Beginning, perhaps, with Lessing's Tellheim in *Minna von Barnhelm* and Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*, the representation of wounded men takes an important turn away from the image of epic bravery and courage, a mark of heroic honor, rather these men are reduced to cripples. Tellheim, particularly, regards his wound as absolutely socially debilitating. In a sense, this development in the depiction of woundedness appears to parallel the move, beginning in the eighteenth century, to regard the image of ruins as devoid of romantic charm. Following a similar trajectory, connections should be made concerning the interplay of these different types of ruins in postwar German literature, which significantly treats both types of *Trümmer*.

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