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„Mark Ravenhill's 'pool (no water)' and Martin Crimp's 'Attempts on her life': postmodern theory and postdramatic theatre"

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We need to feel
what we're seeing is real.
It isn't just acting
it's far more exacting
than acting
We're talking reality
We're talking humanity (...)

(Martin Crimp *Attempts on her life*)

DANKE SAGEN UND SCHREIBEN

Schreiben ist, und war wohl schon immer, eine einsame Angelegenheit. Einsam lässt sich jedoch keine Diplomarbeit schreiben - deswegen gebührt der Dank, der hier in diesen paar wenigen Zeilen steckt vor allem meinen Eltern, die auf meiner odyssee-haften Reise durch die Jahre meines Studiums nicht nur immer mit und niemals gegen den Wind flogen, sondern auch Schiffskoch, Deckpersonal und Kapitän in einem waren und mitunter auch mal Segel flicken mussten.

Gleiches gilt für meine Freunde, die in stürmischen Zeiten zusätzlich auch noch das Unterhaltungsprogramm im Schiffsbauch übernahmen.

Weiters möchte ich auch noch meinem Betreuer, Dr. Rudolf Weiss, für sein Vertrauen, seine Unterstützung und Ermutigung danken.

Vergesst nicht, dass ich euch geliebt haben werde. (Jacques DERRIDA)

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1. INTRODUCTION

> I didn't say that there was no center, that we could get along without the center. I believe that the center is a function, not a being - a reality, but a function. And this function is absolute indispensable. (Derrida, qtd. in Hutcheon, 60)

The underlying principles behind Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" as one of the basic sets of rules reigning over Western traditions of thought and philosophy commonly informed the usual constellation of the human speaking subject as the only centre of thought and thus the major instance of creating discourse. In this context the assumed self-presence of the speaking subject serves as one of the most essential preconditions for this philosophical construction. Putting the focus on the theatre as a locus of production of literary discourse the basic notion of the logos as the centre of discourse, appears to be particularly applicable. Absent characters!

Jacques Derrida's well-known critique of Western logocentrism goes hand in hand with an immanent critique of phonocentrism, the manifestation of the rule of the spoken over the written word, which, based on Saussure's theory of the sign, appears to be one of the key issues of Derrida's writing. The theatre, regarding its material status can be located in exactly the same challenging area in-between, an interspace between speaking and writing, literature and performance. One aspect that must not be left out of consideration in this context, is the historical dimension, for, in particular as regards the german-speaking and the english-speaking theatre-stages, it certainly reveals an entirely different tradition of play-writing and play-making. The self-reflexive, language focused stance of many German and Austrian playwrights, in particular of the 1960s and 70s is to be seen as a development the British stage apparently lacks. With *Attempts on her life* and *pool (no water)* Martin Crimp and Mark Ravenhill two exceptions to this general rule and easily observable tendency mounted the British stages, and with their critique on re-presentation and mimesis appear to have placed their plays in a position succeeding playwrights such as Elfriede Jelinek, Peter Handke and Heiner Müller.

The two plays dominate topic of the realms of art and life collapsing into each other, was not only actually realized by Ravenhill in making his absent character Sally become an object of art herself, but also establishes a connection to the art of the Wiener Aktionisten, who constantly tried to push the ordinary into the field of art. Their claim

that in their performances "absolute presence" is established, can also be found in Antonin Artaud's attempt at re-defining the theatre in terms of a similar claim for presence and thus detaching it from the ideal of flawless re-presentation and mimesis. It an certainly be argued that Artaud's claim for absolute presence of the body is also mirrored in the general definition of physical theatre, which, because of Ravenhill's cooperation with physical theatre group Frantic Assembly, plays a crucial role in relation to pool as well.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum and the hyperreal, ultimately turning around the relationship of copy and original, since he believes the postmodern age to be one characterized by the copy overruling the original and thus breaking with a long tradition of Western thinking, also appears to fit into the general tone of rejecting re-presentation's ultimate mimetic power. With their allusions to the core constituents of postmodern thought Crimp and Ravenhill wrote themselves into the direct neighbourhood of Derrida, Baudrillard and Foucault, finally suspending the speaking subject as the centre of thought and instead portraying it as a projection space inscribed by various discourses. Transferring the "post-" of postmodernism and poststructuralism onto the realm of drama/theatre, Hans-Thies Lehmann coined the term "postdramatic", a tightly woven web of criteria and features, *Attempts on her life* and *pool (no water)* can also be seen in relation with.

> We are difference (...) our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the difference of masks. That difference, far from being the forgotten and recoverable origin, is this dispersion that we are and make. (Foucault, qtd. in Hutcheon, 65)

2. POSTMODERN/POSTDRAMATIC?

2.1 Introducing the plays

2.1.1 Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her life*

Attempts on her life is Martin Crimp's eleventh play, probably his most experimental and controversial one, premiered in 1997 at London's Royal Court Theatre and had a revival

in 2007 at London's National Theatre. The play's seventeen "scenarios", which at first glance appear to be rather unconnected, individual "scenes", in particular as regards their form and stylistic layout, which vary from each scenario to the next, are held together only through the absent central character "Anne", who never actually emerges as a speaking subject but only as a named surface inscribed with various roles and subject positions, such as prostitute, artist, terrorist, mother, but also material objects such as a car. The audience is denied all usual points of reference - character, as well as time and place. On his homepage Aleks Sierz calls *Attempts on her life* "arguably the most exciting new play of the past 25 years", which, still, because it cannot be defined within the very dominant framework of "in-yer-face" which also Mark Ravenhill with his Shopping and Fucking is sometimes put in relation with, appears to be standing outside the most dominant tendencies in contemporary British playwriting.

In an audio-streamed discussion on Martin Crimp's career as a playwright, Dan Rebellato stresses the significance and singular position of Crimp's language, which he characterizes as very self-reflexive, particularly when it emerges as a real object of the play, as it is particularly applicable to *Attempts*. In the same discussion Lindsay Posner argued that Crimp managed to capture a certain Zeitgeist, not only in Britain, but in many European countries, also in the sense of his plays being particularly "postmodern", as the constant use of self-referentiality is one of his primary theatrical devices, and the audience thus denied any emotional engagement. The discussion, led by Aleks Sierz also featured Anne Tipton who, in 2004, produced *Attempts* on her life at the Battersea Arts Centre. This production made use of a whole range of different media devices and interpreted the actors as a kind of vessel which literally randomly filters moments from Anne's life. Her interpretation of the play also managed to include two other important aspects of Crimp's play, firstly, the objectification of the so-called central character Anne, which she tried to realize by means of using a pros arch in simple black, with a screen at the back of it, and secondly, her general stance of feeling very free about the play as such. Since she interpreted "Anne" as a mere device Tipton did not feel confined by what the play appears to be about, but rather supported the general tendency of "story" or "plot" only evolving in interaction with each individual member of the audience (http://theatrevoice.com/2025/reputations-martin-crimp-12-lindsay-posner-dan-rebellat/). Crimp leaves most of the decisions, such as the number of speakers and their physical

features to the director, which referring to Erika Fischer-Lichte might lead to generally characterizing the theatre as providing access to experiencing the processes of how reality is actually constructed, since while the audience is in the middle of constituting a reality of their own they become aware of doing so and a whole process of reflecting upon it is triggered off (Fischer-Lichte, 243).

2.1.2 Mark Ravenhill's *pool (no water)*

Pool, first performed in 2006, at the Drum Theatre Plymouth, in cooperation with Physical Theatre Group Frantic Assembly, is certainly Ravenhill's most demanding and experimental play. Without making use of any real character attribution it features a group of artists, assembling at the house of a former friend of theirs, the only one among them who managed to escape the life of the unnoticed, unsuccessful artist the others are still leading. The play's unattributed speech is one feature it shares with Crimp's Attempts on her life, as well as its denial of the apparent centre, the artist Sally, to emerge as speaking subject who almost continuously remains silent and is inscribed by discourses. This rejection of dramatic speech attribution and the denial of the speaking subject as a real core is in both plays realized as a replacement of a common dialogic structure with a multiplicity of unattributed voices. *Pool*'s unattributed text, freely oscillates within a genre-continuum, between drama, narrative and poetry. Its main features are its inherent indeterminacy and multiperspectivity, which places itself in direct relation to postmodern art in a more general sense.

The main source of inspiration for Ravenhill writing the play were the photographs of American photographer Nan Goldin, in particular those included in her *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, which not only because of her radical depiction of violence and focus on physical features can be seen in an immediate connection to Ravenhill's play, but also was a major thematic inspiration since Goldin herself once fell into an empty pool while taking photographs. The notion of the artistic community and their hedonistic lifestyle can also be seen as one essential thematic similarity between Ravenhill's and Goldin's work. Similar to Crimp, although not as radical as in *Attempts*, Ravenhill reduces his figures to mere "text-bearers", and makes language become the most important

protagonist, for it appears to speak through the only very shadowy painted speakers.

2.2. PostMODERN

As it has already been pointed out by Simon Malpas and others writing on postmodernism, defining the postmodern seems to be a task defying every attempt at fully accomplishing it (cf. Malpas, 4f.). Most of the efforts to make it fit into a proper framework of understanding and our striving to define it according to the same criteria which appeared to have been successfully applied in order to specify other cultural and social periods and episodes, do not seem to provide an apt way for grasping the contemporary world. The term "postmodernism" is commonly used to refer to a style or a kind of genre, while postmodernity is often characterized as being a particular epoch or period and certainly includes all the arts and disciplines in being a world-wide movement (Malpas, 9).

   Most regularly the term itself triggers notions and concepts such as heterogeneity, discontinuity, hybridity, fracturing, fragmentation, indeterminacy, plurality and self-reflexivity and is usually brought into relation with wider societal developments such as globalization, transformations of colonial power, development of new media and communication networks, collapse of religious and political traditions and beliefs, and an entirely new experience of reality (Malpas, 34). One aspect that will become particularly relevant with regard to the two plays, Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her life* and Mark Ravenhill's *pool (no water)*, is postmodernism's critique of centralized, totalized, hierarchized and closed systems, which it questions but not entirely destroys (Hutcheon, 41). This appears to work with relation to all apparent cases of either/or, which in postmodernism seems to have been traded in for a "both/and", and thus leads to cases of being "the process of making the product; it is absence within presence, it is dispersal that needs centring in order to be dispersal (...)" (Hutcheon, 49). Through these processes of de-centring, a shift in perspective and perception takes place, leading to a consolidation of the formerly silenced voices from the margins, which are now given a voice.

   Postmodernism also appears to be not only challenging particular formal structures of art but also institutional structures of bourgeois society, which are usually seen in direct relation to realism, which appears to be continuously re-inforcing it. With the rejection of

realism, it also works against a definition of literature, which is thought of as being meaningful only in connection to an external reference (Hutcheon, 142). The underlying assertion postmodernism draws upon is its affirmation of a relative inaccessibility of any reality which is thought of as existing objectively and in a state prior to our knowledge, thus rejecting the dominant idea of an objective reality, existing "out there". What may present itself as being objectively accessible is instead believed to be always already subjected to ordering mechanisms working according to the concepts and categories of human understanding (Hutcheon, 146).

2.2.1. Framing the Postmodern - Jean Francois Lyotard

> The postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes or the work he creates is not in principle governed by preestablished rules and cannot be judged (...) by the application of given categories to this text or work. Such rules and categories are what the work or text is investigating. (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained*, 15)

The first philosophical work adopting the notion, at first laid out by Ihab Hassan and captured in architectural manifestos, was Jean-Francois Lyotard's *La condition postmoderne*, first appearing in Paris in 1979, its translation into English in 1984. At the centre of his definition of the "postmodern condition" is an apparent loss of credibility of all kinds of grand narratives/grand recits, such as classical socialism, Christian redemption, Hegelian spirit (Anderson, 31). Simplifying the term, Lyotard defines postmodernism, within the confines of his concept of the grand and metanarrative, whose credibility is fundamentally questioned by the postmodern. In Lyotard's terms postmodernism, thus, works against these "grand recits", which formerly functioned as supposed transcendent and universal truths, building up the major framework for western civilization and thus, also fulfilling the goal of legitimizing this civilization in a seemingly objective way. The conventions, procedures and set of rules which determine a particular narrative are what Lyotard subsumes under the term "metanarrative", functioning as frameworks for knowledge and generate a set of criteria alongside which one can form judgements which of the statements made can be regarded as legitimate and true for each individual sort of narrative (Malpas, 37). According to Lyotard metanarratives are merely illusions fostered in order to suppress difference, oppositions

and plurality, which need to be overcome to get away from the concept of totalizing frameworks forcing homogeneity, striving for heterogeneity, plurality and dissensus rather than consensus and the overarching idea of privileged truth, silencing the voices from the margins. With the entering of postmodernity Lyotard fixates a moment of these overarching grand narratives being overcome, and with them also the metanarratives as structures legitimating knowledge losing their stability and power (Malpas, 38). As well as Baudrillard and Foucault, Lyotard seems to stress the notion that since no piece of knowledge whatsoever can liberate itself from its complicity with some meta-narrative, any claim for truth is automatically rendered provisional. Consequently, it is also implied that none of the persisting narratives can be regarded as being a "natural" master narrative, since no hierarchy can ever be "natural", but always has to be referred to as something that was actively constructed. The signifying system, by which we constitute the world we live in are hence not naturally given or universally valid (Hutcheon, 13).

As its full title *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge* already suggests his report is not that much centred on what constitutes postmodernity as a whole, but rather places its focus on the ways it affects knowledge, which according to Lyotard has become an "informational commodity" (Bertens, 123). The main point of discussion raised by Lyotard is the question of the relation between knowledge and ownership, and the arising question of who is in control of the flow of ideas and thus also in charge of who should be supposed to access it. Regarding the ways and means by which knowledge and the entire flow of ideas is generated, communicated and distributed, Lyotard's notion of the narrative, of the stories told about the world, thus structuring and tying together disparate ideas and concepts, plays a crucial role (Malpas, 36). Lyotard's own specific allusions to fragmentation conjure up notions of the dismembering of knowledge into a plenitude of incommensurate discourses. In particular in his application and individual conception of Wittgenstein's language games served as a forceful tool against all totalizing pretensions and celebration of plurality (Bertens, 130).

2.3 From PostMODERN to PostDRAMATIC

In the first section of Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, he named "Prologue", Lehmann underlines the differentiation between classifying a dramatic/theatrical performance as

postmodern or postdramatic, which is basically grounded upon the choice of reference of the underlying term, which either can be postmodern or postdramatic, thus either beyond modernism or beyond drama. He further argues for having it defined within the boundaries of "after the authority of the dramatic paradigm" (Lehmann, 27), which reveals his focus on the transgression of the safe zone of "drama", which brings with it an entire range of attributes that need to be overcome, such as drama's concentration on the text, on character attribution and development and plot. Still, he also argues that it is not possible to have a dramatic theatre without any plot/action at all, for in the characterization of theatre one can still detect traces of Aristotle's mythos, which in his *Poetics* was used as a synonym for plot, as the true "soul of tragedy" (68).

Even though in his account Lehmann argues against using the terms "postmodern" and "postdramatic" synonymously, it still appears to be logical reasoning that the one is unthinkable without the other, which can be proved and exemplified with the help of various common features and a forged emphasis on the proximity in ontological viewpoints. The entire network of new conceptions of identity, subjectivity, presence and physicality, which constitutes the basis upon which Kane's, Ravenhill's, Handke's and Jelinek's plays can evolve to their greatest influence and achievements is closely tied into the net of concepts set up by thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida. Therefore, it can be argued that without these new formations and conceptions, drama in Lehmann's sense might never have been undergone such drastic changes. Still, regarding all genres, and probably all different periods and epochs, it cannot be clearly determined whether the literary texts constitute a period such as postmodernism or whether these texts should rather be classified as products which emerged in the context of a particular episode in cultural history with its own thinkers, paradigms and specific world view. A similar question was posed by Ihab Hassan, who asked whether postmodernism should be understood in terms of being merely an artistic tendency or rather as a broader social phenomenon, to which he found no clearly determined answer (Anderson, 18).

Apart from that structural dilemma Birringer does not believe that in theatre a moment of transition into a postmodern paradigm can be found: "I do not think we can locate a historical moment of transition to postmodernism in theatre and performance art. Unlike architectural or fashion discourses, the theatre never advertised or formulated the changes

that it overtook" (Birringer, 44) It does not appear very reasonable why the theatre should have stayed unaffected by the changes happening in society and culture at large, when all other forms of art underwent considerable changes.

McGlynn locates the beginning of a theoretical announcement of a "postmodern theatre" with Artaud and his *The Theater and Its Double* in which Artaud wished for an end to all representations in the theatre, and a replacement of all "theaters of authors" in which the author as an absent God is in entire charge of what the enslaved actors are doing onstage. In the close setting of the proscenium stage, and with the belief of the author being in total control over "an essential reality founded in the meaning established by the absent author/father." (138).

Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, on the other hand, is not to be characterized as sticking to a general belief in representation, since, in Artaud's own definition of it, it has to be seen as life itself, "in the extent to which life is unrepresentable." (McGlynn, 138) The new form of theatre Artaud envisioned is one independent of speech and writing as vehicles of "rational transparency", therefore capturing life in its fullest presence and immediacy and not based on its status of being a representation and thus pointing to another level of reality beyond it (McGlynn, 138). This is a heavy claim against the powerful mechanisms of mimesis, which since antiquity have signified the embodied representation imitating reality (cf. Lehmann, p. 36/7).

> We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. (Artaud *The Theatre and Its Double)*

Derrida, writing on Artaud as part of his collection of essays Writing and Difference stresses Artaud's opinion that the director as enslaved to the author is with his/her additional material and props, musicality, the actor's gestures only serving as a tool for illustration and as an ornament to the primacy of the text as logos (Derrida, "Das Theater der Grausamkeit", 356). The theatre has to legitimize its status as an independent and autonomous art-form through its separation from the text, the word and literature as such (Derrida, "Das Theater der Grausamkeit", 358). As Derrida with reference to Artaud reports, the theatrical scene no longer simply re-iterates and re-presents a presence, which

has been there before but which is absent the moment it is iterated. Therefore, the theatre has to stop re-presenting another language, and thus define itself in the sense of being deduced from another art-form, such as literature (Derrida, "Das Theater der Grausamkeit", 360). Considering Derrida's assessment, the "phonetic text" seems to be what secures and preserves the ongoing mechanisms of representation, all gestures, images and musical forms and means are thus to be characterized as vehicles illustrating, ornamenting and thus serving a textual basis (356), a theoretical construct which also makes the director vanish behind the powerful writerly hands. Still, a change of concept according to Artaud would not simply mean to put more power and charge into the hands of the director (356). Drawing upon Peggy Phelan, Reinelt establishes a further connection between performance, the body and subjectivity: "Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body per se; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body, that which cannot appear without a supplement" (Peggy Phelan *Unmarked*, qtd, in Reinelt, 201/2) and thus also appears to be criticising a general claim for presence or truth as posed by metaphysics.

Derrida further remarks that occidental theatre tended to only acknowledge grammatically articulated language, the language of the written word, the word which does not gain any more layers of meaning being verbally articulated or not, to be called and labelled as language (361). The theatrical representation in Artaud's sense seems to rather resemble an energy, a notion also occurring in Lyotard's writing (cf. Derrida, "Das Theater der Grausamkeit", 375). According to Erickson, Artaud does not refer to the word as a complement of action taken within a performance, but rather has to be seen as part of a continual becoming - speech becoming gesture becoming ideogram. This concept of speech within the Artaudian framework of thought could be seen in analogy to what Derrida would call writing. Speech is turned to flesh, made physical and hieroglyphic and as soon as it is made flesh the word becomes ideographic and thus a form of writing (Erickson, 290).

> Es geht also weniger darum, eine stumme Szene zu bilden, als eine Szene, deren Geschrei noch nicht im Wort zur Ruhe gekommen ist (...) Die Geste und die Sprache sind hier noch nicht durch die Logik der Repräsentation getrennt worden. (Derrida "Das Theater der Grausamkeit", 363)

These considerations make it quite obvious that postdrama's focus on physicality, the presence of the human body and the whole aspect of performance, can be seen within Artaud's tradition and line of argumentation, which has also been pointed out by Lehmann, whose *Postdramatic Theatre*, proved to be a crucial account in the context of contemporary playwriting and staging. The tendency towards productions which foreground the work of the director, such as the "Regietheater" of German director Einar Schleef, also appears to be taking the theatre one step away from the primacy of the text and the author. Physical theatre, which will become particularly relevant for dealing with Mark Ravenhill's play pool and its London production, takes this notion to its extremest form.

2.4 The dramatic text "espaced" and dissolved – Lehmann Inc.

2.4.1 Drama vs. theatre

In *Der nicht mehr dramatische Theatertext* Gerda Poschmann re-affirms the widely acclaimed notion that every account of postmodern/postdramatic theatre has got to first deal with the differences on its probably most superficial level, the categorization of the text as either "dramatic"/"literary" or "theatric", since she parallels postdramatic theatre with a general movement away from the literary drama-text, which she perceives as being no longer at the centre of attention, and no longer given the status of the most crucial and indispensable part in the art of theatre-production. According to her view, summarizing the last few centuries, speech-material has been more and more exposed to the autonomy of directing and dramaturgy. Referring to this phenomenon Floeck makes the very basic distinction between "Regietheater", which treats the text as only one minor part involved in the actual production of the play onstage and "Texttheater", which performance foregrounds the dramatic text and sticks closely to its textual basis (Poschmann, 20). Poschmann labels it as one basic result of a process of emancipation from the dramatic text that postdramatic theatre with its own particular features, which, finally, appears to have entirely overcome its presumed textual basis, could emerge. She further postulates a split between theatre and literature and characterizes this secession as one of the founding principles upon which modern drama is built. What has been referred to as the "crisis of

drama" is thus always to be seen as a crisis of text-based-drama and which is said to be rooted in the wider context of a general distrust of the power and capability of re-presentation (Poschmann, 23).

Representation always has the assumption of the sign as art's basic structural element as its precondition, a characterization that has been abandoned with the advent of the postmodern era and has led to a consequent destruction of this connection. This automatically triggers a shift of interest and attention from the thing re-presented (signified) to its material surface (signifier) (Poschmann, 27). Subsequently, this tendency appears to be not as easily applicable to theatre as one might assume, for the play as such generally uses the heterogenic material of its close surrounding nature as signs, thus takes real objects as signs for a fictional universe. The theatric representation of fictionality is traditionally grounded on the basis of "referential illusion" and since referent and signifier of the theatre are of the same material quality the audience is generally inclined to believe to be confronted with the referent while he/she is actually faced with the signifier. The theatric/dramatic signifier is oscillating somewhere between being and referring, between object and sign (Poschmann, 27).

Even though Poschmann claims that one of the most crucial features commonly attributed to postdramatic theatre is the loss of the direct connection between speech and the speaking subject, which is commonly refused being painted with psychological depth, mounting in acts of de-centring the subject, denying it the power of mastering the discourse, but rather portrays it as dominated by it, this is one of postdrama's great projects that eludes total accomplishment. One of the reasons for theatre's failure in completing this task is that, whether postdramatic or not, it is dependent on the actor as the iconic sign (Martin Esslin, qtd. in Poschmann, 28). Joachim Kaiser develops this even further and states that: "(Die) als Sinnverweigerung und Entpersonalisierung sich darstellende Tendenz kann auf dem Theater nicht konsequent vorwärtsgetrieben werden. Es wird ja (...) von Menschen gespielt. Das Material trotzt der Entpersonalisierung." (Poschmann, 28). The crisis of re-presentation that has started being constantly suggested and continuously re-affirmed a couple of centuries ago, is difficult to handle for apparently mimetic forms of art, which theatre is the most prominent example of, and Poschmann sees theatre's emancipation from drama as its only opportunity to come to terms with it (29).

Poschmann further develops the argument that there is no longer any semiotic difference between body and text, body as well as text can be regarded as almost entirely "de-semanticized" and have been stripped of their function as signs (32). It appears to be no longer valid to claim that text and theatricality have to be classified as diametrically opposed, and the avantgarde's postulation that regaining theatricality has to be linked with de-literalization of the theatre is no longer to be perceived as significant and needed, for the theatre appears to have reconquered what it has been denied during the entire reign of bourgeois illusionistic theatre: theatricality or at least a new understanding of theatricality (as auto-reflexive medium) evolving with modernism (Poschmann, 32/3). Still, Poschmann also includes a reference to the reverse side of her general assumption and includes one instance in which one might deduce a defence of the textual component, namely the dramatic texts themselves becoming post-dramatic, being composed of a whole range of features commonly associated with postmodernist literature, such as de-centring, fragmentation, incoherence and a general rejection of closure. In these cases it is not only the performance which mirrors (or in fact rather produces) the wider cultural context from which it emerged but the texts themselves. Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her life* could be classified as one of very few examples in Britain's drama history that might offer proof of this variant of post-drama.

Whereas the British stage kept being occupied by and afflicted with its sustaining realist tradition, being in its most radical and subversive form rather characterized by a movement away from the dramatic text, thus forging a general foregrounding of the body, the 1980s in Germany/Austria brought with them a re-evaluation and re-discovery of the text, as exemplified by Heiner Müller's prognosis "dass die Zeit des Textes im Theater erst kommen wird" (Müller qtd. in Poschmann, 37). Certainly not in a traditional form of drama, and its belief in text as a meaning and plot-constituting force but in a different form, asserting themselves against a text-based theatre that still fulfils the role of imitating and repeating life, with the help of the dramatic text as its most important instrument, and instead attributing to it a self-reflexive function, continuously laying bare language's incapacities and self-inflicted hollowness of phrases.

Limited to its most basic principle it could be argued that Poschmann's account is based upon a general belief in a strict differentiation between dramatic theatre centred on the dramatic text, which is supposed to tell a story and non-representational theatric theatre,

which started to further develop with a re-investigation of Antonin Artaud's dramatic work (31). On a theoretical level Jacques Derrida offered a key-account on Artaud's heavily quoted *On the Theatre of Cruelty*, in which he also deals with basic questions of re-presentation and mimesis, which will be placed into the centre of attention in the chapter on Derrida and deconstruction.

Using a terminology obviously influenced by Jacques Derrida, Hans-Thies Lehmann not only argues in favour of an heightened and increasing importance of the component of theatrical performance, in its relation to its so-called textual basis, which can be attested the notion of an unbridgeable dependency but also bearing the potential of conflict, but also refers to the text's own inherent "espacement", a term borrowed from the Derridean philosophical toolbox (Lehmann, 37). The actual performance, the staging of the text, produces another additional dimension of "espacement", one of dissemination and dispersing, a moment of dissolvement of textual significance in a haze of heterogenous materials, structures and processes, further widening and depredating its field of meaning. In Lehmann's perspective postmodern theatre is thus always a performance practice considering the text as material, which has got to be worked upon in the process of putting it onstage (37). This view also appears to draw upon and provide a recursion to the long-existing conflict between the text as an autonomous, self-sufficient product of art and as a mere textual basis for its later performance, a text that ought to be staged, injected with meaning by performing it to gain artistic merit (Bayerdörfer, 2). Postdrama's culmination of the long-existing conflict between text and performance, is thus not a new one, but one preceded by many cases of these two components getting into war with each other, preparing the final dissociation of drama and performance. All throughout theatre history there have been cases of drama being attributed with a general lack of aesthetic autonomy and often placed in line with instances of mere entertainment. Largely influenced by Peter Szondi's *Theorie des modernen Dramas* of 1957, in which he abandoned the traditional dramatic form as being no longer adequate for conveying what a modern audience is being confronted with in a post-war-world, most importantly based upon the fact that dialogue is no longer a proper tool for displaying acts of communication (Bayerdörfer, 3). Subsequently, drama was pushed more and more into the shadowy backyards of theatrical production, no longer appeared to be a proper medium providing the adequate set of formal basics for living up to the a-transparency

and increasing lack of clarity characterizing postmodernism.

2.4.1.1 Body as text and text as body: *pool* and *Attempts on her life* in the in-between of body and text

Gerda Poschmann's dictum that the turn towards postdramatic forms goes hand in hand with a general movement away from text-based drama and mounts in an overarching interest in the body in performance, could be held against an apparent alignment of some theatrical performances with Jacques Derrida's arguments against Western logocentrism and phonocentrism, finally culminating in bringing the text itself onstage, thus eradicating theatrical presence and phonocentrism, as for instance preceded by Brecht's epic theatre and some productions of Elfriede Jelinek's plays, or rather to be called "texts for the theatre". Ravenhill's *pool*, which, in its mere textual form, contains hardly any information on characters or the course of action and presents the reader with unattributed pieces of speech, utterances without any kind of bodily translation, has been performed in both ways, foregrounding the body, in a collaboration with Frantic Assembly, a theatre group which made the text as such secondary to its translation into bodily movements and formations but also pushing the text to the fore, such as in the Viennese Akademietheater's production of the play, which relied on four characters remaining fairly static and thus let all action and movement remain in the text itself, which stood out as the only active "character" involved. By making the dramatic text a secondary force in the whole process of theatre-production, it appeared as if the characters were no longer in charge of the text, as a structuring and ordering principle and primary element, but their bodies instead moved and inscribed by it. A similar thing happened in the Akademietheater's production, but in an entirely different form, where the text took over a primary status over the individual characters, who also remained entirely without characterization or development. In both ways of staging the play, the individual character, the subjects of performance were entirely left in the dark, vanished behind mere physicality, as in the first production of the play, Ravenhill's collaboration with Frantic Assembly or, such as in the second case, the Viennese production of *pool*, behind the text, covering the subject like a blanket and denying it any sense of being really in possession of the play's progression, not enabling it to use it as a force to make dramatic

action continue the way they would like to with speech as their basic tool.

In their introduction to Physical theatre, of which Ravenhill's first choice for cooperation the physical theatre group Frantic Assembly is certainly part of, Murray and Keefe also remark upon the general turn towards foregrounding the role of visual languages of theatre at the expense of a formerly close link between dramatic text and performance composition (13). Within a wider framework of change and development the increasing focus on the actor's body, its physical expressivity and gestural composition as main signifying drives has led to such a tendency (Murray/Keefe, 13). Central to all different formations and development of recent physical theatre is their general engagement in abandoning the basic principle of acting as re-presentation of character, in its most common understanding as "playing the role of another". Rejection of "truthful" character acting often goes hand in hand with heightened physical theatricality, or an extensive exploration of the fields of self-conscious acting or exaggeration (Murray/Keefe, 21). In the context of physical theatre one of the essential concepts that has countlessly been put forward by those dealing with it, is that of presence, and thus fits in quite neatly with the general focus of this paper on the various interpretations of many different and often paradoxical approaches which all claim to have ultimately defined it. In relation to physical theatre its foregrounding of the notion of presence takes a completely different shape, as compared to text-based drama for instance, as it will be further investigated in the following chapters. It is basically thought of as directing the audience to the performer's body and how it is apparently constructed and thus also feeds the long-lasting conflict of bodily movements as being considered as something inherently authentic, unmediated and truthful, thus not blurred or tainted by the deceit of language and the spoken word. Precisely encapsulating such a view, Myra Felner, in direct opposition to many contemporary philosophical discourses, proposing that it is only through language that we experience the world, argues in favour of a reassessment of gesture, as a human capacity preceding the word: "Gesture precedes knowledge/Gesture precedes thought/ Gesture precedes language" (Murray/Keefe, 21) What seems to make presence a concept so particularly appealing for those clinging to phonocentrism, or some theorists and practitioners involved in physical theatre is their common belief in an apparent universal quality of it, making it something that may be sensed, perceived and understood by anyone regardless of identity, attributing it an air of

ahistoricity and aculturality and thus qualifying it as an entity beyond signification.

Rather resembling a phenomenologist stance, an approach thought of as having been overcome by postmodernism and Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl's phenomenology seems to be particularly applicable to physical theatre, for it is also somehow anchored within a tendency to foreground a sensual and bodily perception of the world, experiencing it beyond the intellect and the usual toolkit of interpretation (Murray/Keefe, 26). The same can also be transferred onto the realm of theatre, probably best exemplified by productions of German theatre maker Einar Schleef, who, for instance by bringing Elfriede Jelinek's *Sportstück* on the stage of Austria's National Theatre, is placing his focus entirely on the physical effects on the spectators, even to such an extent that the audience can almost feel the pain and extreme demands on the voice in an absolutely direct manner, as well as being directly exposed to the actors' physical exertion or sweat, all taking place beyond an experience that is explainable (Murray/Keefe, 26). This viewpoint has not only been called into question by Derrida, as will be further explained in the following chapter, but also by Marxist critic Terry Eagleton, who states that phenomenology "promises to give a firm grounding for human knowledge, but can do so only at a massive cost the sacrifice of human history itself. For surely human meanings are in a deep sense historical (...)" (Eagleton qtd. by Murray, 26).

> Despite all efforts to capture the expressive potential of the body in a logic, grammar or rhetoric, the aura of physical presence remains the point of theatre where the disappearance, the fading of all signification occurs - in favour of a fascination beyond meaning, of an actor's ,presence', of charisma or ,vibrancy' (...) The body becomes the centre of attention, not as a carrier of meaning but in its physicality and gesticulation. The central theatrical sign, the actor's body, refuses to serve signification (Lehmann qtd. by Murray, 25)

The human body could therefore also be characterized as text, as culturally inscribed, not preceding signification, but already inscribed. Opposing the prevalent general notion it is thus nothing that describes, that meaning can be directly deduced from, without any mediating instance in-between, but something that is always already described/inscribed, such as by particular discourses, which finds its perfect illustration in the figure of Anne in *Attempts on her life*, as well as becoming apparent when closely examining notions of the female body in pool. The body overruling the text as regards significance also re-instates the binary of body and idea, as illustrated in Heiner Müller's plea of "rebellion of

the body against ideas" (qtd. in Murray/Keefe, 25) and could be perceived as an attempt at placing the physical into the dominant, primary position formerly inhabited by the world of ideas.

The question that remains is one of cultural background and particularities - with a whole tradition of self-reflexive and non-representational drama behind it, it appears quite easily traceable and logical that a german-speaking production of the play would destroy theatrical illusion and mimesis by route of making the text the primary actor and refusing to cling to a mimetic re-presentation of it. Still, it has got to be taken into consideration that the first production of *pool*, Ravenhill's co-operation with the theatre group Frantic Assembly, was one staged and produced in close connection with and intervention of the author and also better fits in with Poschmann's report on the "postdramatic situation" as she proclaims it to be marked by an increasing importance of the performance aspect, therefore postulating a movement away from drama and the text, which was placed into the foreground by the Austrian production from 2008. Still, this cannot be characterized as a simple inversion of Britain's and Germany's/Austria's tradition of play-making and as typical and symptomatic roles they now inhabit in the context of European theatre history, since, it could be argued that the way the Akademietheater staged the play re-vitalized and probably re-surrected the text but still presented the audience with a form of theatre that has obviously overcome traditional forms of re-presentational theatre.

Another aspect that is certainly worth recounting in the context of the relationship between text as an autonomous poetic form and its widely acclaimed and accepted status as being a mere "manual" for performance, a basic framework to be inscribed with meaning in the process of working on it and performing it, is the text's interconnectedness to the performance by, apart from stage directions, containing itself strategies for performance and implications of its inherent theatricality. Many textual features are not only to be considered as guiding the reader through the dramatic text but are also assisting those involved in the process of staging the play, for one may find in the textual layout implicit impulses for its theatrical translation. What might be presented here is a two-fold process, one unfolding and evolving in the process of reading, in which some textual features might trigger and support the notion of the dramatic text as an autonomous poetic entity while at the same time the way the play is staged might be

informed and considerably influenced by exactly the same features. This notion can be applied to *pool*, but also to *Attempts on her life*, ignorant of the apparent un-theatrical constitution of both plays, manifesting itself in both refusing to have attributed character speech, and *Attempts on her life* even rejecting a coherent course of action and replacing it with a sequence of seemingly loose and dis-integrated, single scenarios instead. The idea behind Crimp choosing to have scenarios instead of scenes is to be found in his introductory note to the play: "Let each scenario in words, the dialogue, unfold against a distinct world, a design, which best exposes its irony" (Crimp, *Attempts*, VI). The interconnectedness of form, also in his later realization onstage and the notion which should be conveyed by it, that of looking at "reality" outside, with an ironic eye, becomes apparent here. As well as his assumption that for accomplishing this task, of looking at things with a certain notion of irony, the scenario instead of the scene is the proper mode of doing so. Choosing the scenario instead of the scene might also be an implication of the world of the play being designed in such a way that its being compressed with temporal and spatial confusion, a state working back on the form of the text by producing an air of dislocation and a taste of how unreal the experience of place and time can be in the contemporary world (Barnett, 17).

Even though the dramatic character as it has ruled the theatres for hundreds of years has been denied almost all of its constituting force, in both *pool* and *Attempts on her life,* it still seems to have not entirely given in to the author's and director's attempts at excluding it completely from constitution and construction. By introducing the term "text bearer" ("Textträger") Poschmann appears to deny the dramatic character the role of the main carrier and driving force of action but still has been left with some marks of being the one in charge of the text's layout and structuring, even at those points where this appears to be realized by the text's structure, typography or line breaks. Many features regarding "voice-layout" find their realization (or vice versa) in the textual layout. It is thus to be perceived as an important point of connection for drama and theatre. In Crimp's *Attempts on her life*, where the dramatic character as such has been completely abandoned, there is still an indication of how the whole text, which at first glance does not appear to be divided individually into different dramatic characters or speakers, should be staged and performed with regard to the speakers, amongst whom the text should be divided up. Typographic elements such as dashes and slashes are indicators as

to how the text should be staged with regard to the speakers and their text. Other typographic elements such as particular words and phrases being printed in italics or in capital letters, as well as constant repetitions of one word right after each other can also be seen as important textual elements influencing performance. In *pool* the same task is accomplished foregroundingly by the use of three dots instead of full stops and some utterances being printed in brackets, as well as, similar to *Attempts on her life*, some words being repeated over a couple of lines.

Hence, the two apparently diametrically opposed concepts of mere "character speech" and the dramatic text as a piece of art, as "poetic", are in fact closely interlinked and in some cases one function might be able to mirror the other one. Even in those cases where the major axioms of dramatic action appear to have been entirely outweighed, thus the main relation of character speech, that of referring to a certain course of action, even commonly their utterances being themselves main producers of dramatic action, has been entirely abandoned, there is certainly more to the dramatic text than being merely "poetic", only fulfilling a role close to the dictum of "art-for-art's-sake". It could be argued that there is an additional dimension that is part of the dramatic text, offering proof that apart from being a simple instance of poetic merit, the text's inherent theatricality that according to Gerda Poschmann informs most dramatic texts is automatically putting it into a category differing from other texts. The two main constituents that are usually drawn upon when classifying a text as theatric or dramatic, namely character speech and its relation to plot and action, should not be perceived as inherently dramatic or theatric qualities of a text, but normally rather refer to particular staging and performance conventions, that have in fact nothing to do with the features of the text themselves. The same could be applied to the myth of dramatic speech, as being natural utterances and pieces of speech, when in fact they have been entirely stripped of speech's most important marker, that of being a tool for communication and its purpose of transmitting ideas and notions that are describable by means of particular sets of discourses. This framework of characterization is one that certainly evolved with the bourgeois illusionist theatre rising to its great success, but has somehow been unconsciously prevalent in theatre discourses ever since (Birkenhauer, 17).

Taking *Attempts on her life* as an example, this tendency appears to be quite easily observable, for, even though the individual scenarios are only loosely connected by

means of an ungraspable entity, called Anne (or deviations, variations of the name), the whole structural formation of the play could still be attributed some sort of linearity, for those reading the play, as well as the theatrical audience witnessing the actual performance will have in mind that at some point the play will come to an end and that, even this might only be a guiding help for the audience, with its implicit desire for structure and coherence, for cause and effect as major ordering principles there seems to be a general belief that the intended order of the scene bears some meaningful implications which the author must have had in mind when composing the play. To conclude it could be argued that even though there is no coherence in the way the individual scenarios are organized, or at least it is altogether not transparent for the audience, there is an element of linearity even in Crimp's play, stemming from the simple reason that all scenes necessarily and naturally have a beginning and an end, the play itself begins at some point and ends, and there is no attempt at simultaneously staging the individual scenes, but the audience is still confronted with a certain linearity. Language as a major, overarching tool of organization and structuring is also used here, in order to establish order and structure time, although this might not be easily recognizable at first glance. The fact that Crimp abolished all dialogue and unstripped his play of all convention-constituting forces that had their grip on drama for the last hundreds of years, also automatically denies the usual double-addressing of dramatic dialogue one of its layers, namely the one of character-addressation, whereas the other aspect involved in this two-fold process, the addressing of the audience is still held on to, sometimes even taken to its most extreme form, evolving as a direct address to the audience, which could be seen as an argument against the general assumption that with postdramatic theatre all communication and dialogue has been banned from the stages. As regards constitution of meaning the utterances made onstage are no longer spatially limited to the realm of characters/actors but shifted and transferred to a greater space in which they are directly addressed to the audience and no longer directly correspond to the usually irrevocable double of showing and telling (cf. Birkenhauer, 21).

An approach which might take all different emphases of performance and text, staging and literature into account is Roland Barthes' dictum of "Arbeit mit Sprache" ("working on language"), which he labels as an integral part of all literary work, and which certainly entails an understanding of theatre-making as being itself a process of producing

literature (Birkenhauer, 22).

2.4.2 Anamnesis: Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*

In his major and heavily consulted account on new forms of theatre, which he subsumes under the term "postdramatic theatre", a field of new theatre productions mostly inhabited and occupied by young European dramatists from the middle of the 1960s onwards, becomes the area Hans-Thies Lehmann plunges into. On the very surface of it, his general aim was to investigate and define the range of criteria working together in bringing to the forth a new wave of theatrical productions spreading over most of central Europe. As a basic construct Lehmann distinguishes between three levels of theatrical staging: the linguistic text, the text of the staging and the performance text (85). In his understanding of the term, postdramatic theatre is not simply to be understood as a new kind of text of staging, or new type of theatre text, but rather a form of sign usage in the theatre which turns both of the other levels upside down, by means of structurally changing the quality of the performance text, which, as he states, becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information (Lehmann, 85).

   Throughout his account he develops and defines an entire range of features, relying heavily on critics and theorists usually aligned with poststructuralism, such as Julia Kristeva, Jean Baudrillard or Jacques Derrida, who will all become crucial figures in examining pool and Attempts as well. The concept of the "polylogue", as introduced and coined by Kristeva, which commonly results from a disintegration of dialogue, through which a polyphonic discourse can emerge, as it becomes apparent in Peter Handke's *Kaspar*, for instance, is certainly to be regarded as one crucial feature of Lehmann's conception of "postdramatic" (31). The theoretical basis of Kristeva's polylogue is a movement of secession, of breaking away from an order which is centred on one logos, and instead replaced with a "disposition of spaces of meaning and sound-spaces" (32) which unfold in a multiplicity of usages and is thus no longer ascribable to one single organizer or organon. As one example among many Lehmann refers to the speakers in

Heiner Müller's texts, who are to be considered as mere "vehicles of discourses" (32), a conception that can easily be related to Martin Crimp's construction of Anne, who could also be defined in terms of being dominated by and in fact basically even constructed through prevalent discourses, even though this cannot be proved by means of the language she uses, for she never emerges as a speaker and subject of language, but only as the mere object of it.

The simultaneity of theatrical signs, which goes hand in hand with a de-hierarchization of dramatic means, Lehmann refers to as "parataxis", is also to be treated as a crucial element in most forms and shapes of theatre productions referred to as postdramatic, and always resulting in the failure of the common classical aesthetic ideal of an "organic" connection of certain elements in an artefact and instead replaced by the unavoidable fragmentary character of perception as particularly rendered conscious in postdramatic theatre. Thus, postdramatic theatre tends to have lost a formerly essential compensatory function of drama, namely its apparent ability of supplementing the chaos of reality with structural order (Lehmann, 88). The entire sphere of choice and decision the spectators are confronted with when paying witness to a theatrical production is consequently enlarged, the logocentric hierarchy finally dissolving and dominant roles have to be assigned to other constitutive elements than dramatic logos and language (93).

As it will become particularly vital with regard to Ravenhill's *pool* but also in connection with Crimp's *Attempts*, one major focus Lehmann develops in his account is definitely on the dominant aspect of physicality and the body. As Lehmann points out "the aura of physical presence remains the point of theatre where the disappearance, the fading of all signification occurs" (95), always in favour of an almost spiritual fascination with an actor's presence, charisma and "vibrancy", that occurs beyond the realm of meaning. Thus, theatre is constantly putting forward a sense of meaning which cannot be named, hence, triggering a shift in the understanding of sign production, which is at work when in postdramatic theatre the audience sees itself face to face with an immediately imposing physicality (Lehmann, 95). As it will become particularly virulent with regard to pool, the body as the centre of attention, not to be seen as a carrier of meaning but solely in its mere physicality and gesticulation, as the central theatrical sign refuses to serve signification. What Lehmann suggests can be subsumed under the conception of a somehow "auratic" presence, often additionally aggravated by the presence of the deviant

body, which through a variety of forms of deformation deviates from the norm and thus causes an "amoral" fascination with the audience (95). The postdramatic foregrounding of the body can also be seen in the light of "sensuality undermining sense", which would also point towards a deconstruction of the basic mind-body dyad ruling and structuring Western thinking (162). Theatre's dimension in the process of liberating the body of its status of being reduced to functioning as a signifier, thus, should not be underestimated. By revoking the separation of the body from language and re-introducing into the realm of spirit - voice and language - the painful and pleasurable physicality, which Kristeva called the semiotic within the signifying process (96), the physical body that once was felt to be interpreted in the same manner as a text in postdramatic theatre rather has become its own reality, whose mode of transmission is no longer that of "telling" an emotion, but through an "ultimate presence" manifests itself as the site of inscription of collective history (97).

Another essential feature, also partaking in blowing off, disrupting and suspending the dialogical format, which was dominating the stage for such a long time, is the emerging either of dominant monological structures or a choral voice, a vocal plurality in many productions of the last decades, which could be interpreted in the light of unification of individual bodies in a crowd, as a "force" (130), but also as a mask, under which an individual's voice is no longer clearly discernible.

Postdrama's often attributed proximity to forms of Performance Art can also be affirmed in postulating a split between presence and representation, the representation and the mode of representation which is essentially triggered by performance itself and which could be seen as rooted in older forms of anti-illusionist and epic forms of theatre (136). Under the label of "self-transformation" the actions of the artists are, as Lehmann posits, not so much directed towards attempts at transforming a reality external to them, in order to communicate it by means of aesthetic treatment, for the actions of the artist, which in Performance Art is noticeably often a female artist are usually grounded upon organizing, executing and exhibiting treatments affecting and even seizing her/his own body. The body is thus used not only as the subject of action but at the same time also as its object, as signifying material, which then mounts in an utter annihilation of all aesthetic distance (Lehmann, 137).

> the differentiation between performance and theatre would have to be made not only where the exposure of the body and the self-inflicted injury introduce the body as signifying material into a situation in which it is absorbed by the signifying process but where the situation is brought about expressly for the purpose of self-transformation. Performers in theatre want to transform not themselves but a situation and perhaps also the audience. (138)

Lehmann also refers to Julia Kristeva's "chora", a philosophical concept that also appears to be particularly relevant for Ravenhill's and Crimp's plays. The reason for this connection lies in the opposition to the logos, which is both manifest to the plays as well as to Kristeva's chora and which becomes apparent in the foregrounding of physical features such as breath, rhythm, and the "now" in the physical presence of the human body over the logos (Lehmann, 145). Related to the usual theatre-situation this would particularly affect the flow of communication going on between stage and spectator, which can be no longer defined in terms of communicating meaning, but which rather has been aligned with a "magical" transmission and connection happening by means of language. This specific notion is one we also come across in Julia Kristeva's writing, who referring to Plato and his Timaeus stated that the conception of a "space" which is supposed to render a logically unsolvable problem thinkable in an "anticipating manner", referring to the paradox of thinking of being also as becoming (145). The way Kristeva refers to Plato's chora, it is basically to be understood as a conceiving, receptive space, not logically comprehensible, in whose "womb" the opposition of signifiers and signifieds manifests itself and was differentiating in the first place. In its basic functioning the chora could also be characterized as an ante-chamber, secret cellar and foundation of the logos of language (Lehmann, 145). It positions itself in a way antagonistic to the logos, but still as a form of "rhythm" it is part of all language as its "poetry". Kristeva refers to this particular dimension of the chora in all processes of signification as the "Semiotic".

The way this concept relates to the new forms of theatre Lehmann draws upon, is that it appears to make use of this concept by making attempts at re-instituting it, primarily as a space and speech/discourse without telos and hierarchy, without causality and without fixable meaning and unity. The theatre as a "chora-graphy" thus could be described as a process of deconstructing a discourse which is built upon a basic orientation towards meaning and the invention of a space annihilating and elucidating the laws of telos and unity (145).

 Within the context of space, it is also worth considering Lehmann's notion of "textscapes" ("Stimmlandschaften"), which bears close resemblances to Derrida's conception of "espacement", which is itself a concept closely related to Différance being the overarching principle of his thinking. In this context Lehmann's textscapes mean a phonetic materiality, the temporal course, the dispersion in space, the loss of teleology and self-identity, as well as it also designates the connection of postdramatic theatre language with the new dramaturgy of the visual (148).

> Postdramatic theatre is a theatre of the present. Reformulating presence as present, in allusion to Bohrer's concept of the absolute present tense, means, above all, to conceive of it as process, as a verb. It can be neither object, nor substance, nor the object of cognition in the sense of a syntheses effected by the imagination and the understanding.(Lehmann, 42)

2.4.2.1 Misunderstanding Lehmann

In German departments all over the academic world, Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* has become a fixed and heavily consulted work of reference for all issues dealing with modern, experimental forms of drama. Still, most discussions informed by Lehmann's account use it as some sort of catalogue listing the crucial features and facets that might imply a drama-text's "postdramaticality", when in fact Lehmann with his account provides the academic community with a survey of recent and "postmodern" modes and ways of staging contemporary plays and their performances. A play's attributed "postdramaticality" is thus not a feature inherent to the dramatic text itself, but is, seen through the lens of Lehmann's postdrama, turned into one by means of the actual staging and theatrical performance. It is thus a common and widespread misunderstanding of Lehmann's arguments and intentions to use it as an instrumentarium for analysing texts for the theatre, which happen to have slipped into the category of "postmodern/postdramatic". Some critics such as David Barnett even try to make explicit that their focus is on the text and not on the performance and that the dramatic text itself can be described as postdramatic, that it can bear text-inherent features marking it as postdramatic, which becomes apparent when just looking at the title of his article "When is a Play not a Drama? Two examples of Postdramatic Theatre Texts", which talks explicitly about "Postdramatic Theatre Texts", which could also be seen as an indication

of his general assumption that one needs to talk about "Theatre Texts", which could also be translated to "Texts for the Theatre", a definition also proposed by German critics, thus marking a general movement away from classifying such texts as "dramatic", which would not be a proper label, since a dramatic text does not necessarily have to be one written for the theatre, or for theatric performance. In his article on Crimp's *Attempts* Voigts-Virchow refuses to differentiate between text and performance, classifies Crimp as "Postdramatisches Theater", but in his article refers to Mitchell's production in 2007, which according to Lehmann's instrumentarium, would not fit into the catalogue and its featured characteristics (cf. Voigts-Virchov, "Postdramatisches Theater: Martin Crimp").

An informative note on what triggered and informed Lehmann's extensive study can be found in Jürs-Munby's introduction to the English translation of it: "Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre is testament to a new emphasis on performance in European and North American theatre and art from the 1960s onwards (...)" (4). Lehmann and others thus parallel the prefix "post-" in postdramatic with a new valorization and esteem of the performance aspect - a notion already introduced by Gerda Poschmann - and claim a general „turn to performance" for most of the plays they subsume under the label "postdramatic theatre" (Lehmann, 6). As Malgorzata Sugiera suggests, the basic structural principle for new texts written for the theatre has come to be their immanent theatricality, which is "no longer understood as a reflection upon theatre as a domain of artistic activity or as an extensive metaphor of human life, but rather as a means of inducing the audience to watch themselves as subjects which perceive, acquire knowledge and partly create the objects of their cognition" (qtd. in Lehmann, 6). What Sugiera posits here is the basic and general shift away from the direct mirroring relationship of "life onstage" and "human life", thus anchored in reality, towards a constant attempt at making the audience aware of their position as actively constituting a fictional universe themselves. Jürs-Munby goes on providing examples of postdramatic theatre texts, whose "postdramaticality", as he referred to a few lines before, goes hand in hand with a general tendency of these texts to become manifests of their increasing immanent theatricality. Among his list of authors including Heiner Müller, Elfriede Jelinek, Sarah Kane and Suzan Lori-Parks, we also find Martin Crimp and his *Attempts* (Lehmann, 6). Locating it more on a broader level of a general change of concepts, thus infiltrated by an entire new stance towards subjectivity, presence and conscience and

therefore crossing the boundaries of solely working within the generic space of "drama and theatre", the "postdramatic text" could also be seen as unfolding along the landmarks of postmodernism and poststructuralism, rather than its inner-textual theatricality. Even if tightly knit to the performance aspect of these plays, their theatricality is still a textual feature that must be regarded as very hard to be pinned down by means of certain criteria, most of them being closely connected to language and the relationship of the play to reality. In particular Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp with their plays transgressing genre-boundaries, *48.4 Psychosis* and *Attempts* at times make the line between drama and poetry a particularly fuzzy one, it becomes even harder to detect and define their implicit theatrical quality, as ascribed by Poschmann, Fischer-Lichte, Jürs-Munby and others.

2.4.2.2 Diagnoses: *pool* and *Attempts* in the light of Lehmann's postdramatic

Placing Lehmann's postdramatic into the framework of the philosophical concepts which all conditioned the so-called "era of postmodernism" and provided a proper basis for these new forms of theatre to emerge, as well as bringing it also into a close connection with the understanding of postmodernism in general, makes it worth inspecting Crimp's as well as Ravenhill's play in this particular context.

  One of the main features emerging in all genres of postmodernist texts, is the texts' implementation of a meta-level, referring to the form of the text itself, while at the same time drawing upon and exposing its state as a piece of art. In Crimp's *Attempts*, several instances of meta-theatricality can be found, in which Crimp decided to incorporate a comment of the text itself on its status as a dramatic one, such as in the second scenario whose title "The Tragedy of Love and Ideology" already includes a direct reference to its generic format, which in fact the piece of text itself does not reach but only refers to and parodies:

"A river, exactly, running through a great European city and a couple at the water's edge. These are the basic ingredients." (208) "The basic ingredients in other words of a whole tragedy (...) This whole tragedy / of love. / This whole tragedy of ideology and love." (212)

The other metatheatrical comment occurs in scenario eleven, and is a direct reference to the play itself, its formal innovations, as regards its denial of conventional dialogue and character development:

> It's theatre - that's right - for a world in which theatre itself has died. Instead of the outmoded conventions of dialogue and so-called characters lumbering towards the embarrassing denouéments of the theatre, Anne is offering us a pure dialogue of objects: of leather, of glass, of Vaseline and steel. Of blood, saliva and chocolate. She's offering us no less than the spectacle of her own existence, the radical pornography - if I may use that overused word - of her own broken and abused - almost Christ-like - body. (254)

Instead of interactive dialogue between human subjects, which lead to their development and an enhanced creation of psychological depth, Crimp tries to introduce a mere composition of objects in dialogue with each other, which evokes the feeling of a still life rather than a scene controlled by human subjects in dialogue with each other. The stressed physicality of the scene, Crimp's mentioning of blood and saliva and his final characteriziation of the scene as a spectacle, thus also bearing traces of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, one based solely on the human body, existence thus reduced to the body as spectacle, Crimp brings together both pornography and the body stylized in a Christ-like composition. This form of heightened religious stylization is also made use of in Ravenhill's play. Sally is painted in a similar manner the moment she falls into the empty pool. Both authors emphasis on physicality and the female body in general fits quite neatly into the image of postdrama's general focus on physicality and the female body in performance, working as a projection screen for ideals, wishes and desires. Even though the two authors realize it in different ways both plays show a strong focus on the subject of the female body in performance.

Taking a closer look at Ravenhill's *pool* in the previous section of this paper, it became quite obvious that, in particular as regards the British production in cooperation with Frantic Assembly, the production's focus was very clearly on the female body, especially as a body in deformation and one that needs to be inscribed with meaning. In Crimp's *Attempts* similar moments of an apparently heightened estimation of the body as a bearer of meaning can be encountered. The individual (hi-)stories of a person are merged with the surface of the body, which in the following quote from the play seem to have been absorbed by the body, thus being in a state of inscription needs to be read like a printed text:

"The whole of the past is there in her face. It's written there like a history. The history of her family. The history of the land itself (...)" (215)

A similar notion is revealed a bit later in the same scenario, in which the author refers to

the fact that raising her voice to tell something is not even necessary, since all that has got to be said is in Anne's (Anya's) face, who is, as all the other versions of her, „beyond words", thus remaining silent: "And it's all in her face. / In Anya's face. We don't need words. She's beyond words. Her mouth, in fact her mouth trembles but no words come. / The inadequacy of words." (217) Therefore, it can be argued that postdrama's preference of the physical over the logos, the text, is an issue made explicit by Crimp's text itself.

Through the denial of real character attribution both *Attempts* as well as *pool* keep the audience from getting in touch with what could serve as a referent, that might be able to bridge the world of the text and reality outside. This denial of attributing characters a psychological dimension is probably taken to its extreme in *Attempts*, in which not only the central character Anne remains entirely in the dark, but also the other speakers cannot be defined as characters. What is made visible is only the different modes of re-presentation and certain forms of employing a set of fixed discourses in an apparently unsuccessful attempt at constructing meaning. Through the use of this multiplicity of discourses power is exerted and subjectivity rendered impossible. The incapability of the central character to emerge as a real subject and its ineffective strive for subjectivity, as being also reminiscent in Ravenhill's play, in which Sally as the central character of the play is constantly oscillating between her status as a subject, in control of her own story, and her being subjected to being a mere object of art. The status of the object replacing the position of the speaking subject, is one aspect Crimp makes heavy use of, since he subjects his centre to an entire range of powerful discourses, Anne is consequently constantly turned into an object, but also fetishized and used to satisfy desire, such as in scenario five, "The Camera loves you". Still, Anne's objectification, which is explicitly mentioned in the text as such, also gains an additional dimension, namely that of Anne being her own object, thus the creator of her own scenario: "An object in other words. A religious object. / An object, yes. But not the object of others, the object of herself. That's the scenario / she offers." (255)

As regards formal issues, the multiperspectivity and apparent multiplicity of voices both authors seem to employ, which throughout most parts of the play refrains from being able to be classified as conventional dialogue, also ties in with Lehmann's thoughts on postdrama's new modes of performance. Over large parts a choric quality may also be detected and might be an appropriate strategy for the staging of some scenes, since

closely connected to the choric quality of some text passages, the concept of Kristeva's chora and polyphony and Lehmann's conception of the "textscape" also appear to be of certain relevance regarding both plays.

2.4.3 *Attempts* and *pool* contextualized - two plays retreating from realism

Dealing with postdramatic/postmodern theatre and drama is an academic field quite thoroughly and widely explored, at least in Germany and most and foremost in Austrian university-classrooms and professor's offices, for this is the (although in their plays heavily criticized and debated) home to Peter Handke, Elfriede Jelinek, Thomas Bernhard and Gert Jonke and thus the birthplace of an entire wave of self-reflexive, anti-mimetic modes of drama-writing. These developments and tendencies are something the British as well as the American stage lacks, never quite abandoning an overarching and continuously dominant tradition of (social) realism, perfectly exemplified by Osborne for instance, and bourgeois illusionism. These considerations mark *Attempts on her life* as well as *pool* as singular and exceptional, thus standing outside Britain's dominant tradition of drama-writing, both as regards their two writer's individual work history and also when put into the context of British drama in a general sense, which has to be categorized as sticking fairly closely to its long-sustaining realist tradition. In particular when compared to self-reflexive, anti-mimetic and non-representational drama-texts emerging in the 1960s on the German, and in particular on the Austrian stages - proving to be a somewhat unique example in the wider context of European drama-history, British drama seems to lack such moments of new conception and formation. Still, it must not be left out of sight that in Germany the nineties brought along a wave of young aspiring British drama to be performed all over Germany, Sarah Kane, Martin Crimp's and Mark Ravenhill's early plays, to name only a few, thus proving the fact that the German tendency to abolish dramatic characters as well as dramatic action raised a general desire for action and character based theatre among German audiences, as it was still dominant on the British stage (Bayerdörfer, 1). Plot, individual conflicts, an individual's action and its consequences and the subsequent, in most cases very brutal, destruction of it, were all aspects very much welcomed by these audiences, and

announced a comeback of dramatic theatre on the German stage (Bayerdörfer, 1).

With these two plays, Crimp and Ravenhill both appear to have turned their back on the whole league of realist dramatists that precedes them and instead seem to turn to the continent in search of a point of departure for investigating a wholly new territory of language-based theatre. Ravenhill's *pool* opens up an entirely new theatrical space, a text space, which rather tends to follow Handke's programmatic and symptomatic text *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (*Offending the Audience*), almost appearing to use it as a manual for the composition of his drama-text. A similar concept of playwriting which might function as a point of connection between Handke and Crimp can also be detected when reading Crimp's few guiding remarks which he decided to put right at the beginning of his play, and which, before dealing with typographical details, includes the following instruction: "This is a piece for a company of actors whose composition should reflect the composition of the world beyond the theatre" (Crimp, 202). This short comment which appears to masquerade as an form of manual for staging the play, is apparently ironic, for the play does by no means attempt to reflect anything behind it, for it is quite obvious that the play is far from any kind of mimetic re-presentation. As best exemplified when looking at Anne, Crimp does no longer share a commonly assumed belief in a referential world of things lurking behind the curtains of the stage that nourishes the world of art with graspable elements and concepts. Crimp's apparent instruction to produce any kind of mirror image of the world outside cannot be fulfilled by staging this play, for it is exactly this question of ungraspability the play thematizes, and uses Anne as a proper example of.

Placing *Attempts* into a wider historical and cultural framework Luigi Pirandello's early attempts at creating a theatre that works beyond the limits of illusionism could be seen as a textual as well as a formal source for Crimp's play. A notion also taken up and included in Michael Billington's review of Katie Mitchell's production of the play in 2007, arguing that Crimp has re-cylced the Sicilian's idea that coherent identity is a myth (Billington, *The Guardian*, 15 March 2007). In Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* the characters that are part of the play are searching for an author, who, as they believe, has the power to release them of the stereotyped roles the actors have imprisoned them in (Cohn, 201). The play, thus, points towards its own status as a fictional construct, which is entirely at the hands of the author, who therefore is the only

one in charge of all action and figuration, a general stance towards drama marking it as clearly anti-illusionist and therefore certainly to be considered a predecessor of all evolving anti-illusionist tendencies after World War II. On the basis of assuming a thematic as well as formal link between this very early attempt at breaking down the fourth wall of illusionist drama and Crimp's *Attempts on her life*, in the case of Crimp amendments to the title would lead to labelling it as "a non-specified number of actors in search of one character", thus, the focus is no longer on the author, the external force in charge of the text, but stays inside the textual universe and questions the whole concept of dramatic character as a coherent "authorized" construct. Crimp's Anne is no longer a product of the author's mind and intentions, but rather one that suffers from a heavy lack of coherence as a result of character as being seen as ungraspable and un-constructable by means of language. As pointed out by Julia Kristeva in *Séméiotike* from 1969, the "textual practice decentres the subject of a discourse (or meaning, of a structure) and is constructed as the operation of its pulverization into a differentiated infinity" (Kristeva, qtd. in Davis 132) As one could further deduce from her writing, the speaking subject itself turns out as being a text, inscribed within the whole signifying process, not as a posited entity, but in Kristeva's terms as the semiotic, symbolic and signifiable features of the signifying process (Silverman, 181).

Among most scholars there seems to be a general tendency to treat plays such as pool and Attempts as deviations and exceptions, as "retreats from realism" and examples off the track of an, in the context of the British play, otherwise consistent line of realist enterprises (Luckhurst, 73). Even though there might be no such inclination towards self-reflexive and playful modes of drama writing in Britain, which in Austria also arises from quite an exhaustive tradition of general scepticism and distrust with regard to language and its capacities commonly attributed to, this lack should not only be sought among the playwrights, but is also to be perceived as a lapse on the side of the critics and academia, all part in forming a canon serving the idea of a particular "British theatre", mostly a certain type of social realism endorsed by the Royal Court and other influential institutions.

Still, there is also a short and slippery moment of defence in Luckhurst's short account manifesting itself in her observation that one might detect a tendency of the big mainstream theatres opening themselves up a bit, in particular to physical and dance-

based theatre, an observation also tying in with Poschmann's argument that what is now regarded as "postdramatic" is a theatre turning away from the text and foregrounding aspects of performance (Luckhurst, 79). Luckhurst's general stance is that British theatre history is in fact a joint enterprise of playwrights as well as theatre critics re-discovering and re-exploring realism, beginning with "the grand rediscovery of realism in 1956", which was constituted and built upon an urge for re-affirming that theatre in England rises to its best when centred on investigating state-of-the-nation-debates (82).

3. THE END OF LOGOCENTRISM - DECONSTRUCTION OF PRESENCE

3.1 Jacques Derrida and deconstruction: a general outline

At least since Jacques Derrida's critical thoughts and concepts on the way Western thinking is structured and organized, exposing it as "logocentric", and coining concepts that are now considered as basic and common in the field of literary criticism, paved its way into the academic world, one can no longer get around including what became known as the "deconstruction of Western metaphysics" into every kind of critique that makes an attempt at unveiling the hierarchy of power that has to be perceived as an integral part of all binary oppositions. Binary oppositions are by no means innocent structural relations but power relations, in which one part is set up as the norm and therefore dominates the other, still being dependent on its supposed counterpart. One part of the opposition is always given priority at the expense of the other, which therefore acquires a secondary or derivative position (Currie 49). At the very core of these considerations lies the notion that the status of priority and the privileged position of one part over the other is not an inherent feature, thus to be directly located in the 'nature' of things themselves, since there is always a hierarchy between the two terms of the dyad (Currie, 49).

  Taking into account most of the oppositional pairs commonly associated and drawn upon in relation to Derrida, such as soul/body, being/becoming and presence/absence, it could be argued that in the course of Ravenhill's as well as Crimp's play these dyads are constantly pushed towards the frontiers of deconstructing themselves, as a simple

consequence of the two seemingly opposing terms frequently collapsing into each other and finally resulting in their structural hierarchy being turned on its head at some particular point. Still, it is not sufficient to merely criticize these oppositions and turn them around, but it has to be proved that they are actually interdependent and not independent entities and that their perceived difference in value is not inherent to them but to be classified as a mere product of discourse. The term commonly attributed a certain sense of superiority, such as meaning, soul, transcendence and nature belongs to the realm of the logos, and marks a higher presence, whereas the secondary, inferior term always indicates a fall. The first term is thus given priority over the other and always perceived as secondary and derivative in relation to it, as some sort of complication, negation or disruption of the first (Culler, 93).

Central to Derrida's major themes and theories is the concept of a term being "sous rature", or "under erasure" in its most common English translation, which means that a word that has been written down is crossed out again, and then both the word and the deletion of it remain on the page. This device that functions as the basic underlying concept for most of Derrida's texts and theories is derived from Martin Heidegger, who used it in connection with the concept of Being and who, by crossing a word out and printing both the word and its deletion, referred to the nature of the word as being both inadequate, yet still necessary. His primary notion was that Being is not an entity that can be contained by signification. Contrary to Derrida, he believed in the concept of the "final signified", a "transcendental signified" that manifests itself in the notion of Being (Sarup, 35). Derrida argued that by employing this device the presence of a transcendental signified fades behind the lines of being crossed out but still remains readable (Menke, 249). The way Derrida perceives language, signifier as well as signified have lost their long inhabited position as stable categories but are now regarded as two interdependent instances prone to constant change and finally culminating in the now fairly widespread notion that meaning is never really present in the sign itself, but always depends on what a sign is not and how it is different from other signs. Therefore, a sign's meaning is somehow never really present but changing permanently, which makes it impossible to get a grip on the reference. It is to be considered as a result of these changes and its derived instability that no one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified can establish itself. The world, as a system of signs is never one of stable systems of signs,

therefore, exposes meaning itself as unstable and presents us with permanent shifts in meaning. The sign itself is no index of an underlying reality but of other signs, which implies that in fact there is no reality outside the sign. It is no longer ascribed the role of a homogeneous unit that is capable of bridging an origin (the referent) and an end (meaning), since it is constantly "sous rature", always already marked by the trace of other signs (Sarup, 36). Therefore, it can be concluded that the potential borne by the sign is not referring to something totally other than itself, but that each sign is inscribed with the marks and traces of all the other varying signs surrounding it. The signified which is entirely independent of the signifier does not exist, also fostering the thought that there is no realm of meaning which could exist on its own, isolated from all the marks which are used as indicating it and pointing towards it.

Deconstruction, even though never declared by Derrida to be a particular method or practice probably comes closest to being one when defining it as a set of tools and frameworks of thought used to undermine a certain philosophical standpoint a particular discourse asserts, as well as the hierarchical oppositions that make up its basis, by means of identifying the rhetorical devices and operations of the text which create the key concept or premise of it (Culler 86).

3.2 Deconstructing Husserl's metaphysics of presence

Deconstruction is closely tied to what Derrida labelled "metaphysics of presence", which he links to Edmund Husserl and his phenomenological standpoint and theories. At the very core of his argumentation Derrida agitates against a long philosophical tradition of relying on an immediately available space of certainty manifesting itself in the concept of presence and thus also denies the common Western-occidental conception of an entity being immediately present to itself, in its most ideal case, in an unmediated way. He thus calls into question both the present as an exact point in time and the conventional understanding of knowledge in connection to presence, since presence appears to be marked and conditioned by the idea of knowledge to quite a huge extent, drawing upon the general idea that our knowledge of the world relies very much on what we seem to experience in the here and now (Sarup, 38).

The general assumption that things are present in themselves, thus constituting an area

of presence that we occupy and move about in, which is commonly used to derive knowledge and meaning from, has led to a generally accepted priority of speech over writing. As regards the realm of language in general, speech has been perceived as being closest to presence and finally mounted in a general de-evaluation of writing in most philosophical accounts. The general assumption that led to the manifestation of that hierarchy is the perception of the act of speaking as one characterized by the words being immediately present to the speaker and the hearer, and as a result of this aspect of immediate availability and presence there is no mediating layer in-between that might flaw or destroy its meaning being directly retrievable for the hearer as it is carried outside. In speech meaning is not only present but immanent, ready to be retrieved, particularly with regard to such cases in which we use the inner voice of our consciousness (Sarup, 38). Phonocentrism is the term Derrida uses in relation to this general assumption, which first emerges in his major account *On Grammatology* when examining and deconstructing Saussure's model of the sign and portrays it as a variation being directly interlinked with his overarching attack on Western logocentrism. Thus, phonocentrism is certainly to be regarded as one of the major issues when dealing with the topic of presence throughout the Western philosophical tradition, since it has presented itself as one of the most prevailing and intriguing issues evolving in a multiplicity of different shapes and concepts and could be seen as one of its major manifestations. Presence is also the one major aspect under which an immediate connection between phonocentrism and logocentrism evolves, manifests itself and becomes apparent. Logocentrism, a concept best exemplified when taking Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" as the background of argumentation, is centred on the assumption that the first and the last thing has got to be the Logos, the Word and the Divine Mind, the view of a self-presence of full self-consciousness (Sarup, 39). The concept of logocentrism could be described as being deeply committed to a general dedication to an overarching belief in the conception of some sort of "ultimate" word, presence, essence, truth, language and experience, all implying the existence of the one sign that will give meaning to all the others - the transcendental signifier and its corresponding undebatable meaning which all signs aim at - the transcendental signified. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida defines his abandonment of "natural presence" in relation to his concept of the supplement: "The 'real' supervenes or is added only in taking meaning from a trace or an

invocation of supplements (un appel de supplément). And so on indefinitely, for we have read in the text that the absolute present, Nature, what is named by words like 'real mother' etc., have always already escaped, have never existed; that what inaugurates meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence" (Derrida qtd. in Culler, 106).

In the context of drama and the theatre there is a close connection of phonocentrism to the dramatic performance onstage, for parallel to speech there seems to be the general belief in drama as a mediator of meaning, closely related to the concept of mimesis and presence. Crimp and Ravenhill both undermine this notion, which has been ascribed to drama and the theatre since Aristotle, expose its inability to convey meaning by means of spoken text and performance, and thus strip it of its didactic as well as mimetic character. Actors are present onstage but they act against theatric illusion, break with the didactic tradition of the theatre and show their deep suspicion as regards theatre's potential to function as a mirror of real life.

This philosophy of presence Derrida deconstructs and that determines language in relation to its relationship with truth thus perceives writing as the external, the physical and the nontranscendental and therefore as a threat to the assumed pureness of expression. This seems to be caused by the fact that the operations involved in the process of writing are not seen as a mere means of expression but as affecting or infecting the meaning it is supposed to be just re-presenting (Culler, 91). In contrast to writing, speech is thus attributed the considerable advantage that even though mediation takes place, the signifiers vanish as soon as they are uttered, they are not obtruding and ambiguity can be prevented by the speaker him/herself by means of explaining and ensuring that the meaning has been properly conveyed (Culler, 91). This is not the case with the dramatic situation, since the actors on stage normally do not react to the reactions of the audience and thus cannot make sure that they received their message, if there is any, the way they wanted it to be conveyed. Still, it could be argued that the dramatic situation fosters the belief in a greater immediacy of meaning, since it is en- acted by the actors onstage, who offer no explanations of what happens, but still provide the audience with this sense of immediacy and an apparent unmediated-ness. In contrast, writing obscures this seeming immediacy and thus also its connected pureness of the sign and thus meaning, since its operations are always linked to an absence of the speaker,

which produced an effect of obscurity and alienation/ambiguity. Behind the implied ideal that thought should be contemplated as directly as possible lurks the notion and thus also the premise that language has got to be as transparent as possible (Culler, 91). The rejection of the signifier is thus always to be considered a banishment of writing.

The last centuries have been intoxicated by presence as one of the unique informing attributes of theatre, as exemplified by Michael Goldman in *The Actor's Freedom*, for instance: "we find a present beyond the limitations of the present, a selfhood beyond the limits of self...We identify with actors because the self longs for clarification, because it longs to possess the present and possess itself in the present, in a way that ordinary space, time and selfhood do not allow" (Goldman, qtd. in Fuchs, 70) The goal that was thought to be fulfilled by the actor onstage was that of a recuperation of full reality, "the true Presence of divinity" (Fuchs, 70). It appears that in 1975 Goldman already fought a losing battle, re-instating a claim for presence at a time when a new experimental theatre had already become quite established, with Samuel Beckett in Great Britain and Peter Handke in Germany and Austria formalizing the actor and ripping apart his ritual communion with the audience. Scholar and semiotician Keir Elam's definition of drama as "An I addressing a you here and now", provides a proper basis for the implied importance of the presence-effect (Fuchs, 71). In *pool* and *Attempts on her life*, on the textual level and the level of dramatic action and form, but also as regards the relationship between the actual performance of the play and dramatic text in its written (published) form, which traditionally has been considered the "banished other of dramatic performance" (Fuchs, 71), and in which the legacy of Saussure and Western logocentrism/phonocentrism and its preference for the spoken text can be traced.

Thornton Wilder's symptomatic utterance that "on the stage it is always now" (Fuchs, 72) is one not only challenged by playwrights, probably beginning with Luigi Pirandello's attempts at breaking down the "fourth wall" in his *Six actors in search of an author*, but also implicitly called into question by Derrida's critique on Western logocentrism. To Derrida, there is no Now that can possibly be entered by the human subject, nor can it become entirely present to itself, for every assumed "self presence" is already infiltrated by the trace. The present is nothing primal, but only something that is re-constituted (Fuchs, 72). Christopher Norris on the human voice, explicating Derrida states that it

becomes a metaphor of truth,...a source of self-present living speech as opposed to the secondary, lifeless emanations of writing. In speaking one is able to experience (supposedly) an intimate link between sound and sense, an inward and immediate realization of meaning which yields itself up without reserve to perfect, transparent understanding. Writing on the contrary destroys this ideal of pure self-presence. It obtrudes an alien, depersonalized medium, a deceiving shadow which falls between intent and meaning, between utterance and understanding (...) Writing in short is a threat to the deeply traditional view that associated truth with self-presence and the „natural" language wherein it finds expression. (Fuchs, 73)

It is important to add at this point that for Derrida, all utterances are already infiltrated and marked by writing, or could even be considered to precede speech, for by writing he not only refers to the formal graphic system but to the whole linguistic system he calls "ecriture" and, according to Derrida, precedes all spoken utterances. Thus, there can be no longer any claims for a stable bond between thought and speech, therefore also blurring the moment at which an utterance might have had its origin, finally erasing its point of origin and mounting in an exposure of self-same presence as illusionary (Fuchs, 73). Writing points towards the fact that language is not to be considered a transparent medium of thoughts, feelings and the whole of mental processes, but that it always involves a process of "marking" that might have slipped through the author's net of primary intentions (Menke, 244). Being witness to any kind of dramatic performance we thus encounter this metaphysical assumption in its most concrete form, as it could be exemplified when taking into account Goethe's concept that the audience watching the dramatic performance should be transported into a realm where "even that which is narrated must so be placed before the eyes of the spectator as though it were actually taking place" (qtd. in Fuchs, 74).

Relating it to drama, this would lead to the conclusion that the dramatic text makes an indefinite claim at constantly affirming its status as being as closest to spontaneous speech as possible, a claim turning out as mere illusion. There used to be a constant attempt at asserting speech as the direct, incontestable conduit to Being. This general notion has started being undermined and exposed as mere illusion with the advent of new, experimental forms of drama in the 70s when a turn towards a general "literalization" or "textualization", which would have been classified as simply undramatical by the generations preceding them, occurred and became visible (Fuchs, 74). Already with Brecht, a greater attention towards the written text, also including it in the actual performance, emerged and probably entailed a whole new wave of reflexive, language-

focused theatre in the 60s and 70s, with Beckett and Handke, such as in *Kaspar*, or *Offending the Audience*, as its most prominent figures. Foregrounding the written text as an integral part of the actual performance also led to important implications as regards the dramatic character, who re-assumed his pre-psychological meaning, and re-gained its role as impression or inscription (Fuchs, 74). As Fuchs further remarks, the whole shifting of the centre of significance from character to allegory, could be traced back to the works of early modernism, finally resulting in losing a former unquestioned and undisputed belief in an active, originary force of speech itself (74).

One question posed by Elinor Fuchs in this context is whether the dramatic form is implicated in a generic way in the very destiny of metaphysics (90), can be answered with Ravenhill, Crimp, and a whole generation of mostly continental European, language-critical playwrights before them, such as Müller, Jelinek, Handke, Beckett, only to name a few. Furthermore, she refers to the, after dealing with texts such as *pool* and *Attempts on her life* quite familiar case of the text becoming an actor itself, thus signification being no longer centred on the self, a subject, an actor, or any other kind of em-bodiment of text. This marks a general tendency towards disembodiment, which also contrasts, even contradicts Poschmann's perspective. Still, most of today's theatre-productions appear to be clinging to performances centred on the human subject, sticking to mostly psychologized character development.

Language itself becomes the focal point in *Attempts on her life,* on the basis of its explicit lack of context and a subsequent sense of 'Verfremdung/alienation', reminding us strongly of Brecht (Barnett, 17). Common phrases are presented to the audience but ripped of their habitual inflections and thus calling the very foundations of everyday communication into question. The spectator is immediately directed away from the speaker and his individual utterance to the systems that construct the lexicons and syntax of the spoken, anchored in deploying whole processes of laying bare and alienating. Constant repetition is also forcing the audience to question originality.

The speaker is divorced from the spoken and the utterance released from its dependence on the speaking subject, finally mounting in a gap between speaker and the spoken text. The speaking subject is no longer attributed the role of producing original utterances that are supposed to carry meaning, which leads to the fact that the relationship between text and context turns out to be more important than the interrelation of text and individual

speaker. All the different systems behind the sentences uttered onstage are marked by language and thus evoke the notion of the systems speaking through the speakers onstage, who are then reduced to mere moulds inscribed with language. This also makes the individual incapable of criticizing the system, since it is exposed as being part of it through the language it uses, thus human agency in the text/the power of the speaking subject to create his/her environment by means of language is fundamentally interrogated and language as the only active agent. As also mentioned in the chapter on post-drama/post-theatre, Gerda Poschmann also claims that one of the most crucial features characterizing postdramatic theatre is the loss of the direct and immediate connection between spoken text and the speaking subject.

   One point which has remained unanswered up to now in connection to the two plays in question is whether the apparent disembodiment and de-subjectification that shapes and characterizes *Attempts on her life*, as well as the Viennese staging of *pool* and the strong focus on physicality the audience was confronted with when they were witness to the very first production of *pool*, could be seen as a re-installment of the old mind/body distinction, which has been a crucial constitutive device in the Western philosophical tradition.

3.3 Derrida's concept of Différance - *sans sens* (absent meaning) and *absent presences*

The connection between Artaud's essential texts on the theatre and Derrida's thoughts on Western metaphysics, which already have already been outlined, might probably rise to its most successful exemplification when considering Derrida's own essay on Artaud, which is part of his *Writing and Difference*, and whose central idea is that of the dramatic scene being no longer simply re-iterating and re-presenting a presence which has already been there before, but should instead become its own presence and thus free itself from the primacy of the text as logos. Logocentric, in this sense should, thus, not be solely understood as word-centred, but rather as being centred on a first, or originating principle, centred on the Word. Therefore, it seems to be right in line with Artaud's theory that both Crimp and Ravenhill reject the notion of the speaking subject as centre of thought, and place their focus on the body as a mere surface inscribed by discourses, or turned into an object of art, as in the case of *pool*. The first production of pool made an

attempt at stressing this even more and foregrounded the physical and performance aspect by collaborating with Physical Theatre group Frantic Assembly. As regards *Attempts,* Agusti argues that Anne's speech escapes "the logocentric, patriarchal logic of mastery and self-aggrandisement" (Agusti, "Minimalism", 160). The way Crimp highlights the notion of the absent centre 'Anne', who is inscribed with a whole set of dominant discourses, he certainly undermines the hierarchical structures of a logocentric, patriarchal system of thought. However, it has also to be taken into consideration that Anne cannot escape the system by means of her own speech, since all throughout the play she cannot be described as an actual speaker, for she is incapable of re-gaining the position of the speaking subject, which is a crucial factor in the play's dwelling on the subject of these hierarchic structures.

All the issues connected to the concept of presence, in particular within the horizon of Western logocentrism and the speaking subject as the centre of thought culminate in Derrida's concept of Différance. In addition to a definition of the sign as a supplementation and entity standing in for/substituting an absent presence, it has to be raised that the implied absence is always only of a provisional nature, only to be seen in relation to a future/deferred presence of what was described. The concept of difference, prevalent in all theories of the sign since Saussure is now added the dimension of temporality and could now be rather referred to as de-ferrance rather than difference for Derrida makes it a combination of a temporal as well as spatial level, which then leads to his coining of the word "différance". The inherent aspect of "Ver-räumlichung" implies that there is no closure, that the sign-system is to be perceived as one that refuses to be closed, but that is open to constant change and constituted of inherently provisional elements. The concept of "espacement/"Ver-räumlichung" is not only inextricably tied to Derrida's Différance, but could probably also be seen in relation to the theatre, for the text and the speaking subject are extended in the process of performance, closure is no longer possible once the text enters the act of performance. Employing a notion once brought up by Hans-Thies Lehmann, these "textscapes" ("Textlandschaften") refrain from ever being framed or subject to any kind of closure. The term closely related to it and mostly referred to in the context of Derrida's tendency towards the un-closed, provisional and eternally changeable is "dissemination" ("Vielstimmingkeit" – "Zerstreuung") also further implying that there is no point of origin or centre. a subject

extending.

What we perceive as presence is therefore always already marked by difference and deferral (Culler, 95). In this context Derrida states: "to posit presence...no longer as the absolute matrix form of being but rather as a 'particularization' and 'effect'. A determination and effect within a system that is no longer that of presence but of Différance." (Derrida *Marges* qtd. in Culler, 95). Espacement as a conception almost equivalent to that of Différance becomes vital in the context of new, "postdramatic" forms of the theatre, where the text is added the dimension of performance, which has also already been outlined by Hans-Thies Lehmann.

It is certainly also worth considering Derrida's own definition of Différance as,

> a structure and a movement that cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. Différance is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing (espacement), by which elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive, of intervals without which the „full" terms could not signify, could not function (Derrida, qtd. in Culler, 97).

In his essay on the concept of Différance, included in *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida underlines the close connection between an understanding of the subject as only to be revealed with reference to the notion of self-presence: "Just as the category of subject is not and never has been conceivable without reference to presence as hypokeimenon or ousia, etc., so the subject as consciousness has never been able to be evinced otherwise than as self-presence." (Derrida qtd. in Fuery, 95) Différance can thus also be seen in the light of being the antagonistic opposite of presence, as a productive external, which manifests itself in disrupting any attempt at settling a sign/signifying chain which works entirely in terms of presence (Fuery, 95). The concept of Différance applied to subjectivity also means a fundamental disruption of a conscious and unconscious binarism, since in Différance the subject is ultimately involved in both conscious and unconscious, presences and absences, for each necessarily contains the other. "In this way we question the authority of presence or its simple symmetrical contrary, absence or lack. We thus interrogate the limit that has always constrained us, that always constrains us - we who inhabit a langage and a system of thought - to form the sense of being in general as presence or absence, in the categories of being or beingness (ousia)" (Derrida, *Speech*

and Phenomena, qtd. in Fuery 96). This further leads on to the fact that, according to Fuery, presence can no longer be understood as an absolute of being and subjectivity, but rather has to be defined in terms of being a (political) determinant. Seen in this context the speaking subject's relationship to language is not built upon forces of integration but on difference and deferral, becoming manifest in the notion of difference as an idea entailing absence, for it suggests that the difference of the signifier can be paralleled with the absent, non-selected others (Fuery, 96).

3.3.1 From Artaud to Derrida to Crimp and Ravenhill and beyond

*"Diese Bretter bedeuten keine Welt, sie gehören zur Welt" (*Peter Handke - *Offending the Audience)*

Derrida constructs his theory on the subject upon the basis of his general notions on writing which he mostly develops in *Of Grammatology*. There he identifies the presence of the subject as a mere symptom of human desire and denies it its inner core that could be carried outside by means of language, a conception that becomes increasingly important when putting the focus onto the construction of the "subjects" in *pool* and *Attempts on her life.*

   The basic dyad of subject and object, normally referred to as being directly opposed to each other, which requires re-presentation and sets it in place, is one essential part in what Derrida understands as metaphysics of presence, can only be overcome if a point of undecidability can be proved to be constitutive for both presence and absence, the same and the other, identity as well as difference. Derrida "re-constructing" and displacing Heidegger's words for being, which in his sense still fulfilled the role of being guarantors of presence and at the same time mark a withdrawal or withholding of being, could be seen as precisely undecidable in this sense. Most of the terms commonly associated with Derrida's thinking, such as hymen, pharmakon, supplement, différance and others, include what locally as well as textually, configure the possibility of the ideal and desire for presence in a text, and automatically also the impossibility of its realisation (Bernstein, 138). A way of exemplifying this view Derrida uses Mallarmé's conception of language and states that "for Mallarmé, language is not made of words, even pure

words: it is that in which words have always already disappeared and this oscillating movement of appearing and disappearing" (Derrida, qtd. Bernstein, 39). This sense of "flickering" of a word can easily be transferred onto the status of the subject in both Ravenhill's as well as Crimp's play, since they introduce two female subjects constantly oscillating between life and death, appearing and disappearing and finally also between being subject and object.

Considering Ravenhill's *pool* the "absence" of the female artist and assumed centre of the play is already implied in the beginning, when one of the speakers refers to her and her work with the following utterance: "But nowadays she's...absent" (295), thus introducing the whole dialectics of absence and presence which not only dominates the content of the play but also its structure and form. This absence seems to be one of the essential qualities making her successful as an artist and enhancing the status of her art, and which, in contrast to what the others produce, seems to sell quite well. Taking up their stance the world of successful artistic production seems to be one which only reserves places to those that are not really present. Thus, the opposition of presence as "presence of conscience in being" and absence as a grave lack thereof is denied its constitutive character and the two terms produce a space in-between, a grey area, where they can no longer be perceived as being oppositional and independent but as interdependent and overlapping. The annihilation of that basic opposition is introduced right at the beginning of the play and therefore also produces the wider framework for the rest of the play. Her absence, triggered by her falling unconscious after the terrible accident took place, is where the others derive their sudden strength and self-confidence from. Sticking to the common principle and perception of absence and presence as an oppositional pair, they believe that through her apparent state of absence they might gain greater presence and thus emerge as successful artists, revealing their terrible need of this opposition, in which one part is crucially dependent on the other. In fact, through their attempts at making her the essential part of their artistic work, her presence is even enhanced, and becoming stronger, therefore continuously undermining the opposition.

Her absence, which in this play is automatically linked to being unconscious, feels right to them, at least they appear to be entirely wrapped up in a state of longing for success and appreciation which fosters this feeling and belief.

> She 'passed from consciousness'. / And the great absent thing is lying at our feet and we're thinking: / This is right. This feels - there is right in that. / I am sorry you had to suffer, I'm sorry there's this pain - but there is justice in this. Something is shaping our ends. (303)

Presence in this scene is brought into a close connection with consciousness, a notion at work in every Western mind since Descartes' "cogito ergo sum", and one of the primary goals of Derridean criticism and deconstruction. The play itself also undermines this concept, for throughout the entire play Sally is more present than the others, who only wish and desire her to be absent, so that they can use her for gaining presence and recognition themselves.

   Not fitting in within this general framework are two statements made by either the same or two different persons, in which the desire for her becoming conscious, thus present again is revealed and becomes transparent. The first one is made right after they are informed of their friend regaining a state of consciousness: "That was a...oh relief relief. This is...saved. I am so happy that art has gone away and now we can be people. / That is wonderful. / Let her be present. Please let her be..." (309). It becomes apparent that, in this perspective, her being present is automatically bound to them being released from art, since she is liberated of her status as a mere object of art as well. Her becoming active again is thus also inextricably tied to their position as passive figures, a state which at least one of the group appears to not detest but rather embrace, a position usually not seen as a common feature of an artist. A certain air of relief also becomes apparent in the next utterance, which not only further underlines the previous proposition but also includes the aspect of truth as being one of the main elements in the whole conception of presence: "And you know when she said it - such a relief that she wasn't absent any more after so many years (...) No actually it was the happiest night of my life. To have somebody tell you the truth like that...try to get somebody do it to you if you can...try it tonight...it's really fantastic." (323) Uttered after Sally openly declaring her position as that of the one who will always be ahead of the others, and labelling it as one that is not destroyable. With her re-gaining presence, the old opposition is apparently re-installed and truthfulness re-covered. Her healing and almost full recovery is perceived by the other artists, primarily as a recovery to full presence, not having any access to the fact that during her supposed "absence" she grew to greatest presence.

Apart from the important connection of conscience, knowledge and presence, a second important link is established towards the end of the play, namely that of presence and the notion of a centre or origin. Dealing with drama, the speaking subject is generally assumed to be the centre of thought and action, which is, as already referred to, heavily questioned and criticized by Jacques Derrida, since, according to his view, the deconstruction of presence is always one of an immanent deconstruction of the centre, for without the belief in the presence of the moment, the notion of origin becomes simply impossible. The answer to this crucial point of criticism is to be found in Derrida's general assumption that no word can be extracted from and seen in isolation of the process of language, it is always marked by what precedes and follows it, and thus leaves no space for something like a "present moment" to evolve (Currie, 58). For a moment to evolve as a moment of pure presence the preconditions are very strictly defined, and according to Derrida's principles clearly impossible to be fulfilled. In a similar way to the word, a moment can only come into being through exclusion and the accomplishment of undivided presence, thus only if it is cleared of all traces of past and future. As a result, the moment, being a structure of exclusion, then becomes an entity in its own right but only on the foundation of arbitrarily excluding the relations that constituted it. From this elusive nature of the moment Derrida derives his whole conception of the equally elusive nature of undivided presence in general (Currie, 59). Derrida's deconstruction of presence is thus always to be seen in connection with a deconstruction of the origin, which, according to metaphysical history is the first one in a whole sequence of present moments constituting the passage of time, is certainly the easiest moment to mythologize and declare as presence. Every explanation of something will thus be made in relation to an originary state, since, above all, this state implies purity and self-presence, marking therefore, every deviation or development of it as a fall from that original state of self-presence (Currie, 59). Following this line of argumentation the sign itself could be seen as a fall from presence for it is constantly spread, repeated and used without needing the thing itself to be present. In pool Sally's apparently regained presence is linked to this notion of the centre/origin, which is also tied to her being the only one to really know and understand: "But we don't. We stand and watch her. Silence. She's moving in. She takes the centre. And she takes it in. And sees. / And she understands then - she knows." (322) Hence, Sally not only inhabits the position of being at the centre of things/thought, but

literally "takes it in", embodies and personifies it. She is the one to actively see, understand and know, while the others have again been degraded to being only passively watching. With her taking up/in the position of the centre, her existence mounts to full presence: "And finally. Oh finally she is absent no longer. She is totally...there. And her eyes take us in. And it's as if we can hear her say - her mouth is closed, but still I, we, I we, heard (...)" (322)

With his apparent re-affirmation of the absence-presence opposition Ravenhill leads his audience and also the speakers in his play on a wrong track, since Sally has never been really absent, and additionally her absence as a speaking subject cannot be taken for what it is called by them and how it is referred to by the figures onstage, primarily because in fact Ravenhill does not confront the reader with real characters or subjects but rather introduces us to the notion of mere "text-bearers" ("Sprachflächen") instead of real characters. Thus, Sally cannot take up this role of the centre, or point of origin the others project onto her.

Within the logocentric framework presence as closely tied to subjectivity works as a crucial element to establish self-presence and can thus be seen as tightly linked to the theatre, which has always, and in the postdramatic era even more so, be seen in the light of presence. Presence, as one of the main authorities structuring and infiltrating all our thinking, plays a crucial part in decoding daily life, based on the principle longings for "making clear", "grasping", "demonstrating" and "revealing", at least we appear to live the illusion that it is the answers to these questions that guide us through our daily lives (Culler, 94). The theatrical performance could then be considered an additional tool, aiding us as we fight our way through these daily questions and desires.

Crimp's *Attempts on her life* makes the whole Derridean concept of the sign "functioning in radical absence" the main issue of his play. The play revolves around a supposed centre, which is based on a female figure called Anne, but who has no origin, no permanent and fixed core, but is variable and flexible according to the discourses she moves in and is dominated by. Arguing in line with Patrick Fuery, this also leads to concluding that the in Crimp's play the "absent centre" Anne, as the main focus of attention determines all meaning and signification, for all the systems of meaning and signification involved are directed towards this particular absence, which is not to be

found in a single space or moment but rather is in all spaces and moments, and thus used as the system utilized to construct meaning (Fuery, 4). Tightly woven into the entire framework of thought, in this context and by Derrida referred to as metaphysics of presence are what Fuery terms "originary processes", as well as the dominant notion of transcendental signifiers, which Fuery ties to Derrida's thoughts on the origin: "Where and how does it begin...? A question of origin. But a meditation upon the trace should undoubtedly teach us that there is no origin, that is to say simple origin; that the questions of origin carry with them a metaphysics of presence" (Derrida *Of Grammatology*, qtd. in Fuery, 81).

Even though this underlying concept of the subject without a stable core, and the idea of the centre which is not really present shines through the text in quite an obvious and explicit manner, Katie Mitchell's production from 2007 seeks to ascribe some sort of fictional identity to the characters onstage.

> She created backgrounds to their characters: Zubin Varal plays Cyrus Kape, a composer/musician who also has a background in writing and appearing in political sketches as a student and as a part of writing team for a TV sketch show (...) Once Katie had given out the „bones" of each character, by allocating their primary and secondary skills, it was down to the actors to build up their characters into fully formed, three-dimensional beings. The only other thing that Katie and Martin specified was that although the members of the group come from a range of social classes and backgrounds, they are all university educated and left-wing in their thinking (National Theatre Education, qtd. by Voigts-Virchov, 163)

Zimmermann pointed to the fact that even though there is an undeniable proximity of Crimp's play to the entire complex of what came to be labelled as "postdramatic" or "postmodern" theatre, there is still a gap between his play and what is commonly understood as Performance Art (117), based on the fact that there seems to be an undeniable distance the dramatic text maintains towards what it seeks to signify and is not solely reduced to the physicality of the actor.

Seen within the framework of logocentrism, as a "historical superstructure", subjectivity, particularly in connection to Crimp's *Attempts* and in many different respects, which will be further explored later on, has come to be perceived as being part of a framework essentially compiled of actuality, truth and presence. This could be seen as an aspect particularly revealed regarding the fact that commonly every notion of

presence takes part in denoting a failed sense of presence or used as a signification which can only evolve held against the notion of completeness of subjectivity, as a form of ideality, of the self (Fuery, 87). Therefore, subjectivity evolves as a signifier of presence through operations of the logos (as discourse) and the underlying concept of self-presence against which the entire process has to be seen (Fuery, 88). Fuery insists on the close connection between self-presence and the logos, between the logos, presence and subjectivity and the operations of the logos in making the subject present through language (86f.).

Inextricably interwoven with the entire connection of logocentrism and its operations in establishing a subject's self-presence by means of language, is the aspect of speech and the voice, for it entails dealing with the subject as a conception tightly tied to the representation of the self through language as presence, and which certainly becomes particularly interesting embedded in the field of theatre and drama. As already indicated by Derrida and also taken up by Fuery, speech forms one of the central elements of self as presence: "speech is par excellence that which confers existence, presence (Dasein) upon the interior representation, making the concept (the signified) exist." (Derrida *Margins of Philosophy*, qtd. by Fuery, 97) In relation to speech and language the notion of the self as presence to others, which is a common and basic idea of subjectivity as constituted externally and therefore grounded upon an entire set of (social) processes, is always to be seen as a presence through mediating systems, of which language appears to be the most crucial one (98). In *Attempts* Anne is not rendered present through her own speech but is introduced as a multiple product of an entire range of different discursive formations. Her absence, the whole idea of absence indicating an absented subject position, with all its political implications, as triggered for instance by an assumed repression of speech, a denial to discourse or the speech of the mad could be characterized as an absence based on the negation of discourse through processes of privileging one set of signifiers and codes over another (99). Related to Crimp Anne's silence, as understood as an absence of subjectivity through the denial of speech, does not necessarily have to be regarded as an absence of the transcategorical signifier "to be", as Fuery made explicit, but rather as "the denial, negation or suppression of a politically and/or ideologically orientated ontology" (101) Clinging to this string of thought Anne's condemnation to silence is not simply a result of being denied access to language, but

also implies a notion of having subjectivity/Being itself threatened, denied or suppressed. Concluding this way would thus reveal an understanding of subjectivity as asserted and conformed through speech (Fuery, 101). Even though this might be the most common proposition voice is not solely determined by indicating a presence of subjectivity through articulation and speech, but used in Fuery's account to designate a particular (ideological) state of presence, which is specified as such through its recognition via discursive practices (103).

In *Attempts* a direct reference to Anne being the silent subject is made. In scenario three "Faith in Ourselves" she is characterized as being "beyond words" (217). The notion of the silent subject existing beyond the realm of the logos and of words is inextricably tied to Anne being no character, but merely an absence of character: "She says she is not a real character (...) but a lack of character, an absence she calls it, doesn't she, of character." (229) Furthermore, in his play Crimp manages to establish presence without clinging to the logos, which might also bear some resemblance to Artaud's concept of presence onstage which, according to Artaud has to liberate itself from the logos/word, from speech and its re-presentational purpose.

4 ART VS LIFE

4.1 Introducing Jean Baudrillard – "Why is there nothing rather than something?"

The attempt at drawing clear and distinct borders between what belongs to the universe of art and fiction and the realm occupied by real facts is not only one of the most debated questions in the context of postmodernity in general but also one of the core issues of both pool and Attempts on her life. The figure that emerged as one of the most prominent ones dealing with topics such as those mentioned above is Jean Baudrillard. The primary principle of his thinking is his general assumption that the signifiers in our culture have liberated themselves from their corresponding signifieds and have taken on a sort of self-referential status, thus replacing reality itself in such a manner that they constitute a new reality altogether, of signs all referring to themselves, which he termed hyperreality (Henke/Middeke, 9). Alongside Jacques Derrida he thus is to be seen as responsible for

an altogether new conception of the sign, believing it to be neither constituting the reflection of a profound reality nor referring to a so-called "absent" real any longer and replaces it with a construction of it as having "no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard qtd. in Henke/Middeke, 9). A compressed and succinct example encompassing most of the issues which made Baudrillard the target of critique and rampant debates and discussions is his attempt at defining metaphysics:

> Metaphysics...wants to make the world into the mirror of the subject....Metaphysics wants a world of forms distinct from their bodies, their shadows, their images: this is the principle of Good. But the object is always the fetish, the false...the factitious, the lure, everything that incarnates the abominable confusion of the thing with its magical and artificial double; and that no religion of transparency and the mirror will ever be able to resolve: that is the principle of Evil. (Baudrillard *Fatal Strategies* 184, qtd. in Trifonova, section 13)

The strong dichotomy between subject and object and the diagnosis of the subject as the one and only centre of being that both form part of that particular Western tradition of thinking appear to be two of the main reasons why concepts such as Baudrillard's are still getting under attack. The simulacrum poses a threat not only to the material illusion of the world but also to a subject-centred description of it, still appearing to be a dominant perception of reality and the world. All these cases elaborated by Baudrillard could finally be said to have been built upon the belief that every time the mere description of an object replaces the object itself, thus leaves nothing of the object as such to be seen and perceived apart from the description referring to itself, the object has become virtual (Trifonova, section 16).

The era of postmodernism, therefore, is according to Baudrillard characterized by being the first step into a period where the real has finally been taken away its foundation and is instead replaced with and "transfigured" by rationalized models, which makes the possibility of a "critical and speculative distance" between them collapse (Malpas, 93). Its effect is the ultimate loss of critical distance and reason can be no longer used to map and perceive something as "real". Thus, it might be a result of the precision and complexity of our models, the two have become identical (Malpas, 94). At the core of it, the era of postmodernism, even though not as easy to define and outline as one might wish for, opened the door to the reign of what Baudrillard called hyperreality. "(...) the real is hyperrealised. neither realised nor idealised: but hyperrealised. The hyperreal is the

abolition of the real not by violent distinction, but by its assumption, elevation to the strength of the model" (Baudrillard, "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities", 83-4). One example that has become quite famous in this context is Baudrillard's proposition that the Gulf war never really happened but was in fact generated by the media, a hyperreal spectacle, a copy without an original (Snipp-Walmsey, 413). Hence, the concept of hyperreality can be linked to a culture in which everything produced and created by media, film and computer technologies has become more real for us, and corresponds and interacts more closely with our desires and experiences than the realities of nature and spiritual life. It is this inversion of our expectations about the logic of re-presentation that could be seen as one of the main essences characterizing the postmodern era as Baudrillard has sketched it.

With regard to one of the topics following this brief outline of Baudrillardian thinking, the link between Ravenhill's play *pool* and photography, which is supposed to serve as an illustration and example of Baudrillard's vital influence on the production of literature in the postmodern era, it is essential to have a short glance at Baudrillard's conception of the relationship between the image and the thing, a concept also bearing some traces of Henri Bergson's much earlier descriptions of that particular relation. According to Bergson, who makes no distinction between images and things and asserts that things have no images, nor are we in any position to produce their images. These considerations finally lead him to conclude that things, insofar as they are made of light vibrations, can already be labelled images. "A thing is an image (or a representation) of the totality of images from which perception isolates it like a picture" (Trifonova, section 3). Baudrillard perceives images to be capable of liberating themselves from the world of things and thus either precede or follow them, they have lost their solidity and have gone through a process of de-materializing into images, re-duced to their pre-given meanings (Trifonova, section 3). It is his firm belief that the way images are produced always has to be one of intensification or saturation, thus overexposing a thing into an image. This might echo the common definition of photography as a means of illuminating the nature of the image. Baudrillard's image comes into being through overexposing the object, throwing as much light on it as possible and thus rendering it as more visible than visible (Trifonova, section 3). Following his line of argumentation one feels almost forced to conclude that the real in fact never happens. It never takes place since it is shaped by, and varies with

the speed of light (Trifonova, section 5).

> The objective illusion is the physical fact that in this universe no things coexist in real time--not sexes, this glass, this table, or myself and all that surrounds me. By the fact of dispersal and the relative speed of light, all things exist only on a recorded version, in an unutterable disorder of time-scales, at an inescapable distance from each other. And so they are never truly present to each other, nor are they, therefore, "real" for each other. The fact that when I perceive this star it has perhaps already disappeared--a relationship that can be extended, relatively speaking, to any physical object or living being--this is the ultimate foundation, the material definition...of illusion. (Baudrillard, qtd in Trifonova, section 5)

It is in the context of his many accounts on the hyperreal that he also touches upon the close interconnectedness between illusion and hyperreality, which are both grounded on the fact that they evolve out of a reversal of causality, in which an effect emerges without having a cause. It is Baudrillard's belief that the constitutive illusion of the world can be seen as a result of this particular disturbance of cause and effect (Trifonova, section 7). In foregrounding the virtual (the hyperreal) Baudrillard points towards the impossibility of determining whether a particular object could be still called an existing one or whether it has already vanished, only leaving behind its "virtual ghost", provoking an immediate connection to Derrida's notion of the trace.

In her article on the subject in the context of hyperreality Trifonova claims that although one might have, until now, lived with the impression that Baudrillard entirely abandoned the real and the material referential world, Baudrillard seemingly paradoxically makes some claims about it and its ability of being repeated, stating that the real is only insofar as it is repeated (section 13). A claim bearing strong and distinct resemblances to Jacques Derrida's notions about iterability (iterabilité).

Touching upon the wide and widely discussed field of re-presentation and the referent Baudrillard characterizes it as a concept that does not have to be entirely abolished, but rather argues that everything is in fact re-presentation/beyond the realm of subjectivity and undermining the common subject-object dichotomy (cf. Trifonova, section 13)

4.1.1 Decentring the original in *Attempts* and *pool*

In the context of (post- modernist/dramatic) theatre one of the most influential figures,

and an assumed predecessor of Jean Baudrillard is Guy Debord, and his heavily consulted book *The Society of the Spectacle*. His notion of the spectacular as one of the key elements as regards postmodern drama, makes him also worth mentioning in the context of Crimp's and Ravenhill's plays. He argued that "the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that one was directly lived has become mere representation" (Debord qtd. in Wallace, 94). This view certainly bears strong resemblances to what Baudrillard later talked about in connection to the hyperreal and the simulacrum.

To a certain extent both *pool* and *Attempts on her life* could be read as attempts at integrating some of Baudrillard's most basic thoughts and arguments, or even providing an artistic commentary upon them. They both refuse to employ strategies of mimesis, commonly seen as the main principle which drama is built upon, and thus make no attempt at re-presenting and structuring time, but in the course of the plays re-presentation is itself called into question. By means of dismissing any kind of attempt at attributing character names to the spoken text the status of the spoken subject is contested, leaving the audience with a constant notion of uncertainty and indeterminacy. Taking into account what Baudrillard claimed with regard to the subject and the original, both losing their creational and meaning-making power, the female artists in both *pool* and *Attempts on her life*, although the supposed centres of the dramatic texts, are defying their position as the origin or centre of dramatic action, for they appear to be caught up in a space in-between, in the middle of subject and object, artifice and character. They are not realizing themselves by means of attributed, re-presented speech but are in fact realized as objects of art, as in pool or various discourses, as drawn upon by Martin Crimp in *Attempts on her life*. The female artist in *pool* is said to possess a certain "potential for composition" (306), she is composed and created in an ongoing artistic process involving mostly photography and thus turned into an artistic object by use of the camera. The artist in this context has to exchange her position as "creator", which would naturally go with the profession of the artist, for that of the "created". The artistic, or "aestheticized description" of her prevails and replaces the object itself, leaving behind only the mere "description" of her, thus, in Baudrillard's terms, becoming virtual, or an instance of hyperreality.

The impossibility and incommensurability of nature and theatre, reality and art find their perfect illustration in *pool*'s group of artists' incapability to bring both poles of that dyad together in one single utterance: "Come on. Just look and see. And feel. And care. It's a natural human thing. But we..." (306). Their attempt at fulfilling this task leaves them with nothing more than silence, indicated by the three dots and the "but" at the end of this utterance. Immediately succeeding this utterance Ravenhill alludes to the female artist's artificiality, putting her into the context of plastic, machines and a de-formation of the body the other artists cannot believe to make her still classify as human:

> And you see now - look - what it's done to her. Now the blood's been cleaned away.
> The body bruised and swollen into shape no other human's yet achieved. Her limbs
> in plastic. Her neck in plastic. Her mask. The drips and the tubes. And the machines
> that inhalate and beeeep. A moving...a timeless picture of the...
> Our friend yes but also....
> The line of the machine, the purple of the bruise...(ibid)

The seemingly paradoxical relation between fiction/art and reality is also taken into account by Martin Crimp, when in Scenario 5 of *Attempts on her life*, "The Camera loves you", he writes:

> She says she's not a real character, not a real
> character like you get in a book or on TV, but a lack
> of character, an absence she calls it, doesn't she, of
> character." (229)

Crimp draws upon the people's perception of what they see on TV as they watch their favourite TV-series, or read while following their favourite fictional character on its way to maturity, as more real than the reality outside they are actually part of. This automatically corresponds to Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal as being immediately tied to the advent of a culture in which everything produced by media, film and computer technologies appears to have been raised to a higher status in our decisions about the truthfulness of certain events or instances than the realities of nature or spiritual life. They are inextricably interwoven with our wishes and desires and serve as a proper projection space for a seemingly ideal reality.

In scenario five Crimp seems to allude to a similar notion called into question by Baudrillard and postmodernism in general, namely the capability of TV, films or the theatre to present its audience with a perfect and flawless re-presentation of the real world, offering them proper solutions and supplying them with something to identify

with. The audience may not be in the right position to ask for the "real thing" being shown to them, since they may be aware of the impossibility of doing so, but at least they crave for feeling as if it would happen.

> We need to feel
> what we're seeing is real.
> It isn't just acting
> it's far more exacting
> than acting
> We're talking reality
> We're talking humanity (...) (223)

The inherent twist Crimp integrated in this utterance is that of the oxymoronic construction of the line "it's far more exacting than acting", since, seen in the context of theatre in general or the play itself, this claim seems to negate itself, and makes their longing for reality remain an absurd and naive construction. The play itself suggesting a moment of fading of the boundary between art and reality unravels this desire and longing and exposes it as impossible and absurd. The question of the boundary between art and the real world is also directly referred to by Crimp in scenario 11 "100 words" when one of the speakers asks what it is that makes the difference between life and the work, we could see as an equivalent to art, in this context:

> ..Where does life - literally in this case - end, and the work
> begin?
> With respect to you I think she'd find the whole point about
> making a point outmoded. (...)
> It's surely the point that a search for a point is pointless and
> that the whole point of exercise - i.e. these attempts on her
> life point to that. (251)

The "literally" in the first line, could be perceived as an ironic comment upon life being "literal", thus, not "real", in no respect, which again draws upon life and literature being not diametrically opposed but in fact interchangeable concepts. Anne appears to be living in an in-between of life and art, for she can neither grasp life nor can be grasped by art or various media-discourses.

  The other aspect Crimp draws upon here is postmodernism's negation of the possibility of making meaning and arriving at a final point or conclusion that is the result of this process. The "attempts on her", on Anne, the female protagonist, remain mere attempts, and can never be translated into something more fixed and stable, into a clear-cut definition or fixed and unchangeable attitude.

In *pool*, the image and its multiple relations is one of the most central issues, both on the level of form and content: "And we stand and we look and at last we're moved by the intense beauty of the image" (306). This utterance right at the beginning of the play foreshadows the photographic excess that arises right after the accident of the female artist. Already when they first glance at her lying in hospital, they begin to stress their notion of her as a mere image, a picture of the subject, automatically making her an object and denying her the status of the subject. In a wider context Birringer refers to postmodern culture as closely tied to a fetishization of the body and the image, which fits in both with pool's major theme of "making images" and capture somebody in an image, but also with postdrama's general turn towards the body and physicality. Birringer assumes this to reflect a radical suspicion of authority as well as theory (Birringer, 47). This heightened importance of the image is similar to the notion brought up by Henri Bergson, who in his accounts argued in favour of making no distinction between images and things at all and reported that because of light vibrations all things can be called images. A link could be established between Bergson's perspective and the conception suggested by Baudrillard, which entails that every image can free itself from the thing as such, by overexposing the thing into an image/intensification, therefore illuminating its nature and making it more visible than visible. This might bear a certain relation to photography, turning the eye of the camera into a tool used to make us become (hyper)real and argues that only in this way things are realized. This again points towards the tendency of art replacing the real/material world. The light which is reflected by the objects and refracted by the lens is the agent of the whole process and not as one might assume the physical objects themselves. Thus, it is not a single image which is produced by the object but it is rather the case that the camera manipulates the reflected light in such a way that it created an indefinite number of images (Dow Adams, 466). As Susan Sontag states "photographic images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire" (Sontag qtd. in Dow Adams, 467).

4.1.1.1 Making images/the well-made image

> And then she's running and whooping through the darkness and she launches herself
> and you can just see her up in the sky, up against the sky, the arc of her body through
> the night sky and up and up and up. / She seems so high. She's flying. She's an
> angel. A drunken laughing goddess angel. / And then she arcs down and we're
> clapping and we're cheering. / And then / Some of us thought we heard the splash
> (...) (*pool*, 301)

The whole accident causing Sally's state of unconsciousness is highly stylized and triggered through this stylization, formalization and aesthetic configuration a certain air of alienation and abdication is conjured up, closely related to a general affinity with the stylized image that evolves from desire and their constant craving for artificiality and aesthetification. Already at this point they begin to compose their own image of her and in their composition of seeing her body against the sky she appears as if she were framed, thus perceived as if she was part of a picture, of which her arc-like (de)formed body is just one vital element.

Infiltrated by her being a mere object of art, imagination and reality collapse, they do not hear her body falling on the ground of the empty pool, but think that they clearly perceived it as a splash, which would imply her body falling and sinking into the water, where in fact there is none. "Some of us thought we heard the splash. You do. When you think there`s going to be a splash then you hear a splash. You do the work. But we didn't hear the splash. There was no splash. There was" (301). Right after they found her body, all smashed and deformed, no longer in its original shape, they provide us with their own comment on their incapability to "picture her" in a way that would remain faithful to reality, not infiltrated by desire and unconditioned by feeling and emotion: "Her body - her body is broken in our head. A picture but not - it`s a feeling you know? And you would have thought above else an artist would – " (305) The picture in their heads does not confirm what they have really seen, is no mimetic illustration of reality but each attempt at doing so would entirely be soaked up in feelings, leading to image-constructions not aligning with what they might have really observed.

For an image to evolve as such, a basic requirement is its being silhouetting against something else, a background from which it is spatially withdrawn, therefore presupposing a framing tool, securing this demarcation. It could be argued that *pool*'s

group of artists senses the possibility and inherent danger of Sally's image and the world outside collapse, but need to make this differentiation and general opposition to structure their lives in relation to Sally's. Sally has got to be framed, in order to make her tangible as an artistic object, the act of "framing her" is the prerequisite they demand for making her framed image stick only to the wall reserved for art, and thus thought of as keeping her safe from reality and any sort of merging of the two worlds. "It took a few moments to snap. An image a record a frame." (307)

The importance of the frame can also be read as underlining the significance of the context: "Suddenly you see the way her limbs are now not set quite right, the drag and hobble of her frame. You see the way no make-up known can quite conceal the swollen face. Just one step from hospital to street - but all the difference. And she`s the stranger here. This is our world." (316) The image only works in its proper frame, leading us to conclude that, with reference to this particular scene Sally's own framework appears to be no longer suitable, the image is wrongly framed and thus emerges as an alienating and alienated figure in the whole play that is their life. Integrating Derrida into this discussion would again culminate in his general stance that meaning is context-bound but that the context does not have to be a specific one. In the play it appears that it has. The significance of the frame, as paralleled to Sally's form, or rather de-formation, also flickers through in the following scene: "And the day was coming. The day was coming now. The day when we had promised her that she could see the images laid out from the first stolen shots of her swollen mangled totally unconscious frame right through to those final few days." (319)

4.2 Life as art, the body as art - the plays in the context of *Aktionismus*

> And you're just stripped naked because suddenly all the art was worth nothing, it is nothing, it means nothing. Sally has gone and Art did nothing and Art could do nothing and Death is big and we are small and really we're nothing, we're nothing. (*pool*, 297)

Sharing the group's general attitude towards art would lead to a general perception of art as an unrecognized medium, not acclaimed and valued by the public as one of having no worth and thus also rendering the one who has produced it as unworthy and absent. For the group, art's value is based primarily on its reception and general acclaim. With Sally

separating from the group they have suddenly become worthless, and reduced to being a mere lack. The other aspect becoming apparent in this utterance is that art can do nothing against death and is thus also denied its capability of capturing the one who has created it and thus making him/her untouched by death in a metaphysical sense. It is stripped of its traditional and institutionalized perception of securing presence and restoring it for all eternity, which is a view strongly contrasting that of photographer Nan Goldin, whose photographs served as an elementary source for Ravenhill composing this play. Art is thus closely linked to the presence of the artist, his/her physical presence, without which the artist`s body seems to be un- and thus also dis-covered and emerges in its most radical nakedness. In this early passage the ultimate dependence of art and the human body comes to the surface, and heralds an issue which significance will increase as the play progresses.

After the catastrophic event has taken place a space of determination opens up, and forces them to split their role as artists from their primary subject position as sympathetic human beings. It appears that artistry and its seemingly inherent potential to object-ify life and the human subjects forming part of it bears no sense of fostering empathic relationships. Thus, the following passage could also be seen in the light marking theatre, as one form of artistic communication which is no longer able to conjure up feelings of empathy, the sense sharing pain and thus evoking identification with the theatrical objects onstage. Embedding this passage in a metatheatrical context would automatically imply an immanent critique on a bourgeois drama tradition that foregrounds mimetic illusionism and draws upon the audience‘s unhinged desire for identification. This brief comment placed into a metatheatrical framework thus again underlines its disbelief in the theatre as an illusion-constituting institution. “And we wanted to feel what she was feeling - she is one of us, we are artists - no we‘re people - we wanted to feel what she was feeling - share the pain. / But it didn‘t happen.“ (*pool*, 302)

The most obvious instance of life and art collapsing and becoming infinitely interdependent in Ravenhill‘s *pool* is certainly tied to the three other artists making Sally‘s body the ultimate goal of their artistic proposition, which particularly becomes apparent in their constant temptation to arrange and compose: “And the temptation to arrange - just to move the bed...so...so the composition was...get her head in the light, so.“ (306) Their friend‘s life, or rather life in more general terms is thought of as being

arrangeable according to the principles of art. "Start to arrange, start to order, start to catalogue. Start to - print with a quality of drenched colour, tone and definition and... / Her home is our home, our studio." (307) Once the human body is conquered for the sake of art, also the other most private and intimate spheres such as an individual's home is claimed as a place of artistic production and composition.

But even though they might prove to be successful in spatial terms, quickly appearing to inhabit their friend's home and life, they can never get truly hold of the body, the time span, in which they manage to bring it under their control is limited to the time of her unconsciousness. "But I knew. It was lost then. It was her body. She has dived into the pool. It was her act. And we thought we took the images but she was the work. And she has everything and we have - oh - nothing." (315) Through Sally's jumping into the empty pool the entire artistic project turned out as being all initiated by herself, the true action performed on her body all self-inflicted and thus never truly under charge of the other artists, who, even during her time in hospital, when her body appears to have gone through a process of dissociating from the unconscious mind, and is now at their complete disposal, are incapable of gaining real control over it, not even over the images, and thus never over the story (of the play), which stays entirely in Sally's hands. "But really we know. We know that this story. Her story. The pictures. This is what they are dealing in. Selling. Packaging. Promoting. Launching. They are getting ready for the launch day." (317)

The close connection between art and life, which runs as one of the major topics through the entire play, automatically evokes a direct reference to the ideas and concepts of body and performance art, for which the overcoming of the boundary between art and life was of essential value.

One of the key elements, and simultaneously an aspect pool shares with the actions of the Wiener Aktionisten and other Avant-garde artists of the 1960s is non-representationality. The actions of Nitsch, Brus, Mühl and Schwarzkogler are never meant to represent an external reality, for each attempt at doing so would transcend the situation in which the action actually takes place. Above all, this claim is finally processed through the use of different artistic material, such as paint, the human body as such, blood, cadaver, excrements ("Materialaktionen"), that radically excludes any

interpretation of it as signing entities, referring to a reality outside (Jahraus, 21). This consequent Materialisation which lies at the core of their work, might probably rise to its greatest accomplishment, when the human body is involved and becomes itself the most important material. Physicality does not only dynamically dominate the space of the action, but the body itself is turned into this space, on which acts of destruction, deformation and the constant crossing of boundaries is carried out (Jahraus, 21). It appears that it is only by using the body as material that the action acquires its full function as an act of dis-positioning, of social and discursive rules and norms as well as an individual separation of conscience and communication. By means of this non-representational use of material the whole relation of art and world/reality is turned on its head. Reality and art can no longer be placed at the two ends of the dyad of re-presented and re-presentation. The status of art is conceptualized in art itself and thus fosters a blurring of a formerly consequent distinction between the two areas of art and daily life (Ready Made, Nouveau Realisme, Pop art, Minimal art and Concept art) (Jahraus, 187). Since the material is no longer seen as a tool for representation but as being itself part of the world/reality art itself becomes an instrument for identifying artistic and social structures. Art is given the role of making world and reality available and supposed to secure an immediate experience of the world, for based on the use of material art is no longer perceived as representation but as being itself part of the world ("MATERIALAKTION VERSUCHT NICHT WIRKLICHKEIT ZU REKONSTRUIEREN, SIE STELLT SIE DIRECT DAR" Mühl, qtd in Jahraus 193).

> der mensch tritt nicht als mensch, als person, als geschlechtswesen auf, sondern als körper mit bestimmten eigenschaften. er wird in der materialaktion wie ein ei aufgeschlagen und zeigt den dotter. (Mühl qtd. in Jahraus, 221)

In the context of Wiener Aktionismus it has been argued that destruction is to be defined as one of the core elements and pre-requisites for each action involving material, since it radically destroys the seemingly stable core of identity of the destructed, which is no longer what it has been before, even though it might still be identifiable. Therefore, destruction can be perceived as the most radical form of shift of purpose/alienation and thus ripped out of its former net of connected functions and interactions (Jahraus, 217).

Introducing a second layer of linking *pool* thematically and iconographically to the work

of the Wiener Aktionisten it is certainly worth looking at the production of pool at the Munich Marstalltheater, where one finds an undeniable iconographic proximity to some actions by the Wiener Aktionisten, mostly becoming apparent considering the fact that in both cases an extensive use of paint, and the human body as being all covered in it, is involved. It has been argued by Jahraus that these artistic processes of covering the human body with paint, even though it has to be said that he primarily refers to actions in which the whole process is carried out by the artist on his own body, could be characterized as pointing towards painting as being a process, an event and situating the body as image area, projection space and primary means of expression (203). Another aspect constitutive of the performances of the "Wiener Aktionismus", the theatralization of the whole painting process, can also be seen as an integral part of *pool*, particularly manifest in its Munich production, and leads to the fact that the spectators' attention taken away from the result, the finished product of art and directed towards the process of its production. Reality is no longer re-presented via a particular painting as such but the act of painting is itself part of reality - made possible through foregrounding the body and a heightened physicality (Jahraus, 125).

The process of covering the actor's body with paint has also been seen as one of the first steps towards deformation and implying its destruction. The body as a mere object of art, thus transferred from the realm of real experience to that of art and fiction, is certainly also at the thematic centre of Ravenhill's *pool* and finds its realization in Florian Boesch's production of it, in which Sally is split all over with red colour. This process could refer to a final Enteignung/Entleibung of the body, the artist's state of unconsciousness making it possible to finally dissociate body and mind, so that the other artists can work on Sally's body.

A further point of connection are the religious and Christian implications Boesch as well as Nitsch use. In his art Nitsch is constantly (re)constructing the boundary between theatre and reality, and the discourses constituting it (catholicism, religion and others) and continuously undermining and trespassing it, thus fostering a re-constitution of theatre's ancient forms of festive and cult/ritual plays (Dreher, 191). Another Christian or mythological implication is the sanctification and glorification of Sally, which becomes explicit in the scene in which she is about to jump into the empty pool: "And then she's running and whooping through the darkness and she launches herself and you can just see

her up in the sky, up against the sky, the arc of her body through the night sky and up and up and up. / She seems so high. She's flying. She's an angel. A drunken laughing goddess angel. / And then she arcs down and we're clapping and we're cheering." (pool, 301) What is later realized as physical images in Boesch's production of the play is already implied on its textual basis, as the inter-connectedness of sanctification and destruction. Other Christian implications Boesch makes use of, feature Sally being stuck to the wall, and therefore apparently stylized as holy while at the same time being made an object of art.

Therefore, the discussions about the Munich production of *pool* all revolved around the same issues: the aesthetification of (daily) life, the inability to distinguish between art and reality and the process of turning the "fallen artist" into an object of art by means of making the body an image to be worked upon (cf. http://bayerischesstaatsschauspiel.de/spielplan/). The body of the artist, also as an image the others feel the urge to compose was certainly pushed to the foreground, therefore making it possible and legible to argue that the Munich production was also sticking quite closely to Frantic Assembly's focus on the mere physicality of the actors. Whereas on the other end of the scale, Tina Lanik, who produced the play for the Vienna Akademietheater, apparently decided to place the text itself into the centre of attention and had all action remain in the language itself, at some points even becoming similar to Greek chorus. One of Ravenhill's main intentions, which he explicitly formulated, namely that of *pool* being a "text for performers", is certainly not fulfilled by the Viennese production, for such an interpretation would certainly imply a stronger focus on the human body and physicality of the actors.

Fig. 1 Picture from the 2007 production of pool in Munich (Marstalltheater, Florian Boesch)

Fig. 2: Picture from the 2007 production of pool in Munich (Marstalltheater, Florian Boesch)

Fig. 3: Hermann Nitsch

Fig. 4: Hermann Nitsch

As for the British production, the co-operation with the physical theatre-group Frantic Assembly Ravenhill himself in interviews admitted that being a social and political writer he did not really have an affinity with physical theatre whatsoever, which would automatically link its inherent concentration on the human body in performance to being diametrically opposed to political engagement on the writer`s side. He only became inspired by Nan Goldin's photography, since in her pictures she managed to connect life and art, by making the lives of her friends objects of her very own artistic process and progress. The strong focus on the deformed and disturbed body which he found in Goldin's images became the main constituent Ravenhill's play is built upon. Ravenhill's worries about losing his aims of proving political and social engagement with his work are quite in line with the arguments of Baz Kershaw who claimed that performance has now conquered almost all theatric terrain and thus quite heavily argues in favour of a

strict separation of performance and theatre, which in the next step would also lead to regaining the political onstage (Haas, 59). This is also further strenghtened by Patrice Pavis, who openly declares physical theatre, and in particular dance theatre to be the major opponent of political theatre:

> So the enemy of a radical and political avantgarde is no longer bourgeois theatre, as it was in Brecht's youth, it is on the one hand the theatre of images, which can absorb the body and its social inscription, and on the other hand physical theatre and dance theatre, for which the concept of body and gesture belongs to a completely different model, where the body, more „impetus" and „stimulus" than „gestus", is in a position to make sudden incursions and to destroy any fiction. Dance theatre or the physical, neo-cathartic theatre (...) have become the enemy of (...) a political theatre, still based on gestus and rationalism. (Pavis qtd. in Haas, 63)

Thus, the argument that postdramatic theatre, foregrounding physical conditions, according to Lehmann making them, and their observation the primary aesthetic object, leads an existence at the very opposite end of political theatre, also fits into the discussion on pool and postdramatic theatre in general.

4.2.1 Aesthetics of the ugly - „appeal/tempt/hunt out"

Looking at an object of art is inextricably tied to the concept of beauty and the perception of the beautiful and its aesthetic qualities. The most dominant view on beauty merges both the idea of a pleasurable response evoked by the beautiful object and an acknowledgment that the pleasurable response to beauty is determined in part by objective properties of the beautiful object (McMahon, 307). Still, it has to be taken into consideration that in the context of art the evocation of displeasure or provocation can be more important to the artist than triggering a feeling of pleasure. Taking a closer look at *pool*, it can be argued that art undermines the opposition and parallelisation of beauty and pleasure and ugliness and displeasure, for the artists in pool feel pleasure with the apparent ugliness of the injured and deformed Sally.

   In Derrida's analysis of the "without" (the sans), the entailed connection between Derrida's concept of trace with the "without", the absence and beauty's origin becomes apparent and the concept of beauty is characterized as something which is never seen - a trace, in-between being present and absent, which directly relates to Sally's position as

oscillating between absence and presence in Ravenhill's play.

> The mere absence of the goal would not give it (the experience of the beautiful) to me, nor would its presence. But the trace of its absence (of nothing), inasmuch as it forms its trait in the totality in the guise of the sans, of the without-end, the trace of the sans which does not give itself to any perception and yet whose invisibility marks a full totality to which it does not belong and which has nothing to do with it as totality, the trace of the sans is the origin of beauty. It alone can be said to be beautiful on the basis of this trait. From this point of view beauty is never seen, neither in the totality nor outside it: the sans is not visible, sensible, perceptible, it does not exist. And yet there is some of it and it is beautiful. It gives the beautiful. (Derrida, TP, qtd. in Bernstein 160)

Ugliness, often perceived in direct opposition to beauty and often defined in terms of displeasure, in contrast to the beautiful as something that generally pleases, is usually defined in relation to its apparent counterpart. Still, in particular in relation to art it can be argued that in art the ugly can also be beautiful, when the displeasure of ugliness is on a different scale to the pleasure of beauty; even though ugliness involves negative emotions, when combined with certain elements in art, these negative emotions can result in a heightened positive emotion (McMahon, 164).

In *pool*, the artful, the beautiful and the ugly, the provoking ugliness of physical deformation are all very closely interlinked with each other. The impact of Sally's wounds on the other artists is one of intensity, beauty and an apparent absorption triggered by the image of their friend: "It appeals. It tempts. There is beauty here. We know, we've spent our life hunting it out and there is beauty here. / And we stand and we look and at last we're moved by the intense beauty of that image." (306) In the scene before, the one in which Sally jumps into the pool, the "beauty" of the situation is pushed to the foreground and becomes an integral part of the whole atmosphere. The state of "the exceptional", the exceptionally beautiful or ugly, in this scene, serves as a pre-requisite for the production of art, which is then transferred onto the following sequence of action, in which she actually falls into the empty pool. "I try to visualise that moment and then things don't seem so awful" (*pool,* 306). The whole iconography borrows much from the mythic, as it draws upon beauty and grace and finally mounts in alluding to images from Christian religion, and referring to her as bearing similarities to an angel-like figure (cf. *pool*, p. 301).

The same way *pool* establishes a link between art and life, it also refers to the close link

between art and death, which is also an integral feature of Goldin's pictures, as exemplified in the image which is drawn of Sally's bruised and injured state: "The way the bruises and the swellings grow and ripen over her. The myriad colours that a bruise can take. One day an eye revealed and then another concealed beneath the swollen. Yes." (308) In Goldin's photographs aspects of physical deficiency, illness, in particular connected to sexuality and drug abuse, play a crucial role. In her photographs not only the daily, the seemingly authentic rendered in a way placing her photography into a close relation to the snapshot, but also the ugly, the deficient is put into the context of art, and thus makes the viewer perceive it as artful.

What might connect forms of postdramatic theatre with the link between the ugly in art, has also been attempted to be worked out by Lehmann, who for this purpose draws upon Karl-Heinz Bohrer's "aesthetics of fright", according to whom "aesthetic time is not metaphorically translated historical time. The 'event' situated within aesthetic time does not refer to the events of real time." (Bohrer, qtd. by Lehmann, 142). In contrast to what is usually understood as the represented time, the specific temporality of performance itself in Bohrer's sense is to be considered as an aspect of shock and fright. Alongside Bohrer's concept of 'suddenness', Walter Benjamin established the idea of shock, Bert Brecht the concept of being horrified, as a prerequisite for cognition, and Heiner Müller conceptualized the idea of fright as the first appearance of the new (Lehmann, 143) In an attempt at reformulating presence as present Bohrer arrives at a definition of what is now termed "postdramatic theatre" as "theatre of the present", according to his concept of the "absolute present tense", which, above all, means to define it in terms of a process, of a verb, a presence that happens. This claim for "absolute presence" is also one of the main aspects of the art of the Wiener Aktionisten, which, as it has already been pointed out, share many aspects, claims and qualities with Ravenhill's play *pool*, in particular regarding the way it was staged in Munich and London, for both productions seemed to borrow from the aesthetics of shock, aimed at evoking presence trough moments of shock, as employed by the Wiener Aktionisten.

4.2.2 Truth and meaning suspended

In contrast to Hegel's understanding of the term in both pool and *Attempts* art appears to be no longer a proper tool for making truth sensually perceivable and is finally no longer perceived as a proper mode of creating the illusion of an empirically classifiable reality, therefore no longer seen as vehicle used to uncover truth which can be found inside the objects of the world outside, as still claimed by photographer Nan Goldin, whose photographs were a major influence for Ravenhill. With the advent of postmodernism art is no longer believed to be a direct re-presentation of an external world existing outside of the artistic object. The sense of questing for truth and the desire of uncovering truth by route of exploring an artistic object is closely linked to the desire for making meaning, which, as could be concluded, was firmly believed to be gained and recovered by means of art. On a larger scale this entire new figuration of the understanding of art as being no key to the understanding of reality, can also be seen with reference to the theatre, for in both plays the usual connection between theatre and reality has undergone a re-formulation, which consequently led to a strengthening of the dramatic performance as a form of art, which is no longer limited to a mere mirror-relationship, but has improved its own value as art.

In the context of *pool* the characters' (inter)actions and decisions are influenced by the fact that as long as Sally is physically present the world appears meaningful to them: "(...) it all seemed to mean so much when everything was so full of meaning yes it was all drenched in meaning and we all cared we all cared so so passionately?" (300) When they finally start turning her into an object of art, they make the impression of having become lost and thus pointing towards an apparent deconstruction of their aspired way of making their lives meaningful by means of art, and negate art's capacity of unfolding and uncovering truth and thus establish meaningfulness.

With regard to *Attempts*, one of its metatheatrical comments – "Isn't that the true meaning of these attempts on her life" (253) - not only makes a direct reference to the title of the play itself, but also asks a rhetorical question about the true meaning of the play, which remains unanswered. Since the play seems to break with all truth and meaning, the "true meaning" of these attempts, which can be paralleled with the multiple

inscriptions, will remain entirely in the dark. Crimp's play also ends with such an unanswered question, the very last line of the play is: "And can it? / Can it what? / Mean previously frozen?" (284) The important aspect that meaning cannot be pinned down, and truth not established in language or art is an aspect which not only goes through Crimp's entire play, but is also a crucial part of Ravenhill's text. The fact that in a multiplicity of discourses, all of them stand beside each other without being subordinated to any hierarchical structure, just in the same way as contradictory statements exist beside each other, such as in the last scenario, including the line: "She does work. / she has worked. / She can work. / She will work. / She won't work." (282) There is also one attempt at establishing an objective truth about Anne, for scenario fifteen "The Statement" draws upon the conventions of a witness-account, but which at the beginning of it seems to contain entirely irrelevant questions, which also do not lead to bringing any proper conclusion. The conclusion of the apparent officer is followed first by a long silence and then by another statement which seems to be completely unconnected to the first one. Thus, no meaning can be derived from an apparently objective account either.

4.3 Mirror-images: Introducing Jacques Lacan

Although commonly associated with the field of psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan, in particular examined through the lens of some major concepts of postmodernism as introduced by Derrida and Baudrillard for instance, has proved to be equally important for investigating the major fundaments of thought poststructuralism is built upon. His proposition of the gaze, as a moment of alienation and split of the subject as such and the well-known theory of the mirror stage play a crucial role with regard to the two absent female figures Ravenhill's as well as Crimp's plays revolve about. As Sturken and Cartwright in *Practices of Looking* report, the gaze, in particular the male gaze, is never a neutral one, but always contains a certain potential for definition and inscription projected onto the person the male gaze is directed at (80). They further remark that the act of gazing always entails a kind of split viewers experience when looking at images, a moment of alienation resulting from being simultaneously the surveyor and the surveying entity. The gaze, although directed at somebody else always harbours a moment of looking at oneself through the implied, and thus also inscribing, gaze of others, finally

creating an omnipresence (Sturken/Cartwright, 81). This conception of the omnipresence of the gaze can certainly be transferred onto Ravenhill's implementation of photography into his play, creating a proper tool for illustrating the Lacanian concept of the relationship between image and original. This might also serve as the basic theory for explaining the instance of alienation and the split one experiences when looking at images, as referred to by Sturken and Cartwright (81), which is inextricably bound to every instance of being faced with an image of ourselves, for we see it as ourselves but at the same time also as an ideal.

Taking a closer look at Lacan's conception of the mirror stage some of the aspects raised in relation to the gaze might gain broader ground of understanding and lay bare some of its theoretical groundwork. The mirror stage, as described by Lacan is a period of development the child goes through when it is between six and eighteen months old and commonly understood to be prefiguring the whole dialectic between alienation and subjectivity. At the very core of Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage lies the child's transition from the imaginary to the symbolic. The Imaginary is to be regarded as a pre-oedipal stage in which the child lives in a symbiotic relationship with the body of the mother, entering the Imaginary the child finds access to the realm of images, it tries to identify with (Sarup, 30). The child, as it grows up, continues to imaginarily identify with objects to constitute the self, a narcissistic process used to stress the notion of wholeness as regards the self, by trying to find something in our surrounding we can identify with. The Symbolic, on the other hand, could be characterized as a world of patriarchal order and logic, in which the apprenticeship of language automatically leads to an alienation for the psyche (Eagleton, 27). Going through the mirror stage the child sees its own reflection in the mirror and begins to conceive of itself as a unified being, somehow separate from the rest of the world and finally accesses the language system, essentially a system which is concerned with lack and separation, since language names what is not present and substitutes a linguistic sign for it. This stage also marks the beginning of a period strongly characterized by prohibitions and restraints, associated with the figure of the father (Eagleton, 31).

The child perceives the reflection in the mirror as having a coherence which the object itself lacks, but this self-recognition is always a mis-recognition and the mirror stage is in fact a moment of alienation, and not a process marked by a tendency to get "closer" to

oneself as a subject, since knowing oneself through an external image is in fact always defined through self-alienation (Sarup, 27). In an attempt to establish a parallel between the child and the signifier and therefore put the child into the position of the signifier trying to give meaning to something, the reflection in the mirror could be regarded as the signified and as a result the image in the mirror the child faces has the potential of being viewed as its own "meaning". What the child finds in the mirror could be seen as some sort of "wholeness", as a state where there is no gap between signifier and signified. With the appearance of the father the child becomes aware of the fact that identity is the result of differences, that subjects and entities are in fact characterized by their absence, which also makes language metaphorical, since it always stands in for an absent object. As the child enters the language system it becomes aware of the fact that language is based on lack, and that all language use is conditioned by the fact that it is the lack of something real that makes us use language in order to name the one entity we lack (Eagleton, 154). Language is seen as somehow "empty" since it is an endless process of difference and absence, resulting from this it can easily be argued that the child moves along an endless chain of signifiers, pointing to even more signifiers, which clearly marks the signified as provisional and meaning as instable and unfixable.

   The immanent critique which lies beneath this construction is a general critique of the signified, implicitly criticizing any attempt at trying to fixate and pin down meaning. Therefore, the signifier is pushed to the centre of attention, and constantly suggests the provisionality now attached to meaning, implying that it is something we cannot really get a hold of but that can only be "borrowed" (Lacan qtd. in Bossinade, 40).

4.3.1 Ex-centring the subject in *pool* and *Attempts*

The act of ex-centring the subject, as a result of Lacan's subverting the hierarchy of signifier and signified, which leads to a subordination of the signified to the signifier, therefore now occupying the primary position, could certainly be regarded as one of the main issues prevalent both in *pool* and *Attempts on her life*. The subject is no longer at the centre of thought, Descartes' "cogito ergo sum" dissolves into a haze of self-alienating (mirror-)images. Although from two different strands of theoretical thinking

Lacan provides us with a similar perspective on that matter as already examined in connection to Baudrillard. Both foreground the basic assumption that it is not something real that could be regarded as making a "moment of being" evolve but that its precondition is to be sought in its linguistic formation, in the form of language.

The tool supposed to function as the "representing machine" gains primary status over what it is meant to be re-presented, and the subject constitutes itself through this moment of difference and alienation to what is re-presented. Thus, the subject is one that moves along an infinite chain of signifiers, never pointing to a fixed signified, a stable and coherent re-presentation. This assumption is also responsible for his definition of the subject as lack. Within this theoretical framework the image gains a crucial position, an aspect also increasingly important when dealing with *pool* and *Attempts on her life.* In a common understanding of the word and the concept that lies beneath it language, or art in a more general sense (photography in *pool*), is often thought of as having an image-constituting function. Language as a tool for painting images of something or somebody, an aspect implicitly questioned and criticized by both authors can certainly be regarded as one of the main functions of literature or art in general. Already in the title of *Attempts on her life*, the impression of such images as being mere attempts, therefore implying nothing fixed and stable is conveyed. The images of Anne that are drawn in the play, are mere attempts at pinning down her character, they are all flawed and inconsistent within themselves and seen in the wider context of the whole play they also heavily contradict themselves, for they draw upon a whole range of different discourses and fields of knowledge and thought. Thus, it could be argued that both plays construct themselves in an act of destructing this common and dominant notion of the image, an aspect that also ties in with Baudrillard's as well as Lacan's act of denying the image, or the mirror image its subject-constituting function. Lacan does not believe the image to have any potential for working as a source for getting at a seemingly coherent picture of the self, declares it as illusionary and as leading to a split that emerges out of desire.

A culmination of these notions and concepts can be found in Lacan's "Aphanisis" - effect, which defines the speaking subject as an entity entirely determined through the signifying chain, along which it is positioned and within which its place is one of an interval, a gap, and thus manifests itself in a process of "fading" (Pabst, 65). This formula denies the signified or the referent its potential for being re-presented, a notion summed

up by Lacan in the following way:

> Ein Signifikant ist, was für einen anderen Signifikanten das Subjekt vorstellt. Dieser Signifikant wird also der Signifikant sein, für den alle anderen Signifikanten das Subjekt vorstellen könnten: das heißt, daß ohne diesen Signifikanten alle andern nicht vorstellen könnten. Denn nichts wird vorgestellt, wenn nicht für etwas. (Lacan, qtd. in Pabst, 70).

With reference to the two plays the incapability of both female protagonists to emerge as speaking subjects, one of them never speaking at all, and the other one relying solely on her images, the mirror as such and the photographs taken by the other artists, can be considered as a product of Lacan's definition of the subject as an entity conditioned by lack. On the level of form this attitude towards the speaking subject becomes clearly visible in Crimp's as well as Ravenhill's play, for in both plays no character names are attributed to the spoken text, what the reader or viewer is faced with instead are mere "text-bearers" ("Sprachflächen"), an aspect problematizing the status of the speaking subject, which remain as shadowy as the main figures herself. This notion seems to be mainly applicable to *Attempts on her life*, for Crimp denies the viewer or reader any information as regards psychological details and facts of his speakers onstage. In *pool* the main aspect that might correlate with Lacan's destruction of the subject as centre of being and thought might evolve in relation to the female protagonist as an object of art, which Ravenhill illustrates using the topic of photography.

4.4 Photography - a challenged medium/object-ification challenged

Almost throughout the centuries photography has been classified as a means to objectify and re-present the real world in the most accurate way. Bearing this in mind and shifting the focus onto Mark Ravenhill's *pool* it might be argued that the female artist central to the play is being turned into an object by use of the camera, which focus is constantly placed upon her. She not only becomes an object of desire and the male gaze, but her objectification is additionally given impetus by the other artists' yearning for turning her into an object of art. Through the lens of the camera she is no longer an active, creative subject, an artist of her own, but becomes a piece of art herself. A notion quite similar to this approach is also outlined by Susan Sontag, who states in *On Photography* that to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed, putting itself into a certain relation

to the world that feels like knowledge and therefore like power (Sontag, 15). There is a certain "potential for composition" (*pool*, 306) in their work on the female artist, emphasizing the aspect of creation inextricably bound to every piece of art. She is the one that is composed during the entire process of generating a work of art that will make them last. This is a quite paradoxical view since it captures one of the most basic conflicts inherent to every piece of artistic merit. The young artist, on the verge of dying, not even conscious, is used to fulfil one of the most crucial parts in the context of art in general, which certainly is to make something or somebody last for all eternity, irrespective of every aspect connected to mortality. There is a certain potential not only to make the artists stay within the minds and memories of the public, but also the object itself, even though she was on the brink of vanishing when the picture was taken. The artists take her to another level, when they strip her of all her human qualities making her an aesthetic object existing solely on the level of art. "It appeals. It tempts. There is beauty here. We know, we've spent our life hunting it out and there is beauty here / And we stand and we look and at last we're moved by the intense beauty of that image." (*pool*, 306) Susan Sontag's view on that particular matter conjures up an entirely different image, for she states that photographs are no instruments of memory but inventions or replacements of it (Sontag, 165).

"We've become fascinated by the - look you can see – fascinated by the markings and the bruisings and the cuts progress from day to day. / Just look. Just look. Just look and see. Isn't that rather fascinating? Isn't that fascinating?" (*pool*, 308). It is not only the defining gaze of her fellow artists that attribute to her the features of an object of art as might be deduced from reading this passage, but at the same time they deny her the one characteristic that continued to be central to photography all throughout the centuries, namely the fact that photographs have for a very long time been viewed as signifiers representing a particular signified that is grounded in a real-world-referent. The foundation such an assumption is built upon has often been referred to as the myth of the photographic truth (cf. Struken/Cartwright), which automatically attributes an air of being an unmediated copy of the real world to a piece of photography. In contrast to poststructuralist notions and thoughts as introduced by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan for instance, according to whom every signifier functions as another signified and is therefore seen as being non-representational, which also means that the signified itself is

always of a kind of provisional nature, the persistent view of the photographic image established a direct relation to metonymy. Whereas in Lacanian terms and in the context of language it is commonly acknowledged that no word is ever free from metaphoricity.

Referring to the gaze, a concept introduced and established by Jacques Lacan might entail a kind of split that viewers experience in looking at images. Lacan defines his concept of the gaze as follows:

> In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of te subject in the visible. What determines me, at the moment of the most profound level, in the visible is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which - if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do in a fragmented form – I am photo- graphed. (Lacan, qtd. in Seppänen, 76)

At this point in Lacan's theory a direct equation between the gaze and photography is created, which further strengthens the need for thinking them as co-present and directly corresponding in relation to pool as well. The split that has been referred to is a conception closely related to Lacan's notion of alienation that results from the split between seeing a particular image as oneself but also as an ideal, as both the same and not the same as oneself. It could also be understood as the split that results from being simultaneously the surveyor and the surveyed, in looking at oneself through the implied gaze of others. The split self of the viewer is always connected to the idea that the gaze is omnipresent. In relation to *pool* this would imply that the artists' gaze, for the female artist, their object of art appears to look back at them from the photograph, is one that is not only directed at the woman, inscribes her with features they want to ascribe to her, thus construct her, but is also re-directed back at them, making them aware of their own position in this game. This tendency finally boils down to the fact that at the end of the play it seems that it has not been them constructing her and a whole narrative around her but that finally it is the artist herself evolving as the proper narrator of her own story since she is the one laying out the pictures taken of her herself, and takes up the position previously occupied by her friends, in order to constitute herself by means of the photographs. She is the one giving shape to all the different stages of her condition as apparently captured by the bundle of photographs. She is designing her own layout: "And

now she wants hard copies. So we provide hard copies." / "And she lays them out around the room, arranges, rearranges, studies. And – yes – sometimes she does ask our opinions but really it is her eye, her eye shaping them into a form" (*pool*, 314).

Sticking to Lacan it could also be argued that the female artist might long for a mirror to get a fuller image of herself, an assumption that might become explicit examining the following utterance "No mirror anywhere. I must look like shit. I guess they don't want me to see what…" / "And there was a voice: Oh you can see what you look like." (312) which would perfectly tie in with Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, according to whom all our fantasies are symbolic representations of our desire for wholeness. The "I" of desire is an emptiness that receives a real positive content by a negating action that satisfies desire, desire is therefore a revelation of an emptiness, lack or presence of an absence and always directed towards another desire and thus another emptiness. Desire is directed towards an ideal representation that can never be fully and satisfyingly grasped by the human subject (Sarup, 28). There is an unbridgeable gap between the artist herself and the image she has constructed of herself, which is one that is always shaped and determined by a heavy influence of the subject's desire for coherence and wholeness. She is never going to get a stable image, tries to interpret her relation to others but there is always the possibility of misinterpretation stemming from this gap and mis-recognition. The female artist in pool has an idea of her identity but it does not correspond with reality, the mirror image, which in this particular case is substituted by the photographs is always back to front. Following the Lacanian line of argumentation it cannot be left out of consideration that there is no subject except in re-presentation, but no re-presentation captures us completely, cannot be totally defined nor can escape all definition, causing an inherent threat because our identity always depends on interpretation by others. This is also the foundation Hegel's master – slave dialectics is built upon and works with (Sarup, 22).

Susan Sontag further argues that all photographs are memento mori, which automatically implies that to take a photograph is always inextricably bound to an act of participating in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt (Sontag, 15). Another aspect that needs to be cast some light upon is the notion of the photograph as being both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence (Sontag, 16). In *Camera Lucida*

Roland Barthes states that a photograph is always attached the notion of being a proof of presence of the target at the very moment of taking the photograph. "In photography I can never deny that the thing has been there", he argues (Barthes, qtd. in Seppänen, 98). A statement such as this sheds some light on the inherently paradoxical nature of the ontological status of the female artist in the play. The fact that she is photographed and the implication that she has been present at a particular point of time, even though she never really evolves as a subject, for she never mounts to full presence lies at the very basis of this paradox. It could also be the ache for making time, past and present manageable and thus assure oneself of a certain kind of presence attached to the things photographed that makes photography such an appealing medium. Even though photography as a topic is never explicitly raised in Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her life* the same complex of issues that lurks behind the topic of photography in Ravenhill's play can be detected when dealing with *Attempts on her life*. Crimp, as well as his fellow playwright Ravenhill introduces a woman as his main character who is absent and present at the same time, who is the centre of the play while at the very same moment not being able to fulfill the role of the centre for it is a centre without an original, without a referent that can be grasped or captured in any artistic medium.

When photography was invented in the early 19th century, it was regarded as the most reliable means to render a precise moment in time. Low in cost and generally easily available, photography was a revolutionizing and democratizing new tool as regards the visual image. Ordinary people now got the chance of recording their lives and store it for many generations to come. Drawing upon Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* it can be argued that it is because of its reproducibility that photography has very long been regarded as inferior to the uniqueness of paintings (Mirzoeff, 73). Thus, the main purpose of photography was and still is the preservation of memories:

> In the analog age, personal photography was first and foremost a means for autobiographical remembering, and photographs usually ended up as keepsakes in someone's album or shoebox. They were typically regarded to be a person's most reliable aid for recall and for verifying life as it was, despite the fact that imagination and projection are inextricably bound up in the process of remembering. (Dijck 99)

Knowing that we are going to be photographed, we pose, smile, choose locations, etc., as

already Roland Barthes observed:

> In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. [...] I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity. (Barthes *Camera Lucida*, 13)

Thus, the presumably unaltered reality is in fact altered by ourselves in the moment when a photograph is being taken. There is room for negotiation, as the evaluation of the first pose may influence the second pose (Dijck 104). However, it is also often the case that we consciously try to change or erase our photographed past. Pictures are thrown away or people are ripped out of them, as a means of "clearing up our memory storage". According to Dijck this "image doctoring" (Dijck 105) is an integral part of our autobiographical remembering, as we more or less consciously shape our past to suit our wishes and expectations.

   Photography could be perceived as distinct from other media because it shows that something was definitely there when the shutter was opened. The claim that something was present automatically marks it as a past tense medium, for it denotes that something was there rather than something is there. Barthes claims that "with the photograph we enter into flat death". The past the photograph presents cannot be recaptured and emphasizes "the imperious sign of my future death" (Mirzoeff, 74). Arguing not quite in line with Sontag and Barthes Walter Benjamin states that a photograph, being a mechanically reproduced object, cannot have a genuine presence.

> An image is that in which the then and the now come together into a constellation like a flash of lightening. In other words: an image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of the Then to the Now is dialectical: not of a temporal but of an imaginistic nature. (Benjamin qtd. in Mirzoeff, 69)

As has been argued by Susan Sontag, through photographs the world becomes a series of unrelated, freestanding particles, and history, past and present a mere set of anecdotes. The photographic exploration and duplication of the world fragments continuities and feeds the pieces into an indeterminable dossier and the camera appears to make reality atomic, manageable and opaque. It is a view of the world which denies

interconnectedness, continuity but which confers on each moment the character of a mystery (Sontag, 23).

The connection of truth, knowledge and power in relation to photography is also pushed to the forefront of attention when considering Foucault's notions about the link between knowledge and power. The individual becomes the target of information, with its own specific qualities, enabling the construction of a comparative system which allows it to delineate overall phenomena and constitute specific categories with the individual's position in them. These practices of documentation make the individual take on the notion of resembling the concept of a "case", which is itself inextricably interwoven with a sense of power since it is always linked to knowledge of which the individual is a target of. The realm of truth concerning an individual which is constructed by the capacity of power producing information about an individual could thus be seen as directly related to the aspect of truth which appears to directly correspond to photography as such (Seppänen, 103). "Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it includes and which extend it. A regime of truth," Foucault claims (qtd. in Seppänen, 103).

4.4.1 Introducing Nan Goldin

Born in 1953 Nan Goldin is an American photographer and, as acknowledged by the writer himself, inspired Ravenhill to write *pool* because he got to know of Goldin's accidentally falling into an empty pool. One of the most characteristic aspects concerning Goldin's photography is that it turns against the voyeuristic aspect of the camera, a feature often used and exploited by other photographers. She is of the firm belief that, even though this might be an implication commonly associated with the profession, she has got no right to intrude where she is not known and thus all people encountered in Goldin's work are in fact close friends and all fully aware of being photographed. Her photographs could be characterized as the record of her private life, made art by her decision to exhibit them and to make her private life public by means of art. Therefore it

could be concluded that her work is marked by a great degree of personal intimacy. For this reason Goldin has often been accused of producing snapshot-photography. Catherine Liu delineates the snapshot as being a particular form of photography, only capable of functioning within a very restricted aesthetic area and describes it as both anonymous and succinct, framing the moment but with its formal and aesthetic qualities being suppressed (Liu, 525). She further characterizes the contemporary artist working with snapshot-photography as being fully aware of the "way in which the casual offhanded use of photography reveals more about our relationship with the medium than art photography can. Our historical and material relationship to the medium is that which art photography would like to render invisible or suppress altogether" (Liu, 525). One might detect a parallel to postdramatic theatre here, foregrounding the medium and exposing its self-awareness. Taking a closer look at the field of snapshot-photography one might also deduce a connection to Derrida's remark on Freud's Mystic Writing Pad, which basically draws our attention to Freud's notion of writing as being nothing more or less than a writing aid, a spatiotemporal extension of the psyche, of memory itself (Liu, 527). "The snapshot, especially in its promise of perfect spontaneity attempts to render memorizable, if not memorable the field of vision itself: instant cameras further cut short the time of frame and focusing, thus offering the consumer a fantasy of artless decision" (Liu, 527) In its seemingly inherent offer of capturing the moment, photography appears to be fulfilling the promise that could not be kept by writing of accurate record-keeping of the dead.

However, the scenes her pictures depict are more intimate or radical than usual snapshots, they include photographs of people taking drugs, making love or bleaching their eyebrows. While many photographers use their cameras as voyeuristic tools, which enable them to intrude in foreign spheres, Goldin prefers to take on the position of a witness, since the fundamental difference between a voyeur and a witness is that while a voyeur tries to see without being seen, a witness participates physically in an event and reports on it. This is a decisive differentiation that needs to be kept in mind when associating Goldin with snapshot photography and its common definitions. In her "foreword" or "photographer's note" to *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* she also refers to it herself and supplies those participating in her art with a comment on her own work under which light one is certainly inclined to access her world in a different mode: "There

is a popular notion that the photographer is by nature a voyeur, the last one invited to the party. But I'm not crashing; this is my party. This is my family, my history." (Goldin, 6)

Another aspect that might be worth considering in this context is Goldin's statement that she started photographing after the death of her sister, as the only reminding picture she has now is one picture of her: "I don't ever want to be susceptible to anyone else's version of my history. I don't ever want to lose the real memory of anyone again" (Goldin 9). The fact that memory plays an important role for Goldin becomes apparent when paying a closer look at her work. Her models, mostly young and aspiring artists, recur and return over a 20-year-span. In this way pictures create narratives, in which the spectator adopts the role of an acquaintance. This situation can be compared to those of soap-operas, where the audience is also confronted with the same characters over thousands of episodes broadcast throughout many years. As we recognise certain faces or locations, the illusion is created that we know the characters or models.

The best-known photograph by Goldin is a self-portrait called "Self-Portrait One Month After Being Battered" from her collection *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, published in 1984. After being beaten up by her ex-boyfriend, Goldin took this picture in order to remind herself of not returning to their relationship. This shows again the importance of memory in Goldin's work and the fact that she regards photography as being more reliable than her subjective perception and possibly subjective memory. Her work could also be attributed the status of being a narrative, a notion that would also tie in with the former idea of comparing it to a soap opera, since her work is always featuring the same characters and knowing their names and relations one automatically gets the notion of participating in their life stories. The self-portraits she included in her collection, in particular the one she gave the title "Self-portrait One Month after Being Battered" from 1984 bear strong resemblances to the way the young artist in Ravenhill's play appears to have been depicted in the photographs taken by her fellow artists.
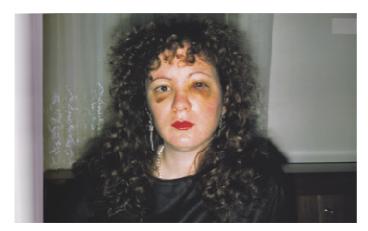
Fig. 5: Nan after being battered (Ballad of Sexual Dependency, p.83)

4.4.2.1 *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* as the eye to essence

In her programmatic introduction to the *Ballad* Goldin provides us with those issues and ideas that seem to have been the basis her early photographic work is built upon: "The instant of photographing, instead of creating distance, is a moment of clarity and emotional connection for me." (Goldin, 6) It seems that in her art Goldin is obsessed with creating and establishing such moments of truth and such instances of revelation. Such a view might even establish a link to phenomenology, which thinks of language as an instrument of getting at the truth, a way of seeing and doing, rather than seeing it as a prison house, as supposed by Frederic Jameson with the advent of postmodernist thinking (Fortier, 41). "In this way, the emphasis is on the presence or 'unconcealing' of the world for consciousness rather than its disappearance into language, and therefore on the interplay with the real rather than on its inevitable deferral." (Fortier, 41) With regard to Martin Heidegger, his thoughts of art as creating a spiritual presence or truth seem to fit into the image of art's capacities as outlined by Goldin. To him pieces of art "provide access, not to things in themselves, but to a privileged relation, of reflection and understanding, with the world, a relation usually concealed in day-to-day human activity." (Fortier, 42) With the advent of deconstruction this desire for full presence and truth is exposed as a mere illusion in which we are trapped.

  Goldin thus posits a concept of fundamental truth the object itself communicates, a true meaning of things, which automatically denies any evolving gaps between referent, signified and signifier. This further entails that meaning is present in the object and

directly communicated. The things she encounters seem to expose their very essence to her. Such a view not only bears traces of phenomenological thinking but also fosters the belief that all referents are not only directly graspable but also actively exposing their essence to those perceiving them. Referentiality and textuality weighed against each other (...) foregrounding the Dingwelt. Reality is seen as transparent and accessible via consciousness and not as a construct of language. This implied reliance on the "authority of consciousness" consequently also appearing to discard the concept of presence, in particular of presence in thinking and the reflexive cogito by heavily arguing against Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum". At the beginning of his *Of Grammatology* Jacques Derrida introduces a number of ways in which "logocentric" conceptions of "meaning of being as presence" have been developed, such as:

> presence of the thing to sight as „eidos" (form),
> presence as substance/essence/existence,
> self-presence of the cogito,
> consciousness. (Baldwin, 8)

All these conceptions appear to aim at providing an account of objective knowledge on the basis of an immediate intuitive relationship between a particular person and something else whose significance opens up to somebody through this kind of intuitive relationship and which makes her/him capable of going on to develop an objective understanding of the world. (Baldwin, 8) The object a knowing subject is presented with is immediately understood as what it is. Thus, it could be concluded that the conception of presence which Derrida marks as logocentric is one according to which "the possibility of objective knowledge is thought to be founded on the immediate cognitive presence of an object in a subject." (Baldwin, 8) "Logocentrism would thus be bound up in the determination of the being of the existent as presence," Derrida states in *Of Grammatology* (Culler, 93) Drawing upon the conceptions already outlined before and linking them with the concept of the binary opposition as a fundamental ruling force in Western thinking it could be argued that in oppositions such as meaning/form, soul/body, literal/metaphorical, nature/culture, transcendent/empirical the superior term of the respective dyad always belongs to the realm of the logos. The other one is assigned a secondary status and conceived of as a complication, negation or disruption of the first. (Culler, 93) This authority of presence arranges all our thinking. All the familiar notions of "making clear", "grasping", "demonstrating", "revealing" invoke presence. One of

Derrida's central concerns is the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, by illustrating that what we consider as presence is always already marked by difference and deferral. (Culler, 94f.) In his famous essay "Signature, event, context", he argues that "there is no experience of pure presence but only chains of differential marks", which nicely sums up his thoughts about the necessary replacement of presence with the concept of the trace and the assumption that we move along an endless chain of signifiers. These concerns about the dominance of presence in Western thinking raised by Derrida and others seem to bring under attack exactly such constructions as they have been put forward by phenomenological thinking.

4.4.2.1 *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* as memory storage/diary

In her few introductory pages to *The Ballad* Goldin not only comments upon her longing and persistent urge to present the "true nature" of her subjects, without glamorizing or glorifying them in any way but also her wish to make it a storage of "real memories": "my desire is to preserve the sense of people's lives (...) I want the people in my pictures to stare back. I want to show exactly what my world looks like, without glamorization, without glorification" (Goldin, 6)

  This is not a unique claim, particularly connected to Nan Goldin, or photography in a general sense, but something that has continuously evolved over the last centuries, as naturalist aesthetics or variations of it, as a general tendency towards the "hyper-real", a strong sense of realism that continued to be a dominant factor in almost all art histories. Two utterances from her "photographer's foreword" might serve as an illustration of Goldin's strong focus on memory and the diary with all the capacities she attributes to them: "We all tell stories which are versions of history - memorized, encapsulated, repeatable, and safe. Real memory, which these pictures trigger, is an invocation of the color, smell, sound, and physical presence, the density and flavor of life. Memory allows an endless flow of connections. Stories can be rewritten, memory can't" (6).

"The diary is my form of control over life. It allows me to obsessively record every detail. It enables me to remember" (6). Memory overrules stories, it, from Goldin's perspective, can be real, but only when triggered by pictures. It is something fixed that cannot be re-written, whereas the story is something exposed to constant change. The

diary, the photographic diary in Goldin's case is the tool she needs to capture memory/ies, control life by means of memory, by enabling her to remember.

The sense of immortality and art's assumed ability to build up a wall against the mortality of its creator and those created in the process of producing art which is also an essential ingredient in Goldin's programme for the production of art - the subjects in her photographs - is thus tightly interlinked with the artist's capability to stay true to the world of facts, that he/she and therefore also his/her stories are a product of and thus avoid fictionalization, or as Goldin puts it, glamorization.

> For years I thought I was obsessed with the record-keeping of my day-to-day life(...)In the process of leaving my family, in recreating myself, I lost the real memory of my sister. I remember my version of her, of the things she said, of the things she meant to me. But I don't remember the tangible sense of who she was, her presence (...) (9)

What can be found here is the strong focus on presence, on the implied wish to re-evocate and thus the urge of trying to make her graspable. Goldin's desire to restore presence would then create a sense of tangibility and immortality.

Memory and its capacities in connection to art have become a widely debated and discussed issue. Scholars have also developed models that are rather based on "textuality", and thus claiming a non-existence of the past, which leads to the fact that memory is no longer a recovery or repetition of physical traces, but could rather be characterized as a construction of the past under conditions determined by the present. Such a system is not built upon retrieval but on reversibility, insofar as the linear, cause-and-effect is replaced by a continuous proleptic and analeptic "shaping". Meaning is constituted in an endless process and retroactively and repeatedly and forgetting is embedded as an integral principle. (Whitehead, 114) Thus, it could be concluded that memory is no longer related to the past as a form of truth but as a form of desire. This not only evokes thoughts as introduced by Jacques Lacan who, in his reflections on the mirror stage, shifted his focus on the child's desire for wholeness and coherence, two factors the world, as being one entirely immersed in language, lacks, and thus can never be achieved by the child, but also seems to point towards Goldin's refusal to "glamorize" life. Her main principle as regards art is concerned with being loyal to one's life. But if we assume that there is no original embedded in the material world of referents that can be easily grasped, this would certainly provoke a general tendency to make one's life-

story poetic, for there will be a rule of desire, possibly one for coherence and wholeness, one cannot shut oneself up against. The underlying notion is one that classifies art as a tool for making things coherent and graspable, since what we perceive as reality often leaves us with the feeling of an inescapable fragmentation and incoherence

Another concept that could be positioned quite in direct opposition to the way Goldin sketches memory's abilities, is Freud's "Prinzip der Nachträglichkeit" ("principle of deferred action"). He illustrates this using the famous case of Emma, a young woman suffering from severe trauma in connection to shopping and sexual abuse. The traumatic event, her being sexually molested when she was a young girl, had no effect in the past, at the very moment it happened. The meaning of the event was not present when the incident came about. It appears that when we talk about it we deal with a "past that never happened", but by "re-writing" it, it is created in the act of being repeated (iterabilité). It seems as though the later event causes the earlier event, because the effect was there before the actual event that caused it. Only in the act of being repeated it gains meaning. A familiar notion can be encountered when paying a closer look at Jacques Derrida's thoughts about iterability and re-iteration, which basically refers to the fact that all signs and text can be repeated in new contexts, but that it is at the same time context-bound, i.e. dependent on a context, but not on a particular one. Freud's concept appears to unsettle the belief that the past can be recovered as it was and that there is a possibility of re-uniting our past and present selves. Still, one might argue that the assumption that memory can give us direct access to the preserved or buried past retains a powerful hold on our culture. (King, 12)

4.4.2. *pool* and the *Ballad* - „you will never know, nor will you, all the stories, nor even the totality of one single story, I kept telling myself as I looked at these images" (Derrida - *Right of Inspection*)

Being one of the main inspirations for *pool*, a great number of parallels and similarities between Nan Goldin's photography and Mark Ravenhill's play can be found. The most obvious one arises from both artists's depiction of physical deformations, injuries, which Goldin herself suffered from after falling into an empty pool, or after having been beaten up by her boyfriend, as one of her most famous photographs, "Nan after being battered",

shows. The most prominent way Sally is referred to in the play, is by means of portraiture, the photographs the other artists are continuously taking of her to picture the different states of her suffering, which establishes a link to Nan Goldin, who, in her own work, also only appears as a subject of her own art, by means of self-portraits.

On a more thematic level, the collective of artists displayed in the play can be compared to Goldin's friends and fellows depicted in her photography. The social surrounding, the dynamics of friendship as depicted in a way resembling snapshot photography, which to some extent also appears to hold true for *pool* as well, is an essential constitutive of both pieces of art. Another feature they have in common is their focus on the depiction of violence and deformation, an "aesthetification of the unaesthetic". Recapitulating the underlying concepts Goldin outlined at the beginning of the *Ballad*, it immediately becomes apparent that content-wise, since Goldin's photographs were a major influence for Ravenhill, *pool* sticks quite closely to Goldin's dominant issues, but on the level of aesthetic theory fundamental discrepancies can be detected. In an essay on Derrida's "Right of Inspection" Gerhard Richter points to some essential arguments Derrida uses in his own text, which denies photography its claim of direct, real-world reference, and thus directly pierces into the major aspect where Goldin's and Ravenhill's view diverge.

> (...) when the referent itself consists of frames that are themselves framed, the index of the wholly other, however marked it may be, endlessly defers reference. The chimera becomes a possibility. If there is an art of photography it is found here. Not that its suspends reference, but that it indefinitely defers a certain type of reality, that of the perceptible referent. It gives the prerogative to the other, opens the infinite uncertainty of a relation to the completely other, a relation without relation. (Derrida, qtd. in Richter, 158)

On the basis of Derrida's thoughts on photography and their apparently inextricable claim for real-world reference lies his concept of a relation without relation which, according to his perspective, describes the art of photography in an accurate way. As Richter further reports, Derrida's photographic referent does by no means relate a present or real, but relates in another way to the other, and always does so in an entirely different manner, according to the type of image, whether photographic or not (159). One further aspect he raises, which will become particularly relevant in relation to Goldin`s claim of providing direct access to the presence of the world around her in her photographs, as well as to the nature of things themselves, which can be exemplified in statements such as the

following one: "I want to show exactly what my world looks like, without glamorization, without glorification" (Goldin, 6), is that the aspect adhering in the photograph is less the referent itself, "in its present effectivity of its reality than the implication in the reference of its having been unique." (Derrida qtd. in Richter, 159).

The logic of the referential is defined by Derrida in terms of uniqueness and singularity of the photographed, since all participants of the photographic act can be said to enter a singular and unique relation to each other, which leads to the conclusion that the photograph cannot be regarded as a record of any extraphotographic, autonomous singularity that had only waited to be recorded, but needs to be seen as an inscription with light of the uniqueness of a specific and now irretrievable relation, which somehow leads to a doubling of relation (Richter, 160). Applied to Goldin, this can also be put in connection with her strong focus on the relation of all participants involved in her art, the close circle of friends she depicts and her desire to stick to the same constellation over a couple of years, which leads to a heightened and increasing suggestion of intimacy. Derrida's notions on the photographic relation have also considerable impact on the aesthetics of the self-portrait, for the self-identity of the relation becomes entirely suspended, the subject's gaze can never simply be itself, the gaze cannot be available as an object to an other who is looking at it and in the same moment observe itself as a gaze that is being looked at. "One assumes that the portrait captures the eyes...that for which, among other things, photography exists. We assume of the gaze that it is what the subject itself cannot seen in its life. If you look at yourself in a mirror, you see yourself either seeing or being seen, but never both at once." (Derrida qtd. in Richter, 161). This inherent split of the subject's gaze appears to be very close to Lacan's concept of the gaze and the scopic field, which in relation to pool take up an important position.

With regard to the depiction of photography in *pool*, it can be argued that Goldin's phenomenologist belief in the referent and art's capacity to provide direct access to the presence of a whatsoever real-world referent, is to be found at the completely other end of pool's inherent denial that reality and the subject can be grasped by means of art. Sally, as the assumed centre of the play, neither becomes graspable by means of photography, nor can she be rendered present in the theatrical text as such.

In *Attempts on her life* the question about the boundaries between life and art is raised as well. In the scenario "Untitled", the focus is placed on the question whether there is

any acceptable way of rendering an individual's attempts on her life in an artful way – "Where does the 'life' - literally in this case - end, and the 'work' begin?" (250) - and thus seems to subsume almost all issues connected to the two plays and other forms of art, such as Aktionismus and similar approaches towards artistic production focusing on the presence of the human body in performance, under one apparently simple question.

> I'm afraid what we're seeing here is pure narcissism. And I think we have to ask ourselves the question, who would possibly accept this kind of undigested exhibitionism as a work of art? ... / Yes, but exactly that's surely the very point she's attempting to make: Where are the boundaries? What is acceptable? ... (*Attempts*, 250)

5 THE SUBJECT ENTANGLED IN A MULTIPLICITY OF DISCOURSES

5.1 Michel Foucault

The concept of discourse and the processes involved in its formation are central to Foucault's thinking and work. The problem inherent to the literary discourse is the fact that, since the main vehicle involved in it is language, language is both its tool, the main part in constructing it but also its subject and main issue (Bossinade, 37). The central figures upon which Foucault builds his theory of discourse formation are archaeology, discourse, representation and power. At the very basis of the term discourse is something that emerges or evolves that has not been there before, such as madness, sexuality and illness within a particular temporal and spatial context. Discourse-producing are utterances, not the single subject, but the subject is itself an entity that is created by a particular set of discourses. Discourses are "not mere groupings of signs (...) but practices which systematically form the subject of which they speak." He argues for an awareness that words are in fact doing things with us instead of believing that we do things with words. Agusti thus describes Crimp's play as using the concept of pastiche and therefore argues that behind Anne as a "person", which the characters appear to construct, there is nothing to be found except an absence, pointing to the identity they describe as a fiction. On a second layer their discourses are automatically parodied as a set of technologies for the construction of subjects (Agusti, "Minimalism", 150). Anne, as the most discussed "character" of the play, is put into the role of being constantly exposed to an entire

process of reification on part of the characters, who automatically place her into the role of a media icon, or part of a myth. As an object with no depth, Anne is conceived only as a constituent part within a whole system of simulacra, which in the context of postmodernity appears to be the only space where something similar to a referent can be found, in order to finally create a state of opinion, an ideology or an identity (Agusti, "Minimalism", 152).

Another relevant point is made by Pabst concerning Foucault's interpretation of Velasquez' Las Meninas as compared to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, in which Foucault shows that the only re-presentation visible to the eye that manifests itself in the image is the mirror-image, that recovers visibility of what has been outside the spectrum of the human eye. This leads Foucault to conclude that this non-representable is what now has got to be seen as the subject. The conclusion that can be drawn from such an approach is that the subject is no longer representable, but can only be perceived in its mirror-image, which must not be mistaken for a perfect and flawless re-presentation of it, but which always bears the potential of an inherent split and a moment of self-alienation (Pabst, 24). The whole topic of the subject, and the urge of defining it anew and making it fit the framework of the postmodern period could be regarded as one point of departure when trying to compare Foucault's to Lacan's concepts. Lacan denies the subject its power of constructing and it has to abandon its role as the centre of thought. Foucault builds up a similar theoretical construction, strips the subject of its meaning-constituting role and function and parallels it with the terms "Zerstreuung", which in the context of Derrida can also be encountered in his sense of "dissemination", which additionally also undermines binarisms and oppositional structures, and "Nomadensubjekt", which both put it in the context of being a mere "variable function of the discourses it is exposed to". Relating to Foucault Gilles Deleuze underlines his argumentation, putting it into the following sentence: "Das sprechende Subjekt ist nicht die Verantwortlichkeit des Diskurses, als vielmehr die Nichtexistenz, in deren Leere die Sprache sich endlos ergießt" (Pabst, 68). The subject has to be seen in the light of being an entity that is produced by language and not that is itself actively producing things by means of language. Language evolves in the moment of "fading" the subject is exposed to and necessarily goes through, and which according to Foucault causes a split, finally leading to a dissemination of the subject and only leaves behind an empty space, a lack and absence. The moment of

alienation of the subject is also an indispensable result of Lacan's "Aphansisis-effect of the signifier".

This close connection between these different viewpoints, which both had a considerable impact on poststructuralist theories and thinking, in particular with regard to the representation of the human subject, might also be worth considering in the context of *pool* and *Attempts,* since both plays provide a critical stance towards the representation of a subject by means of language.

Among many other topics, most of them being grounded upon his primary interest in the exertion of institutional power, Foucault's work of the 1960s focused to a very large extent on language and its mechanisms in constituting the subject, which already explains why his work is of considerable relevance for analysing these two plays. The subject being first referred to as an intersection of discourses, which he later expands towards the additional dimension of the crucial role of power relations, with Foucault gained an entirely new ontological layer (Sarup, 81). Power, as inhabiting the most crucial position within Foucault's framework of thought, not regarded as a tool of repression, constraint or prohibition, but rather as 'producing reality', 'producing domains of objects and rituals of truth'. The subject, not being the knowing, autonomous, self-critical, 'transcendental' subject in a Kantian sense, with Foucault starts being seen as a locus of multiple, dispersed and decentred discourses (Sarup 74).

In *Attempts on her life* Foucault's discourse-theory is implemented by means of the great range of discourses through which Anne's fiction is created, Anne is basically serving as a surface onto which processes of identity constructions are inscribed. The words of the characters make the power diagrams of certain institutions transparent and unfold the entire range of technologies which make these discourses work and succeed. Crimp's play reduces and pares down the subject to a bundle of fragmented values that should be implemented through a series of micro-political interventions of authenticity, empathy and unmasking, probably even mounting in a re-constitution of a particular order of things (Agusti, "Minimalism", 162). All the registers the actors use to talk about Anne, such as Shakespearean quotations, the mythologized language which turns her into an icon can certainly be seen as a crucial and effective way of exerting power through which her fiction/her many fictions are created (Agusti, "Short Circuits", 104). Similar to

Freud's concept of the Mystic Writing Pad, later taken up and discussed by Derrida, Anne, from a Foucauldian point of view can be described as a registering surface upon which a whole variety of different processes of identity construction are inscribed, which are both successful and have a certain inclination to fail, becoming transparent in various forms of collapse (Agusti, "Short Circuits", 104). It is physical violence as well as symbolic violence that seems to objectify Anne, the victim, mounting in a culmination of both, by having discourse producing symbolic "marks" on individuals, which are mostly depicted as acts of violation in the text, but which do not have a direct effect of the individual's flesh and skin, but rather on his behaviour. From a linguistic point of view, these acts of power are also responsible for "marking" individuals to leave their very own, individual register. It is therefore also a linguistic type of violation and creating discourse through language, or as Agusti suggests, through interpretation, assuming that for the aggressor an identity that is "non-subjectified" is to be treated like a non-interpreted text ("Short Circuits", 113).

In this context David Edgar in *State of Play* poses the question whether we are capable of truly knowing another human being or can possibly regard people as existing independent of the many models, the individual, as a media-induced and - infected entity, construct of them. Similar to Agusti's viewpoint, what Edgar draws upon in this context, is the whole complex of institutional and media discourses Anne is dominated by. The play could thus be characterized as a collage of viewpoints which are all somehow embedded in the context of late capitalism. Such a viewpoint would attribute Crimp's play with a certain air of social and political criticism, which has also been pointed out in several reviews, such as in Michael Billington's review for *The Guardian*, who also stated that Crimp's "prose-poem (...) the individual ego is being steadily eroded by a mixture of rampant consumerism, global capitalism and technological advance." (Billington, *The Guardian*, 15 March 2007) As the author himself further remarks in an interview with *The Independent*: "The play has a love-hate relationship with consumer culture. I think it's a fact that within consumer culture, the woman as an image is used as the interface between the consumed object and the consumer. And that's why, perhaps, the figure of Anne is so polymorphous. She is at the site of that exchange between what we want and what we can get." (Sierz, *The Independent*, 8 March 2007)

Even though Anne appears in many different guises and shapes, the play leaves the

audience with one image that could be seen as recurrent and thus as more or less central to the play, namely that of Anne as a terrorist. Katie Mitchell's own perspective on this general focus, has been included in a review of her production of the play at London's National Theatre in 2007: "The play was originally put on just before the Labour election victory in 1997 (...) Since then, however, the idea of terrorism has altered radically because of September 11." (Sierz, *The Independent*, 8 March 2007) The author's focus on terrorism is one he also shares with Ravenhill, whose *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* has just recently been staged in Great Britain as well as in Berlin, and which is centred on terrorism and its effects on society.

The image of society Crimp creates in his play can be described as one which, in Foucauldian terms traverses "all points and supervising every instant (...) compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes" (Foucault qtd. in Agusti, 116). As pointed out by Foucault these processes can only be carried out on the basis of thorough examination, as a mechanism of power which keeps the subjects tied to ongoing processes of objectification, which according to Agusti, should rather be referred to as instances of subjectification, in a similar sense as the actors' relationship to their construction of Anne. In a similar manner the actors are carrying out examinations on Anne as well, with the aim of making her graspable and comprehensible as an identity ("Short Circuits", 116).

The issue of power, and its fascination with it was not only of central concern to Foucault, but was also dealt with by Jean Baudrillard, who perceives the universal fascination with it and its exercise primarily in relation to an unbroken, ultimate fascination with a dead power characterized by a simultaneous 'resurrection effect', in a quite obscene and parodic way, of all the different forms of power that have already been there (Birringer, 9). The characterization of power and its ultimate fascination with it that Baudrillard refers to here can also be found in *pool*, where a perfect illustration of it might be the group of artist's power over the injured one, being practically dead, and their attempts at 'resurrecting' her by means of capturing her condition in photographs. Their mode of exerting power over their unconscious friend can be read as an exemplification of Baudrillard's hypotheses, although it must not be left unnoticed that in the end the whole power relation is again turned on its head, and the formerly passive, injured artist

recovers to full strength again.

6 LANGUAGE

6.1 Duchamp's ready mades

Michel Duchamp himself described the readymade as a "work of art without an artist to make it", which defines its basic concept quite accurately since in most cases they are mass produced objects which have only been signed and are sometimes inscribed by the artist (Ades, 146). Even though the readymade can take many different shapes and guises, there are some basic conceptions lying beneath it, such as the concern to challenge by example all kinds of contemporary assumptions about the essential properties of artistic creation, such as the roles of conception, manual skills, and accident or chance in the process of making art. Other fundamental issues are an immanent desire to expose the role of institutions and social groups involved in the definitions of what according to their view counts as art, as well as a fascination with industrially manufactured and therefore in most cases also anonymously produced objects of desire (Ades, 152).

As an artistic object the readymade occupies a double position, since it is simultaneously the operation that reduces the work of art to its enunciative function and also the "result" of this operation, in fact, a work of art reduced to the statement "This is art" (De Duve, 100). In fact, what makes the readymade part of the discourse of art is only this statement, which labels it as a piece of art, stating its enunciative conditions and, in accordance with Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum, can also be defined as a copy preceding its original, therefore also questioning the relationship of the real and the represented. The readymade, as a reproduction is an object the artist has not really made and from which the viewer also cannot draw a "complete aesthetic experience" from, for, in fact, it is only a piece of reproduction which has no further impact than declaring its existence, as a piece of art, of the work which is its referent (De Duve, 122). Readymades such as Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) or *Bicylce* Wheel (1913) question the museum and the contexts from which they emerged, such as the urinal, suddenly being attributed the status of a piece of art, just because it has been placed into a context marking it as a piece

of art. As casual objects they refrain from being seen as finished products or complete works, for in their state of de-contextualization they are dependent on their relation to the old, "original" context, as well as on their new surrounding, such as the museum as an institution (Agusti, "Short Circuits", 118). What makes them incapable of entering a state of completeness or closure is their dynamic relationship with the new context they have ben placed in, as well as their constant interaction with their spectators. Derrida's conception of iterability, which underlines the importance of the context, and in its most basic terms supports his general argument that meaning can never be fixed and attached to a specific (artictic) object for all eternity, but changes according to the context it is inserted into. He develops this concept of iterabilité in his critique of Austin's speech act theory, in which he argues that every sign that occurs in a language is re-iterable. The sign can thus be understood as being dependent on the context it occurs in, but on no specific one. The readymade foregrounds the accepted, unexamined nature of the referential function of sign systems - thus, like postmodern artforms supplanting „the legislative force of the referential context by the material assumption of a real context, a reality which it had been the mission of representation to repress." (Bois, 1981, qtd. in Hutcheon, 142).

6.1.1 *Attempts on her life* - the linguistic readymade

In Lehmann's "textscapes", which Crimp's *Attempts* can certainly be put into relation with, the dissemination of voices, as it can be called with particular reference to Derrida, he also draws upon the mixture and blurring of language as a mode of expressing subjective presence, but also in the sense of language as mere material, which is not originally produced by the subject but which already exists and is just made use of, sometimes in a wrong and improper context. Language becoming an autonomous force, a cloak worn by the individual subject thus becomes a piece found by a speaker in his/her daily life-context, which makes it comparable to Marcel Duchamp's objet trouvés. Common, daily things, pieces of speech which are commonly part of daily life are put into the context of art, and become de-individualized subjects in such a way that the subject vanishes behind the systemic, form, and the piece itself, which somehow

swallows the speaking subject. The pieces of speech as "object trouvés" are therefore not created but rather "found", as an apparent refusal of form.

To the greatest extent Crimp's play certainly revolves around the power exerted by dominant discourses, regulating and structuring reality, but also includes moments of disruptions or contradictions manifest to the actors' discourses, which in most cases occur in the form of linguistic ready-mades (Agusti, "Short Circuits", 105). They aim at unravelling meaning at precisely these moments when in fact meaning should have to be kept hidden, and thus can also be compared to the broader understanding of "slips of the tongue". This implied notion of language unveiling itself and classifying those using it as incapable of fully possessing it, but instead being ruled by its mechanisms and the incontrollable powers of unconscious processing, has also been a crucial issue in central Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century, when dramatist Ödön von Horvath applied a similar device and attributed his characters with what he termed "Bildungsjargon", also rendering his dramatis personae as incapable of being fully in charge of the language they use. Also many contemporary continental playwrights, such as Werner Schwab, made use of fixed phrases, culminating in the appearance that they are "spoken by the language they use", that many of their utterances onstage very unreflectively speak through them.

Agusti refers to this phenomenon as a form of literary pastiche and classifies it as a mechanism bringing to the fore the fragmentation of the subject into different layers of subjectification and thus again highlights the general perspective of the play as one of denying the subject its essentiality and shows that it is instead constituted in and through language ("Short Circuits", 105). These ready-mades, taken from the field of plastic arts, and introduced into the realm of theatre, stress their immanent aspect of control, normalization and discipline.

The scenario "The New Annie", in which a commercial of a car called Annie is produced by one of the actors, can be seen as a proper exemplification of the linguistic incapabilities of the speakers onstage, for the flow of the commercial discourse which is at work in this particular scene is disrupted by the speaker, who appears to be losing her temper, getting deeper and deeper into a state of acute nervousness, and flawed in her mechanized behaviour (cf. Agusti, "Short Circuits", 109): "The back seat is never made slippery by sperm...slippery by blood...slippery by beer...slippery by saliva...or sticky by melted chocolate" (238). As Agusti points out, the disruption of the commercial

alongside with the woman's mind affected by a state of hysteria collapses, unveiling the „madness" of the media and the sense of losing control as a rupture in Western consumer culture ("Short Circuits", 110).

In one of the play's most striking and controversial scenarios, "Pornó", the speaker's need for a prompt constantly interferes with the speaker's apparently carefully produced discourse, and is realized in the form of verbal collapses, which dominate the speaker's discourse and give her speech more and more the shape of a masquerade, a farce-like attempt at a feminist stance towards pornography. The speaker's dislocated speech, with its collapses, being revealed in her need for a prompt and confusion is perceived by Agusti as a breakthrough of desire, an attempt at escaping certain mechanisms and forces, and thus, as a collapse of meaning.

> She turns away. Momentary confusion. But then another speaker takes over. In fact the rest of the company have probably appeared and may share the following lines, while the first girl drinks a glass of water and is revived; again it should not be clear whether she's suffering stage fright or true distress. (273)

In this context, a reference to Foucault can be established, leading to the conclusion that discourses as contemporary active modes of subjection, as external, mediated understandings of self and society the characters' discourses in Crimp's play are ripped apart by exactly these collapses, dislocations and therefore continuously taken to their limits (Agusti, "Minimalism", 155).

As already referred to above Crimp's technique of introducing words and expressions from foreign languages, as well as incorporating set and fixed phrases can be interpreted in relation to the ready-made, as introduced in visual arts. The ready-made, Duchamp's objet trouvés in their state of de-contextualization are constantly questioning the context in which they appear and thus trigger processes of estrangement among recipients. The other basic and underlying notion of the conception of the ready-made as made popular by Marcel Duchamp is its primary function and claim that everything can become an object of art (Agusti "Short Circuits", 118), which is a notion both significant in the context of *Attempts* but also in relation to *pool*, as it has already been investigated in the section on "Aktionismus". In an entirely different way as Martin Crimp, Mark Ravenhill draws upon the notion of turning the seemingly ordinary into a piece of art and thus fosters Duchamp's interpretation of the ready-made, by introducing the human body as an artistic object, which is literally "found" by the other artists as an object lying on the

ground of the empty swimming pool.

Based on the same theoretical framework as employed by Duchamp's art, Crimp's linguistic ready-mades call into question the socio-political context in which they occur. As moments of disruption and indeterminacy they re-define their original, and seemingly institutionalized context and meaning, and trigger the audience's awareness of the language they use and are surrounded by. In order to illustrate this process, Agusti refers to "Pornó", in which Anne is constructed as a megastar, heroine, or redeeming saint, but at the same time and on the same page their attempts at constructing her are (visually) paralleled with a flight attendant's instructions for a plane crash which thus undergo a process of de-contextualization (Agusti "Short Circuits", 119). The ready-made language, normally used in the context of flying places the other externally imposed identity constructions of Anne into the context of a plane crash.

Agusti also gives another example of an objet trouvé as used in the context of language can be found in the scenario "The Camera loves you", in which one of the speakers asks "What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba? / A megastar." (223) and thus, establishes a clearly marked reference to Hamlet, and his complaining about an actor at Court who in his interpretation of Hecuba's reaction to Priam's death starts to weep, and thus goes against Hamlet's perspective that seeming should not be mixed up with being and thus tears not be mistaken for a proof of authenticity (Agusti "Short Circuits", 120). This scene's immanent critique on the complete merging of the actor and his role, in order to make all actions happening onstage as authentic as possible can also be put into the broader context of postdramatic theatre's criticism on the bourgeois, illusionistic theatre, which by trying to create a mimetic relationship between the theatre and external reality aspired to reach a heightened degree of authenticity. The theme of empathy as a feature which has for a long time been regarded as one of the most crucial ones in relation to the theatre also assumes a central position in scenario three, "Faith in Ourselves": "Of course we sympathise. / Not just sympathise, but empathise. Empathise because... / ...because Anya's valley is our valley(...) / It's a universal thing in which we recognise, we strangely recognise ourselves. Our own world. Our own pain." (219) This whole passage can be read as an ironic inversion of the visual and media culture's, such as the theatre or TV-spectacles, attempts at leading us to empathic behaviour. Being presented with the angry Anya should lead to evoke feelings of empathy among the viewers, which, nevertheless

Crimp brings to a sudden end by finishing the whole scene with an ironic twist: "A universal thing which strangely...what? what what? / Which strangely restores. / Which strangely restores - I think - yes - our faith in ourselves." (220)

Under the umbrella term of literary pastiche, which is now among the most crucial characteristics, when it comes to compile a list of all features postmodernist literature normally contains, Agusti also refers to Crimp's employment of a great variety of different registers, among them rap songs, references to Shakespeare, and the use of ready-mades (121). The text, as a collage, an exhibition of various discourses and the respective registers they employ, is at the same time turned into a parodic space, in which all the elements constructing it are at the same time also subject to processes of deconstruction. This self-referential meta-commentary can thus also be read as reflecting the entire procedure of constructing and simultaneously deconstructing Anne. Anne is portrayed as being dependent on the set of discourses she is constructed in but at the same time distinguishes from them, presents herself as an embodies crisis of the multiplicity of discourses Crimp uses are not hierarchically structured, but are placed in one line one beside the other, questioning each other and also forcing language to call itself into question. The way Crimp uses pastiche as one of his main stylistic elements he not only stresses the simultaneity of different discourses but also points towards his general stance of discourse being not a phenomenon of expression but instead an area of regularizing and normalizing various positions of subjectivity.

6.2 *pool* - aspects of language

Regarding the aspect of language in *pool*, it can be argued that, similar to Attempts, although not in the same explicit manner and with the same ironic twist to it, Ravenhill also implements ready-mades, fixed phrases and fixed expressions, in most cases related to the discourse of art, in his play. Placed into the text as a whole, it not only heightens awareness of the text as a "conveyor of meaning", questions their new surrounding, in the same way as Duchamp's readymade-sculptures, but also indicates the text's apparent artificiality.

Concerning the issue of language, Crimp and Ravenhill also meet at another interface, for it can safely be stated that in both texts the boundaries between drama, narrative and

poetry not only become very thin but also incredibly fuzzy. Other prominent features Ravenhill makes use of are a great number of exclamations, repetitions, ellipses, elements that could be identified as choric and seemingly monologic narrative episodes. All passages of speech refrain from coherency and linear logic but instead appear considerably fragmented, indeterminate and associative, which places the structure of Ravenhill's discourse even closer to the field of poetry. With his text Ravenhill appears to have bridged the gap between heightened artificiality and at the same time evoking the notion of spontaneity and association with regard to the speakers onstage.

> Do you remember do you remember do you remember do you remember do you remember the days? / Ah yes happy happy happy happy happy happy happy days. (*pool*, 300)

7 CONCLUSION

> Modern theater does not exist - it does not take (a) place - and consequently, its semiology is a mirage; (...) Since no set or interplay of sets is able to hold up any longer faced with the crisis of State, religion and family, it is impossible to prefer a discourse - to play out a discourse - on the basis of a scene, sign of recognition which would provide for the actor's and the audience's recognition of themselves in the same Author (...) This is a failure to constitute a communal discourse of play (interplay). (Kristeva, 1977)

Julia Kristeva's claim against theatre's long attributed capability to produce moments of re-cognition and re-presentation and her disbelief in its ability to adopt to a change of circumstances, to certain moments when apparently stable networks of values and norms are shattered, can be answered with a quote from one of the most experimental and controversially received plays of the last centuries, Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her life*:

> It's theatre - that's right - for a world in which theatre itself has died. Instead of the outmoded conventions of dialogue and so-called characters lumbering towards the embarrassing denouéments of the theatre, Anne is offering us a pure dialogue of objects: of leather, of glass, of Vaseline and steel. Of blood, saliva and chocolate. She's offering us no less than the spectacle of her own existence, the radical pornography - if I may use that overused word - of her own broken and abused - almost Christ-like - body. (254)

By implementing this metatheatrical comment Crimp not only gives his audience a bunch of keys to access his plays's major notions of rejecting traditional dramatic form and concepts, but also points towards the wider frame, the indispensability of bidding farewell to conventional dialogue and character formation. Instead of introducing an active, speaking subject as the centre of their plays, both Martin Crimp and Mark Ravenhill, abandon Descartes' "cogito" and Western philosophy's focus on the logos, break with theatre's long tradition of mimetic re-presentation and thus seem to create a space that has formerly been denied its existence. Even though the two plays' unmistakable urge to decentre marks them as being shaped by concepts such as Derrida's Différance and conception of the trace, their general claim must not be mistaken for the concept of denying (Hutcheon, 159). There is no final disappearance of the subject which in its absence is still present, a notion immediately reminiscent of the two absent female

characters in *pool* and *Attempts*.

These new forms of theatre, informed and induced by mostly continental European playwrights certainly have to be seen within the wider framework of postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, Jacques Derrida's Différance, Jean Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal and Michel Foucault's theories on discourse. *Pool (no water)* as well as *Attempts on her life*, which also proved to be located outside the main trends of British theatre, found their way into a realm, previously occupied by writers such as Elfriede Jelinek or Heiner Müller, which Hans-Thies Lehmann termed "postdramatic theatre". Still, it must not be remain unnoticed that in most cases of connecting postmodernism as a larger cultural and social phenomenon to the realm of arts, and literature in particular, the usual point of connection seems to be narrative literature, easily becoming apparent when putting the focus on the number of academic texts dealing with the postmodern novel, such as Brian McHale's *Postmodern Fiction*, or Linda Hutcheon's *Poetics of Postmodernism* for instance. Keeping the overweight of examples taken from prose in mind, the question evolves whether Birringer, with his statement that he does not believe a "historical moment of transition to postmodernism in theatre and performance art", has occured (Birringer, 44), uncovered a moment of truth. However, dealing with plays such as *pool* and *Attempts*, it cannot be denied that postmodern theory and poststructuralist implications found their way into the theatre. Based on the theoretical concepts introduced and formulated by Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault the most important aspect regarding the link between postmodernism and the theatre seems to be "The Death of Character", as proclaimed by Elinor Fuchs for instance, and the sign thus remaining without distinct referent. A notion also highlighted by Martin Crimp in his attempt at summarizing the main features of his play:

"The issue is not the protagonist and her individual problem, which would be conventional. What I wanted was to write a public play, a stocktaking of the world of today which is, however, emotionally charged (Tabert, *Playspotting*, qtd. in Zimmermann, 112)

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9. INDEX

ABSTRACT

Die vorliegende Arbeit beleuchtet die beiden Stücke „pool (no water)" und „Attempts on her life" der beiden zeitgenössischen britischen Theaterautoren Mark Ravenhill und Martin Crimp in einem postmodernen Kontext, sowie unter Einbindung poststrukturalistischer Theoriemodelle. Einen weiteren Anknüpfungspunkt stellt außerdem Hans-Thies Lehmanns einflussreiche und breit rezipierte Monographie „Postdramatisches Theater" dar, in der auch für die beiden in dieser Arbeit behandelten Stücke relevante Thesen aufgestellt werden. Unter Bezugnahme auf Jacques Derridas Konzept der Différance, seiner Dekonstruktion der „Metaphysik der Präsenz" und der damit einhergehenden Infragestellung des sprechenden Subjekts, kann die Konzeption der beiden absenten Protagonistinnen in ein Nahverhältnis zu den Grundthesen des Poststrukturalismus gerückt werden. Weiters ergeben sich bei der genauen Lektüre der beiden Theatertexte, sowie der Analyse ihrer wichtigsten Aufführungen Verbindungen zu Jean Baudrillards „simulacrum" und „hyperreal", sowie Möglichkeiten beide Texte im Licht von Foucaults Diskurstheorien zu betrachten. Die Unterwanderung konventioneller Theaterformen, sowie ihrer über Jahrunderte als solche angesehenen wichtigsten Eigenschaften, wie beispielsweise die Fähigkeit mimetisch abzubilden, ist ein weiterer Aspekt den sich beide Autoren bei der Konzeption ihrer Stücke auf die Fahne geheftet hatten.

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