THE REPRESENTATION OF MASCULINITY IN CRISIS: AN INTERROGATION OF ITS ROOTS AND REASONS

by

Jason Stefan Lieblang

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Jason Stefan Lieblang 2015
The Representation of Masculinity in Crisis: An Interrogation of Its Roots and Reasons

Jason Stefan Lieblang
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto
2015

Abstract

This dissertation develops out of the disturbing realization that masculinity is pervasively represented as ‘in crisis.’ It argues that both ‘masculinity’ and ‘crisis’ are discursive constructs, which have been functioning in unison since the late nineteenth century to bolster male hegemony.

My introductory chapter offers an explication of how discursive domination functions at the level of signification. It explains, and applies to numerous examples, the method of discourse analysis developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and also engages with Reinhardt Koselleck’s critical history of the concept ‘crisis,’ which has recently been further developed in the work of Janet Roitman.

In chapter two I examine the roots of the ‘masculinity in crisis’ discourse in the European fin de siècle. This search proceeds by way of readings of Rémy de Gourmont’s La Dissociation des Idées, Daniel Paul Schreber’s Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken, and Otto Weininger’s Geschlecht und Charakter. Chapter two also examines the crucial role that the representation of
women played in defining masculinity as ‘in crisis’ during the period.

My third and fourth chapters offer in-depth readings of several literary and cinematic works, these showing that while ‘masculinity’ being represented as ‘in crisis’ is a constant, the forms and tropes employed in this representation vary over time and are geographically contingent.

I focus in chapter three on Arthur Schnitzler’s stories _Leutnant Gustl_ and _Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief_, prose works within which contemporaneous psychological, gender and class discourses converge in protagonists representative of bourgeois Austrian masculinity ‘in crisis.’

Chapter four argues by way of analyses of the canonical Weimar era films _Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari_ and _Die Straße_ as well as Ernst Toller’s _Heimkehrer_ drama _Hinkemann_ that the sudden postwar domination of the discursive field by visual forms of media – what Martin Jay calls ‘a scopic regime’ – resulted in ‘masculinity in crisis’ becoming increasingly spectral – taking on ghostly and/or monstrous forms – and spectacular, namely as an event staged for the voyeuristic gaze.

In my conclusion I pursue answers to why ‘masculinity’ has been for over a century, and more importantly continues to be, pervasively represented as ‘in crisis.’
Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor, Dr. John Noyes, for his outstanding guidance, especially when it mattered most. Heartfelt thanks are likewise due to Dr. Gaby Pailer and Dr. Geoff Winthrop-Young for their patience and unflinching support; and also to Dr. John Zilcosky, Dr. Willi Goetschel and Dr. Michael Boehringer for the most helpful comments each provided. Matt Tomkinson lent his eyes to the final drafts and so saved me valuable time when time was of the essence. I am grateful, Matt.

My wife Jessica England, a person much wiser than me, gave me invaluable advice, and loving support, throughout the very long process of writing this dissertation. She continues to offer such advice and support, even now that it is finally finished. For that I am blessed indeed.
# THE REPRESENTATION OF MASCULINITY IN CRISIS: AN INTERROGATION OF ITS ROOTS AND REASONS

0. Prologue: Behold ‘The Man’  
0.1. 2014  
0.2. 1924  
0.3. Thesis  

1. A Critical Introduction to the Nature and Functioning of ‘Masculinity in Crisis’  
   1.1. The *Current* Crisis of Masculinity?  
   1.2. The Deceptively Simple Biology of Men  
   1.3. The Biologization of Sexuality  
   1.4. ‘Crisis’ Becomes Historico-Philosophical Concept  
   1.5. From Language to the Performance of Male Identity  
      1.5.1. Laclau, Mouffe and a Sustainable Fishing Net  
      1.5.2. ‘Masculinity-Crisis’ As Nodal Point  

2. The Stabilization of Masculinity as ‘in Crisis’ at the End of the Nineteenth Century  
   2.1. *Le fin*  
   2.2. The Fin de Siècle’s Eschatological Impulse  
   2.3. Rémy de Gourmont and “The Impossibility of Disassociating Certain Ideas”  
   2.4. An Important Etymological Observation Regarding the Emergence of ‘Crisis’ as ‘Instability’  
   2.5. Beware *die Aufschreibesystem*: the Discursive Disciplining of Judge Schreber’s *Memoirs*  
   2.6. A Point of Pre-emptive Clarification  
   2.7. Sexual Anarchy!
2.8. The Role of Women in the ‘Crisis of Masculinity’ during the Fin de Siècle 87

3. Honour’s Lost, All’s Lost! – Austrian Masculinity at the Fin de Siècle in Two Works by Arthur Schnitzler 108
3.1. The Anachronistic Habitus of the Austrian Officer and Its Consequences for Lieutenant Gustl (Or: Old Habitus Dies Hard) 110
3.2. “Ein Versehen ist leicht zu vergeben”… 131

4. Representing ‘Masculinity in Crisis’ in (the) Light of the Scopic Regime 149
4.1. What Does Not and What Does Change 151
4.2. The Scopic Regime and An Appropriate Form of Occularcentrism 153
4.3. Benjamin and Krakauer: A Prescient Social Constructivist Film Criticism 157
4.4. The Aporia of Impotency at the Heart of Karl Grune’s Die Straße 166
4.5. From Castration to Spectacle / from Der Sandmann to Dr. Caligari 175
4.6. A Note on the Broad Theoretical Applicability of the ‘Male Gaze’ 183
4.7. The Gaze and the Spectacle of Castration in Ernst Toller’s Hinkemann 185

5. Conclusion: Why Masculinity is Represented As in Crisis 195
5.1. The Perpetual Crisis of Masculinity: A Dubiously Dominant Discourse 195
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The ‘Crisis’ Discursive A Priori</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>The ‘Masculine’ Discursive A Priori</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>The First and Last Word</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
0. **Prologue: Behold ‘The Man’**

0.1. **2014**

Two blocks west of where I sit hangs a large advertisement above the French Connection boutique—the image dominates one of the busiest shopping blocks in Canada’s largest city.\(^1\) "This is the woman," the poster’s left half proclaims in lower cased Helvetica font. A young female model, dressed all in white, dances, awash in light. Beautiful, normatively feminine, Caucasian, glamorous and mildly sexualized—her lips slightly open—she stares confidently, directly back at the viewer. She embodies common female fashion representational strategies since the 1970s—embodies the stereotype of young, sexy, confident femininity.

**But she isn’t the point, at least not in and for herself.**

I would argue that the viewer is supposed to focus on the poster’s right half, which proclaims in bolded capital letters that: "This is the man."

The identity of "the man," however, is explicitly *unclear*. There is a man there—he is bearded, this we can tell; and, perhaps he has broad shoulders. But posed against an undefined black background that blends fluidly into the darkness and that obscures his face almost completely, enveloped in a fur-lined parka that makes discerning his physical stature at best conjecture, we ultimately can say no more.

**A poster asserting so explicitly that "this is the man" ultimately asserts his lack of identity all the more forcefully.**

---

\(^1\) Canada’s oldest and largest department store—the Hudson’s Bay—is directly opposite, situated at the epicentre of the city Canadians refer to as “the centre of the universe.”
0.2. 1924

A beautiful ‘New Woman,’ dressed in a dark purple silk summer dress, her blonde hair cropped in a pageboy bob, the fashion of the day, stands, smiling broadly, looking down through the viewfinder of what is likely a Kodak Brownie Model B. (Agfa, Germany’s photographic company, doesn’t produce cameras for a few years yet.)

A slim, tanned man sits below and behind her; he wears a fashionable, olive green, belted swimsuit. With his arms crossed, he stares blankly off into the distance.

In this poster’s foreground sits a realistically-rendered rectangular box of Agfa Rollfilm, which our photographer has, presumably, loaded into her camera. The image's background is dominated by a large yellow sun umbrella. The only text, beyond that on the film box, is the company’s name rendered in its customary sans-serif font, in black, towards the top right corner of the poster. The days of the Sachplakat, the dominant style in German prewar poster

---

advertising and which featured a large, centered and stylized depiction of the product – and little else – are over. A transition in German advertising aesthetic is well underway; and this Julius Ussy Engelhardt poster, with its carefully rendered perspective, accurately realized shadows, and hair and dress ruffled by the breeze, clearly embodies it. The woman, and the man, matter here, then. They signify. On behalf of the product, certainly – but they signify much else besides.

Tellingly, there is no sign of the wind’s influence on the man. His pose is statuesque, and his general passivity contrasts strikingly with his active partner. That she is using the handheld camera implies her, and by association female, mobility. She can shoot when, and where, she likes. The contrast between her and his facial expression further emphasises this active-passive contrast: his physiognomy – blank. Hers, by contrast – she is laughing – expresses great pleasure.

A contemporary advertisement seen above a storefront on a Canadian street; another, ninety years old, taken from a Berlin magazine. While from different cultures in different eras, realized in different formats, and differing greatly in scale, they speak the same language; that is to say, semiotically they have much in common.

Both images present confident, vivacious females – one, dancing, looks directly back at the viewer; the other is clearly enjoying her portable camera – and contrast them with passive males whose sight is questionable: 2014 man’s eyes cannot be seen for the darkness, and may well be closed; 1924 man’s eyes stare purposelessly out at the sea.

---

But what does it matter if, or where, they are looking? Or, for that matter, that these female characters revel – while their male counterparts appear uncannily stolid by comparison?

John Berger, among many others, has argued that the sexual politics of looking matter greatly, as these have historically been aligned with male desire. The representational strategies responsible for inculcating – that is, for encouraging and validating a desirous male gaze – pose female subjects as passive, available and desirable objects. Berger summarizes the logic that has historically governed female representation in Western culture as "men act and women appear."4

As for these women’s enjoyment, the French word jouissance – with its additional meaning of entitlement, the reception of what is justly deserved – fits well here; perhaps especially well as Hélène Cixous uses it to connote a uniquely feminine experience of pleasure – at the same time physical, mental and spiritual – which she argues to be a source of female creative power.5 For Cixous, male hegemony is predicated on the suppression of jouissance. Dance – long associated with magic, altered consciousness, and ecstasy – is an obvious symbol of its release; while Englehardt’s Agfa image suggests a technological outlet for jouissance.

In the 1924 Agfa poster the sexual politics of looking appear inverted: the woman is clearly the actor here; the man could not be more passive. Compositionally, she is larger and foregrounded vis-à-vis her male companion. More important yet, she is the technologically enabled gazer, holding in her hands not only the image from which she is gaining so much


5 See: Hélène Cixous, Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing (New York: Columbia UP) 64.
satisfaction, but moreover the technological and creative capacity to *take it/make it*. Discourses of technology and leisure converge in this poster, then, both of which empower female subjectivity – and, I would argue, at the expense of its counterpart, male identity.

Perhaps most striking about the French Connection advertisement is that, on account of his being shrouded in shadow and fur – we cannot behold ‘the man.’ Luce Irigaray’s envelopment metaphor – connoting the manner in which women are interpellated into a fixed and subjugated identity – needs inversion if we are to understand this puzzling advertisement. Rather than having his identity fixed, here ‘the man’ has been enveloped to the extent that his identity has been destabilized. This six by four foot paragon of masculinity 2014-style is abject, neither stable object nor subject, something caught in a semiotic no-man’s land, in a state of identity crisis.

---


0.3. Thesis

Both of the advertisements I have just discussed – one from Germany’s Weimar Republic, the other from late-Capitalist North America – represent masculinity as ‘in crisis.’ Neither is exceptional for its time, as the many texts I examine here will show. Indeed, depictions of masculinity-in-crisis have been prevalent in Western culture since the mid-nineteenth century, and they run the medial gamut.

These facts raise several questions, first among them that of whether masculinity is currently in crisis. The answer to this question is a definitive no, but not because male identity is going through a stable phase (if, perhaps, it has gone through unstable phases before); or because masculinity is stable here (if perhaps unstable elsewhere). Likewise, the question of whether the Weimar Republic was a period of masculine instability must be answered negatively.

The reason that neither contemporary North America nor Weimar Germany experienced a crisis of masculinity is because both ‘masculinity’ and ‘crisis’ are discursive constructs, and as such neither reveals anything true about identity. Masculinity has never really been in crisis, nor could it be. In arguing this I echo Michael Atkinson, among others, for whom “the crisis of masculinity is one of perception, and not of an objective reality.” The process through which changes to this perceived reality occur is of special interest to me, and in explaining the functioning of this dynamic process, I enlist the help of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s theory of discourse. This position needs explication, which it receives in my first chapter. More

---

interesting perhaps is the special relationship ‘masculinity’ and ‘crisis’ have shared, the tendency for them to signify together, over the last 150 years, the reasons for which I will also examine in my first chapter.

In chapter two I look at the centrality during the fin de siècle of ‘masculinity in crisis’ to myriad discourses, this is to say that this period experiences greatly intensified representation of male identity in crisis. In support of this claim, I discuss numerous texts, among these Remy de Gourmont’s almost entirely overlooked La Dissociation des Idees (1900), Paul Daniel Schreber’s often mentioned but likely not often read Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken (1903) and Otto Weininger’s Geschlecht und Charakter (also 1903), which was a sensational bestseller during the first quarter of the 20th century but is today too quickly dismissed as simply a misogynistic diatribe.

In chapters three and four I concentrate on texts from German-speaking Europe that are either considered canonical or are lesser known works by canonical artists. All of these works stage masculinity in crisis, if in quite different ways. I begin in chapter three by looking in depth at two prose works by Arthur Schnitzler: the stream of consciousness novella Leutnant Gustl, which is arguably Schnitzler’s most famous prose work, and the much shorter but equally fascinating “Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief.” These works highlight the extent to which male identity at the time was inextricably linked with anachronistic ideas of honour.

In chapter four my focus shifts to the Weimar Republic, a period that I will argue sees the representation of masculinity shift in mode as a result of the increased discursive dominance of visual media. To help explain this shift, as well as the demands it makes on interpretation, I enlist two of the period’s most incisive and influential analysts of visual culture:
Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Krakauer, whom I see as remarkably similar in approach to much later thinkers, among them Laclau and Mouffe. Working – as did both Benjamin and Krakauer – out from a telling moment to an understanding of the whole, I offer what I hope are both novel and convincing readings of the problem of masculinity in crisis in the films *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *Die Straße* (1923), and the play *Hinkemann: eine Tragödie* by Ernst Toller (also 1923).

In my fifth, and concluding chapter, I speculate on why masculinity has for so long been, and continues to be, represented as in crisis. The possible answers I present argue quite clearly, I hope, why the pervasive and perpetual representation of masculinity as in crisis is a problem that demands ongoing examination and critique.
Chapter 1. A Critical Introduction to the Nature and Functioning of ‘Masculinity in Crisis’

Why does a dissertation written for a degree in German literature and on representations of masculinity in crisis during the Weimar Republic begin with an extended discussion of contemporary representations of masculinity in crisis across a wide range of media and primarily in North America? It seems that, as I find recourse to do so often over the course of what follows, I turn to Michel Foucault for explanation of why I approach my subject this way, and specifically to Foucault’s designation of his own work as investigating the “history of the present.”

Towards explaining what Foucault means with this formulation, Gary Gutting observes:

Of course history is, by definition, about the past, but Foucault’s histories typically begin from his perception that something is terribly wrong in the present. His motive for embarking on a history is his judgment that certain current social circumstances – an institution, a discipline, a social practice – are “intolerable.” His primary goal is not to understand the past but to understand the present; or, to put the point with more nuance, to use an understanding of the past to understand something that is intolerable in the present.9

When I began this project, it was Weimar representations of masculinity in crisis, and especially across the mediascape, that drew me in, but as I began reading both primary texts and secondary sources on the topic, I started seeing similar contemporary representations, and not

only visual, of masculinity in crisis all around me – sometimes subtle, as in the advertisement with which I began this study; at other times impossible to miss, as in the plethora of newspaper headlines, some of which I will discuss in my first chapter, that appear year after year announcing, in myriad ways, the trouble men are in, the world over.

Following Foucault’s historiographical method, then: the fact that that masculinity was pervasively represented as ‘in crisis’ in 1920s Germany coupled with my acknowledgement that male identity is likewise portrayed today led me to read backwards in the hopes that this dissertation may not only offer some novel interpretations of German texts from the interwar period in which male identity is a problem, but also offer some explanation of for how long, how often, and perhaps even why masculinity is represented as in crisis.

It is hoped that my argument as a whole here explains why such representation is intolerable. That being said, I will offer an explicit summary of this claim in my concluding chapter.

1.1. The Current Crisis of Masculinity?

Writing a new introduction for the fourth printing of her Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men in 1997, Lynne Segal asked the question: “Are men in crisis?”¹⁰ One of the conclusions she offered was that yes, if serious British newspapers, radio and TV programs, and a host of academics, were to be believed, masculinity was indeed in crisis and

---

with serious social and cultural consequences.\textsuperscript{11} Segal noted that, since the early-1990s "(t)exts in social science, especially those emanating from psychology, begin from the idea of a pervasive crisis of masculinity."\textsuperscript{12} According to Segal, the debate around challenges to male identity was widespread – among academics and in the popular media – intense, and, crucially, nothing new.

By the year 2000 the discussions around masculinity in crisis had clearly intensified. 2000 saw, as John Benyon calls it, 'the masculinity in crisis summer,' a highpoint in the debate about challenged male identity, during which "[b]ookshops across the United States were full of boy-crisis books (and) the press in the United Kingdom carried endless articles on the subject, at least partially in response to the publication of Anthony Clare's book \textit{On Men: Masculinity in Crisis}.\textsuperscript{13} Clare's book provocatively asks: "In a world of equal opportunity for the sexes, can men negotiate the relationship with themselves and with women?"\textsuperscript{14} Jumping ahead slightly over a decade to the day I began writing this dissertation, the process of identity negotiation Clare highlights was still being represented using a rhetoric of crisis.

It was October 2010 and Canada’s most-read national newspaper \textit{The Globe and Mail} was reporting a gender “power shift” in an article entitled “The Emasculated Man.”\textsuperscript{15} The article’s content included claims that a “mancession is hitting hard during the economic

\textsuperscript{11} Segal offers numerous examples, one of which coming from “(T)he up-market newspaper \textit{The Independent}, which asked in 1994 a question echoed by other serious (media sources) in subsequent years: ‘Are boys in terminal decline.’” Segal xii.

\textsuperscript{12} Segal xii.

\textsuperscript{13} John Benyon, \textit{Masculinities and Culture} (Buckingham: Open UP, 2002) 79.


downturn,” and that there is rampant concern that men are being robbed of their essential masculinity.” I began paying closer attention to the Globe’s “Family and Relationships” and three weeks later the same newspaper argued in “Daughter Power” that daughters are becoming increasingly influential within the family, especially economically.16 I then did a web search to see what I might of missed and discovered that in between these two articles, namely on October 10th, the Globe had begun a six part series entitled “Failing Boys” that quoted numerous statistics showing female pupils to be outperforming their male counterparts.17 In doing so it echoed London’s The Telegraph, which had reported six months earlier that “Boys Are Falling behind Girls at the Age of Five.”18

In the United States it was a similar story, with The Atlantic magazine reporting in “The End of Men” on “the unprecedented role reversal now under way and (on) its vast cultural consequences.”19 And when I searched German newspapers, magazines and their websites, I found many similar articulations, for example: "Die Krise der Männlichkeit: Rollenwandel -- Frauen gewinnen neue Stärken hinzu, Männer nicht."20 I also discovered I was one click away from websites like "2W: Women Entrepreneurs," that investigates the "mancession's"


consequences for an ever growing female workforce for the first time approaching 50%; and
“The Art of Manliness,” which nostalgically laments “the lost art of manliness,” asserts a
commitment to “reviving” it, and calls for a “manaissance.”

Well, it is now 2012 and the manaissance looks highly unlikely to arrive soon. Today,
well over two years after publication of the above texts, and thirteen and sixteen years after
the masculinity in crisis summer and Lynne Segal's new introduction to Slow Motion
respectively, Canada's Globe carries an article on Hanna Rosin's new book The End of Men,
which "looks at the rise of the matriarchy in North America and its effect on men."22
2012 also saw The Telegraph reveal that “Girls are now outperforming boys in ‘masculine’
subjects [...] such as engineering and construction.”23 And in Germany the Frankfurter
Allgemeine Zeitung recently reported sharply that "Mädchen lernen besser."24

I will now offer a preliminary answer to the question with which I began this section and
base it on the evidence I have presented thus far, which I believe is sufficiently representative
to justify doing so. Masculinity continues to be represented as in crisis and across a broad media
spectrum, and this has been going on since at least the mid-1990s, and at that time certainly
not for the first time.


22 Rosin n. pag.


But don’t the texts I’ve mentioned simply make the reader aware of the unquestionable facts? Statistics, after all, do not lie. In Britain, according to the study by the Educational publisher Pearson to which *The Telegraph* article refers: “of work-based BTEC courses traditionally sat by pupils at schools and colleges between the age of 14 and 19, 28 per cent of girls gained top marks – a distinction – in business this year compared with just 17 per cent of boys.” In other traditionally masculine subjects the results are similar, with 18 percent of girls receiving the top mark in a “construction and the built environment” course versus only seven percent of boys. And the biggest disparity the study reveals is in engineering, where only 16 percent of boys secured a distinction grade against 28 percent of female students.\(^{25}\)

Surely a shift in gender roles is well underway – statistics like these show us clearly – and this is the case because of things happening in the real world: it is accepted today that girls are generally more motivated than boys, and so study more, and more efficiently; while boys at all three levels of education (are twice as likely to) spend (on average close to twice as much) more time playing video games, which leaves them less time for their studies, and as a result they are falling behind academically.\(^{26}\)

Texts like those above do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relationships, however, even those including statements based on statistical evidence. Statements ranging from the clearly reactionary and rhetorical “manliness is a lost art and a manaisance is needed” to the statistically supported “girls are outperforming boys in

\(^{25}\) Paton n. pag.

‘masculine’ subjects” are the building blocks of discursive knowledge. Such statements function to influence, and ultimately define, our understanding – in this case of masculinity, but concurrently also of femininity, and of education. If we live in a society inundated with texts and images that represent girls outperforming boys scholastically, we will come to believe this to be the case, take it for granted, especially in our media-saturated and headline-dominated world where interpretive valences develop between factual and rhetorical statements, the effect of which is simplified, even synecdochal, articulation – in this case: that "masculinity is in crisis," that boys are dumb, girls clever, and believing this affects how males and females perceive themselves and consequently act, which, in fact creates the statistics in a feedback loop.27

Recent research is bearing out this claim that representation profoundly influences the performance of gender, exemplary being a 2012 British study published in the journal Child Development, which argues that “Stereotypes (Atkinson considers these an example of ‘Representational Indictment’) about boys being intellectually inferior to girls affect children during the first years of primary school and prevent them fulfilling their potential.” The study, carried out by researchers from the UK’s University of Kent, argues that rather than differences in academic performance being physiologically based, it is representation that plays the key determining role, a finding which demands, as lead researcher Bonny Hartley argues, that “parents, teachers and even television programmes should be careful to avoid encouraging

27 Indeed, synechdochal articulation has become the cultural rule, and nowhere more obviously that in sexual representation, which engenders the same logic at the level of behaviour. We live in a world increasingly dominated by avatars, twitter feeds, and tattoos, always already once removed from the simulacrum.
stereotypes which could harm boys’ development.”28 How masculinity is represented to boys, Hartley is saying, really matters to how they understand (and perform) their identity and those responsible for its representation need to be conscious of, and careful about, the way they represent it. (The upshot of this claim is that cultural gender representation that eschews oversimplification in favour of portraying what Alice Kuzniar calls “variations within [gender] constituencies and a plethora of identificatory sites” functions to empower the cultural spectator to perform gender in more authentic and satisfying ways.29)

What the University of Kent study suggests, then, is a causal relationship between the representation of male ability and its performance. However, performance here, I would argue, should not be interpreted in the limited sense of qualitative test scores. Rather, the consistent and widespread representation of boys as academically inferior directly affects the way they perform masculinity. Academic underachievement (or, as Michael Atkinson calls it: Male Educational Passivity) becomes something that boys do as a feature of male identity – and, concomitantly, that girls don’t do. The performance of intellectual inferiority through/as less confidence and investment in academic pursuits, which could in theory be measured,30 becomes another example of ‘boys being boys,’ just as the traditional doing of physical play

---


29 Alice Kuzniar, The Queer German Cinema (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000) 7. I use the word spectator here for lack of a better one, and mean by it the general consumer of culture as reader/viewer/spectator/listener.

30 Measuring such performance would be prohibitively complex, but in theory it is possible and would involve measuring not only the amount of time invested in academic activities – including homework – but also the nature of cognitive investment in scholastic activity, i.e. the attitudes, feelings and levels of concentration defining the performance of these activities.
(roughhousing) and emotional detachment continue, if to a lesser degree than in/for past
generations, to play fundamental roles in the performance of heteronormative maleness.\textsuperscript{31}

The University of Kent study also signals a departure from past theories that blamed
‘the gender gap’ on biological differences, on the idea that, as Bonny Hartley puts it: “boys and
girls have different brains.”\textsuperscript{32} The morphological differences in brain constitution – comparative
differences in the size of certain parts of the brain and in neural connectivity patterns – to
which Hartley refers, have become accepted scientific facts on par with those regarding the
determinative role genes and hormones play in gender differentiation, and this “[the] simple
biology of men,” as Michael Atkinson puts it, “has been cited as the root cause of a full host of
social problems” ranging from obesity to violent crime.”\textsuperscript{33}

By “the simple biology of men,” Atkinson clearly echoes Hartley in referring to dominant
explanations that depict male social behaviours as necessary consequences of male physiology
(coding male sexuality); put otherwise, that male brain chemistry and hormones – or a lack
thereof – determine why men act as they do. However, his use of the adjective simple, I would
argue, is self-consciously ironic – it functions to connote its opposite, but not (only) in terms of
foregrounding male biology’s complexity, rather also in suggesting that the biology of gender is,
but should not be, simply accepted.

The place to start undermining/problematizing arguments that gender is, quite simply,
biologically predetermined/coded, is with sex (maleness and femaleness), the ‘biological fact’

\textsuperscript{31} The use of the verb to do to connote the performance of identity is accepted practice in the sociology of
gender. See for example Atkinson page 13.

\textsuperscript{32} Collins n. pag.

\textsuperscript{33} Atkinson 13.
which is taken for granted to be the stable and unchallengeable ground on which gender rests, but which in fact proves open to attack from two related angles. The first destabilizes sex as a category by examining the historicity of the relationship between biology and sexual desire and behaviour. Doing so reveals sexuality’s rootedness in culture and language thus undermining biology’s absolute claim. The second line of questioning takes issue with the common sense assumption that sex engenders gender in a causal and linear fashion. This approach similarly reveals the extent to which social and linguistic presumptions affect what sex means.

1.2. The Deceptively Simple Biology of Men

Scientific explanations, more than those in any other area of inquiry, tend to go unquestioned as regards their social, cultural, historical and linguistic contingency. Scientific explanations have historicity nevertheless, which is to say that the practices, values and concepts employed to explain existence and its functioning are always developed under social, cultural and/or political regimes of understanding and in language, and as such are vulnerable to social, cultural and/or political biases. While science is perhaps unique in striving to render the universal and essential, it does so, like any other human endeavor, from within culture – indeed inevitably from within a culture that is socially and politically specific – and at a particular historical moment.

To say that the scientific understanding of gender difference – and, more importantly of the sexual difference claimed to engender it – has a history is to trace the development of our scientific understanding of it. Inquiring into the history of our biological understanding of sex is not, however, to question the capacity of science to reveal essential truths about sexual difference (or any other object of its inquiry). Doing the history of science still presumes the
discipline’s universal methodological validity, that its method is uniquely resistant to the vicissitudes of time, space, society and culture. The history of science, then, is biased in favour of the universal validity of science – put otherwise: the history of science treats science as if it exists outside of history (and culture).

Inquiring into the historicity of our biological understanding of sex proceeds, however, from the premise that science’s methodologies – by which I mean the values, concepts and practices it employs – demand interrogation, that is, that their validity should not be taken for granted, and indeed that this interrogation will reveal them to be socially, culturally and politically contingent; and, frequently, to be ideologically motivated.

While the past three decades have witnessed increased scientific interest in sex and gender – and especially in grounding the latter in the former and the former in the genetically pre-sexed brain – such interest is anything but new.\(^{34}\) As Helen Longino points out: “A variety of theories of male and female behavioural, temperamental and intellectual differences (almost all positing male superiority) have graced biological thinking in the West since Aristotle.” These theories have consistently “been shaped by several interacting sets of values or value-laden assumptions: an ideology of gender bimorphism, biological determinism, and individualism,” and, remarkably, in spite of being discredited – when the biological paradigm within which they were embedded is replaced, or when proved erroneous by disconfirming research – these

\(^{34}\) It can certainly be argued that this intensification of scientific interest constitutes a rearguard action responding to social constructionist explanations issuing from feminist and critical theory.
theories have continued to be voiced in whatever categories of biological thought are current, “and their disconfirmations have been dismissed as political (and ‘controversial’).”\textsuperscript{35}

According to Longino, recent moves away from a biologically deterministic view of sex-differentiated behaviours to interactional models stressing the crucial role played by environment in behavioural development (of which the aforementioned University of Kent study is one example) are contemporaneous with the increased role played by women in society, i.e. on increased female presence and visibility in the salaried workforce and in cultural and political life.\textsuperscript{36} However, while the increased role played by women in society has recently counteracted gender ideology’s (defined as sexual dimorphism, biological determinism, and individualism) power over gender differentiated explanations of abilities and dispositions, Longino is careful to note that: “The idea remains available to support this ideology should sociopolitical changes revive it, and indeed to support and provide interpretations for those rearguard research programs still engaged in biologizing gender.”\textsuperscript{37}

To be clear, what Longino claims is that the scientific understanding of the biology of (both) sex and gender has itself been shaped by the culture that produced it, and further that this shaping has historically functioned to secure patriarchal dominance, with this trend only being challenged, at least in the West, as a result of the very recent gains in social empowerment by women.


\textsuperscript{36} Longino 207. See also the work of Anne Fausto-Sterling for the clearest and most convincing discussions of developmental systems theory’s arguments for a complex interactional model of the formation of sex and gender, especially: \emph{Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality} (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

\textsuperscript{37} Longino 207.
While Longino is right to claim that a masculinist biologization of gender difference in the West stretches back to the Greeks, it is not until the nineteenth century that the conceptual vocabulary of gender difference with which science still largely works was established and became entrenched, or, put succinctly, this was when sexuality was invented. It is the nineteenth century, then, which reveals most clearly the historicity of the biology of sexuality, to which I now turn.

1.3. The Biologization of Sexuality

As Veronique Mottier points out, the term ‘sexuality’ defined as the “possession of sexual powers, or capability of sexual feelings” did not exist in the English language until 1879. This new concept situated sex, as an area of scientific investigation as well as of personal experience, firmly within the domain of nature and biology, and biological models of sexuality came to increasingly dominate sexual science throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Whereas sexual practices in pre-industrial European society were, as Mottier observes, “primarily subjected to moral and religious problematization and categorized in relation to sin,” the emergence of European modernity “with its Enlightenment-inspired march away from religious obscurantism towards the twin deities of science and rationality” witnessed the emergence of “new ways of thinking about sex which turned it into an object of scientific

---

The early nineteenth century’s feverish establishment and application of statistical methods employed to supervise and manage births and mortality, life expectancy and longevity – what Michel Foucault calls “the biopolitics of the population” – had by mid-century begun to focus on sex.  

Indeed, a new science devoted to sexuality – sexology – developed offering new differentiated medical categories in place of Christianity’s undifferentiated category of sin. Sexuality consequently became explicable in terms of physical and mental disease and degeneration. As Mottier points out, sexology defined sexual normalcy and deviancy from the norm relative to the assumed biological naturalness of inherent reproductive drives, and thus “as an instinctual and potentially overwhelming force, sex was at the same time seen as a source of social disorder.” As European slums grew, their occupants could be counted, and the reasons for their ‘misfortune’ explained it not only in racial and class terms, but also in terms of their sexual desires and habits. This is perhaps one place where we can ask if the wedding of sexuality and crisis emerges.

The biologization of gender difference was a central premise in the new biological model of sexuality. As Mottier notes, “from the 18th century, the traditional idea of the ‘one-sex-body,’ which conceptualized women’s bodies as similar but inferior versions of male bodies (with female genitals being thought of as internal, much smaller versions of male genitals), started to be replaced with the idea of a clear biological differentiation between men and women.”

---

39 Mottier 31.


41 Mottier 32.
women. Male and female bodies were now seen as fundamentally different biologically and no longer as part of the same hierarchical continuum. While women were still viewed as inferior, their inferiority was now explained in terms of (clear and distinct) female biological peculiarities, most often associated with motherhood. The act of sex was also radically redefined: whereas sexual intercourse had previously been understood as occurring between active and passive, cold and hot partners, this was replaced by an understanding of sex in which men and women were now viewed as biologically different creatures. Activity and passivity, hot and cold are quantities measured on a continuum and which are attributable to a person of any type. Biological sexuality differentiated types of people according to physical and mental qualities, which one type has and the other cannot possess.

Also central to the biologization of sexuality was the assumption that natural sexual behaviour was limited to heterosexual desires and acts – those who engaged in deviant sexual practices were now defined as fundamentally different. Exemplary here are same-sex practices that have occurred throughout history; the act of sodomy specifically, which goes through phases of tolerance and persecution, the intensity of which in fact peaks in the eighteenth century.

Whereas up until the nineteenth century sodomy was viewed as a sin that could be performed by any person, in the nineteenth century, as Foucault famously argues, the idea

---

42 Mottier 33.

43 Mottier 34. As Todd Reeser points out, relative heat and coldness was used to explain other aspects of sex: male heat generating semen, woman’s colder nature explaining why she lactated and menstruated. See: Reeser 75.

44 Mottier 37. As Foucault points out, sodomy was punished by fire well into the 18th century in some parts of Europe. See: Foucault 101.
emerged that those engaging in sodomy constitute a separate type of person – the *homosexual* – who possesses aberrant desires resulting from abnormal biological instincts that lead him to commit such acts. What were sexual behaviours thus became sexual identities based in biological difference: “The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood [....] It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions ... written immodestly on his face and body ... consubstantial with him, less as habitual sin than as singular nature.”45 And, once the “homosexual species,” as Foucault called it, was identified, it needed to be investigated and categorized, operations that generated a voluminous new discourse devoted to specific body types and physiognomies, personality traits, gestures and clothes, and which intersected, as the nineteenth century approached its end, with manifold other discourses, all claiming (to be part of) all-encompassing crisis.

While much more could be written here historicizing sexuality, suffice it to say for our purposes that the nineteenth century saw a profound shift in whose domain the explanation of male/female difference was, as well as in the conceptual vocabulary – the ever-expanding nomenclature of sexuality – employed in these explanations. The establishment of sexuality as a concept allowed for its scientific investigation and categorization, its biologization and psychologization. Within the new science of sex, men were differentiated from women as *sexual beings*; the homosexual (word first used 1868) could be differentiated from the heterosexual (earliest-known occurrence 1892) male, and what constituted abnormal male sexual behaviour could be distinguished from the norm, biologically explained and variously

45 Foucault 101.
vilified, justified, punished, treated and, crucially, blamed for a variety of social, cultural and political ills deemed indicative of unavoidable European decline.\(^4^6\)

The counterargument can of course be made that even if biology’s understanding of sexual difference has shifted radically over time, this does not challenge certain facts about male versus female bodies, and these facts anchor sexuality. One set of human beings has a penis, the other does not, after all, and this has always, and will always, be the case. The facts of physical differentiation fail to code for sexual difference in any straightforward way, however, and the assumption that sex engenders gender – and certainly not the other way around – likewise proves problematic under scrutiny. Indeed, biological intersexuality problematizes these ‘common-sense’ assumptions as deeply as at the genetic level. A relatively large number of children are born of ‘undefined sex,’ or of ‘intersex status,’ which is defined as “having physical, hormonal or genetic features that are: (a) neither wholly female or wholly male; or (b) a combination of female and male; or (c) neither female or male.” These children may be neither XX nor XY (this occurring once out of every 1,666 births); have the three chromosomes XXY (1 in 1000 births) – and very rarely even both pairs of chromosomes – XX and XY. Intersex infants may be born with both ovarian and testicular tissue – considered ‘true hermaphroditism’ – in which case the common practice is to ‘stabilize’ their sex through ‘corrective’ surgery. It should be noted that in the vast majority of cases – for true hermaphroditism as for non-hermaphrodites with ‘abnormally’ sized male or female genitalia – such surgery is performed for social reasons, i.e. to allow the individual to better conform to

---

\(^4^6\) For confirmation of these etymologies see: “Homosexual” and “Heterosexual,” Etymonline.com, Etymology Online Dictionary, 10 Sept. 2014. Web.
societal norms regarding penile or clitoral size. This is to say that in the vast majority of cases
the intersex individual is in no physical danger as a result of their genital ‘abnormality.’ Going
under the knife here is a social operation. Social sexuality is here, in a profound sense, prior to
(and certainly prioritized over) biological sexuality. 47
There is another important sense in which social sexuality functions prior to biological sexuality,
however. As Todd Reeser points out:

Our ideas about masculinity come to influence what the male body and the male sex are.
We think a man should be sexually virile, and so we attach great importance to the penis.
The male member represents masculinity when in fact it is just a piece of flesh hanging
between the legs. 48
It is of course Sigmund Freud who first points out “the great importance” of that “piece of flesh
hanging between the legs” in determining and defining social roles and relationships: first
within the family, but by extrapolation within society as a whole.

Or rather, Freud’s Little Hans, protagonist of the Viennese familial drama that becomes
“Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy” (1909), establishes the priority of the penis in
determining social dynamics for Freud. In Hans – a boy who can’t leave his widdler (penis)
alone; and who wonders why his mother so carefully leaves it alone; and also why his sister’s
widdler is smaller than his own; and whose fear of his father’s retribution for his desiring his

47 I am indebted to Professor John Zilcosky for pointing out the necessity that I address intersexuality at this
juncture in my argument. The definition of “intersex status” comes from Australia’s Sex Discrimination
Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Act 2013, No. 98, 2013. COMLaw
C2013A00098, 2013. The data on the instances of chromosomal ‘abnormalities’ is from

For an excellent and in depth discussion of intersexuality see also: Fausto-Sterling, 45-77.

48 Reeser 44
mother takes the form of equinophobia (the fear of horses) – Freud finds a child whose behaviour, he argues, confirms the Oedipal theory already set out in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), but for which Freud’s clinical evidence had up to that point been exclusively adult in nature – which, as many of Freud’s contemporaries had already pointed out, represented a serious problem for a theory of human development stressing early childhood as the formative phase.

Freud’s “Ur boy” little Hans, as Ken Corbett observes, is crucial to psychoanalysis’ Oedipal foundation, in that his story elaborates and embodies [Freud’s] theory of boyhood and masculinity. [...] We know a boy to be a boy through his phallic preoccupations and castration fears, enacted alongside and through his desire for his mother and his rivalry with his father, which in time resolves via the boy’s separation from his mother and identification with his father.49

There is nothing of physiological importance, of course, in Freud’s finding further, and crucially early childhood, support for the central role played by the male sex organ in human development. What is groundbreaking in Freud’s Oedipal analysis is, rather, the fundamental symbolic role the penis plays in that development. Not because it is the penis qua penis playing this role – rather because a symbol (any symbol!) has such productive power psychologically.


It should be noted at this point that the penis (as symbol) has also been argued, most notably by Luce Irigaray, to signify what a woman is. According to Irigaray, female sexuality and gendered behaviour – as the passive recipient of male desire and subservient agent socially – are founded in this masculinist symbolic definition of woman. See: Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).
and socially. What Freud the ‘medical scientist’ establishes is a theory of the human mind – and through the mind’s expression (in, as, and in response to shared activity) a theory of human society – based not in physiology, but in language: based in the representation of one thing – male identity – by another – the penis. (Never mind Lacan, who later argues the phallus to be the Ur-signifier from which a patriarchal discursive economy develops to the disadvantage of those failing to fit its heteronormativity; and about whom I will have more to say in my concluding chapter.) Freud’s is already a psycho-social theory of signs.  

The thing about symbols is that they are precisely neither essential nor universal. Symbolic value is contingent – on place and time: a raven symbolizes death in one culture (ours), the emergence of light and understanding for another (the Hopi); for the ancient Phoenicians the swastika represented the sun, whereas today it is difficult not to associate it – wherever in the world, for any culture – with Nazi atrocities. Accepting the contingency of symbols has an essential consequence for our understanding of masculinity: it entails that other parts of the male body could represent or signify what man is – the beard, for instance, or chest hair (or something wholly unrelated to male physiology, for that matter).

That beards and chest hair, as Todd Reeser points out, “tend not to hold the same symbolic power [is] because what we think a man is (our notion of gender) does not lead us to

---

50 The great irony in Freud, as I see it, is precisely that he makes Schopenhauer’s metaphysical monster – the Will, which allows man neither rest nor happiness – a part of us, a beast buried deep within: our uncontrollable visceral antagonist; and yet simultaneously makes of us beings ruled by symbols – antagonized by language, which will never let us be identical with ourselves (this impossibility of identity becomes the point of departure for Lacan).

Freud the scientist, in spite of himself, and in an effort to make the metaphysical just another physical truth – a corporeal reality, if psychical – reintroduces the meta he set out to put to science’s sword in the form of metaphor.
that aspect of the male body in the same way that it leads us to the penis.” Reeser’s point is that the role the penis itself plays in what it is to be male – not masculine, but sexually male – is, again, linguistically contingent, and defined from within a culture and at a certain time. Such meaning may be affected/influenced by preconceptions about gender – about what it means to be masculine, that is to say by what it means to act like a man/as a man *should* act. Our notion of gender is a discursive construct – from Freud’s Oedipal drama to Viagra advertising, texts have told us what it means to be a man. (And likely the former story has influenced the latter.) You must identify with your father as a penis bearer (not fixate on his/your penis as something external to you); you must get – and keep – an erect penis, for as long as you can – in both senses of longevity – because that is what men do.

To not do so is to fail as a man. (But Pfizer can help.)

Put otherwise, the male sex is constructed socially and linguistically *but then treated as if it exists outside of these domains*. This is to say that maleness as expressed by the body is naturalized according to the same logic through which sexual difference was defined, during the nineteenth century, as essential, and by whose means the heterosexual, and his *other* other the homosexual, was invented during the same period.

1.4. ‘Crisis’ Becomes Historico-Philosophical Concept

We have so far seen that far from being simply an idea that connotes a differentiated biological reality (and specificity) the concept ‘masculinity’ has a social and linguistic history, a crucial phase in the development of which occurs as the biologization of sexuality during the nineteenth century. We have likewise seen that the presumption that sexual facts determine

---

51 Reeser 74.
our understanding of gender is problematic. Indeed, our presumptions about gender appear in some cases to determine what count as sexual facts.

‘Crisis’ also has a history. Again, I am not referring to a history of crises here – of events of social, cultural and political instability, uncertainty and upheaval – but rather to the history of the concept ‘crisis,’ which, as with sexuality, it would be a mistake to consider stable through time and across space, or to be an idea that reveals the truth of states of affairs. I will also argue that it is wrong to consider ‘crisis’ indifferent in its valences to other concepts (with which it co-signifies). To think of masculinity in conjunction with crisis has, I will argue, been the rule for well over a hundred years. And, as we have already seen, this conjunction dominates discussion of male identity today.

While the written output dedicated to investigating crises is voluminous almost beyond measure, and has only intensified (proliferated) since 9/11, and even more rapidly since 2008 in response to the global financial ‘crisis,’ interrogation of the concept crisis is notably scant.52

Philosophical anthropologist Janet Roitman’s monograph Anti-Crisis is novel in offering an in depth interrogation of the concept ‘crisis’ – and its novelty is, she would argue, the point

---

52 One exception is Eric Cazdyn’s compelling, and prescient, 2007 article (2008, as we know, saw the world plunged into ‘the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression’): “Disaster, Crisis, Revolution.” Cazdyn echoes Marx in observing that “there is something necessary about a crisis, something true to the larger systemic form. Crises occur when things go right, not when they go wrong. In other words, crises are built right into many systems themselves; systems are structured so that crises will occur, strengthening and reproducing the systems themselves.” I certainly agree with Cazdyn – and so Marx – about the systemic bolstering that is the raison d’etre of crisis. And, while Cazdyn and I also share the belief that certain key signifiers function to define and delimit what can be thought, said, and done – as he points out regarding revolution, a concept that was during the cold war conceptually amalgamated with crisis and disaster, [and] has since “been driven underground, [...] rendered unspeakable [...] unthinkable” – there is in Cazdyn’s argument, however, too much respect for the necessity and truth of crisis. Another way of asserting this criticism is to say that Cazdyn’s conceptual interrogation fails to go deep enough. See: Eric Cazdyn, “Disaster, Crisis, Revolution,” South Atlantic Quarterly, Duke UP, 2007. Vol. 106, 4, especially pages 647-650. For a more in-depth explication of Marx’s argument that sporadic – if inevitable – crises are intrinsic to the development of capitalism, and one that also closely examines the functioning of crisis as a now global phenomenon, see: Joseph Vogl, Das Gespenst des Kapitals, (Zürich: Diaphenes, 2011).
when considering a term that: “serves as a primary enabling blind spot for the production of knowledge. That is, (because) crisis is a point of view, or an observation, which itself is not viewed or observed.” Indeed, the level of its orthodoxy far exceeds that of sexuality and its sub-concepts, the interrogation of which began in the 70s at the height of second-wave feminism, becoming more nuanced and effective under the influence of Foucault and Derrida beginning in the early-90s and continuing to the present as a key target of feminism’s ‘third-wave’ theorists, chief among these being Judith Butler.

Roitman’s recent work on ‘crisis’ is an exciting development in a grossly under-researched area. It is also clearly, and self-admittedly, indebted to the conceptual historiography (Begriffsgeschichte) that emerged in Germany in the 1970s, and especially to the work of Reinhart Koselleck, whom Roitman identifies as “author of perhaps the only conceptual history of crisis.”

The fundamental premise guiding (Koselleck’s) conceptual historiography is, as Lucian Hölscher articulates it:

(That) there is no reality separate from the tools (words, sentences, pictures, gestures, symbols, etc.), which represent real things. [...] (It) must be stressed that all conceptual historians agree that language is part of historical reality itself. That means that to study the reality of the past we have to study language, which brings past to reality, if not to

---


54 Roitman 7.
existence, but to perception – and, consequently, in order to study historical change, we have to study conceptual change, i.e. the change in concepts.\textsuperscript{55}

Koselleck was the first to examine the historical development of ‘crisis,’ identifying it as a paradigmatic concept already in 1973’s \textit{Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt}. He then returned to it in his more general work dedicated to \textit{Oberbegriffe} (super concepts) entitled \textit{Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache} (2006), offering both an etymological and discursive analysis of the concept reaching back to ancient Greece, and ancient Greek, which traces the term’s changing meaning through ancient military, medical and theological discourses, into the middle ages – where it proliferates discursively and contributes decisively to the establishment of the newly independent sciences of politics, psychology, economy and newly (re)discovered history – then on into modernity.\textsuperscript{56}

Koselleck argues – I think crucially for crisis’s association with gender – that the 18\textsuperscript{th} century sees the concept gain independence, his example here being the ongoing discussion that occurred from the mid- to late-1700s of a structural constitutional crisis admitting of internal rules no longer able to assure imperial stability and thus in need of overhaul. At this moment, then, crisis explicitly comes to signify the necessity for (internal) restabilization. This signals a watershed moment in the conceptual development of crisis as, from this point forward, “Evoking crisis entails reference to a norm because it requires a comparative state for


judgment: crisis compared to what." If masculinity is in crisis, for example, this is the case because of its departure from non-crisis (the norm) and so from a stable form (of identity), which conceptually presupposes that restabilization – a return to the norm – is necessary (and, concomitantly, ‘good’).

Koselleck follows ‘crisis’ as it rises in conceptual rank throughout the 18th century, becoming *ein geschichtsphilosophischer Grundbegriff* (a fundamental/founding historico-philosophical concept), which has, since at least the French Revolution, served as a central interpretive concept (*Interpretament*) for political and social history. For Koselleck, crisis plays no less than the central role in “the emergence of ‘history’ as a temporal category” during the eighteenth century, attributing this emergence to “the concomitant displacement of the term ‘crisis,’” arguing that, by the end of the eighteenth century, “crisis is the basis for the claim that one can judge history by means of a diagnosis of time,” and moreover that:

Crisis becomes a criterion for what counts as ‘history’; crisis signifies change, such that crisis ‘is’ history; and crisis designates ‘history’ as such. In this way, crisis achieves the status of historico-philosophical concept; it is the means by which history is located, recognized, comprehended, and even posited. Koselleck adds that, in spite of the obvious discursive importance the concept had developed, especially in regards to economy, no explicit crisis theory was developed in the nineteenth century, while those developed in the twentieth century, he argues, are limited in being

---

57 Roitman 4.

58 Roitman 7.
overspecialized: they are, for example, restricted to political science or psychology, or, with regards to global attempts, are ungrounded empirically.

In spite, then, of the ever increasing pervasiveness of crises during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Koselleck identifies a relative blindness to the role played by a concept become fundamental to the knowledge – understood as the location, recognition, comprehension and even positing – of history.

Janet Roitman goes further in claiming that crisis becomes a fully-fledged “blind spot.” Following Koselleck, she identifies crisis as a once second-order concept – “once a signifier for a critical, decisive moment” become narrative first-order concept “construed as a protracted historical and experiential condition [...] an omnipresent sign in almost all forms of narrative today, (crisis is) mobilized as the defining category of historical situations, past and present.” Roitman continues:

Through the term ‘crisis,’ the singularity of events is abstracted by a general logic, making crisis a term that seems self-explanatory. [...] (Crisis) serves as the noun-formation of contemporary historical narrative; it is a non-locus from which to claim access to both history and knowledge of history. In other words, crisis is mobilized in narrative constructions to mark out and or to designate ‘moments of truth’; it is taken to be a means to access historical truth, and even a means to think ‘history’ itself.59 ‘Crisis’ is, then, Roitman argues, a second-order concept – a descriptive narrative device traditionally employed to connote historical singularities (so many decisive moments) – that has

59 Roitman 3.
become a first-order, a priori conceptual basis for historical narrative at all (per se) and which is accepted as revealing historical truth.

While Roitman’s primary interest is the 2000s, and her discursive analyses in Anti-Crisis focusses on narratives of financial crisis, it is important to note that she is not claiming that the fundamental narrative role played by crisis is new, or that it is restricted to political and economic domains. Rather, ‘crisis’ is “an omnipresent sign in almost all forms of narrative today, (and) is mobilized as the defining category of historical situations, past and present.”

This is certainly to say that ‘crisis’ is an Oberbegriff – to use Koselleck’s term – in contemporary narratives across our full spectrum of knowledge and distributed via all available media forms. Although she doesn’t mention it, the contemporary masculinity in crisis narrative that I have outlined could not be more exemplary of what Roitman is arguing. However, she is also arguing that crisis is “mobilized as the defining category of past historical situations,” which is to say that those explaining the past – narrating it – do so with ‘crisis’ as Interpretament – to use Koselleck’s term – that is, as central interpretive concept.

Koselleck’s analysis of the development of ‘crisis’ into an Oberbegriff and Interpretament is key to understanding how masculinity has come to be represented as perpetually in crisis. I think it no coincidence that ‘crisis’ develops independence from its former single home in constitutional discourse – and thus gains the ability to signify in other knowledge domains – at the same time as sex is redefined as sexuality, namely in the mid- to late-eighteenth century.

---

60 Roitman 3. My italics.
As for the knowledge domains in which ‘crisis’ functions as Oberbegriff and Interpretament, I will argue its hegemony broadly. I more than share Roitman’s skepticism that “the lines drawn between academic and popular crisis narratives are not as bold as presumed,” and, indeed, in my fourth chapter I will criticize researchers and writers across the social sciences and humanities specializing in the Weimar Republic for an obsession with crisis as interpretive concept generally, and will look in depth specifically at how the over-application of crisis as an interpretive concept has limited how masculinity has been read in Weimar texts, in essence foreclosing alternative readings of masculinity.

What neither Koselleck nor Roitman answer, at least not to a satisfactory extent, is why certain concepts – ‘crisis’ specifically – come to dominate discourses. That is, the question remains as to the mechanism at work in a concept’s rise to Oberbegriff status. And while Roitman shares – and extends – Koselleck’s position that ‘crisis’ has become essential to the narrating of history per se, this is not to answer the question of why certain concepts become inseparable in their signification – as masculinity and crisis have become. If, as Roitman claims, ‘crisis’ is the noun formation anchoring narrative (the ur-noun formation); how did it come to occupy this role? And, how is it that it endures in it? Asked otherwise, what accounts for the stabilization of this noun formation at the center of, and point of overlap/interface between discourses? And, further, why is it that other concepts cannot resist it? (This I will refer to as the question of significatory valence.) A further remaining question is that of benefit. Who, or what, if anyone or anything, benefits from concepts, and specifically ‘crisis,’ dominating historical discourses from within a blind spot? And, more specifically, who or what benefits when masculinity is everywhere represented as ‘in crisis’ from within a blind spot?
1.5. From Language to the Performance of Male Identity

The goal of the preceding discussions of the historicity of biological sexuality and the increasing importance of the concept ‘crisis’ to historical narrative was neither to dismiss the findings of science regarding sexual behaviour – at least not completely – nor to deny that certain historical periods witness more social, cultural and political upheaval than others. Rather, I have tried to show that the apparently self-evident, universal, and essential concepts sexuality and crisis in fact have social, cultural, political and, crucially, linguistic histories; and further that these histories are both generated in and as, and are propagated through, language that is organized, and repeated, in patterns, the contingency of which is masked and thus goes unquestioned.

What, then, of the functioning of discourses, of the most important linguistic constructions within them, and of the process through which such constructions are naturalized?

As Todd W. Reeser observes regarding male identity specifically, “Because our understanding is entirely or largely mediated in language, masculinity itself is linguistically driven, meaning that to study masculinity we have to examine how it is articulated.” To examine how masculinity is articulated in language is to engage in discourse analysis, discourse referring to the linguistic patterns, or “groups of statements which structure the way a thing (masculinity, for example) is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking.”

---


62 Gillian Rose, Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials (London: SAGE, 2007) 142. (Note that I have chosen Rose’s definition here over that of Foucault for the sake of concision.)
otherwise, “discourse is a particular knowledge about the world, which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it.”

While there are numerous approaches to analyzing discourse, each with a different methodological stress, all are based on social constructionism – the belief that reality is constructed through human activity – and while approaches differ as to the extent of language’s influence, all agree on certain fundamental premises, chief among which are the following:

- Our knowledge of the world should not be treated as objective truth. Our knowledge and representations of the world do not reflect the truth of a reality ‘out there.’ Rather, they are products of discourse in the broadest sense (i.e. including visual representations), products of particular ways of representing the world, especially linguistically.

- The ways in which we understand and represent the world are historically and culturally specific and contingent – they could have been otherwise and change over time. As a form of social action, discourse plays a part in engendering the social world – including knowledge, identities, and social relations – and thereby in maintaining social patterns. That the social world is socially and discursively constructed implies that its character is neither determined by external conditions nor pre-given. Likewise, social and discursive construction of the social implies that people have neither fixed nor authentic essences or characteristics.

---

63 Rose, 142.
• Knowledge is created through social interaction in which common truths are constructed via competition about what is true and false.

• There is a link between knowledge and social action. Differences in social understanding engender different actions. Thus, the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences.\(^6^4\)

Accepting these premises has clear consequences for our understanding of what masculinity is. Masculinity is not essential or immutable; it is neither a biological truth – as we have already seen – nor can it be defined or judged according to a set of fundamental characteristics.\(^6^5\) If we are to understand sexuality, we need to examine the patterns of articulation that represent it, as well as the way social agents respond to these representations.\(^6^6\) This means following trends in both representation and behaviour, and asking questions about the relationship between these.

A logic of naturalization governs the functioning of language, however, that obscures the fact that language represents rather than reveals. This occurs on the word level as well as with regard to valences between words and statements, i.e., the tendency for words to appear in certain combinations and, in the case of masculinity, which results in cultural assumptions about its nature – about what it is, has been, or should be.

\(^6^4\) For a clear and detailed introduction to the different approaches to discourse analysis, and which offers excellent examples, see the first two chapters of: Brian Paltridge, *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012) 1-38.

\(^6^5\) It should be noted that the original challenges to the supposition that gender is immutable and its characteristics fundamental arose from within French and Belgian feminism, and regarding *female* identity, in the 1970s and 80s and especially in the work of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, whom I’ve already mentioned, as well as that of Sara Kofman.

To give an example of how this naturalization works at the level of individual words, Todd Reeser looks at the etymology of ‘virtue’ and ‘impotence.’ The former derives from the Latin *vir*, meaning male, which implied in Renaissance Europe that males alone could possess the quality. The Latin *impotens* translates as ‘not powerful,’ implying that the man who cannot achieve an erection lacks power, that such a man cannot hold a fundamental characteristic of masculinity. While such linguistic connections exist under the surface, they nevertheless delimit gender and serve to construct our knowledge of masculinity.

No natural relationship obtains, however, between a word and its root or etymology:

(Such a) relationship reflects a cultural or arbitrary connection made and then presented as natural or inevitable because it is proven by etymology. The etymology of “virtue” has been provided as evidence that men were inherently more virtuous, and women less virtuous. Such appeals to the etymology of a word can be disguised forms of gender stasis and resist the possibility that ideas about masculinity change over time, and in fact those linguistic connections are themselves arbitrary and invented by culture at a certain linguistic moment.⁶⁷

That virtue should figure prominently in the definition of Renaissance masculinity makes sense, of course, as that “linguistic moment” was dominated by the rediscovery of works of classical antiquity, with the most profound influence being the rediscovered Aristotle, and especially his *Nicomachean Ethics*, whose virtue-based approach to behaviour was the standard textbook for

---

⁶⁷ Reeser 30. It is interesting here to note the shift in meaning *impotence* is currently undergoing as a result of what we might call "Viagra discourse" through which the old and traditionally considered least sexually capable are being represented as the most sexually virile. The gay community is the other main focus of recent Viagra advertising, presumably because Pfizer identifies them as virile, as interested as a group in staying harder for longer.
moral philosophy during the Renaissance, spreading from Italian universities throughout Europe as the Renaissance spread. Of more specific importance to the definition of Renaissance masculinity was Aristotle’s notion of the golden mean, defined repeatedly in his *Ethics* as “the middle state between,” which was the guide to virtuous action in myriad contexts. Otherwise put, the application of Aristotle’s golden mean meant living moderately, neither excessively nor with too much reserve. To be a man during the Renaissance was to act the golden mean.

Moderation was, as Reeser observes, considered an inherently male virtue: “a ‘fact’ proven by the often assumed link between the linguistic sign and its etymological origin” discussed above. Moderation, then, was a defining aspect of male subjectivity – not only sexually, but in all areas of life – and, crucially, masculinity was defined in opposition to not only the assumed inherent character of women as immoderate, but also to the assumed inherent immoderation of many other others. Among those groups coded as immoderate, and hence un-masculine, were the enemies of Christendom – Persians and Turks – newly encountered ‘savages’ – Amerindians – but also (from the Reformation on) Protestants – if one was male in a Catholic country – and Catholics, if one was a Protestant male.

It would have seemed self-evident to Renaissance men that being truly male involved moderate behaviour or, in other words, that acting thus was to be consistent with essential masculine norms. What Reeser and others show, however, is that an analysis of contemporary discourses reveals that these norms were in fact linguistic constructs, heavily influenced by

---


classical discourses on ethics and argued to be essential and universal by way of etymological analogy.

Further, as David La Guardia observes, “As a means of presenting itself, masculinity activated different kinds of discourse (exemplary, medical, legal) that defined both itself and the others (women, ‘queer’ men) in relation to whom it structured its conception of self.”

Masculinity as moderate behaviour was understood in opposition to the behaviour of contemporaneous others – or, at least their representations – contingent, then, on not acting as the sexual, racial, ethnic or religious other acts. And, these naturalized ideas about masculinity were disseminated by way of not only the newly rediscovered classical texts, but also by texts influenced by these texts, by texts defining positive masculinity through representations of its others as embodiments of non-masculinity, and by behaviour/performance consistent with the norms – defined by these texts – which dominated socially and ranged from the ability to dance gracefully to the wearing of a beard.

1.5.1. Laclau, Mouffe and A Sustainable Fishing Net

While Reeser’s discourse analysis of the centrality of ‘moderation’ to definitions of Renaissance masculinity emphasizes the constructedness of norms governing male behaviour, it only partially addresses the questions of how such constructions are normalized and why certain concepts – and not others – come to dominate discursively at a given time. The question of who, or what, benefits from such constructions dominating discourse also remains;


as does that of how discourses interact with, and influence, stabilizing and/or destabilizing, one another.

In their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe offer the most in-depth analysis – complete with a lengthy and intricate nomenclature – of the process of discursive fixation and naturalization. Operating under the assumption that discourse is fully constitutive of our world – that is, that there is no *outside* of discourse and our access to reality as construct is *always* through language – their account explains how, why, and in whose favour certain discourses become, and remain, *hegemonic*, which is to say capable of, and actively engaged in, organizing consent without recourse to violence or coercion. \(^{72}\) Laclau and Mouffe are clear, however, that subversive, or counter-hegemonic discursive practice is possible once the insidious processes of fixation and naturalization are unmasked.

Following Michel Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe consider discursive fixation and naturalization to be driven by power understood not as possessed by individuals, meted out, won and lost, but as a dynamic and constitutive epistemological force. Power, in Foucault's

\(^{72}\) Laclau and Mouffe are clearly building on Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony, which makes more fluid and dynamic the dialectical understanding of the social order as base < – superstructure posited by Orthodox Marxism; and under which the base represents the forces and relations of production, the superstructure society’s political power structures, culture, state institutions, social roles and rituals, and which asserts influence as exerted primarily from bottom (base) up. For Gramsci, hegemony is an unceasing process of negotiation through which the interests of one class – understood as a fluid agglomeration of interest groups likewise in ongoing negotiation – are served at the expense of those of other classes (likewise understood as a fluid agglomeration of interest groups). Further, Gramsci understands the superstructure as more influential on the base than does Orthodox Marxism. Where Laclau and Mouffe leave Gramsci behind is by fusing base and superstructure into one field produced by the same discursive processes.

words, "produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth." It is "bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them." For Foucault, as for Laclau and Mouffe, power is necessarily relational, functioning across society as an interactive network of shifting and changing relations among and between signs, structures, institutions, groups and individuals. Power produces objects of knowledge, defines them and organizes them relative to one another, and this happens within and between discourses, which both Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe understand as relatively rule-bound sets of statements that impose limits on what gives meaning.

A discourse necessarily grows, and fixing meaning within it is a dynamic and unceasing process. However, certain signs, Laclau and Mouffe contend, become relatively stable nodes within a discourse around which other signs are ordered; and these signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to such nodes, which Laclau and Mouffe call nodal points. A nodal point in political discourses, Laclau and Mouffe’s main area of focus, is ‘democracy’; while in national discourses a nodal point is ‘the people.’ Socially, ‘the nuclear family’ represents a long stable nodal point in Western discourses; likewise does ‘heterosexuality,’ if, as we’ve already seen, it has done so for a far shorter period.

---


75 Laclau and Mouffe 112.

76 While Laclau and Mouffe do tend to focus on what are commonsensically considered political discourses, they would consider all discourse to be political. There is, for them, no outside of politics.
All of these, while ultimately contingent, have become so naturalized that we treat them as if they have fixed and immutable meanings. Laclau and Mouffe argue that Western political discourses – understood as groups of statements that gain their meaning relative to nodal points such as democracy and justice — exhibit closure, which, on account of the ultimate contingency of language, can never be definite, although it is nearly universally accepted as such. Western political discourses are what Laclau and Mouffe call objective, in that they are so firmly established that their contingency is forgotten.77 An objective discourse tells us nothing about the truth; and meaning in Western politics will change, and the system as a whole could lose all validity. The reason this is unlikely, however, has nothing to do with its reflection of the truth, but rather results from the stability of the nodal points securing it.

All nodal points, even those as stable as democracy, are also floating signifiers – or, elsewhere in Laclau and Mouffe, empty universals. These terms connote the ongoing struggle between discourses to fix what important signs mean. In the West, democracy is not only a relatively stable nodal point currently within political discourses, its meaning is a site of relatively little discursive struggle and certainly when compared with its role as a floating signifier between discourses – among these most notably religious and legal discourses – elsewhere on the planet, exemplary being those in much of the Islamic world. The fact that all signifiers inherently float means that no nodal point has unlimited stability; and, on the other hand, that any signifier can theoretically become a crucial node that remains relatively stable for an extended period of time.

The reason why a particular floating signifier(s) becomes, and remains, a stable nodal point is *vested interest*, as is the explanation for why the discourses that such nodal points anchor become, and remain, hegemonic. The appearance of stability and universality benefits certain groups over others; and, while negotiation between all groups – including those that are disempowered – is ongoing, the tendency is for affiliations between benefitting groups to remain relatively stable over time. Crucially, these affiliated clusters control the means by which discourses are produced and disseminated.\(^78\)

Heterosexuality has been a relatively stable nodal point which has served to stabilize – that is, in Laclau and Mouffe's terms to *close* and thus present as *objective* – many other discourses, examples being those of femininity, masculinity, the family and military – and has in turn been stabilized by religious, then increasingly scientific discourses, especially biology.\(^79\) All these nodes are floating signifiers, however, sometimes referred to by Laclau and Mouffe as *empty universals* – none reveals true knowledge of the world – and the relationship between them is always dynamic and unstable.

Regarding the stability of ‘femininity’ within the insidious, dynamic, interactive functioning of hegemonic discourses, Laclau and Mouffe write: “Every construction of sexual differences, whatever their multiplicity and heterogeneity, invariably constructs the feminine as a pole subordinated to the masculine […] the ensemble of social practices, of institutions and

\(^78\) It should be noted that capturing the inherently fluid, dynamic and relative nature of the process of discursive negotiation is linguistically very difficult. To speak of ‘relative stability over time,’ for example, is certainly not intended to connote a static state of affairs. One way to articulate the process of discursive negotiation is to say that the balance of control over, or benefit from, discourse is ‘always already’ fluid, dynamic and relative.

\(^79\) During the Renaissance, as we have seen, moderation was closely aligned with it. This alignment no longer obtains, probably on account, at least partially, of biology replacing philosophy and Christianity as the most important forms of discourse relative to gender.
discourses which produce woman as a category, are not isolated but mutually reinforce and act upon one another.”⁸⁰ Remembering that there is no outside of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe stress the limits on ‘female’ agency that the construction of ‘femininity’ sets: “It is our view that once female sex has come to connote a feminine gender with specific characteristics, this ‘imaginary signification’ produces concrete effects in the diverse social practices.”⁸¹ It is this ‘imaginary signification’ produced through language within discourse that is responsible for concrete forms of subordination, and these “are not the expression of an immutable feminine essence,” but rather “the symbolism which is linked to the feminine condition in a given society, plays a primordial role.”

A helpful analogy for understanding the dynamic interrelatedness of discourses across the discursive field, and which foregrounds the role a nodal point plays in its greater integrity, is the architecture of a sustainable fishing net.⁸² A traditional fishing net serves well enough to represent discourse understood as the fixation of meaning within a particular domain. All signs, which Laclau and Mouffe call moments, are knots in the net, their meaning being fixed through their difference from one another, as per Saussure’s structural linguistics. However, a traditional net fails to represent nodal points, those privileged signs around which other signs are ordered and from their relationship to which other signs acquire and retain their meaning.

The architecture of a sustainable net differs in that its structure is punctuated by strategically placed metal grommets that serve as emergency exits for fish not yet mature

---


⁸¹ Laclau and Mouffe 117-118.

enough to harvest. A grommet’s size (from approximately one hundred to approximately one thousand times a knot’s, depending on the species being fished) and central void, are suggestive metaphors for a nodal point’s importance relative to other signifiers, as well as for its integral lack of ‘truth’ value; while its metal construction symbolizes, if crudely, both its importance and stability. However, if we are to better represent a nodal point’s importance to the discourses it anchors, and furthermore to the integrity of the greater discursive field, we need to imagine a grommet coming loose or being lost. Whereas any given damaged knot affects only four strands of net, the loss of a grommet affects considerably more, that amount dependent on the grommet’s size. Further, the loss of a grommet concomitantly compromises the integrity of the net as a whole. It becomes open – as is the case with meaning for Laclau and Mouffe when a nodal point wanes in influence.

1.5.2. ‘Masculinity-Crisis’ as Nodal Point

Accompanying a lack of closure for Laclau and Mouffe is the loss of objectivity – what had appeared self-evident, universal and essential knowledge becomes questionable. This was profoundly the case during the nineteenth century in the West as religious certainty was increasingly undermined and lost its defining, and determining, discursive power. The fishing net analogy only goes so far, of course, serving as a decent metaphor for quantitative comparison and for modelling negative processes. It is unable, however, to represent the growing importance of scientific and technological discourses from the early modern period on,
discourses whose influence largely replaces that of Christianity in Western Society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸³

This process that sees Christian discourse and those nodal points anchoring it replaced by those of science results in the dramatic destabilization of knowledge governing most areas of life, among them, as we’ve seen, femininity and masculinity. However, to simply lump sexuality among destabilized domains of knowledge is to grossly undervalue the central discursive position it takes up in the late nineteenth century. If ‘crisis,’ as Koselleck and Roitman argue, and I believe rightly, becomes a fundamental nodal point during the nineteenth century from which myriad discourses acquire, and retain, meaning, then sexuality, and especially masculinity, takes up a contiguous location, and gains in semantic importance quite strikingly as a result.⁸⁴ As central, contiguous nodal points, masculinity-crisis, I would argue, both redefines and generates a great deal of the quickly expanding discursive field in the West during the final decades of the nineteenth century and into the opening decades of the twentieth. This is to say that rapidly expanding economic, political, cultural and social discourses increasingly become explicable in terms of masculinity-crisis during this period; or, otherwise put, that their definition as ‘in crisis’ is represented as contingent on masculinity-crisis.

---

⁸³ Arguably the most famous acknowledgement of this is presented allegorically in Friedrich Nietzsche’s Aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science* (1882) whose ‘madman’ asks “Whither is God ... I shall tell you. We have killed him.” And it is hard to argue with Nietzsche considering the profound and enduring influence of Darwinian evolution (1842) and Mendelian inheritance (1866), those discursive death bringers that Nietzsche certainly had in mind as he wrote. See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974) 181.

⁸⁴ Both Koselleck and Roitman make stronger claims for crisis as a concept, and both consider its reign as *Oberbegriff* to continue in the present. As Roitman puts it, “crisis serves as the noun-formation of contemporary historical narrative; it is a non-locus from which to claim access to both history and knowledge of history.” Roitman, 3.
In the next chapter I will survey the discursive landscape of the late nineteenth and nascent twentieth century to show the extent to which masculinity-crisis dominates this period and, furthermore, becomes a conceptual model for representing masculinity during the Weimar Republic, and well beyond.

Chapter 2. The Stabilization of Masculinity as ‘in Crisis’ at the End of the Nineteenth Century

2.1. Le fin

The final decades of the nineteenth century, especially the period from approximately 1880-1900, has become known across languages by the French term fin de siècle. These dates are artificial, of course. As is always the case with periodization, the evidence supporting an argument regarding the character of an ‘era’ bleeds out on both sides, into the before and after.

A better place to start is with “identifying features,” then, two of which, according to Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, are “as the moment of emergence, in their modern
configuration, of the forms and definitions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture” and as a time of “extraordinary [...] cross-fertilization between forms of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{85}

Taking their cue from Foucault’s \textit{Archaeology of Knowledge}, which argues the necessity of situating each discourse “in relation to those that are contemporary with it or related to it” and further “that one must therefore study the economy of the discursive constellation to which it belongs,”\textsuperscript{86} Ledger and Luckhurst choose a wide array of texts from across the medial landscape of the time for their “Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900.” Their reason being: “[...] we want (this volume) to act as a means of negotiating the \textit{constellated} discourses of the fin de siècle.”\textsuperscript{87} This chapter shares this desire to offer a means of navigating the (expanding) discursive field, albeit from somewhat earlier than 1880 to somewhat later than 1900, and with an eye to explaining the conceptual limits placed on the production of knowledge at the time.

Ledger and Luckhurst are right to cast their net wide textually – the fin de siècle sees the discursive field spread quantitatively, and differentiate formally, as never before. They are also correct to highlight the notions of ‘constellation’ and ‘cross-fertilization’ as these apply to discourses across the high/low cultural divide that relate to each other in ways become possible, circa 1900, in a world now signifying, and networking, via gramophone, film and typewriter.\textsuperscript{88}


\textsuperscript{87} Ledger and Luckhurst xxi.

I am certainly likewise interested here in constellated discourses, but what interests me more specifically are those *signifiers* that assumed relative stability during the fin de siècle and thus governed the discursive economy during this period of intense discursive growth and negotiation. And, moreover, I am concerned with the constellation and cross fertilization occurring at this more basic – or *nodal* – level of discursive production. While Friedrich Kittler is right that around 1900 – that symbolic moment of transition from traditional bourgeois to modern mass culture – new media technologies radicalized the way messages circulated and interrelated; I would also argue that the register in which they did so was actually rather limited. While the instruments of communication certainly diversified, the message these communicated was semantically limited – in both tone and tenor.

Allow me to briefly return, for help explaining this apparently counterintuitive claim, to Laclau and Mouffe, for whom:

The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations [...] Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation *nodal points.*

My argument in this chapter is that the fin de siècle – that period normally singled out as representing discursive variety and complexity – was actually fixated on three dominant ideas that tended to be linked together semantically: crisis and masculinity (the rise in importance of which during the nineteenth century I discussed in my introduction) along with decline. I do not wish to go so far as to say these constitute an episteme, but do consider these to be the

---

89 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony* 112.
privileged discursive points during the period which, more than any others, influenced the field of discursivity.

As I argued in my first chapter, I agree with Laclau and Mouffe that a conceptual hierarchy of influence always obtains discursively, which is to say that at any given time certain privileged signifiers — nodal points — enact control over what is communicated textually. (And I assume here the broadest possible interpretation of ‘text,’ one under which written, spoken, visual and even cognitive structures are subsumed.)

I will also argue that such nodal points tend to form relatively stable constellations; a fact identified already in 1900 by Rémy de Gourmont, who saw the contemporary understanding of the preceding two decades as governed by just such a stable constellation — if he was incorrect about the constellation’s components. That Gourmont should have identified the nodal constellation at just this time is sufficient reason to engage with him at some length here. Another reason to do so is that this important literary critic and epistemologist has been all but forgotten for decades, only starting to garner renewed academic interest well into the twenty-first century. By examining Gourmont’s arguments in detail, I hope to show that a model for understanding ‘masculinity-crisis-decline’ as a nodal agglomeration of great influence was already available at the fin de siècle.

Before examining Gourmont’s arguments in depth, however, I wish to situate him within the context of late nineteenth century social and cultural ideas.

2.2. The Fin de Siècle’s Eschatological Impulse

A good place to start interrogating the nodal constellation that dominated discourse during the fin de siècle is with the representative phrase itself, the first appearance of which,
according to the English etymologist Ernest Weekley, was in the title of an otherwise
forgettable stage comedy – *Paris, fin de siècle* – that premiered at the *Le Gymnase* theatre in
the Boulevard de bonne Nouvelle in February 1900. The location of this first appearance is
somewhat ironic, of course, as in short order the phrase came to communicate the worst
possible news; its *fin* connoting – by the time the likes of the Hungarian-German eugenicist Max
Nordau appropriated it in 1902 – much more than the waning of a hundred year period in any
one specific place. This *end* was prolifically represented at the time in more absolute terms,
temporally and geographically. For many contemporaries it meant no less than an immanent
abyss from which Western society, for some time already in terminal decline, would not return.

There was neither anything specifically French about the perception that this period was
one of decline, degeneration and decadence (though some of the earliest commentators to
describe it as such were indeed French); nor was there anything new about the perception
itself. By the late-1880s – that is, well in advance of there being any single descriptive phrase of
currency – its key concepts had explanatory reach throughout, and indeed beyond, the Old
Continent.

The eschatological impulse so widespread at the end of the nineteenth century has
deep and expansive cultural roots, of course. As R.K.R. Thornton points out, ‘decline’ is a
necessary part of theories explaining the nature of the universe and its history that have
circulated for millennia and which originate from all corners of the globe. Decadence of the fin

---

91 While my focus here is Europe, and will narrow to German-speaking Europe as this chapter progresses, it is
nevertheless at least worth noting that the New World also partook of the *de rigueur* sense of pessimism, which
was applied across the social, political and cultural spectrum – the pervasive view in the United States being that,
with the nation’s ‘manifest destiny’ fulfilled, a point of national crisis had been reached in America, too. The
Pacific Ocean was for many Americans not only literally, but also figuratively ‘the end of the line.’
de siècle variety, Thornton observes, “may well be caused or intensified by its catching reflections from many times and many cultures. Chief among these, he adds, “are Greece, Rome and even Egypt.”92 While Nietzsche’s discovery (after The Birth of Tragedy) of the cultural pessimism of the ancient Greeks, that beacon society which had for well over a century been the European model of progress, constitutes arguably the most original contribution to fin de siècle European society’s understanding of itself as in terminal decline; it was unarguably ‘the decline of the Roman Empire’ that both qualitatively and quantitatively exerted the most discursive influence.93

Max Nordau, mentioned already and arguably the most famous doomsday prognosticator of his time, observed rightly in his Degeneration that, “It is not for the first time […] that the horror of world-annihilation has laid hold of men’s minds,” before proceeding to employ decadent Rome as the paradigmatic case in diagnosing a degenerate Europe.94 Hugo von Hofmannsthal – who doesn’t appear in Nordau’s work, but would exemplify the degenerate artist for him – likewise found cause to mention “das Rom der Verfallszeit” as an archetype for the present moment, if seeing in it much aesthetic possibility.95 While in France, the artist Thomas Couture and critics Desirée Nisard and Rémy de Gourmont compared their

---


93 Thornton 2-3. See also Ledger and Luckhurst xvi. By ‘the decline of the Roman Empire’ I mean the idea, which was originally developed by Edward Gibbon in his The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, originally published in six volumes between 1776 and 1789. See: Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (London: Everyman’s Library, 2010).


nation’s decline directly to that of the Roman Empire. And many more such comparisons from across Europe – and indeed from beyond Europe – could be cited here.

2.3. Rémy de Gourmont and “The Impossibility of Disassociating Certain Ideas”

But I am being unfair to the aforementioned Rémy de Gourmont – the (erstwhile) symbolist poet, novelist, and, arguably, the leading French cultural critic of his day (at least in the eyes of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound) – but who is essentially forgotten today. ‘Byzantium’ was the model for Gourmont; or rather, the model for a model, the deferred model being Ancient Rome. What is most insightful in Gourmont’s analysis of his time – and constitutes the reason I wish to focus on him specifically here – is not the civilization he chooses to represent it: others highlighted the Ottoman Empire’s process of degradation over the nineteenth century in exemplary terms. Nor even is it Gourmont’s circular historiographical hermeneutic, his assertion of the explanatory past – Roman history – being narrowly redefined in light of recent – even present events – an idea which, it should be added, is prescient of his younger French contemporary Maurice Halbwachs’ early ideas about collective memory.

Rather, most striking are Gourmont’s precocious insights into the construction of knowledge as

---

96 The references to Couture and Nisard are from Weir 1.


98 Gourmont, Eliot writes in *The Sacred Wood*, is “the critical consciousness of his generation,” while for Pound, Gourmont was “the best portrait available, the best record that is, of the civilized mind from 1885-1915.” In spite of such high praise from such renowned intellectual contemporaries as these, Gourmont has surprisingly almost ceased to be of interest to scholars of intellectual history. See: Michael O’Driscoll, "Entoporn, Remy de Gourmont, and the Limits of Posthuman Sexuality," *Modernism/modernity* 20.4 (2013): 627-643, *Project MUSE*, Web, 15 Sep. 2014.

discourse. Indeed, he formulates a theory that not only argues the contingency of knowledge but also offers insight into the conceptual *constellations* that delimit it.

Gourmont explains the fin de siècle’s discursive obsession with terminal decline in his *La Dissociation des Idées* (1900), where it serves as a contemporary example for a general epistemological theory:

> A great many commonplaces have an historic origin. One day two ideas became united under the influence of events, and this union proved more or less lasting. Having seen with his own eyes the death struggle of Byzantium, Europe coupled these two ideas, Byzantium-Decadence, which became a commonplace, an incontestable truth for all men who read and write, and thus necessarily for all the rest – for those who cannot verify the truths offered them. From Byzantium this association of ideas was extended to the whole Roman Empire, which is now, for sage and respectful historians, nothing but a succession of decadences. \(^{100}\)

Gourmont focusses in *La Dissociation* on the associated ideas that function as embodiments of ‘truth’ (the quotation marks are his); and, although never using the word, he is clearly also interested in the processes through which these combine to engender ‘knowledge.’ \(^{101}\)

Gourmont’s goal is to reveal the social and historical contingency of such associations and, ultimately, encourage thinking that resists their domination. “One can either accept current


\(^{101}\) I intend this in the Foucauldian sense.
ideas and associations of ideas,” which Gourmont calls *commonplaces*, “just as they are, or else undertake, on his own account, new associations or, what is rarer, original disassociations.”  

“Byzantium-Decadence” is such a *commonplace*, a term for which “the word ‘truth’ may almost always be employed concurrently,” and which Gourmont defines as those “associations of ideas so durable that they seem everlasting, so closely knit that they resemble those double stars which the naked eye sees in vain to separate.”

Regarding the durability of such associations, Gourmont laments that treatises on logic inevitably “teach how abstractions are formed” but have “neglected to teach how they are not formed – that is, why a given commonplace persists in living on without posterity.” This “would suggest” he continues “interesting remarks for a chapter to be called ‘Refractory commonplaces, or the impossibility of disassociating certain ideas’.” Gourmont never writes this chapter, nor does he make explicit mention of an exemplary refracted commonplace; however, it is presumably ‘Byzantium-Decadence’ that undergoes such a process of refraction; and the medium through which it changes, and so lives on “without posterity,” without being replaced by a new association, is ‘Ancient Rome-Decline.’

Gourmont’s call for a deconstructive/reconstructive practice, for “new associations or, what is rarer, original disassociations,” is without doubt intended as a creative model for artists, and one drawing inspiration from symbolist poetics, which Gourmont himself (had earlier)

---

102 Gourmont 1.
103 Gourmont 9.
104 Gourmont 5.
105 Gourmont 8.
practiced. Gourmont’s ironical handling of contemporary historians – as “sage and respectful” – suggests they will be the last of “all men who read and write” to contest the ‘truth.’ (Rather, what they do, presumably, is fabricate it; their reputation lending it assumed, and enduring, veracity.) His clear preference is for poets as legislators, then, for the likes of Mallarmé and Manley Hopkins, exemplary practitioners of language deconstruction/reconstruction – if neither is mentioned directly – and not Montesquieu and Gibbon (and Jacob Burckhardt), who are together charged with having originally popularized the Rome-Decline ‘commonplace.’

I am less interested here in Gourmont’s relevance to the poetics of fin de siècle decadence; more so in his method as a conceptual historian, one whose genealogical and combinative approach represents a very early foray into discourse analysis and, I would argue, thus situates him as a critical forerunner of Foucault, Koselleck and Laclau and Mouffe.

Let us recount his achievement: Gourmont rightly identifies the historical contingency of ‘knowledge’ – its ‘essential’ unfixity – while also highlighting its discursive nature: it is written as history and consequently becomes “incontestable for all men who read and write.” Furthermore, he offers, with his analysis of the commonplace, a theory that not only posits the floating signifier become apparently stable nodal point – to use Laclau and Mouffe’s nomenclature (the best available, in my opinion, for discourse analysis) – but indicts the apparent stability of the conceptual valences that anchor hegemonic knowledge regimes, if never speculating on whom, or what, benefits from such commonly perceived conceptual

106 Gourmont 9. See also Ledger and Luckhurst, who seem to agree: “The model of Gibbon’s ‘rise and fall’ of the Roman haunted many articulations in the period.”

107 Italics are mine. That it is incontestable for not only all who read, but also for those who write is significant, of course, as the gesture of writing constitutes the means by which historical ‘truth’ is spread/disseminated.
stability. (Gourmont is certainly no Marxist. When he mentions the influence of events – presumably the protracted decline of the Ottoman Empire – on the unity of ideas, his intention is surely not to indict any particular self-interested group or agglomeration of interests. Gourmont is an idealist theoretically and politically – his politics, too, prove aesthetic rather than materialistic.)

That Gourmont saw fin de siècle Europe applying a recycled discursive paradigm to its understanding of itself – and, crucially, one that revealed nothing true about the period, is a bold epistemological insight, and one well ahead of its time. He was likewise right to assert the productive discursive power certain conceptual combinations achieve – that these become paradigms through which the creation of ‘knowledge’ is delimited – and further that certain associations – “double stars” – become naturalized, or, as he put it, “so durable that they seem everlasting (and) [...] impossible to disassociate.”

Indeed, as prescient as some moments in Gourmont are of Foucault – and I am thinking here especially of the latter’s arguments regarding the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a given time and place (his episteme) and his insights regarding the incitement to discourse in his The History of Sexuality Volume 1 – I have yet to encounter any commentators who connect these two French thinkers. Foucault himself never mentions Gourmont, at least as far as I can

---

108 See his “Le joujou Patriotisme,” in which he argues rapprochement with Germany on the basis of their shared cultural aesthetics, and for the writing of which Gourmont lost his job at the Bibliotheque national for being ‘unpatriotic.’ Rémy de Gourmont, “Le joujou Patriotisme,” Mercure de France 21 February 1871. Print.

109 Gourmont 5, 8.

110 While doing final edits on this dissertation, I came across a commentator who makes just this connection. Jaffrey Mehlman writes: “Whereas Lacan in our own fin de siècle, I would suggest, at times seems to harken back to the outrageous Léon Bloy, Remy de Gourmont (sic), Bloy’s contemporary, appears in retrospect to have been something of a Michel Foucault before the fact.” See: Jeffrey Mehlman, “Remy de Gourmont with Freud:
tell. Attesting to his already waning importance, no less prominent an intellectual as Havelock Ellis wrote of Gourmont in 1935: “(He) meant much yesterday: he may mean little today: he will mean more tomorrow.”¹¹¹ We will have to wait to see if Ellis’s tomorrow has finally come for Gourmont. (I hope my brief engagement with him here contributes to increased interest, at least.)

Before leaving Rémy de Gourmont, I wish to further speculate on his suggestive ‘double star’ metaphor. Real double stars – by which we mean those bonded by mutual gravity, not merely observable as contiguous, and for which we use the term binary star – had been considered astronomical fact for well over 100 years when Gourmont wrote (if by that point the means by which to prove or disprove gravitational connection had yet to be developed). Gourmont is clearly referring to a visual binary in La Dissociation des Idées, a real double star that the naked eye perceives as a single entity but which can be resolved by telescopic means. Visual binaries, Gourmont probably also knew, consist of the primary and the secondary star, the former being the more energetic and also brighter, which, on account of its potentially much greater relative luminosity, may create so much glare as to make it difficult to detect its fainter partner – at least with the naked eye. The primary and secondary stars also differ in mass, with the former exerting greater force.

These connotations of the visual binary metaphor offer a model for thinking the unequal relationship between constellated nodal points, and more importantly the consequences such

---

inequality might have on discursive practice. It is clear that ‘decline’ (and its synonymic offshoots ‘degeneration’ and ‘decadence’) was considered the most luminous concept during the fin de siècle – these words themselves abound in texts of all kinds and across all the major European languages, as Entartung, Dekadenz, and Dégénérescence, to highlight only three. What Gourmont – and many other commentators – did not see on account of the ‘luminosity’ of decline was the other nodal points with which it had constellated, these being ‘crisis’ and ‘masculinity,’ to form what Gourmont should have identified as a ‘multiple star,’ or more precisely a nodal constellation itself of striking and enduring stability, one resistant to disassociation, and which consequently proved profoundly influential on the discursive economy of his time.

2.4. An Important Etymological Observation Regarding The Emergence of ‘Crisis’ as ‘Instability’

‘Crisis’ is becoming increasingly accepted as a concept fundamental to production across the discursive field during the fin de siècle, a fact attested to in no uncertain terms by Michael Grunewald’s preamble to a 2010 collection – coauthored by German and French scholars – on crisis perceptions as articulated in German-language periodicals during the period circa 1890-1914.

Grunewald writes:

All the circles constituting German society during the era of Kaiser Wilhelm II held the belief that they were going through an accelerated historical process as well as a crisis
involving all aspects of political, social and economic life. That is what we learn in the periodicals, which at the turn of the 20th century were the essential source of communication on the major cultural, political and literary subjects of the time. Those periodicals played an important part in [...] devising possible scenarios to solve the crisis they perceived, as well as [in] the way they conveyed the vision of a future after the crisis.\(^\text{112}\)

Grunewald’s strong claims regarding “all” social circles holding the belief that “all aspects of political, social and economic life” (my italics) were in crisis is supported by the volume that follows them, which runs to almost 600 pages and includes essays on periodicals running the gamut of political and social perspectives – from right to left, catholic to protestant – issuing from throughout Germany, and produced for mixed gender as well as specifically male and female readerships.

Grunewald’s preamble – with its talk of “possible scenarios to solve” and “a future after the crisis” – only hints at something semantically special about the signifier ‘crisis’ as it functions at the end of the nineteenth century. What distinguishes it as a stable signifier – or nodal point – is that it imparts the connotation ‘instability’ on, and through, those groups of statements that gain their meaning relative to it. (In so doing it in fact stabilizes them, making them less amenable to reinterpretation and reformulation. I will return to this crucial function

---

\(^{112}\) Michael Grunewald, “Preamble,” Krisenwahrnehmungen in Deutschland um 1900. – Zeitschriften als Foren der Umbruchzeit im Wilhelmischen Reich, ed. Michael Grunewald and Uwe Puscher (Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 2010) IX. I would have quoted a German preamble but, curiously for a volume consisting exclusively of essays in German and French, there is not one – only English and French versions.
of ‘crisis’ in my conclusion, as it at least partially answers the questions of why the perpetual and pervasive representation of masculinity as in crisis is an intolerable problem.)

Put otherwise, and again recalling Laclau and Mouffe: ‘crisis’ engenders discursive closure as instability. When the discursive field has ‘crisis’ playing a dominant role within it – as was the case around 1900 (and is certainly the case today) – myriad discourses, whether of economics or philosophy, politics or physics, will be described as unstable. Another way of putting this is that ‘crisis’ perpetuates ‘instability’ discursively. The consequence of which is that discourses actually resist radical reinterpretation.

This was not, however, always the case. An etymological investigation of ‘crisis’ reveals its status as a fundamental concept already in ancient Greek – and one that since the Hellenic period has multivalent, if specific, connotations (all of which it retains, if in more general terms) – as a definitive moment (in battle, Thucydides), a critical phase (in an illness, the Hippocratic school), and a decisive political event (Aristotle). However, it is unclear when it assumes the additional meaning ‘instability,’ which – as confirmed by the Collins English Dictionary – it has today. In addition to “a crucial stage or

\[113\] Charles Bernheimer, for one, has argued that it is precisely the “dynamics of paradox and ambivalence,” the semantic “slippage” inherent to decadent cultural production that constitutes its subversive potential (5). I would argue that the development of the crisis connotation “instability” during the fin de siècle – the age of decadence, of cultural production defined by the semantic “slippage” that Bernheimer highlights – is no coincidence. Bringing decadence within the orbit of ‘crisis’ so defined, and discursively productive, can be read to mitigate, even disempower, this subversive potential in decadence. Subsuming a destabilizing force under ‘crisis’ (or as a feature of it) defined as instability makes static a productive creative force bent on challenging conventional forms of identity. Indeed, the power of such a nodal association as I am arguing might explain why even such a productive destabilizer as Nietzsche could not resist its force; and, ultimately needs someone like Bernheimer to rescue him from looking decidedly like an enemy of decadence. See: Bernheimer’s discussion of decadence in his Decadent Subjects, and especially in his introduction and chapter on Nietzsche, pages 7-55. Charles Bernheimer, Decadent Subjects (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 2002).

\[114\] See: Koselleck, The Practice of Conceptual History 237.
turning point,” and “a sudden change [...] in a disease,” crisis now also connotes “an unstable period, esp. one of extreme trouble or danger in politics, economics, etc.” This third connotation is arguably the most common now.\

It is these days quite common to hear of “a crisis at home,” for example, which can connote something as banal as a plumbing issue, but inevitably identifies temporary instability that must be attended to in order to return affairs to their stable, read natural, state. This is also to emphasize the ubiquity of ‘crisis’ in the contemporary world: from the Middle East to the US housing market to my conscience to the kitchen sink, everything is always already in ‘crisis.’\

While I can, ultimately, only assume the fin de siècle to be the period during which the additional connotation of ‘instability’ first arises – a study investigating this assumption is certainly wanting but beyond my scope here – its discursive prominence during the final decades of the nineteenth century is indisputable. Indeed, an examination of texts of many types from across the medial spectrum suggests that inevitably tied to fin de siècle ‘decline, degeneration and decadence’ is ‘instability’ – and not only in “politics, economics, etc.,” but across the entire discursive field.\

What is not as obvious is the frequency with which ‘masculinity’ is found linked to these other two, an assertion I will spend the rest of this chapter attempting to support, beginning

---

115 If one goes further back, to the Proto-Indo-European root on which the Greek krisis is built, namely “krei-” denoting “to sieve, discriminate, distinguish,” ‘crisis’ comes at least suggestively in line with the Proto-Indo-European Root for the Latin castrationum (castration), namely “kes-” to cut. I will elaborate on this suggestive alignment in my concluding chapter. For confirmation of these etymologies see: "Castration" and “Crisis,” Etymonline.com, Etymology Online Dictionary, 10 Sept. 2014. Web.

116 A good place to start investigating this diversity is the essays in Ledger and McCracken’s (editors) Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle. See: Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, eds. Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).
with an excursus on a text Rosemary Dinnage calls “the most written-about document in all psychiatric literature.”

2.5. **Beware die Aufschreibesystem: the Discursive Disciplining of Judge Schreber’s Memoirs**

Bring something incomprehensible into the world.\(^\text{118}\)

[There exists] the tendency, innate in the Order of the World, to *unman* a human being who has entered into permanent contact with the rays. This is connected on the one hand with the nature of God’s nerves [...]; on the other hand it is connected with the basic plan on which the Order of the World seems to rest, that in the case of world catastrophes which necessitate the destruction of mankind on any star, whether intentionally or otherwise, the human race can be renewed.\(^\text{119}\)

In October 1900, from within the Royal Public Asylum housed at Sonnenstein castle above the Elbe River on the outskirts of Dresden, the eminent high court judge Daniel Paul Schreber began writing his memoirs – a work which W. Kendrick considers “the most-quoted unread book of the twentieth century,”\(^\text{120}\) written by a man whom Michael Angelo Tata considers the


first “case study superstar.” How is it, then, that a text could be written about so copiously, quoted so often, and yet have gone largely unread? And what does such a text tell us about the relationship between the signifiers ‘decline,’ ‘crisis,’ and ‘masculinity’ during the fin de siècle?

Those writers to subsequently offer interpretations of the contents of Schreber’s Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken (published 1903) are too numerous to list here but include among their number no less than Melanie Klein (1952), Jacques Lacan (1932, 1955-56), Elias Canetti (1960) and Karl Jaspers (1913/1963). The reason such prominent intellectuals may not have in fact read Schreber’s memoirs is on account of Sigmund Freud getting to them first. Freud was the very first, in 1910-11, to publish an analysis of the text. Or rather, to psychoanalyze its author through his text – as curiously, in spite of them being contemporaries who spoke the same language, Freud never attempted to enter into correspondence with, let alone meet, Paul Schreber.

As Jay Geller points out, “virtually all subsequent interpretations of Schreber’s dementia have been based upon Freud’s selective citations in his ‘Psychoanalytic Notes on an

---


Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoïdes).”  
Freud’s analysis therein – his first diagnosis of schizophrenia – centers on Schreber’s relationship with his father – the prominent educational reformer Moritz Schreber, after whom the German garden allotment (Schrebergarten) is named, and who invented numerous regimens – a cold water health system among them – and apparatuses – most famously the Geradehalter, about which I will have more to say – for educating the young body and mind.

Freud’s psychoanalysis of Schreber’s text focusses on son Paul’s repressed homosexual love for the paternal Schreber. The younger Schreber’s repressed desire is projected, Freud concludes, on to the director of the aforementioned Sonnenstein asylum, the neuropathologist Paul Flechsig, who plays the role of antagonist in the Memoirs, and whom Schreber describes paradoxically as both “a person whose morality and integrity I have not the least reason to doubt” and, far more often, as a malevolent force, ordained by God and able to control Schreber’s nervous system by psychokinesis; or, as Schreber puts it more lyrically, through the control of “divine rays.”

Carl Jung, who had himself published a case history of dementia praecox in 1907, considered Freud’s conclusions “very unsatisfactory;” but Jung remained for decades almost

---


127 Schreber, Memoirs (1955) 34.

128 The formulation “divine rays” appears copiously: literally hundreds of times. One direct attribution of the control of these rays to Flechsig can be found on page 35 of Memoirs (1955).

unique in this conclusion. Freud’s interpretive shadow loomed so large in this case that in 1955 Freud scholar Ida Macalpine wrote the following under the heading “Summary of Literature” in the afterword to her English translation of Schreber:

Freud’s views on Schreber’s illness stand unquestioned, no new material has been added nor different interpretations advanced. Subsequent literature is almost unanimously confirmatory; such reservation as can be detected are only implied. This is all the more surprising in view of the many changes in psychoanalytic theory and practice and in the concept of transference since 1911, and the extension of interest in the psychoses.\(^{130}\)

While subsequent analyses have taken issues with certain details these have not challenged Freud’s central conclusion that Schreber’s text records the paranoid delusions of the unstable mind of a repressed homosexual. At the level of language, most commentators have agreed, Schreber’s Memoirs represent a pathological specimen emitted by a very sick man; a conclusion that has discouraged them from examining the Schreber text itself, preferring rather to respond to Freud’s response to it.

An alternative reading to Freud’s, and indeed to that of the delusions of a paranoid schizophrenic, is possible here, and it considers Schreber’s Memoirs as a text an sich. This interpretation has two parts, and I will develop it with the help of Foucault; who was clearly not only familiar with Paul Schreber – specifically mentioning “Judge Schreber”– but also regarded his famous Memoirs, and the classic case histories surrounding it, as epitomizing the formation

\(^{130}\) Schreber, Memoirs (1955) 372.
of disciplinary power.\textsuperscript{131} I will also have cause to again enlist Rémy de Gourmont – if only briefly – a man for whom Schreber might have represented an artist capable of both “new associations, and what is rarer, original disassociations,” but whose attempts at resisting discursive discipline ultimately proved unsuccessful on two fronts.\textsuperscript{132}

One way in which Schreber’s Memoirs shows itself the object of discursive discipline concerns its inability to not conform to dominant contemporary discursive nodal points. A text that resists making sense at all costs – as evinced by Schreber’s myriad neologisms, by no means unrepresentative examples being die Kopfzusammenschnuerungsmaschine (the divine-head-lacing-together-machine), das Strahlnerneuerungsgesetz (the law-for-the-improvement-of-the-nerve-rays) and das Stimmungsfälschungswunder (the mood-falsifying-miracle) – ultimately cannot resist the nodal constellation dominant during the fin de siècle: that is, it is still fundamentally a text that stages masculinity in crisis amidst a world in terminal decline.\textsuperscript{133}

This becomes clear when we see that at the centre of Schreber’s memoirs – not his assumed madness and/or megalomania, but his memoirs – is a description of his emasculation (\textit{Entmannung} is the word he uses)\textsuperscript{134} being inextricably linked to a degenerate, moribund, and unstable modern world. Schreber’s Europe, and especially his Germany, has become a new


\textsuperscript{132} Gourmont 1.

\textsuperscript{133} English translations of Schreber’s composite noun neologisms are my own.

\textsuperscript{134} Schreber first uses the word on \textit{Memoirs} (1955) P72, then uses it several more times on pages 72-75, the section during which he defines it. See: \textit{Memoirs} (1955) 72-75.
“Sodom and Gamorrah,” a place where the “Order of the World is broken.” Schreber considered himself, as Jacques Le Rider observes, “destined to be the last man after the final collapse of the cultural and moral decadence which was sapping the West,” a man whose eschatological visions:

showed him the particularly grave crisis afflicting the German people, especially Protestantism, which might well be the first casualty of the end of the world unless some warlike hero appeared to defend it. Schreber was equally worried by the rise of Catholicism, Judaism, and the Slavs. [...] He learned that the world was afflicted with leprosy and plague [...] (with) ‘lepra orientalis,’ ‘lepra indica,’ ‘lepra hebraica,’ ‘lepra aegyptia.’

As Schreber saw it, this degenerate world demanded he sacrifice his masculinity, his having no doubt that:

The order of the world was imperiously demanding my unmanning, whether I like it or not, and that in consequence I could no longer reasonably do other than to reconcile myself to the idea of my metamorphosis into a woman.

The disciplining of Schreber’s text continues after the fact, however, which is to say well beyond the fin de siècle, and by means of interpretation (if of a strictly limited scope). This

135 Schreber Memoirs (1955) 78. This statement (or formulations similar to it) abounds in the text, occurring literally hundreds of times.


137 Le Rider 80.
process is begun by Freud himself, who forces the presumed nonsensical delusions of a sick patient to conform to the logic of language by means of the rigorous application of science, or more specifically by the (feigned rigour) of psycho-science. In an obviously unintentional twist of irony, Schreber’s text is treated by Freud and his subsequent interpreters like one of the paternal Schreber’s young pupils, who can be helped to produce clear and verifiable knowledge, but only after being trained to sit quite upright – by means of verbal and physical strictures – while writing.

For Foucault, we must remember, the psycho-sciences are crucial tools of modern disciplinary regimes. Indeed, “all the sciences, analyses and practices employing the root ‘psycho-‘ have their origin in (the) historical reversal of the procedures of individuation” which occurred during the transition from the medieval to the modern. This is to say, psychological analyses function to delimit subjectivity along certain prescribed guidelines, thus molding the modern individual into a (self-monitoring) type, and concurrently into a form more manageable by the state, and at the cost of less investment. Of course, psychoanalysis as the talking cure

---


139 Foucault, Discipline 193.
does not accomplish this through straightforwardly repressive means, it rather does so by encouraging the subject to engage in ongoing discourse about assumed ‘repression.’ In thus creating a subject who accepts the truth of internal repression, and is committed to talking about it (for as long as necessary, and at a price), external repressive mechanisms become less necessary (and the capitalist imperative is also well served).

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari agree with Foucault regarding the disciplinary logic of psychoanalysis. In their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, they describe Freud’s opinion of schizophrenics in typically playful language:

> For we must not delude ourselves: Freud doesn’t like schizophrenics. He doesn’t like their resistance to being oedipalized, and tends to treat them more or less as animals. They mistake words for things, he says. They are apathetic, narcissistic, cut off from reality, incapable of achieving transference; they resemble philosophers -- “an undesirable resemblance.”

Freud’s problem with the schizophrenic is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, that he

---

140 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 23. What is, of course, appealing to the rogue psychoanalyst Guattari and especially to the anti-structural philosopher Deleuze – and would likely also appeal to Gourmont – is precisely that Schreber is a rare individual who “brings something incomprehensible into the world,” or at least tries to. In doing so Schreber resists the strictures that rational language enforces on thought and so also on agency.

Schreber is of course not the only ‘schizophrenic’ writer to be championed by Deleuze for his efforts to resist making sense at all costs, the other being the American Louis Wolfson, whose 1970 book *Le Schizo et les Langues* (written in French!) included an introduction by Deleuze. Wolfson, who referred to himself as, among other self-given nicknames, “the student of demented idioms,” followed an intricate procedure for recoding language that resulted in such reformulations as the following (as recounted by Deleuze): “Such is the general procedure: the phrase *Don’t trip over the wire* becomes *Tu’ nicht trèb über ëth hé Zwirn*. The initial sentence is in English, but the final one is a simulacrum of a sentence that borrows from various languages: German, French, Hebrew – a “tour de babil.” Louis Wolfson, *Les schizo et les langues* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1970). Deleuze’s example sentence comes from: Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (New York: Verso, 1998) 8.
both refuses to make sense and resists being made sense of. He remains a disassociated personality from whom emanates disassociated language. He is an affront to Freud’s system in having not developed an ego; on account of not having gone through the Oedipal process of individuation. (He is neither male nor female – is both; his nerves extend unbroken from earth to heaven: he is both here and there.) Schreber’s gaining ‘health’ depends on being taken through this individuation process; that is, on being forced to make sense in thought, word and deed. He must submit to discipline towards achieving normalcy.

Freud’s analysis of Schreber as repressed homosexual is case in (Foucault’s and Deleuze and Guatarri’s) point, of course, but at the level of the printed word. As Schreber himself is never psychoanalyzed, the act of disciplining the individual – unnecessary and impossible in Schreber’s personal case anyway, as he is physically incarcerated – cannot occur directly. It proceeds nevertheless, but at the textual – and subsequent to Freud’s reading inter-textual – level. In so doing it also embodies the incitement to discourse, an imperative operative within capitalist – and indeed still in late-capitalist – societies, to produce text ceaselessly, but within strictly delimited parameters, and which Foucault first identifies as obtaining in late-nineteenth society relative to sex and sexuality, about which Victorians had traditionally been portrayed as prudish and unwilling to talk.

Schreber’s Memoirs becomes over the course of the twentieth century a text written about voluminously by experts likely to have never actually read the original, all of whom produce essentially the same pathological interpretation. Some more recent interpretations have even been based on technologically-enabled, new ways of not reading the text – specifically content analyses done by computer – the most recent of which arguing that the
frequency of one of Schreber’s neologisms – *das Brüllwunder* (bellowing miracle) – may be explained by a chronic adult onset tic disorder Schreber suffered.  

And so, attempts to “sum him up without remainder,” as Michael Angelo Tata puts it, continue. Not only does Schreber “achieve synonymity with paranoia,” as Freud would have it – in Schreber lies the proof for Freud, and contra his contemporary Kraeplin, that paranoia and schizophrenia are diagnostically discrete – Schreber’s neologisms can be disciplined such as to become synonymous with ICD-10 F95.1 (the classification for Chronic Motor or Tic Disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*).

Rather than allow Freud, or worse yet a computer, to have the last word on the *Memoirs*, I will allow Schreber himself to speak with uncanny prescience, if retrospectively, of the *Aufschreibesystem* by means of which his “new associations […] and original disassociations” were rationally processed, if rarely read:

> The mentioned writing-down-system (*Aufschreibesystem*) is extraordinarily difficult to explain to other people even vaguely. [….] I cannot say with certainty who does the writing. […] I presume that the writing down is done by creatures given human shape on distant celestial bodies, but lacking all intelligence, their hands led automatically, as it were, by passing rays for the purpose of writing them down, so that later rays can again look at what has been written.  

---


2.6. A Point of Pre-emptive Clarification

Schreber’s Memoirs represents for Jacques Le Rider just one of myriad textual examples of a *mitteleuropäische* crisis of identity at the fin de siècle. Others are the works of maverick psychoanalyst become anarchist Otto Gross, the essays of the satirist, and linguistic perfectionist, Karl Kraus, the Zionist pamphlets of the dramatist Theodor Herzl, and the dissertation of “free thinker” Otto Weininger (whose theories I’ll look at closely at the end of this chapter), to name only a few of Le Rider’s examples, all of which were written by Austrians and originated in Vienna.

Le Rider, who proved a valuable resource in writing my preceding section, asserts in no uncertain terms that: “The crisis of the individual, experienced as identity crisis, is at the heart of all the questionings we find in literature and the humane sciences, in Hugo von Hofmannsthal as much as in Freud.”¹⁴³ I would at this point like to turn Le Rider’s thesis, as he pithily articulates it here, inside out, out of necessity, as doing so goes some way to answering a criticism I expect will greet the pages that follow, as I now shift from theoretical concerns to textual evidence for my claims.

Namely, that I talk of an identity crisis, specifically one of masculinity, as if it really existed.

Le Rider argues for just such a reality; or more specifically he argues that the likes of Kraus, Weininger, Hofmannsthal and Freud wrote in response to, and/or as embodiment of,

¹⁴³ Le Rider 1.
such a crisis situation they believed to be gripping European society. My claim is of course that they in fact were discursive conduits that perpetuated this perception; that, to intentionally misquote Le Rider: “the questionings we find in literature and the humane sciences, in Hofmannsthal as much as in Freud (as much as in more ‘popular’ forms of text, such as the periodicals so influential at the time, and which I mentioned earlier), are at the heart – or rather constitute the circulatory system – of the European perception of crisis at the time.” I don’t disagree that individuals experienced (Le Rider’s word) certain sensations as a result of this perception, and consequently acted – in word and deed – as if there was such a crisis. (Thus they perpetuated the perception further; in their turn being part also of the circulatory system.) These perceptions, however, were of nothing real; or at least not of anything prior to the discourses defining and delimiting the world as ‘in crisis.’

That Le Rider and I – and likewise another of the most influential voices on fin de siècle identity, Elaine Showalter (to whom I’ll turn directly), and I – disagree crucially as to the nature (nothing natural about it!) of the crisis, (the ‘crisis’!), doesn’t make their seminal works in the area any less valuable.

Indeed, quite the contrary. It is precisely that the likes of Le Rider and Showalter find so much evidence in the intersecting and mutually informing discourses of the day that makes them so valuable to my argument. They can only help prove an argument for the domination of

\[144\] As Michael Boehringer points out, Le Rider’s thesis presupposes a “fixed masculine identity that is predicated on a stable sex-gender nexus,” the necessary prerequisite for the very crisis I deny here. Boehringer agrees with me, I think, that such essentialist readings of gender “must be called into question,” which is exactly what he does in “Fantasies of White Masculinity in Arthur Schnitzler’s Andreas Thameyer’s letzter Brief (1900),” which strongly influences my readings of Schnitzler’s “Thameyer” and Leutnant Gustl in chapter three here. See: Michael Boehringer, “Fantasies of White Masculinity in Arthur Schnitzler’s Andreas Thameyer’s letzter Brief (1900),” The German Quarterly, 84.1 (Winter 2011): 80.
the discursive field by ‘masculinity-crisis’ in collecting such a depth and breadth of textual evidence asserting a crisis of identity at the heart of middle-Europe’s understanding of itself (Le Rider), and a state of ‘sexual anarchy’ across Europe (Showalter).

2.7. Sexual Anarchy!

Returning briefly to Schreber’s *Memoirs*, this unique work can be read as the extreme embodiment of the “sexual anarchy” that the aforementioned Showalter convincingly argues to pervade fin de siècle culture Europe-wide. Freud’s – and subsequent interpreters’ – disciplining of Schreber represents only one, if an especially successful, attempt to rationalize – to put in order – such anarchy.

What Showalter so convincingly shows, which makes her such a valuable resource, is how – from the 1870s on and throughout Europe – the border demarcating the sexes was represented – and so increasingly also perceived – to be increasingly unstable, with this instability considered inextricably linked with intensifying industrialization, urbanization, militarization, colonial expansion and its attendant domestic challenges, as well as a response to the emerging women’s and labour movements.¹⁴⁵

Anxiety regarding national degeneration also intensified during this decade, with ‘crises’ of race, class, economy and sexual relations all perceived contributors to national decline

across Europe. The period also saw prolonged economic recession resulting in widespread unemployment, which fuelled the growth of slums across the continent. The higher than average levels of disease, ‘madness’ and crime in these sections of Europe's largest cities were increasingly portrayed as pathological by a press that magnified the import and impact of social disorder and the wide range of crimes it engendered. Press sensationalism spread and exacerbated fears that national rot was spreading throughout society from the lower classes out.  

If the urban poor were one source of national decline, widespread perception considered the upper classes to have become 'too civilized' to effectively deal with the threat (and its consequences). Bourgeois and aristocrat alike were represented as becoming increasingly effeminate, and effete, and hence incapable of fulfilling their necessary role as leader, legislator, administrator and warrior. French naturalist writer Emile Zola voiced the concerns of many Europeans in lamenting a feminized bourgeoisie that lacked the virility necessary for the challenges of modernity. While in Vienna, a city whose population had nearly doubled between 1870 and 1890 to 1.8 million, the medical doctor Arthur Schnitzler thematized the failure of both bourgeois and aristocratic masculinity under the pressures of rapid modernization, industrialization in "Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief" and Leutnant Gustl,

---


148 Showalter 10.
both published in 1900, and eight years later again in the novel Der Weg ins Freie, the first two of which I will examine in detail in my next chapter.

Schnitzler’s troubled men Leutnant Gustl and Andreas Thameyer had their analogues across the English Channel. A similar discourse regarding middle and upper-class male incapability circulated widely in Britain, where psychiatrists 'identified' the 'borderliners,' neurotic middle and upper class men who, without compulsory military service to define them, drifted purposelessly in 'Mazeland,' 'Dazeland' and 'Driftland,' and so were of little use to themselves or the state. Crucially, without military masculinity as a guide, those men expected to guide the Empire were increasingly seen as unable to do so. In lieu of the military camp and officer's quarters, British upper-class men indeed spent much time indoors, traditionally the space dominated by women. The British gentleman retired to the homosocial pleasures of "Clubland," which, as Elaine Showalter points out, "existed on the fragile borderland that separated male bonding from homosexuality." And, with the emergence of the aesthete, as embodied physically by Oscar Wilde and fictionally by his Dorian Gray, "the exterior explorations of the flâneur give way to the interior explorations of the collector."

Whereas the flâneur engaged in a privilege not allowed women – that of strolling the urban landscape, unaccompanied and at one's leisure, in search only of phenomenological experience

---


150 Showalter 10-11.

151 Showalter 13.

– the aesthete adopts a feminized habitus involving consumption and the acquisition and enjoyment of tasteful objects.

In Germany, the Prussian aristocratic officer type, "reinforced by a continuous stream of homogenous depictions that were in stark contrast to the non-officer and the ordinary man" served from unification (1871) as the masculine ideal.\textsuperscript{153} This German officer ideal, with its anachronistic courtly habitus – which stressed among other demands a modern form of \textit{minne} and an exaggerated public coolness – appeared increasingly inappropriate in a rapidly urbanizing and increasingly bourgeois-dominated German empire. A "theatrical hypermasculinity," as Leo Baudy puts it, became the standard as the \textit{Jahrhundertwende} approached, and this model at least partially embodied a conflicted portrayal of masculinity that emanated from the very top levels of society, at the centre of which ruled an emperor who "demanded a rigid and monolithic public masculinity for himself that corresponded uncertainly with his short stature, physical fragility, nervousness, and withered left arm."\textsuperscript{154}

The conflicted, unsure and unstable image of the German officer ideal finds exemplary expression in the pages of the satirical weekly \textit{Simplicissimus}, which began publication in 1896. Case in point is a Bruno Paul caricature featured in the 24 April 1900 issue entitled "Allerdings" (Of Course). An officer passes two enlisted men, who stand ramrod straight at attention in response to his appearance. Their bodies – stocky, and with apishly large hands and feet – contrast starkly with that of their superior, whose exaggerated slimness suggests effeminacy,


\textsuperscript{154} Braudy 323-324.
this quality only accentuated by the large cape he wears. While his inferiors’ large hands are bare, the officer nervously adjusts the gloves he wears. This gesture is not coincidental. 

During the middle ages the male wearing of gloves symbolized authority; while the throwing of a knight’s glove announced a feud. Later the glove became a general signifier of nobility due to the fact the right to wear fingered gloves was a privilege reserved for the nobility. This explains why the wearing of gloves is an inevitable feature in male portraits of the renaissance and baroque periods.\textsuperscript{156} That Paul’s officer is pictured self-consciously adjusting his gloves serves not only to focus the viewer’s attention on his dainty hands, it also communicates his insecurity in the presence of his inferiors.

\textsuperscript{155} Bruno Paul, “Allerdings,” \textit{Simplicissimus: 180 Satirical Drawings from the Famous German Weekly} (New York: Dover, 1975) 7. The image originally appeared on page 44 of the issue released on April 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1900. Other examples featuring effeminized officers are not hard to find. Two other such examples from 1900 are “Carriere” on page 47 of the next issue released on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of May; and “Landeswehr” on page 84 of the issue released on the 29\textsuperscript{th} of May. See: \textit{Simplicissimus – die historische Satirezeitschrift}, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, 1896-1945, Web, 10 Sept. 2014 <http://www.simplicissimus.info>.

The image’s caption conveys the officer’s thoughts to the viewer: “Ich habe immer das ekelhaftes Gefühl, daß sich sich die Dümmels was unanständiges denken, wenn man vorbei is.”

That Paul should allow us access to his officer’s thoughts is a modernist gesture, of course, and one consistent with the increasing focus on interiority in fin de siècle culture, and which we will see again in the interior monologue of Schnitzler’s Lieutenant Gustl, another anxious officer.

The thoughts Paul attributes to his officer are careful and coded. They communicate at the same time a sense of superiority – the enlisted men are called Dümmels, ‘grunts’ – as well as an unwarranted self-consciousness: what sort of indecent thoughts might these men be thinking? And why would their superior be concerned anyway?

The fragility of the guiding paragon of Wilhelmine masculinity found expression on a wider scale a few years later during the scandal revolving around politician, diplomat and the ‘Kaiser’s best friend,’ Philipp Prince von Eulenburg-Hetefeld. Between 1906 and 1908 a massive press campaign led by journalist Maximilian Harden alleged Eulenburg to be at the centre of a degenerated homosexual Camarilla. This was not the first such press-driven sex scandal implicating European royalty – 1889 had seen England gripped by the Cleveland Street Affair that centred on a male brothel purported to have been visited by the son of the Prince of Wales. As Marcus Funk rightly points out, such scandals must be understood within the context of 19th century attacks on aristocratic decadence primarily by the educated bourgeoisie “in which (a) supposed moral dilapidation was conjured up as a national danger and eventually scandalized in the media of the rising mass culture.”

157 Funck 53.
were given sexually-coded character traits: the German aristocrat was effeminate, sickly, weak, unmanly and unsuitable for the military or political leadership. And, such sexually-coded descriptions were not limited to Germany, nor to the highest class; rather, throughout Europe such encoding was increasing, and increasingly it characterized the bourgeois male as well.

As it went with men, so it went with their nations, as masculinity in fin de siècle Europe was still inextricably linked with an understanding of the nation state. 19th century masculinity and nationalism emerged and developed together, and both were discursive constructions – "Imagined communities" in Benedict Anderson's words – that relied on the knowledge producing force inherent in print-capitalism. The modern nation was represented as the product of those values and abilities that were properly manly: willpower, honour, courage, discipline, competitiveness, quiet strength, stoicism, sang-froid, persistence, adventurousness, independence, sexual virility – tempered, of course, by restraint – and dignity. And these qualities were perceived to reflect the masculine ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Considering the linked development of 19th century male identity and nationalism, it is not

---

158 Funck 53. The attack on the Wilhelmine court via the Harden-Eulenburg affair continued a tradition of bourgeois critique of the Ancien Régime stretching back to the mid-18th century, and one that employed the media at hand. In the 1770s and 80s the Bürgerliches Trauerspiel was the medium through which the enlightened German bourgeoisie represented itself as the truly civilized, moral and virtuous in contrast with the corrupt, lazy and sexually licentious aristocracy. The works of Lessing, Lenz and Schiller feature aristocratic villains who are extravagant, sexually deviant and often engage in effeminate behaviour. By the fin de siècle the bourgeoisie control more media, but the critique remains constant. For elaboration see: Michael Maurer, *Die Biographie des Bürgers: Lebensformen und Denkweisen in der formativen Phase des Deutschen Bürgertums (1618-1815)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek und Ruprecht, 1996) 236-254.

159 For a discussion of the importance of print capitalism, and specifically print media during the 19th century, see Benedict Arnold, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) chapters 1, 10 and 11.

surprising that a perceived threat to the stability of masculinity was portrayed as a direct threat to national stability. Unstable male identity results in unsure decision making politically and economically, and poor decisions in these areas, so went the understanding, results in unrest domestically and a loss of reputation internationally.

Fears of collapse and degeneration existed even while the age of European imperialism was experiencing its zenith. France's colonial empire, for example, reached its greatest extent during the first three decades of its Third Republic, roughly the period from 1871 to 1898, which saw gains on the Chinese mainland. Yet it is during this period, as John Noyes points out, that "enhanced by the defeats at the hands of the Prussian army, [t]he self-perception of French society as the leading bearer of civilization began to give way to an obsession with what went wrong with French domination." A favourite explanation was that French man had become over civilized and could consequently no longer compete with the physical vigour apparent in more primitive races inhabiting more severe environments.\(^\text{161}\)

A Europe-wide discourse of terminal national decline only intensified as the turn of the century approached, the most famous voice of which was the Austro-Hungarian Max Nordau, whom I mentioned earlier and who is perhaps best known for spreading the term fin de siècle. Nordau famously prophesies "a Dusk of Nations" to be well underway "in which all suns and stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is perishing in the

\(^{161}\) John K. Noyes, *The Mastery of Submission: Inventions of Masochism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997) 106. Noyes convincingly points to masochistic discourses, the political cult of masculine authoritarianism that Peter Gay calls "the Caesarist Virus" as well as to the literary thematization of alternative masculinity as responses to colonialism's inherently fraught nature. I assert that a discourse of masculine crisis could also have functioned as a way to manage the responsibility and guilt associated with the increasing acknowledgement of the inhumane atrocities – among these exploitation, rape and murder – that were endemic to European colonization.
midst of a dying world.\textsuperscript{162} This terminal decline was evinced by the long list of maladies facing European society, and about which volume upon volume was being written by psychiatrists, sociologists and sexologists; and if these diseases were not all specifically male, they were widely seen to be undermining man's ability to run the modern nation – and, crucially, to propagate its future. Chief among these was neurasthenia – with its symptoms of insomnia, exhaustion, anxiety and depression – the male equivalent of the female malady hysteria, and in so being implying the effeminization of men.\textsuperscript{163} Other maladies included alcoholism, prostitution and onanism, as masturbation was called; declining birth rates, the shorter stature of prospective soldiers, even increased spectatorship at sporting events; and these are just a sampling of the problems cited as evidence that the social organism had become dangerously imbalanced; and that the great European nations were consequently becoming decreasingly virile as a result of their men becoming so.

Many commentators – Nordau and German sociologist Georg Simmel among them – blamed the ever-increasing pace of modern life for European society's degeneration. European man was being constantly over-stimulated, worn out by his environment – by the constant "little shocks" of train travel; by the city's perpetual noises and its unavoidable artificial lights; by the constant expectation, whether of the arrival of the newspaper or the post, or of

\textsuperscript{162} Nordau 2.

\textsuperscript{163} George Beard, the American neurologist who first described the disease, considered it a primarily male affliction. And, as Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra points out, diagnoses of it in women were very rare. See: Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, "Introduction,"\textit{ Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War}, ed. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001) 24.
visitors. For sexologists, the new scientists of sexuality, the male perversions raging in contemporary Europe – masturbation and homosexuality chief among them – were "diseases of the imagination unhealthily nurtured by the nervous energy of the city."\textsuperscript{165}

A useless borderliner, lost in driftland; effete aesthete, increasingly reclusive and fetishistic; or the over-stimulated, psychologically unstable neurasthenic, worn out by the modern city. By the fin de siècle, European man if always already a floating signifier, a contested category, had entered into a relatively fixed relationship with ‘crisis’ and ‘decline.’ At the same time, depictions of the European male had become a site at which crucial contemporary questions met, among these whether nature was essentially hostile or beneficial, and if hostile, then how was such hostility to be tamed; if gender was firmly delineated by nature or open to the wilful pursuit of pleasure; and whether nations were sites of war or cooperation.

\textbf{2.8. The Role of Woman in the ‘Crisis of Masculinity’ during the Fin de Siècle}

Marina Nordera writes: “femininity and masculinity are not built independently but by a reciprocal relationship through progressive adjustments that depend on culture, on social conditioning, and on the imaginary of a given time.”\textsuperscript{166} The culture, social conditioning and imaginary to which Nordera refers all develop as, and through, discourse within which the

\textsuperscript{164} Nordau 38-40. See also Georg Simmel’s discussion of "metropolitan individuality" (which in his later work becomes "the blasé personality" or "neurasthenic personality") in "The Metropolis and the Modern Life," \textit{The Sociology of Georg Simmel} (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950) 10.

\textsuperscript{165} Braudy 335.

\textsuperscript{166} Marina Nordera. \textit{Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research} (London: Routledge, 2007) 172.
categories masculinity and femininity are contiguous nodal points, the meaning of each being dictated – by way of progressive adjustments – according to its relational value with the other.

The 19th century saw this relational dynamic problematized discursively, with femininity abnormally, and decentralized, in new ways, the goal of which was to normalize a certain conception of masculinity: that of being in crisis and thus responsible for social, cultural and political decline. "A key aspect of power's normalizing effect" as Todd Reeser points out "is the constructing of an abnormal other. For in order to create a norm, discourse must create or invent an anti-norm, which implies that the norm is the norm by opposition."167 In his The History of Sexuality Volume 1, Michel Foucault famously describes the discursive creation of the 'homosexual' for just this purpose. He writes, "We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized [...] less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself."168 The 'invert' was created through language as a problem for further investigation, one which required volume after volume of research that created our knowledge of homosexuality. Such a problem, as Reeser rightly puts it, is "invented in part to construct a group that is a non-problem, even if not articulated as such."169 And this invisible norm during the fin de siècle was a non-problem become problematic: the middle and upper class man, who had become effeminate and effete, whose identity had become so unstable under the pressures, and discursive struggle, of modernity. The creation of the

167 Reeser 32.

168 Foucault, History of Sexuality 43.

169 Reeser 32.
homosexual can be seen as "rear-guard action." In essence representing what a man should not be to discourage effeminate behaviour among men.

The abnormal 'other' woman served the same purpose – in defining what the feminine norm should be she served to reinforce the male norm in opposition to it. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, “To many late nineteenth and early twentieth century men, women seemed to be agents of an alien world that evoked anger and anguish. While to women in those years men appeared as aggrieved defenders of an indefensible order.”¹⁷⁰ This order had become completely normalized over the 19th century, had come to appear essential – to most men and women alike – and the increasingly self-reliant, visible, mobile and political woman, even if only a cultural fiction, upset it violently. By the 1870s, as Bram Dijkstra puts it, "the ever-increasing enclosure of women within the ornate walls of the middle-class household, and their ever-greater disenfranchisement from virtually all forms of intellectual and social choice – a pattern which had been developing for more than a century – had been virtually completed. The expulsion of the middle-class woman from participation in practical life had become fact."¹⁷¹ In light of this closure, embodiments of female autonomy were shocking to the majority.

As Rita Felski points out, perception during the 19th century saw: "(t)he modern individual (as) the autonomous male, free of familial and communal ties." While in reality, the 19th-century male had both communal and family commitments; his identity was nevertheless

¹⁷⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, No Man’s Land (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996) 1.

secured by the "free and competitive ideal," which in no way involved competition with women.\textsuperscript{172} Women were supposed to be at home with other women caring for children, men with other men labouring, administering, leading, and ruling. The 'New Woman, as she came to be called,' transgressed the dogma of separate spheres, which enforced a strict spatial gender divide: interior – and internal – spaces were feminine; the outside world masculine. In terms of character, masculinity entailed rationality, activity, decisiveness. Women were overly emotional and thus totally unfit for decision making of any consequence, and certainly not in the economic and political spheres.

Feminism and women's suffrage movements Europe-wide certainly challenged the traditional institutions underpinning bourgeois society: marriage, work and the nuclear family, and this challenge must have seemed increasingly threatening as a series of legislative acts materially improved the legal status of women throughout Europe during the 1880s and 90s.\textsuperscript{173} The level of anxiety embodied by a deluge of contemporary texts, which cover the full spectrum from low to high culture, was hyperbolic, however, and, as Peter Gay points out, heavily overdetermined.\textsuperscript{174} The women's suffrage movement in fact went relatively quiet throughout Europe until the end of the twentieth century's first decade, this being especially the case in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[173] In England, the Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1882, followed by the Guardianship of Infants Act in 1886; France re-established a woman's right to divorce in 1884. While gains were made more slowly in Germany, 1882 did see Germany's state sickness and death insurance extended to women, and women gained the right to an 11 hour workday in 1891. Emma Ihrer and Clara Zetkin also fought successfully for equal rights for women within the European trade union movement.
\end{footnotes}
France and Germany, where independent-minded women remained an isolated minority.\textsuperscript{175} Indeed, as late as 1910, German emperor William II could count on the vast majority of Germans agreeing that "the principal task of the German woman lies not in the field of assemblies and associations, nor in the achievement of supposed rights, with which they can do the same things as men, but in quiet work in the house and in the family."\textsuperscript{176}

The statistics also belie the extent to which the threat of the New Woman was a discursive construct. Across Europe, women still earned 50% or less than their male counterparts well into the 1890s; while higher education was possible for only a select few females. By 1897, only 844 women were studying at English universities, and far fewer in France – well under 600; while women enter Vienna University for the first time in 1897.\textsuperscript{177} In Germany, women were not permitted to attend the classical German secondary school (\textit{Gymnasium}), and consequently could not complete the school-leaving \textit{Abitur} exam necessary for university matriculation.\textsuperscript{178} While some faculties permitted women auditors as early as 1896,\textsuperscript{179} formal enrolment of women at German universities did not begin until 1900, with full-time study not allowed until later in the decade.\textsuperscript{180} Medicine, too, was still overwhelmingly male dominated across Europe: France boasted 95 practicing female doctors, England 87, the


\textsuperscript{176} Peter Gay, \textit{The Cultivation of Hatred} 319.

\textsuperscript{177} Albert Fuchs, \textit{Geistige Strörmungen in Österreich 1867-1918} (Vienna: Löcker, 1984) 144.

\textsuperscript{178} Marynel Ryan, "Between Essence and Expertise" (Diss. University of Minnesota, 2006) 47-48.

\textsuperscript{179} Gay, \textit{Education of the Senses} 220.

\textsuperscript{180} A 1908 parliamentary decree finally gave women the right to attend university full-time. See Patricia Mazon, \textit{Gender and the Modern Research University} (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2003) 83.
Netherlands but 1; while in Germany there were none until 1899, when the Bundesrat
(Germany's then very powerful lower house or parliament consisting of state representatives)
finally approved a bill that granted women the right to take the examinations necessary to
practice. 181

Much that was written and visualized during the fin de siècle sought to define women as
abnormal others – the feminist as the hysteric, the political actions of the suffragettes as the
irrational rants of mentally unstable and dangerous women, the "New Woman" as the bane of
modern civilization. In doing so, these representations sought to normalize bourgeois
masculinity.

As Mrs. C. Morgan Dockrell rightly realized already in 1896, the New Woman was largely
"a figment of the journalistic imagination,"182 and clearly a figment in wide circulation – one
that had spread, historian Michelle Perot observed in 1899, throughout Europe, and who could
be seen "from Vienna to London, from Munich to Heidelberg to Brussels to Paris."183 Images of
the New Woman were largely parodistic, with caustic caricatures common in periodicals in
Britain, France and Germany. During the 1890s, cartoons featuring the New Woman appeared
almost weekly in Britain's widely-read Punch,184 as well as in early British comic magazines.

These representations always implied the New Woman as a threat, although the level of

181 French and English numbers are from Showalter, 7. The Dutch statistic is for 1883 and taken from Gay, The
Cultivation of Hatred 363. For the German facts see: James C. Albisetti, "The Fight for Female Physicians in Imperial
Germany," Central European History 15.2 (1982) 352. See also: Angelique Richardson, The New Woman in Fiction

182 C. Morgan Dockrell, "Is the New Woman a Myth?" Humanitarian 8 (1896): 339-350.

183 Showalter 38.

184 Showalter 41.
implication varied greatly.

A common trope was the representation of a rationally-dressed New Woman, often shown smoking – traditionally a male activity exclusively – beside a man of far smaller stature. In one such example entitled “The Awful Effects of Velocipeding” a smoking woman, her uncovered legs flailing, has lost control of her bicycle – a signifier of newfound female mobility – causing it to collide with that of a man, half her size, who has been thrown off and into the air.

Of the more subtle variety is a cartoon from 1892, in which a New Woman in rational dress – she wears a tailored coat and bow tie – holds a top hat full of flowers. As Janet C. Meyers observes, while the intention here may have been to present this gesture as frivolous and trivial, and in so doing defuse the threat that rationalized dress presented, it in fact reveals deep-seated anxieties about the transgressive potential in the adoption of masculine sartorial elements. The top hat specifically lent its male wearer 6-7 inches of height, as well as providing a space within which to house cigarettes, letters or even contraband. Its re-appropriation serves to challenge male sartorial advantages, both symbolic and real, and in so doing challenges

---

gender norms. Yet again, a traditionally male space has been colonized by the ‘weaker’ sex.

London’s *The Yellow Book* also featured the New Woman frequently, and foresaw, and lamented, the "fatal repercussions [...] when women attempt to take the initiative, particularly in marriage, or attempt to assert themselves emotionally." The *femme nouvelle* likewise appeared regularly in the most popular Paris weekly *L’Illustration*—inevitably in ribald caricature as either gargantuan *amazone* or sexually-ambiguous *homesse*. While in Germany, the New Women was satirized by Bruno Paul and Eduard Thöny in the pages of *Simplicissimus* as early as 1896.

*Literary* demonization of emancipated women was also widespread, as writers across Europe reacted anxiously against the perceived threat to masculine norms. 1882 saw the anonymous publication in England of the anti-feminist dystopian novel *The Revolt of Man*, in which an inversion of traditional masculine hegemony has women holding all positions of power, while men are completely subordinated—expected to cultivate their physical appearance towards securing marriage to successful matrons. In Sweden, August Strindberg’s infamous, and influential, misogyny was predicated on the perceived threat to masculinity

---


189 Stanley Appelbaum, *Simplicissimus: 180 Drawings from the Famous German Weekly* (New York: Dover, 1975) 118-126, 143-164. And, these are by no means the first caricatures of their kind in Germany. As early as 1844, the widely read satirical magazine *Fliegende Blätter* caricatured emancipated women. See Peter Gay, *Education* 195.

190 The novel was later attributed to British novelist and historian Walter Besant. See: Walter Besant, *The Revolt of Man* (London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1882).
posed by women who were, like his Miss Julie, “brought up with all those new ideas of sex
equality, women’s rights and so on.” In Strindberg’s opinion—expressed unequivocally in a
January 1887 letter to his friend Heidenstram—there weren’t any real men left in Sweden,
where, as a result of the movement for the emancipation of women, society had become
“weak” and “female.” In the cases of both Besant and Strindberg the connection between
assertive women, softened men and the demise of modern society highlighted earlier is clear.

And Besant and Strindberg were far from alone among Europe’s writers in responding to
a perceived crisis of masculinity with a reactive discourse that tended to demonize the New
Woman. In fin de siècle France, as Peter Gay points out, male artists tended to portray “woman
as vampire, man as victim.” Exemplary is the Goncourt brothers’ 1867 “all-devouring” female
protagonist in Manette Salomon; while Emile Zola’s Germinal offers an extreme expression of
male anxiety when a group of enraged miners’ wives literally castrate a usurious grocer. Zola
and the Goncourt brothers’ misogyny was not new, however, nor were they alone in expressing
it—as Gay points out, many French novels by men from the period feature femme fatales
who offer only fleeting erotic happiness and, ultimately, permanent destruction for their male
lovers.

In other French novels – by the likes of Flaubert, Balzac and Huysmans – the prostitute is
central; taking up this role, as Charles Bernheimer observes, “not only because of her

---


\[193\] While British writers were not as extreme, in addition to Besant’s female elite in The Revolt of Man, Hagard’s She (1887), Wilde’s Salome (1891), MacDonald’s Lilith (1895), Stoker’s Dracula (1897) and Gissing’s In the Year of Jubilee (1894) represent prominent examples that all feature either demonized or marginalized female figures.
prominence as a social phenomenon but, more important, because of her function in stimulating artistic strategies to control and dispel her fantasmatic threat to male mastery. She fascinates to the degree that that fascination can produce structures to contain, sublimate, or metaphorize the contaminating decomposition of her sexual ferment.” Bernheimer also argues convincingly that the prostitute represents a nodal point at which literary, medical, and administrative discourses converge and cross fertilize, with the massive study of public hygienist Alexandre Parent-Duchatelet thus demanding analysis alongside Huysman’s novel A Rebours.

Bernheimer again:

> As the century progresses, the growing fear of contamination is given medical justification by theories of degenerate heredity and syphilitic infection. In the imagination of a Huysmans, the entire organic world is diseased and decomposing, and the syphilitic prostitute is the morbid emblem of this collapse. Confronted by the pathological erosion, the writer must construct art against nature, against woman, against the organic.\(^{194}\)

In German-speaking Europe, prominent authors were also expressing anxiety that intensified as the Jahrhundertwende approached. This anxiety ranged in the nature of its expression; from relatively mild perturbation to pronounced misogyny, which was again frequently coded in anti-organic terms.

In response to plans by an association of literati to include women authors, German novelist Wilhelm Raabe responded with light derision in 1878: he found the idea "a little

comical," and continued: "It sounds a little like a certain fear of the good little women." Raabe's "a certain fear" finds more intense expression in one of the widely-read German-language authors of the closing decades of the 19th-century, the Austrian Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose Venus in Furs, first published 1870, contains a story within a story relating the exploits of a man who submits himself willingly to sexual degradation and domination at the hands of both a noble woman and the three African women she recruits. Masoch's narrator, when explicitly asked for it, summarizes the moral of his tale thus: "That woman, as nature has created her and as man is at present educating her, is his enemy. She can only be his slave or his despot, but never his companion."

Whereas Sacher-Masoch ends Venus on a progressive note that foresees an end to woman's threat in greater female emancipation – "when she has the same rights as he and his is equal in education and work" – other German-language authors characterized women in terms not so easily to be explained or assimilated: as animalistic vamp and black widow – in Erdgeist (1895) and Die Büchse der Pandora (1904), both by Frank Wedekind; or as vengeful hysterical – in Hoffmannsthal’s Elektra (1904) – or split personality, half gentile lady, half whore – as embodied by Maria-Mariquita in the novel fragment Andreas, also by Hoffmannsthal (1907).

In another contemporary German-language text, Oskar Kokoschka’s Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen (1909), the prevailing misogynistic attitudes crystallize in disturbing abstracted form intensified by accompanying images of a violent intersexual struggle – a conflict the text asserts

---


197 Sacher-Masoch 130.
to be incomprehensible and eternal.\textsuperscript{198} As Claude Cernuschi points out, as much as \textit{Mörder} is a pivotal work in the development of the aesthetics of Expressionism, one which influences the development of theatre and film after World War 1, it is also a profoundly misogynistic work whose "underlying ideological assumptions are deeply grounded in, and inseparable from, the deleterious anti-feminist constructs of fin-de-siècle culture."\textsuperscript{199}

The language of myth played an important role in these anti-feminist constructions, a fact embodied clearly by both Kokoschka's synechdoche representing all women in \textit{Mörder} and Hofmannsthal's titular Elektra, if less explicitly so by Wedekind's Lulu.\textsuperscript{200} As we have already seen, the woman demanding emancipation – the "New Woman" – was frequently represented as amazon or serpent in the satirical magazines of the time; and, such representations also abounded in the contemporary fine arts, as Dijkstra convincingly shows in his \textit{Idols of Perversity}.\textsuperscript{201} However, such mythological demonization was not merely invective. Contemporary discourses, chief among them Friedrich Nietzsche's influential \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, argued myth's epistemological and social legitimacy, attributing to it the power to reveal truth and define healthy societies – with the widely-revered Hellenic Greece, at least for the early Nietzsche, as model society. For this Nietzsche "only a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies a whole cultural movement" and mythology provides the "signs (that)
help man interpret his life.”  

Myth embodied an intensification of truth for Nietzsche, and many fin de siècle writers and artists followed Nietzsche’s lead in incorporating myth into systems making truth claims, especially about society, and frequently about the causes of its perceived decline. This shows that theories of gender were filtered through a mix of scientific and mythic figures. Woman was represented both as syphilitic prostitute, the organic source of disease and degradation, and as technological alien – on a bicycle as lampooned in satirical publications throughout Europe – but also as mythical threat: as serpent, harpy, siren or amazon. Likewise a male hero could be an artist, as was the case for Nietzsche, a man of science – as in the cases of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson – or mythological figure, as was the case with Siegfried and Hermann (Arminius) in late-19th century Germany.

2.9. Otto Weininger: ‘Masculinity in Crisis’ As Total Explanation

Chief among those writers who based their arguments about sexuality on a mixture of myth, science and aesthetics, and who were certainly also concerned with the “Woman Question,” was the Austrian Otto Weininger, author of one of the most influential texts of the first decade of the twentieth century: Geschlecht und Charakter (Sex and Character).

Geschlecht, as I will refer to it from now on, is also the work that perhaps most clearly embodies what I have argued to be defining features of fin de siècle culture: intense discursive production and cross-fertilization, which was nevertheless regulated by three dominant ideas that tended to be associated semantically: crisis, masculinity and decline. I also believe Geschlecht has a claim to being the first theoretical explanation of gendered behaviour

---


203 Cernuschi 127.
according to an essentially discursive model.

First published in 1903, Geschlecht had been translated into all the major languages by the end of the decade, and had seen 25 German language editions – including a popular edition – by 1932. 204 The work was not only a popular success, it proved extremely influential on contemporary intellectuals throughout Europe and beyond, a fact the modern reader finds difficult to accept considering the blatant and egregious misogyny and anti-Semitism it contains. The historian John Toews speaks on behalf of many twentieth century commentators before him in finding it “difficult to imagine how such a cartoonishly hyperbolic, pretentiously philosophical, maniacally simplifying book throbbing with uncontrolled misogynistic and anti-Semitic feeling could become the focus of such intense concern for a broad and sophisticated audience of artists, writers and scholars.” 205 Only fairly recently have scholars begun trying to understand it as more than a woman-hating, Jew-hating, self-hating rant, which is to say as a text that brings together many ideas held widely during the fin de siècle, and especially among Austrian intellectuals, and in very novel ways. 206 This is not to excuse the work’s misogyny and anti-Semitism, of course; rather to warn against being blinded by these attitudes to what the text reveals about its time and especially the discourses at work in defining knowledge then.

Weininger’s cornerstone assertion in Geschlecht is that human beings are essentially bisexual, with sexuality determined on a sliding scale at the cellular level. Male and female


"plasms" inhere in every individual cell, the ratio between these determining an individual's biology, anatomy, physiognomy and character. Every individual will possess both masculine and feminine qualities, with the ratio between these determining everything from one's ability to reason – a masculine quality – to one's desire for company – a feminine one.

Weininger writes:

There are no living beings that can bluntly be described as being unisexual and of one definite sex. Rather, reality fluctuates between two points at neither of which an empirical individual can be encountered, but between which every individual has its place somewhere. It is the task of science to determine the position of every single being between these two morphological blueprints.\(^{207}\)

The masculine pole embodies the strongest virtues, and endows the fittest and noblest qualities: consciousness, activity, productivity, morality and logical thought. The more masculine one is, the more spiritual, where spirituality is understood as the domain of the mind, the realm of genius. The feminine pole embodies the basest virtues: unconsciousness, passivity, unproductivity, amorality and the inability to think logically. The more feminine one is, the weaker, more frivolous, more physical, and crucially more sexual one is. Individual greatness is contingent on a high level of personal masculinity for Weininger. Consequently, the more masculine a society – which is to say, the higher the quantity of masculinity as measured across both sexes, all races and classes – the greater its cultural and social achievements.

The extent to which feminine qualities come to exude influence in society determines its cultural potential, then. In a rather imprecise way, Weininger applies a key scientific assumption

\(^{207}\) Weininger 15
of his age here: that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, that the development of the individual repeats the evolution of the species. The more feminized a society's individuals, the more feminine the society, which is to say the baser, less moral and less spiritual – in a word, the more degenerate – that society. This was the type of effeminate society Weininger saw all around him – one dominated by licentiousness and cultural decadence – and his suicide shortly after the publication of Geschlecht can be interpreted as his response – either as escape or, as Bram Dijkstra puts it "first token sacrificial gesture in a process he hoped might ultimately lead to wholesale 'gynicide'."²⁰⁸

As Chandak Sengoopta observes, Geschlecht is “particularly heteronomous and explicitly, almost spectacularly, dependent on other texts, other intellectual traditions, and a whole multiplicity of discourses.”²⁰⁹ Another way of putting this is to see Weininger as a conduit through which many – if not most – of the competing discourses of his time are channeled, among these anti-Semitism, scientific racism and biologism, German idealism, especially in its contemporary neo-Kantian form, psychological introspection versus empiricism, and the quest for sexual liberation.

Philosophical, psychological, economic, national, racial, and gender discourses converge in Geschlecht in a masculinity defined negatively, that is, by the qualities possessed or lacked by its Others: the derivative communist, but especially the Jew and the woman. Both Jew and woman, for Weininger, lack the experience of selfhood, that is, lack individuality, and consequently want for personality; nor can they be ethical, or political, as these qualities are

²⁰⁸ Dijkstra 221.
²⁰⁹ Sengoopta 3.
contingent on the sense of responsibility inherent to selfhood.

Weininger clearly draws on the neo-Kantianism that dominated German academic philosophy from 1870 to the first world war, and specifically on contemporary anti-psychological accounts of Kant's "subjective unity of consciousness," which are articulated, albeit tangentially, in his first *Critique*. Regarding morality,"(t)he only conceivable ethic" for Weininger entails "Truthfulness, purity, fidelity, (and) sincerity toward oneself." Consequently, the woman and the Jew, who have weak senses of self, that is "weak personalities," are less capable of truthfulness, purity, fidelity and sincerity. Neither can the Jew nor the woman differentiate effectively between good and evil because, and presumably Weininger bases his argument on Kant again here, they are transcendentally incapable, that is are lacking in the *a priori* means by which to experience good and evil as clear and distinct perceptions. Among the more curious consequences of "wanting for personality" for Weininger is an incapacity for humour; a capacity which, he argues elsewhere, both Jews and women lack. Similarly curious is the fact that neither can be "a gentleman" in Weininger's eyes.

The same argument regarding distinct impressions in consciousness disallows both Jew and the woman an adequate understanding of that most important of discrete entities in modernity: the nation state. This dooms Zionism to failure, Weininger believes, but also implies

---


211 Weininger 2005, 139. Italics are Weininger's own.

212 As he put it: "Jews and women are devoid of humour, but addicted to mockery." Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London: Heinemann, 1906) 319.

213 Weininger 278.
the ruinous consequences of allowing either Jews or women into government, which he fears will increasingly be the case.\textsuperscript{214} Regarding economics and politics, the Jew – like the woman – is ill-suited for property ownership and concomitantly is inherently predisposed to communism on account of his "wanting for personality [...] and tendency to adhere together," with wanted personality, again, referring to an underdeveloped sense of individuality.\textsuperscript{215} Nor could either a woman or a Jew achieve true greatness, that is reach the status of a genius, as this is also tied to levels of individuality beyond the capacity of either the woman or the Jew.

Weininger's invective and tendency to use the definite "the Jew," "the Woman," and "the Aryan," make it sound as if he treats social groups in absolute terms. However, it is actually the extent of an individual's femininity – and their necessarily attendant lack of masculinity – that determines their intellectual, ethical and political capabilities. To state that the Jew is "more saturated with femininity than the Aryan" is to argue that Jews and Aryans generally are too feminine – which Weininger certainly considered the case in fin de siècle Europe – and consequently lacking intellectually, ethically and politically; but it is also to claim that Jews are more likely to be too feminine, and consequently intellectually, ethically and politically less capable. And for women this is also obviously the case. Masculinity, then, is the quality the possession of great quantities of which translates into individual greatness; and, for Weininger, such great individuals would inevitably be male, white and neither Jewish nor communists. The problem is for Weininger that there are far too few such men in contemporary Europe – too few “geniuses” – and far too many feminine men, whether Jews or decadent “Aryans,” and further

\textsuperscript{214} Weininger 1906, 307-308.

\textsuperscript{215} Weininger 1906, 307-308.
that women have too much influence in society, politically and especially sexually.

Ford Maddox Ford could attest in bemused retrospect – writing in 1919 – to the enduring influence worldwide of the argument I have just summarized. In his words, *Sex and Character*, which first appeared in English in 1906, “had (soon after) spread through the serious male society of England as if it had been an epidemic.” Its “international vogue” extended to France, Germany, and even to “the United States,” continued Maddox Ford somewhat sarcastically, “where men never talk about women.”

Maddox Ford was no admirer of Weininger. Many of the era’s brightest minds were, however, among them the writers Karl Kraus, Stefan Zweig, Georg Trakl, Robert Musil, August Strindberg, D.H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein and James Joyce; the composer Arnold Schoenberg; and the philosophers Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein, who listed Weininger as one of the ten most influential figures on his own thought, and regularly recommended *Geschlecht* to his peers, perhaps helps us understand why it was so highly regarded by so many at the beginning of the twentieth century. In a July 23, 1931 letter to his fellow Cambridge philosopher G.E. Moore, who clearly was not impressed upon reading *Geschlecht*, Wittgenstein describes Weininger’s achievement as he sees it: “It is true that he is fantastic but he is *great* and fantastic. It isn’t necessary or rather not possible to agree with him but the greatness lies in that with which we disagree. It is his enormous mistake

---

216 See: Robert Byrnes, "Jewish Sexual Types behind Molly and Leopold Bloom," *James Joyce Quarterly* 34.3 (Spring 1997): 270.

What may account for the widespread intellectual admiration for Weininger is the scope of his system – the ‘enormity’ and ‘greatness’ to which Wittgenstein refers here. Weininger is committed to a total understanding of gender, that is, to theorizing gender as a fully explanatory continuum. In as much as this is the case he is asserting himself as “genius,” as the defining character of such an individual in action is to be able to see and understand the whole in all its complexity. Geschlecht, as its subtitle announces, is a prinzipelle Untersuchung, committed to establishing fundamental principles, and indeed down to the cellular level, down to those most fundamental signifiers of behaviour that are ultimately responsible on a macro-scale for the nature of culture and society.

As much as the systematic scope of the work may have generated admiration, the fact that Weininger locates bisexuality (or, rather, bi-gender) at the cellular level constitutes a move that Wittgenstein may well have appreciated – in as much as language strictly delimited human understanding for him – and that the likes of Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe certainly would. Weininger’s decoupling of masculinity/femininity from sex, and recasting it on the level of what is essentially a semantic model is a very modern approach to gender theoretically, one that anticipates discursive understandings of gendered behaviour. Once we see beyond – or rather below – the biologized language that Weininger employs – specifically that of ‘plasms’ – it becomes apparent that gendered behaviour was for him determined at the level of code. Being biologically male or female, which is to say possessing the male or female sex organ, did not

---

determine gendered behaviour for him. What did was the specific form in which differentially
inflected units were combined in any given human, which in turn determined different forms of
consciousness across a male/female continuum, which in turn determined behaviour.

Like his fin de siècle contemporary Rémy de Gourmont, with whom I began this chapter,
Weininger is a discourse analyst well ahead of his time. Whereas Gourmont is concerned with
the functioning of discourse – the fixing and limiting scope of nodal points within what Friedrich
Kittler, who similarly saw our bodies as discursively determined, would call a “discourse
network” – Weininger’s interest lies in the formative relationship between discourse and
behaviour by way of biology as intermediate means. Weininger’s purview is not the limited
scope of signification, as for Gourmont, but the effects of this limited scope on the human body
and consequently on behaviour. For Weininger, Europe’s social and cultural freefall is not a
result of there being too many women and Jews, and not enough Aryan geniuses, in power.
Europe’s terminal decline is, at its source, a result of the ‘feminine’ discursive coding that has
resulted in this reality.\(^\text{219}\)

\(^{219}\) I am indebted to John Noyes for providing ideas in his comments that led to the preceding argument.
Chapter 3. Honour Lost, All’s Lost! – Austrian Masculinity at the Fin de Siècle in Two Works

by Arthur Schnitzler

In this chapter I will examine two prose texts by a Viennese contemporary of Otto Weininger’s – a writer Peter Gay has described as both the most interesting writer of his time and an especially credible authority on the bourgeois world of fin de siècle Austria-Hungary: the physician and literary modernist Arthur Schnitzler. The texts I have chosen embody the “extraordinary [...] cross-fertilization between forms of knowledge” that Ledger and Luckhurst argue to be one of the defining features of fin de siècle culture; and they do so in a manner that holds Austrian masculinity – in bourgeois forms both military and civilian – to account. This is to say that these works don’t alert the reader to a crisis of identity, they rather interrogate its discursive roots; and with the sharpest of literary tools.

The first story, Leutnant Gustl, is arguably Schnitzler’s most important prose work. It is also a work generally acknowledged to be, as Klaus Michael Bogdal puts it, “a document

\[220\text{Ledger and Luckhurst xxi.}\]
symptomatic of the crisis in the image of masculinity” at the time.\textsuperscript{221} There is truth in Bogdal’s assessment here, if he didn’t intend to communicate it: namely, that \textit{Leutnant Gustl} “is symptomatic of a general contemporary trend to create an image of masculinity as in crisis.” Schnitzler’s portrayals – his images of masculinity – differentiate themselves from those of his contemporaries, I would argue, precisely in being satires. It’s Austrian masculinity as an anachronistic construct that inflames Schnitzler’s ire; with Gustl as exemplar of Austrian masculinity performed as folly: lacking in sense or purpose, ornamental and socially costly – both in the micro- and macro- senses of the social, which is to say within and beyond the diegesis.

The second story I examine, “Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief,” is a much shorter, lesser known and largely overlooked work critically than is \textit{Leutnant Gustl}. That more interest has not been shown in it is, I feel, a shame, as it proves under scrutiny – especially in terms of the number of cross-fertilizing/interacting discourses at work in it – to be one of Schnitzler’s richest and most intriguing texts.

\textit{Gustl} and “Thameyer,” as I will refer to the two stories from now on, have three obvious, if nevertheless important, things in common. Firstly, both were published in 1900, namely during the year following the publication of \textit{Traumdeutung}, in which Sigmund Freud first formulates his theory of the human unconscious. I will not offer a psychoanalytic analysis of \textit{Gustl} here, at least not explicitly. For my purposes, Freud’s ideas represent only one of several discourses important to the staging of Gustl’s crisis of identity, the most important of

which is the honour code governing the thinking and behaviour of the Austrian officer; or, more precisely, this code as Schnitzler interprets it.

“Thameyer,” although written during the same year, has not tended to be interpreted as having been influenced by *Traumdeutung*. There is good reason to consider the text strongly influenced by Freud’s ideas on the unconscious, however, and as such I will consider Freud more directly when I examine “Thameyer,” and so not until the second half of this chapter.

The second similarity between these texts is a narrative consideration; namely that both works are first person narratives that allow for no narrative commentary whatsoever. They are nevertheless both works that offer scathing critiques of contemporary society through critique of their protagonists, men who reveal their stupidity, and emotional fragility, through their thoughts, words and actions, and who in so doing indict the groups they represent: the Austrian officer and bourgeois minor official. Schnitzler does not tell us what these men represent – he simply shows them in action. Unlike Freud, then, he does not argue an interpretation of symptoms as lengthy narrative commentary. The reader is only shown the symptoms. The prognosis is her responsibility. (However, to be fair, she cannot help but come to Schnitzler’s desired prognosis – so egregiously forthcoming are both protagonists with their character flaws, prejudices and emotional insecurities.)

*Gustl* and “Thameyer” share a third commonality: the protagonists in both are planning to commit suicide the following morning for the sake of honour. The important part of this shared decision is its motivation – the adherence to an outdated code of honour – that Schnitzler considers nonsensical and wishes to reveal as being so.
3.1. The Anachronistic Habitus of the Austrian Officer and Its Consequences for Lieutenant Gustl (Or: Old Habitus Dies Hard)

*Gustl* has tended to be interpreted as either a work of biting social satire or as an examination of its protagonist’s unstable psychological state. (It is both.) The former interpretive trend began almost immediately after its initial publication in Vienna’s *Neue Freie Presse* in December of 1900. Schnitzler’s novella was considered by many contemporaries to be a direct and intentional affront to the military establishment. The Hapsburg army certainly considered it such, striking a military honour commission that soon stripped Schnitzler of his auxiliary officer’s rank in the *k.u.k. Offizierkorps*, the same organization within which *Gustl* is a Lieutenant.

As for the prevalent critical tendency to interpret *Gustl* as a prose study of an unstable psyche, two linked explanations are germane. The first of which I have already mentioned; namely the publication just over a year before *Gustl*’s release, in the fall of 1899, of Freud’s *Traumdeutung*. The second is the fact that *Gustl* is the first work of German language literature written as a pure stream of consciousness interior monologue, a fact on which much of its fame – not undeservedly – rests. We can only speculate as to whether Schnitzler explicitly intended *Gustl* to be a literary experiment in the portrayal of the human psyche as his fellow Viennese doctor Freud had recently articulated it. Schnitzler nowhere explicitly attests to this. Beyond speculation is that Schnitzler read *Traumdeutung* in March 1900 and wrote *Gustl* four months later, from 13 – 17 July of the same year, making it hard not to consider the former strongly

---

influential on the latter, especially considering Schnitzler had studied medicine and had also been following Freud’s work with interest throughout the 1890s. Beyond speculation also is that *Gustl*, as Thomas Freedman points out, has repeatedly “been analyzed as a work of psychology in which the titular protagonist’s ‘free association’ flow of thoughts reflects the workings of the Freudian unconscious.” Without doubt, *Gustl* is a text especially amenable to psychological interpretation; and one certainly needs to come to terms with the way *Gustl* associates his thoughts in order to understand how he acts – or, crucially, fails to act.

The social and psychological are not mutually exclusive interpretive approaches, of course. The social and the psychological are inextricably linked, and mutually determining, spheres of human experience – a fact both Freud and Schnitzler certainly understood. In this interpretation I will bring these spheres together in the figure of *Gustl*; or, put otherwise, I will argue that *Gustl*’s anxiety attack/crisis of identity/nervous breakdown and attendant loss of nerve are communicated in the language of the psyche but must also be understood as socially motivated. At least, they must be so understood if the reader is to get as much out of the text as Schnitzler intended. We sell him short when we read him either as only psychologist or social critic. He is, at least as evinced by *Gustl*, both, and furthermore he wishes the reader to follow his lead in questioning the relationship between the psyche and society.

I should also state explicitly that *Gustl* shows us the crisis of identity of a character type – not a random individual, who just happens to be an officer. Schnitzler offers an argument pro toto,

---


intends Gustl as a representative figure. As focussed as the narrative is on – or rather “in” – Gustl; and as exceptionally stupid, self-absorbed, and delusional about his social standing, as he certainly shows himself to be personally; the work within which he stars is, I would argue, at the same time not really about him specifically. Schnitzler is arguing by unavoidable analogy that Gustl’s actions represent a group of men who adhere to a code that he (Schnitzler) considers at least anachronistic, if it ever made sense. Were he not, he would not have Gustl shown in as much detail as he does what an essentially meaningless existence not only he leads, but which men of his kind lead. Perhaps Gustl is the extreme example – identifies with the guiding code of honour more than the average officer of the time – but to see him as a random exception, I feel, is without support.

As Gustl opens, its titular protagonist is at the opera. Gustl’s colleague Kopetzky gave him a ticket, undoubtedly because he did not wish to experience the boredom and increasing agitation that Gustl is currently experiencing as the story begins. Kopetzky, we soon learn, is currently in his element, and presumably that of his caste, in a tavern enjoying a cigar: “Der Kopetzky hat’s gut, der sitzt jetzt längst im Wirthaus und raucht seine Virginia! ...” Gustl, by contrast, doesn’t have it so good, being stuck in a theatre loge from which he cannot wait to flee. He lies to himself that this is not the case – that he is in fact enjoying himself; and he may even believe it for a moment, but the reader knows he is being disingenuous.

The story’s first two sentences establish clearly Gustl’s combined experience of boredom and anxiety: “Wie lang wird den das noch dauern? Ich muss auf die Uhr schauen ...”

225 Schnitzler 8.
Gustl wants the performance to be over. He simultaneously worries that his behaviour may be considered inappropriate. He also wants to get a proper look at a beautiful girl in a box opposite, but his efforts to objectify her prove futile, as he lacks the right tool: an opera-glass. His effort to assert his male gaze thus fails, and consequently his anxiety grows. He soon becomes paranoid that a man opposite is in fact looking at him, having identified him as bored, as not belonging: “Was guckt mich denn der Kerl dort immer an? Mir scheint, der merkt, dass ich mich langweil’ und nicht herg’hör.” The performance ends. Gustl tells himself, not for the first time, how enjoyable it was: “So lass’ ich mir g’fallen – sehr schön ... Wunderschön ist’s g’wesen.” As he leaves, Gustl remarks on the Jewish noses he sees all around him: “Jüdin ... Noch eine ... Es ist doch fabelhaft, da sind auch die Hälfte Juden.” Bored, agitated, disingenuous, self-absorbed, chauvinistic – these, I would argue, are the operative words for describing the Leutnant Gustl – a man uncomfortably out of his element and frustratingly unable to assert himself – that we get to know over the novella’s first few pages.

Gustl’s central scene occurs in the opera house’s cloakroom, and involves an altercation with Habetswallner, ‘a master baker’ and imposing physical specimen – we are told on more than one occasion; and who is clearly also a far less nervous man, as he remains remarkably

\[^{226}\text{Schnitzler 7.}\]
\[^{227}\text{Schnitzler 8.}\]
\[^{228}\text{Schnitzler 8.}\]
\[^{229}\text{Schnitzler 9.}\]
\[^{230}\text{Gustl refers to him as “ten times stronger than me” – “er ist zehnmal stärker als ich” – (Schnitzler 16); and as “a brawny fellow, a real Hercules”– “ein Kraftmensch ist er, ein Jagendorfer” (22).}\]
calm, and in control, throughout the entire exchange with Gustl. The baker initially simply asks for a little patience, which the already agitated Gustl interprets as an insult and to which he overreacts: to the Baker’s “Nur ein bisserl Geduld!” Gustl responds with “Machen Sie doch Platz!” To his “Stoßen Sie nicht!” he retorts “Sie, halten Sie das Maul!” The story’s pivotal moment sees the baker grab hold of and then refuse to release the hilt of Gustl’s sabre, an obvious symbol of the officer’s inextricably linked military and male virility, in response to Gustl’s rudeness; and in so doing he not only disarms Gustl, he also ensnares him in a double bind of deadly consequence.

The code of honour governing a man of Gustl’s position demands a response to such an affront. Were the offending party a member of Gustl’s class he could be challenged to a duel, the outcome of which would almost certainly leave both men without serious injury and, crucially, with their honour – and consequently their masculinity – intact. We never witness a duel in Gustl – that we cannot is the point.

A ritualistic fight that becomes during the nineteenth century the most evident representation of bourgeois male honour, the duel is best understood as a collective practice; as the means through which the collective virility of an entire class was asserted. “The point of the duel,” as Randall Collins observes, “was more to demonstrate one’s status-group membership than to establish dominance over one’s opponent. Thus it was less important to win than to display courage.” This point is echoed by Jankowski, who characterizes the loss of

---

231 Schnitzler 15.

a fair – and thus ‘honourable’ fight – as preserving one’s status in an honour group rather than injuring it. It is as proof of courage understood as being able to take punishment that the much coveted duelling scar – or Renommierschmiss – should be understood. A clear facial scar received during a duel was a social signifier of honour, class and bravery, but not in the sense that it denoted one’s physical strength or ability. The crucial thing was to prove one could take punishment – the more the better – and return to society with one’s masculinity clear for all to see. The deeper the scar, then, the better, which led some to stuff the wound with irritants such as horse hair to worsen its appearance. The Renommierschmiss is an extraordinary example of the priority of discourse to both behaviour and material reality. It is not the event which secures male identity – as a shared characteristic – but an arbitrary signifier inscribed on the body as text; and not even a signifier of an event, rather of a non-event, one that is, or at least increasingly became, a ruse. This point is emphasized by the vain practice of enlarging the scar through manual irritation – in a sense the equivalent of capitalizing a Letter; of italicizing a word.

To be fair, there was still risk in duelling, but it was by Gustl’s time very limited. If, as Ute Frevert observes, the goal of the duel as part of the civilizing process was to make “violence [...] predictable, calculable and limited,” the ritual as practiced by the bourgeoisie had realized this goal. As Ben Merriman points out, it was extremely rare that a duel would result in serious injury or death; with it being the case that in some countries where duelling was widespread

---


fatalities had become unknown by the nineteenth century, mostly on account of the purposeful use of outdated pistols and modified, usually intentionally blunted, swords. At the risk of putting it too sharply, nineteenth century duelling was rigged such that confrontations almost inevitably ended with a net increase in both bourgeois virility and honour. Gustl himself—who, we learn, has a sabre duel with a doctor the following day—admits to having no fear of the ritual per se. He will more than likely be fine, he tells himself—cold blood is the key. What he fears is that the doctor may seriously injure him out of a lack of skill; that is, not on account of lacking honour or masculinity, but rather out of a lack of practice. A regimental colleague was almost killed by an amateur, Gustl relates, likely a “socialist” (and so ideologically unsuited to the practice), but certainly a man who had never held a sword before. That the doctor and ‘socialist’ are more dangerous opponents stems, one must assume, from the fact they are not officers, and consequently not experienced fencers, or, put otherwise, are unfamiliar with the rules of the game. A fellow officer makes a better duelling partner because he is a more skilled swordsman, understands how a duel should function, and is thus less likely to make a costly mistake during the ritual’s execution. Such a man was Lieutenant Bisanz, against whom Gustl fought his very first duel, the night before which he admits to having been anxious, but from which Gustl emerged unscathed, in spite of losing: “(N)ervos bin ich gewesen in der Nacht vorher … Freilich, der Oberlieutenant Bisanz war ein ernster Gegner. – Und doch, nichts ist mir

---


236 Schnitzler 11. “Das Wichstigste ist: kaltes Blut,” Gustl asserts. Providing he keeps his cool, he believes he has nothing to fear!
One can well imagine the experienced Bisanz taking it easy on the young Gustl; his “seriousness” as an opponent intended ironically here (by Schnitzler if not by Gustl).

The situation that Gustl now faces is more dangerous than any duel, as his ‘honour,’ and with it his ‘masculinity,’ cannot count on the protection assured by the structured ritual of the duel. The reason for this being that the baker is petty bourgeois and hence *satisfaktionsunfähig*, an unworthy – and thus more dangerous – opponent, precisely on account of being lower classed. Gustl thus suddenly has a real problem that leaves him with two quasi-choices: an immediate and violent response, which would at best cause a scene, at worst see the physically superior baker give him a hiding (and so really cause a scene); or to ignore the offense, which in principle was deemed honourable according to the governing code – providing the offender was of lower social status, the case here – but in social reality would see Gustl branded a coward in the eyes of his peers, and thus dishonourable and unmanly.²³⁸

An obviously agitated Gustl does nothing. He can suddenly barely speak;²³⁹ and does so not at all after the much larger, stronger and older man cuts him off to – quietly, and quite calmly – put him in his place:

*Ja, was ist denn das? Ja, was macht er denn? Mir scheint gar ... ja, meiner Seel’, er hat den Griff von meinem Säbel in der Hand ... Ja, ist der Kerl verrückt? ... „Sie Herr ...“*

*Sie, Herr Leutnant, sein S’ jetzt ganz stad.”*
Was sagt er da? Um Gottes willen, es hat’s doch keiner gehört? Nein, er red’t ganz leise

... Ja, warum laßt er denn meinen Säbel nicht weg ... nur keinen Skandal jetzt! ... Is nicht am End’ der Major hinter mir? ... Bemerkt’s nur niemand, daß er den Griff von meinem Säbel hält? Er red’t ja zu mir! Was red’t er denn?

„Herr Leutnant, wenn Sie das geringste Aufsehen machen, so zieh’ ich den Säbel aus der Scheide, zerbrech’ ihn und schick’ die Stück an Ihr Regimentkommando.

Verstehen Sie mich, Sie dummer Bub?“  

Schnitzler brilliantly captures his already agitated protagonist’s suddenly frantic consciousness stylistically through the extensive use of repetition, short statements and questions, and ellipsis here. And with a purpose, of course, as when we compare Gustl’s frenetic thought process with the relative ease and composure with which the baker – Gustl’s social inferior – speaks, the authoritative tone in which he does so, and the threat he feels confident enough to make, even calling the Lieutenant “a young fool” and threatening to snap his sword (!) in two – Schnitzler makes it clear whose identity/sense of self is currently more stable. The baker has a clearer idea both of who he is and what needs to be done under the circumstances. Gustl, a man able to remain cold blooded during a duel experiences here a rush of blood to the head. He is gripped by what modern psychiatry would call an anxiety or panic attack, but which during Schnitzler’s time may have been diagnosed as a case of male hysteria.  

240 Schnitzler 15.

241 That Schnitzler intended Gustl as a case study of male hysteria is exactly what Thomas Freeman argues. See: Freeman 41-51.
As already noted, it is no coincidence that these events transpire at the opera – an interstitial space in both gender and class terms that by the fin de siècle is far removed from its exclusively noble roots, a venue where a baker now rubs shoulders, literally, with the likes of Gustl, an officer – if a relatively low ranking one – and many others – many of these Jews – from across the Viennese middle and upper classes. Indeed, this choice of venue only increases the social pressure on Gustl – a man already out of his element, and agitated as a result – as it represents not only a cultural challenge to his limited aesthetic sensibility but also the most visible forum in which to have one’s honour challenged. His greatest concern during the encounter is that he not be seen – likely impossible, considering where he is, a place Schnitzler takes pains to define over the story’s opening pages as one where many spectators go not to watch the activities on stage, but rather to watch one another.²⁴²

As for the baker’s relatively calm demeanor and control of their encounter, these stem from his having far less to lose, as well as from the unsocial advantages he possesses, namely his physical prowess and age, qualities which, in a society where higher class no longer assures greater power, count trump. The stronger, older baker clearly feels in no way inferior to Gustl; and, tellingly, it is he who chooses how and when to end their encounter. He is even willing to do the lieutenant a favour, but not before telling him again to behave himself:

²⁴² Schnitzler 7-8. It can, of course, be argued that to extrapolate Gustl’s form of spectatorship on to his opera-going peers is unfair. After all, the reader only has access to Gustl’s consciousness. I would counter by arguing that Schnitzler belongs to a tradition of commentators who satirize the bourgeois theatre public for attending for reasons other than to watch the show. The French graphic artists Honoré Daumier and Henri Toulouse Lautrec jump immediately to mind in this regard.
Aber ich will Ihnen die Karriere nicht verderben ... Also, schön brav sein! ... So, habn’ S’ keine Angst, ‘s hat niemand was gehört ... es ist schon alles gut ... so! [...] Habe die Ehre, Herr Lieutenant, hat mich sehr gefreut – habe die Ehre!\textsuperscript{243}

This confrontation between baker and officer that constitutes the central event in \textit{Gustl} ends with the former using a common Austrian-German idiom, repeated twice for effect: “\textit{Habe die Ehre!”} This usage is easy to overlook as common parlance, but here, I would argue, it proves interpretable as an ironic, and elucidating, phrase; one that communicates the crux of Gustl’s suddenly desperate situation. It is precisely the possession of honour, the value at the core of military masculinity, and more specifically what it meant to be a man burdened with upholding it in the Austria-Hungary of the fin de siècle, which Schnitzler questions in \textit{Gustl}. “Having the honour” is much easier to say – the baker’s responsibility – than to live – Gustl’s.\textsuperscript{244}

Why is Gustl so agitated at the opera? Why does he freeze when the baker refuses to make way for him, and moreover, then calmly puts him in his place? How is it that Gustl’s personal moment of crisis should be understood as representative of his class, and furthermore of male identity’s discursive ‘crisis’ in the Austria-Hungary of the fin de siècle?

A productive approach to these questions is in terms of two interrelated concepts developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: habitus and capital – both of which are both discursively inscribed and symbolic qualities. The former denotes, as Loic Wacquant puts it, “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained

\textsuperscript{243} Schnitzler 16.

\textsuperscript{244} What I am arguing here is honor’s dual denotation: the difference between ‘being honored,’ its passive meaning, which, actually and ironically, comes with no responsibility; and ‘upholding honor,’ its active meaning, and a great responsibility indeed, even a burden.
capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then
guide them.” This deposition accumulates unconsciously, determines how an individual
perceives his environment, and constitutes/contains the classificatory paradigms, ethical norms
and even aesthetic proclivities of said individual. The socialized norms or tendencies that
constitute a given habitus will always be to a certain extent individualized, these individual
peculiarities being determined from within a complex nexus of relational influences, each of
which is unique to an individual. Familial influence plays a decisive role, of course. While, extra-
socially, the individual’s genetic profile must also be considered to some extent determinant of
his or her habitus, especially considering it codes the individual psyche and plays a significant
role in determining emotional behaviour.

However, the core of an individual’s habitus is shared. This is to say: the complex nexus
of relational influences that determine an individual’s habitus is nevertheless dominated by
relatively intact social structures that large groups of individuals share – if, of course, the
degree to which any individual partakes of any one of them is distinctive and necessarily
incomplete – among these structures in descending order of generality – at least for the late-
nineteenth century – national, religious, political, and class belief systems, with gender norms
being inculcated through and across these.

Gustl’s habitus is in large part defined by the fact that he is an officer in the k.u.k.
Offizierkorps, an organization that instills in him a sense of superiority, as well as a rigid form of
male identity that sanctions certain activities that serve as outlets for its practice and proof, the

duel, examined earlier, being one of these. Schnitzler proves he has an extensive and astute understanding of this officer’s habitus.

Both because of, and sometimes in spite of, the fact that _Gustl_ is an interior monologue, the reader learns a great deal about the social position, way of thinking, moral code, cultural sensibilities and social habits of the typical Austrian officer at the fin de siècle – a man who is most likely bourgeois and probably not from Vienna, both the case for Gustl, who comes from a small town and whose father, likely a civil servant, has just retired.246 Who is poor, as represented by Gustl’s desire that his wealthy uncle send him regular support payments;247 and by his numerous other references to not having enough money. Who sleeps around and is unlikely to marry: Gustl, we learn, had a fling with a girl whose name he cannot remember; with whom he has a relationship in spite of the fact she cannot speak a word of German;248 while his current sweetheart Steffi – who is likely a prostitute – cannot see him tonight because she has “no time,” presumably because she is with her other, wealthier and thus more marriageable paramour – and who likely ‘keeps her’; or perhaps with a John.249 Gustl is hardly a prize catch. Nor, for that matter, were officers generally, committed as they were to carousing, and on a tight budget.

---

246 Schnitzler 10.
247 Schnitzler 10.
248 Schnitzler 10.
249 Schnitzler 14. The “ihm” on whom Gustl laments Steffi is dependent, and with whom she is tonight out for dinner, is clearly a wealthier other lover, possessed, apparently, of a more attractive form of masculinity.
The typical officer is disciplined, drills and goes on manoeuvres, as would be expected of a soldier; but has likely never seen meaningful action: Gustl laments that last year’s manoeuvres were not the real thing, for example; \textsuperscript{250} and elsewhere nostalgically fantasizes about having been involved in the battle to annex Bosnia – the Austrian military’s last meaningful engagement, which occurred twelve years earlier. \textsuperscript{251}

The typical man of Gustl’s rank frequents taverns and coffeehouses, not the opera, where he feels out of place on account of a relative lack of cultural education – in this sense he is more proletarian than aristocrat. When he goes out (which is on most nights, one suspects), he likely gambles. This is where his cultural preference lies. Gustl’s colleague Kopetzky is at the pub currently, while Gustl, we learn, cannot afford to go out tonight on account of having lost all his money to another officer at cards the night before. \textsuperscript{252}

The typical officer duels, as we have seen, to safeguard his honour, the quality he considers the defining feature of his identity – something even worth committing suicide to uphold.

Bourdieu is clear that habitus is neither fixed nor permanent. The systems that inculcate habitus can change under unexpected situations or over time, although such temporal change normally occurs very slowly. \textsuperscript{253} The same can be said of an individual’s habitus. This temporal point is crucial to understanding Gustl’s plight, I would argue, in as much as both the core of his

\textsuperscript{250} Schnitzler 12.

\textsuperscript{251} Schnitzler 40.

\textsuperscript{252} Schnitzler 9.

habitus, and indeed that of the caste he represents, has not developed quickly enough to keep pace with fundamental changes in the political position Austria-Hungary held in Europe and in the social and cultural makeup of Austrian society. It should also be noted that military forms of habitus should be considered both the least flexible and most deeply ingrained/durable forms owing to, as Bourdieu puts it, “people’s adherence to an institution (being) directly proportional to the severity and painfulness of their rights of initiation.”

Military rights of initiation of course represent the most severe and painful forms in most societies up to the present.

Recent historiographical evidence suggests that the officer’s habitus begins to develop in a manner/direction inconsistent with the general trends governing Austrian society as early as 1848, which is to say more than fifty years prior to when we meet Gustl. (This is a long time for a form of habitus to develop in isolation, and especially in a society otherwise industrializing and urbanizing at a pace unseen anywhere else in Europe, and which consequently experiences profound demographic changes ethnically and in terms of class structure.)

Helmut Kuzmics argues that “a quite paradoxical picture of the Austrian officer’s habitus” develops during the second half of the nineteenth century:

Since 1848 at least – the year of the revolution – Habsburg officers formed a caste separated from the rest of society (Allmayer-Beck 1987; Rothenberg 1976) and they were shaped by a military-aristocratic ‘habitus’ in stark contrast to that of the working bourgeois. Although more and more officers were recruited from the (lower ranks of the) bourgeoisie, got very little salary and were even too poor to be in a position to marry, they stuck to the ideals and mores of a feudal warrior caste, except in those

---

areas where technical skills were indispensable. A habitus evolved which combined bluntness, discipline of the barracks and feudal ‘courage’, but – an Austrian particularity – which was also opposed to ‘knowledge’ and unable to develop qualities of good ‘leadership’ in battle: determination and boldness often gave way to passivity, faltering and dithering in the face of battle.

This officer is, Kuzmics summarizes, “a man of ‘practical experience’ who is somewhat uncouth and for whom exercises, regulations and therefore ‘discipline’ in the narrowest sense are most important, but who is not capable of strategic decisiveness and quick decisions.”

It is of course striking the extent to which this description aligns with that Schnitzler offers in his Gustl. The author clearly understood the lot, and life, of the contemporary officer and offers a detailed picture of it. However, more striking still is Kuzmics’ claim that the bourgeois officer inherited feudal qualities that not only isolated his development vis-à-vis the rest of the bourgeoisie but which also inculcated in him a tendency to become passive and ineffectual when under pressure. Admittedly, Kuzmics is attributing this tendency to officers on the battlefield even prior to 1878, and so to those who fought, and lost, the Austro-Prussian war of 1866. Nevertheless, what he is describing in general terms is an officer whose habitus has developed according to an anachronistic aristocratic paradigm and so is completely out of step with the thought processes, mores and habits of the rest of the bourgeoisie; and who is consequently also likely to consider himself superior to others; and, further, who acts with boldness and determination until really threatened, at which time he may freeze.

---

Put otherwise, it is as if he is describing Gustl.

If Gustl embodies an anachronistic habitus for Schnitzler, his behaviour also suggests that the author sees the class he represents as tending to overvalue the capital their social position – which is in reality relatively low – lends them. Bourdieu’s understanding of capital, which I am applying here, extends beyond its commonplace definition as material wealth. For Bourdieu capital may also be social, cultural or symbolic. The means by which cultural capital is transferred from other forms determines social power relations, and its accumulation plays a central role in societal power dynamics. Domination by certain social groups over others is in large part contingent on the uneven distribution of cultural and symbolic capital. This is to say that domination and hierarchy result in no small measure from inequalities in the possession of these non-financial forms of capital.

The hegemony of the European feudal ruling class, for example, was as much secured by their domination over cultural and symbolic capital as actual material wealth, with their hegemony waning commensurate to their loss of control over these non-material forms. The European bourgeoisie still remained under the political yoke of the ancient regime well after having come to dominate the continent financially. It is only once they can convert their domination of material capital into cultural and symbolic capital – this taking place over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – that they come to dominate European society politically.

In Gustl, I would argue, we have a character whose personal appraisal of his caste’s capital, in Bourdieu’s extra-material sense of cultural and symbolic, is wholly inconsistent with
his social reality; and also increasingly with how other members of the bourgeoisie value it.

That this should occur is consistent with Kuzmics’ observation that the Austrian officer caste developed a “military-aristocratic ‘habitus’ in stark contrast to that of the working bourgeoisie.” When Gustl is placed in an environment dominated by “the working bourgeois” he is unnerved, becomes defensive, and aggressively flaunts his symbolic capital, only to discover the baker has a different idea regarding its value.

The section directly preceding Gustl’s altercation with the master baker suggests clearly that he has an unrealistic opinion of his social status, this being evinced in general terms by the fact that he expects people to simply let him out of his loge once the concert ends, and then soon after becomes very impatient having to queue for his coat. That Schnitzler forces Gustl to queue is no coincidence: the queue, a bourgeois invention, is society’s ultimate levelling mechanism. Neither baker nor officer has the right to jump it. The queue reveals both men for what they in fact are: members of the same class.

Further revealing of Gustl’s unrealistic sense of social superiority are his recollections of a recent discussion with a group of non-military men, to whose justifiable opinions he takes offence:

“Herr Lieutenant” ... schon die Art, wie er “Herr Lieutenant” gesagt hat, war unverschämt ... Sie werden mir doch zugeben müssen [...] Wieso hab‘ ich mit dem Sozialisten in einem Gespräch eingelassen? [...] (D)ieser junge Mensch, der die

---

256 Kuzmics.

257 Schnitzler 13-14.
Jagdbilder mahlt ... Meiner Seel’, der ist an der ganzen Geschichte schuld gewesen! Der hat von den Manövern geredet; und dann erst ist dieser Doktor dazugekommen und hat irgendwas g’sagt, was mir nicht gepasst hat, von Kriegspielerei oder so was [...] Ja, und dann ist von den Kadettenschulen gesprochen worden ... und ich hab’ von einem patriotischen Fest erzählt ... und dann hat der Doktor gesagt [...] “Herr Lieutenant, Sie werden mir doch zugeben, dass nicht all Ihre Kameraden zum Militär gegangen sind, ausschließlich um das Vaterland zu verteidigen!” So eine Frechheit! Das wagt so ein Mensch einem Offizier in’s Gesicht zu sagen! Wenn ich mich erinnern könnt’, was ich d’rauf geantwortet hab’? Ah ja, etwas von Leuten, die sich in Dinge dreinmengen, von denen sie nichts versteh’n.²⁵⁸

The opinion of non-military members of the bourgeoisie is represented by the presumed socialist – whom Gustl charges with wanting to abolish the military – and a lawyer (the Doktor), whose opinion is clearly that the Austrian army is a costly anachronism, an institution that plays at war (Kriegspielerei) – because there are no real battles to fight – and which young men join not out of patriotism and/or a desire to fight, rather simply to find employment (that the state doesn’t need). The historical facts justify the lawyer’s criticism, of course, in that the Austrian army had not fought an enemy in over a decade; and, if Schnitzler’s portrayal is to be believed, consisted of young men who spent much of their time – when not drilling for battles highly unlikely to occur – drinking, gambling, whoring and duelling.

²⁵⁸ Schnitzler 12.
Gustl considers the lawyer’s reasonable appraisal of the Austrian military as an affront to the honour of the officer caste: what the lawyer says constitutes “So eine Frechheit!” as did the tone with which the ‘socialist’ had addressed him earlier.\(^{259}\) Both the lawyer and the socialist simply do not understand what it means to be an officer, Gustl believes: they are simply “zu dumm dazu,” an assertion the irony of which is hard to miss. They would understand, Gustl implies, the moment they pulled on the officer’s uniform: “Wenn ich mich so erinnern’, wie ich das erste Mal den Rock angehabt hab’,” he says with pride, “sowas erlebt eben nicht ein jeder.”\(^ {260}\) The officer’s uniform, and the sense of belonging to an exclusive caste that it symbolizes for Gustl, embody exactly what Bourdieu means by symbolic capital. The problem for Gustl, and indeed for any members of his caste who share his delusion, is that many members of his society no longer accept its symbolic value. This group is represented by the socialist – who would do away with capital altogether – the lawyer – whose problem with the military is that it does not honour the guiding rule of capitalism, efficiency/productivity, and so could have no time for its symbolic embodiment – and the master baker, who represents a fundamental economy that values strength and experience.

Gustl is right to assert that his caste doesn’t have a chance against such civilians; although his realization comes too late, and is too soon forgotten. As he puts it, “… ganz wehrlos sind wir gegen die Zivilisten … Das meinen die Leut’, wir sind besser dran, weil wir einen Säbel haben … und wenn schon einmal einer von der Waffe gebrauch macht, geht’s über

\(^{259}\) Schnitzler 12, 11.

\(^{260}\) Schnitzler 12.
This passage contains a striking paradox: the armed man who is defenseless – who possesses a weapon he cannot use; and we see it for the second time: the first being when the baker grabs the hilt of Gustl’s sword. The sexual interpretation here – that of impotence – is obvious, but Schnitzler repeats the metaphor, and in this extended form, to make sure the reader understands that he is arguing emasculation on a wider, social scale. Gustl’s weapon functions as a synechdoche for his caste – to be an officer – or, more precisely, to live the officer’s anachronistic habitus – is to be defenceless when faced with the realities of fin de siècle Austria-Hungary.

The following quote is attributed to no less than Goethe: “Man kann nicht immer ein Held sein, aber man kann immer ein Mann sein.” Whether Goethe ever wrote it is debatable. What isn’t is that the Austrian officer of the fin de siècle, as embodied by Gustl, could not be the former; and consequently nor could he be the latter. He was caught precariously between classes – the bourgeois and aristocratic – and consequently, at least if Schnitzler is to be believed, embodied an anachronistic and necessarily unstable form of male identity.

3.2. “Ein Versehen ist leicht zu vergeben”...

“Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief” – at approximately one fifth the length of Gustl – is a satirical little gem worth more critical attention than it has thus far received. It is also, and not

---

261 Schnitzler 20.

262 The Goethe quote I employ here represents the most uncanny moment in some 200 plus pages of this dissertation. You can purchase Goethe’s words (?) in the form of an ‘Inspiration Poster Tin Sign’ from amazon.ca; discover them on the dedication page of some chap named Grit Hidebrand’s apparently self-published Der Weg zu meinem Blau: ein etwas anderer Burnout-Tatsachenbericht; and will see the quote on every German Zitate website. However, in none of these places can you learn from whence in Goethe it comes. (Willi Goetschel has made me aware that the quote is likely a false attribution to Goethe, and indeed one of many. I have nevertheless decided to leave it in, if for no other reason than it highlights this curious reality of the Goethe industry.)
coincidentally, an epistolary narrative – its protagonist’s ‘crisis’ being communicated in the first person by means of a letter. The author’s choice of narrative form here – just as was the case with the titular Gustl, whose anxious consciousness found an ideal means of expression in the inner monologue – is undoubtedly intentional. As is the unavoidable intertextuality with the most famous letter writer in German literature – Goethe’s self-destructive ‘man of feeling’ Werther, the doomed protagonist of a sensational bestseller responsible for a Europe-wide cult of copycat suicides by young male admirers: 1774’s Die Leiden des jungen Werthers.

Werther embodied for Goethe a form of masculinity bound to run headlong – and at potentially great personal cost to many a young man of his time – into prevailing social expectations of what it meant to be male then: namely being rational, active and socially useful. As Igner Sigrun Brodey observes, Werther thematizes for Goethe “[…] the new men of sensibility (who) hover on the edge of illness, madness, impotence, inactivity, silence and death and leave themselves open to the constant charge of ‘effeminacy.’” Werther gives literary form to all of these qualities, which is ultimately why neither his society, nor Lotte, the object of his affection – who in her choice of the socially sanctioned Albert as a marriage partner upholds her society’s prevailing gender norms – could ever embrace him. At least not as more than a friend.

We also need to take into account here the centuries-old and wider-spread discourse – it seems fair to call it a Western phenomenon – that considers letter writing a feminine form of expression. Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven observe of this long-prevalent equation that:

---

“[t]he most powerful fiction of the letter has been that which figures it as the trope of authenticity and intimacy, which elides questions of linguistic, historical and political mediation, and which construes the letter as feminine."\textsuperscript{264} I would argue that Thameyer the letter writing amateur sexologist is a discursive contradiction in terms, the ‘rational’ male (but who does shoddy – decidedly biased – research) who employs a female form of expression to authenticate his role as potent progenitor. There is nothing unstable about his masculinity per se – rather male and female discourses come into conflict within him as a character. He furthermore serves as a conduit through which to satirically upend notions of male and female space, social roles and modes of production circa 1900. “Thameyer,” as we shall see, is a work very much, and critically, concerned with notions of discursive authenticity, and in which many discourses relevant to gender identity at the fin de siècle converge.

When we meet Andreas Thameyer, a minor official at a credit union, \textit{"Beamter in der österreichischen Sparkassa"}\textsuperscript{265} – he is in the process of writing a suicide note intended to convince the world that he is not, in fact, a cuckold; and in so doing save his wife’s \textit{Geschlechtsehre}.\textsuperscript{266} Thameyer’s newborn child’s mulatto appearance, he assures the reader, is the result of maternal impression, “a well-attested and scientifically authenticated process”


\textsuperscript{266} The fact that Thameyer is writing a suicide note – with which Goethe’s famous novel ends – connects him yet more directly to Werther, of course, and one suspects that this is the first association Schnitzler’s readers would have made upon beginning the Schnitzler story.
(“Es sind beglaubigte, wissenschaftlich feststehende Tatsachen”) through which an unborn child is permanently marked on account of its mother being in range of some powerful mental influence.

Numerous reputable sources support the veracity of this medical peculiarity. A too intensely studied portrait of Pope Pius, Thameyer has learned from one of the books now in front of him, resulted in a woman’s child being born closely resembling the now saint Pius; while a child with a lion’s head was born to another woman who had recently visited a lion tamer. Thameyer’s review of the literature on maternal impression also cites an incident documented by Heliodorus in his *Libri Aethiopicorum*, according to which the black queen Persina after ten barren years finally bares the Ethiopian king a daughter – a white daughter. The reason for this striking reversal of fortune in fertility being that the queen had stared at marble statues of Greek gods during copulation!

In the case of Thameyer’s wife, a group of Negroes camped in the Prater’s zoo as part of a *Völkerschau*, an exhibition of colonized people, is to blame. No intercourse was needed in this case, the spatial proximity of the black Africans on display being sufficient to darken the unborn child’s skin.

---


268 The German word *Versehen* has maternal impression as one of its connotations, probably stemming from the prevalence of this usage in German folklore. The word has always denoted a limitation of culpability on account of a lack of intent. Fittingly for Schnitzler’s story, the Grimm Wörterbuch includes the following idiom in its definition: “ein versehen ist leicht zu vergeben.” See: “Versehend,” *Wörterbuchnetz*, 2011, Web. 10 Sept. 2014.

269 One wonders why the child was not born multi-coloured, considering that we now know almost all Greek statues to have been brightly painted.
Thameyer’s suicide letter is intended for society as a whole “who are small-minded or spiteful” — “Ihr (seid) zu armselig oder boshaf[...]” — and while this is perhaps a valid criticism of many members of fin de siècle Viennese society, Thameyer’s own naiveté and racism certainly proves it a group to which he belongs. It is he, after all, who considers “these Negroes (to be) weird and creepy” — “[...] diese fremden und unheimlichen Schwarzen” — and as able to generate horror in their onlookers simply by being present.270

Thamayer also takes care to note that his poor wife would have never spent so much time in their vicinity if not for her sister, with whom she was visiting the zoo, disappearing into the fog with a married man of questionable repute. Thameyer, however, does not wish to name names, as this might endanger his sister-in-law’s impending marriage to “a decent man who would be most upset” — “(ein) anständiger Mensch, (der) darüber sehr unglücklich wäre”271 — by the knowledge of her infidelity. Upstanding bourgeois males must look out for one another’s reputations, apparently. Honour, that linchpin of nineteenth century masculinity, demands as much.

My scathing tone here is intentional. It attempts to convey the ridicule Schnitzler conveys for his protagonist, which he communicates by simply allowing him to speak for himself. Thamayer accuses “people” of being “miserably stupid” — “Die Menschen sind dumm und armselig”272 — but it is he who proves himself to be both a fool and an idiot: the former for believing his wife would never betray him sexually; the latter, for apparently being convinced of

270 Schnitzler 517.
271 Schnitzler 518.
272 Schnitzler 516.
her innocence, and simultaneously his own paternity (?), by myths, hearsay and a pseudoscientific theory that Schnitzler would have known to have been discredited in the German-speaking medical community for decades.273

As much as “Andreas Thameyer’s letzter Brief” clearly ridicules a particular, but hard not to consider representative, bourgeois male for being stupid, self-deluding, bigoted, and hypocritical – and as such is a clear piece of social satire – it is also a deceptively simple text, one of the themes of which is the discursive production of knowledge per se. Both author and protagonist make claims about the veracity of maternal impression, which Schnitzler knows to be nonsense, of course, but also knows that many of the Viennese middle class still consider viable science. Andreas Thameyer contributes his letter to this discursive negotiation; Schnitzler contributes his story. The debate over maternal impression as it plays out in “Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief” is an unfair fight, of course – one Thameyer is (quite literally) designed by Schnitzler the author to lose. As hard as Thameyer might try to convince us – or, indeed, because he tries so hard to convince us – the more convincing becomes Dr. Schnitzler’s claim that maternal impression is ridiculous.

Maternal impression represents only one of a complex network of gendered discourses active at the time and that intersect in “Thameyer.” Sigmund Freud’s paradigm shifting insights regarding the uncontrollable unconscious is one. Others include colonial discourses on race and

273 Indeed, as Jan Bondeson points out, it was German scientists who disproved maternal impression in the 1850s, after which time the theory “received little support from serious scientists.” Schnitzler’s contemporary Viennese Otto Weininger knew as much, dismissing Versehen as “an untenable theory” and as “superstition” in his Geschlecht und Charakter (386-387). The same cannot be said of Britain and America, however. Medical practitioners of repute, Bondeson notes, still paid it credence in the 1890s. While in the US, articles on maternal impression still appeared in medical journals as late as the 1920s. See: Jan Bondeson, A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities (New York: Norton, 1999) 157-58. See also: Otto Weininger, Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloominton: University of Indiana Press, 2005) 386-7.
whiteness; the late-nineteenth century’s preoccupation with black sexuality; and contemporaneous anthropological concepts of inherent human animalism. These together portray bourgeois masculinity as under threat from abroad and at home, by both sexes, and consequently as dangerously unstable.

Scientific and ethnographic works had kept black sexuality safely distant for most Europeans for most of the nineteenth century. Beginning in the 1870s, however, the middle classes of Europe’s largest cities were increasingly able to simply take public transit and within minutes come face to face – and face to anatomy – with never before seen peoples from all over the world. By 1900 Völkerschauen, or human zoos, were common attractions in most major cities in Europe; as well as in North America and Mexico (with Montezuma’s zoo being the first place to exhibit humans alongside animals). Vienna was no exception to the trend, its largest and most famous park – the Prater – being home to no fewer than thirteen staged tribal camps between 1895 and 1901, \(^{274}\) with the years 1896-1897 seeing the Austrian capital struck by, in Ian Foster’s words, “an African fever.” \(^{275}\) Careful records were kept making this epidemic readily quantifiable: during the summer of 1896 nearly half a million sightseers visited the first

\(^{274}\) Werner Michael Schwartz, Anthropologische Spektakel: Zur Schaustellung “exotischer” Menschen in Wien 1970-1910 (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 2001) 141. Pemmer and Lackner list the Prater’s first Völkerschauanstellung, involving Zulu and Matabele peoples, as occurring in summer 1895. It was followed the following two summers by Ashanti exhibits. 1898 saw Indian Fakirs and Senegalese set up camp in the park, with Bishari, Siamese, Japanese and Berbers there the following year. 1900, the year of Thamayer’s publication – and likely also when it was written – likewise featured four exhibits: Derwish, Beduin, Boers and Kafirs (Nuristanis). See: Hans Pemmer and Nini Lackner, Der Prater von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart (Wien: Jugend und Volk, 1974), 113.

of two exhibits featuring the Ashanti tribe from Africa’s Gold Coast in what is today Ghana.\textsuperscript{276}

This translates to an average of 5,500 daily; although Sundays were much busier, attracting as many as 30,000 visitors.\textsuperscript{277}

Arthur Schnitzler is not the first Viennese author to thematize the display for bourgeois visual consumption of foreign peoples in the Austrian capital. Already in 1897 Schnitzler’s contemporary Peter Altenberg published his \textit{Ashantee}, a prose sketch inspired by the author’s regular visits that previous, feverish year to the Prater \textit{Völkerschau} compound, which housed approximately 100 ethnic Ashanti, whom onlookers could observe living their ‘everyday lives,’ amidst huts modeled after the real thing.\textsuperscript{278} Altenberg’s reminiscences – his identity is very thinly veiled behind a narrator Peter A. whose protagonist is named Sir Peter – exhibit real sympathy for the plight of the Africans – a prevalent theme being that the Ashanti, in order to appear ‘authentically’ native, are frequently improperly dressed for the Viennese climate\textsuperscript{279} – as well as showing much derision for the dehumanizing prejudices of his contemporary Viennese

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{276} Foster 6-7.
\item \textsuperscript{277} Schwarz 153.
\item \textsuperscript{278} The original 70 Ashanti were later supplemented by 25 from a touring group to bring the number closer to a round hundred, which was, presumably, a number better suited for advertising (Foster 6). Foster and Schwarz both question the authenticity of both tribe and environment, with Schwarz noting that the origin of the Ashanti cannot be verified and that such traveling groups may well have consisted of professional performers of mixed origin. Their doubts echo those of Francheschini, who already in 1897 wrote that “Die kaffeebraunen und die kohlschwarzen Gestalten können unmöglich einem einzigen Stamm angehören” (1).
\item \textsuperscript{279} See for example the sections entitled “Gespräch” and “Conclusion.” Peter Altenberg, \textit{Ashantee: Im Wiener Thiergarten bei den Negern der Goldküste, Westküste} (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1897) 14-15; 63.
\end{itemize}
who flock to take in the Orientalized spectacle, which is increasingly tailored to their tastes to
guard against the waning of interest.\footnote{280}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{A scene from the Voelkerschau, n.d. Volk Verlag, Web, 10 Sept 2014. This image is not a mere illustration; it also makes for interesting reading. Do the crossed arms of the native women signify boredom or anxiety? And what are the women looking at? (And are the Viennese looking at this, too, or at the women?) And what of the young native boy beyond the enclosure, out among the spectators, and who is looking in a completely different direction?}
\end{figure}

In spite of himself, however, sympathetic Altenberg cannot help but engage in colonial
stereotyping, and frequently embodies a colonial gaze which both exoticizes and eroticizes his
Ashanti \textit{friends}. Altenberg’s Ashanti are so laudable as humans – in contrast to his Viennese
compatriots – precisely because they are noble savages, as of yet uncorrupted by European
modernity. In this sense, Altenberg’s text is anachronistically naive, reinforcing discourses
prevalent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which had largely been
replaced, as Michael Boehringer points out, first by images that accompanied colonial conquest
and which imagined the African other as ‘ignoble savage,’ that is, as a cruel and savage warrior

\footnote{280} Many sketches in which Sir Peter describes the inhumanity of the Viennese could be cited. See for example the scene entitled “Philosophie.” Altenberg 57.

\footnote{281} \textit{Voelkerschau}, n.d. \textit{Volk Verlag}, Web, 10 Sept 2014. This image is not a mere illustration; it also makes for interesting reading. Do the crossed arms of the native women signify boredom or anxiety? And what are the women looking at? (And are the Viennese looking at this, too, or at the women?) And what of the young native boy beyond the enclosure, out among the spectators, and who is looking in a completely different direction?
who violently resists being civilized; and later, once subjugation was more complete, in paternalistic terms – as childlike and in need of rearing according to European norms.  

There is nothing naive, however, about the manner in which Altenberg sexualizes the Ashanti women upon whom he gazes. As Sander Gilman identifies, *Ashantee* communicates a fascination with the “sexual nature of the black.” Altenberg’s narrator repeatedly fetishizes the female Ashanti, being fixated especially on their bare breasts, and in so doing he reinforces the contemporaneous “idea of black sexuality as pathological.” “When Altenberg sees the black,” Gilman writes, “it is as the approachable exotic, the bared breast functioning as a signifier analogous to beckoning genitalia.” The black woman, Altenberg’s portrayal communicates, is simultaneously pure and sweet, but also inherently sexual and desirous of European male conquest.

Schnitzler and Altenberg were more than simply contemporaries. Schnitzler discovered Altenberg as a writer in 1894, the two exchanged letters that year, and he was certainly

---


284 Gilman 113.

285 Gilman 118-119.

286 In one especially disturbing moment, Altenberg likens the Ashanti girls he is looking at to the sixteen year old Viennese female teens, dressed in their bathing suits, one sees in the park once spring has arrived. See: “Le Coeur,” Altenberg 60. Here the young Ashanti girl becomes the screen on which Altenberg can focus an amalgam of his transgressive desires; not only for the exotic and foreign, but also for the youthful and local.

familiar with, and indeed admired, the latter’s Ashantee. The camp mentioned in “Thameyer” is likely based on Schnitzler’s visits to either the Ashanti Völkerschau of 1896-97, the Senegalese village of 1898, or on combined impressions of both. What is certain is that Schnitzler’s Neger are portrayed in far more threatening terms – especially in relation to bourgeois, white masculinity – than those in Ashantee, at least as perceived by the story’s protagonist and first-person narrator; as are the women in “Thameyer,” who are all white, could not be less foreign, but prove wilder animals than Altenberg’s negresses.

One possible interpretation of “Thameyer” sees the gaze of the colonized – the fact that the colonized returns the gaze – and the consequences this brings for bourgeois masculinity, as the text’s central issue. There is without doubt a crucial visual element to the description Thameyer gives of the African men he has seen in the Prater, and it betrays his fear of their kind: they are not only giants (Riesenmenschen) with dark, intimidating beards – which, as Boehringer observes, “must be read as a thinly veiled allusion to the ‘myth of the large penis’ that can be traced back to the seventeenth century” – but also possess eyes that glow (mit...

---

288 I am not as convinced as Boehringer that Schnitzler bases the blacks in “Thameyer” on the Ashanti. I find no evidence either in Schnitzler or Boehringer to substantiate this definitively. Indeed, the fact that Schnitzler uses the word “Riesenmenschen” to describe his Africans perhaps suggests the Senegalese, who are among Africa’s tallest people, and visited the Prater in 1899, the year before Schnitzler writes “Thameyer.” Most likely, I suspect, is that Schnitzler based his blacks on a compound vision developed over multiple visits to more than one African tribal exhibit.

289 As Gilman points out, Altenberg banishes “the male blacks [...] to the margins of the text, appearing only in the opening passage.” (118) Schnitzler does the opposite, as black women are given no mention. Rather, it is the sexuality of white women that concerns him, especially as these relates to the tenuous male identity of their partners.

290 Boehringer 86. Boehringer cites Pieterse again here, 175.
glühenden Augen) uncannily, a quality that can certainly be read as signifying wildness, unpredictability, and perhaps even maleficient intent.

Of course, the black males in Thamayer’s letter also possess the power to influence the appearance of an unborn child. Whether understood as resulting from gazing at, or being gazed at by, these uncanny giants – they are referred to as unheimlich on two occasions – this can be perceived in emasculating terms. The extraordinary quality Thameyer attributes to the Africans, coupled with his choice of words to describe their eyes, suggests he considers them the active party in his wife’s misfortune. They may not have raped her. They did, however, penetrate her, if only with their eyes. They hence possess a power over women well beyond that of any European male – to take control of female reproduction without physically touching the woman – and certainly beyond that of Thameyer, who has been married to his beloved four years already, knew her for seven before that, has a steady, administrative position – this all being information Schnitzler is careful to provide – but has only now managed to impregnate her. 291 (Or, rather, as the reader knows, has as of yet been unable to.)

Thameyer’s personal sexual inadequacy may explain his anxiety and actions – Peter Sprengel asserts exactly this, suspecting impotence to in fact be at the root of Thameyer’s despair 292 – as well as explaining, of course, why his wife strays. This anxiety is also explicable in

291 Boehringer notes in support of the assumption that Thameyer is well-situated financially the fact that his wife clearly does not work, being able to spend a midweek day in the park. (82)

discursive terms, however; as the embodiment of cross-fertilizing regimes of knowledge that increasingly represents both male and female sexuality as beyond European male control.

I have already mentioned the common perception in late-nineteenth century Europe that blacks were pathologically sexual, and hence unable to control their sexual urges. A more general, and ‘scientific,’ understanding of sexuality as beyond control was also emerging at the time, and indeed from within the Austrian capital. We know Sigmund Freud’s (paradigm shifting) *Traumdeutung*, first published in November 1899, to have directly influenced Schnitzler’s writing as early as 1900, the year during which both “Thameyer” and *Leutnant Gustl* were written.293 While Freud was certainly not the first to posit an unconscious mind – as Peter von Matt observes, the idea is already prevalent in the science and literature of the German Romantics294 – Freud’s *Traumdeutung* is the first work to not only articulate, but also model a deterministic relationship between mental processes or states, which are usually hidden – that is, which exert influence not perceived consciously – and a broad spectrum of human behaviours. Precisely because the unconscious, as Freud understands it, is necessarily beyond conscious control, so is much behaviour – and this is certainly the case for sexual behaviour, which increasingly comes to dominate Freud’s explanation of the functioning of the human psyche.

Another important consequence of Freud’s meta-explanation of human behaviour is that it puts humans and animals (or ‘lower’ animals) on more level ground with regard to behavioural control – or the lack thereof. Rather than possessing a unique form of

293 See: Schnitzler, *Gustl* 82.

consciousness enabling us to solve problems in all areas of endeavour through the application of reason and for the betterment of all – as Enlightenment thinking had argued – Freud proposes the defining feature of human consciousness to be its divided nature, with the level motivating our actions entirely beyond our rational control. Like animals, Freud argues, we cannot even control ourselves, this being the case for white Europeans, too, whether child, woman or man.

“Thameyer” can be read as staging an attempt to regain control over male identity – defined in terms of rationality and honour – challenged on a number of interrelated fronts: by black and female sexuality, both perceived as animalistic (and so) beyond control; as well as by personal impotence – in both the general and sexual sense – as embodied by the work’s titular narrator. His attempt to both rationalize black sexuality – make it bend to scientific explanation and his personal research – and simultaneously rob it of its physicality, indeed of its materiality, can be seen as one attempt to gain total mastery over something now being revealed to be beyond rational control. While this attempt creates an alibi for his wife, saving her honour (Geschlechtsehre), Thameyer’s explicitly acknowledged intent – she did not have sex with a black man, willingly or not! – it potentially functions to save Thameyer from personal dishonour in two senses: firstly, his wife remained true to him and thus he is no cuckold; secondly, if Thameyer is indeed sexually impotent – as Sprenger argues – then maternal impression allows that physical sexual incapacity need not necessarily mean sexual impotence; at least not in a world where female reproduction can be influenced by paintings, statues and black giants. There would still have been hope for Andreas to prove his masculinity by fathering a child, then – at least in a world where maternal impression obtains.
(And, perhaps there still is a chance of his doing so, as a suicide letter written does not a suicide make.)

When faced with a profound experience of emasculation, Andreas Thameyer asserts himself as a rational man of honour: he does the research; proves he understands the arguments he has gathered by explaining them in detail, and in the process mitigates threats to his male identity both physical and fantastical.\(^{295}\)

Of course, Thameyer does not live in a world inhabited by statues and giants with special powers. He lives in a very narrowly defined Vienna circa 1900; a place Schnitzler populates with a woman engaged to an upstanding young man – who sneaks off in the Prater to have sex with another, less upstanding man; and where her married sister – Thameyer’s wife – gets pregnant with the child of a black man, probably an African visiting as a member of a Völkerschau, and with whom, one has to assume, she had sex in the Prater’s bushes. It should be emphasized that only two women feature within the narrative of “Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief,” both of whom are ethically bound to a single man; both of whom nevertheless commit adultery; and both of whom do so somewhere in the park.\(^{296}\)

\(^{295}\) It should be noted that Thameyer’s attempt to gain rational control over the Other for the purpose of mitigating his sexual anxiety mirrors on the personal scale what the Völkerschau accomplishes on the social scale. As Raymond Corbey argues, the exhibition of colonized peoples fit into “the wider context of collecting, measuring, classifying, picturing, filing, and narrating of colonial Others,” which itself represents an extension of the Enlightenment commitment to increasingly gaining control over all existence by these same means, and by doing so functions to mitigate the anxiety that accompanies uncertainty that is the Other. See: Raymond Corbey, “Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930,” *Cultural Anthropology* 8.3 (August 1993): 338-369.

\(^{296}\) To be fair, the wife of Thameyer’s friend Rudolf Bittner is also mentioned, but we learn no more than that fact about her and so she represents nothing, and so nothing about female sexuality.
I consider three contemporary, and complementary, discourses regarding female sexuality to be relevant for understanding the adulterous activity of “Thameyer’s” women. The first emerges out of a problem faced by the most popular theory explaining sexual difference, which I mentioned earlier, and which was held by almost all contemporary sexologists, including Freud and Weininger, namely that male sexuality was inherently active as opposed to female sexuality, which was by its nature passive. This was not inherently a problem, as the sexes were understood as opposed in a closed and internally complementary system: in theory, then, no sexual frustration could exist.

However, as Karin Jusek explains:

The problem was that at the level of civilization thus far acquired in the western world the monogamous marriage was seen as the only viable social basis. And this monogamous marriage restricted male sexuality to a degree that was, in some sense, considered undesirable by the proponents of this theory. The dilemma facing them – what was good for civilization was bad for the satisfaction of the male sexual urge – was solved by defending prostitution as a legitimate outlet for male sexuality.297

Proponents of the solution concluded that “there must be women with sexual needs and urges that were also prepared to satisfy or indulge in them, which would almost automatically bring them to prostitution.”298 This explanation included a class component that understood women of the lower classes as more sexually active and incapable of shame or restraint, and so


298 Jusek 125.
naturally both inclined and well suited to prostitution; whereas middle-class women were understood to desire children above all else and to be naturally endowed with sexual restraint. The problem then becomes those middle-class women who satisfy their sexual needs outside of the sanctioned realm of prostitution. Two of whom we meet in “Andreas Thameyers letzter Brief.”

The second discourse informing Schnitzler’s portrayal of women in “Thameyer” concerns the tendency in the arts during the nineteenth century, highlighted by Bram Dikjstra in his *Idols of Perversity*, to much more closely align woman to the animal and natural world, with this tendency intensifying during the fin de siècle. I earlier mentioned Frank Wedekind’s *Erdgeist* (1895) as the clearest, if certainly not the only, German-language literary example of what Dikjstra observes in the visual arts.

While “Thameyer’s” women are neither as developed nor distilled characterizations of animal sexuality as Wedekind’s Lulu, they likewise embody, I would argue, the idea that a woman’s sexual drive is – like that of an animal or a negro – beyond her control, and as a result necessarily beyond male control. It seems instructive even to characterize the women of “Andreas Thameyer’s letzter Brief” as Wedekind’s animal trainer does the anti-heroine Lulu in the prologue to *Erdgeist* – Thameyer’s wife and sister-in-law are likewise, I would argue, representative of a growing number of middle-class women who either refuse, or are unable, to be “wohlgesittete Haustiere.”

---

299 Wedekind, 8.
‘Domesticated pets,’ the English translation of this German compound noun phrase, fails to capture its multivalent and metaphorical meaning: the noun *Sitte* connotes both *manner/behaviour* but also *norm* and *moral*; while *Haustier* is, when read literally, an animal confined to a house. While a bourgeois wife’s place was traditionally restricted to the domestic sphere – her responsibilities keeping her *in the house* – and when she did venture out it was always on the arm of an acceptable male companion, these bourgeois women roam relatively freely, and so beyond a husband’s (or future husband’s) control. In Thameyer’s case, there were no children at home to keep his wife busy, likely his fault, an emasculating fact in itself – making it much easier for her to stray, at least during the week when he is at work; while her sister Fritzi’s betrothed is a careerist whose profession has taken him to mercantile Bremen, probably to a great deal of office work, and certainly from where he can do nothing to protect his honour.

When looked at in terms of gendered space, the third relevant discourse here, Schnitzler has pointedly challenged prevailing gender norms in allowing his female characters to roam freely outside, while their male partners toil indoors, with Thameyer, as already mentioned, not only at home, but therein engaged in an activity coded as feminine – letter writing.

By contrast, in the Prater, a place of foliage, and “fog,” a liminal space of temptations – home, from 1766 until a ban came into force in 2013, to the majority of Vienna’s prostitutes, and from the mid-1890s on to travelling tribes of sexually virile *others* – Thameyer’s wife and her sister prove unable to restrain-suppress their sexual desire; like animals they copulate when, where, and with whom their desire moves them to. They do so with at least temporary
disregard for the social constraints that traditionally defined, and differentiated, bourgeois masculinity and femininity. Whereas bourgeois men had the relative freedom to roam – with this freedom finding its ultimate expression in the figure of the flaneur – here women do the roaming while their men are spatially confined. And in so doing they risk the honour of these men, and consequently destabilize their masculinity, still defined in terms of an honour, which is becoming increasingly difficult to uphold.

Chapter 4. Representing Masculinity in Crisis in (the) Light of The Scopic Regime
In a society dominated by the production and consumption of images, no part of life can remain immune from the invasion of spectacle.\(^{300}\)

Let me first be clear as to what I will not be arguing here, namely that European male identity enters a crisis phase during the 1920s as a result of the experience of the Great War and its admittedly profound material, social and psychological consequences for European societies, and especially for their men.

It is a fact that millions of German men died during World War One; and that millions more returned home wounded, maimed and/or traumatized; were consequently unable to work, or find work; and in many cases ended up on the streets where they functioned as visual signifiers of national, political and military (all traditional domains of male dominance) failure. It is fact also that this numerical toll had a less easily quantifiable but nevertheless profound influence on the division of labour in, but not only in, Germany. The war of course created a postwar paucity of male labour, which, coupled with the fact that women had out of necessity filled the productivity – much of it military – vacuum during the war years, resulted in women’s roles, rights, and responsibilities in German society being enhanced and enlarged. This increase in female social capital, and attendant increase in social visibility – which has been represented by the overgeneralized cliché ‘The New Woman’ – certainly had tangible consequences on both male-female relationships and on how men (and women) perceived themselves.

While all of these facts need to be acknowledged as bearing on male identity during the Weimar years, neither does any one of them, nor do they in sum, constitute the emergence of a crisis of masculinity where there was not one before. A common line of interpretation presupposes that masculinity was somehow not in crisis (or was less in crisis) prior to 1914 (or some other point during the war), when in fact masculinity can be no such thing, or otherwise put can exist in no such state, let alone at some point on a crisis continuum along which it shifts position – up and down – over time, as does mercury in a thermometer.  

‘Masculinity in crisis’ is a cultural construction, a productive rather than descriptive concept; or, rather, a conceptual node that drives, and delimits the tenor of, discursive production. And it was a construction decades old already by the 1920s. And hardly a novel phenomenon emerging in response to the outcome of a military conflict – or any other single historical event, for that matter.

301 Regarding this “common line of interpretation (of postwar crises of masculinity)”, examples are too many to reference them all here, and neither are they limited to any one country, nor any single conflict. As Christa Hämerle observes, scholarship on post-World War 1 German and Austrian masculinity has tended to argue that a 1920s ”Krise der Männlichkeit” resulted in response to a) the horrors of the first fully industrialized war and b) the female gains in social capital and self-confidence that resulted from the greater responsibility women took on the home front during the conflict. See: Christa Hämerle, “Vor vierzig Monaten waren wir Soldaten, vor einem halben Jahr noch Männer,” L’homme: europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft. 19.2 (2008): 50-73.

Switching continents and wars, a postwar crisis of American masculinity remains a prevalent cultural trope. Its origin, however, can be traced to a number of critics of postwar life, notably the sociologists C. Wright Mills and William Whyte, for whom the American society of plenty that developed out of American military victory “was undermining American masculinity, creating men who were feminized and weak.” See: “Death of a Salesman.” American Masculinities: An Encyclopedia. 1st ed. 2003. Print. (I could offer numerous more references from the same and other contexts.)
4.1. **What Does Not and What Does Change**

Thomas Elsaesser observes that:

> The idea that definitions of masculinity and male identity were in crisis during the Weimar years is itself, of course, a cultural-historical cliché. The father-son conflicts and their resolutions in favour of the father, for instance, have long been recognized as part of the standard topoi of expressionist drama, to the extent of constituting in the minds of social and cultural historians the key to Weimar Culture’s overall identity.\(^{302}\)

We have to be careful to understand that the lack of originality – or perhaps nuance – Elsaesser highlights here functions on both sides of the interpretive equation. As producers of discourse, both the expressionist dramatists and the social and cultural historians appropriating their topos are – to paraphrase Roitman – mobilizing crisis in the construction of narratives that mark out or designate moments of truth.\(^{303}\) I believe our mistake is not in considering representations of masculinity in crisis as an integral feature of Weimar discourse, one within which the expressionist drama’s Oedipal dynamic – which Peter Gay famously highlights in his *Weimar Culture: The Insider as Outsider* (1968) – has a representative role to play. Our mistake lies rather in believing that the expressionist dramas and/or historical accounts employing intergenerational crisis reveal anything essential about male identity during the 1920s, or at any other time.


\(^{303}\) Roitman 3.
As I have argued, an affinity between the concepts crisis and masculinity develops during the fin de siècle that endures until the present. This affinity has a direct effect on how males are represented culturally – in both culture’s ‘high’ and ‘more popular’ forms. As I took pains to argue in chapter two, I think the European cultural record shows that the fin de siècle witnesses a prevalent tendency to link masculinity, crisis and decline as a combined conceptual basis for the production of knowledge. I have argued – with the help of Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe, Koselleck and Roitman – that these three concepts constituted a relatively stable, and discursively fundamental node – or nodal agglomeration – that both helped to drive a quantitative jump in cultural discursive productivity at the time while simultaneously delimiting the range of its tenor.

What in fact occurs after the Great War, I will argue, is not that masculinity enters (or re-enters) a crisis phase. It is also neither the case that masculinity is represented as in a greater or more profound state of crisis – a qualitative increase. As for the question of whether instances of crisis representations of male identity increase during the 1920s – a quantitative increase – such an appraisal is well beyond my scope here, if it could be accomplished at all.

What clearly changes – I will argue – are both the means through which, and the mode – and I intend here the philosophical definition connoting appearance, form, disposition – in which masculinity is represented as in crisis.

I should also add that the means through which representation changes directly affects the mode in which this representation occurs. When it comes to representing masculinity as in crisis during the 1920s (what I will argue is that) the medium is very much the message.
And that medium is the visual image.

I will read four texts here – three film excerpts, and a play – that evince a shift to what I will call a scopic, spectral and spectacular mode of representing masculinity in crisis during the Weimar Republic. This shift is a consequence of the increasing domination of the discursive field by images during the early-1920s.

Before examining my texts, however, I want to establish exactly what I mean when I say that Weimar’s discursive field became increasingly dominated by images; as well as discuss what arguably the two most important contemporaneous cultural critics – Walther Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer – had to say about visual representation in light of its rise to cultural prominence as photograph and film. To a certain extent my arguments about the representation of male identity at the time will build on these thinkers’ critical responses to their contemporary scopic regime, a fact which testifies to the enduring relevance of their insights. In other ways, however, what I argue departs from their analysis markedly, and necessarily.

4.2. The Scopic Regime and An Appropriate Form of Occularcentrism

Writing about our own fin de siècle in the introduction to a chapter entitled “The Scopic Regime and the Ordering of the World,” Marjorie O’Loughlin observed in 2005 that:

In the past decade the volume of images circulating globally has increased massively both in terms of distribution and consumption. The process of distribution of images has been accelerated by advances in electronic technology. [...] The image now sits at the
centre of global culture; there is a seemingly inexhaustible process of production and circulation of images that distinguishes contemporary life.  

It is hard to disagree with O’Loughlin’s assessment of the technologically driven globalization of visual production and consumption that has occurred over the last approximately twenty years. There is little doubt that the proliferation of cable television and especially of the internet, and the rapid and constant improvements to the hard- and software with and through which to view the digital images these transmit, have profoundly altered the extent to which knowledge is generated, and concomitantly delimited, by visual means.

It would be wrong, however, to consider such a shift – in the speed of image transmission, amount of images in circulation, in image consumption and to the cultural centrality of the image in everyday life – to be an entirely new development. It can of course be convincingly argued that the past twenty years have witnessed the globalization of “the scopic regime” – a term I borrow from Martin Jay (and which he originally intended to connote the cultural relativity of such regimes). Such a radical shift occurred at the regional level once before, during the 1920s – that is, in many regions roughly concurrently but with varying intensity – with Weimar Germany being – arguably – the place to experience its effects most acutely and intensely. Weimar Germany is often represented as a model when asking questions about modernity’s development and impact – socially, culturally, politically – and it represents a regional model, I would argue, of the functioning and consequences of a profound change in

---


the extent to which the discursive field is image dominated. If the “image now sits,” as O’Loughlin puts it, “at the centre of global culture,” during the 1920s the image sat at the centre of a more limited universe: that of the culture of the Weimar Republic.

Two crucial differences between now and then are worth mentioning: firstly that, in terms of the viewer’s ability to process, decode and rationally (and objectively) respond to the increased volume of images such a shift brings, the 1920s Weimar German was far less well equipped than we early 21st-century spectators. The 1920s shift differs from its more recent analogue in that it practically constituted a shift in literacy itself: from the textual – in the narrow sense of the term – to the visual. Certainly the emergence of film predates the Great War; and yes, images were present – I have analyzed some here – including photographs, in the newspapers and magazines of the pre-War era. And, without doubt, the emergence of television, and eventual digitization and computer-facilitated proliferation of images constitute sea changes in the speed, and forms, of delivery of visual information. However, the viewer responding to these developments was not suddenly living in a world dominated by the image where before text had ruled. He experienced shifts within a world already dominated by visual discourse. The Weimar viewer experienced a shift from one form to another. The effects of this should not be underestimated.

The second difference I won’t address directly here beyond saying that the globalization of the scopic regime increasingly offers no regions outside itself (and from which critique might gain independence). There are increasingly fewer places on this planet to escape visual
bombardment, fewer spaces from which to develop critical strategies contemplatively. During the long Weimar decade visual overload was primarily an urban phenomenon.

(There is no longer an outside of the scopic regime. It is to be encountered anywhere one goes; and we carry it with us everywhere we go.)

As Patrizia McBride rightly points out, then, “It would be difficult to overstate the impact of technologies of mass reproduction on the visual culture of Weimar Germany, as a flood of images from photography and film upended conventional models of cultural literacy after the media boom of the early 1920s.”

The 1920s sees one technology of mass reproduction – film – become a cultural force throughout Europe, of course, while media forms traditionally dominated by text become increasingly visual as the photograph becomes a commonplace feature in everyday life. Illustrated magazines proliferate, as does the extent and reach of advertising, as well as the extent to which advertising – whether within magazines or in poster and sign form – is visual. The star system that emerged along with film’s increasing popularity only encouraged the increased production of, and demand for – these paper-based conduits of visual signs. Also not to discount is the fact that mass production and distribution of these texts was enabled by the building of more movie houses, as well as by the increasing automation of not only printing but also packaging and stuffing processes.

As Taylorism was replaced by Fordism during the 1920s, the production and distribution of visual images gained in efficiency.

---


(as was the case in all economic sectors). This concomitantly fueled their consumption; if not visually literacy, the development of which could not keep up.

4.3. Benjamin and Kracauer: A Prescient Social Constructivist Film Criticism

Not surprisingly, Weimar’s most insightful theorists of society and culture – and it should be noted that during the 1920s society and culture become increasingly inseparable – took visual representation, and especially in its photographic and cinematic forms, very seriously. In his *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin speaks programmatically to the sudden centrality of the image in social theory by way of a quotation from Baudelaire: “‘Images – my great, my primitive passion.’”

Benjamin’s essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* is one of Media Studies seminal documents, and stands as one of the most important works of visual aesthetics produced during the twentieth century. While, or perhaps because, the statements – many of them quotations – constituting an imagistic historiography in *The Arcades Project* are strewn throughout a massive text and can be cryptic, their influence on visual cultural studies is still being felt and appraised. Both Benjamin’s stress in *The Arcades* on the necessity of analyzing details as a way to grasp the whole, and the method he advocates of putting images into communication with one another, will prove important to me as I examine the manner in which masculinity is represented as in crisis during the Weimar period.

Siegfried Kracauer’s relationship to visual culture, and to film specifically, about which he wrote more than any other topic and completed two book length studies still in print today,

---

underwent several stages. In the mid-1920s Kracauer abandons what was, in the words of Thomas Y. Levin, “a resigned and even lapsarian metaphysical tone” regarding the Weimar Republic, and which saw it as “the final stage in a process of decay,” in favour of a view that saw popular culture, and especially in its visual forms, as the key to not only understanding his present epoch, but further to this age overcoming itself through a process of self-recognition of the disunity, paucity of value, and social alienation that defined it. After such self-realization fails to occur, Kracauer looks to film, in his From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (1948), to explain why German society regresses so totally – into barbarism of historically never before seen proportions during the 1930s and 40s – rather than progressing as he had thought at least possible. His Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality, published in 1960, is a history of black and white film, a focus on the greatest works of which, Kracauer argues, “afford(s) insight into the intrinsic nature” and “peculiar properties of the medium,” these being that film has privileged access to material reality through its ability to capture and reveal its otherwise unacknowledged detail.309

This notion that film has revelatory potential is one that Benjamin and Kracauer share, with it being a consistent feature of the latter’s thought throughout his more than fifty years of writing on photography and cinema. I will return to this problematic notion momentarily.

First, however, a few words on the idea of “an age overcoming itself,” which might sound strange to today’s reader. Such a traditional Hegelian understanding of both history – and society within it and as history’s engine – still very much influenced both Benjamin’s and

Kracauer’s analyses of Weimar society. Both can rightly be called Hegelians in their shared commitment to rigorously investigating historicity towards enabling society to pursue its utopian birth right. As Thomas Levin observes, in Kracauer’s essays during the 1920s he endorses the social disintegration – the very lack of system – he sees throughout Weimar precisely because he considers it a precondition to a subsequent breakthrough of reason through which social emancipation can be pursued and ultimately reached.\(^\text{310}\)

As for Benjamin, his thought fuses a messianic outlook, rooted in Jewish thought, with a reinterpretation of historical materialism. There are many moments in Benjamin that suggest an optimism regarding where technological developments in culture – with their anti-auratic, class-levelling, and inherently political effects – might lead the proletariat. One example is his enthusiastic validation of Eisenstein’s propagandistic montage masterpiece *The Battleship Potemkin* – a film Kracauer also greatly admired – which both “reproduces the collective in motion” and “has solid concrete foundations ideologically, (and in which) the details have been worked out precisely, like the span of a bridge. The more violently the blows rain down on it, the more beautifully it resounds.”\(^\text{311}\) “As David Ferris observes, “Art is presented by Benjamin as a means of preparing social and political changes by transmitting the new mode of perception that lies at the base of those changes. Such an art is political to its core since it is the means


through which social and political change is mediated in advance of its actual occurrence.” 312

Whether the collective, armed with a new way of perceiving – the prerequisite for a new class consciousness – will cross the bridge that emancipatory art, Potemkin as exemplary, leads is yet to be seen for both Benjamin and Kracauer. The former sees the promise of such an Aufhebung in just such an art. As for the Kracauer of the 1920s, he is likewise optimistic, namely that a synthetic moment will emerge out of the current disintegration bringing a society based in reason with it.

Both also theorize dialectically about visual culture specifically, which is to say they outline its potential to both mislead and liberate the modern subject. Weimar society is for both one becoming increasingly distracted. For Benjamin – the media determinist of the two – technologically reproduced visual images have the power to change the very mode of human perception: “The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well,” 313 Benjamin writes, with one of these historical circumstances being the increasing influence, and speed of transmission, of visual signifiers in society. For Benjamin, the ever-present, reproduced visual image dulls our perception to culture and introduces distraction as a mode of reception. At the same time, however, cinema can function like “a prism” which “brings a new realm of consciousness into being.” 314 Film can, Benjamin writes, again in “Work of Art,” “burst


this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling.”\(^{315}\) Here Benjamin highlights the emancipatory role film can play in bringing the collective – and presumably the proletariat is meant – into visual contact with the details of its existence under technological modernity. While Benjamin’s tone and turns of phrase – “the dynamite of a tenth of a second” and “calmly and adventurously go traveling” – contrast markedly with Kracauer’s more sober and skeptical approach to any subject matter, it is nevertheless with Benjamin’s positive assertions regarding cinema’s revelatory potential that the two most closely align in their writing on visual culture.

The Weimar masses are likewise defined by distraction for Kracauer. His focus is less on what determines this, however, more on popular culture’s role in facilitating a mass realization of the fact that a culture of distraction is existentially unfulfilling and societally stagnating. The “cinema of distraction” paradoxically serves a crucial role for Kracauer in “that it exposes disintegration instead of masking it.”\(^{316}\) The slapstick comedy, of the likes of Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd, is more valuable – he uses the word *sincere* – than the historical epic or art film precisely because it stages contemporary society *as it is*: devoid of substance, structure, unity and purpose. The historical epic is the work that in fact distracts in its “naïve affirmation of cultural values that have become unreal.”\(^{317}\) To engross the viewer in classical narrative form within which bourgeois themes find expression can only distract him from the reality of his

\(^{315}\) Benjamin, “The Work of Art” 236.

\(^{316}\) Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* 328.

situation under postwar modernity according to Krakauer. Only once such a reality is acknowledged en masse as the existential morass that it is can society progress.

I earlier suggested a fundamental similarity between Benjamin and Kracauer to be the belief in the revelatory capacity of visual media, and especially of the cinema. Such an assertion begs the question of whether, or perhaps to what extent, the two theorize according to what David Levin calls the occularcentric paradigm: the tendency to privilege sight over the other senses in its ability to perceive truth, and which critics trace back to classical Greek philosophy and especially to Plato and Aristotle, both of whom gave primacy to sight and associated it with reason. Otherwise asked: do Benjamin and Kracauer consider images more universal, natural, and analogical in their communicative capacity than other forms of signifiers? I believe the answer to this question is a qualified yes, the qualification being that demythologizing the nature of a regime of truth – what both argue – is not tantamount to the revelation of intrinsic reality. Anton Kaes, sounding very much influenced by Benjamin, asserts of cinema: “Every film has its moment (that) reveals in a flash what’s at stake.”\(^{318}\) It is in this sense of “revealing what’s at stake” that Benjamin and Kracauer privilege film; and this form of revelation, I would argue, concerns neither essence nor analogy. Rather it has to do with uncovering the discursive construction of society’s contemporary reality.

Kracauer, whom Adorno once called “a curious realist,”\(^ {319}\) and whom Drehli Robnik more recently labelled “a miraculous realist,”\(^ {320}\) is indeed fond of the words reality


(Wirklichkeit) and truth (Wahrheit), and these are frequently cited by him as exactly what film exposes. He also makes the clear and at least ostensibly contradictory pronouncement in the 1930 essay “Die Angestellten” (The Salaried Masses) that “Reality is a construction.” An early essay on expressionism subtitled “Wesen und Sinn einer Zeitbewegung” (1918), contains, I would argue, Kracauer’s clearest and most developed explanation of what he means (or, at least doesn’t mean) when he refers to reality; and, I believe, it makes it quite obvious that, at least until his overstated and unfortunate – if understandable – claim in From Caligari to Hitler that cinema reveals mass psychosocial motivations, Kracauer sees film as a means to explain the discursive structure of a given time, and more specifically the era about which he most often writes, and which interests me here, the Weimar Republic.

He explains in the “Wesen und Sinn” essay:

Sagen wir besser gleich zu Beginn, was in diesem Zusammenhang nicht unter Wirklichkeit zu verstehen ist. Ich meine nicht mit ihr das transzendentale Jenseits im Sinne Kants; ferner ist sie nicht schlechthin gleichbedeutend mit Wirklichkeit als dem Gegensatz zu einer nur in der Einbildung bestehenden Welt; ebensowenig begreife ich

---


Reality, then, is neither meant in the sense of a noumenal realm, access to which is impossible on account of our perceiving only the phenomenal experience into which our faculties recode such noumena; (but which film, as a medium capable of organizing phenomena in novel ways, might at least give us a glimpse?) Nor is reality some fantastical imagining, whether of a collective or, à la Descartes’ solipsistic evil demon in the *Meditations*, individual nature. Krakauer also does not mean reality in the perspectivist’s sense first articulated by Protagoras as *Homo Mensura*, and which Nietzsche advocates a little over 2300 years later.

Rather, the potential Krakauer sees in film is to reveal the nature of a time’s regime of knowledge; its mode of revelation might be called, in the Foucauldian sense, epistemic; what it reveals is akin to what Husserl means by lifeworld: the limits of, or rules governing, phenomenal experience; if, crucially, Krakauer rejects any claims to universality – whether temporal or social – regarding such phenomenological structures. Exemplary of the sort of revelation Krakauer intends, neither natural nor universal, quite the contrary – constructed and specific to a time and place – is a scene from Karl Grune’s 1923 film *Die Straße*, and in which:

The swirl of the characters resembles the whirl of atoms; they do not meet, but rather bump up against each other, they drift apart without separating. Instead of living

---

connected with things, they sink down to level of inanimate objects: of automobiles, walls, neon lights, irrespective of time, flashing on and off .... 323

The film reveals the lack of social connectivity — the characters do not meet — as well as their lack of connection to the things they encounter. Indeed their alienation in the first sense is a consequence of their alienation in the second: they treat other subjects as they treat the technologized objects now dominating their lives — with distraction. This excerpt obviously portrays what Marx already identified as Verdinglichung (reification). What Kracauer observes is that reification defines and delimits Weimar existence specifically, and that, ironically, it is film — one of the very media of distraction — that holds the potential to reveal the nature of contemporary Wirklichkeit. “The human individual” as Kracauer observes in “The Salaried Masses,” “is formed not by community as such but by knowledge, from which community too may arise.”324 A world defined by distraction, especially as embodied as fleeting visual signifiers, inculcates a kind of knowing in individual agents that defines the manner in which they relate not only to objects but to other agents, with such relations defining community, or rather its lack, as was the case, Kracauer argues, in Weimar Germany.

Benjamin shares Kracauer’s belief that film has emancipatory potential on account of its capacity to reveal the nature of the whole construction through revealing the otherwise unseen atoms, as well as the relationships obtaining between them. Benjamin is reacting directly against Rankean historicism, the dominant approach to history during the nineteenth and well


into the twentieth century, the goal of which was to objectively represent the past, to show it, as Ranke himself put it, “as it actually happened” (“wie es eigentlich gewesen ist”), by means of the collection of primary sources – the vast majority of these textual – that narrate what occurred. In Benjamin’s own words: “The history that showed things ‘as they really were’ was the strongest narcotic of the (nineteenth) century,” and to overcome this narcosis he advocates a turn to an analysis of minor details, especially those that would ordinarily be dismissed precisely on account of not fitting the overall structure of a narrative or argument, as well as the deliberate rending of statements from their systematic discursive contexts to place them in constellation with others, especially in a dialectical relationship between the here and then, between the past and the contemporary moment.

The film can be considered, I would argue, as a medium that technologically models Benjamin’s imagistic epistemological methodology as he defines it in the section of The Arcade Project entitled “On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress” (“Erkenntnistheoretisches, Theorie des Fortschritts”).

There he commits

> to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event.

---


326 Benjamin, The Arcades Project 463.
And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such.\textsuperscript{327}

\textbf{4.4. The Aporia of Impotency at the Heart of Karl Grune’s \textit{Die Straße}}

What I have been arguing here is that Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s projects overlap precisely in viewing knowledge in a very similar way to later social constructivist thinkers – Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe among these. This similarity involves a broad interpretation of textuality, one that not only challenges the traditional privileging of ‘high culture’ as a means of insight and explanation, but even treats history as a constructed text; and which also highlights, and methodologically reacts against, what Laclau and Mouffe call discursive closure, and by which they mean the appearance of objectivity of that which is always already contingent.

Benjamin has proved more influential than Kracauer methodologically, with his advocacy that analysis focus on a moment being a model for the likes of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, both of whom argued from the ill-fitting detail outward to an understanding of not only the whole but beyond the text to the real stakes, namely to those unseen factors determining and delimiting the nature of the text’s construction.

I turn again to Anton Kaes again, who here again shows Benjamin’s influence:

\begin{quote}
Every film has its moment. Be it an unforeseen glance, an unmotivated gesture, or a startling sequence unnecessary for narrative progression, such a ‘moment’ reveals in a flash what’s at stake – then and now.\textsuperscript{328}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{327} Benjamin, \textit{The Arcades Project} 461.
I want to analyze two such ‘crystalline’ moments from canonical Weimar era films here. The first occurs early in Karl Grune’s *Die Straße* and constitutes an aporia not only in being the gap in the text – the moment that doesn’t fit and so brings attention to itself: the crystal that unlocks the work – but in the less theoretical sense of literally staging a man’s moment of perplexity, doubt and confusion.\(^{329}\)

On one level Grune’s *Die Straße* is a self-referential work – a film about film, or more precisely a film about the perceived inherent dangers of this new and strange medium. As Stefan Andriopolous argues, well into the 1920s film was considered a potentially hypnotic medium, one capable of persuading spectators to commit (potentially criminal) acts wholly inconsistent with how they would normally behave. “Contemporary representations of the new medium were predicated,” Andriopolous summarizes, “on a structural analogy between cinema and hypnotism, thereby giving rise to the fear that the spellbound audience might succumb to the irresistible influence emanating from the cinematic apparatus.”\(^{330}\) Andriopolous focusses on *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* (1920), a film I will also discuss here, but it’s clear that the 1923 film *Die Straße* also embodies this fear: its *Kleinbürger* protagonist is lured by projected images – the mode of cinema – into a night of activities in which he would ordinarily never take part, and which include soliciting prostitution and gambling – of which he is guilty – robbery, to which he falls victim; and murder, of which he is wrongly accused.

---

\(^{328}\) Anton Kaes 80.


On another level *Die Straße* is clearly about male identity, and more specifically about one man’s night of identity crisis, with crisis understood as both a time of intense trouble and danger – he is seconds away from prison cell suicide by its end – as well as a turning point – or rather, a turning-back-point, and specifically to a form of male identity he should have never dared to try to escape. Grune’s protagonist follows the following role trajectory in the film: he begins as a petit-bourgeois husband; becomes its antithesis, a flaneur; soon enough is also a paramour and prospective John; and once he proves hopeless as flaneur and John returns home to his wife with his tail firmly between his legs.

The label flaneur is *prima facie* a very well-fitting one for Grune’s protagonist – he takes to the metropolitan streets, after all, where he strolls aimlessly on purpose, looking in this window, then that; even stopping at one point early in the film to lean against a shop front and simply watch the crowds go by – which he does with a look of self-satisfaction on his face. At this juncture he quite neatly embodies the definition of flaneur as masterful voyeur, as a man who wanders at his own pace observing the city alive around him but from a distance, never getting too close, remaining anonymous, and empowered by his ability to do so.

This definition is superficial, of course, and cannot account for the fact that Grune’s flaneur is unable to keep his distance, is incapable of just looking, is not satisfied to only follow – he wants to more than just touch, it must be said – and proves ultimately to be anything but empowered by his urban wanderings. He has set out into what Elizabeth Wilson describes as – in reference to Baudelaire specifically, but in words apt also in this case – “a transgressive space, which dislocates established frontiers.” In our man’s case the frontier between safe (and
stable) domesticity and the dangers of the urban night, which he proves not nearly man enough to handle. Under Wilson’s more nuanced understanding of the flaneur, which highlights the risks inherent in his mode of being, the metropolis provides, she continues, “the mise en scène of the disintegration of male potency. It is an agoraphobic, giddy space, productive of hysteria, terror.”

Giddiness, hysteria, terror: the first two of these emotions can quite rightly be attributed to our man as he careens from street to dance hall to card table – the stage for his moodiest episode, incidentally, when he realizes that his paramour isn’t a one-man woman – to prostitute’s bedroom to attempted suicide in a prison cell. He is led down this path to ruin by said prostitute, her pimp, and their male accomplice, who together always intended to take away his agency, and succeed in doing so. Once they are finished with him he is entirely powerless, has lost any and all control over his life.

The film as a whole, then, is the tale of one man’s unmanning – an unmanning that would never have occurred had he not tried to be the kind of man he is not.

Kaes’ focus, following Benjamin, is on the moment of crystallization that reveals, as he puts it, the greater stakes, and specifically on a moment of narrative rupture that sees our man enter an alley, see a sign, which he momentarily mistakes for a wonder and as a result suddenly proves unable to continue his pursuit of sexual satisfaction: a pursuit which underpins the film’s plot development, it should be noted.

In *Die Straße* a middle-aged husband is summoned by the moving shadows projected on to his living room wall from the busy street below to leave petit-bourgeois domesticity behind – complete with its heavy furnishings and an aproned wife tending a pot of soup for dinner – to become a flaneur and wander the seedy streets of the contemporary metropolis at night.

A beautiful young woman – standing apparently aimlessly on a street corner; presumably she is a prostitute – catches the man’s fancy. He follows her, his gait jaunty, swinging his umbrella beside him, keeping a distance of about ten feet. She looks back from time to time encouraging him on.

Rounding a corner in pursuit, the man now finds himself in a crooked and shadowy alley, indistinct but for what appear to be a large set of eyes – approximately four feet long – which suddenly illuminate above him.

He stops dead in response, as if frozen by their gaze; then begins to literally inch forward carefully, gingerly, covering no ground, the entire time with his eyes focussed on what the viewer now identifies as a pair of neon spectacles – a piece of signage, obviously – probably advertising an optometry shop – but by which this man seems baffled. A medium close up shot now reveals the man’s suddenly very anxious face staring up directly at the sign. He looks, now sheepishly, towards his potential paramour (perhaps for guidance).

The woman looks back at him coquettishly from up the block – inviting him to pursue her further. This is not enough to free him to do so, however, as he remains (essentially) frozen in place even after she has begun to slowly move on, if still urging him on with her glances.
The neon eyes above him now suddenly blink off. With this he is suddenly free to move. The man lifts his hat in a comical gesture of acknowledgement; and now resumes his pursuit, with the very same spring suddenly returned to his step. He also begins swinging his umbrella again. The eyes blink on and off regularly now as woman, then man, round the next corner. The pursuit continues.\textsuperscript{332}

![Image](image)

The moment in question, argues Anton Kaes: “discloses the film’s underlying theoretical project – the nexus between urban modernity and the disciplining power of vision.” He continues: “The all-seeing eye gives the flaneur a vague warning, it suggests a proleptic disciplinary measure or even prospective punishment [...] [He] has no place to hide from the all-pervasive gaze of power; the animism of the omnipresent eye is merely an embodiment of the eye of surveillance he has trained on himself.”\textsuperscript{334} The inanimate eyes suddenly, uncannily, come to life; and our

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{332} \textit{Die Straße}, dir. Karl Grune, perf. Eugen Klöpfer, Aud Egede-Nissen, and Max Schreck, UFA, 1923, Film.
  \item \textsuperscript{333} Sergio Suchodolski, "Die Straße (Karl Grune,1923 French Subs) SIN AUDIO," Online video clip, YouTube, YouTube, 20 Jan. 2013, 28.13 / 1.29.58, Web, 10 Sept. 2014.
  \item \textsuperscript{334} Kaes 85-86.
\end{itemize}
man realizes exactly what Foucault famously observes in *Discipline and Punish*: that the prisoner, and increasingly the citizen (become prisoner), is “subjected to a field of visibility, and knows it, [and consequently] assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.”

For Kaes, what is still at stake now was for the first time at stake then, when “an increased desire for visibility that motivates the expansion of cinema in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had grown by the 1920s into a machinery of self-control.” He is justified in highlighting the panoptical self-disciplining power at work in this scene, and his connecting such self-regulation with urban experience under modernity (and more specifically *in modern urban space*) is both appropriate and well-taken. As I pointed out earlier, the scopic regime that emerged at the beginning of the last century has globalized over the last several decades, with the panopticon taking on not only a more global but also more concrete and immediate form with the spread of CCTV cameras and their digital feeds. Thus *Die Straße* contains a defining filmic moment that offers insight into the scopic regime’s inculcation of self-disciplining subjects, both then and now. The stakes remain essentially the same, if the scope has widened.

---

335 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1995) 202-203. (Brackets are mine.)

336 Kaes 86.

337 The argument is not new, of course. Every undergraduate in the Humanities or Social Sciences inevitably hears it at some point regarding Hausmann’s urban re-planning of Paris, which saw a medieval labyrinth – which offered nooks and crannies within which to plan and practice revolutionary activity – replaced by wide boulevards conducive to both looking and being looked at, a place within which the citizen internalizes state regulation as both performance for, and fear of being judged by, the Other.
Kaes’ extrapolation to the greater stakes, as valuable as it is, takes our focus away from this crystal moment’s relationship to this particular film, however, one in which the suddenly luminous eyes cause temporary impotency within a narrative that stages, as I already alluded to, a man’s unmanning. In a formal sense the scene relative to the whole constitutes a momentary inability in the performance of its function. As Kaes rightly points out, this is a sequence “unnecessary for narrative progression” – and it is the only such scene in the film – with narrative progression being the function of narrative cinema. It isn’t that the film cannot come. It is however fair to say that, at least for approximately ninety seconds, the film cannot go. It does soon recover its potency in this regard, and for the remaining seventy minutes represents narrative cinema of rather regular proportions, complete with a climax that sees an innocent man freed at the last minute and the right wrongdoers get their just desserts. (Justice being served proves especially satisfying for the viewer in the case of the prostitute who, unlike her accomplices, shows no remorse to the bitter end.)

This inability to perform is also staged at the level of content.

If, as Elizabeth Wilson observes, the city provides “the mise en scene of the disintegration of male potency,” then in the blinking eyes sign in Die Straße we have a specific object in the mise en scene that triggers potency’s breakdown. What should we make of this fact? In the case of our man as flaneur – who by definition wanders, follows, and observes, which is to say embodies the masculine “gaze” à la Mulvey – to suddenly be unable to do any of these is to become impotent. In the case of our man as potential paramour – and in fact as prospective John – to suddenly become incapacitated in his attempt to follow a woman
encouraging him to have sex with her is to become impotent: is, in a sense, to become sexually powerless. Whether we look at the aporia scene in Die Straße as simply a married man’s moment of bad conscience, or as this moment of bad conscience signifying something greater (perhaps – as Kaes argues – our status as self-disciplining agents under modernity’s scopic regime) we always see a man’s thoroughgoing disempowerment.

4.5. **From Castration to Spectacle / From Der Sandmann to Dr. Caligari**

The illuminated optical store sign is not the only object to play a role in the aporia scene in Die Straße. The other is a common, steel-ribbed umbrella, itself a fairly recent invention – Samuel Fox’s in 1852. The modern umbrella is already a symbol of petit-bourgeois identity by the 1920s; but it is also a rather special elongated object, one Freud thought worthy of its own parenthetical explanation in his famous discussion of phallic signifiers in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and this “on account of its opening which might be likened to an erection.”

Our man jauntily swings his, the resumption of this activity signaling his freedom to again move and so pursue sexual gratification. He never gets to open it. We cannot be sure either way regarding his becoming erect while playing the role of a John. We know definitively that he fails at flaneurie as well as in ultimately realizing his illicit sexual desires. His impotency on both counts is the point of the film, I would argue, both at the micro – crystalline scene – and macro – greater narrative – levels.

Surely Freud would also have something to say about those illuminated eyes.

---

In “The Uncanny” (1919), his best-known foray into literary analysis, Freud asserts that: “Anxiety about one’s eyes, fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated.” He argues further that such an Oedipal fear is what is at stake in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Der Sandmann (1816), a story whose protagonist Nathanael is gripped as a child by the fear of having his eyes ripped out by the titular bogeyman; a specter which returns to him as an adult, ultimately driving him to suicide. Along the way, Nathanael falls in love with a robot girl, mistaking her for the real thing. She is his objet petit a, the noun phrase Jacques Lacan employs within his symbolic matrix to identify the unobtainable object of desire.

For Freud it is the former plot feature that is more responsible for the tale’s uncanny effect on the reader – while striking in its strangeness, its foreignness, Nathanael’s specter simultaneously alerts us to an inherent male psychical anxiety: that of castration, of being disabled sexually as punishment for, and prohibition against, the innate male desire for the mother. The eyes in Die Straße, I would argue, are uncanny in the second, animistic sense; like Olimpia in Der Sandmann, it is the fact that a machine appears a conscious being, capable of deciding when to switch on, for how long, and most importantly for whom, that constitutes the film’s arresting – and so telling – moment – both for the protagonist and the viewer. Die Straße’s protagonist experiences anxiety in response to the sign illuminating – in both senses of the word – but not regarding his own eyes. His anxiety results from feeling watched, certainly, but also in response to being hailed technologically – by the sudden appearance of a ghost in the machine. The moment is as spectral as it is scopic.

---

Another canonical Weimar film resembles Hoffmann’s novella more closely though: the Expressionist classic *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920).

Speaking of *Caligari’s* social figuration, Stephen Brockmann observes how uncanny the resemblance between the two works in fact is: “Francis, the film’s possibly insane narrator, strongly resembles (Hoffmann’s) protagonist Nathanael, while Caligari resembles the villains Coppola and Spalanzani (both doubles for Nathanael’s childhood bogeyman Coppelius). Even the somnambulist Cesare harks back to a figure in *Der Sandmann*: the mannequin Olimpia who is created by Spalanzani and is completely under his control.”

In arguably the film’s most famous scene, the titular Caligari first reveals to the viewer the extent of his power over Cesare. “Step right up,” he implores a throng of expectant fairgoers. “Before your very eyes, Cesare will awaken from 23 years of death-like sleep!”

A heavy curtain is raised. A coffin stands upright on a stage within a large tent that is now full of anxious spectators. After a few waves of a wand the mountebank Caligari opens the coffin’s doors to reveal a man with ghostly white features whose tight-fitting black tricot serves to accentuate his naturally tall and slim frame. His firmly shut eyes possess thick long lashes and are encircled by dark rings that testify to his more than two decade long coma. His thin lips appear carefully rouged.

“I am calling you ... your master! Awake for a moment from your dark night ...” demands the Dr. – to which Cesare immediately responds: his heavily made-up face first begins to twitch; then

---

painfully slowly his eyes open into an expression of rapt terror. He lifts his long hands from his sides – again with exaggerated slowness – into a position that mimics the holding of another person one is about to violently shake; then he takes five tiny, unsteady steps towards the audience before lowering his arms with great lethargy to his sides again.

A shot of the audience now highlights two friends – the aforementioned Francis and his best friend Alan – with both of whom the viewer is already acquainted. The latter appears visibly shaken by what he has witnessed onstage. The former initially seems inquisitive, attempting to understand the strange male form on stage.

In the meantime (that is, in the brief space of a cross-cut) – and so without the viewer seeing him do it – Cesare has almost imperceptibly altered his stance. The careful viewer notices that his legs are now subtly crossed in a telling gesture that draws attention to an area of instability.341

---

Catherine B. Clement agrees with me here, I believe, if she focusses on a different gesture. She argues of this scene that “The male somnambulist, almost androgynous in Caligari’s manipulations, is the equivalent of the female hysteric.”

She continues:

In the opening of the box, there is something of a ritual unveiling, like the hermaphrodite unveiling a male sex under women’s clothes. In all the anxieties, of waiting, of fright, of surprises, are found the echo of this gesture, the repetition of this ritual, which takes up again the very question of the hysteric: “Am I man or woman?”

Arguing this scene, and indeed the film as a whole, as staging the instability of male identity is to draw on a long tradition of such crisis interpretations of Caligari. Writing in 1990 Clement is,

---


in problematizing and destabilizing Cesare’s gender at the source, in fact responding against Siegfried Kracauer’s post-Nazi reading of the dynamic between Caligari and Cesare, which for him revealed “Weimar’s central theme, that of authoritarian father figures controlling a powerless populace.”

As Alexander Doty observes, for decades analysis was dominated by – or, perhaps, suffered under the shadow of – Kracauer’s psychosocial reading, which appropriates Freud’s straight, male Oedipal interpretation of Hoffmann’s Der Sandmann, applies it to Caligari, through which Kracauer then views many other canonical Weimar films, a broad enough base, he contends, for his thesis that 1920s German film reveals a mass unconscious desire among the German populace for authoritarian rule.

Kracauer’s psychosocial interpretation of Caligari, in much the same way that I earlier argued regarding Freud’s interpretation of Daniel Schreber’s Memoirs, enacts discursive closure in dominating, and so delimiting, the range and tenor of analytical responses to a text. I am less interested in the question of whether Caligari represents masculinity in crisis – I believe it does, which, as I have argued throughout, does not constitute anything exceptional. Representing masculinity as in crisis, to put it bluntly, is what is done, and we have been doing it as a matter of course for a long time.

What interests me more is what is new about the way masculinity is represented as in crisis during the 1920s.

A tendency develops, I would argue, to stage the crisis of male identity as spectacle; and there is no better place to start following this tendency than with 1920’s Caligari, which

---

344 Alexander Doty, Queering the Film Canon (New York: Routledge, 2000) 45.
Krakauer was right to single out as a seminal and representative text, if not for the reasons he asserts. Whether we focus on the Oedipal dynamic between dictatorial father and his tortured prodigy, or see in the androgynous latter the signifiers of unstable gender – those carefully rouged lips, false eye lashes and crossed legs that subtly draw the viewer’s eyes to an area of genital liminality – we, like the audience only meters away from Cesare within the film’s mise-en-scene, are consuming male crisis as spectacle. Whereas the crises of masculinity suffered by Messrs. Gustl and Thameyer are at times hard for the reader to watch, they aren’t staged in such a way that foregrounds being watched.

There are, of course, numerous ways to define *spectacle*. Likewise *to consume* can be understood in several ways. Deriving from the 14th-century Middle English meaning “specially arranged or prepared for display,” *spectacle* today denotes the following according to The Oxford Dictionaries: “A visually striking performance or display,” and “An event or scene regarded in terms of its visual impact.” All of these definitions apply in the case of *Caligari*, as they do in all of the examples I discuss here, and they do so whether we consider film, prose, or drama. That male crisis should be represented as a “visually striking” or visually *impactful* event during the 1920s, that is during that decade which sees new technologies of mass reproduction redefine modernity along increasingly visual lines, should not be that surprising. If such a shift in the medium of representation can alter modes of perception, as Benjamin, and certainly not only he, argues, then certainly it can, and does, alter modes of representation. That such events

---

should be “performative” in character, as all of my examples here are, is less obviously explicable.

Turning to the verb to consume: it can denote “to enjoy avidly,” an accurate description of what those Viennese throngs did in the 1890s when a camp of Ashanti tribesmen were staged as a spectacle in Vienna’s Prater. As they feature in Schnitzler’s “Andreas Thameyer,” however, these spectacular Others stare back, you will recall, with eyes aflame – as Thameyer himself puts it – consuming the protagonist’s honour, and destabilizing his male identity to such an extent that he considers suicide his only way to regain his honour and so restabilize his identity – at least for posterity.

The Prologue to Wedekind’s Erdgeist, where femme fatale Lulu is introduced by means of an avatar – a potentially deadly performing beast – gives us another example of such a spectacle. Again, however, it is the woman/serpent responsible for the emasculation here. As was the case in the garden of Eden, man is debased here by means of an Other. In all of the works I consider here, by contrast, it is European man himself thrust into the spotlight under the glare of which he must perform his own emasculation – and before a gathered crowd of his peers. Those who before watched the show now also become the show – or, to be more accurate, become the stars of the sideshow. The star of Caligari’s sideshow is Cesare, the spectral androgyne trotted out for the financial benefit of its despotic master. I will soon introduce another such attraction.

---

“In many ways,” Paul Dobryden observes, “the world of Caligari is that of Berlin’s arcades.” Dobryden has in mind “The Passage Panoptikum, which [...] contained dozens of rooms, each with a different kind of visual entertainment ... including wax figures, and a freak show (the “Hall of Abnormalities”). These arcades aren’t exactly the iron and glass structures of nineteenth century Paris, which Walter Benjamin identified as the ideal space for the fetishistic display of commodities of all sorts – “binoculars and flower seeds, screws and musical scores, makeup and stuffed vipers, fur coats and revolvers” – and within which “the circus-like and theatrical element of commerce (is) extraordinarily heightened.” The phantasmagoria on display in the tents of Holstenwald’s fairground in Caligari, as in the rooms of the Panoptikum, are more limited in scope than those Benjamin has in mind. Of the bizarre and fantastic variety exclusively, they are more akin to those commodities on display at the Völkerschau than to those in the modern mall, our contemporary equivalent to Benjamin’s arcades.

Another important difference between those objects displayed at the fairground and in Benjamin’s arcades pertains to the way in which they are looked at: while the latter may be gazed upon – and perhaps even gawked at, which perhaps better denotes the stupidity of the consumer enthralled by the commodity fetish; and who purchases precisely because they are dumbfounded, as if by an illusion – the former are subject to the debasing power of what Laura


348 Benjamin, The Arcades Project 828.

349 Benjamin, The Arcades Project 43.
Mulvey famously called the male gaze in her highly influential 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

4.6. A Note on the Broad Theoretical Applicability of the ‘Male Gaze’

It is important to understand that while Mulvey theorized the male gaze as a way to describe the uneven visual power dynamics between males and females in Hollywood films of the classical era, the privileging of the male side of the dynamic (in the service of male desire) is not fundamental or inherent to the theory, nor is its application to film essential, let alone to that of any particular tradition or style. Fundamental to the notion of the male gaze is the unbalanced power dynamic itself, which is embodied by those on either side of it, whether we understand that dynamic in gendered, class, or even age terms. Theoretically the ‘male’ gaze could be embodied by women looking at men; men and/or women looking at children; whites looking at blacks, as was the case with the Völkerschau of the fin de siècle; or, indeed, blacks looking at whites. What is key to the ‘male’ gaze is not that men – or their representations in a cultural text – embody it; it is rather the way of looking itself as practiced, or represented in practice, by any group and which results in the disempowerment of another, even if this only occurs in the consciousness of the gazer(s).

That Mulvey, a feminist film theorist writing at the height of second-wave feminism during the 1970s should have formulated it in patriarchal and phallocentric terms is understandable. Furthermore, the evidence she draws from 1940s and 50s Hollywood cinema is convincing, as are her readings of specific texts. To misunderstand the theory as applicable only

---

to the visual power dynamics obtaining between men and women – and flowing from the former to the latter – is to do the analytical power of Mulvey’s ideas a disservice. Indeed, Mulvey has described “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” as a manifesto and her intentions in writing it to be provocation.\footnote{351}{See: Laura Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 ) 213.}

The provocation of others to theorize the dynamics of power imbalance in visual terms is exactly what the essay has done. As Clifford Manlove points out “’gaze theory’ has made its way into literary and cultural studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, Holocaust studies, black/whiteness studies, and critical race theory.” And, as he further explains: “In most cases, the gaze is used to help explain the hierarchical power relations between two or more groups or, alternatively, between a group and an ‘object.’”\footnote{352}{Clifford T. Manlove, “Visual Drive and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey,” Cinema Journal 46.3 (Spring 2007): 84.} I am interested here in the gaze as focussed on the spectacular object, and specifically on spectacular objects that are men.

4.7. The Gaze and the Spectacle of Castration in Ernst Toller’s Hinkemann

In Ernst Toller’s Heimkehrer drama Hinkemann eine Tragödie the titular protagonist is, I would argue, just such an object. Before focussing on the crystallized moment out of which to analyze him in visual terms, as object of the gaze and so spectacle, I should briefly introduce the play that signalled Toller’s turn from Expressionism to a more naturalistic style, and which is considered by most commentators his bleakest pronouncement on not only his contemporary moment but on human nature generally.
Toller wrote *Hinkemann* during 1921-22 while imprisoned at Niederschönfeld penitentiary in Bavaria for his role in the failed 1918-1919 German Revolution. He spent 149 days of his sentence there in solitary confinement, another 24 on hunger strike, and the play’s pessimism should not only be considered a consequence of the author’s deep disappointment at the failure of the revolution, which it absolutely is, but surely also as an expression of his personal alienation.

On one level the work tries to explain the failure of the aforementioned revolution, which it essentially blames on internicine factionism on the political left. The beginning of scene four of act two makes this clear: it takes place in a worker’s bar within which representatives of these factions, which go unnamed, verbally joust, making themselves appear ridiculous in the process. A brief vignette has a Slater accusing a Tiler of practicing an inferior trade in ironic language that points to a fundamental misunderstanding of the goals of socialism; as the Slater puts it: “Und wenn hundertmal Revolution war! Da kann keine Revolution was ändern! Dekorationsmaler ist was besseres als Tüncher ... Wir bleiben Schieferdecker und Ihr bleibt Ziegeldecker” – after which the caricatures Max Knatsch, Michel Unbeschwert, Sebaldus Singegott and Peter Immergleich accuse each other in turn of having the wrong interpretation of socialism.\(^{353}\) Toller’s petty dogmatists not only lend the work some valuable if fleeting levity, they allegorize real divisions on the left, of course, with SPD leader Friedrich Ebert’s pragmatic decision making – which saw him conspire with traditional elites towards establishing a democratic Republic – considered by most historians at least one of the main reasons, if not the

\(^{353}\) Ernst Toller, *Hinkemann*, (Stuttgart: Reklam, 1971) 22-28. Print. The name *Knatsch* translates as ‘spat’; *Unbeschwert* as ‘not aggrieved; Singegott as, roughly, ‘sing to God’; and *Immergleich* as ‘always the same’.
main reason, why the revolution ultimately failed. It is also clear that Toller had little faith in the men on the ground either, as, except for Hinkemann himself, every proletarian male in the play is either lampooned or derided. Under this interpretation, as Helen Cafferty observes, the play’s central trope – Hinkemann’s emasculation – constitutes Toller’s resigned “expression of political impotence.”

On another level, however, Hinkemann is a work that thematizes another perceived form of impotence: the crisis of masculinity facing Germany in the early 1920s, and which is understood as a result of the nation’s defeat in the First World War that decimated the male population, and sent many more legions of men home crippled. Hinkemann is ostensibly the least subtle representation of masculinity in crisis I discuss – it certainly stages the most obvious and thorough emasculation I treat here. The play’s literally castrated protagonist – who caught a French bullet in the trenches (and elsewhere, of course) – can be read as a statement of not only male proletarian ineptitude and/or inefficacy but also, by means of allegory, as a synecdoche of failed German masculinity as a whole. That Toller intended the work to be

---

354 This line is essentially what Sebastian Haffner argues in his influential Die deutsche Revolution, (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2004).


356 The Heimkehrer genre centres on the often tragic travails of returning soldiers. Other examples are Wolfgang Borchert’s drama Draußen vor der Tür (1947) and Arno Schmidt’s novella Brand’s Haide (1951). In film, Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s Die Ehe der Maria Braun (1979) challenges the genre’s conventions in focussing on the exploits of the wife of a soldier does not return, while Sönke Wortmann’s Das Wunder von Bern (2003) responds to the tradition’s thoroughgoing negativity by bringing a Heimkehrer and his son together through a shared passion for football.

Wikipedia lists the number of German military dead at between 1,773,700 and 2,037,000 depending on the source. Likewise, military wounded are listed between 4,216,058 and 4,247,143. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_casualties
understood this way is suggested by its original title *Der deutsche Hinkemann*, which, as Cecil Davies observes:

is subtly balanced between the particular and the general. Hinkemann the individual is there; the definite article, however, suggests a common noun (rather than a proper name) constructed on the analogy of *Hinkebein* and *Hinkefuß* (gammy leg) and thus implies generalization; the adjective deutsche on the other hand particularises again.  

Of course, Toller isn’t asserting his literally castrated synecdoche in order to lament the loss of some idealized German maleness. *Hinkemann* is a satire with which, as Cafferty observes, “Toller clearly wanted to reject the metaphor that our everyday language suggests: male sexual potency equals national strength.”  

As was the case with Schnitzler, Toller’s is a critique of a discursive construct, not a description of a real identity crisis.

To understand *Hinkemann* as concerned only with class or even national themes is to sell the work short, however. Toller has something to say about the dire consequences of the male domination of society in all places and throughout history here, and moreover he can be read as an early theorist of what I earlier defined as ‘gaze theory,’ which posits a way of cognizing others visually that is responsible for engendering and upholding the very social inequalities Toller is committed to overcoming. If a revolution is to succeed, Toller suggests,

---

357 Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller: a Revaluation*, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996) 269. As Davies notes, the original title would have likely been kept were it not for the scandal of 17 January 1924 which saw the work attacked for its national pessimism from the right and the left. For a discussion of this scandal see: *Der Fall Toller: Kommentar und Materialien*, ed. John M. Spalek and Wolfgang Frühwald, (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1979) 147-148.

358 Cafferty 48.
perhaps without knowing, it must occur at the level of visual perception. It is this argument I will pursue for the rest of this chapter.

As Richard W. McCormick observes, *Hinkemann* is a text among many at the time that together form “a discourse of castration.” The films *Die Straße* and das *Cabinet des Caligari* examined here are two of many more such works.\(^{359}\) McCormick is careful to note that such a discourse is hardly a Weimar peculiarity, however. Rather, as he puts it: “in a broad, evocative, even hyperbolic sense, figuratively and not literally (such a discourse functions) to specify a complex of anxieties around loss of power, control and mastery – ultimately issues of social, political, and economic power, (which are) as often as not represented as a type of castration.”\(^{360}\) These anxieties respond to the destabilizing effect war in general has on what we might call patriarchal hegemony; or, on what McCormick describes, with the help of Kaja Silverman, as “‘the central part which the equation of penis and phallus play in the maintenance of a certain reality’ constructed in patriarchal ideologies.”\(^{361}\) Silverman has argued that many American post-World War II films thematize the destabilization of this equation in terms of “the impairment of anatomical masculinity.”\(^{362}\) The same argument can be generalized to all post-war periods, Weimar among these of course.

---

\(^{359}\) McCormick argues Dupont’s *Variety* (1925) and G.W. Pabst’s *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (1926) to be other examples.

\(^{360}\) Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity,”* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 60. (My brackets.)

\(^{361}\) McCormick 60. The Silverman quote is from *Male Subjectivity on the Margins,* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 65.

\(^{362}\) Silverman 54.
Under Silverman’s understanding, the individual’s loss of the penis and or testicles – or another body part serving as proxy – symbolizes if not the loss of male hegemony – where hegemony is understood as realized as and through discourses that form ideologies and support their institutions – then at least a serious challenge to the unquestioning acceptance of what is in Silverman’s words “a certain reality.” This “certain reality” for Silverman, who is working within a Lacanian interpretive framework, is anchored by the phallus – a foundational concept bestowing power and privilege that, in societies equating it with the penis (an attribute men have and women lack) secures patriarchal dominance. Lacan considered the phallus an indivisible and privileged signifier responsible for inaugurating the process of signification per se. In terms of the discourse analytical vocabulary – borrowed from Laclau and Mouffe – that I have employed in this work, the phallus would be considered a signifier of unparalleled influence: a universal signifier. Indeed, it would represent a node responsible for the masculinist closure of the entire discursive field – an assertion I will revisit in my conclusion. This closure would be ultimately contingent – would/could not be the case inherently. It would however be – and I would argue has indeed proved – very difficult to challenge.

McCormick sees Silverman’s penis/phallus “central equation (as) quite frankly thematized in Toller’s play,” and points as support for this claim to a moment at the beginning of the second scene of act three in which Hinkemann discovers and then buys a male fertility idol. With bitter reverence Hinkemann prays to this Priapus – a statuette with a greatly exaggerated penis – that he has recently purchased through barter for his watch: “Es ist kein Gott außer dir,” he exclaims, “Zu dir beten sie. ... du bist das A und das O, der Anfang und das

363 McCormick 61.
Ende, du bist die Wahrheit, du bist der Gott der Völker. On one level the Priapus has in abundance what Hinkemann physiologically lacks, a penis and by association the ability to satisfy a woman sexually and to procreate, and it thus points to Hinkemann’s personal tragedy: that he can no longer do either. It signifies that, without a penis, a man cannot fulfil his natural role and consequently is nothing in this society. The striking, logocentric language Toller employs certainly also suggests the stronger, universal and essentialist interpretation at which McCormick hints, however. With “alpha and omega” the Christian logos is evoked; with “the truth,” its logical equivalent; while “the people’s God” suggests a shared social logos. The penis as logos is essentially what the phallus understood as a master (or even universal) signifier means. It is this level of influence that, through Hinkemann, Toller seems to attribute it here.

The phallus, I would argue, finds physical embodiment in the form of Hinkemann’s foil: Paul Großhahn. The name of this brutish ladies man, who seduces Hinkemann’s wife, translates as “big rooster,” which, while not aligning as directly with the male member as the English idiom that represents it does – the cock – nevertheless leaves no doubt that Großhahn’s form of macho masculinity represents a problem for Toller. The question is how to understand this problem. That it is a matter of vision, or more specifically of what Laura Mulvey defined as the voyeuristic gaze, is evinced by a passage the careful wording of which is easy to overlook.

Mulvey distinguishes between two forms of gaze: fetishistic and voyeuristic; the latter, she argues, is controlling and associated with sadism: the looker’s “pleasure lies in ascertaining

---

364 Toller 43.
guilt – asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment.”\textsuperscript{365} Großhahn makes it clear in a diatribe ostensibly about his relationship to the machine he works, that he gains great pleasure from such a voyeuristic perspective:

Wenn ich an der Maschine stehe, packt’s mich mit Teufelslust: Du musst den Knecht da fühlen lassen, daß Du der Herr bist! und dann treibe ich das heulende und surrende und stöhnende Ding bis zur äußersten Kraftleistung, daß es Blut schwitze ... sozusagen ... und ich lache und freue mich, wie es sich quält und abrackert. So, mein Tierchen, rufe ich, du musst gehorchen! Gehorchen! Und das wildeste Stück Holz laß ich die Maschine verschlingen und laß es sie formen nach meinem Befehl! Nach meinem Befehl!\textsuperscript{366}

Why I describe this passage as only ostensibly concerned with a worker’s relationship to the machine at which he works should be clear from its tone and wording: the machine is a little animal (\textit{Tierchen}) that moans (\textit{stöhnend}), sweats blood (\textit{schwitze Blut}) and must be shown who the man is (..., \textit{daß Du der Mann bist}). Then there is the image of feeding the machine the wildest piece of wood (\textit{das wildeste Stück Holz}) as Großhahn orders it: “\textit{nach meinem Befehl! Nach meinem Befehl!” This image suggests felatio of an aggressive variety.

To facilitate the less observant reader’s understanding, however, Toller makes things patently clear through his protagonist’s response to Großhahn’s sexually-loaded verbal reveries. When Hinkemann’s wife Grete declares “Wie Sie blicken können, Herr Großhahn,”

\textsuperscript{365} Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” \textit{Screen}: 16.3 (Autumn 1975) 14. The fetishistic gaze, Mulvey argues, involves the exaggeration of a thing’s beauty, the overvaluation of the object being viewed: he or she is transformed into a thing satisfying in itself.

\textsuperscript{366} Toller 9-10.
Hinkemann immediately explains: “Der hat das Wildblicken gelernt, aber nicht an der Maschine.” To this his Grete inquires further: “Sondern?” Hinkemann answers this with a matter-of-fact: “Wo, willst du wissen? Bei den Frauenleuten.” Hinkemann is clear, then, that Großhahn treats his machines as he treats his ladies.

The eminent British Germanist J.M. Ritchie, who translated Hinkemann into English in 1975 for the collection German Expressionist Drama, plays up the passage’s sexual imagery. His Großahn asserts: “So my baby, I shout, you do what I say! Anything I say. And I stuff anything down its throat and make it turn out anything I want! Be a man, then you’re on top."

Strikingly, Ritchie chooses to focus on what Großhahn verbalizes: say, shout, say, say. This tends to both emphasize the passage’s anthropomorphic tone – one speaks to other humans (and occasionally to animals). Yet more important, I would assert, is Ritchie’s translation of the exchange between Hinkemann and Grete that follows Großhahn’s description:

**Grete:** “Wie Sie blicken können, Herr Großhahn.” / **Greta:** “How fierce you can look."

**Hinkemann:** “Der hat das Wildblicken gelernt, aber nicht an der Maschine.” / **Hinkemann:** “He can look fierce alright, but he doesn’t get that from handling machines.”

**Grete:** “Sondern?” / **Greta:** “Where then?”

---

367 Toller 10.

Ritchie has chosen here to translate *blicken* passively, that is in the sense of *to appear (to)*, which denotes *to be or come in sight*. This is not only made clear by coupling it with the adjective *fierce* instead of the adverb *fiercely*; but moreover by the fact that he translates the noun *das Wildblicken* as, again, *to look fierce* in the sense of *to appear fierce*. Under this translation, Großhahn is a spectacle for the Hinkemann’s, and also for the reader.

The German verb *blicken* does not (commonly) denote *to appear*, however, it means *to look (at)*, *to glance*, and *to gaze*; or, as the German Duden dictionary defines it: *[bewusst] seinen Blick irgendwohin richten* – to consciously direct one’s gaze somewhere. As for *Wildblicken*, the Duden unfortunately offers no definition. *To gaze wildly/in a wild manner* is the literal English option. The Babylon translator offers: *to glare, stare in an angry manner, stare at piercingly*.

I would argue that Hinkemann, Toller’s mouthpiece in the play, is drawing our attention to the way Großhahn gazes – and that is *voyeuristically*, in a manner both controlling, sadistic (following Mulvey) and driven by desire, and which makes a personal spectacle of all he visually cognizes, whether machine, woman or man.

Hinkemann’s debasement is never inherent to him – Toller knows – nor is it even something staged: a matter of his presentation, or representation. Even when he stands on stage in the guise of a freak show geek – in scene three of act two – about to bite off the head

---

of a live animal, his spectacular nature, and with it his potential debasement, is never a social fact.

Through his critique of Paul Großhahn Toller alerts us that this facticity always lies 'in the eyes of the beholder.'

Chapter 5. Conclusion: Why Masculinity is Represented as in Crisis

5.1. This Perpetual Crisis of Masculinity: A Dubiously Dominant Discourse
In a May 2005 article in *Maisonneuve* magazine entitled “One Hundred Years of Male Humiliation: The Perpetual Crisis of Masculinity,” Canadian journalist Jeet Heer quotes, among numerous other texts, speeches by Theodore Roosevelt (1899); the Boy Scout movement’s manual (1914); Wyndham Lewis’s *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926); *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) by Marshall McLuhan; a *Look* magazine series entitled “The Decline of the American Male” (1958); a 1960 John Wayne interview during which the Duke laments the lack of *manly* roles in 1950s Hollywood; the non-fiction bestsellers *The Hazards of Being Male* (by Herb Goldsberg, 1976) and *Real Men Don’t Eat Quiche* (by Bruce Feirstein, 1982); the Hollywood films *Disclosure* and *Fight Club* (1994 and 1999 respectively); and, lastly, an article in *Details* magazine that asserts provocatively that: “Desperate Housewives is Castrating us all” (2005).\(^{369}\)

Heer presents these quotes as proof that “for a century at least” male anxiety has been pervasive; as have complaints, by writers especially, that masculinity is in decline. Heer is no doubt familiar with many of the more recent examples I have included in my introduction here, articles and books with titles like “The Emasculated Man,” *The End of Men*, “Failing Boys,” *Die Krise der Männlichkeit*, and “Männlichkeit in der Krise,” to name only a few, and examples only from North America and Germany.\(^{370}\) Heer and I agree, I am sure, that the “Perpetual Crisis of Masculinity” continues today; and, I would venture, he’d agree with me that there is no end in sight for this ‘crisis,’ either.

---


\(^{370}\) For references to these articles please see pages 11 and 12 of this work.
I also share Heer’s opinion that the textual representation of masculinity as ‘in crisis’ constitutes a perpetual discursive thread reaching back into the nineteenth century. His examples all originate from North America, and tend to be quite obvious statements; my purview here has been Europe, for the most part, with my more in-depth studies focussing on texts from Germany and Austria produced between 1900 and 1924; texts I have chosen solely on account of their belonging to the area in which I have the most training: cultural modernism in German-speaking Europe. Many other texts in different media, and from different times, genres, and traditions could have been chosen – and indeed should be examined as further proof of my thesis here, which I believe will stand up to their scrutiny.

I have also argued that the representation of masculinity as ‘in crisis’ can be a subtle affair of signification – hinging, to cite two such subtleties/aporias examined earlier, on an officer’s relationship to his glove – in a 1900 Simplicissimus caricature – or the erratic behaviour of a neon sign, in the 1924 film Die Straße. I have argued also that both the mode and means of this representation shift over time and geographical location – with honour the crux in fin de siècle Austria, for example, whereas today in the West it is economic success – if the commitment to crisis representation per se has not for quite some time changed, and likely will not soon change.

Heer and I agree in one other crucial regard: that the perpetual representation of masculinity as ‘in crisis’ is a problem that should not be tolerated; one that must be
acknowledged and critiqued. More specifically we agree, I will argue in this chapter, on why the domination of this mode of representing masculinity is a problem.

Heer recently tweeted a pithy explanation of why, which perhaps inadvertently makes a nod to the fact that both crisis and critique have their etymological basis in the ancient Greek Krisis, an etymological foundation to which I’ll return in a moment: “So, manhood is always in crisis. Why? Isn’t rhetoric of crisis a way of shoring privilege from critique? Aggrieved privilege sees itself as the victim, sees itself as being in crisis, and therefore in need of reasserting its power.” My explanation grants this premise that the perpetual rhetoric of masculine crisis functions to shore up – in an ongoing and insidious way – male privilege from critique. I will probe the logic of Heer’s premise here, attempting to offer nuance to his essentially correct answer as to why the perpetual representation of masculinity as ‘in crisis’ is a problem. The shoring up he mentions is perhaps better understood as a kind of buttressing – even flying buttressing – I will argue, in as much as it upholds while distracting from the means by which this upholding is achieved.

I am interested in these means that distract as they ‘shore up,’ then, and in what follows I will attempt to explain the stakes and logic of this process.

---

371 I invite my reader to revisit my introduction, where on page eight I mention how the realization that something in the present was a problem, was intolerable, served as the impetus for Foucault’s critical histories.


373 I should acknowledge that Peter Davies has formulated a similar critique of the discursive construction ‘masculinity-crisis,’ coming to the conclusion that “Talk of masculine crisis simply finishes by re-establishing the
5. 2. The ‘Crisis’ Discursive A Priori

Much of what I have argued earlier attempts to answer what kind of problem the representation of ‘masculinity’ as ‘in crisis’ is. In as much as these descriptions overlap with possible explanations for the problem in crucial ways, a brief summary of my earlier line of argument is in order. Central to this argument has been the assertion of ‘crisis’ as a discursive a priori – a foundational and determinant signifier for discursive production.

In my introduction I claimed – with the help of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Reinhart Koselleck and Janet Roitman – that neither masculinity nor crisis reveal anything true about the world; whether independently or when these concepts signify together; which, in my second chapter and with the help of Rémy de Gourmont, I argued them to have been doing since the end of the nineteenth century.

For Laclau and Mouffe, you will recall, there is no outside of discourse – no world outside or beyond language (understood broadly) with which signifiers might be proved true by correspondence. Within discourse, however, influence is certainly differential. While no signifier is inherently fixed – all float by nature; otherwise objective truth would become possible within the system itself – certain signifiers do become relatively stable – and in certain cases this stability endures for great periods of time. Such nodal points – or empty universals as they elsewhere call them– influence those signifiers around them – even determining what
they can mean – and through this influence the form and content of discourse is defined and delimited.

Koselleck and Roitman argue similarly of the signifier ‘crisis’ specifically, a concept which signifies nothing true of the world – crises do not, and cannot, per se exist – but nevertheless exerts profound influence on narratives underpinning scientific, social and cultural activities of all kinds. For Koselleck ‘crisis’ is an Interpretament through which history is constructed; while for Roitman ‘crisis’ constitutes “a primary enabling blind spot for the production of knowledge.”\(^{374}\) For both it has increasingly become the case that ‘crisis’ is taken for granted as the point from which we start describing the world. Koselleck and – even more so – Roitman see the unquestioned centrality of ‘crisis’ to historical narrative as a problem. In short, it is precisely the fact that crisis plays such a dominant role in historical narrative, and especially without being questioned, that makes it a problem. At least, this is one way it can be considered a problem.

And I agree with Koselleck and Roitman: there is no good reason why ‘crisis’ should have such power; nor legitimate grounds for the endurance of its influence. Why are both these features the case?

Such influential and enduring nodal points as ‘crisis’ – let’s employ Jacques Lacan’s term master signifier for ease of explanation – need not be a problem, of course. The argument can be made that master signifiers are (a) necessary for the functioning of society at all; and (b), in certain cases at least, secure a progressively better state of affairs socially than if they lost

\(^{374}\) Roitman 3.
influence and/or were replaced. Are we simply not better off when certain influential signifiers endure in their discursive pre-eminence? There is nothing essential about ‘democracy,’ say, which is as much a floating signifier as any other. That it continues to function as, arguably, the most influential signifier on political discourses, is hard to consider a bad thing. That this concept masks itself in the guise of essential truth, and so functions to close/objectify the political discursive field, results in decreased levels of a vast number of experiences we are better off without. So the argument goes.

And it is a convincing argument. Would society benefit if authoritarianism and monarchism had more discursive influence politically today? Look at what happened when the former did; fascism happened, with devastating effect throughout the world. As for the latter, while it remains a discursive force, we should be thankful it does so in a frivolous, and so far less harmful form than in prior centuries. Copious amounts of ink spent on Princess Kate’s pregnancies, for example, while a trifling waste we could do without, will not result in the spilling of anyone’s blood. The same cannot be said of the royal edicts of past centuries, which themselves prefigured the documentation responsible for first the marginalization, and later the near annihilation, of European Jewry.

But ‘crisis’ is a very different kind of signifier to ‘democracy,’ with which, not coincidentally, it is often coupled. As it also is, for the same reasons, with masculinity, which is itself a different kind of signifier again.

If we accept the privileged status that Koselleck and, following his lead, Roitman claim for ‘crisis,’ it should be no surprise that male identity is perpetually represented as ‘in crisis.’ If
‘crisis’ is a conceptual lens through which history is projected (Koselleck), or, as Roitman describes it, an unperceived, and so unquestioned, first-order concept on which historical ‘truth’ is contingent, then why would the history of masculinity fall outside its formative power? Economic history is now represented as a series of crises; likewise political history; at the intersection of these the history of class is one of perpetual crisis; the same story for natural history – which is increasingly becoming synonymous with ‘the great crisis of our time’: environmental history, the negative telos of which may be only a few generations away, the likes of Al Gore warn us. Indeed, today all these areas are perpetually and pervasively ‘in crisis.’ Why would our mode of representing masculinity, or, to be more accurate, gender as a whole, be any different?

5.3. The ‘Masculine’ Discursive A Priori

There is a crucial sense in which masculinity is a different domain to these others, however; and in which it functions similarly to ‘crisis,’ as Roitman defines that other master signifier as “a primary enabling blind spot for the production of knowledge.” In the most real sense imaginable masculinity signifies a priori to and through the other domains mentioned above, both in being presumptive and as the longstanding condition for ‘knowing’ them, in Foucault’s sense of knowledge inextricably linked to and serving power, at all.375

375 It is on this temporal understanding of the prior-ity of masculinity that Freud bases his castration theory, of course, the most convincing argument for which Freud finds in the Viennese boy Little Hans’ belief that everyone, even his little sister, began with a penis (in his words: “a Widdler”). I discuss the importance to Freud’s Oedipal theory of little Hans on pages 28-30. It would be helpful to keep Freud’s Little Hans in mind when I soon discuss Lacan’s, and his contemporary interpreter Slavoj Žižek’s, attribution to the phallus of a fundamental, and preeminent, position discursively: as master signifier at the genesis point of the entire discursive field. Both Lacan and Žižek build on Freud’s interpretation (with Žižek also building on Lacan).
A common sense explanation of this *a priority* argues that human history is of a man’s *world*, one in which men at – and from – the beginning made the decisions (perhaps because of brute physical superiority and thus being endowed with the ability to assert their shared wishes by force) – establishing the priority of these wishes – which they recorded – or had recorded – including (and especially) as *history*, in whatever form, and using whatever technology, available; thus codifying, and through dissemination inculcating, male priority and superiority. Through this process social institutions emerged, which solidified over time, these functioning to uphold a masculine bias: a bias in favour of male proclivities; at the expense of those of other creatures; human or not; if and as need be.

This albeit simplistic explanation of patriarchal domination nevertheless goes part of the way to explaining how masculinity is *prior*. A glaring shortcoming of this understanding is that it conflates men and masculinity – the bias in question is masculine (a kind of being), but not exclusively male (a kind of physiology), of course. Its other key weakness is that it only explains one register of human experience – let’s call it ‘the material.’ It neither accounts for psychological motivations; nor does it account for ideology.

Jacques Derrida termed the *a priori* masculine bias *phallogocentrism*, by which he meant precisely the privileging of the logos – the determinate, fixed, and *prior* – in the service of the masculine (or its interests) – represented by the *phallus* in the composite noun he creates – in the making of meaning throughout Western cultural history. Derrida’s critique is focussed on Western metaphysics, to which he grants a privileged position in the construction of meaning in Western societies over their history: philosophy – done, not coincidentally,
almost exclusively by men – generates fixed ideas that control discourses which control human activities, and these ideas, he argues, have unerringly served patriarchal domination. What Derrida offers – and one could go to other thinkers for this, of course, Foucault among them – is an ideological explanation for patriarchy.\(^{376}\)

I could not address it adequately here, but the question at least needs to be asked as to how the idea of phallogocentrism relates to the creation of crisis. One possible way to do this is to pursue the psychoanalytic presentation of masculinity in crisis, the most convincing examination of which was offered by Jacques Lacan.

For Lacan, as for Derrida, *phallus* is understood as logos. Otherwise expressed: it is the master signifier operative in – as Slavo Žižek puts it – “all three fundamental dimensions in which a human being dwells.” Lacan calls these dimensions the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. This three-dimensional vision of human existence allows for a more nuanced understanding of patriarchal domination than my preliminary offering earlier. In doing so it accounts for psychological motivations in a complex – and arguably obfuscatory – way I could never hope to explain here.

A very partial and tendentious explanation of Lacan nevertheless helps reveal the insidiousness of male privilege’s endurance and so prepares us to understand why the

conceptual wedding of masculinity and crisis occurred and endures. Why it is, in a sense, the perfect (conceptual) marriage.\textsuperscript{377}

Žižek further describes Lacan’s epistemological triad as follows:

The Imaginary dimension is our direct lived experience of reality, but also of our dreams and nightmares – it is the domain of appearing, of how things appear to us. The Symbolic dimension is what Lacan calls the ‘big Other,’ the invisible order that structures our experience of reality, the complex networks of rules and meanings which makes us see what we see the way we see it (and what we don’t see the way we don’t see it). The Real, however, is not simply external reality; it is rather, as Lacan put it, ‘impossible’: something which can neither be directly experienced nor symbolized.\textsuperscript{378}

A useful way to approach Lacan is as a discourse analyst of the psyche – or rather of all of human activity including its psychological dimension. This psychological dimension, which occupies neither the Imaginary nor Symbolic exclusively, is also composed of webs of signification: language is prior to the psyche; not the other way around. What it means for ‘phallus’ to be a master signifier for Lacan is that it inaugurates chains of signification – as nodal points do for Laclau and Mouffe – into both the Symbolic and Imaginary dimensions in which

\textsuperscript{377} I should at this point be forthcoming that my use of Lacanian theory is based mostly on Žižek’s explanations of Lacan. The obvious reason for this is – at least for me – that Lacan is famously difficult to understand and, in my opinion – and not only mine – Žižek does an excellent job of making Lacan accessible while remaining true to the core of his melding of Freudian psychoanalysis with structuralism, represented most notably for Lacan by the linguistics of Saussure and the anthropology of Levi-Strauss. This being said, and as John Zilcosky (someone far more familiar than I am with both Lacan and Žižek) has pointed out to me: “Žižek’s Lacan is not always the same as Lacan’s Lacan.”

\textsuperscript{378} Slavoj Žižek, Event (London: Penguin, 2014) 120-121.
humans dwell: the psychological and social. (We cannot know its role in the Real, as experiences of this register are never direct, nor can they be symbolically represented.) This is to say that human knowledge as determined juridically/legislatively – in the Symbolic, which to us is invisible – and experienced consciously as phenomenal products of this “Symbolic” determination in the Imaginary, have their point of origin in a signifier that is masculine-biased, if not necessarily male-biased, although historically the tendency has clearly been for these two to largely align.

Lacan, it should be noted, defines the establishment and upholding of patriarchal domination in terms of the phallus as lack, in the sense of not having the male sex organ, yes – a physiological problem for women historically – but more importantly in symbolic terms; or more precisely in those terms established in the Symbolic dimension. The phallus as lack is for Lacan an ontological determinant; it defines the kind of being one is in the Imaginary, or in “the domain of appearing,” as Žižek puts it; or, in what we would call commonsensically, and blindly, “the real world.” That realm of appearance in which we dream, desire, and interact socially.379

---

379 I understand the priority of the phallus as lack as ontologically determinant in Lacan in at least two ways: the first concerns the appearance of subjectivity per se – my becoming a subject at all – regardless of sex, regardless of who I am. I always lack subjective identity with myself – and so ‘full subjectivity’ – in that experiencing myself as whole occurs first in a mirror, and thereafter increasingly in and through – and also via my envy of – others. In this sense we all always already (are) lack – or, in other words, are defined as subjects from birth to death by lack of identity.

The second, and to my argument here more relevant sense in which lack is ontologically determinant, is that which secures patriarchal domination and with it sexual/gender inequality and consequent inequities. I find in the etymological root of castration a suggestive, but nevertheless compelling, linguistic reason supporting Lacan’s argument that the phallus as lack is the master signifier. As I pointed out earlier, its Proto-Indo-European root, which is to say its most archaic appearance as signifier, is ‘kes-,’ connoting to cut. I am also struck by the uncanny denotative overlap of ‘kes’ with the PIE root of crisis: ‘krei-,’ which denotes “to sieve, discriminate, distinguish.” (The middle denotation here has ´cri´ (still) internal to it, of course.) I will pose my point here as a provisional question: “Is a sort of denotative tautology, something unquestionable on account of its identity with itself, at work in the pervasive assertion of ‘masculinity-in-crisis’ (since the fin de siècle)? (Does this arise at precisely that
As Lacan puts it: “The lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It is not the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists.” The key word here is in fact *properly*. There is necessarily proper and improper being in the Imaginary, and the stakes attached to proper (versus improper) being are high. The subjugation of women, and of certain men, is predicated on these groups *lacking* masculine *being* in that register in which being appears – in the Imaginary; or, otherwise put, on account of being a woman, for most of human history, or a certain kind of man, *homosexual* since its categorization – but before its construction other certain kinds – and so embodying unsanctioned forms of being in the Imaginary. To embody such Symbolically unsanctioned forms of being equates to being inferior where it matters: socially; and consequently to being excluded from rights and privileges reserved for forms of being Symbolically sanctioned. Of course, exploitation is also predicated on the Symbolically determined opposition between Symbolically sanctioned and unsanctioned forms of being, if not only along gendered lines.

Another way of explaining this logic of oppression is by recourse to another master signifier in Lacan’s thought: the “Name-of-the-Father, the agent of the symbolic Law which regulates sexual difference,” as Žižek explains, and that “introduces a norm which, even if it is never fully actualized, nonetheless imposes a standard on sexuality, somehow excluding those...”

---

who occupy a marginal position (gays, transsexuals, etc.).” Such a norm can never be fully actualized – its being in the Imaginary can only ever be partial – and furthermore it should not be understood as static, as if the content of its meaning does not change across space and over time. Nevertheless, a form of being historically treated as unsanctioned across space and through time – with exceptions, I grant; and with no intention on my part to assert these as fixed and static categories – is being woman, or being feminine man.

5. 4. The First and Last Word

In chapter two I argued how during the fin de siècle the instability of European male identity – as it has traditionally been expressed, and especially as understood vis a vis new forms of female identity emerging at the time – was equated with negative developments economically, politically, ethnically and in class terms; and furthermore how this equation was represented using all and any available forms of media. This period is the point, I have argued, at which ‘masculinity’ and ‘crisis’ – the former for millennia, according to Derrida and Lacan, a discursive a priori; the latter, according to Koselleck, a signifier quite suddenly become so fundamental during the nineteenth century as to “designate history as such,” and which increasingly comes to denote “instability” – take up a dominant partnership at the heart of the Western discursive universe.

There are a number of related ways to understand why this partnership occurred, and why it endures. It is with an admittedly speculative explanation of these that I will conclude this dissertation.

---

381 Žižek 121.
Let me return briefly to Jeet Heer’s recent tweet. He writes: “So, manhood is always in crisis. Why? Isn’t rhetoric of crisis a way of shoring privilege from critique? Aggrieved privilege sees itself as the victim, sees itself as being in crisis, and therefore in need of reasserting its power.” My previous discussion of the masculine a priori – as explained it terms of the history of Western metaphysics by Derrida; and as determinant of sanctioned and unsanctioned being in the domain of human appearance/experience for Lacan – generates a frame of reference within which understanding “aggrieved privilege” and “shoring up (masculine privilege) from critique” becomes a matter of examining how privileged signifiers are injured, or better: impaired; and what form the response to such impairment takes. How might a master signifier shore itself up against critique which threatens its privileged position as discursively prior?

I will again begin with what might be called a common sense explanation: asserting masculinity as in crisis, as unstable, is simultaneously to (a) assert that masculinity not being in crisis, being stable, was the earlier state of affairs; and (b) that this state of affairs was, and is, right and good, and should be returned to.

Neither (a) nor (b) was – or could be – true; nor was it earlier necessary – prior to the end of the nineteenth century, I would argue – that the latter assertion (b) be asserted at all. (With some exceptions, agreed, the notion that masculine privilege was God-given and so necessarily right and good was simply accepted as undeniable fact throughout the vast majority of Western history. I would challenge anyone to argue otherwise convincingly.)

382 As important as the fact that the goodness and rightness of masculine privilege becomes a matter for

382 God serves for millennia as the reification of what Lacan calls the big Other; is, otherwise put, and in typically paradoxical style, the metaphysical yet simultaneously anthropomorphic embodiment of the master signifier.
assertion at all, is the form in which this is done: not (no longer) affirmatively, rather negatively, retroactively and in terms of instability: namely, as threatened, (indeterminate), and as signalling a crucial turning point (which, in fact, never turns); otherwise put: as ‘in crisis.’

Within what appears a fairly straightforward assertion of nostalgia lies a buttressing logic of (what has become perpetual) (discursive) distraction and deferral. Nikita Dhawan – in an essay arguing the fundamental, but forgotten, role silence plays at the heart of language – finds explanatory recourse in a return to the Greek term Krisis, “which means a pulling apart, splitting, falling apart, fragmentation, loss of origin, lack of origin … (and) implies dissent and controversy.” Another denotation is operative in ‘crisis,’ however, and I would argue that these more commonly associated denotations find pervasive repetition through it:

Crisis is also forgetfulness. A subtle phenomenon that doesn’t disturb the routine of everydayness. And precisely because it engenders its smooth functioning somehow remains invisible, crisis can be catastrophic. Crisis in this form is the indifference, the self-satisfaction of everydayness, the security of the self-evident, that doesn’t provoke one to question, to problematize, but rather presents crisis-management.383

Dhawan agrees with Roitman, then, that “crisis” is a “conceptual blind spot;” it “remains invisible.” From this blind spot, Dhawan contends, ‘crisis’ “engenders the smooth functioning (of the routine of everydayness),” secures the self-evident, discourages questioning, problematizing, rather “presents crisis-management.” Understanding crisis this way is to resist

another common sense explanation of it, one that represents crisis as exceptional – anything but routine, anything but everydayness – as something that requires an incisive response.

And so does not receive one.

The pervasive and perpetual representation of ‘masculinity’ as ‘in crisis’ functions to secure the self-evidence of this state of affairs, to discourage the questioning of masculine bias, to manage the threat of substantive and incisive critique of patriarchal domination. The shoring up of masculine privilege depends on the deluge of discourse articulating the expressions and reasons for masculinity’s instability – in so doing it stabilizes its instability; in being ‘crisis’ is the management of crisis – and this deluge, in both subtle and obvious forms, serves to distract from engagement with the myriad ways in which masculine privilege is in fact the problem that should be interrogated towards its being addressed and overcome. What the pervasive, perpetual representation of masculinity as ‘in crisis’ accomplishes – its everydayness, its self-evidence – is in fact the de-problematization of the problem of masculine bias. When wedded to ‘crisis,’ ‘masculinity’ becomes a problem that is such a problem that it is no longer a problem; or rather: the crisis of masculinity demands so much attention that the masculine bias it masks receives little attention. As such, to use Heer’s phrasing, masculine bias is shored up – I would use the admittedly awkward phrase flying buttressed – from substantive and productive critique.

Feminist theory, and subsequent to, and contingent on it, Queer and other forms of counter hegemonic critique of patriarchy, represent forces of interrogation towards these productive critical ends, certainly, but they themselves, as I argued in my introduction, have also provided
an impetus for the ramping up of masculinity in crisis rhetoric that we have seen over the past approximately thirty years.

That this discursive deluge should continue its distracting role is precisely contingent on the peculiar nature of ‘crisis’ as a signifier; this is to say precisely on account of being that signifier that stabilizes instability as it encourages discursive production about it.

Works Cited


Sept. 2014.


Ledger, Sally and Scott McCracken, eds. *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge:


Print.


Tata, Michael Angelo. “From Daniel Paul Schreber through the Dr. Phil Family: Modernity, Neurology and the Cult of the Case Study Superstar.” *Neurology and Modernity: A*

Print.


