Rainer Werner Fassbinder and the Politics of Simulation: Two Plays

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Rainer Werner Fassbinder's plays represent an important intersection between political and philosophical textual mechanisms, including character, narrativity, and context. Although he is best known in the United States for his films, Fassbinder began his artistic career working in the theatre. Over the course of ten years, he wrote approximately ten plays (five of which have been translated into English), directed numerous productions, and served briefly as the artistic director for Frankfurt's Theater am Türm. Unlike other German playwrights such as Peter Handke, Heiner Müller, or Peter Weiss, Fassbinder's plays have not been given major productions in the United States. However, his obscurity in this country should not be used to underestimate or dismiss his work, for his plays advance an important form of textuality, one that incorporates a historical understanding with a theoretical analysis of such mechanisms as narrative, character development, closure and the teleological project of Western drama. Furthermore, in this case neither history nor theory act as appendages to an already formed textuality, but both anticipate and are anticipated by Fassbinder's literary and philosophical modes. In order to "unravel" his texts then, it is necessary to read them alongside certain theoretical texts, as well as in their historical context--namely, the post-World War Two Federal Republic of Germany.

Connected to his philosophical project is Fassbinder's political agenda. Whereas the aesthetics of capitalism and liberal humanism comport a seemingly benign social order, Fassbinder's plays reveal a form of fascism lurking not far beneath the surface. Fassbinder ties the emergence of this form of personal fascism both to the historical fascism which reached its

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initial apotheosis in the 1930s under National Socialism, and to the rise of State capitalism as a controlling force in Western Europe and the United States. The concrete manifestation of social and economic fascism in the Federal Republic is the subject of his last play *Garbage, Death, and the City* (1975). In similar manner, but in more philosophical or metaphysical form, it is also the subject of his 1972 play *Blood on the Cat's Neck*. In order to explore Fassbinder's understanding of what Michel Foucault called "the fascism of everyday life," I will attempt to situate historically his understanding of State capitalism and fascism in the Federal Republic, and then follow their trajectories first through the political terrain of *Garbage, Death, and the City*, and ending up in the philosophical implications of *Blood on the Cat's Neck*.

It seems most appropriate to begin my investigation of Fassbinder's two plays in reverse chronological order, since the later, *Garbage, Death, and the City*, was impelled by the immediate social and economic conditions in Frankfurt, and, by analogy, in Western Capitalism. Unlike his other, more allegorical theatre works, this play can only be understood in its immediate context. Frankfurt's housing crisis in 1965-1967, when Fassbinder was beginning his film and theatre career, provided the impetus for his final play. Frankfurt, as the showcase of success and industry in the Federal Republic, is considered that country's emblem of success and industry, of its ability to bounce back from the desolation of 1945. It boasts steel and glass skyscrapers, and an ultra-modern facade. Indeed, the parallels between Frankfurt and the cities of the United States (a comparison made in the play) is all the more ironic since it was U. S. money that allowed the Federal Republic to rebuild. At the time, an entire sector of low-cost housing was allowed to be rezoned for industrial use. Consequently, many rich landowners either forcibly evicted their tenants, or, failing to do so, allowed the buildings to deteriorate until they were uninhabitable. Such speculation enriched the landowners, and forced the lower and working class residents to give up their homes, further exacerbating an already pronounced class division. *Garbage, Death, and the City* was in part a reaction to these conditions, as the play explores the processes and effects of those who created and were disenfranchised by the Frankfort housing crisis. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Frankfurt's "Westend" district, home to students, prostitutes, as well as foreign workers, and a high transient population, was seen as prime industrial territory, ripe for development but for the dilapidated apartment buildings and undesirable population. The real-estate concerns procured zoning ordinances to level the district. However, the Westend inhabitants were not so acquiescent. In some instances, buildings were merely left to deteriorate to the point where they were uninhabitable. In other cases, when tenants refused to leave, the police would come in to forcibly evict them, a strategy that almost guaranteed the ensuing riots. Buildings were burned, people arrested, and the area became a symbol of what was wrong with the modern Federal Republic and late-capitalism.[1]

Garbage, Death, and the City proved to be Fassbinder's most controversial play. Written in 1974 and 1975 when he was in Frankfurt serving as Artistic Director of that city's Theater am Türm, it is a loose adaptation of Gerhard Zwerenz's unequivocally Marxist novel *The Earth is Uninhabitable–Like the Moon*. The play opens "on the moon, because it is just as uninhabitable as the earth, especially the cities."[2] It depicts a Frankfurt real estate speculator who is Jewish as a greedy ruthless villain. Furthermore, "The Rich Jew's" calculated cynicism allows him to make huge profits at the expense of the poor. Fassbinder's portrayal of anti-Semitism as an all-too-real social condition caused an uproar in the Federal Republic (three years after Fassbinder's death the play was again banned in Frankfurt) which seems to indicate that "the Jewish question" was still an unresolved sore spot and source of guilt for many people. The reaction to this play is indicative of how the Federal Republic dealt with its acquiescence to the holocaust; a process that, at least initially, proceeded by sublimating and consequently denying both a lingering anti-Semitism and the attendant guilt.

Garbage, Death, and the City is ostensibly a critique of real-estate speculation and the gentrification of German cities as a part of the "miraculous" post-war "economic restoration." However, its stormy reception in Frankfurt centered around its portrayal of certain social attitudes, a reception that insured that *Garbage, Death, and the City* could not actually open until 1985, ten years after it was written. The focal point of the controversy was the play's main character "The Rich Jew." Read by the Jewish community and the political right as an overt anti-Semitic portrayal, this character invoked accusations of "left-wing fascism" from the right, and of singling out of the Jews as the cause for Frankfurt's social problems in the 1970s.[3]

In attacking the instigators of the dismal social conditions, *Garbage, Death, and the City* burned the hands of two important groups. Since the protagonist "The Rich Jew" was apparently responsible for the housing problems, the Jewish population saw *Garbage, Death, and the City* as an overt manifestation of the anti-Semitism in the Federal Republic at the time, and objected on that basis. The Jewish community's reaction to *Garbage, Death, and the City* certainly seems justifiable given their historical situation in Germany. What is surprising about their reaction, however, especially to the attempt to stage the play in 1985, is that it marked the first time since the holocaust that the community protested openly against a perceived abuse.[4] "The Rich Jew" was seen as a continuation of the National Socialist attempt to blame Germany's economic duress on the Jewish community. That the character is not even given a proper name is seen as a confirmation of this view, as is his link to corrupt business practices. Similarly, the several overtly fascistic speeches in the play (especially those of Müller) were seen as Fassbinder's own. The piece was labeled an example of "political pornography" by Dr. E. L. Ehrlich of the B'nai B'rith in 1974, and remained unstaged for the ensuing ten years.[5]

The Jewish indignation over Fassbinder's play must be seen in light of the holocaust, and the final solution. The Jewish experience of National Socialism was even more than what Theador Adorno termed a "betrayal of the entire Western philosophical episteme," it was the complete silencing of an entire race. The genocide of the period 1932-1945 is of such a magnitude that speaking of it today, in the sense of accounting for its effects and affects in terms of an historical categorization or recuperation to a historical master-narrative, is still nearly impossible, if only because it is an event outside of any discursive tradition. Where fascism can be attributed to a form of capitalism, or the genocide practiced against the Native American populations to an imperialist politics, the Holocaust as an event exists in its own genre as an irreparable rend of the social fabric.[6] Consequently, the Jewish outrage over the play cannot be explained away as a simple over-reaction, but must be seen as a result of their experience. Furthermore, as I explain below, Fassbinder's critique does not either preclude or eliminate the Jewish position.

The Federal Republic's conservatives attacked the play as well. This polemic against the play seems somewhat more suspect than the Jewish one. The conservative Right, perhaps recognizing Fassbinder's polemic against capitalism, took up the Jewish cause in a thinly-veiled effort to lambast Fassbinder's politics. During the attempt to stage the play in Frankfurt in 1985, the Right, led by the *Frankfurter Allgemiene Zeitung* allied itself with the Jewish community against the Left, who intended to support production. Unfortunately, the Right's alliance, coming a year after the Bitburg incident--when U. S. president Ronald Reagan honored the graves of S. S. officers and refused to pay homage to victims of the holocaust--was not very convincing. During Reagan's visit to Bitburg, the *Zeitung* had in effect warned the Jews not to protest, for they would only be pressing their welcome in Germany.[7] Indeed, that whole episode, including Reagan's refusal to visit a concentration camp, only seemed to confirm the very anti-Semitism the Jews feared from Fassbinder.[8]

The Right's disgust with *Garbage, Death, and the City* seems more easily explained both because of Fassbinder's political convictions and defiant homosexuality, and because the play, rather than simply blaming the Jews as the cause of German misery, actually implicates the capitalist mechanism, as well as the subvert fascistic tendencies present in every economic and social relationship. With the Right heavily invested in denying the existence of fascism for a variety of reasons, not the least being that many conservative industrialists were business partners of ranking Nazi officials, their insistent attack on *Garbage, Death, and the City* seems to merely mask their anxiety over the notion that big business is perceived as complicit with institutionalized fascism.

These two views were opposed by the political Left's response. The Left argued that no group, including the Jews, is singled out in the play, and even if The Rich Jew is an offensive character, that the Jews are themselves not

above criticism. This position seems suspect if only because the Jewish condition in the FRG is emphatically not the same as other minority groups. While certainly they are not the only oppressed minority, the events of forty years ago belong to a qualitatively different level of oppression than what others have experienced. To be Jewish in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s meant almost certain death, and collapsing that reality into a universalized experience of "minority life" is dangerously amnesic. The second position adopted by the Left insisted that, right or wrong, Fassbinder is entitled to his point of view. Reading the play in terms of "freedom of speech" also seems inadequate however, for that rhetoric also avoids the fascism and anti-Semitism underlying Frankfurt society.[9]

The three views above, the Jewish, conservative, and Leftist are by far the predominant responses to the play. Indeed, very few people have been willing to read it as anything other than an example of Fassbinder's own personal anti-Semitism, a reading that, in my opinion, misses both the point of the play, and of Fassbinder's position on fascism. I hope to show that reading *Garbage, Death, and the City* as an indictment of late-capitalism and the fascistic underpinnings of everyday life, given Fassbinder's situation at the time, his avowed "politics of ambiguity," and interest in allegory, is a more reasoned approach. Along these lines, Heiner Müller, the East German playwright, noted that:

> Fassbinder's *Garbage, Death, and the City* uses a victim's revenge to describe the devastation of a city in huge, harsh images. . . . The perversion of human relationships through their commodity character demonstrates a Biblical piece of wisdom: that the first fratricide, Cain, was also the first to establish a city.[10]

Garbage, Death, and the City comes immediately out of Fassbinder's experience of the Federal Republic, and Frankfurt in particular, during the 1970s. Not only do the contextual circumstances of *Garbage, Death, and the City* reflect his understanding, but, as I will suggest below, the textual apparatus designates a fascism which devastates human agency. Fassbinder's own political ambiguity in the play actually serves a particularly precise purpose: to implicate a much wider circle than that of the play text. "There are anti-Semites in this play. But then they exist in other places too--in Frankfurt for instance."[11]

Fassbinder's critique of anti-Semitism does not posit a simple alternative, a "good/bad" scenario composed of positive and negative characters. Instead, he implicates the entire social structure of Frankfurt as complicit in creating the intolerable conditions his characters suffer. Rather than singling out The Rich Jew as the sole antagonist, the rest of the male characters are equally repulsive, equally responsible for the destruction of the city. Frank B. perpetuates a misogynistic terrorism in his control of Roma B., a sadism which becomes violently masochistic when turned toward his own sexuality. Müller,

the transvestite, hides a Nazi past that he is in fact proud of. For instance, he takes pleasure in doing business with The Rich Jew, whose parents he had exterminated. The play thus moves its anti-semitic tenor from being its focus, to being part of an economic/social environment which includes anti-Semitism as one of its components.

Garbage, Death, and the City depicts a more or less real time situation, the condition of the city in the present day Federal Republic. The play is an allegory for the modern condition under late capitalism, a set of circumstances which comports no human comfort, and which tolerates no illusions about the dominant structures of everyday life. It is also an addition to a series of German plays about fascism that signify a significant new level of understanding, such as Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* and Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*, which could also be seen as two important antecedents. The position of *Garbage, Death, and the City* vis-a-vis the older drama is apparent when reading Andreas Huyssen's review of an earlier generation's attempt at writing plays about fascism and the Holocaust in Germany, about the process of *Vergegenheits-bewältigung.* For Huyssen "the key problem . . . is not so much the presence or absence of historically recognizable events or characters but rather the question of identification."[12] Fassbinder's play, however, inverts Huyssen's demand, pushing any dietetic identification to a level of hyper-abstraction which necessarily implicates the individual's participation in fascism and other social features of State capitalism.

The play is hardly an example of social realism. Its characters function as tropes distinguishing certain discursive boundaries within a terrain constructed from deliberate cultural "signposts." *Garbage, Death, and the City* exploits the possibility of ambiguity within a terrain where that notion, once a central tenet of humanistic discourse, is presumably bankrupt, and ties that ambiguity to a politics of simulation. For example, each scene or setting is framed by a *pas de deux:* either a song from the traditional "high culture" or popular culture; a duet from *La Traviata, Eine Kleine Nacht Musik,* a children's rhyme, or cabaret piece. This device sets into relief the process by which traditional culture is (con)textualized, foregrounding the constructedness and contingency of what constitutes aesthetic pleasure.

Indeed, rather than realism, the play proceeds through a form of *hyper*-realism that pushes aside any naturalistic basis for character, and in its place asserts an aesthetic of simulation. The simulacrum provides a link between the political and philosophic projects in Fassbinder's plays a link which can be traced through what Jean Baudrillard has defined as the "third order of simulation." Baudrillard attacks Western aesthetics' privileging of a hierarchical relationship between the object and its representation, and the moral ontology attendant on that relationship. Baudrillard's critique of representative formulates around his notion of the collapse of that hierarchy in State capitalism.

> The very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction.* . . . At the limit of this process of reproducibility, the real is not only what can be reproduced, *but that which is always already reproduced.* The hyperreal . . . which is entirely in simulation.[13]

Systems of signification are structured by three possible logics that he defines in *Simulations* (1983): the logic of the real, the logic of the reproducible, and the logic of the simulacrum or the hyperreal. The first and second are systems which, in their transcendental teleologies, comport themselves with Western metaphysics. The third however marks a significant departure from teleology. The simulacrum is not merely a copy of the real, but a copy of a copy, a false copy designated by a model rather than a transcendental.

> And so art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality. And so art is dead, not only because its critical transcendence is gone, but because reality itself, entirely impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparable from its own structure, has been confused with its own image.[14]

Referentless and free floating, the sign merely circulates through channels of communication and exchange (controlled for the most part by large multi-national corporations who dictate its composition according to the needs of their marketing strategies, and who can also, by their sheer size, eliminate competition) rather than proceeding towards a determinant destination. As a starting point for theatre, simulation seems an obvious place. It almost goes without saying that the actor on stage is not the character that he or she portrays. What is missing from that observation is the pretense, or suspension of disbelief, necessary for the theatrical economy to proceed, a suspension which in Baudrillard's scheme is no longer possible, or viable, because in the imploded social sphere, illusionism cannot maintain its mechanisms. Baudrillard extends this argument into one for the end of theatre, or rather, for the end of a theatre of any consequence. Theatre might still take place, but its illusionism can only operate as self-parody, or referentless thrill-seeking where the only measure of success is in the emulation of absolute circulation and exchange: meta-static speed. Central to this sort of analysis is his understanding of the simulacrum, and its political effects.

As a result of the dismantling of Platonism that Baudrillard's scheme enforces, Platonic moral categories--the foundations for hierarchicalized discourse--also collapse, with a particularly disturbing result. In "Plato and the Simulacrum," Gilles Deleuze delineates this result as a significant threat to the order of the real and its representations. "Having lost a moral existence in order to enter into an aesthetic view, we have become simulacra."[15] The distinction necessary to Platonism, the ability to separate the simulacrum from

the real, becomes impossible because difference is subsumed to the binary code. The observer, presumably a human agent, can no longer retain any perspective and is also sucked into "the whole chaotic constellation of the social."[16] An imploded social sphere, the legacy of the rise of the simulacrum, invalidates systems of the real, because, as Plato, Baudrillard, and Deleuze noticed, the simulacrum proceeds and constitutes the real. Whether one demands that the real precede the simulacrum, or vice versa, seemingly has immense consequence. "Between the destruction which conserves and perpetuates the established order of representations, models, and copies, and the destruction of models and copies which sets up a creative chaos, there is a great difference."[17] This creative chaos constitutes the difference between incarceration and liberation. The simulacrum then, the copy of a copy, pushes the stakes of verisimilitude to their absolute limit. "At bottom, the profound tactic of simulation . . . is to provoke an excess of reality, and to make the system collapse under an excess of reality."[18] What emerges is a radical contingency, a notion absolutely counterposed to (though also often substituted for) transcendence. If moral categories, including those on which "the real" (hereafter bankrupt) are operative, they are so only as a political function. Morality, the personal, and teleology all become political. In the imploded sponge of the social--the sphere to which Baudrillard relegates State capitalist society--it is not that there are no more consequences, nor that agency becomes a useless, passive parody of itself, but rather that any such notions now must carry the weight of their endemic implications, must be responsible for and to the world they have created. "Terrorists, killers, hostages, leaders, spectators, public opinion--*there is no more innocence in a system which has no meaning.*"[19]

Garbage, Death, and the City pursues just such a conclusive implication with a vengeance. The characters--Roma B., Franz B., The Rich Jew, et al. --may be victims of the system to more or less of a degree--Roma, a prostitute and The Rich Jew seem the two extremes: one a victim of patriarchy and the other of history--but none remain unimplicated by the system that eventually incarcerates them. Of course, a subsequent problem in such a statement is that it could be used to assume that there is a degree of culpability in their implication, that through some personal *"mauvais fois"* each of these characters has destined him or herself to an individual hell. In part however, the structure of *Garbage, Death, and the City* prevents this from becoming a play about solipsism. With each sequence framed by a particular cultural artifact--a duet from *La Traviata* for example--the play is pulled into a historical specificity which exists well outside its own diegesis. Each segment can be read as reflective of both the fascism within the play, and that within the culture as a whole. The patterns of domination in *La Traviata* are replicated on stage between The Rich Jew and Roma B.; if one is only a stage intensity, then the other is a reminder that such things are replicated throughout society, and need not be specific to this particular play.

The conflation of Capitalism and Fascism structure the play's erotic relationships, constituting a domain where erotica *is* "fascistiod" (Fassbinder's term) domination. "Jim: The hero, the hen that lays the golden egg, according to my father, is capital. Where am I going to find capital I wonder. Houses, properties. That's it I think, and I go for it. And the result? I barely make it. And Saturdays I treat myself: Two broads!"[20] The world of prostitution and of real-estate speculation are paralleled, not to condemn either or both, but to implicate the usual middle-class veneer that would place value judgements on both. In *Garbage, Death, and the City* erotics and money are inseparable. "Rich Jew: That's how it should be, and it's fitting. And peace and quiet, Madame, is amazingly gratifying. You don't have to respond. . . . This image is enchantingly beautiful, the city which devotes itself to ruin. So--come. Your diseased lungs should pay off for you."[21] Whether it be the terrain of the prostitute--"Franz B: Now go. Do well and don't leave him in the lurch, the one who is there for you as you need him. Go little one, go and let yourself be fucked. . . . And be righteous. Men too are only human."[22]--or that of the real-estate speculator: "Rich Jew: The city needs the unscrupulous businessman who allows it to transform itself. It must protect him thank you very much"[23]--both are seen as necessary configurations of the city, and the two go hand in hand. "Rich Jew: Cities are cold and it's only fitting that people freeze there. Why do they build themselves such cities?"[24] The fascistic undercurrents of Capitalism arise in the complete subservience, the disintegration of autonomy or agency demanded by these relationships, a confluence that reveals exchange as domination.

The fascism in these relationships does not appear in a moralistic fashion however. Instead, the reality of these people's lives, the intense brutality and cold eroticism are a direct consequence of their simulated world. Indeed, simulation as a scheme seems to be imparted with both negative and positive potentialities. "Roma B: Despair--call it by its proper name, that'll raise you capital."[25] As simulacra, agents without imperative moral contingency, their world is destructive and brutal, with love coming only through domination. "Roma B.: I know you're right. You're right and kind, and you hit me as little as possible, and forgive me my sins."[26] In fact, the whole notion of relationship is radically altered into a form of hyperconformity, and hyperdomination which is too good to be true. "Franz B.: I love you! Shove your fists up my ass, tear me apart, let me hear the angels singing. . . . Do me good. Destroy me!"[27] If empathy need be based on an ulterior motive, a categorical notion of "good" or "humanity," something besides greed or domination, then these characters make a mockery of it. Their world is relentlessly harsh. The breakdown of those traditional categories in the face of State capitalism is not hidden under a veneer of humanism, nor replaced by characters who comport some "good" sensibilities. "Dwarf: Oh my God, I thank you. He has killed her, he has disqualified himself. It's clear he loved her. Whoever loves has blown his rights."[28] Each character, and each relationship is exploited for its fascistic

characteristics, every interaction dissolves into the ambiguity of simulation. "Müller: Yeah, and she lived longer than one could have expected. Kraus, Peter: So it goes. The city gobbles up its children."[29] Müller, the ex-Nazi, is proud of his history: "I wasn't concerned with each and every one of the people I murdered. I wasn't an individualist. I am a technocrat. But it's possible I am his parents' murderer, I'd be glad of it."[30] Müller is paradigmatic of such ambiguity, for as a transvestite he can consciously exploit his surface for a lurid respectability. Hiding as a woman, he ruptures the politics of identification that would pin him down to a (any) position.

> Müller: It's no burden to be a Jew killer when you have convictions like mine.
> Roma B.: And the degradation doesn't affect you?
> Müller: It's not really meant for me, but it does set you to thinking what kind of country this is which permits the kinds of things which occur here everyday.[31]

That he takes on the disguise of the oppressed while proudly revealing his past deeds seemingly implicates the denial of fascism Germany itself went through after the Second World War. By overcoding the pride of Müller the ex-Nazi, Fassbinder foregrounds the banal integration of fascism into contemporary society.

The question of anti-Semitism in *Garbage, Death, and the City*, a question that could also be posed about misogyny, racism, or homophobia, is part of the political nihilism, and indeed of the particular model of simulation the play proposes. "Simulation designates the power to produce an *effect*. But this is not only in the causal sense, because causality, without the intervention of other meanings, would remain completely hypothetical and indeterminate."[32] Certainly The Rich Jew served a political purpose in Frankfurt's reception of *Garbage, Death, and the City*. The character's universality, unnamed and therefore unspecified, dragged the Frankfurt community into a confrontation with its own anti-Semitism. If anything, the socio-political weight of what anti-Semitism and/or fascism means to Germany, and to State capitalism, decrees that any effort to implicate such sentiments through individual characters, through the creation of a notion of individual agency as an explanation for participation in such structures, is to depoliticize an event such as the Holocaust.

> The enormity of Auschwitz itself forbids emotional identification with individual victims. This is what Adorno had in mind when he criticized the Anne Frank play for focusing on an individual victim which consequently permitted the audience to forget the whole.[33]

If disabusing characters of their "humanistic" traits such as compassion or love --the universals by which Platonism distinguishes between good and bad copies--turns them into simulacra, they are also able to lose the characteristics which would fix them within the specificity humanism utilizes to depoliticize its constituents. As simulacra without moral or ethical imperatives they can attack the foundations of humanist discourse. The text's nihilism and attendant anti-Semitism, racism, and misogyny became not only individual traits, but also structural components of the society in which *Garbage, Death, and the City* takes place. Of course, situating anti-Semitism in this way does not make the individuals involved any less culpable, nor does it make Fassbinder any less complicit. However, what the play does is to expose the processes by which fascistic relationships are internalized, and consequently normativized in capitalist society.

Placing these hyper-characters among clearly recognizable cultural artifacts--*La Traviata* et al.--and designating them as prostitutes, pimps, homosexuals, rich Jews, establishes them as tropes within the framework of a discursive milieu; specifically, Frankfurt. Without the humanist specificity of clearly identifiable individuals, they can roam through the play undermining the flaccid illusionism of what Jacques Derrida has termed the "theoretical stage."[34] "Dwarf: The city is groaning under the spiders. It's trembling and moaning. The spiders are becoming a plague. They will be a plague until the city has learned to derive pleasure from them."[35] As simulacra, they push the stakes of discourse to a point where the intense melodrama of the dwarf can sound like "everyday life," an intensification that ultimately shatters attempts to recuperate these characters to a nomativizing discourse. "The secret is to oppose to the order of the real an absolutely imaginary realm . . . whose implosive energy absorbs everything real and all the violence of real power which founders there."[36] Fassbinder's play is a form of political terrorism whose grenades are simulacra and whose hostages are the humanist discourses which subtend fascism into respectability; hostages that *Garbage, Death, and the City* has no intention of ransoming. These simulacra both expose and de()struct the basis of Platonic discourse, leaving in its stead a nihilistic vacuum, and also potentiate a new possibility for liberation from Platonism--a freedom that, while unexplored in the play itself, must needs start with the rise of the simulacrum, and that first requires the defounding of any sort of humanism. Here too is where Fassbinder's work obtains a critique of anti-Semitism. By focusing on the political and economic underpinnings of fascism, and capitalism, the text refuses to categorize anti-Semitism as an event separate from a socio-political context. At the same time, Fassbinder does not seek to appropriate the experience of the holocaust to a humanist master-narrative by incorporating into his own experience.[37] Instead, the play's anti-Semitism is at an allegorical level, one where its complicity with capitalism can be clearly understood.

The simulacrum provides a segue between Fassbinder's political and philosophical agendas. While the two are, in this instance, inseparable, they can be seen as distinct. The fascism in *Garbage, Death, and the City* is counterposed by an anarchy in the representations of the characters. Pushed to an extreme, they embody a force that is disruptive of the metaphysics of character that structures the traditional stage. However, in *Garbage, Death, and the City*, Fassbinder leaves unexplored his ontological and epistemological project, deferring it onto a political terrain. In an earlier play, *Blood on the Cat's Neck* (subtitled *Marilyn Monroe and the Vampires*) he explored the possibility of a textuality which in fact de()structs the representational network.

The central question that *Blood on the Cat's Neck* raises asks what happens when hyperreality--the reproduction of the real based on an inverted teleological order wherein the real exists not in fact but in circulation and thus in simulation--becomes a deliberate condition of performance. On the traditional stage, the word must lie like truth, must construct itself as a true claimant to the father's--read "absent authority"[38]--presence despite the fact that it is *a priori*--a false claimant. (Indeed, the glorification of the playwright in the modernist era seems a continuation of efforts to legitimatize the theatre to the logic of the metaphysical.) Not only must theatre reinstate the father, despite his desiccation and displacement, if theatre is to promote a legitimate copy, but the exigency to do so is compounded when, in an era of circulation, the logic of the false copy threatens to replace the father with an imploding sphere of referentless information. Unfortunately for theatre, if it does comport itself with classical metaphysics--with classical modes of production and utilitarianism which serve a teleological necessity--by relying on the ascendancy of the written text as its central feature, then it also falls victim to its own self-deceptive strategy and subsequently must acknowledge the ontological hyperreality induced by the double displacement of the father. For, to paraphrase Derrida, as long as theatre remains theological, that is invested in hierarchical speech-writing systems, its metaphysical imperative apparently falls victim to a logic of circulation wherein the origin is obfuscated to the point of extinction through the circulation of its signifiers. The circulation of the false claimant finally supersedes the father, and the cool digitality of the binary code becomes the reigning scheme wherein fathers, sons and origins find their hyperreal conclusion.

The neo-Platonic schema of simulation--the threat and ultimate ascension of the false copy from the wreckage of the real--seems the logical conclusion for Western metaphysics.

> Copies can be said to be imitations to the extent that they reproduce the model; since, however, this imitation is noetic, spiritual, and internal, it is a true production guided by the relations and proportions that constitute essence.[39]

Imbued with the same hierarchical structure, the same homogenizing utility of signs and signifiers, the same pessimistic ennui indicative of the nostalgia for an always already absent origin as the regimé of the "good copy," the regimé of the "bad copy," the simulacrum, is inevitable. "To the pure identity of the model or the original there corresponds exemplary similitude, to the pure resemblance of the copy there corresponds a similitude called imitative."[40] If the structures and signifiers that constitute representational frameworks are radically displaced and rendered dysfunctional in an era of simulation ("the copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance"[41]), then such a scheme apparently spells the end of theatre (as well as all representational frames) since theatre is so heavily invested in representation. The stage, along with all other creative endeavor, strategies of resistance and fantasies of liberation become "weightless," circulating as hyper-critical parodies of themselves.

What of a theatre, or a theatrics, which forgoes faithful representations of the father, and instead, by positioning its characters at the limits of the representational apparatus, calls attention to the elisions of a metaphysics that seeks to cross over and hierarchalize divergent or perversive meaning? Approached from this point of view, *Blood on the Cat's Neck* can be read as an alternative application of the logic of deconstruction, one that substitutes an empty bracket of anarchy (de[]struction) for the "con"-game of metaphysics. Fassbinder attacks metaphysics, as he does politics, from the position of that framework's "other." The trajectory of this alternative to teleological readings courses through the terrain of Luce Irigaray's "other woman," but finishes in a sado-machoistic erotics unimagined in Irigaray.

Read through Irigaray's theorization of "the other woman," an enterprise that may also involve appropriating a discourse designed in part as an exclusively feminist terrain, *Blood on the Cat's Neck* opens the possibility of a liberative notion of simulation surfacing in place of the Platonic economy of good and bad copies. While using Irigaray to read "with" an unquestionably masculinist text may seem problematic to some readers, in this instance Irigaray and Fassbinder's projects intersect with remarkable congruence. The intersection of Fassbinder and Irigaray (in some senses almost a parody) leads to an important textual formation. Fassbinder's play, still "theological" because it utilizes the word as primary referent, at least begins to perturbate the Platonic schemata in their recognition of the fundamental hyperreality of theatre; a recognition that places certain inalienable limits on what can and cannot be said on stage. Instead, this play seeks to subvert what takes place within the frame by assuming the politics and anti-ontology of the liberated simulacrum, a position antithetical to Platonism.

In *Blood on the Cat's Neck*, Phoebe Zeitgeist "has been sent to the earth from a distant star to write an eyewitness account of human democracy. But Phoebe Zeitgeist . . . although she has learned the words, doesn't understand human language."[42] Phoebe (moon goddess disguised as virgin hunter) has a

problem: she--the spirit of her times--does not understand the language and therefore cannot participate in the writings of her (hi)story. Since she does not know the terrain, and consequently cannot actively interact, she is present in the play only as a border, a boundary around which the other characters play out their drama. In the first section the other characters talk to her, at her, about their lives and situations. Phoebe, because she cannot respond, can only be an unspeaking (unspeakable) presence. The others, ostensibly portraying humanistic dramas of life, sex, death, and food, interact with each other, but not with Phoebe. They talk to her, but only as something mute and other. She is the frame, the uncrossable limit by which their discourse is measured. In the second part when Phoebe speaks, she does so only in fragments culled from the conversations around her. Her speech, a series of non-sequiturs, is further set off by the fact that she still has no interaction with anyone else on stage. Her words are printed in capitals on the page. Each enunciation, by diacritically separating her, marks the limit of the others' discourse, and provides a physical barrier which demarks the end and beginning of each separate vignette.

Is Phoebe set off from the economy of the earth people because she is an alien, or is her alienation indicative of a certain discursive position? She is inserted, inserts herself, into the discourse throughout the play as if to inspect or interrogate the other agents for the writing of her (hi)story. Yet in the first half she is silent, and in the second present only as a m(h)ysteriously incoherent commentator. Consequently, she remains apart from the play's normative economies. Neither object for the Soldier, Lover, or Policeman's lust, nor confidant for the Dead Soldier's Wife, nor foil for the Mistress or Model, she remains outside of any inscriptive framework, not apart from, but as the limit to the drama. Phoebe thus appears to be the absent, panoptic authority (the father) around which discourse is organized--she hears everything, sees everything, focuses the narrative yet need not participate. Or, more likely, she is the discursive other--theorized by Irigaray as the traditional role of Woman--elided, silenced, and excluded. "The Other is [in Platonism], indeed, not only a defect that affects images; it, itself, appears as a possible model as against the good model of the Same."[43] But then in either case, if she merely serves to fulfil one of the two standard textual rôles (subject/object), why is she on stage if all she does is complete a discursive teleology?

Rather than simply conforming to either the subject or object model, Phoebe acts as a speculum, a tertiary insert into the textual duopoly. "Woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, in-finite, *form is never complete in her.* She is not infinite but neither is she *a* unit(y)."[44] The incompleteness of woman, in Irigaray's formulation, prevents (male) discourse from ascribing her to a specific function, except through imagining her as fundamentally defective. But, if this prescriptive defect is rejected as a phallocentric ruse, the discursive violence inherent in the "prescriptions of a hom(m)osexual imagi-

nary"[45] can be reversed. Not simply as retribution for textual misogyny, but also to raise an irresolution. "For (the) woman neither is able to give herself some meaning by speech nor means to be able to speak in such a way that she is assigned to some concept or that some fixed notion is assigned to her."[46] By establishing a textual terrain without subjects and objects, the/a woman rearranges that space not through a teleological deferment, but as a topology of jouissance which is unrecuperable by phallocratic discourse.

Phoebe Zeitgeist, by not speculating in the other character's discourse, inserts herself into the text's discourse as an observer, both as Irigaray's Other Woman, and as an alien. By remaining outside the textual logic, she forms an uncrossable lacunae, framing and disrupting its authority. If a function of the theological stage is to recuperate divergent elements into economies which territorialize or reterritorialize women and other transgressive behaviors in order to establish the transcendence of the father, and to suppress any false or bad claimants, then Phoebe acts as a boundary whose presence perturbates his discourse by her refusal to participate. Rather than remaining as the other/object, a passive female on which unspeakable acts of violence are played out in the drama, she acts like the/a woman who cannot be inscribed. As such, she is unimaginable to the Platonic hom(m)osexual discourse, which cannot imagine her except as female/object. Phoebe, by remaining incoherent, shatters the structures necessary to maintain the other characters' narratives. By opening the possibility of a transgressive discourse, she exposes that which is concealed by representation: the father's absence and the simulacrum which perforce takes his place. As a simulacrum, Phoebe is not merely a bad copy who has lost her way, but the return of a force Platonism sought to extinguish.

Phoebe Zeitgeist is not simply a transgressive agent. She never sutures into the economy of the earth characters, is never re-organized as woman (other than man), or becomes a site of discursive pleasure. Instead, by the end of the play the earth people have disintegrated into Phoebe's discourse, the discourse of the Other Woman, the elided voice, and thus into simulation. Instead of reification, Phoebe speaks out of her velocity--as opposed to the stasis of a Platonic hierarchy--as woman, a velocity freed from the hierarchical rigidity of metaphysics. Rather than a location--the Other, site of pleasure or *jouissance*--she operates as a pre-originary becoming of forces, as a simulacrum. Indeed her erumpent presence signifies the perturbation of the compliancy that privileges the father and his *logoi* over a pre-originary *differance*, a simulacrum not dependent on the (absent) father for signification.

By the end of the play the other characters are as unable to articulate a coherent grammar as Phoebe. As she mimics their confusion while biting them, they fall out of the organizing discourse with which they originally sought to inscribe Phoebe. She ends the play by quoting Kant: "A concept is not, however, determined in a purely abstract manner; understanding is to be differentiated from reason, therefore, in the comprehension of concepts as a whole,"[47] a strategy which parodies the other characters' complete loss of

their comprehensive facilities, and which perturbates her position as the silent woman. Here too, she moves away from what Irigaray had in mind for the/a woman.

Irigaray has been critiqued by material feminists for valorizing the/a woman as an essentialist being, a timeless, universal entity divorced from social, political and racial considerations.[48] Certainly her notion of the/a woman can be read this way, for the body, in her estimation, becomes a transcendental site which, when writing for itself, is seemingly free of any culturally specific attributes.[49] Whether this reading is a complete, or accurate, summation of Irigaray is still a matter of contention between materialist and cultural feminists.[50] When the notion of an essential body perturbating discourse is applied to Phoebe Zeitgeist, its inapplicability is on the one hand immediately apparent; on the other hand, Irigaray's (re)theorization of the/a woman in the context of metaphysics is important to my own project for it both represents a continuation of the critique of metaphysics underlying my argument, and reveals a further aspect of Fassbinder's own critique--his radical unfounding of difference. Indeed, Fassbinder's sexual politics lead far afield from Irigaray's. He has no intention of recuperating any form of sexuality as a liberative experience, unless that experience is a sado-masochistic pleasure in death.

Phoebe Zeitgeist's seduction, and subsequent abandonment of the other characters at the end of *Blood on the Cat's Neck* is an example of how Fassbinder apparently begins to adopt Irigaray's notion of woman-as-speculum, as I argued above. But the manner in which she leaves those characters to their own demise leaves no question as to her intentions. At the end of the play, when she has the characters babbling incoherently--that is, speaking in (her) tongues, saying words that have no grammatalogical connections--rather than rewarding them for participating in her (other) language, she reverts to the father, Immanuel Kant. While the density of the quote in relation to the vapid conversations of the other characters, the formality of the language, is enough to assure that it will be accessible only to those thoroughly ensconced in the Western philosophical tradition, for Phoebe to bring such a Platonic conception of reason and understanding into the text at this point completely subverts her previous counter discourse by betraying the assumption that it is nonsense. The text constructs a counter erotics, based on Phoebe's otherness, to seduce the characters away from those of the father. But when Phoebe reverts to Kant, that discourse "goes weightless" (loses its primary referent), and reveals a universe as cruel and inhospitable as the one in which the characters of *Garbage, Death, and the City* exist.

The sexual politic that emerges from both texts is merciless and violent. Rather than seeking to subsume the excess of desire to a unitary logic of one sort or another, these characters live in a delirious world which is, in a sense, beyond misogyny and anti-Semitism, and into a world of S&M scare tactics.

Relentlessly unable to provide an alternative to nihilism and brutality of a simulated universe, Fassbinder's characters revel in their own destruction, and in the process reveal the consequences of a metaphysics based on an imaginary "real."

The move away from metaphysics to anarchy embodied in Fassbinder's texts is also a move from the masquerade for/of the father (pretending that the father, and not writing, is behind the staged word) to the simulacrum. The movement makes subjects and objects, as well as their attendant economies (economies predicated on transcendental signifiers) inarticulate by problematizing the position they would otherwise speak from. Phoebe and her colleagues become hyperreal. Theirs is not a hyperreality nostalgic for an origin, but a hyperreality of forces that are deterritorialized and allowed to form their own affinities (though the optimism of such a statement is problematic). For if simulacra rather than the "real" predicate the theatrical economy of the word, itself always already a copy, the ensuing hyperreality results not as a falling away from the ideal, not as an implosion of the social sphere, but rather as a liberative affirmation which allows an all out assault on the "real." The terrain constituted by Fassbinder's plays imparts a radically different sphere of theatricality than that which the 'theological' conception of theatre would allow. If this stage is still dominated by words and their attendant hierarchy of father/son economies, then it is a theology wherein god has long since died and no amount of ideation can revive him, nor keep the reveling simulacra from dancing on his grave. In fact, it would not even be possible to talk about Fassbinder's theatre in metaphysical terms were it not still tied to the word.

While this theatre effects a radical perturbation of the metaphysic of "the father," it does not exist outside that economy. Rather, like Phoebe Zeitgeist, it is a theatre of the transgressed limit. Fassbinder's characters are worse than bad sons running about murderously and unchecked. Whereas within the rigid frame of classical representation the stage strives to void its status as false claimant to be expelled from Plato's Republic, to ameliorate the patricide at its heart through true and good copies of the father's authority and his metaphysic's ascendancy, Fassbinder's characters perch on the borders of that frame, speaking out of the elided positions it sought to contain. They do not stand in nor masquerade for or against the father, do not fill in for him through the playwright's words, nor enact through their deeds his absent presence. Rather they violently destroy the framework which constitutes fathers and sons.

Here is a critical intersection of two versions of hyperreality, two functions of the simulacrum. On the one hand if simulation is the futility of masking the father's inherent absence, his death and the ensuing hyperreality of his signifiers, and consequently signals the implosion of systems of meaning based on that (absent and presumed dead) father, conterminously, as Fassbinder's characters speak from the margins, simulation is also a strategy

for eradicating the illusion of fathers and sons by finally making such things unspeakable. Phoebe Zeitgeist's hyperreality dominates the stage as she ruptures the boundaries which would inscribe both her narrative about life on earth and her presence as woman in the male discourse. Roma B. and The Rich Jew "hyper-ize" their entire world, finding in the logic of terrorism the limits of late capitalism. Such a hyperreality is a threat exactly because it has access to the boundary, to the frame, and can perturbate the process of representing the father.

What questions do these characters, these "simulacra with a vengeance," raise about the theatrical frame and the theatrical enterprise? The strategies Fassbinder employs in his attack on metaphysics and representation apparently reaches the limit of the stage, a limit whose transgression would signal either the end of theatre, or facilitate a slide back into the territory of the frame. Fassbinder brings anarchy to the stage with no interest in controlling either its effects, providing an escape from representation, or leaving intact his own position. The nihilism his characters evince would seemingly embrace a traditional analysis of their condition (their torpid state is a tragic result of alienation and the bankruptcy of humanistic values). However, rather than finding cause for sorrow within that position, they instead use it to "off" the residuals of their theological heritage. What Fassbinder does provide in wasting the theological frame of representation is the possibility or opportunity for performing a reformulation of character, and identity, along a non-fascistic genealogy.

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Notes

1. The situation in Frankfurt was not historically isolated. In the Bronx in New York City during the 1970s a similar process was occurring as the city consecutively closed down fire stations in crowded areas in order to remove slum housing through fires. For a report on the actual process by which large areas of the South Bronx were decimated, see Rodrick Wallace, "A Synergism of Plagues: 'Planned Shrinkage,' Contagious Housing Destruction, and AIDS in the Bronx," *Environmental Research* 47 (1988). Furthermore, the recent riots in New York's East Village were caused by more or less the same problem as those in Frankfurt.

2. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Garbage, Death, and the City," *Plays*, trans. Calandra (New York: PAJ Publications, 1985) 163.

3. C. f. Has Kiderlen, ed., *Deutsch-jüdische Normalität . . . Fassbinder's Sprengsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Pflasterstrand GmbH, 1985).

4. A group of about thirty Jews occupied the stage just before the curtain went up, stopping the performance and initiating a verbal battle with the audience and theatre personnel. C. f. Kiderlen, ed., *Deutsch-jüdische Normalität . . . Fassbinder's Sprengsätze*, for a collection of essays and discussions on the circumstances surrounding the controversy of the 1985 attempt to stage *Garbage*.

5. Letter to Suhrkamp quoted in: Gerhard Zwerenz, *Der Langsame Tod des Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (Munich: Knaur, 1982).

6. I am thinking here in part of Jean-Françoise Lyotard's discussion of Auswitzch in *The Differend* (trans. Van Abeele. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987). Lyotard's argument is that the Holocaust emblemizes the death, or the limit of speculative thinking, for it constructs a moment which can only be experienced in person (the gas chambers or ovens). Yet that experience also signals death, or the absence of witnesses to that experience. In the gap between the two discourses then (the living and the dead in this case), there is a "differend" that signals not an incommensurability, but a recognition that no universal experience can account for both those who did not experience Auswitzch, the living, and those who did: the dead. Furthermore, this differend insures that competing genres of discourse will not negate each other, but will maintain a tension, and thus an anti-universal limitation.

7. Both the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the weekly magazine *Quick* ran articles criticizing Jewish protests. For a summary of this controversy, see Hajo Funke, "Bitburg, Jews, and Germans: A Case Study of Anti-Jewish Sentiment in Germany during May, 1985," in *New German Critique* 26 (Spring 1986): 57-72.

8. At the time Reagan defended his decision by declaring that "Oh God, I know about (the Holocaust), but do I have to see it?" quoted in George Skelton, "Image of Blundering Fought: Can Eloquence Calm the Furor? Aids to Wait, See," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1985, 17.

9. The Left's position on free speech is historically ironic since "right or wrong, my country" was a central defense at the Nuremberg War Criminal trials.

10. Heiner Müller, quoted in "Die Notwendige Zumutung," *Theater Heute* 10 (August 1984): 10. A confrontation between the texts of Müller and Fassbinder has yet to take place.

11. Fassbinder, quoted in *Theater Heute* 5 (August 1976): 36.

12. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 105.

13. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Foss, Patton, Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983) 146.

14. Baudrillard 151-152.

15. Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," trans. Krauss, *October* 25 (1982): 48.

16. Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, trans. Foss, Patton, Johnson, (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983) 94.

17. Deleuze 56.

18. Baudrillard 120.

19. 116. My italics.

20. Fassbinder, *Garbage* 168.

21. 169.

22. 167.

23. 171.

24. 168.

25. 167.

26. 166.

27. 183.

28. 188.

29. 188.

30. 185.

31. 185.

32. Deleuze 54.

33. Huyssen 110.

34. C. f. Jacques Derrida, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981). Indeed, the Derridan reading of representation underlies much of my argument in this paper.

35. Fassbinder, *Garbage* 180.

36. Baudrillard 119.

37. For Fassbinder to attempt to speak for the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, that is, to incorporate it into a larger liberal critique of oppression, would serve only to further silence Jewish people; to remain silent about the link between fascism and capitalism would only

serve to perpetuate the conditions *Garbage, Death, and the City* seeks to expose. Unfortunately for Fassbinder, the line between his critique and anti-Semitism is a thin one. On the one hand, it is important not to appropriate the Jewish experience, on the other, it is necessary to acknowledge the Jewish position. In rejecting humanism, Fassbinder also rejects the standard explanations of anti-Semitism, focusing instead on how it obtains as a consequence of the capitalist state.

38. C. f. Derrida. *Disseminations*, trans. Johnson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979).

39. Deleuze 49.

40. 50.

41. 48.

42. Fassbinder, "Blood on the Cat's Neck," *Plays*, trans. Calandra (New York: PAJ Publications, 1985) 97.

43. Deleuze 49ff.

44. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 229.

45. 229.

46. 230.

47. Fassbinder 125.

48. See, for example, Gayatri Chahravoity Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame," *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987) 134-153; and Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

49. C. f. Barbara Freedman, "Frame-up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 40.3 (October 1988): 386.

50. Elin Dimond argues against the essentialist interpretation in "Mimesis, Mimicry, and Theatre," *Modern Drama* (Spring 1989).

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