
Linguistic Squinting:
The Reader's Encounter with the
Textuality of Peter Handke's
Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter

Marielle Sutherland

Josef Bloch, an ex-goalkeeper and now a construction worker in Vienna, walks in to work one morning and decides he has been fired because nobody looks up to acknowledge him (Handke 7). This is Bloch's first semiotic misadventure in the novel, and the reader is carried on his schizophrenic stream of consciousness through many more divergent encounters between self and external order, as Bloch strays further and further from convention and predictability. His interaction with other human beings is perpetually retarded by misunderstandings: he strangles a cinema cashier the morning after he has slept with her. Consciously or unconsciously on the run, he wanders aimlessly in a remote village on the Austrian border; in this state of dislocation, he is plunged further into an incoherence of signs while the police systematically decipher the clues which lead to him.

The interest in *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* has focused mainly on the confusion of the protagonist's world – the subjection of Josef Bloch to a disturbance in the relation between signifier and signified. This has led to readings of the text as a psychological case study and as an investigation into semiotic operations.¹ Patrick O'Neill, however, addresses the reader's reception of the text, distinguishing between *story* as the narrative plane of the text and *discourse* as the reader's interest in the manner of narration (284).² He writes: "Bloch's multiple confusions on the level of story are reflected in the multiple possibilities for confusion that are put in the way of the reader on the level of discourse" (285). O'Neill reads the novel as a mirror held up to the reader's act of reading, arguing that not only does the text ask the reader to recognize in Bloch her

own compulsion to interpret the world, but it also offers itself as semiotic material upon which she can practice that interpretation.³ As a piece of narration, the novel is signing to its reader, and the anxiety which its protagonist undergoes in his struggle to connect to its external world of signs is, O'Neill argues, potentially reproduced in the relation it sets up between itself and its reader. His argument, however, remains primarily focused on the reader's interpretative responses to the text, suggesting that her conventional obedience to the linguistic and literary call for coherent meaning – her persistent attempts to decode the significance of certain recurring phenomena in the text – are comparable to Bloch's paranoid-schizophrenic tendencies.

I would like to expand on O'Neill's article and argue that not only does the text proffer and then revoke literary conventions, but it also, on occasion, draws the reader claustrophobically close to its linguistic operations, seizing from her precisely that disproportionate attention Bloch gives to language. I will show that Bloch feels overworked by language, ensnared and exhausted by its demand to be read unambiguously, and that there are moments in the text when language similarly perplexes and overpowers the reader. Of Bloch's encouragement to focus on the goalkeeper instead of the rest of the game at the football match his companion says, "Wenn man auf den Tormann schaue, komme es einem vor, als ob man schielen müsse" (126). Bloch applies an overbearing scrutiny to unnatural focus-objects in the text, and the reader also often finds herself drawn into an excessive and disturbing preoccupation with the words on the page, a metaphorical 'squinting,' as she tries to bring the lexemes and their grammatical and syntactical relations to one another into focus. Indeed, the word 'schielen' actually induces a linguistic squinting in the reader at this point in the text, for the ambiguity of the sentence demands further scrutiny from her. The statement is that it *seems* to the observer that he is squinting, and so the reader is drawn into a struggle with the layers of perspective conditioning the language.

I will first of all introduce Bloch's neurosis as one which is centered on the reading of reality as a coherence between self and world, identifying where Bloch's anxiety enters the reader in her attempts to orient herself within the textual reality of the novel. I will go on to look at Handke's notion that language – despite

human reliance on it – is a precarious, indeed dangerous, piece of artifice rather than a stable medium for reality. I will then examine how Bloch is disturbed by language on a level even more fundamental than that of signification. I will trace how Bloch's over-consciousness of language as a tyrannizing agency is passed to the reader in her confrontation with a text which foregrounds its textuality and 'narratedness' in linguistic turns and effects which may obsess and wholly disorient her while at the same time conveying to her her dependence on language.

The text invites the reader to recognize that all signs are arbitrary and kept in place by conventions which legislate when it is acceptable to infer meaning and when it is not. Bloch's dysfunctional semiotics cause him to behave unconventionally in his attribution of significance. When the waitress takes a chair down from the table for Bloch, he takes down another chair and sits down (36). Here, instead of reading a sign which is not there, he fails to read a sign which is there.⁴ Bloch is dislodged from the world around him: "Es kam ihm vor, als hätte ihn ein Stemmisen von dem, was er sah, abgestemmt, oder als seien vielmehr die Gegenstände ringsherum von ihm abgehoben worden" (58). This inability to relate conventionally to the external world leads to an acute self-consciousness which thoroughly isolates him:

Es war ein Ruck gewesen, und mit einem Ruck war er unnatürlich geworden, war er aus dem Zusammenhang gerissen worden. Er lag da, unmöglich, so wirklich; kein Vergleich mehr. Sein Bewußtsein von sich war so stark, daß er Todesangst hatte. Er schwitzte. Eine Münze fiel zu Boden und rollte unter das Bett; er horchte auf: ein Vergleich? Dann war er eingeschlafen. (80)

Thomas Barry argues that Bloch attempts to read the sound of the coin as a simile as part of an existential desire to be comparable with something in the external world. His fear of death at this point, according to Barry, is grounded in his absolute isolation, the utter incommunicability of his situation. His impulse is to produce

language in order to come into contact with the world; this becomes a compulsion to perceive objects as metaphors (100-01).⁵ The compulsion for relation manifests itself as paranoia, a manic enquiry into what does and what does not make sense. He panics: "Ob das Blinken etwas mitteilen sollte? Waren es Blinkzeichen?" (48).

The reader finds herself in a similar situation with the text before her which does not offer her the consoling orientation of plot. She is carried along on Bloch's predisposition towards detail which impairs his ability to unify actions and events. They proliferate into a host of disconnected elements and incidents which neither Bloch nor the reader can digest, as the scene at the inn demonstrates:

Die Kellnerin ging hinter die Theke. Bloch legte die Hände auf den Tisch. Die Kellnerin bückte sich und öffnete die Flasche. Bloch schob den Aschenbecher weg. Die Kellnerin nahm im Vorbeigehen von einem anderen Tisch einen Bierdeckel. Bloch rückte mit dem Stuhl zurück. Die Kellnerin nahm das Glas von der Flasche, auf die sie es gestülpt hatte, legte den Bierdeckel auf den Tisch, stellte das Glas auf den Deckel, kippte die Flasche in das Glas, stellt die Flasche auf den Tisch und ging weg. Es fing schon wieder an! Bloch wußte nicht mehr, was er tun sollte. (36)⁶

The reader finds it unnatural to follow Bloch's perspective so intensely through a linear series of experiences which seems to be going nowhere.⁷ Her conventional orientation would be towards the 'Kriminalroman' of the murder committed by Bloch and his pursuit by the police. The detective story, however, remains peripheral in Bloch's perspective. In her anxiety to make sense of the text, the reader must cast around for clues in the same way as Bloch does.

The reader's anxiety to unify the details is provoked further by the seductive presence of possible clues. Bloch notices the 'beschädigtes Hirschgeweih' on two occasions, and because the barmaid explains "es stamme von einem Hirsch, der sich ins Minenfeld verirrt habe" (38), the suspicion arises that the broken antlers could be an omen for Bloch, for he too is disoriented as words set traps for him. The

police's determination to trap the murderer is also always in the background. But the reader is torn between her interpretation and the awareness that her overactive, readerly imagination resembles Bloch's exaggerated perspective.⁸ Another obvious invitation to the reader to decode the text is the significance of the goalkeeper figure framing the text.⁹ At the side of the pitch with Bloch at the end of the novel, when he elaborates a theory of the goalkeeper's innate disadvantage, the reader may become a different kind of football fanatic as she tries to translate Bloch's idiosyncrasies so that they have everything to do with football.¹⁰ However, Vannatta is right to identify the pure chance at the heart of the save the goalkeeper makes in the novel (615) and to argue that the phenomenal world is without explanation or meaning (609).

Bloch has the uncanny feeling that language forces a predictability on language-users and their perception of the world: "es kam ihm nicht geheuer vor, wie man zu reden anfangen und dabei wissen konnte, was man am Ende des Satzes sagen würde" (89). The novel reproduces this anxiety in the reader in the sense that language artificially orders reality, creating a semblance of coherence which reality itself does not inherently possess. Bloch has schizophrenic tendencies in that he deviates from semiotic norms, but the title refers to him as a 'goalkeeper,' which Handke calls "einen 'normalen' Helden" (*Text + Kritik* 3). If he were to be labeled a schizophrenic, the reader might dismiss Bloch's experiences as specific to his mental condition and therefore irrelevant to her own. Handke continues: "Dieser Vorgang, Gegenstände als Normen zu sehen, soll eben nicht als krankhaft verharmlost, sondern als lebensüblich vorgestellt werden" (*Text + Kritik* 3). Linstead argues that it is "purely the intensity of Bloch's perspective that makes him stand out from the other characters" (97).

Unlike the average language-user, Bloch is sensitive to the enforced orderliness and coherence of language which insists on its reflection of a given causality in nature. He investigates words and discovers that they are in fact shaping the human concept that events proceed logically from one another. Grammatical and syntactical regulations mediate Bloch's experience of reality, and the reader finds him trying to resist its irresistible procedures:

Er ging weiter, weil –
 Mußte er das Weitergehen begründen, damit –?
 Was bezweckte er, wenn –? Mußte er das “wenn”
 begründen, indem er –? Ging das so weiter, bis –?
 War er schon so weit, daß –?
 Warum mußte daraus, daß er hier ging, etwas
 gefolgert werden? Mußte er begründen, warum er
 hier stehenblieb? (123)

Bloch feels oppressed and persecuted by the linguistic system: “Er mußte sich vor Wörtern in acht nehmen, die das, was er ausdrücken wollte, zu einer Art von Aussage machten” (90-91). He finds that syntax is commanding him to give reasons for his actions, refusing to permit the possibility of the irrational. Language seems to be demanding from Bloch that he recognize the interpretability of the world:

Je länger er sprach, desto weniger natürlich kam Bloch vor, was er redete. Allmählich schien ihm gar jedes Wort eine Erklärung zu bedürfen. Er mußte sich beherrschen, um nicht mitten im Satz ins Stocken zu geraten. (66)

Bloch's response is to over-scrutinize language; Dennis Vannatta, however, contends that it is folly to expect language to rationalize the world: “In Wittgensteinian terms, Bloch's problem is that he is expecting his analysis of language to result in explanations. Instead, ‘we must do away with all *explanations*,’ wrote Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*, ‘and description alone must take its place’” (qtd. in Vannatta 612). Language is standing intimidatingly in the foreground in this novel because it is a self-conscious description of language, rather than the practical tool of elucidation Bloch wishes it to be. Bloch simply cannot access the paradise of coherence he is desperate to believe in. He suffers under the contradiction that he is besieged by, and yet is totally dependent upon language.¹¹

Bloch's fraught relationship with language is a collision with ambiguity, with the instability of the model which language perpetuates. In his obsession that all words make absolute sense,

he experiences language as a trap which entangles him in its intransparency, its perpetual failure to map a coherent world. An example of this ambiguity is: “Die Kellnerin brachte das Getränk, das Bloch für sie bestellt hatte. Welche ‘sie?’” (38). Handke contends: “Indem man die Sprache nur *benutzt* und nicht *in* ihr und *mit* ihr beschreibt, zeigt man nicht auf die Fehlerquellen in der Sprache hin, sondern fällt ihnen selber zum Opfer” (*Elfenbeinturm* 30). He implies here that, in contrast to the unreflecting utilitarian approach to language, the literary project brings language forward in order to be scrutinized and criticized. The result is not more precision, but rather an awareness of breach (‘Fehlerquellen’) and inadequacy. The reader becomes aware of her own addiction to the linguistic search for the rational as the novel performs its text. Vannatta describes the literary project as a depiction of language which does not reach beyond language: “Events can be neither predicted nor explained in rational terms – by Bloch or by Handke. Irrationality may be dramatized, however; indeed, irrationality is perhaps the dominant theme in Handke's drama and fiction” (616). Bloch's derangement by a system which insists on its coherence and yet does not always deliver its user into a direct and unambiguous reality is dramatized in the foregrounding of text, and the reader is part of this dramatization.

Bloch's deviant perspective drains language of its innocence as a natural and reliable human interface with the world. Handke argues that language-users internalize linguistic conventions, and that literary language can explore the way in which this works:

Ich habe keine Themen, über die ich schreiben möchte, ich habe nur ein Thema: Über mich selbst klar zu werden, mich kennenzulernen oder nicht kennenzulernen, zu lernen, was ich falsch mache, was ich falsch denke, was ich unbedacht denke, was ich unbedacht spreche, was ich automatisch spreche. (*Prosa* 270)¹²

In the self-conscious maneuverings of literature, author and reader can interrogate the textuality or constructedness of language which is naturalized and employed ‘automatically’ in conventional

speech.¹³ Linguistic conventions corrupt individual expression in the novel, so that the signifier gains an unnatural prominence over the signified. The landlady's use of cliché, for example, is to Bloch just an edifice of language, and therefore reaches the reader as words without content: "Die Pächterin antwortete mit einer Redensart" (51). Handke said in an interview in the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* that he wanted his text to administer a "schizophrenic shock" to the reader (Durzack 67). As language inflates and amplifies itself before Bloch, outdoing its own potential for referentiality, the reader experiences the shock of the text pressing forward in place of the reality it is supposed to encode.

The reader, like Bloch, feels that the text is in control. Looking more closely at the narrative plane, the conscious structure and factual tone of the prose suggests that the narrative is a reporting of events, which requires little interpretation by the reader.¹⁴ But there is tension between the lucid, naïve surface of the text and the current of complexity running menacingly underneath, and resisting the structure of, this surface. Heinz Ludwig Arnold refers to the "Starrheit der Prosa" (94); this 'stiffness' irritates the reader who cannot align Bloch's random mental processes to it. The text is foregrounded here: whereas language conventionally clarifies, in *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* it obscures. The self-conscious grammaticality and constructedness of the text creates an impression of the artificiality of language, and this is how Handke uses language to attack language, uses a 'poetic thinking' (*Wünschen* 76) – literature – to highlight the conceptual limitations which conventional language imposes.

The text of Bloch's world asserts itself in the unnatural dominance of the signifier; the "Aufdringlichkeit der Wörter für die Sachen in der Umgebung" (21) is manifested in the schizophrenic mind as an exaggerated sense that the outside world is relaying messages of its own accord. Objects become speech:

Überhaupt kam ihm alles ähnlich vor; alle Gegenstände erinnerten ihn aneinander ... Was sollte er an dem Blitzableiter ablesen? ... Und warum hatten die Kekse dort auf dem Holzteller die Form von Fischen? Sollte er "Stumm wie ein

Fisch" sein? Dürfte er nicht weiterreden? (111)

Bloch senses that the biscuits are shaped in such a way as to issue a specific command, yet he goes through various interpretative contortions and still is not sure he has gotten to their meaning. As commands, the biscuits are manifestations of the oppressiveness of language which becomes autonomous and takes possession of objects in the world rather than functioning as a vehicle for their expression.¹⁵ Language exceeds and eludes Bloch, tyrannically in control: "Es war, als ob er das alles nicht sah, sondern es irgendwo, von einem Plakat mit Verhaltensmaßregeln ablas" (111).¹⁶

As Bloch's world fragments around him, objects are grotesquely magnified in their singularity, going over into speech, into 'Reklame für sich selber' (58). Similarly, names block access to the substance of the things themselves, language parading itself so that signs clutter perception: 'Wieder kamen ihm die Einzelheiten wie Namensschilder vor' (86). Word games and puns escalate and aggravate Bloch's sense that language is maliciously teasing and deceiving him: "Als ob sie [objects] mir zuzwinkern und Zeichen geben!" (92). Details stand uneasily for the whole: "Innerhalb der Ausschnitte sah er die Einzelheiten aufdringlich deutlich: als ob die Teile, die er sah, für das Ganze standen" (85-86).¹⁷ An overall coherence of world and language has undone itself and anarchic elements jump out at Bloch, who says of pictures: "Wenn man sie ansah, sprangen sie einem buchstäblich in die Augen" (98).

The reader experiences the 'schizophrenic shock' of text in its literal sense – in its substantiality as text – literally springing at her eyes. Like Bloch, she is confronted by individual elements of language which are nauseatingly both unstable and over-assertive. Bloch experiences language as compelling him to recognize meaning and rationality; this leads to an over-attention to operations within language. The reader similarly latches on to words in the text which seem to be ill-fitting and therefore demand explanation, and yet the reader cannot decide whether these words make sense or not. In his determination that the schizophrenic condition should not be trivialized in the pathologization of the protagonist, Handke makes his text a place of precariousness and danger for the reader. Bloch is troubled and dizzied by language's sudden inscrutability and

unpredictability after all its insistence on order: "Nicht ein Schrei erschreckte ihn, sondern ein auf den Kopf gestellter Satz am Ende einer Reihe gewöhnlicher Sätze" (123-124). 'Schizophrenic shock' and linguistic squinting are induced in the reader as she encounters sentences which resist rationalization in the text.

As mentioned earlier, the novel makes the reader conscious of her subjection to the narration. The first time the narrator disorients the reader is when Bloch accidentally hails a taxi. Most critics focus on the confused semiotics here: Bloch raises his arm without intending this as a signal that he would like a taxi; however, a taxi does stop for him and he gets in anyway. Whereas the semiotic mistake is transparent, the narration which follows is not: "Schließlich hörte er vor sich ein Bremsgeräusch; Bloch drehte sich um: hinter ihm stand ein Taxi, der Taxifahrer schimpfte; Bloch drehte sich wieder um, stieg ein" (7). Firstly, the action narrated here moves too quickly for the reader to follow at a first reading, and secondly, it is spatially impossible. If Bloch's alternating facing-directions are traced, they cannot be coordinated with the position of the car. The reader is forced to study the text closely yet cannot get any further than the text. It elicits an unnatural, obsessive scrutiny from her.¹⁸

Another occasion when the reader must read with a squint is when Bloch is on the bus after having left the football match before the end: "Bloch bildete sich ein, die Geräusche zu hören, mit denen die Bierflaschen aufs Spielfeld fielen; zugleich hörte er Staub gegen die Scheiben schlagen" (11). Here, the expectation is set up (in the 'bildete sich ein') that the second clause will correct the first and state that the sound was not bottles but something else, implying that Bloch had confused the sound. Instead it does not correct, but proposes that Bloch thinks he hears one specific sound and actually does hear another at the same time. The simultaneity disorients the reader all the more because she cannot work out whether Bloch is separating the two sounds in his head, or whether the imaginary sound of the bottles replaces the actual sound of the dust for him. Added to this is the fact that the sound of the dust may not be real at all, even though the text offers it as a more real sound than the bottles – indeed, it is difficult to imagine that dust hitting windows can be audible. The possibilities are held nauseatingly in check.

"Bloch tat, als sei er erschrocken; aber in der Wirklichkeit war er

erschrocken" (13). Here, the text goes against the rational, linguistic expectation that the pretence will be confirmed in the second clause. The reader is suspended between a sense that the sentence is wrong and the recognition that it might still make sense. Reader expectation is overturned again here: "Bloch ließ den Deckel fallen und setzte sich neben die Pächterin, nicht eins nach dem andern, sondern indem er bei jeder Bewegung zögerte" (108). The reader is already disoriented by the correction. She may begin to think that Bloch is making a distinction between 'und,' which means 'and then' and 'und' which means 'at the same time as.' But when the 'sondern' comes, the narrator introduces something that is not in contradiction with 'eins nach dem andern.' The reader may read and re-read, but although there is grammatical and syntactical consensus within the sentence, she is still not able to grasp it.

Another instance where the text is suddenly magnified is: "Es kam ihm vor, als reiße ein Knopf von seinem Rock und springe auf die Straße. Er hob den Knopf auf und steckte ihn ein" (124). The reader is probably accustomed to assuming that if a sentence begins with "es kam ihm vor," the appearance will turn out not to be the reality, and yet the appearance is confirmed in Bloch picking up the button. The juxtaposition of the hypothetical and the actual constitutes a readerly blind spot here, for the reader is suspended between real and unreal. The momentary magnification of the button in Bloch's attention to it becomes an over-textual moment for the reader when she finds she apportions an unusual amount of attention to the words on the page in order to sort out the ambiguity. Similarly the 'außerdem' in:

Bloch warf die Karten ein. Als sie in den leeren Kasten fielen, halte es darin. Aber der Briefkasten war so klein, daß es gar nicht hallen konnte. Außerdem war Bloch sofort weitergegangen. (47)

First it is reported that the cards echoed as they landed at the bottom of the postbox. Then the stability of this statement is challenged by the next, which states that the postbox is too small to facilitate an echo. A further ambiguity is introduced in the 'außerdem,' which suggests that Bloch had anyway left the scene

before a sound could be made or not made. Does this mean that Bloch is sensitized to noise and hears it anyway? Or that he just thinks he hears it because he expects to (i.e. his assumption becomes the reality)? The 'außerdem' may even be used to dismiss the whole incident as irrelevant despite the original scrutinizing of the postbox. The text has a way of perplexing the reader and entangling her in eccentricities and ambiguities which seem to straddle the boundary between the rational and the irrational. She is forced to conduct a Blochian interrogation of the word 'außerdem'.¹⁹

Language can become a difficult experience for the reader, even though it makes perfect sense:

Aber es folgte nicht mehr darauf, als daß er den Schuldiener in die halbdunkle Holzhütte hinein fragte, ob es denn für alle Schulklassen nur dieses eine Schulzimmer gebe, und daß der Schuldiener antwortete, für alle Schulklassen gebe es nur dieses eine Schulzimmer. (100-01)

The overuse of the subjunctive foregrounds the textual in the reader-experience, and it is also curious that the answer is hypothesized as well as the question. This passage touches on the nausea induced by the following passage in which simply too many modal layers are introduced:

Als die Kellnerin sich zu ihm setzte, tat er nach einiger Zeit, als wollte er den Arm um sie legen; sie merkte, daß er nur so tun wollte, und lehnte sich zurück, noch bevor er deutlich machen konnte, daß er nur so hatte tun wollen. Bloch wollte sich rechtfertigen, indem er den Arm wirklich um sie legte; aber sie war schon aufgestanden. (57)

The reader finds herself trying to see through the self-consciousness of the protagonist and sort out what is the reality behind the text.

There is a similar ambiguity in the following passage, which becomes an unnatural focus for the reader:

Er beobachtete auf einem Feld einen Hund, der auf einen Mann zulief; dann bemerkte er, daß er nicht mehr den Hund beobachtete, sondern den Mann, der sich bewegte wie jemand, der einem andern in den Weg treten will. Jetzt sah er hinter dem Mann ein Kind stehen; und er bemerkte, daß er nicht den Mann und den Hund beobachtete, wie man es gewohnt gewesen wäre, sondern das Kind, das von weitem zu zappeln schien: aber dann merkte er, daß es das Geschrei des Kindes war, was ihm ein Gezappel vormachte. Inzwischen hatte der Mann den Hund schon am Halsband gepackt, und alle drei, Hund, Mann und Kind, waren in eine Richtung weitergegangen. "Wem hat das gegolten?" dachte Bloch. (98)

As Bloch observes the man he loses sight of the contextual, relational structures of the scene and the reader too must concentrate harder on the language. The child becomes isolated in Bloch's exclusive perspective, and the oddity of its role as the focus-object translates into agitation as it wriggles in the distance. His sensory perception is confused, for he thinks he sees the child wriggling when in fact he realizes that it is screaming. The scream is relayed to him not aurally but in the gesture of wriggling, for it is the scream of the child "was ihm ein Gezappel vormachte." This performance, or 'show,' of wriggling by the scream makes enormous demands on the reader who must try to penetrate the layers of perspective in order to piece together an audio-visual scene. The 'Gezappel' is induced in the reader in the form of an anxiety at the dense overlapping of sound, gesture and the 'showing' of gesture. The word 'Gezappel' compels her attention as an impenetrable piece of language. Bloch's anxiety that he must go through the corruptions of language and cannot arrive at a true articulation of his experience is transmitted to the reader as she tries to deal with the words on the page. The language of this passage is fidgetingly self-conscious and textual, subjecting the reader to an extraordinary detail and intensity, and demanding the same absolute concentration upon language which so pressurizes Bloch.

Speech marks also become exaggerated focus-points which still do not yield any new information. They seem to be randomly inserted throughout the narrative, each time surprising the reader, who has become accustomed to the dominant mode of indirect speech (the narrator's mediation), for suddenly Bloch's consciousness seems to be more immediately present. The reader may find this ambiguous, for it could be the narrator stepping back briefly (for inscrutable reasons), or it could be the onset of a deeper self-consciousness in Bloch, the speech marks signifying his awareness that he is thinking.²⁰ The reader's awareness of the speech marks may be exaggerated into the same kind of anxiety with which Bloch is inflicted. If she dwells too long on them, they stand unnaturally forward, detracting from the content of the language in the same way the 'Rufzeichen' bear down on Bloch's consciousness.

Handke does transmit Bloch's anxiety to the reader in the text's subversion of literary conventions and the reader's hermeneutic expectations, but the reader also comes close to Bloch's neurosis on a more elemental level of the textual language. The text often foregrounds its own intransparency, teasing the reader into trying to work out what is wrong with the linguistic relations she is dependent on for an understanding of the text. I have tried to show that the language of the text often elicits an excessive, strained, Blochian attention from the reader which bars her from any comprehensible, direct relation to the subject matter. The relation which *is* established, then, is one of identification with the protagonist through a schizophrenic squinting at the text.

University College London

Notes

¹ Durzak, Heintz, Mixner, Renner, Summerfield and Thuswaldner offer psychological readings and Lenzen and Barry bring in a sociological and an existential dimension respectively. Bohnen, Dixon, Falkenstein, Schlueter and White offer semiotic readings and Linstead adds a sociological dimension.

² Schlueter briefly mentions the reader, suggesting that the reader is not just a reader of reality but also of *this* text when she suggests at the end of her chapter on *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* that when the words

on the page turn to images of the objects, Bloch is observing the reader unconsciously names each outline: "It may well be that the 'normal' hero of Handke's novel is not Bloch after all, but the reader" (92).

³ I am employing the feminine pronoun simply as a neutral alternative to the masculine. It is not intended to posit female reading behaviour. The textual strategies I will be discussing posit a reader of Handke who is sensitive to the enquiry into language which dominates his work.

⁴ O'Neill says that Bloch has lost the faith necessary to keep him within the semiotic order (287-88). "Sprache funktioniert mit einem automatischen Reflex, hinter dem die Wirklichkeit verschwindet [...] Diese sprachliche Sicherheit, die Sicherheit der Formeln, ist Bloch verlorengegangen" (Durzak 73).

⁵ Barry's thesis is that Bloch tries to transcend his alienation from the external world through the creative use of language: "His pathological need to perceive the world as metaphor expresses his desire to give meaning to the random, arbitrary and meaningless events around him" (101). Barry argues that Bloch resembles a writer creating a "system of relationship" for his estranged consciousness (102).

⁶ Heintz makes the same point but he assumes that there is a given unity in events and that Bloch simply does not perceive this: "die natürliche Einheit zerlegt sich hier in eine Vielheit" (104). I do not believe that Handke posits this 'natural unity.' The novel is rather concerned with how language gives the false impression that it mediates a natural unity.

⁷ Durzak applies the adjectives 'ziellos' and 'umherirrend' to Bloch (71).

⁸ O'Neill makes the same argument, using other examples.

⁹ Dixon offers an interpretation of the relationship between football and human existence, comparing the fear of God, in whose hands human fate rests, and the goalkeeper's fear that his fate is delivered into his own hands at the penalty kick (76).

¹⁰ American English: soccer

¹¹ On the fish-shaped biscuits Sergiooris says: "Er versucht, ihre Bedeutung zu erraten, wird ihrer aber nicht sicher" (59). In other words, Bloch cannot rationalize the biscuits even though he feels compelled to do so.

¹² See Gunther Sergiooris: "Für ihn ist die Literatur 'Sprache': die Darstellung mit der Sprache ist eine Darstellung der Sprache" (2). "Die literarische Darstellung ist nicht 'natürlich', sondern ein von einem Menschen gewollter, durch 'Sprache' existierender Vorgang" (3).

¹³ Handke said literature should facilitate the "Entschleierung des Zwanges, der im Gerüst der Sprache steckt" (Sergiooris 2).

¹⁴ Hern argues that the overall impression is one of definition and redefinition until no ambiguity is permitted (4). The irrational, however, perpetually breaks through the text.

¹⁵ "So werden die Wörter für die Gegenstände als die Gegenstände selbst genommen" (Schlüter 5). Handke writes: "das Prinzip war, zu zeigen, wie sich jemandem die Gegenstände, die er wahrnimmt, infolge eines Ereignisses (eines Mordes) immer mehr versprachlichen und, indem die Bilder versprachlicht werden, auch zu Geboten und Verboten werden" (Text + Kritik 3).

¹⁶ Sergiooris writes: "Bloch bewältigt die Realität nicht mit der Sprache, sondern er selber wird von der Sprache, von seiner versprachlichten Wirklichkeit bewältigt, bezwungen, unterdrückt" (49). Rossbacher illustrates the point that Bloch feels he must do what objects demand from him in Bloch's compulsion to flip through magazines right to the end before putting them down, even though he does not enjoy it (94).

¹⁷ Bloch shows symptoms of a modern condition in which the human has become the object of sentences because he reacts unreflectingly to linguistic signals. This passivity might also have something to do with the passive role of the goalkeeper who can only react and never intervene, as Linstead interprets it (96). Sergiooris says Bloch is a manifestation of a vague, fragmented signal-language devoid of grammatical and logical unity (60). Durzack argues that Bloch is disconnected from the linguistic consensus and this isolation is reflected in the 'Atomisierung und Auflösung' of language (338).

¹⁸ Rossbacher does address the illogicality of the narrated incident, arguing that the narrator is as unreliable as Bloch, but he does not explore the reader's response to this (90-91).

¹⁹ Rossbacher says the cards do not echo although Bloch perceives an echo (96). I think the key to this passage is not whether the cards echoed or not, but the reader's compulsion to determine from the language of the text whether they echo or not. Because the reader has the feeling the narrator is as unreliable as Bloch, she becomes involved in speculations which might help her figure out what really happened. Speculations such as: is it Bloch or the narrator who decides that the postbox is too small? And: perhaps this is a misjudgement – a disturbed perception – of the size, and so it is not that Bloch did not hear the sound, but that he *thought* he did not hear it because he *thought* the postbox was too small! Heintz is close when he says that there is no natural cooperation between the sentences. Heintz is also right to point out that the words take on an autonomy in their dispute with one another but he does not mention the reader's response to this (107). I argue that the reader's provoked isolation of these lines of text is experienced by her as a disruptive linguistic encounter.

²⁰ Vannatta acknowledges that some words and phrases are in quotation marks but others are not, arguing that there is no logical pattern to any of it. He compares this to the late Wittgenstein's language of madness (615).

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Theatrics of Sound in Marcel Ophuls' *November Days* and *Hotel Terminus*

Avi Kempinski

I

In the documentary work of Marcel Ophuls much can be said about *mise-en scène*, that cinematic aspect which Timothy Corrigan defines as a "theatrics of space as that space is constructed for the camera" (52). What distinguishes Ophuls' *mise-en scène*, however, is the frequent juxtaposition of and interplay between a "theatrics of space" and what I posit here as a "theatrics of sound": Ophuls' strategic and provocative use of diegetic and non-diegetic audio. The use of sound, I suggest, adds a crucial layer to the spatial composition of the two films under discussion here, *November Days: Voices and Choices* (1990) and *Hotel Terminus: the Life and Times of Klaus Barbie* (1988).¹ Through an analysis of such a theatrics of sound, Ophuls' documentary techniques, and his work as a whole, can be more richly interpreted and understood.²

November Days was commissioned and first broadcast by BBC 2 to mark the one-year anniversary of the opening of the Berlin Wall. In the documentary, Ophuls interviews many of the same people who months earlier appeared in BBC news footage of the events of October and November 1989. Adding historical context, the film also includes in-depth interviews with leading political and cultural figures, such as Egon Krenz, Heiner Müller, and Stephan Hermlin.³ *Hotel Terminus*, completed two years earlier, is a four-hour sleuth-like investigative work that explores the career of Klaus Barbie, head of the German Security Police (SIPO-SD) in occupied France, where he was known as "the butcher of Lyons." Through interviews with his acquaintances, comrades, victims, and apologists, the film traces Barbie's life from boyhood to old age, with locations ranging from