

The transformation of literary autonomy in short fiction.

Illustrated by Franz Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler* and Ilse Aichinger's *Der Gefesselte*.

1 Introduction

In Beckett, history devours existentialism. In *Endgame*, a historical moment is revealed....after the Second World War, everything is destroyed, even resurrected culture, without knowing it; humanity vegetates along, crawling, after events which even the survivors cannot really survive, on a pile of ruins which even renders futile self-reflections of one's own battered state. (Adorno 1982, 122)

The quotation, taken from Adorno's *Trying to understand the Endgame*, addresses the compressed literary representation of a protracted process of desubjectification that Hamm and Clov suffer in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957). The situations in which the characters find themselves testify to the development of a historical moment in which the human condition is completely exhausted after the historical catastrophe of WWII. Despite the world experiencing its own downfall, it nevertheless needs art as an unconscious historiography. Adorno is not uncritical of all literature. The distinction between an inauthentic art, "in which the utmost horror trembles", and an inauthentic one belonging to mass culture, is according to him subject to a mechanism of repression. People are no longer living as they could have

been, and thus are not survivors in the conventional sense; although they continue to live, they are thoroughly changed, completely different from their former selves. The power of thought and self-reflection is also affected, as the catastrophic event defies understanding, making people unable to rationalize or represent what happened.

It becomes apparent that Adorno's essay offers a theoretical framework for mediating between the claim of modernist art as the embodiment of autonomy, while still remaining within the bounds of its historical, social, and political context. In the following sections, I will outline the role of this framework in my own concept of a narrative "endgame of autonomy", as represented in the short fiction works *A Hunger Artist* by Franz Kafka and *The Bound Man* by Ilse Aichinger.

2 Autonomy and its Endgame in modernism

The continuity of aesthetic experience cannot be detached from historical experience. Historical processes correct the artistic process of creation in confrontation with historical events and phenomena (cf. Adorno 1970, 400). According to Adorno, the content of a work of art is always historically determined, however, this can take many forms. Considering this, Adorno positions Beckett's *Endgame* as a kind of antipode to the Existentialist works that were its contemporary, stating that the Existentialists were too interested in a kind of abstraction of the human condition that remains beholden to its historical context: "Was nach existenzialistischem Jargon die condition humaine wäre, ist das Bild des letzten Menschen, das die früheren, Humanität, frisst. Die Existentialontologie behauptet Allgemeingültiges in einem

seiner selbst unbewußten Prozeß von Abstraktion.”¹ (Adorno 1982, 195) In the end, this meant that their concept of humanity was inherently heteronomous, not only inseparable from its historical context from which it is abstracted but identical to it. By contrast, Beckett’s play is characterized by what Adorno (1973, 192) calls “isolated” or “jettisoned facticity” (“abgesprengte Faktizität”). Instead of using the historical moment as a starting point, Beckett inverts the process, starting with the human figures and removing any trace of the history from their factual existence. There is no attempt at abstraction, no essence to be distilled. Adorno refers to this as subtraction and is the basis for the enigmatic character of the text. The context of the narrative is erased on the surface, but still determines the text inherently – not explicitly, as in Existentialism –, inscribed in the structure of the narrative. The result is a game, of which Adorno claims is more revealing than a text which seeks to actively reveal the historical moment: “Das aller Spiegelbildlichkeit ledige Spiel mit Elementen der Realität, das keine Stellung bezieht und in solcher Freiheit, als der vom verordneten Betrieb, sein Glück findet, enthüllt mehr, als wenn der Enthüller Partei nimmt.”² (Adorno 1973, 198 f.) Meaning is thus hidden within, or behind, apparent meaninglessness, the identity behind nonidentity. The work of art seeks to make the isolated facts speak by forming constellations with them. They are not

¹ "What would be the condition humaine according to existentialist jargon is the image of the last man eating the ones before, [the rest of] humanity. Existential ontology asserts universal truths in a process of abstraction of which it itself is unconscious." (ot)

² "Playing with elements of reality, devoid of all reflexivity, taking no position and finding happiness in such a freedom, merely of the prescribed operation, reveals more than when the revealer were to take a stand." (ot)

explained further but are integrated into the complex of plot without further commentary.

The experience of the Second World War and the Holocaust, however, has made any meaning impossible. The meaning behind the meaninglessness thus becomes the meaninglessness of human existence – the loss of autonomy of the subject as a result of the catastrophe. With explicit reference to Kafka, Adorno writes: “Weil kein Sachverhalt bloß ist, was er ist, erscheint ein jeder als Zeichen eines Inneren, aber das Innere, dessen Zeichen er wäre, ist nicht mehr, und nichts anderes meinen die Zeichen.”³ (Adorno 1973, 202) This loss of autonomy and meaning, also referred to by Adorno as “complete negativity”, has continued into the present as part of a process of dehumanization and deindividuation due to the abstraction of human interaction to mere relations of exchange in capitalist society. This destructive process, released by the increasing rationalization of modern society, is the basic precondition of what I call the endgame of autonomy. In the context of literature, this endgame is the negotiation of “aporetic constellations” (cf. Wellmer 1998, 156) characteristic for literary practices under the conditions of Adorno’s “complete negativity” in the context of meaning of the whole which the whole denies. (cf. Adorno 1973, 190) .The aporia represented in Adorno’s idea of “inversion” of the historical and aesthetic takes place on two levels, both on the representational level and in the diegetic world. Even where meanings become meaningless, the historical

³ "Because no fact is merely what it is, each appears as a symbol of an internal space, but that space for which it would be a symbol is no more, and nothing else is meant by the symbols." (ot)

process inscribes itself into the stories and shapes their structure, though hidden by their enigmatic character. This isolates the text as a monad, which in turn has a dual characterization. On the one hand, the text itself is a monad, an autonomous art object, in the traditional metaphysical sense. On the other hand, the titular character of the text is entwined in a process of becoming a monad himself, one which represents the collective type of the artist, and is thus faced with the loss of his individual autonomy, becoming instead an expression of man in society – that is, the human condition – as a whole.

From the structural features of the story, the various levels of meaning in the text can in fact ultimately be reconstructed, in the analysis of the choice of theme, motif, narrative situation, and perspective, as well as sentence structure and style. These incidental characteristics of the texts form the “isolated facticity” that reveals the historically determined loss of autonomy, both on the diegetic and structural level, which in the narrative is embodied by a representation of the process of desubjectification and dehumanization. This process is in turn made apparent in “auratic moments”, expressed through a particular spatial metaphor of proximity and distance, occurring in paradoxical entanglement. Both Kafka and Aichinger, as I will show, use these moments to represent an irrevocable distance of the individual from societal reality in their texts.

3 The Auratic Moment

Since the endgame of autonomy occurs primarily on the diegetic level, the narrative construction of the texts in question must be examined. The narrator of *A Hunger Artist* begins his exposition by introducing the historical change of the hunger art in a kind of objective report, while also slowly putting the hunger artist in his cage. First, within an analepsis consisting of a long report of objective details strung together with semicolons, it is reported how the whole city was once interested in the hunger artist used and how he once pursued his art relatively independently.

After that, the reader is given an account of the present, in which everything has changed for the worse: “eine wesentliche Abnahme des Zuspruchs war festzustellen”⁴ (Kafka 1922, 985), in a kind of narrative step-by-step structure, highlighting the downfall of the art of starvation. From the start, the hunger artist seems to be less an individual and more of a collective subject that stands for all hunger artists of his time as well, contrasted to and also joined by the virtual community of the audience, becoming a “collective assemblage” or “a molecular becoming-collective” (Deleuze/Guattari 1986, 84) of their day and age. The narrator tells about the audience’s lack of understanding and the limitation of the duration of the artist’s starvation period to suit the taste of an audience that has become superficial. In the end, the artist refuses to observe this limitation and he dies. He is then replaced by a panther, which hints at a new vitality, a new entertainment that

⁴ "a substantial decrease in popularity was noted" (ot)

fits the modern taste of the audience. The break from the internal focalization of the hunger artist to a more general authorial perspective is signaled by short staccato sentences and the account of the only direct dialogue towards the end of the narrative.

Adorno notes that, in the aporetic logic of action in Kafka's world, the only way out is by "making oneself completely inconspicuous, small, a defenseless victim, instead of insisting on one's rights according to the mores of the world, the mores of exchange" (Adorno 2003, 268f). Is this why Kafka allows the hunger artist to voluntarily enter the cage because he does not want to allow the mores of the world to triumph over him? The failure of the hunger artist, or rather his voluntary end, as a representation of his gradual loss of artistic autonomy, mirrors the precarious position of the artist in relation to the historical development of bourgeois society. The hunger artist stands for artists as a whole, in their struggle to resist the logic of consumption. At the time Kafka was writing, the First World War had made obvious the complete dehumanization of the human subject as pure material. Not only this, the process of commodification of life as a whole, and thus also art, was quickened by the rapid industrialization after the war and the political upheaval that accompanied this process. If the subject is thus dehumanized, then the act of starvation ceases to be an art form, no longer an "act" in the artistic sense that reflects on humanity and mortality, instead only the senseless devaluation of a reproducible commodity.

Despite this connection of Kafka's text to its unique historical context, it nonetheless is not merely a representation of this context, and it offers no explanation of it.

Kafka's world is thus, for Adorno, a cryptogram of a decaying capitalist order and this immanent order causes the failure of the character's transcendental ideas. We can compare this to Benjamin's statement that the "lack of explanation" in a story is the key why it "does not use itself up" the way facts or information do (Benjamin 2019, 8). As Adorno puts it in *Aesthetic Theory*, the challenge "is not to explain away the element of incomprehensibility, which speculative philosophy has almost invariably sought to do, but rather to understand the incomprehensibility itself" (Adorno 1970, 347). Kafka's hunger artist chooses death because there is no other opportunity to escape the capitalist system of exchange. In doing so, he reasserts his humanity by refusing to submit to the logic of commodification.

If one follows this logic, the idea of the auratic moment converges with Adorno's concept of autonomy: both are elements of a conception that still grants subjectivity to the work of art. According to Adorno, aura and autonomy have their commonality in the emphasis on wholeness and self-sufficiency, and self-reference in a work of art. Isolated facticity is where artistic choice makes use of the language of society, removed from its historical context. The artistic language is a mirror, revealing the emptiness of this language. Kafka's "mirror writing" (Spiegelschrift) denounces the reification of experience, while nonetheless maintaining a sense of hope, a "chance," Adorno writes, "to prevent the world from being all-triumphant" (Adorno 2003, 284). This is achieved in writing, that is, in the art form itself.

In Aichinger's text *The Bound Man*, the nameless main character wakes up in a forest and finds that he has been robbed of his few belongings, and inexplicably bound from

head to toe by a convoluted system of knots. The rope is loose enough to allow him movement, but not enough for him to escape, as he realizes early in the story. With difficulty, he manages to stand up, and learns to move, as if for the first time, like a child, or perhaps an animal. By the time he leaves the forest, he has acquired such an efficient and artful way of moving that a circus owner invites him to perform. He becomes very popular, but also knows that the end of the summer will also bring an end to his time in the circus. In early autumn, a wolf escapes from the circus and attacks the bound man. He strangles the wolf effortlessly. The people cannot believe this feat and insist he proves it, but when the bound man willingly turns to fight the wolf, the circus owner's wife cuts the rope; the bound man, now no longer bound, suddenly feels weak and realizes the pointlessness of the fight. He shoots the wolf, flees, and hides from the pursuing crowd.

Aichinger's text, like Kafka's, makes frequent use of isolated facticity, as evident in the sparseness, ambiguity, and objectivity of the language. It is indebted, in Adorno's sense, to the objective decay of language, from which "a second language of silencing" (Adorno 1970, 204) emerges, rebelling against "words as trademarks" and the "echo of the advertising world." (ibid.) Advertisement of the Bound Man: "Sie sehen den Gefesselten!"⁵, (Aichinger 2016, 17) is contrasted with poetic language that relies on ambiguity: "as if the water were carrying ice floes, as if the snow had already fallen over in the meadows, taking away memory." (Aichinger 2016, 29) The language, however, at the same time becomes autonomous in its self-referentiality:

⁵ "Here you see the bound man!" (ot)

“der Fluß, der da und dort über ausgerodete Stellen hinweg in der Tiefe sichtbar wurde, stellte sich unwissend.”⁶ (Aichinger 2016, 28). A circular structure becomes visible here within the linguistic form, which Adorno recognized in Beckett and which further affects the space and time dimension of the text: "Der Sommer wuchs sich entgegen." (Aichinger 1991, 17). The summer grows out of itself, becoming a contained space, summer in and of itself as the setting of the story, separated from the usual passing of the seasons. Within this space, the language experiences a shift of meaning. This circular self-referentiality constitutes another type of auratic moment which, in Kafka, is not present. Aichinger, writing after the Second World War, was in a situation much more similar to the one described by Adorno in regards to Beckett, where the forward movement of history had come to a standstill: “Geschichte wird ausgespart, weil die Kraft des Bewußtseins ausgetrocknet hat, Geschichte zu denken, die Kraft zur Erinnerung.”⁷ (Adorno 1982, 197) The form of Kafka’s text as a historical report does not make sense “on a pile of ruins” (Adorno 1982, 122).

4 Animalized Man- a new form of autonomy

According to Adorno, the historical crisis has its limit at the biological reality of the individual. (Adorno 1973, 210f.) The unfolding of the moment of crisis, however, is mediated by the representation of the bodies of the characters in both texts. First of

⁶ “the river, which here and there became visible in the background through clearings, feigned ignorance.” (ot)

⁷ "History is omitted, because the ability of consciousness to think history, the strength to remember, has dried up." (ot)

all, in both texts, the art forms of the characters are physical. The hunger artist starves, and the bound man moves. Their art is thus characterized by a kind of naturality, in the sense that they are not seen as an acquired skill, but an innate ability. Thus the artists are animalized, no longer active individual, someone who is making a choice, but creatures that cannot help but demonstrate their art. For Kafka, the animalization of the hunger artist is never complete. Once he joins the circus, he is placed in a cage near the exotic animals, but this nearness doesn't complete the transformation, and the animal world, exemplified by the panther, replaces the human body of the hunger artist at the end. The body provides "the experience – lived out to its end" (Adorno 1981, 259), but remains, in the end, human, too human, and only the panther can satisfy the demands of the audience.

Aichinger's character, on the other hand, faces a "Reduktion auf den vertierten Menschen" (Adorno 1973, 199). Numerous passages in *The Bound Man* show the resemblance of humans to animals. In particular, the bound man is shown to resemble birds. This resemblance finally shows the bound man at the border to the animal state. At the border, however, he gains leeway, and even accepts this role as an animal – but his binds are cut off against his will by the circus director's wife. This is not described as a positive liberation. The plot logic suggests a negative interpretation of this "rehumanization": he uses a pistol to kill the wolf, as a symbol of the effortless destructive potential of rationalized, technologized civilization. This is staged as a radical act of violence in contrast to the grace and gentleness of the first fight with the wolf, where the man is still tied up.

Grace and gentleness are shown here as characteristics of animality, and aggression and harshness are framed in terms of humanity. The text also shows how he sympathizes with the wolf, which he only shoots when his binds fall off and it becomes a life-or-death situation. In certain passages, the mediation of his thought process even suggests that he is not above the wolf in the sense of a man-animal hierarchy, but he feels pity for the animals: “Er dachte, daß sie das Recht hätten, erbittert zu sein: ein Zirkus um diese Zeit, ein Gefesselter, ein entkommener Wolf, und jetzt dieses Ende”⁸ (Aichinger 2016, 26). The aborted unpoetic language that curtly depicts the shooting of the wolf indirectly reflects this connection. Humanity’s own “Subjektivität selbst ist die Schuld”⁹ (Adorno 1973, 232), and the weapon becomes the “Endprodukt der Naturbeherrschung, die sich selbst erledigt”¹⁰ (Adorno 1973, 229). This mode of symbolic representation is, as Adorno writes in his essay (cf. 1973, 230), the self-reflective thematization of the history’s end of subjectivity as represented in the narrative side of the monadic unit, that erases the individuality of the character.

This final erasure is evident in the closing scene of *The Bound Man*, where the man, in the moment he is freed, is enclosed in the wolf’s cage as an animal. Indeed the freedom he gains is an animal one: “Er stand im Innern des Käfigs, während er die Fessel wie die Reste einer Schlangenhaut von sich riß”¹¹ (Aichinger 2016, 28) and

⁸ "He thought that they had the right to be bitter: a circus at this time, a captive, an escaped wolf, and now this end" (ot)

⁹ "Subjectivity itself is the guilt." (ot)

¹⁰ "End product of the domination of nature, which destroys itself." (ot)

¹¹ "He stood inside the cage while he tore the ropes from himself like the remains of a snake’s skin." (ot)

only through the violent act of shooting the wolf can he assert his humanity. The end is then drawn together by the narrative technique of subtraction in a circular, auratic moment that co-negotiates the moment of crisis in that humanity becomes inhuman: "Der Mond schien auf die Wiese, sie hatte in diesem Moment zugleich die Farbe des Wachstums und des Todes"¹² (Aichinger 2016, 29). The freedom of the bound man, and his brief attainment of brutal humanity, are thus called into question.

Throughout *The Bound Man*, the question of the main character's apparent unfreedom is thematized. When a woman brings food to the bound man by the river, she incredulously asks him if he wouldn't rather get rid of his binds and go his own way completely free:

Sie fragte ihn, ob es ihm nicht lächerlich scheine, gefesselt zu bleiben, aber er erwiderte, nein, lächerlich scheine es ihm nicht. Es zögen so viele mit dem Zirkus, Elefanten, Tiger Spaßmacher, weshalb sollte auch nicht ein Gefesselter mitziehen?¹³ (Aichinger 2016, 21)

The other characters of the story are unable to comprehend his choice to accept his binds, and can only see them as a hindrance to his freedom that he should flee from. Freedom, for the audience, and thus also for society at large, is understood as freedom of movement. Autonomy in this sense is the ability to escape from constraints to this

¹² "The moon was shining on the meadow, it had at that moment at the same time the color of growth and of death" (ot)

¹³ "She asked him if it didn't seem ridiculous to him to stay tied up, but he replied, no, it didn't seem ridiculous to him. There were so many people in the circus, elephants, tigers, why shouldn't a man in chains go with them?" (ot)

freedom. As a constituent part of his art, however, it instead becomes a symbol of his artistic autonomy. For Deleuze and Guattari the escape from the constrictions and expectations of humanity doesn't consist in fleeing – quite the contrary (Deleuze/Guattari, 14). For Deleuze and Guattari “Flight is challenged when it is useless movement in space, a movement of false liberty; but in contrast, the flight is affirmed when it is a stationary flight, a flight of intensity” (ibid., 13). In the case of the hunger artist, we can assume this kind of stationary flight, which rejects false liberty and freedom. For although the cage is moved to different locations within the plot, the hunger artist himself is hardly shown to us in motion. Only the panther at the end of the story moves in the cage in a vital way: “dieser edle, mit allem Nötigen bis knapp zum Zerreißen ausgestatteten Körper schien auch die Freiheit mit sich herumzutragen”¹⁴ (Kafka 1922, 992). The embodiment of the audience's idea of freedom is an animal one.

The bound man is also in a motionless state at the beginning of the narrative. He is, however, frequently brought into motion, constrained only by the restraints of his binds. The ease of these motions, as mentioned above, gives the bound man an animal quality from the start. His body exists not during the process of dehumanization, but in its aftermath. He has no humanity left, so he appears natural. The captured wolf in the circus finds itself, by comparison, as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, “deterritorialized by human force. But in turn, the deterritorialized animal force

¹⁴ “This noble body, furnished near to bursting with everything necessary, seemed also to carry freedom around with it” (ot)

precipitates and intensifies the deterritorialization of the deterritorializing human force” (Deleuze/ Guattari, 14). In the concrete context of the circus in the course of the plot, this means that the wolf is banished by the human into a cage as the other of the human ratio, but that it is then also the decisive factor in which the plot takes its fatal outcome. He activates the mechanism of the bound man’s violence, which has been identified as rationalistic, stimulated by the demands of the audience to experience a spectacle of violence. The climax in *The Bound Man* is incited by deterritorialization through the deterritorializing forces of a thoroughly rationalized society, whose governor is the audience.

The subject suffers from physiological and logical exhaustion in relation to the increasingly rational times, the historical moment, which leads itself ad absurdum through the adherence to its own rationale. With the rationale, the movement of the autonomous subject also enters into a circular structure. The caged and shackled human being seems to have no options, no way to construct a world more worth living in than to bind himself to the cage and the rope to draw from it precisely a final potential for freedom. Forced by the mechanisms of society, he retreats into the state of the monad and at the same time cannot exist there closed off from the world. Deleuze and Guattari state that "the animal essence is the way out, the line of escape, even if it takes place in place, or in a cage" (Deleuze/Guattari 1986, 35).

5 Performed vs. Experienced Authenticity

The audience is an important narrative feature in both texts, also questioning the characters' humanity, as well as their artistic autonomy. Both the bound man and the hunger artist are regarded with suspicion by their audiences, who do not believe that the artists are truly "living their art". The hunger artist is watched by three guards, and the bound man is continually confronted with accusations of incredibility about how he got bound and if he remains so at all times. The cage, which in the last section was a symbol of the characters' animalization, connects here the audience and the artists as their stories unfold, centering on the expectation of authenticity from the artist. Authenticity is seen as the guarantor of true artistic work as a commodity value, without which it would fall into the realm of fraud.

It must be noted that there is a difference between depicted authenticity vs. experienced authenticity, and this relates directly to autonomy. This conflict is played out in the diegetic world using selected narrative forms. The texts suggest that historical change is occurring in relation to authentic forms. Authentic acts of subjective self-constitution can hardly be defended diegetically anymore. Both stories *A Hunger artist* and *The Bound Man* show diegetically the changing situation of artistic representation and performance. Artists are being drawn into acting out their art performatively. The performative aspect is known to the audience and yet is also considered an authentic expression of the artist's being (Wesen). With the hunger artist as an irrationalist artist, it shows that art is increasingly performative and that the old art autonomy disappears, which was traditionally associated with the

concept of authenticity. While Beckett's *Endgame* is a play about performance, *A Hunger Artist* and *The Bound Man* are narrations of performances. For Adorno, texts like those of Beckett or Kafka show ways to work through the impossibility to fulfill the demands of modernist art as an embodiment of autonomy. The more performative art becomes, the more the independence of the artist from his environment is lost.

Performativity, however, is mainly shown within narrative constellations. With the body of the hunger artist, the story focuses on his relation to a faceless crowd, which is described once as enthusiastic, then as pleasure-hungry, and later it becomes almost dangerous, "thronging upon" the hunger artist's cage ("sich heranwälzende Menge"). In the end its description changes again and it is even described as a crowd that is to be admired. This shift in the depiction of the crowd's relationship to the hunger artist brings something of the historical change of the times into focus. The spectators, who gradually cease to be interested in the hunger artist, show in an indirect way, always in relation to the hunger artist himself, the changes in the social structure. Deleuze and Guattari state that "there is no subject, there are only collective propositional concatenations" (19), meaning that Kafka consistently renounces a narrated subject and also a narrator subject, using instead collective chains of statements – and his literature is the expression of these chains. The texts themselves are maps of intensities that show "the molecular movements and the collective assemblages" of an immanent desire (cf. *ibid.* 45). The sentences avoid "the duality of a subject of enunciation and a subject of the statement; rather it constitutes a single process, a unique method that replaces subjectivity." (*ibid.* 36) The collective chains

of statements show an objectified subjectivity in writing and literary practice. Through collective chains of statements, the individual is linked to the immanently political sphere.

We know from the hunger artist that he leads or has led a wandering life. He has a certain pride and the honor of his art is important to him. He perceives his hunger as authentic. The context of authenticity disappears in the age of performativity. The fact that it is not verifiable that he really fasts for 40 days without interruption, since no one can sit with him uninterruptedly for the whole period, offends him. He suffers from the suspicions that his art is based on a lie. However, starving is easy for him, he emphasizes more and more that he cannot do otherwise:

Er allein nämlich wußte, auch kein Eingeweihter sonst wußte das, wie leicht das Hungern war. Er verschwieg es auch nicht, aber man glaubte ihm nicht, hielt ihn günstigstenfalls aber für reklamesüchtig oder gar für einen Schwindler, dem das Hungern allerdings leicht war, weil er es sich leicht zu machen verstand, und der auch noch die Stirn hatte, es halb zu gestehen.¹⁵
(Kafka 1922, 985)

¹⁵ "He alone knew, and no one else knew, how easy it was to starve. He did not conceal it, but he was not believed, and at best he was thought to be a recluse or even a swindler, for whom starvation was easy because he knew how to make it easy for himself, and who also had the courage to half confess it." (ot)

Of his ability to starvation he feels no limits. In his art, the starvation artist strives for authenticity and he practices his art to the extreme in order to make his credibility clear and to satisfy his audience:

(...) das Orchester bekräftigte alles durch einen großen Tusch; man ging auseinander und niemand hatte das Recht, mit dem Gesehenen unzufrieden zu sein, niemand, nur der Hungerkünstler, immer nur er.¹⁶ (Kafka 1922, 987)

Authenticity loses value, historically speaking, but at the same time the audience still craves the appearance of authenticity. Representation of authenticity ends up being more important than its real truth content. The hunger artist holds on to a lived authenticity and suffers from the audience's rationalization of his art:

Diese dem Hungerkünstler zwar wohlbekannt, immer aber von neuem ihn entnervende Verdrehung der Wahrheit war ihm zuviel. Was die Folge der vorzeitigen Beendigung des Hungern war, stellte man hier als die Ursache dar! Gegen diesen Unverstand, gegen diese Welt des Unverstandes zu kämpfen, war unmöglich.¹⁷ (Kafka 1922, 988)

Within the depiction of the hunger artist's struggle against "eine Welt des Unverständnis" (ibid.), his striving for autonomy of his art is ultimately also

¹⁶ "the orchestra affirmed everything with a great flourish; they parted and no one had the right to be dissatisfied with what they had seen, no one, only the hunger artist, always only he." (ot)

¹⁷ "This distortion of the truth, well known to the hunger artist, but always enervating him anew, was too much for him. What was the consequence of the premature termination of starvation was presented here as the cause! To fight against this lack of understanding, against this world of lack of understanding, was impossible." (ot)

revealed. His desire thus also distances itself from the offerings of the empirical world. In the changed conditions of society this element is considered as inauthentic. This striving is often also shown in internal focalizations and the thoughts of the hunger artist himself are staged: "Was die Folge der vorzeitigen Beendigung des Hungerns war, stellte man hier als die Ursache dar!"¹⁸ (ibid.) At the same time, this internal focalization refers to the impossibility (aporia) of such a struggle, as in the final line of the quote on the previous page. The spectators ask questions, feel his arm to get a tactile sense of his leanness, also buy photographs, and have him measured at the end of the starvation period by doctors who announce the results through a megaphone. Viewers also buy photographs of the hunger artist, in which he is seen "near death" in the state of the 40th day of hunger (Kafka 1922, 37). They only believe in what is documented and measured. The new conception of knowledge is based on experience: Starvation is an individual experience, and the audience cannot follow every moment of it, and it therefore is not verifiable as an authentic form of art and loses credibility.

Kafka's story, however, does not simply demonstrate that the success of authentic art ultimately represents a renunciation of life. Rather, the hunger artist, who is found dying in rotten straw at the end, is driven to death by his consistent refusal of food. The enigmatic character remains in the paradox that the hunger artist addresses in direct dialog. He confesses the intention of his pursuit of art with the last of his

¹⁸ "What was the consequence of the premature termination of starvation was here presented as the cause!" (ot)

strength: "Immerfort wollte ich, daß ihr mich bewundert"¹⁹, only to immediately negate it: "Ihr sollt es aber nicht bewundern."²⁰ (991f.)

Just like the starvation artist, the bound man suffers from the fact that the audience does not believe his reasons for being bound and thus his art practice, from his point of view, has an authentic art urge. The two fights with the wolves in *The Bound Man* also take place according to a scheme of authenticity, whereupon a crowd of spectators already pushes the bound into a performative constellation of compulsion. The astonishment about his movements is at first seen naturally: "Das Staunen der Zuschauer galt einem Vogel, der freiwillig auf der Erde bleibt und sich im Ansatz beschränkt"²¹ (Aichinger 2016, 16). As time goes on, however, he is questioned, particularly how he was tied up, making the entire performance questionable, since it cannot be authentic if the binds are not. Authenticity is demanded of the artist, but the experience by the audience itself is not considered to be authentic by the audience. This aporia in the expectations of the audience is made obvious in the contrast of the two fights, as the first happens naturally as if a fight between equals – two animals – , and with no one watching. This leads to the demand for another fight, out of disbelief, and the bound man looks at this new meeting with dread, as he is unable to perform the experience he had fighting in the woods. Only his unwilling freedom from his binds, brought about by the circus owner's wife, thus also the loss of his art

¹⁹ "I always wanted you to admire me" (ot)

²⁰ "But you should not admire this." (ot)

²¹ "The amazement of the spectators was for a bird, that freely stayed on the ground and limited itself from the start." (ot)

and autonomy with it, can save him in the second encounter. As the cage closes on him and the rope falls away, he is unfree, no matter what happens.

Conclusion

The motif of the cage highlights these convulsive moments of desubjectivization and dehumanization that bring historical experience to the surface through the narrative mode of representation that Adorno calls “isolated facticity”. In this representation, the characters of the works analyzed by Aichinger and Kafka are the focal point of a sense of alienation from one's body, from one's family, from social relations and thus become the embodiment of the impossibility of autonomy. The bodies of the characters no longer move autonomously in space, but are controlled by shifting constellations object relations, and serial statement chains (“kollektive Aussageverkettung”), or in this case of perspective, creating an assemblage of “an unlimited field of immanence that mixes with it in the process or the movement of desire”. (Deleuze/ Guattari, 86) For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka's writing becomes an “abstract machine” that is “the unlimited social field, but it is also the body of desire” (ibid. 88). The properties of the text produce intensities “which are inscribed in all sorts of connections and polyvalences.” (ibid.) The cage, and the man's binds as a form of restraint, are properties that produce different connections and polyvalences in terms of the desire of the characters, but also in terms of the pursuit for autonomy and its impossibility.

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