

Heiner Müller's Cooperation with the "Institution of Art"— An Analysis of His Performance at the Büchnerpreis Award Ceremony Ⓢ

JENS POHLMANN

*Zentrum für Medien-, Kommunikations- und
Informationsforschung (ZeMKI), Universität Bremen*

Heiner Müller's "Die Wunde Woyzeck"¹

Heiner Müller was one of the very few East German authors who was able to pass through the Iron Curtain and to present his work to West German audiences beginning in the 1970s. He was celebrated and supported in the West as an East German dissident and as the somewhat brutal and mystical playwright of German history, but he was also respected as a fierce critic of capitalist society and as the aesthetic advocate of utopian and revolutionary alternatives to the status quo by the West German (and North American) Left. In light of the latter strand, Müller's award speech at the Büchnerpreis award ceremony in 1985, "Die Wunde Woyzeck," has been interpreted as a rebellion against the social norms of the West German "Kulturbetrieb". With it, he supposedly expressed his disdain for the "petty bourgeois farce" of the ceremony and resisted co-optation by the cultural establishment. Most interpretations of Müller's treatment of the Büchnerpreis therefore emphasize the independence, rebelliousness, and cleverness with which the author mastered this tricky situation and present him as a triumphant, anti-establishment figure.

In this essay, I take another look at Müller's performance at the Büchnerpreis award ceremony, at his speech "Die Wunde Woyzeck," as well as at his public appearances right after he accepted the award. I examine the extent to which this literary prize actually posed a threat to his image as avant-garde author, political anarchist, and critic of capitalist society. Since Müller cooperated with what Peter Bürger calls the "institution of art" when he accepted the prize,² this participation seriously compromised his claim to avant-garde integrity. My interpretation of Müller's dealing with the Büchnerpreis re-evaluates his aesthetic and performative strategies when maneuvering under the circumstances of a capitalist Western society and media public sphere,

as he did with and increasingly after the acceptance of the Büchnerpreis. I claim that the tightrope dance that Müller performed at this event and afterwards is not only indicative of his difficult position between the East and the West, but that it intentionally displays the challenges of presenting an artistic critique of capitalism within a capitalist media public sphere (Boltanski and Chiapello) and under the influence of a developing brand culture (Banet-Weiser).

The Büchnerpreis Award Ceremony as Communicative Symbolical Act

The annual Georg Büchner Prize, the most important German-language literary prize today, was awarded to Müller in 1985 by the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung. The award ceremony takes place in Darmstadt where the recipients present their acceptance speech to an audience consisting primarily of invited dignitaries, politicians, and patrons of art and literature: a high-profile display of the German cultural elite. The prize naturally bestows considerable prestige and cultural capital, not only because of the prize money (30,000 Deutsche Mark in 1985) or its connection to the much-acclaimed Georg Büchner, but also because of the prolific and influential writers who have received this prize since its postwar reestablishment in 1951. Among the winners are authors such as Gottfried Benn, Max Frisch, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Günter Grass, and many others. (Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, Website) Due to its significance, the Büchnerpreis has also frequently been seen as an indicator for potential future Nobel Prize nominees writing in the German language. Unsurprisingly, the bestowal of the Büchnerpreis is an excellent platform for the promotion of an author. The award ceremony is staged as a major social event that draws the public's attention. Winners are announced at a special press conference that generates extensive media coverage and that positions both the prize as well as the awardee in the public sphere long before the actual award ceremony. The attention generated by these public relations measures boosts the publicity of the awardee, increases the sales of the respective author's books, and helps to reaffirm the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung as one of the most important literary institutions in Germany. The acceptance speech itself is a powerful means of self-presentation—and self-promotion—for an author, since it is published and reviewed each year by a leading newspaper, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, as well as commented on by other media, and therefore read, seen, and discussed by a wide audience.

At the same time, such a literary award and the prestigious ceremony associated with it present a challenge and a threat to an author like Heiner Müller and his image as outsider, social critic, and political anarchist. The prize is granted by an organization that embodies what Bürger calls the "institution of art" (Bürger 22): It represents the value system of established

society and grants prizes that eventually incorporate authors and their works of art into the canon of bourgeois art and literature. In doing so, these kinds of awards undermine the avant-garde thrust and revolutionary potential that these authors and their works may have. In addition, the ceremony participants, especially the audience of dignitaries, epitomize the same cultural world which Müller otherwise holds in disdain. The very elitism of the Büchner Prize would seem to stand at odds with Müller's radical or (post) Marxist self-understanding. Finally, to the extent that one understands the Büchnerpreis in terms of the literary market and the competitive advantage it confers to the recipient, it contributes to the commodification of literature, a further aspect against which Müller would be expected to adopt a critical stance.

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field, the acceptance of the Büchnerpreis poses a great threat to Müller's avant-garde public image. Bourdieu assumes that avant-garde authors, who represent the autonomous principle in the field of cultural production, would have to neglect any form of (immediate) commercial success and mainstream recognition, particularly the "social signs of consecration — decorations, prizes, academies and all kinds of honours." (Bourdieu 123) Accepting a literary award such as the Büchnerpreis can be interpreted as an indicator that authors consent to the recognition by the economic and political field, that they are interested in economic profit, and that they are willing to reach out to mainstream audiences. Based on these assumptions, their avant-garde integrity might be at stake, at least from the perspective of the hardliners in the autonomous area of the field who can attack the recipients for their interest in worldly recognition and the compromise of aesthetic purity and political ideals.

Judith Ulmer has taken Bourdieu's thoughts a step further. In her book on the history of the award, *Geschichte des Georg-Büchner-Preises: Soziologie eines Rituals*, she uses his theoretical framework to interpret the award ceremony as a communicative symbolical act that is created in order to stage and publicly establish certain aesthetic value judgments. (Ulmer 171) Most important, she points out that the bestowal of a literary award has to be understood as a (mutual) donation (eine "Gabenhandlung", Ulmer 15). Key to acts of donation, in Ulmer's view, is their inherent reciprocity: the supposedly selfless donor always expects a gift or favor in return. Donations are therefore to be understood as exchange relationships. In the case of the literary award, the gift in return that the donor expects, is the laureate's loyalty, as Ulmer argues. By accepting the award, awardees also accept the donor's qualification and eligibility to proclaim judgments on aesthetic and literary matters and the system of values on which these decisions are based. Through their acceptance, laureates demonstrate respect to the awarding institution and legitimize its authority.³ Awardees, in turn, gain economic and symbolic capital and can use it to further advance their position in the literary field.

In Ulmer's incisive analysis, laureates' compliance in the exchange relationship, which the bestowal of a literary award constitutes (or rather: conceals), is by no means unproblematic. By accepting the prize and publicly partaking in the act of donation, they help to veil the fact that the granting institution, in our case the Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, is an elitist interest group that makes arcane decisions, but presents them as if they were based on a public mandate and on general public interest. Yet, the opposite is true, as Ulmer asserts: The Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung is one among many other interest groups in the German literary field, and it is acting not on a public mandate, but rather pursuing its own particular interests. Through the Büchnerpreis, the Academy tries to promote certain aesthetic value judgments, which influence the German literary field in favor of its own agenda; furthermore, by making these judgments publicly, the Academy attempts to continuously renew its own legitimacy as an organization with the authority to make these judgments. Through its award ceremony, the Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung thus pursues a strategy of presenting its own particular interests as if they were selfless, collective, and publicly legitimated goals, as Ulmer argues. (Ulmer 172)

Based on Ulmer's insights, we can see that if Müller accepted the prize and played his role in the gift exchange without disturbing or revealing it, he not only engaged with the institution of art in bourgeois society—the "Kulturbetrieb" – and legitimized its values and actions, but he also helped to promote the particular interests of a specific, established group in that system. At the same time, by taking part in this exchange, he attended to his own interests as well, since Ulmer assumes that the involved parties' interests and their implicit mutual obligations are deliberately obscured by the partaking protagonists, unless someone (laureate, awarding institution, or audience) intentionally uncovers this deception through the exposure of the underlying economic and strategic interests. (Ulmer 171) In such a case, the illusion potentially collapses. Moreover, the act of donation, and with it the establishment of the aforementioned social relationships, runs the risk of failing.

Müller's Acceptance Speech—a Formal and Thematic Provocation

We can read Müller's performance at the award ceremony in Darmstadt within this precise context. What Müller did was not so much an act of disclosing the economic and strategic interests of the involved parties, as Ulmer demands, but rather an act of snubbing the award ceremony audience and of provoking the literary and cultural establishment. It was an avant-garde gesture of protest and criticism, directed at the institution of art and at the West German establishment's self-image in general, which relied on forms of formal and thematic provocation.

Müller's disrespect for the attendees of this event and his discontent with some of its implications became obvious, first of all, in the way he dressed. When appearing on stage, he was not wearing jacket, shirt, and tie, but rather a casual jacket and T-shirt. Müller continued to neglect the customary award ceremony proceedings by refusing to address the assembled dignitaries at the beginning of his speech, including, for example, Richard von Weizsäcker, President of the Federal Republic of Germany at the time. Müller also refrained from thanking the Academy or the jury for the prize, and went straight to delivering his speech. All of these (minor) elements already point to his discomfort with the ceremony, and they may raise the question as to what extent the act of donation was freely and willingly performed and consented to by the author.

Yet these breaks with award ceremony conventions are not the main reasons why Müller's acceptance speech has been considered to be the "very opposite of a speech of thanks." (Kaufmann 70) The real affront was the speech itself: the text that he read on stage turned out to be so complex and hermetic that hardly anyone in the audience was able to understand it. His speech was obviously not intended to be an inclusive communicative speech act, but rather quite the opposite. Müller intentionally overwhelmed his listeners with a poetically dense and polyvalent piece of avant-garde literature. Even today, his text remains a provocative imposition on the reader due to its metaphorical and figurative density and its complex, multilayered structure, which draws on idiosyncratic allusions to German and world history, the arts, literature, and philosophy. By refusing to give an easily comprehensible speech, Müller violated one of the ground rules of acceptance speeches and snubbed the audience to such a degree that the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* even considered not printing it the next day. (Kaufmann 70)

Scholars such as Uwe Schütte and Kristin Schulz have therefore interpreted "Die Wunde Woyzeck" as Müller's "rebellion against social norms and standardized communication." (Schütte 469) They read his appearance in Darmstadt as a "performance in which he intentionally tries to distance himself from an award ceremony that he interpreted as a petty bourgeois farce." (Schütte 470) But was Müller really able to elude this "petty bourgeois farce" through the presentation of this speech, as Schulz and Schütte suggest? Was this formal (avant-garde) provocation of presenting a complex, almost incomprehensible speech enough to torpedo the act of donation that Ulmer assumes to be the foundation of the award ceremony? Did he openly and effectively criticize the institution of art in bourgeois society and its interests?

In addition to its provocative hermeticism, Müller's text was peppered with inflammatory, albeit subtle references to Germany's political past and to West Germany's political and societal present. Members of the audience might not have been able to understand their deeper meaning right away, but they were certainly able to recognize some of the catchwords and phrases he

was using. Most prominently, Müller makes positive mention of Ulrike (Marie) Meinhof, the RAF terrorist:

Ulrike Meinhof, a daughter of Prussia and late born bride of another erratic block of German letters who buried himself on Wannsee shore, female protagonist in the last drama of a bourgeois world, the armed RESURRECTION OF THE YOUNG COMRADE FROM THE LIME PIT, she is his [Woyzeck's, JP] sister with Marie's bloody necklace.⁴

Müller describes her not only as "daughter of Prussia" and as the ideal bride of the poet Heinrich von Kleist, but also and most notably as Woyzeck's sister. By connecting her so closely to Büchner's Woyzeck, he hints at the shared political interests and experience of these two figures. According to Müller, she is the "female protagonist in the last drama of a bourgeois world," which implicitly and approvingly prophesies the demise of bourgeois society, but which also describes Meinhof as a person who took up the fight that Büchner anticipated (and presumably supported) in his description of exploitation and oppression in *Woyzeck*. The RAF guerilla fight against West German society is thereby indirectly presented as the ultimate consequence of Büchner's thinking and beliefs. In West Germany of the 1980s, the positive allusion to Meinhof alone was provocative and intended to upset the elite audience.⁵ But the connection that Müller drew between her and Büchner's thoughts was even more of an affront. In his autobiography, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, Müller recollects with great pleasure the "icy silence" that occurred after he had mentioned Meinhof in his speech. (HMW 9, 281) He thereby underlines the extent to which provoking the audience was part of his performative strategy at this event. Additionally, Müller's reference to her "bloody necklace" points to her death in the prison of Stuttgart Stammheim, where Meinhof was found strangled and declared to have died of suicide on 9 May 1976, an explanation long doubted on the Left. Müller thereby alludes to the West German state's alleged use of violence in response to RAF terrorism and opens recent wounds in German society by pointing to one of the darkest chapters of its postwar history. Ulrike Meinhof became a symbol of the most violent and explosive political and ideological struggle in postwar Germany, and of its ongoing irreconcilability. But this reference was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of Müller's thematic provocations.

Müller's Political and Institutional Critique

Woyzeck still is shaving his captain, eating his prescribed peas, torturing Marie with the torpor of his love, the play's population has become a state, surrounded by ghosts: The Fusilier Runge is his bloody brother, proletarian tool of Rosa Luxemburg's murderers; his prison is called Stalingrad where the murdered woman faces him in the mask of Kriemhild; her monument is erected on

Mamaia Hill, her German monument the Wall in Berlin, the armored train of the Revolution curdled to politics.⁶

Müller begins his speech with the claim that Woyzeck, the eponymous protagonist of Büchner's drama, "*still* is shaving his captain, eating his prescribed peas, torturing Marie with the torpor of his love" (Müller/Weber 73; italics, JP). In this line and throughout the text, Woyzeck can be read as synecdoche for the "Woyzecks" of this world: the exploited and oppressed members of the lower, underprivileged classes. Müller points to the fact that they are *still* being marginalized, exploited, and oppressed, nearly 150 years after Büchner began to write his seminal play. But Woyzeck does not only epitomize their suffering, but also their instrumentalization by repressive political powers: Müller's text suggests that the ongoing economic exploitation and political oppression of these groups continues to help the powerful to build and maintain their dominant status through turning the oppressed against each other and by utilizing them in their political maneuvers. (Kaufmann 72, Schütte 471)

Müller's example is Woyzeck's "bloody brother," the Fusilier Otto Wilhelm Runge, who was turned into the deadly weapon that murdered Rosa Luxemburg, head of Germany's socialist movement, in 1919. Woyzeck is thereby depicted as a potential perpetrator of fratricide, who can be manipulated to commit crimes against his fellow people and kills the leaders who advocate his own political cause. In Müller's disjointed poetic thinking, Woyzeck's struggle is also indirectly the cause of the Berlin Wall, since he interprets the Wall as the German memorial in honor of Luxemburg. Müller reminds us here that the underprivileged's age-long struggle for liberation led to the formation of communist regimes. In Müller's view, the building of the Berlin Wall was as a defensive measure to protect this emancipation of the oppressed that, fatefully, simultaneously generated their imprisonment behind the "Iron Curtain" and brought about new forms of oppression. Müller's reading therefore sees current German and European politics as directly influenced by the aftermath of Woyzeck's exploitation and the fight against it.

Müller furthermore perceives Woyzeck as being "still on his Way of the Cross into history" in Africa and other parts of the world where the hunger for revolution, social justice, and improved living conditions is brutally suppressed and "quenched with bombs." (Müller/Weber 73) In Müller's view, the situation that Woyzeck symbolizes, namely the exploitation of human beings by human beings, is *still* very much present. This phenomenon might be less visible in Central Europe at this time, but it points to a global scale and constitutes a disgrace for the conscience of humanity.

Woyzeck is for Müller, "in his double role as victim and perpetrator," the key factor that will decide mankind's future. (Schulz 302) As a universal symbol of the oppressed, he personifies not only their sustained sufferings,

but also the prospect of their possible bloody and brutal revenge. With reference to Francisco Goya's painting "Colossus," Müller depicts Woyzeck as a potential giant, who is counting the "hours of the rulers," and who might arise to threaten not only the established balance of power, but also the lives and chattels of the ruling and exploiting classes.⁷ Furthermore, Müller imagines Woyzeck to be the metaphorical "father of the Guerilla," since the ongoing exploitation of his misery and suppression has generated those paramilitary resistance groups who will eventually fight their oppressors. At the end of his speech, Müller pictures Woyzeck along these lines, as a now dead, domesticated dog whose potential resurrection as a menacing wolf could threaten the established world order:

Woyzeck lives where the dog is buried, the dog's name: Woyzeck. We are waiting for his resurrection with fear and/or hope that the dog will return as a wolf. The wolf will come from the South. When the Sun is in its Zenith, he will be one with our shadow and in the hour of white heat History will begin.⁸

Müller imagines this resurrected dog/wolf to come from the global South, where social pressure and misery are greatest, and he seems to evoke the idea of his vengeful arrival in the wealthy North with malicious pleasure. In his view, this potential revolution is connoted positively, since it may lead to a more just world in which human history ("Menschheitsgeschichte") finally commences: a truly democratic coexistence without exploitation whatsoever, a "brotherhood of man," a utopian state (as opposed to the current barbaric state of affairs). Müller paints this ferocious picture with reference to his own ambivalence of "fear and/or hope" regarding these events, but it is a violent affront to the award ceremony audience, nevertheless. His words launch a forceful attack on the audience's self-image and world view, since they incorporate a grim moral and aesthetic challenge to their status and power. In contrast to the well-established West German opinion that the social contract of the welfare state had eventually changed the situation of the working class and solved the social question, Müller argues that Woyzeck's situation and struggle are far from being overcome. West German workers may be comparatively well-off due to the development of the "social market economy," a tamed version of capitalism that provides social benefits, minimal job security, and retirement provisions to workers, but suffering and exploitation have not ended. In other parts of the world, people still have to live like dogs, as did Woyzeck. By taking on a global perspective and by claiming (our) responsibility for the rest of the world, which, in Müller's view, pays the toll for peace and prosperity in Europe,⁹ he attacks the aforementioned self-adulation of the institution of art and the complacent self-image of the West German establishment.

On an even deeper level, Müller's speech argues that Büchner and his play *Woyzeck* have been wrongfully co-opted and misused by the Academy

and therefore by the institution of art in bourgeois society. He implies that the political ideas and values that Büchner advocated, especially in his *Woyzeck*, are the same radically anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist beliefs and ideas that Müller puts forth in his speech. He insists that they are in sharp disagreement with the interests and values of the audience and the Academy. The latter, in choosing Büchner as its visible emblem, its logo, attempts to exploit the author's genuinely creative power, but excludes his radical political convictions, which were, in fact, a major impetus for his writing. Müller suggests that the pillars and leading lights of society in the audience would have been the ones who imprisoned and banned Büchner, at the very least—that is, if he were alive and committed to the extrapolation of his former aesthetic and political agenda.¹⁰ Müller thereby points to a standard scheme of cultural co-optation: Büchner was turned into a classic and adopted by the institution of art by way of neglecting his aggressive political and revolutionary agenda. His radical cry “war on the palaces!” was historicized and thereby defused. Müller, on the contrary, tries to uncover Büchner's fundamental convictions and the political implications of his work in order to translate them into the present.

The Implications of Müller's Award Speech

Although this text constitutes a sophisticated piece of literature, an important contribution both aesthetically and politically, I do not think that Müller's performance in Darmstadt ruptured the act of donation that I initially outlined with reference to Ulmer's thesis. The “act of donation” between awarding institution and awardee, between the Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung and the author Heiner Müller, took place no matter how much criticism he expressed in his cryptic lines. As a result, Müller received the economic and symbolic capital associated with the prize, and the institution gained further legitimacy based on the loyalty and respect that he conveyed by accepting the award. The opacity of his speech may have allowed him to execute his “tightrope dance” between East and West (HMW 10, 406), but it also came at the price of restricted effectiveness, for his political and institutional criticism was easily neglected, in the West as well as in the East. Müller's “collaboration” with the institution of art, however, as manifested in the act of donation was widely visible: Even if people recognized that he had created a small scandal with his speech and that he, apparently, criticized German politics and world-wide exploitation, I would argue that the most salient aspect in terms of the public's perception was the fact that he accepted the prize at all.

For Müller's public image this must have been a double-edged sword, since, on the one hand, he was now an officially acclaimed and recognized author, associated with some of the most prolific postwar writers in German literature, but, on the other hand, he was now also associated with the Aka-

demie für Sprache und Dichtung and the institution of art in bourgeois society that it represents. Accepting the prize brought him economic and symbolic capital, but it also linked him to the establishment. The reproach of having made his deal with the institution, potentially of having "sold out," is certainly plausible at this point and undoubtedly a problem for Müller's self-presentation as avant-garde and anti-bourgeois author. Additionally, Müller may very easily be charged with elitism himself: the criticism that he expressed in his speech was so heavily coded that only the educated elites he was supposedly attacking would eventually be able to unravel it. In a way, this turns the argument of his social criticism in "Die Wunde Woyzeck" on its head: those he seems to be speaking for and about are excluded from the text and its meaning due to its highly sophisticated form. With regard to Müller's self-presentation and public persona, the question that arises at this point is: why did he accept the prize in the first place? If this institution represents the society that he opposed so vehemently and that he tried to criticize through his work, and if this institution had co-opted and misused Büchner's work by eviscerating its political intentions, as Müller's speech suggests, then why did he support and legitimize this institution through his participation?

Bourdieu would probably describe Müller's performance at the Büchnerpreis event as a tipping point, the moment in which an avant-garde author begins to change his strategy from the long-term project of accumulating symbolic capital based on the acknowledgment of fellow avant-garde authors and artists to generating economic profit and social recognition through the cooperation with the "Kulturbetrieb" in order to reach the mainstream, become part of the literary and cultural canon, and to acquire access to positions in (cultural) policy and that exact "Kulturbetrieb." (Bourdieu 255) If we follow Bourdieu's argument, then we must assume that Müller condones the potential loss of symbolic capital and avant-garde cachet for economic profit and gains in publicity and status. Although this might be true, I think we need to bear in mind that this prize and the accompanying increase in publicity and recognition value also granted Müller the opportunity to disseminate his work and aesthetic-political agenda to a wider audience. The prize can therefore function as a means to a political end. We will therefore have to examine to what extent Müller, in his self-presentation after the acceptance of the prize, was able to balance the different and opposing representational needs of the autonomous and the commercial/political field of cultural production.

"I am a Negro"—Müller's Public Reading One Day after the Büchnerpreis Ceremony

One day after the award ceremony, Müller took part in a public reading that was organized in his honor at a bookstore in Darmstadt. This event was open to the public and no longer part of the official Büchnerpreis procedures, but

still connected to the prize, since it happened in its immediate aftermath. In this setting, Müller presented himself very differently. Significantly, he engaged in a genuine dialogue with the audience. He was asked by the organizers to read his acceptance speech once again and did so, this time encouraging the attendees to ask questions and to interrupt his reading, urging them to take part in the conversation. During the exchange that followed, Müller explained his behavior at the ceremony and gave hints and references in order to shed light on some of the metaphors and allusions he used in “Die Wunde Woyzeck”. Confronted with this non-elitist audience, Müller did not shut people out through the presentation of his hermetic text, as he had the night before, but, on the contrary, tried to make it accessible.

During the conversation that followed, audience members repeatedly asked Müller why he was willing to participate in the “circus” of the award ceremony and they posed astute and perceptive questions with regard to Müller’s elitism, his Eurocentric point of view, and his potentially tarnished political and aesthetic avant-garde integrity. They thereby exposed and criticized Müller’s cooperation with the cultural establishment and the accompanying appropriation of his work and persona and revealed the extent to which accepting the Büchnerpreis posed a challenge to his avant-garde public image. In the course of the conversation, the atmosphere eventually became quite confrontational. This is partly due to comparisons between the situation in East and West Germany, as Schulz has argued (Schulz 310), but the most sensitive issue, and the real trigger, is Müller’s involvement with the institution of art and the underlying calling into question of his aesthetic and political integrity. In the end, Müller is asked once more why he agreed to take part in the questionable procedure of the award ceremony. Being the politically engaged, socialist playwright and author that he is—or pretends to be—people in the audience wonder how he could patiently bear “the whole charade”? (HMW 10, 388) Confronted with the implicit accusation of having made his compromise with the institution of art, Müller replies to a question that addresses the aforementioned Eurocentrism with a provocative and hostile repudiation:

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If I understood your text correctly then it draws on a model of history that I would describe as linear and as Eurocentric as well.

MÜLLER: I would like to answer this from an autobiographical perspective. I am a Negro. In terms of my biography. I am still a Negro. I was a Negro yesterday night as well. It sounds provocative, but I am serious about this. I really am a Negro. I grew up as a Negro. I grew up as the son of parents who couldn’t buy certain things that other people could buy. I was a Negro till ’45, and I was a Negro again from ’47 on. I am a Negro here, yesterday night for example, you see? It isn’t so much a problem of Marxism, but it is much more so a subjective problem, and that is why I take interest in Negroes for that matter.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So how can you stand all this so patiently here, this whole charade?

MÜLLER: Because I am a Negro. I put up with these things. Negroes put up with a lot of things. Right?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was thinking of this official meeting of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung that I joined by coincidence.

MÜLLER: As I said, Negroes put up with a lot of stuff. I also resent myself for putting up with this, but I am a Negro.¹¹

In this passage, Müller harshly breaks a taboo by publicly using the word "Negro". It is obvious that this word has not lost any of its inherent ideological conceptions, patterns of thought, and hierarchies, as Susan Arndt explicates in her entry on the term in the critical dictionary of racism in the German language. (Arndt, *Neger_in* 653) This term is inseparably connected to colonialism and to the enslavement and debasement of human beings of African descent and its usage is therefore "ersatzlos zu streichen," as Arndt suggests. (Arndt, *Neger_in* 654) It carries the meaning of "zum Dienen geboren zu sein" (born to serve somebody or born to be a servant) in many German expressions and figures of speech, which unmistakably points to its rootedness in the era of slavery. (Arndt, *Neger_in* 655) In his statement, Müller draws on this meaning, "born to be a servant," but, at the same time, he twists it around and combines it with a Marxist critique of capitalist exploitation, thereby displaying and partially undermining traditional racist ideology. From our perspective today, Müller's move must be read as inappropriate and crude, but one should keep in mind that the belated critical discussion about racist language and the use of the term "Neger" both in East and West Germany was just about to begin in the mid-1980s, (Arndt, *Neger_in* 655) and, on the other hand, that it was precisely Müller's strategy to be offensive and to get under people's skin with this remark, just as he did the night before by mentioning Ulrike Meinhof in his speech.

Concerning Müller's provocative use of the word "Negro", we have to keep in mind that in his employment and understanding, this term is not supposed to refer to a racial description, but that it is intended to disclose the hidden class struggles (between the rich and the poor, capitalists and proletarians) that are, in his interpretation, at the basis of racial discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. Müller therefore uses the word "Negro" as a global expression for the oppressed and intentionally applies this taboo word to provoke the audience and to point to the economic reasons behind the ongoing racial divide. He explains this notion as well as the dedication of his Büchnerpreis speech to Nelson Mandela in a short piece on Georg Büchner from 1988:

Woyzeck is a white Negro. Being a Negro does not depend on the color of your skin. That is the reason for the dedication [of "Die Wunde Woyzeck", JP]

to Nelson Mandela. He is the most senior prisoner in the world by now, I think. . . . And only because he phrased the question of race as the question of class. And that is exactly what we need to do: to re-identify the question of class as the root of racial inequality.¹²

In this sense, Müller aims to strip the term “Negro” of its traditional, biologicistic and racist ideology. This ideology states certain, supposedly naturally given, static, and objective racial features that are then connected with specific social, cultural and religious characteristics and behavioral patterns in order to implement social hierarchies and (oppressive) power relations. (Arndt, *Rassismus* 39) Müller’s anti-capitalist reinterpretation of the term equates it with the “Woyzecks” of this world, “the oppressed”. By doing so, he identifies one key reason for racial inequality and oppression in economic exploitation and (capitalist) power structures and he thereby undermines and challenges racist ideologies and their biologicistic foundations. However, he also reduces the problem of racism to these economic and political aspects and neglects many other psychological, societal, and cultural factors that contribute to the reality of racism.¹³ Furthermore, he perpetuates racist frames by using the word “Negro”, even if he intended to do so in a subversive way.

Black German Studies scholar Peggy Piesche emphasizes that the GDR, a socialist country which one would expect to show solidarity with Third World countries, actively engaged in the exploitative practice of importing low-wage guest workers, very often People of Color. In her article, “Making African Diasporic Pasts Possible,” she describes the living conditions, very restricted rights, and the lack of governmental support for this Black minority that began to emerge in the GDR from the 1960s onwards. Furthermore, she explains the difficult situation of the growing children of these guest workers with regards to their identity formation in a country where access to Black role models and to the cultural heritage of their fathers’ native countries were not available to these young Black GDR citizens.¹⁴ In combination with the overall population’s lack of exposure to otherness due to the impossibility of travel and the absence of a systematic preparation for contact with different cultures in schools, the media, and literature, Piesche argues that Black GDR Germans were strongly and negatively affected by tensions between the official, idealist claims of the socialist party line and the real effects of GDR policies. (Piesche 228) Regarding Müller’s use of the term “Negro”, these findings underline that racism is not only a matter of capitalist exploitative practices and they suggest that Müller’s lack of sensibility for other forms and realities of racism could be grounded in the limited exposure to and experience with the everyday life situations of People of Color in the GDR.

During the public reading in Darmstadt, Müller uses “Negro” to present himself as part of a socially deprived, disadvantaged, and stigmatized group by referring to his upbringing as the son of a social democratic family during

the Nazi period and to the exposure to social surveillance and pressure that came with this. This maneuver is above all strategic, as it aims to highlight that he is aware of the (symbolical) exploitation that he was subjected to during the award ceremony. It is also supposed to underline that he was not in a powerful enough position to refuse this offer. Müller knows very well that the Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung has used his reputation for its own self-presentation, and he is also aware that he is making a deal with this institution and the "Kulturbetrieb" in general, which is complicated for his own self-presentation and the perception of his art. For these reasons, he is trying to alleviate the resulting reproach by presenting himself as a victim of the disproportionate power relationships. He is pointing to his dependency on the Academy and the market, the institution of art, in order to identify them as part of an oppressive (and exploitative) system: As Woyzeck and Runge were utilized ("instrumentalisiert") by the rich and powerful, so was he the previous night.¹⁵

Nonetheless, referring to himself as "Neger" is bizarre and a cynical move, even as Müller tries to align himself with the oppressed, the "Woyzecks," of his award speech. The incongruity is emphasized by the fact that Müller, at this point, is already a well-known author and is privileged in many ways: he is one of the few GDR authors who is allowed to travel, and the royalties of his publications in the West and of the stagings of his plays permit him a lifestyle that has little in common with the "Woyzecks" of this world. In this sense, he employs this association in a lurid and somewhat melodramatic way, with the (debatable) intention to disturb and fend off the audience that begins to ask him unpleasant questions.

When asked once more why he took part in all this "circus," Müller eventually is explicit: "Well, the reason is, for example, 30.000 Mark, and excuse me, taking part in a circus show for 30.000 Mark, well . . ." (HMW 10, 418) In this moment, Müller plainly reveals his economic interests and discloses the "act of donation" as the fundamental underlying principle of the award ceremony and as the reason for his participation. He shatters the illusion of the Büchnerpreis performance and, at least partly, destroys the dignified and honorable public image of the Academy, the ceremony, and himself as well. He goes on to describe the bestowal of the award as an economic and strategic transaction for which he was basically bribed to show up and let the Academy take advantage of his reputation: "Four weeks ago, I heard that I would have to give a speech here, for 30.000 Mark, [. . .] that is a motive for doing something [. . .] and then, in the end, I produced a short text, half drunk, more wasn't possible".¹⁶ Müller thereby uncovers the deception that was staged through the "act of donation" at the award ceremony, just as Ulmer demands. But we have to keep in mind that this only happens after the actual award ceremony and the bestowal of the prize. This belat-

edness is the reason that the initial act of donation between the Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung and Müller is not jeopardized and that the bond between them is potentially tarnished, but, in the end, still sound.

If we look back at Müller's appearance in Darmstadt as a whole, at his performance at the award ceremony and at the public reading the day after, we see that Müller tried to use these events to challenge and criticize the customary award proceedings and the social and political entities and structures that initiate and utilize these kinds of events. At the end of the public reading, Müller remarks that based on his East German perspective he would not take this whole academic business of literature seriously anymore and that it would not be worth protesting against it. (HMW 10, 417) But this is exactly what he was doing: protesting. During the award ceremony as well as in the public roundtable discussion the day after, Müller is once more engaged in exposing and criticizing the workings of the literary award circus and the "Kulturbetrieb". This is, according to Peter Bürger, a key concern of the avant-gardes' project and therefore very much in line with Müller's avant-garde persona and self-presentation. (Bürger 22) At the same time, his complicity with the institution of art, his participation in the "act of donation," cannot be ignored and puts exactly this avant-garde image into question.

Literature and Politics—Müller's Strategic Reasons for Accepting the Prize

For Müller, the distribution and impact of his work was probably more important than any moral considerations or avant-garde values. He was aware that this prize would provide not only the platform from which to promote himself, but also the cultural capital to better disseminate his work. In the context of the Cold War, this prize also meant that Müller would gain more recognition in the East, which would grant him more freedom to work and particularly more opportunities to see his work staged in the GDR. In fact, after receiving the Büchnerpreis in the West in 1985, Müller was granted the "Nationalpreis der DDR" in the East in 1986, which Ulmer and others interpret as a direct response to the Büchnerpreis and Müller's acclaim in the West.¹⁷ Ulmer also believes that Müller outsmarted both political regimes: by accepting both prizes, he fended off these regimes' respective intentions to exploit his literature and public persona for their own ideological and political interests. (Ulmer 351)

With regard to the "Nationalpreis der DDR," Müller himself argued that it would not have been useful at all to reject the prize, since this would have had negative effects on the distribution of his work. In his autobiography, he points to the positive consequences of the "Nationalpreis" for the staging of his plays and emphasizes that this was more important to him than any kind of moral consideration: "It is important that my stuff gets staged, and not that

I play the noble knight in shining armor." (HMW 9, 280) In this passage, he refers to the fact that many of his plays had not been staged in the GDR for political reasons. The prize changed this reluctance of the cultural authorities to present his work and therefore allowed him to expose more people in East Germany to his work. In this regard, Müller could even present his acceptance of the prize and the money in the West as a subversive strategy to leverage the aesthetic and cultural impact of his work in East Germany in order to influence the discussion of what socialist politics could or should be. But aside from Müller's reiteration of his indisputable intentions to have his work staged and published in the East in order to achieve an impact there, it would be too reductionist to consider Müller's motives solely from this East German aspect. The mere effect of his work in the West was also of great importance to Müller—regardless of consequences in the GDR—much more so than he admitted in most of his interviews at the time. From the 1970s on, he was present in two German states; he was very much aware of the structures of the West German market and public sphere, and of their importance for his work and reputation.

With regard to Müller's strategic interests and distribution policy in the West, his allusions to Ulrike Meinhof and to the RAF terror illuminate the provocative aesthetic project that he performed at the Büchnerpreis award ceremony and afterwards.¹⁸ At the same time, they also enhance our understanding as to why Müller was willing to accept the prize and what this meant for him with regard to his aesthetic agenda in West Germany. With Jost Hermand, we can assume that through his deliberate reference to Meinhof, Müller puts "those terrorists into the foreground who saw themselves forced to commit cruel and inhumane acts of violence in order to fight a world of barbarity, of exploitation, of cruelty, of rape and murder" in which they were living.¹⁹ Hermand points to the fact that Müller interprets the RAF's violence as a specific strategy to startle the media-saturated audience in Western societies, since the members of this group believed that without these brutal acts the flood of mass media and culture industry content would drown out their critique and rage. One key element of the RAF's struggle is, in this interpretation of Müller's argument, the effort to show that the wealth and prosperity people enjoy in the West is based on exploitation and oppression in other parts of the world. According to Hermand, Müller believes that the only way to create this awareness is through exposing the audience to a shocking "refusal of meaning". For Müller, RAF terrorism is the perfect example of an absurd undertaking, which elicits aggressive (counter-)reactions from the public, since these terrorists attack not only human beings and valuable property, but also the most fundamental principles of bourgeois society: rationality, utility, and meaning:

The key feature of terrorism or of the RAF is the refusal of meaning. What they are doing does not make any sense. And due to this, their actions disperse

the conceptual framework of bourgeois society; and that in turn unleashes the authorities' aggression and the population's aggression as well. It makes no sense; one doesn't do things that make no sense. 100 people running against such a state apparatus? That is absurd! The absurdity of this undertaking is what makes people aggressive.²⁰

Müller thus establishes a close link between avant-garde aesthetic practices and those aforementioned terroristic acts, at least on a theoretical level. This is significant inasmuch as one of the core elements of his aesthetic project is to expose the audience or the reader to these acts of destructive anti-rationality, as this forces the recipients to react to and to reflect independently on the potential motivations of such deeds. We see an example of this desired effect when Müller, a few lines earlier, refers to a staging of Beckett's *Endgame* ("One of the most beautiful theater experiences of my life"; HMW 8, 342), in which the refusal of meaning ("Sinnentzug") caused attendees to boo, walk out, and protest loudly. In both cases, the exposure to "Sinnentzug" is, similar to the aforementioned terrorism, interpreted and justified as the potential trigger for a reflective thought process.

Hermant argues even more broadly that Müller uses references to the RAF and anarchic-terroristic acts (the Manson Family) to insist that the exploitation of human beings, as it occurs in the "slave-holding societies" of the West, is politically unacceptable and morally unbearable. On the other hand, Hermant asserts that Müller is aware that the humanistic "reform movement of the Enlightenment," which eventually led to movements such as the Jacobin terror, but also to different socialist, Stalinist, and terrorist measures to achieve the abandonment of exploitation, inevitably relies on the use of force against its opponents. In this sense, neither of the two options is morally tolerable. Hermant therefore describes Müller's aesthetic strategy as exposing the public to the following paradox: that neither living in and accepting exploitation nor trying to abolish it by exercising coercion over human beings is a morally acceptable solution. The provocative function of Müller's texts lies in displaying this paradox and in provoking the audience to react to it. The scenes and images of horror in Müller's plays as well as his approving references to terrorism and anti-capitalist counterviolence are supposed to confront the audience "with the barbaric events of human history as well as with the bloody present and the approaching catastrophes in order to wake them from the politically idle current circumstances in which every smooth façade is interpreted as another sign for unstoppable progress to greater wealth or increasing democratization," as Hermant argues. (Hermant 110) In this sense, Müller refuses to issue any explicit political mandate, but rather exposes the audience to this tragic situation in order to force them to deal with it themselves. As Hermant suggests, he tries to shatter the smooth façade which is well established and maintained through Western media, and he aims to facilitate the perception of the "real" situation.

If we follow this reading, then it becomes evident why Müller was interested in the benefits that came with the Büchner award: This prize granted him more artistic and personal freedom in the East. On the West German side, the prize gave him greater visibility, stimulated his book sales and the staging of his plays. His work became more visible, and he thereby exposed more people to the aforementioned paradox, while he gained enhanced access to different media vehicles to further promote his work. The line of argument that I presented with reference to Jost Hermand therefore constitutes a counter-argument to the interpretation that I gave beforehand with reference to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Hermand's arguments emphasize the aesthetic and political reasons that played a role in Müller's decision to accept the prize and to put up with the accompanying exploitation and humiliation for the sake of his art and its avant-garde political engagement. I conclude that these two different sets of motivations were both influential in Müller's dealing with the institution of art, and that they are, to some extent, inseparable from one another.

The circumstances of Müller's acceptance of the Büchnerpreis illustrate the double-edged nature of institutional recognition for avant-garde authors and the obvious dilemma in which it puts them. With reference to Banet-Weiser, we can assume that the amount of criticism that Müller expressed about the Academy and the ceremony, as well as the openness with which he revealed his dependency on this institution and its money at the public reading, was perceived as avant-garde authenticity (or as whatever comes closest to this under the given circumstances). Müller did not want to forgo the gains in prestige and economic freedom that came with the prize, nor did he want to renounce the associated possibilities for the further distribution of his work; and yet, he was aware of being exploited and co-opted by the "Kulturbetrieb" and of the potential loss in avant-garde integrity that came with the prize.

Eventually, he made all of this visible at the public reading the day after the award ceremony. Especially Müller's display of his own "corruptibility" at this event points to his strategy of engaging with the media public sphere in the years after the Büchnerpreis. In my understanding, Müller was faced with the two evils of either forgoing the chance to influence the world with his work due to a lack of visibility and "brand awareness" or sacrificing his integrity by selling out, by not biting the institutional hand that feeds him—but with the hope that this move would grant him the possibilities that would have been denied to him otherwise. By choosing the latter option, he paradoxically preserves much of his integrity and avant-garde cachet by sacrificing it and by participating in an establishment ceremony.

The acceptance of the Büchnerpreis was a milestone for Müller's public self-presentation, since it boosted his "brand recognition" within the mainstream without completely destroying his avant-garde aura. This allowed him

to publish texts and statements in different media venues than before, it paved the way for cooperations with famous artists such as Alexander Kluge, and it eventually lead him to take on positions in the field of cultural politics such as the director of the Berliner Ensemble and the *Präsident der Akademie der Künste (Ost)*. In this last phase of his work, the tightrope dance between (radical) aesthetic-political engagement and the appropriation by the “Kulturbetrieb” that I have discussed here with regards to the Büchnerpreis ceremony continues and his ambivalent relationship towards the avant-garde and avant-garde values persists or gets even more problematic. But that is the topic of another analysis.

¹I am quoting the German original texts with reference to the Heiner Müller *Werke* edition by Frank Hörnigk in this abbreviated form: HMW volume number, pages. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. The title of Müller’s acceptance speech for the Büchner Prize “Die Wunde Woyzeck” (HMW 8, 281–83) refers to Georg Büchner’s seminal play *Woyzeck* (Büchner 197–255.) and its protagonist, Franz Woyzeck. At the same time, it references Theodor W. Adorno’s essay “Die Wunde Heine” (Adorno 95–100).

²Bürger 22: “Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society. The concept ‘art as an institution’ as used here refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. The avant-garde turns against both—the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy.”

³Ulmer 21: “Wenn ein Laureat einen Preis annimmt, toleriert er gleichzeitig den jeweiligen Geber und dessen Wertesystem, auch wenn er es sich nicht zu eigen machen muss. Mit seiner Loyalität beantwortet der Adressat das Beziehungsangebot des Gebers und erfüllt auf diese Weise seine Pflicht zur Erwidern.”

⁴Müller/Weber 74. The German original (HMW 8, 282) reads: “Ulrike Meinhof, Tochter Preußens und spätgeborene Braut eines andern Findlings der deutschen Literatur, der sich am Wannsee begraben hat, Protagonistin im letzten Drama der bürgerlichen Welt, der bewaffneten WIEDERKEHR DES JUNGEN GENOSSEN AUS DER KALKGRUBE, ist seine [Woyzeck’s, JP] Schwester mit dem blutigen Halsband der Marie.” The term “Findling” in the original could also be translated as ‘orphan’ or ‘foundling’.

⁵In an interview from 1981, Müller considers terrorism to be the one West German taboo: “In der Bundesrepublik hat man keine Schwierigkeiten, publiziert zu werden, außer wenn es sich um etwas handelt, das mit Terrorismus zu tun hat. Das ist das westdeutsche Tabu.” (HMW 10, 177)

⁶Müller/Weber 73. HMW 8, 281: “Immer noch rasiert Woyzeck seinen Hauptmann, ißt die verordneten Erbsen, quält mit der Dumpfheit seiner Liebe seine Marie, staatsgeworden seine Bevölkerung, umstellt von Gespenstern: Der Jäger Runge ist sein blutiger Bruder, proletarisches Werkzeug der Mörder von Rosa Luxemburg; sein Gefängnis heißt Stalingrad, wo die Ermordete ihm in der Maske der Kriemhild entgegentritt; ihr Denkmal steht auf dem Mamaihügel, ihr deutsches Monument, die Mauer, in Berlin, der Panzerzug der Revolution, zu Politik geronnen.”

⁷HMW 8, 281: “Goyas Riese war seine [Woyzeck’s, JP] erste Erscheinung, der auf den Bergen sitzend die Stunden der Herrschaft zählt, Vater der Guerilla.”

⁸Müller/Weber 74. HMW 8, 282–83: “Woyzeck lebt, wo der Hund begraben liegt, der Hund heißt Woyzeck. Auf seine Auferstehung warten wir mit Furcht und/oder Hoffnung, daß der Hund als Wolf wiederkehrt. Der Wolf kommt aus dem Süden. Wenn die Sonne im Zenit steht, ist er eins mit unserem Schatten, beginnt in der Stunde der Weißglut, Geschichte.” A more accurate translation of “wo der Hund begraben liegt” would be that Woyzeck lives ‘at the crux of the matter’ or ‘at the source of the problem’.

⁹“Der Frieden in Europa war immer nur möglich durch Kriege woanders. Darauf basiert der Frieden in Europa, auf Kriegen in Asien, Afrika, in Lateinamerika. Das ist die Basis des Friedens in Europa.” (HMW 10, 404)

¹⁰Ulmer points out that student protest groups had argued similarly when they criticized the bestowal of the Büchner Prize on Golo Mann in 1968: Ulmer 205–9.

¹¹HMW 10, 414:

“MÜLLER Ich würde das einfach mal ganz, ja ganz autobiographisch beantworten wollen. Ich bin ein Neger. Also von meiner Biographie her. Ich bin nach wie vor ein Neger. Ich war gestern abend ein Neger. Es klingt sehr kokett, aber ich meine es ganz ernst. Ich bin wirklich ein Neger. Ich bin aufgewachsen als Neger. Ich bin aufgewachsen als Sohn von Eltern, die bestimmte Dinge nicht kaufen konnten, die andere kaufen konnten. Ich war Neger bis '45, ich war ab '47 wieder Neger, und ich bin hier ein Neger, gestern Abend zum Beispiel, ne. Es ist nicht ein Marxismusproblem, glaube ich, es ist vielmehr ein subjektives Problem, und deswegen interessieren mich Neger in diesem Zusammenhang.

DISKUSSIONSTEILNEHMER Wie halten Sie das dann alles so geduldig aus hier, das ganze Zeremoniell?

MÜLLER Weil ich ein Neger bin. Ich laß mir das gefallen. Neger lassen sich ungeheuer viel gefallen. Ist doch klar.

DISKUSSIONSTEILNEHMER Ich dachte jetzt zum Beispiel an diese öffentliche Sitzung der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, wo ich zufällig reingeraten bin.

MÜLLER Ich sag doch, Neger lassen sich viel gefallen; ich nehme mir das auch übel, daß ich mir das gefallen lasse, aber ich bin ein Neger.”

¹²HMW 8, 347: “Woyzeck ist ein weißer Neger. Und ob man ein Neger ist oder nicht, ist nicht von der Hautfarbe abhängig. Deswegen die Widmung für Nelson Mandela. Das ist der dienstälteste Gefangene der Welt, jetzt glaube ich . . . Und eigentlich nur, weil er die Rassenfrage als Klassenfrage gestellt hat. Und darum geht es eigentlich: hinter der Rassenfrage die Klassenfrage wiederaufzufinden.”

¹³Important scholarly work by Peggy Piesche, Sara Lennox, Maureen Maisha Eggers and many others in the fields of Black German Studies and Critical Whiteness Studies provides a detailed overview and presents decidedly Black perspectives on the complexity of racism in general and its past and present reality in Germany in particular: see Sara Lennox (ed.), *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2016; Maureen Maisha Eggers (ed.) *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: kritische Weisheitsforschung in Deutschland*. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2005; Öffentlichkeit gegen Gewalt e.V. and CyberNomads (eds.) *The Black Book: Deutschlands Häutungen*. IKO – Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation: Frankfurt am Main, 2004.

¹⁴The guest workers were initially solely men and they had to leave the country after their contracts of 3–6 years ended. (Piesche 230)

¹⁵Both Müller's performance at the award ceremony and his appearance and statements at the public reading the day after are obviously happening in a very delicate East-West-German constellation and this situation has definitively influenced Müller's statements as well as the hermeticism of his award speech. I do not engage with these aspects at great length, since I deliberately want to focus on Müller's relationship with avant-garde values and the “Kulturbetrieb”. However, scholars such as Kristin Schulz with regards to “Die Wunde Woyzeck” and “Ich bin ein Neger” (Schulz 300) as well as Christoph Hauschild in his biography *Heiner Müller oder Das Prinzip Zweifel* have addressed this topic in more detail.

¹⁶HMW 10, 419–20: “Ich habe vor vier Wochen . . . wußte ich, ich muß irgendwie eine Rede halten da, für 30 000 Mark, das ist ein Grund [. . .]. und dann kam irgendwann raus, so im Halbsuff, ein kurzer Text, mehr konnte ich nicht.”

¹⁷Ulmer writes: “Dass diese [die DDR-Führung] die Büchnerpreisverleihung an Heiner Müller tatsächlich als zu parierenden Affront auffasste, zeigt die Tatsache, dass Müller schon

ein Jahr später mit dem Nationalpreis I. Klasse der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik ausgezeichnet wurde.” (Ulmer 267–68)

¹⁸For an overview over Müller’s reception in West Germany, particularly regarding his engagement with the “Neue Linke” see Janine Ludwig. *Heiner Müller, Ikone West: Das Dramatische Werk Heiner Müllers in der Bundesrepublik – Rezeption und Wirkung*. Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2009. Print.

¹⁹Hermund 108: Müller stelle “jene Terroristen in den Vordergrund [. . .], die sich in einer Welt der Unmenschlichkeit, das heißt der Ausbeutung, der Grausamkeit, des Tötens und Vergewaltigens, notwendig zu ebenso grausamen, unmenschlichen Akten gezwungen sahen, um im Rauschen der alles überflutenden Massenmedien überhaupt noch gehört zu werden.“

²⁰HMW 8, 342: “Aber das Phänomen des Terrorismus oder der RAF überhaupt ist der Sinnentzug. Es macht keinen Sinn, was die machen. Und damit treten sie heraus aus dem bürgerlichen Sinnzusammenhang, und das entfesselt die staatliche Aggression und auch die der Bevölkerung. – Es macht keinen Sinn; man tut nichts, was keinen Sinn macht. Daß 100 Leute gegen einen solchen Staatsapparat antreten, ist sinnlos. Das Sinnlose ist es, was aggressiv macht.”

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. „Die Wunde Heine.“ *Noten zur Literatur. Gesammelte Schriften II*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997. Print.
- Arndt, Susan. „Neger_in“. *Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht: (K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv Deutsche Sprache: Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk*. 1. Auflage. (Hg.) Susan Arndt und Nadja Ofuately-Alazard. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2011. 653–57. Print.
- Arndt, Susan. „Rassismus“. *Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht: (K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv Deutsche Sprache: Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk*. (Hg.) Susan Arndt und Nadja Ofuately-Alazard. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2011. 37–43. Print.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: New York UP, 2012. Print.
- Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London, New York: Verso, 2007. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996. Print.
- Büchner, Georg. *Werke und Briefe*. Hg. Karl Pöribacher. München: Hanser, 1988. Print.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984. Print.
- Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung. „Auszeichnungen – Georg-Büchner-Preis“, <http://www.deutscheakademie.de/de/auszeichnungen/georg-buechner-preis> [date of access May 18, 2020].
- Eggers, Maureen Maisha, Hg. *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: kritische Weisheitsforschung in Deutschland*. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2005. Print.
- Hauschild, Jan-Christoph. *Heiner Müller oder Das Prinzip Zweifel: Eine Biographie*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2001. Print.
- Hermund, Jost. „Diskursive Widersprüche. Fragen an Heiner Müllers ‚Autobiographie‘“. *Mit den Toten reden. Fragen an Heiner Müller*. Hg. Jost Hermund und Helen Fehervary. Köln: Böhlau, 1999. 94–112. Print.
- Kaufmann, Ulrich. „Quiz für Eingeweihte in 16 Sätzen. Zur Büchner-Preisrede Heiner Müllers (1985).“ *Positionen 3. Wortmeldungen zur DDR-Literatur 3* (1987): 68–76. Print.
- Lennox, Sara, ed. *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2016. Print.
- Ludwig, Janine. *Heiner Müller, Ikone West: Das Dramatische Werk Heiner Müllers in der Bundesrepublik – Rezeption und Wirkung*. Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2009. Print.
- Müller, Heiner. *Werke*. Hg. Frank Hörnigk. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998–2011. Print. (HMW)
- Müller, Heiner. *Explosion of a Memory: Writings*. Translated by Carl Weber. New York: PAJ Publications, 1989. Print.

- Öffentlichkeit gegen Gewalt e.V. and CyberNomads, Hg. *The Black Book: Deutschlands Häutungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2004. Print.
- Piesche, Peggy. "Making African Diasporic Pasts Possible". *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture*. Ed. Sara Lennox. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2016. 226–42. Print.
- Schulz, Kristin. *Attentate auf die Geometrie: Heiner Müllers Schriften der „Ausschweifung und Disziplinierung“*. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2009. Print.
- Schütte, Uwe. *Arbeit an der Differenz: Zum Eigensinn der Prosa von Heiner Müller. Beihefte zum Euphorion, Heft 60*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2010. Print.
- Ulmer, Judith. *Geschichte des Georg-Büchner-Preises: Soziologie eines Rituals*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006. Print.

Jens Pohlmann
Centre for Media, Communication & Information Research, ZeMKI
University of Bremen
Linzerstr. 4
28359 Bremen
Germany
jpohlmann@uni-bremen.de