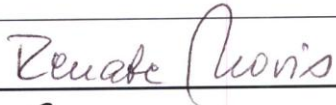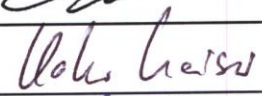On Radical Comedy

Martin Patrick Sheehan
Aiken, SC

M.A., University of Virginia, 2004
B.A., University of South Carolina, 2001

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Professor Renate Voris, Dissertation Advisor	*Renate Voris*
Professor Chad Wellmon	*signature*
Professor Volker Kaiser	*signature*
Professor Gordon Braden	*signature*

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomena of incomplete, problematic, or disruptive mimesis and resolution as they function in German dramatic comedies and current television situational comedies which draw attention to and question the genre's boundaries, structure, and traditionally normative function in society. Specifically, this study analyzes the effects of the exaggerated resolution of Lenz's Der Hofmeister, the open ending of Hauptmann's Der Biberpelz, the dense dialogue of Sternheim's Die Kassette, and the camera work of the BBC2 situation comedy The Office. These works are interpreted within the context of two modes of comedy based on the presence, nature, and clarity of the dramatic mimesis and comedic resolution—the conventional and radical forms, wherein the complete, structured, and stabilizing form of the former serves as the base from which the latter deviates.

The analysis suggests that these radical comedies represent a movement away from the conventional foundations of comedy and toward the decentering or rupture of postmodernism by exaggerating, aborting, obscuring, or otherwise problematizing both the resolution and the dynamic between the audience and the mimesis. Extending the scholarship of critics such as Arntzen, Mauser, and Haida, this study describes how radical comedy demonstrates the problematic nature of representation (aesthetic, epistemological, moral, or political) overlooked by rationalist proscriptions of art which assume that all artistic production—especially, dramatic comedy— can entertain, instruct, and normalize its audience. By subverting the traditions of comedic structure, representation, and reception, the works analyzed in this study appear to challenge the boundaries between the audience and comedy.

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I must also express my gratitude to my friends. Thanks go to Brandon Wicks and William Wright, who were always willing to volunteer their energy, time, and editorial comments with good humor; to Adam Humphreys, a former rival whose friendship and invitations to concerts helped keep me focused and entertained during graduate school; and to Jesse Hill, whose laughter and intellect inspired this work.

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INTRODUCTION

Dramatic comedy has existed in different forms for over two millennia and has received its share of critical discussion. Critics have approached the genre diachronically (Walter Hinck, Fritz Martini, Helmut Prang), semiologically (Bernhard Greiner) and philosophically with regard to laughter (Henri Bergson). But this dissertation combines historical, Rezeptionsästhetik and (post)structural approaches in its aim to reframe the genre by examining moments of destabilization, transgression or subversion in the dramatic institution insufficiently explored or explained by these other methodologies. This dissertation seeks to elucidate those dramatic comedies which through their form, function, and effect appear to problematize and threaten the genre's tradition. Furthermore, this dissertation argues that such apparent perversions of comedic form actually demonstrate the genre's essence, echo its origin, and continue to influence dramatic comedy's present and future.

This dissertation explores the interaction of two concepts—the comedic and the comic—and how they produce the discourse called comedy. The term "comedic" functions here as a plot-structuring concept that focuses on what Aristotle calls in Poetics the "arrangement of the incidents of the plot" (Epps 13). Simultaneously, the comedic focuses on the logic (e.g. causal, associative, dialectic, etc.) governing the concatenation of these incidents. When the concatenation culminates in a socially affirming, normalizing, clarifying, or otherwise stabilizing resolution of the plot's conflicts, it builds what I call a conventional comedy. When, however, the concatenation resists, subverts, aborts, or otherwise frustrates the socially affirming resolution of the conventional comedy, then it builds what I term a radical comedy.

The comic, as I use it, denotes the formal elements or compositional stucture of this particular genre that I term comedy. In this dissertation the term "comic" functions as a poetic term or what Aristotle calls the "manner of portraying objects," that is, the manner in which the specific composition of elements defines a particular theatrical <u>mis-en-scene</u>, such as the verbal, the visual, or the musical (Epps 3). As defined by Henri Bergson, laughter arises as an effect of the comic—specifically the incongruity, juxtaposition, or collision of the mechanic and the human within one frame or <u>mis-en-scene</u>. Furthermore, the comic is based upon social forces and for that reason it is at times closely allied with the comedic. Indeed, as these two processes—the plot-structuring concept of the comedic and the formal elements of the comic—operate simultaneously, they produce the discourse called the comedy[1].

As stated above, this dissertation approaches comedy as a bifurcated mode of dramatic writing, which is comprised of two main forms: conventional and radical comedy. Extending the work of the critic Helmut Arntzen, I understand conventional comedy to be a generally light-hearted dramatic process which endorses clarity, stability, and social order by focusing on the problems of the individual in society and the possible and necessary solutions to these problems[2]. Far from a mode of writing denoted solely by the presence of comic characters or situations, conventional comedy is marked by its teleological process towards its comedic resolution,[3] a constituent turn in conventional comedy's mimesis towards social reconciliation, order, unity, clarity and stability.

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[1] Whether the relationship of the comedic and the comic is mutually beneficial or antagonistic serves and the focus of Chapter 2.

[2] Helmut Arntzen argues in his book <u>Die ernste Komödie</u> "[…] die Komödie is daran erkennbar, daß sie von menschlichen Konflikten und ihrer möglichen und notwendigen Lösung handelt," (18). I extend Arntzen's definition to reveal the need for order inherent in his comedy concept.

[3] The following chapters all expand on the concept of comedic resolution.

Indeed, many critics have theorized how the concepts of the individual, society, and social order underpin the comedic genre. As Northrop Frye observes comedy's actions as moving from "one social center to another" in the course of the archetypal New Comedy[4] plot, social order appears essential to conventional comedy (Anatomy 166). From the raucous and scatological Old Comedy of Aristophanes to the marriage plots of New Comedy; from comedies of humours to comedies of manners, conventional comedy portrays individuals trying to negotiate with and achieve balance, order, and stability in social structures with varying degrees of success. Although the objects of mimesis (i.e., setting, characters, language, and action) in conventional comedy might change over time, ultimately the genre continues to use these objects to engage the issues of social life and to promote the stabilizing structures of society.

How a dramatic comedy presents and handles these societal issues determines whether it can be called a conventional or radical comedy. Informed by the critic Wolfram Mauser, I argue the conventional[5] comedy cannot exist without a "Gesellschaftsordnung, die für das Verhalten und für die Beurteilung von Verhalten feste Normen ausgebildet hat" (216). These norms arise, both consciously and unconsciously, to stabilize society and to guard it from anarchic disorder. In his article "Gerhart Hauptmanns 'Biberpelz': eine Komödie der Opposition?," Mauser argues that whether they represent the "führende Gesellschaft" or the governmental order, these norms range "von hohen Werten (wie Gerechtigkeit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Treue) bis zu einfachen

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[4] "The plot structure of Greek New comedy, as transmitted by Plautus and Terence, in itself less a form than a formula, has become the basis for most comedy, especially in its more highly conventionalized dramatic form, down to our day. […] What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will" (Frye, Anatomy 163).

[5] Although Mauser writes of "traditionelle Komödie," I have chosen to employ the critical idiom of "conventional comedy" in order to highlight the role of convention and norms in dramatic comedy.

Verhaltensformen des täglichen Umgangs (wie der Art zu reden, zu essen, zu gehen, sich zu kleiden)" (216). In other words, norms[6] govern and seek to order all arenas of social production and consumption; even those one might consider the most individual, such as self-expression through language. According to Mauser, by respecting these norms, an individual contributes to the stability of society, potentiates his own upward mobility, and legitimizes the power of the "führende Gesellschaft." Although some manifestations of norms (such as social convention and etiquette) might appear arbitrary, they nevertheless operate in a larger context to serve "der führenden Gesellschaft dazu, sich selbst darzustellen, Zugehörigkeiten sichtbar zu machen und Nichtkonformes auszugliedern" (216). Mauser here understates his argument, as norms allow "die führende Gesellschaft" not only to represent itself but more importantly to valorize itself and its members while exposing, punishing—benignly or violently—any non-conformists. Thus, through its structure, plot, and themes, conventional comedy communicates, validates, and reinforces the stabilizing norms of society. Consequently, conventional comedy normalizes its audience within the social institution of the theater by exhibiting the advantages of stability, security, and order while rendering comic (and, therefore, eccentric and undesirable) the disruptive deviations from the stabilizing norms of society.

Society's desire for stability through normalization is reflected in both the structure and thematic content of conventional comedy's mimesis. Mauser argues that when characters in conventional comedy deviate—consciously or unconsciously—from norms, they experience a similar normalizing process:

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[6] Norms here shall be understood as David Lewis defines them: "regularities to which we believe one ought to conform" (97). Here, one sees the assumed superiority of the group, the social ("we") as well as the tension between the social and the individual.

> Die Entschärfung und Auflösung der Normverstösse erfolgt dadurch, dass die Figur, die sich an der Norm vergangen hat, entweder durch eigene Einsicht zur Normbeachtung zurückgeführt (Major von Tellheim [in Minna von Barnhelm]), durch überlegene Personen überlistet und bekehrt (Hans Karl Bühl [in Hofmannsthals Der Schwierige]) oder völlig isoliert bzw. bestraft wird (Dorfrichter Adam [in Der zerbrochene Krug]) (217).

Essentially, when characters appear at odds with reigning norms in a conventional comedy, their success within the dramatic reality depends upon their successful rehabilitation back into consonance with the norms of that dramatic reality. This reconciliation is a joyful event and usually signals the "happy end" telos most often associated with the comedic genre. A successful reunion with a particular social code is simultaneously a happy reunion and a covert validation of the social code. Conversely, a character's failure in the course of a conventionally comedic plot results from an inability or unwillingness to normalize himself. If the nonconformist cannot be realigned with the values of the mimesis (e.g., Dorfrichter Adam), then he is demonized, punished, or driven out as a warning to discourage imitation as well as to promote normalization. In both the successful and unsuccessful rehabilitations of nonconformists, the process always serves to reinforce, validate, and communicate norms while demonstrating the hazards of nonconformity. Structurally, the ultimate spectacle of the conventional comedy caps the work as a whole, thereby emphasizing the ordering resolution (with its many reconciliations, reunions, or marriages) as the desired telos and end of the comedic process.

The comic demarcates and often aids this normalization project of conventional comedy. The Bergsonian comic outlines a subject/object relationship which functions as a normalizing force in society by highlighting traits, behaviors, or conditions of the object eccentric to the traits, behaviors, or conditions prized by the subject, a manifestation of

society. When such eccentricities become apparent or are exposed in the object, the subject erupts with laughter. In Bergson's model, this laughter functions as a social corrective to suppress the expression of social eccentricity in the comic object. Afraid of becoming a comic object again, the object's eccentricity is suppressed, thereby rendering him suitable to join the ranks of the subjects[7]. Within conventional comedy, comic elements therefore do more than entertain; they accentuate the violation of norms and help identify and highlight the process of rehabilitation. This marking function of the comic explains how Helmut Arntzen can claim that the comic "konstituiert […] die Komödie nicht, [die Komik] funktioniert aber in ihr, und zwar um so richtiger, je mehr sie der Gesamtintention des Stückes integriert ist" (11). While Arntzen argues this "Gesamtintention" includes the presenting of human solutions to the conflicts that arise between the individual and society, I argue such solutions underscore conventional comedy's normalizing project as well as its need to present order or stability as the preferred telos of its process.

Radical comedy, however, takes a different position. Radical comedy subverts the methods and effects of the conventional comedy and by doing so seems to ask whether social order and stability are indeed preferred. While conventional comedy seems to solidify and unify social institutions and power structures, radical comedy suggests that solidity and unity are illusory. For this reason, radical comedy exposes and explodes conventional comedy's normalizing effects. Unlike conventional comedy, radical comedy refuses to be yoked with the task to communicate, validate, and reinforce a society's norms; radical comedy understands that such a project is a naïve undertaking. Moreover,

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[7] For a more thorough analysis of the subject/object dynamic created by the comic, see Karlhenz Stierle's "Komik der Handlung, Komik der Sprachhandlung, Komik der Komödie."

radical comedy encourages the individual to explore dissent, disagreement with or the re-evaluation of societal norms. Whereas conventional comedy views its audience (and by extension, society) as monolithic in composition and character, radical comedy understands society to be fragmented, irregular, and inconsistent. For this reason, radical comedy explores social difference, dissidence, and instability on both formal and thematic levels. By subverting, undermining, or otherwise frustrating the elements of the mimesis, radical comedy problematizes the genre of comedy and presents a rupture in the comedic tradition. The radical form might confuse an audience evaluating the work against the conventional rubric, yet this confusion is the desired effect because it alienates and thereby awakens the audience to the form and function of conventional comedy. The radical disruption of the conventional whole elucidates the form of the whole.

The interaction between a society and comedy's conventional and radical forms appears in one of the earliest and yet most neglected definitions of comedy. In the third chapter of Poetics, Aristotle presents dramatic comedy's etymology:

> They [the Dorians] observe that they call their surrounding districts comae while the Athenians call theirs demoi, and that the word for comic actors [commodoi], is derived not from comadsein, meaning "to revel," but from the fact that these actors, being expelled from cities as unworthy of recognition, wandered from comae to comae [and thus came to be called comodoi] (Epps 5).

This short discussion of comedy ends the chapter and receives no further elaboration. Without additional expansion from Aristotle, this quote only seems to frame a tangential debate between Dorians ("die Bewohner der Peloponnes") and Athenians concerning the origin of the term "comedy" (Fuhrmann 106). Yet, on a parabolic scale, this quote suggests the fundamentals of radical comedy. When comic actors arrive and perform for the city's audience, they are banished to satellite villages where they ultimately find

acceptance. I argue this definition should be read as a parable because, despite its

generalities of character, setting, and action, this etymology offers an insight into the

reception dynamic between radical comedy's audience and its creators. Comedy's first

audience, the city, opens its gate and allows entry to the actors and their art form. The

effects of the performance eventually prove to anger or disgust the city audience, which

leads to the actor's expulsion as "unworthy of recognition[8]." The city expels the actors

because their performance injures or insults the norms of the city's social code instead of

its aesthetics (as it seems unlikely that the Dorians would claim their culture as the origin

of an artistically inferior genre). As comedy found its way to the City Dionysia festival in

Athens "erst relativ spät" in 486 B.C., it is conceivable that the genre also found itself

diluted into Aristophanic Old Comedy, a form known for its attacks against political and

philosophical figures, yet perhaps also only an echo of comedy's previous vicious

subversion (Furhman 108). This social reaction to the radical comedy of the Dorians

suggests that the roots of comedy demonstrate a radical form inherently disposed to insult

norms, upend power structures, and/or parody authority. For these subversive effects, the

Dorian actors found themselves banished to the villages.

  This definition of comedians as nomadic actors expelled from a city as unworthy

of recognition has been traditionally neglected by the institutional discourse. Not only

have dramatic comedy scholars ignored the above-mentioned definition in Aristotle's

Poetics but also Classics scholars such as Lane Cooper and Stephen Halliwell in the

larger context. Each scholar either dismisses the Dorian parable as digressive (Cooper) or

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[8] Exactly how they earned this dishonor remains uncertain throughout varying translations. Lane Cooper decodes the Dorian passage, stating that the actors left "when a lack of appreciation forced them out of the city" (Cooper 173), while Manfred Fuhrmann's rendering paints the Dorian comic actors as "Ehrlose [,die] aus der Stadt vertrieben, durch die Vororte gezogen seien" (11).

undeveloped (Halliwell), if the Dorians receive any treatment at all. Although Manfred

Fuhrmann comments suggests in his translation of the Dorian definition that "[d]ie von

den Dorern […] bekämpfte Etymologie gilt heute als die wahrscheinlichere," few critics

have acted upon this qualification (106). Instead, scholars are more likely to employ

Aristotle's other definition of comedy as "an imitation of more ordinary persons" when

discussing the genre (Epps 8). The Dorian parable, though, can augment an

understanding of the genre, for the parable demonstrates that along with being a genre

distinguished by comic characters, plots, or language types, comedy began as a genre

focused on challenging the values and structures of a society. In other words, dramatic

comedy began as radical comedy[9].

    Conventional comedy, it would seem, rises within the city after the actors and

their radical form are banished. In the wake of the subversive performance of the radical

comedians, the city officials encourage and promote an anti-radical form of comedy

which will become conventional comedy. Whereas radical comedy destabilizes and

parodies the city's structures, conventional comedy develops as a stabilizing force

designed to valorize the security of institutions, validate their existence, and promote

social stability through normalization. Conventional and radical comedy appear

diametrically opposed, yet the modes are the two faces of Janus: one face looks back to

the stability and certainty of the past (conventional comedy) while the other looks ahead

into the uncertain future (radical comedy). Radical comedy represents the universal

constant of entropy, which conventional comedy obscures and seems to disprove. As a

reaction to radical comedy's embracing of uncertainty, the city banishes the form in order

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[9] I employ the term "radical" here because in addition to describing the genre's rebellious nature, "radical" can also denotes a root or origin.

to forget and recover the certainty it once had. In this manner, the Dorian etymology parabolically offers insight into dramatic comedy.

While this parable might potentially aid a diachronic approach to comedy, this study will instead employ the parable for a synchronic approach to the moments when the radical explodes the conventional[10]. The radical comedies of this dissertation subvert, frustrate, and challenge the expectations, concepts, and values of society as embodied by its audience and manifested in the genre of dramatic comedy. That is, these radical comedies parody, problematize, and undermine the mimesis of conventional comedy to question and to draw attention to the genre's normative function in society. To explore these examples of radical comedy, I will juxtapose moments of conflict between critics and comedies in three case studies from the late 18th, late 19th and early 20th centuries because these instances exhibit divergences in the conception of the genre in Germany. In order to recontextualize and contemporize the conventional/radical model, the fourth case study focuses on television situation comedy at the beginning of the 21st century. Here, I will demonstrate how a shift in cinematic style destabilizes the traditional dynamic between the audience and the mimesis just as the other works discussed in this dissertation do.

More specifically, I will first illustrate how the closing scenes of J.M.R. Lenz's comedy Der Hofmeister engage and ironize the resolving spectacle of conventional comedy. Der Hofmeister represents an attempted shift in the discourse towards ambiguity: in one light, the effort succeeds; in another, it seems to affirm what it attacks. A similar, yet contrasting ambiguity exists in the four act structure of Der Biberpelz.

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[10] At no time will this study become a diachronic account of comedy's development. I direct readers to the critical work cited in this introduction's opening paragraph for diachronic scholarship.

While comic elements might appear to signal this work as a comedy with an impending, ordering resolution, Hauptmann's drama ends abruptly before an inept public official can expose the criminal responsible for the multiple thefts that have destabilized the mimesis. While Hauptmann's enterprise might seem a failure because it neglects to reinstate and promote stability, the drama actually succeeds in exposing the genre expectation of its audience as well as the antagonism between the comic and the radically comedic. Carl Sternheim's Die Kassette presents a different problem; that of linguistic fragmentation: in historical context, this refers to the anti-bourgeois experiments of German Expressionist theater. I will show that a breakdown of dramatic language, similar to other elements such as plot and structure, can fundamentally obscure the mimesis from an audience, thereby problematizing the socially normalizing project of conventional comedy. Finally, I will shift to the new, yet related medium of television, where the genre of situation comedy continues the normalizing project of conventional comedy. I will demonstrate that in television, the conventional situation comedy model creates two audiences: one in the television studio and one at home in front of the television. The studio audience, despite its physical proximity to the comedic performance, is removed from the conventional comedy dynamic by the recording apparatus, which privileges the home audience and renders them passive. This chapter will then track the camera-character relationship in the BBC2 2001-2003 situation comedy The Office and clarify how this relationship subvert the dynamic between mimesis and audience. While many situations comedies accept the illusory relationship between audience and screen, The Office problematizes precisely this conventional relationship by introducing anti-illusory detachment in the form of a fake documentary apparatus which acts as the audience's

representative and functions both as a witness to and cause of character frustration, humiliation, and disappointment. With its camera work analysis, this final chapter concretizes the discussions of the previous chapters by demonstrating the effects of the conventional and radical comedy apparatus.

In sum, this study seeks to demonstrate how the concepts of conventional and radical comedy—identified first in Aristotle's Dorian definition of comedy—offer an innovative understanding of comedic structure and reception, which in turn explains and reframes subversive examples of radical comedy. This study demonstrates that synchronic examples of radical comedy have the ability to throw the qualities, functions, and effects of conventional comedy into relief. Furthermore, I undertake this project not to disprove any particular view of dramatic comedy, but to augment the discourse by analyzing the function and merit these radical comedies demonstrate. If the relationship of conventional and radical comedy remains unexplored, then the interplay of their stabilizing and destabilizing forces will continue to be misunderstood.

CHAPTER 1

<u>Der Hofmeister</u>: The Ironic Spectacle of Resolution

Early in the 18th century, a discussion of dramatic comedy began in Germany. Instead of endorsing the marketplace manifestation of the genre at the time, voices began condemning comedy as amateurish, immoral, and dangerous to the audiences crowded around the country's <u>Wanderbühnen</u>. Lead by University of Leipzig professor Johann Gottsched, this effort was an attempt to evaluate, normalize, and restrict it through compositional rules and criteria until a desired, positive effect could be discerned; specifically, a socially normalizing force which could promote order and perfect society according to the ideals of the early Enlightenment. Against this backdrop appeared Jakob M. R. Lenz's 1774 comedy <u>Der Hofmeister</u>, a work whose resolution—an ordering end to a disordered plot—seems to promote Gottsched's view of comedy as normalizing force in one light. Yet, in another light, the work's resolution undermines and ridicules the unity the comedy reaches. Through the ironic undertone inherent in its concluding tableaux, Lenz's <u>Der Hofmeister</u> exposes and mocks Gottsched's and conventional comedy's enterprise to socialize its audience. The work's resolution exaggerates its portrait of social order through numerous reconciliations, reunions, and weddings to such an extent that the harmony it appears to exhibit becomes dissonant, thereby inviting audiences to notice the tools of normalization employed by conventional comedy. In its attempt to inflate the comedic resolution to the point of instability, <u>Der Hofmeister</u> proves itself to be a radical comedy.

If conventional comedies do affirm social order by demonstrating human problems and their possible and necessary solutions, then the closing act of <u>Der Hofmeister</u> ironizes this mechanism in a two main ways: firstly, a hyperbolic amount of reconciliations and reunions saturate the work's resolution and call attention to its mechanism. In some cases, unforeseen conflicts are mentioned just to secure another solution, thereby calling attention to the role of resolving order in conventional comedy. Secondly, the resolution's resolving spectacle overshadows and conceals its impure or absent motivations. Many of the unions in the final scenes arise dubiously, which casts aspersions on the order or unity they seem to represent.

In this chapter, I argue that Gottsched's proscriptions of the comedic genre attempt to strengthen and harness conventional comedy as a socially normalizing force. At the core of Gottsched's project is mimesis, the dramatic illusion of the stage, whose plot affirms the picture of social order and unity it depicts in its resolution. By claiming such social order can be achieved through comedy, Gottsched, therefore, attempts to codify and promulgate the forms and objectives of conventional comedy. Within this framework, I will demonstrate that the resolution of Lenz's radical comedy <u>Der Hofmeister</u> ironizes the appearance of social order and exposes the artifice of such order. To problematize the order of society, Lenz's work ends with dazzling tableaux of reconciliations, reunions, and marriages that expose the emptiness of the ordering spectacle.

The figure in Germany who most clearly articulates the operative assumptions and compositional requirements of conventional comedy (including the significance of the genre's resolution) is the 18th century University of Leipzig professor, Johann

Gottsched. Written in 1744, his influential poetics, <u>Critische Dichtkunst</u>, argues that

comedy "ist nichts anderes, als eine Nachahmung einer lasterhaften Handlung, die durch

ihr lächerliches Wesen den Zuschauer belustigen, aber auch zugleich erbauen kann"

(186). Gottsched's sense that comedy can edify its audience through the laughable

representation of vice underscores his assumption of the genre's socially normalizing

function. According to Gottsched, comedic plots should demonstrate the defeat of vice

and the victory of virtue. Consequently, Gottsched insists comedy has the ability and duty

to quash socially detrimental behaviors by demonstrating the benefits of certain desired

philosophical, ethical, and social ideals within a mimetic plot. These ideals, founded upon

enlightened rationality, ultimately serve to stabilize and provide order to comedic plots as

well as society. Because he views comedy as a genre able to affirm and instill social

order and stability in its audience, Gottsched embodies and champions conventional

comedy in the German dramatic tradition.

Drama, specifically comedy, emerged as a genre well suited to Gottsched's desire

to normalize society through the dramatic illusion, an entertaining recreation of society.

According to Gottsched, comedy in Germany was deplorably unstructured and unfocused

on improving its audience's morality:

> Allein, ich ward auch die große Verwirrung bald gewahr, darin diese Schaubühne
> steckte. Lauter schwülstige und mit Harlekins Lustbarkeiten untermengte Haupt-
> und Staatsaktionen, lauter unnatürliche Romanstreiche und Liebesverwirrungen,
> lauter pöbelhafte Fratzen und Zoten waren dasjenige, so man daselbst zu sehen
> kam. (199)

This excerpt from the preface to Gottsched's own dramatic creation <u>Der sterbende Cato</u>

identifies the main problems he felt compelled to reform: namely, a "Verwirrung" which

is essentially "unnatürlich" and therefore an amusement removed from its audience's

quotidian reality as well as an amusement lacking in redeeming social value. While the violence of <u>Harlekin</u>'s slapstick ("Haupt- und Staatsaktionen"), the hyperbolic facial expressions, and the sexually aggressive jokes might have entertained an audience, all was too removed from an audience's reality to have any redeeming instructive value. That is, comedy's dazzling disorder did nothing to raise the masses (<u>Pöbel</u>) up morally or intellectually. Because it only seemed to endorse confusion and amusement instead of order and moral instructions, Gottsched aimed to improve comedy by providing it an ordering structure.

An advocate of Christian Wolff's moral philosophy, Gottsched exhibited a drive to marry literature with Reason in order to instill the philosophical and ethical principles of the early Enlightenment figures. These principles had the lofty goal of improving the norms of all societies until they achieved the ideals of rationality and morality. When he applied his critical acumen to comedy, Gottsched found that far from being a genre driven by the flights of fantasy of comic geniuses, the genre could be dissected, analyzed and revised according to reason. The comic playwrights, it seemed, possessed a talent for observing and reproducing comic behavior which were predicated upon failures of reason and virtue. This talent, Gottsched was convinced, could be harnessed to better society. According to the 18th century rationalism to which Gottsched ascribed, if "Reason alone enables us to distinguish between good and evil, wisdom and foolishness [and] we only laugh at that which seems absurd to our understanding (<u>opinio</u>)," then the playwrights of comedy, "poin[t] out to other men where their reason has failed them, and the ensuing laughter is an intellectual process, consisting in the mental comparison of some eccentricity with a norm" (Aikin-Sneath 13). In the minds of Gottsched and other

rationalists, such comic observations could serve as the core of comedies, whose plot could emphasize and satirize the absurdities of non-Reason. Through its plot, a comedy would demonstrate the misfortune of irrational thought while heaping fortune and happiness on those characters who best exercised moral, ethical, and rational thought. Comedy had the duty to refine this mechanism so that audiences could witness dramatized examples of characters whose "reason had failed," thereby encouraging the improved exercise of Reason. Gottsched argued that reason would help stabilize society by correcting eccentricities, such as vice, which threatened society's stability with the selfish, irrational disorder they represented. In this manner, early Enlightenment drama promoted "[…] die Verbesserung des Bestehenden, die Verbreitung vernünftiger Einsicht, die Stärkerung der Überzeugung" (Steinmetz 6). It was through reason that Gottsched and other rationalists believed society could be stabilized by discouraging what they saw as the disruptive lack of reason. Gottsched believed that by experiencing the rationally designed mimesis of comedy, an audience could witness the value of morality, logic, and reason. Gottsched's Critische Dichtkunst attempted to refine and limit comedy to this two-fold purpose of entertaining and normalizing its audience.

Yet, Gottsched's mission is not so simple. Gottsched's "education through comedy" project is predicated upon problematic assumptions of the mimesis. The dramatized mimesis, in his model, recreates the external reality of society so perfectly that an audience will assume that the apparent advantages of reason on stage can also exist outside the theater. The more clear, rational, and (therefore) perfect the mimesis, the more educative the mimesis can be. But, can a mimesis ever be said to mirror reality completely? Likewise, can the consumption of the rational behaviors that are successful

within the mimesis ever influence an audience so completely that it adopts the rational

behaviors fully? Can society, an organic and amorphous entity, ever resemble the

scripted, idealized, and highly structured mimesis? Gottsched and other proponents of

conventional comedy overlook these questions and firmly embraces literature as the

entertaining and socially instructive tool they are convinced it can become.

Gottsched's project to employ comedy's natural mimesis to instill reason and

order in an audience is best described by the playwrights he criticizes and praises in

Critische Dichtkunst. In Gottsched's opinion, Moliere's comedies cannot achieve his

instructive model because they do not present the audience with a credible, natural

mimesis. Moliere's style, which Gottsched labels as "nicht allezeit so natürlich, als sie

vor Comödien wohl seyn sollte," presents its audience with characters who are

ineffective because their speech, as well as their actions, appear unnatural (183).

Specifically, Moliere

> treibt […]seine Charaktere zuweilen sehr hoch, so, daß sie endlich unnatürlich
> werden. Z.E. er läßt seinen Geitzhals so argwöhnisch werden, daß er einem
> Bedienten, der aus der Stube geht, nicht allein die Taschen und beide Hände
> besucht; sondern auch fordert, daß er ihm die dritte Hand zeigen solle; gerade als
> ob jemals ein Mensch so närrisch sein könnte zu glauben, daß jemand drei Hände
> habe. (183)

Gottsched here looks past the inherent absurdity of such an unnatural (and perhaps even

suggestive) episode in Moliere's The Miser and views it as a violation of the stage's

natural mimesis. Consequently, this violation undermines Moliere's ability to affect his

audience. More significantly, though, Gottsched dislikes Moliere because, "er offt das

Laster gar zu angenehm, die Tugend aber gar zu störisch, unartig und lächerlich gemacht

hat" (183-184). To Gottsched's dismay, Moliere violates conventional comedy's

sensibility and prime directive in that the playwright's works seem to promote socially

destructive forces, such as "das Laster" (vice), while presenting "Tugend" (virtue) as "störisch, unartig und lächerlich" (184). Gottsched, of course, argues against Moliere's model: the playwright's mimetic plot should demonstrate the triumph of <u>Tugend</u> over <u>Laster</u> since this is the result desired in the audience's reality.

For Gottsched, the mimesis is to be an instructive and reassuring illusion. While it may be artificial, there is some sense that it can improve its audience as well as the larger society they represent. The mimesis of the comedy plot, according to Gottsched, should guarantee the triumph of <u>Tugend</u> over <u>Laster</u>, the moral over the immoral, reason over folly, and order over disorder. For, ultimately, Gottsched's project of comedy poetics is to classify literature so that it might best instill order in society. For this reason, he despises Moliere's apparent praise of <u>Laster</u> over <u>Tugend</u>, for if <u>Laster</u> were shown as pleasing and <u>Tugend</u> as "störig" to society, then this would disrupt society's order. To a rationalist like Gottsched, then, the best comedy is the comedy that reinforces the social order through its mimesis. The illusion is reassuring insofar as it promises an audience that order and all the other guiding principles of rationalism are achievable in both the mimesis and reality.

It is no surprise, then, that Gottsched should endorse the comedies of the German Baroque playwright Andreas Gryphius, whose comedies, in Gottsched's words, "stellen solche lächerliche Thorheiten vor, die dem Zuschauer viel Vergnügn und Nutzen schaffen können" (185). Consider Gryphius' <u>Herr Peter Squentz</u>, whose cast of simple-minded laborers plans to perform the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe at the local court. Squentz, an inept schoolmaster who purports himself to be the smartest man in the world, hopes a successful performance will secure him a seat at court. But his

longwinded flights of idiocy, his fights with his amateur actors as well as their unwittingly comic performance of the tragedy all prevent his ascendance to court. Thus, although the plot presents a challenge to the social order (as all the actors hope to become members of the court), social order is ultimately restored. In their risible lack of sophistication, reason, and social refinement, Squentz and his actors demonstrate themselves to be unsuited for a life at court. For this reason, the social order is preserved and, ultimately, Squentz, his amateur actors, the members of the court, and the work's audience understand that challenges to the social order are laughable and unsuccessful. With its tendency to portray the violation of social order as absurd, contemptible, and temporary, this example of Gryphius' comedies proves itself to be a conventional comedy and a favorite of Gottsched.

Since they further the socially normalizing and stabilizing program of rationalism, the finest comedies are conventional comedies for Gottsched. He demands that comedy present an ordered and natural mimesis in which reason and the order it represents triumph. He hopes that this dramatized triumph of order and defeat of socially disruptive forces embodied by dramatic figures will usher in and help maintain the order he wishes to see emerge in early Enlightenment Germany. The assumption that the conventional comedy plot can have a stabilizing effect on its audience underpins his view of the genre. Gottsched, conventional comedy's advocate and defender in Germany, is convinced that dramatized characteristics, behaviors, and events can have a reassuring and stabilizing effect on its audience. Inherent in his argument is the assumption that the constructed and unnaturally ordered reality of the comedic stage is somehow achievable in nature. By extension of Gottsched's logic, if the dramatized chaos can end in harmony, if

complexity can end in simplicity, then the same is possible in the audience's world. This is the great lie of conventional comedy, and radical comedy exposes this lie.

When confusion, anarchy, and irrationality seem to reign during parts of the conventional comedy plot, its resolution demonstrates that any disruptive elements in their own way contribute to an overarching unity. Conventional comedy exhibits teleology as its scenes and acts build towards a perhaps unforeseen, yet logical resolution. In its resolution, conventional comedy assembles unions from the fragments of its plot and arranges the preceding chaos into simplicity. Despite any preceding disarray of plot, this resolution ends the conventional comedy's action with a sense of unity of the whole work. In turn, this sense of unity soothes and reassures its audience that invisible forces are always working to secure harmony. Since conventional comedy's stage is presented as a perfect mimesis of the natural world, it would seem that any harmony achieved on stage can and will be achieved in the audience's world.

Radical comedy works to undermine these operating assumptions of conventional comedy. Radical comedy seeks to remind an audience that it is witnessing a mimesis of their world on the radical comedy stage. As such, radical comedy problematizes this mimesis when possible, demonstrating the emptiness of any dramatized harmony and the true disjuncture of the realities of the stage and the audience. In Gottschedian terms, radical comedy asks if virtue is always better than vice. Since it understands that that there can be no true stability, radical comedy operates in opposition to conventional comedy's mission to proselytize socially stabilizing norms. While conventional comedy dispels disorder and ushers in order with its resolution, radical comedy problematizes the

notion of order in all its forms (i.e., ethical, philosophical, moral), but most pointedly in its social manifestation.

This problematization of the social order serves as the core of Lenz's 1774 comedy <u>Der Hofmeister</u>, a comedy which through its ironizing resolution proves itself to be a radical comedy. Its plot ends with such dazzling tableaux of reconciliation, reunions and marriages—in short, numerous examples of social order. Yet, this order appears as a facade that exposes the emptiness of the ordering spectacle while simultaneously accentuating the ritual of order.

Before its unifying conclusion, <u>Der Hofmeister's</u> is a plot marked by disorder. Its five acts can be difficult to summarize due to its 23 characters and 35 scenes which vacillate between many different locations over the course of three years. With other occupational avenues closed to him, Läuffer, the title tutor, is hired by the von Berg family of Insterberg. He has an affair with one of his students, Gustchen, who is forlorn after her lover and cousin Fritz von Berg leaves for university. When Gustchen and Läuffer's romance is discovered, she and the tutor flee in separate directions: she ends up pregnant, lodging with a blind beggar woman; Läuffer, under an assumed name, seeks refuge with a schoolmaster. Meanwhile, Fritz navigates university life and feels consumed with thoughts of Gustchen. After a manipulative letter from a fellow student reports of Gutschen's collapse into a pond, Fritz urgently wishes to travel home but is too poor to afford a carriage. Just at this moment, Fritz's friend Pätus learns he has won the lottery and the windfall finances Fritz and Pätus's trip home. Both return safely and find their fathers and future wives waiting for them. Läuffer, after a coincidental encounter reminds him of his affair with Gutschen, castrates himself as punishment. This violent

action, however, does not preclude him from finding happiness in a marital union after a local farm girl expresses her love for him. After a birth, a near drowning, a duel between friends, all conflicts and estrangements are resolved or overlooked—even an apparently irrevocable castration. While such subject matter might at times seem at odds with the traditionally light-hearted material of comedy, tragic turns in the plot all lead to a resolution of conflicts. The protagonists all seem to receive reconciliation and redemption in some form as each plot complication finds an agreeable resolution.

Critics label the rapid turn from disorder to unity within the drama as problematic. Some misinterpret the comedic resolution of Der Hofmeister as a failure of Lenz's imagination, thus misreading the project the work presents. Christoph Wieland's 1774 review in the "Teutscher Merkur" criticizes the ordering events as too rushed and numerous in the work's final scenes:

> Um der Kunst Willen, das heißt, um ein Stück, das einmal nicht Trauerspiel seyn sollte, nicht tragisch zu enden, ist die Entwicklung unnatürlich übereilt worden. Aussöhnungen, Verzeihungen, Wiedervereinigungen, Lotterein, Heyrathen folgen Schlag auf Schlag, so viele Schwierigkeiten allen diesem entgegenstanden. (358)

For Wieland, the speed and quantity of resolving feats in the fifth act renders Der Hofmeister "unnatürlich übereilt." No less than three separate engagements, seven rapid-fire reunions, one adoption and one castration all occur during one act, but mostly occurring in one scene. Moreover, Wieland notes the "Schwierigkeiten" in the plot suggest the work to be a "Trauerspiel," and yet the events he lists ("Aussöhnungen, Verzeihungen, Wiedervereinigungen, Lotterein, Heyrathen") speak more to the unifying and stabilizing devices of comedy. To justify this turn from "Trauerspiel" to comedy, Edward McInnes posits that Lenz,

seems […] to be drawing ironic attention to his own basic failure as a playwright to motivate the comic [sic] resolution. He has completely failed (he seems to admit) to derive the happy ending from the tensions he reveals in the earlier parts of the play and has had to bring it about by means of an arbitrary and violently improbable manipulation of developments. (55)

While I do agree with McInnes' assertion that the work's resolution seeks to draw ironic attention to itself, it does so not to signal an inability to craft a logical end. Instead, the work exaggerates its resolution to draw attention to the resolving devices of the comedic genre.

With its hyperbolic nature, Der Hofmeister tests the limits of the conventional comedy mechanism of resolution and thereby draws attention to it. As a radical comedy, Der Hofmeister parodies the mechanisms of conventional comedy in an attempt to free itself from the ordered and ordering requirements placed on the genre by Gottsched and others. Lenz's work ironizes and reveals conventional comedy's mission to affirm stability through the presentations of possible solutions to human problems.

To demonstrate this point, I will discuss two main elements of the work's resolution: the resolution experienced by the von Berg family and the resolution experienced by Läuffer. Before this discussion, however, I will outline the significance of scenes of resolution in conventional comedy to provide a backdrop for my analysis. Then, after summarizing the order the closing scenes provide for the von Berg family of Insterburg, I will demonstrate how the von Berg family tableau exhibits a dissonance between its reassuring appearance and the discordant reality this resolution obscures. Although each main character receives some level of reward in the closing scenes of the work, the excessive rewards heaped upon the minor character der alte Pätus especially underscore the emptiness of Läuffer's closing tableau, which will serve as my second

focus. The castrated tutor's union with the simple farm girl Lise accentuates the ironic function of Der Hofmeister's resolution. Ultimately, Lenz's work accentuates the artificial order it and all conventional comedy's achieve to draw attention to the apparently stabilizing apparatus of conventional comedy's resolution.

While resolutions are important constitutive elements in most forms of drama, they play an especially significant role in conventional comedy. Speaking to the significance of dramatic plot's ending, Aristotle first notes in his Poetics:

> A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which of necessity does not follow anything, while some thing by nature follows or results from it. On the other hand, an end is that which naturally, of necessity, or most generally follows something else but nothing follows it. (Epps 15-16)

Although a drama's beginning can exercise some creative independence, both the middle and end must prove themselves linked to the beginning through causality. As it must be a causal product of both the beginning and middle, a drama's end must contain the logical, final link in a causal chain and thereby embody elements of the entire work. An ending not only caps the action preceding it, but also unifies the work, as Northrop Frye suggests when he argues the following:

> The point at which direct experience and criticism begin to come into alignment, in a work of fiction at least, is that point known as recognition or discovery, when some turn in the plot arrests the linear movement and enables us for the first time to see the story as a total shape, or what is usually called a theme. (Natural Perspective 8-9)

In other words, the end of a fictional work (in this argument, dramatic comedy) is meant to end the work in such a way that it provides a synthesizing perspective, from which to understand the entire work. The end contains within in it a "recognition or discovery" which, by definition, recalls something forgotten to mind or provides a new vantage point, thereby offering the "total shape" of the work, which was previously obscured.

Mapped onto the conventional comedy tradition, the ending provides order to a previous chaos and renders preceding complexities simple or readable. For example, the closing scenes of Kleist's Der zerbrochene Krug identify Richter Adam as the culprit responsible for the destruction of the titular jug. This revelation relieves the plot's intrigue, reframes the plot, and provides a new perspective from which to judge the preceding action. This new perspective demonstrates itself to be a happy occasion: with the comically irrational Richter Adam gone, Ruprecht and Eve are free to pair up, marry, and thereby stabilize their relationship and, by extension, their community.

From such traditional endings an audience might sense, in effect, that impediments to unity can and will be overcome; like conventional comedy, the audience's lives are on a path towards order, justice, or unity in one form or another. The anxieties evoked by the social conflicts portrayed in comedy (such as Adam's threat to send Ruprecht off to war so that the judge might target Eve) are quelled. As Peter Haida argues, an audience's fears are allayed

> durch den Schluß […], indem das Gute belohnt und das Böse bestraft wird. Die so im Werk hergestellte Ordnung affirmiert zugleich den unversöhnten Zustand außerhalb seiner: der Zuschauer wird inaktiv gemacht, er verläßt das Theater mit dem beruhigten Bewußtsein, es sei alles in Ordnung. (23)

It is through the end, or "Schluß," that an audience finds its own sense of order affirmed. Though "das Böse" might have appeared in control during the beginning and middle of a plot, the end punishes "das Böse" while rewarding "das Gute," as one observes in Der zerbrochene Krug.

One can conceptualize these two opposing forces differently to accentuate their effects within the drama and beyond it. Because it wins out and restores a sense of clarity to the reality of the plot, "das Gute" represents the force of order and transparency. And

because it reigns for part of the plot and contributes to a darkness that the recognition or discovery of the resolution must be illuminate and banish, "das Böse" should be considered the force of disorder. In this manner, one sees how audiences might feel reaffirmed by the plot of conventional comedy. Although not expressed in such terms, this calming effect, which purports the world to be in order, is the goal of the conventional comedy's mechanism. It reassures the conventional comedy audience that such a thing as order, causality, justice, and balance exist and are in control of the world. Because this turn from disorder to order, from ignorance to recognition, from transgression to justice is such a distinct element, Peter Haida deems it "das wichtigste [Element]" of the comedy genre (20).

Two components comprise the apparently perfect order of Der Hofmeister's resolution: the scene with Läuffer in Wenzeslaus' schoolhouse (Act V, ix-x) and the von Berg family scene in Insterburg (Act V, xi-xii). On the surface, these scenes feature positive reunions, reconciliations, and engagements, all of which appear to reinforce the values and unity of familial and social life. In Insterburg, Fritz arrives unexpectedly and is immediately embraced by his father, whom he begs for forgiveness. Having come to discover if the rumors of his love Gustchen's pregnancy and suicide are true, Fritz is rewarded with her hand in marriage. Gustchen's father, the Major, is more than happy to accept his nephew Fritz as Gustchen's husband, a union that further strengthens the von Berg family unity. The Von Berg family is again enriched when Fritz happily adopts Gustchen's bastard child, a child not Frtiz's own, but nevertheless loved and accepted as his own. Underscoring the regained harmony of the family unit, Fritz's university friend and traveling companion Pätus arrives in the final tableau, reunites with his own father

der alte Pätus, and reveals to him that he will marry Jungfer Rehaar. This engagement promises grandchildren for der alte Pätus, who, serendipitously, has been reunited with his own mother recently and who expresses his contrition several times during the scene. On top of all this, Pätus' family unity is further augmented (albeit financially) by Pätus's lottery win, for as der alte Päus confesses, his former greed lead him to dissolve his tie to his own mother. The Von Berg scenes are overwhelmingly positive: fathers are reunited with sons, sons with future wives, and the bonds of friendship between Fritz and Pätus appear stronger than ever.

Each character present in the Von Berg tableau receives a reward of some kind, thus imbuing the scene (and by extension, the comedy) with a positive patina. Within this tableau of redemption, reunion, and reconciliation, Der Hofmeister appears to affirm social values and promote social solutions familiar in the conventional comedy. Within this final tableau, all the problems of the previous five acts seem to have found their possible and necessary solutions. For the Von Berg family, the initial union between Fritz and Gustchen demonstrated in their first scene and throttled by the threats of Fritz's father der Geheime Rat has been restored again. Though the Major experienced both rage (Act III, i)[11] and sorrow (Act IV, i)[12] over his daughter's affair and flight, that is all erased by the profound joy he expresses in Act V, xii[13]. The rifts between fathers and sons, including Fritz and his adopted child have been smoothed over. Even Pätus' penury,

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[11] (in reference to Läuffer and Gustchen) Hat er sie zur Hure gemacht? (schüttelt [seine Frau])Was fällst Du da hin; jetzt ists nicht Zeit zum hinfallen. Heraus mit, oder das Wetter soll Dich zerschlagen. Zur Hure gemacht? Ists das?—Nun so werd' ich denn die ganze Welt zur Hure[…]". (70)

[12] " Ich kann nicht mehr lesen; ich hab meine Augen fast blind geweint". (86)

[13] (to Fritz, who has just declared his intent to marry Gustchen) "(drückt ihn immer an die Brust) Nein Junge—Ich möchte Dich todt drücken—Daß Du so großmüthig bist, daß Du so edel denkst—das Du—mein Junge bist." (150)

which landed him in jail earlier in the text, has been solved by a lottery win, a win that allows Fritz and Pätus to attend the scene of reunion.

In actuality, though, this excessively positive resolution functions as a mask, presenting an affirmative ending while concealing an emptiness. As these characters embrace each other and beg each other for forgiveness, they obscure the true or absent motivations that create and contribute to this orgy of reconciliation and (re)unions. Earlier in the work, (Act IV, vi) Pätus openly derided Jungfer Rehaar's father when he suggested that the student cement a union with his daughter, with whom Pätus had been seen cavorting, or else duel over her honor[14]. At the time, the idea of pursuing a relationship with the girl was laughable to Pätus. Indeed, Pätus agrees to marry the girl only because he did not like the alternative: losing the friendship of Fritz. Despite the delight with which the marriage is accepted, the union was ultimately motivated by extortionary tactics, a fact obscured during the final scene.

The relationship between Fritz and Gustchen appears just as hollow when analyzed. Although their union appears to function as the central relationship of the comedy, it is built upon both an illusion and an allusion. From their first appearance together, Fritz and Gustchen occupy a Romeo/Juliet constellation that serves as shorthand to indicate their romantic attachment:

> GUSTCHEN. Glaubst Du denn, daß Deine Juliette so unbeständig seyn
> kann?[…]
> FRITZ. […] Wenn Sie an mich schreiben, nennen Sie mich Ihren Romeo[…]
> (22)

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[14] Though in reference to the prospect of dueling with Rehaar to save his daughter's honor, Pätus's remark "Du wirst mich doch nicht zwingen wollen" could equally describe his attitude towards marrying the girl. (108)

After fantasizing about how other characters might impede their romance as Paris did to Romeo and Juliet's, the two flirt with the idea of further fulfilling the dramatic roles they see themselves playing. When the Geheimer Rat happens upon them during the height of their performative relationship, he wonders loudly "Was sind das für Romane, die Sie da spielen?"(27). As an outsider, it is clear to him that they are more in love with acting out the roles of lovers than loving each other as individuals.

Indeed, their relationship never grows beyond these roles. While at school, Fritz becomes forlorn when he thinks about the oath he as Romeo swore to his Juliet, Gustchen. He never grows out of his role and gladly re-enters its restrictions when he arrives back in Act V. In the meantime, Gustchen finds another Romeo, both figuratively and literally. In Act II, v, she consoles Läuffer by quoting a passage from Shakespeare's tragedy: "O Romeo! Wenn dies Deine Hand wäre" (54). While it might seem here Gustchen declares regret to the Romeo that left her behind (Fritz), she quickly reveals that she quotes the monologue "wenn ich Sorgen habe" instead of when she actually misses Fritz. She then kisses Läuffer's hand while addressing him "O göttlicher Romeo," which symbolizes the displacement of Fritz, who is ultimately himself just a substitute for Shakespeare's Romeo in Gustchen's fantasy (55). Thus, when Gutschen and Fritz reunite in Act V, they reunite not in an expression of their individual love but as a return to their former, artificial roles, which undercuts their union.

Similarly undercutting and ironizing of the unions and picture of unity Der Hofmeister provides is the rush of good fortune that occurs for der alte Pätus. His hastily foreshadowed and unforeseen reunions and reconciliations draw attention to the disproportion of this closing scene. Although he is alluded to earlier, this closing tableau

is <u>der alte Pätus'</u> only appearance in the work. For such a marginal character, he receives an absurdly bountiful resolution: he is rewarded with a reunion with his son, a reunion with his mother, the repayment (with interest) of a loan to his son, a new daughter-in-law, and, with her, a promise of future grandchildren. All of this good fortune occurs with little foregrounding, and consequently seems ironic. It would seem only his presence in the closing tableau create the opportunity for his good fortune. Although he has been mentioned, <u>der alte Pätus</u> arrives as an unfamiliar character in the final scenes. Indeed, his estranged mother Marthe has had more appearances in the work than he. Surprisingly, the more familiar Marthe is absent from this closing scene, yet this new character bursts into the picture.

Der alte Pätus ultimately creates a dissonance in the work, as the number of benefits he reaps is incommensurate with the role he plays. His ironic lamentation "Muß denn alles heute wetteifern, mich durch Großmuth zu beschämen?" underscores how overwhelmed he feels by the rush of good fortune (151). He arrives as a character seeking redemption, but the depths from which he is redeemed are abstract. When he tells his son "erkenne Deinen Vater wieder, der eine Weile seine menschliche Natur ausgezogen und in ein wildes Tier ausgeartet war," his words sound out of place (151-152). Though he has confessed that he disowned his mother after receiving his inheritance as well as his son due to the student's debts, one must rely on <u>der alte Pätus</u>'s account of the matter. While his actions did impact the plot by providing Gustchen with Marthe as a blind babysitter, his request for forgiveness for unseen, <u>ex post facto</u> behavior lacks substance. In a sense, the audience cannot recognize ("wiedererkennen") the father who lost his "menschliche Natur" and regains it only through atonement. Without direct

foregrounding, his resolution lacks the same force as reunions of the Major and Gustchen or of the Geheimer Rat and Fritz, whose relationships have framed and motivated the entire plot. Der alte Pätus remains a marginal character who receives the rewards as a central figure. It is his peripheral quality that amplifies to the ironic dissonance of the work's resolution.

Similarly, the exclusion of troublesome characters from the closing tableau underscores the ironic artifice of the positive resolution of conventional comedy. By not dealing with the problems caused by the Majorin, the meddlesome Seifenblase and the tutor Läuffer within one frame, the resolution cloisters potential dissenters from the scene. Specifically, the Majorin causes dissonance throughout the work as she demeans her husband, flirts with male characters (Läuffer, Wermuth), and attempts to set her fallen daughter up with Wermuth. Although she does exhibit some transformation of character when she hears news of her daughter's flight, her absence from the final tableau suggests that she is not rehabilitated enough to join the positive family unit. Her presence would ultimately disrupt the picture of unity the resolution is meant to communicate unless she demonstrated her own transformation. For this reason, the manipulative student Seiffenblase is also absent: he stands too much in moral opposition to Fritz and Pätus who themselves redeem two fallen female characters instead of exploiting them, as Seiffenblase intends.

Most noticeably absent from the closing scene, however, is the titular tutor Läuffer. Despite the fact that the title features his profession, that he delivers the opening lines to the audience, and that his affair with Gustchen leads directly to her flight and indirectly to her suicide attempt, Läuffer is not present in the ultimate scene of the work.

While the rich tableau in Insterburg appears artificially packed with characters and reconciliations, the resolution that Läuffer experiences appears austere. Unlike Fritz von Berg or his former student Gustchen, Läuffer enjoys no reunion with his father. Because Läuffer continues to live under the alias of Herr Mandel, his closing scene finds him still estranged from not only his father, but from his true self. In further contrast to the fathers in the Insterburg tableau, Läuffer experiences no reunion with his child or the child he assumes to be his child[15]. While it is true that Läuffer gains a father-in-law in his marriage to Lise, his new in-law is absent in his scene, which suggests only the remotest of union of father-in-law and son. In contrast to Pätus, Läuffer enjoys no lottery win, but must continue to subsist as a colleague to Wenzeslaus, the village schoolmaster. Although he does demonstrate an infatuation with the farm girl Lise, she in no way is as talented or priviledged a student as his former lover Gustchen. Before Läuffer completely consents to the union, the marriage asserts its future emptiness: due to his castration, Läuffer will not be able to sleep with her and, consequently, he will not be able to provide her or the marriage with children, which Wenzeslaus emphasizes is the motivating joy of marriage: "Eine Ehe ohne Kind ist wie ein Tag ohne Sonne" (140). Truly, Läuffer's resolution can be called pathetic.

Similar to the sudden appearance of der alte Pätus, Lise highlights artifice of the conventional comedy marriage mechanism in that she lacks any dramatic foregrounding. She arrives as a near deus ex machina solution that appears to end Läuffer's loneliness, but she does so only on a superficial level. With Lise comes no reconciliation with Läuffer's past in Insterburg. If anything, Lise's emergence cements Läuffer's new, isolated life as Herr Mandel. Läuffer achieves no peace in terms of his past in marrying

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[15] For a summary of the paternity issue, see Claudia Albert (65).

Lise; he remains a man remote from his father as well as the child he assumes is his. But this union demonstrates the emptiness that marriage seems to paper over in conventional comedy. As a further sign of how empty a solution marriage will be for Läuffer, Lise reminds him that she does not want children: "Mein Vater hat Enten und Hühner genug, die ich alle Tage füttern muß, wenn ich noch Kinder obenein füttern müste" (140). Instead of watching his children grow in his own image, the tutor now has the promise of one day selling off or slaughtering these farm animals, which Lise incidentally emphasizes as belonging to her father and not her new husband. Bereft of sexual love and offspring, Läuffer's marriage to Lise, therefore, is actually emptier than the scene seems to frame it.

The disparity between the Läuffer and Von Berg closing scenes and the extreme amount of reunions and reconciliations accentuate the resolving mechanism of conventional comedy. According to the critic Karl Eibl, the presence of der alte Pätus is meant to herald the beginning of the resolving sequence and highlight its grotesque excesses[16]. Whereas Eibl argues the close of Lenz's comedy is designed to highlight the contradiction between literary depictions of realism and the portrait of realism displayed by the work's final, cynical climax, I believe the work's excessively conventional ending is meant to strike its audience with its grotesque nature (463). The work presents a comedic resolution drawn with very broad strokes: three weddings—the clichéd and empty union of Fritz and Gustchen, the fruitless union of Läuffer and Lise, and the

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[16] "Am aufschlußreichsten aber ist die Versöhnung des alten Pätus mit seiner Mutter; damit sie überhaupt stattfinden kann, muß gegen alle dramaturgische Regel kurz vor Schluß erst noch erwähnt werden, daß die beiden sich entzweit hatten! Was auf den ersten Blick wie eine Dramaturgie mit der Brechstange aussehen mag, hat freilich eine sehr wichtige Funktion. Die Versöhnung des alten Pätus mit seiner Mutter steht am Beginn der Schlußsequenz wie Doppelpunkt und Anführungszeichen, die sagen: Hier wird noch einmal der konventionelle Komödienschluß zitiert, ein Dreigroschen-Opern-Schluß, der aus dem tatsächlichen Hergang keinerlei Stütze findet" (462).

hollow and "dramenökonomisch überflüßig"[17] union of Pätus and Jungfer Rehaar—cannot be overlooked. The object of parody or irony here is neither the <u>bürgerliches Trauerspiel</u>[18] nor the sentimental comedy[19], but rather the mechanism of conventional comedy.

Although the conflicts that arise in <u>Der Hofmeister</u> might appear irreparable and therefore more akin to the <u>bürgerliches Trauerspiel</u>, they serve to emphasize the manner in which <u>Der Hofmeister</u> must resolve them. That is, the conflicts find eventual (if not improbable) solutions because they occur in a comedy. Were these events to occur in a work like <u>Emilia Galotti,</u> Läuffer's castration and Gustchen's collapse into the pond might lead to the death and redemption of these figures consumed however rightly or wrongly with guilt. But because these actions occur within a comedy, they are guaranteed a happy ending. These actions threaten to disorder their dramatic reality completely: the loss of Gustchen, for example, would most likely trouble her already fragile father so much that he would descend into madness. But Gustchen <u>is</u> rescued by her father, thus restoring a sense of unity to a plot on the brink of disarray. Gustchen's collapse is such an exaggerated action that it draws almost as much attention to itself as her rescue and overly delighted father. And precisely this—one of the several ways in which its happy ending unfolds—is the focus of <u>Der Hofmeister</u>. The contrast between the darkness of the work's tragic content and the brightness of its resolution brings attention the brightness and its effects. That is, Gustchen's rescue, her reunion with her father and Fritz, as well as Fritz's adoption of Gustchen's bastard all contribute to a sense of unity or order in the plot.

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[17] Eibl 462
[18] Huyssen 138
[19] Guthrie 18

While Gottsched might not have approved of some of the content in <u>Der Hofmeister</u>'s mimesis (e.g., Gustchen as a single mother), he would most likely have approved of the portrait of order the closing scene in Insterburg provides: patriarchal power is in control, the masculine and feminine sexual drives of the work's children are confined to marital unions, and any threats of disorder are remote. Therefore, if conventional comedy according to Gottsched is designed to present a reaffirming mimesis of social order, then <u>Der Hofmeister</u> seems to accomplish just that. However, one cannot overlook the dissonance Läuffer's resolution presents. Having castrated himself as a punishment for his sexual drive, he finds himself nevertheless still attracted to the opposite sex, so his castration fails to serve its purpose. Also, since he is already castrated, his marriage to Lise appears superfluous as it cannot symbolize the reigning in of masculine and feminine sexual drives as it does for Pätus and <u>Jungfer Rehaar</u>. Läuffer's marriage appears as a union for the sake of union, thereby undercutting the order it is meant to represent.

Thus, <u>Der Hofmeister</u> demonstrates itself to be a radical comedy. It understands the main mechanism of Gottsched's conventional comedy—a unifying resolution filled with reconciliations, reunions and marriages—and exaggerates it to emphasize its nature, to accentuate its function, and to demonstrate that although the resolution might appear to reverse the disorder of the comedy's plot, it does so only artificially. <u>Der Hofmeister</u> points out that, if the order within the mimesis is hollow, perhaps so too is any sense of unity achieved in reality. In his study <u>How Dramas End</u>, Henry J. Schmidt posits that resolutions can act like a mirror by providing "a pleasurable reflection" that "confirms the viewer's identity and legitimate his or her status" (8). In this manner,

> [e]xperiencing a satisfying fictional resolution is therefore self-ennobling, assuring one of the correctness of one's beliefs and of the fundamental stability of one's social and moral environment. The reestablishment of order is experienced as regained security, which was temporarily and vicariously threatened before the denouement. (Schmidt 8)

While appearing to reassure the society it reflects, Der Hofmeister provides a final existence for its characters that only externally seems stable. The mimesis might appear to affirm an orderly picture of society, but, of course, Läuffer's closing scene imbues the resolution with a sense of irony. While Der Hofmeister does not directly attack social order as other radical comedies might, the work nevertheless accentuates the artificiality of the order it seems to promote.

CHAPTER 2

<u>Der Biberpelz</u>: The Comic Absence of Comedic Resolution

<u>Der Biberpelz</u> unfolds as if it were a simple conventional comedy: a quick-witted washerwoman, Mutter Wolff, steals both firewood and a beaver coat from a wealthy citizen of a Berlin suburb while a transplanted state official, Wehrhahn, gains his executive bearings and threatens to discover Wolff's crimes. It would seem only natural for such a comedy to reach its resolution by exposing and punishing the perpetrator, thereby clarifying previous uncertainties and achieving the balance of justice. Twice the arrangement of plot suggests its course to be a clarifying and, therefore, comedic one: twice the settings shift from Wolff's house to the official's court, twice the wealthy victim Krüger comes to report the crimes and twice the official Wehrhahn seems close to exposing and prosecuting the thief or, as critic Gert Oberempt views it, "[z]weimal geht die Rechnung, daß die Diebin entdeckt werden müsse, nicht auf" (150). That is, twice the work seems to signal an impending comedic resolution featuring the indictment of Wolff as the perpetrator, which would consequently reinstate the social and legal order while relieving the dramatic tension the crimes precipitated. Yet, this comedic resolution never arrives. As such, <u>Der Biberpelz</u> remains a four act comedy without a comedic resolution, without a fifth act. With its absence, the comedic resolution of <u>Der Biberpelz</u> provides substantial insight into the resolution's function in conventional comedy.

Hauptmann's 1893 comedy <u>Der Biberpelz</u> has been analyzed with regard to its mimetic quality (Haida), to its naturalist qualities (Martini), as well as with a focus on the structure of its acts (Vandenrath, Grimm) to quantify and rationalize both the work's

deviation from the comedic tradition as well as the response of the first performance's audience. In this chapter, however, I argue Der Biberpelz is a radical comedy which manipulates its audience's conventional comedy expectation of an impending resolution in three ways: first, on a formal level, the work vacillates between two settings: a house where the crimes are planned and a courtroom where the crimes are reported. The repetition of these two settings implies that the drama is working towards resolution before it appears to end prematurely, before justice for the crimes planned in the house can be served. Second, the ironic endings of its four acts imbue Hauptmann's work with a dissonance that creates a tension, which appears on track for relief yet remains unresolved by the drama's end. Third, and most importantly, the comic—traditionally thought to be the ally of the conventional comedy—appears to signal an impending reconciliation of the social norms shown as injured. Ultimately, though, the comic can be seen as the primary motive force behind Hauptmann's radical comedy for it prevents revelation and the return to order associated with conventional comedy.

First, some background on the poetic term, the comic: as defined by the French philosopher Henri Bergson in his 1900 work "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic," the comic is a purely human phenomenon which arises whenever "something mechanical" is observed "encrusted upon the living" (29). Because this mechanical nature appears to replace a subject's human qualities (e.g., agility, intelligence, consciousness, etc.), Bergson finds that the comic always represents a "mechanical inelasticity," the inability of a subject to adapt its "character of mind and even of body, because [this mechanical inelasticity] is the possible sign of a slumbering activity as well as of an activity with separatist tendencies… in short it [inelasticity] is the sign of an

eccentricity" (17). This "mechanical" nature of the comic is produced when the "living body" becomes "rigid, like a machine;" that is, unable to (or unaware that it should) adapt physically, mentally, or—most importantly—socially (29). That which cannot adapt socially (whether due to lack of ability or awareness) becomes labeled as mechanic, eccentric, potentially separatist, and therefore comic. To normalize the eccentricity the comic represents, laughter arises as a "social gesture" which "[b]y the fear that it inspires, […] restrains eccentricity, keeps constantly awake and in mutual contact certain activities of a secondary order which might […] soften down whatever the surface of the social body may retain of mechanical inelasticity" (17). In this model, members of society are to demonstrate a mental, physical, and social attentiveness that renders them agile and attentive at all times. Laughter, then, arises from other members of society to correct such lack of attentiveness or agility. It is the recognition of a deviation from the social norm that one might consider "the comic" and therefore both worthy and in need of the corrective, laughter.

How the comic operates in conventional comedy is often unseen and unacknowledged. One might argue that the terms comedic and comic are currently interchangeable and their connection familiar, yet this assumption is incorrect. Although Bergson outlines his concept of the comic and its relationship to laughter with examples from French dramatic comedy, the philosopher neglects to comment directly on the function of the comic in dramatic comedy. Bergson discusses what may constitute dramatic comedy, but ultimately, comedy as a Bergsonian concept appears to be little more than a collection of comic scenes, events, situations or behaviors. Comedy for Bergson is, broadly, "a game […] that imitates life" and is comprised of any "events so as

to introduce mechanism into outer forms of life" (46). This evaluation demonstrates such a blurring between the boundaries of the comic and comedic that the terms conflate, as if the comic were a single unit that accretes to form a comedy.

The German critic Wolfram Mauser, however, provides a more distinct analysis of the role of Bergson's comic in dramatic comedy. Like Bergson, Mauser emphasizes the role of society in dramatic comedy when he argues "[d]ie traditionelle Komödie ist nicht denkbar ohne eine Gesellschaftsordnung, die für das Verhalten und für die Beurteilung von Verhalten feste Normen ausgebildet hat" (216). Figures in comedies drift from these norms, which range from high values such as "Gerechtigkeit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Treue" to quotidian mores such as "der Art zu reden, zu essen, zu gehen, sich zu kleiden" (216). According to Mauser, these deviations from norms can be and are necessarily resolved in what I term the conventional comedy resolution, the process which strengthens or legitimizes a norm depending on either the success of characters who observe it or the failure of those who ignore it. To this end, comedies employ the comic to entertain, to emphasize the contours of these norms, and to reveal "die Zielrichtung des Abwertens von Normverstößen" (217). Ultimately, Mauser argues that the comic accentuates the comedic process by demarcating the comic eccentricities to be corrected during the course of the conventional comedy. On the basis of Mauser's analysis, one can therefore claim that the comic may indeed arise from these deviations from the spectrum of societal norms (as Bergson suggests), but deviations from norms do not necessarily produce the comic. Similarly, the mere existence of the comic in a dramatic work does not always produce the comedic[20].

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[20] Consider the comic characters and scenes in the tragedies of Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet.

This distinction between the comic and the comedic is significant because in many ways the normalization project of the comic seems allied with that of the conventional comedy. That is, in a dramatic work, the comic—a humorous deviation from a social norm—might seem to foreshadow the comedic, a process whose telos in conventional comedy is the correction of the eccentricity the comic represents. But, the comic alone does not necessarily lead to the correction of mental, physical, or social deviation. When divorced from the comedic, the comic can only highlight eccentricity. While the laughter a comic event garners only encourages the victim to avoid such physical inelasticity in the future, the comic alone has no power to correct or erase the exhibited eccentricity. Despite the fear the laughter of others inspires in the victim, the comic cannot guarantee the inelasticity will not occur again.

The comedic, however, suggests the opposite. The comedic suggests that most disruptive eccentricities can and will be normalized through the comedic process. The unity achieved, the norms legitimized or strengthened within the comedic process erases most traces of eccentricity first identified by the comic. When operating symbiotically with the comedic, the comic seems to guarantee in its own way that mechanical inelasticity (especially when viewed as socially eccentric) can and should be cured. To take Kleist's Der zerbrochene Krug as an example: the socially eccentric (if not destructive) manner in which Adam runs his courtroom embodies the comic. Within the course of the work's comedic process, the disorder the judge represents cannot be rehabilitated and is therefore is banished. When Adam flees at the end of the work, he thereby heals most of the wounds to the social order caused by his comic behavior. In this manner, the comedic suggests that most comic eccentricities, if demonstrated to be

egregious, disorderly, or disruptive enough, will be dealt with so that order and harmony might best be achieved. Ultimately, the comic alone represents social disorder, whereas the comedic frames the comic in such a way that its disorder is seen to contribute to a larger, more stabile order. Conventional comedy successfully yokes the comic to instill a sense of social stability in an audience instead of the disorder the comic really represents. The comedic, the repairing of the social (dis)order embodied in the comic, in this way seems to assure that all comic eccentricities and disorder can be repaired.

This problematic assumption, I argue, is at the core of <u>Der Biberpelz</u>. In effect, the comedic serves to correct the comic deviation as if it never existed. Resolutions erase all prior anarchy or injury to the order within the comedy. All previous instability embodied or caused by the comic thus is forgotten. The comic, however, does not function this way. When operating beyond the bounds of the comedic, the comic cannot wipe clean the deviation from the norm it represents, but instead wags the deviation in one's laughing face. At times, it can be difficult to discern if comic situations or characters will contribute to an overarching, teleological comedic process or if the comic will simply remain comic. Although Hauptmann's comedy <u>Der Biberpelz</u> intimates that its comic disorder and eccentricities are operating within a comedic process, ultimately, the work operates beyond the boundaries of the comedic. By embracing and affirming comic disorder over comedic harmony, Hauptmann's comedy <u>Der Biberpelz</u> proves itself to be a radical comedy.

The criticism <u>Der Biberpelz</u> received upon its first performance in Berlin's Deutsches Theater on September, 21, 1893 mainly attacks its failure to reach this comedic harmony. Specifically, critics such as Julius Hart attack the work's resolution,

asserting "[d]er Schluß der Komödie ist ein Schluß dramatischen Ungeschicks" (895).

Hart goes on to charge that, despite Hauptmann's attempt to craft a well-constructed

drama in the tradition of Schiller or Goethe, "er kanns nicht, ihm zerbricht der Stoff unter

den Händen in lauter kleine Stücke […]" (895). Hart's indictment here suggests that even

though the playwright has the necessary material ("der Stoff"), he has no idea how to

configure it properly, thus leading to a "Schluß dramatischen Ungeschicks." These

dissenting critics are much more likely to label the end of the comedy as a failure, mainly

because they measure it against the long tradition of conventional comedy.

Yet one must not suggest that the reviews are homogeneously negative. Against a

majority of dissent, critic Franz Mehring insists after seeing the first performance that the

work is:

> endlich einmal eine Komödie im alten und echten Sinn des Wortes: eine
> lachende Geißelung der verkehrten Welt, worin wir leben und weben, dabei ganz
> frei von des spintisierenden Gedankens Blässe, ganz frei von den Mitteln und
> Mittelchen des hergebrachten Komödiensapparats. (18)

Mehring, here, applauds Hauptmann's comedy for the same reasons others attack it: the

work's perceived deviation from convention, from the "hergebrachten

Komödiensapparat." For Mehring, yet not for the majority of the audience, this departure

from tradition makes for a successful performance.

For at least a short period during the performance, however, the work seemed set

on a successful course. Though Mehring might appear to be one voice speaking against

the negative reviews, he goes on to identify a portion of the play when its first audience

was unified in their enjoyment of the work:

> Das Premierenpublikum nahm die ersten Akte des Stücks sehr freundlich auf; es
> hatte lebhaftes Gefallen an der drastischen Komik und dachte wohl, daß die Diebe
> schließlich an den Galgen kommen würden. Als die Dinge aber nun so ganz

anders kamen und aus der Posse sich eine bitterböse Satire entwickelte, da schlug
die Stimmung sofort um[...]. (17)

Mehring underscores an initial feeling of ease, of familiarity, grounded in the apparently

conventional comedy Erwartungshorizont[21] created by the "Komik" in the first

performance. Yet before the comedic expectation that "die Diebe schließlich an den

Galgen kommen würden" can be fulfilled, something shifts. The effect of this immediate

change in "Stimmung" demonstrates the shock produced when the performance dashes

the conventional Erwartungshorizont (the discovery and prosecution of Wolff). The

change in the attitude of the audience bears out their reaction to the destruction of their

comedic expectations. Initially, though, the „drastisch[e] Komik" puts the audience at

ease, thereby suggesting that, at least for a time, the comic supports if not augments the

audience's comedic expectation. Another review identifies this shift in Der Biberpelz,

which "sich nach dem zweiten Akt zum stürmischen Beifall steigerte und erst nach dem

das Publikum überraschenden Schluß von einer Minderheit des dicht gefüllten Hauses

gestritten wurde" (qtd. in Bellmann 32). This turn in the reviews of Hauptmann's work

has been overlooked and yet this turn offers an insight into the relationship of the comic

and the comedic. At some point, it would seem, the comic mutates from the ally of

conventional comedy into its enemy. Therefore, although aspects of Der Biberpelz appear

to stabilize the dynamic between audience and stage by indicating a conventional

modality, comic aspects ultimately destabilize this familiar relationship, which in turn

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[21] The set of expectations a reader brings to a text, as described by the Rezeptionsästhetiker Hans Robert
Jauss in the following: "A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as
something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind
of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It
awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and
with its beginning arouses expectations for the 'middle and end,' which can then be maintained intact or
altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the
genre or type of text" (22). This term has specific significance in this chapter because my area of inquiry is
the construction of audience expectation regarding the end of dramatic comedies.

magnifies the effect of the work's conclusion, thereby problematizing the perceived synergy of the comic and the comedic.

Essentially, somewhere within its dramatic process, Hauptmann's work identifies itself to its audience as a conventional comedy. In this next section, I argue that the settings, ironic dissonance of situations, and the comic qualities of its characters all seem to signal a forthcoming resolution. Yet, at some point the comedic process of <u>Der Biberpelz</u> is stalled, impeded, or is simply aborted. In short, a conventional comedy reveals itself to be radical.

Firstly, let us explore the comedic expectation created by the play's two alternating settings—the Wolff household (Act I & III) and Wehrhahn's courtroom (Act II & IV). These arenas of action appear to circumscribe <u>Der Biberpelz</u> within the comedic world insofar as these two locations seem to build a unity of action: After the audience witnesses the planning and initial execution of Mutter Wolff's scheme to steal Krüger's wood in Act I, Act II shifts to a courtroom, an arena of re-action, investigation, and discovery. Furthermore, Act II features Krüger's report of the crime planned in Act I, which indicates Wolff's success, magnifies the impact of the crime, and suggests a connection between the two settings in terms of the plot. The alternation between settings initiates an apparent cause/effect, action/re-action dynamic between the Wolff home and the Wehrhahn courtroom which, it seems, foreshadows the inevitable collision of the two settings in the form of a comedic resolution.

Speaking to the repeated shift from household to courtroom and the ambiguous expectation it produces, Gert Oberempt observes:

> Dem Prinzip der <u>Steigerung</u> in der <u>Wiederholung</u> zuliebe, einem probaten <u>Komik</u>-Mittel, ordnet Hauptmann zweimal die gleichen Schauplätze nacheinander an. Er

entspricht mit der Abfolge von Diebslokal und Justizlokal unseren natürlichen Erwartungen auf Entlarvung und potenziert sie gleichzeitig, indem er mit der duplexen Anlage auch die Delinquenz der Wolffen erhärtet. (150, emphasis added)

Oberempt here analyzes the ambiguity that arises from the repetition of settings as I outlined aboved, but does the vacillation of "Schauplätze" function as a "Steigerung" or "Wiederholung"—two concepts which produce widely differing effects? That is, does the repetition of settings produce a comedic effect (Steigerung), thereby signaling the plot's development towards a possible climax and catastrophe, as in the dramatic theories of Gustav Freytag? Or does the repetition produce a comic effect (Wiederholung) which underscores Wolff's "Delinquenz" and produces laughter at the cost of progress towards a resolution? As the settings of "Diebslokal und Justizlokal" are consonant with "unseren natürlichen Erwartungen auf Entlarvung," the settings suggest the comedic. Yet, because this "Entlarvung"—an ordering revelation usually featured in the comedic—never transpires, the repetition of settings must be comic, serving to emphasize the comic disorder or eccentricity embodied by each respective location.

Much like the alternating settings of the play, the open and ironic endings to scenes in Der Biberpelz foster a seemingly comedic Erwartungshorizont[22], yet the irony actually promotes a comic atmosphere. If one considers the instability situational irony creates within Der Biberpelz and how comedic resolution might stabilize such ironic disconnections, then the comedy would seem to require an ending that dispels the ironic atmosphere. This resolution seems all the more necessary when one notes that each of the four acts ends with a wry, ironic situation or character comment that destabilizes the sense of unity or resolution that might traditionally cap an act—a cycle that fails to build

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[22] By "comedic Erwartungshorizont" I mean the expectation that the drama would end comedically, resolving all the discord and confusion caused by both Wolff's thefts and Wehrhahn's misuse of power.

towards an overarching resolution or unity at the end of the comedy: Act I ends as Mutter Wolff employs the unwitting court deputy Mitteldorf to aid in the theft of Krüger's wood. Then, after Wehrhahn dismisses Krüger's complaints at the end of Act II, the judge self-aggrandizes when he claims that by frustrating the victim, he continues his fight for the welfare of the nation. Again, irony pervades the end of Act III as Krüger examines and compliments Frau Wolff's firewood (stolen from him, of course) before he vows to track down those who have stolen from him. And ultimately, Wehrhahn commits the most ironic mistake of all in Act IV when he claims that the thieving Wolff is "eine ehrliche Haut" whereas Dr. Fleischer, the liberal democrat, presents the true threat (542). Each set of closing lines or interactions contributes to an overall sense of dissonance, in which stage appearance and reality seem disconnected and in need of rectification: specifically, at the end of Act I, the deputy Mitteldorf is supposed to realize that he is drunk and that he is contributing to a crime instead of fighting it as a deputy should; Wehrhahn is supposed to realize that by frustrating Krüger, Wehrhahn is actually doing a disservice to his nation; Krüger is supposed to realize that the wood he compliments in Wolff's house is his own; and Wehrhahn is supposed to realize that Wolff is, of course, the least "ehrlich" in his courtroom. This sense of what is "supposed" to happen is tied to a network of social norms (e.g., semiologically, an agent of the law such as Mitteldorf should not commit a crime), but this sense is also grounded in the dramatic norms of the conventional comedy. That is, audiences might laugh at the first few dissonant endings because they intuit that Wolff's crimes will be uncovered and she will be punished, thereby reconciling the conflict her thefts have caused within the work. When Wolff escapes exposure in the closing scene, the preceding scenes prove that they were not

building towards a unifying and ordering comedic resolution. Instead, they were simply comic scenes, pointing out an injury to the social norms of right and wrong, but in no way healing this injury.

More so than the dramatic setting and act structure, the presence of the comic in the work's characters promotes and then problematizes the construction of the comedic Erwartungshorizont. Before the audience can gain a sense of the repetition of settings and before the first act can provide a sense of dramatic trajectory, the comic confronts the audience in the form of characters. That is to say, before the settings and ironic scene caps can suggest a comedic Erwartungshorizont for the work's audience, the characterizations create their own comic expectation for the audience, which ultimately undermines the comedic instead of fortifying it.

Viewed in terms of Bergson's "mechanical inelasticity," Wehrhahn obsessively and comically focuses on combating the abstract crime of democratic thought (represented by Dr. Fleischer) at the expense of his investigation of the concrete crime of theft (perpetrated by Frau Wolff). When Mitteldorf reports the wood's theft, Wehrhahn accuses his deputy of association with Dr. Fleischer, which nearly sidelines the investigation:

> WEHRHAHN. Von wem haben Sie's denn?
> MITTELDORF. Ich hab' es…
> WEHRHAHN. Na, also, von wem dem?
> MITTELDORF. Ich hab' es…ich hab' es von Herr Fleischer jehört.
> WEHRHAHN. So! Mit dem Mann unterhalten Sie sich…? (507)

Mitteldorf's trepidation demonstrates that he understands Wehrhahn's fixation on Fleischer. Shortly after this implication of Wehrhahn's state of mind, the official himself admits to his obsession with Fleischer as well as his intention:

> Ich habe die halbe Nacht nicht jeschlafen. Die Sache [Fleischer] hat mich nicht schlafen lassen.[…] Meine Aufgabe hier ist: mustern und säubern. […] Dunkle Existenzen, politisch verfemte, reichs- und königsfeindliche Elemente. Die Leute sollen zu stöhnen bekommen. (507-508)

Coupled with the exaggerated danger he feels Fleischer poses to the nation, Wehrhahn here also reveals his sense of mission. With Wehrhahn, the Bergsonian comic arises also from the contrast between the officier's perceived sense of his "heilijen Beruf" (to observe and purge all "Dunkle Existenzen, politisch verfemte, reichs- und königsfeindliche Elemente") and its actual function (investigating petty thefts and recording births, as observed during the course of the work). Ultimately, both his obsession with Fleischer and his inflated view of his office are mechanic in that neither wavers or wanes throughout the comedy.

Whereas Wehrhahn appears defined by his inelasticity, Mutter Wolff demonstrates her Bergsonian elasticity during her many comic interactions. Repeatedly, her exchanges produce the Bergsonian comic largely by rendering her scene partners mechanical. During her initial bargaining with Wulkow, for example, Wolff manipulates her customer as if he were a mechanical toy or, as Bergson would label such a situation, a "dancing jack," a comic victim who "thinks he is speaking and acting freely, and, consequently, retains all the essentials of life, whereas viewed from a certain standpoint, he appears a mere toy in the hands of another who is playing with him"(41). In this manner, Wolff manipulates Wulkow until he willingly pays the amount she desires, thereby demonstrating her agility:

> WULKOW. Hebb' ick jesacht, ick will et nich koofen?
> FRAU WOLFF. Mir is das ja ganz eengal, wersch kooft.
> WULKOW. Ick will et ja koofen.
> FRAU WOLFF. I, wer de ni will, der läßt's halt bleiben.
> WULKOW. Ick koofe det Stick! Wat soll et denn bringen? (492)

This manipulation continues until Wolff has predicted Wulkow's moves and pulled his strings so artfully that he pays for venison he admits he cannot sell for profit. While this might appear as simple haggling, this interaction nevertheless demonstrates Wolff's superior litheness as she renders Wulkow inert, mechanical, and comic. Wolff makes Middledorf into a dancing jack at the end of Act I in a similar yet more direct fashion when she conscripts the unwitting deputy to assist her in the theft of Krüger's wood. From these interactions, it is clear that Wolff possesses a superior dexterity that allows her to manipulate other characters and thereby render them comic.

As a consequence of these central characters, <u>Der Biberpelz</u> remains within the realm of the comic and never achieves a comedic resolution because these comic characters necessarily cannot lead to resolution. Specifically, Wehrhahn's comic incompetence prevents him from focusing on and discovering Wolff's crimes. Similarly, Wolff's superior agility prevents her from losing control and becoming a suspect as a consequence. Though not phrased in the same manner, H. J Schrimpf essentially suggests this same conclusion when he observes:

> Was Frau Wollfen, die schlaue und intelligente Komödiantin, in Szene setzt, ist keine soziale Revolution, sondern eine vitale Revolution. Ihre Schlagfertigkeit, ihr unbeirrbarer Instinkt, ihr erfolgsbringender Realismus, ihre Fähigkeit zu überlisten und zu täuschen, ihre sichere Menschenkenntnis, all dies gibt Anlaß zu immer neuen komischen Situationen und Mißverständnissen, und es gewinnt der Mutter Wolffen zugleich die Sympathien, da die frei ist von Arglist und Heimtücke, von Bosheit und Niedertracht. (40)

In this analysis, Schrimpf underscores not the comedic qualities of Wolff—those qualities that contribute to a clarifying and impending resolution—but rather the Bergsonian comic quality of elasticity—the quality that contributes to episodic, open ended "immer neuen komischen Situationen und Mißverständnissen." Wolff's "Fähigkeit zu überlisten und zu

täuschen" ensures that she will never be gotten the better of or deceived—events that would have to occur to implicate her. Likewise, her "Schlagfertigkeit" allows her to react quickly and efficiently to surprises, while her "unbeirrbarer Instinkt" imbues Mutter Wolff with the qualities necessary to escape capture, the end to her elasticity, and therefore a comedic resolution featuring her punishment. This "Schlagfertigkeit" is on display each time she is confronted with incriminating evidence. In Act I, she coolly feigns ignorance when Frau Motes shows her the snares Wolff no doubt used to poach the deer she cleans:

> FRAU MOTES. Da, sehn Se mal zu. *Sie zeigt ihr zwei Drahtschlingen.*
> FRAU WOLFF, *ohne aus der Fassung zu geraten.* Das sein woll Schlingen?
>   […] Ihr Kinder, was hier bloß gewilddiebt wird! (407)

Even though faced with incriminating evidence, Wolff is calm, "*ohne aus der Fassung zu geraten.*" Similarly, in Act II when unexpectedly called to speak with Wehrhahn, the texts notes that Wolff enters the courtroom "*unbefangen, heiter, mit einem flüchtigen Blick auf die Drahtschlingen*" before she nonchalantly asks "Hier bin ich! Was hat's nu? Was gibbt's mit der Wolffen ?"(513). Though she walks into an unknown situation to find potentially incriminating evidence in the hands of the authorities, Wolff gives nothing away and quickly projects an adroitly innocent demeanor, a testament to her quick wit.

As Schrimpf unknowingly but implicitly posits, these traits necessarily preclude this definite comedic resolution. Instead, Wolff's elastic character contributes only to new, comic iterations while it eschews exposure and capture, the only chance to correct the many "Mißverständnissen" Wolff precipitates in the work (e.g., Wehrhahn's opinion that Fleischer is the real villain to watch). If one considers a comedy prior to its

resolution as an uncertain world clouded in "Mißverständnissen," then Wolff's elasticity perpetuates this condition; neither she is willing nor Wehrhahn able to return certainty or "Verständnis" to the reality of the comedy. These qualities allow her to steal while they simultaneously forestall Wolff's exposure as a criminal in a possible comedic resolution.

But, curiously, comedic "Verständnis" in the form of a resolution appears palpable and impending at times in Der Biberpelz. The action of Act IV does appear to be building to a resolution, a breaking point where Mutter Wolff's elasticity cannot save her from being revealed as a criminal. The act opens back in Wehrhahn's courtroom, where Mutter Wolff has come to drop off some fake evidence to suggest that someone else stole and fenced Krüger's beaver coat. Before she can present the evidence, Wulkow, who is dressed in the beaver coat he bought off of Wolff, arrives in the courtroom and unwittingly threatens to expose Wolff and her crime. Other unexpected arrivals create another Bergsonian comic situation known as the "Snow-ball"—an "abstract vision, that of an effect which grows by arithmetical progression, so that the cause, insignificant at the outset, culminates by a necessary evolution in a result as important as it is unexpected" (43). In Bergson's view, this process of increasing danger and damage precipitates the comic in that it reveals a character's inability to foresee catastrophic results from a seemingly innocuous choice or situation. Indeed, "[w]ere events unceasingly mindful of their own course, there would be no coincidences, no conjectures, and no circular series; everything would evolve and progress continuously" (Bergson 45). This "Snow-ball" effect, though comic, seems to point towards a comedic in Der Biberpelz as the number and magnitude of coincidences seem to threaten Wolff's ultimate exposure and thereby a comedic resolution.

In Act IV, Mutter Wolff, who has controlled so many situations and interactions previously in the drama, finds herself in the process of becoming the victim of coincidences. What begins as a simple task of handing over false evidence to Wehrhahn quickly threatens to expose Wolff as the "Snow-ball" situation grows. Firstly and perhaps most dangerously, Wulkow—the beneficiary of Wolff's most recent theft—arrives in the courthouse to register a birth. What is more, he is wearing the stolen coat whose theft Wolff's evidence is meant obscure. With Wulkow's arrival, the text strongly suggests that Mutter Wolff understands her risk of exposure, as if she comprehends that circumstances might challenge her control. As evidence that she realizes the burgeoning challenge before her, Wolff loses her verbal agility: WOLFF, *starrt sprachlos auf Wulkow, dann.* Nee, aber Wulkow, Ihr seid woll gar nich mehr gescheit?! Was wollt Ihr d'nn hier? (530). On one hand, the silence can be a purely theatrical move, meant to be filled with the audience's laughter, as the comic mis-en-scene of Wulkow wearing the beaver coat might garner a laugh of surprise. In this case, laughter would have swallowed any immediate response from Wolff. On the other hand, the silence can signify a break in the usually elastic character of Frau Wolff, thereby serving as a potential omen of her exposure. Previously the thief displayed no compunction when presented with evidence of her crimes. By contrast, when she views Wulkow in the incriminating beaver coat within court of law, the sight robs her of her agility, vitality, and elasticity as her silence demonstrates. With this silence, one perhaps sees the potential end of Wolff's ingenuity. This momentary lapse of elasticity suggests that she no longer enjoys the upper hand, which might lead to her exposure and thus a comedic resolution.

After Wulkow appears, events seem set in motion for a comedic resolution as the snowballing continues: Wolff sends the increasingly manipulative daughter Adelheid on a meaningless errand so that she will not complicate and possibly expose her mother's crime, yet before she has been gone long, Wehrhahn is heard off stage and unexpectedly returns the girl to the main arena of action. With his sudden arrival, Wehrhahn too contributes to a sense of impending revelation. Unable to focus on one task at a time initially, the judge vacillates between the two parties present—Wolff and Wulkow—and he seems close to discovering their connection, yet he never does. Indeed, Wehrhahn delays Wulkow's matter several times, causing one to think it is a device designed purely to heighten tension before administering the ultimate coup de grace of the resolution. But, when the delays continue, a sense grows that Wehrhahn's stalling is less a devious manipulation than his incompetence.

What soon becomes the culmination of the "Snow-ball," though, is the appearance of all characters with the arrival of Krüger, who brings with him the insistent language to drive towards the telos of resolution, yet Krüger's own comic qualities thwart his mission. Krüger appears on the scene in Act IV much like a commander resolute in challenging Wehrhahn's constant impeding of progress. When informed that Wehrhahn is "nicht zu sprechen," Krüger barges into the official's office as he bellows to the group he leads in "Immer vorwärts, vorwärts" (536). With him, Krüger seems to bring a push for order and comedic conclusion, as he complains that "nichts keschieht! Die kanze Sache nimmt keinen Fortgang" (536). He and his effort to reach a conclusion, however, are undermined by his comic characteristics[23]: his age and impaired hearing, both

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[23] J. Vandenrath characterizes the comical Krüger thusly:"Von ziemlich burlesker Komik ist die Figur der Gefoppten, Krüger, die aus drei Zügen, seinem cholerischen Wesen, der Schwerhörigkeit und seiner

qualities which yielded some comic moments in Act II. As Wulkow is wearing Krüger's

coat, this seems the prime opportunity for the recognition of the crime to emerge, yet

Wehrhahn's direct questions fail to connect crime, criminal and beneficiary:

> VON WEHRHAHN. Sind Sie doch Schiffer?
> WULKOW. Seit dreißig Jahren hebb' ick jeschiffwerkt.
> […]
> VON WEHRHAHN. Tragen nun die Spreeschiffer öfter Pelze?
> WULKOW. Manch eener hat seinen Pelz, immerzu.
> VON WEHRHAHN. Der Herr dort hat einen Schiffer gesehn, der hat im Pelz
> auf dem Deck gestanden.
> WULKOW. Da is nischt Verdächtijes bei, Herr Vorsteher. Da sin ville, die
> schöne Pelze hab'n. Ich hebbe sojar all ooch selber eenen.
> VON WEHRHAHN. Na sehn Sie, der Mann hat selbst einen Pelz.
> […]
> VON WEHRHAHN, *im Vollgefühle des Triumpes mit gemachter*
> *Gleichgültigkeit.* So […] *Wieder heftig.* Es wird uns doch deshalb im
> Traume nicht einfallen, zu sagen: er hatte den Pelz gestohlen. Das wäre ja
> eine Absurdität.
> KRÜGER. Wa? Ich verstehe kein Wort davon… (537-8)

After Wehrhahn has failed to connect Wulkow with the stolen coat, it is either his age or

his poor hearing which prevent Krüger from making the connection needed to restore

order. Whatever the reason, Krüger's own comic qualities forestall the comedic

revelation as Wehrhahn's had and thus the opportunity to spotlight Wolff dims.

Once the opening for resolution has closed, what once had potential to be a grand

revelatory spectacle reverts to a simple, comic episode, which ends ironically much like

the previous scenes of the work. Fleischer and Krüger leave frustrated as Wehrhahn

finally records Wulkow's newborn in his books before the official reassures the

washerwoman of his superiority:

> WEHRHAHN. Das ist nämlich hier unsre fleißige Waschfrau. Die denkt alle
> Menschen sind so wie sie. *Zu Frau Wolff* So ist's aber leider nicht in der
> Welt. Sie sehen die Menschen von außen an. Unsereins blickt nun schon

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komischen Sprechweise besteht" (234). However, his comical "Schwerhörigkeit" proves to be the most
detrimental to the comedic process in the work.

> etwas tiefer. […] Und so wahr es ist, wenn ich hier sage: die Wolffen ist eine ehrliche Haut, so sage ich Ihnen mit gleicher Bestimmtheit: Ihr Dr. Fleischer, von dem wir da sprachen, das ist ein lebensgefährlicher Kerl!
> FRAU WOLFF, *resigniert den Kopf schüttelnd*. Da weeß ich nu nich… (542)

With its irony, these closing lines do not place the audience at the satisfying end of the comedic process; instead, they defer and delay the closing loop of the dramatic circle only to perpetuate the dissonance accentuated by the closing lines of each of the three preceding Acts.

Act IV ends in this manner so that there can be no debate over whether a comedic conclusion has been achieved. Even the last words of the work—Wolff's uncertain "Da weeß ich nu nich…"— emphasizes their irresoluteness. Her response is neither "ja" nor "nein," but a statement underscoring the absence of certainty. Her response even prevents the passing of a moral judgment on Mutter Wolff: had she answered "ja," then she could be demonized for it would seem that Wolff would sacrifice the innocent Fleischer to save herself. Had she responded with a "nein," then Wolff would have told the truth, redeemed herself by contradicting the erring Wehrhahn, and thereby endangered herself in the process. But the last line of the work is neither of these. Wolff continues to block any conclusion the audience might draw from the work's fourth and final act. And as the curtain falls after Wolff's final, uncertain words, Der Biberpelz remains a comedy without revelation, without restoration of order, without justice, and therefore without a comedic resolution.

Essentially, Act IV flies in the face of its audience and incites them to reflect on what exactly went "wrong" and how the comedy became derailed so suddenly and yet so subtly. According to Peter Haida both audience and critical objections to the work are therefore understandable because:

> Hauptmann hatte nicht etwa ein unentscheidbares Problem offengelassen, sondern eine nach alter Komödiengepflogenheit handgreifliche Lösung ignoriert: die Ergreifung der Diebin und die Korrektur eines anmaßenden und zugleich dummen Beamten. Damit handelte er gegen die Erwartung der Zuschauer und verließ das althergebrachte Schema der Komödie. (29)

As Haida stresses, it is not as if the comedy presents an unsolvable problem. Rather, the problem it presents (theft) seems so clearly solvable, especially against the backdrop of "das althergebrachte Schema der Komödie." The work's comedic resolution seems clear— "die Ergreifung der Diebin und die Korrektur eines anmaßenden und zugleich dummen Beamten" —which would thereby rectify the two major eccentricities to the world of the work, which in turn would embody the conventional comedic resolution.

While it might appear that Der Biberpelz deliberately ignores this accessible solution, it actually has no alternative but to end the comedy as it does without adhering to "das althergebrachte Schema der Komödie." No familiar character within the world of Der Biberpelz has the ability to force a comedic resolution. No character seems able to free himself or herself from the mechanical inelasticity of his or her comic condition to challenge Frau Wolff's superior agility. Frau Wolff is as unlikely to make a misstep as Wehrhahn is to succeed in his investigation of the thefts. Given these comic characters, an organic, internal resolution for Der Biberpelz is improbable if not impossible. In his praise, Franz Mehring stresses what he views as the only potential resolution, yet his suggestion, as he notes, rings as implausible as it does external and inorganic:

> Und was den Schluß anbetrifft—je nun, welchen anderen Schluß soll die Komödie haben, als daß der Amtsvorsteher von Wehrhahn in seiner hoffnungslosen Schneidigkeit so weiterwurstelt, wie er bisher gewurstelt hat? Soll etwa der Landrat oder Regierungspräsident auf der Bildflache erscheinen, um ihn abzusetzen, Mutter Wolff ins Zuchthaus zu sperren und dem Rentier Krüger wieder den Glauben an irdische Gerechtigkeit beizubringen? (19)

Such an ending would align with Mauser's conception of comedy as a return to and strengthening of a societal norm challenged or injured throughout the course of a comedy; in short, the work would transform into a conventional comedy. The "Landrat," a symbol of societal power embodied in the political sphere, would appear in the final scenes to re-instate the order Mutter Wolff's thefts have destabilized, much like in Tartuffe, where the title character's treachery is overturned in the last scene by the unseen, yet omniscient Prince. Nevertheless such a conclusion would occur externally, lacking foreshadowing and grounding within the play's reality. This deus ex machina resolution is the only conceivable comedic ending, since (as Mehring notes) it is unlikely that Wehrhahn could relinquish his focus on the liberals he suspects around him. If the work frequently characterizes Wehrhahn as an inept state official, then the change necessary to discover Wolff's crimes is implausible in the text. Only such a change can precipitate the return to norms in the form of comedic resolution as suggested by Mauser. Yet no such change arrives and, therefore, no such comedic resolution occurs or can occur.

The absence of the work's comedic resolution has a few notable effects. First, the aborted comedic resolution brings about frustration. Act IV tantalizes the audience with all the components necessary for its resolution: the thief Wolff, the victim Krüger, the stolen goods worn by Wulkow, and an administrator of justice in Wehrhahn. When these resolving elements do not fall into place the way they seem designed to in a conventional comedy, the interruption of the resolution serves to accentuate the conventional comedy expectation. Because these elements do not yield a resolution and no fifth act arrives to rectify the non-resolving disorder of Act IV, the final scenes of Der Biberpelz can cause

confusion. Indeed, an audience might question whether the lack of Act V and its concomitant resolution is an involuntary mistake of the theater, not of the drama. These effects are symptoms of the larger effect the work produces; namely, an awareness of conventional comedy expectations.

Some might ask why it is important to expose the conventional comedy apparatus. Radical comedy understands that conventional comedy endorses and promises order which serves to normalize the social body into stagnation. Radical comedy fights against this normalizing force by awakening the conventional comedy audience to the form and effects of conventional comedy. Whereas the numerous reconciliations, reunions, and weddings of Lenz's Der Hofmeister encourage an audience to peer behind the artifice of the conventional resolution, Der Biberpelz appears to have no resolution at all. This lack, however, provides a perspective on the conventional comedy resolution. Instead of offering the negative of the conventional resolution (where Mutter Wolff would triumph and Wehrhahn would end up incarcerated), Der Biberpelz offers no resolution and thereby draws more critical attention to the strict, compositional regulations of the comedy genre.

By drawing attention to its missing resolution and by extension to its apparent failure as a conventional comedy, Der Biberpelz draws attention to the function of the resolution for the audience. The work simultaneously attacks and displays the audience's need to witness what one might call the completion of the conventional comedy process. Because the comedic resolution is subverted, the conventional comedy loses its sense of unity, which in turn seems to imbue comedy with a threatening aggression. The conventional comedy promises a reinforcing of social order with its plot, which reassures

its audience with its firmly limited proceedings. With no comedic resolution righting all the wrongs in the plot, so to speak, Der Biberpelz takes on a different, distorted form. If one recalls Fry's comment about how the end of a work of fiction provides a vantage point from which the theme and unity of the entire work can be glimpsed, then one realizes that the close of Der Biberpelz offers only a picture of disorder: the harmless Fleischer becomes the focus of Wehrhahn's investigation while the thieving Wolff is cleared of all suspicion. With no comedic resolution, the comic elements of the work and the dramatized world fail to contribute to a unified, normalizing force. As a result, the comic disorder of the mimesis menaces the audience's reality with its episodic, limitless nature which threatens to spill out into the audience if not contained or restrained by a comedic resolution. The uncertainty of the radical comedy process might been seen as the governing force in their lives as opposed to the certainty of the conventional comedy, which they embrace.

As a radical comedy, Der Biberpelz undermines the reassuring conventional comedy model by confronting its audience with the reality that no order is ever guaranteed, that wrongs might not always be righted, and that thieves might remain undiscovered and unpunished. As the reviews quoted earlier in this chapter demonstrate, many in the audience disliked this prospect during the work's first performance. However, one must not lose sight of those minority audience members who clapped and cheered loudly to show their support for the work's project. As the final curtain descended opening night, the critic O. Elster observed a faction in the audience who overwhelmingly supported Hauptmann's work:

> [es erfolgte] vom Parquet aus eine energische Ablehnung, während die Freunde Gerhart Hauptmanns den Abend durch anhaltendes, demonstratives Klatschen zu retten suchten. Wir glauben nicht, daß ihnen dies in der That gelungen ist.

Although it is difficult to determine whether this histrionic applause was meant to support Hauptmann against the "energische Ablehnung" or to support the radical shift Hauptmann's comedy represented, the applause and this quote suggest that Hauptmann's work produced two factions. In reality, this work does not create a dividing line, but rather tests an audience's tolerance for progress and innovation. The work invites its audience to consider a comedy where clarity is not automatically guaranteed by the concluding scenes, to consider a comedy whose reigning dissonance is not assured consonance, to consider a comedy in which injuries to social norms do not receive the panacea of the resolution. In short, Der Biberpelz asks its audience to consider radical comedy.

Although the comic and the comedic seem inseparable in the genre of dramatic comedy, the terms have become conflated. In truth, the comic and comedic have different objectives: the comic strives to spotlight disruptive if not socially destructive eccentricity in all its forms, whereas the comedic strives to demonstrate that the damage done by comic eccentricity can be overcome and will be overcome so that society might reach an equilibrium or perfection. In Hauptmann's comedy Der Biberpelz, one sees clearly how the comic can derail the comedic. Although the work's settings and dissonant ends to its acts might suggest an impending comedic resolution, ultimately these elements prove to be disguised manifestations of the comic. Because the comic eccentricities and dissonances of Der Biberpelz do not find themselves resolved in a comedic resolution, the work takes on an episodic, irregular appearance. Instead of affirming order and

clarity, the work's lack of comedic resolution confronts its audience with an enduring

chaos and forces them to consider that perhaps disorder and uncertainty are the norms in

the audience's reality as it is in the mimesis.

CHAPTER 3

The Muddled Mimesis: Linguistic Representation in <u>Die Kassette</u>

Language in conventional comedy appears to be a perfect system. In comedy's socially normalizing process of presenting the potential and necessary solutions to the human problems that arise between an individual and a society, language appears perfectly transparent, able to represent comedy's characters, the conflicts that arise between them, and the solutions to these conflicts. Carl Sternheim's 1911 comedy <u>Die Kassette</u>, however, problematizes this model. As a radical comedy, <u>Die Kassette</u> accentuates the opacity of language. Instead of characters becoming more transparent and coherent as the comedic plot progresses until a comedic resolution of complete coherence and transparency is reached, the work's two male protagonists in particular seem to disintegrate linguistically. By the closing scenes of the comedy, the language that has defined both these characters grows increasingly ambiguous. In a move embodying the work's attitude towards language, the comedy's final scene verbally and visually separates the audience from the main action. In effect, <u>Die Kassette</u> accentuates the problems and limitations of language within the comedic mimesis, problems and limitations which are overlooked by conventional comedy.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how dialogue in <u>Die Kassette</u> problematizes the clear mimesis necessary for comedy (especially comedy's resolution) to engage in Gottsched's project of normalizing comedy's audience. To provide a sense of the dramatic and conventional comedy tradition, I analyze Gottsched's requirement that comedy exhibit its mimesis through clear, rational language. Then, I discuss Nietzsche's

analysis of rational dialogue as exemplified by Euripides and epitomized by conventional comedy. This background will illuminate how the dialogue in <u>Die Kassette</u> subverts the linguistic representability of the mimesis by condensing character dialogue, by undermining characterization through linguistic repetition, and by preventing rational argumentation in dialogue. Thus I contend <u>Die Kassette</u> successfully disrupts the ability of the comedy to represent, communicate, validate, and reinforce societal norms to its audience.

Through its assumed ability to render the characters and the actions of these characters in the mimesis as intelligible and transparent, dramatic language (i.e., dialogue) is traditionally thought to augment the dramatic process. While language is just one of the channels through with the theatrical experience is transmitted, to the archon of conventional comedy Gottsched, a believable and clear linguistic mimesis was paramount. If characters, their actions, or their behaviors seemed to deviate from the natural world of the audience, then all effort must be made to ground these deviations in the mimesis:

> Kommt ja einmal was Außerordentliches vor; daß etwa ein Alter nicht geizig, ein Junger nicht verschwenderisch; ein Weib nicht weichherzig, ein Mann nicht behertzt ist: So muß der Zuschauer vorbereitet werden, solche ungewöhnliche Charaktere vor wahrscheinlich zu halten: welches durch Erzählung der Umstände geschieht, die dazu was beigetragen haben. (Gottsched 191)

When a character's behavior or constitution threatens to render the mimesis unnatural ("außerordentlich") and therefore ineffective, every effort must be made to account through dialogue ("durch Erzählung") for the "unnatural" deviation from the character's expected disposition. In short, dialogue must justify the circumstances that explain the unnatural character; language must clarify as natural that which might seem unnatural in

the mimesis or comedy will lose its ability to socialize and normalize. According to

Gottsched, nothing must threaten the transparency of the natural mimesis if it is to

impress upon its audience the need to adopt the rational behavior that ensures victory in

the mimesis for a character.

In effect, language in comedy reassures an audience's trust in language.

Conventional comedy's seemingly transparent use of language reassures its audience of

language's power and controllability. Although the language of the mimesis might appear

ineffective and even destructive at times (during comic complications), language also

leads to the ultimate resolution of these lesser linguistic problems. Comedic language

(i.e., the language employed in comedy both to secure and represent the genre's

resolution) has much in common with the language of the closed form of drama[24] as

described by Volker Klotz:

> Das geschlossene Drama glaubt an die sprachliche Faßbarkeit und
> Artikulierbarkeit der Welt. Nichts ereignet sich, das nicht Sprache zu werden
> vermöchte, wovon helles Bewußtsein nicht Besitz ergreifen könnte. Nichts bleibt
> ungesagt. Umgekehrt: was die Sprache mit ihren Mitteln nicht zu fassen vermag,
> existiert nicht: das Dunkle, Unkontrollierbare, Alogische, alles, was sich gegen
> den Zugriff des Regelhaften, Normativen sperrt, dem dieser Dramentyp bis in alle
> Einzelheiten verschworen ist. (72-73)

As in this definition of closed drama, comedic language understands the world of its

mimesis to be perfectly comprehensible and transparent through the medium of language.

In effect, comedic language seems to impress upon its audience that everything can be

perfectly represented and resolved through language.

Despite the temporary conflicts and divergences caused by and portrayed through

language, language ultimately has the power to reconcile in conventional comedy. Such

is the case in Lessing's Minna von Barnhelm: the young noblewoman Minna loves the

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[24] One could argue that conventional comedy is an exemplary form of closed drama.

major Tellheim, who returns from the Seven-Years' war at the beginning of the comedy

and who suffers a slight identity crisis: he is in debt as he waits for his combat pay to

come through, his arm is slightly injured, and he feels because of these facts, he no longer

is worthy of Minna's love. The conflict he feels regarding his self image and his

relationship with Minna is best articulated during a speech in which he expresses doubt

about what his name represents on a linguistic level:

> […] Sie meynen, ich sey der Tellheim, den Sie in Ihrem Vaterlande gekannt haben; der blühende Mann, voller Ansprüche, voller Ruhmbegierde; der seines ganzen Körpers, seiner ganzen Seele mächtig war; vor dem die Schranken der Ehre und des Glückes eröffnet standen; der Ihres Herzens und Ihrer Hand, wann er schon ihrer noch nicht würdig war; […] Ich bin Tellheim, der verabschiedete, der an seiner Ehre gekränkte, der Kriepel, der Bettler. […]. (74-75)

Here Tellheim outlines a temporary distrust of language. His name, he reveals, no longer

signifies what it once did. Through his language and in his language he explains the

disconnect he perceives between the signifier "Tellheim" and what it signifies. By the

end of the comedy, however, Tellheim learns that his honor and financial stability,

despite temporary uncertainty, remain intact. Just as Tellheim's misperceptions about

himself are represented in his language, so too is the resolving of his misperceptions. The

major change in Tellheim comes when a royal letter corrects his misapprehension

regarding his honor and fortune. As Tellheim silently reads the King's letter in Act V, he

summarizes the missive to be read aloud moments later by Minna. "Mein Glück, meine

Ehre," he shouts triumphantly," alles ist wiederhergestellt!" (168). Just as language

characterizes the conflict within Tellheim earlier in the comedy, so too does language

characterize Tellheim's happiness and signify the resolution in the comedic process. If

there are some linguistic issues in the plot—such as Tellheim's sense that his name has

become synonymous with "beggar" or "cripple"—then these matters are solved during

the work's resolution. Minna tries to find the words (but, more importantly, Tellheim is able to read the words) that reframe his perception of himself. This reconciled perception in turn prepares him to enter into his union with Minna.

In Minna von Barnhelm, the comedic resolution is a product of language. Tellheim regains his confidence in language just as an audience might. To use Klotz's vocabulary, "das Dunkle, Unkontrollierbare, Alogische" is rendered light, controllable, and logical in the comedic process through language. As a conventional comedy, Minna von Barnhelm suggests that clarity, reconciliation, and unity can all be reached in language and through language. Within conventional comedy, as in Klotz's model of the closed drama, the transparency and comprehensibility of language is never in doubt. Both the producers and consumers of the genres seldom seem to exhibit misgivings about dialogue's ability to reproduce and represent a complete mimesis.

But this is conventional comedy's illusion. The mode appears to promise that everything abstract and concrete can be fully represented through language. It promises that all aspects of the natural world can be captured, represented, and rendered transparent through language. All doubts about language are momentary and will be resolved in the closing scenes of the conventional comedy.

Radical comedy, however, exposes the limitations of language conventional comedy overlooks. The language in radical comedy can undermine the conventional comedy concept of the stage's mimetic transparency and thereby draws attention to all the troubling aspects of language that closed theater guards against: "das Dunkle, Unkontrollierbare, Alogische" in the linguistic realm. Language in radical comedy problematizes the conventional comedy assumption that a mimesis can be perfectly

represented through language. <u>Die Kassette</u> begins with such a linguistically transparent

mimesis before the work reveals its radical comedy traits by problematizing the linguistic

clarity of the comedy mimesis.

Before the language muddles the mimesis, the work opens with clear, expository

dialogue: Emma, the Krull family maid, outlines much of the background necessary for

the impending comedy. In her half-flirtations, half-gossip with the photographer

Seidenschnur, Emma reveals that the professor Krull is expected back from his

honeymoon on the Rhine with Fanny, the younger sister of Krull's first wife and

therefore aunt to Krull's daughter Lydia. Emma goes on to reveal that Krull's own aunt

Elsbeth is opposed to the union, of poor health, and considering what to do with her

prized possession, a strong box ("eine Kassette") that Krull later discovers is filled with

stocks, bonds, and futures (366). Once Krull learns of the small fortune the strong box

contains, his dialogue and actions challenge the unambiguous picture the work's

exposition presents.

While Sternheim's characteristic use of language has been approached many

times in the past century, critics have yet to explore how Sternheim's language manages

characterization within the comedic genre. Critical discussions by Sebald, Brinkmann,

and Fröhling have focused on Sternheim's language as a cultural critique by analyzing its

ability to satirize the bourgeois and to obscure perception through language's figurative

manifestations (mostly Sternheim's attacks against the metaphor). But my analysis

focuses on Sternheim's language and its function (or dysfunction) within the dramatic

comedy genre. Although Winfried Freund tackles Sternheim's dialogue model in a

chapter entitled "Verschleierung und Demaskierung: zur Funktion von Dialog und

Monolog in den Komödien [Sternheims]," he asserts that Sternheim's objective is to expose the Bürger sociologically. Whereas Freund argues that through Sternheim's dialogue "wird dem Zuschauer die Chance geboten, das Wesen seiner Zeit ungeschminkt und unverstellt zu schauen," I contend that the dialogue in Die Kassette serves to disrupt and thereby expose the assumed perfect linguistic transparency within conventional comedy.

The assumption that linguistic transparency can and should exist in the dramatic mimesis has a long tradition. In Section 11 of Die Geburt der Tragödie, Nietzsche identifies the Greek tragedian Euripides as the blame for the decline of fantastical myth and the rise of linguistic rationality as the defining factor of Greek drama. In Nietzsche's reading, Greek tragedy at its finest employed dithyrambs, musical components and familiar myths to transform its stage and its actors into a transcendent illusion able to astound its audience. According to Nietzsche, because Euripides is unable to comprehend the Dionysian motivations inherent in tragedy, the playwright injects lengthy and overly rational verbal exchanges to rationalize and render transparent the logical motivation of his characters and plot. Nietzsche argues that Euripides started the overtly and overly functional use of language in drama to strengthen the pedagogic effect of the dramatic process upon its audience by presenting the dramatic figures and their reality as realistically and rationally as possible. Indeed, according to Nietzsche, the great tragic works seemed to confuse Euripides with their "gewisse täuschende Bestimmtheit und zugleich [...] rätselhafte Tiefe, ja Unendlichkeit des Hintergrundes"(108).

Euripides' efforts aimed ultimately to clarify the mimesis to the audience through language. To Euripides, an uncertain and uneasy spectator, tragedy lacked a foundation

of rationality precisely on the level of language, which had the ability to explain all that

Euripides felt drama lacked:

> Und wie zweifelhaft blieb ihm die Lösung der ethischen Probleme! Wie fragwürdig die Behandlung der Mythen! Wie ungleichmäßig die Verteilung von Glück und Unglück! Selbst in der Sprache der älteren Tragödie war ihm vieles anstößig, mindestens rätselhaft; besonders fand er zu viel Pomp für einfache Verhältnisse, zu viel Tropen und Ungeheuerlichkeiten für die Schlichtheit der Charaktere. So saß er, unruhig grübelnd, im Theater, und er, der Zuschauer, gestand sich, daß er seine großen Vorgänger nicht verstehe. (108)

Many aspects of the mimesis remained unclear for Euripides primarily because they

lacked a clear rationality: the resolution of ethical issues, the dispensing of fortune and

misfortune, and even the "Sprache der älteren Tragödie" remained "zweifelhaft,"

"anstößig," and "rätselhaft." In Nietzsche's imagination, these perceived shortcomings of

drama confounded Euripides as well as Socrates, the other significant spectator who did

not understand tragedy. As Nietzsche observes, within the Socratic system, to be

beautiful everything must be conscious and intelligible—values that are absent in aspects

of the Dionysian: music, myth and fantasy. As Euripides began to replace music with

dialogue, myth with naturalism, and fantasy with rationality, the mimesis began to exhibit

the rational and intelligible traits of the Socratic values.

Although other dramatic elements (e.g., setting, plot, etc.) create a sense of

intelligibility, clear dialogue grew to define Euripidean tragedy[25] and eventually

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[25] "In the dialogue of Euripides, again, we have the same rhetorical mannerism, reminding us too much of the forensic and political oratory then dominant at Athens. Instances are seen in the formal controversies which are debated between Peleus and Menelaus in the Andromache, between Helen and Hecuba in the Troades, between Agamemnon and Menelaus in the Iphigenia in Aulis. For this reason Quintilian advised young orators to read Euripides, seeing that his language was very like the oratorical style and for attack and rejoinder he might be matched with any of those who had distinguished themselves as public speakers, on which ground, indeed, he had been blamed by those who preferred, for sublimity, the grave and truly tragic tone of Sophocles. Even in its external form the dialogue of Euripides reflects the character of his age. His language is an exact reproduction of the style of conversation used by the Athenians of the time, with all its merits and defects, its polished sparkle and transparent lucidity, its easy, gossiping diffuseness, its tinge of ironical raillery. His lyrics, again, are faithfully modeled on the favorite dithyrambs of the

conventional comedy. Nietzsche argues Euripides' privileging of language contributed to

the distinct unification of audience and stage which in turn contributed to the rise of New

Comedy[26], a manifestation of conventional comedy:

> Im wesentlichen sah und hörte jetzt der Zuschauer seinen Doppelgänger auf
> der euripideischen Bühne und freute sich, daß jener so gut zu reden verstehe. Bei
> dieser Freude blieb es aber nicht: man lernte selbst bei Euripides sprechen, und
> dessen rühmt er sich selbst im Wettkampfe mit Äschylus: wie durch ihn jetzt das
> Volk kunstmäßig und mit den schlausten Sophistikationen zu beobachten, zu
> verhandeln und Folgerungen zu ziehen gelernt haben. Durch diesen Umschwung
> der öffentlichen Sprache hat er überhaupt die neuere Komödie möglich gemacht.
> (103-104)

Nietzsche here argues that this shift in dialogue united the spheres of the spectator and

stage with "die neuere Komödie" as the culmination of this unity. Not only could the

spectator watch and hear what he perceived to be his double on stage, but from the stage

the spectator learned "selbst bei Euripides sprechen"; that is, how to express himself

through the linguistic structures and devices heard on stage. In Nietzsche's interpretation,

the stage soon became a linguistic mirror for the audience, but one that taught with its

reflection. Audiences admired the reflection so much that they soon learned to value to

how one could "künstmäßig...[die] schlausten Sophistikationen [...]beobachten, [...]

verhandeln und Folgerungen [...] ziehen"—all traits one would associate with logical

rhetoric and, as Nietzsche mentions, sophistry.

In observing the impact of Euripidean dialogue, one sees how this new

prominence of language in drama lays the groundwork for New Comedy, or as Nietzsche

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period. The want of true emotion is hidden by a showy and wordy expression of feelings, which is seen
particularly in the long laments of his much suffering heroes". (The Drama: Its History, Literature and
Influence on Civilization, vol. 1. ed. Alfred Bates. London: Historical Publishing Company, 1906. pp. 183-
185.)

[26] By "New Comedy," Nietzsche means the plot-driven form of comedy popularized by the works of
Menander and practiced by the likes of Moliere and Shakespeare. Most often, the New Comedy plot
features two lovers whose union is complicated by the parents of the young protagonists.

calls it the "schachspielartige Gattung des Schauspiels, die neuere Komödie, mit ihrem fortwährenden Triumphe der Schlauheit und Verschlagenheit" (104). As soon as tragedy's audience became practiced "in der euripideischen Tonart," they witnessed not the mythical transfiguration of the stage, but the sober, measured movements of characters in order to reach an intelligible resolution from which the audience should learn. This process of learning, this dynamic of instruction requires a union between the reality of the audience and the mimesis.

Nietzsche's chess metaphor also reinforces this sense of the conventional comedy genre as instructive and normative. Like a game of chess, New Comedy communicates, validates, and reinforces the laws of a system. Comedy contains figures that find themselves in a process of conflict or besieged with problems. The figures move to resolve these conflicts and problems, yet their movements are restricted by unseen yet understood laws and conventions. Each game ends when one side outmaneuvers the other through clever or unique gambits. A loss is a consequence of one's poor logic. From this loss, it is clear that such losing behavior (i.e., such poor logic) should be avoided. Each iteration of the chess game provides an opportunity for new winning strategies to be learned within the scope of the governing rules. But these new games never overtly challenge the validity of the game's system; new games only reinforce the system. It is in this manner that conventional comedy normalizes its audience by validating its social system.

Nietzsche presents his reader here with a visual representation of the events that are marked verbally within the comedic mimesis. While the conflict can assume a physical form on stage, often such conflict is presented verbally as characters,

representing two different viewpoints, argue at times comically and/or effectively.

Furthermore, language represents not only the conflicts in Nietzsche's chess metaphor,

but the entire chess game itself. It is through language that characters might identify

themselves as certain pieces on the chess board, identify the moves they are making and

why, otherwise they risk being seen as unnatural a la Gottsched's system. Characters will

also use language to identify the end of the chess game, as Tellheim does when he

exclaims "alles ist wiederhergestellt!" (Lessing 168). In short, the language in

conventional comedy is to be so clear that it helps its audience visualize its plot and

characters as if they were a game of chess. <u>Die Kassette</u>, however, challenges this

metaphor by problematizing this visualization.

Observing first the language that <u>Die Kassette</u> employs, one sees that its truncated

structure muddles the moves of rationality, clarity, and intelligibility that mark Nietzche's

chess metaphor. Sternheim critic Burghard Dedner argues forcefully that Sternheim's

avoidance of linguistic clarity can best be seen in most lines in <u>Die Kassette</u>, but more

clearly in the following, delivered by Krull's Aunt Elsbeth: "Du bist nicht bei Trost. Hat

deine Versicherung, Seidenschnur verzichtet, in solchem Zustand abgegeben, überhaupt

wert?"(421). Dedner unpacks this dense sentence by claiming:

> A normal speaker might say: "Hat deine Versicherung, *dass* Seidenschnur
> verzichtet, überhaupt einen Wert, *wenn* du sie in einem solchen Zustand abgibst?
> [...] Sternheim's heroes, a critic might conclude, imitate and exaggerate linguistic
> tendencies characteristic of bureaucratic & legal exposes, tendencies which may
> be acceptable on paper but which are contrary to the language of the theater. (73)

The "language of the theater" Dedner mentions should be understood as dialogue whose

objective is to elucidate a character's (in this instance, Elsbeth's) motivation or attitude to

a dialogue partner (Krull), which in effect represents the comedy's mimesis to audience.

Yet, without conjunctions such dense language functions more to muddle the mimesis by ensuring that the audience comprehends only a sense of the dialogue instead of the full force of the dialogue. As Dedner concludes, such linguistic constructions essentially "mak[e] it difficult furthermore to judge the logical coherence of these statements" (73). The style of the dialogue creates an uncertainty for the audience because its dense form prevents clear understanding. Before the audience can insert the missing conjunctions, decode the statement's meaning, and then judge the bearing the statement has on characterization or plot, the next line of dialogue comes only to restart this process of understanding. The work's language does not allow the time required to take in a complete picture of its characters and by extension the work's plot. Ultimately, through such dialogue, audiences gain a rough outline of character stripped not only of all ornamentation but of all flesh or meat to provide a full sense of character. Instead, one receives the minimum required for a sense of character integrity. While it is clear that Krull is a professor and Seidenschnur a photographer, these characteristics are only broadly outlined; their dialogues do not explore all the facets of these characterizations.

Further undermining the clarity of the mimesis, the repetitive language of the male protagonists in <u>Die Kassette</u> problematizes the representation of the character. Certain linguisitic repetitions seem to anchor characters initially, but these repetitions later reveal themselves to be verbal masks, which problematize characterization. Each time a mask is dropped, it is unclear if a consistent character is revealed or if a new verbal mask appears. For example, Krull's use of the nickname "Süße Puppe" appears to communicate his affection towards his new wife Fanny, yet when repeated, the pet name demonstrates the distance instead of the closeness between the two figures. When he

appears in Act I, Krull's language makes him seem to be a man devoted to his new, younger wife—a fact most enthusiastically indicated by his frequent exclamations of his wife Fanny's nickname "Puppe":

> KRULL. Sieht Fanny nicht hinreißend aus, junges Moosröschen?
> *Auf Fanny zu*:
> Meine Puppe! (369)

Although Krull uses the pet name "Süße Puppe" three more times during his first appearance on stage apparently to communicate his affection for his new wife, "Süße Puppe" slowly loses its previous sense of unified meaning over each successive uttering. Not only does one note the abandoning of the line break between the nickname and the rest of the dialogue, the stage direction "zu Fanny" also falls away:

> KRULL. *Liest die Kuchenaufschrift:* Friede und Segen den Liebenden. Wie
>   feinsinnig!
>   *Zu Fanny:*
>   Süße Puppe!
>   […]
> KRULL. *Zu Lydia*: Und was sagst du zu deinem neuen Mütterchen? Ist es
>   nicht schön, von Glorie umgossen? Süße Puppe!   (370)

When Krull utters the nickname in subsequent scenes, it marks a change in him, thereby challenging his previous characterization. During escalating sexual contact between the professor and his new bride in Act I, v, Krull again uses the pet name, yet avoids the physical expression of the feelings her nickname seems to represent. With his hand down his wife's shirt to retrieve a lost necklace, the scene is set for Krull to express the feelings he ostensibly indicates when he exclaims "Süße Puppe," and yet within this situation his mind is clearly on other matters:

> FANNY. Kannst du hinlangen?
> KRULL *fühlt*. Ich habe es! *Er bringt es herauf*. Süße Frau, süße Puppe!
> FANNY. Heinrich!
> KRULL. Ist Welt, Welt schön! Versinken…

> *Sie liegen sich in Armen.*
> KRULL *nach einem Augenblick*: Was mag sie besitzen?
> FANNY. Fünzig-, sechzigtausend mindestens.
> KRULL. Sechzigtausend dachte ich auch. *Er küßt sie.* Süße Puppe! (375)

Clearly, this instance of "Süße Puppe" designates a shift in Krull's character. The professor appears more infatuated with his aunt's finances than with his new wife. He kisses Fanny not out of passionate affection, but because he is pleased that she corroborates his own estimate of Elsbeth's fortune. Later in Act II, vi, while counting the contents of the strongbox, his wife's nickname again appears. But this time the term is so completely stripped of emotion that it functions as a mere place marker:

> ELSBETH. Fanny ist blendend schön! Es scheint nicht nur so?
> KRULL. Fünfundsiebzig. Blendend. Verblüffend. Süße Puppe. (392)

On this occasion, the nickname is bereft of any emotional connection it appeared to have in Act I. Krull here delivers the nickname just as casually and absentmindedly he counts numbers and repeats previous descriptors for Fanny. Although Krull employs the vocabulary of affection, it lacks its former emotional and communicative charge in order to demonstrate that its previous warmth was an empty gesture. In this instance, the term "Süße Puppe" demonstrates how little Krull actually cares for his wife, thereby revealing the term to be a verbal mask behind which Krull hides. If Krull's love for money can easily supplant his perceived love for his wife, then his "Süße Puppe" only served to obscure this fact.

The larger question remains: if Krull's love for money can supplant his love for Fanny, then can something else supplant his perceived love of money? Within the mimesis, he seemed to profess his affection for Fanny so clearly and directly. Is there therefore any indication that something else cannot replace his obsession with money?

With this line of questioning I suggest that <u>Die Kassette</u>'s mimesis provides an unstable sense of character integrity. It becomes difficult to ascertain if characters are revealing their true nature and motivations or if their language reflects only a passing façade, as seen in Krull's "Süße Puppe."

In a similar fashion to Krull, Seidenschnur's repetitive language first exaggeratedly communicates and then undermines his integrity as a character. The artistic directions Seidenschnur gives to Lydia during her portrait sitting are so similar to statements he makes to Fanny that both instances detract from the reality of Seidenschnur as an artist. Initially, with Lydia in Act II, ix, Seidenschnur projects an artistic and creative façade by peppering his few helpful instructions ("Darf ich bitten, gegen den Schreibtisch Stellung zu nehmen. Den Rücken leicht angelehnt") with provocative declarations meant to underscore his intensity: "Der Apparat wird gierig, seine Linse aufreissen, Sie zu schlingen. [...]Mehr expressionistisch.[…]Ach Fräulein Lydia! Der Künstler, der wie unsereins vom Modell abhängt.[...] Was wäre Phidias, hätten ihm die schönsten Helleninnen nicht den herrlichen Leib ohne Scham geboten[...] (398-399). On the surface, the combination of these statements suggests a talented, creative soul, but Seidenschnur's attempt to present himself as an artistic portrait photographer becomes undermined when he recites more or less this same script to his other subject, Fanny, in Act III, iii: "Meine Linse brennt, Sie zu verschlingen […] expressonanter. Wir armen Künstler, die wir in hohem Mass vom Modell abhängig sind! Was wäre Phidias..." (414). While some statements are echoed directly ("Phidias"), Seidenschnur indirectly echoes others, such as "Schlingen/verschlingen," "mehr expressionistisch/expressonanter," and "abhängt/ abhängig sind." Admittedly not verbatim repetitions, his statements to Fanny

nevertheless expose his previous statements as rehearsed not spontaneous, stale not fresh, artificial not organic. Language that once seemed to communicate Seidenschnur's artistic intensity sounds clichéd when repeated.

Just as Krull's "Süße Puppe" demonstrates, Seidenschnur's language consists of a series of repetitions that erodes the sense of him as a coherent, unified character, let alone as an artistically gifted character. That is to say, while the repetition of specific linguistic constructions can accumulate to concretize a character's representation, repetition in Die Kassette undermines the representation of a character. Initially, each male character's language appears to define them as well as their connection to other characters: Krull appears to love his new wife completely and Seidenschnur appears to be a photographer whose bourgeois portraits might exhibit the dynamism and artistry his language at times appears to have. Yet, despite its expected ability to solidify characterization for the audience, verbal repetition creates a dissonance of character that weakens the boldness and clarity of the character their language appears to define initially. This ultimately presents an uncertain depiction of the work's characters.

Along with truncated syntax and diminishing repetitions, ineffectual argumentation also contributes to the ambiguity of the characters in the mimesis. Failed arguments demonstrate both the illusion of language as a productive and communicative force as well as the intentional weakness of Sternheim's characters. Shortly after Krull's first appearance, an argument between the overly romantic Krull and the financially minded Elsbeth breaks out, but this exchange only carries the façade of rational argumentation:

> ELSBETH. Mit diesen Mätzchen, Lurley, Warporzheimer muss die Reise
> Geld verschlungen haben.

KRULL. Bei Gott! Sollte man sich diesen einmaligen Genuß durch
sauertöpfische Rechnerei vergällen? Ich habe sogar bei unseren Freunden
Susmichel in Andernath ein Darlehen von zweihundert Mark aufnehmen
müssen.
ELSBETH. Peinlich. […]
[…] Dein Konto schloß Ultimo März mit einem Saldo von
zweihundertsechsundsiebzig Mark zugunsten der Bank.
KRULL. Teufel, ist das möglich?
[…] Das hieße mit vierhundertsechsundsiebzig Mark in der Tinte sitzen.
(371-72)

While one can assume the ideological positions of Krull and Elsbeth throughout this

exchange, no standpoint is clearly substantiated, no attitude philosophically argued, yet

there is a sense of argumentation; two attitudes conflict with each other until one side

wins out. However, this victory comes not through philosophical debate, but rather

through sudden yielding. Although her attitude of financial responsibility is clear, at no

point does Elsbeth justify her miserly perspective. Krull eventually relents and adopts

her financial point of view. The aunt never posits why such spending habits should

concern her, Krull, or anyone else. Essentially one understands that she detests Krull's

attitude but one never why, which frustrates attempts to evaluate the validity of her

dissent. Despite Elsbeth's lack of justification, one can imagine the grounding of this

discussion clearly. As a counterpoint to frame the discussion in more general terms, Krull

could argue "diese[r] einmalig[e] Genuß" or any "Genuß" is worth momentary debt,

thereby projecting his character as an epicurean. But he abandons this attitude too quickly

to declare that he embodies any distinct perspective. In effect, one receives the same end

result as an argument (i.e., a change in attitude or perspective), but with none of the

augmented characterization possible in such a process.

This form of non-argumentation is emphasized directly during an exchange

between Krull and the newly self-anointed painter Seidenschnur in Act V, where instead

of finding an opponent for an open debate on the societal merits of artists, Seidenschnur

comes up against an opaquely argumentative Krull, whose technique clearly confuses his

listeners, both on stage and in the audience:

> SEIDENSCHNUR. Ich habe die Sklaverei satt—will Maler werden.
> KRULL. Ausgezeichnet. […]
> […]
> SEIDENSCHNUR. […] Also?
> KRULL. Heftiger Widerspruch meinerseits.
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Was?
> KRULL. *Amüsiert*. Das versteht sich. Nicht nur aus Gründen, die Sie
>   verstehen, weil ich Vater bin und Ihr Geschäft meine Tochter nährt…
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Herr, das ist?
> KRULL. Sie sind wundervoll. Seien Sie ehrlich; nicht einmal aus Ihrer
>   Wurmperspektive erwarten Sie Zustimmung.
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Nicht unbedingt. Ihre Art aber…
> KRULL. *Lachend* Ablehnung ist Ablehnung. (451)

Here Krull demonstrates the disruptive linguistic opacity in <u>Die Kassette</u>: though he

could provide logical grounds to support his attitude ("Nicht nur aus Gründen, die Sie

verstehen[…]") he does not see the need to do so as the reasons seem overly obvious to

him. In Krull's mind, all the argument requires of him is that he communicate his

disapprobation, regardless of his reasoning, or as Krull phrases it—"Ablehnung ist

Ablehnung." In fact, Krull is so convinced that he need only communicate and not justify

his attitude that as soon as he has done so, Krull promptly grabs his coat and leaves the

scene:

> SEIDENSCHNUR. Ich pfeife darauf.
> KRULL. *Zieht den Paletot an, setzt den Hut auf.*
> SEIDENSCHNUR. *Hart an ihn heran:* Hören Sie, ich pfeife auf Ihre
>   Meinung, verstehen Sie?
> KRULL. Ja. Nur so ist Entwicklung möglich. Ich bin auf Weiteres gespannt.
>   Guten Abend. *Er geht.* (451)

When the issue is raised again a few scenes later and Seidenschnur again hopes for

progress in the discussion, Krull leaves even more curtly than before:

> SEIDENSCHNUR. Kurz, wir beginnen unsere Auseinandersetzungen, wo wir
> sie abbrachen.
> KRULL. Sie pfeifen auf meine Meinung?
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Unbedingt.
> KRULL. Famos. Schluß. Gute Nacht. (456)

Although he claims "nur so ist Entwicklung möglich," Krull of course evades

"Entwicklung" by leaving the argument both in a literal and figurative sense.

Krull's departure here functions as a physical representation of his behavior during

arguments. He is and has been unwilling (or unable) to engage in verbal conflict even

when directly incited to do so. Previously, debates (e.g.,Elsbeth's reminding Krull of his

debt) were approached and resolved obliquely with only an intimation of true

argumentation. If conflicts produced any development or clarification of plot or

character, it was done with a minimal amount of sophistry. With this interaction and

Krull's others in Act V, though, one observes the complete verbal and physical avoidance

of argument.

By avoiding verbal argumentation, Die Kassette avoids plot development and

more importantly the communication of character. In his article "Dialogführung und

Dialog im expressionistischen Drama," Walter Sokel identifies the following four types

of traditional dramatic dialogue:

> A. Charakterisierung—Aussagen, die zur Erhellung eines Charakters, seiner
> Vergangenheit, Beschaffenheit und Motivierung beiträgen.
> B. Situations-oder Milieuschilderung
> C. Gefühls-und Gesinnungsaussagen der Figuren, womit sie ihre Gefühle und
> Meinungen ausdrücken; dazu gehören auch verallgemeinernde
> Aussagen—loci communes oder Sentenzen.
> D. Rhetorik. Im rhetorischen Dialog versuchen die Sprecher andere Figuren,
> und gelegentlich auch die Zuschauer, zu bestimmten Gesinnungen
> und/oder Handlungen zu überreden. (59)

Sokel discusses these types in terms of their ability to either advance or embroider a drama's plot. Inherent in each dialogue type, I contend, is the ability to represent the characters, actions, and events of the mimesis for its audience by elucidating the motivations, contours and attitudes through language. Even though the "Situations- oder Milieuschilderung" type apparently offers no informing of character, this type serves to illuminate how characters perceive what occurs around them so that the audience might have a better sense of the characters' sense of the mimesis. In terms of Sokel's list, argumentation has the ability to operate under at least three if not all dialogue types: a verbal conflict potentially illuminates the biography, constitution or motivation of the characters involved ("Charakterisierung"). Verbal conflict might suggest the ethos by which a character operates ("Gefühls- und Gesinnungsaussagen") especially if one character attempts to convince others of the validity of his or her attitude ("Rhetorik"). Depending upon how the conflict is portrayed and what effect it has on the environment (or that the environment has an effect on it), the verbal conflict might satisfy the "Situations- oder Milieuschilderung" dialogue type. However verbal conflict may be categorized, it is clear that traditional verbal conflict contributes to clearer characterization for the audience. Repeatedly, however, Die Kassette frustrates this tradition.

Nowhere is argumentation to reveal characterizations more necessary and nowhere is it more lacking than in the final act of the comedy when the dramatic roles have essentially shuffled with Krull as the new Elsbeth and Seidenschnur as the new Krull. When they arrive back from their honeymoon in Act V, Seidenschnur and Lydia find themselves not only in the same position as Krull and Fanny at the beginning of the

comedy, but Seidenschnur unknowingly echoes Krull's enthusiasm while Krull adopts

Elsbeth's attitude and language[27], which further contributes to a confusion of character.

When characters mutate in this manner, clear discussion is necessary to anchor and

rationalize each character's metamorphosis, yet none is forthcoming. In this final act,

Krull is in the position to explain the motivations behind the changes in his character and

to rail against hypocrisy or poor logic, but nothing like that occurs. Indeed, without a

clear justification of the transformations of character, the characters in the mimesis of Die

Kassette appear to be "alles mit allem austauschbar," as Helmut Arntzen claims (303). In

other words, the character transformations appear so transitory, uncertain, and lacking

foundation that the characters seem interchangeable.

If characters appear undifferentiated and interchangeable, then this subverts their

potential within the conventional comedy mode, where they, their actions, and exercises

of rationality are meant to serve as models of logic. Unclear characterizations then

frustrate conventional comedy's normalizing effect. Without distinction of character,

though, it becomes problematic to chart which character embodies or violates which

norm. Consequently, it becomes difficult to gauge whether a character represents a more

rational position that those who oppose him. When the comedic resolution eventually

arrives, therefore, it becomes near impossible to judge whether the most rational

character and his behavior have succeeded. Learning from the mimesis, then, is frustrated

since characters and the mimesis in which they exist are opaque. If characters are

interchangeable in this opaque mimesis, then Gottsched's objective of entertaining and

educating comedy's audience cannot be achieved. Only after viewing a transparent,

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[27] Compare Elsbeth's admonition "Mit diesen Mätzchen, Lurley, Warporzheimer muß die Reise Geld
verschlungen haben" with Krull's "Mit solchen Sachen, Chianti Kalomel muß die Reise gehöriges Geld
verschlungen haben" (371;446).

natural, and ultimately rational mimesis can an audience learn, since according to

Gottsched and Nietzsche's view of Euripides: "durch [Euripides] […] [hat] das Volk

kunstmäßig und mit den schlausten Sophistikationen zu beobachten, zu verhandeln und

Folgerungen zu ziehen gelernt […]" (103-104). The surfeit of interchangeable characters

practicing unclear "Sophistikationen" frustrates this learning process.

The opacity of language in the comedy's final scene exemplifies the limitations of

language as the communicative dialogue model is subverted, thereby frustrating attempts

to draw rational conclusions from Seidenschnur's conversion to Krull's avaricious

attitude. Avoiding what could easily become a debate between the value of subsisting as

an artist or enjoying the dividends of capitalism, Krull acknowledges the failure of

language to communicate the difference between these two lifestyles:

> SEIDENSCHNUR. Doch ein gewaltiger Unterschied zwischen saurem
> Erwerb und Kapitalrenten.
> KRULL. Da reicht kein Wort, Freund. (462)

Here, Krull does not even attempt to verbalize and thereby offer his perspective on the

gap separating these two attitudes for he seems to know a better way of convincing his

scene partner: Krull places the strongbox, containing stocks and timber futures, in front

of Seidenschnur and lets the visual argue for him:

> KRULL. Schließen Sie auf!
> SEIDENSCHNUR *öffnet die Kassette*. Gott...lieber Schwiegervater, Sie
> wollen...das in der Tat...
> KRULL. Na, Junge?
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Ja, ja...mein Gott...ja...
> KRULL. Na? Tränen im Aug!
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Meine armselige Jugend...Vaters
> Gram...Gerichtsvollzieher...was Mutter duldete.
> KRULL. He Jungchen...he!
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Wie der Geist sich weitet, Welt Form bekommt.
> KRULL. He! He! He!
> SEIDENSCHNUR. Zum Arme breiten, in die Luft zu bellen.

> KRULL. He?!
> SEIDENSCHNUR *halb weinend.* Recht hast du. Tausendmal recht!
> Tausendmal. Basta! *Krull nimmt ihm die Kassette ab und geht auf sein*
> *Schlafzimmer zu.* (463)

This is a scene of social and emotional conversion, a conversion ultimately marked by language and yet not a conversion performed through language. That is, Seidenschnur's elliptical language exhibits a character deeply affected and consequently in flux, yet his language does not outline the stages of the change. Seidenschnur's language indicates that Krull has won over the artist through visual, not verbal means. This distinction— through visual instead of verbal means—in effect locks out the audience, who see only that Seidenschnur is converted but cannot see, as Seidenschnur does, that which leads to his conversion. With a verbal mechanism, the audience can hear the convert speak his reasoning for the change, so the audience can judge for themselves the efficacy of the argumentation as well as how rational, logical, and intelligible this reasoning is (this would be the rationally linguistic model endorsed by Gottsched or by Euripides, according to Nietzsche). By contrast, though, the audience only sees Seidenschnur convert and has only a sense of what precipitates the conversion from his fragmented speech. Clearly, peering into the strongbox bears a specific, symbolic meaning within the mimesis. But without language to explicate the effect the strong box obviously has on Seidenschnur, the audience is essentially distanced.

Instead of verbal explanations for this change in the photographer, he provides only verbal ambiguities. One observes, for example, the transformation from the formal "Sie" to the familiar "du," which seemingly demonstrates a new intimacy between Krull and Seidenschnur. Yet the stage directions do not indicate to whom Seidenschnur directs the lines, so the "du" might indicate an apostrophic address to the strong box itself. Most

importantly, in a final attempt to underscore the limitations of language in the comedy, this scene features a conversion and a concession to Krull's financial attitude with the most incomplete and truncated language yet in the work. Seidenschnur's quick biography, with so many ellipses and so few verbs and conjunctions, hardly reveals the emotions Seidenschnur is experiencing. Instead, his language indicates that there are deeper motivations for his conversion and that they will only be intimated. Indeed, what happens to the artist's painful memories when faced with the fortune of the strongbox? Does the photographer think access to the financial papers redeems his parents's implied hardship? Should the audience, therefore, consider that a rational motivation? Does this desire for redemption shape his ethos as well as inform his romantic motivations? One can only assume the answers to these questions as Seidenschnur's broken dialogue provides only questionable glimpses into his character.

This last scene again underscores how verbal repetition problematizes linguistic communication in the mimesis. With no stage direction, Krull's constant refrain of "he" obfuscates more than it indicates. At times it resembles an exclamation of triumph, of pride, of haughty exuberance, until finally it becomes an unsure interrogative. Just before Seidenschnur's confessed conversion, Krull's confident refrain of "he" grows uncertain. In that moment when Seidenschnur appears most connected with his father-in-law, there is a communicative disconnect:

> SEIDENSCHNUR. Zum Arme breiten, in die Luft zu bellen.
> KRULL. He?!
> SEIDENSCHNUR *halb weinend.* Recht hast du. Tausendmal recht!
>   Tausendmal. (463)

Despite this sense of epiphany for Seidenschnur, this apparent moment of union between Seidenschnur and Krull is simultaneously a moment of separation between the two

characters. Krull, the instigator of Seidenschnur's conversion, reveals he does not

comprehend what Seidenschnur means at the precise moment Seidenschnur apparently

understands and yields completely. If Krull cannot understand Seidenschnur in this

moment when he is most connected to his son-in-law, then it seems unlikely an audience

could. Thus, the audience remains locked out from the first stage of Seidenschnur's

conversion.

To underscore this impression of being "locked out" (which the language in the

comedy has suggested throughout the work), the final scene of Die Kassette features an

actual "locking out" of the audience. The last few images of the comedy in Act V, v—

Krull taking Seidenschnur into a back room, Fanny opening and closing her door,

Seidenschnur emerging from Krull's room as if in some trance—encapsulates the overall

effect of Die Kassette: the dramatic mimesis is ambiguous and at times

incomprehensible; language often cannot render transparent all the aspects of the

mimesis. The imagery and language of the last scene underscores the mimesis as a

distant, perplexing image, whose transparency is problematic.

The ultimate images of the work accentuate the sense of limited perspective; only

this time, the opacity is emphasized visually, instead of linguistically:

> [Seidenschnur] *geht hinter Krull ins Schlafzimmer ein. Die Tür schließt sich hinter beiden. Man hört aus einer Rede Krulls heraus folgende Worte:* Durch Aufforstung...Ameliorisation...Amortisierung...Welthandel! *Währenddessen öffnet Fanny ihre Tür und schließt sie wieder, öffnet und schließt wieder. Endlich kommt Seidenschnur. In der Tür nimmt er mit tiefer Verbeugung Krulls herausgereichte Hand.* (464)

This series of actions intentionally removes the events on stage from the audience. Krull

takes Seidenschnur from the main arena of action, the living room, and escorts the

younger man into Krull's bedroom, the site of the professor's own union with the

strongbox. The audience is meant to discern from an entire speech by Krull only the least informative buzzwords of capitalism. There is no way to know how these buzzwords are being used, what Krull is saying about them, and most importantly how Seidenschnur reacts to them (although one can guess since the convert reappears and "*verläßt mit vagen Gebärden wie im Traum das Zimmer*")(465). Whatever Krull says to Seidenschnur, it wins the artist over so completely that he appears under a spell and the audience is barred from it all. To accentuate the audience's distance from the conversion further, Fanny opens her door repeatedly as Krull converts Seidenschnur in the other room. Although she ostensibly appears to display her impatience with her tardy paramour Seidenschnur, Fanny's intermittent appearances remind the audience of its separation from the main characters and main action.

But one ultimately wonders why it is necessary to distance the audience from the verbal channel of discourse and leave them with only an incomplete portrayal of the visual. While the mimesis suggests Seidenschnur's conversion, it provides little insight into the techniques of conversion, which problematizes conventional comedy's normalizing effects. If anything, the audience must intuit Krull and Seidenschnur's thinking as the audience is separated, visually and verbally, from the artist's true, complete conversion. With no sense of Krull's methods or reasoning, the audience can draw no clear conclusion and make no judgments against Seidenschnur, which derails Gottsched's project of comedy as a tool of inculcation. The audience is aware of Seidenschnur's baptism as a new capitalist, but without rational grounds for the metamorphosis, it becomes difficult to judge this new form of his character. Indeed, all the audience knows is that Krull and Seidenschnur change when exposed to the strong

box—the effect it has on them both is clear—yet, it remains uncertain whether this change in character is to be viewed as positive or negative. The work's conclusion is, thus, inconclusive.

If this last scene of <u>Die Kassette</u> were the endgame of the chess game (as Nietzsche understood the New Comedy—and, by extension, the conventional comedy genre—to be), then Krull's gambits remain obscured both linguistically and visually. To extend Nietzsche's metaphor, the moves made by the characters in the final scene are so obscured, it is as if the chessboard is shrouded in darkness. Just as the darkness lifts, a victor is crowned, but there is no way to deduce precisely how the game ends. Again, there is a sense of process, but the specifics of the process are muddled.   Within <u>Die Kassette</u>, language muddles the specifics. The work provides little sense of the motivation of migrations in character. While linguistic repetition traditionally emphasizes character traits, Krull quickly abandons his romantic feelings just as Seidenschnur verbally projects himself as an artist. In short, the language in the mimesis serves to undermine the transparency, consistency, and integrity of the mimesis. As linguistic masks are put on and taken off quite frequently, an audience can never be certain if it is viewing the true nature of the characters. Indeed, the promise of a character's "true nature" is in question. With no clear sense of character in the mimesis, the normalizing effects of the conventional comedy are likewise in question. If one cannot judge the rationality of a character and his attitudes, then an audience cannot understand the character's more rational perspective, which is meant to validate, legitimize, and communicate the supposed rationality supporting social norms. Because language problematizes firm characterization in <u>Die Kassette</u>, the radical comedy successfully

disrupts the positive and postivistic linguistic model of the conventional comedy. Truncated language, diminishing repetition, and the avoidance of verbal conflict all contribute to a sense of language as limited, opaque, and imperfect. By alienating its audience from its characters through language, <u>Die Kassette</u> refocuses its audience's attention on the limitations of language. The work's use of language ultimately demonstrates how language constructs the mimesis and can easily obfuscate it.

In this manner, the radical comedy <u>Die Kassette</u> challenges the conventional comedy assumptions about language. While conventional comedy seems to suggest that through language, everything can be articulated, comprehended, and therefore perfectly communicated; radical comedy understands that this assumption is flawed. Through its problematic and problematizing use of language, radical comedy exposes the conventional comedy audience to "das Dunkle, Unkontrollierbare, Alogische" (Klotz 73). Whereas conventional comedy assures its audience that nothing stands outside of language and rationality, radical comedy understands that there is so much language cannot capture. What is more, radical comedy understands that the normative and regulative effects conventional comedy is thought to have on its audience are illusory. If the transparency of language is in doubt, then the transparency of the resolution is also in doubt. And if the resolution cannot clearly impart the normalizing lessons of the plot, then conventional comedy and its normalizing and reassuring effects are lost.

CHAPTER 4

The Office: The Collision of the Mimesis, the Apparatus, and the Audience

It might appear unorthodox to discuss a contemporary, British situation comedy in a dissertation otherwise focused on German dramatic comedies, but there is sense to the shift. Within the BBC2 2001-2003 series The Office—a situation comedy centered on the workplace interactions of employees of a paper company—one finds a mimesis plagued with disorder that also ends with a sense of order; the end of the 14 episode series provides a sense of closure to the stalled plots of the preceding episodes. Yet, more importantly, the final episode of The Office also presents the end of a specific camera technique that lead to much disruption in the mimesis. This technique—the rhetoric mode of camera address—allows the characters within the mimesis to acknowledge the presence of the means of mediation, the apparatus work[28]. Representing a radical departure from the cinematic mode of address that marks the traditional situation comedy, the acknowledging of the filming apparatus accentuates and problematizes the relationship of the situation comedy's audience to the situation comedy's mimesis. The series' resolution, the return from the rhetoric mode to the cinematic mode, however, cannot erase the audience's awareness of their effect on and apparent interaction with the mimesis.

In this chapter, I analyze the relationship between the mimesis of television's situation comedy and its filming apparatus. I argue that the cinematic technique of the

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[28] By "apparatus work," I mean Jean-Louis Baudry's sense of the cinematic process that transforms instants of time or slices of "reality" into readable inscriptions (Baudry 348).

conventional situation comedy I Love Lucy imbues its audience with a sense of remote

omniscience, while the technique of The Office precipitates the collision between the

apparatus, the mimesis of the comedy, and its audience. A closer investigation of the

problematic interaction between the apparatus and the boss character in The Office,

David Brent, demonstrates how disruptive the apparatus—and, by extension, the

audience—can be to the mimesis when acknowledged.

Firstly, it must be noted that conventional television situation comedies represent

a refined and mass produced form of the dramatic comedy. Although the term "comedy"

might seem the only the connection between the two genres, the situation comedy

demonstrates the basic tenets of dramatic/conventional comedy at its core. The television

genre endorses societal norms like its analogue and ancestor. Similar to the dramatic

comedy, "[…] situation comedies depend on familiarity, identification, and redemption

of popular beliefs" to be popular and effective (Marc 20). Also, situation comedy

"producers working in the genre have taken careful pains to respect the age-old tradition

of grafting humor to moral suasion" (Marc 20). While the dramatic comedy may engage

only a few norms during its singular lifespan, a single situation comedy series has the

ability to engage countless norms over the course of its many episodes. With its socially

stabilizing, episodic nature, the situation comedy presents the essence of the dramatic

comedy on a mass produced scale.

Like the dramatic comedy, the situation comedy finds its longevity and success

dependent on audience reception: "A sitcom cannot suffer the massive sting of active

rejection; its audience cannot boo or throw tomatoes. It is canceled only by indifference;

a perceived or projected indifference (i.e. the ratings) at that" (Marc 11). As a result of

this dynamic, the audience must be satisfied as quickly as completely as possible, which means a situation comedy may avoid overly taboo topics or unfamiliar forms to ensure its longevity. Producers, directors, advertisers and other executives associated with situation comedy projects might not risk radical themes, characters, plot lines, or techniques in an effort to keep the audience satisfied, comfortable, and—more importantly—to keep them watching. Thus, the situation comedy genre might engage societal, economic, or gender-based power structures only to ossify these structures. While some critics argue that the situation comedy genre therefore lacks dramatic comedy's ability to present wholly revolutionary affronts to societal norms[29], the situation comedy nevertheless adopts and refines conventional comedy's capacity to normalize and reassure its audience.

Yet, the term "audience" when discussing the situation comedy is problematic. In that the situation comedy has "generally upheld the sanctity of the proscenium," the genre seems to represent a televised manifestation of the dramatic comedy (Marc 20). One should not forget, however, that the situation comedy presents itself to a bifurcated audience: the studio and television audiences. In the standard model of situation comedy inaugurated and represented by I Love Lucy, a studio audience physically witnesses the unmediated performance while a series of three cameras records and transmits the performance (after heavy editing) to the television audience. Paradoxically, to find oneself in a studio audience of a situation comedy is to find oneself removed from a situation comedy. As David Marc notes, to be a studio audience member during a taping of a situation comedy

> is to witness the preparation of a drama, not its performance. Crew and
> equipment, heedless of a non-paying audience's prerogatives, move in and out
> of the line of vision at will. Second takes are by no means unusual. Most

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[29] Namely, David Grote's The End of Comedy.

importantly, the members of the audience are more conscious of being a part of a television program than of seeing one performed, and this creates an almost irresistible incentive for enthusiasm. (23)

The studio and television audiences might appear to witness the same performance, yet the elements of the apparatus work can hinder the pleasure of the studio audience while simultaneously privileging the television audience. Although a studio audience is witness to the situation comedy performance, ultimately, the mediated mimesis of the situation comedy occurs for the benefit of this Television audience.

Traditionally, a three camera system mediates the mimesis of situation comedy. Since its inception upon the set of I Love Lucy, the three camera apparatus has defined the cinematic technique of the conventional situation comedy genre. For a number of reasons, Desi Arnez, husband of Lucille Ball, producer and star of I Love Lucy, decided to begin a new tradition of the televised comedy by filming his show in front of a live audience as well as three film cameras. Firstly, after traveling the vaudeville circuit with Ball in preparation for I Love Lucy, Arnez realized that his wife performed best in front of a live audience. In this regard, Ball needed a live audience not in order to entertain them, but for them to have an effect on her. For this reason, when the studio for I Love Lucy was found and the sets built, the multiple cameras, the crew, and other elements of the production physically separated the action and the audience seating.

Secondly, by opting for three film cameras instead of the grainy, often lined picture created by the television industry standard Kinescope format, Arnez downplayed the program's "television" appearance. The look of I Love Lucy would depart from the Kinescope and therefore the other television elements in order to identify itself as filmic or cinematic. To achieve the cinematic look within the television studio, Arnez hired Karl

Freund, the cinematographer of such classic German expressionist films as "Der Kabinett des Dr. Caligaris" and "Metropolis" before working within the Hollywood idiom. Freund brought the Hollywood cinematic apparatus:

> three BNC Mitchell cameras with T-stop calibrated lenses on dollies. The middle camera usually covers the long shot using 28mm. to 50mm. lenses. The two close-up cameras, 75 to 90 degrees apart from the center camera, are equipped with 3" to 4" lenses, depending on the requirements for coverage. (Freund 16)

These three cameras, as well as how I Love Lucy used these cameras would come to define the situation comedy genre more so than the interaction of the live audience to the action occurring in front of them.

Because three cameras can provide three different viewpoints from which the television audience watches the action unfold, the apparatus provides the television audience with a sense of ubiquity, omniscience, certainty, and, paradoxically, distance vis a vis the mimesis. While a studio audience member might find his single perspective limited or obscured at times, the perspectives of the studio's three cameras covers every relevant inch of the mimesis. The editing between these cameras optimizes the thematic and comic elements of the mimesis for the benefit of the Television audience, thereby providing the audience with omniscience, since nothing will ever escape their view or comprehension. Following from this ubiquity and omniscience, the audience receives a sense of certainty regarding the reliability, regularity, and reality of the mimesis. A final effect of the apparatus work is the physical and temporal distance it creates between the audience and the mimesis.

All these effects can be seen in the camera work occurs in the first episode of I Love Lucy's second season titled "Job Switching": Lucy and Ethel bet their husbands Ricky and Fred that women can be the breadwinners of the household better than men

can perform housework. As the episode opens, Ricky chides Lucy for spending too much

of his paycheck. When the neighbors Fred and Ethel arrive, the scenes transforms into a

battle of the sexes as the men stand off against the women, a fact underscored by camera

technique. In their framing, the cameras emphasize both the widening gap between the

men and women as well as the growing solidarity of each pair. The initial medium long

shot frame (fig. 1) establishes the common plane and space the four characters share

before cuts to medium shots from two other cameras (fig. 2 & 3) show each pair

separated from the other, with eye lines and the 180° rule suggesting that Ricky and Fred

are still interacting with their wives despite the visual distance suggested by the editing:

| fig. 1 | fig. 2 | fig. 3 |

The framing and editing of these three shots reinforce the overall theme of the scene for

the television audience and not for the studio audience. During the sequence when Ricky

and Lucy outline the terms of the bet—that the men could do the women's jobs better

than the women could do the men's jobs—the avoidance of the medium long shot

demonstrates the gap of understanding between the characters. For the television

audience, the alternation of these three shots communicates the mounting tension and

frustration so that a wager is the only way to resolve the discussion.

The studio audience, however, has no sense of the editing and camera technique

of the sequence. For those unmediated witnesses to the scene, the pairs have had their

conversation in a straight line at the center of the set seemingly under a proscenium.

While the groupings according to gender do have some thematic significance, the camera

and editing techniques exceeds the dramatic staging technique's ability to underscore the

thematic of the scene. Furthermore, the cuts back between the medium shots of the

separate pairs build a tension and suggest that the quick cuts back and forth lead to the

titular "job switching," which Lucy and Ricky agree to despite the objections of their

neighbors.

Furthermore, the television audience's sense of removed omniscience is

augmented by an anticipatory apparatus, which sets up shots to best convey comic

elements. Later in the "Job Switching" episode, with Ricky ironing wildly in a long shot,

the camera tracks slightly to the right to anticipate Fred's entry (fig. 4-6). This movement

occurs subtly in order to best frame upcoming sight gag for the television audience:

fig. 4   fig. 5   fig. 6

Here, the camera pans as if to match Ricky's exaggerated ironing motions and in the

process temporarily imbalances the composition of the frame. This temporary imbalance

prepares the television audience for Fred's appearance in his feminine cleaning cap.

While the camera controls the gaze of the Television audience and thereby primes them

for the upcoming joke, the studio audience has to fend for itself essentially. Though they

might have more freedom with their undirected, uncontrolled gaze, the studio audience

could potentially miss the visual gag were they to focus solely on Ricky's ironing. The

apparatus however ensures that the television audience cannot overlook Fred's entrance.

Similarly, by fragmenting parts of the mimesis, the apparatus ensures the television audience cannot overlook the comic aspects in scenes. For example, the mobile frame during the beginning of the employment agency scene later in the episode fragments the scene's elements and participants in order to communicate comic potential visually. The scene opens with a close-up of the employment sign (fig. 7) before craning down to a medium shot of Lucy and Ethel (fig. 8). Next, a cut to a medium long shot from a different camera provides the television audience with the full perspective of the scene and its participants (fig. 9). Later in the scene, the women demonstrate verbally what this opening sequence has predicted visually: a comic incongruence—they are not prepared to take on any of the jobs suggested by the temp agency. The near montage of professional employment sign and nervous faces signals communicates the comic basis of the scene, but the camera work communicates this to the Television and not the Studio audience:

| fig. 7 | fig. 8 | fig. 9 |

For the studio audience, the visual content of the scene is communicated all at once, which weakens the comic quality of the <u>mis-en-scene</u>. Similarly, the chocolate dipping scene opens with a close-up of a woman swirling chocolates in the proper manner—an important establishing shot for the comic potential of the events to ensue. Because this establishing shot provides the audience visually with a sense of the "proper" manner in which to swirl or dip chocolates, Lucy's childish attempts come across as all the more

comic. This fragmentation telegraphs the scenes' comic potential so directly, that the scene's humor is difficult to ignore.

The multiple perspectives of the three camera system ensure that nothing will be hidden from the Television audience. Indeed, the anticipatory framing demonstrates that, if anything, the Television audience will have the best angle to view the unfolding action. As a result, it would seem that nothing will catch the cameras and, therefore, nothing will catch the audience completely off guard as they find themselves visually cued and prepared. In the same manner, no joke will be lost, no comic potential wasted in the episode because the camera will fragment the scene preemptively to emphasize the humor to ensue. Through the apparatus, the Television audience gains all perspectives (multiple cameras), relative foreknowledge (anticipatory framing) and unconscious insight into comic potentials (fragmentation). These qualities reduce the work to be performed by an audience in terms of receiving a performance. Essentially, most aspects of the comedy are broadly telegraphed, clearly marked and pre-packaged. Consequently, the Television audience can view the episode more passively and less engaged, as comprehension of the mimesis requires less effort.

The television audience thus maintains a certain distance from the events of the mimesis. Not only is the Television audience physically distanced from the mimesis, which is mediated through the television set, but the Television audience is also temporally distanced, as its events they seem to witness have already transpired. Additionally, the Television audience views the mimesis as a voyeur would—the fact that the mimesis is being observed and mediated is never acknowledged by the mimesis and consequently has no discernible effect on it.

Further separating the Television audience from the mimesis, the Television audience is often never reminded of the apparatus which mediates the situation comedy mimesis. The entire process of mediation is consciously downplayed, overlooked, and forgotten by the situation comedy in several ways. First, no physical part of the apparatus is ever seen by the apparatus and therefore by the television audience—no trace of theatrical artifice, no apparatus personnel, and certainly no physical evidence of the apparatus, such as a camera or stage lights. Second, the mimesis adopts an ignorance of the apparatus known as the cinematic mode of viewer address. I Love Lucy, as well as a long list of present and past situation comedies in American and international markets (The Cosby Show, Friends, Seinfeld in America; Steptoe and Son, Fawlty Towers, Till Death Do Us Part in the UK to name only a few) operate as if the studio audiences and the apparatus were absent. In this cinematic mode of camera address, the characters seem unaware they are being filmed. The cinematic mode and viewer engagement employed by many television genres, critic Robert C. Allen writes,

> expends tremendous effort to hide its operation. It engages the viewers covertly, making them unseen observers of a world that always appears fully formed and autonomous.[…] [W]ith very few exceptions (most of them comedies), the viewer of a Hollywood-style film is neither addressed nor acknowledged. One of the cardinal sins of film acting is looking into the lens of the camera, because doing so threatens to break the illusion of reality by reminding viewers of the apparatus that intervenes between them and the world of the screen. (117)

The cinematic mode of address demonstrates a separation of the sphere of action and the sphere of the audience. To look into the lens is to acknowledge not only the audience, but also the apparatus "that intervenes," as Allen says. By not addressing the camera, the fictional reality retains the illusion that there is no apparatus.

Although it is one of the few genre's in which an audience is addressed or acknowledged, situation comedy rarely breaks the illusion of the mimesis. To address the camera in the rhetoric mode of address is to expose the limitations of the mimesis, to reveal that the audience is not viewing "a world that always appears fully formed and autonomous," thereby reminding the audience of the artifice of the mimesis. Essentially, this is Gottsched's prime proscription for conventional comedy: anything that violates the natural mimesis of the situation comedy threatens the instructive value of the mimesis. As such, the tradition of situation comedy shares at its core the main Gottschedian tenet of conventional comedy that the mimesis retain a natural quality which situation comedy preserves through its cinematic mode of address.

To cross this gap between the situation comedy world and the audience's world, to destroy this glass wall the situation comedy apparatus traditionally builds between fictional reality and television audience, a radical change in situation comedy style is necessary. The Office presents its audience with such a radical change. With its apparatus work and mode of address, The Office demonstrates not a pleasant union, but an unsteady collision between the mimesis, the filming apparatus, and the television audience.

With its first season beginning in 2001, the UK situation comedy The Office presents a strange structural hybrid to audiences. Written and directed by Stephen Merchant and Ricky Gervais, The Office has enjoyed both critical success and international translations despite its combination of the situation comedy and the "docu-soap"—a fly-on-the-wall documentary genre "contaminat[ing] the seriousness of documentary with the frivolity of soap operas," which tends to favor an entertaining tone over a socially critical one (Creeber 132). The series centers on the often mundane,

workaday world of a struggling British paper company Wernham-Hogg, run by the boss, David Brent, who fancies himself more an entertainer and friend to his employees than a martinet. Cinematically, <u>The Office</u> is a non-conventional situation comedy driven by conventional plot elements, such as romance, interpersonal interaction, etc. Evoking a documentary film feel with its use of hand-held cameras, interviews, and subject addresses to the camera, this situation comedy differs greatly from the conventional model of <u>I Love Lucy</u> in the awareness its fictive world has of the intervening apparatus.

From the camera techniques, the action of <u>The Office</u> appears as anything but controlled and fictive: the characters appear to react to unforeseen events in real time with sometimes less than appropriate remarks. The camera at times scrambles to film the unfolding action as evidenced by unsteady camera movements. Likewise, the camera's framing defies the compositional law of thirds. As a result, these aspects imbue the mimesis with a vérité feel and suggest to the audience that the events of the series are unfolding before them. With few exceptions, though, <u>The Office</u> is a plotted, scripted situation comedy, which has at its core the tenets of genre despite external appearances.

With regard to the techniques that defined the conventional situation comedy (multiple angles, anticipatory framing and fragmentation), the apparatus work in <u>The Office</u> differs greatly from <u>I Love Lucy</u>. Unlike the multiple film cameras of <u>I Love Lucy</u>, <u>The Office</u> employs a limited number of digital video cameras with restricted coverage of and access to the mimesis. Limited to one camera (sometimes two), the television audience can no longer experience the sense of omniscience the multiple perspectives and distances the three camera system creates. Because of the prevalent single camera perspective in <u>The Office</u>, there is often no opportunity for the apparatus to

gain a synthesizing perspective as an event occurs. With few exceptions, perspective on a situation cannot be gained nor action contained sufficiently through multiple cameras. For example, when Tim walks out of his interview in episode II, vi, the apparatus demonstrates its limitations: even the script emphasizes the limitation of the apparatus and its inability to capture the fictional action easily:

> TIM. Sorry, excuse me… TIM SUDDENLY GETS UP AND WALKS
>   OUT OF THE FRAME.
> THE CAMERA BEGINS TO MOVE—IT'S OBVIOUSLY BEING LIFTED
> OFF ITS TRIPOD. THE CAMERAMAN HASTILY FOLLOWS TIM, WHO IS
> STRIDING DOWN A CORRIDOR. HE APPROACHES DAWN AT
> RECEPTION. (II, 248)

The descriptions here indicate how restricted the apparatus is and how unprepared it to seem for unforeseen contingencies. When Tim "SUDDENLY" leaves the frame, the single camera dedicated to interviews has to be "LIFTED OFF ITS TRIPOD" before the cameraman follows Tim "HASTILY". There is no second or third camera waiting to capture Tim as he walks down the corridor. In order for the audience and the apparatus to discover what Tim is doing, the single camera has to scramble. Here, elements of the action are lost as the camera reacts responsively to the action it observes and, as a result, misses key parts of the event, as a true witness to the scene might.

As a result of the limitation of perspectives, the cameras in The Office seem to operate far more reactively than anticipatorily. At times, the camera appears caught off guard by characters, events, and interactions as evidenced by shaky or overly rapid (and therefore blurred) camera movements, by the lack of supplementary light, and by imbalanced framing. Thus, the apparatus of The Office is imbued with a sense of being unprepared and unready as the mimesis unfolds. The apparatus no longer foreshadows the thematic and comic elements of a scene for the audience. Indeed, the apparatus reacts

as a human witness to the mimesis would, as with Tim's walkout, for the apparatus appears to react uncertainly to the events unfolding.

The fragmentation in <u>The Office</u> functions differently from that of <u>I Love Lucy</u>. In "Job Switching" the fragmented syntagm of the employment agency sign, the nervous women, and the wider shot of the agency contributes to a comic foreshadowing. The comic elements of the fragmentation in <u>The Office</u>, however, are often not revealed until the end of the syntagm. In episode I, vi when Brent fires Alex, the building tension in the scene is suddenly undercut by Gareth's absurd question and unexpected presence. Alex forcefully demands to know why he is being fired instead of Anton, a midget employed in the warehouse who is physically unable to perform his job properly. During this scene of confrontation apparently only involving Brent and Alex, the naïve employee Gareth— "who," the text notes,"we only now realize is present"—asks an absurd question ("what's an elf?") off camera, thereby being revealed verbally before he can be revealed visually (I, 234). Gareth's presence arrives as a comic surprise precisely because the camera work in the scene was so limited that it did not provide a clear establishing of all present in Brent's office. Whereas the fragmentation in <u>I Love Lucy</u> is a product of apparatic surplus, of multiple cameras, this comic reveal comes as a result of the apparatic limitation in <u>The Office</u>.

Overall, the effects of such limitation humanize the apparatus of <u>The Office</u> until it seems as if it were both apparatus and audience member, until the Television audience members feels as if they were present in the mimesis. These limitations of apparatus render the camera of <u>The Office</u> more human, inquisitive, emotionally reactive and fallible, much like a regular audience member. The near divine <u>I Love Lucy</u> apparatus

never chooses the wrong area of the action as its focus. Indeed, as with Fred's entry

during Ricky's ironing routine, the camera presages that which will occur—something

beyond the ability of the normal audience member. By contrast, the camera in The Office

follows characters and often reacts to characters' gestures (to be demonstrated later). In

its limitations, this near-human apparatus becomes a surrogate for the Television

audience, fully engaged in the events of the mimesis.

This surrogacy becomes problematic and disruptive when the apparatus, the

former observer of the fictive world, seemingly becomes embroiled and implicated in the

action of the mimesis. Allen identifies the rhetorical mode of viewer engagement as being

"in some ways the opposite of the cinematic mode. […] Rather than pretending the

viewer isn't there, the rhetorical mode simulates the face-to-face encounter by directly

addressing the viewer"(117-118). As seen in the traditional situation comedy model of I

Love Lucy, the presence of the apparatus is completely ignored by the mimesis, which

creates a gap between the Television audience and the mimesis.

More than just a simple witness to its mimesis, the apparatus in The Office is

treated at times like an interactive partner—a communication partner, though, who

cannot reciprocate. At times, the boss David Brent engages, entreats, and directs the

camera—actions which confuse and conflate the relationship between the apparatus and

the audience it represents. In Episode I, iii, after Brent's feigned firing of an employee

over the phone is exposed and Brent is called "pathetic," he responds by responsively

staring into the camera and entreating "Is it?". Here, he seeks support from the camera as

he might an independent observer. But to whom is he speaking here when he speaks to

the camera? His intended audience might be the Television audience the camera

represents. But he may easily interpret his audience as the apparatus operator himself.

Whoever his intended audience might be, Brent's entreaty of an external audience

nevertheless engages the viewer in the awkward tension of the mimesis—a product of the

rhetoric mode of address. This and numerous other examples of camera and viewer

address over the course of the series demonstrate that each how each acknowledgement

of the camera is essentially an attempt "to engage the viewer" (i.e., the camera that

functions as apparatus, as Studio audience and as Television audience) (Allen 118). Allen

notes that in the purely rhetoric mode "the television addresser attempts to solicit the

viewer's participation in a communication transaction in which a prospective audience

member agrees to play the role of listener/viewer" (118). With their direct speech

interactions with the camera as well as their indirect glances, the fictional characters of

The Office obliquely include, implicate and otherwise embroil the viewer who finds

himself remote from the fictive world.

The mode of address operating in The Office, however, is at times an uncertain

hybrid. Glances directly into the camera do occur in the series, but these are tempered by

characters both speaking to unseen members of the production staff and by characters

interacting with each other as if unaware of or unworried about the camera's presence. In

Episode I, i, while he builds a wall of boxes to isolate himself visibly from his annoying

co-worker Gareth, Tim speaks to the camera crew as the shooting script states. Tim looks

to the right of the frame to locate his conversation partner, which is distinct from a glance

directly into the camera. During this scene, Tim only indirectly engages the apparatus.

This address differs from earlier in the same episode when Tim and Gareth bicker about

the boundaries of their workspaces, but take no time to address the camera (I, 36).

Indeed, this previous scene occurs completely within the cinematic mode, as characters of

the mimesis do not address the apparatus at all. Scenes shot in the cinematic mode are

woven into the overall rhetoric mode fabric of the series. Despite these lapses into

indirect or non-address, however, the apparatic work in The Office ultimately awakes in

the audience a disruptive awareness of the apparatus.

I claim the awareness of the apparatus is disruptive because the rhetoric mode

implicates the viewer into the disorder of the mimesis. Far from being a remote,

unacknowledged spectator to events and character interaction, the apparatus in The

Office has an impact on the events it records as well as how the audience reacts to the

recorded events. The hybrid mode of address in The Office does not afford the audience

the pleasurable privileging or separation it enjoys with conventional situation comedies.

If anything, the presence of the single camera—the surrogate for the television

audience—causes much of the chaos in the mimesis of The Office mainly because the

characters acknowledge the presence of the apparatus. This acknowledgement—an

essential deviation from the conventional cinematic mode—is a disturbance, a deviation

of conventional situation comedy cinematic style, but also of generic and social norm;

specifically, the social norm of comedy consumption.

Formally, the relationship of the apparatus to the mimesis and the disruptive

effect the apparatus has on the mimesis represent the core of the conventional façade for

this radical comedy. In the following section, I will analyze the impact the apparatus has

on David Brent over the course of the entire series because it best demonstrates the

disruptive effect the apparatus and by extension the audience has on the mimesis. Brent

not only acknowledges the presence of the camera but he also panders to it. His changing

relationship with the camera plunges the mimesis and his life more deeply into disorder

over the course of the series. It is not surprising, therefore, that the entire series concludes

when Brent stops addressing the camera and reverts to a general ignorance of the

apparatus, thereby returning the situation comedy genre back to the non-disruptive,

conventional cinematic mode of address. Ultimately, though, this return has unforeseen

effects for it problematizes the integrity and boundaries of the conventional cinematic

mode.

From the first scene of the series, Brent demonstrates a constant awareness of the

apparatus even when he feigns otherwise. Shot in one long take, this first scene features

Brent apparently interviewing a prospective employee Alex, yet Brent monologizes more

than he interviews. Initially, Brent fills the frame and exudes a cockiness designed to

emphasize his authority. It is uncertain to whom he is speaking until the opening medium

framing of the boss zooms out to a medium long shot to reveal the interviewee Alex's left

shoulder and head. Brent and his actions, however, remain the focus of the scene, as the

camera never reveals more of Alex than the back of his head and shoulder. After a zoom

into a close up of Brent as he jokes with the person on the phone, he uneasily hangs up,

embarrassed at something he said (after teasingly asking if the person's wife had left him

only to recall a moment later that she in fact had). Then, with Alex's head still in frame

but out of focus, Brent moves his head down to cast his eyes down, next he raises his

head to glance at Alex momentarily before Brent stares directly into the camera followed

by a slight turn of his face directly towards the camera (figs.10 -12). Before this glance

can fully register, the scene changes. But this direct address did occur, however

unexpectedly and consequently an ambiguity is established. Up until this direct address

of the camera, the scene, the episode, and the series which it inaugurates seems to be a

conventional situation comedy (albeit one shot with a limited number of handheld, digital

video cameras). Although the scene seems to begin in the cinematic mode (as Brent only

acknowledges the camera at the scene's last moments), Brent's glance reveals he has

been aware of the apparatus the entire time. If the mode of address can shift so suddenly

from the cinematic to the rhetoric, then the audience occupies an uncertain space: when

the cinematic mode is in operation, they become as distanced as the audience of a

conventional comedy, who can consume the mimesis passively with little thought paid to

the mediating apparatus. However, with the inconsistent mode of address this sequence

demonstrates, the conventional distance is shattered and the audience is more actively

engaged in their consumption. As a result, an uncertain dynamic arises as the audience

cannot be certain when the mode of address will shift and thus uncertainty pervades

consumption.

fig. 10   fig.11   fig.12

Uncertainty, too, marks the relationship between Brent and the apparatus. In its

interaction with Brent, the single hand-held camera seems to become a character. In

tandem with the shaky humanlike movements of framing throughout the sequence, the

abrupt pull out cued by Brent's pistol-like point demonstrates the camera as reacting to

Brent's actions. This exaggeratedly quick zoom-out also makes the audience of the

camera as its limitations are not concealed. That is, instead of smoothly cutting to a wider

shot from a different camera as <u>I Love Lucy</u> might have, this single limited camera must

scramble to fill its frame and through its scrambling the audience becomes aware that

what it sees is being mediated. As a direct result of Brent's gesture, the camera quickly

zooms out, as if commanded to prematurely before it was prepared. The reactions of the

apparatus therefore suggest that the camera reacts to Brent's actions; it suggests that

Brent is powerful in his ability to control the apparatus with his movements and Brent of

course contiues to exert control over the apparatus during most of the first season.

Brent's relationship to the camera evolves over the course of the second season,

which centers on the merger of Brent's Slough branch with the Swindon branch, overseen

by the more successful and well-liked boss, Neil. By contrasting Brent's few, relative

victories in the first season with his numerous, awkward defeats in the second, the second

season provides an important step in Brent's evolving relationship with the camera.

These defeats, though, are apparent to everyone else but Brent as he begins to focus more

on the camera rather than others as a redeemer of his self-worth. During the second

season, however, the camera seems to capture Brent's slow development of a self

realization in front of and with the help of the camera. This process begins with Brent's

first subtle scuffle for control of the camera with the younger, more attractive boss Neil.

When Neil first arrives at the Slough branch in season 2, the changing role of the

apparatus comes to the fore, as Brent treats the camera as a referee. During the viewer's

first encounter with Neil in II, i, the camera comes upon Neil waiting at the reception

desk only after Brent leads the handheld camera to Dawn's desk (fig. 16). As the camera

follows Brent, he turns his head to speak with the production crew and continues to

provide narration and introduction for the events in front of the camera. The objective of

this encounter is to introduce Neil as the new boss in <u>The Office</u>, yet Brent controls the introduction instead of letting Neil introduce himself. Without any arrogance, Neil states to the camera that he is Brent's boss, a fact which Brent attempts to undercut only indirectly through the camera; "Just a tiny bit above me," Brent says to the camera.

| fig.16 | fig. 17 | fig. 18 |

The composition of this scene, however, conflicts with Brent's statement: Brent has (un)intentionally positioned himself closer to the camera than Neil, thus producing a sense of visual hierarchy, with the camera in the paramount position, Brent next, Neil and then Dawn, the receptionist (fig. 17). In this position between Neil and the camera, Brent noticeably avoids being on the same plane as Neil, who stands close to the desk while Brent hovers in front of it. Even when Brent realizes he cannot deny Neil's authority and extends a hand to his new boss, Brent looks into the camera (fig. 18). Important here is that Brent breaks his eye contact with the camera precisely at that moment in which he realizes Neil has undeniably more authority than he. In this scene, both Neil and Brent express their authority to the camera—Neil indirectly, Brent directly—and Brent's loss of status in front of the camera will dominate his appearances throughout the second season, beginning with Brent's disappointing public greeting of the new Swindon staff.

The failure of this welcome speech in episode II, i initiates a motif of the second season: Brent's repeated, failed attempts to entertain while the apparatus looks on, failing to blink. Here, what Brent assumes will be his opportunity to demonstrate his unique

comic wit devolves into strained quotation of pop culture. His jokes increasingly flounder as his routine drags on until finally he takes his seat again, as the script denotes "a broken man" (II, 33). The editing of the scene helps increase the sense of Brent's desperation as well as his audience's sense of apathy. The increasingly fragmented vacillation between Brent in frame and then his disaffected audience demonstrates not only the lack of impact Brent's jokes have his employees, but also the widening gap between the performer and his audience. Standing in contrast to Brent's failed speech, Neil's introduction succeeds in securing a number of laughs as well as injecting a sense of general goodwill into his audience—a fact underscored by the scene's camera work (fig. 19 & 20). Instead of quickly cutting between the performer Neil and his audience (as was done later with Brent), the camera pans left from Neil over to the laughing employees, thereby suggesting a connection between the two subjects. Brent, however, appears cut off from his audience, isolated during his failing routine by the constant shot-reverse shot editing (fig. 21 & 22).

Painful to Brent, his audience, and the Television audience, this sequence ends not with Brent trying to hide from the camera, but rather with a full-on stare into the lens. While others avoid eye contact with Brent as they leave the meeting room, the failed comedian gazes directly into the camera—perhaps the longest addressing of the camera in the entire series (fig 23 & 24). But why does the camera linger on Brent's face for so long? Why does he stare into the camera for such an agonizingly long time? This action sets the tone of the relationship between Brent and the camera throughout this second season: Brent begins to realize that the camera can record moments of weakness for him as well as the few triumphs he experiences. Indeed, this prolonged glance underscores his

self-acknowledged sense of failure, which stands in contrast to most of his interactions in the first season, where he (mistakenly) feels he comes off as an intelligent entertainer:

fig. 19

fig. 20

fig. 21

fig. 22

fig. 23

fig. 24

This embarrassing performance is but one of the many for Brent. The second season heightens this conflict between Brent's relationship to his employees and the camera by providing Brent with far too many opportunities to impress the camera and disappoint his employees, as in the "Red Nose Day" episode, II, v. To be sure, this episode from its beginning seems to underscore the abyss between Brent's desires to be viewed positively by the camera and the effect that desire has on others. At Dawn's reception desk as the episode starts, we find Brent "LIKE A CHILD AT CHRISTMAS" (II, 176). He turns his back to the camera and is wearing both a plastic red nose and an irrepressible grin when he turns back around, clearly for the benefit of the camera and distinctly not for Dawn:

> BRENT. Just a normal day, innit, so… What?
> (TO DAWN)

> What are you laughing at?
> SHE IS NOT LAUGHING   (II, 176)

Focused on the camera, Brent continues throughout the episode. At its most benign, Brent

desire to connect with the camera leads him to direct the production staff to include the

telephone number for Comic Relief during his melodramatic plea for the charity. At its

most malicious, this desire to connect leads him and others to strip a co-worker to Brent's

near maniacal laughter and grinning glances into the camera. In this episode, he also fails

to notice the shock on the faces of those in the circle surrounding him during his

improvised dance, which he ends with his finger pointed directly into the camera, his

ultimate audience (fig. 25).

fig. 25

Brent's divesting of attention to the Slough branch paired with his over-

investment in the camera and the fertile future it potentially holds are his clear

characteristics in the second season. Yet what concludes the second season and Brent's

career at Wernham-Hogg is not a final pleading for acceptance to the camera, but the

scene in which Brent is fired, a scene marked by his conspicuous ignoring of the film
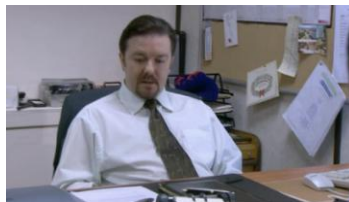
crew.

fig. 26   fig. 27   fig. 28

The pain in this scene comes not at the implication of the audience in the emotion of the scene through Brent's pleading glances into the camera; rather, the discomfort felt is a product of Brent's denying the camera his gaze. As a subtle echo of the opening scene of I, i, here again the camera frames Brent in a medium/medium close up shot over the shoulder of another. Yet noticeably absent is the prior swagger of Brent's overly specific hand gestures and facial expressions (fig. 26). The boss barely makes eye contact with those seated across from him and, to be sure, the editing together of numerous shot-reverse shots emphasizes the disconnection between Brent and his superiors (fig. 27). In addition to breaking the camera's previous focus on Brent, these shot-reverse shots also underscore Jennifer and Neil's perspective vis a vis Brent, who has consistently disappointed them.

While the opening scene in I, i ended with a direct acknowledgement of the camera, Brent never addresses the film crew in this closing scene of season two, a fact which imbues the scene with an uncertainty and negative potential energy. As argued earlier, the glance into the camera Brent gives in the opening interview scene of season one demonstrates that he is always aware of the camera's presence and, at any moment, might glance into its lens, thereby appearing to engage the audience in the mimesis. Throughout this emotional scene, during which Brent breaks down and begs for his job with tears in his eyes, the audience does not know if they will again be engaged in the mimesis as they had been in Brent's very first scene. Since the audience is uncertain, they watch uneasily.

In part, Brent is being fired due to his relationship to the camera. His awareness of the camera and the constant attention he pays to it interfere with his ability to focus on his

employees and fiscal responsibilities. Perhaps to remind the audience of the threat that

Brent might acknowledge the camera, Neil nervously glances into the camera during the

sequence. As soon as Brent begins to beg for his position, the camera seems to position

itself just above Neil's shoulder, begging to beg to be acknowledged. After cutting to a

long shot, the camera hangs, lingers uncomfortably in the corner of The Office as Brent,

Jennifer, and Neil all sit silently uncertain of what happens next (fig 28). Here the mode

of camera address wallows in between the cinematic and rhetoric modes of address. To

some extent, the viewer resumes his role as unacknowledged voyeur when shut out so

distinctly from the developments on screen, yet the viewer's implication and assisting of

the events leading up to Brent's firing cannot be overlooked or forgotten. From Brent's

overbalancing of priorities, the valuing of the camera over his occupational

responsibilities comes his firing. The camera and the television audience it represents are

to blame.

If the first two seasons of The Office see Brent placing increasingly more

disruptive focus on the apparatus at the cost of his interpersonal relationships, then during

the show's "Christmas Specials,"[30] Brent overcomes this disruptive focus. The final

scene of the entire series features Brent unemotionally walking away from the still-

filming camera, and thus the series reaches a conventional comedy resolution. To

accentuate the role the apparatus plays in the show's resolution, the Christmas specials

draw immediate attention to the filming apparatus. This new attention to the apparatus

provides the viewer with a formal arc to trace towards a comedic resolution; the new

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[30] "When approached in 2003 by BBC controller Jane Root to produce one more six episode season, The Office writer/directors Gervais and Merchant felt that while they did want to resolve the Tim and Dawn romance somewhat, they could not foresee stretching this reunion out over another season run" (Walters 46). The resulting resolution came in the form of a two part Christmas special, broken down into two 45 minute episodes that had at their center the Tim/Dawn trajectory as well as Brent's struggle with "fame."

overt apparatus operates proactively to demonstrate how Brent can only find redemption through the apparatus before he walks away from it and ignores the camera, thereby reverting The Office back to the cinematic mode of address.

Before the familiar opening sequence begins the Christmas special, inter-titles interrupt and inform the viewer directly of the previous relationship of the "BBC Documentary crew" to the employees of the Wernham-Hogg office as well as the intent of the special as a reunion of sorts. The language of these titles—in particular the wording of the second one, "Now, nearly three years later, we return to find out what has happened[…]"— draws attention to the alignment of the film crew and the audience, as the antecedent of "we" remains obscured; both the film crew and the audience are essentially "returning," revisiting the employees of The Office (fig 29 & 30). Both groups experience together what progress or regression has been made and it is only through the apparatus of the film crew that the audience has access.
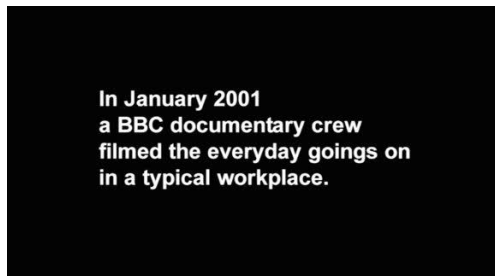

In January 2001
a BBC documentary crew
filmed the everyday goings on
in a typical workplace.

fig. 29

Now, nearly three years later,
we return to find out what has
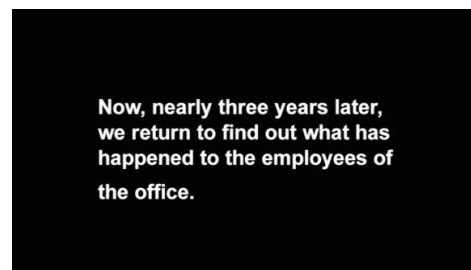happened to the employees of
the office.

fig. 30

This prologue foreshadows the other, more overt examples of the film crew's presence, which is unavoidable throughout the Christmas specials. While the first "talking head" shot of the special follows the form set in previous episodes—a subject, in this case Brent, answers a question no one else has heard—the rest of the cast's interviews and interaction with the camera crew are marked by audible, yet unseen members of the film crew: a feminine Irish voice interviews Brent while Dawn and Lee

talk with a British man's voice. These voices heighten the viewer's awareness of the camera crew's presence directly, yet the owners of these voices are never seen on camera and develop no true characterization as in the 7 Up series of documentaries or the mock documentary series People Like Us. But why bring these voices in at all? With no visible person attached to the voices, the television audience can retain its connection to the camera. If a physical crew member were seen, the illusion of unity between the television audience and the camera would be destroyed and this identification is still crucial for the series; to see a crew member would mean a re-evaluation of the entire series and therefore shatter the potential the apparatus had in the first and second seasons.

During the first installment of the two-part Christmas special, Brent's relationship with the camera receives direct and indirect comment. The opening scene of the first special begins with Brent discussing his anger at the previous two seasons of The Office. After he labels these previous installments negatively as "stitch ups," Brent participates in these special episodes not simply to redeem his image but to demonstrate how his television fame has impacted his current life. To be sure, a tension still remains between Brent and the camera; nowhere is this tension more present than in Brent's music video.

Departing from the usual camerawork of the preceding seasons of The Office, Brent's video has a subjective air to it, as if its camera technique were meant to augment visually the thematic elements of his pleas. Although there is no direct mention of who directed the music video, with the 42,000£ Brent spent self-producing his vanity single "If You Don't Know Me By Now," it is fair to think the would-be pop star must have exerted some control over the filming of the music video. This entire music video project seems to serve as Brent's last pleading to the camera, which had, in his opinion, judged

him harshly. In its visual technique Brent's video presents his desire to be understood by the camera while he simultaneously desires to control the camera.

One of the video's defining features is the constantly moving, steady camera that travels though the video's set. It must search for Brent who is always prepared for its arrival; the camera never catches him offguard. If anything, the video is marked by Brent looking and singing directly and confidently into the camera, instead of the frequent and, at times, timid glances which define his usual mode of address.

Thus, the video also presents Brent as more dominant than the apparatus. Not only does the camera have to search for Brent constantly while he confidently awaits its arrival, but often the camera also has to film into a light source, which throws off the exposure levels of the shots. This technique occurs when the camera finds Brent looking squarely into the camera as he lip synchs his song, which creates a blinding halo around Brent (fig. 31). While this technique renders Brent difficult to see, it over illuminates the camera for him from his perspective; Brent can view the camera without difficulty while the camera lens fills with glare, which privileges Brent's gaze.

What appears to be a love song, though, gains another reading if one understands the words and camera technique to refer to the filming apparatus instead of the woman seen at times in the video. Ostensibly, the single refers to the dark haired woman present in Brent's loft before she storms out after an argument (fig. 32) and whose picture Brent paws before his eyes meet the camera. Yet in her absence, the intended audience of the song—the "you" indicated in the title—is not the woman, but the camera. It is to the camera that Brent pleads most emotionally to be understood and accepted. Thus, Brent's video is an expression of his desire for the camera to "know" him as the great person he

assumes himself to be. In fact, at times multiple forms of Brent appear in the frame, which doubles his gaze and ensures that he cannot be overlooked, marginalized, or diminished (fig. 33). Apart from this music video tangent, Brent still struggles in his relationship with the apparatus in these two Christmas specials.
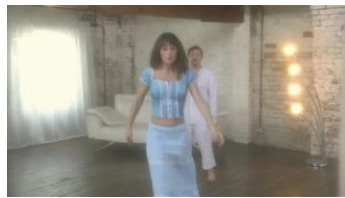

fig. 31   fig. 32   fig. 33

If the two regular seasons and the first Christmas installment feature Brent's acknowledgement of the camera, the final tag scene of the second installment stands in deep contrast. Though framed similarly to all the individual, "talking head" interviews, this interview indicates a sea change in Brent and his relationship to the camera, as the once attention-hungry boss voluntarily abandons the camera's frame. Brent exits from his normal "talking head" position after he asks the camera crew "Have you got everything you need? … Cheers.". Indeed, any direct glimpses at the camera in this tag shot are slight, short, involuntary, but—most importantly—lacking all pregnancy. Diminished here is the gap between the production crew and the camera, as Brent's few, quick glances between the crew and the camera appear to unite the audience again with the apparatus of transition. In leaving his framed position, Brent demonstrates his ability now to operate without concern for the apparatus or the audience (figs. 34-37).

fig. 34

fig. 35

fig. 36

fig. 37

The sequence here suggests that Brent has gained a new prerogative. To be sure, by this point in the denouement of the episode and the series, Brent has successfully found a woman who appears interested in him. This incipient relationship has apparently provided Brent with the ability to challenge the bully, Chris Finch. Also, Brent has earned genuine laughter from his former employees by way of a well-timed impression. When this closing interview occurs, then, it seems Brent no longer needs the approval of others, as he has gained it from his budding romance and his former employees.

As the last Christmas special comes to a close, the denouement might strike its audience differently, which is a result of a shift in the characters' awareness of the apparatus—Brent, especially. In each of these three examples of Brent's transformation, the character's near trademark glances into the camera are missing: During his first conversation alone with his first "successful" blind date, Carol—separate from the Christmas celebration to suggest intimacy—the camera is itself remotely positioned, as passers-by cross into the foreground of the medium long shot between the pair and the camera. Carol brings attention to the stationing of the camera as she glances up at times at the figures as they cross the frame, out of focus. Brent, by contrast fails to address any

of these figures with his eyes. Most significantly, however, he fails to address the camera, thereby preserving the scene's air of intimacy. Even when discussing his misgivings about the entertainment industry, his comments are directed towards Carol as opposed to the camera, tool of the very industry about which he complains. This instance, however, would be the opportunity for even an involuntary glance at the camera, whose approval Brent has sought out across the course of the show. That he does not look at the camera at the moment he is most expected to suggests a change in his character.

Similarly, after this conversation with his love interest, Brent fails to address the camera directly in his challenge to Finch's insult regarding Carol, which further indicates a change in Brent's relationship to the camera. At the beginning of the sequence, Brent quickly passes through the frame in the far background of the medium shot. Neil and Finch in conversation cause him to return, not the presence or prominence of the camera. Brent's friendly pat on Finch's shoulder underscores the pair and not the camera as his reason for engagement (fig. 38).

When Finch lets loose his insulting joke, Brent confirms what the visual has already intimated: as his reduced number of camera addresses indicates, Brent seems to have reached a new level of emotional certainty and security. Whereas previously across the series, Brent had allied himself with Finch in order to save himself from the bully's assaults, Brent here shows a disregard, an ability to stand up for Carol against Finch as he forcefully tells Finch to "Fuck off." Brent's once-uncertain gaze has transformed into confident glares, as Brent stares into Finch's eyes while he delivers his retort before moving onto Neil's eyes, the audience of Finch's assaulting insult. Brent's former glances of timidity are now stares of intimidation (fig 39, 40 & 41).
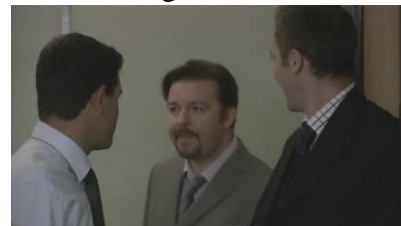
fig. 38

fig. 39

fig. 40

fig. 41

Finally, during the penultimate sequence in the special and the series, Brent expresses a desire for a camera to be used not as a tool of self-promotion, but one of sentimental preservation. As the employees of Wernham Hogg line up for a photograph, Brent appears obscured, buried behind characters who have remained nameless over the course of the two series. On the left of the frame, the view of Jennifer's back with film camera in hand doubles the viewer's sense of photography, yet it is in this scene that no one seems aware of the television apparatus. When the television camera zooms in to capture Tim's playful kissing of Gareth, a quick pan to the left reveals Brent's eyes blankly looking towards the television camera as he makes his way to the front of the throng. He politely requests that Neil leave the frame of the film camera for a shot of "the old gang." The documentary crew, however, has provided Brent and the others with two series' worth of footage, one would think adequate to fulfill any nostalgic yen Brent might have in the future.

When positioning himself in a particularly congenial pose for the "old gang" picture (itself an allusion to the Brent of the first and second series), Brent demonstrates

first a confusion as to which camera to pay more attention to before choosing the still

camera. Having been, perhaps uncomfortably, in the background of the first still shot,

Brent moves toward the front out of ostensibly sentimental reasons (fig. 42). When he

arrives at the front, Brent throws his arms around Gareth and Tim, claiming this lineup as

"the real gang," "the glory years" with only a nod to the documentary camera (fig. 43).

During these phrases, Brent's eyes vacillate quickly between the out of frame film

camera and the documentary camera, displaying an uncertainty as to which he should

focus on. Even when the film camera fails to flash, Brent stays focused on it as he divides

his attention between it and those he is embracing.

| fig. 42 | fig. 43 | fig. 44 |

In making his well-timed and executed allusion, Brent seems to be performing for those

around him and not the documentary camera in front of him. Thus, Brent demonstrates

that he has departed from his previous dependence on connecting to the television

audience through the apparatus at the cost of his local audience (fig. 44). And, indeed, the

tag scene of the Christmas special—the last scene of the entire two series and special—

demonstrates Brent's new willingness to forget and forgo the attention of the camera.

This abandoning of the documentary camera is ultimately underscored by the

short tag sequence, which occurs as the very last footage of the series. After Brent's

reunion with the "old gang" and the credits sequence, Brent suddenly appears in the

frame as if in a "talking head" interview and he is focused on a crew member sitting just

to the left of the frame. He asks "Have you got everything you need?," he throws a glance

into the camera, and, in rising to stand, his face leaves the frame, leaving only his mid-section to the very left of the frame, throwing the composition off balance.

Important here is the construction of this sequence as it communicates directly not just the finish of a series, but also indirectly that Brent is finished with the series, with television. This scene hints that Brent has chosen to leave the camera behind, both literally and figuratively. We listen as he disconnects his lavaliere microphone, which aurally draws attention to the process of disconnection with its rustling. Perhaps Brent lingers slightly before leaving the frame, but the visual composition prevents the audience from any further knowledge.

In this manner, each season's installment of the situation comedy The Office seems to contribute to an overarching comedic resolution on a formal level, if one considers the evolution of Brent's relationship with the camera. This process of discarding the camera seems to deliver Brent to equilibrium or an order in his life, namely a life free of the disruption of the apparatus and the larger audience it represents. Instead of seeking support, fame, or redemption from the audience, Brent demonstrates a new focus: specifically, a focus on the local audience at the expense of his previous focus on the apparatus. This last segment of Brent's arc, most importantly, reinstates an order that once was, the stability in the mimesis before the characters became aware of the apparatus.

While Brent's metaphoric walking away from the apparatus might seem a bold triumph over the apparatus, this comedic resolution actually demonstrates the return to the previous mode of address in the situation comedy genre. In that moment of disconnecting, Brent emphasizes his reversion back to the cinematic mode of apparatic

address. By taking off the microphone, Brent takes off the physical reminder of the filming apparatus, yet the apparatus still exists.

With I Love Lucy one sees how situation comedy characters traditionally operate with an ignorance of the apparatus. As a challenge to this ignorance, in each episode of The Office characters demonstrate an awareness of the apparatus, which in turn affects their behavior at times. As Brent leaves the frame, the camera continues to film the empty frame (fig. 37)—a shot which underscores not Brent's ability to separate himself from the apparatus, but the ability of the apparatus to survive without Brent. Because it can survive without Brent, the camera demonstrates its superiority over its subjects. By walking away, Brent demonstrates his desire and ability to break away from the apparatus, but even with disconnected and unseen by the apparatus, the camera continues to film. Had the filming stopped at that precise moment when Brent left the frame, then it would have signaled a simultaneous, mutual abandoning. It would have been as if both Brent and the camera had experienced enough of the other at precisely the same time. As it stands, however, the empty frame awaits another subject or prepares to stalk another subject.

Essentially, this forgetting locates Brent back in the cinematic mode of address instead of the more complicated hybrid mode he demonstrated previously. The awareness of the apparatus proves too disruptive for him in his reality. This awareness causes him to embarrass himself and others personally and professionally. This awareness causes him to lose his job. In short, the awareness causes him to transgress many societal norms. Thus, in order for his life to stabilize, he must redeem himself and the societal norms by forgetting the apparatus.

When he walks away from the apparatus, Brent most certainly has changed, but has the audience? Over the course of both seasons, during a total of fourteen episodes, the audience finds themselves frequently implicated in the action of the mimesis of <u>The Office</u>. Will they navigate the return to the traditional apparatic situation comedy model as easily as Brent seems to? More importantly, having experienced the hybridized, rhetoric mode of viewer address in <u>The Office</u>, will they return to consuming the cinematic mode of address mindlessly? In the wake of the radical comedy <u>The Office</u>, there remains an uncertainty whether the cinematic mode of address might again rupture and shift into the rhetoric.

CONCLUSION

Given the popularity and ubiquity of dramatic comedy in the form of the situation comedy on television, I became interested in the nature and function of comedy in society, particularly the effects of the mimesis and its comedic resolution. I wondered if the clear resolution of the mimesis to a certain degree defined the comedy genre more so than the light-hearted presence of the comic as many often assume. Therefore, my specific purpose within this study was to understand and demonstrate the phenomena of incomplete, problematic, or disruptive mimesis and resolution as they function in German dramatic comedies and current situational comedies that seem to challenge the genre marker "comedy."

To answer my research question, I established two modes of comedy based on the presence, nature, and clarity of the mimesis and comedic resolution—the conventional and radical forms. The complete, structured, and therefore stabile form of the former serves as the base from which the latter deviates. Extending the scholarship of comedy critics such as Arntzen, Mauser, and Haida, I demonstrated that the radical comedy form can clash with the conventional form in several ways: by exaggerating, aborting, obscuring, or otherwise problematizing both the resolution and the dynamic between the audience and the mimesis. In selecting the texts in this study, I applied four criteria: first, I sought texts whose first performances precipitated critical debate of form or theme. Then, I looked for texts that problematized the clarity of the dramatic mimesis. Thirdly, I sought texts that subverted the end of the dramatic process and by doing so challenged the social benefit traditionally ascribed to conventional comedy. Based on these criteria, I selected Lenz's <u>Der Hofmeister</u>, Hauptmann's <u>Der Biberpelz</u>, and Sternheim's <u>Die</u>

Kassette. I chose my final text, the UK situation comedy The Office, because it subverts the relationship of the audience to the mimesis, which in essence is the ultimate effect of the other works in this study. For each text, I traced the radical comedy characteristics that challenged the thematic, formal, and social unity embodied in the closing scenes of conventional comedy.

In this final chapter, I synthesize and analyze the data discussed in the previous four chapters and use the analysis to develop a theory of the radical comedy mode to answer my research question. Before proceeding, however, I will briefly summarize my analysis of each radical comedy.

In chapter one, I found within the writings of Johann Gottsched the structure and effects of conventional comedy which radical comedy exposes and challenges. The pre-Enlightenment thinker was convinced that through the effects of its structure and mimesis, dramatic comedy has both the ability and the duty to educate, socialize, and normalize its audience through its entertaining nature and form. When the dramatic mimesis demonstrates to an audience the advantages of rationally motivated virtue and the disadvantages of irrational vice, dramatic comedy can function most effectively as a normalizing force, according to Gottsched. It was thought that this force, in turn, served to stabilize society by communicating, validating, and reinforcing the rational precepts of the early Enlightenment. In its resolution—a spectacle of social reconciliation, reunion, and unity—conventional comedy provided for Gottsched a model of social stability. Lenz's comedy Der Hofmeister presents its audience such a spectacle of social unity in its two closing tableaux, yet the excesses of these scenes subvert the social unity the scenes seem to present. Although the couples united in these scenes appear loving and

stabile, each couple has flaws the resolution obscures: Gustchen and Fritz's union lacks a convincing foundation; Pätus caves to Fritz's wishes and marries <u>Jungfer Rehaar</u>, whereas Lise and the castrated Läuffer's union lacks the fruitful and productive future marriage seems to promise. Therefore, while appearing to promote the socially stabilizing program of conventional comedy, the resolution of <u>Der Hofmeister</u> actually ironizes it.

In my second chapter, I explored the manner in which Hauptmann's <u>Der Biberpelz</u> appears to signal a clear conventional comedy <u>telos</u>. Because the work's four acts end ironically and because the settings vacillate between Wehrhahn's courtroom (an arena of justice) and Wolff's home (an arena where thievery is planned), the work seems to foreshadow an impending exposure and prosecution. Yet none arrives; Wolff's crimes go undiscovered and justice is not served, as it might be in a conventional comedy. If the comedic is viewed as an arrangement of a plot's incidents which build toward a final resolution that provides the work with a sense of completion, then within <u>Der Biberpelz</u> the comic derails this comedic process. The comic aspects of the work's characters—Wehrhahn's mechanic persecution of liberals and Mutter Wolff's ability to outwit others—do not necessarily lead to the reinstitution of norms in the form of a comedic resolution. This disruption of the comedic emphasizes the structure of the comedic, the role of comic within the comedic, as well as how the radical comedy can disrupt the passive consumption of dramatic comedy, as the reviews of the work's first performance demonstrate.

In my third chapter, I demonstrated how the language in Sternheim's comedy <u>Die Kassette</u> muddles the work's mimesis. Language in conventional comedy is thought to perfectly communicate the reality of the mimesis, yet <u>Die Kassette</u>'s stage language such

as dialogue and monologue frustrates this assumption. Audiences must unconsciously or consciously perform multiple linguistic operations to decode and process the language spoken within Sternheim's mimesis. In addition to this compacted dialogue, the degenerative repetition, and flawed argumentation of the work's male protagonists would seem to hinder the audience's attempt to identify or evaluate these characters' fundamental motivations or attributes. Consequently, the audience seems locked out from the work's muddled mimesis, which the work's closing tableau thematizes. As a result, Die Kassette undermines the conventional comedy assumption that characters, their motivations, qualities, and action can be linguistically represented in comedy's mimesis.

Just as the compacted language of Die Kassette challenges the audience's passive relationship to the mimesis by requiring them to listen attentively and perform multiple operations to process the work's dialogue, so too does camera work of The Office challenge the passivity of its audience. In my fourth chapter, I focused on this British situation comedy and the way in which it radicalizes the camera work and the mode of camera address represented by I Love Lucy, a conventional situation comedy. I traced how instead of being a detached witness to the humiliation of the David Brent and his employees, the presence of the camera—and by extension, the audience it represents— causes his humiliation. This rhetoric mode problematizes the conventionally strict separation between the audience and the mimesis. Consequently, when the mode of address appears to revert back to the cinematic as the series comes to a close, the work has effectively challenged the audience's passive consumption of comedy. Indeed, all the radical comedies I analyzed in this dissertation disrupt the passive model of aesthetic consumption which conventional comedies promote.

Several contributions to comedic theory grow out of my analysis, the most fruitful of which being the clarification of the relationship of the comic to the comedic. Conventional wisdom suggests that the terms comic and comedic are interchangeable, but Der Biberpelz exposes this conflation as problematic. While the comic—the humorous incongruity within a mis-en-scene—might be present within a comedy, the comic can impede if not completely derail the comedic—the arrangement of plot which builds to a socially affirming, normalizing, clarifying, or otherwise stabilizing resolution of the plot's conflicts. In the work, Wehrhahn's mechanical obsession of persecuting liberals can never best Mutter Wolff's vitality nor expose her culpability. Only Wolff's exposure could create the conventionally comedic. As the plot of Der Biberpelz demonstrates, the comic—or the comic characters alone—cannot create this comedic resolution. In this manner, Der Biberpelz demonstrates how Helmut Arntzen could claim that a comedy is more than a dramatic work in which the comic is present[31].

Macroscopically, radical comedy represents a movement away from the rational center of conventional comedy's modernism and toward the decentering or rupture of postmodernism[32]. Radical comedy demonstrates the problematic nature of representation (aesthetic, epistemological, moral, or political) overlooked by Gottsched's rationalist proscriptions which assume that conventional comedy (and artistic production in general) can not only represent, but that it can also instruct and indoctrinate its audience. Gottsched might claim that art can be used to promote the hegemony of reason to

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[31] Helmut Arntzen, Die ernste Komödie (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlag, 1968) 11.

[32] Postmodernism is a notoriously difficult concept to describe as it represents many diverse movements, concepts, and developments in art, literature, and society. For my purposes here, I employ Hans Bertens' explication of the many postmodernisms: "If there is a common denominator to all these postmodernisms, it is that of a crisis in representation: a deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real, in the widest sense. No matter whether they are aesthetic, epistemological, moral or political in nature, the representation that we used to rely on can no longer be taken for granted" (10).

improve society, but radical comedy exposes this notion as hollow. Radical comedy

understands that morality is relative, truth unattainable, and completeness illusory. For

example, by demonstrating how the prime objective of the conventional comedy is to

complete the fractured, heal the injured, and unite the separated, Der Hofmeister exposes

comedy's resolution as artifice. Lenz's comedy draws attention to the size of its

resolution to bring attention to its artificiality and is therefore an inadequate attempt to tie

up loose ends. Der Biberpelz and Die Kassette respectively abort and conceal the

resolution Der Hofmeister goes to great lengths to orchestrate and exaggerate.

The relationship of conventional comedy to radical comedy harbors within it the

same relationship of modern to the postmodern. In an article entitled "Postmodernity, or

Living with Ambivalence," critic Zygmunt Baumann posits that in its search for a stabile,

intellectual foundation, "[m]odernity could dismiss its own uncertainty as a temporary

affliction" (15). This, I argue, is exactly the attitude conventional comedy adopts and

promotes. In modernity, "[e]ach uncertainty," Baumann continues,

> came complete with a recipe for curing it; just one more problem, and problems
> were defined by their solutions. (Societies, Marx insisted, never put before
> themselves tasks until means for their execution are available.) The passage from
> uncertainty to certainty, from ambivalence to transparency seemed to be a matter
> of time, of resolve, of resources, of knowledge. (15)

Conventional comedy espouses these same ideas: the formal and thematic uncertainties

within conventional comedy were always promised resolution in that they occurred

within a comedy. Conventional comedy, as I understand Arntzen to mean, deals in

problems and conflicts and their necessary and impending solutions. No matter how

daunting or apparently insuperable these uncertainties seem in conventional comedy, the

comedic concatenation of the plot will show the path "from uncertainty to certainty, from

ambivalence to transparency." And this path will always be found; it is only a "matter of time, of resolve, of resources, of <u>knowledge</u>" before the resolving scenes arrive. The conventional comedy suggests that solutions are always impending, so society relaxes, convinced of its stabile and comfortable equilibrium. Destroying this equilibrium and bespeaking the postmodern condition, radical comedy exposes and embraces uncertainty's permanence. Radical comedy indicates that no matter how much time passes in the mimesis, how resolved characters might be or the resources they might possess, the end of uncertainty is not always immanent. The works discussed in this dissertation all confront their audiences with a lingering ambiguity that points to the ambiguity and instability of institutions.

In effect, these works appear to create more conscious consumers of comedy, by problematizing representation. In this manner, radical comedy represents the fundamental shift in the viewing dynamic between the audience and the mimesis later pursued by Brecht. With no definite resolution to cap the action of <u>Der Biberpelz</u> and <u>Die Kassette</u>, the audience finds its ability to easily consume these comedies undermined. Radical comedy seems to tear down the idea of drama as a commodity. It subverts the aesthetic experience by frustrating the boundaries of the mimesis. As the audience leaves the theater, they carry with them the incomplete action of the radical comedy they have just witnessed and search for the necessary (but absent) solutions to the problems the mimesis has just presented. Radical comedy incites within its audience a postmodern awareness

> of no certain exit from uncertainty; of the escape from contingency being as
> contingent as the condition from which escape is sought. The discomfort such
> awareness brings about is the source of specifically postmodern discontents:
> discontent against the condition fraught with ambivalence, against the
> contingency that refuses to go away, and against the messengers of the news—

those who attempt to spell out and articulate what is new and what is unlikely ever to return to the old. (Baumann 15)

The "certain exit from uncertainty" Baumann speaks of here is tantamount to the resolution of conventional comedy. The discomfort resulting from the end of this "certain exit" explains the negative receptions the works here received (in particular, Der Biberpelz and even in the Dorian parable of comedy's origin put forth in my introduction). But the end of the "certain exit" now explains the success[33] of these radical comedies, as the traits that alienated their audiences now are timely and more widely accepted. Some might wonder what happens, then, to conventional comedy after the acceptance and success of radical comedy. If radical comedy exposes the instability of conventional comedy's foundations, the decentering of its center, and the rupture of its completeness, then these changes cannot be undone. Radical comedy by no means erases the existence or tradition of conventional comedy. The two forms still exist side by side, but the radical form overshadows the conventional and undermines its theme, form, and effects. In the shadow of radical comedy, conventional comedy appears naïve, outmoded, and a commodity designed purely for amusement. Conventional comedy's reinforcement of social, formal, and aesthetic norms is forever undermined by radical comedy's formal and thematic cynicism.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to describe and analyze radical comedy's form, yet there are several limitations to this study, most of which arise from my synchronic approach. Although this synchronic approach was effective in portraying the periodic manifestation of radical comedy, I do not attempt to chart these appearances and

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[33] Der Biberpelz has become one of the most performed comedies in the German language. Additionally, The Office has been adapted into American, French, German, and even Chilean versions, making it an international hit series.

draw correlations between them except for the traits they share as radical comedies. While it might be fruitful to approach dramatic comedies diachronically or to analyze multiple comedies by a single author, I have chosen a one work/one author model because it provides me a stronger position from which to establish radical comedy as a modality. A diffused investigation of several works would have blunted the force and focus of my argument.

Along with a diachronic approach, I also avoided prolonged analysis of historical context or authorial intent to investigate the nature of radical comedy. I would argue it is difficult if not impossible to prove the rise of a single radical comedy as the direct product of a specific historical context or authorial impulse. The historic context I provided in Chapter 1—specifically, the conventional comedy requirements established by the pre-Enlightenment Rationalist Gottsched—outlined the goals of the conventional form and served as a necessary backdrop for my ensuing discussions.

With the sole exception of Chapter 4's discussion of <u>I Love Lucy</u> and <u>The Office</u>, the works of this study were written and produced in Germany. Chapter 4 was specifically designed to reframe and recontextualize radical comedy to prove that radical comedy traits exist beyond the German stage.

Through this investigation, I have described the nature of radical comedy in drama and television situation comedy. However, the phenomenon of radical comedy may not only be restricted to dramatic comedy. Wider and deeper investigation is the clearest direction of future research. As this study was limited to the dramatic comedies of Germany, this is not to suggest that radical comedy is solely a German phenomenon. The mode may exhibit other characteristics in other genres or media, such as the novel or

romantic comedy films. Moreover, the apparatus theory employed in this dissertation will hopefully encourage new approaches to situation comedies, which tends to focus more on content than how camera technique frames that content. Additionally, much future work waits in analyzing the radical comedy responses of minorities in all arenas of culture. Since minorities themselves exist as eccentricities of the social center perceived and promoted by conventional comedy, studies on feminine, queer, or disabled engagements of radical comedy would all yield fruitful extensions of this study. Whether or not my readers agree with the characteristics I put forth in this study of the radical comedy genre in German dramatic comedy and current situation comedy, it is my hope that they will agree on one thing: comedy is serious stuff.

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