PLATH, BACHMANN, AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROSE OF THE ORDINARY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The departure of this study was shaped by my attempt to answer how literature denies losing contact with the events. In other words, my concern was the state of getting used to their frequent appearance in the everyday: in conversations, in newspapers, in topics of discussion. This is because habituating oneself to any event, to any disaster, would bring an end to every possible response to life. Nothing meaningful can remain after the event, if there is none of its impacts to be sensed. Literature, on the other hand, has the aesthetic capacity to resist such idea. It has the capacity to be attentive to the sensation of events: to how every moment will, and *should* continue to make us startled, to make us disturbed, and provoked. This is also the very reason why Sylvia Plath and Ingeborg Bachmann, whose texts are central to this study, are writing for the sake of what comes, and *should* come after the event. By telling about this, they deny, in their own writing, to bring an end to the ability to response.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> "[T]ears come later, in the middle of peace, as you once called this time, in a comfortable armchair, when no shots are being fired and nothing is burning."[1]
> - Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina: A Novel*

Nothing burns in *The Bell Jar* and *Malina*.[2] There are no wars, no accidents. There is nothing that changes the routine of the everyday. In these narratives, life seems to be repetitive and ordinary at first glance: life, in which people "have to work another eight hours or take time off, run errands, buy groceries, read the morning and evening papers, drink coffee, forget things, keep an appointment, ring someone up" (2).[3] This is how the everyday unfolds in the eyes of the protagonists in these novels, namely Esther in *The Bell Jar*, and the nameless female narrator in *Malina*. They, speaking in first person, utter these daily actions in a purely mechanical manner, as if they happen over and over again in the same way. They only name them while they count them one after another. They do not tell about them, as if there is no difference between them to tell about. For these everyday practices are reduced to one another in their speech, they give way to a sameness, or, to an allegedly eventless ground: a ground, where as if the events can no longer be differentiated, as if nothing significant occurs, and as if life, in its rhythm, sanely and forever, *goes on*.

Can life *go on* regardless of events? According to these novels, it cannot. The fact that no action would ever seem to make any difference in the everyday's rhythm, that days seem only to come one after another with making the same impact, that deaths would pile up in morning papers only in numbers, does not mean that there is no significant moment one can be affected by. There is, even, an imperative in being affected, as one cannot not have any

[1] "Außerdem weint man später, mitten im Frieden, so nanntest du doch einmal diese Zeit, in einem quemen Sessel, wenn die Schüsse nicht fallen und wenn es nicht brennt" (Bachmann, *Malina: Roman* 423-424).
[2] Written by Sylvia Plath in 1963, and by Ingeborg Bachmann in 1971, respectively.
[3] "daß sie wieder nur acht Stunden zu arbeiten haben oder sich freinehmen, ein paar Wege machen werden, etwas einkaufen müssen, eine Morgen und eine Abendzeitung lesen, einen Kaffee trinken, etwas vergessen haben, verabredet sind, jemand anrufen müssen." (*Malina: Roman* 10).

experience when facing any moment as it passes. The event, meaning the significant difference in time that affects the life of its witness in its each moment, brings, thus, an end to the idea of sameness in these novels. There is text, *because* the everyday is, in fact, has always already made an impact on life, which makes it worth telling.

This is why Esther and *Malina*'s narrator tell about their experiences to give evidence for their lives as *difference*: this means that in experiencing the orderly outlook of the everyday, there must be first difference between things, between the acts of 'running errands' and 'drinking coffee,' between 'forgetting things' and 'ringing someone up,' so that a telling can take place. In other words, there must be, first and foremost, an event that differentiates itself from other moments, and that leads lives to make sense of things – things that are experienced as significant by *someone* to be told. This *someone* is the one who looks at how things make sense as she witnesses them, how even the remotest event has capacity to make impact on her in numerous ways, and how life, actually, depends on those events, to which one can never be immune. Therefore, this *someone*, who is telling her story, is responsible to speak about every single event through presenting her experience. *The Bell Jar* and *Malina* concern themselves with the necessity of such autobiographical look.

This study, therefore, is about these two texts that, in their own ways, demand justice for experience. And in order to do that, they both start their protagonists' stories from exactly where the experience goes out of sight – the assumed ordinariness of everyday life. In *The Bell Jar*'s New York, and in *Malina*'s Vienna, life continues no matter what happens. In the repetitiveness of its everyday condition, events, in these novels, can only be parts of newspapers, subjects of conversations, and fragments for daily reportages in the radio. The autobiographical accounts of the narrators, on the other hand, constantly stress on the fact that how these events are distanced from their experience, and how their possible impacts are externalized from their lives. In this way, they state that there is violence in such

externalization. That they still cannot get through the events they become distanced from. That the everyday cannot reside in its sameness, in which nothing happens, and, in which, every second can be easily surpassed. Therefore, despite their relative absence from life, wars, accidents, suicides, and executions continue to make impact on the narrators. Such absent makes every single habit they engage to become an event: a moment, which has become significant. Each moment, in turn, crystallizes in the event, and each moment, to which the protagonists' lives are destined to, matters.

This attitude in writing also questions how history fails to do justice to event. How, by only naming it, it externalizes it from the realm of experience. The act of writing, thus, becomes at the same time a response to this distancing impact. By choosing to engage with the autobiographical, these texts start their position from elsewhere, where the impact of the event surfaces in the everyday experience. In this way, they show where the significance of the event lies: not in how it occurred, not in how it is called and counted as, but how its impacts infiltrate in life.

Following this distancing logic of the everyday as well as the history, this study is composed of three main chapters: "The Headline," "The Ordinary," and "The Autobiographical." In each of them, I aim to engage with *The Bell Jar*'s and *Malina*'s fundamental aesthetic concern about writing the experience of the everyday. By doing this, I will question how through writing, Esther and *Malina*'s narrator cope with the events they encounter in the midst of the ordinary, in which their responses fail to become visible. As both novels concern themselves with how the telling of experience can demand a different beginning in the narration of the event, each part in this study opens itself with the same question: what does it mean to begin? By close reading how *The Bell Jar* and *Malina* start their telling, I intend to approach their initial ethical stance with respect to history: the history that, speaking of the events as they happen, disregards their impacts. I will ask how the

beginning of these novels might be significant in their protagonists' regard of the event as an indispensible part of experience.

In the second chapter, titled "The Headline," I will emphasize how the everyday life unfolds in Esther's experience and telling in *The Bell Jar*. The main focus will be on the news as faced by Esther. I intend to get closer to the fact that how her engagement with the headlines, flashing and disappearing daily, benumbs her senses, and distances her from the reality of disasters in the world she inhabits. I will read her experience as a shock experience, which creates a sort of apathy in her encounter with the everyday. By also giving examples from references frequently given about the shocking impact of electricity itself, I will show how the shock experience is aesthetically foregrounded in the novel, and how it becomes the central problem in Esther's story. Hence, in the end of the chapter, I will dwell on this aesthetic gesture that problematizes the abstraction of the event. I will argue that shock is generated through this abstraction called *scandal*, and that *The Bell Jar* composes itself as the resistance to the scandalous, where its protagonist, Esther, portrays her distanced position by writing about its problematic nature.

The third chapter, "The Ordinary," is about how the experience of the everyday is set forth through the narrator's language in *Malina*. It is engaged with the narrator's use of the everyday words to tell about her past and present. I aim to make sense of her struggle with the words in her telling, which she uses in her ordinary life: I will maintain that her habitual words both make up and limit her potential to call back the impacts of the events she went through, and is going through. Such autobiographical telling, however, does not have a demand for recovery – there is no intention in the text toward an archival desire to reconstruct the events in the language, but toward a testimony of what she experiences in her present because of those events. *Malina*, I will argue, shows one's problematic relation with the everyday through one's singular use of words. Thus, this everyday language used in

Malina cannot be went beyond, but constitutes the very condition of the narrator's telling. It is her effort in form of text, which, in her each use of words, manifests itself.

Both texts' integration with the everyday life and the act of telling rests in their aesthetic mode, which I contemplate to clarify in the fourth chapter, "The Autobiographical." I will engage my reading particularly with the passages that show the protagonists' anxiety toward the sameness of the everyday. This anxiety discloses their pathological relation with the record of *what happened*, or, the violent simplification of the events in the everyday speeches – in the news, in dialogues, in letters, and in lectures. I will claim that the autobiographical writing in these novels resists such simplification by deliberately disrupting the rhythm of the everyday, by becoming its syncope. The voice as syncope disturbs the categorical time as it searches for its own temporality, its own rhythm. By doing as such, the speaking voice in *The Bell Jar* and *Malina* transforms time, or History with capital H, which determines its beginning and its end. This is why there is responsibility in telling, in speaking of experience, in showing what other beginnings and endings there might be. I will, therefore, mention this responsible gesture in the end, and indicate to its necessity in such aesthetic, proposed by these novels.

Eventually, I will inquire the possible reasons for these texts' imperative for writing. Consequently, the concluding chapter of this text, "Reading the Autobiographical," will focus on such imperative. It will touch upon the possible meanings for the reader's encounter with their ethical stance that does justice to experience. By speaking of the constructive impact of the everyday, I will suggest that these novels introduce a prose, which ethically disintegrate themselves from history. This disintegration, in turn, allow them to find a new way of telling about oneself in literature – a potential ground for speaking of experience.

As from these initial remarks about the chapters, my approach towards these texts will not regard these novels as representative of any era, any theme, or any generic category, but

as two examples for a specific mode of writing. In other words, I will give my efforts to look at these texts as manifestations of a fundamental question, the question of *living on* through writing. Through close readings of the passages, I intend to approach these texts by asking how their autobiographical mode generates itself by reacting to the senseless representation of life, in which everyday speeches reduce events to one another. In this way, I expect to make sense of their particular way of telling, and of what it proposes.

CHAPTER II

THE HEADLINE

2.1 The Question about Beginnings

> It is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back.
> - Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*

What does it mean to begin? To begin after and despite previous beginnings? To start telling after and despite all other '*Once upon a time*'s? If a beginning necessitates a decision about starting things over elsewhere, then it must partly contain a repudiation[4]: a repudiation against what has been already told, what has been already suggested, and what has been already recognized. This means that without reckoning with other beginnings, namely other histories, other autobiographies, and other geneses, beginnings cannot begin. Their reckoning with past narratives shall define their moment of departure. In this way, the text predestines itself through the way it starts itself.

How does *The Bell Jar* begin? What is its imperative moment to do justice to its own telling? In order to search for answers to these questions, it is necessary to look at how the narrative comes to make its choice, or to ask what the novel's beginning might repudiate by being written in the way it is written, in the United States, in 1963. At the outset, the reader encounters a voice. The voice belongs to the protagonist Esther Greenwood. Esther starts her story with a descriptive phrase: *It was*. She starts telling first and foremost about a summer, a very particular summer, being the summer of 1953:

> It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read about in the papers – goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on

[4] For the revolutionary capacity of beginnings to start things anew and elsewhere, see Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963).

> every street corner and at a fusty, peanut-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves.
>
> I thought it must be the worst thing in the world. (Plath, *The Bell Jar* 1)

This is how the nineteen-year-old Esther Greenwood tells about her summer in the beginning of *The Bell Jar*. From the very start, she employs an autobiographical tone by specifying her impressions of the particular kind of summer she had. Her personal experience of the summer dominates the narrative within this autobiographical mode of writing. However, what the beginning of her narrative evokes is far from autobiography: She avoids giving information about who she was, or why she went to New York. Neither does she start with what was going on with her life during the time she spent there. She begins with the Rosenbergs, and the news about how they are going to die.

The news about the Rosenbergs flashes in the first sentence. This means that Esther's narrative cannot begin without telling about the Rosenbergs. Such necessity suggests that their instant appearance at the beginning does more than to allude to a historical reference – an informative detail about the summer of 1953. In other words, it is not just an anchor point, which allows the reader to make inferences about a specific time period. Hearing about the Rosenbergs' execution designates the very beginning of Esther's story, and the reason for her writing in the first place. It sets up the fundamental problematic behind why her summer was indeed 'queer' and 'sultry,' and why she had no idea what she was doing in New York.

From her first sentence on, she expresses how the Rosenbergs infiltrates into her daily existence, and how she fails to comprehend the extent of violence inflicted upon them during their trial and execution. In 'every street corner' and 'every subway' she will be exposed to the information about their pain. The overwhelming documentation of the trial in the newspapers will not help her further to close her distance with the experience of being

electrocuted by the state, or having a determined deadline for life. Rosenbergs' untranslatable reality does, and will haunt her everyday life. It will keep making her feel 'stupid about executions' in her every attempt to understand. Feeling distant, she will say, 'it had nothing to do with me.' However, such irrelevance itself will never actually become irrelevant to her everyday life. She will be embarrassed by the fact that whatever she imagines about their condition, actually happens, and her distance to this fact becomes so disturbing that even her speculations about them are adequate to make her 'sick.' While her disgust with being a mere, distant observer to this violence concludes the paragraph, she refers to her distant position through a self-standing, one-sentenced expression: 'It must be the worst thing in the world.' She deliberately chooses to write about this very detachment, to begin from this irreconcilable '*must be*' by suspending her autobiography, where this condition, in the end, becomes her entire story. *The Bell Jar*, therefore, is not about Esther Greenwood's everyday life as a summer intern at a magazine in New York, and the months following it in form of *life writing* – which might seem so at first glance. It is, on the contrary, about feeling 'queer' and 'stupid' about the everyday life itself, and what happens to it when one is forced to *live on* along with the simultaneous presence of executions.

What other past narratives does, then, the beginning of *The Bell Jar* repudiate, by mentioning firstly and only the news about the Rosenbergs? A History about Eisenhower? A History about the summer of 1953? A History about Esther, the person? History itself? In order to understand why the narrative might have set forth such beginning, a further look into Esther's detachment from the *reported* events is necessary. From the opening paragraph onwards, there is tension between the news and Esther's life. Her daily routine is constantly interrupted by the up-to-date reportages of the events happening elsewhere. The Rosenbergs instance alludes to such condition. Telling about her initial exposure to the news, Esther keeps thinking of the events she hears about in comparison to her life: "I knew something

was wrong with me that summer, because all I could think about was the Rosenbergs and how stupid I'd been to buy all these uncomfortable, expensive clothes, hanging limp as fish in my closet" (2). This 'fish-like' 'limpness' of her clothes in the face of the horrible events demonstrates the insufficiency of her reaction toward what she is informed about. The irrelevance of her ordinary life numbs her. The inanimate mass, created by the dangling pieces of fabrics in her closet becomes a testimony for her inactive position. In her everyday life, she is senselessly taking up space on earth, by "moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo" (3). Despite her awareness of the disasters taken place in her surroundings, her 'uncomfortable' and 'expensive' life in New York goes on in its secured rhythm anyway.

The tension between the news and her life is created through her efforts and failure to differentiate her everyday from the events. She forces herself to place the events 'outside' of her everyday life because of their representative characteristics: the events, told *in form of* the news, do not seem to become part of her experience. However, at the same time she expresses her discontent repeatedly for being in such a distant position. She feels "still and empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel" (3), but her detachment from the events does not lead her to indifference. The events she reads about in the headlines baffle her. She remains *struck* by them. Therefore, her 'dull' passivity, complemented by her keen knowledge of the fact that the Rosenbergs are going to die in pain, causes her to repeat the word 'stupid' for the second time in the beginning. The word's frequent appearance cannot merely be a coincidence, given that feeling 'stupid' is central among Esther's reasons for writing, as also being alluded in the opening paragraph. Etymologically, the word 'stupid' means "confounded" and "struck senseless," ("Stupid," *Online Etymology Dictionary*) as well as being "stunned with surprise, grief," and being "benumbed" ("Stupid," *Concise Oxford Dictionary*). The pacifying experience described in the etymological meaning of the

word resembles, to a large extent, the apathetic state of a person who is confronting a shock. The shock also 'stuns,' 'confounds,' and 'benumbs' people. Its unexpected occurrence creates a void in the assumed rhythmic flow of everyday life by suggesting the moment of disorder. It plays with temporality by coming too early or too late than being expected: creating such effect, shock is relative to the hazardous crowd in a big city, the contingent logic of gambling, and a sudden rupture in the movement of the machine (Benjamin, "On Some Motifs"). In other words, its coming is based on the principle of luck.

Through the stupefying effect of the news like that of shock, the copula of Esther's ordinary life is irreversibly disintegrated. In this way, her life's rhythm is lost forever. What is left over after such disintegration, after this "jolt in the movement of the machine" (177), can be nothing other than the random appearance of the event that is *embedded* in the course of the ordinary. The threat of shock, caused by the news, shows that the so-called pattern of everyday life can collapse at any moment. This also means that there actually has never been a pattern in the first place, because at every moment, there is risk of dissolution. Hence, Esther Greenwood's everyday life and story can never be separated from the Rosenbergs trial, where the news about it is randomly scattered around the entire city of New York. It can 'stare up' at her from everywhere, at any time.

Consequently, Esther's way of telling about her 'stupid' position in the beginning refers directly to the news' unexpected –and baffling- presence in her ordinary life. In this way, her telling erases the hierarchical significance of the event as opposed to the 'insignificant' everyday, where the continuous structure of the everyday provides ground for its break by and for the event.[5] In other words, the event does not interrupt its counterpart, namely the *uneventful*, and instead, becomes a condition of it. Esther's failure to separate

[5] Michael Sayeau also discusses such dichotomy between the everyday and the event, when he mentions Aristotle's definition of sudden awareness of the characters (*peripeteia*) and instant turning points in the plot (*anagnorisis*) in tragedies. According to his *Poetics*, Sayeau states, the everyday provides a continuous realm where the significant event can be foregrounded to break such continuity. In this way, the arrival of the event creates a new meaning, through creating a significant change in the usual (13).

these two temporal notions defines one of the most remarkable motives of her story's beginning: the disentanglement of the assumed continuity of the everyday. This is why Esther does not make use of the sentence pattern "*It was a day like any other, but then…*" (Sayeau 13). Instead, she implies the fact that "*It was a day like any other*. Full stop," (13-14) where everyday's "rhythmical partner, the event, fails to arrive on time or at all" (14). This means that what happens in the narrative has already happen, and will continue to happen. Every moment will count. Every moment will matter. Esther's story will begin with 'it was a queer and sultry summer,' and will be bound to make a full stop there. Not an external, or extensional, or relatively more significant phenomenon will suddenly enter her story to change it. In the narrative, therefore, there is not a defining moment that invents History. The news about the Rosenbergs merely becomes an indispensable part of Esther's life, and of the ordinary condition of her summer. Its way of telling underlines the very fact that the summer of 1953 is ordinary. That electrocution is ordinary. Eisenhower regime is ordinary. Disasters are ordinary. They are as ordinary as the 'fusty, peanut smelling mouth of every subway.' The seemingly eventless condition of her summer is, thus, actually made up by *every* single event, and this is what makes it worth to be told from the very start.

This is also the reason why Esther's mode of writing becomes autobiographical through taking its shape by being an anti-autobiography: it is autobiographical, because it dwells on the moments of personal experience, and it is an anti-autobiography, because it avoids foregrounding a story about a course of life. Her narration does not selectively determine *essential* turning moments to make up a coherent structure. It does not crystallize moments to approach them as part of a bigger whole. By not doing so, Esther's narrative refuses to become another history, another "Once upon a time" (Benjamin, "Theses" 262) by "blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework" (263). It refuses to begin with a particular event, which could become an origin for all other subsequent

events: the event of being born, of winning a war, of the creation of heavens and the earth, or of the Big Bang. The summer of Esther is presented as a continuum without an origin. In its unchanging 'queerness' and 'sultriness,' it records and witnesses the comings and goings of headlines; the shocking, daunting, flashing, 'goggle-eyed headlines' that do not start anything and end in anywhere. The headlines, however, matter by hinting at the emptiness of the historical time. And why and how they matter, is the question I will pursue in the next section.

2.2 The News, *The Bell Jar* and the Disappearance of the Event

In *The Bell Jar*, the headline appears like a lightning. It comes in an instant, creates a 'stupefying' effect, and disappears into where it comes from: the newspaper. The daily-distributed newspaper becomes the hiding place of headlines, which can unexpectedly pop-out from every house, every street corner, and every subway station. "SUICIDE SAVED FROM SEVEN-STOREY LEDGE!" (*The Bell Jar* 144), "STARLET SUCCUMBS AFTER SIXTY-EIGHT HOUR COMA" (154), "SCHOLARSHIP GIRL MISSING. MOTHER WORRIED" (210), "GIRL FOUND ALIVE!" (211). These are some of the titles mentioned by Esther – the last two addressing the articles written about her suicide attempt. In the narrative, headlines summarize incidents such as suicides, missings, deaths and executions in a concise and distanced way. They come one after another, highlighting the most dramatic outcomes of events. In capitals, they are designed to draw the reader's immediate attention, as if they intend to show nothing but the simple facts. Being evident and easily reachable; however, the facts they show do not become more relatable to people's lives: the headlines keep 'stupefying' their audience –including Esther- by only informing them about what happened, without allowing them to sympathize with the events any further.

Esther's trouble with engaging the news into her daily existence, which I previously mentioned, also lies in this seemingly disinterested objectivity of the headline. Its cold and

hard content, embedded in its 'goggle-eyed stare,' strikes the audience in a direct but distant way. This distant stare highlights only what is *worth* to be known outside one's reality. What the headline provides its audience, therefore, is a part: the event's significant essence, which is sought necessary to be summoned into ordinary lives. Informing its reader about prevented suicides, dying starlets, and missing girls turn out to be alive, its way of telling about the events is partial, brief and exclusive.

The news also mirrors headlines by summarizing events, and determines what is significant in them: every detail that is given should directly serve the question of *what happened*, and the question of what happened only. In this way, only the piece of information one needs to know is going to be documented. Only the stages of how things have happened are going to be recorded part by part. By using conclusive expressions such as 'suicide saved,' 'starlet succumbs,' and 'mother worried,' the language of the newspaper reduces the complexity of life to single moments that can only *make sense* in a coherent and bigger story. In this story, what is important is that the man does not kill himself in the end. That the starlet dies. That a mother looks worried for her missing girl. That Esther, the scholarship girl, is found alive. The newspaper's stories only matter by their results. They operate a kind of history, which seeks for the outcomes. Like history's simplifying manner of wars, disasters and accidents, the news breaks off and picks out moments from the everyday life, and presents them back to its audience as abstract 'events.' What does, then, this part called 'the headline,' do to *life* itself – the life that is isolated from the events, and is, nevertheless, constantly invaded by them?

In *The Bell Jar*, the shocking characteristic of the headline lies in its distance from the audience, in other words, in its place outside the experience. Facing the Rosenbergs, Esther expresses her impersonal response to what will happen to them, stating 'that's all there was to read about in the newspapers.' This comment has no relation to what she feels about their

trial, or how she is affected by the news. Encountering merely informative details about the electrocution generates a kind of atrophy in her senses – a shock experience in which she fails to assimilate what she hears about into her life (Benjamin, "On Some Motifs" 158). While events are approached by the newspaper as being irrelevant phenomena to everyday, Esther's expression does no more than to address the automatic, senseless act of 'reading' – the reader's only possible relation to the reportedness of the event. In this minimalizing attitude of the newspaper, the event is thus decomposed into its singular details, into what is 'all there is to read about.' In *The Bell Jar*, shock is created by this abstraction in journalism.

It is necessary to analyze further this 'stupefying' shock effect that strikes Esther constantly, so that the impact of this journalist abstraction can be understood. The shock, generated by the headline, strongly resembles the flashing images of electricity in the narrative. Because of its suddenness and intensity, the impact of electricity is present to dominate, paralyze, and exhaust senses. From the beginning of the narrative onwards, hearing about electrocutions stimulates Esther's thoughts, as she repetitively keeps trying to imagine the experience of 'being burned alive all along your nerves.' Later on, the face of Eisenhower *beams up* at her from his photograph on a magazine laid on a low coffee-table (*The Bell Jar* 93), as well as the *beaming up* of "far, bright faces of babies" (234), whose photographs she encounters on a magazine called *Baby Talk*. After her suicide attempt she observes in the newspaper a photograph, on which bright, "moon-faced" (211) people are looking for her in the forest. Esther describes them as 'moon-faced,' because their faces are illuminated at midnight by flash. Electricity also finds her through electroshock treatments, implemented to her in mental institutions. She describes her first benumbing experience of shock in detail: "Whee-ee-ee-ee-ee, it shrilled, through an air crackling with blue light, and with each flash a great jolt drubbed me till I thought my bones would break and the sap fly out of me like a split plant." (151) This time, the untranslatable experience of being shocked by the blue

flashes of light is abstracted by her in the language, with expressions such as ‘crackling air,’ ‘drubbing jolt,’ and ‘splitting plant.’

In Esther’s narrative, everything surrounding her beams up, shakes her being, and disappears in the speed of light. The faster the light beams, the harder the reality is absorbed, and things eventually lose their sense (Baudrillard 49). Similar to headlines, photographs she encounters isolate the events from their continuous movement by capturing images out of them. By doing this, photographs reduce the events to a single flashing moment, whose reality are perpetually suspended. (Derrida, *Mourning* 39) While Eisenhower’s face appears resembling a half-animate being, “bald and blank as the face of a fœtus in a bottle” (*The Bell Jar* 93), the repetitive images of look-alike babies overstimulate Esther’s vision: “bald babies, chocolate-coloured babies, Eisenhower-faced babies, babies rolling over the first time, babies reaching for rattles, babies eating their first spoonful of solid food, babies doing all the little tricky things it takes to grow up” (234). The capacity to absorb and distinguish these similar images of babies diminishes by the increase in their frequency to appear in front of the eye. They confound Esther’s vision by appearing one after another, in similar and anonymous poses, which transform them eventually into an overwhelming mass.

Such desensitizing capacity of the photographic instances is also presented in form of shock in the newspapers. While the newspaper displays the traumatic events such as “local murders and suicides and beatings and robbings” (144), images of women suddenly come in sight between them. Esther tells particularly about the foregrounded details of their body, which are purposely placed on almost every single page of the newspaper. Each time, the news are ‘ornamented’ by a suddenly appearing “half naked lady … with her breasts surging over the edge of her dress and her legs arranged so you could see to her stocking tops” (144). The flashing presentations of events along with the juxtaposition of these voyeuristic images of women stun Esther. Their unrelated and hazardous arrangement in the newspaper shows

the arbitrariness of their signification. The events are no longer perceived in the continuous flow of everyday life, but separated by their special 'captures' in the newspaper. In such projection, they do not become any different than the surging breast, the arranged leg, and the stocking top. They become parts of a provocative arrangement. In their stimulating and momentary presence, the effect of surprise becomes the news' primary goal. This principle of surprise works for the event's reductionism into a single defining moment. That is why the experience of shock in reading has a desensitizing effect: there is nothing more to be known more about what is written or exposed, nor there is nothing more to be experienced. The newspaper frames a coherent picture of the external world by only revealing the facts in *parts*. Just as the photographs she encounters on magazines and newspapers, the news defines the newspaper's reason to be: a sense of unity made possible through many constituting *parts* in which there is "no duality, no direction, no disturbance" (Barthes 41).[6]

What matters for the news, again, becomes the question of *what happened* – as known as the result. Therefore, it becomes only the scandalous 'snapshot' of the significant, the miraculous, and the shocking. It works in favor of what it defines as *extra-ordinary*. In this way, the news creates a sense of a securely kept private realm of the ordinary called 'the everyday,' which is, and will, to a certain extent, be immune to the happenings taking place outside called 'the event.' The sense of unity is constituted through this temporal separation, and this can only be sustained through an exile: the exile of the event whose moment is forever *abstracted* from the continuity of the everyday.

An example to how this exile occurs would be the case of George Pollucci. He is the man who commits suicide, and in the last minute, 'is saved from seven-storey ledge.' After reading the newspaper article, Esther questions the lack of information given about Mr.

[6] Roland Barthes uses this expression to clarify the working of news photography. News photographs, as frequently appear in *The Bell Jar*, complement the way the newspaper presents the events: they distance the reader from their complexity. They become simple and coherent blocks of images, which detach the reader's experience from the news.

Pollucci's state: "The inky black newspaper paragraph didn't tell why Mr. Pollucci was on the ledge, or what Sgt. Kilmartin did to him when he finally got him in through the window" (144). While being in an obsessive inquiry for understanding the suicide attempt of George Pollucci, Esther's engagement with the event is limited by 'the inky black newspaper paragraph.' This means that from the very beginning, the text has the agency for orchestrating the stories written about the events. It does not choose to tell about any personal motivations behind Mr. Pollucci's attempt, or what happened to him after he gives up. It erases Pollucci's story for the sake of foregrounding the scandalous act: the suicide. The black ink dictates that the essence of this story should become suicide itself. It is this anonymity that makes the news irrelevant to any kind of experience. Within the text, George Pollucci never commits suicide. The suicide belongs to no one. The substance of the event escapes the news forever, by which its reality is sublimated (Baudrillard 31). Just as the sublimation of Pollucci's features on his photograph, which "resolved themselves into a regular pattern of dark and light and medium grey dots" (*The Bell Jar* 144). The event is perpetually suspended and expelled from the 'inky black paragraph' of the newspaper. In this way, it is banished from the news' unifying and harmonizing mechanism. Devoid of any substance, experience and personalization, the news becomes nothing but pornography. Pornography resembles to journalism in its unifying abstraction of events. Killings, massacres, overdoses, executions, accidents and wars are presented in journalism only for serving as parts of a coherent reportage. The news, in turn, becomes "like a shop window which shows only one illuminated piece of jewelry" (Barthes 41), as the pornographic images concern themselves merely with one goal: the presentation of sex.[7] No life is shown beyond the event's projection.

[7] Roland Barthes parallels the pornographic photography with news photography as he defines the "unary" photographs. He claims that they both lack any disturbing inconsistencies (fissures) that would enter in and deconstruct their coherent unity; they only highlight what they aim to reveal. (41)

If this is the case, then, why does one write? Or, put in other words, why does one even begins to write if one arrives at the end of meaning, or at the end of the beginning, where 'that's all there was to read about'? The ninth chapter of *The Bell Jar* opens with a little comment on the Rosenbergs' electrocution by Hilda, an acquaintance of Esther whom she runs across: "I am so glad that they are going to die" (104). This sentence is repeated three times at the beginning of the chapter, along with her additional statement about the event: "Its awful such people should be alive" (105). Such claims, like a scandalous headline, or a blue light that 'crackles the air,' keep echoing in Esther's mind. As soon as they appear, they occupy her life in every minute. In this way, they become more than just some coldblooded commentaries on someone's death, just as the newspaper means more than a mere collection of subsequent headlines. They are *seen* and *heard* by Esther. Esther witnesses the fact that Hilda's claims are said the very same day on which the Rosenbergs are going to be executed. She witnesses Hilda's indifference in face of the coming violence, and her big yawn. She witnesses the event's perpetual exile in Hilda's commenting "orange mouth" (105). The "voice of the dybbuk" (105) that comes out of Hilda's lips, like the newspaper's reductionist objectivity, or like the simplifying manner of the news photographs, is undermined by Esther's way of writing about them. The sensational logic of the news is unguarded to Esther's eyes, which are in close relation to her everyday life. In her autobiographical mode, writing displaces the news language that fails to do justice to events.

How is this language displaced? As I argued before, only events that are sought to have considerable actuality and worth are to be written down in the newspaper. These isolated 'captures' of events are given historical value, and they will eventually dominate the newspaper's rhetoric. The scandalous, therefore, will be recorded as significant to become part of a bigger whole, to become a special moment. It will be stripped out of the complexity of the ordinary as an isolated 'event,' while being appropriated as significant part of the

history. It will seek a habitation place with a desire for an absolute beginning: the newspaper. This pattern is similar to that of the archive (Derrida, Prenowitz, "Archive Fever" 55). Archive's parting from the continuous whole, its nostalgic desire for domesticity, and its delusion of becoming part of a bigger *truth* (55) lies similarly in the abstraction of the event as an isolated moment of time in the newspaper, taken out from the everyday. The newspaper reportage, like the event's archivization process, however, is not without its threats of dissolution. Esther sees the specters of the everyday in the violent reductionism of the printed event.[8] She does not become indifferent to the news' desensitizing maneuvers of shock, but becomes disturbed by them. The same way she is disturbed by the news surrounding her life, informing about the Rosenbergs, about George Pollucci, and about herself. That is why she starts her narrative from elsewhere, by repudiating the archive, and repudiating "the part, the parting, the partition, the piece" (55) from the very beginning. By pointing out at the binary thinking of the event as part of *presence* –in this case, of a newspaper- or not (*Specters* 78), her writing becomes the ghost of the historical time, as well as the temporality of the printed event. It overrules the assumed wholeness and integrity of time. By opening the sphere of the ordinary, by writing explicitly about the ordinary, by engaging with the language of the ordinary, Esther writes about the scandalous aspect of her everyday: the scandalous aspect that disturbs, troubles, and 'stupefies' her.

2.3 The Scandalous Everyday

"A scandal sheet" (*The Bell Jar* 144) is what Esther's mother calls the newspaper. Only few paragraphs before, her mother informs Esther about the electroshock treatment she is going to receive, where she felt "a sharp stab of curiosity, as if [she] had just read terrible newspaper headline about somebody else" (143). Her mother's statement sounded to her as remote as a

[8] In *Specters of Marx*, related to his references of specters in the text "The Archive Fever," Derrida asks the question of "What is a ghost?" (10) By haunting the assumed integrity of the house, or the archive as 'absolute others,' he answers, the ghosts are "staging for the end of history" (10). They show the emptiness of the historical time by coming from *outside* the home and its established temporality.

scandalous headline she sees on a newspaper: happening elsewhere, to someone else. Her curiosity toward the unknown 'stabs' her, just like her obsessive inquiry towards the experience of being electrocuted at the beginning. She feels distant from this information of what would become of her. This is similar to the shock experience she has when hearing about what would become of the Rosenbergs. In other words, she becomes alienated from her everyday life because of her mother's words, through which her ordinary life is suddenly *scandalized*.

Many instances appear in Esther's narrative like a headline, remaining unassimilable, unfamiliar and strange to her experience. Hilda's indifferent yawn towards the Rosenbergs' execution is one of them. Another would be the "woman-hater" (111) Marco's condescending treatment to her, like the snake she saw in the Bronx Zoo, which "struck and struck and struck at the invisible pane till [she] moved off" (111). These instances are poignantly violent, which 'strike' Esther the moment she encounters them. Yet, by being parts of her everyday routine, they demand indifference. Such demand is caused by their repetitive occurrence in her life: they complement her everyday, and therefore, after a certain point they *should* become habitual – as the increase in the frequency of shock 'strikes and strikes and strikes,' and creates a kind of atrophy on the side of its receiver. This is similar to the desensitizing effect of the newspaper. As dramatic events are portrayed in a disinterested manner, Esther manages to look at their surprising presentation only from an appropriated distance. With a certain distance, maintained through this disinterested style of language, the event is transformed into an object of spectacle: shocking, but distant. Surprising, but, *out there*. Such appropriation of distance between the reader and the event, therefore, is the ultimate success of the scandal. Before looking further at how this success is attained, and how Esther's writing refuses to reconcile with *proper* distances, one firstly needs to ask the question of what exactly makes of a scandal.

> One slide I remember showed a beautiful laughing girl with a black mole on her cheek. 'Twenty days after that mole appeared the girl was dead,' the doctor said, and everybody went very quiet for a minute and then the bell rang, so I never really found out what the mole was or why the girl died. (66)

Esther enters in a lecture room. For a few seconds, the photograph of the 'beautiful laughing girl' appears as a medical record in front of the audience. It is one image among many, flashing and disappearing like all the other images that are presented. These images seem to move in a rhythm: they *slide* subsequently, and show cases one after another until the bell rings, by which the lecture comes to an end. The lecture has no time for the traumatic reality happening behind the 'black mole.' For the sake of being instructive and efficient, it needs to display examples from certain diseases in a scientific and disinterested manner. It is an automaton, where professionals "[wheel] sick people out on the platform and [ask] them questions and then [wheel] them off and showed coloured slides" (66).

The repetitive structure of the lecture here is based on a conjunction only: the conjunction of 'and.' It indicates two separate actions in a juxtaposed manner, or adds one thing to another, without necessarily providing any connection between them. In other words, it focuses on the partition itself. Within the mechanical temporality of the lecture, the time is broken into pieces, and appears in Esther's text as such. This is why there remains no other meaning beyond the fact that 'the people are wheeled out *and* asked questions *and* wheeled off *and* slides are shown,' or the doctor said the truth about the girl '*and* everybody went very quiet … *and* then the bell rang.' The lecture is programmed for demonstrating only what happened, just as the newspaper with its headlines does. As the events and cases pile up in front of their audience, it becomes gradually blinded by getting used to them. The members of the audience went 'very quiet for a moment,' and for a moment only, until life, or the bell calls them to move on – to move on regardless of accidents, disasters, suicides, missings,

wars, and electrocutions. Esther's deliberate and repetitive use of 'and's in her writing indicates the newspapers', the lectures', the asylums', and the families' –themes that are often written about in her narrative- violent demand for their audience's indifference.

This call for *moving on* defines the moment of scandalization. As soon as the black mole is shown to the audience in the room, the shock factor comes: this animated, beautiful girl is now dead. The sickle-cell anemia appears and strikes people in the room, while leading them to a short and momentary silence. But they recover fast from such shock, and follow the bell. During the slide's presentation, Esther notices that no other information is given about 'what the mole was,' or about 'why the girl died.' The lecture only shows the result. Recalling the previous section, later in her narrative, Esther will use the exact same sentence pattern when she faces the newspaper article about George Pollucci's suicide attempt: "The inky black newspaper paragraph didn't tell why Mr. Pollucci was on the ledge, or what Sgt. Kilmartin did to him when he finally got him in through the window" (144). The scandal strips the event out of its complexity by not showing 'what x was' or 'why x happened.' Feeling more and more distant from the singled-out event, the audience becomes more and more unfamiliar to it. Such presentation results in the audience's lack of judgment when encountering the events, and eventually, in its indifference. This lack of judgment is the very reason, which makes Esther feel 'stupid' and disturbed from the very beginning. And this is why she writes against such alienation.

Through writing, Esther responds to the scandalous. From the word's earlier religious and moral uses onwards, the Ancient Greek expression *skándalon* stands for the unforgivable "cause of offence," or the "stumbling-block" that leads to the ineffectiveness of the common code ("Scandal," *Concise Oxford Dictionary*).[9] In other words, the meaning of the word does

[9] Especially in the New Testament, the word *skandala* is used to define the deliberate "offenses" for committing a sin, contrary to *hamartenein*, the acts of "trespassing," which are committed as a result of human weaknesses (Arendt, *Human Condition* 240). Therefore, *skandala*, which are not caused by the understandable human motives, and which are considered as offenses against the Christianity itself, cannot be judged as crime – and as

not include the offenses that trespass the law, the rule or the common sense, but that undermine it. Politically speaking, *skandala* undermine the human condition, and thus, responsibility towards the others. By invalidating the agreement itself, they weaken one's power to judge: as there is no common ground, there can be no crime. Eventually, they bring "the greatest danger," that is, "the indifference" (Arendt, *Responsibility* 146). This is the very reason why Esther is disturbed by such indifference, by such "unwillingness or inability to relate to others through judgment" (146), which is demanded from her by her surroundings. She reacts against this lack of judgment, against the bell that calls people for *moving on* despite the catastrophes that are happening around them. Her narrative, then, asks the question: how can life go on by repudiating the call for moving on?

It is a question of responsibility. Esther's feeling of alienation towards the indifference never stops her from writing about her uneasy entanglement with the scandalous presentation of the everyday, which demands such indifference. Her choice of writing particularly about the everyday resists such alienation (Felski 173). She responsibly reacts to the fact that her everyday is not a projection. As the reality of the Rosenbergs is not an article written in black ink. As Hilda's statement 'I am so glad that they are going to die' is not a harmless sentence. As the beautiful laughing girl with a black mole on her cheek is not a medical case. She refuses to get habituated by the scandalization of events. She looks, instead, for the ghosts that are going to dissolve the scandals, their archivization, and speak for themselves in order to do justice to events (*Specters* 122).

In her narrative, therefore, *living on* does not mean *moving on*. Living on can very well mean the opposite, to *stop*, to become 'sick' as long as there is an appropriated distance. The word 'sick' becomes almost the embodiment of her response against habituation, against indifference. It is used in her narrative around thirty times: "The idea of being electrocuted

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it cannot be judged, it cannot be forgiven as a result of the verdict, of the Last Judgment (Arendt *Responsibility* 73).

makes me sick" (*The Bell Jar* 1). "Girls like that make me sick" (4), "[Things] surprised me or made me sick" (14), "Physics make me sick" (36), "The sickness rolled through me in great waves" (46), "Children made me sick" (123), "[T]he sight of this nurse made me sick at heart" (222), "I have been defending [my virginity] for five years and I was sick of it" (241). Sickness has proximity to life – it is its evidence. It means not being well until the pain is over. It means not getting used to pain. Such repudiation of habituation or desensitization also delineates Esther's writing. Her narrative does not accept life's projected presence – news, slides, lectures etc.- in *parts*, but the fact that its continuity, and its complexity never lie in such projection.

Her writing about the ordinary, therefore, is a search for justice. It is to do justice to life by showing it in form of evidences: the evidence of movement instead of moment, the evidence of passing instead of partition. (Nancy 85).[10] Esther's story does not *move on*, because it assumes another kind of temporality that makes it impossible to move on from one moment after another: it repudiates it and begins itself from the continuous ordinary, where only there one can find the immediate reality of events. It does this because to believe in *moving on* means that one has to believe in partition of moments – of lectures, of ringing bells, of flashing and disappearing headlines, and of 'and's. And to believe in partition of time means that life should give its way to a mere series of –archival- events, emptied out of any experience, and coming senselessly one after another: "Then the front door opened and shut. Then the car door opened and shut, and the motor went broom-broom and, edging off with a crunch of gravel, faded into the distance" (*The Bell Jar* 121). When Esther comes back to her mother's home in the suburbs, the ordinary comes upon her event by event. The

[10] Jean-Luc Nancy discusses the Kiarostami's film *Life and Nothing More* (1992) in terms of its repudiation of projections. Telling about life in the aftermath of the 1990 Manjil-Rudbar earthquake, the film, similar to *The Bell Jar*, is in effort to do justice to the continuity of life: According to Nancy, its art "makes up immediate reality, to make evidence visible- or, more precisely … , to make visible that there is (*il y a*) this evidence and this justice. Life goes all the way to the end- that's its right measure (*juste mesure*), and that's how it always keeps going beyond itself" (85).

intense, mechanical rhythm of the everyday overwhelms her as if she is following some slides shown in a lecture. Doors open, doors shut, and motors go 'broom-broom.' This senseless telling of opening and shutting doors, or of coming and going cars is the very symptom of 'sickness' in Esther's writing. In most parts of her narrative, Esther deliberately writes in this indifferent mode that would imitate the language of the newspaper. Her insomnia, depression and suicide attempts accompany such language. Ironically juxtaposing her pain and sickness with such mode of telling, she shows her disturbance with the distancing impact of all flashing sequences, events, moments, and beginnings in her life. Her language gets deliberately 'sick' by writing about the everyday in an imitative, distancing, and *scandalous* manner.

Thus, the headline by Esther follows: 'Then the front door opened and shut. Then the car door opened and shut.' A semi-'scandal sheet' appears in front of the reader, which only seems to speak about the events. The autobiographical voice, by telling about Esther's troubles and private experiences in absorbing these events, however, insists on her search for justice. Within this subsequent historicizing of coming and going of events, the narrative asks: who opens and shuts these doors? Who are these ghosts that untimely enter in the text - whose stories appear in headlines, photographs, lectures, asylum records and magazines-, and 'fade into the distance'?[11]

Beginning from the news about the Rosenbergs onwards, *The Bell Jar* calls for the silence behind the scandalous projection of life. Its language shows the violence in the reportage of the eventful. This language, in the end, seeks other ways for searching evidence for life in the continuous existence of the everyday. It searches evidence for life within the continuous, "incalculable malice of the everyday" (Plath, "Three Women" 184). This language can also be that of *Malina*.

[11] Derrida shows how ghosts, with their "furtive and untimely" comings, disrupt the temporality of the "modalized presents" by quoting from *Hamlet*: "Enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost" (*Specters* xix).

CHAPTER III

THE ORDINARY

3.1 The Question about Beginnings Continued

> Der Krieg wird nicht mehr erklärt,
> sondern fortgesetzt. Das Unerhörte
> ist alltäglich geworden. Der Herd
> bleibt den Kämpfen fern. Der Schwache
> ist in die Feuerzonen gerückt.
> - Ingeborg Bachmann, "Alle Tage."[12]

The question should be asked again: What does it mean to begin? To pick a day as *today* to begin? To finally decide writing *today*, while hesitating between telling and not telling, between "Ich muß erzählen" (*Malina: Roman* 24)[13] and "Ich will nicht erzählen" (30)?[14] Will this hesitation be over when everything is written at last? In each narrative, beginning necessitates a decision – an initiative, which should be taken for moving the tip of the pen at the right time. In this case, beginning becomes a result of calculation, of waiting. Most of them, the poem mentions, wait: for 'the declaration' [Die Erklärung], 'the outrageous' [Das Unerhörte], 'the hero' [Der Herd]. These beginnings are born in the aftermaths, and they tell about the events only after they are over, after they become significant, after they become historical. But then again, how can a text begin if it does not reconcile with the belief in which things end *properly*? What does such a text wait for to tell about, while it never agrees with the idea that 'war is over,' and will ever be over, in Vienna, after 1945?

Malina begins with how hard it is to begin. For pages and pages, the first-person narrator tells about how *today*, a day like any other, in the year of 1971, can never become a significant date to be picked as a beginning. She explains in page-long sentences, step by step, of how the word 'today' is impossible, how it cannot be addressed to, and how it gives

[12] "War is no longer declared,
but rather continued. The outrageous
has become the everyday. The hero
is absent from the battle. The weak
are moved into the firing zone." (Bachmann, *Darkness Spoken* 39)
[13] "I must talk" (*Malina: A Novel* 9).
[14] "I don't want to talk" (*Malina: A Novel* 11).

her a tremendous anxiety every time she thinks about it. The narrator, without a *today*, writes all about her hesitation to start:

> [D]urch dieses Heute kann ich nur in höchster Angst und fliegender Eile kommen und davon schreiben, oder nur sagen, in dieser höchsten Angst, was sich zuträgt, denn vernichten müßte man es sofort, was über Heute geschrieben wird, wie man die wirklichen Briefe zerreißt, zerknüllt, nicht beendet, nicht abschickt, weil sie von heute sind und weil sie in keinem Heute mehr ankommen werden (*Malina: Roman* 9). [15]

'[D]urch dieses Heute kann ich nur in höchster Angst und fliegender Eile kommen.' She informs her reader about the fact that what she can write about can only be her relation with 'today' [Heute], but never what it consists of. And that is why this is the only place she can begin. Any attempt to arrive at a 'today' would only result in falling distant from it. Like a reflection in a mirror, each effort made to touch it will let one fall back to the image itself. Hence, she states that all she can do is to report this very image, or to 'only write about it' [nur … davon schreiben] in the way it appears in her life. This happens because the word 'to-day' refers to a day, in relation to both yesterday and tomorrow. It is a *part* taken out from an imagined order of time: like a letter that is sent from one party to another, it *de-parts* from past and future moments to arrive at their presence.[16] In such an understanding, therefore, any use of the word 'today' will inevitably allude to the partition of the moment from its continuity. The narrator's intense anxiety and haste derive from this very language of partition, because according to her, 'today' has no correspondence in time. Just as all the letters 'that are written and cannot arrive,' that are written to specific people in specific

[15] "This Today sends me flying into an anxious haste, so that I can only write about it, or at best report whatever's going on. Actually, anything written about Today should be destroyed immediately, just like all real letters crumpled or torn up, unfinished and unmailed, all because they were written, but they cannot arrive, Today." (*Malina: A Novel* 2).

[16] Also, the construction of the German word "Heute" is similar to that of "today" (to-day), stemming from the Proto-Germanic expression "hiu-tagu," meaning, "on (this day)" ("Today," *Online Etymology*).

places, in specific *now*s, and that are waiting forever to be received, the events that are written about also cannot arrive at their own presence – at their own 'today.'

'[V]ernichten müßte man es sofort, was über Heute geschrieben wird.' Where does this urge to 'destroy' [vernichten] come from? Why all the letters have to be 'torn up' [zerreißt] and 'crumpled' [zerknüllt] that are expected to be received by someone, to arrive at someone's 'today,' and in the end, not? The problem of correspondence cannot fully explain this wish to annihilate. The narrator is not only in despair for her perpetual failure to come to terms with the idea of 'today,' but also believes that it would be a right thing to tear apart all its references, everything that is written for, and addressed to it. This iconoclastic attitude is also a moral one: to write about 'today,' to attribute it an exclusive temporality, to legitimize its partition, 'should' [müßte] not exist. As soon as she writes "Zeit/Heute" (2)[17] in the beginning of her narrative, she becomes suddenly frustrated by the word's impact to assign a definitive beginning to her narrative, to give it a History, an authenticity that makes it *hers*. And this claimed ownership of time (Adorno 79) –aka the indifference to time's impersonal continuity- is the very crime, the very *skandala* she tries to escape from. This is why *Malina* also becomes an attentive autobiographical writing similar to *The Bell Jar*, which tells about its narrator's trouble in beginning to tell. And by doing so, it refuses to become an autobiography, which would start from who she is, and what she is going to tell its reader in the first place.

In attempt to eradicate every single text that is dedicated to 'today' in the beginning, the narrator asks for an alternative for telling about things: about the ongoing impacts of war, about the perpetual violence of men in her life, and about accidents and dying horses and sounds of gunshots during carnivals (*Malina: Roman* 29-30). According to her, realities of these events should not be appropriated again and again within the historical container

[17] "Time: Today" (*Malina: A Novel* 2).

(archive) called 'today,' which would reduce them to contemporary, significant points in time. This is why *Malina*'s repudiation in the beginning does not refer to a silent resignation from writing just because the word 'today' is impossible, and one cannot start talking without mentioning it. It is, on the contrary, a search for another mode of writing, for another language, which enables telling about what she actually means by 'today.' In other words, it is a search for another beginning: a beginning, which denies becoming a part of an abstract historical imagination.

The narrator continues: "Wer je einen schrecklich flehentlichen Brief geschrieben hat, um ihn dann doch zu zerreißen und zu verwerfen, weiß noch am ehesten, was hier unter >heute< gemeint ist" (9).[18] In this statement, the narrator implies the fact that the 'intensely fervent letter' [schrecklich flehentlichen Brief] is not being written for the purpose of being sent, but 'only to [be torn] to shreds' [um ihn dann doch zu zerreißen]. It is a letter, which is only there for being thrown away. In other words, disposal is its only purpose: without a destination, it is not even once read, and hence, it is not encountered by anyone who might have acknowledged it. Does 'tearing it to shreds' make it disappear? Within the world of senders and receivers, yes – the letter is no longer there to be handed in, as it is completely destroyed. It is made illegible. It is completely absent from everybody's eyes to be witnessed. Its presence cannot be proven, because it is erased from the records of history. Is, however, being torn to pieces make this letter unwritten? Can it be stated that its 'intensely fervent' content never existed?

Only the one who writes a letter to be torn to shreds 'knows exactly what is meant by today' [weiß noch am ehesten, was hier unter >heute< gemeint ist]. The letter (the event) is irrecoverable, and only a medium (a language), which starts regarding it from this very fact, can do justice to it. The fact that the letter is irrecoverable does not mean that it does not

[18] "Whoever has composed an intensely fervent letter only to tear it to shreds and throw it away knows exactly what is meant by 'today'" (*Malina: A Novel* 2).

exist, that it can no longer be talked about, and that it can no longer be acknowledged, just because the fact that it is no longer physically in the world of senders and receivers. It is similar to what Bachmann's poem states: the fact that there is no 'declaration' [Erklärung] between two parties does not mean that there is no war. In the narrator's understanding, therefore, the impacts of events –or, their 'specters'- continue to reside within the flow of time. 'Today' must be, then, inseparable from this cumulative reality called the 'everyday,' where "the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary" (Das 1). And the language she is going to use, therefore, should insist on telling about the ordinary life itself, about the very 'tentacles' that make up its existence: the impacts of wars, of train crashes, of all the events that are presented in the everyday, irrecoverably in media: "Zeitungen und Zeitschriften und Taschenbücher überall, auf allen Bahnhöfen, in allen Zügen, in Straßenbahnen, in Omnibussen, Flugzeugen, und alles über alles gelesen, in vier Sprachen ... und alles verstanden, was es zu lesen gibt" (*Malina: Roman* 105).[19] In other words, the narrator imagines a language, which will lay out the problem in 'today' itself: the problem in which the events are simulated and piled up as merely external facts, and becoming detached from the ordinary experience. Her language, therefore, will work through giving voice to the very experience about this distancing condition of 'today.'

Because the news exteriorizes events from the everyday life, and lists them as topical and up-to-date records, it becomes the very letter in the beginning that is addressed to, and *arrives at* 'to-day.' The examples of these records would pop-up each day 'at all train stations, in all trains, in streetcars, busses and airplanes' [in allen Zügen, in Straßenbahnen, in Omnibussen, Flugzeugen], whose every detail is obsessively stored in 'four languages' [in vier Sprachen] of the archive. The act of presenting and reading 'everything about

[19] "[N]ewspapers and periodicals and paperbacks [being] everywhere, at all train stations, in all trains, in streetcars, buses, airplanes and [writing about] everything about everything in four languages, … and everything understood that can be read" (*Malina: A Novel* 49).

everything' [alles über alles] about these events, in the end, becomes part of the desire to *know* more about them: a desire to attain a bigger and better picture about an assumed metaphysical order, which can also be called History. What matters here, thus, is the question of arrival; the question of what can be *the great reality* behind what has happened today, and will happen every single 'today.' The skeptic belief and desire in the event's recovery through its abstraction in the reportage: this is the language of 'today' that the narrator wants to 'destroy immediately.'

In the language of *Malina*, therefore, there will be nothing *beyond* the everyday. There will be not a "Blauer Blitz rast in Roten Blitz, 107 Tote und 80 Verletzte" (349).[20] The narrative will refuse to involve itself in the crime of numbering. It will retain itself from all the listings, numberings, taxonomies and documentations that would objectify events in the service of the triumph of knowledge. And only such a language, telling exactly about the experience of how the ordinary life unfolds in front of someone can accomplish this: a language, which does not become a communicative limitation between the addresser and the addressee, which does not become an informative vehicle between what is known and what cannot be known, but the very condition of experience. This language will form itself by repudiating "its power to word the world," (Cavell 84)[21] by undermining its desire to reach for the *unknown* through what can be known as *facts*. Hence, the narrator will say, "[I]ch war natürlich nicht gefaßt auf eine große Zeit" (*Malina: Roman* 114).[22] It is not because she believes that she has no capacity to know about what 'a great age' [eine große Zeit] is, but it is because she has absolutely no idea about what 'a great age' is. She is troubled with the very idea, while failing to imagine what it is to understand "einer [Zeit] für alle" (114),[23] and

[20] "Blue Lighting Express crashes into Red Lightning, 107 dead and 80 wounded." (*Malina: A Novel* 169).
[21] Such 'ordinary language,' according to Cavell, also responds to the logic and desire of skepticism to go beyond what is sensible, in hope for reaching/knowing about the bigger truth. He concludes "the existence of the world and others in it is not a matter to be known, but one to be acknowledged" (109).
[22] "I wasn't prepared for a great age" (*Malina: A Novel* 54).
[23] "one moment to mean all moments" (*Malina: A Novel* 54).

refusing to speak of all kinds of "großen Zeiten ... von großen Vorkommnissen, großen Menschen, großen Ideen" (114).[24] She, therefore, also refuses to be in attempt to write a great story, a great autobiography 'to word her world,' but starts from the very torn shreds of events that appear constantly in her everyday. Shreds, which hauntingly appear and disappear in her narrative, and which, make up the experience of her ordinary life.[25]

To be repeated once more: only the one who writes a letter to be torn to shreds 'knows exactly what it meant by today.' *Malina* is filled with its narrator's unsent letters and unfinished phone calls, in which the sentences are literally torn into half, remain incomplete, unaddressed. The sentences never become recovered in her writing, as her past memories, which she has hard time recalling. There is no intention of recovery in the text. And this defines the very condition of her problematic relation with 'today,' because what enters the scene of 'today' should wait for its recovery, in the headlines, in the archive, in the letters, that wait for a destination. Responding against this hope for arrival, for come-back, or for return, *Malina* generates a new ground to write about, a *prosaic* ground, to look for answers in whatever resides in the ordinary life of its narrator: her partners Malina and Ivan, Ivan's children Béla and András, houses, letters, phone calls, Vienna, and the street she tries to dwell: *Ungargasse*.

3.2 *Malina* and the Language of the Ordinary

Malina starts with the problem of 'today,' and continues with the testimony of its narrator about her past and its impacts on her present. She tells about them thoroughly, by jumping from one event to another in a dream-like atmosphere: one cannot decide where an event starts or ends. However, the impacts of each event she experienced throughout her life are remembered and condensed during her daily actions – as she speaks, as she calls someone, as

[24] "great ages, of great events, great people, great ideas" (*Malina: A Novel* 54).
[25] In her book *Life and Words: Violence and the Decent into the Ordinary*, Veena Das will ask the meaning of the autobiographical language that speaks particularly about the ordinary: "What it is to pick up the pieces and to live in this very place of devastation?" (6)

she reads the morning paper, as she makes tea. In the center of the novel, two more characters are emphasized, who are her partners living in *Ungargasse*, namely Malina and Ivan. The narrator constantly tells about her relation with them. Nevertheless, although they appear in the narrative frequently, they still do not constitute the main issue in the novel. The plot of *Malina* is irrelevant to the main problem in *Malina*.

In order to approach the language that foregrounds the narrator's ordinary life, which constitutes the main problematic in the novel, it can be meaningful to start from its gesture of naming the narrative itself: *Malina* is not about Malina. It is not about Ivan. It does neither tell about the narrator's love for Malina, nor for Ivan. It is not the story of a particular kind of love that is addressed to a particular person, place, object, or 'today.' It is a single word, which makes up the title: the narrator's entire story depends on this single utterance at the beginning. In this way, any potential reader of the story cannot *not* begin reading it first, and *first of all*, by facing this name: *Malina*.

In the narrative, therefore, the name comes first: "Ich war allerdings von Anfang an *unter* [Malina] gestellt, und ich muß früh gewußt haben, daß er mir zum Verhängnis werden müsse, daß Malinas Platz schon von Malina besetzt war, ehe er sich in meinem Leben einstellte" (16).[26] The narrator places the name 'Malina' before anything else, even Malina, the character she shares a house with as a partner. It becomes the word that precedes everything: it appears before every other event that will be recalled and told by the narrator, and every other name that will be uttered in the story. The narrator is, from the very beginning, '*subordinate*' to this word [Ich war allerdings von Anfang an *unter* ihn gestellt], whose place is not even taken by Malina himself. Does it stand for the idea of an omnipotent God, of unconditional Love, or of a patriarchal History whom she feels 'subordinate' to? The name 'Malina,' whatever it might refer to, comes into existence as the narrator's ultimate

[26] "Certainly I was *subordinate* to him from the very beginning, and I must have known early on that he was destined to be my doom, that Malina's place was already occupied by Malina even before he entered my life" (*Malina: A Novel* 5).

'doom,' [Verhängnis] a metaphysical force like the bad fortune that affects and haunts her everyday. It is a kind of disaster, whose impact shows itself in her ordinary life, and whose impact resonates, again and again, in each utterance of the word, in each pronunciation of its letters: M-a-l-i-n-a. This means that 'Malina,' like a catastrophe in the narrator's story, has already taken place by "[putting] a stop to every arrival" (Blanchot, *Disaster* 1), or in other words, to every letter that 'were written, but cannot arrive, Today.'

What 'Malina' does, is 'murder.' The narrative closes itself with the sentence "Es war Mord" (*Malina: Roman* 462),[27] where this final emphasis of death in the novel, following Malina's silent steps, indicates for the last time the word's overwhelming sense in the narrative. Its pacifying power seems impossible to be defied. In this case, the question I asked for *The Bell Jar* can also be asked for *Malina*: Why does one write if one feels oneself standing 'after' everything that has already happened? Why write after this 'irrecoverable' disaster under the name 'Malina,' created by her father, by her lovers, by war, and by the everyday speech of the newspapers, filled with "spectacles" and "descriptions" that does not allow one to have any experience but to look at the world with "empty but fascinated" eyes? (Blanchot, Hanson, 14)? In the narrative, writing about the ordinary, about what lies as purely physical in front of oneself, becomes a search for overcoming this metaphysical representation of violence. The narrator's autobiographical mode, therefore, tries to get rid of the displacement of pain through the distancing daily reports and speeches, and creates a language that does justice to experience. The narrator's telling, in other words, relies to the fact that pain exists, and it *should not* become something other than pain itself. It should not be addressed to anywhere, which means that it should not be historicized, so that its reality does not remain unacknowledged, but is present in the text. The language of *Malina* does this because it is the only way, in which 'Malina's seemingly dead-end state can be undermined

[27] "It was murder" (*Malina: A Novel* 225).

through writing. The story can end up in murder, but it is survived through the text.

Therefore 'Malina,' which names the narrator's suppressive 'doom' *beyond* her everyday reality, becomes distant to her language. It never becomes 'evidence' of her life, or any life, which continues in its immanence (Deleuze, *Life* 28).[28] While moments passingly and dynamically flow in the language of everyday life as 'evidences,' the language repudiates 'Malina' as a metaphysical threat by showing its concrete impacts in her life. The concrete impacts of an abstract reality, which make up her wounds until her 'today' – as being born as a woman, as being raised by an oppressive father, as having lived in Vienna after the war. These wounds, like the force behind 'Malina,' have existed and continue to exist for a long time, even before the narrator. They have existed in the silencing language of the newspaper, in the uncountable unuttered names being absent from the archives, which never are acknowledged by History. In fact, they are present in 'today' by their silence – just as the nameless narrator who shows her unaddressed existence within a 'today' through telling about her wounds in *Malina*. "My wound existed before me," will state Deleuze in a similar attitude, "not a transcendence of the wound as higher actuality, but its immanence as virtuality always within a milieu" (31). The wounds of the narrator lies, and will always persist, within this 'milieu' of the everyday: in *Ungargasse*, where her life takes place as 'a life.'

This is how 'Malina's transcendental setup translates itself in form of wounds within the autobiographical language of *Malina*. 'Malina's impact overwhelms her to the point that she perpetually seeks an insurance to get herself out of its destructive force in her ordinary life. She seeks for a language to insure her voice and experience against it. It is indeed remarkable how often the word 'insurance' [Versicherung] is repeated in the narrative:

[28] Deleuze contrasts life's making up of singularities with the transcendental logic that discontinuously separates and abstracts things as universal subjects and objects: "Immanence is not related to Some Thing as a unity superior to all things or to a Subject as an act that brings about a synthesis of things" (*Life* 27). In its transcendental distance, the word 'Malina' in the narrative stands for such universal separation of things, which are taken out of their context and physical reality.

"Genügt ein Satz denn, jemand zu versichern, um den es geschehen ist? Es müßte eine Versicherung geben, die nicht von dieser Welt ist." (95)[29] Here, the narrator looks for 'a sentence' [ein Satz] to insure herself, a singular sentence, which does no longer belong to this world, the world of her 'today,' that "exhausts" her (*Malina: A Novel* 44) [Müdigkeit] (*Malina: Roman* 94). Throughout her narrative, she seeks a way out of her fatigue: she tries hard to find words that would make up an "aura," so that the "pathos" of her life is lessened (60). Her search for alleviating her suffering and weariness, in the end, becomes only possible through writing about it – being similar to her decision of starting from writing her problematic relation with 'Today.' The sentence that will become her insurance, therefore, should make itself up from somewhere other than the 'sanity' of beginnings and endings, of 'today's, or of moments that construct a History. As Esther's narrative, the narrator's story also remains 'sick' within the exhausting 'pathos' of her ordinary life. Such sickness appears repeatedly in her narrative as an insurance of life, because it becomes the physical evidence of her everyday suffering:

> Ich stehe vorsichtig auf, damit es gut bleibt, mein Leben, ich stelle das Teewasser auf, ich muß Tee trinken in der Küche, frierend trotz des langen Nachthemds, mache ich mir diesen Tee, den ich brauche, denn wenn ich nichts mehr kann, ist Teekochen noch eine Beschäftigung. Wenn das Teewasser kocht, bin ich in keinem Atoll, ich wärme die Kanne, zähle die Löffel mit dem Earl Grey hinein, gieße ihn auf, ich kann noch Tee trinken, kann das kochende Wasser noch dirigieren bis zu meiner Kanne. (259-260)[30]

This passage is taken from the second chapter of *Malina* called "The Third Man" ["Der dritte

[29] "Is one sentence enough to insure the person for whose sake it was uttered? There must be some insurance which is not of this world" (*Malina: A Novel* 44).
[30] "I get up carefully, so that my life stays good, I put water for tea, I have to drink tea in the kitchen, where I'm cold despite my long nightgown, I make the tea which I need, because at least making tea keeps me occupied whenever I can't do anything else. When the water comes to a boil, I am no longer in an atoll, I warm the pot, count the spoonfuls of Earl Grey, I pour the tea, I can still drink tea, I can still conduct the boiling water to my pot." (*Malina: A Novel* 125)

Mann"] (234). In this chapter, the narrator tells Malina everything about the 'man' who was in her life before him and Ivan: her father. She presents her childhood in a nightmarish setting, and depicts her father as a Nazi whose gas chamber one cannot defend against [Man wehrt sich nicht im Gas] (236). While she is telling about all her traumatic memories she has with her father, the reader suddenly encounters a very long and detailed paragraph about the narrator's tea making process. This passage comes especially after her narration of her dream-like memory, in which her father takes her to a seaside called 'the kingdom of thousand atolls' [das Reich der tausend Atolle] (258), where he threateningly approaches her to strangle her to death. Telling about her witness of her father's physical and psychological violence towards herself and her mother, she starts obsessively articulating the minutiae of her habitual act of tea making.

In the passage, she shows each single step she follows while making tea. Sequence by sequence, she describes the entire process in a rhythmic manner: waking up, putting water for tea, boiling the water, warming the pot, count the spoonfuls of Earl Grey, pouring tea to the glass, and drinking it. Like a ritual, which she is capable of practicing everyday, tea making 'keeps her occupied whenever she can't do anything else' [mache ich mir diesen Tee, den ich brauche, denn wenn ich nichts mehr kann, ist Teekochen noch eine Beschäftigung], whenever she can't defend against the violence surrounding her life. She starts presenting her voice no longer 'in an atoll,' but in the midst of things: of ordinary objects, of practices of everyday life, of Vienna.

In this way, her pain resides in her clinging to the ordinary act of making tea. The very state of 'being cold despite the long nightgown' [frierend trotz des langen Nachthemds] in the kitchen gives her insurance for life that *goes on*, the fact that she can 'feel the coldness' of the kitchen, that she can 'still drink tea' and 'still conduct the boiling water to her pot' [ich kann noch Tee trinken, kann das kochende Wasser noch dirigieren bis zu meiner Kanne]. Her

ability to *conduct* [dirigieren], or to act upon things and words through which she can live with her pain, gives her possibility to *live on* within the world of persisting violence. She has to wake up 'carefully so that her life stays good' [Ich stehe vorsichtig auf, damit es gut bleibt, mein Leben]. This expression is not suggesting a question of whether her life stays good in the end or not. It does not show a sane gesture towards *moving on* as if she chooses to remain indifferent to pain. It, rather, demonstrates her careful act of 'waking up:' learning to *live on* with it. She should, therefore, tell about her story by choosing her words attentively, so that she can make up her singular 'aura,' which would do justice to her telling. The main problematic in the novel, here, surfaces once again. The narrator will responsibly, and one by one, select the words that would not omit anything, but would tell everything that is experienced in her life as much as they can, even this can mean an indication toward a silence. This is why the act of tea making defines the key issue: in its very repetitive structure, her voice enters the event, and makes the ordinary significant through telling about the impact it makes on her experience. She would find the words that are no longer strangers to her, and that, for this reason, are able to start her story elsewhere from the world of 'Malina.'

Toward the end of the chapter, her dream-like telling of her past closes itself: the reader observes that the narrator takes a heavy marble ashtray in her hand [Ich nehme den ersten schweren Aschenbecher aus Marmor] (318), in order to put an end to her nightmare. While her father is eating his dinner, she aims at the table, and in her third try, she manages to hit it by using this ashtray. Every object that was standing on it once, flies all over the place. Each element that makes up the image of her father becomes separated from his center of gravity: the bread, the wine glass, the cigar, and the little shards of the plate, along with the Schnitzel, fragment (319). Her words do not choose to reconcile with her father's holistic entity that makes him her father/murderer, but find themselves in the very crack of his image:

instead of describing her father's state, they prefer to focus on the upward movement of the objects that would eventually spill and land in different places on their own after the blow. In her language, objects return in the eyes of the narrator as being objects again, each unique and singular, which do no longer *belong* to anyone. They transform into entries, traces of a significant event. And in such perception, the idea of the father can no longer survive. This iconoclasm, embodied in the directness, velocity and heaviness of the marble ashtray, echoes the narrator's direct statement in the beginning, the statement that 'anything written about Today should be destroyed immediately.' By destroying the table, she also destroys the sentence that is addressed to her father, as well as to History, as an authority.

Malina is precisely about this iconoclastic gesture of language, which seeks to tear apart all the letters that are addressed to an authority – to a 'today,' which necessitates a transcendental as well as an archival perception of time. As soon as the objects get loose from whom they are 'possessed,' words that describe them no longer signify an assumed, superior unity *beyond* themselves.[31] The center of gravity becomes instead the way the words appear in their material condition, and set forth in the narrative: in other words, in the way the words *descend* into life, they 'break off from the orbit'[32] that belongs to the metaphysical set up of unity. In the end, all the imagery that gives pain to the narrator has to dissolve into her language she uses every day, and in this way, becomes the closest bearer of her unuttered experience.

3.3 Words Descend into Life

[31] Stanley Cavell similarly mentions a "return of the familiar" in his theorizing about the ordinary language: with the conclusive awareness in skepticism that states that there is no longer an unknowable and meaningful truth beyond an object, the object can no longer be the same as before, although it looks like the same. It is no longer an example, which indicates a transcendental meaning, but only a materiality that does not give any reference *beyond* itself, its physical reality. He adds: "Then that might mean that we have not found the way away, have never departed, have not entered history" (101).

[32] Like her tear "that doesn't want to orbit with the world … [that] breaks off from the planet and plunges into infinity," of the continuous life (*Malina: A Novel* 208) [die nicht mit der Welt herumkreisen möchte, sondern sich von der Welt lost und in den unendlichen Raum stürzt] (*Malina: Roman* 430).

No verb other than *to descend* would better describe what words do in the autobiographical language of *Malina*: they *descend* into the narrator's life with their shortcomings and missings in expression; but at the same time, with their inescapable use in her everyday. *To descend* refers to a movement towards a downward direction, indicating to a fall, a landing, or a plunge from a relatively higher order or milieu. It shows proximity to a ground. It makes it visible by defining the act of coming closer to it. The thing –the event, the object, the idea, or the person- is only able to refer to the surface on which it descends into. For *Malina*, this surface is called language: by setting forth the ordinary world of its narrator, *Malina* gives emphasis to the fact that language can be the only surface for harboring any experience. The narrator, therefore, does not seek what kind of event is responsible for the words' descent into her everyday life, or how exactly a particular event happened so that it can be talked about as significant. She knows that such recovery of the event is an impossible task. Thus, what she is interested in is how, and to what kind of ground words descend into. In other words, she is interested in what kind of language will words set forth in life. She is concerned with such questions for the very reason that she seeks to make up a possible ground for her voice, a possible language for doing justice to her realm of experience, which is silenced by the language addressed to a 'today.'

In her book *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Veena Das preoccupies herself with the question of inhabitance after disaster by using the word 'descent:' the question of how the ways, in which words descend into the everyday language, might show different ways of *living on*, or inhabiting the world after the catastrophes. For Das, this is not a question of recovery, but of mourning (77, 216). Life can continue only within a gesture of mourning, in not bypassing, but acknowledging the 'sicknesses' events generate in people's lives. In other words, language is not a search for engaging oneself with the impossible task of reviving and defying the ghosts (7) that existed once, but with how the

specter of a past event –meaning the *impact* of it- surfaces in everyday language in form of struggle, as known as mourning.

This is why in *Malina*, the reader observes that the narration switches to the past simple tense in the final sentence, while Malina's murderous steps silently approach its prey and set up a giant wall around it: "Es ist eine sehr alte, eine sehr starke Wand, aus der niemand fallen kann, die niemand aufbrechen kann, aus der nie mehr etwas laut werden kann. Es *war* Mord" (462).[33] She knows that her struggle is perpetual, that she cannot defend against what has already happened, against this 'very old, very strong wall' [eine sehr alte, eine sehr starke Wand] surrounding her. However, in the final sentence, she changes the temporality of her telling from 'is' to 'was,' from present simple to past simple, implying that what 'Malina' does to her, has already happened. As she stands on the ground, the wall around her builds up itself, of which she cannot get out, and where her voice can no longer be heard [aus der niemand fallen kann, die niemand aufbrechen kann, aus der nie mehr etwas laut werden kann]. It was her murder, and it was over: 'Es war Mord.' But it is peculiar for one to speak about their murder. One cannot simply *outlive* their murder and tell about it. Death, by its definition, is unspeakable. Then, what can be told about here? Why the narrative closes itself with this single, precise sentence that is emphasizing this impossible act?

The experience of the past, like events, cannot be recovered. It cannot be told because the witness is already dead, even if the one who once encountered the event is physically alive (Nichanian 30). By falling short in such metaphysical demand of recovery, language shows how the witness is no longer possible to be called, and how it can no longer speak. The narrator uses the past simple to indicate this fact: she states that 'it was murder,' as if she has become estranged to her past, as if she had watched another person suffer in her recollections. All she can write about, therefore, is the impermeable wall itself, her problematic relation

[33] "It is a very old wall, a very strong wall, from which no one can fall, which no one can break open, from which nothing can be heard again. It *was* murder" (*Malina: A Novel* 225). The emphasis in the sentence belongs to me.

with ‘today,’ in other words ‘Malina,’ and ‘Malina’ only, who puts her witness to silence. Consequently, she does not tell its potential reader about how she has been ‘killed,’ instead, she tells about how her painful experiences can never be recovered, and how her witness can no longer be alive in her language. She *mourns* her witness through this inadequate language, which she is destined to in her everyday – language, only by which the words that she can use can descend into life.

How do, then, the narrator’s words descend into life? In order to respond to this, a closer look into her relation with words themselves can be necessary. In the passage I quoted below, the narrator expresses her mandatory attachment to words she uses in her ordinary life. These words give her every possibility to tell her story, and because they give her *every* possibility to tell, they, at the same time, become the limits of her telling:

> Ich weiß noch die Worte, die rosten, seit vielen Jahren, auf meiner Zunge, und ich weiß die Worte ganz gut, die mir jeden Tag zergehen auf der Zunge oder die ich kaum hinunterschlucken kann, kaum hervorstoßen kann ... Zwanzig Deka Kalbfleisch. Wie bringt man das über die Zunge? Nicht daß mir etwas Besonderes an Kälbern liegt. Aber auch: Weintrauben, ein halbes Kilo. Frische Milch. Ein Ledergürtel. Alles aus Leder. Eine Münze, ein Schilling etwa, rollt für mich auch nicht das Problem des Geldverkehrs, einer Entwertung oder der Golddeckung auf, sondern ich habe plötzlich einen Schilling im Mund, leicht, kalt, rund, einen störenden Schilling zum Ausspucken. (442)[34]

‘How can you get that past your tongue?’ [Wie bringt man das über die Zunge?] Here, the narrator makes an emphasis on the non-negligible presence of the words she utters in her

[34] I still know the words, they have been rusting on my tongue for many years, and I know very well the words which daily dissolve on my tongue or which I can scarcely swallow or spit out. … Half a pound of veal. How can you get that past your tongue? Not that I’m especially concerned about calves. But also: Grapes, one pound. Fresh milk. A leather belt. All leather. A coin, something like a schilling, does not unleash the problem of cash commerce, devaluation or the gold standard, it’s just that suddenly I feel a schilling in my mouth, light, cold, round, a bothersome schilling to spit out. (*Malina: A Novel* 214-215)

everyday life. By being repeated multiple times, these words stick to her tongue and become inseparable instruments of her expressions. Their necessity determines her condition to speak, as well as to inhabit the world she calls 'today.' By asking this question, therefore, she also alludes to the fact that the everyday cannot be surpassed, cannot be reached *beyond*. As these words cling to her tongue and not letting it go, their impacts can never be fully eliminated from it. In other words, their eventual dissolution in her tongue [die mir jeden Tag zergehen auf der Zunge] makes it impossible for her to get rid of their presence in her everyday life. She rarely manages to 'swallow' them, or 'spit' them out like some unwanted food residue, waiting to be cleansed from the mouth [die ich kaum hinunterschlucken kann, kaum hervorstoßen kann]. In this way, she describes them as some remains from a regular practice, which one scarcely loses sight of. They are occupying her life all the time: she *has to speak* about them, and she cannot *not* speak about them. The words she uses become, thus, both the condition and the limit of her language, as well as her everyday struggle for *living on*.

For the narrator, these words seem familiar, and it is their familiarity that bothers her: the expressions she uses are bound to their habitual recurrence. Such habituation comes from their common use, in which they become part of a shared knowledge. This is why she resists the exhausting limitations of meaning in the passage. She claims to 'know very well' [Ich weiß noch die Worte ... ich weiß die Worte ganz gut] about what specific meaning they imply in her everyday discourse, about what their particular impacts on her life are. In her tongue, their common references in her everyday life start to erode as she articulates them one by one: 'Half a pound of veal' [Zwanzig Deka Kalbfleisch], 'one pound of grapes' [Weintrauben, ein halbes Kilo], 'fresh milk' [Frische Milch], 'leather belt' [Ein Ledergürtel], which is 'all leather' [Alles aus Leder], and 'a coin' like a schilling [Eine Münze, ein Schilling etwa]. She refers to the abstract familiarity of these words by describing how they appear in butcheries, fruit sellers, and markets – as the way events appear in headlines. Their

weight, freshness, material, and likeness to other objects are turned into habitual phrases, or common codes that become weary in one's language and memories. Like the objects that are used for a long time, her words also is said to become 'rusty' in the end [die Worte, die rosten, seit vielen Jahren, auf meiner Zunge].

However, as she keeps uttering these words randomly one after another, they gradually materialize in her *own* language rather than to become utterly transcendental: in other words, they become unfamiliar and unique in their familiarity. The word 'coin' cannot be more than how she can relate herself to the presence of a coin. In other words, her use of the word cannot be separated from her experience of the world. Hence, any word she is going to use in her narrative will set her condition of being, of her experience. The coin she is speaking of, therefore, can no longer be an object for abstraction, which would 'unleash the problem of cash commerce, devaluation or the gold standard' [rollt für mich auch nicht das Problem des Geldverkehrs, einer Entwertung oder der Golddeckung auf]. There is no such transcendental demand in the language of *Malina*. The words will appear in her ordinary life with their common use, and *descend into* the autobiographical telling of her singular experience of the world. 'It's just that suddenly I feel a schilling in my mouth,' she will say, 'light, cold, round, a bothersome schilling to spit out' [Ich habe plötzlich einen Schilling im Mund, leicht, kalt, rund, einen störenden Schilling zum Ausspucken]. The word 'schilling' never loses its familiarity; its impact will always be in relation with the ordinary life by being acknowledged as an object of cash commerce, devaluation, or gold standard. However, the narrator's encounter with the word will begin from somewhere else: from somewhere unfamiliar, from its 'light, cold, round,' and 'bothersome' presence in her mouth. The schilling is 'bothersome,' because while its familiar meanings accompany her experience, its unfamiliar physical immediacy makes her re-encounter its existence in her life. Its material impact on her tongue discloses her singular relation with it, and in this way, with the world.

She will start from its lightness, its coldness, and its roundness, rather than its alleged function as *part* of a bigger, metaphysical value system called *exchange*. Her language will, therefore, become a 'bothersome' language, whose possibilities, limits, and even singularity come from her very experience with the ordinary.

Similarly, her story tells about the destructive impact of 'Malina' as a word belonging to the language of 'today.' In this language of 'today' she describes, it seems that she is not allowed to use, and even find her voice by belonging to it. However, she does not become subjected to its reductionist, all-encompassing claims. She sets forth a new ground, a new language, which starts from its ruins that are not so new, and that affects her entire condition and everyday life: her story begins by how hard it is to begin when one has to dwell on such ruins. By how hard it is to do justice to one's voice and dwell on it when it is put behind the absolute walls of 'Malina,' or of the archival language. By how frantic it has to be to try 'speaking the unspeakable' (Boos 75), when one tries to address to the unaddressable. *Malina*, as well as *The Bell Jar*, are aware of these hardships of telling when they come into existence as autobiographical texts – autobiographical in the sense that experience, despite all those hardships of telling, presents itself.

CHAPTER IV

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

4.1 Beginning as Syncope

> What it is to inhabit a world? How does one make the world one's own? How does one account for the appearance of the subject? What is it to lose one's world?
> - Veena Das, *Life and Words*

After throwing the 'heavy marble ashtray' to end her nightmare, *Malina*'s narrator faces her father for the last time in her narrative, and exclaims: "Ich werde leben!" (*Malina: Roman* 319)[35] Similarly, after her suicide attempts and nervous breakdowns, Esther acknowledges and mourns her suffering, and finds herself passing a threshold -a door-, where people are waiting for her to listen to her story at the other side: "The eyes and faces all turned themselves towards me, and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room" (*The Bell Jar* 258). In Plath's and Bachmann's novels, the question about beginnings presents itself as the question of inhabitance: how is it possible to tell about one's world, while one keeps finding oneself appropriated to another? While the condition of experience is inseparable from other beginnings that are addressed to arrivals, to results, to endings? While the experience is perpetually bound to their presence?

For these narratives, then, to begin must mean not to start but to start *over*, in place of the ones that have since long ago existed: in place of the scandalous treatment of the press, the disinterested manner of daily reportages, and the letters written with the purpose of being part of daily communication. In these novels, there is no other world to inhabit. There is no other language to tell things differently. Everything has happened beforehand, and everything has already begun in advance – Just as 'Malina,' being existed in the narrator's life long before she meets him, or the bell jar that is hung "a few feet above [Esther's] head," is

[35] "I will live!" (*Malina: A Novel* 154).

depicted as being perpetually "suspended" (*The Bell Jar* 227). There is, therefore, always the *return* of beginning: the beginning as re-turn, as re-start, as re-inhabitance.

Malina and *The Bell Jar* begin in this circular gesture, where their narrators do not introduce their stories as unique events that have proper beginnings. Instead, each story keeps falling into the realm of the ordinary, in which things have always, already happened, and continue to happen in a recurring manner. The language these narratives use also accompanies such gesture: within such a mechanical setting of the everyday where everything repeats itself, every event becomes expressible in similar words, and in similar ways. Every event can be reduced to cases, examples, idioms, and numbers. This repetition of sameness in the narratives also prepares the ground for their particular aesthetics: by focusing on the uneasiness of the protagonists with their facing of the event's violent simplification, these narratives defamiliarize *habituation* itself. The ordinariness of everyday life is estranged by the autobiographical experiences that surface in the novels. In this way, their linguistic setting undermines the historicizing logic of the everyday, where one can no longer decide what is ordinary, what can be counted as an event, or which moments in time should be recorded so that they can be archived in History. As the temporal hierarchy between the moments fades away, the alleged significance of the events remains undecided. This is the way in which the experience of the ordinary sets forth the autobiographical language of *The Bell Jar* and *Malina* – it generates an error within the decisive logic of the everyday that differentiates.[36] It becomes the rupture in its harmonious unity, by not becoming exterior to it, but by taking place in it, by being born as part of it. The language of these narratives, in other words, begins as an internal cut within the language of the everyday: it presents itself as *syncope*.

[36] According to Stanley Cavell, decisiveness comes after the differentiation of things. If there is no difference between two phenomena, this means that no decision –or definition- can be made about them. Hence, the uncanniness of the ordinary lies in this indistinguishable sameness between events, whose difference is bound to remain undecided (89), and thus, harbor in it both the familiar [*heimlich*] and the unfamiliar [*unheimlich*] (Freud 220).

Then, asking the following questions becomes necessary: first, when exactly can one talk about syncope, and second, what this particular word might refer to in the autobiographical mode of Plath's and Bachmann's novels? In order to be able to respond to these questions, reading a passage from *Malina*'s beginning about her experience as syncope might be helpful:

> Wenn ich hingegen >heute< sage, fängt mein Atem unregelmäßig zu gehen an, diese Arhythmie setzt ein, die jetzt auch schon auf einem Elektrokardiogramm festzustellen ist … Nur ich fürchte, es ist >heute<, das für mich zu erregend ist, zu maßlos, zu ergreifend, und in dieser pathologischen Erregung wird bis zum letzten Augenblick für mich >heute< sein. (*Malina Roman* 10)[37]

As soon as the narrator utters the word 'today' in order to set the date of her narrative, her breathing begins to grow 'irregular' [unregelmäßig]. The word gives her an anxiety attack by interrupting the rhythmic continuity of her respiration. It is like an effective stimulant, which has a direct and sudden impact on her entire body: her heart rate accelerates, her nervous system is pathologically overwhelmed, and she hyperventilates out of panic. While her body becomes severely irritated by her use of the word, however, she also cannot refrain herself from repeating it, even in the beginning of her story.

She got used to make use of the word 'today' so frequently that the anxiety 'today' gives her becomes a chronic disease, which haunts, and will haunt her for the rest of her life. It becomes inseparable from both her habituation and her habitat – she feels to be bound to this word until her last moment, where it will stick to her forever, like the ordinary words her tongue cannot get rid of. Following her nervous state, she will say, 'this pathological agitation will be a part of my 'today' until its final hour' [dieser pathologischen Erregung wird bis zum letzten Augenblick für mich >heute< sein]. In this statement the narrator makes

[37] "But when I say 'today,' my breathing grows irregular and my heart beats in syncopation which can now be captured on an electrocardiogram … I'm just afraid 'today' is too much for me, too gripping, too boundless, and that this pathological agitation will be a part of my 'today' until its final hour" (Malina: A Novel 2).

clear that her 'agitation' [Erregung] is permanent. She will be disturbed by the word 'today' as long as her condition depends on it, in which her life is separated and re-allocated allegedly into temporal slots, and defined exclusively by this metaphysical logic of time she encounters every day. Her life, her experience, and her testimony are *destined* to her pathological relation to this single word: 'today.'

The narrator's entire story can be read as this arrhythmia she states in the beginning, this 'sickness' felt by one's encounter with the simplifying manner of the everyday language. The narrator of *Malina*, like Esther in *The Bell Jar*, are telling their stories that precisely start with such 'sickness,' and seek ways of introducing their experience to this same 'sickening' language they are obliged to dwell their speech upon: 'But when I say 'today'… my heart beats in syncopation' [Wenn ich hingegen >heute< sage, ... diese Arhythmie setzt ein]. The anxiety she experiences from her use of the word 'today' results in a kind of rhythm disorder in her heart. The impact of it is so excessive that her syncopation becomes symptomatic; it can be 'captured on an electrocardiogram' [die jetzt auch schon auf einem Elektrokardiogramm festzustellen ist], which physically articulates her immediate relation to the world. Her 'pathos,' here, becomes almost medically detectable, just as it can be captured by her autobiographical language, where the experience translates itself to the same vector that keeps drawing her beats on paper, each second, continuously.

The word 'today,' as her arrhythmia suggests, fails to correspond with her understanding and perception of time without any beginnings and endings, without significant climax points. Her temporal experience is 'too much' and too exciting [zu erregend], too continuous and too proximate as compared to its exteriorization and abstraction in her everyday use of words. The immanence of time does not relate to her life across a distance, as known as 'yesterday,' 'today,' or 'tomorrow,' which needs to be addressed to a historical categorization. Instead, it directly touches it, by *becoming* the very

condition of her life. The temporality of her life is, thus, 'too gripping' [zu ergreifend], and 'too boundless' [zu maßlos] for her that its simplification makes her heart go out of its rhythm. Her arrhythmia, thus, is neither caused by an experience of time as something happening *beyond* the language, nor by a kind of inadequacy in language while expressing such experience. It lies in the very relation: in the narrator's effort and desire of presenting her experience within language, or in how her words *descend* into life, despite the fact that she constantly faces limits of her everyday expressions. This is how experience surfaces to the narrator's autobiographical writing as *syncope* in *Malina* – which, by its particular placement in language, "simultaneously attaches and detaches" its moments to lay bare the junction, or the 'limit,' itself (Nancy 10).

Syncope, or syncopation, therefore, is not something exterior to the interrupted order: Either in medical, linguistic or musical terms, the word is related with the act of disorder that comes from within the system, it is the factor that "contracts," "fails of action," "cuts up," and "cuts short," by whatever order it is generated ("Syncope," "Syncopation," *Online Etymology*). To be put differently, it is interruption itself, addressed to nowhere but is found as an "instantaneous, punctual, and discrete … nature of the cogito" (Nancy 10). It comes into existence as the internal 'jolt' of the transcendental imagination. Such setback comes from the abstract reduction of phenomena within discourse, which treats them as "nearly the same" in their "undecided identity" (33). Both novels make an emphasis to this undecided significance and generic similarity between events, discoursed in language. By repudiating the reductionism of the everyday through their foregrounding of experience, their main characters' autobiographical expressions serve similarly as an internal interruption. Their introduction of experience becomes in this way the 'arrhythmia' of language. Consequently, significations of the everyday events remain undecided in their autobiographical accounts of the ordinary, which deliberately fails to define them as *nearly the same*.

How do, then, this repetition and failure of the everyday rhetoric, or syncope, determine 'the autobiographical mode' in Plath's and Bachmann's novels? This question might make more sense if one looks closer at Esther's description of insomnia – while her sleepless, vigilant and anxious state lifts the difference made between night and day, the singularity of her experience interrupts the metaphysical temporality of the everyday:

> I saw the days of the year stretching ahead like a series of bright, white boxes, and separating one box from another was sleep, like a black shade. Only for me, the long perspective of shades that set off one box from the next had suddenly snapped up, and I could see day after day after day glaring ahead of me like a white, broad, infinitely desolate avenue. (*The Bell Jar* 135)

The disruption of the categorical time rests in Esther's state of insomnia. Insomnia shows itself in her restless awakening in which she can never sleep again. Awakening can no longer suggest that there will be a new day, or a day after another. There is no longer the beginning 'proper,' consolidated by the act of waking up. There is no longer a yesterday, a today, and a tomorrow. Time opens itself up toward an incessant continuity, in which each moment is equally given value of. There is no break, no rest, no event. Her telling of this experience starts from a temporal appropriation: 'the days of the year.' This means that when she had sleep, she had days, and she had names for days, and thus, there was naming itself. The fact that there is naming suggests that there is decision. It is decision that creates the difference between Mondays and Tuesdays, between the last day of August and the first day of September, between their first and last moments. There is no state of passing, but mutual exclusion. Days end and begin one after another in an infinite sequence, while each one is separated from another by a 'black shade of sleep.' The repetitive act of sleeping distributes time evenly, and keeps days disjointed. It is like an automatic mechanism, because of which

the days that resemble each other in forms of 'bright, white boxes,' become differentiated. In other words, sleep makes 'perspective.'

Insomnia comes into existence through undoing sleep. It is a state that empties out the temporal perspective offered by its sanity. It is wakefulness, "which tears away at whatever forms a nucleus, a substance of the same, identity, a rest, a presence, a sleep" (Levinas 170). The frequent appearance of the words that are the same as, or similar to 'exhaustion,' 'weariness,' 'fatigue,' 'tiredness,' and 'sickness' in *The Bell Jar*, as well as in *Malina* comes precisely from this sleepless experience of beginning: beginning after, within, anew, and despite others. There is no longer 'a substance of the same' that makes up all the everyday discourses, lectures, and newspaper articles that speak similarly of suicides, accidents, electrocutions, and diseases. Events can no longer be reduced to other happenings, but be able to present themselves as singular, whose reality matters by *every* moment. The insomniac is aware and vigilant to *every* moment she experiences as well as misses because she is the one who is awake *all the time*. They are the experienced moments whose impact resonates in her inhabitance of the world, and only her narration of their impacts can do justice to it.

'Only for me,' Esther will say, there is no longer the nucleus of time, the 'long perspective of shades that set off one box from the next.' The days 'stretch ahead' in her experience like liquid. They are present within a fluent movement of time, which never comes to a halt. The transcendental logic of the everyday that makes up days and nights 'had suddenly snapped up' by this internal inclination toward a wakeful state in Esther's experience. The phrase 'only for me,' therefore, is significant in this sense: mentioning the slight shift that recently occurs in her everyday experience, she differentiates her state of mind from other people who manage to sleep. 'The *only* difference in my perception of time,' she implies, is that there is no sense of time that separates. This means that everything has

changed, while nothing has. She still lives in the same world, but the whole nature of its sameness has irreversibly fallen apart.[38] Her insomnia, in such experience, never becomes exterior to the state of sleep. On the contrary, insomnia presents the immanent flaw in sleep through its very possibility to surface, through its demand for remaining awake. Only in this way, she can be capable of seeing 'day after day after day glaring ahead … like a white, broad, infinitely desolate avenue.' She never 'catches' insomnia like an exterior disease that interferes with her sleep, but instead it mutates it from within. It grows and expands *in* her when the time comes, in which she goes to bed for the very purpose of falling asleep. Such mutation breaks the logic by being an immanent part of 'the long perspective of shades.' In other words, insomnia becomes sleep, forever syncopated.

Esther's experience of time as this 'white, broad, infinitely desolate avenue' is only possible through this syncopal character of insomnia, which indicates the failure within the transcendental categories of time. Time's bright and infinite surface contains, and at the same time undoes the mechanical and repetitive set up of the 'day after day after day.' In this 'desolate' avenue, therefore, their character becomes *undecided*. This lack of decision between moments also brings about the question of uncertainty in naming, aka the question of representation. But this question of uncertainty never yields to a resignation from writing: In Esther's language, such uncertainty opens up the very possibility of presenting the undecided, the unheard of, or the inexpressible. Even if the capacity of her expressions would never suffice, it will open up such possibility because her telling never becomes a question of right/accurate representation. *The Bell Jar*, and as well as *Malina*, concern themselves with how they would tell about things that they *have to* represent. Things that they *have to* take responsibility of telling. Things that they *have to* speak about no matter what. In other words,

[38] This experience of undecided difference within the sameness also takes place Cavell's understanding of the sensation the ordinary: "What has to be developed here is the idea of difference so perfect that there is no way or feature in which the difference consists … as in the difference between the waking world and the world of dreams, or between natural things and mechanical things, … or between the past and the present."

their language brings about the question of how the 'white, broad, infinitely desolate avenue' called experience can surface within the decisiveness of the everyday language – how the autobiographical writing syncopates, and finds, or, *has to* find its voice within the ordinary.

4.2 *The Bell Jar*, *Malina*, and the Prosaic Condition

In her Büchner Prize speech titled "Ein Ort für Zufälle" ["A Place for Coincidences"] she gave in 1964, Ingeborg Bachmann tells about the horrors taking place in Berlin after the Second World War. She describes the post-war era as if the war never ended, and continuously presents itself in the everyday life in Berlin:

> Denn ich vergesse nicht, daß ich in Ihrem Land bin mit seinen Zufällen, die sich der Diagnose nicht ganz, aber im Grunde entziehen, wie alle Zufälle; Zufälle, die sich mitunter aber einer Optik und einem Gehör mitteilen, das sich diesem Zufall aussetzt, dem Nachtmahr und seiner Konsequenz. (Bachmann, "Ein Ort für Zufälle" 1)[39]

In Bachmann's narration, the word 'Berlin' remains far from being an object of naming: it comes into presence in forms of singular impacts, which are rendered in a dream-like atmosphere. 'Berlin,' in other words, is not a proper name for a city. Its depiction does never rest in a sense of nostalgia. She struggles with her estrangement toward it, and starts by telling about this very experience of foreignness. With all the nightmarish events that had occurred in it, and that had left their imprints in it in forms of traumatic consequences [Konsequenz], 'Berlin' has been transformed into a non-place that "has become a field of war and violence" (Ben-Horin 85). There are only hazardous instances or accidents [Zufälle], which are happening at the same time and all the time. These random happenings strike and overstimulate Bachmann's senses by their violent presence in her ordinary life. In this

[39] "For I do not forget that I am in your country with all its coincidences, which not entirely but fundamentally withdraw from the diagnosis, like all coincidences. Coincidences, which now and again communicate themselves to an optics and a hearing, that exposes itself to this coincidence, the nightmare and its consequence." Quotations from this text are translated by Lisa Teichmann.

nightmarish sequence, where the events' beginnings and endings become undecided, the voice in the narration tells about her encounter with these happenings: "Es war eine Aufregung, war weiter nichts. Es wird nicht vorkommen" ("Ein Ort für Zufälle" 9).[40] Whatever happens 'will not occur' [wird nicht vorkommen], because whatever happens, has already left an irrecoverable impact on this unrecognizable disaster place called 'Berlin.' There is nothing more than the impact, the agitating 'exposure' [Aufregung] to what remained from the sense of the city, ruined.

Bachmann's distanced voice tells about the events in Berlin, whose significance could not be distinguished from each other. Her tone confirms that what make up the everyday life are coincidences [Zufälle], which happen one after another, continuously. The coincidental occurrences come into existence in forms of accidents: they cannot be expected to happen, and thus, cannot be known, or be speculated beforehand. But this is not the significant part of her narrative. It is, rather, the fact that they are *experienced* the moment they happen, when people sense their immediate impacts in their lives, when they can be 'fundamentally diagnosed, if not completely.' [Zufällen, die sich der Diagnose nicht ganz, aber im Grunde entziehen]. Bachmann's voice concerns precisely with those impacts. It refuses to get used to disaster and their consequences, or tries to tell precisely *what happened*, but keeps telling instead everything that catches her senses. She resists apathy, which are demanded by the way these accidental occurrences in Berlin are portrayed in the everyday discourse. The distance in her voice also signifies her refusal to take part within the continuous crime of everyday life, whose speech *goes on* incessantly: in newspapers, in Berlin, in today.

In this way, the autobiographical instances she tells about become singular 'cases' [Fällen] (Parkinson 69) or evidences, which directly shows the *experience* of disaster. Because of this, the diagnosis of disaster is always interrupted by the event's unknowable

[40] "It was an agitation, it was nothing more. It won't occur."

character: the event's past cannot be completely deciphered, but its present effects will always be sensed. In such an understanding, there is neither a place for the archival knowledge of the event, nor its representation, which is constituted by places, dates, and numbers. In other words, they cannot be recovered or constructed within a metaphysical order, but they present 'pathos' in their irrecoverable state, taking place in people's everyday life. Thus, in Bachmann's speech, disaster can be spoken of, and *should be* spoken of, even if it cannot be 'recovered' through the rendering of events. This means that it should be told because of its perpetual presence and continuation in each moment. It should be told because its contingent impacts can be seen and heard every day [Zufälle, die sich mitunter aber einer Optik und einem Gehör mitteilen], while people keep baring this painful 'nightmare and its consequences' [Nachtmahr und seiner Konsequenz]. It should be told because it is the very syncopation that lays bare the ruins, embedded in the alleged eventless-ness of the ordinary. What kind of writing, or speech, then, do these evidences, or these 'cases,' might give way to? How language can repudiate to reconstruct the disaster, but is, at the same time, destined to speak of the experience of it?

Like Berlin, which is haunted by the untold remnants of war in Bachmann's speech, Vienna also falls into silence by becoming the landscape of past disasters in *Malina*. Towards the end of the first chapter, the narrator tries to understand her experience of Vienna, as situated within post-war: "Wien schweigt" (*Malina: Roman* 233).[41] She becomes troubled by the non-responsive and collective silence of the place. Silence, here, becomes a sort of violence, which is caused by the disinterestedness of the everyday life that continues in a routine after the war. Throughout the narrative, therefore, she gives much effort to reckon with such silence that, at the same time, mutes her experience.

While closing the chapter with silence, the narrator does not concerns herself with the

[41] "Vienna is silent" (*Malina: A Novel* 112).

problem of representability [*Darstellbarkeit*] as the problem of transcendence, where the unspeakable can never be rendered, translated, or explained in language. Instead, silence turns out to be problematic for the very fact that it closes any kind of narrative, which tries to speak about disaster.[42] In other words, Bachmann sets forth this problem in *Malina* as the question of beginnings, which first and foremost gives emphasis on the necessity to start speaking the unspeakable. It becomes an ethical obligation to speak about the untold experience, and to find alternative ways for representing it, for writing about it. Vienna, as well as Berlin, and as well as New York in *The Bell Jar*, which I am going to exemplify later in this section, become the bearers of such resistance to tell: against showing events as scandals, diseases as diagnosable examples, and suicides as social phenomena. It is a resistance against the language of the everyday that moves on no matter what, that disregards experience, and that, consequently, attempts to silence mourning:

> Aber Wien hat nicht mehr viel Zeit, es gleitet aus, die Häuser schlafen ein, die Leute machen immer früher das Licht aus, es ist niemand mehr wach, ganze Stadtviertel werden von einer Apathie erfaßt, man kommt nicht mehr zueinander, man geht nicht mehr auseinander, die Stadt gleitet in den Untergang, aber es stehen noch einsame Überlegungen und die erratische Monologe in der Nacht. (*Malina: Roman* 334)[43]

In the novel, Vienna dies as the night comes. It disappears into its own silence. The darkening sky accompanies its death, where 'people turn their lights off earlier and earlier' [die Leute machen immer früher das Licht aus]. They give up on coming into contact by being silent.

[42] Sonja Boos also refers to Bachmann's Büchner Prize speech as a criticism of not speaking up for violence that needs to be spoken of: "Bachmann allegorizes the problem of *Darstellbarkeit* by submitting an argument not for the unspeakability of the Nazi terror, but rather against the alleged unspeakability used to deny a voice to those who were subjected to it" (75).

[43] "But Vienna doesn't have much time left, it's sliding away, the houses are falling asleep, people are turning their lights off earlier and earlier, no one is awake anymore, entire districts are gripped by apathy, people aren't coming to one another and aren't leaving one another, the city is slipping into decline although isolated thoughts and erratic monologues still occur at night" (*Malina: A Novel* 162).

They go to sleep. The overwhelming impact of sleep is so pacifying that it eventually takes over the entire city – it cuts every possible relation with consciousness. Even the houses fall asleep [die Häuser schlafen ein] while Vienna slides away [gleitet aus] and slips into decline [gleitet in den Untergang]. The repetition of the German word "gleiten" -which means slide/slip- in the passage indicates the city's slow decay as an unnamed, undecided, and uncontained liquid, which leaks out of its consolidated ground, and becomes lost in darkness. It melts, like Berlin, into a non-place where there is no sense of building, dwelling, or inhabitation.[44]

The narrator becomes, however, very attentive to such groundlessness, and depicts it as the end of Vienna, both that of the word/name, as well as of the city. According to her, Vienna as a city was considered to be a meaningful ground, a unifying element with its streets, houses, and windows, through which people were used to 'come to one another and leave one another' [man kommt ... zueinander, man geht ... auseinander], which is not the case anymore. It has become just like the main element in her coming together with Ivan, separating from Ivan, quarreling with Ivan, being in love with Ivan in one of Vienna's narrow streets called *Ungargasse*, in even the smaller area between her house and Ivan's house, starting from number 6, and ending in number 9 (112). The fact that no one is awake anymore [es ist niemand mehr wach] means that there is no longer any room for wakefulness, for disturbance and syncopation of sleep, for insomnia, for one's awareness of their doomed presence within the everyday – the everyday that still goes on, moves forward in the same disinterested attitude, and within the same perpetual circulation of violence that never stops but repeats itself. However, this incapability of dwelling, of staying within things and places, of inhabiting also necessitates another question to be asked about the beginnings themselves: how can a beginning begin, if it can no longer situate itself?

[44] Vienna can no longer be seen as a unifying and meaningful *building*, in which people can dwell, because "dwelling itself is always a staying with things" (Heidegger 149).

‘[G]anze Stadtviertel werden von einer Apathie erfaßt’ [entire districts are gripped by apathy]. The answer to the question above rests in this voice that resists the premise of its sentence. It is where the apathy surfaces, but at the same time, becomes distanced through the immediate ‘pathos’ of the narrator. The reader senses the apathetic state of the everyday life and discourse from her descriptive passage, in which the districts in Vienna are entirely ‘gripped’ [erfaßt] by it. At the same time, however, the observer becomes immune to this apathetic state of the city by writing her experience about it: she incessantly speaks against it, in spite of simultaneously living in it, being exposed to it, and being called by it. Her entire prose makes itself up from this very problematic: she sees Vienna’s decay brought by the disinterestedness and miscommunication among people, but also, her voice remains obliged to inhabit in such decay. She has to search for words in her contradictory position to tell, which sets up the very language she uses in her ordinary life. Her initial hesitation ‘to tell’ and ‘not wanting to tell,’ therefore, situates her *prosaic* condition – which eventually opens up her text to the experience of the ordinary.

How do such experience surface in the narrative? The last part of the passage I quoted above might be a case in point. The voice that resists to its own sentence’s premise shows her singular experience within the daily routine she finds herself: ‘the entire districts are gripped by apathy, but I am the one who is reacting to it.’ After differentiating her experience in her autobiographical account in relation to the repetitive language of the everyday, she also ends up in noticing other voices, which feverishly speak to themselves. These voices stand despite the decay [aber es stehen noch], despite the everyday speech that puts every experience in Vienna to silence, where their echoes are heard at the heart of this very place of destruction, as persisting remnants. The narrator draws her audience’s attention to the ‘isolated thoughts’ [einsame Überlegungen] and ‘erratic monologues’ [erratische Monologe] of people in the apathetic night she thoroughly describes: they pierce, and syncopate within the linguistic

realm of the everyday, by speaking incessantly with themselves. They talk to themselves without addressing their voices to anywhere, just like the letters 'that are written to be torn down to shreds.' They, however, like the letters that are written and thrown away, have a demand to be heard. Such demand is not a demand for being understood or historicized, but for being acknowledged. With these voices, *Malina*'s narrator alludes to her own autobiographical speech, which surfaces within the ordinary and erratically speaks to itself – which syncopates through the language of the everyday by reintroducing experience, or 'pathos,' to her telling.

The Bell Jar similarly questions the representation of events within some predefined, temporal sequence: events, whose presence is addressed to, and situated in repetitive days. Such repetition enables the naming of events –in Esther's everyday, it is set forth in form of headlines-, which constitutes a hold. Through uniform titles of the newspapers, topics of daily discussions, and shared narratives such as history, events become similar, comparable, and exchangeable. This is why Esther feels silenced within the prosaic impact of the city she inhabits, New York. New York affects her in such way because every event mundanely visits and exists the ordinary life in silence, and repeatedly:

> The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of the silence. It was my own silence.
>
> I knew perfectly well the cars were making a noise, and the people in them and behind the lit windows of the buildings were making a noise, and the river was making a noise, but I couldn't hear a thing. The city hung in my window, flat as a poster, glittering and blinking, but it might just as well not have been there at all, for all the good it did me. (*The Bell Jar* 19-20)

Esther's silence depresses her, as her silence is not the silence of the silence. Even though this sentence seems to involve nothing more than a repetitive self-reference of the signifier

‘silence,’ it does not give way to tautology: on the contrary, it underlines that the silence Esther senses is not the silence of the city, in which she passively finds herself in, but it is *her* silence. Silence does not become part of a metaphysical exteriority where Esther, as a subject, encounters it, or is exposed to it. The silence, on the contrary, rests in her, defines her experience, and comes from within her very condition of living in New York: ‘It wasn’t the silence of the silence. It was my own silence.’ Like that of the narrator of *Malina*, this statement resists its premise of being silent. Esther is bothered by her silence, but in fact, she is never silent for she tells about it all the time. Her telling, thus, syncopates within the silencing routine of New York, which she distantly watches from her window. In this way, she becomes both the object and the subject of this prosaic condition of living in the city: she tells about her life, where she feels silenced by the very language she has to speak. Therefore, she takes her distance from such language, and only prefers to tell about her problematic relation to it: ‘I knew perfectly well the cars were making a noise, and the people in them and behind the lit windows of the buildings were making a noise, and the river was making a noise.’ She knows that there are noises out there, but they are unreachable and inexpressible in her condition. In other words, she senses that they exist, like the ‘isolated’ and ‘erratic’ speeches that appear during the night in *Malina*, but they are left behind the window’s perspective, from which she is forced to look at the city in silence. This threshold of silence is this glass window that sets the limit of hearing, and of experience. *The Bell Jar* is this glass window called ‘the bell jar,’ which is hung above Esther’s head perpetually by making her ‘sick’ and ‘depressed.’

To put differently, in silence, she seizes its dangers. And not because of the fact that the reality of an event can never be reached again. It is because in silence, there will be no impact of event, no impact of electrocutions, accidents, suicides. There will be no impact means that there never will be an encounter. Within the potential silence of hers, the

continuous cacophony of cars, people, and river is lost. Within it there would have been no sensation, and thus, no story to tell. In such silence, she would have not been able to tell anything about her experience of New York, or about her distance from the news, or about her feelings towards the disturbing uniformity of the suburbs, or about the hollow mouth of her apathetic friend Hilda. This silence Esther speaks of in the passage, therefore, is not an absolute one in which she could *fall into*. Instead, it is a relative one, which is completely dependent of her telling – silence, against which she can give efforts to undermine it by speaking up about it.

In such logic, therefore, to be silent or not becomes a decision of telling. In Esther's case, there will be text. There will be telling, despite the bell jar will be hung above her head. There will be a telling about the bell jar itself. Her resistance to the archival order of History, to the everyday dialogues, or to the language of the press, is through writing about the very limited condition she finds herself in. She gives her effort to write about her silence so that the dual character of this metaphysical logic (the significant event vs. the insignificant everyday) can no longer persist. It is also remarkable that her autobiographical mode of writing prevails her experience of New York in forms of momentous impacts. These impacts make up the very continuity of her *ordinary* life, whose every moment becomes significant: Her experience is the fact that she 'couldn't hear a thing.' It is the fact that 'the city hung in [her] window, flat as a poster, glittering and blinking.' It is the fact that with its 'glitter' and 'blink,' the city becomes nothing but a flashing light in her experience of silence: a non-place she cannot relate herself to –'it might just as well not have been there at all'-, but at the same time her 'electrocardiogram,' on which her experience can be written about.

The languages in Plath's and Bachmann's novels, consequently, do not aim to refer to something more than what can be narrated. In other words, their gesture is never an inquiry toward an alleged truth beyond the ordinary, but a deliberate return to it. They return to the

particular moments that make up evidences for any experience of disaster. How, then, does such experience is rendered in language? Where does the syncope, generated by the autobiographical mode that speaks of the unspeakable, leads to the aesthetics of *The Bell Jar* and *Malina*? To approach these questions, it is necessary to look closer at how the voice appears in the texts – the voice of the one who speaks.

4.3 *Sprechgesang*: Atonality

The languages of *Malina* and *The Bell Jar* occupy themselves with one thing: the speaking voice. They are concerned with the voice that speaks within the limits of their language – the voice that tries to speak about itself, to tell about an *I*, in order to speak. To speak about oneself, when it comes to the narrators of these novels, is to play with the contours of language, which makes up the everyday conversations and the shared grounds of knowledge. They, with their autobiographical mode, play with this uniformity by telling about the singularity of their experience. Their voice, in other words, takes form through the language, and, at the same time, by speaking it, transforms it.

In 1912, the aesthetics of the speaking voice presents itself once more in form of music: in his work *Pierrot Lunaire*, Arnold Schoenberg introduces ways to make use of the speaking voice in order to reach to an alternative musical potential (Rapoport 2). His style of *Sprechgesang* (speech-singing) takes place as the musical recitation of Hartleben's German translations of Albert Giraud's fifty poems (1), where the verses are uttered in a distorted tonality, come closer to the atonal characteristic of the human voice. In this way, musical keys can no longer make a harmonious order for the notes to be appropriated. Instead, each single key is made use of (this technique is also called as the twelve-tone technique) so that the notes can freely correspond to *every* sound: to the contingent character of the speaking voice. Here, the music approximates itself to the singular moments of experience rather than a metaphysical order of beauty. It concerns itself with what is *unspeakable* within the

coherent aesthetic of the tonal music. Hence, *Sprechgesang* makes up the autobiographical gesture of speech through music by introducing the experience to it. It is both the condition and the limit, in which the music itself is formed.

In the first part, and towards the closure of *Malina*, the narrator hears fragments from *Pierrot Lunaire*. Partial images of the score appear and constitute a kind of frame in the narrative, where the music seems to enter and exit in the narrator's everyday life. She encounters the music's ghostly presence, serenating her from time to time, when she stands above, or passes by the Stadtpark in Vienna. It appears ghostly because there seems to be no origin from which the music is produced. Its existence in the narrator's story remarkably resembles her relation to Malina, who also is a spectral figure in her life, entering and leaving her speeches and discussions with herself. Malina, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, is also the condition and the limit of the narrator's capacity to tell. It is the silencing force, like 'the bell jar' that indicates to Esther's 'pathos.' She is destined to Malina –by stating "ich sterbe in Malina" (*Malina: Roman* 460)-[45] as she is destined to the language that will be the only instrument for her to speak about her suffering. She will be born and die within the same language she is destined to use.

"Our need for song is there," asks Bachmann, "Must song come to an end?" ("Music and Poetry" 139) If the nature of the human voice cannot be situated in any other ground but within a "bankrupt language," which would not "provide … progressive transcendence of the world," (139) would that mean that its possibilities of expression also have to come to an end? Bachmann's question is highly related to the atonal character of the autobiographical voice in *Malina* that sets itself up, from the very beginning, as bankrupt both within, and opposed to the unifying tonality of the everyday. It is bankrupt because it needs to make use of what it has already had as a language. This is why her story begins as syncope, which

[45] "I will die in Malina" (*Malina: A Novel* 223).

shows the bankruptcy of the word 'today.' The word 'today,' like every other word she is obliged to use in her everyday, is bankrupt in meaning. This is why she resists such bankruptcy by repudiating to remember them: "ich vergesse, ich vergesse schon die Namen, die Grüße, die Fragen, die Mitteilungen, den Klatsch" (224).[46] The generic, reductionist everyday uses of the words in proper 'names, greetings, questions, messages, and gossip' are no longer addressed to anyone in the narrator's speech. They are forgotten. They become emptied as they cannot correspond to any experience but only serve for particular codes for trivial conversations. The voice in *Malina*, therefore, starts from this irrecoverable bankruptcy that is doomed to be dissonant as compared to the alleged consonance of the everyday. It deliberately forgets about the melody for the sake of presenting itself.

The autobiographical elements in these novels, therefore, lie in this atonal potential of language. This atonal potential differentiates the autobiographical from the conventional codes of autobiography: it is where the unifying historicism of the autobiography, or its location within a "multi-determined temporal continuum" (Sontag, "Thinking Against Oneself") is undone by the syncopal introduction of the experience of self. This is also the reason of why the beginning of *The Bell Jar* repudiates autobiography through Esther's encounter with the news about the Rosenbergs, as I argued in the second chapter. The narrative begins merely with Esther's stimulation, without any prior knowledge given about her: no information on who she is, or what she does in her life. There is only her sensation, which makes up her experience. Toward the end of the novel, her speech will speak about everything, which she is stimulated by throughout the summer of 1953 up until the winter:

> I remembered everything.
>
> I remembered the cadavers and Doreen and the story of the fig tree and Marco's diamond and the sailor on the Common and Doctor Gordon's wall-

[46] "I am forgetting, already forgetting the names, the greetings, the questions, the messages, the gossip" (*Malina: A Novel* 108).

> eyed nurse and the broken thermometers and the negro with his two kinds of beans and the twenty pounds I gained on insulin and the rock that bulged between sky and sea like a grey skull. (*The Bell Jar* 250)

As the narrator of *Malina* forgets the daily conversations that silence her experience, Esther remembers every single detail that has to do with her silence: 'I remembered everything.' These two opposite inclinations, forgetting and remembering, make up the protagonists' memories as well as their conditions of experience. Here, Esther incessantly counts what has left an impact on her, each moment she has written about. She titles each experience she tells about like a headline, while presenting them once more to her potential audience after her speech with Doctor Nolan, her psychiatrist in the asylum. She, however, uses the same voice when she encounters the disturbing rhythm she senses in the lecture room. By using the conjunction of *and* between the events she remembers, she arrays them as medical cases: 'I remembered the cadavers *and* Doreen *and* the story of the fig tree *and* Marco's diamond.' By doing this, she only gives the contours of what she has gone through, without telling about how she has gone through them. While one emphasis on an event is uttered after another, she breathlessly counts each moment that drives her to her alleged insanity. In this way, Esther's witness to her own past in the given passage becomes distant and mechanical, which becomes appropriated to the logic of asylum. It is a deliberate imitation, which shows how her experience is going to be silenced by being turned into significant events. Events, which will become reduced to cases in her medical history.

Every case, or title she mentions, therefore, contributes to the rhythm that makes her anxious throughout her narrative – for instance, the rhythm that is similarly created by the news about the Rosenbergs everywhere, showing itself repeatedly. This is the same rhythm that demands from its audience a move forward, a get-through. It is what informs people about the fact that the events have already happened. That they are over, that they can be

forgotten: in such archival language, which sorts the events one after another, 'the sailor on the Common and Doctor Gordon's wall-eyed nurse and the broken thermometers' have already become fragments of Esther's past.

The rhythm in Esther's imitative language lies in this systematic dismemberment of her memory, accomplished by her medical treatments. However, in the midst of such dismemberment, she gives efforts to re-member everything. By remembering each of her experience in a fragmented way, she will say, "But they were part of me. They were part of my landscape" (250). Her landscape, or, in other words, any ground for her experience, finds itself in her everyday routine: in the city, in the language of the press, the lectures and the asylum. Everyday language, in such understanding, is a "direct discourse," which "is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage" (Deleuze, *Thousand Plateaus* 84). Direct discourse, by being a fragment, or being isolated as a *part* of an assemblage, is where naming occurs (84), as well as where one can "draw [one's] voice" (84). It is the condition of Esther's voice, as well as the atonal (also singular) character of her experience: her speech introduces a new beginning, a new entrance to this tonality of everyday language, to its direct discourse. It is very similar to *Sprechgesang*, where an entirety in music is changed by a singular strike. Where every strike counts and matters. Where every single moment in Esther's life in her narrative surfaces, and becomes significant. In such logic, Esther introduces a voice, which sets forth the temporariness of the everyday's unity. She presents her voice, where unity becomes merely a *part*. The same voice also can relate itself to 'the isolated thoughts' and 'the erratic monologues' the narrator mentions in *Malina*, which, by their dissonance, break the tonality of the night's routine. These voices indicate to 'the collective assemblage' Deleuze mentions, where every voice appears, where every impact can be felt, and where every moment can be mentioned.

This is how the autobiographical speech in *The Bell Jar* and *Malina* sets itself forth within a responsible gesture: through giving way to singular speeches of their protagonists, their aesthetic impulse of speech discloses the act of telling as necessity. It is, more importantly, the only imperative. It is the only imperative in order to *live on*, or to inhabit the world after disastrous events, whose impacts continue. The autobiographical voices of Esther and the narrator of *Malina* rest in such responsibility. By their way of telling of the ordinary, by showing the immediate impacts of the past in their everyday lives, they do justice to their experience. They demand for such justice in their prose. They demand for showing evidence to experience itself, and nothing more. They refuse to name, to number, and to inform. They refuse to recover the past. They refuse to be part of scientific inquiry, or of archival knowledge. The only concern these narratives have, is, how the impact comes, and why it matters: to Esther, to the narrator of *Malina*, to their audience, to world. When the impact comes, and when only the experience remains in these texts, then, the final question remains: What does it mean to read them?

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: READING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

The reader's encounter with *The Bell Jar* and *Malina* becomes, in the end, an inevitable part of their fundamental question: what might it suggest to read these autobiographical narratives, whose primary concern is to do justice to experience? What does it mean for the readers to see such demand for justice? To be able to come up with a response to these questions, it is necessary to look at the reasons of these narratives to start themselves with the everyday itself – the everyday that, with its alleged sameness, presents itself as both the potential and the limitation of experience.

In *Malina*'s and *The Bell Jar*'s mode of telling, the everyday becomes material. The continuous, daily repetition of habits is deliberately foregrounded. The reader is exposed to the everyday's apathetic impact on the narrators' expressions. Both Esther and *Malina*'s narrator engage their telling with the cold and mechanical impact of daily life, primarily in New York and Vienna, respectively. Their narration not only mentions such effect, but it is destined to it. It cannot come into existence as a text without regarding it, without dwelling on it. The effect of the ordinary, embedded within the recurrence of the events happening every day, has become, thus, the condition of their prose. It is their initial stimulation, their fundamental problem, and their reason to begin.

A remarkable example for the impact of the everyday might be the moment, in which *Malina*'s narrator decides to write down everything she needs to do within a day: "Ich starre vor mich hin und horche und schreibe eine Liste: Elektriker / Stromrechnung / Saphirnadel / Zahnpasta / Briefe an Z. K. und Anwalt / Reinigung" (*Malina: Roman* 98).[47] The effect of the everyday here becomes concrete, as the narrator presents a to-do list in her telling. It is notable that each element in the list refers to a habitual act, which must be repeated whenever

[47] "I stare out into space and listen and write a list: Electrician/Electric bill/Sapphire needle/Toothpaste/Letters to Z. KÇ and lawyer/Cleaners" (*Malina: A Novel* 46).

necessary during the course of one's everyday life: calling an electrician, paying bills, repairing things, brushing teeth, writing letters, and cleaning. These words in the list set up the building blocks of her world; of the everyday she has to find her ways to inhabit. They emerge by coming from the space that the narrator looks at, and listens to [Ich starre vor mich hin und horche]. In her empty stare and listening, the reader encounters the narrator's disengagement with the continuous and senseless repetition of her daily behavior. With all its irrelevant elements, lacking any connection with each other, and positing none of her experience, the list portrays the skeleton of what makes up her conditions of living. It is the embodiment of sameness, where the elements mentioned in the list are reduced to names, and to each other. It is the minimalized inventory of her life, which is the source of her 'pathos' she mentions from the very outset of her narrative. It, in other words, stands for the constitutive idea of the everyday itself.

The reader encounters similar impacts of listings throughout *Malina*, as well as *The Bell Jar*. The list resembles the random serialization of events in the newspapers, whose entries mentioned only in names and dates, presented from the top of the page to its bottom, and never regarded as being any different from one another. This reductionism brings violence to their abstract presentation on paper. There is no place for experience in listings. There is no impact, and thus, no significance. The list is a pile of information, whose records are only appear to be documented, to be numbered, and to be portrayed in another list, a more extensive one, called history. This is why, through the news, the impact of the everyday appears as a violation of the complexity of the event. And this is the very reason why the autobiographical mode in these novels, by presenting the voice itself, becomes resistance against listings, against sameness, and against the perception of the event as fact.

What, then, could this particular telling about the impact of the everyday possibly mean for the reader? The everyday's solidity as a structure; in other words, its way of

becoming a closed mechanism by reducing the events to one another, shows itself in the testimonies of *The Bell Jar*'s and *Malina*'s protagonists. The everyday's materialization in lists, headlines, conversations, and habits, crystallize in their prose. In this way, their prose leads to their singular perception of their ordinary lives, to a telling of how they react to this closed mechanism by being destined to inhabit within it. The violent reductionism of the everyday, or history, thus, never comes from somewhere outside their lives, but from within. Each of their statement, which tells about their experience within this reductionist logic, undermines its structure.

In this sense, their voices appear as similar to what the quotations in *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin) do. To present the arcades of Paris, to portray their everyday impacts on various accounts, to designate how they are made significant in a variety of literature of the time, Walter Benjamin selects passages from every text he could possibly find on the subject. By being constituted of the disjointed parts, the project emphasizes its incomplete character: not because of the fact that some information lacks from the work, but because the work itself cannot be possibly finished: "This was something that could be realized only indirectly, through 'cunning': it was not the great men and celebrated events of traditional historiography but rather the 'refuse' and 'detritus' of history, the half-concealed, variegated traces of the daily life …" (Eiland, McLaughlin ix). Each voice in the text comes into existence with regards to their reaction toward the solid, iron structure of the arcades. In this way, each voice becomes an individual 'trace of the daily life,' which defines the arcades as a significant event. The impact of the arcades' structure on people, like that of the repetitive rhythm of the everyday in *The Bell Jar* and *Malina*, in turn, defines the realm of their experience, while their singular testimonies undermine the claim of traditional history to be a coherent whole. Such appearance of the voice, such insistence on the voice is what makes up the ethics of these texts in their response to history.

To encounter this autobiographical impact of the everyday in both novels, thus, enables the reader to become attentive to singular experiences that overrule the reductionist accounts of historicism. This is where the ethics of *The Bell Jar* and *Malina* starts, and this is where the significance of the autobiographical mode manifests itself: the autobiographical mode as the repudiation of traditional histories, of conventional autobiographies, and of any propositions, in which facts, numbers and listings dominate them, in which any reality of the event is externalized and distanced, and thus, in which, any experience lacks. Such character of these novels, in other words, suggests that there *must* be nothing but the event, and that there *must* be experience, so that one can make sense of what is intended to be told. The event, therefore, holds these narratives as the first cause: it is their imperative, their precondition, their necessity to tell. And to read them, in other words, to be exposed to their proposal, is to accompany, alternate beginnings.

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