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So-Called Speechlessness: Voiceless Speech in Thomas Bernhard's *Walking*

In reconstructing the reasons for its protagonist going mad, Thomas Bernhard's text *Walking* is structured around a double transgression. Karrer crosses both the line into total madness and into speechlessness by producing a seemingly endless repetition of a single phrase that evidences his madness. As critics have pointed out, Bernhard's overuse of verbal repetition is constitutive of his so-called 'literature of speech'. Drawing on both Michel de Certeau's notion of 'rhetoric of walking' and Giorgio Agamben's concept of vocal deprivation, I conceive of Karrer's insane act of 'going too far' as a problem of speech. More precisely, instead of considering speechlessness as different from speech, this essay makes the case for Bernhard's repetitive prose as a literature of speechlessness. As I suggest, *Walking* demonstrates paradigmatically that Bernhard's so-called literature of speech is in fact constituted by a lack of speech that reveals narrating to be constituted by a deprivation of the breath.

In both her famous homage to Thomas Bernhard (1989) and an interview two years later (1991), Elfriede Jelinek describes Bernhard's writing as a 'literature of speech'. She states:

No one will come around this dead giant any more. His life-long illness has singled him out, he has had to inscribe his always missing breath. Therefore, his literature was a literature of speech [...] of endless tirades [...]. Thomas Bernhard choked on his furious breath.¹

The experience of gasping for breath created the wildly flaming breath of his life's speech. [...] From the breathlessness in Hermann Pavilion [...] to a literature of endless diatribes.²

What Jelinek refers to in calling Bernhard's writing a 'literature of speech' is his excessive production of language, the endless repetitions, the seemingly never-ending sentences, and the quasi inexistence of paragraphs. Although this writing is characteristic of Bernhard's work in general, it is particularly striking in his prose. One of the texts that illustrates this 'literature of speech' paradigmatically is his early novella *Walking* (1971). The novella relates the narrator-I's walk with Oehler, who used to walk with Karrer and now tells the narrator-I about Karrer's madness and

1 All English translations are mine unless otherwise noted. "An diesem toten Giganten wird niemand mehr vorbeikommen. Seine lebenslange Krankheit hat ihn herausgehoben, seinen stets fehlenden Atem hat er festschreiben müssen. Daher war seine Literatur eine Literatur des Sprechens [...] der Endlos-Tiraden [...]. Thomas Bernhard ist an seinem wütenden Atem erstickt" (Jelinek 1991: 311).

2 "So hat die Erfahrung des zu wenig Luft Kriegens den wüsten flammenden Atem des um sein Leben Sprechenden erzeugt. [...] Von der Atem-Not im Pavillon Hermann [...] zu einer Literatur der endlosen Sueden" (Jelinek 1992: 160).

his confinement in the mental asylum "Am Steinhof":³ During one of their walks they (Oehler and Karrer) enter Rustenschacher's store where Karrer, as usual, gets into a fight with Rustenschacher and his nephew about the material of their pants. But this time Karrer goes mad. The narrator-I cites Oehler, who tells this story to both the narrator-I and Scherrer, the psychiatrist conducting Karrer's case. In order for Scherrer (and the narrator-I) to reconstruct what exactly happened in Rustenschacher's store, Oehler tells an episode that immediately precedes Karrer's crossing the line into final madness. In this episode Karrer accuses Rustenschacher's nephew yet again of dealing with Czechoslovakian rejects.

Karrer suddenly raised his walking stick again, as Oehler told Scherrer [...] and said emphatically: you must admit that in the case of these trouser materials we are dealing with Czechoslovakian rejects! You must admit that! You must admit that! You must admit that! Whereupon Scherrer asks whether Karrer had said you must admit that several times and how loudly, to which I replied to Scherrer, five times, for still ringing in my ears was exactly how often Karrer had said you must admit that and I described to Scherrer exactly how loudly. (Bernhard 2003: 145)⁴

To illustrate the deviance of Karrer's behavior, Oehler does not simply point out the fact that Karrer repeated the phrase 'You must admit that!' several times, but he reproduces this repetition excessively. Oehler's repetitive performance of Karrer's manic speech is the very technique through which Karrer's deviant behavior is illustrated. By giving evidence of Karrer's manic speech through the same means, namely repetition, the possibility of a clear distinction between Oehler's intact and Karrer's nonintact mental health is challenged.

Scholarship on Bernhard regards the technique of repetition and, in particular, the character's excessive monologues, to be the characteristic element of Bernhard's

3 The former mental hospital "Am Steinhof", which is situated at the periphery of Vienna, plays a crucial role in a variety of Bernhard's texts, including the novella *Walking* (1971), the novel *Wittgenstein's Nephew* (1982), and the play *Heldenplatz* (1988). As with Karrer in *Walking*, several characters in Bernhard's texts are committed to Steinhof. In 1967, Bernhard himself spent some time in the hospital, during which time he met Ludwig Wittgenstein's nephew Paul Wittgenstein. For a focused perspective on the (problematic) role of Steinhof in Bernhard's writing see Greite (2009), and for a critical discussion of Steinhof as a mental institution more generally see Ledebur (2015).

4 "Auf einmal hob Karrer wieder den Stock, so Oehler zu Scherrer, und [...] sagte mit Nachdruck: das müssen Sie mir zugeben, daß es sich bei diesen Hosenstoffen um tschechoslowakische Ausschußware handelt! das müssen Sie mir zugeben! das müssen Sie mir zugeben!, worauf mich Scherrer fragt, ob Karrer mehrere Male das müssen Sie mir zugeben gesagt und in was für einer Lautstärke genau gesagt hat, worauf ich Scherrer sagte, fünfmal, denn ich hatte ja noch im Ohr, wie oft und wie Karrer genau fünfmal das müssen Sie mir zugeben! gesagt hat" (Bernhard 2006: 188).

'literature of speech'.⁵ Whereas some scholars try to reconcile the mostly contradictory monologues in one voice,⁶ others, in contrast, emphasize the manifoldness of voices present in these monologues by revealing the indirect speech to be Bernhard's fundamental narrative strategy.⁷ What unites these strikingly different works is their focus on the role of speech. By discussing Bernhard's repetitive, excessive, and monologic language, these approaches address the vocal and audible dimensions of his writing. What remains unaddressed, however, is the role of speechlessness, not as a motive besides speech but as the core constituent of Bernhard's so-called 'literature of speech'.⁸

5 For a discussion of the role of the repetition in Bernhard's writing see among others Schmidt-Dengler (1997), Rieger (1998), Strowick (2004, 2009).

6 For example, Jürgen Doll suggests that *Walking* deals with Austria's Nazi past and its historical debt. He claims that the four different characters/voices in Bernhard's novella in fact represent one single monologue: "Wir haben es also in *Gehen* nicht mit der gedanklichen Auseinandersetzung zwischen verschiedenen Figuren zu tun, sondern mit einem einzigen, wie gewohnt bei Bernhard, in sich durchaus widersprüchlichen, unaufhörlichen, zugleich montonen wie faszinierenden Monolog." / " In *Walking* too, we do not deal with the intellectual confrontation between different characters, but rather, as usual with Bernhard, with a single, contradictory, endless, simultaneously monotonous and fascinating monologue" (Doll 2003: 110).

7 Elisabeth Strowick recently pointed out that Bernhard's use of indirect speech does not function in a grammatical sense as the reproduction of someone else's speech but rather operates in terms of Deleuze's/Guattari's concept of indirect discourse (cf. Strowick 2009). According to Deleuze/Guattari, the indirect discourse is the fundamental operation of language as such: "The 'first' language, or rather the first determination of language, is [...] *indirect discourse*. [...] There are many passions in a passion, all manner of voices in a voice, murmurings, speaking in tongues: that is why all discourse is indirect, and the translative movement proper to language is that of indirect discourse." (Deleuze / Guattari 1987: 76f.) Indirect discourse, therefore, "is not explained by the distinction between subjects; rather, it is the [collective] assemblage, as it freely appears in this discourse, that explains all the voices present within a single voice [...] the languages in a language, the order-words in a word." (ibid.: 80) It is in this sense that Bernhard's use of indirect discourse – "says Karrer, Oehler tells Scherrer" (Bernhard 2003: 145), – produces, as Strowick suggests, "die unaufhaltsame Fragmentierung/Partialisierung jeglicher Erzählinstanz" / "the relentless fragmentation/partition of any stable narrator" (Strowick 2009: 312). This use of indirect discourse no longer allows for a clear distinction between different speakers. In fact, as Strowick concludes, every seemingly individual enunciation is the articulation of a multiplicity of voices, not as the interlocking of different individual voices but as a collective assemblage (cf. ibid). For the initial discussion of Deleuze's/Guattari's concept of indirect discourse in Kafka see also Vogl (1994).

8 Speechlessness as a motive in Bernhard's writing has been extensively addressed in recent scholarship. Specifically, scholars strive to emphasize the important role of the silent characters in Bernhard's plays with a tendency, however, to conceive of speechlessness as somewhat secondary to speech. For example, Reika Hane seems to suggest that the relation between speech and speechlessness is that of a form of translation: "Während ich [...] schweige, spricht sozusagen meine 'innere' Stimme. Was meine innere Stimme spricht (was ich denke), kann der andere etwa anhand meines Gesichtsausdrucks oder meiner Gestik möglicherweise bis zu einem bestimmten Grad erraten, aber nicht in *derselben* Deutlichkeit vernehmen wie das Ausgesprochene" / "While being silent, my inner voice speaks. What my inner voice speaks (what I am thinking), the other can probably guess from my facial expression or my gestures, but will not be able to understand with the same clarity as an utterance." (Hane 2014: 103) Similarly, Stefan Krammer considers speechlessness to be a problem of representation because, in order to be described, speechlessness is dependent on speech/words. According to Krammer, it requires "Worte beziehungsweise Interpunktion, um ein Schweigen zu beschreiben oder wenigsten anzudeuten." / "words or punctuation, in order to describe or at least indicate a silence." (Krammer 2003: 14) As my reading

The constitutive role of speechlessness is already implied in Jelinek's poetological reading where she conceives of Bernhard's life-long fight against his lung disease as foundation for his art of writing. According to Jelinek's interpretation, what generates Bernhard's literature of speech is his furious breath, which in turn is a product of his life-threatening missing breath. The lacking breath thus transforms into a narrative strategy. Jelinek formulates a double paradox. Bernhard's 'always-missing breath', that is, the absence of breath, constitutes his literature of speech. But at the same time, he "choked on his furious breath", which means that what granted life and literary productivity in the first place turns out to be the life-threatening element. What generates the furious, productive breath is the absence of breath, and what produces the lethal breathlessness in the end is the furious breath itself.

As I suggest, Jelinek's paradoxical conjunction of breathlessness and literary productivity implies that there is a moment of breathlessness situated within the literature of speech. How can we conceive of Bernhard's writing differently if we take this moment of speechlessness into consideration? I claim that Bernhard's writing is a literature of speech only insofar as the lack of speech is its core constituent. Instead of simply turning Jelinek's dictum of a literature of speech on its head, thereby promoting a literature of speechlessness, my reading of Bernhard's novella makes the case, rather, for a literature of *so-called* speechlessness. By challenging the demarcation line between speech and speechlessness, *Walking* reveals that narrating means to speak without a voice.

1. Speaking of Speechlessness

How does speechlessness articulate in a text that seems to deal only with speech? That speechlessness in this text is as important as speech, is already visible on the level of content, for example when Oehler describes Karrer's declining condition in a circular image: "The shouting and the collapsing and the silence on Klosterneuburgerstrasse that followed this shouting and collapsing, said Karrer, says Oehler." (Bernhard 2003: 171)⁹ In this circle of desolation silence is as important as speech (*shouting*) and it even obtains the function of a capstone or point of intersection

will show, the issue is not so much how speechlessness is represented in *Walking* but rather that it operates as a mode of representation.

9 "Dieses Aufschreien und dieses Niederfallen und dieses Schweigen in der Klosterneuburgerstraße, das auf dieses Aufschreien und Niederfallen folgte, so Karrer, sagt Oehler" (Bernhard 2006: 223f.).

between two sets of repetition. The importance of speechlessness is also present when Oehler recalls his sudden speechlessness in the moment of Karrer's 'crossing of the border into final madness' (ibid.: 125):¹⁰ "I can now say that I am astonished at my passivity in Rustenschacher's store, my unbelievable silence, the fact that I stood by and fundamentally reacted to *nothing*." (ibid.: 128)¹¹ It is due to his speechlessness that Oehler is unable to interrupt and thereby possibly prevent Karrer from going mad. Oehler neither decides not to speak, nor does he lose his voice while trying to speak. Rather, only in the moment of retrospective reflection does he notice his surprise about his passivity. A third episode indicates the impact of the relation between speech and speechlessness on the level of narration. Oehler relates a conversation he had with Karrer on the Friedensbrücke shortly before Karrer surprisingly decided to rush into Rustenschacher's store.

I have often stood here with Karrer beneath the Obenaus, says Oehler, and talked to him about all these frightful associations. Then we, Oehler and I, were on the Friedensbrücke. Oehler tells me that Karrer's proposal to explain one of Wittgenstein's statements to him on the Friedensbrücke came to nothing; because he was so exhausted, Karrer did not even mention Wittgenstein's name again [...] I myself was not capable of mentioning Ferdinand Ebner's name any more, says Oehler. [...] we were suddenly no longer capable [...] of saying the names of Wittgenstein and Ferdinand Ebner [...] I myself was so weakened [...] that I can no longer say the word Wittgenstein [...] let alone say anything about Wittgenstein or anything connected with Wittgenstein, or anything at all, says Oehler. (ibid.: 162f.)¹²

The Friedensbrücke is a transit zone not only semantically, by combining two Viennese neighborhoods, but also poetologically. The two narrations, Karrer's conversation with Oehler and Oehler's conversation with the narrator-I, entangle through a narrative breach Gérard Genette calls 'metalepsis'.¹³ Oehler's story about

10 "[...] den Augenblick der endgültigen Grenzüberschreitung in endgültiges Verrücktsein" (Bernhard 2006: 159).

11 "Jetzt kann ich sagen, mich erstaunt meine Passivität im rustenschacherschen Laden, meine unglaubliche Schweigsamkeit, daß ich daneben gestanden bin und im Grunde auf *nichts* reagiert habe" (Bernhard 2006: 163).

12 "Mit Karrer bin ich sehr oft hier gestanden unter dem Obenaus, sagt Oehler, und habe ihm von allen diesen fürchterlichen Zusammenhängen gesprochen. Dann sind wir, Oehler und ich, auf der Friedensbrücke. Es war bei dem Vorhaben Karrers, mir auf der Friedensbrücke einen wittgensteinschen Satz zu erklären, geblieben, aus Erschöpfung erwähnte Karrer nicht einmal mehr den Namen [...] ich selbst war zur Erwähnung des Namens Ferdinand Ebner nicht mehr fähig gewesen, so Oehler. [...] aus Erschöpfung waren wir [...] auf einmal gar nicht mehr fähig gewesen, die Namen Wittgenstein und Ferdinand Ebner auszusprechen [...] ich selbst bin auch noch [...] in der Weise geschwächt worden, daß ich jetzt auf der Friedensbrücke nicht einmal mehr das Wort Wittgenstein aussprechen kann, geschweige denn kann ich etwas über Wittgenstein oder etwas mit Wittgenstein Zusammenhängendes sagen, wie ich überhaupt nichts mehr sagen kann, sagt Oehler [...]" (Bernhard 2006: 211f.).

13 Notoriously, Gérard Genette claims that the only way for the narrator to directly communicate with the narrated characters is by committing a breach, which he calls 'metalepsis': "The transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the

having been incapable of speaking affects the narrative level on which he paradoxically states that he is unable to 'say anything at all'. He claims to be speechless, while speaking/narrating. Oehler's exhaustion, in the form of his former speechlessness, virtually sets in motion the narration by affecting his current ability to speak. Speech and Speechlessness are taking place at the same time, or, in other words, speech articulates through speechlessness. In their very different ways these passages show that, besides the elements characteristic of Bernhard such as endless repetitions and excessive speech, there are also moments of nothingness, passivity, or silence at stake.¹⁴ More precisely, they indicate how excitation and passivity, speech and speechlessness intertwine such that even when seemingly no one speaks or acts, language and action are still produced.

2. Walking/Speaking 'Too Far'

The moment in which Karrer goes mad is described in terms of movement and, more precisely, as a specific form of walking. In Rustenschacher's store the usual argument between Karrer and Rustenschacher's nephew about the material of the clothing escalates when Karrer fails to control his speech. While accusing Rustenschacher and his nephew of selling second-rate clothing, Karrer crosses the line into

act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation. Any other form of transit is [...] at any rate always transgressive." Drawing on but also extending the classic narrative figure of the metalepsis, he defines the term 'narrative metalepsis' as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe etc.)." (Genette 1980: 234f.) Bernhard's use of indirect discourse makes impossible a clear distinction between different narrative levels on the one hand and between narrators or narratees on the other and thereby constantly produces metalepses. The narrator(s) always already is/are the narratee(s) and vice versa. The quoted passage is merely one of many examples of the metaleptical structure, one which specifically illustrates the linkage between speech and speechlessness in Bernhard's novella. In the English translation the metalepsis is not as visible as in the German original. Whereas in English the text switches from past to present tense, the German original uses the temporal adverbs 'next' and 'now' ("dann sind wir" / "daß ich jetzt auf der Friedensbrücke") in order to transgress the line between story and narration, *histoire* and *discours*. The story being told reaches into the level of narration (and vice versa) situating Karrer, Oehler, and the narrator-I in the same narrative space.

14 This strange kind of active weakness is also reflected elsewhere. In *My Prizes* (2009), Bernhard discusses the dilemma connected to the act of accepting a prize. He writes: "After the Julius Campe Prize [...] I had a constant empty feeling in my stomach whenever there was a question of accepting a prize [...]. But I remained too weak in all the years that prizes came my way to say no. [...] I despised the people who were giving the prizes but I didn't strictly refuse the prizes themselves." (Bernhard 2010: 98f.) "Nach dem Julius-Campe-Preis [...] hatte ich immer ein schales Gefühl im Magen gehabt, wenn es darum ging, einen Preis in Empfang zu nehmen [...]. Aber ich war doch die ganzen Jahre [...] zu schwach, um nein zu sagen. [...] Ich verachtete die, die die Preise gaben, aber ich wies die Preise nicht strikt zurück." (Bernhard 2014²: 101) This example illustrates the peculiar way in which weakness causes action showing that passivity and nothingness are extremely productive operations.

final madness. According to Oehler, this happens because Karrer "thinks too far", because he literally "goes too far in his thoughts". (ibid.: 118, my emphasis)¹⁵

Bernhard scholars have extensively discussed the connection between walking and thinking as a prominent theme in Bernhard's writing,¹⁶ which has led to the consensus that the practice of walking in Bernhard's novella is not merely a motive but rather operates as a 'poetological code'.¹⁷ Drawing on this conjunction of walking and narrating, I suggest that, with French critic Michel de Certeau, a further connection can be made between walking and narrating/speaking in regard to failure.¹⁸ Conceiving of speaking/narrating as failure makes visible Bernhard's novella as literature of so-called speechlessness, that is, a literature that basically does not speak but is speech nonetheless.

In his book *Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) Michel de Certeau discusses walking (through the city) as a tactic or practice of everyday life that is linked to failure. By suggesting, "[t]o walk is to lack a place" (de Certeau 1984: 103), de Certeau points to the ephemeral character of walking as an act that essentially misses its place. In a second step, he parallelizes walking and speaking, proposing that "the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language" (ibid.: 97), which means that "walking is a spatial acting-out of the place [...] as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language" (ibid.: 98). De Certeau goes even further by claiming a structural linkage between walking and speaking. He suggests that there is a parallelism between "discourse, dreams, and walking", not only because enunciation determines all three areas, but also "because its discursive (verbalized,

15 "[...] zu weit denken", "einfach zu weit gehen in unserem Denken" (Bernhard 2006: 149).

16 "On the other hand walking and thinking are two completely similar concepts [...]. If we observe very carefully someone who is walking, we also know how he thinks." (Bernhard 2003: 163f.) "Andererseits sind Gehen und Denken zwei durchaus gleiche Begriffe [...]. Wenn wir einen Gehenden genau beobachten, wissen wir auch, wie er denkt" (Bernhard 2006: 213f.). For a discussion of the entanglement of thinking and walking in Bernhard's writing, see: Gross (1974), Fischer (1985), Schmidt-Dengler (1989), Kahr (2000), and Rieger (2002).

17 "Look, said Karrer, says Oehler, his tone of voice suddenly so quiet, probably because we are now standing still" (Bernhard 2003: 170). "Sehen Sie, so Karrer, sagt Oehler, sein Sprechen ist plötzlich, wahrscheinlich, weil wir stehen, so ruhig." (Bernhard 2006: 222) For a focused perspective on walking as poetical code in Bernhard's novella, see: Wellmann (1991), Albes (1999), Niccolini (2000), Janhsen (2002), and Simons (2014).

18 Oliver Simons' analysis of Bernhard's novella also draws on de Certeau but with a focus on *Bildung*. He suggests that de Certeau's 'rhetoric of walking' is "eine theoretische Variante der von Bernhard skizzierten Poetik des Gehens, die ihrerseits stets versucht ist, von vorgegebenen Wegen abzukommen und eigene Schrittfolgen zu definieren"/"a theoretical version of Bernhard's poetics of walking, which itself constantly seeks to go astray and define its own path." (Simons 2014: 145) According to Simons, through this rhetoric of walking the text illustrates 'the narrator's' success "im rechten Augenblick vom Weg Karrers abzuweichen"/"to deflect from Karrer's [false] path in the right moment" (ibid.: 146).

dreamed, or walked) development is organized as a relation between the place from which it proceeds (an origin) and the nowhere it produces (a way of 'going by')" (ibid.: 103). According to de Certeau, speaking operates as walking, not only in that they are similar, but rather, in that they are structurally intertwined. In this sense, speaking, just as walking, means to lack a place. In other words, walking/speaking is an act of failure that, with every step/utterance, inevitably produces a 'zone of going by'.

On the level of narration, Bernhard's novella presents the moment of Karrer's crossing the line as an act of failure by interlocking Karrer's 'going too far' with his 'speaking too far'. At the beginning of his walk with the narrator-I, Oehler gives an explanation for Karrer's madness by elaborating on his philosophical experiment. According to this explanation, Karrer trained himself in holding his thoughts in endless suspension by pushing them to their ultimate limit without ever allowing them to cross this line.¹⁹ This experiment runs the risk of failing because it is haunted by the unpredictable moment at which "madness *enters*" (Bernhard 2003: 124).²⁰ Once madness has entered, the person affected suddenly and irreversibly crosses the line between "the so-called intact" and the "so-called nonintact world" (ibid.: 125).²¹ Karrer's (impossible) philosophical project of gaining control over this crucial moment is described as a problem of speech:

[I]f it is possible to control the moment that no one has yet controlled, the moment of the final crossing of the border into Steinhof, and that is, into final madness, without being able to finish the unfinished statement, says Oehler, Karrer said at that time, he did not understand what was doubtless an unfinished statement, but that he knew what was meant by this unfinished statement. (ibid.)²²

19 "His own daily discipline had been to school himself more and more in the most exciting and in the most tremendous and most epoch-making thoughts with an ever greater determination, but only to the furthest possible point *before* absolute madness." (Bernhard: 2003 117f.) "Sich zwar mehr und mehr in den aufregendsten und in den ungeheuerlichsten und in den epochemachendsten Gedanken zu schulen und sich solchen einzigen für ihn noch möglichen Gedanken mit einer noch immer größeren Entschlossenheit vollkommen auszuliefern, sei seine tägliche Disziplin, aber immer nur bis zu dem äußersten Grad *vor* der absoluten Verrücktheit" (Bernhard 2006: 13f.).

20 "[...] die Verrücktheit *eintritt*" (Bernhard 2006: 158).

21 "[...] der sogenannten intakten zum Unterschied [...] der sogenannten nichtintakten Welt" (Bernhard 2006: 159).

22 "Wenn es möglich ist, auch den Augenblick zu beherrschen, den noch niemals ein Mensch beherrscht hat, den Augenblick der absoluten Grenzüberschreitung nach Steinhof und das heißt in endgültiges Verrücktsein, ohne den unfertigen Satz fertig sprechen zu können, sagt Oehler. Karrer hat damals gesagt, er verstehe den zweifellos unfertigen Satz nicht, er wisse aber, was mit diesem unfertigen Satz gemeint sei" (Bernhard 2006: 159f.).

The unpredictable moment is constituted by a lack of control over speech. More precisely, the center of the lack of control is determined by the aporia of the unfinished statement. Being essentially unfinished, the statement can never be finished but at the same time has to be finished in order for the speaker not to cross the line into madness. As the unfinished statement only turns out to be impossible to finish the moment it occurs, both the occurrence of the unfinished statement and the entrance of madness are thus unpredictable. At the same time, however, both are integral to speech because every statement can turn out to be the unfinished statement. This structural belatedness reveals every thinking/speaking²³ to be potentially manic. The attempt to control the moment of crossing the line by trying to finish the unfinished statement is doomed to failure and at the same time unavoidable.²⁴ And, as Oehler points out, in the end Karrer as well "did not succeed where no one has yet succeeded, [...] in knowing the moment when the border to Steinhof is to be crossed" (ibid.).²⁵ It is precisely the unfinished statement that is at work the moment Karrer crosses the line into final madness.

3. Voiceless Speech

Karrer's madness enters in the middle of his argument with Rustenschacher's nephew:

Karrer once again says that in the case of these trousers they were apparently dealing with Czechoslovakian rejects, and he made as if to take a deep breath, as it seemed unsuccessfully, whereupon he wanted to say something else, I tell Scherrer, says Oehler, but he, Karrer, was out of breath and was unable, because he was out of breath, to say, what he apparently wanted to say: *These thin spots. These thin spots. These thin spots. These thin spots. These thin spots over and over again. These thin spots. These thin spots. These thin spots, incessantly. These thin spots. These thin spots. These thin spots.* Rustenschacher had immediately grasped what was happening and,

23 As the scholarly discourse on the entanglement of walking, thinking, and narrating/speaking already implies, the text does not separate thinking from speaking in that one is to be understood as the 'translation' of the other: "I thought I was thinking, I say, I am walking over the Friedensbrücke." (Bernhard 2003: 165) In the English translation, the nexus between the three operations is not as visible as in the German original: "[...], weil ich gesagt habe, ich denke, ich sage, ich gehe auf die Friedensbrücke" (Bernhard 2006: 216).

24 The aporetic structure of speech is also reflected on the level of grammar. The conditional sentence, upon which the whole paragraph is based, is incomplete as it lacks a conclusional clause. The conditional clause ("[I]f it is possible to control the moment" / "Wenn es möglich ist, auch den Augenblick zu beherrschen") does not formulate any consequence or fulfillment. The incomplete conditional sentence illustrates the impossibility of escaping the linguistic play of the unfinished statement as it does not present a prospect of how to go beyond it.

25 "[...] ist nicht geglückt, was noch keinem Menschen geglückt ist, [...] das Bewußtsein des Augenblicks der Grenzüberschreitung nach Steinhof" (Bernhard 2006: 160).

on my orders, Rustenschacher's nephew had already ordered everything to be done that had to be done, Oehler tells Scherrer. (ibid.: 155f.)²⁶

Apparently, there is evidence for Karrer crossing the line into final madness as everyone immediately 'grasps what was happening' and knows what 'has to be done'. Without further ado Karrer is being carted off to the so-called nonintact world of Steinhof, being excluded from society presumably for the rest of his life. What proves Karrer's madness is his manic speech. More precisely, his incapability to finish the unfinished statement produces, or rather constitutes, the endless repetition of the phrase *these thin spots/diese schütterten Stellen*, which proves that Karrer 'went too far'. And indeed, he goes too far not only by crossing the line into madness but also by seemingly transgressing the boundary between speech and speechlessness. Karrer does not seem to speak at all because he is running out of breath and is therefore 'unable to say, what he apparently wanted to say'.²⁷ The repetition of the fatal phrase *these thin spots* is the result of, as Jelinek puts it, the missing breath. Consequently, what constitutes Karrer's manic speech that legitimizes his exclusion from society is a moment of speechlessness.

This idea of speechlessness being constitutive for speech corresponds with Alice Lagaay's (negative) philosophy of voice, where she suggests that there is a "silent dimension that is in fact intrinsic to the nature of the audible, acoustic, physically resonant, noise-like, sounding human voice" (Lagaay 2012: 63). By claiming that the voice has an intrinsic relation to the possibility of silence, Lagaay does not refer

26 "[...] sagt Karrer noch einmal, daß es sich bei diesen Hosenstoffen ganz offensichtlich um tschechoslowakische Ausschußware handle und er tat, als wolle er tief einatmen und es hatte den Anschein, als gelänge es ihm nicht, worauf er noch etwas sagen wollte, sage ich zu Scherrer, sagt Oehler, aber er, Karrer, hatte keine Luft mehr und er konnte, weil er keine Luft mehr hatte, nicht mehr sagen, was er offensichtlich noch hatte sagen wollen. *Diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen*, immer wieder *diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen*, ununterbrochen *diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen, diese schütterten Stellen*. Rustenschacher hatte sofort begriffen, sagt Oehler zu Scherrer und der Neffe Rustenschachers hat auf meine Veranlassung hin alles veranlaßt, was zu veranlassen gewesen war, sagt Oehler zu Scherrer." (Bernhard 2006: 202f.).

27 Although Strowick particularly comments on the crucial scene in Rustenschacher's store, in which Karrer 'is unable to speak' but speaks nonetheless, she is not concerned with the role of the voice in this scene but with the role of citation/intention. As she convincingly remarks, the fact that Oehler does not cite what Karrer said but more accurately what he did not say, marks narrating as an act of failed speech: "Alles Erzählen/Zitieren [zeigt sich als] Bewegung der Verfehlung/Fehlakt." / "All narration/citation [appears as a] movement of failure/act of failure." (Strowick 2009: 319) Since she is concerned with the concept of the unreliable narrator rather than with the question of speechlessness, Strowick does not dwell on the role of the (missing) voice.

to the mere refusal to speak or to the loss of the voice. Rather, she proposes that the human voice is fundamentally precarious.²⁸

This idea of a negative (human) voice can be pushed even further with Giorgio Agamben's concept of the voice.²⁹ In *Language and Death* (1982) he focuses less on the experience of language as meaningful speech, but rather, more on its modes of operation by asking what permits language to "show its own taking place" (Agamben 1991: 32). More precisely, he investigates the relationship between the human voice and the concept of negativity. Agamben suggests that the 'taking place of language/discourse' is based on pure negativity, because a negative dimension already constitutes the human voice. Drawing on both the medieval concept of a 'thought of the voice alone'³⁰ and Hegel's 'idea of the animal voice',³¹ Agamben claims that the 'taking place of language' is essentially constituted by the removal of the voice. Based on his readings of Hegel and medieval philosophy, Agamben differentiates between the voice as mere sound and meaningful discourse. He states:

A voice as mere sound (an *animal* voice) could certainly be the index of the individual who emits it, but in no way can it refer to the instance of discourse as such, nor open the sphere of utterance. The voice, the animal *phoné*, is indeed presupposed by the shifters, but as that which must necessarily be removed in order for meaningful discourse to take place. *The taking place of language between the removal of the voice and the event of meaning is the other Voice* [...]. But inasmuch as this Voice (which we now capitalize to distinguish it from the voice as mere sound) enjoys the status of a *no-longer* (voice) and of a *not-yet* (meaning), it necessarily constitutes a negative dimension. It is *ground*, but in the sense that it *goes to the ground* and disappears in

28 Notoriously, Derrida challenges the dichotomy between speech and speechlessness for example in his essay *How to avoid speaking* where he claims that pure speechlessness does not exist because it is impossible to exceed language. Derrida states: "Thus, at the moment when the question "How to avoid speaking?" arises, it is already too late. There was no longer any question of not speaking. Language has started without us, in us and before us." (Derrida 1992: 99) According to Derrida, not to speak is impossible as language has always already taken place. Even the seeming refusal to speaking is a form of speech. From this perspective, speechlessness is not secondary to speech but rather one mode of speech besides others.

29 For a detailed analysis of Agamben's concept of the 'removed voice' see Lagaay / Schiffers (2008).

30 According to Agamben, the 'thought of the voice alone' is a concept in medieval logic that situates the voice in between two registers. As no longer being mere sound and not yet being meaningful discourse, it opens a new sense of the voice "as an intention to signify and as a pure indication that language is taking place" (Agamben 1991: 34).

31 In Agamben's reading of Hegel's manuscripts of the lessons he held at Jena (1803–4/1805–6), what constitutes the human voice, or more precisely, what "give[s] rise to human language as the voice of consciousness [in Hegel's sense]" (Agamben 1991: 44), is the animal voice. The animal voice is, according to Agamben's interpretation of Hegel, the voice of death: "In dying, the animal finds its voice, it exalts the soul in one voice, and, in this act, it expresses and preserves itself *as dead*. Thus, the animal voice is the *voice of death*. [...] 'Voice (and memory) of death' means: the voice is death, which preserves and recalls the living as dead, and it is, at the same time, an immediate trace and memory of death, pure negativity." (ibid.: 45) From this perspective, Agamben claims, "the importance of this situation of human voice as the articulation of an animal voice that is, in truth, *the voice of death*, cannot be avoided" (ibid.: 46).

order for being and language to take place. [T]hat, which articulates the human voice in language, is a pure negativity. (ibid.: 35)

According to Agamben, what enables the taking place of language is a double negativity. The (animal) voice of mere sound is, with Hegel, already a 'voice of death', which must be removed in order for meaningful speech to take place. In other words, the deprivation of the voice is as integral to speech as that which demonstrates the 'taking place of language' through the indexical function of the (human) voice. Even more precisely, speaking as an operation of the audible voice is possible only insofar as it is constituted by a lack of voice.

Bernhard's novella radicalizes the idea of a voiceless speech by illustrating how speech, and even more radically, how so-called manic speech not only rests upon a lack of the voice but, even more profoundly, upon a lack of breath. Or, to put it differently, Karrer's missing breath demonstrates the deprivation of the voice not to be secondary to speech – he does not 'decide' not to speak – but intrinsic to speech as such. The radicalization consists in the understanding of speech as fundamentally voiceless since it does not take place because Karrer does not speak, but rather, precisely through speechlessness. Karrer's manic speech, one could say, broadens the concept of indirect discourse as collective assemblage by producing not only all the (audible) voices but also the breathless non-voices present within a single voice. On the level of narration, the repetition of the phrase *these thin spots* is the articulation of the non-vocal, breathless non-voice. Speaking/narrating is not bound to breath; rather, it is that which is initiated precisely through the lack of voice.³²

4. So-Called Speechlessness

The narration performs a further twist not merely by turning the relation between speaking and not speaking on its head but rather by challenging the speech/speechlessness boundary itself.

Karrer performs his crossing of the speech/speechlessness line in a mode of *as if* (Karrer '*made as if* to take a deep breath/'er tat, als wolle er tief einatmen'). This performance does not simply fail but, again, 'seemed unsuccessful'/'es hatte den

32 Without referring to Bernhard, Petra Gehring formulates a similar thought when she claims that, in literature, complete speechlessness is rather embodied by repeaters than by silent characters: "So sind es in der Literatur daher gar nicht die großen Redeverweigerer, die das vollständige Schweigen verkörpern oder die besonders stillen Figuren, sondern vielmehr die mechanischen Wiederholer." / "Thus, in literature it is neither the big deniers of speech nor the extraordinarily quiet characters, who embody complete silence, but rather the mechanical repeater" (Gehring: 2002: 140).

Anschein als gelänge es ihm nicht'. It is precisely through his performance of a double as if/als ob that Karrer produces the manic speech *these thin spots*. The double twist makes it impossible to decide whether or not Karrer is speaking (in the sense of producing audible speech). Rather, as they articulate in the moment and through the mode of an *as if*, the border between speech and speechlessness collapses.³³ Bernhard's novella not so much 'is' the boundary between speaking and not speaking³⁴ but rather it makes visible the precarious constitution of the boundary between speech and speechlessness by demonstrating the failing of its coming into being. The novella's key scene does not depict Karrer's crossing of the speech/speechlessness demarcation line but rather reveals this line itself to be a "schütterere Stelle", or, as de Certeau puts it, a 'zone of going by'.

In Bernhard's novella speechlessness is not only a crucial motive but it also operates on the level of narration. The text radicalizes the idea of a silent voice by showing that speech is at stake also and particularly when the voice is missing. That which constitutes speech in Bernhard's novella is the lack of voice. Speechlessness is not beyond but *within* speech, it is in fact what constitutes speech, not as its potential, not insofar as it would be possible for speech to take a rest or not to take place, but as that which constitutes speech from within. In its radical conceptualization of a voiceless speech/narration, the text challenges the dichotomy between speech and speechlessness, revealing speechlessness as being not the pure absence of speech or secondary to speech but as being one mode of speech. In order to critique and challenge the metaphysical concepts of truth and knowledge, Karrer calls everything "so-called"/"ein sogenanntes" or even "so-called so-called"/"sogenannte sogenanntes" (Bernhard 2003: 156; 2006: 204). Insofar as speechlessness operates in a mode of *as if*, it is, in Karrer's words, also only a *so-called* speechlessness.

33 Krammer makes a similar observation in regard to Bernhard's plays when he notices a certain "Unentscheidbarkeit – weil Gleichzeitigkeit – der beiden Kategorien [sprechen und schweigen]" / "undecidability – due to simultaneity – of the two categories [speaking and not speaking]." (Krammer 2003: 32) Despite the crucial observation that speech and speechlessness are deeply intertwined, he conceives of them as "zwei komplementäre Mengen" / "two complementary quantities" (ibid.), and concludes that "neben dem Gesagten das Verschwiegene in Form einer schweigenden Rollenfigur stets präsent ist" / "besides all speaking, speechlessness embodied in the silent characters is also present" (ibid.: 15).

34 "[Bernhards Werke] bewegen sich auf der Grenze von Sprache und Nicht-Sprache. Sie beschreiben sie nicht, sie umschreiben sie nicht. Sie sind die Grenze" / "[Bernhard's works] are situated on the border of speech and speechlessness. They do not describe but rather are the border itself." (Fischer 1985: 132) For *Walking* in particular Fischer claims, "'Gehen' [...] ist die Grenze, besser noch: die Grenzziehung." / "'Walking' is the boundary, more precisely, the drawing of the boundary" (ibid.: 131).

Bernhard's novella discusses the metaphysical relationship between speech and speechlessness by problematizing their binary, revealing their mutual implications and, most importantly, by demonstrating that it is impossible to overcome this dichotomy. It is in this sense that both Karrer's experiment and the novella's poetic create a state of complete indifference, which is "through and through, a philosophical state"/"[ein] durch und durch philosophischer Zustand" (Bernhard 2003: 174; 2006: 227).

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