Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann

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Part Two: A History of Reading Bachmann, 1985, Chapter 6. Bachmann and Wittgenstein, with essay titled, Reading Bachmann in 1985

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1985

The caesura that separated 1984 from 1985 was Ronald Reagan's landslide victory in the November 1984 election. The lopsided results turned the euphoria of progressives who had participated in the Jackson campaign into deep gloom. The title page of the January–February 1985 issue of *Socialist Review* bore the caption (borrowed from Ntozake Shange's play) "For Leftists Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf," and the Socialist Scholars' Conference in April 1985 was titled "The Left in Crisis." Despite the Democratic Party's nomination of the first-ever female vice presidential candidate of a major party, Geraldine Ferraro's candidacy had not especially inspired women to vote the Democratic ticket. Perhaps that was in part because the campaign managers for presidential candidate Walter Mondale, targeted as the candidate of "special interests" ("women, trade unionists, blacks, Hispanics, gays, and environmentalists—that is, seventy to eighty per cent of the population," remarked one commentator wryly [Altman 10]), did not allow Ferraro to appeal specifically to women voters until shortly before election day—far too late. And despite a 4 to 9 percent gender gap that divided men's and women's support for the Republicans, a majority of U.S. women as well as men backed Reagan (Riddiough 24–25). The *New York Times* quoted a thirty-year-old woman from Ferraro's New York neighborhood as saying: "Reagan is a true capitalist, and so am I. I really don't care about social programs. Reagan cares about strength, power, spending for the military just like I do" (Altman 8). The so-called New Deal coalition seemed to have collapsed, and only black voters, including those newly registered by the Jackson campaign, remained a reliably Democratic constituency.

Feminists also were shaken by the Reagan win and by a more general sense of feminism's lack of political effectiveness. Though they conceded that liberal feminism had made gains for women, within Reagan's America those changes were minuscule compared with the complete transformation of everything that radical and socialist feminists had originally envisioned. A panel of eminent socialist feminists, asked by *Socialist Review* to comment on the state of socialist feminism, proclaimed its demise (somewhat ironically, since only a few years later it would be reincarnated, at least in the academy, as "materialist feminism"). Deirdre English commented: "I don't feel very comfortable calling myself a feminist anymore, because socialist-feminism is dead, my version of radical feminism is dead, and the mainstream feminist movement is just barking up the wrong tree" (English et al. 104). Not surprisingly, recriminations

and soul searching were the consequence both outside and inside the academy. Cultural feminists and "difference" feminists of all sorts took a beating in academic feminist journals, since the emphasis on women's difference from men was now seen as racist, classist, and of potential utility to the right. The editors of *Feminist Studies* noted, "We suspect that the very category of 'difference,' to the extent that it implies biologically based distinctions between women and men in cognition and capacity, may prove finally to impede rather than to further the quest for knowledge and for equality" (Vicinus/ Rosenfelt 5). In summer 1985 the editors of *Signs*, printing the papers of the 1983 *Signs*-sponsored conference "Communities of Women," apologized for the limitation of their topic: "We did not realize, until courteously yet explicitly advised of our failure of insight, that this focus might be seen to limit the topic's appropriateness to the interests of middle-class white women in their struggle against the dominance of white men. When women and men are oppressed because of class or race or both, women's autonomy may not be a relevant issue" ("Editorial" 1985, 634).

Among the critiques of feminist methodology advanced by those papers, most striking was Joan Ringelheim's account of how a cultural feminist perspective had led her to ask the wrong questions about women's experience in the Holocaust. "Cultural feminism," she now declared, "developed not simply as a tactic for battling the antiwoman line in a sexist world, but as a way to detour around it without violent revolution; without confronting the state, family, marriage, or organized religion, and without eliminating institutions intent on keeping women in their place. . . . [C]ultural feminism substitutes a political activism that was risky and offensive for another that, accidentally or not, conveniently disallows risk" (754). "My use of cultural feminism as a frame (albeit unconsciously)," she continued, "changed respect for the stories of the Jewish women into some sort of glorification and led to the conclusion that these women transformed 'a world of death and inhumanity into one more act of human life." But the Holocaust, she concluded, "is a story of loss, not gain" (756–57).

Other feminist scholars developed similarly scathing critiques of cultural feminism. Anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo, for instance, debunked the notion of woman as peacemaker which had underwritten cultural feminist participation in the peace movement. The articles in the book she was reviewing, she explained,

> reflect a certain radical feminist perspective that envisions women as innately more peaceful than—and thus morally superior to—men, thus lodging this analysis in an imagined matriarchal past. This perspective leads authors to make statements that are historically and anthropologically inaccurate. They assert that "women are the first victims of the patriarchal state of war," and declare that "pre-Patriarchal cultures believed that, because women alone brought forth life, women therefore held the secrets of nature and the keys to wisdom." This last claim would come as a considerable surprise to the foraging African Pygmies and Australian

aborigines. Such counterfactual assertions, misreading ethnographic and histori-
cal evidence, are the despair of feminist anthropologists. (606)

Carol Gilligan's theory of women's different moral sensibilities were not just
based on insufficient empirical evidence, members of a feminist study collective
argued, but could also be used to support arguments like those of conservative
Phyllis Shlafly for the separate interests of women and men—"a conviction," they
maintained, "that contributed to the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment"
(Auerbach et al. 159). Wendy Chapkis even cast aspersions at Susan Brownmill-
er's insistence on clinging to the feminist "uniform" of the 1970s—unshaven legs,
no makeup, functional clothing, trousers, flat shoes: "[Brownmiller's book] *Femi-
ninity* reads like the statement of a woman weary of the struggle and unable to
find inspiration for a new female esthetic that allows for play and pleasure" (111).
(Such a remark documents a striking sea change pointing in the direction of the
flirtation with gender performance that would characterize the queer politics of
the 1990s.) Even literary scholars denounced the cultural feminist or French fem-
inist lens that had been directed at women's literary texts: in the spring 1985 *Signs*
issue, for instance, Alicia Ostriker protested a conception of poetry advanced in
an article by Margaret Homans which, drawing on French theory, portrayed
women's experience as inexpressible in men's language.

While thus displaying the influence of the reconsideration of feminist polit-
ical strategies in the political arena, feminist scholarship simultaneously moved
toward the elaboration of alternative paradigms that might avoid what they
now perceived as earlier errors. In feminist journals, articles exploring the
enormous range of female possibilities across culture and history proliferated:
anarchist women in the Spanish Civil War (Ackelsberg); black women in the
Sanctified Church (Gilkes); contemporary Iranian women (Higgins); Jewish
immigrant women in New York and the 1917 food riots (Frank); women work-
ers in the Shanghai cotton mills from 1919 to 1949 (Honig); German feminists
before World War I (Ann Taylor Allen); women in the Israeli army (Yuval-
Davis); Bedouin women (Abu-Lughod); women workers in the Yale clerical
union strike (Ladd-Taylor), women in the new Nicaragua (Molyneux). Authors
of articles on such topics developed increasingly more careful ways of theoreti-
cally and practically differentiating among women, Maxine Molyneux argu-
ing, for instance: "Although it is true that at a certain level of abstraction women
can be said to have some interests in common, there is no consensus over what
these interests are or how they are to be formulated. This is in part because
there is no theoretically adequate and universally applicable causal explanation
of women's subordination from which a general account of women's interests
can be derived" (231).

As followed from the critique of cultural feminism's emphasis on women's
separate sphere, feminist scholars also began to problematize their strategy of
examining women's undertakings independently from those of men. Kathryn

Kish Sklar observed, for instance: "One of the most important questions asked by historians of American women today is, To what degree has women's social power been based on separate female institutions, culture, and consciousness, and to what degree has it grown out of their access to male spheres of influence, such as higher education, labor organization, and politics?" (659). In accord with critiques raised against various sorts of feminists in the political realm, feminist scholars also criticized the practice as well as the theory of feminists who perpetuate an existing system of domination in the course of pursuing what they believe to be feminist ends: Susan Schechter and Michelle Fine, for instance, drew attention to what they termed a "feminist hegemony" in the battered women's movement, "the imposition of a feminist way and a feminist set of values on women who live and work in these shelters" (Fine 402). Rather than predicting women's automatic opposition to oppression, scholars examined how they actually negotiated conflicting pressures and how ideologies as well as actual conditions guided their choices (Lamphere; Ferree, "Between"; Zavella). Particularly in texts focused on sexuality, scholars began to underline notions of the "social construction" of all aspects of female behavior (Caulfield).

Literary scholars also demonstrated a greater awareness of both political and social conditions and strategies of literary representations as barriers to understanding a female author as a voice unproblematically giving expression to the concerns of a female subject. Margaret Homans began an article on women's love poetry by remarking, "This essay assumes that poets are shaped as much by the literary forms and the conventions of language they inherit as they are by the social and political universe in which they have their historical being" ("Syllables" 569). Scholars commented as well on the difficulties of politics, positioning, and representation that intrude between a feminist scholar and her subject matter (Minnich). Leslie Rabine's analysis of Harlequin romance novels continued to move feminist literary analysis beyond canonical texts into interdisciplinary methodologies by arguing that recent Harlequins treat the theme of sexuality in the workplace as a means to envision "an end to the division between the domestic world of love and sentiment and the public world of work and business" (40), thus helping readers to manage conflicts in their own lives. A feminist critic of Shakespeare (a field where much pathbreaking literary scholarship was undertaken in the 1980s) proposed a feminist reading of Shakespeare's texts as a site at which discursive contradictions could be interrogated: "For generations Shakespearean critics lamented the marriages that end these plays as tacked on and conventional; recently feminist critics have described them as strategies that circumscribe female revolt and power. I would suggest instead that the plays expose contradictions between the enactment of repressive social structures manifested in genre (courtship and marriage) and the representation of powerful female protagonists" (Newman 602). In the best literary analyses of 1985, feminist scholars gave expression to their efforts to reach beyond the

(frequently mainly formalist) training they had received in their own fields and also investigated developments occurring in other fields of cultural studies as they inched toward the major transformation of their field that would begin later in the decade.

Most indicative of the new directions in which feminist scholarship was moving and the rupture with earlier feminist paradigms that they would represent (as well as the emergence of a new version of socialist feminism) was Donna Haraway's article "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," first published in the March-April 1985 issue of *Socialist Review*. From the perspective of the development of feminist thought, Haraway clearly elaborated her cyborg myth in response to the implosion of the category "woman." "Woman," she explained, is itself a fictional construction imposed on us by our enemies: "There is nothing about being female that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as being female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism" ("Manifesto" 72). Instead, the cyborg is the "fiction" Haraway wishes to use to characterize women. In contrast, say, to the woman as cultural feminism understood her, cyborgs are hybrid and heterogeneous postmodern creatures that refuse those binaries which structure Western thought: arising out of a confusion and transgression of boundaries, they are both nature and culture, both organic and crafted, products of both imagination and material reality, both public and private, a conglomerate of races, beyond gender, neither deriving from a single lineage nor originating at a moment of prelapsarian wholeness. Haraway explains:

> An origin story in the "Western," humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism. Hilary Klein has argued that both Marxism and psychoanalysis, in their concepts of labor and of individuation and gender formation, depend on the plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature. The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. ("Manifesto" 67)

When such concepts are drawn into question, theories based on ontology and teleology such as classical Marxism and classical psychoanalysis—and cultural feminism—become impossible as well. As Haraway observes: "Catherine MacKinnon's version of radical feminism is itself a caricature of the appropriating, incorporating, totalizing tendencies of Western theories of identity grounding action. . . . It's not just that 'god' is dead, so is the 'goddess'" ("Manifesto" 77, 81). But the consequence of the loss of such constructions that also motivated

political action for socialist feminists, Haraway underlines, need be not cynicism or despair but rather opposition and a contestation for meanings that cannot predict in advance what the outcome will be. "We do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. In that sense, dialectics too is a dream language, longing to resolve contradictions." Writing (in contrast to an originary, self-identical speech) is preeminently the technology of cyborgs, and "Cyborg writing," says Haraway, "is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" ("Manifesto" 92, 94). Haraway argues here for a theory and practice based on a feminism without guarantees, an aleatory strategy that squarely confronts the bleak present but, opting (like Brecht) for the "bad new" rather than the "good old," nonetheless continues, as a new sort of socialist feminism, to hope and work for a transformation of the future.

Bachmann and Wittgenstein

Not just the case of Kakania showed that
thinking in closed ideologies leads directly to war,
and the permanent war of faith is still ongoing.
—*Ingeborg Bachmann,* Werke

*T*welve years after her death, literary scholars are slowly beginning to understand the author whom Sigrid Weigel has termed "the other Ingeborg Bachmann." As Weigel explains, "The stimulus of feminist cultural criticism and poststructuralism was necessary before Bachmann's late work could be understood and the more radical dimension of her writing grasped" ("Andere" 2). The new Bachmann scholarship has been remarkable, producing several impressive recent volumes and finally enabling us to begin to comprehend Bachmann's profound and difficult texts. Yet despite the accomplishments of the new scholarship, it too runs some danger of again distorting Bachmann's works by extracting them and Bachmann herself from their cultural context, the mid-twentieth-century Austria which her fiction so carefully anatomizes. It is certainly the case that Bachmann participated in the intellectual debates of the European intelligentsia of the postwar period, thus also knew and was influenced by, among other things, the developing poststructuralist theory of the 1960s. As evidence of her familiarity with issues under discussion by European intellectuals, one might, for instance, consider the names of the other members of the editorial board of a proposed international literary journal on which Bachmann was also chosen to serve, including in 1963 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Günter Grass, Helmut Heißenbüttel, Uwe Johnson, Martin Walser, Roland Barthes, Michel Butor, Michel Leiris, Italo Calvino, Alberto Moravia, and Pier Paolo Pasolini (*W* 4: 376). In Bachmann's own contribution to the first number of the journal, however, she cautions against the creation of a common

European "supermarket of the spirit" and urges instead that literary production be rooted in the particularities of language and culture: "Only now can one safely ponder what one can say and contribute oneself, each from his own province, from his own place at which the world (that is, the other provinces) washes up" (*W* 4: 70–71). At this point in the development of the new Bachmann criticism it may be most productive to follow Bachmann's own advice and, while preserving the insights gained via the use of poststructuralist theory, to investigate Bachmann's roots within the specificity of Austrian history and the Austrian cultural tradition.

As a contribution to that effort I would like to explore Bachmann's indebtedness to the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who, despite the efforts of Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, is also almost invariably extracted from his Austrian background. Unpublished material from the Bachmann papers as well as Bachmann's published essays on Wittgenstein show that many of the concerns that inform Bachmann's late fiction were present, at least in germinal form, in her work from the beginning and can be traced to her encounter with Wittgenstein. Using Janik and Toulmin, I first briefly examine Wittgenstein in the context of the Austrian intellectual tradition, stressing particularly his relationship to the Vienna Circle, the perspective from which Bachmann, under the influence of her dissertation director, Viktor Kraft, first treated him. Then I trace Bachmann's own development as a young philosopher, from her critique of Heidegger—undertaken mostly from the perspective of logical positivism—to her growing engagement with the work of Wittgenstein, whom she increasingly distinguished from the logical positivists. Finally, I examine Bachmann's two published essays of the 1950s on Wittgenstein and argue that her encounter with his posthumous *Philosophical Investigations*, which she read after writing the first and before the second of her essays, was of key importance to her subsequent intellectual development, the themes she emphasized in the second essay remaining central to her own writing until her death.

Janik and Toulmin point out that Wittgenstein's concern with what language is able to say—in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) as well as the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and the various other collections of aphorisms, remarks, and lecture notes published after his death—is rooted in both the neo-Kantian atmosphere and the general spirit of cultural crisis of pre-1914 Vienna. His work needs to be understood as an attempt to secure the first principles of human thought at a time when it was increasingly unclear on what founding principles the culture rested. Wittgenstein, Janik and Toulmin explain, was born in 1889 as "the youngest son of Vienna's leading steel magnate and patron

of the arts" (13). Within that intellectual milieu, of course, not only philosophers deliberated the principles through which language corresponded to the object world; for figures such as Karl Kraus, Arthur Schnitzler, Adolf Loos, Oskar Kokoschka, Arnold Schönberg, and Sigmund Freud, along with many others, questions about communication and representation were critical, finding their most drastic expression in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Lord Chandos Letter." Because the Wittgenstein household was, Janik and Toulmin argue, both a cultural center and also a site of generational conflict, "Wittgenstein was personally exposed to the crises in art, morality and even family life that were the central sources of cultural and ethical debate in prewar Vienna" (174). Wittgenstein (like Robert Musil and Albert Einstein) began his own intellectual life with the study of engineering, which required at that time also a thorough grasp of theoretical physics and mathematics, and his early thought was influenced by debates in those fields. Ernst Mach insisted, for instance, that all knowledge can be reduced to sensation and that physical theories are merely simplifications of experience which are more or less efficient and useful. Max Planck, however, maintained that Mach's theory was still enmired in metaphysics and argued instead (not unlike Kant) that the physicist "creates the physical world by imposing form upon it" (Janik and Toulmin 138). On matters of ethics and aesthetics, Janik and Toulmin argue that prewar Viennese thinking was informed by the very unscientific thought of Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard, and Leo Tolstoy, demonstrably figures who also helped to shape the work of Wittgenstein. As a philosopher and a Viennese, Wittgenstein faced the problem of reconciling contemporary thinking on physics with that on ethics.

The *Tractatus*, which Wittgenstein completed while fighting in the Austrian army during World War I, thus draws upon his training in physics to argue that language uses an a priori system of logic to make "pictures" (*Bilder*) that describe the facts of the world. Such propositions can be empirically verified. Propositions that are neither tautological nor empirically verifiable are literally meaningless or non-sense. By far the larger part of the *Tractatus* is devoted to the details of its author's critique of language. The sixth and seventh sections of the book, however, concern the nature of ethics, a realm which is "higher" and "transcendental" and about which one cannot speak at all, as Wittgenstein explained in the work's final sentence (which Bachmann never tired of citing): "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (*Tractatus* 151). As Wittgenstein tried to explain to friends (e.g. in a letter to Ludwig von Ficker), what he had not said in the book was its point: "The meaning of the book is an ethical one. I once wanted to put a sentence into the foreword which now in fact

isn't there but which I will now write to you because it will perhaps be a key for you. I wanted to write, my work consists of two parts, of the part that's here, and of all that I didn't write. And precisely this second part is the important one" (*Briefe* 35).

Believing the *Tractatus* to be the final solution to the problems of Western metaphysics, Wittgenstein gave up philosophy until 1929, when he returned to Cambridge, where he had earlier studied with the British philospher Bertrand Russell, and worked for the rest of his life on the ideas that would be published after his death (and that are discussed in greater detail below). In the English-speaking world, where Wittgenstein's work has received most attention, he has been viewed mostly through the lens of Cambridge as an analytic philosopher on the order of Gottlob Frege, Russell, and C. E. Moore. In Vienna, Wittgen-stein's early writing influenced the work of the Vienna Circle, formed in the 1920s around Moritz Schlick, who held the chair for philosophy of the inductive sciences (established for Mach) at the University of Vienna. Relying on Mach's sensationalist theory of knowledge, the members of the Vienna Circle used the *Tractatus* to provide the basic logical structure for their own philosophy. As the Vienna Circle was dispersed in the 1930s by death, academic departures, and persecution, Wittgenstein's work came also via this route into international cur-rency. "Nicely domesticated," as one Wittgenstein scholar has put it (Edwards 2), Wittgenstein's works became a subject of consideration by professional phi-losophers and social scientists, whereas their relevance to the historical issues of his time was scarcely examined.

Bachmann apparently also came to Wittgenstein via the Vienna Circle, writ-ing her dissertation under the direction of Viktor Kraft, of whom she said in a later interview: "There were very few professors back then; I think the students were more or less on their own until I then happened on one of the last old men of this 'Vienna Circle,' the Vienna neopositivists, from whom I may really have learned something" (*GuI* 82). Kraft, born in 1890, had been a member of the Vienna Circle while still a student of Friedrich Jodl and may be the only mem-ber of the group to have remained in Vienna until after 1945 (Johnston 189). In a work published in 1951, *Der Wiener Kreis*, Kraft detailed the history and phil-osophical positions of members of the group, remaining, as he explained stead-fastly if somewhat apologetically, committed to their principles:

> To be sure, those who seek from philosophy a confession of personal wisdom about the world or life, of subjective interpretation of world or life, or those who seek from it the speculative construction of an otherwise veiled and inaccessible ground of being or the conceptual poetry of a novel about the world—such people

can certainly understand philosophy as the Vienna Circle understands it only as an impoverishment. For it excludes everything that can't be obtained in a scientific way. But only then can one move beyond subjective difference and variability, only then can one claim universal validity and lasting results. (10)

That Bachmann's own philosophical position at the time of her dissertation corresponded to Kraft's is evident not just from the dissertation itself (analyzed in further detail below) but also from two unpublished essays in her papers, apparently written in the period immediately after she completed her studies. In what seems to be the first of the two, "Philosophie der Gegenwart" (Philosophy of the present), Bachmann briefly summarizes phenomenology, contemporary metaphysics, existentialism, idealism, and historical materialism, but ten of the essay's eighteen pages are devoted to the Vienna Circle, an emphasis she justifies in the introduction: "The special attention to the 'Vienna Circle' can be explained by the consideration that neopositivism displays the most radical break with traditional philosophy and the path toward scientific philosophizing is taken most convincingly" ("Philosophie" 1). Her discussion of the Vienna Circle follows the structure and content of Kraft's book and often also borrows his language without acknowledgment. Her treatment of Wittgenstein in this essay stresses his relationship to the work of the Circle: she emphasizes that neopositivism's concern with language derives from the members' interest in logic as a tautological system, and that their investigations of language are inquiries into its possibilities as a "system of representation [*Darstellungssystem*]." Because one must use language to speak about language, she explains, Wittgenstein came to the conclusion that one could not speak meaningfully about language at all: "But finally all philosophical questions led back to this analysis. Philosophical problems thus revealed themselves as pseudo-problems. Wittgenstein draws the conclusion from that and concludes his work with the explanation that his own remarks make no sense, for: What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" ("Philosophie" 11). This is a significantly different explanation of the conclusion to the *Tractatus* than Bachmann would later give to it.

In contrast, Bachmann continues, Rudolf Carnap argues that philosophy could evolve a "metalanguage" to analyze language. He considers the task of philosophy to be metalogical or semiotic analysis of the language of science, investigating linguistic symbols pragmatically, semantically, syntactically, and independently of their content. One of the sticking points of neopositivism, however, became the verification of propositions. Wittgenstein's solution in the *Tractatus* to the problem of verification "pointed the way ahead," Bachmann explains. There he insists that all general statements must be reducible to individual

empirical statements ("all men are mortal" being thus identical with the assertions "X is mortal" plus "Y is mortal" plus . . .) to be meaningful at all. Later some of the neopositivists came to the conclusion that it was impossible to reach ultimate verification and that statements must be regarded as more or less probable hypotheses. The pragmatism to which the neopositivists were now compelled enabled them to address broader areas than before, though, says Bachmann, perhaps exactly because their earlier dogmatism allowed them to clarify the bases of philosophy's claim to scientificity. But she concludes her essay by maintaining, like her teacher, that still no answers to humankind's most fundamental questions can be expected from philosophy: "The expectations of many that they will find instructions on how to lead their lives or access to understanding the world can't and won't be fulfilled here. Scientific philosophy—and it is the task of philosophy to be a science—is, unlike religion or literature, unable to console, to assist, or to give insight into thinking that may lie beyond the experiential, but rather it must make order, must investigate the knowledge that various sciences convey to us, uncover logical relationships and bring them into a useful system" (18).

Bachmann's second unpublished essay on this topic is "Der Wiener Kreis: Logischer Positivism—Philosophie als Wissendchaft" (The Vienna Circle: logical positivism—philosophy as science). This radio essay, first broadcast on 14 April 1953 by the radio station Hessischer Rundfunk, was not included in the *Werke*, the editors explain, because "in places Bachmann followed to the letter Viktor Kraft's book *Der Wiener Kreis*" (*W* 4: 406). Although its style is less labored and the essay is more clearly oriented around the *Tractatus*, Bachmann still interprets Wittgenstein here through the lens of the Vienna Circle, and the essay does not differ in perspective from "Philosophie der Geganwart." Yet a subtle shift in Bachmann's own position is apparent. Although she praises the Vienna Circle for the resistance it offered to the irrationalism and subjectivism of its time, no longer does she claim that the only philosophy possible is the sort the Vienna Circle undertook. Through the voice of a critic Bachmann is able to articulate objections to the Circle's position more clearly, and by explaining that its endeavor initially was to create a "unitary system" via an analysis of language, she is able to show how it continues to be implicated in the project of Western metaphysics. Most important, Bachmann's radio essay, after discussing the later fortunes of former Vienna Circle members, concludes by asking "Where should the lever be applied today? Perhaps with Ludwig Wittgenstein, who still must be discovered, the greatest and at the same time most unknown philosopher of our epoch. There are statements on the last pages of his *Tractatus logico-phil-*

sophicus that could bring the turning point, the end of positivism, without having to give up its insights." She continues:

> For he says, before he revoked all his words into silence:
> (Professor/reading) "The facts all contribute only to setting the problem, not to its solution.
>
> We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched.
>
> Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer.
>
> There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.
>
> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)
>
> He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright."
> ("Wiener Kreis" 25)

If at this point in her development Bachmann could not yet think beyond the philosophical solutions of the Vienna Circle, this radio essay displays clearly both her desire for other sorts of answers and her recognition that Wittgenstein too pointed beyond the limitations of the philosophers who had learned so much from his work.

Bachmann's dissertation, "Die Kritische Aufnahme der Existentialphilosophie Martin Heideggers" (The critical reception of the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger), completed in 1949, can begin to reveal both the kinds of philosophical questions the young Bachmann passionately wished to address and why neither Heidegger nor the Vienna Circle could provide the answer to them. Later interviews indicate that in some contrast to the Heidegger enthusiasts of the 1950s, Bachmann took Heidegger's early support for the Nazis seriously and was also prepared to connect his political opinions to his philosophy. In a 1973 interview she declared that she had refused to write a poem he had requested from her for the *Festschrift* on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, and it was still with some glee that she reported her certainty that her dissertation had demolished his philosophy: "Because back then, at twenty-two, I believed I was now going to bring this man down!"(*GuI* 137). To the end of her life she stood by the critique of Heidegger she had formulated in the dissertation. Until Bachmann's personal papers become available in 2025 we will not know why, given her political reservations about Heidegger, she chose nonetheless to write her dissertation on him. On the basis of evidence in it as well as in

the body of her work, however, one might surmise that she was powerfully drawn to the kinds of questions Heidegger was asking but also realized that his answers were historically and politically inadequate; for all their alleged challenge to Western metaphysics, they were still deeply enmired in those ways of thinking which had led to the crimes and cultural crises of Europe in the twentieth century.

For my purposes, what is most important about Bachmann's dissertation is the *kind* of critique she directs at Heidegger. The dissertation is structured as a sometimes rather cursory survey of Heidegger's reception by various twentieth-century German-speaking philosophical schools: logical positivism, historical materialism, neo-Kantianism, idealism, phenomenology, existentialism, neo-Thomism, and so on. The two critiques with which Bachmann begins seem to be the most important determinants of her own position. Included first is logical positivism, and Bachmann outlines in some detail Rudolf Carnap's analysis of the meaninglessness of Heidegger's central argument in "What Is Metaphysics?" Heidegger wants to explore the status of "nothing" in the following passage: "What should be examined are beings only, and besides that—nothing; beings alone, and further—nothing; solely beings, and beyond that—nothing. What about this nothing?" (*Kritische* 20; Heidegger 97). Carnap insists that grammatically the "nothing" of this sentence cannot be a "name of an object"; hence, the question is literally meaningless and there is nothing to investigate. (Bachmann was evidently quite taken by the conclusiveness of this argument and repeated it in "The Vienna Circle" as well as in her two published essays on Wittgenstein.) The specific argument is of course illustrative of Carnap's general critique of Heidegger, "that science could not involve itself with a tangle of illogical questions, as Heidegger demands from it" (*Kritische* 22). Nor is metaphysics adequate for the expression of a "feeling about life [*Lebensgefühl*]," for even in this instance metaphysics takes the form of a theory which attempts to speak of truth and falsehood. "The result of the investigation is: Metaphysics could be only an insufficient substitute for art and deceives itself when it believes in its theoretical content. That is true not only for Heidegger but for every speculative or intuitional metaphysics, every ethics or aesthetics as normative discipline but also for a metaphysics that begins with experience and on the basis of some kind of conclusions or other maintains it can recognize that which lies behind or beyond experience" (*Kritische* 24). In her initial argument Bachmann has thus shown why philosophy is incapable of answering any of the questions she cares about. Though logical positivism leaves a space for art, it is also at the cost of art's claim that it can speak truly about the world.

The second perspective on Heidegger that Bachmann investigates in the dissertation is that of historical materialism, basing her analysis on a book by Theodor Hartwig, *Der Existenzialismus*, published in Vienna in 1948. For Hartwig (as evidently for Bachmann), there is a connection between Heidegger's existentialism and fascism. Quoting Hartwig, Bachmann explains: "That shouldn't be understood as the claim that existentialism was born from fascist ideology, but rather both ideologies grew out of the same sociopolitical fundament; they sprang from a social climate of conviction that developed out of the general economic crisis and the existential insecurity related to it" (Hartwig 9, *Kritische* 25.) She continues, paraphrasing Hartwig: "Existentialism is not a philosophy but rather a revolt of the threatened petty bourgeoisie in the guise of philosophy, which in its despair emphasizes all subjective values in order to work against modern collectivizing tendencies and to hold up the inexorable course of history" (*Kritische* 12). That this ideological reading of existentialism corresponds generally to Bachmann's own is suggested by her statement on existentialism in "Philosophy of the Present," this time in her own voice: "We are concerned in the main here with the transitory expression of European *Angst* that is rooted in the misery and distress of our continent after two world wars" ("Philosophie" 6).

To have thus ideologically comprehended the historical reasons for the appeal of existentialism has not, however, assuaged "European *Angst* . . . after two world wars." In a brief summary at the end of the dissertation Bachmann attempts to arrive at her own conclusions about Heidegger. She is compelled to conclude from her own logical-positivist perspective as well as from the others she examines that Heidegger's philosophy cannot legitimately make any claims to truth. Instead, she maintains, "the result will always be the dangerous half-rationalization of a sphere that can be addressed with the words of Wittgenstein: 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'"—and yet this conclusion has obviously not solved the problems for Bachmann, for she continues, "The fundamental experiences with which existentialism is concerned are in fact alive in the human being and demand expression" (*Kritische* 115). At most they can find their expression in art, which can make claim to neither science nor truth. Her dissertation concludes on a deeply subjective note (recalling in this respect Christa T.'s master's thesis in Christa Wolf's *The Quest for Christa T.*) by citing a "linguistic testimony to the most extreme representational possibilities of the communicable": Baudelaire's sonnet "Le gouffre." In its expression of horror before the ever-threatening void ("tout est abîme,—action, désir, rêve, Parole!") as well as its powerlessness to escape a rationality which cannot address the void ("Ah! ne jamais sortir des Nombres et des Etres." "'Nombres,' 'Etres,'" Bachmann adds in

a footnote, "are things that have no consciousness but exist only numerically" [*Kritische* 117]), Baudelaire's poem particularly gives voice to dilemmas Bachmann confronted upon completion of her dissertation, for she had proved there were no answers to the questions most important to her. In this respect her position on Heidegger corresponds to Wittgenstein's own, revealed in a discussion in 1929 with members of the Vienna Circle: "I certainly can imagine what Heidegger meant by Being and *Angst*. The human being has an instinct to fight against the limits of language. Think for example of the astonishment that something exists. That astonishment can't be expressed in the form of a question, and there also isn't any answer at all. Everything that we'd like to say can a priori only be nonsense. Nevertheless we fight against the limits of language" (quoted in Waismann 68).

Grasping that this was Wittgenstein's dilemma (though we have no evidence that she was familiar with his specific comments on Heidegger), Bachmann thus stressed not his logical analyses but his ethical concerns, and his interest in "the mystical" about which we cannot speak, when she came to write about Wittgenstein directly. In her essay "Ludwig Wittgenstein—Concerning a Chapter of the Most Recent History of Philosophy," first published in the *Frankfurter Hefte* in July 1953, she stressed that the Wittgenstein of whom she wrote was not the British language philosopher who had shaped analytic philosophy but an unknown Austrian: "Now, he wasn't well known at all, he was in fact the least well-known philosopher of our time, a man to whom the words of his compatriot Karl Kraus apply, who once said about himself, 'I'm famous, but it hasn't gotten around yet'" (*W* 4: 12). Many sections of this essay are borrowed from writings already mentioned: the discussion of the Vienna Circle from the unpublished "Philosophie der Gegenwart" and "Der Wiener Kreis" and Carnap's critique of Heidegger from the dissertation. The standpoint Bachmann represents here, similar to that of the radio essay "Der Wiener Kreis," was probably written at about the same time. In this published essay, however, she places the work of the Vienna Circle and Wittgenstein more clearly in its Austro-German historical context as an endeavor to hold fast to an increasingly imperiled reason as the guiding principle of human activity. In 1929, she explained, the same year that the Vienna Circle declared itself publicly, "the second edition of Heidegger's *Being and Time* appeared, which seemed to show that the group was right in its struggle against the irrationalism which was spreading out from Germany, the land of depression. Conjoined to this in Vienna, and this was necessary, was the bitter opposition of the group to Austrian clericalism, for instance in the form of the doctrines of the state philosopher Othmar Spann" (*W* 4: 13–14).

Particularly important here also is her perceptible impatience with the philo-
sophical poverty of the Vienna Circle, which "in its passion for the whole truth
can only offer the dry, formulaic, 'eternal' truth of logic" (*W* 4: 21), and her prob-
ing of Wittgenstein's work for possible alternatives. In the *Tractatus*, however,
there is no solution, if "the world is the totality of facts" and "the limits [*Grenzen*]
of my language mean the limits of my world." "We stand, think, speak on this
side of the limit/border," Bachmann tells us; "The way over the border is blocked
to us." We cannot utter ethical statements, "since a sentence cannot express any-
thing higher," and we cannot act ethically in the world, "for the world [as a total-
ity of facts] is independent of our will." She thus concludes correctly that "it
[Wittgenstein's philosophy] cannot answer any of the questions that we are accus-
tomed to direct to philosophy. With the question about the 'meaning of being' we
are left to our own devices" (*W* 4: 20–21).

Bachmann recognizes in this essay that this solution was no more adequate
for Wittgenstein than it is for her: "'God does not reveal himself in the world'
(6.432) is one of the bitterest propositions of the *Tractatus*" *(W* 4: 22). Thus she
wonders (though she finds it unlikely) whether Wittgenstein's posthumous
papers might reveal that he had taken the leap of faith to a certainty that reason
did not allow him. For it is clear that in the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein, writing out
of his historical situation, was seeking ultimate truth and that no less would do,
as Hanna Fenichel Pitkin has eloquently explained:

> Confronted with the modern predicament, with a universe in flux, lacking cen-
> ter or meaning or stability, the *Tractatus* is essentially a failure of nerve, a retreat
> to what seems the only remaining solid ground, the one fortress that still seems
> defensible, ruthlessly abandoning whatever is outside the walls. If language
> defines our world, then for that world to retain any kind of stability language
> must be a system of fixed, exhaustive, systematic rules. If we stay within those
> rules, we will be safe, will save meaning and sense and reality. Of course, much
> will have to be given up. For all of art and esthetics, all of religion and ethics, all
> really of judgment, sensibility, and affect will have to be abandoned outside the
> fortress. Those things cannot be talked about, and if men continue to experience
> them they must do so in silence and therefore in isolation, in the wordless private
> world of dreams. Our language and our common life must be confined to the
> lucid, ordered crystal palace of mathematics, logic, science, a world secured
> against all ambiguity. That, I think, is the spirit of the *Tractatus*. (336–37)

As a philosopher the young Bachmann could not think beyond this cul-de-sac
either, and Pitkin describes her dilemma as well as Wittgenstein's. But Bachmann's
essay provocatively concludes with a sentence which the *Tractatus* could not

authorize (since there language is either empirical description or a tautological system independent of human use) but which suggests that she understands Wittgenstein's historico-cultural situation to be the real source for a text such as the *Tractatus*: "Or did he also conclude that we have forfeited our language because it contains not a single word that matters?" (*W* 4: 23).

Yet the sentence also points more perceptively in the direction of the kinds of answers Wittgenstein would explore in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Before Bachmann wrote her final Wittgenstein essay, a radio essay composed in 1953 and first broadcast on 16 September 1954 (*W* 4: 377), she was able, at least cursorily, to read that posthumously published work. As we know, Wittgenstein did not become a believer—on the contrary. But what Bachmann grasped, unlike the majority of Wittgenstein commentators, is the larger continuity of concern between his two works, despite the far-reaching critique to which Wittgenstein subjected the *Tractatus* in the later book. As James C. Edwards has explained, "There are at least two ways in which Wittgenstein's lifework is a unity: the later writing is an attempt to take the measure of the earlier, and hence of the tradition which it culminates; and the later work tries to recast, to transmute, the ambition that gives rise to the tradition itself, to fulfill that ambition in spite of itself. . . . In both periods his essential ambition is an ethical one: to locate the sense of life; to answer the question of human being" (4). Or, as Bachmann put it in the radio essay, "The experience that lies at the basis of Heidegger's mysticism of Being may be similar to that which allowed Wittgenstein to speak of the mystical" (*W* 4: 114).

In the *Philosophical Investigations,* Wittgenstein moved beyond Western metaphysics, addressing the problems of philosophy by showing that those problems were simply wrongly conceived. He recognized that in the *Tractatus* he had posed the question falsely—"A picture held us captive" (48)—misunderstanding the nature of language altogether. Language is not a perfectly coherent system that is true either because it is tautological or because it corresponds to empirical reality. Instead, language is primarily speech, and "speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (11), deriving its meaning from whatever "language game" the speakers happen to be playing. Such language games are multiple and varied with no necessary coherence among them but, like the very different tools of a toolbox (another of Wittgenstein's metaphors), nonetheless allowing humans to operate successfully in the world. To use Lévi-Strauss's and Derrida's formulation, Wittgenstein has given up the perfectly coherent and abstract model of the engineer, within which every part can be explained as a component of a single system (the ambition of Western metaphys-

ics since its beginnings), for the heterogeneity of bricolage (Derrida, "Structure" 255–56). As Edwards has explained, Wittgenstein's concern with language is really a concern with guaranteeing "rationality as representation," another way of explaining the central problem that has plagued Western philosophy since the Greeks: "The Socratic-Platonic answer to the question of human being stressed our capacity for *thinking*, conceived as accurate representation of the real: knowledge is (our) virtue, and knowledge is knowledge of universal definitions, representations of the eternal Forms of which we here and now see only the shadows" (20). Some version of this project was still Wittgenstein's ambition in the *Tractatus*, but in the *Philosophical Investigations* he abandoned the entire endeavor to find that intersubjectively verifiable, coherent, ultimate Truth, and, as Pitkin explains, he substituted "partial overviews, developed ad hoc where they are needed, for the older vision of a single, dominating politico-theoretical system" (326).

In her second essay on Wittgenstein, Bachmann shows that she understands exactly what was at stake in the *Tractatus*. According to the *Tractatus*, she explains, we are able to talk about reality at all, use "signs that mean something without having anything in common with that which is signified," because reality and language share "the logical form" (*W* 4: 110). Language can talk neither about this logical form itself nor about anything nonlogical—"outside logic everything is accidental" (*Tractatus* 137)—that is, not about the particular case, the nonessential, the specific, the contingent, or, of course, the ethical, the aesthetic, or any of the other questions of most crucial moment to humans. Thus, Bachmann asks, what has Wittgenstein actually accomplished? "He gives us the answer on one of the last pages of the *Tractatus,* which first allows us to grasp the adventure, the risk in which this book involved itself: 'nothing at all'" (*W* 4: 113). He asserts a similar answer in a passage from the *Philosophical Investigations* which Bachmann also cites: "A whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar" (*Phil. Investigations* 222; *W* 4: 123). As Bachmann perceives, the move beyond the *Tractatus* in the *Philosophical Investigations* is to show "that the problems of philosophy are problems of language, that so to speak the misfirings of language create philosophical problems" (*W* 4: 123). By reconceiving how language functions, by abandoning the abstract level on which he analyzed language in the *Tractatus*, she continues, Wittgenstein can do away with the problems altogether: "He believes that we can silence the problems when our language functions well and sensibly, when it lives and breathes in *use*. Only where language, which is a form of life, is taken out of use, when it comes to a standstill—and it does that in his opinion when it is used to philosophize in the

conventional sense—do problems arise. These problems are not to be solved but rather eliminated" (*W* 4: 124). Language in use can be heterogeneous, multiple, nonsynchronous, particular, and in that practice and play of language the metaphysical problems which have plagued the West are revealed, indeed, to be meaningless.

Bachmann concludes her Wittgenstein essay by drawing from the *Philosophical Investigations* provocative citations and images that will resonate through the rest of her own work. Language is simultaneously a "system of signification" and a "multiplicity [*Mannigfaltigkeit*]" (*W* 4: 124), an almost Kristevan recognition of the multivalencies of language upon which particularly the "Ways of Death" novels draw. Language is "a labyrinth of paths" and an old city: "a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses" (*Phil. Investigations* 8; *W* 4: 124)— images that point toward Bachmann's own later fascination with symbolic topography and her (and Freud's) interest in archaeology as a metaphor for the layers of the psyche. She emphasizes as well Wittgenstein's insistence that philosophy "must be like a therapy, for philosophical problems are illnesses that must be healed. He demands not a solution but a healing" (*W* 4: 124). Encouraged by Wittgenstein, Bachmann thus seems to have grasped very early what has become a central insight of poststructuralism, that the psyche is constituted through language, Wittgenstein's language games, a point she also made in a 1961 interview discussing "Youth in an Austrian Town": "The children—they entered into a game that somebody else was putting on. The I [of the story] leaves the game, unmasks the game as game; he or she has lost the innocence of these movements" (*GuI* 26). Moreover, present in germinal form in this Wittgenstein citation is also Bachmann's later concern with the connection of absolutist ideological systems to the Western (male) psyche, the same sorts of men of whom the "I" says in *Malina*: "the whole approach of men toward women is diseased, moreover, each disease is so wholly unique that men will never be completely cured" (*Malina* 177).

Finally, what Bachmann understands as Wittgenstein's particular kind of mysticism, his "points of invasion of that which shows itself or is experienced with belief, which affects what we do and leave undone" (*W* 4: 124), seems very close to what she has described (or shown) elsewhere in her work as the utopian, a vision of an almost-not-yet-imaginable, different way of being in the world. In this respect Wittgenstein succeeds in thought in moving beyond the limits/borders of the West, the analogues in thought to the terrible and terrifying practices

of our time, as Bachmann also recognized in this essay: "It is true that he like no one else recognized the solidifying antagonisms of thought of his century: irrationalism and rationalism, held his own against them in his work, and already overcame them" (*W* 4: 126–127). If this is the case, Wittgenstein's thought might represent for Bachmann the hope that the nightmare triumph of Western political and cultural imperialism she envisioned in *The Book of Franza* might not have to come true after all: "The whites are coming. The whites are landing. And if they are driven back, then they will come again. No revolution and no resolution can prevent it, nor any controls over the currency. They will come again in spirit if there's no other way for them to come. And they will resurrect themselves in a brown or black brain, which will become white once again. They will take over the world through such indirect means" (*Franza* 112). Wittgenstein, after all, suggested in the introduction to his *Philosophical Remarks* that the spirit of his work "is a different one from that of the grand stream of European and American civilization in which we all exist" (7), and he prefaced the *Philosophical Investigations* with an epigraph from Nestroy: "Progress has altogether the quality that it looks much bigger than it is ([*Überhaupt hat der Fortschritt das an sich, daß er viel größer ausschaut, als er wirklich ist]*" (*Phil. Investigations* viii). In an essay on Musil, also written in the 1950s, Bachmann remarked, "Not just the case of Kakania showed that thinking in closed ideologies leads directly to war, and the permanent war of faith is still ongoing" (*W* 4: 27). Wittgenstein's philosophy, beyond the closed systems of Western metaphysics, may offer the hope and the possibility that the ever present war of the "Ways of Death" might cease.

But a further affinity between Bachmann and Wittgenstein may also exist, not in these essays but in their lives and work. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein said, "It [philosophy] leaves everything as it is," and similarly in *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik* (Remarks on the fundaments of mathematics): "The illness of a time is healed by a change in human beings' way of living, and the illness of philosophical problems can only be healed by a changed way of thinking and living, not by a medicine that a single person invented" (57). About literature, Bachmann made much the same point in the Frankfurt lectures: "With a new language reality will always be encountered there where a moral, cognitive movement happens and not where someone tries to renew language all by itself. . . . A new language must have a new gait, and it has this new gait only when a new spirit inhabits it" (*W* 4: 192). Missing for both Wittgenstein and Bachmann was the practice which would enable their thoughts and images to guide an almost inconceivable transformation of the

world; indeed, their works were so distant from a practice that most of their readers could not grasp that these works dealt with transformation at all. Wittgenstein stated gloomily in the introduction to the *Philosophical Investigations* (a passage which Bachmann quoted in her last essay): "It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely" (*Phil. Investigations* vi; *W* 4: 122). Despite the few moments of utopian harmony in the "Ways of Death"—the "Secrets of the Princess of Kagran" in *Malina*, the silent meal at Wadi Halfa in *The Book of Franza*—Bachmann too can scarcely imagine a mediation between the far-reaching critique of the later work and what she sometimes termed, borrowing Musil's words from *The Man without Qualities*, "the other condition," a world where it would be altogether different. In one of her last interviews Bachmann addressed this problem:

> And I don't believe in this materialism, in this consumer society, in this capitalism, in this monstrosity that's taking place here, and people who enrich themselves on us without having any right to do so. I really do believe in something, and I call it "A Day Will Come." And one day it will come. Well, probably it won't come, because it's been destroyed for us so many times, for thousands of years it's always been destroyed. It won't come, and I believe in it nonetheless. For if I weren't able to believe in it, then I couldn't write any more. (*GuI* 145)

But what Pitkin wrote about Wittgenstein's philosophy is also true (as Bachmann knew) of literature: "Where philosophy succeeds, it reveals our conceptual system as it now exists, not its trivial and evanescent details, but its deep necessities. For philosophy is concerned with precisely those concepts that reflect our most central forms of life. To change these concepts, our forms of life would have to change; and that is not accomplished through philosophizing" (298). Inspired by Wittgenstein's philosophy to understand the world differently, Bachmann also shared his gloom about changing it, as her work and her life reflect. Like the main character of *Malina*, Bachmann could not compose a book titled *Exsultate Jubilate* either, but instead wrote "Ways of Death."

READING BACHMANN IN 1985

This essay was written in summer 1985 and published in a special issue of *Modern Austrian Literature* devoted to the "other," feminist Bachmann. In that issue my essay was one of the few that did not address feminism or gender questions. As I observed in chapter 2, I believe now (though I probably would not have said so at the time) that my lack of attention to gender there expressed my general discontent with the cultural/French feminist reading of Bachmann that had by then become virtually hegemonic in Bachmann scholarship—a discontent that would become more general among feminist Bachmann scholars toward the end of the decade. I commented in chapter 2: "As in my own case, I am inclined instead to think that gender is missing in these studies because Bachmann scholars (who otherwise may well have identified themselves as feminists) wanted to pursue a range of aspects of her work apart from those addressed by 1980s feminists and did not want to make use of the feminist methodology that had come to dominate Bachmann studies. Because feminist scholarship had not yet elaborated alternative methods that permit other kinds of literary-critical questions to be asked in gender-specific ways, these young Bachmann scholars did not know how to address the issues they wished to consider in ways that also took gender into account." In August 1984 I had spent a month in Vienna consulting Bachmann's papers in the Nationalbibliothek, researching a project that I called "Philosophical Backgrounds to the 'Ways of Death,'" one of the earliest versions of this book. Though I found virtually nothing in the archive useful for my project (if such material exists at all, it is in the personal correspondence and other materials in the portion of the archive closed until 2025), my focus here on Wittgenstein grew out of that complex of concerns. Though I am at present committed to the position that all experience is gendered, I would still today find myself at something of a loss for a method that could allow me to demonstrate definitively what was gender-specific about Bachmann's reception of Wittgenstein. Two decades later, feminist scholarship has still not, I think, solved all its methodological conundrums.

My discontent with feminism in 1985 was not limited to Bachmann scholarship. That spring, I had written an article on the current U.S. women's movement for the collection *Frauen Literatur Geschichte* (Women literature history), edited by Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann. My argument there is a harsh one: I assert that feminists of the 1970s had taken positions that led the movement into the cul-de-sac of feminism in the mid-1980s. I maintain particularly that the separatist strategies of cultural feminism were predicated upon the class and race privilege of its participants, who did not have to concern themselves with securing resources to assure their basic survival and could focus on transforming their own lives rather than the larger society. This privilege, I continue,

was also responsible for their lack of interest in, if not contempt for, campaigns of liberal feminism that focused on, say, assuring working women equal pay with men. The retreat from contestation in the political arena was precisely what had left feminists without strategies to combat the national and international developments that they now observe with growing horror. After a lengthy disposition on the theoretical and literary variants on cultural feminist positions, I conclude by directing attention to the many English-speaking women writers who deny that their works are primarily concerned with women's issues, who even go so far as to maintain—like the white South African writer Nadine Gordimer—that the problems of white women are not the most important in today's world. Attempting to end my article on a positive note, I look for sources of inspiration for renewed feminist struggle from feminists now working in the Rainbow Coalition or supporting striking coal miners in England, from Third World women or women in trade unions who say, "I'm not a feminist, but . . ," anywhere but from within the women's movement itself. Given that attitude toward U.S. feminism, it is no wonder that I do not address feminist issues in my essay on Bachmann and Wittgenstein.

Yet though this essay scarcely mentions feminism or gender, it could not have been written without the developments in feminist scholarship chronicled in my commentaries on previous chapters. First, this chapter was an experiment in methodology. I complain in both "Gender, Race, and History" (chapter 5) and this essay that feminist Bachmann scholars do not pay sufficient attention to history and culture. It was also clear to me that training in U.S. literary studies, at least, did not prepare one to do so. Under the influence of New Criticism, the school of formalist criticism that flourished from the 1940s to the late 1960s, and the various formalisms into which New Criticism mutated, including the literary reception of poststructuralism by the Yale School (Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom), literary scholarship had been defined as literary criticism: a sensitive mind produces a reading of a text unconstrained by the conditions of the text's production (the "genetic fallacy") or the author's intentions for it (the "intentional fallacy"). Particularly under Barthian and Derridean influence, that seemed to come to mean "anything goes," the wilder and more ingenious the better. Clearly, historians had different standards of evidence, as feminists' historical studies in feminist journals had showed me. Backed into a corner by many feminist poststructuralists at the conference "Feminist Studies: Reconstituting Knowledge," held at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee in April 1985, feminist historian Linda Gordon had maintained: "It is wrong to conclude, as some have, that because there may be no objective truth possible, there are not objective lies" (22). Moreover, as I attended to the arguments about the importance of recognizing other women's difference, I had increasingly come to feel that ripping a text out of the context of its historical and cultural conditions of production did violence to its author

by failing to respect either the project she had set herself when she wrote it or the various social factors that informed her and her production. (I had been very indignant about an MLA talk by Sandra Gilbert addressing Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which removed Hurston from the context of black culture and anthropology to make her conform to the thesis of Gilbert's book.) In this essay, therefore, I try to understand both Wittgenstein's thought and Bachmann's use of it as undertakings motivated by the concerns of their time. (Such a historically based approach is not in much favor among U.S.-trained philosophers and political theorists, who often treat theoretical texts as if they all existed simultaneously in some ethereal realm detached from time and space.) My main secondary sources in this essay were thus written by intellectual historians. I also wanted to treat the thought of both figures as ideas that evolved over time, and I use my close reading skills (one aspect of U.S. literary training that still serves us well) to trace steps in Bachmann's own intellectual growth as she interacted with Wittgenstein's texts. In this regard I think the essay is true to the feminist goal of exploring women's specificity as well as my own attempt to reinsert Bachmann into her own history and culture.

But even more important, I think it was the development of feminist thought up to this point that allowed me to understand the rupture in the tradition of Western thought that Wittgenstein's work represented and why it was so important to Bachmann. Clearly, Wittgenstein was struggling with the problem that gained more currency when it was raised again by poststructuralism: how to guarantee the correspondence between reality and representation, how to anchor truth and morality securely. He concluded in the *Tractatus* that it was not to be done, that true statements can be made only about areas and aspects of human experience that are not very important. With this conclusion he bade a philosophical farewell to the theories we have come to call metanarratives (say, Marxism, Critical Theory, psychoanalysis, cultural feminism): there exists no "scientific" basis on which they could put in a claim to truth. Trained in logical positivism, Bachmann understood Wittgenstein's argument, as well as his anguish about not being able to address in any way the issues that most urgently confronted him. But—and this is what feminists such as Donna Haraway helped me to grasp—Bachmann also understood the dangers of those imperializing, totalizing theories (all "irrational" by definition, since they could not be proved "scientifically"), and that explains the vehemence of her rejection of Heidegger. It is a theme her works continued to pursue until her death. I am also pleased that even at this point, in emphasizing Bachmann's condemnation of "the whites," I understood the connection of totalizing theories and imperialism that postcolonial studies would later stress. (So one might argue that the cultural feminist appropriation of Bachmann is a profound misrecognition of one of the issues she found it most important to pursue.) And what Bachmann also seems to have learned from the *Philosophical Investigations* is that possibili-

ties exist beyond the constraints of total systems—though she could imagine that alternative only as a utopia quite detached from any mediation that could move from the present to the future. That is also a quality which derives from Bachmann's historical situation and is a point at which it is up to feminists like Donna Haraway and like us to think beyond the point to which Bachmann herself was able to go.

Finally, I think the conclusion of this essay shows that I never repudiated my materialist roots—and still adhere to the 1966 historical materialist analysis advanced by Christa Wolf. Whatever the brilliance of their insights, neither Wittgenstein nor Bachmann could change the world by ideas alone. To translate theory into social transformation (Marx said in an early text, "Theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses" [Tucker 60]), a social agent engaged in social practice is necessary. As Donna Haraway suggested in her cyborg myth, as I believed then (and probably still believe today), it's not impossible that feminists might join with others to become such agents. Or, to echo Bachmann, to be able to write and act at all, I have to continue to believe that that will be possible.