

Border and Border Experience
On a German post-war philosophical and literary leit-motiv

Suzanne Kirkbright
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Aston in Birmingham
September 1995

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Summary

This enquiry examines aspects of 'borders' and analyses their consequences, as characterized by contemporary German writers and thinkers in the post-war period. To understand the essential features of 'borders' prompts an examination of their theoretical and pragmatic characteristics. The aim is to contribute to the interdisciplinary study of what is called the German border experience.

Karl Jaspers' method of *Existenzerhellung* provides a hitherto rarely considered framework for analysing the manifold consequences of border experience. While the exposition of "existential situations" constitutes a theoretical understanding of 'borders', suggesting their perception as a mental threshold, Jaspers' aim is to clarify our thinking about reality. His approach is to consider life in terms of human existence. He recognized the ethical status of existence as a context for evaluating Germany's post-war division.

Jaspers' ideas lead to an important conceptual root for this study, as represented by his understanding of Kierkegaard's aesthetic discourse on 'borders' as thresholds of tolerance between apparently contradictory views. It is noteworthy that Jaspers' contemporary, Helmuth Plessner, by analysing human behaviour in terms of its anthropological study recognized 'borders' as physical entities whose pragmatic implications support both Jaspers' theoretical views and their aesthetic representation.

The subsequent assessment of a selection of prose and poetry follows authors' interpretations of 'borders', to establish analogies that demonstrate the value of applying theoretical notions to literature. Eugen Gottlob Winkler's 'neo-platonic' treatment of 'borders' is one essential poetic representation that is assessed in the light of Durs Grünbein's recent appraisal. The effects of Germany's physical division are analysed by a contrasted interpretation of narratives by Christa Wolf and Uwe Johnson. The assessment of aspects of the writer's environment, whether real or imaginary, is to advance our understanding of one of the essential, albeit rarely analysed features of German literary discourse after 1945.

Key Words

Existential Dilemma
Psychological thresholds
Authenticity and Existence
"Guilt" and accountability
Poetry on Boundaries

For my family

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* These sketches are from the original copies held at the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv*, and are reproduced by permission of the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv*, Marbach am Neckar, Germany.

*Something which we knew must be a dawn -
A different darkness, flowed above the clouds,
And dead ahead we saw, where sky and sea should meet,
A line, a white line, a long white line,
A wall, a barrier, towards which we drove.*

T. S. Eliot *

Introduction

In German thought and literature, the idea of the 'border' represents a problem that has been studied by writers and intellectuals for consequences that have manifested themselves in the various contexts that will be examined in this work. The choice of the border theme as a guiding principle for this study is part of an attempt to understand the framework of German contemporary thought and literature, as well as to consider the connection between borders and their political function in Germany after 1945. To choose this theme, however, means to trace some of its roots further back than the post-war context; and in some cases back to the Age of the Enlightenment. The 'border' leitmotiv may be seen as a principle already implied by Kant's philosophy of critical reason. In the context of the Enlightenment, Kant identified the potential of philosophy to develop structures for ideas. These structures were thought by Kant to establish a context for experience that might also initiate a process of rational questioning, with which the scholar might seek to extend the boundaries of knowledge and experience. The process of rational questioning was generally thought by Kant to work towards the refinement of human understanding; and to encourage an attitude of individual enlightenment about the meaning of life experience and acquired knowledge.

This study of 'borders' implies a process of questioning life experience and knowledge, but can the examination be based on Enlightenment principles? In the opening chapter of part one of this work, a positive connection is made between Kant's reception of 'critical reason', and Karl Jaspers' interpretation of border experience in the

late 1920s and early 1930s.¹ The connection is made by analysing Jaspers' main work, *Philosophie* (1931), in which he devised a method of thinking which was strongly influenced by Kant's work in that it adopted a manner of border transgression that may be seen as an integral part of Kant's philosophy: Jaspers' interpretation of Kant's concept of 'critical reason' can be taken as one basis for the definition of the 'existential' category of Jaspers' thought.² The category of "existence", as understood by Jaspers, manifests an essential relationship to the concept of 'borders' because of the exposition of a method of analysis that opens a route of enquiry for this study, which allows us to appreciate the meaning of the 'border' in a contemporary context.

The nature of Jaspers' philosophy has been termed "existential", but the application of this term to his thinking has less to do with the style of his philosophy. It is more related to the content of the reasoning behind Jaspers' ideas, which depend upon a method of illuminating "existence" as an essential part of life. The method of Jaspers' approach to thinking is "existential" only so far as this term implies a form of border transgression by which he aimed, in three successive stages, to approach or to "elucidate" what he regarded as the essential meaning of life. What Jaspers' method of thinking contributes to this enquiry into border experience is a possible affinity with other ideas. Hence by exposing Jaspers' understanding of "existence" to other political, psychological or aesthetic influences it is possible during the course of this work to identify these other

* From: *The Waste Land. A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. Ed. by Valerie Eliot, London, Boston (1971) 1986, (first version of *Death by Water*).

¹ See Part One of this study, Chapter I, Section 1, pp. 40-73.

² Jaspers himself gives us confirmation of the influence of Kant's thinking for the development of his philosophy of "existence", see note 16, p. 22 below. Hans Saner also documented the apparent methodological similarity between Kant's thinking and that of Jaspers, see Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers Mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Hamburg 1970. Yet it was Hannah Arendt who recognized what seems at first sight only an implicit importance of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* for Jaspers' *Philosophie* and for his post-war study, *Die Großen Philosophen*, Bd. I, Munich, Zurich 1981 (first edition 1957). See especially *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers Briefwechsel 1926-1969*, ed. by Hans Saner/Lotte Köhler, Munich, Zurich 1985, pp. 354f. Arendt's additional contribution was that she turned what might be called the idealized connection between Kant's and Jaspers' work into a more practically oriented study of the explicit value of Kant's ideas in terms of political philosophy, see Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, edited and with an interpretative essay by Ronald Beiner, Sussex 1982, (the lectures are on pp. 7-77).

aspects of experience as alternative perspectives from which to examine the significance of 'borders'.

To commence with a discussion of Jaspers' method of analysis is therefore to posit from the beginning of this study the idea of border transgression, which means that there is an intention to explore what lies beyond an existential conception of life; and to investigate other horizons of experience and knowledge. Such a mode of enquiry merely adheres to a signal that is implied by Jaspers' reception of Enlightenment thinking, which takes us back to another important root for this work that has further consequences for its overall structure.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, originally explored the meaning of 'borders' in a polemical account of their implications. Yet, Kierkegaard's polemic can also be read as an aesthetic discourse on 'borders' as thresholds of tolerance between opposing views held by individuals. To appreciate the psychological significance of these thresholds, Kierkegaard showed that it is necessary to study both philosophy and literature. His intention was not to establish a polemical study, but to give equal weight to the validity of ethical and aesthetic conceptions of life. Jaspers' reaction to this discourse concerns us in this study, since Kierkegaard gave an account of an experience of the 'border' that seems to emphasize a complementary, as opposed to mutually antagonistic relationship between the separate disciplines of ethics and aesthetics. Hence, the suggestion that philosophy and literature can be mutually disposed to one another contends with the view held by Jaspers that the theoretical nature of 'borders' is 'existential' and thus renders superfluous their representation as an entity with aesthetic implications. These alternative interpretations of 'borders' offer variations on the leit-motiv of this study that in its theoretical conception suggests the essential nature of a 'border' as a threshold at which life experience and knowledge are assumed to meet. The substantiation of this view is revealed by examining Jaspers' definition of the 'border' as a mental threshold where 'life' and 'existence' can be distinguished from one another. The category of 'existence' in

Jaspers' thought is developed from a differentiation of human 'life' from 'existence', but it also follows on from Jaspers' knowledge of Kierkegaard's work on the psychological implications of 'borders'.

If Jaspers' understanding of human existence sets this study along a singular route of enquiry that is represented by an ethical conception of border experience, the opportunity to depart from this approach is given by reference to Kierkegaard. Moreover, because of Kierkegaard's reception of 'borders' there is the possibility to transgress the boundary of criteria established by following what may also be called the 'existential' route of enquiry. To appreciate that there is a proven validity to an aesthetic reflection of 'borders' means going beyond the essence of Jaspers' thinking; and since the ethical validity of his thought is derived from Kant and Plato, this also implies a critique of the ideas of both these philosophers. The hostility to an aesthetic Idea of Beauty is not restricted to Jaspers' thought, since like Plato and to a certain extent Kant, Jaspers understood aesthetics as an invalid variation on the Platonic 'Idea'. To substantiate the aesthetic validity of border experience, as in the second part of this work, means returning to Kierkegaard's interpretation of the border as a threshold where different views in life are confronted with one another.

In essence, Kierkegaard's literary interpretation of the 'border' describes how the contemplation of life creates a tension between the individual's choice actively to pursue life's manifold opportunities, or to choose to live in a passive state of existence. Kierkegaard analyses this sense of tension at an imagined threshold between time itself and the psychological aspect of contemplating the meaning of life in the context of time's eternal continuity. Part two of this study examines the literary transformation of the border motif from 'existential' influences into what may be called a poetic threshold between time and the aesthetic contemplation of 'borders' through time. The rationale for examining the meaning of literary transformation in this manner is derived from Kierkegaard's enquiry into border experience, but the benefits of first considering Jaspers' existential category of thought accrue for two reasons.

In the first instance, Jaspers' philosophical enquiry offers us a basic grounding in a method of analysis, which at the same time furnishes us with a conceptual framework for examining, amongst other aspects, the aesthetic validity of the border motif. In the second instance, Jaspers' understanding of the border theme gives what might be regarded as a paradigm for the discussion of 'borders' not only in existential terms, but in a political, psychological or literary context. If the second half of this work is read as an aesthetic variation of the Platonic conception of the essential nature of reality, such as in terms of its unchanging form or pattern, the purpose is to trace the transformation of political, existential or psychological implications of 'borders' into their aesthetic form. Hence a comparison is made between the meaning of borders, such as they influence the ideas and work of individual authors, and the opening discussion of Jaspers' ideas that provide a theoretical framework for this analysis. In this way, an overall insight into the meaning of border experience might be gained, by suggesting that there is an equal validity of ethics and aesthetics, whose meaning comes to light when following the literary-philosophical discourse on 'borders', such as they have been reflected in contemporary German thought and aesthetic culture.

1. The critical condition of existential interpretation

In the first part of this work, significant texts by Karl Jaspers and Helmuth Plessner are studied. Jaspers and Plessner were each thinking about the meaning of 'borders' at about the same time and each expressed thoughts about the consequences of 'borders' in their writing that was published in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The ideas put forward by both these contemporary philosophers in relation to the meaning of border

experience are represented in this study as complementary to one another, despite the fact that Plessner's conception of the 'border' led him to question, more than Jaspers, the validity of the existential category of thought. Nevertheless, the key aspect of the pre-war discourse on border experience that is discussed in part one of this study can be broadly summarized as 'existential'. However, one of the aims of this study is to determine the extent to which Jaspers' method of analysing the existential conception of border experience can illustrate the manifold implications of this theme in the post-war period.

To begin with, some preliminary remarks are necessary about the existential category of Jaspers' thought, since the significance of this aspect of his thinking may be obscured by a tendency to associate his style of reasoning with that of another contemporary, Martin Heidegger. In this introduction it is necessary to expand briefly on what can be regarded as the critical condition of an existential interpretation of border experience, in order to call into question the validity of associating Jaspers' thought with that of Heidegger. The connection between Jaspers and Heidegger is tenuous. A brief reference to the meaning of an existential perception of border experience indicates what is not meant to be taken as existentially significant in this study.

In the first place, it is Jaspers' existential philosophy that is of specific application to this analysis of border experience. An insight into this theme is related principally in part one of this work to an interpretation of Jaspers' *Grenzsituationen*, which were first defined in the second volume of his *Philosophie* (1931).³ The title of this volume, *Existenzerhellung*, is at the heart of analysis in part one of this study. However, *Existenzerhellung* can also be taken to mean the method of Jaspers' analysis of border experience, which is referred to in this study as "existential elucidation". A brief introduction to this method of analysis is given: its significance is discussed further, as indicated, in the main body of the work.

³ See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie* Band I-III, Berlin 1956. In this introduction, all references are taken from the new paperback edition by Piper, *Philosophie* Band I-III, Munich, Zurich 1994.

Jaspers' method of "existential elucidation" was developed to explain what he regarded as a most critical condition that appears as a pervasive influence in existential situations such as border experience. His method of "elucidation" comes into play when circumstances, like *Tod*, *Leiden*, *Kampf* or *Schuld* are experienced by the individual.⁴ Jaspers' description of these situations is part of a process of border experience that can be briefly divided into three successive stages that are connected with one another. Initially, life is regarded by Jaspers as mundane, in the sense that the experience of living in the world (*Dasein*) is not sufficient to understand its essential meaning (*Existenz*). Pragmatic experience is taken by Jaspers as a starting point for his analysis of 'real experience'. From this point, his description implies that progress in life involves border experience, which appears to be invoked by an intermediate stage of being between worldly situations and other situations that are assumed to rely on the imparting of further knowledge. Finally, a different quality of life experience is regarded by Jaspers as being within reach of individual *Existenz*. The recognition that life involves a consciousness of existence means that the conditions of any of the four *Grenzsituationen* may be revealed.

Progress is therefore assumed by Jaspers to involve more than a pragmatic understanding of life's problems, since during the individual lifetime more knowledge can be acquired. This in itself might challenge the knowledge that is gained through experience alone. The intermediate stage of his analysis, between life experience and acquiring knowledge, appears to correspond to a critical stage that is perceived between 'life' and 'existence'. This stage is regarded as "existential", so far as it implies an individual phase of self-questioning. However, it is only by transgressing the limits of practical experience, to learn more about life, that a true insight into the existential category is supposed to be given.

At first, it seems that worldly considerations are the most influential for individual consciousness. By comparing this worldly situation with the possibility to acquire other

⁴ These situations are discussed in this study on pp. 68-73 of Chapter I.

knowledge about things, the crucial stage for Jaspers' method of reasoning occurs between the intermediate and final stages of "existential elucidation". In this context, a threshold might be reached between the two possibilities of 'life' and 'existence'. The implication of being at this threshold of experience is that there is a choice between the two entities of 'life' and 'existence' that only presents itself to the individual, who is conscious of being in this particular set of circumstances. The concept of a threshold is used as an analogy in both halves of this study for referring to border experience. In part one of this work, however, the idea of a threshold implies a possibility to distinguish between different qualities of experience; and possibly even to transgress the threshold between 'life' and 'existence'. Jaspers regarded the ability to realize that there is a difference between these concepts as being further linked to a propensity to experience subjective and objective dimensions of thought. The mutual connection that he inferred between these qualities of thought suggests that, to Jaspers, neither one of these categories of consciousness is relevant without application to the other. It is the connection between these elements that promotes his existential explanation of life, because pragmatic experience can be considered both in a subjective and an objective light.

Another important aspect of Jaspers' method of analysis is its appreciation of the human ability to transcend experience. The transcendent aspect of Jaspers' theory seems to have led to the derivation of the term *Existenzphilosophie*, so far as it can apply to his ideas, as expressed in *Existenzerhellung*. In his essays on French existentialist thinking, Otto Friedrich Bollnow made an interesting distinction between *Existenzphilosophie*, as it was practised in Germany in the 1920s, and the later development of this thinking into existentialism, which Bollnow perceived to be principally represented by Sartre's study of Heideggerian thought, as expressed in Sartre's main work, *Being and Nothingness*.⁵ The derivation of "existentialism" is therefore to be linked with Heidegger's conception

⁵ See Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Französischer Existentialismus*, Stuttgart 1965, here the essay on *Existentialismus* (1947), *ibid.*, pp. 11-22, p. 11. See further, Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness, An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes, London 1991.

of "existentialist" philosophy. What Bollnow criticized is the vagueness of the term *Existenzphilosophie*, which he saw as an unsuitable description, since it seems applicable neither to the essence of Heidegger's thought, nor to that of Jaspers' approach to thinking:

Heidegger lehnte schon damals aufs entschiedenste ab, der Existenzphilosophie zugeordnet zu werden, weil er das Ziel seines Philosophierens in rein systematischer Richtung, in einer neuen Ontologie sah, und wenn Jaspers auch den Namen der Existenzphilosophie aufnahm, so war sie bei ihm doch nur ein Glied in einem größeren Ganzen, das über die Erhellung der Existenz zu einer philosophischen Metaphysik hinüberführte.⁶

The term "existential" therefore already implies a discrepancy regarding the method of analysis that Heidegger and Jaspers developed independently of one another. The "existential" category of thought only applies in this study in the strictly methodological sense, that is, with application to Jaspers' method of "elucidation". As Bollnow pointed out, this method forms only one aspect of Jaspers' philosophy as it is defined in *Existenzerhellung*. Although this study observes the evidence of progress in Jaspers' thinking beyond the existential category, it is not possible in this discussion of border experience to assess the nature of Jaspers' development of a philosophy of "metaphysics". The significant point about Jaspers' existential interpretation of border experience is that taken in isolation neither one of the concepts that he defines, - *Dasein* or *Existenz* -, can in itself be used to deduce an existential understanding of life. Jaspers' view of existence is that it involves the consciousness of worldly influences that derive a transitional quality from an awareness that there are also other "non-worldly" situations. It is the tension from the individual's perception of being in these two situations that characterizes Jaspers' method of analysing border experience, as it is studied in chapter one.

⁶ O. F. Bollnow, *Deutsche Existenzphilosophie und französischer Existentialismus*, in: *Französischer Existentialismus*, op. cit., pp. 23-38, here p. 24.

Jaspers' method of "elucidation" has been criticized for being too dependent on transcending pragmatic experience, so as to reach an idealized interpretation of reality. The implication is that since pragmatic experience alone is an insufficient basis from which to describe the meaning of existence, Jaspers relegates the meaning of life, where he elevates the meaning of existence. Such criticism suggests that his method leads to an interpretation that is so far removed from reality that it cannot be of use in life. The "transcendental" element of his theory means that it is dependent on carrying over different qualities of experience into a realm that appears to be remote from life. However, it is within this realm that the individual is given time and space to ascertain what is of essential significance, and what might be left behind as a part of the transition towards progress, which is itself regarded as an outcome of following an insight into life's existential conditions. The three-stage analysis is a characteristic feature of the "transcendental" method. The difficulty with this method is that even if an existential interpretation of life is understood, a further application of the theory is implied. In other words, if it is to be regarded as being of any use to the individual in the prevailing circumstances, the general description of existential reality that Jaspers offers has to be addressed by the individual in his or her particular situation.

"Existential elucidation" is not devised in order to give an all-embracing explanation of the nature of human experience and reality. There is no indication that Jaspers intended his method to lead to the deduction of a philosophical system. As his approach is not system-based, it is well disposed to an analysis of the nature of an experience of extreme conditions. The validity of "existential elucidation" depends on suggesting that there is a threshold that can be reached between 'life' and 'existence', but the perception of this threshold is entirely dependent on the individual following Jaspers' method of reasoning. Any insight into border experience to be learned from Jaspers' ideas is persistently relative to the experience of the individual, and relative, too, to the impact of diverse influences that Jaspers' thinking aims to account for. What he "elucidates" appears to become clear at the intermediate stage of his analysis. It is at this "transcendent" stage that the 'border' is assumed to be experienced by the individual as a

form of threshold, as though at this threshold, different perceptions or solutions to constricting circumstances in life were to emerge of their own accord. The existential aspect of the border situations is supposed to present a way forward to an experience of new meaning that is related to the perception of the essential quality of life. The possibility of restrictive circumstances being transformed emerges in each of the four specific *Grenzsituationen*. Yet when the individual is faced with extremes, different strategies of survival have to be developed: what is at stake is not life, but existence. The threshold between these entities is reached as though the individual were undecided between them. In this case, a sense of tension derives from existential situations that imply a meeting of conflicting circumstances, such as suffering and happiness; conflict and harmony; or accepting the idea that guilt can arise through responsibility for individual initiative. In each of these cases, it is persistently a matter of individual choice to turn these extremes into a constructive way of life.

The preoccupation with the specific, and not with the general validity of "existential elucidation" might be regarded as an attempt by Jaspers to distinguish his ideas from the approach to explaining life that was taken by Heidegger. As Bollnow has indicated, Jaspers' and Heidegger's versions of "existential" philosophy are often compared, but the "existential" rubric may in fact be mistakenly attached to both philosophers. Whereas Jaspers' method of analysis puts forward the idea that there is a threshold in life that can be experienced and will not be relinquished as long as the individual is in extreme circumstances; the ideas put forward by Heidegger in his magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), aspire to an ontology of Being.⁷ The confirmation of these real differences in approach can be found in the considerable body of evidence that Jaspers himself left in a work that was published posthumously by his last assistant in Basle, Hans Saner. It is relevant at this point to consult briefly with Jaspers' *Notizen zu Heidegger*, since this work shows Jaspers' own perception of his differences with Heidegger.⁸

⁷ See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit, Werke*, Band II, Frankfurt am Main 1977.

⁸ See Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, ed. by Hans Saner, Munich, Zurich 1978.

Jaspers' thoughts on Heidegger's philosophy are critical and polemical; and they show deep disappointment both on the part of Jaspers, and of his Jewish wife, Gertrud, with Heidegger's political commitment to the Nazi cause in 1933. Jaspers' notes show how the early contact between the two contemporaries in the period before 1933 was to diminish after this date, to the extent that in 1948-1950 Jaspers wrote as follows:

Heidegger ist in der Öffentlichkeit sehr oft zusammen mit mir genannt, - eine sensationsbegierige Öffentlichkeit vergleicht, spielt gegeneinander aus, sieht eine Art Konkurrenz, - dabei eine schiefe Situation: ich scheine hineingedrängt zu werden in eine Haltung, die mir fremd ist, als ob ich Rivale sei - die Situation ist leicht für mich, denn offenbar bin ich in dieser Rivalität unterlegen; Heideggers Bewunderer sind zahlreicher, ich habe keine, höchstens einige Freunde - Heideggers Begabung in einer Richtung, auf der ich ihm nicht nacheifern kann, weil sie mir ursprünglich völlig abgeht [...] ⁹

Although Jaspers' plea for distance from Heidegger intends to reject the idea that there is any rivalry between them, paradoxically, it also seems to draw him closer to Heidegger. The polemical tone of these notes cannot conceal the implication behind them that, in some respects, Heidegger was regarded by Jaspers as a potential rival. It is Heidegger's language that Jaspers views as the key aspect to the greater success of Heideggerian thought; and it is predominantly Heidegger's language that distinguishes his ideas from those of Jaspers. What Heidegger has to contribute to thinking, argued Jaspers, is a "Kultus von Worten". ¹⁰ Jaspers regards Heidegger's stylistic innovations as an attempt to imitate pre-Socratic thought. ¹¹ The popularity of Heidegger's philosophy, its originality, and its stylistic quirks are the factors that have overshadowed the significance of Jaspers' own method of thinking. The characteristic sobriety and economy of Jaspers' expression, such as can be found throughout *Existenzerhellung*, contrasts with the terminology that Heidegger devised in order to express his ideas.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 89, note 63, (part II - 1948-1950).

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 185, note 168, (part VI - 1961-1964).

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 146, note 128, (part IV - 1954-55).

Against this "style cult" of language, Jaspers, rather ruefully, noted that his work could not compete.

The contrast in the language and style that was adopted by Jaspers and Heidegger marks underlying methodological differences in their work. Jaspers came to regard these differences as irreconcilable. To him, Heidegger's "Existenzialien" offered evidence of Heidegger having anticipated absolute principles in life, which Heidegger supposed could be experienced, and which, in *Sein und Zeit*, he had set about explaining. In this regard, Jaspers noted: "Heidegger antizipiert die Einheit des Seins als Dasein in seiner geschlossenen Struktur".¹² Heidegger's "Existenzialien" might mean to suggest that there are absolute conditions that can be identified in order to explain life. However, such "existentialist" principles might also be regarded as an attempt by Heidegger to create a refuge from life. This implies that, for Heidegger, the real world was increasingly experienced through the style of his language. Therefore in contrast to Jaspers, Heidegger's version of "existential" reality appears to be encapsulated within a closed ontological system of thought, which is itself caught within the banner of his own language, a banner that appears to wrap itself around his thinking, so that it becomes difficult to dissociate the language from the thinking. The result appears to be that Heidegger creates a philosophical retreat, - what he called a "Haus des Seins". The "Existenzialien" appear to be part of this philosophical structure, in relation to which Jaspers saw his own method of "existential elucidation" as having been undermined and even subverted: "Kein Unterschied von Daseinserhellung und Existenzerhellung. [...] Existenzerhellung wird verkehrt in Existenzwissen von Existenzialien."¹³ Jaspers was frustrated by Heidegger's "Existenzialien", which he seems to have taken as evidence of Heidegger's inability to discern what to him is a crucial distinction between illuminating the meaning of life and existence, (*Daseinserhellung und Existenzerhellung*).

¹² *ibid.*, p. 44, note 69, (part II - 1948-1950).

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 30, note 6, (part I - 1928-1938); and p. 137, note 117, (part IV - 1954-55).

The above distinction is fundamental to Jaspers' thinking, since by these categories he aimed to show on the one hand that existential knowledge can be of use in life. On the other hand, he saw experience as an incentive to attempt to acquire more knowledge about the meaning of conditions that may carry with them extreme demands, or that may place intense pressure on the individual. In Jaspers' philosophy, border experience can be approached, as it were, from both sides of the fence: from life experience and from acquired knowledge. Experience and knowledge can be taken as alternative ways of expressing Jaspers' concepts of 'life' and 'existence'. What Jaspers criticized in Heidegger was that he did not communicate the knowledge that existence can contribute to life. Hence Heidegger's preference was for an ontological interpretation of existence. In contrast, at the end of *Existenzerhellung*, Jaspers sought to reiterate what his method of analysis had intended to achieve: an appeal to individual existence (*Existenz*) to consider the existential approach as one means with which to find new insights into life and its experience in testing or extreme conditions:

Jeder Satz der Existenzerhellung, der nicht als Appell, sondern als *Seinsaussage* genommen wird, die er nur der unmittelbaren Form nach ist, ist *Versuchung* zu diesem Mißbrauch. ¹⁴

The emphasis placed by Jaspers on his work as an existential appeal to the individual is in order to distance his ideas from an ontological interpretation of being, - *Seinsaussage*. The appeal is intended to underline the difference between his ideas and those of Heidegger. Jaspers meant to encourage the individual to achieve his or her own potential in life; and he was frustrated by Heideggerian thought, in which he could not discern the potential for encouraging others to achieve progress. ¹⁵ It is part of Jaspers' ethos that his thinking should incline towards a pedagogical intent. This ethos is a re-working of Enlightenment thinking, and in particular, of Kant's tradition of 'critical reason': "Mir war es eigen, den Spuren Kants zu folgen, daher war ich seit meiner

¹⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie*, Band II, *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 433.

¹⁵ See Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 48, note 19, (part II - 1948-1950).

Jugend jederzeit 'altmodisch'".¹⁶ Jaspers' impression that he was regarded by others as an "old-fashioned" thinker might be taken as a manifestation of his ethical commitment to life in extreme situations. Being on the brink of experience implies the possibility to strive to reach other goals in life. Such striving is essential in *Grenzsituationen*, where life itself is perceived to be at stake. A philosophical approach to this experience is regarded as one way of dealing with the circumstances of individual existence:

ein *Vollzug* zwar nicht der existentiellen Wirklichkeit, aber der *existentiellen Möglichkeit*. [...] Wir wenden uns *philosophierend* der Existenz nur zu, sind noch nicht, sondern *denken* unser Sein.¹⁷

The reason why Jaspers placed such emphasis on the power of reason and thought for illuminating the positive aspect of existence is that in his view, the essential meaning of life is a never-ending process of applying thought. He saw that the circumstances of existence, such as are manifested in situations of antagonism, suffering, guilt, or individual mortality, can be dealt with most effectively by adopting a rational approach to them, in order to foster a sense of harmony, despite possible afflictions and oppression. A rational view of these situations suggests appreciating their limitations, and therefore acknowledging the precarious status of existence as merely one route by which to follow the meaning of individual problems. That this route leads to a truly informed understanding of life is because of the application of thinking, which becomes a form of self-discipline for the individual, or a challenge to achieve harmony over and above the occurrence of antagonisms. Such an attitude to thinking seems to be a deliberate attempt to differentiate between Jaspers' own ideas and Heidegger's ontological interpretation of being. Yet the important question is whether Jaspers distinguished between the rational view of life and its real experience?

This question is considered and discussed in greater detail in part one of this study. However, it may be provisionally answered by relating its implied message to Jaspers'

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 101, note 79, (part II - 1948-1950).

¹⁷ *Existenzerhellung*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

understanding of the 'border', which he suggested to mean fostering the ability to reason, and encouraging this ability in others: "*Grenze* drückt aus: es gibt ein anderes [...]." ¹⁸ To Jaspers, being conscious of the 'border' meant being aware of "otherness". This awareness meant developing an ability to recognize the potential to be extracted from oneself in trying circumstances, as well as being conscious of the potential that may lie dormant in others. However, extracting the best out of life, and acting to the best of one's ability also stretches the strength and resilience of the individual in *Grenzsituationen*. Hence wherever such a threshold between life and existence is perceived, there is also a choice either of accepting extreme circumstances, or striving against them.

Jaspers' ideas are not to be taken as ends in themselves, since they are more a means to another end: existence as the reflected essence of life is to be regarded as one goal of experience. However, understanding the benefits of an existential insight into border experience marks one difficulty with Jaspers' theory: it is left open to the individual to decide on the specific relevance of ideas, which are only described by Jaspers in general terms.

In order to understand Jaspers' ideas, it is beneficial to return to his critique of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's work, *Either/Or*, is examined in relation to Jaspers' understanding of this work in the second section of chapter one. ¹⁹ Kierkegaard's ideas were first taken by Jaspers as a contribution to the psychology of life in extreme situations, since they demonstrated that there is a threshold to be discerned between alternative views. The experience of this threshold was thought by Kierkegaard to place the individual in a dilemma, because of the difficulty of choosing a harmonious balance of those different opportunities that may be associated with alternative attitudes to life. The Kierkegaardian dilemma of how to make choices so as to balance different possibilities might be seen to shadow a distinction that he perceived between ethics and

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 203.

¹⁹ See Part One, Chapter I, Section 2, pp. 74-93.

aesthetics. Kierkegaard expressed such a distinction with his formula, "either/or". In other words, he implied that to find answers to moral problems one might not necessarily exclude their aesthetic contemplation.

If ethical and aesthetic approaches could be found to coincide at some point, this was regarded by Kierkegaard as the ultimate expression of border experience. Jaspers' critique of Kierkegaard suggested that such a balance between philosophy and literature cannot be found, - at least, Jaspers did not identify this particular balance in his own work. He did not regard Kierkegaard's aesthetic interpretation of border experience, as it was exposed in *Either/Or*, as compelling enough for his ethically committed philosophy. As far as Jaspers was concerned, the burden of extreme conditions was not necessarily to be alleviated by the suspension of these pressures through aesthetic enjoyment, nor imagination. Having distanced himself from the aesthetic application of his theory of *Grenzsituationen*, in the post-war period, Jaspers did turn to the political application of his ideas. In section three of chapter one, it is argued that although Jaspers' post-war political analysis mirrors the awareness of extreme situations that was embedded in the his pre-war philosophy, the theoretical value of his ideas approaches a revision, in order for them to be rendered applicable to political affairs.²⁰ His intent to carry his insight into the existential category of thinking further than its purely philosophical relevance led him to publish the contents of a lecture series, given at Heidelberg university in 1945-46. Jaspers' essay on the "Guilt Question" analyses different qualities of guilt; and he used this analysis to question the nature of political renewal in Germany after the end of the war. His pre-war inquiry into guilt as a *Grenzsituation* is shown in this study to have political implications. However, it is also shown that when transferring existential implications of border experience to the political situation in Germany after 1945, Jaspers himself questioned the existential category of his thought by devising a new category of *politische Haftung*. In preference to the former conception of reality, the latter concept

²⁰ See Part One, Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 94-123.

was thought by him to offer a more applicable way of explaining Germany's political division after the war.

In section four of chapter one, Willy Brandt's claim is examined that *Ostpolitik* shadowed the existential reasoning that lies behind Jaspers' ideas on guilt.²¹ The intention in this section of the chapter is to compare and contrast existential and political implications of border experience, with the aim of dissociating these aspects from one another. It is argued that Brandt's misunderstanding of Jaspers' "Guilt Question" means that *Ostpolitik* does not follow Jaspers' ideas about Germany's physical division as closely as Brandt claimed.

Helmuth Plessner's ideas on border experience are discussed in chapter two of this study.²² Plessner's philosophical anthropology is represented as complementary to Jaspers' theory of "existence", since Plessner questioned the relevance of the existential category of thought for informing our understanding of life. In chapter three, both Jaspers' and Plessner's ideas are compared and contrasted with one another.²³ It emerges from this comparison that Plessner's anthropology offers another way of analysing border experience, which unlike Jaspers' "existential elucidation", takes into account the relevance of art and culture. Although Plessner's account is couched in terms of anthropological principles, he is able to show how the drive towards art and culture is to be regarded as a fundamental condition of human life. Plessner's insight into border experience might be regarded as more pragmatic than Jaspers' existential theory. Yet, Plessner was not as successful as Jaspers in revising his theoretical ideas, so as to make them applicable to the political implications of border experience in Germany after the war. Plessner's approach is therefore significant for its preparation of the literary interpretation of the border motif, since his ideas imply that cultural and historical activity derive from man's search to understand his experiences. An innate capacity for acquiring

²¹ See Part One, Chapter I, Section 4, pp. 124-139.

²² See Part One, Chapter II, pp. 140-157.

²³ See Part One, Chapter III, pp. 158-166.

an informed appreciation of life leads this study to consider the contribution that is to be made by literature in assessing the consequences of the border theme in contemporary German culture.

2. Poetic Antidotes

The second half of this enquiry continues to follow the leit-motiv of border experience through an interpretation of literary transformation. The aim is to demonstrate what is meant by such transformation; and to suggest that the chosen literary texts can be regarded as a potential source of antidotes to the conditions of Jaspers' interpretation of *Grenzsituationen*, as they were defined and explored in part one of the study. The adoption of this approach suggests that the existential category of thought continues to be taken as an appropriate tool for analysing literary texts. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, there is the validation of the existential category as essential to an understanding of life, an observation that is taken from Plessner's critique of existential theory, which shows it to be an "authentic" means of analysing border experience. Secondly, by making continued reference to Jaspers' ideas on border experience, a critique is implied in part two of this study about the reticent approach that Jaspers' took regarding the aesthetic application of his ideas. Nevertheless, the next half of the study is not intended to contradict the validity of Jaspers' interpretation of border experience. On the contrary, it may be taken in further support of the existential category of Jaspers' thinking, since the suggestion is that writers in particular experience, reflect, and at times work with influences that can best be described with the benefit of an existential insight into life. It transpires that further reference to Jaspers' understanding of *Grenzsituationen*

is essential if accurate interpretations are to be offered of the specific texts under consideration.

Another reason for applying Jaspers' ideas to the literary context of this study is that these ideas are themselves partly derived from Kierkegaard's aesthetic discourse. It has already been indicated that Kierkegaard's understanding of the importance of 'borders' was evidence of a division of thought and experience into ethics and aesthetics. The selection of texts for inclusion in part two of this study is not necessarily based on the motif of the existential threshold between 'life' and 'existence', as defined with reference to Jaspers' understanding of these categories. There are further aesthetic implications of this threshold which are described wherever relevant to the texts concerned. What is posited is a transformation of the threshold between life experience and knowledge into a poetic threshold. The aim is to establish the meaning of a poetic threshold as a particular problem that authors experience or reflect; and to illustrate further in what way this threshold might imply an aesthetic border experience.

The second part of this study is not merely a repetition of the reasoning behind the preceding philosophical enquiry. What is paramount is to assess whether and how the manifold implications of 'borders' that were identified in the first half of the work can be varied through considering their poetic meaning. The texts in part two of the work are included because of the various insights they can give into the meaning of literary transformation. In this regard, it is not only a case of examining how existential influences are affected when examined in the context of literature. It is also the purpose to consider how authors' perceptions of political influences can affect our understanding of borders. Alternatively, there may be poetic reasons for the selection of the border theme as an important subject for German writers. All these aspects of the literary discourse have influenced the structure of this half of the study, which aims to illustrate that there are a series of approaches to be represented on the literary aspect of the border leit-motiv.

Consequently, when studying particular texts it was necessary to bear in mind whether existential, political, or poetic influences could be seen to effect a change in perceptions about 'borders'. In some cases, the application of these criteria has returned the study to Kierkegaard's concept of "either/or" and initiated a further discussion about whether literature should only be concerned with an aesthetic agenda, or whether it should also be morally, or politically engaged. A further point is relevant to explain the criteria for including particular texts in this half of the study. Although the purpose is ultimately to gain an understanding of what is meant by the transformation of the border motif, this does not necessarily mean that only those texts which aim to alter perceptions of existential or political factors can be included in this work. There are particularly two texts included in part two, by Christa Wolf and Ernst Jünger, which do not appear to reflect a poetic transformation of the aforementioned criteria. What these texts show instead is a 'negative' aspect to the meaning of transformation. An example of this 'negative' viewpoint can be found in Uwe Saeger's description of crossing the border between East and West Germany in his novella, *Das Überschreiten einer Grenze bei Nacht*.²⁴ The title of Saeger's work may imply a possible change in perception of the German-German border that could have emerged from a successful passage between the two sides of Germany. Yet this assumption is misleading, since the border-crossing that Saeger perceived was literally static, in the sense that he described how his family was detained by border guards at what used to be the crossing point between East and West Germany. The value of Saeger's novella seems to be its historical content, which retains a sense of the reality of the division of Germany, rather than having achieved a new poetic representation of this experience. In another instance, such as Christa Wolf's text, *Der geteilte Himmel*, her perception of the East German border is a valuable contribution to this study, because it also indicates the possibilities of understanding the meaning of political division through a poetic interpretation of this experience. In summary, the fact that a specific text cannot illustrate a transformation of existing influences into literary

²⁴ See Uwe Saeger, *Das Überschreiten einer Grenze bei Nacht*, Munich, Zurich 1988.

ones is not taken as sufficient grounds to reject that text as irrelevant for the purposes of this enquiry.

One contemporary author who has been at the forefront of literary discourse since German unification is the East German poet, Durs Grünbein. In October 1995, Grünbein's poetry earned him the award of the Georg Büchner prize.²⁵ It is not accidental that Grünbein's work is studied in this enquiry, because it adds to our understanding of how literature can reach beyond political influences by operating in a new poetic context. Grünbein's early poems, in particular, are studied in chapter one of the second half of this work; and they provide interesting variations on the meaning of literary transformation.²⁶ These variations are evident in Grünbein's language, which is not only metaphorical, but satirical; and his work qualifies as an example of how political and poetic influences have inspired a poetic reflection of 'borders', both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Grünbein's interest in 'borders' seems to have led him to explore the work of a much earlier contemporary, Eugen Gottlob Winkler, who was writing about the border theme in the early 1930s.²⁷ Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue, *Die Erkundung der Linie* (1934), is studied for its paradigmatic value, because it not only explores a peaceful co-existence between literature and philosophy, but because through this text there is evidence that the underlying distinction made by Jaspers between 'life' and 'existence' can be poetically reworked. Winkler's purpose was to show that aesthetic and philosophical interpretations of reality can be seen as complementary to one another. Yet in this study, emphasis is placed on Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue as a successful attempt to overcome what was seen by him as an existential conflict, which he experienced in his own lifetime as a discrepancy between reality and art. Grünbein's

²⁵ See *Spiegel-Gespräch, Tausendfacher Tod im Hirn*, in: *Der Spiegel*, 9 October 1995, Nr. 41, pp. 221-230.

²⁶ See Part Two, Chapter I, Section 1, pp. 174-184.

²⁷ See Part Two, Chapter I, Section 1, especially pp. 184-194, for Winkler's interpretation of the border motif.

interpretation of Winkler's work did not illuminate this aspect of his writing, so far as it was meant to surpass the sense of existential tension that was an antagonistic influence on his work. Since Grünbein's study made no reference to Winkler's reception of existential aspects, a prior knowledge of existential conditions can be found by referring to part one of this work. Moreover, such a comparison may be essential to a clear understanding of Winkler's fictional dialogue, which shows how harmony can be found between pragmatic and poetic perceptions of reality in a poetically inspired monologue that reads like a critique of Plato's *Phaedrus*. The underlying connection between poetic interpretations of life and the illuminating power of ideas may explain why Winkler is of such central interest to Grünbein and today's discourse on the literary exploration of the border motif. Winkler's text seems to encompass all the qualifying principles for including texts in part two of the study: his work is exemplary of a poetic transposition of political and existential influences, thus leading him to achieve a transformation of these influences by reaching what could be seen as poetic perfection.

In Winkler's work, an appreciation of the meaning of experiencing a harmonious kind of aesthetic reality leads to an exposition of a poetic threshold between reality and art that may be considered as a variation on Jaspers' existential threshold between 'life' and 'existence'. The identification of a poetic threshold establishes a criterion for interpreting texts respectively by Ernst Jünger, Elisabeth Langgässer, and Christa Wolf. Having been 'rediscovered' by Grünbein in the 1990s, this new edition of Winkler's text may be regarded as "contemporary" to a new 1980s edition of a text by Elisabeth Langgässer. Langgässer attached a clear poetic aim to her early novella *Grenze: Besetztes Gebiet*.²⁸ Her novella focuses on the historical differences between France and Germany, but her text is not included because of its chronicle of political events in Germany in the early 1930s. It is seen as poetically relevant, since it introduces a new aspect of the border motif: the poetic *Grenzgänger*. The significance of the *Grenzgänger*, as a variation on the leit-motiv of this study, is discussed with reference to three original sketches made by

²⁸ This text is discussed in Part Two, Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 209-222.

Elisabeth Langgässer.²⁹ The sketches are used to illustrate how the author developed her story line through a process of exploring, and purposely changing the nature of political reality as she remembered it. In Langgässer's novella, the task of the *Grenzgänger* is attributed to a fictional character, who fulfils the role of a poetic go-between, and thereby manages to show a way of connecting the difference that exists between reality and art.

The poetic qualities of Winkler's and Langgässer's pre-war interpretations of the border theme can be more clearly illustrated with reference to Ernst Jünger's essay on the leit-motiv, *Über die Linie*.³⁰ If Winkler demonstrated the possibility of harmony between reality and art, by illustrating that complementary insights into life can be gained from studying both philosophy and literature, Jünger demonstrates his opposition to this possibility. His essay, *Über die Linie*, is one example of the 'negative' dimension to literary transformation, since the text demonstrates that there is such a thing as an experience of being caught between reality and art. Jünger's contribution to this study is particularly ambiguous; and it is not clear whether he seeks proximity or distance from the philosopher, Martin Heidegger, to whom he dedicated his essay. Jünger claims in his essay to have experienced time itself as an approximation of the poetic threshold between reality and art, yet there are few clear signs of this experience, and his ideas can only illustrate the meaning of poetic development, rather than an accomplished change in perception of things because of a literary approach to them.

A further variation on the border theme is offered at the end of chapter one with a study of Christa Wolf's early narrative, *Der geteilte Himmel*.³¹ Christa Wolf's text demonstrates how the experience of ideological division in Germany affected the possibility to achieve a poetic development of this theme. This text remains confined to an enclosed monologue situation, which might be taken as an aesthetic parallel to the

²⁹ See pp. 212-214.

³⁰ See Part Two, Chapter I, Section 2, pp. 195-208.

³¹ See Part Two, Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 223-247.

ideological division of Germany that was symbolized by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The text is seen in the context of the *Literaturstreit* in 1990; but an attempt is made to show how postmodern comparisons seek to look beyond the criticism of Christa Wolf's work, *Was bleibt*, which was made at the beginning of the *Literaturstreit*.

In chapter two, Uwe Johnson's narrative, *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, is discussed with a view to illustrating a further coincidence between existential and poetic ideas about border experience.³² In *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, Johnson's narrator, Karsch, might be regarded as another poetic *Grenzgänger*, who achieves a literary transformation of the border theme by narrating events from a poetic threshold that is between different perceptions of reality. In a literary context, the poetic threshold can be discovered where Karsch is seen to explore a narrative context between monologue and dialogue. An awareness about this context helped Johnson to demonstrate how the internal border between East and West Germany was experienced. This leads to a discussion of Johnson's narrative interpretation of *dazwischen*, which is seen both as a literary parallel to, as well as progression beyond the existential threshold that was identified in relation to Jaspers' interpretation of border experience. Although Johnson does not seek to explore an existential dimension to Germany's division, he comes close to this with his narrative exposition of *dazwischen*. From this poetic threshold between reality and art, Johnson was able to describe Germany's political division between the different political ideologies of Communism and Capitalism, but without prejudice to an East German or a West German view.

The literary part of this work ends with a discussion of poetry on boundaries.³³ Poetry might be regarded as a natural source of antidotes to existential conditions, because by its nature, as long as lyrical or metaphorical illustrations of reality are deemed of paramount importance, a poetic interpretation of reality is supposed to deal with a

³² See Part Two, Chapter II, pp. 248-274. (In addition, a brief comparison is made of Johnson's text and that of Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer*, see, Chapter II, pp. 270-274).

³³ See Part Two, Chapter III, pp. 275-292.

purely aesthetic understanding of life. It is the aim of this final chapter to discuss whether this suggestion can be supported with reference to a selection of poems from anthologies that were published after Germany's unification. What emerges is the shadowing of the existential context of being between different aspects of reality, since a poetic conflict is found to emerge between political and poetic interpretations of border experience. This prompts the question as to whether poetry is only to be seen as a mirror for Germany's political border experience? The question is addressed by searching for a *Grenzfallgedicht* that cannot only be understood as a satirical statement about the collapse of the Berlin Wall, but a *Grenzfallgedicht* that can be appreciated in the true sense of the word: namely in terms of a transformation of time and space into an aesthetic experience of the meaning of these entities. However, the search for this quality of *Grenzfallgedicht* leaves this work with a closing sense of duality. On the one hand, the nature of changes in German political life since 1990 appears to have hindered the ability to achieve a poetic reworking of the experience in those poems that are discussed. On the other hand, it appears that there are other aspects that are relevant to the reworking of real experiences that imply a new dimension of border experience, so as to necessitate a discussion of poetry on boundaries. The main part of this enquiry therefore closes with an allusion to a new form of aesthetic border experience, but a form that is valid only in poetic terms.

3. Observations on methodology

This study attempts to define border experience in the light of Karl Jaspers' method of "existential elucidation". It identifies pragmatic characteristics of 'borders' with further reference to the contribution made on this matter by Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology. Moreover, this study attempts to address the question of

what is meant by an aesthetic border experience by evaluating the importance of the theoretical understanding of 'borders' in the light of a literary representation of their consequences. The results of the enquiry are therefore divided into two sections on philosophy and literature, so as to examine the interpretations of those authors and intellectuals in Germany that have studied or written about the border theme. The ebb and flow of activity that has produced Germany's shifting political frontiers does not necessarily give an insight into the conditions underlying post-war division in Germany. This enquiry does not seek a repetition of empirical studies into German division, as it was experienced because of historical changes to Germany's national boundaries and frontiers. The history of Germany's frontiers has already been reliably documented by Alexander Demandt's extensive work, *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte*, first published before German unification.³⁴ In the wake of unification there followed Timothy Garton Ash's interpretation of *Germany and the Divided Continent*, which touched on the theme of border experience, but mainly focused on the wider ideological situation and the end of the cold war in Europe.³⁵ Garton Ash discussed Brandt's *Ostpolitik* more extensively than can be achieved by the more concentrated focus of this study.³⁶ In addition, the more immediate political consequences experienced in East and West Germany in the aftermath of the political *Wende*, have been further outlined in Robert Darnton's diary of the "last dance on the Wall".³⁷

Since the political history of Germany's frontiers and boundaries is not of central relevance to this enquiry into border experience, one difficulty arose which might be regarded as specific to this study: how to deal with political implications; and where to situate these within the work. It became apparent that by treating political factors as already implied in a philosophical and literary discussion of the theme, the political

³⁴ Alexander Demandt, *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte*, Munich 1991. See also Hans Medick, *Grenzziehungen und die Herstellung des politisch-sozialen Raumes*, in: *Literatur der Grenze - Theorie der Grenze*, ed. by Richard Faber, Barbara Naumann, Würzburg 1995, pp. 211-224.

³⁵ See Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name Germany and the Divided Continent*, London 1993.

³⁶ *ibid.*, especially pp. 28-47.

³⁷ See Robert Darnton, *Grenzübertritte*, in: *Der letzte Tanz auf der Mauer Berliner Journal 1989-1990*, Frankfurt am Main 1993. See Jens Reich, *Karneval des Widerstands*, Tagebuch der Wende 1989, in: *Die Zeit*, 4 November 1994, Nr. 45, p. 6.

context of border experience could be taken as already understood in this work. The method that has been adopted is to attempt to integrate factors that appear to be of political relevance into the study of philosophy and literature. For this reason, the study is divided into two clear sections; and political factors punctuate the exposition wherever relevant.

In the case of Jaspers' theory of *Grenzsituationen*, the problem of situating the political dimension of his thought was not merely one of chronology. In other words, it was not only necessary to show that Jaspers' philosophical interpretation of border experience preceded his period of political commitment. It was also important to show that because of their existential appeal, his ideas were predisposed to an analysis of political life, in which the individual no longer only played an existential, but a political role. Jaspers' attempts to define the meaning of democracy and freedom in Germany after the end of the war can be appreciated when they are seen in the light of his approach to thinking as it is studied in part one of this work. Yet if Jaspers' ideas had only been considered for their existential content, their validity as a political philosophy might have been overlooked; and so too, a tool of analysis for ideological division in Germany after 1945.³⁸ Jaspers' essay on the "Guilt Question" is treated in this work as an existential contribution to explaining Germany's post-war division, but only because he used the

³⁸ An existing monograph of Karl Jaspers as a political thinker has appeared in recent years, see Godfrey Robert Carr, *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic The political dimension of his thought*, Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York 1983. In his work, Carr referred in general terms to many aspects of Jaspers' approach to thinking that are identified in this study: the general appeal that is intended to have specific, individual relevance; the systematic approach to thinking that proceeds in three stages; and "the sense of tension" in Jaspers' philosophical thought, *ibid.*, p. 12 & 15. One omission in this monograph is that of a convincing connection between these facets of Jaspers' thinking and the concept of "existence". This may be regarded as an oversight, especially since it impairs the development of a grounding in what is seen in this study as a central influence for Jaspers' political critique. It may be legitimate to make sparse reference to the term "existential", which is mentioned by Carr on three or four occasions, to note rather vaguely that Jaspers is seen as the initiator of "the philosophical movement known as 'Existentialism'". *Ibid.*, p. 37. However, by omitting to emphasize the methodological significance of the existential category of Jaspers' thought, Carr's examination of Jaspers' political analysis does not go far enough.

For a more comprehensive recent study, resulting from the "Second International Jaspers Conference", August 1988, see *Karl Jaspers Philosopher Among Philosophers (Philosoph unter Philosophen)*, ed. by Richard Wisser/Leonard H. Ehrlich, Würzburg, 1993. See especially, Stig Nystrand (Lund), *A Struggle at the Borders of Life and World The Philosophies of Jaspers and Wittgenstein*, *ibid.*, pp. 190-201; and Shinji Hayashida (Tokyo), *The Ethical Significance of Jaspers's Philosophy*, *ibid.*, pp. 235-240.

reasoning behind the development of the existential category of his thought to apply this prior knowledge to understanding political life.³⁹

It is equally pertinent to note the degree of responsibility that must be attached to achieving an adequate representation of the meaning of Jaspers' existentially inspired ideas in an English-speaking environment. The lack of attention that Jaspers' works in general have received may be due to the difficulty of interpreting the practical value of his thought. Yet the difficulty of interpretation hardly lies with the style of Jaspers' language, which is characterized for its clarity, relative simplicity and even its stringent precision.⁴⁰ The vocabulary that Jaspers adopted in *Existenzerhellung* is straightforward in the sense that simple words or phrases are selected that seem to stand in opposing pairs, such as *Situation* and *Grenzsituation*, *Dasein* and *Existenz*, *Welt* and *Sein*. What is more difficult to convey about the element of opposition to his use of these concepts is the intention that lies behind the meaning, which is largely left open to interpretation. As a hallmark of the existential category of his thought, such openness can be seen both as the benefit and the drawback of Jaspers' ideas; and this seems to summarize what has been called in the first section of this introduction the critical condition of existential interpretation.

Jaspers' concepts cannot be associated with a philosophical system. This leaves the onus of responsibility with the individual interpretation, which must strive to do justice to the task of explaining Jaspers' original ability to confront apparently abstracted

³⁹ *Die Schuldfrage* is also observed by Carr to be the least well known of Jaspers' works, despite the fact that Jaspers considered it to be the most significant, see Godfrey Robert Carr, *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, op. cit., p. 81. Since Carr's observation is not supported by a sufficient explanation of the existential significance of *Die Schuldfrage*, he is not able to show how a misrepresentation of the existential dimension of Jaspers' ideas on "German guilt" may have contributed to the relative obscurity to which Jaspers' observations about Germany's political division have been confined. See Part One, Chapter 1, Section 3 of this study for a full explanation of the significance of *Die Schuldfrage*, pp. 109-123.

⁴⁰ These features of Jaspers' expression are discussed extensively by Carr, yet again, no connection is made between the style of expression and the relation this bears to Jaspers' approach to thinking, *ibid.*, especially p. 12f. On the one hand, a pertinent observation is made about the sense of 'tension' that emanates from Jaspers' style of expression. Carr rightly assumes that this tension is based on the suggestion of a "rift in reality between 'Welt' and 'Existenz'", *ibid.*, p. 54. On the other hand, Carr's analysis halts at this point; and he fails to observe that the connection between these two spheres of 'life' and 'existence' can only be approached through explaining the existential content of Jaspers' ideas.

or reasoned contexts with actual situations that emerge and may be experienced by the individual. What Jaspers seems to have aimed for in his work was a synthesis between thought processes that can only occur in the mind, and relaying what he saw as an existential connection: an ability to take practical decisions in life is based on knowledge that is actively applied in order to solve problems. Jaspers' understanding of border experience represented a form of productive antagonism that is mirrored in the contrasting of his concepts between two spheres of practical and mental activity. The practical side of this antagonism, the aspect of Jaspers' thinking that represents the greatest challenge for interpretation, can be clearly studied in Hannah Arendt's works, one of Jaspers' pupils whom he regarded highly.⁴¹ Arendt's literary talent had allowed her to convey, perhaps more readily than Jaspers, the active impulse that thinking can contribute to a critique of political life, and particularly her work *Vita Activa*, explores this connection.⁴²

With regard to Plessner's philosophical anthropology a similar difficulty arose in part one of this work when it came to linking his ideas to political life. The political validity of Plessner's thought did not emerge as clearly as in Jaspers' case. Indeed, there is a tendency for Plessner to take political factors as a validation of his theory, thereby suggesting that his ideas might subordinate political activity to the overriding importance of anthropological conditions as underlying determining principles of political life. Plessner's ideas might be taken to imply anthropological 'absolutes', which suggest that there are irrefutable ways for theory to describe life, instead of implying what Plessner intended to be seen as "constant" aspects of anthropological principles that help illuminate

⁴¹ The life-long intellectual dialogue that Jaspers and Arendt pursued can be read in their letters, see *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers Briefwechsel 1926-1969*, op. cit.

⁴² See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958, (the lecture series from which this work evolved took the title "Vita Activa", which is given to the German edition, *Vita Activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*, Stuttgart 1960). In her explanation of the term, *Vita Activa*, (see *The Human Condition*, op. cit., pp. 12-17), Arendt makes a useful comparison with the *vita contemplativa*, (ibid., p. 16), in order to underline the apparently 'restful' state of thought. She links this "stillness" (ibid.) of thinking to Aristotle's distinction between 'quiet' and 'unquiet', in the sense that an 'unquiet' state is assumed to represent the *vita activa*, and even something "more decisive than the distinction between the political and the theoretical way of life", ibid., p. 15. *Vita activa*, being understood rather in terms of this last distinction between political and theoretical spheres, and with reference to what Arendt called a conflict between "the philosopher and the polis" (ibid., p. 12) could be said to sum up precisely the antagonistic spirit of Jaspers' philosophy of existence.

the nature of human experience. By showing the significance of Plessner's interpretation of the border theme in relation to cultural and historical activity, the relevance of his contribution to this study of 'borders' could be retrieved from relegating the validity of pragmatic experience to the supremacy of abstract theories.

The political realm and reactions to real events are assumed as one reason for authors' descriptions of 'borders'. However, as has been observed, the important factor in part two of this enquiry is to show whether such political implications can be poetically reworked. The integration of political elements into the literary and philosophical discourse cannot in itself guard against the possibility that the two sections of this work might become polarized, or themselves reflect a division of thought between philosophy and literature that is not necessarily intended in this analysis. The need for cross references between the two halves of the study has been established by pointing out that an existential insight into border experience can help to interpret literary texts that reflect this theme. Each section of this enquiry needs to be regarded as complementary to the other. Wherever connections between philosophy and literature have been exposed in the nature of the texts themselves, or by applying relevant ideas from the philosophical study to literary texts, cross references have been used to show that there is a process of mutual reflection in operation between the two parts of the work. By exploring the nature of these connections, this work can be regarded as an interdisciplinary contribution to the discourse on 'borders'. It is an attempt to show that the ideas of Germany's intellectuals about the manifold implications of 'borders' can help to illuminate, to a certain extent, the intentions of literature. Conversely, literature can help to illustrate, and to explain further, what may at first sight appear to be merely theoretical observations that emerge from exploring ideas in relation to political or psychological aspects of border experience.

Part One
The Existential Dilemma

Chapter I

The ethos of existential values

1. Existential border situations (Karl Jaspers)

The interrelation between Karl Jaspers' early philosophical writing and the nature of his subsequent reflections on political life suggests that his work is essential to what this enquiry calls the German border experience. By following the nature of this interrelation it is possible to show that Jaspers' ideas are not only to be regarded as theoretical examples of border experience, but that he endeavoured to render one of those particular examples applicable to an explanation of the post-war division of Germany.¹ The experience of the 'border' implies, in Jaspers' perception, an association between the acquisition of knowledge and the individual's experience, where the purpose of ideas is to inform the individual about what is essential in terms of experience. As a culmination of centuries of the German preoccupation with the political and psychological repercussions of borders, Jaspers' philosophy can be seen to demonstrate how border experience is a truly existential issue that has consequences for understanding political division in Germany after 1945.²

To begin with, the necessary investigation into the meaning of an existential understanding of border experience leads us to Jaspers' thinking in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It is through his philosophy of "Existential Elucidation", (*Existenzerhellung*), that the necessary analytical tools, together with a theoretical

¹ Reference should be made to section three of this chapter, pp. 109-123, see also note 5 below.

² The practical side to the border theme implies a discussion of Germany's changing frontiers, a discussion that in its historical form, dating back to Charlemagne, is more fully detailed by Alexander Demandt's study of Germany's national boundaries, see Alexander Demandt, *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte*, op. cit.

framework may be identified as a means with which to continue the purpose of this enquiry: to examine border experience from a political, psychological, or literary perspective.³

Jaspers developed a method of explaining the significance of borders by imparting further knowledge about life's existential implications. It is in the middle volume of Jaspers' *Philosophie* (1931), itself given the title *Existenzerhellung*, that an exposition of the method of "existential elucidation" is defined. The methodological exposition is followed in four specific "existential border situations" (*Grenzsituationen*): *Tod*, *Leiden*, *Kampf* or *Schuld* are defined as examples of extreme conditions that can arise.⁴ The exposition of these conditions is not only to be regarded as part of an abstract model based on philosophical ideas, but as a model that can be related to the field of political activity.⁵ Dolf Sternberger summarized the underlying nature of Jaspers' method of "elucidation" as "eine Ethik der Intimität", by which is meant in this study the inherent connection that can be found between Jaspers' existential thought and the application of his ideas to an understanding of the historical division of Germany.⁶ The ethical implication of Jaspers' thought is demonstrated by referring to his understanding of the 'border' as an abstract phenomenon, which is in need of further examination from other quarters.⁷ In other words, it is the aspect of "otherness" inherent to the "border" that requires explanation:

Grenze drückt aus: es gibt ein anderes [...] ⁸

³ The text used in this part of the study is Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie*, I-III, Band I - *Philosophische Weltorientierung*; Band II - *Existenzerhellung*; Band III - *Metaphysik*, Berlin 1956. (This is a reprint of the 1932 edition. The first edition was published in a single volume in 1931, see Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 February 1983).

⁴ An exposition of *Grenzsituationen* is given in *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., pp. 201-254.

⁵ The relevance of Jaspers' ideas to political aspects of border experience will be seen in this study with reference to Part One, Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 94-123.

⁶ See Dolf Sternberger, *Jaspers und der Staat* (1963), in: Hans Saner (ed.), *Karl Jaspers in der Diskussion*, Munich, Zurich 1973, p. 418-423, here p. 418.

⁷ See also Shinji Hayashida, *The Ethical Significance of Jaspers's Philosophy*, in: *Karl Jaspers Philosopher Among Philosophers*, op. cit., p. 238. The following observation is made: "Jaspers's philosophy of Existenz has, in distinction from all other existential thoughts, a decisive significance for ethics; for Jaspers's Existenz is always accompanied by reason."

⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 203.

To Jaspers, making the 'border' appear transparent meant illuminating its nature, both from within an abstracted realm of ideas, as well as from within the realm of practical actions, such as manifested in political life. Hence a general understanding of the 'border' can only be achieved if its essence can be appreciated in both these realms. *Existenzerhellung* draws the consequences of this recognition, where the notion of a 'border' is introduced as a concept that has the abstract attributes of a leit-motiv, so far as its implications pervade the method of "existential elucidation" until a variation of its meaning can be followed in the pragmatic context of Jaspers' politically motivated work, which was not published until after the end of the Second World War. Therefore, there is a sense in which *Existenzerhellung* forms not only a centrepiece for the 1931 publication of Jaspers' *Philosophie*, but also a centrepiece of his thinking; and the work illuminates the central theoretical values involved in this analysis of border experience.

In the nature of Jaspers' existential conception of reality there is an implicit appeal to question knowledge: either knowledge that is acquired through individual experience; or knowledge that is imparted by further study. These two approaches imply a process of border transgression, for if not through a process of self-questioning, which brings an awareness of the needs and reality of other individuals, how else can an appreciation of "otherness" be acquired? Jaspers' ideas on this question were dependent upon categories of thought that appeared to him to be neither wholly subjective, nor entirely objective. The individual who is fully conscious of his connection with reality is not content to rely on his experience or knowledge of his surroundings, but is motivated to seek out other knowledge. This other knowledge is objective, so far as the process of learning to respond to and practice a new approach to a particular situation represents a challenge to subjective notions and experiences. The assumption that there can be such a meeting between one's own ideas and experience and new ideas about the meaning of reality suggests that a compromise is achieved between these two influences. Jaspers referred to the essential nature of this compromise as a division in

thought that he called the "Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung".⁹ What Jaspers meant by this term is fundamental to the development of his ideas, as well as to his understanding of border experience:

Das, was wir denken, von dem, stets ein anderes als wir, ist das, worauf wir, die Subjekte, als auf ein Gegenüberstehendes, die Objekte, gerichtet sind.¹⁰

Jaspers stressed the vital need to observe a difference between the individual as a thinking subject and the content of those subjective ideas. Whereas ideas themselves can be treated as objects, no thinking individual is to be regarded as an object because this would contradict the treatment of the individual as the person who has the sovereign jurisdiction over ideas: "Der Gegenstand ist ein bestimmtes Sein für das Ich".¹¹ The crucial perception of a difference between ideas as objects and the reality of the individual's subjective experience means that Jaspers did not see the division between these spheres as being mirrored in the individual's consciousness. The thinking individual has the capacity to reason which enables him to overcome this division between the world outside him, or 'objects' that appear in this world, and the content of his thoughts.

Despite the preceding observations about the divisive aspect of the *Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung*, the term implies not a sense of dislocation, but a sense of unity between the individual as a subject and the individual's interpretation of ideas that appear to him as objects because they seem to exist in a world that has yet to be explored. The sense of unity is also expressed by Jaspers' concept of *das Umgreifende*. This concept was defined after *Existenzerhellung*, but may be seen at this point of the study as a field in which the *Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung* manifests itself to the individual. The relevant concept for this description of border experience is that of the *Subjekt-*

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 338. In his study, Godfrey R. Carr gave no full explanation of this concept, referring to it merely as the "subject-object-split", see *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹⁰ See Karl Jaspers, *Was ist Philosophie?*, Munich, Zurich 1976, p. 46.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 47.

Objekt-Spaltung, since it seems to summarize in another way Jaspers' perception of life as a process of self-questioning, leading beyond the experience and knowledge of a single individual to a meeting of minds, or to an exchange of ideas and experience with others.

In Jaspers' view, it is possible for the ideas and experience of the individual to coalesce productively with objective perceptions about these ideas. Moreover, the assumption of such a link between the realm of experience and ideas is necessary to explain Jaspers' existential understanding of reality. He assumed that the individual capacity to advance knowledge, in itself a form of border transgression, derives from combining what is known by the individual with new attitudes that may remain undiscovered because they have yet to be experienced. The unknown entity that is seen in relation to the individual has to be acquired by reaching this entity which is represented for Jaspers by the category of "existence":

Existenz in der Erscheinung drängt nach zwei Seiten: Sie *sucht das Objektive* als Form und Gestalt des Lebens. [...] Ebenso drängt Existenz zum *Subjektiven*. Das Objektive als solches bleibt ihr leer, ein fremdes Andere. Erst wo Objektivität gegenwärtig wird in der Subjektivität durch persönliche Vollzüge je einzelnen Daseins, erscheint sich Existenz als *jeweilige Totalität* von Objektivität und Subjektivität.¹²

Jaspers observed a relationship between the individual's known experience and hitherto unknown perceptions of life that have to be explored. The exploratory element is intrinsic to his view of reality as existential. The active search by the thinking individual for new ideas is reflected in Jaspers' method of "elucidation" which seems to be caught up in a relentless process of discovering a connection with other areas of thought. The need is demonstrated by the fact that Jaspers later applied his ideas to political analysis. The existential dimension *per se* was seen by him as deriving from a formative tension that comes from experiencing a situation that lies in both subjective

¹² *ibid.*, p. 337.

and objective spheres: *Existenz ist stets in Subjektivität und Objektivität*.¹³ The connection between existential reality and the concept of the *Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung* underlines the observation that Jaspers seeks to explore the productive coalescence of experience and knowledge. Each individual might seek out, apparently on an intuitive basis, new ideas that can inform experiences. Jaspers aims to account for what seems to be an intuitive recognition that comes from his understanding of border experience: an exposition of an objective insight into life, such as might be found by consulting with theoretical values, does not exclude the validity of subjective opinions and experience.

If the existential association with border experience is to be fully described, "existential elucidation" is obliged to account for the individual's position in history, since only by being included in a particular historical situation can the individual appropriate new ideas or experiences. In this regard, Sternberger criticized the distinction that Jaspers made between *Dasein* and *Existenz*, because he claimed that these concepts suggested a "philosophisches Zweiklassensystem".¹⁴ However, far from implying that there are different levels of experience in a hierarchical system of ideas, this distinction was made by Jaspers because it is necessary for describing what is meant by an existential understanding of life. The idea of border transgression is implied by the distinction between 'life' (*Dasein*) and 'existence' (*Existenz*), in the sense that experience is regarded only as one stage towards the acquisition of more knowledge about life.¹⁵ This does not mean, however, that Jaspers regarded acquiring

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 338.

¹⁴ Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

¹⁵ Jaspers referred to empirical being as *Dasein*, which implies certain 'real-life' or worldly situations. However, being *itself* was given the term *Existenz*, which German can also refer to as *Sein*. The distinction between *Dasein* and *Sein* has existential implications, when attempting to demonstrate that the particular, historical situation of *Existenz* is also intrinsically linked to the subjective experience of *Dasein*.

The problem for translation is that the English word *existence* cannot fully clarify the difference between subjective being in the empirical world (*Dasein*); and objective being, leading to an existential experience of being itself (*Existenz*). The approach adopted in E. B. Ashton's 1970 translation was to retain *Existenz* to refer to existential experience, while translating *Dasein* as *existence*. Ashton's preferred translation of *Grenzsituationen* is "boundary situations". See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy* Volume 2, Translated by E. B. Ashton, Chicago, London 1970, *ibid.*, pp. 177-218. It will be noted that this study has chosen "border situations". The reason for this is the distinction between *Dasein* and *Existenz*, and the idea of the border as a precipice, the edge, or threshold, and the experience of this, which this study

knowledge as an absolute goal towards which the individual should strive. On the contrary, he regarded 'absolute' possibilities of specific events or situations as questionable, because of the implicit need to strive beyond what is already attained in terms of experience, or understanding.

An application of the Hegelian dialectic may seem an appropriate way of describing the method of "existential elucidation", but this option is not really viable for the reasons that have been outlined with regard to the idea of the *Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung*.¹⁶ In other words, Hegel's goal was diametrically opposed to the ideas behind Jaspers' thinking. Hegel worked on the assumption that history was self-fulfilling and that it culminated in a kind of absolute self-knowledge, which existential interpretation naturally regards as impossible. Jaspers treated the Hegelian dialectic as a "subjectivizing" account of history.¹⁷ Furthermore, for similar reasons, he rejected the Marxist view of history, which he argued intended to objectivize history, - so much so, that the individual position was valid only so far as it contributed to overcoming the class struggle, a consequence of a materialist interpretation of history.¹⁸ The method of "existential elucidation" cannot even be said to steer a course between these interpretations of Hegel and Marx. This is because an existential perception of reality treats both subjective and objective categories of thought as equally valid, thus defining an existential space that lies between these spheres, as it lies between experience and a further reference to ideas. Jaspers' existential treatment of history leads beyond Hegel or Marx to Nietzsche, but it also leads back to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's writing was regarded by Jaspers as particularly significant for developing "existential elucidation":

aims to describe. Jaspers' idea of *das Umgreifende* seems to approach the idea of a boundary situation, which alludes to a field of experience more than his *Grenzsituationen*.

¹⁶ See Norbert J. Schürgers, *Der Staat als Ort existentieller Selbstfindung*, in: Schürgers, *Politische Philosophie in der Weimarer Republik*, Stuttgart 1989, pp. 220-236, here p. 232.

¹⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, Berlin, New York 1979, (8th. reprint from the 5th. 1932 edition; the original *Göschen* edition was published in 1931), p. 11.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

Die erste umfassende, in ihrem Ernst von allen vorhergehenden unterschiedene Kritik seiner Zeit brachte *Kierkegaard*.¹⁹

Kierkegaard's critique of history implied a sense of moral "Ernst", a depth of perception and ethical commitment, which appealed to Jaspers' approach to thinking. This moral *Ernst* is described by Dolf Sternberger as one of the key words in Jaspers' existential vocabulary.²⁰ It refers to a possible stringency behind Jaspers' thinking that appears to derive from his reading of Kierkegaard.²¹ From Kierkegaard, Jaspers developed an ethical framework for his ideas; and this basis distinguishes Jaspers' "existential elucidation" from Heidegger's ontology of Being, for reasons that can only be briefly alluded to here. In his *Notizen zu Heidegger* of 1953-4, Jaspers was to write as follows:

Unter den deutschen Philosophieprofessoren unserer Zeit hat mich nur einer interessiert: *Heidegger*. Alles andere schien mir intellektueller Betrieb. Nur hier war ein anderer Ernst.²²

If Jaspers was initially alerted to Heidegger's work by a familiar tone of ethical *Ernst* that had attracted him in Kierkegaard's writing, this seems to have followed on from an undeniable early regard for Heidegger's work and stature as an important contemporary thinker. Yet on this point Jaspers' *Notizen* are polemical. They reflect the difficulties and mental conflicts that tormented his friendship with Heidegger. As indicated in the main introduction to this work, Jaspers' and Heidegger's versions of *Existenzphilosophie* are often compared in a rather loose manner.²³ Herbert Marcuse, (incidentally, a pupil of Heidegger), argued that Heidegger and Jaspers developed

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 12f.

²⁰ Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

²¹ Jaspers' interpretation of Kierkegaard's ideas is discussed in Section 2 of this chapter, pp. 74-93.

²² Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 48.

²³ See Introduction to this study, especially Section 1, *The critical condition of existential interpretation*, p. 17 & p. 19.

approaches to thinking that are not compatible with one another.²⁴ The only reason, Marcuse continued, that these philosophers are associated with one another is because of the "existential" rubric applied to both.²⁵ Yet as has been also argued in the introduction to this study, Heidegger was concerned with an ontological interpretation of life, whereas Jaspers' existential interpretation of reality is primarily his concern in *Existenzerhellung*. Although this work is rightly linked with *Existenzphilosophie*, it does not account for the entire sum of Jaspers' thought. To Jaspers, Heidegger's magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), apparently remained inaccessible, for in his *Notizen*, Jaspers claimed to have read very little of this work.²⁶ Although Jaspers did not consider it necessary to regard himself as the public rival to his contemporary, Heidegger, he was nevertheless sensitive to the relative success of Heidegger's philosophy, as measured against the success of his own.²⁷ Rüdiger Safranski's biography of Heidegger gave the following speculative definition of philosophical differences that exist between the two contemporaries:

Jaspers hatte in seinem Hauptwerk 'Philosophie' von 1932 das 'Suchen des Seins' ähnlich wie Heidegger als wichtigste Aufgabe der Philosophie herausgestellt. Er suchte es auf andere Weise. Das Sein ist für Jaspers das 'Umgreifende', das nur in der Bewegung der Freiheit, im Transzendieren, erfahrbar wird.²⁸

As Safranski suggests, one reason for Jaspers' self-confessed inability to follow the consequences of Heidegger's approach is the transcendental implication of Jaspers' concept of *das Umgreifende*. This key concept marks a departure in Jaspers' thinking towards the development of a "metaphysics" of philosophy. The importance to be noted in our study about the concept of *das Umgreifende* is that it shows that Jaspers did succeed at a later stage of his work in progressing beyond his existential ideas, but

²⁴ See Herbert Marcuse, *Philosophie des Scheiterns Karl Jaspers' Werk (1933)*, in: Hans Saner (ed.), *Karl Jaspers in der Diskussion*, op. cit., pp. 125-132.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 130.

²⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 142.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁸ See Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland Heidegger und seine Zeit*, Munich, Vienna 1994, p. 446.

it also implies that his thought was open to secondary influences, such as those of a political nature. Such openness implied by Jaspers' method of reasoning is possibly why Safranski selected *das Umgreifende* as a point of contrast between Jaspers' and Heidegger's approach to thinking. The political implications of Heidegger's thought were evident in 1933, at the critical moment when Hitler came to power. Jaspers' *Notizen* have charted Heidegger's political intentions at the time by quoting his reported phrase of commitment to the Nazi cause: "Man muß sich einschalten".²⁹ Safranski is in no doubt that such political engagement, - which is shown in Heidegger's induction speech as Rector of Freiburg university in 1933 -, is to be regarded as a deluded attempt to associate his philosophy with what he thought would be not only a political, but a "metaphysical" revolution.³⁰ George Steiner has suggested further that there "were instrumental connections between the language and vision of *Sein und Zeit*, especially the later sections, and that of Nazism".³¹ Such political controversy that has surrounded Martin Heidegger does not apply to Karl Jaspers. However, as will be seen later, Jaspers was also criticized in his time for his reflections about Germany's division after the war.³²

Safranski provided another useful interpretation of Heidegger's approach to thinking that illustrates the differences of style between Heidegger and Jaspers. He compared Heidegger's "Existenzialien" to an 'absolute' version of Kant's categories.³³ In other words, Heidegger treated Kant's ideas as pointing towards absolute knowledge

²⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 86.

³⁰ Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland*, op. cit., p. 484. See further Martin Heidegger's inaugural speech, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*, Breslau 1933. Reference should also be made to Karl Löwith's essay on Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, which is an authoritative and critically sensitive account about the notorious difficulty of deciphering why Heidegger chose to commit himself to Nazi doctrine in 1933, only to distance himself from this cause a year later. See Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, in: *Neue Rundschau*, Heft 63, Frankfurt am Main 1952, pp. 1-27. Hugo Ott is a more recent authority and can be recommended for further study, see Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie*, Frankfurt am Main 1988; and in translation by Allan Blunden, *Martin Heidegger A Political Life*, London 1994.

³¹ See George Steiner, *Heidegger The influence and dissemination of his thought*, Sussex 1978, p. 117. Hugo Ott has analysed the connection between Heidegger's philosophical work and his intent to posture, through his work, as a significant exponent of the "self-assertion" of the German university in 1933, see *Martin Heidegger A Political Life*, op. cit.

³² See Section 3 of this chapter, pp. 110-113.

³³ Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland*, op. cit., p. 187.

and experience that Jaspers ruled out for his existential method of analysis. Jaspers, too, followed in the tradition of self-questioning and 'critical reason' that had been defined by Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.³⁴ However, Jaspers' interpretation of Kant did not intend to work towards the same "existentialist" grounding as Heideggerian thought. Jaspers was concerned not only to define the individual's position in history, but critically to examine this position. The process requires self-questioning, as implied by Jaspers' understanding of the abstract properties of the border as a leit-motiv, which could be seen as a problem that dates back to Kant and to Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, Hans Saner warns that the intellectual continuity represented by the ideas of Kant, Kierkegaard and Jaspers is not as clearly defined as may appear:

Oft kann es scheinen, als sei er (Jaspers, S.K.) weiter nichts als Kierkegaard noch einmal, nur ohne dessen tiefe Religiosität, als sei er Kant noch einmal, aber ohne dessen Verantwortung vor der Strenge einer wissenschaftlichen Philosophie, als sei er beide zugleich, nur unendlich viel weniger, weil er ihr Denken nicht hervorgebracht, sondern nur nachvollzogen habe.³⁵

Although Jaspers' contribution to contemporary thinking is not merely to be perceived as "another Kant" or "another Kierkegaard", he was influenced by both these thinkers. In contrast to Saner's view, Kant's disciplined attitude to thinking may well be said to have been a significant influence on Jaspers' analytical method. Although this method of analysis does not offer evidence of a system-based approach, it nevertheless relies on a strictly systematic study of what is meant by the 'existential' aspect of border experience. It is because of his systematic approach to thinking that Jaspers assumed that only fragmentary insights into the border theme are to be gained. Hence Jaspers assumed that a clear evaluation of our understanding of borders can only be acquired by piecing together their different qualities, whose significance can be deduced from

³⁴ See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Band 3-4, ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel, Darmstadt 1983, (Sonderstudienausgabe). See further Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 101.

³⁵ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 153.

observations. This methodological approach was adopted for another reason, which Jaspers called the difficulty of "antinomy":

Auf dem wahren Weg entwickelt sich also die Antinomie, daß der ursprüngliche Impuls, *das Ganze* zu erfassen, scheitern muß im unvermeidlichen Zerstäuben des Ganzen zu *partikularen Perspektiven* und Konstellationen, aus denen rückwärts ein Ganzes gesucht wird.³⁶

The theory of *Grenzsituationen* attempts to deal with the problem of antinomy, since Jaspers argued that this problem gives rise to abstract consequences which can affect the way in which a true understanding of the individual's situation can be approached. He suggested that the benefits of a study of *Grenzsituationen* only apply on the understanding that they contain an appeal to the individual, which means that there is no generally valid resolution about the nature of the problems that are raised in *Grenzsituationen*. In other words, Jaspers' method of "elucidation" does not rule out the possibility of 'failure' to arrive at composite conclusions about how to overcome the extreme circumstances of *Tod, Leiden, Kampf* and *Schuld*. In this case, a sense of 'failure' is not only to be regarded as part of an existential understanding of border experience, but it may be seen as an inevitable accompaniment to *Grenzsituationen*. The inevitability of experiencing challenging situations at some point in life is suggested to arise because of underlying antinomies. These leave the individual caught up in antagonistic situations, whose basis is seen by Jaspers to run deeper than what seems a merely superficial difference between ideas and individual experiences.

The assumption that the individual *Grenzsituationen* inevitably mean capitulation in the face of adversity is because of antinomies, or irreducible discrepancies, which can emerge, so that any attempt to overcome difficult circumstances appears futile. However, to remain content with this interpretation would imply that Jaspers intended to undermine his own theory. The opposite appears to be the case. By observing the problem that is represented by antinomy, Jaspers hoped to underline his conviction that

³⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, op. cit., p. 28.

it is difficult for any individual to grasp the entirety of human experience and thought. This seems to place the concept of the *Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung* in its true perspective.

It was observed already that the *Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung* implied a coalescence of experience and knowledge, rather than a permanent rift between the world of ideas and the subjective experience of them. What Jaspers suggests is that the ability to perceive this coalescence is always threatened by the experience of difficult or challenging circumstances when the individual might lose sight of an innate ability to reason. Moreover, the implications of this threat could also be associated with Kierkegaard's formula, "either-or", and possibly even with the aesthetic approach to life that this formula raises. The wider implications of an aesthetic approach to life are studied in the second part of this work, but it is relevant to note here that Jaspers' dislike of an aesthetic application of his ideas may be partly explained by the passive contemplation of reality that such an application could involve. Jaspers could be forgiven for assuming that this state of mind can jeopardize the active will to take challenging decisions about things, but this is only possible if individual consciousness were assumed to be permanently in a passive state of existence. It may not necessarily follow that such contemplation entirely rules out the possibility of objective thought. However, since Jaspers' approach is dependent on making general observations about individual consciousness, rather than focusing specifically on the subjective nature of this consciousness, it is difficult for his theory of *Grenzsituationen* to take into account the validity of aesthetic contemplation. When Herbert Marcuse observed that Jaspers defined a "philosophy of failure", he did not mean to imply that Jaspers' philosophy failed to achieve its aims.³⁷ Instead, he referred to Jaspers' reading of Kierkegaard, from whom he developed an intention to overcome the dangers of a passive state of existence by combining pragmatic and idealized influences in such a way as to secure a rational basis for the method of "elucidation":

³⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *Philosophie des Scheiterns*, op. cit.

Eine 'Philosophie des Scheiterns' also, und Jaspers hält das 'Scheitern' als das eigentliche Signum seiner Philosophie fest. Aber es ist ein Scheitern nicht diesseits, sondern jenseits jedes möglichen Resultats, ein Scheitern, das allem echten Philosophieren wesentlich ist.³⁸

An existential interpretation of border experience assumes transcendental significance by following a series of logical transgressions, so as to add weight to the different intellectual perspectives that are to be balanced against one another. Jaspers' existential interpretation of the idea of the 'border' outlines what might be regarded as a critical threshold between life experience and acquired knowledge. These practical and theoretical ways of life are connected to one another as though the threshold between them is itself experienced. In the earlier version of *Grenzsituationen*, Jaspers concentrated on the psychological implications behind the presumed experience of this threshold. His *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919) had already coined the idea of certain "border situations", which were then defined as those of *Tod, Kampf, Zufall* and *Schuld*.³⁹ Heidegger's intensive critique of Jaspers' book had rather dogmatically held that the existential value of Jaspers' "border situations" had to be fully realized.⁴⁰ The early exposition of the psychological implications of border experience was not superseded by an existential definition until the publication of *Grenzsituationen*, which might be considered a reworking of the earlier study, in the manner that had been indicated in Heidegger's review of *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*.⁴¹

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 129.

³⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin, Heidelberg 1919, pp. 202-247, - the individual "border situations" are on pp. 226-247.

⁴⁰ See Martin Heidegger, *Anmerkungen zu Jaspers' "Psychologie der Weltanschauungen"* (1919-21), in: Hans Saner (ed.), *Karl Jaspers in der Diskussion*, op. cit., pp. 70-100. (Heidegger's critique was not published until this 1973 edition). Jaspers' *Notizen zu Heidegger* show, however, that although he received a copy of Heidegger's review in 1921, he did not react to it, see Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 225. In an editor's note, Saner points out that Jaspers' had scrawled in the margin of Heidegger's response that the "existential" value could not be derived without a rewrite of the entire book, see Hans Saner (ed.), *Karl Jaspers in der Diskussion*, op. cit., p. 100.

⁴¹ See Herbert Marcuse, *Philosophie des Scheiterns*, op. cit., p. 130. Jaspers himself, however, rejected the possibility that the book was reworked consciously along Heidegger's suggested lines, see Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, Munich, 1977, see especially the section on *Heidegger* (*ibid.*, pp. 92-111), where Jaspers observed the following about Heidegger's critique of his work: "Er gab mir das Manuskript dieser Kritik. Sie schien mir ungerecht; ich las sie flüchtig, sie wurde in mir nicht fruchtbar. Ich ging andere Wege, als er sie vorschlug." *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Jaspers' method of "elucidation" begins from life experience (*Dasein*), and by working from this empirical context describes three stages of logical transgression to a transcendental interpretation of border experience. Sternberger's criticism was that a "two-tier" philosophical system is invoked by this method of description, implying that the transcendental aspect of the method is qualitatively to be set apart from its empirical roots. It does not necessarily follow, however, that Jaspers intended his method of analysis to be understood as such a "two-tier" hierarchy, since his method relies on following three specific stages. There is a systematic approach to his method of "existential elucidation", which remains open to different elements of thought and experience so that it can hardly be regarded as a philosophical system.⁴² The absence of a system-based approach is also alluded to by Marcuse in his interpretation, "Philosophie des Scheiterns", which points to the critical aspect of Jaspers' method, in so far as by departing from a system-based philosophy, "existential elucidation" remains between the different aspects of thought and experience that it aims to illuminate. What Sternberger appeared to take as a purely abstract theory is in fact rooted in experience, purposely taken as a starting point, since without any connection to life experience, the plausibility of transcending this stage towards the threshold between life and existence would be called into question.

The significant factor with regard to an existential insight into border experience is the suggestion that there is a threshold where the different entities of experience and thought are assumed to meet. The suggestion of this theoretical threshold between different forms of experience and understanding arises from questioning subjective attitudes, a form of inquiry that may lead to new perceptions about the essential properties needed for progress. An existential perception of life aims to emphasize the individual's capacity for transforming attitudes to difficult experiences, thus leading to

⁴² See further *Karl Jaspers - Heinrich Zimmer Briefe 1929-1939*, in: *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Karl Jaspers-Gesellschaft*, ed. by Elisabeth Salamun-Hybasek, Kurt Salamun, Wien 1993. On Jaspers' *Philosophie* Heinrich Zimmer to Karl Jaspers, 31 December 1931: "[...] hier ist Philosophie, - nicht aber dieser oder jener Philosoph, nicht ein System oder eine Studie [...] der Systematiker [...]", *ibid.*, p. 11.

the development of an ability to perceive a synthesis of ideas and experience. It is not clear that Jaspers intended an experience of individual *Existenz* to be regarded as a "better" way to live and understand reality. His attempt to combine what can be experienced with what can be learned about life was intended as part of a theory that could lead to new insights into certain real 'crises'. The realization that in a crisis situation there is a threshold at which experience might merge with ideas is part of the existential appeal to the individual to draw his or her own conclusions about this realization.

It is clear that Jaspers' interpretation of border experience makes general observations before it implies any application of these to individual experience. In other words, "existential elucidation" begins by describing a route to the threshold where new aspects of challenging circumstances are ultimately intended to come to light by way of rational analysis. The results of such analysis can only have meaning for the individual. Therefore, the method of description can only work by observing general characteristics of problems, before a more detailed analysis can be made of their specific nature. At the threshold where such general and specific criteria appear to meet, it is not a question of relinquishing either aspect, but rather of using general theoretical knowledge to enrich the individual's perception of experience. Ultimately, a combination of ideas and experience is involved in establishing what appears as a "three-tier", not a "two-tier" method of considering the essence of *Grenzsituationen*. A distinction between general situations and specific "existential border situations" leads Jaspers to define what he meant by each. These definitions are dealt with in the order in which Jaspers treated them, so as to work towards an exposition of *Grenzsituationen* by way of comparison:

Situation heißt eine nicht nur naturgesetzliche, vielmehr eine *sinnbezogene Wirklichkeit*, die weder psychisch noch physisch, sondern beides zugleich als die konkrete Wirklichkeit ist, die für mein Dasein Vorteil oder Schaden, Chance oder Schranke bedeutet.⁴³

⁴³ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 202.

The various situations that arise in life, Jaspers suggests, are generally a conglomeration of different influences, but because of the diverse nature of these influences, it is not always clear that opportunities can be concealed by difficulties. The assessment of the circumstances in which the individual exists not only depends on understanding the general characteristics of a particular situation, but on a subjective interpretation of these characteristics, which necessarily varies according to each individual. A real appreciation of the nature of experience can only be recognized by comparing its specific with its general context. In other words, when comparing our individual situation with that of others, we can reach a true understanding of what is essential and unique to our situation.

By following this method of comparison through three stages, a reversal of the generalized description comes into force where application is made to the specific context of the individual. An apparent infusion of both general and specific criteria occurs in a way that ultimately makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. What Sternberger criticized as a "two-tier" system is more a process of combining a perceived difference between the general status of empirical factors (*Dasein*) and the specific context of existence (*Existenz*). The exposition of *Grenzsituationen* draws on this comparison, as manifested in a presumed existential threshold between the worldly context of experience and the 'otherworldly' aspect of existence. Reality may actually be regarded as a combination of worldly situations that have general importance, with a specific assessment of this worldly realm that comes from the knowledge of it, such as is held by the individual. A differentiated, or even a 'true' perception of reality comes to light through the recognition that worldly and non-worldly situations can be reflected in each other. This recognition is equally valid when considering the relevance of an existential interpretation of border experience, since this interpretation suggests that a "true" awareness of the meaning of individual experience is its relation to the category of existence:

Grenze drückt aus: es gibt ein anderes, aber zugleich: dies andere ist nicht für das Bewußtsein im Dasein. Grenzsituation ist nicht mehr Situation für das Bewußtsein überhaupt, [...] Denn das Dasein als Bewußtsein begreift nicht den Unterschied [...] Die Grenzsituation gehört zur Existenz, wie die Situationen zum immanent bleibenden Bewußtsein.⁴⁴

The distinction made between *Situation* and *Grenzsituation* manifests an example of an experience of the 'border'. The consciousness of this 'border' appears to be dependent on the individual's innate ability to draw an imagined line between different categories of thought and experience, as though the idea of the 'line' were itself the means by which the different contexts are to be connected.⁴⁵ What is significant is not the division of experience and thought into subjective and objective spheres, nor into general and specific terms, but to establish continuity between these opposing pairs. There is an element of competition, so far as these different entities, as they have been described, seem to seek qualification as the essential determining characteristics of particular experiences. Jaspers suggested that the real meaning of life becomes apparent to the individual in extreme conditions, which yield up ethical questions that can only be addressed by a rational ability to use analysis and reflection as a means to overcome the apparently restricting nature of these conditions.

The general appeal that Jaspers made is to each individual to shape or alter the constricting nature of what in reality may be constraints that exist in subjective consciousness. The phrase, "*Wir schaffen Situationen*", implies a Kantian and ethically committed philosophy, so far as it refers to the need for the individual to take responsibility for shaping the course of events through active decision-making that is informed by an existential insight into difficult situations that may arise.⁴⁶ As has been mentioned, Jaspers did not seem to entertain the idea that his thinking can have an

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 203.

⁴⁵ The significance of the 'line' concept is also discussed in Chapter III pp. 159-160; and extensively in Part Two of this study, see Chapter I, Sections 1 & 2, pp. 184-194, and pp. 195-208 respectively.

⁴⁶ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 203.

"aesthetic" appeal, nor that aesthetics can be concerned with anything other than the passive contemplation of subjective consciousness. At the beginning of *Philosophie*, Jaspers was at pains to point out that his work is not to be regarded as an aesthetic philosophy:

[...] es handelt sich [...] nicht um Philosophie als Literatur zum Zwecke ästhetischen Genusses. ⁴⁷

This observation is perhaps intended to safeguard his method of analysis as a philosophically 'sound' approach. In other words, his method of interpreting border experience implies an underlying transformation of individual attitudes, but this is not necessarily meant to be interpreted as literary transformation. ⁴⁸ Jaspers suggested that transforming attitudes to life, because of applying to existential theory, can only be accomplished through thought, and not merely through observation, or the contemplation of form for its own sake, that is for aesthetic purposes. There is a metaphysical implication to Jaspers' thinking, so far as he proposed that the ability to make judgements about different situations, or the ability to deliberate about the nature of extreme or restrictive circumstances, are abilities formed on the basis of the Platonic Idea. In Platonic thought the Idea suggests a distinction between appearance and reality, implying that there are "shadows" of reality which can be studied aside from appearances, in order to reveal the "true", essential nature of things. It is within this Platonic conception of the "true" nature of reality that Jaspers perceives individual *Existenz*:

Als Selbstsein stehe ich in der *Unruhe des Wählenkönnens* zur möglichen Gewißheit einer Wahrheit, die über alle Helle und Begründung hinaus nur in dieser Situation liegt. ⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Weltorientierung*, Band I, op. cit., p. XXII.

⁴⁸ In part two of this study the idea of literary transformation is discussed further; and although Jaspers' method of analysis may be taken as an insight into existential influences, it will be argued that existential influences themselves, as Jaspers implied, are not evidence of their literary transformation.

⁴⁹ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 214.

An awareness about the essence of things emerges when the individual recognizes that general demands being placed on him or her in any situation are also unique to an individual understanding of this situation. The reason why Jaspers placed so much emphasis on the role of the individual is because he saw practical endeavours as following on from the recognition of the specific, unique value that can be gained from allowing each individual to make his own contribution to life. The 'metaphysical' aspect of this argument arises from the comparison, which Jaspers implies is made by each individual between subjective and objective categories of thought. This makes recognizing an existential perception of reality into an abstract form, so far as only the thinking individual can realize that there is "otherness" to be met, or that there is a realm that exists outside of his or her own experience. Jaspers regarded the self-conscious individual as being able to connect experience with knowledge; and to make this connection into a reason for taking action in any given set of circumstances.

His interpretation draws on Plato's *Simile of the Cave*.⁵⁰ The *Simile of the Cave* aims to reflect what is a "true" definition of reality, which is quintessential to the Platonic Idea. Jaspers' method of "existential elucidation" aims to determine what is essential for life, but he interprets the quintessential meaning of life as "existence". Any general situation is envisaged by Jaspers as being chained to the necessity of subjective interpretation: an existential experience of this situation is held back because the individual cannot develop an appraisal of things beyond the present into a potentially more objective domain. In the Platonic simile, the prisoners in the dark cave are initially blinded to the meaning of reality, which lies quite literally behind them. The prisoners' chains bind them behind an artificial wall that has been built.⁵¹ The wall symbolizes the division between appearance and reality. The prisoners' chains are analogous to Jaspers' perception of subjective restrictions and situations imposed on the individual. In general, these situations do not seem to imply any form of reality beyond the artificial division that

⁵⁰ See Plato, *The Simile of the Cave*, in: *The Republic*, London 1987, translated by Desmond Lee, pp. 316-325.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 317.

is supposedly drawn between interpretations formed on subjective assumptions about reality, and those founded on an objective process of recognition. In the simile, it is the freedom of one of the prisoners from his chains that overcomes this artificial division between appearance and reality. The "shadows" of reality that have been projected in the cave are then realized to be artificial impressions, in other words they are seen as inferior imitations of reality that the freed prisoner can clearly identify, once he has escaped the cave and is exposed to the 'true' nature of things.⁵²

The freed prisoner in the Platonic simile can be compared with Jaspers' interpretation of being in *Grenzsituationen*, since in these extreme circumstances subjective experience is apparently left behind by the individual, as worldly situations are transcended in order that their 'real' meaning can be understood. In Plato's simile, it is the ability to perceive a 'metaphysical' form of being that is taken as the 'real' or 'true' meaning of things; and the Platonic Idea is reflected in an existential interpretation of individual consciousness.

It is because of his adherence to Platonic thought that Jaspers was able to progress beyond emphasis on the existential context of his ideas; and to arrive at *das Umgreifende*, a concept not refined until the publication of the major post-war work entitled *Philosophische Logik*.⁵³ Jaspers completed only one volume of this project. It is perhaps not accidental that this volume, *Von der Wahrheit* (1947), which is related to understanding the notion of philosophical truth, also contains the existentially revised conception of his philosophy. Jaspers' later referred to *das Umgreifende* as: "Der Schlüssel zur Schlüsselkammer".⁵⁴ In other words, it may be considered as the key to understanding Jaspers' "post-existential" philosophizing. The concept remains within a Platonic field of reference, so far as it refers both to experience and the suggested experience of a field of reality within which Jaspers developed his thought. Hannah

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 318.

⁵³ See Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit*, Munich, Zurich 1991 (4th. edition).

⁵⁴ See Karl Jaspers' letter to Hannah Arendt, 17 April 1965, in: *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers Briefwechsel 1926-1969*, op. cit., p. 631; and with footnote to letter 374, *ibid.*, p. 822.

Arendt considered this concept as an important step beyond Jaspers' existential philosophy, but remaining faithful to the existential beginning in *Existenzerhellung*.⁵⁵

The significance of this beginning is that the existential dimension is used by Jaspers to "elucidate" the four conditions that he identified as circumstantial evidence of border experience. The specific criteria are those of *Tod, Leiden, Kampf, and Schuld*. Jaspers' grounding in Platonic thought suggested to him that in these situations, the individual is confronted with a need to connect pragmatic experience with a capacity for understanding what extends beyond the limits of experience. In other words, the individual must be able to reach beyond his own knowledge or experience, into an existential context that is regarded by Jaspers as a horizon within which to gain orientation. It is this stage of the method of "existential elucidation" that is confronted with the direct need to take history into consideration:

Man wird überall an die Grenzen geführt, um die äußersten Horizonte zu erreichen: Aus diesen Horizonten heraus werden uns Ansprüche fühlbar. Ein Rückstoß erfolgt des die Geschichte Sehenden auf sich selbst und seine Gegenwärtigkeit.⁵⁶

In his post-war analysis of historical epochs, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (1947), Jaspers showed that history has a direct bearing on philosophical ideas. An awareness that history created the need not only to consider, but to deal with consequences which arise from theoretical study meant that Jaspers' existential analysis was also compelled to take into account the force of historical time. This necessity is also related to his critique of Platonic thought, and in his book on Plato, Jaspers argued that the Platonic Idea was not exposed to history, but was envisaged as a timeless "truth" of eternal being.⁵⁷ To Jaspers, this sense of "timelessness" marked only one of the limitations of Platonic thought that prevented Plato from really developing a democratic

⁵⁵ See Hannah Arendt's letter to Karl Jaspers, 28 May 1948, *ibid.*, p. 148. Arendt wrote: "Das ist ein großes Buch und überall, wo man es zufällig aufschlägt, mit der gleichen klaren hellen Präzision geschrieben."

⁵⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg 1957, p. 256.

⁵⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Plato*, Munich 1976, especially on *Platos Grenzen*, pp. 74-82.

idea that could surpass the merely abstract notion that the 'philosopher ruler' can participate in political life. Yet if Jaspers had not followed Platonic thought, it is likely that his existential interpretation of history would not have emerged as it did: namely to envisage a field within which the individual might realize the unique chances of his own *Existenz*. In other words, his interpretation would not have implied the need to link pragmatism with idealism. The distinction made between *Situation* and *Grenzsituation* is related to the antagonism perceived between practical and theoretical approaches, a tension that appears more intended to establish a connection, rather than division between these two contexts.

The connection between these spheres is further implied by the ethical dimension of Jaspers' thought: worldly situations are different in quality to existentially enlightened circumstances. In contrast to the former situations, the latter conditions are assumed to acquaint the individual with the seriousness of choosing between life and existence; or between subjective opinion and objective knowledge. In "existential" situations the individual is confronted with choices that are essential not only to the quality, but to the continuity of life. This has a direct bearing on the practical aspect of an understanding of human consciousness, which as Sternberger has noted, derives from ethical consequences that are seen to arise in extreme conditions: ⁵⁸

[...] in seinem unvertretbaren Ursprung *ist jeder, was er ist, sich selber schuldig.* ⁵⁹

The idea of "guilt" is regarded by Jaspers as highly significant because it crystallizes all the diverse influences which his existential interpretation of border experience aims to account for. Guilt is a general condition that applies to all human experience; and because it applies to each individual without exception, it imposes an ethical responsibility on each individual to account for his actions. Jaspers' method of

⁵⁸ See Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

⁵⁹ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 214.

"existential elucidation" therefore "comes into its own" in relation to the discussion of "guilt", which is both an existentially significant concept, and through its connection with the sphere of individual action is further applicable to political life. In relation to guilt, Jaspers' method of "elucidation" needs to be paid further attention, not only in this interpretation of *Grenzsituationen*, but with reference to political implications that are studied later in this chapter.⁶⁰

An understanding of existential guilt implies a sense of isolation in which the individual may seek to learn more about his or her situation in relation to others. The desire for knowledge leads to this encounter with "otherness", so far as guilt implies the inner compulsion to examine individual motives for taking certain courses of action and not others, and to assess the effects of particular decisions for others. These aspects of guilt are infused in a description of three stages, a "three-tier" approach, which establishes the plausibility of an existential insight into the implications of guilt:

Die drei Sprünge gingen vom Welt-dasein angesichts der Fragwürdigkeit von allem zur *substantiellen Einsamkeit des universal Wissenden*, vom Betrachten der Dinge angesichts meiner notwendigen Teilnahme an der Welt des Scheiterns zum *Erhellen möglicher Existenz*, vom Dasein als möglicher Existenz zur *wirklichen Existenz in Grenzsituationen*.⁶¹

The process of transgression that is implied by the above statement about the method of "elucidation" seems to reach a crucial point at the intermediate position, where a threshold between life and existence comes to light. This stage involves what might be called a threshold experience, in the sense that the individual reaches a mental threshold that has psychological implications, derived from being apparently caught between experience and ideas. The significance of this situation is related to the mental activity needed to overcome the antagonism perceived between experience and ideas. A positive outcome of this antagonism is assumed to be an existential perception of this situation,

⁶⁰ See Section 3, pp. 94-123.

⁶¹ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 207.

but such an outcome is not necessarily compelling. If the final stage of "elucidation" is not reached, where the individual is supposed to leave behind a subjective view of this antagonistic experience, then the critical threshold cannot be perceived. In this case, an awareness of the restricting nature of subjective experience cannot be recognized; and there is little opportunity for the individual concerned to arrive at an objective assessment about the meaning of any antagonism that may have been experienced. However, if the final stage of "elucidation" is reached, the result is that the border as a critical threshold leads on to a fuller appreciation of individual existence:

[...] das *Werden der in uns möglichen Existenz*: wir werden wir selbst, indem wir in die Grenzsituationen offenen Auges eintreten. [...] Grenzsituation erfahren und Existieren ist dasselbe. [...] Die Grenze tritt in ihre eigentliche Funktion, noch immanent zu sein und schon auf Transzendenz zu weisen.⁶²

A crucial aspect of appreciating the meaning of existence is that in Jaspers' understanding of this term there appears to be no distinction observed between life experience and the realization of its existential context. Therefore, equal emphasis is placed on the importance of pragmatic experience and on an experience of transcendence. By transcending life experience the individual may encounter "otherness", so that the meaning of existence seems to be intrinsically linked to a heightened state of awareness about recognizing the validity of other attitudes to life. To the general observer, a solution to a particular problem may not be apparent. To the individual who compares a specific experience with other situations that may be of an antagonistic nature, a possible solution may be arrived at on the basis of comparing these two contexts with each other, so as to lead to the emergence of new conclusions.

The attempt made by Jaspers to define a connection between experience and thought was apparently in order that other approaches to understanding life may be included. Yet Jaspers' approach was criticized by Otto Friedrich Bollnow's analysis,

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 204.

Existenzerhellung Existenzerhellung und Philosophische Anthropologie.⁶³ Bollnow rightly observed that it is only when existential conditions have been identified that they appear applicable to the individual; and this necessitates following what Bollnow regards as Jaspers' "methodische Strenge".⁶⁴ In other words, Bollnow criticized this method of analysis because of its metaphysical leanings:

Jaspers entwickelt [...] seinen Begriff der Existenz gar nicht von ihrer ursprünglichen Erfahrung her, sondern - sehr bezeichnenderweise - im Zusammenhang der allgemeinen, theoretisch gestellten Seinsfrage.⁶⁵

What is meant by Bollnow's critique of the metaphysical basis of Jaspers' analysis can be further considered in chapter two, which studies in greater detail Helmuth Plessner's pragmatic interpretation of border experience.⁶⁶ Significantly, Bollnow was not prepared to entertain the possibility that experience and thought can be combined. In one sense his criticism is accurate, since Jaspers does not necessarily base his analysis on pragmatic experience alone, - what Bollnow would regard as "ursprünglich". However, because of the connection between pragmatic and idealized experience, it cannot be said that Jaspers only links his ideas to an abstract theory. It is therefore difficult, as Bollnow attempted, to criticize Jaspers' approach for being one-sided, or for being related only to abstract concepts, since it is the duality of Jaspers' method of analysis that enables him to perceive an existential category between experience and thought. Hence it becomes increasingly difficult to restrict an interpretation of Jaspers' method to one particular influence of experience or thought, without implicitly excluding the influence of the other

⁶³ See Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Existenzerhellung und Philosophische Anthropologie Versuch einer Auseinandersetzung mit Jaspers*, in: Hans Saner (ed.), *Karl Jaspers in der Diskussion*, op. cit., pp. 185-223. Bollnow's review emphasizes four different stages to Jaspers' "existential elucidation", a procedure which is interpreted as moving from lower to higher stages, *ibid.*, p. 197. However, this assessment considers "existential elucidation" from an anthropological perspective, so that what is envisaged by Jaspers to be a three-stage progression, is taken by Bollnow to imply four concrete steps (*Stufenbau*), which seems to overlook the final stages of intellectual objectivity and existential reflection as being themselves part of an existential experience.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 186.

⁶⁶ See Chapter II of this study, pp. 140-157.

element to his thinking.⁶⁷ To criticize the systematic basis of Jaspers' analysis seems to strike at the heart of the existential category of his thinking, yet such criticism only exposes further the difficulty of restricting an interpretation of Jaspers' theory to one particular aspect of its reasoning.

The reasoning behind "existential elucidation" may appear to imply a possible choice between the alternatives of experience and ideas that Jaspers' theory of *Grenzsituationen* identifies. In reality, the intention is not to posit a choice, but rather to concentrate on realizing the benefits that can accrue from an individual affinity for appropriating experience and knowledge. It therefore appears unjustified for Bollnow to criticize Jaspers' theory as self-limiting, thus implying that his ideas about existence have no direct connection with experience.⁶⁸ For his part, by merely adopting the opposite viewpoint, Jaspers was willing enough to defend his theory against such practical opposition:

Jede Gestalt des Sprunges wird zur *Abgleitung*, wenn die Gestalten ihre *Beziehung aufeinander verlieren*. Das wissende Selbstsein kann zur harten Egozentrizität des Unbeteiligten werden, zur Gleichgültigkeit des "so ist es" [...]. Das die Grenzsituationen erhellende Philosophieren kann [...] sich verschließen, und als ein bloßes Erdenken des Existentiellen ohne Bereitschaft zur Existenz schamlos werden. Eine unmittelbare Wirklichkeit der Existenz kann versinken in verwirrender Leidenschaft als radikales Erschüttertsein ohne Klarheit der Transzendenz.⁶⁹

To defend his theory with an attack on any objection to his existential philosophy because of a perceived failure to follow the logic of the analysis may appear unjustified

⁶⁷ See also Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Existenzphilosophie und Geschichte*, in: *Karl Jaspers in der Diskussion*, op. cit., pp. 235-273. Bollnow criticized the existential interpretation of history for putting the individual at the mercy of history, rather than suggesting that the individual can change or shape the course of history, the view that is apparently taken by anthropology: "[...] das Wissen vom unvermeidbaren Scheitern die Kraft zum Einsatz lähme und überhaupt dem tätigen Leben den Sinn abspreche [...]", *ibid.*, p. 263. This anthropological interpretation of history overlooks the ethical appeal of an existential context, as described earlier and suggested by Jaspers' idea: "Wir schaffen Situationen." See *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 202.

⁶⁸ See Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Existenzerhellung und Philosophische Anthropologie*, op. cit., p. 188: "[...] An diese Unmöglichkeit jeder bestimmten Aussage bleibt für Jaspers alle Existenzphilosophie gebunden."

⁶⁹ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 208.

on Jaspers' behalf. The criticism hardly seems to encourage others to follow his method of analysis, especially if it is because of an objection to reaching beyond pragmatic perceptions of reality that the analysis cannot be followed in the first place. Yet when Bollnow criticized the lack of practical value of Jaspers' approach to thinking, it exposed a lack of tolerance, or a lack of openness to developing thought patterns beyond a pragmatic understanding of reality. It exposed an unwillingness to recognize that Jaspers' method needs to be followed through the three different stages, - from experience of worldly situations, to a questioning of knowledge and experience -, in order to acquire more knowledge and to realize the full potential of the ideas. What occurs, therefore, in cases where pragmatic experience is not questioned, is the criticism of Jaspers' approach to thinking as elitist, or even aristocratic.⁷⁰ Perhaps these criticisms are an attempt at some sort of an apology that the method of analysis is too difficult to be followed, or alternatively, that without immediate practical value, this approach is worthy of being questioned.

It is important to note that Jaspers' method of analysis aims to arrive at a combination of theoretical questioning and practical activity. The reason for this is because the approach can be particularly helpful in situations where the individual is faced with the experience or knowledge of his own death, suffering, mental antagonisms or guilt. These circumstances are supposed by Jaspers to intensify our awareness about the essential quality of life. Such awareness supposedly arises in these kind of extreme circumstances, which place extra demands on the individual. Such experiences can stretch the potential of the individual to the full; and their relevance for Jaspers' theory of *Grenzsituationen* is that they can be regarded as an opportunity for an individual experience of the threshold that is thought by Jaspers to manifest itself between life and existence.

⁷⁰ See Norbert J. Schürgers, *Der Staat als Ort existentieller Selbstfindung*, op. cit., p. 232. See also Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

An experience of this existential threshold means that attitudes to life can be changed. Although the inevitability of death does not in itself constitute a threat to individual existence, an existential interpretation of death may be one way of dealing with life's essential meaning. Death is an absolutely subjective fact of life, so far as it firstly concerns the individual; and yet death cannot be experienced in any absolute sense. When seen in an objective light, individual mortality may not mean an absolute ending to existence.⁷¹ Jaspers argued that subjective perceptions about death condition our reactions to the idea of our mortality, for if human beings were immortal, or life were an endless possibility, death would signify a radical end to all being.⁷² A transformation of individual attitudes is what is apparently needed to overcome subjective worries about death. Such worries are inevitably intensely involved in dealing with the physical necessities for life. However, whether the reality of death can be transformed by an existential interpretation of mortality depends on whether the individual appreciates the idea that the end of individual existence is not an absolute ending to all life.

As has been seen, Jaspers' interpretation of border experience draws on Plato's conception of *eidos*, which can be described as the unchanging form of reality.⁷³ The possibility of a change in circumstances through time is seen to be relevant to individual existence, but only when change arises from action to overcome the historical situation that the individual is in. There is no suggestion that Jaspers intended an ontological interpretation of Platonic thought. Jaspers objected to ontology as an absolution of existential involvement, which if accepted, would imply that life is not part of a historically experienced reality.⁷⁴ The importance of our individual mortality is that it

⁷¹ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 222.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 220f.

⁷³ See Max Müller, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart*, Heidelberg 1964, p. 18: "Eidos bedeutet die feste, bleibende Gestalt, den währenden Umriß, der sich durch alle Veränderungen der Zeit und durch alles Werden nicht fortreißen läßt." The incorporation of time into existential philosophy - following what Jaspers terms *prima philosophia* of Aristotle, the connection of *eidos* (eternity) with *ontos* (time) - overcomes the Platonic Idea of a constant and unchanging reality.

⁷⁴ See Karl Jaspers, *Metaphysik*, Band III, op. cit., p. 160f. "Ontologie muß zerfallen. [...] Ontologie als Wissen und Wissenwollen dessen, was das Sein eigentlich ist, [...] würde für uns zur Vernichtung des eigentlichen Seinssuchens möglicher Existenz in der transzendenten Bezogenheit ihrer Entscheidung

sharpens an individual awareness of the quintessential meaning of life.⁷⁵ The perception of mortality as a threshold to life can transform the significance of this threshold into an existential one:

Kann der bedingungslose Lebenswille sich der Grenzsituation durch Vergessen nicht entziehen, so *formt er den Sinn des Todes als Grenze um*.⁷⁶

To work on changing the meaning of death, from that of specific meaning to a more objective observation about this reality, implies that the individual can alter the experience and perception of worries that are perhaps inextricably linked with the idea of one's own mortality. Jaspers argued that these worries (*Daseinsangst*) are transformed by the individual into *existentielle Angst*. It is this form of "existential angst" that is supposed to lead to a different perception of life that can lead to active resistance against death.⁷⁷ The idea of "existential angst" implies an intense awareness about the importance of preserving human life, but such awareness cannot entirely compensate for real worries about survival. Such worries may even be intensified because of a more radical apprehension of existential *angst*:

Der Tod ist nur als ein Faktum eine immer gleiche Tatsache, in der Grenzsituation hört er nicht auf zu sein, aber er ist in seiner Gestalt wandelbar, ist so, wie ich jeweils als Existenz bin. Er ist nicht endgültig, was er ist, sondern aufgenommen in die Geschichtlichkeit meiner sich erscheinenden Existenz.⁷⁸

Although there is obviously no ultimate escape from individual mortality, Jaspers implied that its meaning can be transformed if it is regarded as an existential border experience. The aspect of transformed understanding can be identified with regard to the

werden. Ontologie täuscht durch die Verabsolutierung von Etwas, wovon das Andere sich herleiten soll. Sie fesselt an objektiv gewordenes Sein und hebt Freiheit auf."

⁷⁵ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 211.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 224.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 225.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 229.

other experiences of suffering, mental antagonisms or guilt. Yet Jaspers' interpretation of these other conditions must still deal with the passage of time, because existence is perceived both in a historical context, as well as with the capacity to shape this context through individual actions. Hence to accept the idea of suffering because of the hope that suffering will come to an end of its own accord is assumed to be counterproductive. Individual action to minimize any destructive results of suffering is essential, especially if no end to suffering is in sight. It is not a question of whether to act, but when to act. ⁷⁹

Nevertheless, what appears to be a possible acknowledgement of the importance of time in any of the individual *Grenzsituationen* bears no relation to an aesthetic perception of time, since what Jaspers alluded to in these other *Grenzsituationen* is the need for communication. Moreover, his perception of any antagonistic situation that provokes in the individual the need to assert the right to a free existence does not resemble the Darwinian principle of the *Survival of the Fittest*. This principle is not existentially relevant, since it suggests there is no possibility to treat others as we would be treated ourselves. Jaspers' idea of conflict is that life is a potential battle amongst equals, since any disagreement or confrontation with others is also an inner confrontation with *self*:

Der Kampf sucht dieses Offenbarwerden auf dem *Weg über die Objektivitäten*. [...] sein Ziel ist nicht die allgemeingültige Richtigkeit, sondern die Wahrheit in der gegenwärtigen Situation als die des in dieser Kommunikation sich verwirklichenden Seins. ⁸⁰

Communication is regarded by Sternberger as another watchword of Jaspers' existential vocabulary. ⁸¹ In Jaspers' philosophy, genuine relationships are those established between individuals, who seek to argue or agree with one another on an equal footing: "'Kommunikation', das meinte eine Beziehung zwischen einzelnen Menschen - immer zwischen einzelnen, und eigentlich nur zwischen zweien, von 'Existenz' zu

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 232f.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 243.

⁸¹ Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

'Existenz' [...]".⁸² The problem with this ideal of existential communication is that the kind of unequivocal openness it implies is particularly difficult to appreciate when the need is not seen by others. This highlights one problem of *Grenzsituationen* that Bollnow rather unsuccessfully alluded to, when he criticized the lack of practical relevance of Jaspers' analysis. It is not that *Grenzsituationen* are divorced from practical experience, but that they are theoretical examples of extreme circumstances, whose specific significance may be difficult to communicate to others who have never experienced situations of death, suffering, conflict or guilt. The meaning of guilt can be readily communicated to others, since it is directly attributable to individual actions, and as has been indicated, guilt represents an original condition, applicable to everyone, and perhaps most readily known in the context of original sin.⁸³ What is difficult to ascertain, however, are the psychological implications of guilt, as well as the psychological implications of the other *Grenzsituationen*, which can only be appreciated in a specific context related to the individual involved.

Jaspers' own recognition of the psychological aspect of *Grenzsituationen* seems to have been invested in his consideration of the problem of antinomy, which suggested to him that there can be no resolution of existential consequences. What Jaspers recognized was that he could only reiterate, albeit in a modified form, what Kierkegaard knew: that it is impossible to achieve one goal, without excluding an undesired side-effect of having reached it. The situation is not so much paradoxical, as offering evidence of a dilemma that emerges because of the human ability to reason, for thought challenges the individual's ability beyond the bounds of familiar experience. Moreover, Jaspers suggested that individual existence cannot avoid an experience of those antagonistic situations of guilt, suffering, mental conflict and ultimately the knowledge of death. Yet he supposed that these situations can be explained because of irreducible discrepancies that are seen to arise in relation to the problem of antinomy:

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 246f.

Die Grenzsituationen von Tod und Leid, von Kampf und Schuld zeigten einzelne Antinomien; ihr Gemeinsames wird in dem Gedanken von der antinomischen Struktur des Daseins begriffen.⁸⁴

Whereas Jaspers rejected the plausibility of generalizing about existence, he did not rule out entirely the possibility of generalizing about life experience. This is because his ideas about life are intended to leave the onus of responsibility for decision-making firmly with the individual. The nature of existence is such that Jaspers felt compelled to expose the implausibility of absolute knowledge about the meaning of human understanding and its real conditions. A conviction that it is ultimately impossible to generalize about the individual nature of experience seems to have informed his description of the existential context. Moreover, this conviction explains the principles which define the category of existence in Jaspers' thinking. These principles are described in Jaspers' exposition of the meaning of border experience as it has been studied in this section of the chapter. In summary, on the basis of these principles Jaspers posited what may be called an existential dilemma: the dilemma was that of reconciling the experience with the knowledge of being in any antagonistic situation. The fact that Jaspers perceived an ethical framework to this dilemma was because he saw that progress follows on from the responsibility of each individual to mould attitudes and behaviour according to his or her experiences. The practical consequences of this responsibility can be studied later in this chapter, but they are related to an appeal which is embedded in Jaspers' method of "existential elucidation": to emphasize the unique experience of individual existence, whilst enquiring into the purpose of life in its most critical existential border situations.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 250.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 253.

2. Psychological Thresholds: Jaspers on Kierkegaard

Jaspers' method of analysing the general context of life experience, in order to proceed to a particular appeal addressed to the individual in an existential context, may be understood in the light of his interpretation of one of the first cursory discussions of border experience. This discussion was published in 1843, written by the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard whose work, *Either/Or*, might be said to epitomize the meaning of border experience.¹ The implications of this formula, "either-or", play a pivotal role in this enquiry, since what the expression suggests is a choice between ethics and aesthetics. At the same time, recognition is made of a mutual affinity which connects the ethical view of things with the aesthetic view. Although a general account of such an affinity appears to be given in Kierkegaard's discussion, the debate that takes place is specifically an argument about whether the ethical or aesthetic way of life are really harmoniously disposed to one another, so that Kierkegaard's work can be regarded as an aesthetic discourse about what it means to be in a dilemma.² The nature of this dilemma only becomes clearly visible during the course of the reported argument, so that it is important to consider the work in its own right, rather than only Jaspers' appraisal of it.

The alternative perceptions that were outlined in Kierkegaard's examination of 'borders' will still be considered in the context of Jaspers' ethically founded existential philosophy, for the basis of this philosophy is partly derived from a study of

¹ See Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or Part I-II*, ed. and translated by Howard V. Hong/ Edna H. Hong, Princeton 1987. Since this text is unabridged, it is used as the main source of reference. However, Alastair Hannay's translation, in its abridged form, gives pertinent alternative translations. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, translated by Alastair Hannay, London 1992.

² See Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, London 1982. This monograph covers the extensive range of Kierkegaardian thought, which Hannay has roughly considered in terms of Kierkegaard's religious, aesthetic, philosophical, and psychological writing. Amongst this group, *Either/Or* is classified as an example of Kierkegaard's aesthetic writing. However, being chiefly concerned with Jaspers' ideas on Kierkegaard, this study cannot hope to take into consideration the vast range of Kierkegaard's other work.

Kierkegaard's exposition of what is involved in determining the relative validity of ethics and aesthetics. Jaspers' existential philosophy can be regarded as an implicit critique of Kierkegaard's work, since Jaspers excluded the relevance of an aesthetic viewpoint from his ethically inspired view of human existence. Incidentally, Kierkegaard's work did not influence Jaspers until after the turn of the century when the first German translation of *Either/Or* and of Kierkegaard's other writing became available.³ Moreover, the ethical framework of Jaspers' view of existence did not immediately follow on from an acquaintance with Kierkegaard's ideas, since Jaspers first concentrated on the psychological significance of human experience. As has been indicated in the preceding section of this chapter, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, focused on the psychology of different views and opinions.⁴ Jaspers first regarded Kierkegaard's contribution to his own ideas as a "verstehende Psychologie", by which is meant Kierkegaard's far-reaching exposition of the individual's capacity to endure mental torment and suffering.⁵ The problem of individual suffering was thought by Jaspers to pose ethical questions and place demands on the individual for practical action to change the extreme nature of suffering.⁶ In *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Jaspers gave what could be considered a "pre-existential" interpretation of Kierkegaard's idea of suffering: "eine Synthese von Objektivem und Subjektivem, Allgemeinem und Individuellem, Zufälligem und Notwendigem, Gegebenem und Gewolltem." ⁷

What Kierkegaard achieved, according to Jaspers, was a form of "synthesis" between different aspects of life's inevitable and unpredictable meaning. Yet the term "synthesis" already seems to posit Jaspers' own idea of a critical threshold between thought and experience, so as to imply mutual affinities between the different aspects of

³ See *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Michael Theunissen/ Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main 1979. See Karl Jaspers on *Kierkegaard (1951)* in: *Rechenschaft und Ausblick, Reden und Aufsätze*, Munich 1958, pp. 137-157. Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* was first published by Insel Verlag in 1904; and an edition of his collected works appeared in 1909, *ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴ See Section 1 of this chapter, p. 54.

⁵ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

⁶ See Section 1 of this chapter, p. 71.

⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

life's challenges and their inclusion within an ethically determined conception of existence. The suggestion that mutual affinity means "synthesis" presupposes that each quality of life and existence is implicitly reflected in the other; and that perhaps the perception of one aspect leads on to the experience of the other. The idea seems "pre-existential" so far as "existential elucidation" was shown to be based on an understanding of 'border consciousness' *per se* as an affinity with "otherness", - this affinity may constitute an exchange of ideas and experience with other individuals, or it may mean an experience of other forms of knowledge. ⁸

The idea of "synthesis" in Kierkegaard's work might best be understood as a threshold that has psychological implications. This means retaining, albeit in a modified form, the idea of the threshold between life and existence, as it was already understood with reference to Jaspers' definition of existential border experience. In *Either/Or*, the idea of a threshold implies both the perception of a mutual affinity between opposing views, as well as antagonisms arising because of the differences. There is not necessarily an innate combination of the two opposing ethical and aesthetic life-views, such as suggested by the term "synthesis". The rivalry that develops between the two speakers in *Either/Or* is representative of a conflict between an aesthetic and an ethical approach to life, as well as harmony being struck between these two approaches. From the description of the conflict between the opposing sides of the argument, "either-or" implies a choice, but "synthesis" is not necessarily a compelling feature of Kierkegaard's interpretation. If he concentrated on a description of a threshold as one of acute psychological pressure, he implied that an experience of this pressure itself manifests a form of border experience. The psychological implication of 'borders' was therefore that

⁸ In *The Human Condition*, op. cit., Hannah Arendt gave a useful illustration of the "curious quality" of "otherness", p. 176. Arendt observed that otherness is one of the "universal characteristics of Being, transcending every particular quality." Ibid. It is this "other worldly" aspect, to which Jaspers alluded, which is also implied by the concept of "existence". Although this implication can rarely be grasped in a tangible sense, this crucial aspect of Jaspers' existential philosophy becomes more tangible when it can be linked to what Arendt called "human distinctness": "In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness [...]", ibid. Jaspers, too, suggested that human difference, as explained by the capacity for rational thought, is part of individual distinctness that makes each individual life into a unique state of existence, which is truly worthy of examining more closely.

they involved the strain of trying to counteract and balance the different opinions that are held by ethical, aesthetic, as well as ultimately religious views. These different views are reflected in the pattern of *Either/Or*: an aesthetic way of life is set against a contrasting ethical view, but only for the entire debate between these life-views to be referred to as a consultation with a lesson from the Bible. The closing reference to the religious implication of the argument between the two speakers in the debate suggests that no "synthesis" is perceived by Kierkegaard, but that this term is indeed more applicable to the nature of Jaspers' own existential ideas.

The religious aspect of *Either/Or* cannot be taken into account until the end of Kierkegaard's study of 'borders', where this aspect is added in the form of a postscript, which could be seen as a 'last-ditch' attempt to resolve the conflict and pressure for consensus that the clash of views at the imagined threshold between them has brought forth.⁹ Kierkegaard did not describe a method of "elucidation" with regard to border experience. His work offers us a description of what can occur if opposing views come into real conflict with one another. His description of this experience led to an example of the style of aesthetic philosophy from which Jaspers distanced himself. The literary dexterity with which Kierkegaard treated his subject matter was rejected by Jaspers in his own existential interpretation of life, where aesthetic experience is regarded as leading to the subjective contemplation of Beauty that cannot necessarily have significance for Jaspers' thought. Aesthetics seems only relevant to Jaspers, so far as it is treated as a mental condition that has pathological implications. Indeed, because of Kierkegaard's reflection of suffering, Jaspers first regarded Kierkegaard as relevant to his pathological study, *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913).¹⁰ Jaspers' essays on Strindberg and van

⁹ See Michael Theunissen/ Wilfried Greve (eds.), *Existenzphilosophie*, in: *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, op. cit., pp. 62-76, here p. 63. The religious dimension of Kierkegaard's work is not relevant to Jaspers' "existential elucidation"; although this is not to say that in his later work Jaspers did not take religion into account as a form of "otherness" with "metaphysical" significance. Particularly in the post-war period, Jaspers wrote on the significance of religion, see further Karl Jaspers, *Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung*, Munich, Zurich 1948.

¹⁰ See Michael Theunissen/ Wilfried Greve (eds.), *Existenzphilosophie*, op. cit., p. 64f. It is observed in this essay that Kierkegaard is not mentioned in the 1913 edition of *Allgemeine Psychopathologie*,

Gogh (1922), and his later introduction to Nietzsche (1936), are further examples of his study of pathological aspects of experience.¹¹ Saner has documented Jaspers' distanced affinity with art and literature: contemporary art is supposed to have culminated in the work of Toulouse-Lautrec and van Gogh; and literature was supposed to have ended with Dostoevsky and Strindberg.¹² Art is, nevertheless, considered relevant when it has some metaphysical value, not because of aesthetic considerations, but for its expression of thought.¹³ Despite a lack of close affinity with art, Jaspers did respect Kierkegaard's literary genius, which he saw as one of the reasons for this author's philosophical significance.¹⁴

Whereas Jaspers' "existential elucidation" describes a philosophical method, as it seems to follow on from *Either/Or*, it is apparent why this method did not lend itself to a philosophical system. Kierkegaard had already suggested that there was no possibility of finally resolving differences between opposing perceptions of reality; and therefore that there is no real possibility for an absolute interpretation of life. Nevertheless, if a study of Kierkegaard's work did not imply a system-based approach, Jaspers did work towards a connection of alternative views. The synthetic connection he developed is reflected in the existential category of his thought that depends on a systematic approach to dealing with other influences that affect human experience and consciousness. In *Either/Or*, the sense of inner suffering comes from the lack of synthesis that can be achieved at the mental threshold between ethical, aesthetic and religious perceptions of life. It is from the incidence of psychological pressure that Kierkegaard traced the

(possibly because Jaspers was newly acquainted with his work), however, by the fourth edition (1946), Kierkegaard is included, because of the psychologically conscious part of his work, *ibid.*, p. 101.

¹¹ See Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, *op. cit.*, p. 76. (See further, Karl Jaspers, *Strindberg and van Gogh*, translated by Oskar Grunow, David Woloshin, Arizona 1977; and *Nietzsche Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*, Berlin 1947).

¹² Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹³ See Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-124. Jaspers *Notizen* show that he did read and value the work of Ernst Jünger, whom he considered to be more of a philosopher than an author, see *Notizen zu Heidegger*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁴ See Karl Jaspers on Kierkegaard (1951), *op. cit.*, p. 137f.

dimensions of border experience: an ever-revolving inner conflict between ethics, aesthetics and religion that apparently makes the underlying character of border experience into an aesthetic whole. If the term "synthesis" is to apply to Kierkegaard's understanding of one of the essential consequences of 'borders', this supports the need for a further discussion of their aesthetic implications, since their harmonizing quality may also be derived from the contemplation of life not only from the existential viewpoint, but through the aesthetic perception of reality.¹⁵

Kierkegaard suggested that literary reflections about experiences are another way of gaining an insight into reality from a 'metaphysical' perspective. This quality of the aesthetic standpoint may moderate the sense of perpetual conflict arising from Kierkegaard's exposition of a psychological threshold between conflicting opinions, but Jaspers' approach appeared to leave out aspects of aesthetic and religious significance. What Kierkegaard's work observed is that an ethical view of things is virtually obliged to take into consideration other needs, such as in the discussion of aesthetic and religious ones. An attempt to reflect these three dimensions as being of equal importance in relation to one another suggests that there are different tolerance levels in each of these three cases that are only perceived through the experience of a threshold between them. The idea of a threshold seems to have suggested to Kierkegaard a further problem of including these different ways of looking at life, but without ruling out the significance of any one particular point of view. Such an intent can also be represented by the experience of a dilemma, especially where different tolerance thresholds attached to opposing views seem incompatible with one another. The real dilemma amounts to the difficulty of overcoming the presumption that, purely on the basis of difference, conflicting approaches to life cannot be complementary to one another. A dilemma in this sense offers us another example of border experience. In order to describe the

¹⁵ Reference is made to Part II of this study on *Literary Transformation*, where the significance of an aesthetic interpretation of border experience is discussed in greater detail.

psychological aspect of such a dilemma, Kierkegaard resorted to a literary pseudonym, which is the adopted style of most of his philosophical writing.¹⁶

The use of the pseudonym may intend to conceal the subjective aspect of an aesthetic viewpoint, but nevertheless, it is subjective contemplation that forms the content for the problems under discussion in this half of Kierkegaard's study. The "either-or" connection between the two parts of Kierkegaard's work has autobiographical implications that may be relevant to understanding this work and therefore cannot be entirely overlooked.¹⁷ After breaking off his engagement with Regine Olsen, Kierkegaard travelled to Berlin, which he visited in subsequent years, and studied philosophy, at first, attending Schelling's lectures.¹⁸ As a student of theology, too, Kierkegaard completed examinations to enter the priesthood, but could not commit himself to this calling.¹⁹ Aspects of these autobiographical details seem to recur in the content of *Either/Or*. However, because of the use of the pseudonym, these aspects of autobiographical significance can only be surmised to be of further relevance to interpreting Kierkegaard's text.²⁰

In *Either/Or*, it is the pseudonym, Victor Eremita, who assumes the role of "editor" of the two parts of a work that contains the papers of the aesthete, referred to only as "A", and the ethicist, referred to as "B", but known as judge William. Apparently, a choice is to be made between the views put forward by these speakers. William's letters take the form of a plea, to attempt to dissuade his young friend from following what

¹⁶ See also Wilfried Greve, *Das erste Stadium der Existenz und seine Kritik Zur Analyse des Ästhetischen in Kierkegaard's 'Entweder/Oder II'*, in: *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, op. cit., pp. 177-215, here p. 177f.

¹⁷ The autobiographical background to this work seems to arise in relation to Kierkegaard's own experience of mental torment that caused him to break off his engagement with Regine Olsen, for reasons that are subsequently explored, albeit in a veiled manner, in the aesthetic writing that followed soon after this break. See Michael Theunissen/ Wilfried Greve (eds.), *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁸ See Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁹ See Michael Theunissen/ Wilfried Greve (eds.), *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, op. cit., p. 18. See also Karl Jaspers on *Kierkegaard (1951)*, op. cit., p. 144.

²⁰ See Michael Theunissen/ Wilfried Greve (eds.), *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, op. cit., p. 19. The view is also put forward that the use of pseudonyms lessens the effect of "subjective thought" that Kierkegaard seems to rely on, *ibid.*, p. 16.

appears to be a life of contemplation and pleasure.²¹ Jaspers may not have seen the need to incorporate into his ideas the different aspects of 'borders' that Kierkegaard considered, but he was aware of the different perspectives that could be taken on the border theme:

In den Pseudonymen, unter denen Kierkegaard die meisten seiner Werke veröffentlichte, dichtete er Denker, die er ihre Positionen vortragen läßt, - den Ästhetiker in seiner souveränen Ungebundenheit beim genießenden Ergreifen aller Möglichkeiten des Lebens und des Geistes, - den Ethiker in seiner wohlgegründeten sittlichen Verwirklichung als Ehemann und Bürger, - den Religiösen als den Erschütterten, der die Forderung Gottes hört, vor der das Ästhetische suspendiert wird.²²

Moreover, Jaspers' interpretation of Kierkegaard seems to follow what Kant had implied about aesthetic study in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*: art form is only "artificial", since its effect is dependent on what Kant implied was the "schöner Schein" of aesthetic Beauty.²³ Kant had implied by his understanding of aesthetics that this mode of study cannot only be concerned with metaphysical questions. Kierkegaard's use of the pseudonym may appear to confirm what Kant (and Plato) had implied: namely that art uses a cloak of aesthetic appearance to pretend to a metaphysical insight into reality, which is not based on the discipline of thinking, but on the ability to play with ideas or to contemplate subjective experience. Whatever the philosophical implication of an aesthetic approach to border experience, Jaspers did recognize that the use of the pseudonym in *Either/Or* was a sign of the literary dexterity that enabled Kierkegaard to offer his penetrating analysis on literary, ethical and religious questions. The underlying reason for using a pseudonym seems to be based on the need to offer an objective analysis of the threshold envisaged between ethical, aesthetic and religious opinions.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 57f.

²² Karl Jaspers on *Kierkegaard* (1951), *op. cit.*, p. 138.

²³ See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Werke Band 8, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 404f, *Schöne Kunst ist eine Kunst, sofern sie zugleich Natur zu sein scheint*. In part two of this work, E. G. Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue takes up the idea of a connection between art and metaphysics by attempting to disprove what Plato had criticized in the *Phaedrus* as the irrelevance and unsuitability of art and literature to achieve metaphysical insights into reality, see Part Two of this study, Chapter I, Section 1, pp. 188-189.

Since the pseudonym is able to express the meaning of these different views in an apparently objective manner, without becoming further involved in the debate, *Either/Or* provides an extensive exposition of 'borders' because it suggests that literature does not only depend on subjective impulses. Therefore, it cannot be assumed, as Jaspers implied, that aesthetics is an invalid form of representing life experience because it can only explore the subjective aspect of individual experience. A limitation of Jaspers' interpretation of *Either/Or* may be that he selected only one possibility from this exposition, that is, the ethical approach to life. However, this selection is in keeping with Jaspers' Platonic and Kantian background. It is this background which Jaspers intended to preserve in his existential philosophy:

Vor Jahrzehnten habe ich von Existenzphilosophie gesprochen und damals hinzugefügt, es handle sich nicht um eine neue, nicht um eine besondere Philosophie, sondern um die eine, ewige Philosophie, der für einen Augenblick des Verlorenseins an das bloß Objektive der Kierkegaardsche Grundgedanke als Akzent gegeben werden dürfe.²⁴

As Jaspers saw it, the task of the thinker is to interpret and pass on the basic philosophical ideas that date back to Plato and the Greeks. Kierkegaard's contribution is to be regarded as part of this fundamental philosophy. As far as Jaspers was concerned, Kierkegaard's work is significant where it discusses the ethical aspect of choice. It was not a literary-philosophical combination that enabled an existential connection to be identified by Jaspers, but the predominantly ethical perception of reality that establishes a framework for describing the category of existence. To find a plausible balance between ethics and aesthetics was the problem implied by the formula "either-or". This problem becomes a question of experiencing the best of all possible worlds. An ethical approach is put forward as one way to deal with this question. However, for an aesthetic life-view, this approach only intensifies the preference of not taking the initiative and challenging one's own opinions or beliefs. The optimum balance between these two possibilities depends upon a realization that the choice of one alternative cannot detract

²⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Vernunft und Widervernunft in unserer Zeit*, Munich 1950, p. 49f.

from the ability to experience the other. Yet by striving towards this unity of purpose, a sense of antagonism arises, which was later defined by Jaspers as an example of one aspect of human existence. Kierkegaard already seems to have expressed the possibility of existential situations, such as conflict, suffering, and as will be seen later, guilt, by articulating an ethical appeal:

If you cannot manage to see the esthetic, the ethical, and the religious as the three great allies, if you do not know how to preserve the unity of the different manifestations everything gains in these different spheres, then life is without meaning and one must completely agree with your pet theory that of everything it can be said: Do it, or do not do it - you will regret it either way.²⁵

The dilemma that is exposed appears to be an element of indecision of how to choose between a responsible life, as outlined by the ethicist, or a Romantic approach to life, as represented by the aesthete. The formulation of an appeal to the aesthete to abandon this approach to life and take up more responsible attitudes and behaviour becomes a quest to preserve continuity between the two different approaches: an aesthetic way of life is seen by the ethicist to hinder continuity between the views, by such revelling in the moment as causes it to be noted as "hedonistic".²⁶ The particular point where it might be possible to switch between these alternative outlooks on life invokes a mental conflict, which arises from the attempt to maintain a sense of balance between the views. It is this area between opposing viewpoints that Jaspers defined in his method of "elucidation", where at a critical threshold between life and existence, he suggested a combination of opposing aspects might be realized. The idea of "synthesis" appears applicable to the ethical framework of Jaspers' reasoning. With regard to Kierkegaard's interpretation of border experience, the synthetic quality appears to apply only in relation to the aesthetic contemplation of life.

²⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Esthetic Validity of Marriage*, in: *Either/Or A Fragment of Life*, (Part II), ed. by Victor Eremita, (Containing the Papers of B, Letters to A), op. cit., p. 147.

²⁶ See Wilfried Greve, *Das erste Stadium der Existenz und seine Kritik*, op. cit., p. 186.

As far as a comparative view of 'borders' is concerned, Jaspers considered the idea of the 'border' in a similar way to Kierkegaard: a threshold from which ideas may be brought into contact, or conflict with other aspects of experience or knowledge. Both Kierkegaard and Jaspers perceived the border as an intellectual threshold; and both considered its experience to be within reach of the individual. Whereas the perception of an existential threshold between life and existence was considered by Jaspers to be attainable only from an ethical viewpoint, Kierkegaard suggested that both the ethical and the aesthetic viewpoint can be conducive to gaining an awareness of what is really involved in border experience. This "dualistic" insight into the meaning of the border motif is implied by the structure of *Either/Or*, which corresponds to a quintessential definition of border experience: a retrospective reflection of all the possibilities intended by the *either/or* definition. This expression seems to be a form of shorthand, which means that whatever the nature of differences between individual views, the difference itself must be observed, in order to achieve a full discussion of 'borders' and their meaning.

The shorthand version of border experience, as expressed by Kierkegaard's notion of "either/or", is so deeply embedded in the structure of his work that its intended harmonization of differences between two essentially opposing viewpoints might be overlooked because of the divisive implication of choice between the ethical and aesthetic life-view. The problem of choice is explored by writing under the pseudonym, because this technique can allow the level of reflection to be intensified, perhaps because of the impression of an objective representation of this debate.²⁷ *Either/Or* is supposedly a polemic against the aesthetic life-view. Yet the polemic is conducted more by proxy, or "second-hand" reflection, that is, the pseudonym's perspective adds a degree of impartiality to the discussion of subjective problems that are experienced both by the aesthete (A), and the ethicist (B). Such perception by proxy of the entire debate can at

²⁷ See Karl Jaspers, *Kierkegaard*, op. cit., p. 152. Jaspers noted that the use of pseudonyms offers more objective possibilities and fewer prescriptions, which avoids the pitfalls of absolute subjective interpretation.

least allow Eremita, as assumed 'editor', to organize the differences between the two approaches into a freely unfolding discourse. The irony is that although a choice appears to be posited between the two sides of the debate, the very act of choosing would itself obscure the equality between the viewpoints that the *either/or* formula is also meant to define. A dialogue seems to develop between the two sides, by virtue of the pseudonym's influence, so that each point of view can apparently be represented on equal terms, and not in a destructive atmosphere of defensive opposition.

The important message about choice relates to its quality, since for the individual concerned, any choice carries with it a burden of responsibility to be equitable and to balance carefully each alternative that presents itself. The choice in Kierkegaard's work is presented on the one hand in the form of a diary that contains the papers of the aesthete (A), which show the nature of this way of life, as exposed in a subjective account of particular experiences. On the other hand, the work is a separate exposition, compiled by Eremita from the letters of the ethicist (B), which provide a reasoned argument against the aesthetic approach to life. The fact that the two points of view have been 'organized' by an objective third party seems to allow the dialogue to develop in such a way as to confirm the validity of each side of the argument. In the dialogue, a threshold of tolerance is exposed, whereby each side contributes its own perception of this threshold, which is reflected in relation to the other. It is at the point of conjunction between the two views, namely at the threshold between them, that communication could take place between the entirely subjective views represented in the debate. However, in order for a consensus to be reached, an insight into the psychology of the situation is needed, so that the differences between the views can be understood in a rational manner and possibly resolved.

If the discussion of the thoughts and experiences of each side were meant to lead to a permanent disagreement, the pseudonym's influence invites an objective plea to the reader to consider both alternatives as equally valid approaches to support. The polemic that could have developed more fully in this debate is turned into an ironic discussion.

The debate turns to irony as the threshold that is exposed between the different views is not evidence of a clear choice between them, but of the psychological dimension to the debate. An insight into the mental state of the two life-views is the only viable means of resolving the antagonism between them. A sense of productive antagonism between an ethical and aesthetic perception of life was resolved by Jaspers' theory of *Grenzsituationen*, which may have intended to continue the polemic against Kierkegaard's aesthetic philosophy. Kierkegaard, however, leaves the polemics to his pseudonym, for the choice that is posited is so veiled as to leave the polemical account, to turn to an impartial representation of the two alternative views. The underlying aim of this discussion is to find harmony, or common ground between the two views:

What, then, is it that I separate in my Either/Or? Is it good and evil? No, I only want to bring you to the point where this choice truly has meaning for you. It is on this that everything turns. [...] Rather than designating the choice between good and evil, my Either/Or designates the choice by which one chooses good and evil or rules them out.²⁸

Can the ethos of individual initiative be entirely accounted for by the suggestion that life is essentially ethical? Jaspers argued that it could be, for he saw Kierkegaard's study of the ethical life-view, with its implicit plea for individuality, as a viable defence against aesthetic contemplation. Moreover, the diary entries in the *Diary of the Seducer* seem to confirm negative consequences of a life of endless contemplation.²⁹ The intention of such contemplation is not to peruse the philosophical meaning of life, but to prolong the enjoyment of life into eternity. Kierkegaard's aesthete exalts in the moment. This leads to the aesthetic involvement in a negative dialectic that seems to absolve this approach from the ethos of responsibility. The aesthete does not even perceive that this is a compelling part of reality, since he has not yet experienced the validity of his friend's approach. The aesthetic motto focuses on the significance of time as an eternal reflection

²⁸ See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality*, in: *Either/Or*, Part II, op. cit. p. 168f.

²⁹ See Kierkegaard, *The Seducer's Diary*, in: *Either/Or*, Part I, Containing A's Papers, *ibid.*, pp. 301-445.

of the moment, but ironically, without the significance of this moment having been appreciated: "[...] the true eternity does not lie not behind either/or but before it." ³⁰ In Kierkegaard's characterization, the ethicist foresees negative consequences of eternal contemplation, since an aesthetic way of life only concerns itself with imaginary, or "artificial" reflections. The ethicist claims that this approach, a life devoid of the imperative for individual initiative, will end in despair:

It has become apparent, then, that every esthetic life-view is despair, [...] You see, my young friend, this life is despair; if you conceal it from others, you cannot conceal it from yourself that it is despair. ³¹

The constant weighing of alternatives against one another suggests that the polemical nature of the argument is sustained, since the debate is left without any clear resolution. Not an existential connection between the two sides, but a melancholy affliction is seen as the consequence of too much contemplation. Melancholy, in this instance, could arise from the aesthete not having escaped the confines of his own subjectivity. In this case, the perception of the threshold between aesthetics and ethics is only by virtue of an ethical interpretation of harmony between these influences. The unity of purpose is therefore perceived to be reflected not in an existential idea of reality, but in the ethical view of the state of marriage. Jaspers saw it as ironic that Kierkegaard's ethicist defended the state of marriage as a unity of purpose between opposing motives and opinions, particularly given that Kierkegaard thought himself not able to fulfil the conditions that the married state would have imposed. ³² Yet the irony lies more in the specifically aesthetic understanding of events and experiences: the search for a sense of harmony through the subjective contemplation of Beauty is not realized in aesthetic terms. All that can be realized is an experience of eternity by prolonging contemplation of the moment. Moreover, the contemplation of harmony that is sought as an aesthetic possibility is actually realized by an ethical perception of an ideal state of existence, that

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Diapsalmata, An Ecstatic Discourse*, in: *Either/Or*, op. cit., p. 39.

³¹ See *Either/Or*, Part II, *The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical*, op. cit., p. 193 & p. 205.

³² See Karl Jaspers, *Kierkegaard*, op. cit., p. 144f.

is, the state of marriage. This state is supposed to include different aspects of aesthetic, ethical and religious meaning in a unified form.³³

If the ideal approach is to adopt some combination of both viewpoints, the ethicist seeks to support his perception of this ideal by putting forward a defence of the married state. This is seen as one means to overcome the difficulty that neither one of the views discussed in the debate can lead to a sense of unity, since when taken in isolation, one approach can only account for part and not for the entirety of life's possibilities:

My Friend,
What I have said so often to you I say once again [...] Either/or, *aut/aut*, for the introduction of a single corrective *aut* does not clarify the matter, inasmuch as the subject under discussion is too significant for anyone to be satisfied with just a part of it and in itself too coherent to be capable of being possessed in part. There are conditions in life in which it would be [...] a kind of derangement to apply an Either/Or, but there are also people whose souls are too dissolute to comprehend the implications of such a dilemma, whose personalities lack the energy to be able to say [...] Either/Or.³⁴

The crux of the matter is that an ethical understanding of life seems to allow for most of the different possibilities that present themselves to be chosen by the individual. The formula *either/or* expresses knowledge about the psychological implications of the conflict between ethical and aesthetic viewpoints. It alludes apparently to an intuitive knowledge that all possible alternative views and choices might be within reach of an individual's experience. Moreover, it is suggested that only by choosing both views put forward in this argument that the full potential can be extracted from life. The insight into the fact that there is a dilemma about which approach to adopt is exposed in this argument by the ethical viewpoint. However, the unity of purpose that is aimed for can actually be achieved because the ethicist succeeds in pointing out a possibility for harmony, which is attainable over and above the conflict of views. Life is partly seen as an ethical situation, because of the need to make decisions. At the same time, an ethical way of life can

³³ See Kierkegaard, *The Esthetic Validity of Marriage, Either/Or*, Part II, where unity is expressed as "concentricity", *ibid.*, p. 47 or as "a multiplicity of 'whys'", *ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁴ See *The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical*, *ibid.*, p. 157.

supposedly include the aesthetic viewpoint, by a sense of respect for the Romantic idea of marriage. ³⁵ Paradoxically, the Romantic viewpoint seems to be regarded as an underlying basis from which an ethical approach to life can draw its ideals. The ethicist merely tries to represent an awareness that Romanticism, if pursued as an end in itself, may be regarded as an affliction that verges on the state of melancholy. In this representation, however, Wilfried Greve sees Kierkegaard himself, who reflects through his pseudonym, judge William, his own reception of German Romanticism, such as he had studied in the ideas of Schelling, Schlegel and also in Hegel's dialectic. ³⁶ It is the underlying dialectic in operation between the two sides of the argument that can help to explain the aesthete's sense that there are endless possibilities waiting to be realized, but that the wait itself ultimately imposes a limit on realizing these different opportunities:

The more time that passes by, the more difficult it becomes to choose, for the soul is continually in one part of the dilemma, and hence it becomes more and more difficult to work itself free. ³⁷

Romanticism can lead to the opposite of a life of contemplation, if this life comes into permanent conflict with the need to reach decisions. When taken to extremes, a Romantic attitude to life could lead to an irresolvable dilemma between aesthetic and ethical needs that is merely prolonged by the progression of time. If pursued as an end in itself, the consequence of the Romantic approach to life is to perceive the passage of time as an experience of restriction or enclosure that confines the aesthetic view to subjectivity. The suggestion that the subjective contemplation of life is a form of self-limiting dialectic implies that the passage of time is ultimately to be regarded as an absolute constraint for this approach to life. In this case, the concept of irony is again applicable. What the aesthete aims to do is to distance himself, as time passes, from his own passive state of existence. In fact, the aesthete aims to achieve a life of contemplation by overcoming the force of time itself. A life of endless contemplation leads to a search for a release from

³⁵ See Wilfried Greve, *Das erste Stadium der Existenz und seine Kritik*, op. cit., p. 186, p. 196.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 187f., p. 208f.

³⁷ *The Balance between the Esthetic and the Ethical*, op. cit., p. 169.

the passage of time, but an absolute release from the flow of time is impossible to experience. The implication is that of a permanent state of psychological affliction, so far as the aesthete lives in opposition, not only to other views and attitudes, such as those held by the ethicist, but also in opposition to time itself. Time becomes the only way to reconcile subjective experience with the nature of reality outside of this experience.³⁸

As regards the aesthetic treatment of time, the structure of *Either/Or* is worthy of another observation. The form of this work is intended not only to bridge the gulf between the ethical and aesthetic points of view, but also to overcome this gulf by surpassing the conflict of opinion. While the ethicist perceives romantic motives as being infused in marriage, his appeal to the aesthete seems self-limiting, since the aesthete has shown himself not only hostile to, but possibly unaware of the fact that his life of 'immediacy' is already accounted for by living in the state of marriage. Although the partners in this dialogue do not appear able to overcome their differences, because they do not seem to perceive the validity of the other point of view, the argument between them can be rendered more tolerant by the influence of the pseudonym. If there were an irreducible conflict of opinion, *Either/Or* could be regarded as a subjectivizing account of border experience, of a nature which Jaspers' exposition of existential meaning necessarily regards as implausible. *Either/Or* does not merely describe in general terms a subjective narrative of individual experience, since it is itself balanced by an objective dimension that is reflected by the pseudonym.

The search for an objective account of 'borders' or thresholds leads to the concluding section which examines another aspect of experience, not yet considered relevant to this study. Kierkegaard's enquiry implied a further discussion of human experience in the context of religion.³⁹ This discussion might be regarded as a release from the constricting argument between aesthetic and ethical values. It seems to alleviate

³⁸ The aesthetic interpretation of time is considered in greater depth in Part Two of this study, see particularly Chapter I, Section 2, pp. 195-208; and Chapter III with reference to *Poetry on Boundaries*, pp. 278-292.

³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part II, *The Esthetic Validity of Marriage*, op. cit., p. 150.

the psychological affliction that emerges at the threshold between these two views. Yet religion may merely mean another way of evading the choice between ethical and aesthetic alternatives. To consult religious knowledge might also imply an underlying dogmatic framework that even belies the aesthetic interpretation of life. The religious aspect of Kierkegaard's interpretation derives its weight from the ideas that are lastly examined in the *Final Word* or *Ultimatum*.⁴⁰ This *Ultimatum* is described as the text of a sermon that has been sent to William by a friend who is now a priest in Jutland. The autobiographical implication of this biblical text implies a conflict of faith; and the point under discussion is whether or not to believe in a transcendent God. The discussion of this conflict is hardly to be regarded as an exposition of religious dogmatism, since even here, the inference is of a tolerance threshold between religion and other views. An alternative meaning of the threshold experience is expressed by Kierkegaard as an individual conflict with a sense of guilt for doubting the validity of religious belief. The sense of doubt that plagues the *Final Word* echoes Kierkegaard's own doubts about religion. However, since the pseudonymous structure of *Either/Or* is retained, there is no clear sign that it is meant as a reflection of Kierkegaard's life. The conflict with religious belief is built around the title: "The Upbuilding that lies in the thought that in relation to God we are always in the Wrong."⁴¹ The last section of *Either/Or* therefore concerns itself with what is proposed as the ultimate paradox: the validity of religious belief, and because of this, the difficulty of contradicting divine truth.

The implication of this closing section of *Either/Or* is that the individual is eternally caught within a dilemma, where the mere suggestion of contradicting the idea of a transcendent God makes the individual guilty.⁴² What is outlined, therefore, is a new

⁴⁰ *Either/Or*, Part II, *Ultimatum*, op. cit., pp. 334-354. This section is based on a study of the verses from Luke, 19: 41-8, in which the downfall of Jerusalem is predicted, and Jesus enters the temple, and ejects those buying and selling as though the temple were a market place, see also Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, op. cit., p. 62.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Part II, *Ultimatum*, op. cit., p. 346. (The translation of "upbuilding" might also be referred to as "edifying", as in for example the abridged translation by Alastair Hannay, *Either/Or A Fragment of Life*, London 1992).

⁴² Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, op. cit., p. 63.

conflict between reason and belief: rational thought needs to account for the possibility that religious truth is dogmatic, or perhaps intolerant towards other viewpoints, in the sense that it may not be contradicted. Since there is no way in which to argue against the validity of divine knowledge, against the existence of God, challenging belief would imply nihilism. The problem that Kierkegaard examined is whether religion can offer a resolution for conflicts of opinion, without compromising the teachings of divinity, but with some security of a compromise between ethical and aesthetic views within the context of faith:

Then we have only the choice between being nothing in relation to God or having to begin all over again every moment in eternal torment, yet without being able to begin, for if we are to be able to decide definitely whether we are in the right at the present moment, then this question must be decided definitely with regard to the previous moment, and so on further and further back.⁴³

The implication is that the persistent need to revise religious belief and opinion is too great a burden for the individual to deal with. Moreover, even questioning faith is suggested to make the individual guilty. As Jaspers noted, Kierkegaard's interpretation suggests that religion borders on the absurd, since it implied there is no means of questioning faith without being guilty.⁴⁴ And for Kierkegaard, the risk that such questioning involved does not seem to corroborate with his treatise: that the ideal is to exclude no possibility as a valid experience or opinion, but to include all of life's opportunities and differences. Ultimately, what is joined is a debate between religion and aesthetics, yet what is described turns into a never-ending discussion. Religious faith is likely to obscure the validity of aesthetic experience, unless of course, the aesthetic form of experience can be included in the unity of marriage:

In relation to God we are always in the wrong. But is not this thought anesthetizing; however upbuilding it may be, is it not dangerous for a

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Ultimatum*, in: *Either/Or*, op. cit., p. 346.

⁴⁴ See Karl Jaspers, *Kierkegaard*, op. cit., p. 140: "Für den Verstand ist der Gottmensch ein Paradox. Der Glaube ist absurd, daher nur zu vollziehen durch Knechtung des Verstandes. [...] (Die) Gottesoffenbarung ist indirekte Mitteilung. [...] Sie bedarf selber schon des Glaubens, um verstanden zu werden."

person? Does it not lull him into a sleep in which he dreams of a relationship with God that nevertheless is no actual relationship; does it not vitiate the power of the will and the strength of the intention? ⁴⁵

The dilemma between opposing views appears to be permanent, so far as it is right to assume that religious belief contradicts the validity of aesthetic experience, or that belief is by its nature "anaesthetizing". Moreover, the implication is that, even without reference to the religious aspect of life experience, the aesthetic and ethical viewpoints have not yet been reconciled. What is the significance of Kierkegaard's study? Jaspers suggested it was existential, since he regarded the legacy of Kierkegaard's thought as indicative of a connection between different views and opinions. To identify the nature of the connection between opposing views as existential, Jaspers thought it necessary to focus only on the ethical life-view. He particularly concentrated on the idea of guilt in a secular and ethically committed interpretation of Kierkegaard's ideas, but aspects of suffering and mental conflict were taken up from Kierkegaard's discussion of the psychological impact of a threshold that can be perceived because of the validity of alternative ethical, aesthetic and religious viewpoints. With regard to Kierkegaard's contribution to an understanding of border experience there remains the suggestion of an aesthetic philosophy to be considered. By incorporating different aspects of experience into an aesthetically understood form, the implication of the psychological aspect of the threshold of tolerance between different views is left open to interpretation. Hence, when Kierkegaard wrote in his *Final Word*, "only the truth that edifies is truth for you", Jaspers' response to this was to regard it as an ethical, not as an aesthetic, or religious appeal. ⁴⁶ And from this ethical appeal, an existential conclusion was drawn.

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Ultimatum*, in: *Either/Or*, op. cit., p. 363.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 354.

3. "Guilt" and accountability

The idea that an existential explanation of human experience and reality can apply to political problems, and specifically to the political division of Germany after 1945, leads us to consider Jaspers' post-war analysis of "German guilt", *Die Schuldfrage*.¹ Jaspers saw a distinction between the political consequences of guilt as such, and guilt as an existential problem. However, in order to understand the reasoning behind *Die Schuldfrage*, and its association with the historical division of Germany, it is first necessary to highlight an implicit connection between Jaspers' philosophical and political writing. In section one of this chapter, it was noted that Sternberger observed an underlying "ethical intimacy" inherent to Jaspers' existential thought.² Another way to regard "existential elucidation" is to treat it as implying a political philosophy, which means examining the "pre-existential" treatise, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (1931). This work is a useful guide, even a yardstick, for measuring the contribution of Jaspers' ideas on *Grenzsituationen*, as set against the analysis put forward in *Die Schuldfrage*, which is relevant to an understanding of the reasons for Germany's post-war division.³

Firstly, it is important to establish the nature of the connection between the political and purely theoretical dimension of Jaspers' thought. Norbert J. Schürgers suggested that this connection is existential in character.⁴ Sternberger, on the other hand,

¹ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage Von der politischen Haftung Deutschlands*, (new edition), Munich, Zurich 1987.

² See Chapter I, Section 1, p. 42.

³ See Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, op. cit. In his monograph, G.R. Carr suggested that *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* may be read as "a form of prolegomena to the *Philosophie*", see Godfrey Robert Carr, *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, op. cit., p. 55.

From Jaspers we know that he was asked to write *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, which was to be "das tausendste 'Göschchen-Bändchen'", see Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, op. cit., p. 71. The original title was supposed to have been *Die geistigen Bewegungen der Gegenwart*, but Jaspers changed this to his published title.

⁴ See Norbert J. Schürgers, *Der Staat als Ort existentieller Selbstfindung*, op. cit., pp. 220-236.

accentuated the ethical validity of Jaspers' thinking; and this view was supported in the last section of this chapter, where it emerged that the existential dimension of Jaspers' ideas depended on a kind of "inner" knowledge about ethical questions. Yet there are other elements to Jaspers' investigation of the ethical aspect of life experience. A discussion of these elements may shed light on why Jaspers treated political factors as already being embedded in the underlying existential nature of human experience.

Since Jaspers was concerned with analysing ethical matters, his theoretical view of life first emphasized the need to encourage the development of individual abilities to their full potential, - this was the rationale behind the phrase "*Wir schaffen Situationen*".⁵ His analysis of political problems shows an awareness of how ethical questions can affect political life. However, it is important to distinguish clearly between the purely existentially informed ideas and the political philosophy. In the former case, Jaspers saw the freedom of the individual as an ideal standard; whereas in the latter case, the focus was on the freedom of the individual in a political context. In each case, however, Jaspers made recourse to the ethical status of individual existence.

Schürgers did not focus sufficiently on the interconnection that has been indicated between the ethical and political validity of Jaspers' thought. In other words, he did not highlight enough the importance Jaspers attached to an ethical role for the individual in the realm of politics. In this realm, it is an individual's prerogative to take responsibility for initiatives. The prerogative for individual action substantiates an ethical connection between Jaspers' existential and political thought; and moreover carries greater weight than the existential dimension *per se*. This is not to say that in his committed analysis of German post-war politics, Jaspers abandoned entirely his existential beginnings. It is more the case that if the *existential* dimension is seen in isolation as establishing the grounds for a political philosophy, Jaspers' contribution to understanding political culture will be undermined. Schürgers attempted to claim that the existential dimension of

⁵ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 203.

Jaspers' thought is the only factor that illuminates our understanding of Jaspers' political writing. This encouraged the supposition that Jaspers treated the fields of intellectual thought and political practice as polar opposites. Moreover, Schürgers implied that this divisive approach marks a flaw in Jaspers' thinking that was never corrected, thereby concluding that Jaspers' ideas have nothing more to offer than a "pseudo-political philosophy", and that his work is devoid of political insight, so much so, that it resembles an "apolitische Theorie".⁶ These criticisms are moderated slightly by Schürgers' suggestion that Jaspers' thought bears the hallmark of a profound "dilemma": a political philosophy that claims to be of practical value, yet is not necessarily in a position to realize this aim, since the arguments that are developed are too closely related to abstract thought.⁷

The idea that Jaspers' work is caught in a "dilemma" is a valid description, but one that can be modified slightly by applying the qualification "existential".⁸ The identification of an existential dilemma with regard to the quality of Jaspers' thought may be seen to follow on from Kierkegaard's interpretation of 'borders'. In the preceding section of this chapter, Kierkegaard's analysis was seen to posit the experience of a dilemma if all possible aspects of life are to be realized. Whereas this idea of a dilemma could be envisaged more as an aesthetic problem about how to unite opposing views, the idea of a dilemma in Jaspers' thinking is related to his definition of the existential category. What Jaspers learned from Kierkegaard was that an existential dilemma is ethical in nature. In order to identify a positive connection between life and existence, Jaspers thought it necessary to acknowledge an ethical aspect to the extreme situations of death, suffering, mental antagonisms or guilt. The validity of the ethical dimension also derives from the imperative to act, or from the individual's prerogative for initiative to change the extreme nature of the existential situations. Yet the imperative for action also

⁶ Schürgers, *Der Staat als Ort existentieller Selbstfindung*, op. cit., p. 227.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 225.

⁸ The idea of an "existential dilemma" was also floated in the concluding part of section one of this chapter, see p. 73.

requires thought. Jaspers made the general assumption that each individual has the intellectual capacity to strive to reach a threshold, where the essential meaning of life is recognized, so that especially in extreme situations, action can be taken towards preserving the continuity of human life. The existential dilemma therefore implies a state of heightened awareness, or a more intense understanding of life's challenging conditions and the recognition that choice, in an optimal sense, may be made by the individual in a rational manner. Jaspers supposed that rational behaviour can be explained by an underlying ethical framework to individual existence.

Schürgers' interpretation of Jaspers' existentially enlightened philosophy was largely based on an examination of the pre-war treatise *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*. The intention was to place the existential category of Jaspers' thought in question, with the purpose of determining the validity of this aspect of thinking in its application to the political situation of Weimar Germany. Unlike Sternberger's revised opinion of Jaspers' treatise about the Weimar period, Schürgers appraisal remained sceptical. Sternberger had asserted that Jaspers' treatise was a critically valid indictment of its time, with such a perceptive prognosis of impending conflict that it reflected the period with great accuracy:

Ich übersah treffende prognostische Warnungen wie die, daß ein neuer Krieg möglich sei [...] Ich wunderte mich wohl über die Kühnheit, daß hier einer eine Simultanpartie gegen Marxismus, Psychoanalyse und Rassentheorie aufnahm.⁹

The content of Jaspers' "prognosis" is discussed after first noticing that both Sternberger and Schürgers have made the charge that in his assessment of life in the 1920s, Jaspers relied too heavily on abstractions. These are said to make it difficult to associate the work directly with the political situation in Weimar Germany, which it aimed to describe.¹⁰ The complaint about the abstracting tendency of Jaspers' political

⁹ See particularly Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit. See also *Jaspers und der Staat*, op. cit., p. 418.

¹⁰ See Schürgers, *Der Staat als Ort existentieller Selbstfindung* op. cit., p. 353; and Sternberger, *Jaspers und der Staat*, ibid., p. 418.

analysis also applies to his post-war publication *Die Schuldfrage*, but this work appears to have been generally misunderstood because of an uncritical association of an existential understanding of life with political elements. Admittedly, in Jaspers' thinking, the distinction between life and existence runs deeper than a straightforward link between his existential and political philosophy. Because of the complexity of the relation between the theoretical and practical aspects of his thinking, it is valid to maintain that the interconnection between these fields has more far-reaching implications. This is not to assert that *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* and *Die Schuldfrage* cannot be appreciated without being fully versed in the method that is at the heart of *Existenzerhellung*. Nevertheless, the charge has to be addressed that Jaspers' politically-oriented works are to be dismissed as too abstract. It is possible that a general lack of clarity prevails about the link provided by the centrepiece of Jaspers' thought, as described in *Existenzerhellung*, with the politically intended analysis.

The contribution made by the existential category of Jaspers' thought to his political writing is not so much that the ideas about human existence are too complex to be applied to an understanding of political culture. It is rather that these ideas establish a framework of reasoning that affords an alternative insight into political affairs. The theoretical element introduces an aspect of "otherness" that has already been identified as a working context for Jaspers' existential philosophy. What he intended to achieve by applying theory into political practice was to expose political matters to what might be called philosophical "truth". In other words, he aimed to measure worldly matters, such as represented by affairs of the political realm, against the 'otherworldly' realm of existence. So far in this study of border experience, existential philosophy has been seen within the context of the Platonic Idea about the essential, or "true" nature of reality. Jaspers' perception of the conditions of individual existence appears to amount to a paradigm for his ensuing analysis of political culture. The Platonic aspect to Jaspers' thinking helps explain the nature of his prognosis, not only about Weimar Germany, but also about Germany after 1945, such as it was given in the exposition of *Die Schuldfrage*.

Dolf Sternberger highlighted the Platonic aspect of Jaspers' philosophy by recalling that when he studied under Jaspers in the 1920s, there was little evidence of any overt political consciousness: seminars were concerned with purely philosophical questions, explored through interpretations of Hegel and Kant.¹¹ In Jaspers' reader, *Was ist Philosophie?*, he conceded that it was Hitler's dictatorship that marked the beginning of his active interest in politics.¹² It was only in response to the survival of dictatorship that, after the war, his thought clearly became politically committed. It is true that Jaspers' ideas only develop a clear affinity with politics after the short treatise written during and about the Weimar period, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*. Given that this treatise preceded by a marginal period of time the publication of *Existenzerhellung*, was it not inevitable that it would initially be more predisposed to abstract thinking rather than practical analysis?¹³ Hans Saner saw Jaspers' *Grenzsituationen* as illuminating when they are perceived as a paradigm for explaining the pattern of political life.¹⁴ This does not make the arguments put forward in *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* redundant. On the contrary, it rather suggests that *Existenzerhellung* should be read as informing the arguments in *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*. Furthermore, it seems that there is no essential rift between the method of analysis displayed by Jaspers' existential thought and that adopted by his critique of political life. It therefore becomes easier to appreciate how Jaspers' first post-war publication, *Die Schuldfrage* (1946), in continuing the approach adopted by *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, could be criticized by both Sternberger and Schürgers as too abstract. Was it not because of the abstract aspect of his reasoning that Jaspers was able to turn at all to an analysis of political matters? And does Sternberger not also define Jaspers' "ethical intimacy" within an intellectual context, thus allowing for

¹¹ See Sternberger, *Jaspers und der Staat*, op. cit., p. 418.

¹² Karl Jaspers, *Was ist Philosophie?*, op. cit., p. 26.

¹³ Jaspers in fact extracted parts of his *Philosophie*, so that all relevant sections could be integrated into the *Göschen* band: "Aus dem im Wachsen begriffenen Werk 'Philosophie' konnte ich nun alles herausnehmen, was sich auf die Gegenwart bezog [...]", see Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, op. cit., p. 72. He also delayed the publication of *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, which was ready much sooner than his *Philosophie*, so that the two works were published within two months of one another; the former at the start of October 1931 and the latter in December 1931, *ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁴ See Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 53.

the tendency to regard political problems as essentially ethical ones? ¹⁵ Whatever the case, Sternberger was open to the fact that Jaspers intended to explain political matters by looking into ethical aspects of these issues.

Schürgers, on the other hand, suggested that a resolution of what he saw as a "dilemma" between the theoretical and pragmatic aspect of Jaspers' thinking could be possible, if only the political weight of the ideas were purged of what he inferred was their "transcendental baggage". ¹⁶ This suggestion tends to oversimplify what the existential dilemma shows: an irreducible, yet productive connection between different elements of thought and experience. Equally, the aspect of antagonism between opposing ideas and interpretations of life was turned to productive use in Jaspers' philosophizing. Saner not only regarded the existential dimension of Jaspers' thought as an original contribution, but as a theoretical insight into life to which few of his contemporaries could lay claim. ¹⁷ What is meant, perhaps, is that the "existential" component is that part of Jaspers' thought that is based on an underlying connection between aspects of ethical and political significance. Hence, where Schürgers saw the actions of the individual as intuitively following existential motives, he did not question in sufficient depth the existential category of Jaspers' thought, since he overlooked the ethical aspect of individual initiatives that Jaspers studied in relation to the field of political practice.

This oversight can be illustrated by briefly referring to Jaspers' commentary on life in Weimar Germany, for as Jaspers saw it, the main problem at that time was the demise of the individual's ability to participate actively in a democratic state. There was a perceived absence of what Schürgers' called "existentielle Selbstfindung", that is, an atmosphere in which the pursuit of intellectual values could be carried out. The supposed intellectual vacuum manifested itself, in Jaspers' view, as a subtle divorce of power

¹⁵ See Sternberger, *Jaspers und der Staat*, op. cit., p. 419.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 353.

¹⁷ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit. p. 73 & p. 122.

between the majority and the state, with a corresponding shift of power away from the individual towards the state. Admittedly, whilst the political realm is studied in *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, it only appears as an expression of various abstract forms of reality, such as could also be studied in an economic, or sociological dimension.¹⁸ To Jaspers, the political implications of the division between the individual and the German state in the 1920s were only just visible. Indeed, although he was able to witness the beginning of a crisis of democratic consciousness, he owned not to have fully comprehended the significance of his observations.¹⁹ It was possibly the weakening of the liberal, bourgeois tradition in which he defined his own political identity that provided one motive for Jaspers' reflections about life in Weimar Germany.²⁰ Jaspers' political philosophy can be characterized as being in this liberal, bourgeois tradition. The expression of this tradition in his thinking has been criticized as "subjectivizing", "elitist" and even "Victorian" (Sternberger).²¹ These criticisms can be dealt with in their turn, but they derive from the attempt to define what drives Jaspers' approach to thinking.

What Schürgers regarded as a conflict between the theoretical and pragmatic value of Jaspers' ideas which he had not succeeded in resolving might also be analysed in a more positive light. By identifying the essential determining characteristics of an interconnection that Jaspers perceived between life and existence, his efforts to demonstrate the relevance of such an interconnection may be evaluated. Although Jaspers may well have placed undue emphasis on the importance of human existence, his approach is legitimate when it is recognized that his understanding of life in terms of existence was intended to draw our attention to the possible merits of perceiving a vital

¹⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁰ Jaspers described his intention behind *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, the title he had requested in preference to *Die geistigen Bewegungen der Gegenwart*, which was originally suggested to him: "[...] ich übersehe die Bewegungen nicht; ich weiß nicht, was im Ganzen geschieht. Ich kann nur die Situation und ihre Aspekte zeigen. Ich kann den Leser erregen, aufmerksam machen, sehen lehren, aber nicht eine historische Übersicht über die Gegenwart geben." See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, op. cit., p. 71f. In other words, only with hindsight are we really able to appreciate the historical value of Jaspers' ideas, since at the time of writing, he was only able to write about the situation as he perceived it, in an intellectual context, and not in an historical one, such as the original title would have implied.

²¹ Schürgers, *Der Staat als Ort existentieller Selbstfindung*, op. cit., p. 228. See Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

combination of pragmatic experience with knowledge, as opposed to their mutual antagonism or conflict. In this case, it is difficult to maintain that "existential elucidation" is a "subjectivizing" method, since this method purposely confronts an objective sphere of ethical values with the individual's subjective interpretation of these values. The nature of human existence seems to reveal a vital combination of a rationalized view of reality, such as manifested by the ethical status of existence, with the pragmatic considerations of daily life. Such an interpretation of the purpose of being is not intended to expose merely divisive aspects of experience and understanding, but to emphasize also the possibility of harmonizing differences. Moreover, although the complex relations between existence and ethical or political situations may be provided for in day-to-day life, this does not necessarily mean that an understanding of the conditions of existence will be perceptible to every individual.

In *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, Jaspers did not regard sociological, psychological or anthropological components as relevant to his study of life in terms of existence, despite the fact that previously in this work his ideas have been supposed to be open to other dimensions of thought. These other areas of thought were considered by him not conducive to developing an awareness of a specifically existential understanding of life: other ideas merely partake in a study of the individual as an object, that is, they seem incapable of taking into account the importance for theory of the individual's own opinions and experiences.²² In his consideration of aesthetic form, as has been shown, Jaspers took the opposite view: aesthetics could only focus on subjectivity, without reference to any objective thought, given the 'subjective' contemplation of Beauty. Godfrey R. Carr also pertinently observed that Jaspers "sees no community of intellect which might find expression in the arts, and their value for him seems to lie in the negative function of showing the horrors of an existence without values."²³ The values that Carr omits to mention are accounted for by the predominantly ethical basis of life

²² Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, op. cit., pp. 138-148.

²³ Godfrey Robert Carr, *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, op. cit., p. 61.

experience. Since ethical values, such as behaving and making choices in a responsible and rational manner, were perceived by Jaspers to carry more weight than the aesthetic nature of subjective contemplation, there is no reason to suppose that a productive coalescence of ethics and aesthetics does not exist.

Jaspers' concern to distance his philosophy from these other aspects of thought was not only intended to accentuate the dependence both on the subjective and objective dimension of his own ideas, but to concentrate on the inherent appeal to the individual to cope in a positive way with situations that involve ethical issues, such as death, suffering, mental conflicts or guilt. A positive attitude to these situations implies the individual will to take the initiative to overcome these specific circumstances. Yet such a positive element is a general assumption made in support of Jaspers' theory. It is possible that his negative reception of the ideas of Marx, Freud, and anthropological theory was because, in his view, these forms of study do not respect the ethical demands that can be placed on the individual in extreme circumstances. Jaspers' objection to the chief representative of sociological study, Marx, was that the implementation of Marxist theory led to an ideology of class struggle through an objectivizing treatment of history. Hence, even though Marx intended a society devoid of ideology or religion, the implementation of his theory led to the opposite result.²⁴ On Freud's psychoanalysis, Jaspers criticized what he saw as an exploitation of entirely subjective elements, such as dreams, un-conscious associations or individual failures into an objectivizing analysis that turned human beings into slaves of the un-conscious.²⁵ Yet the cultural implication of the subconscious, which Freud defined in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, is not reflected by Jaspers.²⁶ The objectivizing tendency which he regarded as inherent to psychoanalysis is virtually equated by him with the material interest of Marxist theory.²⁷ Furthermore, although he acknowledged the similarities between anthropological and

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 142f.

²⁶ See Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, pp. 63-129.

²⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, op. cit., p. 143.

existential study, anthropology was perceived to aim towards 'total solutions', thus being dangerously close to the racist theory which Hitler practised.²⁸

Jaspers' attempt to focus on the intellectual, as opposed to the political aspects of the early 1930s lead to two different perceptions of history: one that places the individual firmly within a political context; and one that defines the individual in an abstract world of ideas. These different perceptions of history imply practical and theoretical purposes, but the history of ideas is more illuminating in Jaspers' view of political life. Hans Saner held that Jaspers had the gift of explaining the ideas of other philosophers, so as to demonstrate the relevance of their work to his own life and times.²⁹ Jaspers called this a process of "Zeitkritik".³⁰ His underlying intention was perhaps also pedagogical, since history was to illuminate the lessons which still apply: "Nur im abstrakten Raum ist daher die geistige Situation von Staat und Gesellschaft eine allgemeine der Zeit."³¹ The idea that reality as such is manifested to the individual not only by way of experience, but in an abstract realm of ideas can be associated with Jaspers' philosophical approach to history. In other words, he regarded history in terms of philosophical ideas and theories, which are equally as important for understanding contemporary politics and society, as the historian's ability is essential to illuminate events in the past, if we are to educate ourselves about the present. Schürgers criticized this treatment of history: Jaspers' did not clearly show those lessons that still apply in the present; and he made no distinction between historically relevant and irrelevant facts.³²

This reservation about Jaspers' ability to interpret history may not be entirely unfounded. In his post-war publication, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (1947),

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 145. In Chapter III of this study, it will be shown that Plessner's version of philosophical anthropology was working along similar lines to "existential border situations", and is therefore studied as existentially relevant, as opposed to providing 'abject' or 'total' explanations of life, see pp. 161-166.

²⁹ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

³⁰ *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 86.

³² Schürgers, *Der Staat als Ort existentieller Selbstfindung*, *op. cit.*, p. 227. See also note 20, where it is observed that Jaspers' intention was not to write an historical account of the time, but to outline its intellectual aspects.

Jaspers continued to study history in relation to ideas, but without necessarily directly relating the ideas to recent political history. Saner focused on the originality of the *Achsenzeit*, a concept that was defined by Jaspers in this study: the "axis period" is said to provide an empirical link between the history of ideas and political history.³³ The concept of the *Achsenzeit*, as Carr observed, was an attempt by Jaspers to describe "the period in which the great cultures emerged".³⁴ Jaspers' aspiration was to describe a philosophical interpretation of history that might be unified with a merely historical approach to the past. Yet the constant need to move between these different treatments of history implies that different inferences are to be drawn from each interpretation. If this treatment of history is related to the method of "existential elucidation" it follows that a different historical lesson is meant to apply for life experience than for a knowledge of existence. The difference begs a description of border experience that can establish an interconnection between practical activity and the intellectual pursuit of knowledge. In this way, the two perceptions of history can be reconciled with one another. Karl Löwith described this treatment of history not as an "entweder-oder" interpretation, but as "sowohl-als-auch", in other words, an interpretation that is reminiscent of the Kierkegaardian formula, which in this case means establishing a connection between two different views of history.³⁵ The need to reconcile these two approaches can be understood within the context of Jaspers' method of "existential elucidation", for Jaspers stated that: "Die geistige Situation des Menschen ist erst, wo er sich in den Grenzsituationen weiß."³⁶

Jaspers' theory of *Grenzsituationen* was clearly viewed by Löwith as the link between the two different interpretations of history that are envisaged by Jaspers in an existential context.³⁷ The essential nature of this link has been found in this enquiry into

³³ See Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 108f.

³⁴ Godfrey Robert Carr, *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, op. cit., p. 93.

³⁵ See Karl Löwith, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (1933), op. cit., p. 143.

³⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, op. cit., p. 65.

³⁷ See Karl Löwith, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (1933), op. cit., p. 146. (Löwith wrote that: "Alle Ordnungen haben jedoch ihre absolute Grenze, und diese Grenze überschreitet nur der in 'Grenzsituationen' existierende Mensch.")

border experience to be represented by the ethical significance of "existential elucidation", which forms what Jaspers intended to be an intellectual appeal to individual consciousness. Saner's suggestion that no other contemporary had achieved a comparable version of "existential" philosophy and the "existential border situations" might appear a little exaggerated.³⁸ What his suggestion implies, however, is that no other contemporary established the ethical validity of existential thinking that is further evidenced through the association of Kant's thinking in the Enlightenment with Jaspers' writing on the role of the individual in Germany after the war.

The assumption of the importance of the ethical status of Jaspers' thinking as a means with which to connect the pragmatic and theoretical aspects of his work can be confirmed by briefly referring to his own life. This consultation of Jaspers' autobiographical comments is illuminating about the relation of ethical questions to the conditions of existence, as well as to the conditions of political life. The predominantly ethical appeal implicit in Jaspers' thinking can be found in the autobiographical text, *Schicksal und Wille*.³⁹ The authorized publication of Jaspers' autobiographical reflections shortly before his death was motivated, as Saner sees it, by the need to leave matters resolved.⁴⁰ Some diary notes that Jaspers kept from 1939-1942 seem to show a need to account for his life.⁴¹ In the various entries, the idea of guilt is recognized as an existential problem, but in his post-war essay on the "Guilt Question", Jaspers went beyond an existential understanding of this problem, to describe guilt as a concept that was also of political consequence.

What heightened his awareness of an ethical dimension to guilt as an existential border experience? The answer lies in the nature of Jaspers' own experience. In *Schicksal und Wille*, Jaspers' diary notes portray the mental conflict that surrounded his

³⁸ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 97 & especially p. 98.

³⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Schicksal und Wille Autobiographische Schriften*, ed. by Hans Saner, Munich 1967. (This work revised Jaspers' first autobiographical publication, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, (1957), *ibid.*, p. 13.)

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 143-163.

decision to remain in Heidelberg during the war years. If necessary, he was prepared to commit suicide with his Jewish wife, rather than face deportation to the concentration camp and what he perceived would be an almost certain death.⁴² The planned suicide pact seems to imply an acceptance of one of the extreme situations of death that his existential ideas had defined. Whether or not the suicide pact was itself ethical is not the question being considered. What is more relevant is to see the suicide pact made by Jaspers with his wife as a consequence of the political situation in which they lived at the time. The decision to remain in Germany during the war years, despite the fact that this meant living with the permanent and real threat of deportation could also be regarded as a consequence of being in the "existential situation" of mental strife. The imminent threat of death gives rise to ethical questions, particularly if such a threat is irrespective of the individual's own right to live. Moreover, as a *Grenzsituation*, death was a real part of Jaspers' own life experience, for he suffered throughout his life from a terminal bronchial illness, which he described in meticulous detail in his autobiographical notes.⁴³ The daily knowledge of living on the brink between life and death perhaps explains the generalizing tendency to "existential elucidation", which works not so much from general criteria as from the generalization of specific criteria about a life and death situation. Through illness came a direct knowledge and experience of the frail, ephemeral nature of humanity's position, if this position is not safeguarded by the ethos of responsibility.

There is a sense in which Jaspers' decision to remain in Germany during the war years was merely a continuation of an existential conflict between life and death, a condition under which he "normally" lived. Indeed, his illness was one factor that made it difficult for him to leave Germany under precarious political circumstances. He had been forced by the Nazi administration to take early retirement, and so was relieved of his

⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 158-161. (In fact Jaspers', and his wife's deportation orders had been given for 14 April 1945, but the Americans liberated Heidelberg on 1 April 1945. Thus, the Jaspers' were spared. See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, op. cit., p. 74).

⁴³ Clearly one of the overriding reasons for the difficulty to leave Germany during the war was Jaspers' bronchial illness, see Karl Jaspers, *Schicksal und Wille*, op. cit., pp. 109-163.

duties at Heidelberg university around 1938.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding the illness that gives an insight into the real circumstances that may have further influenced his thinking, Jaspers' decision to leave Germany after the war (to take up the offer of a position at Basle university), needs further explanation. In March 1939, he had written in his diary notes, as follows: "Das Werk zu vollenden, ist mein Dienst. Dieses Werk allein berechtigt mich in der Welt. Es ist ein deutsches Werk. Aber es wird, wie es scheint, als durchaus gleichgültig angesehen."⁴⁵

If there is an "aristocratic" trait, observed by others as an implicit tendency in Jaspers' work, then this strand seems applicable where he describes his contribution to philosophy as a fundamentally German one. The diary note of 1939 has to be set against a change in perception of his work, which reflects a general change in attitude towards Germany, already implied in the arguments developed in *Die Schuldfrage*.⁴⁶ Jaspers' *Philosophie* may be regarded as a fundamentally "German" work, so far as it translates all the dilemmas of political life under Nazi control, to which its author was exposed at the time. As we have seen, not political influences alone led to "existential elucidation", but the experience of the border, which gave Jaspers real cause to reflect on how to describe life on the brink of being and not being. Moreover, the conflicts associated by Jaspers with his German consciousness leave an intensity of awareness about political developments in pre-war Germany that seems to be carried over to his post-war critique of "German guilt".⁴⁷

Having survived Hitler's tyranny in Germany, Jaspers wrote of his hopes for renewal, both in terms of university life, and in German politics. It was towards this

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 162, p. 151f.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴⁶ A further significant factor that contributed to a change in Jaspers' relationship to his German consciousness was his concern for his wife, who had suffered because of the Nazi persecution of Jews. Highly significant to Jaspers was the knowledge that he would not have been allowed to be buried with his wife inside the cemetery, for his wife was Jewish, and she would have had no other choice than to be buried in a mass Jewish grave, *ibid.*, p. 166. Jaspers writes further: "Die Erfahrung des Ausgestoßenseins vom eigenen Volk durch einen Staat, der ein Verbrecherstaat war, ändert die Beziehung zu diesem Volk." *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 181.

end, for example, that along with Dolf Sternberger and others, he edited the journal, *Die Wandlung*. He came to regard this journal as a "poeticizing" of politics, rather than a direct address of the political situation at the time.⁴⁸ Jaspers' contemporaries did not necessarily share the same high standards that he held towards renewal in politics and university life. These ideals are contained in the lecture series which Jaspers first gave at Heidelberg university during the winter of 1945-46, under the title "Die geistige Situation in Deutschland".⁴⁹ In his later letter to Martin Heidegger, Jaspers noted that reactions to his lectures at the time were a "sensation", but that the subsequent publication of *Die Schuldfrage* (1946) met with less success.⁵⁰ One reason for this may be the theoretical analysis given of the political situation in post-war Germany. *Die Schuldfrage* could also be read as a penetrating subjective account of disappointments that Jaspers had himself experienced at this time. His observations were recorded on two different levels: firstly, on an individual basis; and secondly, on what he called a "collective" basis. These terms might be regarded as a continuation and development of the specific and general criteria that were identified with regard to "existential elucidation". Hence Jaspers regarded it first as the moral responsibility of each German citizen to assess his or her part in supporting or opposing the crimes that had been committed during Nazi control in Germany. In the second instance, he concentrated on an appeal to what remained of the German state for "political accountability" (*politische Haftung*).⁵¹

If the concept of political accountability can be seen as an appeal for a political ethic, the origins of this appeal could have arisen from Jaspers' own attempts at self-justification that were recorded in the diary entries of the war years. In this sense, his

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴⁹ See Karl Jaspers, letter to Martin Heidegger, 25 March 1950, in: *Martin Heidegger - Karl Jaspers Briefwechsel 1920-1963*, ed. by Walter Biemel/ Hans Saner, Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Zurich 1990, p. 199.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ G. R. Carr focused on what he called the concept of "radical change", see *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, *op. cit.*, especially chapter 5, *The Nazi Era and the Concept of Radical Change*, pp. 70-91. The concept of "Umkehr" or "Wandlung" is certainly alluded to in *Die Schuldfrage*, yet this attitude for change that Jaspers aims to encourage is fostered more by his concept of "political accountability", whose significance Carr's monograph did not analyse in detail.

analysis of guilt appears to have the specific purpose of clarifying a difficult relationship with Germany. The difficulty manifested itself in the unwillingness to leave during the war years, whilst deciding to leave Germany for Switzerland three years after the war had ended. Jaspers' assessment of the intervening period was dismissive: "Die Jahre 1945-1948 waren vertan."⁵² The impression of waste and lack of achievement, that is, in terms of an absence of real change and renewal in political life, is echoed in the tone of *Die Schuldfrage*. What Jaspers criticized in relation to his own actions, he applied, without moderation, to other Germans. His appeal might have been overambitious. *Die Schuldfrage* was directed towards a state that had capitulated. Yet he intended his ideas to be read as a pedagogical critique, which might educate other Germans, as well as the Allied occupation forces. Jaspers later explained his intention in an afterword to *Die Schuldfrage* (1962):

Die Schrift sollte der Selbstbesinnung dienen, den Weg zur Würde im Übernehmen der je in ihrer Art klar erkannten Schuld zu finden. Sie wies auch auf die Mitschuld der Siegermächte, nicht um uns zu entlasten, sondern der Wahrhaftigkeit wegen, und auch um leise der möglichen Selbstgerechtigkeit zu wehren, die in der Politik verhängnisvolle Folgen für alle hat.⁵³

The existentially informed critique of *Die Schuldfrage* is a perfect example of the "ethical intimacy" that Dolf Sternberger attributed to Jaspers' work. The analysis of "German guilt" involves all three aspects that have been associated with the existential dilemma: it implies ethical considerations that arise from accepting responsibility for choice and individual initiative; it suggests further consequences from choosing one course of action in preference to another; it implies political factors that derive from putting choices into practice. *Die Schuldfrage* seems to have been generally intended to provoke thought and reflection in others, rather than to initiate the practical political change that Jaspers also implied was necessary. Hans Saner has commented that the

⁵² *Schicksal und Wille*, op. cit., p. 169.

⁵³ See Karl Jaspers, *Nachwort 1962 'über meine Schuldfrage'*, in: *Die Schuldfrage Zur politischen Haftung Deutschlands*, op. cit., pp. 84-89, here p. 85.

moralizing tone of Jaspers' argument is partly to be explained by the political restrictions under which Germans had to live in Allied occupied Germany.⁵⁴ Yet Jaspers himself noted that in contrast to other colleagues he had been allowed a surprising amount of freedom by the Americans, to publish and write.⁵⁵ A real possibility arose for Jaspers to sound a different note from the theoretical one that had been struck in *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*. Whereas the earlier treatise had tended to comment on political reality from a theoretical viewpoint, *Die Schuldfrage* was more pragmatic, but still with one significant drawback: its whole approach was complex, even convoluted.

Although few copies of this essay were originally sold, Jaspers sometimes received threatening letters.⁵⁶ In this respect, Carr was right to note that *Die Schuldfrage* made Jaspers "widely known as one of the most outspoken advocates of a radical change of consciousness in Germany after the war."⁵⁷ The need to call for such radical change is clear when it can be seen in the light of the historical division of Germany, which came about after the war. Jaspers' had gained a prior understanding of the conditions in Germany during the war, not only because he experienced them, but because he had analysed their meaning in the detailed theoretical investigations of "existential border situations". The importance of this theoretical knowledge was arguably given greater purpose and clarity when it was combined with first-hand observations of the situation in Germany which was defined at the Potsdam and Yalta conferences. Jaspers was clearly qualified to reflect from a position of knowledge on what was an emerging division in Germany. Thus, the theoretical analysis of 'borders' could be applied to understanding the context of the gradual process which led to Germany's separation, until 1990, into the two states of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Yet the nature of Germany's division was at first sight not necessarily existential, but rather ideological, since there were two zones of influence in Germany:

⁵⁴ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁵⁵ *Schicksal und Wille*, op. cit., pp. 167f.

⁵⁶ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 173f.

⁵⁷ See Godfrey Robert Carr, *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, op. cit., p. 83.

the western zones aligned to the western occupying forces; and eastern zones aligned to Soviet control.⁵⁸ Jaspers' experience and knowledge enabled him to appreciate the imperative of leaving behind the consciousness of ideology, or perceiving ideology as part of Germany's past that could be represented as a phase of German history which came to the surface with during the Nazi era. Yet it was not necessarily possible to reconcile such a rational view of ideology as part of the past with actual events. In this context, Jaspers voiced his ideas about the extent to which credence ought to have been given in the post-war era to the notion of a specifically "German guilt" in connection with the darkest period of Germany's history. By association with his analysis, Jaspers demonstrated that greater clarity about the ideological dimension to Germany's physical division after the war could be undermined in the light of a critique of arguments about "German guilt".

Although *Die Schuldfrage* aimed at general enlightenment about the post-war situation in Germany, it became itself embroiled in misconceptions that existed about the idea of guilt. What *Die Schuldfrage* indicated was the difficulty of communicating an argument to others that was based on existential reasoning. Moreover, it showed clearly that achieving existential communication, which was discussed briefly in section one of

⁵⁸ See further Tony Sharp, *The Wartime Alliance and the Zonal Division of Germany*, Oxford 1975. The preliminary plans for dividing Germany were begun by the European Advisory Committee (EAC), which was set up after the Moscow Conference in 1943, with a remit to make plans for Germany after the cessation of the war, *ibid.*, p. 56. The EAC developed the London Protocol, a "blueprint of the post-war political order", which was not finally agreed and signed by all Allied powers, until 12 September 1944, *ibid.*, p. 120 & p. 81. (The Protocol declared that: "Germany, within her frontiers as they were on 31 December 1937, will, for the purposes of occupation, be divided into four zones, one of which will be allotted to each of the four Powers, and a special Berlin area, which will be under joint occupation by the four Powers." For the full text of the Protocol, see pp. 204-208).

That Germany's division into the FRG and GDR materialized as an ideological separation is related to the varying interpretations of the Yalta (4-11 February 1945) and Potsdam (17 July-2 August 1945) agreements. Although these conferences fixed the Polish-German frontiers *de facto* along the lines of the Oder and western Neiße rivers, the final settlement was to await a Peace Conference, (which never emerged), see particularly Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Volume VI, *Triumph and Tragedy*, London 1954, especially Chapter XXI, *Yalta: Plans for World Peace*, *ibid.*, pp. 302-318, & p. 339, p. 570. It is in this context that Timothy Garton Ash analysed post-war ideological division: "Once, Europe was cut in two. The two parts were called West and East. The division itself was often labelled 'Yalta'. It was set in concrete in the Berlin Wall." See Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, *op. cit.*, p. 1. The context of division as it affected Germany, and the attempt made by Brandt's policies at the end of the 1960s to overcome this ideological division are analysed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter, see Section 4, *Existential or political borders?*, pp. 128-139.

this chapter, depends on communication between individuals that share an existential insight into life's problems.⁵⁹ It is possible that the poor reception of *Die Schuldfrage* is attributable to a general lack of clarity about its analytical method. It can be recalled that Bollnow criticized "existential elucidation" on this very point: namely that it was an exclusive way of arguing about pragmatic experience; and that it depended upon prior understanding of the ideas, rather than on an ability to understand them through experience. The letters that were sent to Jaspers after the publication of his essay on guilt showed the invective that his critical thoughts had provoked: "In jener Zeit erhielt ich viele Briefe zu dieser Schrift, einige wenige schimpften ('Landesverräter' u.dgl.), viele stimmten ein, ergänzten, modifizierten; merkwürdig oft kam ein Satz, '... aber hier am Ort bin ich wohl der einzige, der so denkt.'" ⁶⁰

A misrepresentation of the intended message, together with a resulting failure of communication, may well be associated with the style of Jaspers' argument: the political intent of *Die Schuldfrage* is still linked to existential ideals. Dolf Sternberger has also observed that the political intent of Jaspers' existential interpretation of guilt is easily misrepresented.⁶¹ Yet there is hardly an exclusive intent underlying Jaspers' method, since he purposely revised his existential theory by developing the idea of *politische Haftung*. It is this idea that Saner estimated as one of Jaspers' best pieces of political analysis.⁶² *Politische Haftung* might be regarded as the variant of existential guilt, but it also derives from an innate ethical framework, which underpins Jaspers' understanding of the immediate post-war political situation in Germany. A relationship between politics

⁵⁹ In his appraisal of *Die Schuldfrage*, G. R. Carr focused on the opening passages of this work which appeal for open and free communication and seem to echo the tone of the journal, *Die Wandlung*, see *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, op. cit., p. 81. However, to emphasize the aspect of communication in this way seems to highlight one of the most intangible, indeed possibly the most tenuous part of Jaspers' existential philosophy, namely the ideal of existential communication. In this way, Jaspers' thought might be dismissed as remote and idealistic, whilst its fundamental ethical values remain forgotten. For this reason, and since the rather intangible aspects of "communication" and "radical change" have received prior attention in Carr's monograph, this study seeks to highlight the practical value of existential ideas which can be discovered by considering the ethical meaning of existence and the related appeal for individual initiative and "political accountability".

⁶⁰ See Karl Jaspers, letter to Martin Heidegger, 25 March 1950, in: *Martin Heidegger - Karl Jaspers Briefwechsel*, op. cit., p. 199.

⁶¹ See Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

⁶² See Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 53.

and ethical questions has been shown to be implied by the method of "existential elucidation", in which Jaspers appears to have outlined what could be regarded as a working paradigm for his analysis of guilt: "Jede Handlung hat Folgen in der Welt, von denen der Handelnde nicht wußte. Er erschrickt vor den Folgen seiner Tat, weil er, obgleich er nicht an sie dachte, sich doch als ihren Urheber weiß." ⁶³

As has been indicated, the "existential border situation" of guilt gives rise to an appeal to the individual to transgress, or overcome guilt by taking responsibility for individual actions. Jaspers' political analysis continued this appeal as an ethical one, so far as existential circumstances have consequences that are translated into a politically relevant argument. What Jaspers defined in *Die Schuldfrage* might be regarded as his existentially illuminated idea of *politische Haftung*. This implies, as John Erpenbeck has argued, a critique of political ideology, since ethical factors point to the freedom to exercise individual responsibility over and above other political needs. ⁶⁴ Erpenbeck argued that Jaspers' insight into political life can be regarded as a political philosophy of "guilt", which can be used to unearth the lingering psychological aspects of political division that prevail in Germany, despite unification. ⁶⁵ The particular relevance of *politische Haftung* to an understanding of the reasons for the building of the Berlin Wall will be seen in the next section of this chapter, which discusses how Jaspers later used the idea of *politische Haftung* to intimate that political freedom was more important than the goal of German unity. In *Die Schuldfrage*, however, *politische Haftung*, so far as it refers to guilt as such, means general accountability, as accepted by a democratically organized state.

⁶³ *Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 246.

⁶⁴ See John Erpenbeck, *Grenzsituationen Können wir mit Jaspers die Aktualität begreifen?* In: *Neue Gesellschaft/ Frankfurter Hefte*, Nr. 12, December 1992, pp. 1118-1121, here p. 1118, p. 1120f.

⁶⁵ Although this study cannot consider in detail the implicit "anti-ideological" intent to the existential argument, it can outline the "anti-ideological" aim by relating Jaspers' existential arguments to Germany's political division. In the previous section, the psychological background has been shown to lead back to Kierkegaard. Psychological factors are also implied in chapters two and three of the literary section of this work.

The meaning of guilt is turned by Jaspers into accountability, which applies to the individual, before it can be considered relevant in a "collective" political context. In this case, Jaspers seems to adopt the opposite approach to "existential elucidation". Whereas the latter method worked from the general to the particular situation; the method behind the idea of *politische Haftung* is to work from the particular, individual situation towards the general, collective context.⁶⁶ Jaspers argued that each individual had to decide on his or her own moral status under Hitler's tyranny; and that Germany as a state must accept political responsibility for the war and its consequences:

Wir haben in einem Staat gelebt, der diese Verbrechen begangen hat. Wir haben zwar persönlich keine Schuld in einem moralischen oder kriminellen Sinne. Aber da wir in diesem Staate als dessen Bürger gelebt haben, können wir uns nicht von ihm trennen. Das heißt: Wir haften mit dem neuen Staat für das, was der vorhergehende Verbrecherstaat getan hat. Wir müssen die Folgen tragen. Das bedeutet politische Haftung.⁶⁷

The intent was to be clear about the difference between political and moral consequences. Hitler's dictatorship had left a legacy that brought with it the real need for Germany to accept collective responsibility for atrocities committed during the Second World War. As far as Jaspers was concerned, this meant that every German citizen who had survived the war had some part in taking responsibility for the crimes that were committed under the auspices of the German nation. He argued that this responsibility did not in itself suggest a "collective German guilt".⁶⁸ What was paramount was to turn the guilt of having survived Nazi Germany, and the responsibilities that this implied, into something constructive: "Daß wir leben, ist unsere Schuld".⁶⁹ Moreover, if survival were to have any real purpose, there would have to be a clear mandate in post-war

⁶⁶ Carr writes: "As in all of Jaspers' writings, the movement of the argument is from the particular to the general [...]", *Karl Jaspers as an Intellectual Critic*, op. cit., p. 89. Clearly, the heart of Jaspers' *Philosophie* works from the general to the particular, therefore Carr's comment can only be regarded as an oversight.

⁶⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Was ist Philosophie?*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁶⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶⁹ Quoted after Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 50.

Germany for "die Freiheit des Menschen".⁷⁰ What Jaspers called "Umkehr und Neuschöpfung" could be realized in the form of a democratically functioning state, and therefore, by implication, not in the form of a political ideology intent on absolute control.⁷¹ Yet was Jaspers' appeal for democratic renewal in the form of an enquiry into the nature and validity of a "German guilt" not too optimistic?

The analysis of the situation appeared to work against the political climate at the time in which an ideological division between the different zones of Allied occupation was turned into an "iron curtain" within Germany. As Jaspers saw it, his appeal was necessary, since the division between the two sides of Germany went deeper than an ideological one. The "iron curtain" in Germany was regarded by Jaspers as a conglomeration of different influences explained by him as a consequence of an existential dilemma. Jaspers' understanding of the post-war situation in Germany identified the problem of holding Germany accountable for guilt, especially when the division of Germany made it difficult to achieve a unified or collective sense of responsibility. The dilemma was how to combine collective political will with ethical responsibility, at the same time as having clear reference to a sense of guilt, but without perpetuating the "iron curtain" in Germany:⁷²

Die Schuld wird weiter ein Mittel der Politik. [...] Infolge dieses Kollektivdenkens wird die politische Haftung zugleich als Strafe durch moralische Schuld begründet.⁷³

⁷⁰ See Karl Jaspers, *Thesen über politische Freiheit*, in: *Die Wandlung*, Jahrgang I, Heft 6, June 1946, pp. 460-465: "[...] die Freiheit des Menschen ist selber der Ursprung, aus dem auch für die Erfahrung real werden kann, was durch bis dahin behauptete Erfahrungen für unmöglich erklärt wurde." *Ibid.*, p. 465.

⁷¹ Karl Jaspers, *Schicksal und Wille*, op. cit., p. 167.

⁷² The idea of the "iron curtain" is generally ascribed to Churchill's Fulton speech of 1946, an "iron curtain" running "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic[...]", quoted after Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, op. cit., p. 431. The idea of the "iron curtain" was already used by the German writer Rudolf Borchardt to refer to the situation in Germany. See Rudolf Borchardt, letter to Heinrich Zimmer, July 1940: "[...] Ich glaube nicht dass Ihr mir noch werdet antworten können - sieben Wochen hat Eurer Brief gebraucht [...] und bis dahin kann ein neuer '*eiserner Vorhang*' (my italics) niedergegangen sein [...]", in: *Rudolf Borchardt, Hugo von Hofmannsthal Briefwechsel*, ed. by Gerhard Schuster, Munich, Vienna 1995, p. 413.

⁷³ *Die Schuldfrage*, op. cit., p. 30, p. 51.

Jaspers' theoretical explanation of German division is based on a framework of different influences, whose psychological effects are manifested in political life. In fact, his intention was to use his existential grounding in order to dissociate all the elements that were having an impact on political consciousness in Germany after 1945. What his method of "existential elucidation" had practised was the ability to seek out distinct elements of thought and experience, in order to combine them. His explanation of Germany's political division is existential only so far as it uses *in reverse order* the method that was adopted in "existential elucidation". His analysis of guilt enabled him to be clear about the generalizing tendency to explain division, while the specific complexity of the situation had not been widely understood. In *Die Schuldfrage*, Jaspers argued for the need to treat each aspect of ethical responsibility, political will, and guilt in its own right, in order for an explanation of Germany's ideological division to become plausible. Central to the explanation is the idea of "political accountability" (*politische Haftung*), which is already a development beyond guilt as an existential *Grenzsituation*, and appears to have been intended to contend with the general claim made after the war that there is or was a "collective German guilt".⁷⁴ Jaspers argued that the danger of asserting a "collective German guilt" was that it might be misused as a political argument, to imply that Germany as a nation had to pay a form of collective moral penalty (*Strafe*) for crimes committed during the war. Later, when the Berlin Wall was built, the idea of *Haftung* was confused with the idea of *guilt*. *Die Schuldfrage* was therefore wholly misconstrued on two counts. There were those in West Germany who thought that Jaspers advocated Germany's existential division because of her collective duty to be morally responsible for the war and the holocaust.⁷⁵ There were others who welcomed the wisdom of the Federal Republic's outspoken philosopher and political critic. In the GDR, for instance, there was a real chance to make political mileage out of the idea of "collective German

⁷⁴ See Dolf Sternberger, *Karl Jaspers zum hundertsten Geburtstag*, op. cit.

⁷⁵ As will be seen in the next section of this chapter, even Willy Brandt proceeded to mistake the essence of Jaspers' arguments, confusing the concept of *Haftung* for the idea of *existential* punishment. This was despite the fact that Brandt clearly respected the significance of Jaspers' thinking, see Section 3, pp. 136-139.

guilt". This is because all the sense of guilt for the war could be offloaded onto the FRG's collective consciousness, which conveniently side-stepped the thorny issue of whether the GDR was not also to be regarded as part of this consciousness. In short, 'collective guilt' could be occupied by the GDR to validate the existential division, as manifested by the building of the Berlin Wall, an act which Jaspers had never once supported.⁷⁶

The analysis of guilt itself is easy enough to follow. It looks into the guilt question from four different angles and relates to each case certain distinct and specific implications. Guilt is defined not in existential terms, but in criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical terms.⁷⁷ The consequences identified in relation to each of these ideas are intended to be applicable only in each of the different cases. Therefore, criminal activity, wherever possible, involves guilt that is treated by applying the required punishment designated in law for the committed offence (*Strafe*). In political terms, guilt at the very least implies responsibility for political actions (*Haftung*). Moral guilt was regarded by Jaspers as being properly reflected in the individual conscience, since only in this way could the necessary inner atonement or inner transformation be achieved (*Buße und Erneuerung*). Finally, the idea of metaphysical guilt, which in itself is less immediately relevant to the political context, implies transcendent motives of religious renewal (*Verwandlung des menschlichen Selbstbewußtseins vor Gott*).⁷⁸

In this carefully differentiated scheme, Jaspers observed a paradigm for the political situation. The misinterpretation of "German guilt" had confused several different aspects of meaning; and his intent was to unravel this confusion. At this point, the existentially

⁷⁶ Incidentally, Jaspers' ideas found a resonance within East Germany, for Walter Ulbricht attempted to make contact with Jaspers. Saner documented this as follows: "Anfang Juni 1966 überschickte Walter Ulbricht einen dreizehnseitigen Brief an den 'Geehrten Herrn Professor'. [...] Jaspers hielt den Inhalt des Briefes nicht für unvernünftig. [...] Er befürchtete, daß eine Korrespondenz zwischen ihm und Ulbricht, ähnlich wie einst die zwischen Russell und Chruschtschow, letztlich zum Propogandamittel werde. So bestätigte er kurz und höflich dem 'Geehrten Herrn Staatspräsidenten' den Empfang des Briefes." See Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 63f. Therefore, after Jaspers' courteous response the 'correspondence' between Jaspers and Ulbricht ended.

⁷⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, op. cit., pp. 17-21.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 20f.

revised argument is as weak as it is convincing. It is weak in the sense that it did not guard against the possibility of being used as a euphemism. In other words, Jaspers' ideas on guilt could be, and were, used, particularly in the GDR, to infer that it was right for Germany's division to be a form of existential accountability for guilt about the war, as well as guilt in criminal and moral terms, - this was the idea of guilt as a moral *Strafe*, which spread the misconception that Jaspers advocated "collective German guilt". Then again, ironically, the strength of the argument was that it reflected precisely what was happening. The misinterpretations of his ideas only served to confirm that Jaspers realized that guilt could be manipulated for political reasons. The convincing aspect of the argument was that it highlighted the dangers of making generalizations in the realm of politics. Whereas Jaspers recognized that general assumptions may well serve the purpose of developing explanations about life in a theoretical context, when seen in a political context, these same generalizations might promote prejudices or misconceptions that ought to be exposed. Because Jaspers' existential philosophy had required him to apply general observations in order to render them applicable to an individual context, it might be said that it was his duty as a thinker to express his reservations about the situation as he perceived it. This was the purpose behind the revision of existential guilt: to make his theoretical knowledge of guilt as an existential situation applicable to an experience of life:

Kollektivschuld eines Volkes oder einer Gruppe innerhalb der Völker also kann es - außer der politischen Haftung - nicht geben, weder als verbrecherische, noch als moralische, noch als metaphysische Schuld. Wir 'haften' kollektiv. [...] Haftbarmachen heißt nicht als moralisch schuldig erkennen. Kollektivschuld also gibt es zwar notwendig als politische Haftung der Staatsangehörigen, nicht aber darum im gleichen Sinne als moralische und metaphysische und nicht als kriminelle Schuld. ⁷⁹

A valid interpretation of guilt, in Jaspers' view, was his practically-oriented one of collective accountability (*politische Haftung*). This meant that each individual should

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 25 & p. 40f.

accept a role to contribute to political life in a democratically elected state. To emphasize the need for an individual sphere was in keeping with an existentially reformed and democratic idea of *politische Haftung*. This idea was intended to counteract demands for a collective morality; and to suggest instead that moral questions can only be addressed by the individual. Yet even then, only the individual who sought on a personal level some form of inner renewal was considered by Jaspers to be morally accountable.⁸⁰ Nowhere did Jaspers state that there was a "collective German guilt". If this had been the case, it would have implied a plea to every German citizen to accept guilt for Nazi Germany; and this would have meant an appeal to the eastern half of Germany as well. Yet Jaspers was not interested in propaganda exercises on behalf of the East German regime.⁸¹ What his thesis pleaded for was political accountability to be accepted by the newly emergent state of the FRG. Such accountability meant supporting individual freedom and a democratic system, for if this system was upheld, Jaspers believed that the separate state of the GDR would prove existentially invalid. As regards moral guilt and how this should be applicable, the question was left open by Jaspers for the individual to decide. In an interview with Thilo Koch that was broadcast in 1960, Jaspers again tried to revise the general misconceptions about his questioning of guilt and its valid place in political life:

Man hat törichterweise behauptet, ich hätte die Kollektivschuld angenommen. Das Gegenteil ist der Fall! Ich habe ausdrücklich ausgeführt, die gebe es nicht. Aber das Gerücht ist geblieben [...] und die Schrift ist versunken.⁸²

Whatever the degree of misinterpretation, in some respects, the validity of the arguments put forward seemed open to such misunderstandings: Jaspers did regard "guilt" as a politically relevant concept. By this is meant, as we have seen, his idea of

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸¹ See note 76.

⁸² See Thilo Koch, interview with Karl Jaspers, transmitted 10 August 1960, Nord- und Westdeutscher Rundfunkverband Fernsehen, in: Karl Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, (new edition), Munich 1990, pp. 107-115, here p. 109.

politische Haftung. Hence, although he did not intend a "collective German guilt", it was the idea of guilt as such that had a far more successful career than the pragmatically intended argument of *politische Haftung*. This concept implicitly undermines the validity of political ideology, or what Jaspers seems to have referred to as a "collective" mentality (*Kollektivdenken*). Yet did Jaspers define in concrete terms exactly which steps would have been sufficient to effect *politische Haftung*? His concept of accountability, though pragmatically intended, necessarily remains theoretical, since it cannot be generally prescribed how political accountability should be achieved in real terms. The political analysis remains, in essence, Kantian since it follows Kant's definition of the Enlightenment: "Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit."⁸³ The ethical dimension to Kant's interpretation of the ideals represented by thinking at the time of the Enlightenment also seems reliant on the concept of guilt, which is taken by Kant and Jaspers alike, to mean a sense of individual responsibility that both thinkers aim to encourage in others.

On the one hand, Jaspers did imply a need to accept the burden of collective accountability. On the other hand, he did not intimate, nor suggest the validity of a "German collective guilt". His appeal was for accepting accountability for crimes committed during the war, at the same time as a general questioning of the consequences that the moral aspect of guilt imposes on the individual.⁸⁴

Jaspers' analysis offers a perceptive insight into the reality of the situation that became clearer with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The ideology of the GDR seemed to apply moral arguments to political problems, which Jaspers saw as an excuse to divide Germany with an existential barrier of guilt. The euphemism, "antifaschistischer Schutzwall", which was given to the Berlin Wall when it still existed, implied, amongst other things, that the Wall was there to protect the Communist state from infiltrations of

⁸³ See Immanuel Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung?*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁸⁴ Yet there could be no possibility of a "Gnade der späten Geburt", quoted after Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt Eine Ortsbestimmung*, Hamburg 1983, p. 275.

guilt for the Second World War. Robert Darnton called the Berlin Wall a *cordon sanitaire*, a useful comparison of describing the Wall as a barrier against guilt.⁸⁵ Another way of looking at this barrier, was to regard the existence of the Berlin Wall as a symbol of a state ideology that attempted to represent itself in opposition to the western side of Germany. In this way, ideology as such could be regarded almost as an emblem of political change, which after the war apparently led the eastern zone of occupied Germany to swap state authority and control that had existed in pre-war Germany for a totalitarian style of government, albeit clearly in a much differentiated form. Christa Wolf's narrative, *Der geteilte Himmel*, implied that this may be a relevant way of assessing aspects of life in the GDR, and Wolf's narrative of this experience is discussed in part two of this study.⁸⁶

As regards Jaspers' ideas about "German guilt", they imply a critique of ideology as it was practised during the division of Germany. The problem with Germany's division, he argued, was that it was founded on a moral argument about guilt that was politically invalid when it was applied on a general basis. This is not to say that Jaspers denied the validity of guilt itself, but what he meant to encourage in writing about this concept was the need for a political ethic that could be first practised in an individual sphere, before it could be made effective in the realm of politics. Elsewhere, Jaspers argued against the existence of a separate East German state, suggesting that this was "eine Funktion russischer Macht" with which the German population was "in ständigem inneren Widerspruch".⁸⁷ His suggestion that the GDR was a contradiction in political terms followed on from an existential understanding of borders that led him to question other arguments, rather than to suggest there are flaws with existential theory. His views have been more recently supported by Antonia Grunenberg's thesis that the political division of Germany lasted for so long because it was based on the exception of an

⁸⁵ See Robert Darnton, *Der Letzte Tanz auf der Mauer*, op. cit., especially on *Politik und Schuld*, ibid., pp. 193-201, here p. 198.

⁸⁶ See Part Two, Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 223-247.

⁸⁷ See Karl Jaspers, *Zwei Deutsche Staaten?* in: *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., pp. 69-75, here p. 71.

"oppositional myth".⁸⁸ In her essay *Deutschland und das Mythos des 'Anti'*, Grunenberg argued that East Germany was the ideological shadow to West Germany; and that a separate East German existence could only be made legitimate if it were that of an "anti-fascist" state. Thus what used to be East Germany might only be remembered for its profile of being a collective "guilty conscience" for the western half of Germany: "Der Antifaschismus der DDR war auch deshalb so erfolgreich, weil er als *alter ego*, ja als verkörpetes schlechtes Gewissen des westdeutschen Staates auftrat und sich mit dieser Gegnerschaft legitimierte."⁸⁹

Grunenberg's argument can be appreciated in the light of Jaspers' views about "German guilt", which were analysed within an existential context, to explain the reality of division in Germany. When an explanation of border experience is linked to the concept of guilt, this is intended to undermine the ideological dimension that was representative of Germany's political division. The Berlin Wall could be described, with reference to Jaspers' critique, as a contradiction in political terms, so far as it was not built only for political or ideological reasons, but also for supposedly moral reasons. Jaspers' critique of "German guilt" shows us that in political life, moral arguments about guilt are highly questionable, particularly when they are not implicitly regarded as an appeal to each individual to assume responsibility for his or her actions. The awareness of an ethical framework for individual experience was sharpened by Jaspers' existential theory of life. Through this theory was displayed a political ethic, intended to support the imperative for individual initiative. In calling for such an ethic in 1945-46, the reasoning that lies behind the questionable assertion of a "collective German guilt" was shown to be a merely expedient excuse for the post-war ideological division of Germany.

⁸⁸ See Antonia Grunenberg, *Deutschland und das Mythos des 'Anti'*, in: *Schweizer Monatshefte*, 7/8 Juli-August 1994, pp. 15-19. The idea of a founding "myth" being invested in emergent states is also anticipated in Helmuth Plessner's essay *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (1924), in: *Macht und menschliche Natur, Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. V, ed. by Günter Dux, Odo Marquard, Elisabeth Ströker, Frankfurt am Main 1981, pp. 42-133, here p. 124: "Junge Völker haben zuerst kaum historisches Bewußtsein, also kaum Geschichte, sondern Mythen."

⁸⁹ See Antonia Grunenberg, *Deutschland und das Mythos des 'Anti'*, op. cit., p. 17.

4. Existential or political borders?

By virtue of a differentiated understanding of "guilt", Jaspers was able to apply the knowledge he had gained from his exposition of *Grenzsituationen* to an interpretation of the ideological division of Germany: his existentially revised idea of *politische Haftung* developed into a critique of post-war division. This critique can be followed in the essays on German unity, parts of which were first published in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.¹ What Jaspers argued in these essays followed on from the rationale behind his conception of *politische Haftung*, which suggested to him the paramount importance of establishing individual accountability in Germany, especially since the opportunity for such accountability had been temporarily denied to the population living at the time in what was East Germany. Yet German unity was unthinkable unless it allowed for some form of *politische Haftung*, that is, for democracy, in terms of individual freedom to participate in the process of decision-making through the basic right to elect different political outlooks, such as was possible in West Germany, but not, at the time in East Germany because of its centralized system of power.

Jaspers' view was that the ideological division of Germany was actually possible because of the general readiness on both sides of the border to accept division as a form of "existential punishment" (*Strafe*). This view also posited an equivocal attack directed both against West as well as East Germany: "Die Schuld wird weiter ein Mittel der Politik. [...] Infolge dieses Kollektivdenkens wird die politische Haftung zugleich als Strafe durch moralische Schuld begründet."² In relation to the charge that guilt was being misused for policy reasons, a dilemma was observed in the preceding part of this

¹ See Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., p. 61.

² Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, op. cit., p. 30, p. 51.

chapter of how to distinguish between political and existential borders. Jaspers was keen to highlight the fact that, when explaining the division of East and West Germany, existential and political factors were not one and the same. Yet a connection between these types of borders was supported by a policy of division. The main objection to division was that it amounted to a misappropriation of the individual's right to a free existence, but even this basic right was overruled by the ideological division of Germany. Jaspers tried to demonstrate that existential reasoning aims to undermine the validity of ideological division. The role that existential thinking has to play in deciphering the precise nature of Germany's division is the method of analysis, which depends upon an innate propensity for making distinctions between different aspects of thought, as well as distinguishing between ideas and experience. Evidently, in order to achieve a connection between these entities it is first necessary to distinguish between them; and this ability was fostered by Jaspers' method of "existential elucidation". With this method of analysis, Jaspers was able to determine the elements, which he considered continued to influence the political situation in Germany. He argued for an open distinction to be made between ethical, political and existential factors, the last of which he saw as having been instrumentalized as an invalid support for ideological division.

From an ideal perspective, Jaspers was able to describe the post-war ideological division of Germany as a paradox: division was the outcome of a policy that could only be overcome by exposing its underlying influences and motives for their 'real' nature. The reality was an "invalid combination", perhaps even a confusion of existential and political influences. The paradox was that if Germany's internal division were to be recognized as a self-evident fact of political life, the very act of recognition would lead to the realization that, in the long term, this political reality was unsustainable. Jaspers argued that the first step to overcoming the ideological division of Germany was to recognize it; and that if the division of Germany were generally accepted, the goal of German unity might be achieved under the conditions of freedom for both of her halves.

This thinking forms the rationale behind a postulation that caused him to be severely criticized within West Germany. In the following statement, he appeared to imply that German unity should be altogether abandoned in favour of democracy:

Die politische Freiheit ist eine absolute, die Wiedervereinigung eine relative Forderung. Wiedervereinigung und Freiheit sind nicht Gegensätze, aber voneinander trennbare Ziele.³

Jaspers advocated a recognition of the distinctions that he saw were necessary for German unity to be achieved within a democratic framework. Yet since the West German constitution established the goal of German unity as a cornerstone of West Germany's post-war democratic consciousness until 1989, it is hardly surprising that the arguments came under heavy criticism. In the preamble to the West German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) West Germany's existence was regarded as "temporary", until the goal of unification could be achieved: "Es hat auch für jene Deutschen gehandelt, denen mitzuwirken versagt war. Das gesamte Deutsche Volk bleibt aufgefordert, in freier Selbstbestimmung die Einheit und Freiheit Deutschlands zu vollenden."⁴ This meant that for West Germany, any recognition of East Germany appeared to compromise the long-term goal of political unity. Therefore, until Brandt's policies marked a change in attitude to the real problem of recognizing East Germany, the Hallstein doctrine (1955) was the measure of West German attitudes. This doctrine was intended to deter other states from recognizing East Germany, and it included the threat that West Germany would break off diplomatic relations with any state that formally recognized East Germany. In this context, before the Berlin Wall had even been built, Jaspers indeed regarded German unity as a politically unrealistic goal. What he meant was that unity should not be seen as an end in itself, if this meant sacrificing the idea of democracy.

³ See Karl Jaspers, *Die gegenwärtige Lage und ihre Möglichkeiten*, in: *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., p. 34.

⁴ See *Das Grundgesetz*, Bonn 1989, p. 21.

The argument leads us back to his concept of *politische Haftung* which places the individual at the centre of a democratically functioning state. It can only be supposed that Jaspers argued for accountability in this outspoken way because of his pre-war experience in Weimar Germany when he had observed a divorce of democratic accountability between the individual and the state; and had experienced the tyranny that followed this. Although he did not regard East Germany as anything like a repetition of the political tyranny during Nazi control of Germany, he nevertheless dismissed the East German Communist regime as a form of puppet government, controlled by Soviet influence: "Ostdeutschland ist kein Staat, sondern ein von Fremdherrschaft vergewaltigtes Gebiet."⁵ Paradoxically, what this perception of East Germany meant in political terms, however, was that recognizing East Germany could not in itself harm the goal of German unity. He argued in this fashion because he perceived both existential and political factors of ideological division as two separate entities. Hence when explaining Germany's division, the existential and political aspects of the situation could be used, but only to find mutual reflections of one factor within the other, so as to further illuminate, in a theoretical context, the complex reality of the situation.

An insight into the possible uses of existential reasoning and the benefits that such intellectual reasoning might have for the field of political practice was apparently recognized by Willy Brandt. It may seem far-fetched to assume that Brandt's policy of *Ostpolitik* that was adopted in West Germany at the start of the 1970s was based on the reasoning behind Jaspers' arguments on German unity and on the question of "German guilt". Yet Brandt himself made this connection in a foreword he wrote in 1990 for a new edition of Jaspers' essays on *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*:

[...] manchen von uns, die wir Ende der sechziger, Anfang der siebziger Jahre [...] einer neuen Politik zum Durchbruch verhelfen, die Nähe zu wesentlichen Jasperschen Postulaten durchaus bewußt: Der Vorrang der Freiheit war für uns unbestritten, [...] Wir waren nicht der Meinung, daß sich der Auftrag zur Vereinigung (in der Präambel zum Grundgesetz aus guten Gründen ohne ein 'Wieder!') auf das

⁵ Karl Jaspers, *Grundgedanken zur Wiedervereinigung und Freiheit*, in: *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., p. 17.

Territorium des Bismarckstaates zu beziehen habe oder daß es einem vernünftigen Zweck dienen könne, die bestätigende Hinnahme der neuen Grenze zu Polen in der Schwebe zu halten.⁶

Whereas Jaspers argued that existential implications of the internal German border had a theoretical meaning, Brandt indicated that he attempted to use the existential component to enlighten his policy of dealing with the political border. If Brandt was conscious, as he claims, of the existential reasoning behind Jaspers' idea of political accountability and its implicit application to democracy, the claim can apparently be supported by recalling the rationale behind Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. The basis of this policy is most frequently summarized by the formula of *Wandel durch Annäherung*, which was interpreted by the chief negotiator of the Basic Treaty (1972), Egon Bahr, as a policy of "overcoming the status quo, by first not changing the status quo."⁷ The rationale does bear a resemblance to Jaspers' unearthing of the paradox that recognizing East Germany as a separate state would do nothing to harm the goal of unity. In other words, the thinking behind *Ostpolitik* was that a West German recognition of East Germany would enable West Germany to begin to work more effectively towards achieving the constitutional goal of unification. Yet is the reasoning behind *Ostpolitik* to be regarded as existential?

It is useful at this point to examine the implications of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* in order to ascertain whether there can be a connection between policy measures and the existential implication of border experience that Jaspers exposed in his political philosophy of "guilt". At the end of the 1960s, Brandt's *Ostpolitik* had applied measures to the division of Germany by taking steps that appear to coincide with Jaspers' idea about the importance of political freedom being placed above the goal of unification. At the beginning of his memoirs, Brandt described the effects of the building of the Berlin Wall, which as the ruling mayor of Berlin from 1957-1966, he had witnessed through first-

⁶ Willy Brandt, *Vorwort*, in: Karl Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., p. II.

⁷ Quoted after Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, op. cit., p. 178.

hand experience: the Wall divided families; it prohibited free travel between East and West; and it was a death trap to those who sought to cross it. ⁸ The Berlin Wall was a symbol of the ideological division between East and West Germany, with which Brandt was directly concerned during his period in office as West Germany's Federal Chancellor. Timothy Garton Ash summarized the various semantic permutations of what has generally come to be known as *Ostpolitik*. ⁹ Garton Ash was careful to note, however, that Brandt himself disliked this term, since before 1945, the idea of *Ostpolitik* had negative connotations which referred to Germany's eastern expansionism. ¹⁰ In its post-war context, *Ostpolitik* symbolized West Germany's awareness of political responsibility and democracy, for which Jaspers had argued by his idea of *politische Haftung*. Nevertheless, it hardly follows that *Ostpolitik* was guided by a theoretical interpretation of Germany's division. It is probable that the reasoning behind *Ostpolitik* is more pragmatic. ¹¹

Although the complexities of division were undoubtedly addressed by Brandt's policy of openness with eastern Europe and with what was then East Germany, it is unlikely that this policy was adopted in order to demonstrate a subtle link with the existential reasoning about the benefits of recognizing East Germany. It was Brandt's own political experience that gave him an insight into the reality at the time. The thinking behind *Ostpolitik* is further defined in his memoirs by a series of rhetorical questions: "Wie die Mauer durchlässig machen, wenn wir schon auf längere Zeit mit ihr zu leben hätten? Wie zu einem Modus vivendi, einem geregelten Verhältnis zwischen den Teilen Deutschlands kommen?" ¹² Brandt's argument was that the Wall had to be made "more

⁸ See Willy Brandt, *Erinnerungen*, Frankfurt am Main, Zurich 1990, pp. 9-12.

⁹ See Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, op. cit., chapter two on "Ostpolitik", pp. 28-47, here pp. 34-38.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 35. See also Willy Brandt, *Erinnerungen*, op. cit., p. 158.

¹¹ For recent studies of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, see also Peter Pulzer, *German Politics 1945-1995*, Oxford 1995, chapter on *Ostpolitik*, pp. 108-128. See further Peter Bender's article, *20 Jahre Warschauer Vertrag*, in: *Neue Gesellschaft/ Frankfurter Hefte*, Nr. 12, December 1990, pp. 1069-1074. See also Peter Bender, *Die 'Neue Ostpolitik' und ihre Folgen Vom Mauerbau bis zur Vereinigung*, Munich 1995.

¹² See Willy Brandt, *Erinnerungen*, op. cit., p. 12. The further provisions of the *Grundlagenvertrag* did attempt to address the problems of free travel and communication between the two sides, with agreements on postal and telecommunications services, and special exemptions relating to family visits from East to

transparent", by which was meant overcoming the political implications of ideological division between East and West Germany. The perception of the Berlin Wall as a threshold, not as a barrier certainly seems to tie in with Jaspers' existential critique of border experience as the attainment of a threshold connecting experience with abstracted reflections. That the Berlin Wall was really an existential, not a political border has also been acknowledged by Peter Bender: "Im Verhältnis zu Bonn ging es für die DDR buchstäblich um Sein oder Nichtsein".¹³ Yet the East German treatment of the Berlin Wall as an existential border meant, as we have seen an invalid state of affairs. More specifically, to speak of the Berlin Wall as an existential border actually meant to place the validity of this state of affairs in question. Therefore, the East German use of an existential border was really invalid, since it relied on distorting the meaning of existence, to the extent of an attempt to annihilate this value of life by an orchestrated reversal: the building of the Berlin Wall was as much for the purpose of securing an East German existence as for undermining the capacity of others critically to examine the validity of this political existence. The fact that Brandt identified a paradox was not necessarily related to the realization that existential and political implications of division had become infused with one another. The existence of two halves of Germany that had to be reconciled with one another represented in the first instance a political problem of how to live with the reality of the Berlin Wall.

The problem was that at the time this reality was compounded in the West German view of the situation by a legal complication, relating to international law and the provisions made at the post-war conferences of Potsdam (17 July-2 August 1945), and Yalta (4-11 February 1945). In political terms, the West German perception of division was not so much conditioned by an awareness of the ethical aspect of division from East

West, such as for silver and golden weddings, see *Vertrag über die Grundlagen der Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, ed. by Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, Bonn 1973, p. 58-67. (Further references use *Grundlagenvertrag*). See also Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, op. cit., pp. 141-149.

¹³ See Peter Bender, *Die 'Neue Ostpolitik' und ihre Folgen*, op. cit., p. 36.

Germany. It was more affected by a complex legal situation that arose out of the definition of the post-war Polish-German frontier, which was settled *de facto*, for all intents and purposes at the Potsdam Conference, along the natural lines of the Oder and western Neißerivers. At both post-war conferences of Potsdam and Yalta, the Oder-Neißer frontier served as a preliminary definition of Germany's national frontier with Poland, but the question was ultimately supposed to have been resolved upon signing a peace treaty with the former Allied powers.¹⁴ The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 superseded the need for a formal peace treaty between Germany and the former Allies, yet it did not supersede the ethical responsibility that lay behind the frontier question between Germany and Poland. It may be for ethical reasons that Brandt's policies in the early 1970s attempted to address the legal dispute that emerged in West Germany on the Oder-Neißer Line issue, for it was an ethical imperative to clarify this issue, as long as the idea of political accountability towards Poland is upheld.

The treaties signed and sealed under Brandt's *Ostpolitik* had already appeared to place the Polish-German frontier beyond question. East Germany had signed the Görlitz agreement (1950); and so had recognized the Polish western frontier long before West Germany. West Germany did not officially recognize the Oder-Neißer frontier until the Moscow Treaty (12 August 1970), in which Article 3 asserted respect for "die territoriale Integrität aller Staaten in Europa in ihren heutigen Grenzen"; and significantly, observed the inviolability of the Oder-Neißer line as "die Westgrenze der Volksrepublik Polen".¹⁵ The Moscow treaty also conferred this recognition on the internal border between the two Germanies, observing the political reality of a "Grenze zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik."¹⁶ The significance of the Moscow Treaty was that it was the first implicit recognition by West Germany that East Germany existed as a separate state. Yet this admission might best be explained as part

¹⁴ See Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Volume VI: *Triumph and Tragedy*, op. cit., p. 563 & p. 339.

¹⁵ See Article 3, *Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken*, ed. by Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, Bonn 1972, p. 10f.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 11.

of the pragmatic intentions behind *Ostpolitik*, rather than representative of an ethically conscious policy. As Peter Pulzer has observed in his recent study of German politics, it was an important strategic element of *Ostpolitik* that relations with Moscow should first be secured, before the negotiations with East Germany or Poland commenced.¹⁷ The idea that Moscow held the key to German unity is certainly confirmed by events that led up to unification in 1989.¹⁸ In 1970, however, the Moscow Treaty was still only a preliminary stage, a "small step" towards better relations with West Germany's neighbours in the east, as well as with the eastern half of Germany. Article 1 of the Warsaw Treaty even more explicitly asserted West Germany's recognition of the Oder-Neiße line as the western frontier of Poland.¹⁹

The Moscow and Warsaw treaties laid the foundation for relations with East Germany to be "normalized". However, clarity was also needed about another confusing aspect of the legal argument, which implied that although Germany had capitulated, the German Reich still existed within its 1937 frontiers. After 1945, West Germany regarded itself as the legitimate successor to what remained of Germany's political consciousness before 1945. This implied the continuity of the German Reich, - even though, in reality, it no longer existed! Such reference to a rather artificial, *de jure* state of political affairs was the implication behind the 1937 definition of Germany's frontiers that relied on a legal interpretation of Germany in international law, still upheld by the

¹⁷ See Peter Pulzer, *German Politics 1945-1990*, op. cit., p. 114. This view also traces Jaspers' arguments on the possibility of recognizing East Germany as a separate state: "Verhandlungen der Bundesrepublik mit der DDR werden mit Recht verworfen. Sie sind nicht gleichberechtigte Partner. Die Bundesrepublik stützt sich auf freie Volkswahlen, das Ulbrichtregime auf die Russen. Verhandlungspartner wäre nicht Ulbricht, sondern Rußland, das sich dabei verborgen hält." Karl Jaspers, *Zwei Deutsche Staaten?* In: *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., p. 70f.

¹⁸ Peter Bender charted how Moscow's reduced influence in East German affairs, resulting from Gorbachev's policies of reform, led to the approval for unification from Moscow, see *Die 'Neue Ostpolitik' und ihre Folgen*, op. cit., p. 263 & p. 275f.

¹⁹ See Article 1 *Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Volksrepublik Polen über die Grundlagen der Normalisierung ihrer gegenseitigen Beziehungen*, ed. by Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, Bonn 1972, p. 155f. (Both the Moscow and Warsaw Treaty appear in this same document, further references to either treaty use the single abbreviation, *Die Verträge*).

See also Walter Scheel's response to the German Bundestag, 23 February 1972, op. cit., p. 12. Scheel's commentary on the German-Polish treaty confirmed a resolution of the frontier question: "Diese Aussage stellt klar, daß die Bundesrepublik die Oder-Neiße-Linie als Westgrenze Polens nicht mehr in Frage stellt. [...] Der deutsch-polnische Vertrag schafft allerdings kein Optionsrecht für die Deutschen jenseits von Oder und Neiße."

Federal Constitutional Court in its ruling of 31 July 1973.²⁰ What Brandt's *Ostpolitik* demonstrated was that in claiming to represent all Germans, West Germany's political consciousness was not to be regarded as continuing the political consciousness of the German Reich, as had been implied by the Federal Constitutional Court's ruling.²¹ The clarification of the Oder-Neiße frontier was supposed to contribute to a general mood of *détente* with Poland, Russia and East Germany. Despite this aim, the West German domestic reception of this frontier recognition was hostile, especially when the Basic Treaty (*Grundlagenvertrag*) was subsequently signed with East Germany.²²

It is at this point that an ethical aspect to *Ostpolitik* appears to come to light. The implications of the Basic Treaty (1972) ought to be considered in the wake of an event that occurred on Brandt's state visit to Warsaw. The visit was to seal the treaty with Poland and to mark the continuity of *Ostpolitik*. It was during this visit that Brandt fell to his knees at a commemorative monument to the victims of the Jewish ghetto.²³ This single, spontaneous action of Brandt's might be taken as a sign of his awareness of Jaspers' ethically conscious concept of *politische Haftung*. Brandt's reaction seems to symbolize that there was another dimension to *Ostpolitik*, which was not just pragmatic, but ethically committed, and even aware of Jaspers' existential theory. Brandt's spontaneity demonstrated a gesture of moral responsibility that Jaspers had appealed for by his concept of political accountability. Did this gesture really extend to a reflection of the ethical imperative to *Ostpolitik*? It is difficult to answer this question with certainty. What is plain is the significance of the fact that it was West Germany's Federal Chancellor who knelt at the memorial to the Warsaw ghetto. Most importantly, the

²⁰ See *Urteil des Bundesverfassungsgerichts vom 31. Juli 1973*, ed. by Gesamtdeutsches Institut, p. 8: "Das Deutsche Reich existiert fort besitzt nach wie vor Rechtsfähigkeit, ist allerdings als Gesamtstaat mangels Organisation, insbesondere mangels institutionalisierter Organe selbst nicht handlungsfähig."

²¹ See also Helmut Rumpf, *Deutschlands Rechtslage seit 1973*, in: *Zeitschrift für Politik*, H. 2, 1975, pp. 111-139, here p. 127.

²² See Walter Scheel's commentary on the policy rationale behind the Moscow and Warsaw treaties as the cultivation of a general period of *détente*, prior to the revisions of *Ostpolitik*, Walter Scheel, *Commentary on negotiations*, in: *Grundlagenvertrag*, *ibid.*, p. 83f.

²³ See Willy Brandt, *Erinnerungen*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

gesture demonstrated to Germans and non-Germans alike that West Germany was conscious of its political responsibilities.

Nevertheless, at the time of the signing of the 1972 Basic Treaty (*Grundlagenvertrag*), *Ostpolitik*, or the policies that it entailed, appeared to a West German appraisal of the situation like a contradiction in terms: the Basic Treaty suggested that West German policy was to guarantee the Polish-German frontier; and moreover, to secure the continuity of the Berlin Wall. With hindsight, it is easy to see that such security was only in nominal terms. Yet in the Moscow Treaty, an additional "Letter on German Unity" had been included, which specifically expressed that this treaty was not in contradiction of the continuing West German goal of unity.²⁴ The treaty with the Soviet Union may have appeared to offer East Germany the official recognition as an independent state, which it sought from West Germany, but the treaty can also be viewed as part of Brandt's overall expressed aim to make the Berlin Wall "more transparent". In other words, behind the carefully worded treaties of *Ostpolitik* lay the kind of reasoning suggested by Jaspers' existential argument: recognizing East Germany would be a first step towards German unity in a democratically understood form.

Whether or not Brandt had this ulterior motive in mind, any signature to the Basic Treaty by both East and West Germany was meant to further regulate and "normalize" relations between the two states.²⁵ A restatement of West Germany's political will to achieve German unity was included in the Basic Treaty, despite the fact that the treaty itself had apparently recognized the inviolability of the internal German border between East and West Germany.²⁶ If it appeared that Brandt's policies had contravened *de facto* the West German constitutional commitment to achieving political unification, the appearance was deceptive. Nevertheless, at the time, *Ostpolitik* was opposed by the

²⁴ See Walter Scheel, *Brief zur deutschen Einheit*, (Moscow Treaty), in: *Die Verträge*, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁵ Article 1 of the Basic Treaty (21 December 1972) referred to the need to foster "normale gutnachbarliche Beziehungen" between the two Germanies, see *Grundlagenvertrag*, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁶ See *Brief der Regierung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur deutschen Einheit an die Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 21. Dezember 1972*, (Egon Bahr to Dr. Michael Kohl), in: *Grundlagenvertrag*, op. cit., p. 22; and Article 3, *ibid.*, p. 18.

conservative opposition in West Germany. The federal state of Bavaria made an appeal to the Federal Constitutional Court which argued against the Basic Treaty as a contravention of the West German constitution. As one of the main pillars of *Ostpolitik*, the Basic Treaty narrowly survived this political opposition when the same Federal Constitutional Court ruling that had argued on the continued existence of the Third Reich, mercifully recognized that the Basic Treaty was "kein Teilungsvertrag".²⁷

The Basic Treaty and the treaties with Moscow and Warsaw that had preceded it suggested that West Germany perceived the external frontier with Poland and the internal German border between the two Germanies in a different manner. Firstly, the Polish-German frontier was placed *de facto* beyond question by all treaties, but it was for reasons of political expedience, not out of regard to the ethos of policy-making, that the Oder-Neiße issue was not definitively resolved in West Germany until unification. Poland had to wait until November 1990 until a formal treaty was signed with her, officially to recognize the Oder-Neiße Line as the western frontier of Poland and of a unified Germany.²⁸ Garton Ash has reliably documented the political reasons for West Germany's reluctance to recognize the legal status of the Oder-Neiße frontier. This reluctance was mainly explained by the domestic political need to placate a sizeable group of expellees from Silesia, advocating a return to their *Heimat* because of the legal definition of Germany's frontiers that suggested continuity with Germany's 1937 frontiers.²⁹ Yet what of the implications for the West German perception of the Berlin Wall, given the recognition that was made in the Basic Treaty of the internal division between the two Germanies?³⁰

²⁷ See *Urteil des Bundesverfassungsgerichts* vom 31. Juli 1973, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁸ See *Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Republik Polen über die Bestätigung der zwischen ihnen bestehenden Grenze*, in: *Die deutsch-polnische Verträge vom 14. 11. 1990 und 17. 6. 1991*, ed. by Auswärtiges Amt, Bundesministerium des Innern, Botschaft der Republik Polen, Article 1, p. 14. Separate treaties with other East European states, including Czechoslovakia, were signed later. The treaty of mutual respect and friendship with Czechoslovakia was not signed until February 1992, see Peter Bender, *Die 'Neue Ostpolitik' und ihre Folgen*, op. cit., p. 358.

²⁹ See Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, op. cit., pp. 227-231. See also Peter Bender, *20 Jahre Warschauer Vertrag*, in: *Neue Gesellschaft/ Frankfurter Hefte*, Nr. 12, December 1990, pp. 1069-1074.

³⁰ On the issue of the West German perception of the Berlin Wall between the two Germanies, Garton Ash further concluded that the question of Germany's political division was characterized by a form of

It is not clear whether the then West German recognition of the East German border was, as Brandt seems to claim, made possible because of an awareness about Jaspers' critique of existential and political borders. Brandt acknowledged that history has proved the validity of Jaspers' ability to distinguish between the complex aspects of Germany's division as a vindication of Jaspers' thought. Notwithstanding this assertion, it is far from clear that Brandt fully understood the existential reasoning that lies behind the concept of *politische Haftung*:

Karl Jaspers könnte sagen, er habe nicht vergeblich von der neuen Chance gesprochen, politische Freiheit durch Mitverantwortung verwirklichen zu helfen. Das ist nicht wenig.³¹

Whereas Brandt appeared accurately to assess the political implications of Jaspers' thinking, it is not clear that he really observed an ethical connection, (other than spontaneous gestures), between political matters and existential reasoning. Brandt's remark about unification made in Berlin in November 1989 was that: "Wir sind jetzt in der Situation wo zusammenwächst, was zusammengehört."³² Yet there is no indication that he meant to express knowledge of the argument aired by Jaspers: namely that division itself could be exposed as illegitimate because of a confusion of political will, ethical responsibility and guilt. Furthermore, Brandt appears to reiterate a generally held misconception about Jaspers' interpretation of "guilt", so far as he implied that Jaspers saw "German guilt" as a vindication for Germany's ideological division:³³

paradox. However, he did not describe the intellectual significance of this paradox as being related to existential reasoning: "Paradox was the characteristic intellectual figure of German-German relations (itself a paradoxical phrase): the two-in-one of the 'community of responsibility'; accepting the status quo in order to overcome it; strengthening the regime in order to loosen its grip; not demanding German unity being the only means to achieve it." See Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, op. cit., p. 205, (chapter on *Germany and Germany*). Peter Bender's review of Garton Ash's book, *Verspannte Entspannung Verwunderter Nachtrag zur Diskussion über Garton Ash*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 December 1993, criticized *In Europe's Name* for not having fully recognized the 'strategic' implications of *Ostpolitik*.

³¹ See Willy Brandt, *Vorwort*, in: Karl Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., p. IV.

³² Quoted after *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 November 1989.

³³ See Karl Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., p. 22: "Was die Sowjetzone betrifft, so würden diese Leiden mit Gewährung politischer Freiheit aufhören. Die Grenze hätte keine Bedeutung mehr. Es bedarf keine Wiedervereinigung."

Ein deutliches Fragezeichen setze ich hinter die These, der Nationalstaatsgedanke als solcher sei zu dem Unheil Europas [...] geworden [...] auf nationalstaatliche Souveranitätsansprüche zu verzichten, sondern auch die Teilung anzunehmen - gleichsam als Haftung für das, was NS-Deutschland anrichtete. Später hat solches Denken über Schuld und Sühne seine Fortsetzung in der ebenso gutgemeinten wie abwegigen Formel gefunden, das Wissen um Auschwitz verbiete die deutsche Einheit.³⁴

Brandt's critique of Jaspers' discussion of "guilt" does not distinguish between existential and political implications of Germany's division. Moreover, he clearly confused the idea of *Haftung* with the concept of guilt, thus perpetuating the misconception that guilt was to be equated with political division as a form of "existential punishment" (*Strafe*). This explains why he linked Jaspers' ideas on "German guilt" with the aesthetic argument first put forward by Theodor Adorno that poetry is unthinkable because of Auschwitz: "'Ich denke an Auschwitz' muß alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können', so hat Theodor W. Adorno den kategorischen Imperativ neu formuliert; nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, sei barbarisch."³⁵ Günter Grass explored Adorno's dictum further by examining the difficulties that the knowledge of Auschwitz represents for German contemporary authors. His essay, *Schreiben nach Auschwitz*, is a response to Adorno's dictum.³⁶ Yet Grass implied in this essay that knowledge of Auschwitz cannot even be rationalized by a sense of guilt. While he did not go as far as the suggestion that German writers have a moral obligation to address guilt in their work, he did mean that if art is to continue in spite of Auschwitz, poetic writing needs to be constantly aware of what happened there.³⁷ Jaspers was hardly aiming his interpretation of guilt towards German authors, especially since he regarded his existential philosophy as not necessarily appropriate for reference to

³⁴ Willy Brandt, *Vorwort*, op. cit., p. III.

³⁵ Quoted after Hermann Glaser, *Die Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Band III, *Zwischen Protest und Anpassung*, 1968-1989, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 349.

³⁶ See Günter Grass, *Schreiben nach Auschwitz*, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 13f.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9f.

aesthetic experience. Jaspers argued politically that because Auschwitz had happened, Germany as a state must accept a permanent need for political accountability:

Die Anerkennung der Haftung hat die Hinnahme der Teilung Deutschlands zur Folge, auch die der Bevölkerung, die getrennt worden ist. [...] Aber diese Haftung, die anzuerkennen eine politisch-sittliche Forderung ist, hat eine Grenze. Die Beraubung politischer Freiheit in Ostdeutschland, faktische Annexion durch eine fremde, russische Macht, Trennung des Verkehrs der Deutschen miteinander, eiserner Vorhang sind zwar ebenfalls Folgen des Hitlerkrieges und sind trotzdem weder moralisch noch rechtlich anzuerkennen.³⁸

The permanent need for accountability, however, did not mean a permanent support for Germany's division. There was no argument, according to Jaspers, that could have supported the division of Germany, apart from the ideological one, which his existential theory aimed to expose as invalid, since it was based upon questionable thinking, or simply upon ideology. As far as Brandt was concerned, he suggested that Jaspers gave an existential recognition of ideological division. The assertion is true in the sense that Jaspers urged the recognition of East Germany because of his method of reasoning, but it is not true to claim that there is or was a permanent existential recognition of the division of Germany. The very act of recognition was supposed to be a step towards undermining the suggestion that Germany's division had any existential validity in a political context. This is because an existential perception of division exposed a paradox: recognition of the border between East and West Germany would be a political act of transgressing it. The full consequences of the political act may have been obscured because of unspoken aspirations and differing motives that were held on either side of the border. The future aspiration defined in West Germany's constitution was to remove the existential nature of division that the East German policy of ideological division perpetuated. Yet if *Ostpolitik* had no intention of recognizing East Germany on a permanent basis, it is not clear why Brandt assumed that Jaspers intended to support

³⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, op. cit., p. 26f.

ideological division: "Anders als Karl Jaspers zog unsereins *nicht* in Erwägung, die innerdeutsche Grenze mehr denn als *de facto* anzuerkennen." ³⁹

It has already been shown that Jaspers' analysis of "guilt" was essentially opposed to division. He did not consider a *de facto* recognition of the inner German border as permanent, since he regarded political and existential borders as separate entities. He argued against Germany's division being excused by an existential conception of "guilt", which he pointed out did not apply in political terms. Germany's political border was thought by Jaspers to be based on a mixture of political, as well as existential factors, but these were mistakenly adjoined in East Germany with the belief that the Berlin Wall itself could not be questioned. To summarize the intention of Jaspers' reasoning is to show how he himself questioned an existential validity of Germany's ideological division. The unification of West and East Germany on the basis of Article 23 of the *Grundgesetz* allowed an East German accession to the constitutional framework of the Federal Republic. ⁴⁰ This accession marked an act of border transgression, which Jaspers had argued would follow on from allowing each individual the right to political accountability. The 1990 Unity Treaty recognized and underlined a new German situation in which "Grenzen nicht mehr trennen." ⁴¹ What this treaty finally marked was a distinction for which Jaspers had argued: to realize the difference between political and existential borders and their impact on experience.

³⁹ Willy Brandt, *Vorwort*, op. cit., p. II.

⁴⁰ See Article 23: "Dieses Grundgesetz gilt zunächst im Gebiete der Länder Baden, Bayern, Bremen, Groß-Berlin, Hamburg, Hessen, Niedersachsen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Schleswig-Holstein, Württemberg-Baden und Württemberg-Hohenzollern. In anderen Teilen Deutschlands ist es nach deren Beitritt in Kraft zu setzen." *GG*, Bonn 1989, p. 32. After the East German decision on 23 August 1990 to come under the jurisdiction of the West German *Grundgesetz*, Article 23 was suspended on 3 October 1990. See *Beschluß der Volkskammer der DDR über den Beitritt der DDR zum Geltungsbereich des Grundgesetzes der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: *Texte zur Deutschlandpolitik*, III, Band 8a, op. cit., p. 447.

⁴¹ For the text of the Unity Treaty, see *Texte zur Deutschlandpolitik*, III, Band 8b, op. cit., pp. 7-37, here especially p. 7.

Chapter II

The aspect of Authenticity (Helmuth Plessner)

What lies behind the distinction between political and existential borders is the question of their authentic experience. This aspect of the study may shed more light on what is essential to our understanding of 'borders', and what is only a transitional stage towards their broader comprehension. The work of Helmuth Plessner is significant for its contrasted view of 'borders', which sets Karl Jaspers' existential theory in perspective. Plessner's main aim was not to develop an existential connection between life and existence, but to concentrate on why 'borders' have any relevance at all to life. Practical and reasoned elements are no less relevant to his 'authentic' definition of the 'border', but whether Plessner really succeeded in his aim of finding out what authentic experience involves is the subject of this chapter.

The interpretation of an authentic definition of the 'border' is given in a theoretical model. The essential feature of this model for the purpose of our study is its exposition of authenticity, which is to be further related to existential and political implications of border experience. This discussion leads us to Plessner's main work, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928).¹ In this work, Plessner's purpose was not merely to study life in objective terms, but to lay his interpretation of life open to the field of practice, and to confirm the validity of subjective experience, both in political and cultural terms. Norbert J. Schürgers drew attention to the fact that Plessner's early

¹ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch, Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band IV, ed. by Günter Dux, Odo Marquard, Elisabeth Ströker with Richard W. Schmidt, Angelika Wetterer, Michael-Joachim Zemlin, Frankfurt am Main 1981, especially pp. 149-156 on: *Wie ist Doppelaspektivität möglich? Das Wesen der Grenze*. (Further references use *Die Stufen ...*).

essay, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinschaft* (1924) and subsequently, *Macht und menschliche Natur* (1931), both intended to outline the associations between anthropology and politics.² The theoretical model of authenticity implies this particular association, where the politically motivated ideas appear to be committed to the theory that life comprises various "stages" (*Stufen*). This theory means to subject life to an objective study, whilst attempting to draw the consequences of this theoretical approach by relating theory to practice:

Nicht also das Entweder-Oder, sondern [...] das Sowohl-Als-Auch bestimmt seinen Ansatz; laut Plessner müssen die apriorische und die empirische Betrachtung miteinander verbunden werden.³

It is not clear, from the above statement, why Schürgers relied on the Kierkegaardian formula of "either-or" to illuminate Plessner's connection between pragmatic activity and that of the mind. Plessner's thinking does not appear to be motivated by a study of Kierkegaard. The connection made in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* between anthropology and politics is hardly to be regarded as existential. The theoretical basis for the connection between ideas and experience is outlined in Plessner's subsequent essay on *Macht und menschliche Natur*, which aimed to restate in a more practical manner what the theory of *Stufen* appeared to strive for. The argument was that the benefit of theoretical insights into reality, in general, can only be seen by putting theory into practice. Conversely, practical decisions are best made by first measuring them against theoretical objectives.⁴ Plessner in fact appeared to revise the distinctly theoretical perception of political life that he had first set out in his notion of authenticity, which can also be regarded as a theory that outlines stages towards political practice. In this regard, Plessner seems

² Norbert J. Schürgers, *Politik als Organon der Anthropologie (Helmuth Plessner)*, in: *Politische Philosophie in der Weimarer Republik*, op. cit., pp. 212-219. See Helmuth Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (1924), in: *Macht und menschliche Natur, Gesammelte Schriften*, Band V, Frankfurt am Main 1981, pp. 7-133; and *Macht und menschliche Natur Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht* (1931), *ibid.*, pp. 139-234.

³ Norbert J. Schürgers, *Politik als Organon der Anthropologie*, op. cit., p. 212.

⁴ Helmuth Plessner, *Macht und menschliche Natur*, op. cit., pp. 151-154.

only to echo what Jaspers had implied: philosophy has an incentive to distance itself from "compromising" practical values; and perhaps even to inject some "aristocratic" quality into political life. Yet if Plessner argued that politics and philosophy have a mutual obligation to take up matters that are common to both disciplines, he argued from a different standpoint to Jaspers. It is not political leadership as such that counts, but the general mandate given by the people to political leaders, whose role it is to organize the provision of material wants. It is this mandate and the responsibility attached to it that determines the significance of political life:

Je geringer sie (die Politik, S.K.) geachtet ist, um so schlechter wird sie. Denn nicht der Glücksfall des großen einzelnen bestimmt ihr Niveau, sondern das Maß der Aufmerksamkeit, das ihr auch die nicht unmittelbar materiell an ihr interessierten Schichten eines Volkes entgegenbringen.⁵

In expressing an interest in political matters, Plessner's theory of the essential conditions for political life does not offer a repetition of Jaspers' existentially informed political analysis. When compared with Jaspers' critique of political culture, Plessner's theory is more practically oriented, to the extent that he advocated a philosophy that is not too concerned with metaphysical problems: philosophy should not just deduce from theory, but should observe reality through first-hand experience.⁶

In *Die Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, Plessner tried to defend his pragmatic approach to life. He intended to define the anthropological principles of life, which he argued are a basis for what he called "politisch-diplomatische Konstante im menschlichen Gesamtverhalten".⁷ Schürgers interprets these "political constants" as part of Plessner's theoretical framework, in which politics is treated as an anthropological "constant" and is accepted as part of certain given conditions.⁸ This interpretation follows on logically from what Plessner himself wrote on the matter, but

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 143.

⁸ Norbert J. Schürgers, *Politik als Organon der Anthropologie*, op. cit., p. 214.

these "political constants" appear to approach a revision of the original theory, as it was set out in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* which first concentrated on defining "anthropological constants".⁹

René Weiland criticized Plessner because of his claim to a practical approach to life, when in fact he regarded politics not as a primary, but as a secondary field of activity.¹⁰ In Plessner's view, politics was a consequential field of study, that is, political life apparently derives its vitality from its application to anthropological theory. Weiland suggested, however, that to Plessner, politics was only a logical outcome of his theoretical approach. Therefore politics could only be experienced as a form of "inauthentic" reality.¹¹ The terms "inauthentic" and "authentic" are inferred in the definition of authenticity given in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*. The idea of "authentic" reality is apparently equated with the "constant" anthropological conditions in which life is assumed to exist. "Inauthentic" reality seems to follow on from a negative distinction that sets anthropological "constants" against those areas that are not first included within this theoretical field of analysis. There are two problems with this approach. Firstly, the terms are only valid in application to this particular theory. Otherwise, the use of the terms "authentic" and "inauthentic" can be misleading. They appear to imply that "authentic" values are superior to "inauthentic" ones, yet this is not the intention behind Plessner's distinction. The idea that political activity is to be regarded as "inauthentic" refers to the claim that political affairs derive validity when they are measured against "authentic" theoretical values. The second problem is that the term "inauthentic" seems redundant, especially when it emerges that politics is predefined within "constant" anthropological conditions. In this case, political affairs are hardly "inauthentic", since they are assumed as part of life's "authentic" experience.

⁹ See Helmuth Plessner, *Macht und menschliche Natur*, op. cit., p. 230.

¹⁰ René Weiland, *Grenzbesinnungen - Zum 100. Geburtstag Helmuth Plessners*, in: *Neue Gesellschaft/ Frankfurter Hefte*, Nr. 8, August 1992, pp. 743-748.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 745.

Accordingly, Plessner did not develop his ideas as a reaction against the political context in which he was writing.¹² His ideas did not spring from the need to turn his experience of political events in Germany in the late 1920s into an anthropological theory. It was rather that his theory attempted to incorporate and to account for political needs through first explaining life as an end in itself. The theory was based primarily on the humanitarian purpose of doing practical endeavours justice.¹³ This purpose already implies a connection between thought and experience, which may suggest a similarity with Jaspers' existential theory. Plessner was fully aware of the similarities and differences between anthropology and existential theory. It is useful to bear in mind, however, whether the existential distinction between life and existence, as understood by Jaspers, is also made by Plessner.

The model of authentic experience offers a hypothesis that tries to identify which elements are "constant" conditions in life. Political activity is implied by this hypothesis, but only to the extent that it can be regarded as a validation of Plessner's theory. The theoretical model of life aims to retain all possible influences that are present in human consciousness, without discounting evidence from any quarter.¹⁴ However, it appears that only those influences relevant to the purposes of the model are to be fully accounted for; and this approach seems to lead to a paradox in the analysis. The paradox that is implied can be further demonstrated with reference to the original illustrations that accompanied the hypothesis.¹⁵ Figure I, overleaf, illustrates the hypothetical scenario that Plessner envisaged as a means of explaining the reality of a 'border'. The illustration shows how a border acts as a demarcation line, so that both

¹² See Joachim Güntner, *Der Mensch als offene Frage (Zum 100. Geburtstag von Helmuth Plessner 4. September)*, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 4 September 1992.

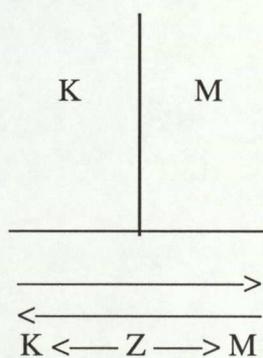
¹³ See Helmuth Plessner, *Die Aufgabe der Philosophischen Anthropologie* (1937), in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band VIII, *Conditio Humana*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 36.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., 155. The following explanations of the terminology attached to these illustrations are given: "K bezeichnet den begrenzten Körper, M das angrenzende Medium. Figur I symbolisiert das "leere Zwischen" der weder K noch M bzw. sowohl K als auch M angehörenden Grenze." (The illustrations are followed by formulas at a later stage of the analysis (*ibid.*, p. 181). For reasons of clarity, the formula is depicted together with the diagram).

sides, which Plessner arbitrarily refers to as *K* and *M*, are divided from one another. In the illustration, the flow and direction of the arrows that are placed underneath the diagram indicates possible movement between the two entities. The implication in Figure I is that no movement is really possible between the two sides, because the border divides the two entities, referred to as *K* and *M*. (Plessner's formula, has been added underneath Figure I, but it was not originally included with the illustration. However, this formula seems to illustrate more clearly the implication behind this first scenario.) In the formula $K \leftarrow Z \rightarrow M$, the two sides that are represented by *K* and *M* are physically divided from one another by what is called a "neutral zone between the two sides" (*leeres Zwischen*). If the border exists in this manner, as a "limes", or as a neutral "repellent", the reality of the division is thought to be essentially static. The border seems to come between the two sides, so that movement between each side is not only cancelled out, but also prevented by the physical existence of the border. ¹⁶

Figure I ¹⁷



From the illustration, Figure I, clearly there is no indication of a paradox in Plessner's thinking. The border is a straightforward physical division. Although the two sides seem to be in reciprocal contact, with each side appearing to 'border' on the

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 155.

other, there is no guarantee that the border is really fulfilling the 'neutral' function that it is assumed to perform according to this scenario. What Gerhard Arlt called a "Missverhältnis", that is, a conflict between opposing views might also be read from Figure I.¹⁸ In this case, Arlt seems to have based his interpretation of Plessner's political analysis on the above model, but this means taking the scenario illustrated by Figure I much further, so as to see the illustration almost as a paradigm for the political division that the border between former West and East Germany used to impose. It cannot be claimed, however, that this scenario, as it has been described in Figure I, offers any explanation of the existence of a political border such as the Berlin Wall, beyond the suggestion that the Wall was a kind of repellent. Obviously, the Berlin Wall was hardly to be described as a "neutral" entity, since it was more an antagonistic division, a death strip, between the two divided halves of Germany, which according to Jaspers had existential implications.

Plessner seems to have applied the suggestion of a "mismatch" between two sides of a "neutral" border, not necessarily in political terms alone, for in reality a 'border' is based on a conflict of practical and theoretical components. Nevertheless, it was Plessner's ability to perceive a connection, over and above antagonisms between the fields of theory and practice, which led him to use his theoretical ideas for analysing political life. In *Die verspätete Nation*, originally published in 1935, but withdrawn because of Nazi censorship, the connection between ideals and reality is explored further by an analysis of the concept of German nationhood.¹⁹ A new edition of *Die verspätete Nation* was published in 1959, in which Plessner argued that the German 'problem', as regards defining its national identity, was partly to be related to the "mismatch", or conflict between practical and ideal values. In a modified form, the idea of "mismatch" could be said to have inspired his argument that there was also a form of

¹⁸ See Gerhard Arlt, *Die Vernunft und die Gesellschaft Helmuth Plessners politische Philosophie*, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 4 September 1992.

¹⁹ See *Die verspätete Nation Über die Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes (1935/1959)* in: Band VI, Frankfurt am Main 1982, op. cit. (Plessner himself left Germany in 1933 and eventually fled to Holland), see Norbert J. Schürgers, *Politik als Organon der Anthropologie*, op. cit., p. 217.

'delayed' connection between ideals of nationhood in Germany and the ability to define nationhood in political terms, but without the political entity representing antagonisms against others. Thus in comparison to other European nations, the relative "delay" in achieving an acceptable definition of nationhood in Germany might have led to negative compensation for a sense of fragmented national existence:

Im Vergleich zu Frankreich, England und den USA, so die Kernthese Plessners, kommt die Bismarcksche Reichsgründung von 1871 zu spät. Deutschland verpasst die Frühaufklärung, von der sich jene Nationen getragen wussten. Damit fehlte [...] ein Verhältnis zum politischen Humanismus der Aufklärung als ein Verhältnis zur Rechts- und Staatsidee. [...] Diese Haltung wurde den Deutschen zum Verhängnis, sie brachte die verspätete Nation auf den Sonderweg.²⁰

The thesis of "delayed nationhood" implied that Germany's history had prepared a way for the growth of Nazism, in the sense that her unique path of an overexpansive interpretation of political identity led, during the 1933-45 period, to an effort to "catch up" with other European states. Yet apart from the idea of a dissociation between ideal and practical values this thesis naturally seems difficult to relate to the full implications of Plessner's notion of the border's function, as it was broached in Figure I. Moreover, this initial scenario only represented one particular stage of Plessner's theory. Whilst it demonstrated that theory enables observations to be made about political reality, this rather theoretical view of the 'border' could hardly be taken as a general explanation for reality. What Figure I shows is that the idea of a 'border' as a division is only a preliminary definition of its authentic experience. If a border exists as a demarcation line, this state is to be regarded as transitional: "[...] reiner Übergang vom Einen zum Anderen, vom Anderen zum Einen und wirklich nur als das Insofern eben dieser wechselweisen Bestimmtheit."²¹ The first illustration is envisaged by Plessner far more as a preliminary step towards a dynamic 'border' definition. In other words, the preliminary definition refers to the border as a periphery, what Plessner called

²⁰ See Gerhard Arlt, *Die Vernunft und die Gesellschaft*, op. cit.

²¹ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., p. 154.

"Raumgrenze" or "Kontour." ²² Modifications to the merely superficial, or peripheral characteristics of borders give a more comprehensive description: "Grenze ist stehendes Übergehen, das Weiter als Halt, das Halt als Weiter." ²³

The difficulty of defining the practical repercussions of the preliminary scenario, as in Figure I, led Plessner to suggest that there are more intrinsic features of a 'border' that lead beyond the first stage of the hypothesis. The revised 'border' definition took into account the initial illustration, but studied it in relation to behavioural patterns on either side, so far as these could be deduced. The need for deductions to be made from observations about the apparently static reality of 'borders' implies that a theoretical framework is essential if the perplexities of defining an authentic experience of 'borders' are to be fully comprehended. The drawback of the scenario illustrated by Figure I was that it was impossible to account for the essentially paradoxical nature of the border. This made it difficult to find an authentic definition. The border appeared to exist in its own right; and to come between the two entities *K* and *M*. The "authentic" border definition was not yet evident, since the actual reality of experiencing a 'border' was regarded by Plessner to be more complex.

If a true picture of the reality of border experience is to be gained, in Plessner's view, the intrinsic elements that characterize it have to be accounted for: the properties defined are not just *Raumgrenze*, but *Aspektgrenze*. ²⁴ In other words, a "true" perception of a 'border' can be given when this entity is seen in a spatial dimension that is both related to the subject itself, as well as to the surroundings of that particular subject. The second illustration, overleaf, may be seen to describe what Plessner understood as an "authentic" definition of border experience. Again, the entities *K* and *M* are purely arbitrary, and the arrows below the illustration suggest motion between the two sides. Plessner's formula is included together with his illustration, since it

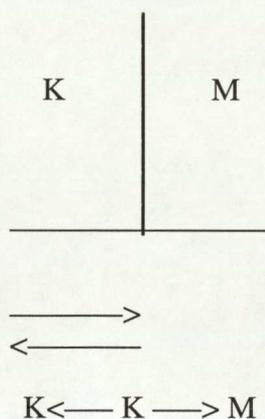
²² *ibid.*, p. 153.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 155: "In Figur II fällt das leere Zwischen fort, da die Grenze dem begrenzten Körper selbst angehört."

appears to complement the diagram by showing the meaning more clearly. In the illustration, and from the formula, there is a qualitative difference that distinguishes the first from the second illustration.

Figure II ²⁵



In Figure II, although the physical presence of the border is no longer in place between the two sides, there appears to be some barrier preventing movement beyond the limits that are attributed to the entity *K*. What is described is the existence of a paradox, since the border of the entity *K* apparently both 'is' and 'has' itself as its own limit. In other words, 'borders' are observed as an integral aspect of any entity, without which it is not possible to exist. The identity *K* appears to retain an intrinsic internal limit, which is implied in the formula, $K \leftarrow K \rightarrow M$. The implication is that since border transgression is a natural part of existence, there is no need for any form of artificial division, such as in Figure I. In Figure II, the border appears to be so intrinsic to the identity concerned, that the previous difficulty of determining the meaning of an authentically experienced border appears to be overcome:

Ein Körper, der sich entsprechend der Formel $K \leftarrow K \rightarrow M$ zu seinen eigenen Grenzen verhält, ist, da ihn seine Grenze nicht nur

²⁵ *ibid.*

einschließen, sondern ebenso sehr dem Medium gegenüber aufschließen (mit ihm in Verbindung setzen), *über ihm hinaus*.²⁶

The implication of Plessner's "authentic" border definition is that in order to appreciate fully the impact of 'borders', recognition should be made of a combination of individual experience meeting with other aspects of experience that lie beyond individual consciousness (*über ihm hinaus*). If there is a "metaphysical" intention to this theory, it is not clearly developed, since what is shown is only that border experience is a part of life. Life itself is regarded as a two-way process of individual experience, which meets with what might be regarded as 'objective' insights into this experience. The theory hardly implies transcendence, so that the ideas do not carry the same existential weight as the method of thinking that Jaspers described in *Existenzerhellung*. Plessner's interpretation of border experience described a paradox of appearing to transcend subjective consciousness, whilst not actually breaking out of the boundaries of subjectivity.²⁷ This points to a tendency for the theoretical model to rely on a style of argument that supports practical values as authentic ones, but only when they are perceived within the theoretical field.

If the importance attached to life experience as well as to the influence of thinking is taken in a positive light as part of Plessner's aim to do human life justice, his "authentic" border definition may be regarded as an essential part of his ideas.²⁸ In other words, the definition itself offers a framework within which the paradox inherent to an "authentic" perception of reality is made manifest. The paradoxical element, as represented by the idea of *über ihm hinaus, in ihm hinein*, does not necessarily mean that there is a problem with the theory. It may be a sign that the aim of representing life in all its diversity has been achieved. Yet such a realistic insight into the meaning of 'borders' is not necessarily "authentic". The deduction from the paradoxical conditions

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 188.

of borders is that their experience involves a conflict of motives, or a behavioural paradox, "Doppelaspektivität".²⁹ According to Plessner, life can be properly appreciated when it is understood to be based on a number of conflicting intentions which are mutually antagonistic, rather than mutually indifferent. To him, life can only be fully represented by an awareness of such antagonisms.³⁰ The earlier "limes" scenario is superseded by this view of antagonistic influences, which suggests that conflict is an inevitable part of an "authentic case".³¹ From this revised perception of authenticity, Plessner evidently regarded 'borders' as an essential part of human experience. Moreover, he suggested that the ability to perceive an authentic form of experience offers a principle with which to understand the paradoxical circumstances of borders: there is such a notion as a "Prinzip der real gesetzten Grenze (Fall II)":³²

Die Grenze des Dinges ist sein Rand, mit dem es an etwas Anderes, als es selbst ist stößt. [...] Wohl tritt die Grenze [...] als prägnante Gestalt hervor, aber sie läßt sich nicht dem von ihr Begrenzten oder dem, woran sie als Grenze stößt gegenüber als Eigenes fassen.³³

Plessner's first illustration of the border, as depicted on p. 145, might be regarded as an intermediate stage towards his modified definition: "Bleiben, was es ist, Übergehen in das, was es nicht ist (über ihm hinaus) *und* in das, was es ist (in ihm hinein)." ³⁴ Life is seen as a process of experiencing antagonistic influences that seem to derive from individual consciousness coming into contact with what lies beyond the bounds of subjective experience. Yet the key to Plessner's analysis lies not necessarily with the principle of authentic experience, but with the concept of "Exzentrizität".³⁵ Although the latter concept is incorporated within the former theory it appears more

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 149.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 189.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 191.

³² *ibid.*, p. 171.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 151.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 193.

³⁵ See section on *Die Positionalität der exzentrischen Form. Das Ich und der Personencharacter*, *ibid.*, pp. 360-365, here especially p. 364. The concept of "Exzentrizität", as will be seen, has nothing to do with the English idea of "eccentricity."

useful for the purposes of explaining the paradoxical conditions of borders. Essentially, it implies that human life can reflect on its own actions. The concept of "Exzentrizität" attempts to explain the supposed paradox of humanity's striving to find a "transcendental" purpose, but without actually achieving a tangible perception of this "metaphysical" possibility.

The idea of "stages" or *Stufen* is relevant at this point, since it is by following successive stages of human development that Plessner distinguished humanity from animals, for instance, by placing them on a different stage of development. Hence animals cannot experience their own actions, nor reflect on the consequences of these, since this capacity only applies to human life: "Ist das Leben des Tieres zentrisch, so ist das Leben des Menschen, ohne die Zentrierung durchbrechen zu können, zugleich aus ihr heraus, exzentrisch."³⁶ The apparently "transcendent" element of the concept of "Exzentrizität" means rather that human experience has to deal with the effects of living through a paradox of experiencing subjectively as well as being conscious of other spheres of experience and knowledge. This irreducible form of paradox is a consequence of the human capacity for experiencing and reflecting upon practical and creative endeavours.³⁷ The idea of *Exzentrizität* appears as a preferred way of explaining the reality of border experience, because the conditions that it implies are also inevitable and unchanging:

Er ist in seine Grenze gesetzt und deshalb über sie hinaus, die ihn, das lebendige Ding begrenzt. Er lebt und erlebt nicht nur, sondern er erlebt sein Erleben.³⁸

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 364. Plessner observed an evolutionary development from animal to human life. Human life is "raumbehauptend", that is, man both lives within time and space, at the same time as being able to reflect on this position. In contrast, animal life is described as "raumerfüllend", that is, living purely in the here and now, *ibid.*, p. 186. (For further discussion see Band IV, pp. 360-365, especially on the human position as "gesetzt" or "gestellt" within limits of identity, *ibid.*, p. 364).

³⁷ In a literary-philosophical context, a good illustration of this is offered in relation to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, with Orlando as a fictional character remaining a mystery or "Anachronist" throughout the historical context of the novel, see Rüdiger Görner, *Exzentrizität und Geschichte Zum Wesen der Posthistoire*. Radio Lecture in the series "Die Aula." South German Radio Baden-Baden, June 1992 (typescript), p. 6.

³⁸ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Positionalität der exzentrischen Form*, in: *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., p. 364.

The unchanging and unique human capacity to re-play experience and reflect on the past means that Plessner's anthropological theory can account for history and culture in a positive way. This is because human life is not only ruled by history, but is supposedly endowed with the potential to control or shape direct actions that influence the course of political history: "In der Fassung seiner selber als Macht faßt der Mensch sich als geschichtsbedingend und nicht als durch die Geschichte bedingt." ³⁹ Plessner goes on to define certain "anthropological principles" (*anthropologische Grundgesetze*), which are intended to demonstrate the relevance of literature and culture to his theoretical view of life. ⁴⁰ These principles derive from his idea of human *Exzentrizität*: since humanity can reflect on its actions and deeds, there is an incentive to discover more about this reality and to understand it. Yet significantly, none of the principles that are defined contradicts the theoretical basis of Plessner's model of authentic experience.

The first anthropological principle of "natürliche Künstlichkeit" attempts to explain the need for culture. ⁴¹ Culture arises from that part of human reality which is described as "*künstlich*". ⁴² This principle gives a view of cultural life, in which cultural expression, in its various manifestations, is seen as an attempt to understand the conditions of existence: "Als exzentrisch organisiertes Wesen muß er sich zu dem, was er *schon ist, erst machen*." ⁴³ In other words, culture is seen as part of a general human endeavour to understand the elusive "centre" of reality. This implies a sense of self-conscious awareness, which is not applicable to animals, since they can do no other than exist, without the faculty to reflect on life experience. ⁴⁴ Man's *Exzentrizität* means that human life is both based on experience, as well as on the ability to think. Plessner's idea of "natürliche Künstlichkeit" takes into account Freud's idea of culture

³⁹ *Macht und menschliche Natur*, op. cit., p. 190.

⁴⁰ See *Die anthropologischen Grundgesetze*, in: *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., pp. 383-425.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 383-396.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 384.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 383.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 383f.

as a process of "Triebsublimierung".⁴⁵ However, Plessner does not entirely support Freud's theory, since he argued that repressed un-conscious needs are not the only reasons for the existence of culture. The will "artificially" to reconstruct experience in order to discover the full creative potential of humanity is another cultural imperative.

Plessner's interpretation of culture does nothing to contend with a second anthropological principle of "vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit".⁴⁶ Hence it is because human reality is experienced through a process of "artificial reconstruction" (*natürliche Künstlichkeit*), that there is the need for language and expression. The difficulty of achieving an ideal form of existential communication need not trouble Plessner's theory, which has a far more straightforward attitude to relations with others. The need for human communication is no longer an ideal, but a necessity. It is necessary to deal directly with others because all individuals are first distanced from each other. Relations and dependencies therefore have to be explored or sought out (*vermittelt*), in order for a direct experience of another's reality to become more tangible (*Unmittelbarkeit*).⁴⁷ Communication is therefore the uncomplicated and apparently uninvolved process of establishing more direct relations with others as a matter of course. In this way, history is also the result of the need for cultural and artistic expression, as well as an innate propensity for human interaction.⁴⁸ Historical continuity is supposed to derive from the conditions of the human position, which implies an essential, even an innate need to leave a legacy of creative and political heritage behind because of the need to communicate.

This view neatly leads on to Plessner's third and final anthropological principle of "utopischer Standort".⁴⁹ The vision of "utopia" is that of a timeless reality in which human experience is virtually suspended, as it were, without being in time or space.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 388.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 396-419.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 400f.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 416.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 419-425.

Yet, Plessner does not perceive utopian values in an aesthetic environment, but rather regards these values as the motivation behind the human search for religious meaning. There does not appear to be any transcendental, or 'otherworldly' value attached to the influence of religion, which is merely seen as another route to finding a fixed or central point to correspond to and confirm the basic anthropological condition of human *Exzentrizität*.⁵⁰

The significance of all these principles seems to depend less on there being an "authentic" reality of experience than on the strength of individual identity to turn subjective experience into a political or cultural form. Progress in history is seen as the result of the individual conscious participation and contribution to the store of humanity: "Leben *ist* Bewegung, kann ohne Bewegung nicht stattfinden."⁵¹ Historical progress is linked to the experience of subjectivity that realizes its potential creativity in a three-dimensional, abstract world of "Außenwelt, Innenwelt, Mitwelt."⁵² The experience of this apparently fragmented world is not necessarily related to the attainment of any psychological threshold, nor to a threshold between life and existence. Instead, it implies a coincidence of an exchange of individual views and objective ideas, fostered by a meeting with others in a political and social environment, or a "Mitwelt":⁵³

Jeder Realsetzung eines Ichs, einer Person in einem einzelnen Körper ist die Sphäre des Du, Er, Wir vorgegeben [...] Durch die exzentrische Positionsform seiner selbst ist dem Menschen die Realität der Mitwelt gewährleistet [...] Mitwelt ist die vom Menschen als Sphäre anderer Menschen erfaßte Form der eigenen Position.⁵⁴

The possibility of experiencing this communal "Mitwelt" is linked to Plessner's interpretation of communication with others, as supplemented by the anthropological

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 420.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 187.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 360-382. The concept of *Mitwelt* was also interpreted by Plessner as 'sociality' and thus in an altogether wider context than he envisaged in his philosophical anthropology. The socio-political implications of the term were interpreted in Plessner's book *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, (1924), *op. cit.*

⁵³ See also René Weiland, *Grenzbesinnungen*, *op. cit.*, p. 745.

⁵⁴ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 374f.

principles on history and culture, which bestow on each individual an ability to appreciate and experience other spheres of consciousness, such as in the form of the second, or third person singular or plural. In this case, reality is experienced through open communication with others, which returns us to the politically oriented analysis: "Der Mensch lebt also nur, wenn er ein Leben führt." ⁵⁵ If this statement is taken as Plessner's interpretation of the leit-motiv of border experience, his interpretation is related more to the reality of the human situation than to determining how "authentic" this situation is. If the process of living involves creating political, cultural and historical experience, Plessner sees this experience as part of the human condition. This means, however, that he regarded the individual as a subject with the ability to shape life, rather than merely as an object, seemingly at the mercy of history, politics and culture.

As will be argued in the next chapter, when Plessner's model is considered on its own merit, it is restricted by a tendency for tautologous argument, which has been alluded to in this chapter by the suggestion that the diverse influences that condition human consciousness seem to be taken into account only when they influence the theory. What this means, however, is a significant difficulty of providing a wholly objective explanation of the nature of authentic experience. In summary, the essence of authenticity is to be described as a life-oriented interpretation of 'borders', which may focus unduly on the divisive aspects of borders in political, cultural and historical terms. Whilst cultural endeavours may well be included in Plessner's notion of authenticity, they are included only as an anthropological principle, which means that their value is not necessarily placed into question. In other words, the possible effects and consequences of cultural, or political endeavours are not considered outside of their predestined inclusion within the model of anthropological, or "authentic constants" that supposedly condition our experience. The theory of authenticity is questionable when it is taken as an integral part not only of Plessner's understanding of border experience,

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 391.

but also of a practical understanding of life that seems hostile to those ideas not represented by the life-oriented, anthropocentric viewpoint.

Chapter III

A comparison of Authenticity and Existence

The philosophical and anthropological discourse on "existential elucidation" and 'authentic' experience has documented that the consciousness of borders plays a vital role in our reflections on human existence and behaviour. Given our previous findings it might be concluded that Jaspers and Plessner are merely looking into different aspects of a problem that is related to border experience: the question of overcoming a division between different qualities of experience. Plessner described the principle elements of life as embedded in a Cartesian process of experience and reflection. The process involves a link between subjective consciousness and the reflected experience of this consciousness, - *cogito ergo sum*. Jaspers described the framework of border experience in a Platonic context, and although transcending life experience meant reaching a "timeless" Idea of *Existenz*, it is this existential insight into life that changes attitudes to certain extreme situations, such as a confrontation with individual mortality, suffering, antagonism with others or guilt.

Jaspers' analysis of the above situations may be used to expose the tautologous bias inherent to Plessner's theory. By the same token, the validity of an existential interpretation of border experience is confirmed by the benefits of Plessner's tautologous reasoning:

Existieren kann nur, wer lebt, auf welchem Niveau auch immer. Sich dagegen zu sperren und Leben auf einer seiner Möglichkeiten, nämlich existieren, zu fundieren, heißt den Einsatz der Frage des Menschen nach sich selber [...] als die einzige legitime Direktive für eine Anthropologie in philosophischer Absicht gelten zu lassen. ¹

¹ See Helmuth Plessner, *Der Aussagewert einer philosophischen Anthropologie* (1973), in: *Conditio Humana*, Band VIII, op. cit., pp. 380-399, here p. 388. (Further references use *Der Aussagewert ...*).

The circular style of argument that lies behind the idea of authenticity means that both life and existence can be regarded as valid concepts for a description of human reality. In Plessner's view, the existential category takes second place in comparison with the intent to describe all possibilities that can affect human consciousness.² Therefore, his model of life's essential principles treated differences between existence and life as truisms. In other words, Plessner would argue that since there is basically no difference between life and existence, there is little need to distinguish between them. Any underlying differences can be explained away by tautology, such as the proof: "*Homo est quomodo omnia.*"³ The fact that all of life's possible alternatives can be open to experience places the existential category in perspective: "*Leben birgt als eine seiner Möglichkeiten Existenz.*"⁴ The implication is that an existential interpretation of life is only one way of looking at the significance of pragmatic experience, but to safeguard against any criticism, the existential perspective is incorporated, as has been shown, in Plessner's reasoning.

Another characteristic of Plessner's thinking is that it is not only tautologous, but possibly axiomatic, that is, in the Kantian sense of the word. Plessner relied on this axiomatic element by referring to the idea of a 'line' as an analogy to explain the nature of his reasoning: "[...] der Linie entspricht keine eigene Entität."⁵ In other words, the Kantian axiomatic connection between reason and experience posits a link between the world of ideas, as weighed "a posteriori" against experience.⁶ The 'line' analogy is

² See Joachim Güntner, *Der Mensch als offene Frage*, op. cit.

³ Helmuth Plessner, *Der Aussagewert ...*, op. cit., p. 389.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 390.

⁵ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., p. 151.

⁶ Incidentally, Plessner tried to claim Kant as a significant forerunner of his anthropology, see especially Helmuth Plessner, *Die Aufgabe der Philosophischen Anthropologie* (1937), Band VIII, op. cit., p. 34. He seems to have based this claim on observing Kant's critique of the Platonic Idea, as given by Kant in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Die Transcendentale Dialektik Von den Ideen überhaupt*), op. cit., pp. 321ff: "Plato bediente sich des Ausdrucks Idee so, daß [...] er habe darunter etwas verstanden, was nicht allein niemals von den Sinnen entlehnt wird, [...] Die Ideen sind bei ihm Urbilder der Dinge selbst, und nicht bloss Schlüssel zu möglichen Erfahrungen, wie die Kategorien. Nach seiner Meinung flossen sie aus der höchsten Vernunft aus [...] Plato fand seine Ideen vorzüglich in allem was praktisch ist, d. i. auf Freiheit beruft, welche ihrerseits unter Erkenntnissen steht, die ein eigentümliches Produkt der Vernunft sind."

only used, however, to support Plessner's tautologous argument. Hence the significance of a given 'line' is regarded as purely abstract, since the image of a 'line' is not a really existing entity ("keine eigene Entität"). Nevertheless, Plessner did not conclude that the idea of a 'line' is invalid. He argued more that the reality of a given line has to be created, as is it were, by linking its existence to other factors, and thus suggesting an association of theoretical values with actual experiences.

What is illuminated by Plessner's circular style of argument is the validity of his theoretical application to cultural, political and historical aspects of experience. René Weiland called the style of Plessner's argument a "doppelte Grenzforschung".⁷ The Cartesian duality about Plessner's ideas is that they rely on the analogy of Kant's axiomatic line, in order to further support the circular reasoning behind the idea of *Exzentrizität*. This idea promoted a realization of a behavioural paradox that manifests itself in human consciousness, thus necessitating a description of authentic experience, by way of a theoretical framework that can live up to the task of analysing paradoxical circumstances.⁸ As indicated in figure II on p. 149, Plessner's conception of these circumstances made no recourse to a metaphysically inspired interpretation of reality. Instead, the interpretation was couched in the theoretical terms of a model, that in turn relied on a straightforward correlation between experience and abstract reasoning:

Exzentrizität ist die für den Menschen charakteristische Form seiner frontalen Gestelltheit gegen das Umfeld. [...] Die Bezeichnung "exzentrisch" [...] unterstreicht die [...] verbleibende und ihn sprengende Doppelnatur des Menschen, die nicht statisch zu fassen ist, sondern eine ständig zu durchlebende und zu vollziehende Verschränkung des Leibes in den Körper bedeutet.⁹

Since Plessner's ideas were not derived purely from a "metaphysically" inspired theory of human behaviour, it seems that his respect for practical values is based on his understanding of Kant's view of Platonic thought.

⁷ René Weiland, *Grenzbesinnungen*, op. cit., p. 744f.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Helmuth Plessner, *Der Aussagewert ...*, op. cit., p. 394 & p. 396.

It may seem strange, therefore, to suggest that after all, *Exzentrizität* implies that borders are really of an existential quality. This realization does not arise from any form of "elucidation". It arises more from deducing the context for the Cartesian doubt that life experience can only be fully comprehended and rationalized because of the human ability to think. The Cartesian attitude of doubting is what Plessner calls a "Doppelnatur". This leads René Weiland to identify as an analogy for Plessner's work, the aesthetic motif of the *Doppelgänger*:

Die Tatsache, daß der Mensch seiner selbst nur über den anderen und über den Umweg einer Rolle habhaft werden kann, macht das "Doppelgängertum" des Menschen aus [...] ¹⁰

The idea of the *Doppelgänger* is analogous to anthropological principles, so far as these principles envisage human life in general as suspended in time and space. In part two of this study, the idea of the *Doppelgänger* is interpreted by the motif of the *Grenzgänger*, a figure that responds to aesthetic conceptions of time and space and therefore can do no other than exist in an 'otherworldly' realm. ¹¹ Plessner's understanding of the human situation establishes the fact that it is a human striving to seek to reconcile mutually antagonistic sides to reality, - the concrete with the abstract. By following Kant's axiomatic rule that experience follows on from abstract ideas, there can be no suggestion that Plessner intended experience to be caused by ideas. ¹² This was a further attempt to safeguard his theory from association with Heideggerian thought. If Plessner's ideas appeared to come close to those of Heidegger, he was clearly against ontological conclusions being drawn from his anthropological theory:

Daraus irgendwelche ontologische Schlüsse zu ziehen, ist jedoch ein sehr gefährliches Beginnen. [...] Das Sein, das erscheint, ist zwar

¹⁰ René Weiland, *Grenzbesinnungen*, op. cit., p. 745.

¹¹ See Part Two, Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 209-222.

¹² Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., p. 163. This shows further Kantian origins: "Kategorien sind keine Begriffe, sondern ermöglichen sie, weil sie Formen der Übereinstimmung zwischen heterogenen Sphären, sowohl zwischen Denken und Anschauen wie zwischen Subjekt und Objekt, bedeuten." Ibid., p. 169.

auch Sein, aber nicht das ganze Sein, wie es an ihm selbst und in ihm selbst west und ist. ¹³

The "constant" anthropological principles for life are not caused by the process of rationalizing experience, for such theoretical principles cannot be identified without the capacity of reason. This capacity is an intrinsic part of humanity's ability to exist in two different realms, that is, acting occurs in connection with thinking, or essentially humanity leads a "double life" (*Doppelgängertum*). It is highly inappropriate to suggest that Plessner's idea of "authentic" experience has any causal implications. Moreover, the border appears in his theory of life as a guiding principle: "Fall II bedeutete dann den Grund (nicht die Ursache) der Lebenserscheinungen." ¹⁴ The idea of an "authentic" definition, (which was illustrated in Figure II on p. 149) therefore becomes intimately involved in explaining the nature of consequences that filter through to our life experience, because of other abstracted, or 'invisible' conditions. ¹⁵ In other words, Plessner's theory is based on observing circumstantial evidence about life, which is the basic intent of his principle of *Exzentrizität*. Ultimately, this concept concurs with Jaspers' theory of *Grenzsituationen*, so far as Plessner summarized border experience in the context of what he called "Grenzsituationen des Übermannwerden": ¹⁶

Wir geraten außer uns: im Lachen und Weinen, im Affekt und in der Leidenschaft. [...] seelische und geistige Möglichkeiten, die nur einem Lebewesen offenstehen, das zu sich in Opposition treten, mit sich und anderen eins sein kann. ¹⁷

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ See Helmuth Plessner, *Der Aussagewert ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

¹⁷ *ibid.* See also Band VII, *Lachen und Weinen Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens* (1941), Frankfurt am Main 1982, pp. 201-387; and Band III, *Anthropologie der Sinne* (1970), Frankfurt am Main 1980, pp. 317-387. Plessner is sensible that his "Grenzsituationen" may appear similar to Heidegger's concept of "Da-sein". Plessner does not seem to include Jaspers in his critique, instead, his criticism is directed towards Heidegger's ontological "Seinsinterpretation", see *Der Aussagewert ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 388-399, especially p. 399: "Da eine Philosophische Anthropologie in unserem Sinne diese Frage zwar bedacht hat, sie aber in die umfassende Lebensperspektive mit einschließt und samt den Anschluß an die Erfahrung vom Menschen gewinnt, halte ich den Aussagewert einer solchen Anthropologie anderen, auch existenzialphilosophischen, für überlegen."

Thus a similar conclusion is arrived at by both Plessner and Jaspers: subjective and objective factors contribute to certain critical "border situations". However, Plessner's version of these "border situations" is different to Jaspers' "existential border situations". The extreme circumstances are supposed only to exert physical, rather than "metaphysical" pressures. Although situations of "laughter" or "tears" are founded on the basis of an irresolvable antinomy, this theoretical form does not pervade the anthropocentric view of life in the same way as it affected the whole structure of Jaspers' existential theory:

Nach dem Gesetz der Antinomie der Erscheinung können Phänomene zu Unrecht, d. h. ohne die entsprechende Seinsgrundlage auftreten. Darum ist Erscheinung als solche noch nicht bloßer Schein. ¹⁸

Plessner's treatment of the problem of antinomy was pragmatic. Jaspers' observation of antinomies led to the conclusion that there is an irresolvable dilemma about overcoming situations that are regarded as existential. Plessner's observation of antinomies only went as far as the suggestion that there are "border situations", such as those of laughter or tears, but that these effects result merely from the realization that circumstances are not always what they appear to be:

Es könnte nämlich der Hiatus, [...] nicht so anschaulich hervortreten, erschiene er nicht als echte Grenze, die das im Werden begriffene Ding über es selbst hinaus - in es selbst hinein führt. Dadurch gerade kommt [...] das Phänomen des Hiatus, der Abgehobenheit des Geformten von seiner Form zustande. ¹⁹

The idea that reality can manifest itself to us in a form of "hiatus" attempts to explain why appearances can be deceptive. The extreme situations of life cannot be entirely explained away by a metaphysically inspired theory, but by looking instead into the reality of life experience. The concept of "hiatus" is a complementary addition to the concept of *Exzentrizität*, which suggested that subjective consciousness is

¹⁸ See Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., p. 180f.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 179.

intuitively predisposed to experience other spheres of consciousness, or to appreciate that there are different interpretations of reality that lie beyond one's own self. Neither of these concepts involves a method of analysis that reaches into the 'otherworldly' sphere of transcendence. Kant's ideas are no less explored by Plessner for his theory, but the axiomatic principle is seen as more relevant. Furthermore, for Plessner, this axiom can be likened to the leit-motiv of border experience, so that a principle is revealed with which to suggest a relationship between the practical and theoretical way of life.²⁰ Since the subjective element to life experience is retained throughout Plessner's description, even his reference to the idea of "hiatus" seems to overlook the difference between subjective and objective categories. There is still a correlation between experienced and idealized perceptions of life, but because of the difference between them, life is necessarily based on antagonistic principles, - "ontische Antagonismus".²¹ This antagonistic view of life is realistic and achieves the aim of treating human reality as an "open question". Yet because Plessner did not base his ideas on a metaphysically inspired interpretation of reality, his theory cannot aspire to account for the ethical dimension of life that Jaspers regarded as such a significant part of "existential border situations".

Jaspers' approach to an analysis of life's challenging conditions shows that Plessner's ideas have their limitations, especially when they cannot account for ethical questions that arise in the context of really challenging experiences. The category of existence, in fact, may be more open to experience, since it describes a "philosophy of failure". In other words, because of an acquaintance with ethical problems, existential reasoning has the capacity to place the adopted methodological basis in question. The method of "existential elucidation" remained open to the possibilities of political experience, by using the existential category to develop concepts that were applicable to explaining political life in post-war Germany. The tolerant openness of an existential

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 180.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 193.

interpretation of life contrasts with the circularity of authenticity, which does not seem able to question its own approach. Yet significantly, despite their hermetic qualities, Plessner's ideas did not rule out the validity of aesthetic experience.²² Indeed, culture and the aesthetic interpretation of life were equally valid parts of human endeavours. Existential theory can only just allude to the possibility of aesthetics, and then only by way of the all-embracing concept of *das Umgreifende*. Yet as has been observed, this concept was actually defined after *Existenzerhellung*:

Dadurch, daß ein Horizont ist, sich also ständig ein Weiteres ankündigt, das den gewonnenen Horizont wieder umgreift, entsteht die Frage nach diesem *Umgreifenden*. [...] Das Umgreifende, das wir sind [...] ist vielmehr das, worin alles Andere uns vorkommt. Wir [...] werden seiner inne als Grenze. [...] Aber wir sind [...] mit diesem Grenzbewußtsein für die Möglichkeit des Andern, das wir nicht kennen, offen zu werden. [...] Leben ist der Träger dieses Bewußtseins, der selber unbewußte Grund dessen, was wir bewußt erfahren.²³

Is Jaspers' distance to an aesthetic understanding of borders to be regarded as a limitation to his method of "existential elucidation"? He appeared to assume that, in any case, the literary incentive to record life is already embedded in the field of life experience and knowledge, and therefore it was not necessary to investigate the aesthetic implication of borders. But Jaspers did not wish to examine the aesthetic aspect of life more closely. For this reason, Plessner's theory is an important complement to the existential understanding of human reality. Above all, both these conceptions of human life show that existential borders are not an unrealistic entity, but rather that although they can only be approached and understood initially in theoretical terms, they exact practical consequences that really take their toll on life. Since Plessner showed that there is an intrinsic human need to communicate and therefore to create individual experience, this leads us back not to an existential, but to a Kierkegaardian dilemma. The first extensive interpretation of borders offered an

²² Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen ...*, op. cit., p. 217.

²³ Karl Jaspers, *Vernunft und Existenz*, Munich 1960, (*Zweite Vorlesung: Das Umgreifende*), p. 43, p. 45 & p. 47.

aesthetic discourse about the implications of a psychological threshold, whose consequences can only be approached in terms that will be discussed in part two: namely not only through a study of a theory of existence, but a further study of the meaning of transcending the reality of existence. In this case, we arrive at an interpretation of situations that is only manifested to us in the individual work of art.

Part Two

Literary Transformation

Introductory Comments

The following part of this study proposes an application to philosophical values from the perspective of the literary discourse on 'borders'. Jaspers' concepts, as put forward in *Existenzerhellung*, were not meant for the pursuit of "aesthetic pleasure", nor for interpretation of the arts, since he thought philosophical ideas held no relevance for literature.¹ Thus the next half of this study of the border leit-motiv must contend with the challenge of explaining why an application of Jaspers' existential theory is undertaken precisely in the manner that he emphatically opposed. The challenge is not as insurmountable as might first appear. This is because the transcendental aspect of the concept of 'existence' particularly lends itself to the suggestion that our perception of life can be transformed when we are faced with extreme demands created by what Jaspers saw as existential pressures. To transform the oppressive nature of such demands could only mean, in Jaspers' view, active resistance against the challenge to the individual's ability to cope with them in a responsible manner.

Subsequently, in the first half of this study, scrupulous attention had to be paid to the predominantly ethical aspect of existence. Such vigilance need not be exercised in the next part of the work, for the theoretical framework with which to examine the literary significance of 'borders' has already been established. It is now a matter of discovering the meaning of possible *analogies* between the merely theoretical circumstances of existence and practical circumstances that have led authors to describe the contemporary significance of borders.

¹ See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie*, Band I, op. cit., p. XXII.

Interestingly enough, the main convincing argument for proceeding in part two of this work exactly in the manner that Jaspers opposed is that the essential value of his theory and political critique of existence can be even more visibly demonstrated. In the main introduction of this work, it was noted that there is a particular difficulty of explaining how Jaspers' understanding of existence is applicable to life.² This is because the 'otherworldly' aspect of existence is seemingly intangible to our understanding. By applying his ideas about the conditions of existence to art, however, it is finally possible to secure the validity of existential philosophy, not only in ethical terms, but to demonstrate the singular quality of the concept of existence in an aesthetic, and particularly a literary, context. Indeed, existence, in Jaspers' sense of the word, bears a closer, more tangible affinity with reality if it is represented in an individual text, especially on the subject of borders.

The ensuing discussion of the aesthetic transformation of the border leit-motiv might appear 'indulgent', such as in the manner that Jaspers criticized. Yet individual authors may be able to turn the apparently remote nature of existence into a reality that is perceptible to our senses, either by way of pictorial illustration, or in prose and poetry. If the next part of this study assists in explaining further the value of existential philosophy, it is difficult to foresee any really fundamental or valid objection to applying Jaspers' conception of the existential aspect of borders to an interpretation of literary texts that deal with this theme as an aesthetic problem. Each of the texts in part two is interpreted with a view to linking, by way of analogy, the aesthetic variations of the border theme with the theoretical knowledge of this theme that has been hitherto established. When following such variations, cross references are made to the considerable body of evidence that has been amassed by analysing Jaspers' and Kierkegaard's ideas about 'borders'.

² See Introduction to this work, *Observations on Methodology*, p. 37.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard observed that there is a potentially never-ending debate between aesthetics and ethics. What the debate raises in a contemporary context is the question of an ethically inspired literature, as opposed to a purely aesthetically determined literature. During the West German *Literaturstreit*, a quarrel that flared up in the early 1990s, the protagonists of this quarrel, namely West Germany's literary critics, made no explicit connection of their debate with Kierkegaard's extensive examination of the ethical implications of aesthetic discourse. Such a connection, however, might have been legitimate and illuminating. The more fundamental aspect of the German *Literaturstreit* was its relation to the border motif, in as much as the border theme resurfaced in Germany's contemporary literary discussions about the aesthetic implications of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Clearly, the context of the West German *Literaturstreit* was also political, since the quarrel about Christa Wolf's text, *Was bleibt*, was partly an attempt to come to terms with the past division of Germany.³ In the first half of this work, German division was seen as an example of border experience, whose ethical foundation was questionable because of its relation to the idea of "German guilt" as a form of penance for Germany's actions during the 1933-1945 period. After 1945, Jaspers showed us that to speak of guilt means to assert the idea of accountability. The notion that authors, too, are accountable for their texts surely amounts to the suggestion that aesthetics and ethics are complementary to one another. Moreover, the pursuit of Beauty as an end in itself, that is, for aesthetic pleasure, is not entirely immune to the moral and political influences that condition the writer's environment. Why then does the issue of guilt, either as an ethical, political or existential concept virtually disappear from the discussion of the poetic environment?

³ See "Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf" *Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*, ed. by Thomas Anz, Munich 1991. The background to the *Literaturstreit* is discussed in Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 223-231.

The explanation is similar to the reason why the use of the word guilt, during the course of Jaspers' critique of its facets, particularly its existential, ethical and political validity, was relentlessly questioned by his examination. Of course, the guilt concept as such was not buried, but it became embedded in Jaspers' endeavours to establish a more practical conception of guilt, which led him to establish the ethos of political accountability as a way of some recourse to a private moral code. In other words, it is just as much a matter of individual morality, as it is a prerogative of individual taste for authors to decide upon the ethical status of their texts, and whether to follow up any ethical questions at all.

It seems hardly surprising that the least applicable text to existential theory, in terms of analogies, is Christa Wolf's early text, *Der geteilte Himmel*. In the next part of this study, it can be seen how the ethical status of Wolf's text is virtually superseded by another incentive: the influence of Communist ideology in East Germany to posit a specifically East German literature. It is easy to criticize the substitution of private morality for ideology. But the ethical status of a text, as far as the individual author remains accountable for this, surely resides with the author concerned. It is difficult to find any real validity in the general attacks that rained down upon Christa Wolf during the *Literaturstreit*, since what came under fire was not the quality of her text as such, but far more her private morality. Yet as we learn from Jaspers, the question of morality is a highly individual one, and arguably to be resolved more reliably in an ethical, rather than an aesthetic context.

Another compelling reason for the disappearance of the guilt issue in part two of this work is that this matter, as Jaspers has shown, is really embedded in the influences that perpetuated the historical and ideological division of Germany. The irony is that the East German regime, when it still existed, could adopt such a flawed argument of "collective guilt", since Germany was obviously not organized collectively, but was physically divided. Thus, by questioning the idea of 'absolute control' that is inherent in

the nature of ideology, the concept of existence gains its most effective critical potential. One author who comprehended the need for a critical framework to underpin his texts was Uwe Johnson. His desire to describe as accurately as possible the border between East and West Germany led him to develop a structure to his narrative that enabled his description of the German-German border to reflect the changes and distortions of reality that this situation imposed. Johnson's attention to the details of his description seems almost as methodical as the systematic descriptive process of "existential elucidation". Johnson's text offers us the closest analogy to existential theory, since he was prepared to confront the co-existing ideologies of Communism and Capitalism with flaws or weaknesses that were common to both sides.

The perceptibility of a 'border-line' from both its respective sides is also a common factor of the aesthetic discourse on 'borders' that corresponds to the method of "elucidating" them. The concept of existence offered an accessibility to life in pragmatic terms, as well as from a theoretical standpoint. This kind of 'dualistic' accessibility is particularly noticeable in Eugen Gottlob Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue about the concept of the border. Winkler realized that especially in art, it is necessary to discuss the process in which reality as such is made manifest in the artwork itself. His fictional dialogue on this matter provides an analogy to connect existential theory with aesthetic reality by a discussion of the concept of the 'border-line' as a literary and as a philosophical motif. The purpose of studying this motif in part two of this work is rather to ascertain the meaning of experiencing a poetic threshold. In order to achieve this, the rules of chronology are all but disregarded, for the texts that follow are not examined according to the order in which they were published. Instead, they are organized so as to approach a gradual understanding of the various aesthetic manifestations of the border leit-motiv.

At this point, however, we are returned to the method of "elucidation" that Jaspers developed. The, as it were, visual illustration of this method can be found by reference

to Elisabeth Langgässer's original sketches on pages 212-214. Significantly, her study of the border motif proceeded to illustrate its poetic qualities in three successive stages that follow the meaning of the border in a similar way as Jaspers approached his theoretical interpretation of its reality. In other words, it appears that authors' individual experiences and observations provide a starting point for considering how the experience of the border is transformed, or reworked in the poetic consciousness.

The truly 'otherworldly' nature of aesthetics prompts an examination of how reality is made manifest through art. Why did Jaspers refrain from aesthetic study? Perhaps the answer is to be found in the peculiar suitability of his concept of existence for application to art, rather than its unsuitability because of predominantly theoretical and explanatory properties. These properties appear more illustrative when they are set in a poetic context, because their relevance to practical situations can be appreciated more readily in the context of events, which even though perhaps intended as fictional representations of reality, apparently describe the effects of extreme pressures that may befall the individual. It is probable that Jaspers thought any hint of comparing, as he saw it, the transcendental properties of Beauty with the philosophical validity of existence might radically alter, or at the very least, change the meaning of existence into an aesthetic form that he refused to contemplate. The distinctness of his existential philosophy is therefore that it remains a *philosophy* of existence. For its aesthetic implications, we have the works of individual authors to consider. The enduring purpose of a study of literary interpretations of 'borders' is to observe any variation that transforms our experience and understanding of them, so far as it has been consolidated through a consultation with Jaspers' method of "existential elucidation". The cultural endeavours that Plessner implied to be an important part of human experience are best examined, too, through a study of authors' reflections of 'borders'.

Chapter I

Theme and Variation

1. Interpreting the 'Border-line': Durs Grünbein on E.G. Winkler

A poetic interpretation of 'borders' was a recent concern for the East German poet, Durs Grünbein, whose first collection of published poetry, *Grauzone morgens*, was written before the fall of the Berlin Wall between 1985-1988.¹ This in itself is a hint that his subject-matter was not the East German border, as it was then, nor its possible existential implications, such as we have considered in chapter one of the first half of this study. Ostensibly, the concept of existence, in Jaspers' sense of the word, plays no role in Grünbein's poetry, for his sights are set on a truly poetic interpretation of the 'border-line'. In this specific regard, not even the transcendental element of existence can be said to be made manifest in any of Grünbein's poems, although he was working no less on transcendental aspects of reality by turning his experiences of life in East Germany into a poetically inspired version of them. As we shall see later in this section of the chapter, the process of combining individual experiences and observations with their poetic representation can involve existential elements.

In Grünbein's poetry, his apparent use of observations about life on the eastern side of the Berlin Wall was taken by Gustav Seibt as an example of how this work heralded a new departure in contemporary German literature.² Seibt thought that Grünbein confirmed how the political division of Germany had been finally overcome.

¹ See Durs Grünbein, *Grauzone morgens Gedichte*, Frankfurt am Main 1988.

² See Gustav Seibt, *Mit besseren Nerven als jedes Tier*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 March 1994, p. 1.

Yet Grünbein himself stated that, at least in *Grauzone morgens*, his intention was not to describe the division of Germany, and still less to overcome its underlying existential implications: "Diese Prägungen haben wenig mit dem Ost-West-Gegensatz zu tun."³ His interpretation of 'borders' expressed itself as a search for poetic orientation. During this search, it is as though the border motif is a guiding principle for establishing the essence of his own poetical ideas.

Interpreting the 'border-line' is one starting point for finding his unique expression of reality through poetic writing, yet the next poem collection, *Schädelbasislektion* (1991), already develops beyond this beginning.⁴ The later poems were written at the actual time of German unification, from 1989-1991.⁵ They show a marked difference in quality to the first collection and therefore their significance shall be considered after the *Grauzone morgens* volume.⁶ In these poems, the search for orientation is expressed as the start of a lyrical journey that is directed towards "home":

Grauzone morgens, mon frère, auf dem
Weg durch die Stadt
heimwärts.⁷

The intent of *Grauzone morgens* is not to dwell on political experiences. There are few manifest political implications to be associated with the idea of "home".⁸ This is not to say that the idea of "home" is entirely unrelated to political identity in East Germany. It suggests rather that the primary aim is to deal with the poetic

³ See *Spiegel-Gespräch, Tausendfacher Tod im Hirn*, in: *Der Spiegel*, op. cit., p. 221.

⁴ Durs Grünbein, *Schädelbasislektion*, Frankfurt am Main 1991. Grünbein's lyrical interest in the border motif seemed to have lapsed still further in *Falten und Fallen*, Frankfurt am Main 1994. A possible reason for this may be a perceived regression from a primary to a secondary interest, see the following discussion, pp. 184-87.

⁵ See Durs Grünbein, *Schädelbasislektion*, op. cit., p. 154.

⁶ Grünbein's published poetry, which is in four volumes to date, was awarded the Büchner prize in October 1995. See Fritz J. Raddatz, *Nicht Entwurf der Moderne, sondern Faltenwurf der Mode*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 September 1995.

⁷ Durs Grünbein, *Grauzone morgens*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁸ See further on the literary-intellectual significance of the theme of German "home" or "Heimat": *Heimat im Wort Die Problematik eines Begriffes im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Rüdiger Görner, Munich 1992.

representation of the political situation that Grünbein experienced. Indeed, all this is borne out by his own explanation about the meaning of *Grauzone morgens*, which was intended to sketch a series of landscape "impressions":

Rückblickend würde ich sagen, das war eine Sammlung impressionistischer Stücke und Wahrnehmungen des vor allem frühmorgendlichen Alltags einer Stadt im Osten, nämlich Dresden, wo ich herkomme.⁹

The motivation for the poems was to translate influences from the outside world into the inner, almost hermetically sealed world of poetry. The meaning of reality as such is translated into its poetic representation, a task that in itself amounts to interpreting a 'border-line' or threshold experience between worldly reality and the 'otherworldly' reality of the poetic kind. It cannot be entirely ruled out that in his poetic conception of reality Grünbein intended to include his "insider" knowledge about life in East Germany, for this knowledge is present in his poetry, which describes the surroundings of Dresden in the impressionistic manner that he aspired to. There is occasional satire, provoked apparently by the sense of enclosure behind the political confines of the Berlin Wall:

Vor den letzten Ruinen
[...]
Entlang der Straßen tobt
architektonischer Kalter Krieg, stalineske
Fassaden [...]
(TRAUM oder TRAUMA)
schattenlos
wie der idiotische alte Zeppelin schwarz
über 'Europas Balkon'.¹⁰

There is no escaping the sight of the ruins that were left in the cold war as visible monuments, almost as an ominous admonition of Germany's past destruction. Yet the phobia that emerged from the once baroque city of Dresden is not necessarily out of

⁹ See Gerhard Moser, *Im Fach der Orchidee* (Ein Gespräch aus der Werkstatt), in: *Die Presse*, 20 May 1995.

¹⁰ Durs Grünbein, *Grauzone morgens*, op. cit., pp. 22f.

fear of these ruins, since the satirical comment is directed against what was then still East Germany: life in this 'other' half of Germany was, depending on the ideological point of view, either a dream or a nightmare. The satire is not a characteristic feature of the *Grauzone morgens* poetry collection, in which the tone is more lyrical. Indeed, the impressionistic aspect of the poems themselves seems to be because of a lyrical dilemma, although in this case, there is no underlying existential meaning. The dilemma is about Grünbein's orientation difficulty of finding a path to the stability of "home", that is, a secure focal point, a marker, or milestone at which to begin expressing his poetic ideas.

The particular difficulty of actually finding an aesthetic representation of reality is that, in this context, reality itself appears fundamentally changed. Hence the need to use the 'border-line' itself as a principle or guideline in order to try explore his ideas and experiences poetically. Eberhard Falcke attributed to Grünbein's poetry a more radical variation of reality, which is different again from the changing political conditions experienced in Germany during the *Wende*, in the sense that in poetry, the concept of time itself undergoes a fundamental change: "Die Mauergrenze kaum hinter sich, schreitet er nämlich schon eine andere Grenzlinie ab, an der das zentrale Zeitproblem mit aller Schärfe hervortritt [...]" ¹¹ This other kind of 'border-line' is the threshold of time itself, which separates the historical passage of time in the worldly realm, from the poetic ideals of eternity and endurance that are relevant in the realm of art and poetry. The ruins of Dresden are remnants of the past, serving as poetic reminders of the need to interpret a connection with which to bind together our merely historical notions of time, with the poetic vision of eternity. The effects of finding such an interconnected treatment of time can be seen in the poem entitled *No. 8*:

[...] Dresden
grausam zurückgebombt um ein
weiteres kaltes Jahrhundert der Müdigkeit
und betriebsamen Enge die Straßen

¹¹ Eberhard Falcke, *Lyrischer Landesmeister*, in: *Die Zeit*, 1 April 1994, p. 58.

Being in his native city of Dresden gives Grünbein an incentive to reflect on what happened there in the past. The reflections inspire memories, which in their eternal presence to him, are likened to tones and indeterminate "echoes" that reverberate dissonantly within the poems. Since the past has been preserved in the ruins of Dresden, these act as a starting point for their poetic representation, encompassed again by a comprehensive treatment of time in its eternal poetic context. Hence the customary historical distinction between three different modes of time is entirely surpassed into a virtually 'simultaneous' treatment of the three categories. In other words, present observations are made more intense because of their conflict with past memories; and the future element is the new imagery that will become manifest in the poems. Clearly, Grünbein's journey "homewards" is not just about physical orientation, but also lyrical orientation, which seems the nearest approximation to the transcendental aspect of Jaspers' concept of existence. However, since there is essentially no break with past memories, the aim is to restore poetically, the obscurity of the past that arises from its historical consideration. The 'simultaneous' poetic treatment of time is still measured in three dimensions, but they are no longer necessarily distinct from one another. In *Grauzone morgens*, the different modes of time reverberate and illuminate each other respectively in memories from 1945, and in anticipations of the image that is developed on the continuing journey "homewards":

Langsame Einfahrt in die zerstörte Stadt
Gesehen ganz wie
von neuem (geschockt):
diese Viehtransporter
vollgestopft mit
geduldig blökenden
Schafen und Massen
[...] äugend
durch schmale Ritzen
im Holzverhau
[...]

¹² Durs Grünbein, *Grauzone morgens*, op. cit., p. 40.

In dieser
Grauzonenlandschaft am Morgen
[...]
Da ist dieser Trick mit der Zeit. ¹³

The "trick of time" is that elements of past, present, and future are omnipresent in the single poetic idea of a grey "borderland". In other words, an underlying continuity between the three historical categories of time is used to create the poem's lyrical form, which also arises from the search for liberation from the confines of the aesthetic perception of time. This leads to a paradox: the simultaneously intended measurement of time gives the poems their characteristic images; whilst liberating the imagery from this use of time would destroy its poetic viability. The image of the *Grauzonenlandschaft* relies on a connection of present experiences with memory, to create a tension that is sustained whilst working towards the definition of the image.

The search for liberation from this situation was first expressed in diary form: "TAGEBUCH 51° NÖRDLICHER BREITE: FREI [...]" ¹⁴ The intent to break free of the lyrical tension between past and present is evidenced in the upper case letters. The experience of tension could be compared to an existential *Grenzsituation*, such as existential antagonism, as studied in the preceding section with regard to Jaspers' exposition of that issue. ¹⁵ Yet paradoxically, the antagonistic circumstances of poetry are not sustained, nor can they necessarily be overcome, since the tension of experiencing them is integrated into a compacted form of time past, present, and future that is invested in the poem. The poems therefore remain in a permanent state of disorientation; and their sense of "déjà vu" comes from the togetherness of time past, present and future, which is developed and sustained in the form of the *Grauzonenlandschaft*. This landscape is haunted by the presence of apparently hidden

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 20ff.

¹⁴ Durs Grünbein, *Grauzone morgens*, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁵ See Part One, Chapter I, Section 1, p. 71.

images from the past, so that the morning bus journey could be confused for a scene from the holocaust of men and women being herded into cattle wagons. ¹⁶

The lyrical journey "homewards" has not yet reached its end; and it never will reach an end, for the journey is not really experienced. It is a journey of exploration about the consequences of a poetic use of time that is characterized by the continuing search for a secure image, which emerges in the *Grauzonenlandschaft*. Having attained this visual impression of a grey, metaphorical landscape, the creative use of time and the context of poetry are truly arrived at. The same cannot be said of *Schädelbasislektion*, where the metaphorical aspect of Grünbein's poetry seems to have receded. The nominal 'intellectual' content of *Schädelbasislektion* is less significant to shaping the form of the poems; and in comparison, *Grauzone morgens* seemed more intellectually challenging:

Stell dir vor: ein Café voller Leute, alle
mit abgehobenen Schädeldecken, Gehirn
bloßgelegt
(Dieses Grau!) [...] ¹⁷

In *Schädelbasislektion* the above verse is given the new title: *Zerabralis*. ¹⁸ In other words, there is a parody on the life of the mind. The interpretation of the 'border-line' as a guiding principle of orientation appears no longer valid where thought is treated as an end in itself. The parody therefore virtually departs from interpreting the 'border-line' as the threshold of time, for the new element is a conflict of poetic and political intent.

¹⁶ The impression of images from the holocaust is present in some of the poems in *Schädelbasislektion*, but Grünbein seems to regret having evoked this association: "Es gibt Wendungen, die man später gern auslöschen würde", see *Spiegel-Gespräch, Tausendfacher Tod im Hirn*, op. cit., p. 230.

¹⁷ Durs Grünbein, *Grauzone morgens*, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁸ See Durs Grünbein, *Schädelbasislektion*, op. cit., p. 134.

A typical example of this conflict is given by the poem cycle, *Porträt des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund*.¹⁹ The opening line of the fourth poem in the *Grenzhund* cycle begins: "Alt siehst du aus, young dog. Atomzeitalt."²⁰ The *Grenzhund* poems parody man's Cartesian instinct, as opposed to the supposedly baser, animal instinct: "Der Mensch, nun ja [...] das alphabetisierte Tier [...]"²¹ Hence Grünbein takes in not existential implications, but anthropological conditions, where human life is merely developed one stage beyond that of animals.²² The parody on the possible weaknesses of the human mind, which are supposedly compensated for by the animal trait of the human instinct, suggests a virtual self-parody that could generally explain the less intellectually significant nature of the *Schädelbasislektion*.

The *Grenzhund* poem cycle is also dedicated to Pavlov's experiments with dogs and the dogs that once patrolled the East German border.²³ An interesting reflection of the fate of these dogs was made in a curious report by Peter Schneider.²⁴ According to Schneider's report, about 2, 500 watchdogs received new owners after the collapse of the Wall. The majority of the new owners lived in West Germany, and some in West Berlin, but whilst these owners from West Berlin were walking their new pets near the Wall, the animals reacted, as if by instinct, and began to patrol the section of the Wall, as they had been trained to. The point was, of course, that these watchdogs could not function without the border. It may seem far-fetched to draw an analogy here with literature, but what Grünbein posits is some intrinsic physical need for borders. He meant to imply, perhaps, that poetry intrinsically seeks out the margins of life, so that

¹⁹ See *Portrait des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund*, in: *Schädelbasislektion*, op. cit., pp. 92-107. This cycle of six poems is prefixed by the poem *Der cartesische Hund*, *ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁰ *Portrait des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund*, in: *Schädelbasislektion*, op. cit., p. 98.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 100.

²² This developmental view of life can be confirmed by referring to Chapter II of this study on Plessner's philosophical anthropology, see pp. 140-157.

²³ See further Helmuth Plessner's critique of Pavlov's experiments, *Die physiologische Erklärung des Verhaltens. Eine Kritik an der Theorie Pawlows* (1935), in: *Conditio Humana*, Band VIII, op. cit., pp. 7-32.

²⁴ See also Peter Schneider, *Die Mauer im Kopf Wachhunde überleben die Wende*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 August 1991, p. 21.

either by thought, or by some intrinsic physical need, borders play a really vital part in guiding poetic observations and imagination.

The fundamental human need for borders as a means of defining spheres of integrity was confirmed by Plessner's regard for borders as such an essential feature of life, that human existence cannot possibly do without them.²⁵ Grünbein's reference to Pavlov's experiments perhaps also infers that physical instincts cannot be entirely distinct from mental ones, so that the mimetic process has a vital role to play in poetry which relies on turning experiences into poetic memories of them.

Yet the reflexes of the memory are hardly tested where Grünbein takes to parody or rhetoric, because his poems turn away from the faculty of thought to more pragmatic perceptions of reality. Our attention turns accordingly to political influences that were initially avoided as subject matter for his first poem collection. One poem in particular, *12/11/89*, attempts a poetic interpretation of this date through word plays. The poem confirms a difference between a lyrical interpretation of reality that explores different modes of time; and an interpretation that is concerned with political and historical conditions. Where such conditions cannot be turned into a poetic image of reality, satire or rhetoric emerges: "Komm zu dir Gedicht, Berlins Mauer ist offen jetzt./ [...] Letzter Monstranzen Glanz, hinter Panzern verschanzt./ Langsam kommen die Uhren auf Touren, jede geht anders."²⁶ The opening line of the poetic telegram, *12/11/89*, is a reminder note that political affairs of the time are certainly relevant in poetry. This specific date is closely associated with the end of Germany's political division; and the assumption is that because of its historical nature it ought to be marked by a poetic reaction.

²⁵ The intrinsic authenticity of 'borders' as part of the fundamental human condition was described particularly with reference to Plessner's idea of an "authentic definition", as seen in Part One, Chapter II, pp. 140-157.

²⁶ This poem is one of the cycle *Sieben Telegramme*, in: *Schädelbasislektion*, op. cit., pp. 59-65, here p. 61.

The reaction that emerges is illustrative of the quality of the poems in *Schädelbasislektion*, which do not aim to deal with lyrical problems by applying a great deal of thought to them. Hence the *Grauzonenlandschaft* is not an image that is repeated. Its effectiveness was that it arose from observations having been turned into, or transformed into a poetic interpretation of reality:

Später dann war es die silbrige Leucht-
 spur haarfein durch den
 frostklaren
 Himmel gezogen, die wie eine riesige
 Sicherheitsnadel die beiden
 Hälften des Morgens
 zusammenhielt.
 [...] als dieses erste Licht
 halbwegs vergessen war, spürtest du
 plötzlich die Schwerkraft
 in deinen Knochen. Alles schien dir
 verkürzt [...] ²⁷

The aspect of division in this interpretation paradoxically represents an interruption that is more a continuous, even eternal thread or train of thought, which cannot be broken because of its lyrically intended nature. In *Schädelbasislektion*, however, Grünbein's train of thought and his powers of observation seem to have been interrupted by political events that evoke rhetoric and poetic diction, as well as the characteristic turn to anthropology. The resort to self-parody in *Schädelbasislektion* is a veiled admission of an intellectual decline of which Fritz J. Raddatz complained: "Tatsächlich ist zu erkennen, daß Durs Grünbein rasch lässig geworden ist. [...] Durs Grünbein vernachlässigt sein poetisches Material, - oder, anders gesagt: Er geht zu hurtig damit um." ²⁸ This observation about the decline of thought in Grünbein's poetry is supported by the brief contrast that has been made between the quality of the poems from *Grauzone morgens* and examples taken from *Schädelbasislektion*. ²⁹ The

²⁷ Durs Grünbein, *Grauzone morgens*, op. cit., p. 19.

²⁸ Fritz J. Raddatz, *Nicht Entwurf der Moderne, sondern Faltenwurf der Mode*, op. cit.

²⁹ For a further study of Grünbein's recent poetry, (such as in *Falten und Fallen*, Frankfurt am Main 1994; and in *den Teuren Toten 33 Epitaphe*, Frankfurt am Main 1994), see Suzanne Kirkbright, "... die Suche nach Zwischentönen." *On Durs Grünbein's poetics*, (in preparation for print).

inconsistent quality of Grünbein's initial poetry collections, as has been briefly studied, would itself appear to make Gustav Seibt's comparison of Grünbein with Hofmannsthal, T.S. Eliot, or Ezra Pound an unlikely one.³⁰ Yet a more plausible connection might be found between Grünbein and the "neo-romantic" figure of Eugen Gottlob Winkler (1912-1936). Moreover, since Grünbein begins to stray from a poetic interpretation of the 'border-line', attention can be turned instead to his interpretation of Winkler's study of this motif, *Die Erkundung der Linie*.³¹

Winkler gives us a purely poetic interpretation of the *Linie* motif. His ideas on this theme appear to have interested Grünbein, who in 1993 edited an anthology of Winkler's short stories, essays and poetry that were originally written during the 1930s. Yet Grünbein's essay about Winkler, *Bis ans Ende der Linie*, seems to have taken the title motif of the 'border-line', *Die Erkundung der Linie*, as a nominal introduction to the anthology, without having fully extracted the essential purpose of 'borders' as a principle of Winkler's own poetic studies.³² *Die Erkundung der Linie* was written in 1934, and is in the form of a "neo-platonic" dialogue, not an accidental structure, but the result of a careful study that enabled Winkler to interpret the 'border-line' in a fictional conversation. Beyond the poetic aspect of this discussion, there are also other influences that could effect an accurate reading of Winkler's study. Since Grünbein's essay on Winkler did not address these other influences, which may be regarded as both political and existential, it is important to do so in this work.

³⁰ See Gustav Seibt, *Mit besseren Nerven als jedes Tier*, op. cit: Seibt wrote: "Seit den Tagen des jungen Enzensberger, ja, vielleicht seit dem ersten Auftreten Hugo von Hofmannsthals hat es in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik einen solchen [...] hinreißenden Götterliebbling nicht mehr gegeben. [...] Überrascht entdeckte sie (die Kritik, S.K.) den souveränen Rückgriff auf die klassische Moderne, auf den hohen Anspruch von T. S. Eliot, Pound und Williams."

³¹ See Eugen Gottlob Winkler, *Die Erkundung der Linie*, in: *Die Erkundung der Linie*, ed. by Durs Grünbein, Leipzig 1993, pp. 55-88. (References are from this source and further citations use *Die Erkundung...*). Winkler's *Erkundung* is also in: Eugen Gottlob Winkler, *Die Dauer der Dinge, Dichtungen Essays Briefe*, ed. by Heinz Piontek, Munich 1985, pp. 29-59. See also Eugen Gottlob Winkler, *Aus den Schriften eines Frühvollendeten*, ed. by Walter Jens, Frankfurt am Main 1960. A recent full bibliography (primary and secondary literature) see Eugen Gottlob Winkler, *Zum 80. Geburtstag am 1. Mai*, Warmbronn 1992, pp. 34-43.

³² See Durs Grünbein, *Bis ans Ende der Linie Über Eugen Gottlob Winkler (1912-1936)*, in: *Die Erkundung ...*, op. cit., pp. 259-281.

As regards the political influences on Winkler's life, the situation in Germany in the 1930s seems to have had a direct, but adverse effect on his writing environment. In his experience of this environment, Winkler witnessed Hitler's seizure of power in 1933-34, and his perception of this event was so acutely attuned to its possible dire consequences, that it is fair to say he regarded his environment in an existential light. Admittedly, this perception of his writing conditions could have been intensified by his own imagination, for Winkler seems to have lived in an intense state of existence that Jaspers' existential theory would call *existentielle Verwirklichung*. In this state of mind, however, Winkler's writing was more real to him than events taking place in politics, since his work genuinely had existential meaning to him: "Ich bin dabei damit irgendwie über die Kunst als Lebensziel hinausgerückt und neige eher dazu, sie als Lebensfolge zu betrachten." ³³

Winkler's life was influenced by a combination of factors that can be attributed to his perception and experience of existentially antagonistic circumstances. In a letter to his friend, Walter Warnach, he described his life as an *Existenzkampf*. ³⁴ This was an even more intense kind of conflict than can be intimated by Jaspers' idea of a *Grenzsituation*. Whereas Jaspers described a conflict ensuing from the antagonism between life and existence, Winkler experienced an internal conflict, a problem of how to reconcile the diverse components that influenced his life with his artistic temperament. Added to this, was the need to connect his ideas about writing with his aspiration to perfect his writing, so that it would correspond exactly to the ideas he wanted to express. Apparently, Winkler lived to work, in which case his literary endeavours really were existential. In the two years preceding his death, for instance, his letters show more than anything a prolific pace of artistic production. ³⁵ The poetic

³³ See letter to Hans Rat, 8 December 1935, in: Piontek, *Die Dauer der Dinge*, op. cit., p. 285.

³⁴ See Eugen Gottlob Winkler letter to Walter Warnach, 15 March 1936, in: Piontek, *Die Dauer der Dinge*, ibid., p. 302: "Dabei war mir bekannt, solange ich mich auch entsinne, daß ich niemals den Existenzkampf in mein Daseinsform einzubeziehen vermöchte."

³⁵ Most of Winkler's essays were written in the 1936-6 period.

work was not just an escape from the political reality of the early 1930s, since Winkler's experiences of reality were re-lived and transformed in his own imagination.

Nevertheless, this intense nature of his experience of life could not sustain him, and his suicide appears to have been linked to the excessive strain of trying to balance the various political, existential, and poetic influences that affected his life.³⁶ In this regard, Walter Jens concluded: "Vergessen wir nie: ein Mann wurde in den Tod getrieben, nur weil er gut schrieb."³⁷ Yet Winkler's untimely death was also a consequence of all the antagonistic influences that bore down on him with the heavy burden of excessive mental pressure. The almost banal, but tragic circumstances surrounding his death confirm this. In November 1933, he had been arrested and imprisoned for ten days for allegedly defacing an election poster for the Nazi party. Following this imprisonment, in 1933 there was the first suicide attempt, but his eventual suicide on 24 October 1936 occurred after he was questioned by a Gestapo officer outside Thomas Mann's vacant villa in Munich. Perhaps fearing, and exaggerating the fear of another arrest, Winkler took a veronal overdose, and died two days later in hospital.³⁸

Grünbein criticized Winkler for being preoccupied with intellectual reflection, which he called a *Formkult des Linearen*.³⁹ However, this preoccupation with imagined reality, and perhaps even imagined fears, needs to be set in the context of the intensity in which Winkler lived his life. If he was excessively preoccupied with his own ideas and thoughts, this was surely a reaction to the pressure of circumstances that fuelled his perception of life as an *Existenzkampf*. In other words, his life was spent

³⁶ Grünbein's anthology offers a limited selection of Winkler's letters, entitled *Die beiden letzten Jahre (Die Erkundung ...)*, op. cit., pp. 246-256). This selection appears to give the impression that suicide was inevitable. A wider selection of letters is available in Piontek, *Die Dauer der Dinge*, op. cit., pp. 273-330; and in: *Briefe 1932-1936*, ed. by Walter Warnach, Bad Salzig 1949. These show that suicide was not as inevitable as Grünbein's clichéd "line of fate" interpretation appears to suggest.

³⁷ Walter Jens, *Aus den Schriften eines Frühvollendeten*, op. cit., p. 16.

³⁸ See *Die Abschiedsnotiz*, in: *Die Erkundung ...*, op. cit., p. 257; and letter to Waldtraud Rohrig, 27 November 1933 where Winkler describes his earlier internment in 1933, *ibid.*, p. 243.

³⁹ Durs Grünbein, *Bis ans Ende der Linie*, in: *Die Erkundung ...*, *ibid.*, p. 272.

treading an existential precipice between the reality of the political situation as it was in the 1930s, and reality as he imagined it, as well as explored it for his writing art. Only in the poetic environment could he experience the harmony that Grünbein rightly regarded as "anachronistic" in relation to its time.⁴⁰ Beyond this, Grünbein's interpretation offered the clichéd idea that Winkler's poetic study of the 'border-line' can be represented by the idea of "a line of fate", which supposedly spelled out disaster from the very beginning:

Sicher ist nur, daß alles im kurzen Leben des Eugen Gottlob Winkler auf diesen Augenblick hintrieb. Bereit zu sterben war er schon lange, es bedurfte nur noch der Aussicht auf einen Schrecken ohne Ende.⁴¹

Given that existential circumstances also appear to have influenced Winkler's life, *Die Erkundung der Linie* could be regarded as a poetic parallel to a *Grenzsituation* of conflict, but only if there were not an important difference between the poetic result of existential pressures and their philosophical exposition. Winkler's poetic interpretation of his life led beyond its existential implications to suggest instead an imagined understanding of reality that would seemingly alleviate its existential elements. In other words, poetic imagination can become an antidote to existential influences, because solving poetic problems can lead to a search for harmony that might also offer a real feeling of relief from the sheer pressure of existence. Winkler's *Erkundung der Linie* can be read not as a parallel to existential conditions, but as a poetic transformation of them, exacted by the search for an enduring experience of harmony that was not possible during his short life-time.

The search for poetic harmony to surpass his own life and times meant a predilection for study that took Winkler to Italy and Greece. His observations on antiquity are a principle of harmony, later apparent in his prose.⁴² *Die Erkundung der*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 266.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 260.

⁴² See Eugen Gottlob Winkler, *Gedenken an Trinakria*, in: *Die Erkundung ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-108. Winkler travelled in Sicily in summer 1933, visiting the Greek temple at Segesta. *Gedenken an*

Linie draws the consequences of his studies of antique form by expressing these theoretical ideas in a "neo-platonic" dialogue.⁴³ Grünbein's interpretation of Winkler's prose "als Sonderfall der Kontrapunktik" does not quite address the significance of harmony for Winkler.⁴⁴ His prose is less concerned with a "special case of the counterpoint" than with a metaphysically-inspired vision of reality: his writing transcends reality in order to describe it. The "neo-platonic" dialogue was a deliberate attempt at a critique of metaphysics, to apply the Platonic Idea to literature, and to draw the consequences of this poetic application:

Es wird sozusagen mein künstlerisches Glaubensbekenntnis abgeben und nebenbei eine Metaphysik der bildenden Kunst versuchen, wie sie ungefähr Platon hätte geben können, wenn er in der bildenden Kunst nicht etwas Banausenhaftes und eines Philosophen Unwürdiges erblickt hätte. Das Stück heißt: 'Erkundung der Linie', und ist, um dem Leser, einiges Vergnügen zu machen, in Form eines Gespräches abgefaßt, da sich drei Freunde, [...] sich über das Wesen der Linie unterhalten und darüber sich klar zu werden suchen. [...] das rein Geistige, in dem ich mich (dem Stoff entsprechend) hier bewege, nimmt unter der Hand sinnliche Gestalt an; mit anderen Worten: der Gedanke schafft sich einen Wortleib, der ihm völlig entspricht; oder noch einfacher gesagt: es gelingt mir eine Prosa, die nicht nur ein notdürftiges Vehikel für das Gedachte ist.⁴⁵

Winkler's aspiration was to define a "metaphysics of art"; and this might be read as a critique of Plato's *Phaedrus*.⁴⁶ In his critique of Platonic thought, Winkler went beyond a combination of intellectual principles with actual experiences. The

Trinakria, written in January 1934 precedes *Die Erkundung der Linie*, written in June 1934, see Eugen Gottlob Winkler letters to Johannes Heitzmann, 8 February 1934 and 17 June 1934, in: Piontek, *Die Dauer der Dinge*, op. cit., p. 263 & p. 268. (Both works were first published posthumously, respectively, in: *Die Neue Rundschau* 47, December 1936, Bd. II, Heft 12, pp. 1271-1285; and in: *Dichterische Arbeiten*, ed. by Hermann Rinn, Johannes Heitzmann, Leipzig 1937).

⁴³ The border theme could be traced to antiquity, to Homer, for example, as division between reality and myth.

⁴⁴ Durs Grünbein, *Bis ans Ende der Linie*, in: *Die Erkundung ...*, op. cit., p. 275.

⁴⁵ See Eugen Gottlob Winkler letter to Johannes Heitzmann, 17 June 1934, in: Piontek, *Die Dauer der Dinge*, op. cit., p. 268f.

⁴⁶ See Plato, *Phaedrus*, translated by Walter Hamilton, taken from: *Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII*, London 1973. Winkler's discourse on art might be compared with Socrates' exposition on the intellect as the "pilot of the soul", *ibid.*, p. 31.

This Platonic connection again brings Winkler's ideas about the 'line' concept into contact with Jaspers' conception of 'existence', for it will be recalled that Jaspers, too, placed his ideas in a Platonic context, see Part One, Chapter I, especially p. 60.

interpretation is more far-reaching, so far as the aim is to combine art and metaphysics, which he regarded as two different, yet essentially complementary perceptions of reality. His "neo-platonic" study is a vehicle for this interpretation, but is also significant in its own right, for the prose seeks to represent idealized qualities as though they are experienced. It is this element that Winkler regards as evidence of the complementary nature of literature and philosophy, because both disciplines are concerned with the manifestation of ideas. However, it is significant that the poetic representation of the 'border-line' is not to use this motif as an explanatory paradigm, but to describe its precise image, and this is done by comparing it to the 'line' sketch made by one of the fictional speakers, Vigilius. During the course of an imagined conversation, the apparently trifling sketch of this line on the back of an envelope is actually proven to correspond to the idea of it that resides in the minds of the speakers. When this can be proved, then it also signifies that the meaning of the 'line' conception has been more clearly understood.

At first, however, the conversation is fraught by a disagreement between the three speakers, - Constantin, Cosmas and Vigilius.⁴⁷ The argument about the meaning of the 'line' sketch is "vigilantly" watched over by Vigilius's attempt to steer a path towards consensus, which he achieves by relying on an inner monologue of independent thoughts and ideas that he shares with the others to encourage them to develop a dialogue. Despite their perception of him as an "anachronistic" conversation partner, Vigilius emerges as the key figure in this dialogue, even if he digresses at times to discuss his own ideas as they occur to him through the informed inner monologue. This alternative stream of consciousness is a flow of knowledge which appears to be purely abstract, so far as it is more visible to Vigilius than the other conversation partners.

⁴⁷ It is possible that these names are meant to be symbolic. A brief characterization of the relative perspectives of each speaker shows that Constantin defends a pragmatically-sceptical view of reality, this defence is represented in the name "Constantin", meaning possibly, "constant". Vigilius appears as the voice of intellect and reason, his name being reminiscent of "vigilant". Cosmas is receptive both to factual and reasoned reality, and assumes a position of compromise between the two. His name seems to imply a "cosmas", that is, receptive to universal influences.

Therefore, Vigilius is suspiciously regarded by them, because his thoughts seem irrelevant to the perceived line of their conversation. However, as the conversation develops it becomes apparent that the monologue is a source of real inspiration that is ultimately to establish the basis of their consensus. In fact, the conflicts of opinion are willingly idealized by Vigilius, who gives an intellectually moderated interpretation of their differences.

The communication of this intellectual dimension is fundamental to reaching consensus. Constantin and Cosmas have important roles to play as prompters; and they encourage Vigilius to explain and clarify, whenever he threatens to digress too far into his inner monologue. Yet without this alternative insight into the discussion of the meaning of the 'line' sketch, communication between the three different speakers would have been difficult, since each is necessarily attached to his own opinions of the sketch. Communication is facilitated at the point of conjunction between Vigilius's monologue and the flow of the dialogue. It is Constantin who begins the conversation by voicing his sceptical opinion of a sketch of lines and figures that has been drawn by Vigilius on the reverse of an envelope: "Von welcher Seite aus soll dies Machwerk denn überhaupt betrachtet werden?"⁴⁸ Constantin's appraisal of this sketch initially seeks the conversation about it, during which he is forced into retreat, since his viewpoint is only relevant where it invites clarification of the other views that are aired in the conversation. His viewpoint is eventually found by the others to be redundant: his assertions are counterproductive, since he merely suggests that whatever lies beyond his pragmatic understanding is essentially irrelevant, - the variations are *Sinnlosigkeit, das Nichts, abstrakte Ordnung*, or not *der vollständige Genuß des Wirklichen*.⁴⁹

The exclusion of this viewpoint from the discussion means that Constantin is resigned to a passive role of observation. The remainder of the conversation is

⁴⁸ Eugen Gottlob Winkler, *Die Erkundung der Linie*, in: *Die Erkundung ...*, op. cit., p. 56.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 56, p. 61, p. 65, p. 71. Having defined his position, Constantin suggests he is listening to the dialogue at his own leisure and for intellectual entertainment. His intervention in future shall be for the purpose of clarification, *ibid.*, p. 70f.

therefore delegated to Cosmas and Vigilus. Cosmas's willingness to participate as far as possible in the intellectual discussion confronts him with new perspectives, for Vigilus discusses what he regards as the original meaning of his sketch by digressing into an extended discourse on the significance of art. The point of his digression about the meaning of a still-life painting is to explain, by way of analogy, what is meant by his "line" sketch:

VIGILIUS: [...] Die Linie war da und trennte. Das Nichts, das sie durchstrich, war in zwei Hälften geteilt.⁵⁰

Vigilius's 'line' analogy is one way of explaining the value of a poetic perception of reality. The interpretation of this 'line' sketch is a purely mental procedure, in relation to which Vigilus compares the powers of the intellect to the powers of art, since in both cases, the mind is likened by him to a blank sheet of paper: a canvas without colour is also like a mind without consciousness, because what is intellectually significant in both cases is an active memory that can store up instances of experienced reality to recount these instances later. Artistic perceptions of life, - just like metaphysical ideas -, have the singular quality that memories about life can be represented in an enduring form. Likewise, in a thinking and self-conscious state, the mind has the capacity to paint images that Vigilus compares to colours painted by the artist on a blank canvas. The purpose of his analogy is to illustrate how memory is the enabling faculty for differentiating, as well as for connecting opposing views of reality with one another. Vigilus's line sketch is not irrelevant, as Constantin had held. It is intended as an analogy to explain how an accurate interpretation of reality depends upon an ability to compare material things with their underlying form, which means memorizing their form, such as can be demonstrated with reference to the visual art of painting.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 62.

The consequence of this mimetic quality is further demonstrated by Vigilius, who suggests that different interpretations of reality merely reflect differences of perspective. The conversation proceeds towards a consensus because it has taken into account the possibility that both idealistic and realistic perceptions of reality can be equally valid; and that their differences are merely relative to one another. What appeared to be a disagreement between a sceptical and an intellectual viewpoint is overcome. As a mediator, Cosmas is instrumental in prompting this demonstration, though in any case Vigilius was not to be deterred from his conciliatory intent. He remained consistent to his inner monologue, so that he was able to contribute harmoniously to the dialogue an independent source of unbiased knowledge. Vigilius responds to Cosmas's interpretation of the "line" motif, in order to explain that different perceptions of reality can really co-exist because of intellectual discussions and representations of them:

COSMAS: [...] Die Grenze, an der das Gebirge infolge seiner Beschaffenheit aufhört, steigend den Horizont zu bedecken, und wo die Sichtbarkeit des Himmels anfängt? [...]

VIGILIUS: Was ist die Grenze? Auf jeden Fall nichts Wirkliches. [...] Du nimmst sie an, weil dein Geist erkennt, daß zwei verschieden geartete Bereiche aneinanderstoßen. Du siehst zunächst von deren besonderer Stofflichkeit ganz ab; du achtest nicht auf das Was, sondern untersuchst ausschließlich ein gewisses Wie, das in einer solchen Absonderung nur von Gnaden deines Geistes existiert, und das du als Grenze bezeichnest. Wir begreifen etwas nur, indem wir seine Grenzen bestimmen.⁵¹

Differences of opinion or perception are likened by Cosmas to the line of natural division, - the horizon between the sky and earth.⁵² This motif is used by Vigilius to show the difference between an idealized and realistic perception of reality. Whereas the former is preoccupied with the intellectual form of reality, the latter is concerned

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 73f. The task set for Cosmas, is to describe from memory how to draw the landscape in view, (p. 72). He is later asked to repeat the exercise, as if he were describing the same landscape to a stranger, (p. 74) - the purpose being to demonstrate the abstract quality of the border as a principle of measurement and perspective.

⁵² This variation of the border motif is considered more fully in section 3 of this chapter, see pp. 233-236 & pp. 238-39.

more with the content of reality. An intellectual interpretation of life is therefore necessarily concerned with abstracted, as opposed to concrete notions of reality. The significance of this distinction is that the physical appearance of reality can be examined and understood from an alternative viewpoint, whose primary interest is in representing and interpreting life as closely and accurately as possible. Winkler's "neo-platonic" interpretation of the 'line' sketch aims to reflect the relative difference between "metaphysical" and physical, or 'ideal' and 'real' aspects of reality as equally legitimate forms:

CONST: Was gibt die Linie? Grenzen, wie ihr sagt. Sie ist dort, wo die Ganzheit sich unserem Blick zu verbergen beginnt. [...] Läßt mich die Linie irgend etwas Stoffliches erfahren? [...]

VIG: Nun, ich habe schon gesehen, wie zwei Linien, [...] die mannigfaltigen Formen eines Beines [...] ausdrückten. Die Fläche war überwunden. Die unsichtbare Seite dieser Form wurde mir so gegenwärtig wie die sichtbare. [...]

COSMAS: Ja, ich denke da an Schattenrisse, die ich von einigen meiner Bekannten kenne, [...] gleichsam als würden durch diese Schattenrisse die *Ideen* ihrer Antlitze gegeben [...] ⁵³

In Winkler's dialogue, the difference between the intellectual form and the real content of reality is turned into an aesthetic variation of the Platonic Idea: reality is transcended as far as its idealized representation. What are called "Schattenrisse" are really the "true" impressions of reality, as in the essential manner that Plato implied in his *Simile of the Cave*. In a literary context, the coincidence between reality as it appears and its poetic form is no less the result of an intellectually inspired view than it was in the Platonic simile. ⁵⁴

The metaphysically inspired interpretation of the 'line' motif was the product of Winkler's search for harmony, itself a consequence of an existential conflict between his life, his imagination, and his interpretation of his experiences for his work. In

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 78f & p. 81f.

⁵⁴ The existential implication of the Platonic simile was discussed in Part One, Chapter I, pp. 60-61.

comparison, Grünbein's poetic impressions of the 'border-line' were less mythologically inspired, but dealt mainly with the problem of time in a lyrical context. Where parody, rhetoric or satire developed, such as in *Schädelbasislektion*, Grünbein exposed the possibility that a poetic conflict arises if intellectual and political factors cannot be harmoniously reconciled. Thus, two possible variations on the border theme have been broached. Firstly, in Grünbein's poems, which point to the transformation of the meaning of time into a 'simultaneous' experience of past, present, and future that is invested in the form of the landscape image. Secondly, Winkler points to the analogous quality of the 'border-line' as a means of exposing the intellectually challenging nature of the poetic process that is involved in changing the nature of existential or political influences into a far-reaching understanding of their metaphorical implications. Each of these thematic variations alluded in its own way to the suggestion of a poetic threshold that separates historical reality from the reality of art; and the meaning of this is examined more closely next.

2. Crossing the 'border-line': E.G. Winkler on Ernst Jünger

Winkler had regarded life a means to an end, in the sense that his very existence was devoted to the perfection of his writing art. Although he perceived his environment as an existential challenge, this challenge was intensified by imaginary influences. Jaspers had criticized the subjective nature of aesthetic experience, for he thought that aesthetics encourages an exaggeration of existential circumstances because of the involvement of the distorting powers of the imagination. Winkler's ideas about existence are therefore different to those developed by Jaspers' existential philosophy, so that a further examination of existence in a literary context is needed for securing the validity of what Winkler intended to be a "metaphysics" of the arts. In the preceding philosophical study of this work, the concept of a theoretical line provided a principle (in Plessner's philosophy), that was also present in Kant's idea of an axiomatic connection between reason and experience.¹ This axiom is not necessarily sufficient to explain the literary significance of borders, for an additional facet of their meaning has to be accounted for in this context. The variation of the theoretical line concept into the idea of a poetic threshold involves a process of observing the unique treatment of time in philosophy and literature, both of which work with more than merely historical notions of time.

The use of time in an aesthetic context is different again to a philosophical understanding of time, which aims at an explanation of history in terms of its ever-widening provision of ideas and theories about human reality. Notwithstanding the eternal values of a metaphorical use of time, Winkler's ideas were based on Platonic philosophy; and the fictional dialogue was a vehicle for expressing his view of philosophy as essentially related to the art of poetry and painting. Interestingly enough,

¹ See Part One, Chapter III, p. 159-160.

the process of deciding on this connection in Winkler's dialogue depended specifically upon his use of three imaginary speakers, so that the way of illustrating the poetic properties of the 'border-line' seems analogous to the systematic three stages of border transgression that characterized the methodological basis of Jaspers' *Grenzsituationen*.²

In Winkler's dialogue, however, the 'line' initially appeared as an abstraction, for even after it had been sketched, its meaning was difficult for one speaker in particular to appreciate. It was left to Vigilius to make its meaning more plain. This he did by way of analogy, to show the potential latent artistic ability in each individual to use ideas about material things as a basis for a comprehensive illustration of them. Winkler's preoccupation with intellectual study, such as Platonic thought, also enabled him to draw some pertinent conclusions about the writer, Ernst Jünger. These observations are relevant for discussing the post-war essay by Jünger, *Über die Linie*.³ Regardless of the fictional quality of the sketch in Winkler's study, its significance was that the sketch could at least be imagined by the reader. What interests Jünger appears more allusive: a description, without any illustrative, or visual aids, of a writer's experience of crossing a 'border-line', perceived by him to exist almost as a barrier between historical values and the eternal values of literature. Winkler's essay, *Ernst Jünger und das Unheil des Denkens*, unfolds a perceptive critique of Jünger's intellectual ability, and despite the time that has elapsed since it was written in early 1935-36, it yields some pertinent comments about Jünger's attitude to thinking:⁴

Es gibt heute wenige Denker, zu deren Werk man auf Jahre hinaus in einem Verhältnis steht, das zwischen spontaner Zustimmung und entschiedener Ablehnung ununterbrochen wechselt. [...] Jünger kann nicht widerlegt, sondern nur überwunden werden.⁵

² This methodological similarity is explored in the next section of this chapter, with regard to Elisabeth Langgässer's illustrations, see pp. 212-214 & p. 220.

³ Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie*, Frankfurt am Main 1950. (All references from this source). The original text in: *Anteile, Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt am Main 1950, pp. 245-284. For a more comprehensive study of Jünger's work, see Martin Meyer's monograph, *Ernst Jünger*, Munich, Vienna 1990.

⁴ See Eugen Gottlob Winkler, *Ernst Jünger und das Unheil des Denkens*, in: Piontek, *Die Dauer der Dinge*, op. cit., pp. 162-187. (First published in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift*, 49, Heft 9-10, 1935-36, pp. 335-355).

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 162 & p. 165.

The reason why the reader should not pass an uncompromising judgement on Jünger's work is, Winkler suggests, because Jünger's ideas are founded on experience: "Die Erfahrung ist die einzige, jedoch unbedingte Voraussetzung des Gedankens."⁶ By the same token, Winkler warned us that the most sensible way to approach Jünger's work is not to waste time arguing about the validity of his ideas, but to overcome them: "Nichtverstehen ist gefährlicher als Kritik".⁷ The question is how to argue with someone who has survived his first-hand experience of trench warfare? If Jünger had not experienced the trenches, Winkler speculated that the early texts might be altogether of a different intellectual quality: "Denn hier tritt die Romantik entschieden aus sich heraus".⁸

Nevertheless, the qualification that Jünger's ideas should only be accepted on the grounds that they are matched by his parallel experiences might suggest that experience can be used as an excuse for any perception of life. If individual experience is sufficient grounds to validate any course of action, does this not exclude the possibility of an ethical framework to experience?

Jaspers' reception of Kant's critique of reason implied that the ethos of existence is that thought processes be used as a moderator of life. In turn, Kant treated ideas as categories of thought that establish a framework for assessing the value of particular experiences. The significance of thought and ideas is therefore that they are a means with which to guide or regulate experiences and events. This presupposes that there is an ethos of accepted responsibility for any course of action, the meaning of which Jaspers developed more explicitly in his conception of existential *Grenzsituationen*. In ethical and existential terms, no experience might excuse all manner of attitudes or behaviour, since

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 163.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 172. Jünger's wartime experiences influenced the expressionistic style of his early texts; and seem to have shaped his ideas in the mould of the diary, a genre that is continued in Jünger's later work. Examples of early expressionism can be found in: *Totale Mobilmachung*, Berlin 1931; and *Der Arbeiter (Herrschaft und Gestalt)*, Hamburg 1932. See also Ernst Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoßtruppführers*, Hannover 1920; and more recent examples of diaristic continuity, see *Siebzig Verweht I-IV*, Stuttgart 1980-1994.

the very point of the human capacity for reason is that this force can be harnessed to moderate the effects of all kinds of events that can happen to individuals during their lifetime. Ethically speaking, it is possible to argue against Winkler: attitudes to life ought to be regulated by improving our knowledge and understanding, before supporting the general validity of all experience. Is the same not also to be true of literature?

Winkler's critique of Jünger is well reasoned, for he aimed to expose this very point: to arrive at a better understanding of Jünger's literary texts, we have to overcome possible prejudices that may be directed both against his experience and against his approach to thinking, so far as these are different to our own. Winkler's interpretation of Jünger's early texts outlined the still valid perplexity of overcoming such prejudices, since the problem is the ambiguity of the texts because of the weight of experience behind them. This observation certainly applies to what Jünger attempted in *Über die Linie*, which is similar to Winkler's endeavours, that is, if Jünger really meant to outline an affinity between art and metaphysics. The validity of such an affinity has already been demonstrated by Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue, but was mainly explored and pursued from an aesthetic perspective. The interesting thing about Jünger's essay is that from this same standpoint, he implies that there is no peaceful coexistence of philosophy and literature, even though it might appear that the essay is an attempt at a poetic re-working of existential theory.

What Jünger attempted was to define an experience of crossing what he called the meridian line between reality and art. The meridian line is the threshold of time, a "Nullmeridian".⁹ His interpretation of this time meridian gives the appearance of being inspired by an essentially philosophical purpose: to explain the significance of life experience.¹⁰ Yet this supposedly philosophical meaning is deceptive. In fact, it is difficult to reach a conclusive appraisal of the intention behind Jünger's interpretation of

⁹ Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie*, op. cit., p. 22, p. 26, p. 29.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 31. (The full citation as follows: "Es gibt [...] auch eine Frage nach dem Grundwert, die heute an Personen, Werke und Einrichtungen zu stellen ist: Sie lautet: inwiefern haben sie die Linie passiert?")

the 'line' motif, since comments about his intentions are not clearly developed in the essay. Consequently, it might be supposed that Jünger intended to describe what he understood by crossing the time meridian, yet a description is not forthcoming. He assumes, perhaps, that an understanding of what is involved in the poetic transgression of experience is comprehensible only to a select number of philosophers and authors, who already understand the significance of Platonic metaphysics. The issue is more perplexing still, as signs emerge that Jünger perceives political, as well as existential implications of being, as it were, between a historical and poetic conception of time. Yet equally, there are signs that neither existential nor political conditions of this situation are meant to be invoked by his discussion. Additionally, it might be assumed that Jünger's essay is purely an intellectual exercise, or even a demanding piece of work, in the sense that it is also addressed to Martin Heidegger for the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. Yet Jünger's conclusions appear less clear than those made in Winkler's original *Erkundung der Linie*, because no harmonious co-existence between art and metaphysics is identified by Jünger's analysis.

In Jünger's essay, there is no indication of any aspect of transformation, that is, no fundamental change in attitude to the writer's environment, which is ostensibly a hostile one, inhabited by the author as a representative of a persistent undercurrent of "opposition" (*Widerstand*), which is understood by Jünger as "das Anliegen unserer Literatur."¹¹ Martin Meyer criticized Jünger's *Linie* essay, arguing that it failed to draw clear conclusions about the key question it raises: this is also taken by Meyer to be about the circumstances in which literature is developed.¹² Meyer's point that Jünger is not able to describe how literature develops, could be explicable, in part, by the fact that Jünger remains essentially hostile to doing justice to the essay title he has set himself. His interpretation falls short of showing how the 'border-line' can be crossed. Yet what

¹¹ See Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie*, op. cit., p. 19. See also Otto Schulmeister, *Kämpfer, Beobachter, Visionär: Ernst Jünger und sein Jahrhundert*, in: *Die Presse*, 24 March 1995, p. 3. The reviewer wonders whether "opposition" is a relevant interpretation: "Geht es bei Jünger etwa um einen Fall aus der 'Ästhetik des Widerstands?'"

¹² Martin Meyer, *Ernst Jünger*, op. cit., p. 473.

is implied is that there is a marginal space between life and its poetic interpretation; and that this space has creative potential that must first be explored before its meaning can be invested in the form of the individual artwork, such as a literary text.

In other words, from his negative standpoint of hostility to life and its manifold situations and events, Jünger highlights the prospect of a margin, or threshold that separates the author from reality, much in the manner of a defensive barrier, which prevents anyone from crossing it. His idea of a poetic threshold cannot yet be taken as an analogy to the existential threshold between life and existence, as understood by Jaspers. This is because in order for the poetic threshold to be a true analogy to the existential one, there would have to be an element of mutual contact between the author and his writing environment. Nevertheless, Jünger's conception of the 'border-line' as a poetic barrier is useful as a point of differentiation. The threshold in Jaspers' understanding of it recognized no conception of space that could be creatively occupied for artistic or literary purposes. The existential threshold implied a distinction of antagonistically experienced conditions, yet antagonisms were supposed to spur the individual on, with a renewed sense of purpose and initiative. The ethos of existential values was linked expressly to the individual initiative for action, as opposed to the creative and imaginative endeavours of art.

The problem with Jünger's essay is that it is not clear whether his conception of the time threshold is poetically intended, or if there are not, after all, existential connotations. The reason for this ambiguity is that there are no tangible signs of the idea of a time threshold having been turned into a new poetic form. An example of the ambiguity is the allusion to the existential motif of "suffering", which Jünger apparently sees as a poetic problem because writers suffer a state of what he calls aesthetic "opposition" to reality.¹³ Yet without clear evidence of such suffering, such as we have in Winkler's case, it cannot be concluded that Jünger achieves a viable poetic analogy to an existential

¹³ "Der große Einschnitt liegt darin, daß die Vernichtung zunächst leidend empfunden wird. [...] Dann schlägt das Thema um, zum Widerstande [...]", *ibid.*, p. 19.

experience of worldly and 'otherworldly' aspects of existence.¹⁴ Moreover, if Jünger's perception of a threshold between reality and art is only meant to have poetic implications, these seem so intimately linked to his idea of the time threshold as a barrier to aesthetic achievement that the need is to remain ambiguous about its meaning for developing texts and literary ideas. Ambiguity therefore itself becomes a barrier to comprehension, since Jünger cannot really generalize about his experience of "crossing the meridian line of time" and render his impression of this transgression potentially fruitful and accessible to others.¹⁵

The main body of Jünger's essay comprises three sections: prognosis, diagnosis, and therapy.¹⁶ The middle "diagnosis" section of the essay appears most significant. It is in this section that Jünger gives an exposition of his version of an intellectual exchange with Heidegger. It might be regarded as evidence of Jünger's success that his essay earned a response from Heidegger, who wrote a reciprocal version for Jünger's sixtieth birthday, entitled *Über 'die Linie'*.¹⁷ Yet Heidegger's essay was later given the title *Zur Seinsfrage*, which demonstrated that his philosophical contribution was not intended to be an aesthetic description of the border motif, but a further exposition of his own way of thinking.¹⁸ This literary-philosophical exchange of views does not illustrate harmony,

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 30, p. 19.

¹⁵ This absence of argument from the general to the particular clearly marks the difference between Jünger's essay and the structural method of Jaspers' "existential elucidation".

¹⁶ See Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-10; pp. 10-28; and pp. 28-45. The analysis attempts a three-dimensional study, with "prognosis", "diagnosis", and "therapy" sections respectively on the pages indicated.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Über 'die Linie'*, in: *Freundschaftliche Begegnungen Festschrift für Ernst Jünger zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt am Main 1955, pp. 9-45. (All references from this source). The essay was revised as *Zur Seinsfrage*, Frankfurt am Main 1959.

¹⁸ No better confirmation of this is Heidegger's retitled version of *Über 'die Linie'* as *Zur Seinsfrage*. Even on the first page of his first version, the stamp of Heidegger's authority as a thinker puts Jünger in his place: Jünger's perspective is "trans lineam", Heidegger is concerned with an ontological "de linea" analysis which he proceeds to define: "Wenn wir beim Bild der Linie bleiben, dann finden wir, daß sie in einem Raum verläuft, der selbst von einem Ort bestimmt wird. Der Ort versammelt. Die Versammlung birgt das Versammelte in sein Wesen. Aus dem Ort der Linie ergibt sich die Herkunft des Wesens des Nihilismus und seiner Vollendung." *Über 'die Linie'*, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Martin Meyer concludes that Jünger does not follow Heidegger into the realms of deconstruction, see Martin Meyer, *Ernst Jünger*, *op. cit.*, p. 488. One reason, perhaps, for Jünger not following Heidegger is that despite his attempt to define an affinity with Heidegger, he is sceptical as to whether a philosophical understanding of reality can really account for the experience of writers, in terms of their problems and the influences under which they write.

but antagonisms between the two disciplines that underline a considerable difference between art and metaphysics, as understood and interpreted by Jünger and Heidegger. The idea of a permanent gulf between reality and art is compounded by a much wider gulf between literature and philosophy that is posited in Heidegger's essay, which is a definite departure from Platonic metaphysics towards a deconstruction of reality.¹⁹ Yet Heidegger's essay is significant where it distinguishes Jünger's intent from his own: Heidegger is committed to his version of ontology, which is a *de linea* deconstruction of reality with the sole aim of explaining the meaning of the *Seinsfrage*. Thereby, Heidegger's thoughts demonstrate that Jünger only addresses the aesthetic possibilities of the Platonic Idea. This leads Jünger to what Heidegger deems a *trans lineam* description, in other words, a description that remains within the Platonic tradition.²⁰

Nevertheless, it can be recalled that Winkler saw Jünger as a particularly ambiguous, if not problematic thinker: "Es wäre nicht unbegründet, der geistigen Haltung Ernst Jüngers den Vorwurf der Schwäche zu machen."²¹ According to Winkler, Jünger does not exercise his considerable intellectual powers in an optimal sense: first-hand experience of trench warfare may have brought him into direct contact with nihilism, but Jünger himself has not overcome this experience in his work.²² The implication of Winkler's judgement is that Jünger can do no other than define his intellectual identity as a writer in 'opposition' to his experience of life, as well as on the defensive against other individuals. Perhaps Jünger is still writing as part of what

¹⁹ See Martin Meyer, *Ernst Jünger*, op. cit., p. 488.

²⁰ See Martin Heidegger, *Über 'die Linie'*, op. cit., p. 10. See also Alfred Andersch's review of Jünger's essay: *Am Äquator des Nihilismus?* In: *Frankfurter Hefte (Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik)*, ed. by Eugen Kogon, Walter Dirks, H. 7, July 1952, II, pp. 976-978, here especially p. 976. Andersch criticized Jünger for retreating from his earlier text, "Der Arbeiter"; for retreating into "conservatism"; and for attempting, but not succeeding, to overcome "das neunzehnte Jahrhundert [...] aus dem heraus Jünger schreibt." Ibid., p. 976f.

²¹ See E. G. Winkler, *Ernst Jünger und das Unheil des Denkens*, op. cit., p. 184.

²² See also Rüdiger Görner, *Betrachtungen eines alten Kriegers*, in: *Die Presse, Spectrum*, 25 March 1995, pp. 1f. Ernst Jünger is regarded by Görner in a similar manner as Winkler: "Ernst Jünger - der Zeuge der Zeugen, ein Überlebender aus der Zeit der Stellungskriege, der ideologischen Kämpfe, der unzähligen 'Wenden' in der Geschichte der Deutschen in diesem Jahrhundert, ein Chronist mit prophetischen Gaben [...] aber in erster Linie - ein beinahe inkommensurables Problem: Distanzierung von Jünger ist eine Form der Annäherung an ihn."

Hannah Arendt referred to as the "Frontgeneration"?²³ In this spirit of permanent hostility, *Über die Linie* may well be opposed to Heideggerian philosophy. There again, Jünger also meant to show his esteem of this philosophy, for he implied that his work as a writer is not beyond the range and depth of Heideggerian thought.²⁴

In Heidegger's essay, which opposes Platonic metaphysics, and for that reason is not considered in greater detail by this study of borders, the criticism of Jünger's *trans lineam* analysis was that this was not 'oppositional' enough to Platonic thought. What Jünger intended, argued Heidegger, is essentially metaphysically motivated, since he outlined a discrepancy between reality and art forms, only experienced by writers as artists, who have to deal with the problem of overcoming a rift in reality that is imposed by the permanent responsibility they must attach to their writing task. Jünger's standpoint is between the two disciplines of philosophy and literature, which means that he cannot have solved in his own mind the rift that in both cases arises from a fundamentally different conception of time, for both disciplines do not work with the merely historical. What Jünger aims for, perhaps, is to be considered as eligible for belonging to both disciplines, yet because of this he cannot necessarily demonstrate any relevance to either.

In aesthetic terms, even though he may be aware of what is meant by the transformation of 'real' experiences into the literary work of art, in this essay at least, he cannot describe in a concrete manner what the meaning is. For this reason, and because of Jüngers' consistent ambiguity, Winkler's 'border-line' interpretation is more illuminating, since he had the original idea of making the reality of the border motif manifest in the fictional circumstances of a dialogue. In comparison, Jünger offers us the unsatisfactory "prognosis" that the style of a literary text is sufficient evidence of whether or not the threshold of time between reality and art has been crossed. Yet again, this is

²³ See Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge Totaler Herrschaft*, op. cit., p. 492.

²⁴ See Jünger's further publications *Federbälle, Für Martin Heidegger anlässlich seines 80. Geburtstag*, Biberach 1969; and *Federbälle, Teil I & II*, (Martin Heidegger in memoriam), Zurich 1980.

ambiguous, since attending to stylistic predilection conveniently circumvents a comprehensive, methodical exposition of the structures and processes of experiencing the time threshold itself. Hence even the label *trans lineam* becomes suspect. In other words, the issue of style need not necessarily indicate whether or not a specific text is an example of a truly literary piece of work. More especially, aspects of style are largely a matter of subjective opinion, which tells us, as Jaspers argued, little about the objective weight of the ideas or methods.

All this is confirmed by Jünger's survey, which turns out to be in praise of his own stylistic position, a "Beurteilung der Lage", which presupposes not only that the threshold experience of crossing the line between reality and art is entirely clear to others, but that the meaning of this experience is actually manifest in his essay.²⁵ Instead, he argues summarily that the style of language is sufficient evidence of literary transformation; and groups literary style into three categories: "optimistic", "pessimistic", or "defeatist" language.²⁶ His own style is regarded as "optimistic"; and coincidentally, it is this style that is equated with his idea of "aesthetic opposition".²⁷ The benefit of critical language is supposedly that it crosses barriers, such as the barrier imposed by the time threshold between reality and art:

Die Überquerung der Linie, die Passage des Nullpunkts *teilt* das Schauspiel; sie deutet die Mitte, doch nicht das Ende an.²⁸

To posit the existence of this time threshold as a barrier is not in itself evidence of its transgression. Transgressing the bounds of historical time and space, that is, turning experiences into a poetic form, is a unique facet of literature, which is arguably a crucial deciding factor when it comes to assessing the literary quality of a text. This task really requires, as Rüdiger Görner has argued, the ability to find a truly transforming

²⁵ See Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie*, op cit., p. 7.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 7f.

²⁷ *ibid.*, & p. 19.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26.

possibility, a feature or sign that art, such as literature, can really change the nature of conditions as they were once experienced: "Die Kunst arbeitet mit den Zeichen der Zeit. Sie begnügt sich nicht mit einer Wende; sie will Wandlung."²⁹ To begin an original conception of what it means to experience the difference between historical and poetic reality is the really challenging stylistic concern, so that the effort that any author inevitably gives to perfecting the style of his or her text can only be taken in part as evidence of its poetic qualities. The content of the text, its ideas, or the possible innovations must also be accounted for, if possible, together with their expression. On the point of content, as Meyer noted, Jünger is surprisingly reticent. Therefore, since Jünger's actual comments on experiences are sparing, he is open to criticism for his own stylistic values, and for what Görner regarded as one characteristic mark of Jünger, "die Kälte seines Stils".³⁰ This icy aloofness produces the kaleidoscopic evasion of the title-theme, *Über die Linie*, where there is little attempt, as in Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue, to show that metaphysical "opposition" to life can actually be used to illustrate or illuminate the meaning of this particular experience. Since Jünger offers no such illustration, he is in a quandary, that is, caught between reality and art, as well as being undecided about where to assign his allegiances: to philosophy or to literature.

Naturally, it may be the case that Jünger actually intended to describe in his essay a poetic threshold that only means to signify a general attitude of "opposition". At least, therefore, he is consistently ambiguous about the means and processes of writing, and his relationship with aesthetics is still "timeless", in the sense that his attitude of "opposition" is one way of suspending the passage of historical time. In so doing, however, he outlines a persistent discrepancy between time in an aesthetic context; and the flow of time in historical categories of past, present, or future. For the reason that there is no apparent interconnection between these two conceptions of time, the

²⁹ See Rüdiger Görner, *Melancholie und Zynismus*, in: *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 17 June 1994.

³⁰ See Rüdiger Görner, *Betrachtungen eines alten Kriegers*, op. cit.

intermediate exposition of his "diagnosis" appears strangely incongruous to the concluding "therapy" section of his essay:

Der Augenblick, in dem die Linie passiert wird, bringt eine neue Zuwendung des Seins, und damit beginnt zu schimmern, was wirklich ist. ³¹

Again, the possibility arises that Jünger intended to describe a poetic variation of existential circumstances, so far as an experience of the poetic time threshold is comparable to a transformed state of being. Yet again, there is no further definition of what this state of transformation actually means. Furthermore, Heidegger's analysis focused more closely on "existential" aspects, so far as they can be linked to his deconstructivist intent. Interestingly enough, Jaspers' *Notizen* clearly show that Heidegger's essay was regarded by Jaspers as a vicious polemic against his "existential elucidation". In *Über 'die Linie'*, it is the following section of Heidegger's essay that offended Jaspers:

Wer heute das metaphysische Fragen im Ganzen seiner Art und Geschichte deutlicher zu durchschauen und zu befolgen meint, sollte, wo er sich doch so überlegen gern in hellen Räumen bewegt, eines Tages darüber nachdenken, woher er denn das Licht zu einem klareren Sehen genommen hat. ³²

Heidegger's reference to "helle Räume", that is, the enlightened context of Plato's "true" conception of reality, does not escape Jaspers' notice, who has clearly analysed in detail the entire section that has just been quoted and concluded in his *Notizen*:

Es ist nach den gewählten sprachlichen Wendungen leider kein Zweifel, daß ich gemeint bin. [...] In diesem Falle Heideggers sehe ich nicht den Typus, sondern das Offenbare zielen auf meine Person. Hier beginnt eine Häßlichkeit, auf die ich mich nicht weiter einlasse. ³³

³¹ Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie*, op. cit., p. 32.

³² See Martin Heidegger, *Über 'die Linie'*, op. cit., p. 37.

³³ See Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 189, note 172, (part VI - 1961-64).

Jaspers appears to have taken Heidegger's attack personally, as a direct attempt to undermine his methods of thinking to the extent that he assumed, although he could not prove, that Heidegger was actually accusing him of "plagiarism" of his ideas.³⁴ Jünger's analysis avoids entirely the debate about existential philosophy, as represented by Jaspers, for he appeals instead to Heidegger, who seems to have been intent on defending his reputation in post-war Germany, apparently at the expense of Jaspers' philosophy of existence. Yet this still sheds little light on Jünger's real aims, for nowhere in his essay is there a sign that the time threshold can really lead to a new aesthetic perception of reality, or as Jünger called this: "Verwandlung im Sinne des Ovid".³⁵ Clearly, Jünger has stated a preference for not describing anything other than developmental procedures; and this is possibly because he cannot generalize about them. In his analysis of the 'border-line', his ideals may be those of the antique myth and Platonic *eros*, but since he has not described what is to be made of these ideals, there is a note of dilettantism about the assertion that they can merely be found in the individual work of art:

Durchaus verbunden sind Freiheit und musisches Leben, das dort zur Blüte kommt, wo innere und äußere Freiheit im günstigsten Verhältnis stehen. [...] das heißt das Kunstwerk [...] ³⁶

The individual work of art, such as a literary text, may well have gone through the process of experiencing an entirely new conception of time. Yet surely this would be evident in the content as well as in the style of the particular text concerned? Jünger's interpretation of the means and processes of literary development is particularly economical as regards the content of these procedures. Perhaps this is why he remains sceptical about the capacity of writers to overcome a rift between the reality of life and its representation in art, such as literature. The significant problem with this conclusion is that it is only an exposition of a particular stage of development. Moreover, the idea that

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 130, note 109, (part IV - 1954-55).

³⁵ Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 41.

time alone holds the key to solving literary questions is something of a cliché if it is not supported by evidence of real knowledge about the mechanisms that enable the author to work against time in order to produce literature.³⁷ Reference is rather to be made on this point to Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue, for his work really can posit the idea of a positive connection between reality and its manifestation in art. The consensus that was found in the fictional dialogue showed evidence of how time can help to overcome the mental barrier of capturing reality in its closest aesthetic representation. Winkler showed that the experience of the particular space that Jünger described does not have to be an empty void or "Nullpunkt". To appreciate the achievements of literature meant, to Winkler, using the intellect to organize ideas in concert with observations, for only when this kind of reconciliation is possible can time in the realm of metaphysics and in its enduring poetic realm be harmonized. Winkler's criticism of Jünger was that his hostile approach to thinking hindered his literary development and made his ideas antagonistic because they could not be reconciled with the nature of his experiences. This development was found by Winkler to be potentially more disconcerting than whatever may be credited to the wealth of Jünger's lifetime experiences: "Das Denken ist schließlich ein Mittel, um dem Leben einen Sinn zu verleihen. [...] Das Denken ist seine Gefahr."³⁸

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁸ E. G. Winkler, *Ernst Jünger und das Unheil des Denkens*, op. cit., p. 184.

3. Poetic *Grenzgänger* and *Geteilter Himmel* (Elisabeth Langgässer and Christa Wolf)

To provide a viable analogy for connecting the literary with the philosophical discourse on 'borders', the idea of the poetic threshold needs to imply something more than a mental barrier to work against. The additional quality that is called for can be attributed to another variation of the border motif, which shows us how pictorial representation is another way to look at the meaning and consequences of the developmental processes of literature. An analogy between words and pictures might offer the kind of synthetic connection that is sought, since it was shown in Winkler's dialogue that pictorial representations of reality can depend on a variation of the Platonic Idea, that is, a view of reality that depends upon building a mental picture of the patterns and underlying form of appearances. The connecting property of pictorial representation can be likened to the idea of the poetic *Grenzgänger*, another aspect of the border motif that is further applicable to understanding Elisabeth Langgässer's early novella, *Grenze: Besetztes Gebiet*.¹ The *Grenzgänger* motif can be followed throughout this novella, as well as by referring to three original illustrations that were sketched by Elisabeth Langgässer as suggested title motifs for the front-cover of her published work.² The significance of these sketches is their close association with three developmental stages of

¹ Elisabeth Langgässer, *Grenze Besetztes Gebiet Ballade eines Landes*, (first edition, Berlin 1932); new edition Olten 1983, with afterword by Anthony W. Riley, *ibid.*, pp. 125-141. (All references from the new edition, further citations use the abbreviation *GBG*).

² The sketches are reproduced here (see pp. 212-214), by permission of the holders of Elisabeth Langgässer's original manuscript collection at the German Literature Archive, Marbach, Germany.

The original dustcover for the 1932 edition was designed by the artist Walter Ladengast, and it depicted a border post in "tricolor" colours, with a "Grenzvogel" sitting at the edge of the post, see Karlheinz Müller, *Elisabeth Langgässer Eine biographische Skizze*, Darmstadt 1990, p. 51.

As part of a contemporary revival in the author's earlier work, - not only the new edition of this novella -, renewed local interest in the author has grown, especially with various exhibitions on her early work, see further *Katalog zur Ausstellung Elisabeth Langgässer Grenze: Besetztes Gebiet Ballade eines Landes Eine Ausstellung zum Leben und Werk der Dichterin*, ed. by Michael Maaser, Karlheinz Müller, Seligenstadt 1988. See also Michael Maaser, *Elisabeth Langgässer (1899-1950)*, in: *Katalog zur Ausstellung ...*, *ibid.*, pp. 12-28.

the narrative prose. Langgässer's sketches will also be significant later on in this section of the chapter, to illustrate why Christa Wolf's narrative, *Der geteilte Himmel*, makes no recourse to the motif of the *Grenzgänger*.³

Langgässer's novella is set in 1923, during the French occupation of the Rhine and Ruhr area, which was a condition of the reparations set out by the terms of the Versailles treaty. Langgässer herself really experienced the French occupation, since she lived on the border of French occupied Ruhr in the town of Griesheim, Rheinhessen.⁴ By working from her own experience and recollection of the time, Langgässer's intention was to offer what she called: "Impressionen aus der Zeit des Ruhrkampfes im rhein-mainischen Winkel."⁵ She did not write this novella until the Spring of 1930, and this wait of seven years before she wrote about her historical "impressions" may indicate the intention to offer an historically accurate account of this period, together with a desire to write a poetically "true" account of her experiences.⁶ In this case, she was writing against the political reality that she had experienced, but not necessarily only being in aesthetic "opposition" to her memories of the period, because she clearly aimed to transform the meaning of her recollections. The poor reception of her novella in the 1930s might suggest that she had not achieved her poetic aim for this story. Yet the fact that, at the time, this particular novella virtually disappeared from circulation is perceived

³ See especially p. 222 & p. 233. Although Wolf's prose was written virtually thirty years after that of Langgässer, and therefore describing an entirely different historical period, these works can be compared with one another on purely poetic grounds. Whereas both authors took political events and circumstances as their starting point, Langgässer's intention was to transform the political setting of her story during the course of narration.

⁴ Elisabeth Langgässer's biography shows that Griesheim is the actual setting for the story. From 1919-1920 the author taught at Seligenstadt and then Griesheim near Darmstadt (1920 to 1928), see *Katalog zur Ausstellung ...*, op. cit., p. 65f.

Elisabeth Langgässer was classified during the period of Nazi control in Germany as a "Halbjüdin" (her father was Jewish). She managed to escape deportation to the concentration camp, yet she had to do forced labour, and was excluded from the so-called "Reichsschrifttumskammer", and forbidden to publish from 1936. Her daughter, Cordelia, was classified as "Dreivierteljüdin", and was deported to Theresienstadt, and then in 1944 to Auschwitz. She survived this ordeal, see Karlheinz Müller, *Elisabeth Langgässer Eine biographische Skizze*, op. cit., p. 68. See Cordelia Edvardson, *Gebanntes Kind sucht das Feuer*, Munich, Vienna 1986; and *Die Welt zusammenfügen*, Munich 1991. In these books, Cordelia Edvardson attempts to relate her experience of the concentration camp.

⁵ See Elisabeth Langgässer letter to Richard Knies, 10 December 1931, in: *Elisabeth Langgässer Briefe 1925-1950*, Band I, ed. by Elisabeth Hoffmann, Düsseldorf 1990, p. 129.

⁶ See Elisabeth Langgässer letters to Karl Thieme and Frau Friedländer, in: *Elisabeth Langgässer Briefe 1925-1950*, *ibid.*, p. 91 & p. 94.

by the author herself to be a reflection more of the time in which she lived, rather than an indictment of her writing:

Links stehende, demokratische Blätter wie die Ullsteinpresse vermeiden natürlich alles peinlich, [...] - und rechtsstehenden Blättern ist es, wie ich fürchte, nicht nationalistisch genug. Es ist nämlich ganz einfach weder rechts noch links, sondern: wahr - und deswegen schwer an den Mann zu bringen.⁷

The connection of "truth" with poetic "truth" implies that, for Langgässer, a poetic understanding of reality was a more accurate interpretation of the times than an historical one. Some evidence that her emphasis on the poetic nature of her interpretation of life in 1923 was valid can be given by the reception of the new 1983 edition of this novella, which focused more on the aesthetic quality of the work, rather than on possible political antagonisms between Germany and France. As Anthony W. Riley indicated, the tensions that Elisabeth Langgässer records between Germany and France in 1923 might now be perceived as historical details.⁸ Ironically, in the early 1930s, this novella was deemed to be not political enough. However, by stressing the importance of the lyrical quality of her novella, which she regarded as more important than its political content, Langgässer was primarily concerned with transforming the realistic nature of her memories into a literary account.

This aspiration is demonstrated more clearly with reference to her original sketches. The sketches illustrate the novella's story-line, or what Karlheinz Müller described as a "poetische Wanderkarte".⁹ What is significant for the novella is that the political context is a starting point. The first sketch overleaf (page 212), illustrates the reality of the

⁷ See Elisabeth Langgässer letter to Martha Friedländer, 11 April 1930, in: *Elisabeth Langgässer Briefe 1925-1950*, *ibid.*, p. 96. The novella was eventually first published by the critic Emanuel bin Gorion, whose mother Rahel, ran a publishing-house (Morgenland-verlag). The first 1932 edition had limited success, with approximately 350 copies sold by the end of September 1933 when the edition was presumably dissolved. (Emanuel and Rahel bin Gorion escaped the holocaust, emigrating to Palestine in 1936), see Karlheinz Müller, *Elisabeth Langgässer Eine biographische Skizze*, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-50.

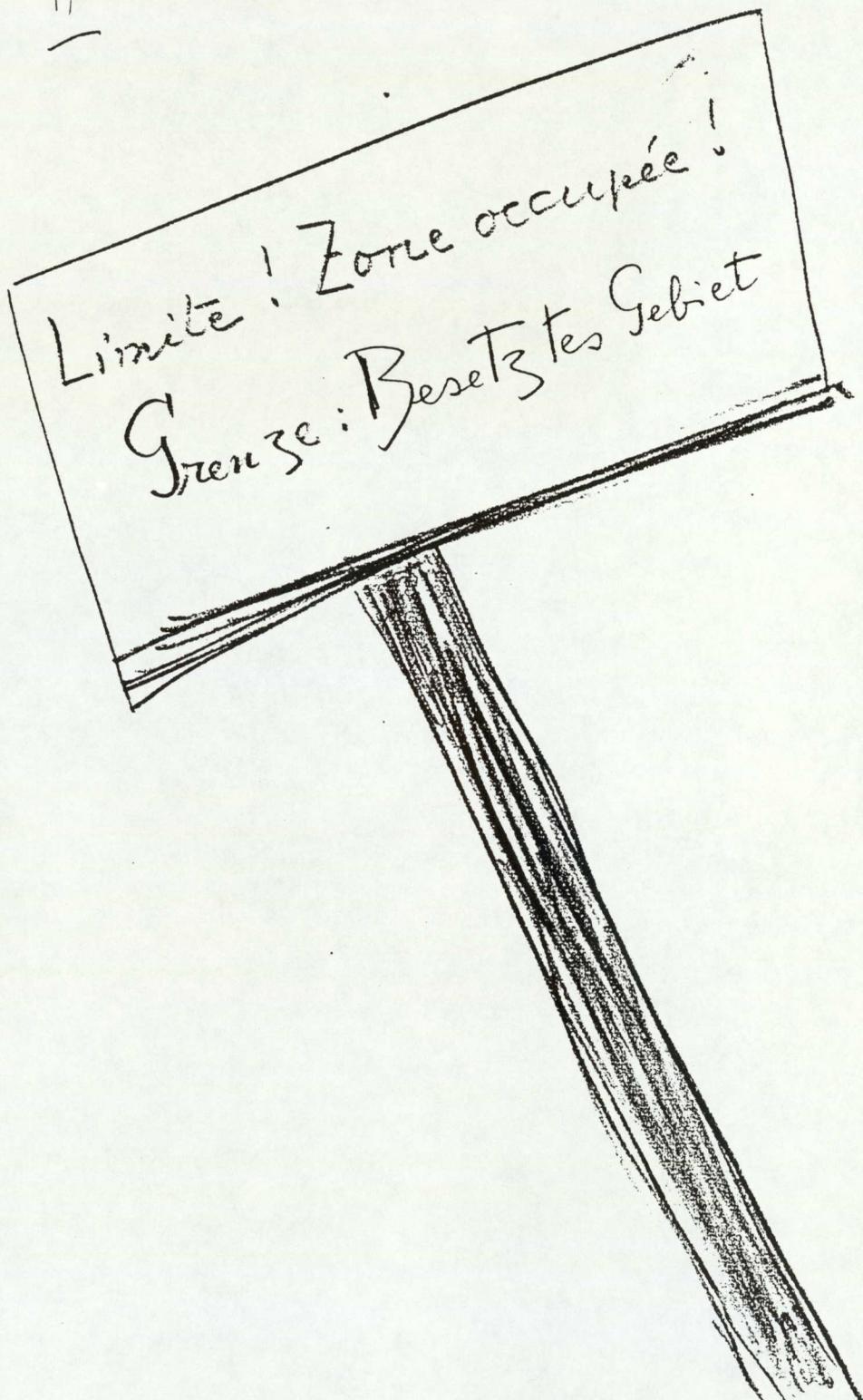
⁸ See review in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 24 November 1983, quoted after Karlheinz Müller, *Katalog zur Ausstellung ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 52. See also Anthony W. Riley, in: *GBG*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

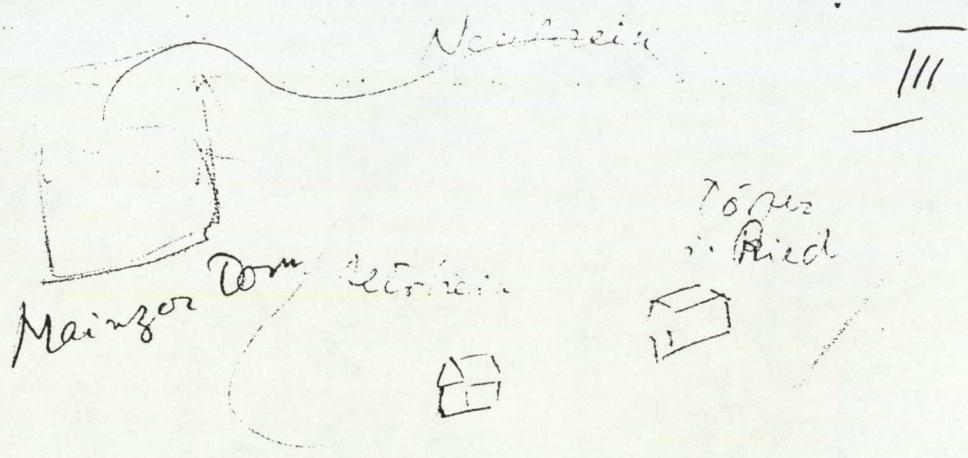
⁹ Karlheinz Müller, *Katalog zur Ausstellung ...*, *ibid.*, p. 50.

I

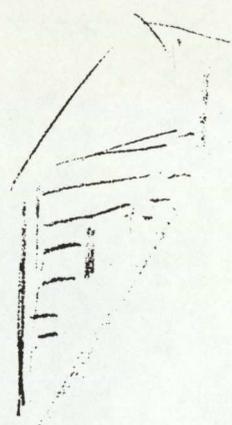
Franze

Besetztes Gebiet!

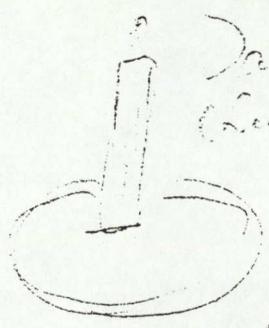




Groß =
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2300 hase

Ordnung

situation as Langgässer experienced it, where the border is a demarcation line between French and German territory. In order to achieve a poetic interpretation of this political context, the fictional character, "Lorchen", who is a young teacher in the story, acts from the start as the poetic *Grenzgänger*. Lorchen's purpose as a *Grenzgänger*, is to seek to forge a passage across the border, and to transcend the historical reality of the time to reach a more enduring poetic atmosphere. In the novella, however, she is the homesick character, who crosses the border to visit her mother living in "free" German territory on the other side of the border, in Darmstadt. The additional function of a poetic *Grenzgänger* is to alter the nature of political conditions, by acting as a 'go-between'. This role is fulfilled both in a realistic sense, such as when Lorchen negotiates with the French occupying forces to be allowed to cross safely from one side of the border to the other. It is also carried out in an ideal sense, for the purpose is to connect the content of the story, such as the various anecdotes of the border-crossings, with a new sense of their poetic meaning. By the end of the first chapter, *Ali und der Igel*, we see Lorchen already devising a means of escape from the confines of the present situation in French occupied territory, because she wishes to escape the impression of isolation from home. This incentive also has the other purpose of beginning to turn the realistic elements of the story into a purely fictional story-line:

Selbst im Einschlafen schmiedet sie Pläne, der Gefangenschaft zu entkommen. Sie radelt viele Wege, doch die Felgen versinken im Sand, und wenn sie sich mühsam hindurchgearbeitet hat und schon gerettet glaubt, schiebt sich ein Schild in die Höhe, schwarze Schrift auf weißem Grund -
GRENZE: BESETZTES GEBIET! ¹⁰

For all intents and purposes, the border-post depicts the inescapable facts of life: occupation on one side; and freedom on the other. As the novella's *Grenzgänger*, Lorchen interprets this reality as a signal to invent ways of forging a passage from one side to the other. The constant confrontation with the border begins to lead to a new

¹⁰ Elisabeth Langgässer, *GBG*, op. cit., p. 24.

dimension, which appears only accessible to the *Grenzgänger*, who finds the confirmation of her existence at the margins of life's possibilities.¹¹ The unique accessibility to real events and their literary meaning is embodied in the figure of Lorchen, so that each aspect of her experiences is made manifest in the story-line. The second sketch on page 213, illustrates how accessible the poetic dimension is, by showing a process of translation from French to German. The idea of translation offers an analogy for the way in which two essentially different conceptions of life can be made manifest in each other. In other words, the experience of the French occupation of the Ruhr area has to be translated into an imagined form of reality, if the "impressions" are to be recorded according to Elisabeth Langgässer's poetic aspirations. Poetic "truth" therefore is indirectly taken out of an historical context. Hence the process of translating realistic impressions from 1923 into a story-line renders their political content neutral. This means maintaining a distance from the actual experiences to prevent any possible prejudice arising that might obscure the poetic quality of the text. The evidence that this novella was intended to prevent the perpetuation of allegiances to the French or German side is confirmed by Langgässer's complaint that her work was not political enough, neither to left, nor to extreme right wing political views in the 1930s.

In her capacity as *Grenzgänger*, Lorchen is not controlled by political forces, but responds to the poetic principles of the motif that she represents: to perceive reality from all possible angles.¹² In the novella, Lorchen forges a passage between the two sides of the border, the one being under French occupation, the other being "free" territory under German control. The act of crossing the border also symbolizes a connection in the narrative between its poetic form and the actual anecdotal content. In other words, a "true" account of the situation does not only depend on describing experience. If poetic "truth" is to be represented in as objective a light as possible, there must be some

¹¹ See also Rüdiger Görner, *Grenzgänger Dichter und Denker im Dazwischen*, Tübingen 1996, especially *Einführender Grenzgang*, *ibid.*, pp. 9-16.

¹² Görner characterizes the sense of endless space that is apparent to the poetic *Grenzgänger*: "Er denkt anders. Die Grenze ist ihm der Rand der Zeit und der Rand der Ewigkeit. Die Grenze wird sein Weg". *Ibid.*, p.14.

recourse to poetic imagination. Lorchen transgresses the distinction between historical fact and poetic fiction, through her role as poetic "go-between". This responsiveness is evident in the chapter, *Ein Mädchen fährt über die Grenze*, where the reality of isolation and division that has been imposed by the border is compared to the relative freedom of life on the other side.¹³ In poetic terms, this is the point where the process of literary transformation commences:

Bewegten sich drüben die Äste? Ein gelbes Gesicht schaut zwischen den Zweigen hervor - und wird zum Ginsterstrauch. An dem Grabenrand sitzt ein Franzose - und verwandelt sich in Stein. Jetzt kommt die Grenze näher, die Schilder fliegen heran, das Rad rennt plötzlich auf Schotter [...] ¹⁴

Before the poetic *Grenzgänger*, Lorchen, can reach the other side of the border, the narrative flow seems to be literally "punctured". The poetic translation of historical elements into poetic ones has begun. Those sections involving travel from one side of the border to the other are like the process of translation illustrated in the second sketch on page 213. Yet the translation, in poetic terms, requires transformation. The French soldier who is transformed to stone immediately becomes a desensitized figure, for his allegiance is no longer to political, nor historical factors, but to poetic elements. The transforming quality of this novella was hinted at even in the opening section of the novella, *Das Tor geht zu*. This prologue section is compared by Anthony W. Riley to a "coda-like" form, which marks the opening and closing sections of the novella.¹⁵ The musical analogy is a useful comparison for the moment of the border-crossing, which is anticipated by musical infiltrations, such as the Moroccan flautists that are a prelude to the central ballad, which emerges later as the leit-motiv of this novella. The sound of the flute suggests that a poetic border crossing is about to happen; and accordingly, the flute is first heard before Lorchen crosses the border:

¹³ Elisabeth Langgässer, *GBG*, op. cit., pp. 24-31.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁵ See Anthony W. Riley, *ibid.*, p. 141, this comparison is made with regard to *Das Tor geht zu*, *ibid.*, pp. 7-16; and *Das Tor geht auf*, *ibid.*, p. 123f. But these narrative sections might also be compared to prologue and epilogue.

Die Lerchen steigen empor, und marokkanische Flöten erwecken den schlafenden Wald. Sie sind von durchdringender Süße, grell, traurig und verdeckt, schwellen an und scheinen so ferne, als ob sie von Afrika kämen [...] Eine kurze Melodie kehrt beharrlich immer wieder - es ist, als tränke die Morgenluft verworrene Träume auf -- ¹⁶

The flute's melody indicates the essentially poetic meaning of Lorchen's activities, described in the next border-crossing in the chapter, *Land ... Land ...*. In this chapter, it becomes clear just how apparently meaningless political events in 1923 are to the story. There are vivid descriptive accounts of nature, which are now interspersed with anthropomorphic elements that only echo the threatening conditions of the times by alluding to the demonic side of human reality. ¹⁷ At this stage, Lorchen is still caught between both sides of the border, a situation that was referred to by Jünger as aesthetic "opposition". This ambiguous situation is retained until the sound of the flute symbolizes the poetic border-crossing, which is mimicked by the shrill cry of the peacock:

[...] der Boden hier brüdet gleichfalls, und pflanzenhafte Gestalten, die würgend einander umarmen, wachsen blaugrün und giftig auf. Mit einemmal dringt ein Schrei: rauh, wild und abgebrochen, an ihre entsetzten Sinne, eine böse, zornige Klage, die trotzdem nicht erbittert, nur namenlos traurig macht. Als es zum zweiten Mal ruft, weiß das Mädchen, es ist der Pfau und will darüber lachen [...] ¹⁸

The cry of the peacock defuses the ambiguity of being in what might also be described as a poetic dilemma: Lorchen is caught between two different perceptions of reality, unable to decide whether to return to historical events or whether to progress into the poetic exploration of these events. The dilemma is especially manifest where the call of the peacock indicates a "wild", even "demonic" side to nature's freedom, which is also described as something eternally positive, such as Rousseau had thought, - "den besten Franzosen [...] der an den freien Menschen unter freiem Himmel glaubt." ¹⁹ The

¹⁶ Elisabeth Langgässer, *GBG*, *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁷ Anthony W. Riley, *ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Langgässer, *GBG*, *ibid.*, 51f.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 51.

perplexity of the situation is overcome when the story yields to the inherently transforming aspects of the poetic leit-motiv, which is the flow of the river Rhine that is the ballad of the title-theme:

Dieser Strom, der sich verträumt hat und eingeschlafen ist, liegt zwischen grünen Weiden und Pappelränden gebettet [...] Ein namenloser Friede, der jenseits des Lebens ist, erfüllt dieses Fleckchen Erde, [...] Die Natur hat es längst vergessen, trotz mal und Schwedensäule. [...] Erst wo die Ufer münden, strömt wieder die Weltgeschichte, und der weit geöffnete Rhein nimmt die träumende Seele Germaniens in seine Schicksalsbahn auf [...] ²⁰

The image of the Rhine is Langgässer's poetic "impression" of reality, which is also a way of transcending the political situation of the time. The idea of fate is skilfully used to confront the historical nature of events with the eternal motion of time, so that a proper sense of destiny is achieved by comparing the political fate of Germany with time itself. Apparently, by suspending the flow of time in an historical sense, the metaphorical flow of time shows that political elements in this story can really be dispensed with: Germany's future political fate is part of a destiny, whose meaning will inevitably become clear and distinct as time takes its course. This course is compared to the flow of the river Rhine. The use of time in this way seems to be reflected in Langgässer's final sketch, which illustrates a purely imaginary picture of the border that has clearly surpassed any political or historical meaning. The first two sketches are not redundant images, since they are implied in the full panorama that is illustrated in the third sketch on page 214. From this sketch, a map of the route for the story's poetic *Grenzgänger*, Lorchen, can be envisaged. The sketch illustrates the entire narrative's setting: Mainz and the cathedral bordering on the Altrhein, the "Dörfer im Ried" are all detailed on the other side of the border, behind the "Grenzschilderhaus." There is still a faint line that is discernible between the other side of the border, where Darmstadt is depicted, together with the "Luisenplatz", the "Bergstraße", and as far as the "Odenwald"

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 48.

(towards Heidelberg).²¹ However, in comparison with the first sketch, this poetic map illustrates the extent to which the actual reality of the time has been poetically reworked. This is because of a connection between the historical subject matter and the interpretation of historical facts as poetic fiction. It is the *Grenzgänger*, who enables fictional reality to become 'real', by exploring time and space with what appears to be a poetic compass.

To illustrate further that the process of literary transformation is completed during the course of the story, each sketch might be associated with the twelve chapters in the novella. The table overleaf, (see page 221), may be referred to as a working model for interpreting the formal development of the novella. Elisabeth Langgässer's narration of anecdotes and incidents in each of the places featured on the map in the final sketch shows how poetic development can be achieved by linking the structural implications of the narrative to the motif of the *Grenzgänger*. The table that has been devised by working from the sketches clearly shows the importance of finding a structural framework, or a method, whereby historical events can be taken and used as a basis for literary texts. In this instance, the peculiar recurrence of the three-stage developmental procedure for describing the significance of the political border is more than coincidentally reminiscent of the methodological basis of Jaspers' "existential elucidation". In other words, to portray the reality and consequences of poetic or existential borders, it is essential to begin with life experience, in order to show how this experience can be either explained in a philosophical manner, or illustrated in a poetic reworking of political or existential conditions. The systematic three stages of literary development, which were no less reflected by Winkler's use of three speakers, as well as Jünger's three-stage analysis of the 'border-line' suggests that in order to interpret the poetic quality of the border motif, literature also needs to make some recourse to ideas. Thus, as long as Langgässer's story develops within aesthetic limits, the process of transforming the nature of political experience can be accomplished. The subtitle of the novella further indicates the work's lyrical intent: the "ballad" is the melodic flow of the river Rhine that features in variations

²¹ This topography can also be followed on any conventional contemporary map.

Table I

A model of Poetic Development

Section A *

	(1)	Das Tor geht zu
I	(2)	Ali und der Igel
II	(3)	Ein Mädchen fährt über die Grenze
III	(4)	Dorf im Fieber

I	(5)	Was geht im Schulhaus vor?
II	(6)	Land ... Land ...
III	(7)	Der Versucher

Section B

II	(8)	Die Fahrt nach Mainz
I	(9)	So sieht es aus
III	(10)	Satyrspiel

II	(11)	Hin und Zurück
III	(12)	Totenmal
I	(13)	Franzosenkind
	(14)	Das Tor geht auf

* Sections A and B indicate the extent of inner development occurring during the course of the novella. The numbers I, II, III represent the numbered sketches on pp. 212-214, whereas the bracketed numbers (1-14) refer to the numbers of each chapter as noted in *Grenze Besetztes Gebiet*, op. cit. It can be seen that the first six chapters retain the comparative order of the individual sketches. In Section B, the extent of poetic development can be read according to the inner changes which seem to occur in the ordering of the sketches.

throughout the story.²² Yet as the narrative draws to its conclusion a new, melancholy tone to the ballad is introduced:

Allmählich, wie die Grenze geschlossen wurde, tut sie sich wieder auf, [...] und der erinnerungsvolle Blick vermöchte vielleicht noch viel weiter ins Grenzenlose zu schauen, wenn sich der Horizont jetzt nicht auf einmal verwölkte und langsam zusammenzöge, weil Tränen ihn verdunkeln.²³

What the tone of this epilogue section anticipates is the effect of not turning reality into a purely poetic representation of it. The epilogue, together with Elisabeth Langgässer's sketches, and the use of a poetic *Grenzgänger* therefore offer a point of contrast with Christa Wolf's prose representation of the political of division of Germany in the early 1960s. Langgässer's novella was intended to give historical "impressions" that could be equated with poetic "truth"; whereas Wolf's narrative can be regarded as politically motivated. For this reason, *Der geteilte Himmel* offers another variation on the conditions of the border as a literary motif, for Wolf intended to represent reality as it was at the time the work was written.²⁴ In her narrative of Germany's division, Wolf does not necessarily need to resort to the *Grenzgänger* motif, since her interpretation of reality in the early 1960s is to emphasize two separate states of FRG and GDR and the corresponding different perceptions of reality that are attached to the ideologies adopted by either side.

²² For example, followed here as the melody of the flute, mimicked by the cry of the peacock, finally resurfacing in the flow of the river, *GBG*, op. cit., p. 13, p. 27, p. 52, p. 48.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁴ See Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel*, Munich 1993. (Further references use, *DGH*). A further comparison of Christa Wolf's style with that of Virginia Woolf has been made by Joyce Crick, in: *Christa Wolf and Virginia Woolf: Selective Affinities*, in: *Responses to Christa Wolf Critical Essays*, ed. by Marilyn Sibley Fries, Detroit 1989, pp. 91-107. Crick seeks "selective affinities" between Christa Wolf's writing, after its commitment to Bitterfeld ideals, and that of Virginia Woolf. Hence after Christa Wolf's *Moskauer Novelle* (1961) and *Der geteilte Himmel*, Joyce Crick observes that there is a change in Wolf's style, which departs from its socialist realist commitment: "[...] Where Christa Wolf can demonstrate the working-out of [...] catharsis in the barely fictionalized figure of the author herself, Virginia Woolf delegates it to the fictional figure." *Ibid.*, p. 99. In other words, Virginia Woolf's narrative is poetically inspired, yet Christa Wolf cannot achieve the same level of poetic competence, because she is present in her narratives as a "barely fictionalized figure". Crick observes that there is a lack of poetic development, yet this means a Wolf-Woolf affinity must remain highly selective; and Crick is obliged to append the essay with *A Bibliographical Excursus*, which is largely devoted to ascertaining whether Christa Wolf was acquainted with Virginia Woolf's work, *ibid.*, pp. 102-105.

Wolf aimed to maintain a "realist" attitude; and was reacting to Walter Ulbricht's appeal for East German authors to create a "socialist realist" literature.²² *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963) is set in the historical context of Germany's division. However, at the time the book was published, reactions were mixed, as far as its "socialist realist" credentials were concerned. Martin Reso's edition *Der geteilte Himmel und seine Kritiker* collected the diverse reactions of contemporary reviews in a single volume, and Reso commented on the polemical nature of debate, ("widerspruchsvolle Meinungsäußerungen"), that Wolf's book then provoked.²³ The polemics alternated between asserting a poetic and an ideological intent to Wolf's narrative. In his afterword, Reso remarked on what he clearly saw as the narrative's "socialist realist" credentials, and attempted to explain how he arrived at the following interpretation of Christa Wolf:

Sie will Wahrheit vermitteln. Die Wahrheit über den Sozialismus kann aber nur schreiben, wer die Wirklichkeit des Sozialismus mit dem Ethos des Sozialisten durchforscht, wer die ethisch-moralischen Prinzipien der sozialistischen Gesellschaft und Voraussetzung für das Wirken in der Gesellschaft akzeptiert und sie als integrierender Bestandteil seines Schaffens dem Leser bewußt macht.²⁴

Reso observes the complexities involved in defining what is meant by a "socialist realist" intent. He argues that in the early 1960s Christa Wolf was practising a "moralist" approach to literature in the form of the "socialist realist" ethos which assigned to literature not only a facility for discussing moral codes, but also for encouraging commitment to Socialist values. In his essay on *Der neudeutsche Literaturstreit*, Reinhard Baumgart more recently established a link between this debate

²² The text was published along the lines of the so-called "Bitterfeld Conference", which was first held in 1959. At this conference, Walter Ulbricht appealed for the production of a national East German literature: authors were encouraged to gain experience of work in factories; and workers encouraged to write, or "*die Höhen der Literatur zu erstürmen*". See Dieter Sevin, *Christa Wolf, Der geteilte Himmel/ Nachdenken über Christa T: Interpretationen*, Munich 1982, p. 13. Christa Wolf worked at a locomotive factory near Halle, (*ibid.*, p. 15); and character studies of some characters in *DGH* are based on this experience, see Christa Wolf, *Dienstag der 27. September 1960*, in: *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, H7, 1974, p. 22.

²³ See Martin Reso, *Der geteilte Himmel und seine Kritiker*, Halle 1965, *ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 258.

about Christa Wolf's book in the 1960s, and the implications of the *Literaturstreit* in the 1990s. ²⁵ Baumgart argued that similar questions resurfaced in this "new" debate in 1990, so far as it discussed whether West German literature after 1945 was politically or morally committed, or whether it was only concerned with poetic problems. ²⁶ In the 1990s, the debate implicitly downgraded any combination of literary with political, or moral values. The *Literaturstreit* implied that art should be pure art, and not waste time on a hidden political or moral agenda. The exposure of these different aesthetic, political and ethical influences has some bearing on what Reso identified in the 1960s as a "moralist" intent behind East German literature. The suggested combination of literary and "moral" principles was again reworked by Ulrich Greiner's idea, who wrote in *Die Zeit* that post-war West German literature had been motivated by what he called "Gesinnungsästhetik". ²⁷ "Gesinnungsästhetik" implies a compromise between literature that is purely poetically intended, and literature that has a moral agenda or attempts to change political attitudes through a form of moral commitment. Reinhard Baumgart sums up all aspects of the 1990 *Literaturstreit* as follows:

Als Debatte um Christa Wolf hat der neudeutsche Literaturstreit begonnen, hat sich dann ausgeweitet zu einer Kontroverse über die sechziger Jahre und ihre Folgen, doch mit dem Schlagwort 'Gesinnungsästhetik' war schließlich der Generalverdacht formuliert, [...] Es ging und geht offenbar in der ganzen Kontroverse um nicht mehr und nicht weniger als um die Möglichkeit und die Unmöglichkeiten einer engagierten Literatur. ²⁸

Baumgart implied that the *Literaturstreit* in the 1990s was more than an attempt to break free from Germany's political division, which had been symbolized by the building of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961. Although the *Literaturstreit* examined the issue of aesthetically engaged literature, - *l'art pour l'art* - as opposed to morally committed literature, this debate has been shown in part one of this study to have been

²⁵ See Reinhard Baumgart, *Der neudeutsche Literaturstreit Anlauf-Verlauf-Vorgeschichte-Folgen*, in: *Text und Kritik*, 113, January 1992, pp. 72-85, here p. 76.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 77 & p. 78.

addressed by Kierkegaard in his extended reflection on border experience that he entitled *Either/Or*.²⁹ Kierkegaard's study of aesthetic and ethical codes attempted to find a connection between them, which also provoked an argument between the corresponding ethical and aesthetic perception of reality. In part one of this study, mainly the ethical implication of this argument was raised in the discussion of Jaspers' *Grenzsituationen*. In this part of the study, however, the focus is on the literary component of *Either/Or*, concerning the ability of aesthetic experience to take in ethical questions, given what Jaspers called the subjective, creative implications of aesthetics.

What came to the fore during the *Literaturstreit* was merely the reworking, albeit from a literary perspective, of Kierkegaard's *either-or* debate. The concern in West German literary discussions in the 1990s, as Baumgart has indicated, was to suppress the moral and related psychological and political aspects of Germany's border experience, to concentrate, supposedly, on aesthetic problems that are implicit to the achievement of *l'art pour l'art*. The background to the *Literaturstreit* can therefore be seen to date back further than the 1960s, as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century even, to Kierkegaard's understanding of the relentless argument that lies behind choosing to include ethical implications within a poetic attitude to life. This "excursion" into the philosophical background of the *Literaturstreit* is not unrelated to an understanding of conflicting reactions to Wolf's narrative *Der geteilte Himmel*, as well as to the severe criticism against the publication of her narrative *Was bleibt* in 1990.³⁰ What can be learnt from Kierkegaard is that any debate about the ethical, or any other intention behind literature will be never-ending, given that the nature of aesthetic reflection is to turn subjective experience into an aesthetic form.

In another respect, the debate about the "socialist realist" intent to Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* suggests that there is a further ideological dimension to be accounted for in this case. Another review in Reso's volume by Irma Schmidt contradicted Reso's

²⁹ See Part One, Chapter I, Section 2, pp. 74-93.

³⁰ See Christa Wolf, *Was bleibt Erzählung*, Frankfurt am Main 1990.

affirmation of Wolf's ideological intentions. The implication was that, in *Der geteilte Himmel*, there is a mixture of poetically and ideologically inspired ideas:

So kommt bei dieser Erzählung letzten Endes heraus, daß die Spaltung Deutschlands und nicht das Wiedererstehen des deutschen Imperialismus ein Unglück darstellt, und es wird offengelassen, daß wirklich persönliches Glück nur in der sozialistischen Menschengemeinschaft wachsen kann [...] ³¹

Irma Schmidt supposed in her review that the poetic intent of Wolf's narrative determines its "socialist" commitment, since the narrative describes Germany's political division in poetic language. This contradicts Reso's reading of the predominantly ideologically biased narrative, perhaps offering a more balanced view of the poetic intention behind the work. Wolf's narrative was awarded the Heinrich Mann Prize for literature because of its poetic qualities. The award of what was then a literary prize for East German literature applauded Wolf's use of traditional techniques, such as the use of inner monologue, and different stylistic features of describing the differences between past and present which impact on the story-line. ³² *Der geteilte Himmel* might be read as a document about a situation that is now part of political history. Yet it is more than an historical document; and its poetic implications may help to shed light on some of the arguments against Christa Wolf that were expressed during the *Literaturstreit*. At the beginning of the 1990s, the argument about Christa Wolf ostensibly concerned the timing of the publication, *Was bleibt*. ³³ Günter Grass attempted to point out what he regarded as a mercenary debate about Wolf's writing in

³¹ See Irma Schmidt, *Veränderung bewirken und sich mit verändern*, in: *Neues Deutschland*, 17 December 1963. Reso included an edited version in *Der geteilte Himmel und seine Kritiker*, *ibid.*, pp. 160-163, here p. 163.

³² *ibid.*, p. 29. Reso quotes the decision given at the *Deutsche Akademie der Künste*, which awarded the prize for the following reasons: "Die gewählte Komposition, die mit verschiedenen Zeitebenen und Erzählhaltungen arbeitet, erlaubt der Dichterin die allseitige Verschränkung sachlicher, gesellschaftlicher und persönlicher Beziehungen und ... das Ineinanderwirken der Erlebnisse verschiedener Zeiten spürbar zu machen [...]."

³³ For an informative background survey on the *Literaturstreit*, see "Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf" *Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*, ed. by Thomas Anz, *op. cit.* (See especially pp. 66-89, reviews by Ulrich Greiner, in: *Die Zeit*, 1 June 1990; Volker Hage also in: *Die Zeit*, 1 June 1990; and Frank Schirrmacher, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 June 1990). See further Terence James Reed, *Grenzen und Distanz Literatur seit der Wende aus britischer Sicht*, in: *Deutschunterricht* 47, (1994) 11, pp. 538-546.

an interview given with *Der Spiegel* that appeared under the title *Nötige Kritik oder Hinrichtung?*³⁴ In this interview, Grass suggested that the debate surrounding Christa Wolf went beyond aesthetic bounds, but ironically, without having even considered the aesthetic implication of her first book since unification, *Was bleibt*. When it subsequently emerged in 1993 that Christa Wolf had in the early 1960s herself been linked with the Stasi, (East Germany's former state police), the author's position grew in the eyes of some critics even more precarious.³⁵ Fritz Raddatz did not intend to appear as another apologist for Wolf, as Günter Grass had represented himself. However, like Grass, Raddatz did attempt to draw critical attention back to Wolf's writing, and away from her personal situation. In his article *Von der Beschädigung der Literatur durch ihre Urheber* Raddatz attempted to plead on behalf of Christa Wolf, by way of a gentle reminder that she had been both a product and advocate of Germany's ideological division, as well as a key supporter of East Germany's political reform during the early phase of the political *Wende*.³⁶ Raddatz implied by his critique that Wolf's "socialist realist" commitment is not to be seen as static, but to be regarded as part of a period in her life, from which she has since progressed.

The progress made beyond the aims of her first narrative, *Der geteilte Himmel*, was also discussed by Judith Ryan in a more recent attempt at mitigation for Wolf's work. What Ryan attempted in her interpretation of Wolf's Frankfurt lecture on

³⁴ See further Günter Grass, Hellmuth Karasek, Rolf Becker, *Nötige Kritik oder Hinrichtung?* Spiegel-Gespräch mit Günter Grass, 16 July 1990, in: *"Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf"*, op. cit., pp. 122-134. Grass' original suggestion of "Hinrichtungsvorbereitungen" against Christa Wolf was given in a speech at the Reichstag in Berlin, 16 June 1990. (See Günter Grass, *Bericht aus Altdöbern*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 30 June 1990 and also in: *Europäische Ideen*, Heft 74, October 1990). Grass' comments were still refuted by Ulrich Greiner in an open letter, *Kampagne, Hat die Zeit zur Hetzjagd gegen Christa Wolf und andere Schriftsteller der DDR aufgerufen?* In: *Die Zeit*, 25 February 1994.

³⁵ See *Akteneinsicht Christa Wolf Zerrspiegel und Dialog Eine Dokumentation*, ed. by Hermann Vinke, Hamburg 1993. The files show the author's assumed identity as "Margarete" occurred in 1959-62, see *Der Spiegel*, 25 January 1993, *ibid.*, pp. 152-156.

³⁶ See especially, Fritz J. Raddatz, *Von der Beschädigung der Literatur durch ihre Urheber*, in: *Die Zeit*, 28 January 1993. See also Christa Wolf, *Reden im Herbst*, Berlin, Weimar 1990. This is a collected volume of speeches and interviews given by Christa Wolf, including her *Rede auf dem Alexanderplatz*, which urged general commitment to East Germany during the critical stages of the *Wende*, *ibid.*, pp. 119-121.

Kassandra (1983) was to explain a crisis in Wolf's writing.³⁷ The suggestion of crisis was not new. In the 1970s, Manfred Jäger had argued that Christa Wolf's work seemed to have reached "die Grenzen des Sagbaren."³⁸ The search for clarity amidst ambiguity seems to be one of Wolf's themes in *Was bleibt*, which would support Jäger's theory, as expressed by Wolf herself in terms of scepticism about her language:

Jeden Tag sagte ich mir, ein bevorzugtes Leben wie das meine ließe sich nur durch den Versuch rechtfertigen, hin und wieder die Grenzen des Sagbaren zu überschreiten [...] Eines Tages, dachte ich, werde ich sprechen können, ganz leicht und frei [...] den Stift nehmen und anfangen. Was bleibt. Was meiner Stadt zugrunde liegt und woran sie zugrunde geht.³⁹

Was bleibt is as much a poetic explanation about Wolf's writing as it is political criticism against the former East German system that had disintegrated by the time her book was published. It may be that the publication of this book in 1990 was not meant to be a political statement to mark the end of the East German Communist regime, but to reflect a deeper crisis perceived by Wolf to be related to the form of her language. *Was bleibt* does not portray poetic and political factors as totally independent of one another. The collapse of the political situation that once inspired her work seems to have left her writing in a crisis that has been called the German writer's new form of "melancholy".⁴⁰ Even in her most recent publication, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*, Wolf still showed doubts about the future of her writing: "Ein Weg? Vielleicht nur ein Pfad, und was heißt überhaupt 'weiterkommen'."⁴¹

³⁷ Judith Ryan, *Poetik als Experiment Christa Wolf, Voraussetzung einer Erzählung: Kassandra* (1983), in: *Poetik der Autoren Beiträge zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Paul Michael Lützel, Frankfurt am Main 1994, pp. 80-94, here p. 92.

³⁸ See Manfred Jäger, *Die Grenzen des Sagbaren Sprachzweifel im Werk von Christa Wolf*, in: *Christa Wolf Materialienbuch*, ed. by Klaus Sauer, Darmstadt, Neuwied 1979, pp. 130-145, here p. 130. See also Christopher Colton, *Was bleibt - eine neue Sprache?* In: Wallace, Ian (ed.), *Christa Wolf in Perspective*, Amsterdam, Atlanta 1994, pp. 207-226, especially p. 214f, and the section on *Language and Literature: "die neue Sprache"*, pp. 217-220. See also Anna K. Kuhn, 'Zweige vom selben Stamm'? Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*, *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, and *Sommerstück*, in: Wallace, Ian (ed.), *Christa Wolf in Perspective*, *ibid.*, pp. 187-205.

³⁹ Christa Wolf, *Was bleibt*, *op. cit.*, p. 22 & p. 107f.

⁴⁰ See also Rüdiger Görner, *Melancholie und Zynismus*, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Christa Wolf, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou Texte 1990-1994*, Cologne 1994, p. 10.

According to Judith Ryan, the positive aspect of Wolf's work is to be found in its utopian idealism. Where such idealism has its roots, somewhat paradoxical, in her period of "socialist realist" commitment, it might be regarded as a form of "border transgression", so far as it leaves political problems behind, in order to focus on other problems, which specifically concerned Wolf as a writer. With regard to *Der geteilte Himmel* it will be argued later in this section of the chapter that such utopian idealism is not necessarily a form of "border transgression", since it represents a utopian vision of life and society that is to be achieved within the context of Socialism. As Christa Wolf herself indicated in *Was bleibt*, the collapse of East German ideology severely limits the scope for utopianism. Ryan therefore goes further than the aspect of this kind of "utopian" outlook on society.⁴² What is more specific, according to Ryan, is a postmodern trend that runs from *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979) to the Frankfurt lectures, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra* (1983).⁴³ Ryan supports her claim by highlighting a fundamental question raised by Wolf in these lectures:

Wo liegt die Grenze zwischen der Ambivalenz und der Doppelzüngigkeit, zwischen der Mehrdeutigkeit, die jedem großen Kunstwerk eigen ist, und dem Bewußtsein, daß die Dichtung auch im gewissen Sinne eine Art von Betrug ist?⁴⁴

By airing the idea of ambiguity and interpreting this feature as a postmodern trend, Ryan supposes that Christa Wolf's work has gone beyond a crisis. Yet this does not mean the crisis has been overcome, for postmodern writing is expressly concerned with exploiting ambiguity and double-meaning, and playing with the distinction between art and reality that arises because of the poetic threshold dividing the two. In postmodern terms, the act of playing rather exceeds other poetic intentions and turns the discrepancy between art and reality into a postmodern interpretation, which is, as

⁴² See further on this aspect Anna K. Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision From Marxism to Feminism*, Cambridge 1988.

⁴³ Judith Ryan, *Poetik als Experiment*, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 92.

Hermann Glaser has noted, that "anything goes".⁴⁵ According to Ryan, such an interpretation can be applied to Wolf's narrative on Karoline von Gunderode, - *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979) -, through to her Frankfurt lectures, since in these works, postmodern ambiguity can be found. Wolf more recently called this ambiguity 'Tabou' - willkommene Doppeldeutigkeit", yet it is not clear whether she intended this in a postmodern sense.⁴⁶ Ryan observed that Christa and Gerhard Wolf were victimized as "Doppelzüngler" by the Stasi police.⁴⁷ She found an analogy of "Doppelzüngigkeit" in the underlying ambivalent identity of a "Doppelleben" in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968).⁴⁸ The analogy is then stretched and taken as evidence of postmodern identity in Wolf's work:

Widerstand und Kollaboration: das Zusammenlegen dieser beiden Gegensätze in der Erkenntnis, daß das alte dualistische Denken heute nicht mehr gelten kann, ist für das in den Frankfurter Vorlesungen zum Ausdruck kommende postmoderne Bewußtsein kennzeichnend.⁴⁹

By suggesting that opposition and collaboration are examples of postmodern writing, Ryan is able not only to imply that Wolf's ideological motives are no longer valid, but she can also evade the *Literaturstreit*, as if it had never happened. This means that Ryan does not address a significant aspect of the *Literaturstreit*, which looked into the purpose of literature: namely whether literature should have a moral or purely aesthetic agenda. The moral side to the debate was taken up again by Raddatz, and his main criticism against Wolf was that she owed her readers moral accountability for having been both privileged in the former East Germany, as well as for having exploited this position, by her supposed "collaboration" with the Stasi. Perhaps *Was bleibt* was meant to show that the moral imperative is too high an ideal to be placed

⁴⁵ See Hermann Glaser, *Die Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Band 3, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 266.

⁴⁶ Christa Wolf, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁷ Judith Ryan, *Poetik als Experiment*, op. cit., p. 82. See also "Sachstandbericht", in: *Akteneinsicht*, op. cit., p. 286.

⁴⁸ Judith Ryan, *Poetik als Experiment*, op. cit., p. 81f. See Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Munich 1993.

⁴⁹ Judith Ryan, *Poetik als Experiment*, op. cit., p. 82.

with literature? If this really was Wolf's intent in publishing her work, it means that she herself regards her earlier "socialist realist" commitment as confined to the past.

Of course, the debate about aesthetic inspiration might be addressed and possibly resolved by referring to Karl Jaspers, for example, who clearly regarded it as impossible for literature to be concerned with moral values. Jaspers used this idea in order to define his philosophy against aesthetics. The *Literaturstreit* showed that Jaspers' supposition that art is entirely devoid of moral values is implausible in literary circles, where debate is merely fuelled by such a proposition. Ryan's approach is important since it avoids the necessity of becoming embroiled in this irreducible debate; and poses the analogy of postmodern writing. However, one problem with Ryan's analogy is that it can overlook aesthetic intentions. For instance, by interpreting the implications of ambivalence in fiction as postmodern, the real fictional intent of ambiguity can be disregarded. Ryan notes that consciousness of a "double life" is a facet of Rita's character in *Der geteilte Himmel*.⁵⁰ Yet her previous analogy with postmodernism means that the purpose of the consciousness of a rift between reality and fiction can be explored no further. What is important for postmodern purposes is to examine "superficial" elements of this consciousness. In other words, the ambiguity that is involved in turning experiences into fiction is treated as an end in itself, rather than as a means to explore the underlying creative implications of this end. Apparently, there is no need for processes and structures, in order to produce narratives of experiences. Yet the consciousness of difference between reality and fiction cannot be denied Christa Wolf at the time of writing *Der geteilte Himmel*, which is not an example of a postmodern text.

Wolf's difficulties in post-unification Germany may have derived from the loss of the prior ideological context in which she began her writing career. The meaning of Rita's "double-life" in *Der geteilte Himmel* shows how Wolf was able to poeticize

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 81.

political reality, and as Reso has suggested, was therefore able to offer an 'authentic' reflection of "socialist-realism". Wolf's ability to exploit the poetic threshold where fiction is created is obscured by comparing her work to postmodern writing. This particular approach to writing even contradicts the existence of the poetic threshold, which draws its critical dimension from two opposing interpretations of time: one that works with finely distinguished layers of historical time, - past, present, future; and one that must strive to overcome these ephemeral categories towards a "timeless" interpretation, or a transformation of reality, such as was observed previously with regard to Elisabeth Langgässer's *Grenzgänger* motif.

The problem with postmodern writing is that it does not recognize the difference between political and poetic influences and their impact on perceptions of time: "Nicht auf das Überspielen der Grenzen kann es ankommen, sondern ihre Sichtbarmachung."⁵¹ The important point is that postmodern writing distorts classical modernist distinctions made about interpreting time in an aesthetic context.⁵² Hermann Glaser's proposed postmodern motto is that "anything goes". This motto implies that postmodernism is itself an ambiguous means of interpretation: it offers no clear principles with which to define the poetic intent of narrative ambivalence, which emerges at the poetic threshold where fiction is created. Furthermore, in *Der geteilte Himmel*, the actual purpose of poetic ambivalence was to allow the author to situate her narrative within an ideological context. Although Wolf's references to the building of the Berlin Wall are initially rather vague, ultimately, it is this specific political situation that is gradually made more explicit in the text: "Wir wußten damals nicht - keiner wußte es -, was für ein Jahr vor uns lag. [...] Ein historisches Jahr, wie man später sagen wird."⁵³ Wolf's narrative commences in 1959 and the story continues until the autumn of 1961, shortly after the

⁵¹ See Rüdiger Görner, *Über postmodernes Schreiben*, in: *Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte*, June 1991, Heft VI, pp. 528-536, here p. 536.

⁵² See further Paul Michael Lützeler, *Einleitung: Von der Spätmoderne zur Postmoderne*, in: Lützeler, Paul Michael (ed.), *Spätmoderne und Postmoderne Beiträge zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 11-22, especially on the problems of delineation between modernism and postmodernism, *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵³ Christa Wolf, *DGH*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

construction of the Berlin Wall.⁵⁴ While the historic date looms on the periphery of the narrative, its central focus is on the experience of the story's two main characters, Rita Seidel and Manfred Herrfurth.

The story of Rita's relationship with Manfred is told in the light of fictional events, but whereas the story-line can avoid commentary on the political situation, the prose of *Der geteilte Himmel* is unmistakably styled on the political division of Germany, which is invested, too, in the leit-motiv, "geteilter Himmel". Elisabeth Langgässer's sketches are relevant at this point, to clarify the essence of this leit-motiv. By referring to Langgässer's first sketch on page 212, it is clear that the idea of division is never relinquished in Wolf's narrative, for its poetic quality can be compared with the image of division that is illustrated in Langgässer's sketch. The second or third sketch are only relevant to this explanation so far as they show a contrast between the implications of the motif of *Geteilter Himmel* and those of the poetic *Grenzgänger*. Hence the latter motif relies on a process of poetic translation, such as indicated in the sketch on page 213, in order to turn reality as it was experienced then into its poetic representation, such as in the final sketch on page 214. In contrast, the former motif achieves neither translation nor transformation, and the absence of a fictional character in Wolf's narrative that might be compared with Langgässer's Lorchen therefore prompts a study of other motifs and symbols.

Dieter Schlenstedt argued in his contemporary study of motifs and symbols that Christa Wolf's use of these techniques was ideologically motivated: "Die Erzählung schildert die Übergangs- und Entwicklungsprozesse zu einem sozialistischen Bewußtsein."⁵⁵ The interaction of the narrative prologue and epilogue, together with a motif-study that focuses on the problems of individual characters is suggested by

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 11, p. 9, p. 181. (References respectively to 1959, the final days of August 1961 and explicitly to 13 August 1961).

⁵⁵ See further Dieter Schlenstedt, *Motive und Symbole in Christa Wolfs Erzählung*, in: Martin Reso, *Der geteilte Himmel ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-226, *ibid.*, p. 187. (Schlenstedt's study was first published in: *Weimarer Beiträge*, Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft, H. 1, 1964, pp. 77-104).

Schlenstedt to tip the balance of the story to what he called an ideologically inspired "Motivkette".⁵⁶ The basic intent of this chain of motifs is related to the leit-motiv of the "geteilter Himmel", which not only represents the eventual separation of Manfred and Rita, but symbolizes the ideological division between the two Germanies:

Früher suchten sich Liebespaare vor der Trennung einen Stern, an dem sich abends ihre Blicke treffen konnten. Was sollen wir uns suchen?
'Den Himmel wenigstens können sie nicht zerteilen', sagte Manfred spöttisch.
Den Himmel? Dieses ganze Gewölbe von Hoffnung und Sehnsucht, von Liebe und Trauer? 'Doch', sagte sie leise. 'Der Himmel teilt sich zuallererst.'⁵⁷

The leit-motiv of the "divided sky" underlines the ideological differences between the GDR and FRG. Manfred is about to leave East Germany for West Germany - he will commit *Republikflucht*. However, in the above quotation, Christa Wolf's use of monologue and dialogue seems equally as significant as her motif study. Her use of inner monologue is to be contrasted with the idealistically inspired monologue that Winkler relied on in his "neo-platonic" dialogue. The use of monologue in *Der geteilte Himmel* is inspired by ideological facts. The dialogue fragment that is quoted between Manfred and Rita is significant where it alludes to ideology, implied as an irreconcilable difference of political opinion between Manfred and Rita, which is reflected in the narrator's treatment of their different views. As part of the ideological context, the breakdown in communication between Manfred and Rita appears to symbolize the political division of Germany. A communication breakdown is the source of an eventual schism in the main characters' personal relationship.⁵⁸ The lack of communication can be identified in an inner monologue that does not develop into dialogue, so that the monologue encloses the narrative; and this leaves three different levels of narrative structures to consider: either the monologue only continues between

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁷ Christa Wolf, *DGH*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵⁸ See Sevin, *Interpretationen ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

the fictional characters; or it is used between the characters themselves; or else it indirectly establishes a link between the narrative and the reader.

The interaction of the monologue in the third way may be regarded as a particular challenge to the reader, who is invited to draw independent conclusions.⁵⁹ Schlenstedt took this as a positive feature of the narrative: "Die Anforderung an den Leser, die Brechungen mitzudenken, steigt, der Stil legt es gerade darauf an, dieses Mitdenken zu provozieren."⁶⁰ However, the value of such "insider" information can also be interpreted as a narrative limitation. The use of monologue leads to hermetic isolation, in which narrative, character, or reader is trapped within each one of these categories. The tendency to an enclosed monologue context has negative implications for the dialogue. The narrator poses what appears to be an objective question: "Was sollen wir uns suchen?" Manfred's answer is consistent with his character, which is sceptical and distant: 'Den Himmel wenigstens können sie nicht zerteilen'. The narrative gives Manfred no incentive to break through the barrier of his own subjective views. His answer, if it is directly addressed to Rita, not surprisingly fails to attract a positive response. Rita does not share Manfred's defeatist attitudes, which merely seem to confine her to her own isolation. Her answer contradicts Manfred's attempt to overcome their separation that has been caused by his intent to leave for West Germany.

'Der Himmel teilt sich zuallererst' is an ideologically charged leit-motiv that intends to show how Rita is committed to supporting the political differences that exist between them. Neither Manfred nor Rita is able to overcome a subjective interpretation of their individual ideas and experiences. Subjectivity is exacerbated by the narrator. The narrative voice may appear to be objective, yet it is committed to supporting Rita's ideological goals. In this sense, the narrative itself is part of the "motif chain" identified by Schlenstedt. The "motif chain" remains connected to an undercurrent of ideological

⁵⁹ See Schlenstedt, *Motive ...*, op. cit., p. 224 and Sevin, *Interpretationen ...*, op. cit., p. 18f.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

meaning; and this entrenched perspective is supported by the narrative monologue: "Früher suchten sich Liebespaare vor der Trennung einen Stern [...] Was sollen wir uns suchen?" The shift in emphasis from an objective third person plural, to a subjective question in the first person plural, "wir", makes it unclear to whom the question is addressed. This places the narrative in a virtual vacuum, which leaves the objectivity of the narrator hanging in the balance. What emerges is the subjective bias of the narrative, so that when viewed as a whole, it is not an objective commentary of a third person narrator, but a subjective narrative, given by Rita as "Ich-Erzählerin." ⁶¹

Not surprisingly, because of this subjective and ideological bias to the narrative, it is difficult to render Jaspers' philosophy of existence applicable to this text, apart from using Jaspers' ideas as a critique. To put it another way, Wolf's text seems to confirm the existential criticism of literature, that it is a "quasi-transcendental" form of experience, which without recourse to reason cannot be regulated by any objective measure, but only by the contemplation and exploration of subjective experience. Moreover, since Wolf's text is, in part, evidence of her early support for East German "socialist realism", Jaspers' sense of morality, as in the ethos of political initiative, is distant from the text's representation of "socialist realist" values. Instead, the commitment to a "really existing" brand of East German Socialism was meant to form an alternative collective code of morality, such as manifested in Wolf's descriptions of the locomotive factory and the hard-working attitudes of those employed there. Because of this, it is hard to find any evidence of an existential pattern to Wolf's text about German division, particularly when it is remembered that East German ideology tried to harness what was thought to be a valid "existential" concept of collective morality to attempt to support the GDR's division from West Germany. ⁶²

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 225. Sevin further suggests that the third person narrative, termed simply "Erzähler" cannot be confused with the identity of the author herself, see Sevin, *Interpretationen ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶² The crux of the invalid idea of "collective German guilt" has been extensively examined in Part One, Chapter I, Section 3, see especially pp. 116-118.

The consciousness of political division permeates the narrative, where it is artificially duplicated. In other words, there is a split of the narrative voice into two, which creates an ambivalence between an apparently impartial third person narrator, and a subjective first person narrator, namely Rita. There is an unsuccessful attempt to overcome the rift between the two:

Die mehrfache Brechung, das Schillern zwischen objektiver Erzählfunktion, Figurenerlebnis, Figurenreflexion, Figurenbericht trägt ein übriges dazu bei, daß die wirklichen Kämpfe und Erlebnisse, die solche spontanen Momente hervorbringen und die sie abbauen, oft nur als 'Meta'-Handlung in der subjektiven Sicht Ritas erscheinen. ⁶³

Schlenstedt concluded that the break in style because of the narrative rift is characteristic of an inner monologue that really leads to a "meta"-narrative, but only so far as this reflects events as they occur in Rita's experience and recollection. Alexander Stephan described Rita as "Fokus der Erzählperspektive". ⁶⁴ From within this one-sided perspective of events, a narrated prologue creates a general impression of defeat and a mood of resignation. There is a sense of "Beunruhigung", as Christa Wolf herself preferred to call it. ⁶⁵ Therefore, both Sevin and Schlenstedt were right to ascribe this mood to the unrest and fear in East Germany before the Wall was built. ⁶⁶ The prologue translates this atmosphere of uneasiness into characteristic features that accompany a more fundamental breakdown in communication between the two fictional characters. The implication of this communication breakdown is then developed in the leit-motiv of the "divided sky":

⁶³ See Schlenstedt, *Motive ...*, op. cit., p. 225. See also Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T*, Munich 1993. In *Christa T* the duplicated effect of two narrative voices is overcome by the incorporation of both observation and reflection within the first person narrator. This is crystallized into the sentence: "Über die Schwierigkeit, ich zu sagen." Ibid., p. 167.

⁶⁴ See Alexander Stephan, *Das Werk Christa Wolfs*, in: *Christa Wolf Autorenbücher 4*, Munich 1976, p. 37.

⁶⁵ See author's correspondence with Christa Wolf, 6 March 1994. Christa Wolf was careful to observe that a number of motifs can be used to form any particular text: "[...] jedenfalls war mein Motiv, dieses Buch damals zu schreiben, soviel ich weiß nicht Angst, eher Beunruhigung. Aber es gibt ja niemals nur ein Schreibmotiv für einen bestimmten Text."

⁶⁶ See Sevin, *Interpretationen ...*, op. cit. Sevin places this within the political context of the work, - the construction of the Berlin Wall and the general atmosphere of unrest and fear in the summer of 1961. Schlenstedt arrives at the same synopsis, *Motive ...*, op. cit., p. 183.

Die Leute, seit langem an diesen verschleierte[n] Himmel gewöhnt, fanden ihn auf einmal ungewöhnlich und schwer zu ertragen [...] Aber die Erde trug sie noch und würde sie tragen, so lange es sie gab. [...] Wir gewöhnen uns wieder, ruhig zu schlafen. Wir leben aus dem vollen, als gäbe es übergenug von diesem seltsamen Stoff Leben, als könnte er nie zu Ende gehen.⁶⁷

The tension between "Himmel" and "Erde" that pervades the "motif chain" also relates to a tension derived from the difference of opinion between Manfred and Rita. The "Erde" motif seems to refer to a pragmatic view of life, which is, in this case, a general outlook on the burdensome process of day-to-day living. The motif of the "Himmel" suggests a more elevated intellectual approach to life that looks beyond the day-to-day problems by considering life as a wealth of experience on which to base reflections. While the realm of ideas, "dieses ganzes Gewölbe", transcends pragmatic perceptions of reality, life's tangible problems and priorities are still relevant. The suggestion that the leit-motiv of the "Geteilter Himmel" might intend to unite these conflicting spheres would overlook its implication as a sardonic euphemism. What is euphemistic about this motif is the obvious impossibility of dividing the sky, which transfers its significance to the context of division. In this context, as we have seen, the existential validity of division was really euphemistic, since the idea of "collective guilt" was used as an expedient, yet illegitimate argument to support the ideological division. The main characters are caught up in this context. Manfred suggests, albeit sardonically, the image of the sky as a positive proof that different sides can never be irreconcilably divided. The very thought is contradicted by Rita, to whom it must seem like an anathema, since division is exactly what wins her approval. The unravelling story of her inner reflections shows how she perceives her physical separation from Manfred, not necessarily as inevitable, but as a bitter result of their ideological alienation.

⁶⁷ Christa Wolf, *DGH*, op. cit., p. 7.

The narrative prologue confirms the shared ideological fervour of Rita's outlook on life, for it is in the prologue that the division of "earth" and "sky" is first named. These terms symbolize the political division of Germany because the "realist" commitment that is exemplary of a "socialist realist" intent is supported by the underlying ambiguity of the description. In other words, there is no question of freedom to choose between the daily grind of life and remote intellectual idealism. The choice is rather an aspect of utopian idealism that implies both practical and intellectual values as equally viable possibilities to be realized in East German society, by commitment to the further consolidation of Communist ideology. The sudden realization that, after the building of the Berlin Wall, there is no possibility of free choice between a Communist and a Capitalist ideology creates the mood of resignation, which is apparently shared by the narrator. Yet in the prologue, another narrative shift from third person to first person plural (from *sie* to *wir*) infers a sense of solidarity with generally held "socialist realist" attitudes. This surrenders narrative objectivity. From the beginning, the narrative is committed to the "meta"-narrative that is given by Rita.

The implicit narrative bias becomes explicit as Rita Seidel begins to recall her experiences. Rita presents an 'authentic' documentation of events, so far as she remains true to her own recollections of events. This supposedly 'authentic' approach only emphasizes the cliché that "Wir leben aus dem vollen". Rita's experience of physical and mental collapse after her separation from Manfred contradicts this cliché; and suggests doubt about the "socialist realist" credentials of the work, such as observed in Irma Schmidt's review. However, as the story progresses, the impersonal narrator is not only concerned to support Rita's view of events, but entertains a vested interest in Rita's recovery:

In jenen letzten Augusttagen des Jahres 1961 erwacht in einem kleinen Krankenhauszimmer das Mädchen Rita Seidel. [...] Ach ja, die Stadt. Enger noch: das Werk, die Montagehalle. Jener Punkt auf den Schienen, wo ich umkippte. Also hat irgendeiner die beiden Waggons noch angehalten, die da von rechts und links auf mich

zukamen. Die zielten genau auf mich. [...] Und wo sie sich treffen werden, da liegt sie. Da liege ich.
Dann weint sie wieder.
Sanatorium, sagt der Arzt. Sie will nichts erzählen. ⁶⁸

Rita attempts to commit suicide after the breakdown of her relationship with Manfred. This event provides the material for a story on Rita's convalescence. The story is unravelled in a form of "quasi-dialogue" between Rita and the narrator. The "quasi-dialogue" interrupts the narrative flow in order to confirm the other's description of events. Hence the narrative "da liegt sie" is duplicated by Rita's "da liege ich." These duplications appear to create the authentic record, which is rather a one-sided overview of events, as they are remembered by Rita. ⁶⁹

Wolf's narrative becomes a monologue of retrospective self-analysis, based on a subjective psychological undercurrent that plays on discrepancies between past and present. The narrative duplications are aimed at exploiting the discrepancy as a creative threshold. As Rita works through events in the past, her reflections form a re-enacted present, whilst her actual physical presence in the sanatorium recedes into the background. ⁷⁰ Only the arrival of various visitors can force Rita to return from her own reflections to the present surroundings in the sanatorium. ⁷¹ However, as the thread of recollection moves towards the present, it is clear that she has not yet fully recovered, - "Das Sanatorium ist weiß, wie die Trauer selbst." ⁷² The road to recovery involves sifting through memories to find the point where their relationship visibly

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 9f.

⁶⁹ The difficulty of applying Plessner's idea of "authentic" experience to Wolf's text is that there is no definite means with which to counteract the subjective content of the fictional events. Moreover, it also highlights the limits of "authentic" experience, in relation to the transcendental aspect of existence, as understood by Jaspers.

⁷⁰ Sevin splits up the narrative into three clearly delineated flows of "Gegenwartsebene", "Reflexionsebene" and a parallel "Erlebnisebene". See *Interpretationen ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 21f.

⁷¹ Christa Wolf, *DGH*, for instance, Meternagel pp. 36-39; Marion, pp. 121-123. (Even these episodes lead back into Rita's reflections, like interludes or flashbacks. These aspects make the narrative suitable for film; and a film version of *DGH* was made by Konrad Wolf, see Therese Hörnigk: *Gespräch mit Christa Wolf*, in: *Sinn und Form*, H2 1989, pp. 241-272, here p. 259).

⁷² Christa Wolf, *DGH*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

began to fall apart. Psychologically, this is a "point of no return" that is used to justify Rita's decision not herself to commit *Republikflucht* and join Manfred in West Berlin. Her ideological commitment has forced her to make a personal sacrifice, since even if Rita were to change her mind, this would be both physically and psychologically implausible. A cure of short-term containment for her illness is preferred, as opposed to finding a more permanent means of recovery, - "Sie lernt auch, die Berührung der Wunde zu vermeiden - auch das." ⁷³

Nevertheless, Rita does doubt that her decision to remain in the GDR is the correct one. There are passages almost in the form of soliloquies, during which the reader is permitted rare glimpses of Rita's and Manfred's uncertainties. Yet these interludes do not overcome the typically closed monologue. ⁷⁴ Neither character is able to communicate openly; and a failure to develop the monologue into dialogue underlines the lack of poetic development in this work. The reason for this lack of interactive development between monologue and dialogue can be explained with reference to the leit-motiv of the "divided sky". As indicated, this motif symbolizes a polarity of "realist" and "idealist" aspects, and the attitudes of the central characters can be linked to these polarized perspectives. However, a straightforward characterization, such as Rita the "realist", or Manfred the "idealist", only gives a limited insight into attitudes. ⁷⁵ In each case, both attitudes apply, but the complexities of their conflicting motives can only be appreciated by a final examination of the symbols that are related to the central leit-motiv.

There are two groups of symbols, secondary to the central leit-motiv of the "divided sky". The first group can be loosely described as "idealizing", such as

⁷³ *DGH*, *ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 88. See Rita: "Hat er recht behalten? Und hatte ich unrecht? War meine Härte gegen uns beide - Unnatur?" And Manfred: "Er war sehr müde. Dieses Gespräch tat ihm schon leid. Es ist meine Sache, dachte er. Was ziehe ich sie hinein?" *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁵ Rita's commitment to the teacher training programme, for which the Communist, Schwarzenbach, has recruited her, suggests she is more "realistic" than Manfred's fiercely "idealistic" belief in the value of his work as a chemist and intellectual. But neither of these are equivocal characterizations.

comprised of shades and colours that accompany atmospheric conditions. The second group can only be vaguely termed "realist" symbols that refer to production quotas and performance targets that assume overriding relevance for Rita when she goes to work in the factory, as obligatory 'work experience' for her teacher training course. The use of these symbols reinforces the interpretation of political division, and builds up the atmosphere of tension before Manfred's *Republikflucht*. It is this event that forms the ultimate separation of the central characters, which is followed by the clear narrative reference to the building of the Berlin Wall, - "'Der Sonntag nach meinem Besuch bei Manfred war der dreizehnte August'".⁷⁶

The dependence on shades and colours accentuates moods or atmospheric conditions, which are sharply contrasted with the second group of symbols, relating to the reality of life in East Germany. The colours can be linked to the changes in Rita's own moods. The first references to the blue sky are linked to her home environment, the context in which she first sees Manfred.⁷⁷ The initial attraction of Manfred is that he represents freedom, since his independent spirit is appealing, yet also arrogant.⁷⁸ The blue sky seems to capture Rita's imagination, where she escapes from the pressures of daily life. Her relationship with Manfred encourages her to break free from her home environment and provides the support she needs to leave the rural setting of her home for the unfamiliarity of the city. The mood of escapism is repeated on their visit to the Harz region:

Das Wetter war klar. Alle Leute auf dem Turm drängten sich in der nordwestlichen Ecke zusammen und starrten auf die ferne, im Dunst verschwimmende Andeutung einer westdeutschen Stadt [...] Aus irgendeinem Grund [...] schwiegen sie alle.
'Ach ja', sagte Manfred [...] "Blick auf Westdeutschland." Die merkwürdigste der Merkwürdigkeiten in dieser Stadt.'⁷⁹

⁷⁶ DGH, *ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 11. Further references to the clear, blue sky see, p. 64, p. 162, p. 168.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 65.

The first open reference to West Germany is made by Manfred, whose sardonic remark scarcely conceals the fact that he intends to escape to West Berlin. Here again, the clear weather reflects optimism, despite the fact that West Germany is closed to the East German tourists, who are trying to catch a glimpse of what is portrayed as the "other" Germany. The blue skies and clear weather symbolize freedom that Rita attaches to her relationship:

'Wir sind der Leuchtturm. Dort draußen, auf dem Meer, ist unser kleiner Kahn. Er gibt Notsignal. Wir erwidern seine Zeichen.' [...] Neun Monate später war das Boot untergegangen. Sie standen an verschiedenen Ufern.⁸⁰

Such freedom and optimism is in stark contrast to Rita's experience of reality. The abrupt change of the weather the night before she begins her work experience at the locomotive factory seems to be a bad omen.⁸¹ The change in mood corresponds to the prologue's "verschleierter Himmel", which is echoed in repeated references to the grey or cloudy sky, whenever Rita is in the working environment at the factory.⁸² It is not clear whether this overall picture of a sombre, even depressing environment has dulled Rita's interest in life beyond the routine of work. Her commitment is reflected in the hard-working attitudes of the team of workers at the locomotive yard. Gradually, the functional nature of the production quotas and output takes on an importance of its own, even beginning to take precedence over her relationship with Manfred.

The responsibility for moulding Rita's outlook along accepted norms is taken up by Erwin Schwarzenbach. He plays a key role in Rita's psychological development. Schwarzenbach is a party ideologist, who is committed to Socialism. He persuades Rita to begin the teacher training course, and advises her on several occasions to continue. The narration of Rita's decision not to remain in West Berlin (the most

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 80f.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 29f.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 48, p. 136.

significant point in the text), is framed by Schwarzenbach's visit to the sanatorium. ⁸³ His presence shifts emphasis from Rita's recollections to the present situation. The "containment" approach to Rita's illness is taking effect, since she begins to view her decision not in negative terms of a private sacrifice, but in positive terms as a sacrifice for the common good. Schwarzenbach, ever intent on soliciting an open commitment to the socialist system, poses tactically motivated questions. His questioning begins a series of rhetorical manoeuvres that are designed to trade off the underlying emotional and psychological strain of her condition against what she perceives to be more 'real' political questions and problems: ⁸⁴

'Haben Sie nie daran gedacht, ihm nachzufahren?'

Rita versteht sofort.

'Ich *bin* ihm nachgefahren', sagt sie '[...] Vieles gefällt einem, aber man hat keine Freude daran. Man hat dauernd das Gefühl, sich selbst zu schaden. Man ist schlimmer als im Ausland, weil man die eigene Sprache hört. Man ist auf schreckliche Weise in der Fremde.' ⁸⁵

The poignancy of this appraisal of division is that Rita can only mimic the ideological rhetoric, directed against the western half of Germany. To promote the independent status of East Germany means not to remain open to spheres of "otherness", that is, especially in the existential sense, of not being tolerant to different views, which in this case could have formed such a vital part of a unified consciousness. Instead, there is an atmosphere of subtle coercion that may have led Rita to reject her visit to West Berlin as alienating and foreign:

Rita überlegt. 'Der Sonntag nach meinem Besuch bei Manfred war der dreizehnte August', [...]

'Liebten Sie ihn nicht?' fragte Erwin Schwarzenbach. [...]

Als ob ich es nicht versucht hätte! [...] Aber die Fremde ist mir fremd geblieben, und dies alles hier heiß und nah.

'Der Sog einer großen geschichtlichen Bewegung ...', sagt Erwin Schwarzenbach [...] Rita muß lächeln. Auch er. ⁸⁶

⁸³ *ibid.*, pp. 172-188.

⁸⁴ See Schwarzenbach's observations: "Das Schwere nicht in leicht umdeuten, das Dunkle nicht in hell. [...] Aber doch nur Taktik, die zur Wahrheit hinführt." *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 172 & p. 174.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 181.

Rita's decision to return to East Germany was ideologically motivated. Since Manfred does not share such political conviction, Rita must accept a real dilemma: either to leave Manfred for her situation in East Germany; or to relinquish her political ideals for Manfred. What appears to be perceived on one level as a personal choice is a foregone conclusion.⁸⁷ The irony is that Rita's ideological interpretation of her situation means that she cannot take into consideration Manfred's side of the story. In some ways, Manfred is caught up in a similar dilemma, although he seems to resolve this by leaving East Germany. Manfred's character could, in part, be responsible for this dilemma that appears to be exacerbated by their mutual communication difficulties. In one embittered soliloquy about his childhood he reflects that his family has its own ideological history, which he approves of even less than the current Communist ideology.⁸⁸ Manfred describes his own membership of the Hitler Youth movement. Yet he criticizes his father's opportunist motives, which led him to join the SA, only to convert to Communism after the war. His open hatred for his father and resentment of his mother is expressed in his caustic formulation about his home environment: "Mein Lebenssarg. Eingeteilt in Wohnsarg, Eßsarg, Schlafsarg, Kochsarg."⁸⁹ Manfred's approach to these experiences leads to his retreat into a cynical, isolated world, - characteristics which have impacted negatively on his ability to form close relationships.⁹⁰ If Wolf's story offers a one-sided view of the situation, it is partly due to Rita's inability to sympathize with problems which she has not experienced.⁹¹ It becomes too easy to off-load responsibility onto Manfred, without attempting to understand the deeper implications to the communication problem, that is represented as a problem that persists between their different generations.⁹²

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 179.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 42-46.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹¹ This is also described in the text as a "generation problem", *ibid.*, p. 44.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 41.

The deeper implication could be relayed in the motifs or symbols of Wolf's ideologically inspired leit-motiv. Yet none of the second group of symbols reveals this implication, since they are ambiguous attempts to transcend the ideological divide, and because of their ambiguity do not succeed in breaking free of the ideological basis. The introduction of the swallow at the funeral of Frau Herrfurth, Manfred's mother, might be intended as a symbolic variation to the ideologically inspired *Geteilter Himmel* motif: "Rita [...] sah, wie die Schwalbe [...] einen weiten Kreis über den Himmel zog [...] das ganze blaue Himmelsgewölbe auf seinen schmalen, dünnen Schwingen mit sich tragend. " ⁹³ That this is not a poetic variation on the ideological interpretation of the border theme, but a repeat of the melancholy tone of the prologue can be confirmed by reference to the epilogue. Although the narrative epilogue seems to retain a melancholy atmosphere, there is still some doubt whether the conflict of emotions, which caused Rita's breakdown and attempted suicide, has been fully overcome. The swallow follows an ideologically motivated "motif chain" that is linked to other symbols of East German success: namely the jet plane that is heard breaking through the sound barrier; and the ironic reference to the first manned Soviet spacecraft as "*die Nachricht*." ⁹⁴ These other symbols are complementary to the ideological intention of this narrative that the epilogue restates:

Der Tag, der erste Tag ihrer neuen Freiheit, ist fast zu Ende. [...] Das wiegt alles auf: Daß wir uns gewöhnen, ruhig zu schlafen. Daß wir aus dem vollen leben, als gäbe es übergenug von diesem seltsamen Stoff Leben.

Als könnte er nie zu Ende gehen. ⁹⁵

The "new freedom" that is promised at the end of Wolf's narrative is that of "socialist realism". If there is any remaining ambiguity at the close, then it is intended to be reflected as part of life in former East Germany. The narrative was not intended to transform political reality, but to reflect life as it was experienced. It was therefore

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 48 & p. 144.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 199.

an ideologically and morally committed work that reflected the reality of the Communist system, in which the author lived and wrote at the beginning of the 1960s. Beyond this interpretation of Germany's political division there is an impression of narrative symmetry between prologue and epilogue that can be compared and contrasted with the prologue and epilogue sections in Elisabeth Langgässer's novella. A significant difference between these two interpretations was the absence of a poetic *Grenzgänger* in Christa Wolf's narrative. Furthermore, the use of monologue that confined Wolf's narrative to an ideologically inspired prologue and epilogue supports the "socialist realist" aspect of this work. It is without such a "metaphysically" inspired interpretation of reality, as given by Langgässer's *Grenzgänger*, Lorchen, or Winkler's figure, Vigilius, that Wolf's narrative offers not so much a poetic variation, as an ideological interpretation of Germany's division, which may, however, be seen as a valuable reminder of the conditions of the time.

Chapter II

Uwe Johnson and the boundaries of dialogue

1. Political ideology and poetic truth

Uwe Johnson's narrative of Germany's division was the first significant prose treatment of this theme. It was, in fact, published before Christa Wolf's prose, in the year that the Berlin Wall was built.¹ There is an affinity between Johnson's treatment of German division in *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, and Christa Wolf's leit-motiv of the "divided sky".² The respective narratives are of a different quality; and one contributing factor is Johnson's treatment of dialogue, which concerns us, amongst other things, in this chapter. The notable feature about Johnson's use of dialogue is that he explored its limitations in a different way to Christa Wolf. The dialogue in *Der geteilte Himmel* became trapped in an enclosed monologue situation that could be seen as a parallel to the enclosure of East Germany behind the Berlin Wall. In contrast, during the course of fictional discussions about political life and its varying ideological viewpoints, Johnson's characters and the narrator, Karsch, establish the nature of differences between the two sides of Germany. In Johnson's description of Germany's division, as in Wolf's text, there is no actual change to the divisive reality of the East German border. However, unlike the decisive separation of Manfred and Rita, the main characters in Johnson's text

¹ Uwe Johnson, *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, Frankfurt am Main 1973. (First edition 1961. Further references use *Das dritte Buch*).

² Previous studies have concentrated on formal parallels between *Mutmassungen über Jakob* and *Der geteilte Himmel*, yet few have focused on the border theme as a thematic affinity. See for example Eberhard Mannack, *Zwei deutsche Literaturen?* Kronberg 1977. Especially *Zur Erzähltheorie: Alain Robbe-Grillet - Uwe Johnson - Christa Wolf*, *ibid.*, pp. 50-65. Mannack observed parallels between Johnson's *Mutmassungen über Jakob* and Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel*, *ibid.*, p. 27f.

are brought together by unfolding a dialogue between them. If the division of Germany seems, as it were, to recede into the background, it is because Johnson concentrates on giving an accurate description of the consequences of the East German border for individuals living on both sides.

At this stage, it may seem far-fetched to assume that in his attempts to facilitate discussion and dialogue, Johnson's narrator, Karsch, was also pursuing a philosophical aim, such as in the theoretical value of Jaspers' notion of "existential communication" as an open exchange of views between individuals. Yet it may be pertinent to consider whether Karsch explored similar intellectual implications of the East German border, as recognized by Jaspers' critique of existential guilt.³ There are two additional purposes of this chapter. Firstly, to demonstrate that Johnson's poetic *Grenzgänger*, Karsch, explores the difference between a realistic and a poetically idealized perception of reality. Secondly, to show that the fictional version of reality is different again to its existential conception.

To return to Johnson's use of monologue and dialogue, it is noteworthy that the integration of these aspects into a narrative had already been tested in his first book, *Mutmassungen über Jakob*.⁴ This novel is the story of Jakob, a trainworker on the East German railway, whose death gives rise to "speculations". The speculative element of the story is incorporated in an inner monologue that is italicized in sections, which are intentionally offset from the rest of the dialogue. The story therefore follows two strands of thought: the fictional events within the story itself; and the interpretation of these events in the monologue sections that aim to reflect a speculative account of the "truth". By allowing these two aspects of the story-line to develop independently of each other, speculative and fictional reality can be distinguished from one another. At the same time, however, both elements are integrated in the process of narration, so as to combine each aspect into an aesthetic whole. In *Jakob*, therefore, the inner monologue represents a

³ See Part One, Chapter I, Section 3, pp. 94-123.

⁴ Uwe Johnson, *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, Frankfurt am Main 1959.

stream of consciousness that voices speculations or suggestions about the death of Jakob, as these questions occur to people outside the flow of conversation within the developing story-line.⁵ The pattern continues in *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, where the inner monologue records questions and observations about the fictional narrator, Karsch, whose friends in Hamburg are curious to learn more about his visit to East Germany.⁶ The same questions and curiosity about Karsch's activities in East Germany return in Johnson's later short story collection, *Karsch, und andere Prosa*, which uses a similar narrative technique of raising questions in the monologue that are then addressed by the dialogue.⁷

In his Frankfurt lectures, *Begleitumstände*, Johnson defended his treatment of monologue and dialogue in this way, and claimed that it was intended to describe, as closely as possible, the manner in which conversations develop in real life.⁸ *Das dritte Buch über Achim* earned Johnson the label, "Dichter des gespaltenen Deutschland".⁹ However, he described this label laconically as "peinlich."¹⁰ What is perceived as an "embarrassment" is the implication behind the accolade that apparently suggested to Johnson that his narrative could have effected changes in society and politics: "Daran ist [...] bemerkenswert [...] das Vertrauen auf die Wirkungen einer Kunst in der Erreichung von politischen Fernzielen."¹¹ Johnson doubted whether literature can be morally, politically or socially engaged; and this suggests an affinity with Jaspers' position that an aesthetic view of experience cannot include ethical considerations. The suggestion of this affinity marks another difference between Johnson's *Das dritte Buch über Achim* and Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel*. In her narrative, Christa Wolf was practising committed

⁵ See Uwe Johnson, *Begleitumstände*, op. cit., p. 139.

⁶ *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit., p. 191.

⁷ See further Uwe Johnson *Eine Reise Wegwohin* In: *Karsch, und andere Prosa*, Frankfurt am Main, p. 65f.

⁸ See Uwe Johnson, *Begleitumstände*, op. cit., p. 191f.

⁹ Quoted after Uwe Johnson, *Begleitumstände Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, p. 336. For a survey of contemporary reviews (mostly press), see *Uwe Johnsons Frühwerk Im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literaturkritik*, ed. by Nicolai Riedel, Bonn 1987.

¹⁰ Uwe Johnson, *Begleitumstände*, op. cit., p. 337.

¹¹ *ibid.*

"socialist realist" values that could be implicitly undermined by Jaspers' ideas about existence, since the related notion of a "collective morality" implied by such values obscured what Jaspers saw as the fundamental benefit to the individual and to society of taking one's own initiative. Johnson's view that literature deals first and foremost with poetic problems, and not with moral, political or social ones, would seem to support Jaspers' concern about literary values having little in common with theoretical ones.

The label that Johnson was given as a "poet of divided Germany" suggested that his writing might be able to "unite" the two states, in the sense of continuing the idea of Germany as a single *Kulturnation*. It is possible to see why the aspiration of German unity in the context of the *Kulturnation* could have arisen and attached itself in this manner to Johnson's work, for his use of dialogue allowed the ideological foundation of Germany's division to be made manifest. The story transcends the reality of the political division between East and West Germany, yet his narrative was not necessarily a radical poetic attempt to undermine the ideological element of division, such as the critical nature of Jaspers' political commentary. Johnson made it clear that he was concerned with the poetic dimension of the political reality at that time; and merely aspired to describe division as it was experienced.

The recognition that monologue and dialogue both have a significant role to play in a description of Germany's political division arose not only from Johnson's first book, *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, but also from his short essay, *Berliner Stadtbahn*.¹² This essay reads like a programmatic attempt to describe the political border, by mapping out a detailed account of the operating difficulties of the city's S-Bahn, as it ran between the West and East German sectors of Berlin. In order to describe this subject accurately, Johnson worked out a complex tableau of ideas that were later applied in *Das dritte Buch*

¹² See Uwe Johnson, *Berliner Stadtbahn*, in: *Berliner Sachen*, Frankfurt am Main 1975, pp. 7-21. (The text was first published in 1961).

über Achim. In *Berliner Stadtbahn*, he recognized the paradoxical circumstances of the border, much in the manner that part one of this study has already established: ¹³

Die Grenze zerlegt den Begriff. Sie kann nicht als Kenntnis vorausgesetzt werden. Zwar ist bekannt, daß das Gebiet der ehemaligen deutschen Hauptstadt wie eine Insel vom ostdeutschen Staat umschlossen liegt und daß die Insel wiederum geteilt ist. ¹⁴

Johnson's attempts to describe the S-Bahn route in Berlin showed him that achieving an accurate picture of this transportation route was far more difficult than it appeared. He argued that the existence of the East German border changed or distorted perceptions of reality, depending on which side of this border one stood. However, he saw that one could not assume general recognition of the manifold consequences of the border, whose very existence distorted perceptions of reality in a paradoxical manner. The anomalies arising out of different perceptions of reality that are held on either side of the border were thought by Johnson to make an honest description of its experience difficult, but he undertook the task anyway, so that the meaning of the border for both sides could be more widely understood:

Eine Grenze an dieser Stelle wirkt wie eine literarische Kategorie. Sie verlangt die epische Technik und die Sprache zu verändern, bis sie der unerhörten Situation gerecht werden. [...] Solange die Arbeit an einem literarischen Text dieser Art sich mit der Wahrheit befaßt; muß ihr Gegenstand also geprüft werden an zwei gegensätzlichen Tendenzen der Wahrheitsfindung. ¹⁵

The conclusion was that a realistic description of the S-Bahn's operating route through the divided city of Berlin conflicted with a poetically accurate one. In order to achieve the most honest poetic representation of the border, new, or unique methods of description had to be devised. If this were not attempted, there would be no possibility of achieving a description of reality that was both realistic, and that could live up to a

¹³ See particularly Part One, Chapter II, on Plessner's notion of "authentic" experience, pp. 140-157.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 10.

literary idea of truth. To Johnson, it was not really the political border that had to be described, but its underlying poetic meaning. This meant studying the effects of the political border from two different perspectives: from reality as it was perceived and experienced in East and West Germany; and from reality as it was imagined, or in Johnson's case, as it was worked out to be. The working out, as it were, occurs in the narrative process where the difference in the practical and poetical meaning of the border is overcome. In other words, as Johnson put it -, "Eine Grenze an dieser Stelle wirkt wie eine literarische Kategorie". Thus, exploring the potential of observations meant using the idea of a border as a point of reference, for by using this point in the manner of a threshold, it would be possible to translate impressions of reality into their poetic representation. Having clarified his intent in this manner, Johnson gave a further exposition of his scheme, which was to aid his subsequent description of the political division of Germany as it was experienced on both sides:

Wenn also das Schema der einen Seite den Fahrgast auf dem Bahnsteig erwähnt, so kann das andere ihn verschweigen. Das Schema A beansprucht ihn als Kronzeugen für die Vorzüglichkeit des Staatswesens, in dessen Sinn zu arbeiten es beauftragt ist. Das Schema B verschweigt den Reisenden. Oder es macht ihn zu einem Zeugen für die Schrecklichkeit des Landes, das er eben erst aufgesucht hat, das er noch gar nicht kennt, für das er nur insofern entschieden ist, als er in dem anderen nicht habe bleiben mögen. Die Nachbarschaft dieser zwei politischen Ordnungen ist nicht mehr als eine Alternative von Wirklichkeit. Sie sind nicht durch Logik verbunden, sondern durch eine Grenze.¹⁶

The programmatic "scheme" of things works on the assumption that the two different sides of the border, which Johnson merely refers to neutrally as A and B, attempt to contradict each other in order to represent what they regard as the "truth". Both sides attempt to represent a valid account of reality according to their own versions of this. *Das dritte Buch über Achim* seems to be an attempt to unravel the 'poetic logic' behind the meaning of the East German border, which Johnson aimed to achieve by illustrating the reality of ideological division according to his carefully worked-out

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 12.

scheme. This gave him an insight into the contradictions of differing perceptions of reality in both East and West Germany; and thus it offered the poetic principles with which the division between the two sides could be represented in a poetically accurate manner. The scheme led Johnson to realize that what one side perceives as "true", the other side may attempt to deny. However, rather than taking sides and representing one side of the border in preference to the other, Johnson aimed at an equitable representation of each side's political views. As part of this aesthetic intention, Johnson's relation of the meaning attached to A and B remains ambiguous, since it is not aesthetically significant whether A is to be equated with a West German side, or whether B is meant to describe the East German side: the labels "A" or "B" are meant to distinguish the difference in perceptions, in order for them to be described:

Das Wort Dilemma tritt nicht oft in so reiner Kongruenz mit seinem Gegenstand auf. Das zweiseitige Problem der Wahrheitsfindung wirkt also hinein in die Phase der Konzeption [...] Der Verfasser sollte zugeben, daß er erfunden hat, was er vorbringt, er sollte nicht verschweigen, daß seine Informationen lückenhaft sind und ungenau. Denn er verlangt Geld für was er anbietet. Dies eingestehen kann er, indem er etwa die schwierige Suche nach der Wahrheit ausdrücklich vorführt, [...] indem er nicht für reine Kunst ausgibt, was noch eine Art der Wahrheitsfindung ist.¹⁷

Poetic truth, according to Johnson, is imagined truth. This leaves the problem of reconciling an image of reality with real experiences. The existential dimension, which we clearly found in part one of this study as the real context for exposing the implausible foundation of divided Germany, seems to mirror the dilemma that an author normally has to live with: namely to reconcile essentially conflicting perceptions of reality. The closeness of poetic and existential conditions is apparent where the existential perception of reality observes a conflict between life and existence, as understood by Jaspers. Yet poetic dilemmas and conflicts do not need to be "elucidated", as such, in a theoretical way. This is because an author already actually works with a different way of looking at life, which arises because of the essentially poetic way of looking at things. The

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 14, p. 20f.

individual author is therefore called upon to reconcile his perceptions of experiences with his idea of them, but the crucial distinction of literature from existential philosophy is that the only concrete validation of the difference is manifested in the literary text itself. In other words, the imaginary changes that derive from the author's original work are manifest in the literary text, whereas there is no comparable way of making the existential dimension *concrete*. This is one problem highlighted by Jaspers' argument against the Berlin Wall. Jaspers criticized Germany's physical division because it was a concrete manifestation of an existential border, rather than merely a political entity. Johnson's poetic perception of this entity exposed the impact of ideology, for he recognized that the ideological existence of the GDR relied on exposing any contradictory view of reality as inaccurate. Johnson argued that there can be a total immersion in one point of view, if the consequences are entirely fictional. His work therefore also accentuates a potentially never-ending poetic dilemma for authors of how to reconcile the content of real experiences with the poetic form that is to represent them.

Another problem that Jaspers observed was the essentially subjective nature of literature. Where Christa Wolf chose to give an ideologically inspired narrative of division, Johnson's narrative turned out to be in opposition to ideology, but only because he wanted to describe the actual nature of his observations and experiences as honestly as he could. By referring to Johnson's standards of poetic truth and logic, we find that aesthetics does work with a transcendental conception of existence. Yet a poetic dilemma is not the same as the existential dilemma that was studied in the first half of this inquiry, because in a literary text, or artwork, the transcendental quality of existence can endure. This was not the case in Jaspers' *Grenzsituationen*, since the whole point of his method of "elucidation" was to demonstrate that in reality, the existential nature of borders can be changed, and change in real terms, according to Jaspers, is possible first and foremost in the political realm.

The dilemmas of the writer about how to change the conditions in which he lives and to connect observations and experiences so that they are fully integrated into the text

are not necessarily resolved, even at the end of the writing process. The only place where the synthetic existential connection of life and existence can be found in aesthetics is during the writing process itself, where the conditions of the writing environment are gradually infused, or incorporated within the text.¹⁸ The difference is that in a literary text, the existential, or any other conditions of the writer's environment can be made manifest. In aesthetic terms, therefore, it is important to speak of a variation of existential implications, if the pressures and dilemmas that the writer has coped with have been really turned into a poetic idea of them. The suggestion of poetic "truth" seems necessarily ambiguous, or double-edged, since different aspects of reality have to be taken into account in the writing process. A writer, in Johnson's opinion, should not be dissuaded from interpreting poetic "truth" as an ideal or imagined form of reality, since art relies on exploring how a poetic conception of reality can be experienced. The implication is that a dilemma between fictional experience and actual experience can hardly ever be resolved, since it is the tension and ambiguity that results from this dilemma that is invested in the art form itself.

It is not surprising that Jens Reich's recent interpretation of Johnson's work suggested that it had an uncanny quality, which is a product of the realistic and poetically imaginative aspects of Johnson's narrative coinciding with one another: "Wir damals Lebenden und Handelnden kommen uns entgegen, als wären wir auf einer Leinwand, wir sind unsere eigene Erinnerung."¹⁹ This strange impression of meeting of oneself could have represented a dilemma for Johnson while he was writing, because he had to reconcile his experience of political life with its fictional representation. To Jens Reich, as reader and critic, Johnson's work is an accurate reflection of what he actually experienced in East Germany. Reich pinpoints a sense of "déjà vu", which can be compared to the idea of the *Doppelgänger* that Plessner's notion of authenticity touched

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 16: "Auch in der Phase der Beschreibung kann das Dilemma wirksam werden".

¹⁹ See Jens Reich, *Da sind wir, Figuren, federwerkgetrieben* In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 May 1994, p. 37.

upon.²⁰ The apparently paradoxical meeting of oneself was explained by Plessner as part of the basic anthropological condition that humans, unlike animals, are endowed with a unique capacity to contemplate their own thoughts and experiences. Plessner found this capacity evidenced in art and culture, which he understood as an inevitable part of the human condition, because of the necessity of communication and expression as an end in itself.

The characteristic indirect manner of Johnson's style of writing is possibly also to be explained by the capacity for reflection, for he meant to use this capacity to describe the border between the two sides of Germany as it was experienced: "Der Verfasser kann die Person, von der er berichtet, nur mit Verhaltensweisen ausstatten, über die er selbst verfügt oder die er bei Dritten und Achten beobachtet hat."²¹ An author can only describe what he knows to be true, which in Johnson's view means that information sometimes has to be "borrowed" from second-hand sources. Johnson's style tends to prefer abstract formulations to concrete ones in order to protect the original nature of the material he used. The concern for the originality of his ideas led to the narrative objectivity that is particularly apparent in *Das dritte Buch über Achim*. Since Johnson did not pretend to have achieved a "true" description of the political border as it was, he was able to acknowledge that his characters and reflections are only imagined, but because of this, they appear more genuine and original. The imaginative input into the story and characters means that Johnson was able to achieve a precise description of reality as he saw it through the eyes of those characters and the story's events, a position which he clarified again at the close of *Das dritte Buch über Achim*:

Die Personen sind erfunden. Die Ereignisse beziehen sich nicht auf ähnliche sondern auf die Grenze: den Unterschied: die Entfernung und den Versuch sie zu beschreiben.²²

²⁰ See Part One, Chapter III, p. 160-161.

²¹ See Uwe Johnson, *Berliner Stadtbahn*, op. cit., p. 14.

²² *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit. (This statement is added after the closing page of the narrative, which ends on p. 300).

In this observation, there is a working definition of the 'border', which reflects what Johnson had observed already in *Berliner Stadtbahn*, for he acknowledged that describing the border between the two sides of Germany includes a reflection of two different perceptions of reality. The necessity arises because of the differences that the existence of a border imposes. First, however, the differences have to be worked out; and this is done in Karsch's narrative.

The story of *Achim* begins when Karsch, a journalist from Hamburg, visits East Germany under the supposition that he is visiting his former girlfriend, Karin. Karsch is a free agent, just as free to visit East Germany, as to begin researching for his biography on Karin's boyfriend, Achim. From the beginning of the narrative, there is a characteristic indirectness in Karsch's dealings with others that is reflected in the distinct connection between monologue and dialogue, upon which the continuity of the narrative relies. Hence the monologue intercepts the dialogue in anticipation of a question that might have been raised by one of Karsch's friends in Hamburg; and that might also have occurred to the reader:

Was gab Karsch den Gedanken ein zu einem Buch über Achim?

[...] warum sollte ein Tiger Achim heißen? [...] Dies und mehr gab Karsch den Gedanken ein, nach dem du fragst [...] ²³

The italics of the monologue describe a tension that is built up throughout the story being related in the dialogue. Yet dialogue is only connected to the monologue through the italicized sections. Thus, a process of mutually reflected questions and answers begins: the monologue asks questions and makes observations, or assertions, to which the dialogue sections respond. At times, this creates a sense of tension that is purposefully exploited, so that ambiguity can be maintained, for instance, as in descriptions of Karsch's dealings with the shady character of Herr Fleisg. He is a Communist party functionary, also head of the local newspaper and publishing house,

²³ *ibid.*, p. 42 & p. 44.

where Karsch signs a contract for Achim's biography. The latent political rhetoric in Herr Fleisg's conversation with Karsch is exposed in the monologue:

In herzlichem vertrauensvollem Gespräch treten die Gemeinsamkeiten der deutschen Nation hervor. [...] Und war Herr Karsch wie bisher in seinem Hotel zu erreichen? - Ja: sagte Karsch. Da war er aber schon seit zwei Tagen umgezogen.

Warum war das gelogen?

[...] Er hatte nichts für Herrn Fleisg und nichts gegen ihn; er glich auch nicht den tückischen Dicken, von denen ihm abgeraten war zu Hause. [...] Karsch hatte ihn nicht verstanden. ²⁴

In the above excerpt, the tension created between monologue and dialogue begins to develop into a critique of ideological views, such as they are upheld by the fictional figures Karsch meets in East Germany. The narration of the above meeting shows how far distortions of the "truth" can lead, so far as not only Karsch, but his conversation partner handle the "truth" economically. Accounts such as this, were described by Jens Reich as an accurate portrayal by Johnson of the Stasi's activities in former East Germany. ²⁵

While he is writing his biography about Achim, Karsch's efforts to find out what is to be regarded as a 'true' perception of Achim's life brings him to the centre of an ideological conflict: the biography about Achim, which is promised in the title of the work, is more than the third book that has been written about him. ²⁶ *Das dritte Buch über Achim* becomes a "Beschreibung einer Beschreibung" when Karsch realizes that it is

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 40f.

²⁵ Jens Reich, *Da sind wir, Figuren, federwerkgetrieben*, *op. cit.*

²⁶ *Das dritte Buch*, *op. cit.*, p. 44. Much of the secondary material on *Das dritte Buch* contents itself with this discovery. For a critical overview of contemporary reviews see Uwe Johnsons *Frühwerk Im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literaturkritik*, *op. cit.* See also Nicolai Riedel, *Uwe Johnson Bibliographie 1959-1975*, Bonn 1976 and *Uwe Johnson Bibliographie 1959-1977*, Bd. 2, Bonn 1978. See further Uwe Johnson, *Begleitumstände*, *op. cit.* especially pp. 173-193. Johnson concentrates on the review by Karl Pestalozzi (*Achim alias Täve Schur. Uwe Johnsons zweiter Roman und seine Vorlage*. In: *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, 1963, pp. 479-486, quoted after Riedel, *op. cit.* 1976, p. 42). Johnson's commentary on Pestalozzi's article shows the background to the title *Das dritte Buch über Achim*. On Siegfried Unseld's request, Johnson was persuaded to replace his original (and evidently preferred title) of *Beschreibung einer Beschreibung* with *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, see *Begleitumstände*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

especially the political dimension of reality that he must take into account. Achim is a sporting celebrity in East Germany and enjoys privileges of position and a career as a candidate for the SED, the ruling party. When Karsch unearths a discrepancy between the public and private life of Achim, he finds incidents in Achim's past that compromise his position as a celebrity and as a law-abiding representative of East Germany. Achim himself admits that he crossed the border to West Berlin, in order to buy a three-speed gear for his bicycle. In doing so, Achim had committed an offence against East German regulations that forbade the use of East German currency in West Berlin.²⁷ Achim is supposed to have taken part in the worker's strike of 17 June 1953. Karsch 'discovers' this when he miraculously receives a photographic slide in the post, which apparently depicts Achim amidst a mass of protesters during the strike.²⁸ These discoveries place Karsch in a dilemma: if he tries to apply accepted West German norms whilst in East Germany, and tries to publish this material, he comes into conflict with the authorities. His stay in East Germany therefore has to end, since his intent to write about what he has found means that he will contravene accepted norms of society in East Germany by contradicting the public perception of Achim as a law-abiding East German citizen. Karsch is asked to leave East Germany. Yet before he leaves, he has already begun to work through his discoveries with Achim in the course of their conversations:

Was hatte Achim eigentlich gegen Westdeutschland?

[...]

Ja was mochte denn da nicht nach seiner Nase sein [...] Was wählte er aus, indem er vergleichen durfte; was machte ihn fromm gegen einen Staat, der ... - Das wollen wir doch mal nicht vergessen! sagte Achim. Der doch angefangen hatte mit der Wiedereröffnung des Marktes in Freiheit? [...] Da kam auch welches von überm Meer [...] legten an und zurück unter den Augen der Sieger, die wollten erst einmal sehen auf die Ordnung, die schützte den Besitz und die Freiheit [...] Was paßte ihm da nicht?

- Und so ist es doch gar nicht! sagte Karsch.

- Lassen Sie mich mal meine Meinung sagen! forderte Achim, der schon nicht mehr zuhörte [...]

Es müssen politische Gründe sein! [...]

Lesen Sie mal die Zeitung, und ich hab sie Jahre lang gelesen [...]

- Was ist denn das für eine Zeitung? fragte Karsch.

- Das ist ja klar: sagte Achim: Daß eure nicht schreiben wie der [...]

²⁷ *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit., pp. 202-214.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 253, p. 260f.

der [...] den Bertolt Brecht verglichen hat mit einem Zuhälter und Schläger? [...] Hätt er nicht doch erst versuchen sollen zu leben mit ihnen in Freiheit: [...] den Kanzler zu loben oder nicht, [...] der Justiz zu trauen oder nicht, dem Nächsten zu schaden oder nicht so sehr, gegen den Kommunismus zu handeln oder nicht, die Wahrheit zu verleumden oder nicht, und alles ohne Gefahr der strafweisen Einsperrung für mehr als drei Wochen?

[...]

Achim zeigte sich betroffen. Öfters verständig nickend räumte er dem Fragesteller einen Platz frei im besprochenen Gelände [...] ²⁹

The monologue incites a long exposition of the real dilemma that both parties are in, which each comes to realize is based on purely political foundations. Achim's perception of reality has been fostered by his position as a representative of the East German state. He only sees one side to reality, which Karsch exposes as an ideological standpoint. The entire section of this dialogue revolves around the observation: "Es müssen politische Gründe sein!" ³⁰ The exclamation is uttered by Achim, who is attempting to account for the fact that his perception of reality is different to that of Karsch. When it becomes apparent that neither of them can agree on any point about life in East and West Germany, they are both forced to concede that it is not reality as such that is different, but their perceptions of it. Achim criticizes what he sees as the equal ideological bias to Karsch's political outlook, pointing out that West Germany was helped both politically and economically after the war by the Americans. The integration of West Germany into the western world made that part of Germany as much victim to ideology, since it turned to Capitalism, which Achim views as a conflicting ideology to Communism. In a different vein, Karsch criticizes the Communist system in East Germany, because he regards it as hostile to political and intellectual freedom that are the virtues of his own system. He points out that political freedom has its own price, for it has to be cultivated by each individual, who must work out for himself what is the "true" perception of reality, - namely whom to trust and which political party to support. The irony in this dialogue is that the political argument divides and unites the two speakers and their corresponding

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 273, pp. 278-280.

³⁰ Karsch echoes this sentiment shortly afterwards, *ibid.*, p. 286.

different viewpoints.³¹ Karsch does not necessarily imply that one perception of reality is preferable to the other, but merely exposes the differences between them.

The dialogue section, as quoted on pp. 260-261, can also be regarded as a manifestation of Johnson's literary interpretation of the political border. This arises with regard to Karsch's use of inner monologue, which creates a narrative space for the dialogue between the characters to develop. What Karsch outlines are fictional boundaries of a dialogue with Achim. Hence when Achim finally remains silent for long enough, the political dimension of the border between East and West Germany can be strikingly reflected in their conversation. Karsch is still able to allow Achim the freedom to express his opinions. Later on in their conversation, Achim is allowed to speak again in answer to the monologue's question, *Was hatte Achim eigentlich gegen Westdeutschland?:*³²

Ja aber. [...] Sie werden ihren Staat ausgeben für allein rechtmäßig und unsern für nicht rechtmäßig: [...] sie werden sagen daß sie rüsten weil wir rüsten: sagt ihnen daß wir rüsten weil sie rüsten: sie werden sagen daß wir sie mit Sabotage Spionage überziehen: sagt ihnen daß sie uns mit Sabotage Spionage überziehen [...]

- Ich mein doch dabei nicht was Sie meinen! sagte Achim sofort: Und so war es gar nicht. Sie nehmen es viel zu deutlich.

[...]

- Ich erkläre mir das so: sagte [...] Karsch: [...] Es müssen politische Gründe sein! [...] Sie begnügen sich mit dem geringeren Anteil, weil sie nicht lassen können vom Antlitz des Sachwalters. Und sie haben ihn wieder und wieder gewählt. [...] Sie sind nicht zu drei Millionen einzeln über die gefährliche Grenze gegangen, denn darauf steht Gefängnis. Sie stehen nicht auf gegen die Panzer der sowjetischen Armee, nachdem sie erfahren haben was Sozialismus ist nach diesem Krieg: mit dem Lohn die Dinge des Wohlstands nicht zu kaufen, den Sachwalter zu loben, [...] gegen den Kapitalismus zu handeln, die Wahrheit zu verleumden, [...] Mochte er lieber leben in Ostdeutschland weil in Westdeutschland kaum so gern? Mochte er nicht leben in Westdeutschland, weil er in Ostdeutschland war? Lebte er da? Was ließ ihn zwei Staaten vergleichen: die Grenze zwischen ihnen?³³

³¹ See further Uwe Johnson, *Zwei Ansichten*, Hamburg 1968. In the same way, the political context in which the story of B. and D. is set seems to exacerbate the division of views between these characters.

³² *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit., p. 273.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 281f, p. 284, p. 286f.

Karsch is allowed to repeat the idea that Johnson put forward in *Berliner Stadtbahn*: that the border between the two sides changes perceptions of reality. In aesthetic terms, the purpose of the border has been altered from a communication barrier in real life to a means of poetic orientation. As a guiding principle for Johnson's description of the political situation, the border itself appears to be described as it was experienced. The actual *existential* significance of the border as a death-trap, which was built by East Germany, is called into question, since the function of the *political* border is to act as an artificial barrier to support East German ideology. Karsch suggests all this by pointing out that those who left East Germany, by crossing the border between East and West Germany, recognized that this was a formidable barrier, built by the East German side, not only to prevent comparisons between the two sides of Germany, but to prevent any form of border transgression. By looking beyond the reality of the border guards, barbed wire, and the death-strip between the two sides, Karsch perceives the border as an artificial means of division that is used to protect an ideological perception of reality.

The psychological impact of the Berlin Wall was its threat as a death-trap, which 'artificially' secured its existential validity, because, as we have seen with regard to Jaspers' critique, the Berlin Wall once threatened the very ability of East German citizens to question why it was there at all. Achim, too, has not questioned the need for the political border which serves almost as a support for his own political opinions.³⁴ It is Karsch's skilful use of dialogue that undermines the effectiveness of political differences between them. Karsch repeats the phrase "Es müssen politische Gründe sein!" Karsch means by this that he, at least, has not been deceived by their differences, and regards the two sides of Germany as essentially the same, apart from the key stumbling block of their ideological differences, as manifested by the physical division of the border between them. As long as Achim can explain that the border between East and West Germany is a necessary device to support his point of view, he supports the border's existential

³⁴ This is shown by Achim's "eye for an eye" style of argument: "[...] sie werden sagen daß sie rüsten weil wir rüsten: sagt ihnen daß wir rüsten weil sie rüsten [...]", *ibid.*, p. 282.

implications such as we have discussed in part one of this study. This argument only protects Achim up to a certain point. In the long run, Achim's position proves untenable. For Achim, life stops at the border of East Germany; and for Karsch, the lack of political freedom undermines the border's legitimacy. Karsch regards the border as a measure of what he terms the political expediency of the "Sachwalter" (the East German state leadership), and a symptom of an ideology held at a particular point in history to meet particular political ends. Karsch's ultimate intent is to write his biography, but this leads him to expose an ideological perception of reality. The consequence is that Karsch is in a dilemma: caught between an ideological and a poetic perception of the "truth"; and if he were to represent his version of the "truth" this would place him in permanent conflict with Achim.

2. Between monologue and dialogue - *dazwischen*

Beyond the political and historical aspect of Johnson's story, Karsch's interpretation of what was once the East German border is clearly poetically motivated. The intention to write Achim's biography means that Karsch must find out and explore the real truth about Achim's life. Karsch has to examine all possible perspectives in his search for truth; and this leads him to expose the distorting effects of ideological positions. Hence the process of writing about Achim brings forth hidden emotional and psychological complications that create the ultimate barrier to the continuity of their friendship. Karsch is obliged to return to West Germany:

Wie nahm Achim das auf?

Mit Bedauern. Er zeigte Bedauern. [...] Achim schien es zu bedauern. Sie redeten einander nun noch mit du an für eine Viertelstunde. Sie fragten einer den andern ob er das Gefühl von Schade kenne, kennst du

- Schade, und
- Vielleicht hätt ich das Buch gern lesen mögen, es war doch wirklich über mich [...] ³⁵

The friendship that developed between Karsch and Achim was due to the dialogue that has been made possible between them. ³⁶ Karsch defined the limits of this dialogue to the extent that the discoveries he makes necessitate his departure for West Germany, and the abandonment of the biography. In Johnson's short story, *Eine Reise wegwohin*, Karsch is described as exploring in his dialogue an area of "Dazwischen":

Der Nachmittag hatte ihm die Empfindung von Dazwischen auf den Leib gerückt, die war ihm so unheimlich, er brachte seine ostdeutschen Sachen ins Reine, sich in Sicherheit zurück. ³⁷

The sense of being caught between East and West Germany finds its aesthetic parallel where Karsch's position is that of interpreter, with the task of reading between the lines of monologue and dialogue and supplying their interconnection. This situation might be regarded as a consequence of what Johnson observed as a "dilemma" of choosing between different perceptions of reality. The dilemma is apparently resolved in this definition of a narrative space of "dazwischen", where different perceptions of reality are allowed to prevail. Hence a narrative that is described as "dazwischen" interprets the border as an inner perspective, that is, as a poetic principle of orientation that leaves the narrative itself in a neutral position in relation to those perceptions that are being described. To Johnson, the only valid means of exploring Germany's division was to describe the experience of being between the two sides. Johnson's narrator, Karsch, is therefore made to observe the two different perceptions of reality, but not to take sides, because of his working position between each side, that is, his position of "dazwischen".

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 296f.

³⁶ This is shown by reversion from the polite, formal *Sie* to a more familiar form of confidence and trust by the address of *du*.

³⁷ See Uwe Johnson, *Eine Reise wegwohin*, op. cit., p. 63.

Johnson's narratives have been criticized for being "omniscient", which suggests that his narrator assumes a "God-like" position, when dealing with his characters. It was Johnson himself who first raised this as a problem in *Berliner Stadtbahn*: "Die Manieren der Allwissenheit sind verdächtig. Der göttergleiche Überblick eines Balzac ist bewundernswert. Balzac lebte von 1799 bis 1850." ³⁸ Johnson rejected the idea of the omniscient narrator because he regarded this "God-like" position as an outdated narrative technique. In his book *The Ethics of Narration*, Colin Riordan reliably outlined the difficulties that some studies on narrative perspectives have found themselves in. ³⁹ An alternative insight into "the problem of omniscience" is to regard Johnson's narrative technique in *Das dritte Buch über Achim* as an answer to this problem. The answer also follows on from Johnson's understanding of the border as a poetic principle. Hence his narrator, Karsch, described reality from an 'inner' perspective, as it were, working between different perceptions of reality, in order to take into account different perspectives. A narrative position of "dazwischen" places the idea of "omniscience" in a positive light. Furthermore, it emphasizes Johnson's commitment to finding the best narrative means to describe his chosen themes. ⁴⁰

Johnson's principle of "dazwischen" might be regarded as a poetic variation on the existential threshold between life and existence. Yet as has been seen, the narrative context is hardly based on the existential properties that characterized the context of Germany's post-war division, since the implications of the idea of "dazwischen" are merely poetic. The true quality of Johnson's narrative of "dazwischen" is perhaps its unique discretion, which allows the exploration of both sides' points of view. In other words, the function of his narrator, Karsch, is to retain as low a profile as possible, in order to make the poetic threshold between monologue and dialogue visible. It is from

³⁸ Uwe Johnson, *Berliner Stadtbahn*, op. cit., p. 20.

³⁹ See Colin Riordan, *The Ethics of Narration: Uwe Johnson's novels from Ingrid Babendererde to Jahrestage*, London 1989. Especially Chapter III: *The problem of Omniscience*, ibid., pp. 31-54.

⁴⁰ In an interview with Horst Bienek, Johnson explained that in each of his narratives he attempted to find the original form that was adequate to describe his chosen theme, see Horst Bienek, *Werkstattgespräch mit Schriftstellern*, Munich 1962, p. 93.

this threshold that the real differences between the two alternative political systems of Communism and Capitalism are unfolded in a dialogue that is without prejudice to one side or the other. Because of this unique narrative quality, a "true" account of border experience can finally be given:

Und wie war die Reise?

Karsch [...] legte die Platte mit dem Capriccio über die Wiederkehr von langer Reise auf und ließ sie laufen. [...] Mit dem letzten Ton (dem berühmten Nachklappen des Cembalos, das den Schlußakkord synkopierte, ihm immer witzig vorgekommen war) drückte er die Zigarette aus und stand auf.

[...] Er schrieb bis hier und
Telefon.

- Karsch: sagte er.

[...] - Wie war es denn? sagtest du. ⁴¹

The end of the story seems to return it to the beginning. Karsch places a record on the turntable, which is a symbolic moment, since this not only marks the end of his narrative role, but it describes the narrative tone which accompanies the idea of "dazwischen". ⁴² The whimsical music of the caprice is the tone in which the entire story is told. The tone explains the frequent moody retorts that are made in the dialogue in response to the interceptions from the monologue. Riordan called this tone "laconic" or "sarcastic", and attributed these tones to what he termed an "interlocutor". ⁴³ However, it is rather Karsch who instils a moody tone in the narrative monologue and dialogue: "*Hör endlich damit auf!* [...] Beschwerde dich nicht. Genauigkeit, mit der du bedient werden willst, würde noch mehr als den Zusatz erlauben [...]" ⁴⁴ The same moody retort is repeated, when the narrative is trying to establish why Karin has invited Karsch to East Germany in the first place:

⁴¹ *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit., p. 299f.

⁴² See further Siegfried Unseld, Eberhard Fahlke (eds.), *Uwe Johnson: Für wenn ich tot bin*, Frankfurt am Main 1991. See especially Siegfried Unseld, *Uwe Johnson: "Für wenn ich tot bin"*, pp. 9-71, especially p. 70. Unseld recounts here Johnson's 1979 lecture, in which Johnson had explained the importance of tone in his narratives: "Er hörte seine Leute reden. Es war ein Ton [...] gehorsam schrieb er nach [...]."

⁴³ See Colin Riordan, *The Ethics of Narration*, op. cit., p. 52f.

⁴⁴ *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit., p. 237.

Sie hatte Achim von Karsch erzählt. Lad ihn doch ein: sagte Achim.
[...] Auf ihn (Karsch, S.K.) kam es gar nicht an. Frag mich was
anderes.

[...] Offenbar hatte sie ihn wiedersehen wollen. Manchmal glaubte er
das eher. [...] Ich habe dir schon gesagt daß es auf ihn nicht ankam.

[...]

*Wird es nun doch die Geschichte von der Dame mit den beiden
Herren?* ⁴⁵

The interaction between inner monologue and dialogue, as indicated in the excerpt just quoted, lends the narrative an autonomy that can be regarded as a consequence of the context of "dazwischen". It is from this working position that Karsch is able to move freely between his own perceptions of life in East Germany and the information that he is able to compile about the situation because of his research into Achim's biography. The idea of "dazwischen" is that it functions as the kind of literary category that Johnson observed was necessary to describe the border in his study of the *Berliner Stadtbahn*. The accompanying tone that has shadowed Karsch's story-telling role and followed his position of "dazwischen" throughout the story does not appear until the very end, when the record is revolving on the turntable. At this point, it becomes apparent that the tone has even guided Karsch in his selection of material, which explains his preference for details, or for what he calls "Zwischenrufe." ⁴⁶

At first, the relevance of these interpolations is difficult to discern. However, their significance is clearer, when they are regarded as complementary to the story's whimsical note. Karsch describes the "Zwischenrufe" as elusive details that accompany his attempts to describe the differences between the two sides of the border. He tries to describe differences in the appearance of the "Straßenbild", or else he focuses on ascertaining exactly what Achim means when he refers to the atmosphere in West Berlin as "sonntäglich". ⁴⁷ It turns out that Achim had meant the difference in atmosphere: West Berlin had appeared calm and ordered, but this was like East Berlin on a Sunday. The

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 12, p. 31f., p. 119.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 22f and pp. 201-210.

telephone conversations that begin and end the story are further examples of these "Zwischenrufe", which can be interpreted as symptoms of the attempt to describe what is meant by border experience:

da dachte ich schlicht und streng anzufangen so: sie rief ihn an, innezuhalten mit einem Satzzeichen, und dann wie selbstverständlich hinzuzufügen: über die Grenze, damit du überrascht wirst und glaubst zu verstehen. [...] irgend wo sind die Drähte zwischen Ostdeutschland und Westdeutschland zusammengefaßt, da gehen sie also über die Grenze, wen wundert das. [...] Zum Glück auch war Karsch noch wach [...] er erkannte ihre Stimme sofort und sagte ohne zu fragen ja. Ja: sagte er und legte die Verbindung still [...] wiederum war er hinter der Demarkationslinie. Du wirst aus unserem Mißverständnis mit dem Flüchtenden und den Schüssen im Morgengrauen ersehen können welche Art von Genauigkeit ich meine; ich meine die Grenze: die Entfernung: den Unterschied.⁴⁸

Das dritte Buch über Achim is a story about Karsch's endeavours to overcome the narrative difficulties that he encountered whilst organizing the material collected for Achim's biography into a cohesive form.⁴⁹ His attempt to describe everything in meticulous detail leads him to seek out similarities as well as differences between the two sides. The opening and closing telephone conversations, as well as sections of monologue describe his view of border experience as an acquaintance with difference that Johnson also aimed to describe in a harmonious form.⁵⁰ What seems a virtual obsession with detail and precise registering of facts goes so far beyond the political reality of the time that the narrative can do no other than draw on an imagined perception of reality. Experience and observations of the time are turned into a fictional representation of reality, as measured, at times, by the metaphorical language:

Dennoch würde ich am liebsten beschreiben daß die Grenze lang ist und drei Meilen von der Küste anfängt [...] in manchen frei gelegenen

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 7ff.

⁴⁹ This explains perhaps Karsch's suggestion of other means of description, like for instance a film, *ibid.*, pp. 247-252.

⁵⁰ Johnson's excessive use of the colon might also be regarded as the consequence of this aim. His preference for an anglicised system of punctuation earned critical reactions from contemporary reviews. See Nicolai Riedel, *Uwe Johnson's Frühwerk*, op. cit. (For instance, Marcel Reich Ranicki, *Ein Mann fährt ins andere Deutschland. Uwe Johnsons Das dritte Buch über Achim*. *Ibid.*, p. 130). See further Uwe Johnson, *Begleitumstände*, op. cit., p. 190: "[...] vereinigen durch den Doppelpunkt, der die Richtung der Beziehung noch durchlässt, ja, geradezu ansaugt!"

Dörfern auf der einen Seite waren die Kirchtürme von Lübeck zu sehen der anderen Seite, zehn Meter breit aufgepflügt drängt der Kontrollstreifen in den eigens gerodeten Wald [...] vielleicht sollte ich blühende Brombeerranken darüberhängen lassen, so könntest du es dir am Ende vorstellen [...] der naturhaft plötzliche Abbruch der Straßen an Erdwällen oder in Gräben oder vor Mauern; ich gebe zu: ich bin um Genauigkeit verlegen.⁵¹

This return to nature signifies the truly poetic dimension that Johnson's narrative reached. He was able to describe the political division of Germany as it was experienced, because of an interpretation of what he understood by poetic truth: taking experience and its fictional transformation into equal consideration; and devising a narrative that upholds these aspects in equilibrium. The need to register detail is part of this intent to explore as methodically as possible, and in as balanced a way as possible, the different perceptions on either side of the border. A reconciliation of the fictional story with the political situation at the time is not the intention, since otherwise the ideological division that Johnson aimed to reflect would not emerge as clearly as it does. If he had tried to harmonize his poetic intent with the political views held by either one of the sides, he would have harmonized the opposing political differences, which was not the aim. Harmony, in this case, comes from having reworked any outstanding differences, which become clearer, because they are represented in a poetic form. Accordingly, Johnson's prose coincides primarily with the theme that he intended to describe, which is not necessarily the same thing as a harmonization of differences as they were then. The point of coincidence between the political reality in the early 1960s and its fictional representation is best broached in terms of this threshold between monologue and dialogue, - *dazwischen*. This term refers to the prevailing political conditions, as well as to their poetic reworking.

Another attempt to describe Germany's division was made by Peter Schneider's *Der Mauerspringer*, which was published in the early 1980's.⁵² Schneider's

⁵¹ *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit., p. 7f.

⁵² Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer*, Frankfurt am Main 1990. (The original text published in 1982).

Mauerspringer motif reads as an attempt to emulate what Johnson had already achieved almost twenty years previously, since the work is less poetically ambitious and was not based on the same kind of inner perspective between monologue and dialogue, nor on equanimity and discretion, qualities that Johnson worked with. Schneider's text is realistically motivated; and is an attempt to reflect life on both sides of the Berlin Wall.⁵³ For this reason, however, *Der Mauerspringer* may be seen as an important complement to Johnson's highly imaginative text, since the psychological effects of the reality of German division are documented no less accurately by Schneider.

It is possible that Schneider was aware of the poetic limitations already imposed on this subject matter by the prose of Johnson and that of Christa Wolf.⁵⁴ Schneider focused on four separate *Mauerspringer* stories, which are recounted from his own perspective as narrator. Yet this means that a poetic interpretation of the *Mauerspringer* remains elusive.⁵⁵ The intent may be that of defining the story of a poetic *Grenzgänger*, however, as Gordon Burgess also noted: "We never encounter this 'Grenzgänger.'"⁵⁶ Instead, there are descriptions of different individuals, who have illegally crossed the border between the two German states.⁵⁷ The fragmentary nature of this material means that its representation cannot be as poetically ambitious as Johnson's interpretation, which as has been shown, developed an original narrative position of "dazwischen" in order to describe the border theme. Schneider's *Mauerspringer* stories may share a similar intent to Johnson's *Karsch*, - to portray life as it was actually experienced at the time the Berlin Wall existed. *Karsch* is able to explore the perceptions of reality on both sides of the border because of his neutral narrative position of "dazwischen".

⁵³ See Paul Konrad Kurz, *Die Mauer im Kopf einreißen*, in: *Frankfurter Hefte*, 38, H 3, 1983 p. 69.

⁵⁴ See further, Hanns-Josef Ortheil, *Kein niemand, kein nichts*, in: *Merkur* 36, 1982, pp. 1022-1025, here p. 1024.

⁵⁵ See also Gordon Burgess, *The case of Peter Schneider*, in: *Literature on the Threshold The German novel in the 1980s*, ed. by Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes, Roland Smith, New York, Oxford, Munich 1990, pp. 107-122. On *Der Mauerspringer*, *ibid.*, pp. 110-114.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁵⁷ Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer*, *op. cit.*, p. 21. Gordon Burgess has detailed the authentic nature of Schneider's sources, which were taken from newspaper cuttings or other contemporary sources, see *The case of Peter Schneider, Der Mauerspringer*, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-114.

Schneider's narrative scarcely conceals the fact that such a poetic threshold between both sides of the Berlin Wall is not valid for his purposes of describing the political border.⁵⁸ *Der Mauerspringer* does not intend poetically to rework the consequences of the reality that it describes, but rather to represent the physically imposing Berlin Wall by oscillating between the two sides of West and East Berlin. Such oscillation leads to shades of Johnson's Karsch, which are introduced as each new *Mauerspringer* anecdote begins with the recurring phrase, "Kennst du die Geschichte von [...]"⁵⁹ What emerges is the difficulty of integrating the author's experience into that of the anecdotal characters.⁶⁰ This incongruity frustrates Schneider's text, which begins to read like a newspaper that contains stories that are filtered by the author's own experience.⁶¹ Schneider's sparse use of dialogue is contrasted with Johnson's reliance on this form.⁶² The *Mauerspringer* motif focuses on a number of "illegal" border crossings, which succeed in various illicit ways to forge a passage between one side of the Berlin Wall and the other. Therefore the Berlin Wall appears not as a Platonic shadow, as it may appear in Johnson's narrative. In Schneider's work, the Berlin Wall is a fact of life:

⁵⁸ See also Ortheil, *Kein niemand, kein nichts*, op. cit. Ortheil questions whether Schneider's political representation of German division can be adequately dealt with in narrative form, p. 1025.

⁵⁹ Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer*, op. cit., p. 28, p. 41, p. 70 & p. 93. This seems to be an attempt to emulate Karsch's dialogue between readers and characters at the beginning of *Das dritte Buch*, "[...] über die Grenze, damit du überrascht wirst und glaubst zu verstehen." Uwe Johnson, *Das dritte Buch*, op. cit., p. 7. Further evidence is given of attempts to define the boundaries of dialogue. Echoes of Karsch's telephone conversations recur as Schneider describes failed attempts to contact his friend Robert, *ibid.*, p. 67. And similar frustrations occur in his efforts to contact his girlfriend Lena, *ibid.*, p. 31f.

⁶⁰ See especially Colin Riordan (Ed.), *Peter Schneider*, (in series: *Contemporary German Writers*, ed. by Rhys. W. Williams), Cardiff 1995. Riordan's monograph contains not only a useful bibliographical reference to primary and secondary material on Schneider, but an interview with the author conducted by Riordan and Williams, see *Gespräch mit Peter Schneider*, *ibid.*, pp. 24-35. In a particular section devoted *Zu den Problemen des Erzählens* (*ibid.*, pp. 28-30), Schneider concedes that the style of narration in *Der Mauerspringer* amounts to what he sees as a *Mischform* between his preference for essayistic writing and prose, *ibid.*, p. 29. In Schneider's own view, the literary quality of *Der Mauerspringer* was impaired, "vielleicht sogar ruiniert" by this hybrid mixture of essay and prose, so that his book "ist ja eben doch mehr ein Essay als ein erzählendes Buch", *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶¹ See also Ortheil, *Kein niemand, kein nichts*, op. cit., p. 1024. See further Gordon Burgess, *The Case of Peter Schneider*, op. cit., p. 112. Burgess notes to the contrary: "[...] it may come as all the more of a surprise that at the heart of Schneider's tale lies authenticity." Burgess regards Schneider's incorporation of authentic material as successful. It is interesting that Johnson also used authentic documents for *Das dritte Buch*, but this material is integrated into the narrative, see further Uwe Johnson, *Begleitumstände*, op. cit., pp. 178-180. Johnson's best-known work the *Jahrestage* tetralogy relies heavily on extensive use of newspaper reports from *Der Spiegel* and *The New York Times*.

⁶² See Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer*, op. cit., p. 92: "Ich denke über eine Kurzrezension zu meinen Erzählungen nach. 'Es sind eigentlich alles nicht zustande gekommene Liebesgeschichten.'"

Warum sind wir nur hier geblieben im Schatten der Mauern, in denen jedes Wort, jeder Gedanke wie das Echo von etwas klingt, das längst und vergeblich gesagt wurde? ⁶³

The presence of the Berlin Wall overshadows Schneider's narrative, so that the impression of constant movement between the two sides of East and West Berlin conceals the absence of poetic variation about the meaning of political division. The *Mauerspringer* motif emerges as a symbol of division. It alludes to the static reality of repeated attempts to cross from one side of the Berlin Wall to the other, without any consequences being drawn from these anecdotes, other than to show that even while the Berlin Wall existed, it was possible to transgress it, despite the threat to life that it represented:

Der Grenzring rund um Westberlin hat eine Gesamtlänge von 165 km; auf einer Länge von 106 km besteht dieser Ring aus Mauerplatten mit Rohraufgabe, auf einer Länge von 55,1 km aus metallgestanzten Gitterzäunen. Entlang des Grenzrings stehen 260 Beobachtungstürme, in denen doppelt so viele Grenzer Tag und Nacht Wache halten. [...] Für den Fall, daß ein Unbefugter den Grenzstreifen betritt, stehen Jeeps der Grenztruppen bereit und Hunde, die an 267 Hundelaufanlagen im Einsatz sind. Der Zutritt zum Grenzstreifen von Osten her wird zusätzlich durch eine innere Mauer verwehrt, die in einem Abstand von unterschiedlicher Breite parallel zur äußeren Mauer verläuft. Am Fuß der inneren Mauer sind an zahlreichen Stellen Nagelbretter ausgelegt, deren 12 Zentimeter lange Stahlnägeln einen Herunterspringenden buchstäblich festnageln. Die innere Mauer besteht zwar auf weite Strecken noch immer aus den Fassaden grenznaher Häuser, aber deren Türen und Fenster sind zugemauert. ⁶⁴

Schneider gave an important document about the reality of the Berlin Wall that is of a different quality to that of Johnson. Whereas Johnson provided an idealized account of this border, so far as it conformed to his standards that the poetic form of a story should coincide with the content it aims to reflect, Schneider's account may be termed positivist. In other words, Schneider's aspiration was merely to reflect the political reality as it was, not to change the reality to conform to a poetic idea of the truth. If Schneider does search

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁶⁴ Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer*, op. cit., p. 45.

for narrative breakthroughs, in order to describe his theme, a poetic quality, like a poetic *Grenzgänger* remains elusive. Schneider described a concrete form of Platonic division that has a psychological undercurrent: "Die Mauer im Kopf einzureißen wird länger dauern, als irgendein Abrißunternehmen für die sichtbare Mauer braucht." ⁶⁵ The *Mauerspringer* motif captured the solidity of Germany's ideological division, which was at one time so fiercely defended that it appeared unlikely that it would ever be pulled down. The point about the "wall in the mind", however, is that Johnson worked his way around it, or even beyond it, since his narrative and its characters were made to deal with the reality of political division. ⁶⁶ Johnson's text, in displaying a high degree of poetic integrity, also gives us the most realistic account of Germany's historical division, because it was Johnson, and not Schneider who really knew how to describe the significance of the political border in terms of its experience.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 102. For an illustrative representation of Schneider's "Mauer im Kopf", see Hans-Georg Rauch, *ZEITZEICHEN "Territoriales Denken"*, in: *Die Zeit*, 3 January 1990.

⁶⁶ See further Stephan Reinhardt, *Die Mauern im Kopf - 'Es muß einmal ... ein Ende haben mit dem gekrümmten Gang'*, in: Riordan (Ed.), *Peter Schneider*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-49. Reinhardt observed that Schneider was one of the few who predicted the fall of the Berlin Wall in the Spring of 1989, *ibid.*, p. 41. The supposed prediction might rather have been more speculation on Schneider's part, whose forecasts were made in an essay written for the *New York Times* in March/April of 1989, which was given the title 'Was wäre, wenn die Mauer fällt', (first published, 25 June 1989, see further details, in: Reinhardt, *ibid.*, p. 48). Schneider ought to be credited for his observation, which remains useful, so far as it shows that even after unification, there is a particular difficulty of working around, in the manner that Johnson did, the psychological effects of Germany's division, which run deeper than may appear.

Chapter III

Poetry on Boundaries

Die Wunde
des Möglichen blutet noch.¹

After Germany's unification, the literary journal, *Neue Rundschau*, posed a question to Germany's young writers and poets.² The leading question that was raised by the journal's survey is also important in this chapter: *Wieviel Literatur im Leben, wieviel Politik in der Poesie?* What lies behind the question is a proposed discussion of the purposes of literature, bearing in mind that the Berlin Wall no longer exists. The ulterior motive is to find out which influences cause poets and authors to write. The journal's survey was circulated to fifty authors; and answers were sought about literary methods and ideas in the wider context of Europe that has opened up since the end of the cold war.³ The aim of this concluding chapter is also to assess whether poems published in Germany after unification are to be regarded as a poetic response to this new political situation, or whether a really poetic conception of reality is the main driving force for poetry that has appeared in anthologies since the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁴

¹ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, PRAGMATISMUS, für Cesare Cases. In: Anna Chiarloni/ Helga Pankoke (eds.), *Grenzfallgedichte Eine deutsche Anthologie*, Berlin 1991, p. 117.

² See *Neue Rundschau* 103, Heft 2 1992, *Wieviel Literatur im Leben, wieviel Politik in der Poesie? Eine Umfrage unter deutschsprachigen Schriftstellern der Jahrgänge 1950 bis 1966*, pp. 95-130.

³ *ibid.*, p. 95. Four leading questions are posed that aim to seek out affinities between political and intellectual activity, - Vaclav Havel is given as an example of an author, who has taken a leading role in political life in Czechoslovakia.

⁴ The poems discussed in this chapter are selected from Anna Chiarloni/ Helga Pankoke (eds.), *Grenzfallgedichte, Eine deutsche Anthologie*, op. cit; and from Karl Otto Conrady's anthology, *Von einem Land und vom andern Gedichte zur deutschen Wende*, Frankfurt am Main 1993. A further anthology is also selected: *Was sind das für Zeiten Deutschsprachige Gedichte der achtziger Jahre*, ed. by Hans Bender, Munich, Vienna 1988. (Further references refer only to editors Chiarloni/Pankoke, Conrady or Bender respectively). There is a valid reason for including Bender's anthology, which is

At least two separate anthologies were published in response to Germany's political *Wende*, as well as the separate publications, such as those poetry volumes by Durs Grünbein, which were considered in chapter one. Judging by the reaction to the *Wende*, a poetic interpretation of its meaning might be assumed to be a main impulse for poetry. Anna Chiarloni and Helga Pankoke compiled the first notable "German" anthology after the fall of the Wall, which was given the title *Grenzfallgedichte Eine deutsche Anthologie*.⁵ The title may possibly imply a double meaning, a play on the word *der Fall*, suggesting that the fall of the Wall is in itself a 'case' for satirical interpretation. Alternatively, it may imply that there is such a thing as a *Grenzfallgedicht*, suggesting that a transformation of political events and experiences can be achieved within the form of a poem.

The idea of a *Grenzfallgedicht* further suggests that prose and poetry harbour different motivations. As has been seen in the preceding chapter, Johnson's narrative interpretation of the political border described the reality of Germany's ideological division, but it did not necessarily intend to change this reality, since the aim was to describe how in the early 1960s, the division of Germany was experienced. This does not mean, however, that Johnson's narrative of the political border was not poetically motivated. *Das dritte Buch über Achim* offers sufficient evidence to demonstrate that prose is most successful when it aims to describe the reality of a border in such a way as to coincide with its poetic implications. Johnson developed a narrative of "dazwischen", which enabled the fictional narrator, Karsch, to explore a narrative threshold by working between monologue and dialogue. In poetry, it might be assumed that the intention is primarily to transform the reality of division so that it is experienced in purely aesthetic terms. What this implies, therefore, is a literary transformation of a 'border' into a 'boundary'. This poetic amendment may be

relied on to demonstrate the difference in quality between poems published after the *Wende*, and those published before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

⁵ See Chiarloni/Pankoke, op. cit.

evidenced in this chapter in the quality of those poems, where the barriers of historical time and space can fall, perhaps as an aesthetic parallel to the symbolic collapse of ideological division in Germany.

Although Chiarloni's and Pankoke's *Grenzfallgedichte* anthology was an early reaction to the political *Wende*, the poems it included appeared to be satirical reflections about the end to Germany's division, rather than aiming to find a new way to reflect this event. A *Grenzfallgedicht*, in the transforming sense, implies an immediate fall of the barriers of time and space, so as to release the form of a poem into a boundary that is purely poetically defined. A prose description of border experience may envisage division itself as a real barrier in time and space, but as was seen with reference to Johnson's narrative, the 'border' can still be used as an aesthetic principle for describing reality. The purpose of working with the border in this way is that it becomes an actual tool of transgressing the poetic threshold that exists between the reality of life and the transposition of this reality into the metaphorical context of poetry. The poetic threshold suggests an entrance into a new aspect of experience which is marked by the boundaries of poetry.

From Durs Grünbein's *Grauzone morgens* poems, it can be inferred that he works under the influence of a poetic boundary, which could explain why he needed to seek orientation, since reality, as it were, is poetically changed, devoid of the historical conception of time. There is no apparent point of release from a lyrical context, that is, providing that the poems themselves are encapsulated within a purely poetic field of vision. Grünbein's *Grauzone morgens* poems were found to be within a poetic field, so that even before unification, these poems, at least, were an exposition of a real *Grenzfallgedicht*, in the transforming sense of the word. These particular poems were not anticipating political events in 1989 in a satirical manner. They were concerned with exploring lyrical themes and metaphors. What was achieved was a poetic transposition of reality, part of the process of translating the meaning of historical modes of time into an aesthetic understanding of them, thus integrating this new

understanding of time into the image of a metaphorical landscape. Although all Grünbein's observations were made in the present, they were interrupted by memories from the past. Since this experience of time was purely poetic, there was no release from the impression that Grünbein's lyrical identity was in a kind of quandary between conflicting notions of time. The tension he experienced from working with this kind of quandary was buried in the poetic image of a *Grauzonenlandschaft*.

It can be seen that Grünbein's poetically inspired interpretation of reality had to deal with the double bind of transposing present observations, which were interrupted by memories of the past, into a poetically experienced form. The process of literary transformation that has been alluded to can be regarded as an original part of poetry, because of the different conception of time that operates in this context. The difference between traditional modes of time, - past, present and future -, and a poetic reaction to observations within these categories of time has been summed up by Görner's concept of "aesthetic time":

Das Kunstwerk kann keinen Widerstand gegen das Zeitliche leisten und mildert das Leiden an ihm nicht. Als ästhetische Zeit ist sie des Kunstwerks innewirkende Kraft, die es als zeitlich bedingtes bestimmt.⁶

The idea that the process of literary transformation is itself informed by an "aesthetic time" implies that poetry that is purely poetically motivated intends to translate present, past or future into an "inner" or "aesthetic" experience of time. This conception of "aesthetic time" corresponds perhaps to one axis of an aesthetic border experience, the other, complementary axis of this experience can be accounted for by the apparent change of poetic 'borders' into 'boundaries'. The notion of "aesthetic time" is obliged to a corresponding spatial dimension, such as a situation within the poetic

⁶ See Rüdiger Görner, *Zum Begriff der Ästhetischen Zeit*, (Bemerkungen zu Johannes Andereggs Beitrag 'Zeitlichkeit und Kunstcharakter'). In: *Sprachkunst Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft*, XII/1981, pp. 382-391, here p. 390f. (For Andereggs contribution see, *Zeitlichkeit und Kunstcharakter*, in: *Sprachkunst*, XI/2 1980, p. 163-172).

field or boundary. A combination of "aesthetic time" within an aesthetically defined space therefore supersedes the possibility of existential influences as possible working conditions for poets. Because of the intensity of poetic consciousness, the existential motif of suffering is turned again into a new poetic image. Evidently, the idea of "aesthetic time" takes us further than Ernst Jünger's suggestion that art is only to be regarded as an "hostile" element to reality. Such an interpretation was seen in chapter one of this part of the study only to reach a mid-point between reality and the development of fiction, which means that Jünger's observations and experiences cannot have been translated into a coherent and harmoniously experienced poetic reality.⁷ Furthermore, in its very particular aesthetic space, "aesthetic time" is not necessarily a "timeless", unchanging dimension of art, since art derives its aesthetic form from the translation of different modes of time into a poetic whole. This process is the best possible approximation for describing the meaning of literary transformation: namely that reality is worked upon in the poetic imagination so that it can be experienced within newly defined conceptions of time and space.

An aesthetic border experience therefore derives its poetic characteristics from being within a boundary that represents an entirely literary field of vision, reached by a coincidental act of freeing words from their present, past or future context, so as to find them in a new situation and within a new poetic time.⁸ The question arises as to where satire and rhetoric fits into this poetic time and space. Durs Grünbein's poetic telegram, 12/11/89, implied no lesser distinction between political events and poetic reactions to them: "Komm zu dir Gedicht, Berlins Mauer ist offen jetzt [...] Langsam kommen die Uhren auf Touren, jede geht anders."⁹ What Grünbein achieved in this poem was the satirical rearrangement of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The "Uhren auf Touren" sets a

⁷ See Chapter I, Section 2, pp. 195-208.

⁸ See also Rüdiger Görner, *Zur Poesie der Fähre Oder: Ein Wort setzt über den Sprachfluß*. In: *Poetry, Poetics, Translation. Festschrift in Honor of Richard Exner*, ed. by Ursula Mahlendorf/Laurence Rickels, Würzburg 1991, pp. 131-139, here p. 131: "Jedes Übersetzen von Worten ereignet sich quer zum üblichen Sprachfluß, es widersteht dem bloßen Daherreden."

⁹ Durs Grünbein, 12/11/89, in: *Schädelbasislektion*, op cit., p. 61. (The poem is from a series entitled "Sieben Telegramme", *ibid.*, pp. 59-65. The poem was also referred to on p. 182.)

political agenda that is within a poetic interpretation of time and space. "Jede geht anders" implies that there are different political agendas, as well as a difference between a political and a satirical interpretation of these agendas. The satirical opening line, "Komm zu dir Gedicht", describes a conflict between poetic and political influences. The idea of a conflict between reality and its poetic experience implies, however, that this form of satire may not yet have transgressed the entry mark into a purely poetic context. The satirical element to this poetic telegram derives from playing upon the idea of poetic time and space, but not necessarily entering into this new conception of reality, a supposition that is confirmed by the language itself remaining between influences of a political or purely poetic nature. Thus, being caught on the edge, or periphery of the boundary of poetic time, the satirical form is still an aesthetic border experience, yet this kind of experience is not as refined, nor as whole as its lyrical counterpart.

In relation to other contemporaries, Grünbein's description of a poetic conflict between politically and poetically motivated language is highly representative of the kind of poetry that was published to mark the fall of the Berlin Wall. The satirical form emerges as the typical meaning of a *Grenzfallgedicht*, so that as regards the leading question about poetic inspiration, it seems that in Germany, political influences are still more significant than a purely aesthetically engaged literature.

Since there are few examples of a *Grenzfallgedicht*, in terms of images that have been transformed into an aesthetic interpretation of time and space, reference has to be made in this study to Hans Bender's anthology *Was sind das für Zeiten?* Although it was published before unification, this anthology thematizes the intentions of "aesthetic time" more directly than anthologies that appeared since unification. In Bender's anthology, there are also several examples of a *Grenzfallgedicht*, which do not merely allude to a poetic conflict, but suggest that the validity of poetic transformation is based on a form of transgression from 'border' to 'boundary' experience. It is this particular combination that leads into a new conception of time and space that appears "timeless",

when compared with traditional conceptions of time. Hilde Domin's poem, *Mauern sortierend*, defines this "timeless" context.¹⁰ In the poem, the difference is made clear between political influences that affect poetic consciousness; and the working of poetic consciousness on political conditions. Some of the poem is quoted below in an effort to demonstrate the process of literary transformation:

Mauern sortierend

Kataloge von Blumenzwiebeln
Stoffmuster
Muster
von Mauern.

Die chinesische Mauer
aus Porzellan.
[...]

Die türelosen Mauern
für Hektor
und die Paßlosen.
[...]

Mutter
Mauer
zwischen Geschwistern
jeder auf seiner Seite
Berlin

Unsichtbare Mauer
steiler
härter
länger

die Mauer aus Rücken

"Mauern sortierend" is a statement of intent: to define "Mauern" at the same time as offering variations on this theme. The use of a present participle, "sortierend", shows this intent. "Kataloge von Blumenzwiebeln" defines the contour of a boundary for this poem, so far as the boundary corresponds to the space in which Domin's poetic transposition of reality is to be accomplished. It is in this poetic space that new aspects of meaning are to be defined. The metaphor of flowering plant bulbs suggests that the

¹⁰ Hilde Domin, *Mauern sortierend*, in: Bender, op. cit., p. 35f.

meaning of "Muster/von Mauern" has been pared down to a poetically understood design. Therefore, the apparently narrow straits that are formed by any kind of walls are turned into a much wider conception of space, like that encompassed by the Wall of China, which encapsulates this vast terrain, just as poetic walls encapsulate the world of poetry. By the end of the first main verse, the poem has begun to work on exposing layers of hidden meaning, so the process of transformation can commence.¹¹ At the beginning of the second verse, "Die chinesische Mauer/ aus Porzellan" offers an image that exposes the word "Mauer" to a discrepancy between its real purpose as a division and its ideal form as a means of allowing entry into an imagined poetic enclosure. The idea that walls are in fact "porcelain" introduces a "porous" delicacy that seems to symbolize the entry point into the process of inner transformation, since it is at this point that a different perception of the word "Mauer" is considered.

A new aspect of the idea of walls is that they enable free passage between the two sides that any wall creates. "Die türelosen Mauern" is a line that continues the process of transformation, since at this point, the poem translates present into mythical reality. The poem is not only within a new conception of space, but it is possible to travel back through time, even to a mythical enclosure, as in the bounds of the *Iliad*. The idea of Hector's fate at the hands of Achilles is listed in the same context as images of "Paßlosen". Because we are now in a poetic context, we can make comparisons like this, such as the queue of people, perhaps political refugees waiting to cross the border, who are all mentioned within the same context as Homer's myth.

Alternatively, Domin gives a maternal image as an analogy to understand Germany's political division. This is compared almost to a family feud, with each side of Berlin being part of one identity, yet with both sides being characterized by their individuality.¹² "Unsichtbare Mauer" finally translate the experience of division into a

¹¹ The success of achieving inner transformation can be compared to the "aesthetic time" of this poem.

¹² See further, Eva Strittmatter, *Mein Land*, in: Chiarloni, op. cit., p. 7. ("Ein Organismus mit zwei Herzen. / Wie Siamesenzwillinge [...]"). Also published later, in: Conrady, op. cit., p. 172.

psychological conflict, which leads to the compilation of the poem's list of comparatives, "steiler, härter, länger". This does not mean that Domin's poem ignores a concrete dimension altogether, since the closing line of the poem leaves the image of the individual with the back against the wall. "Die Mauer aus Rücken" acts as a balance to the abstraction of the opening line, "Mauern sortierend." In this sense, it is an example of a *Grenzfallgedicht*, in which barriers of time and space fall as an ongoing transformation in the poem that works towards a new interpretation of time and space in a poetic context.

Incidentally, the entire process can be followed through in temporal shifts. Hence the poem begins in the present tense, "Mauern sortierend". It travels back in time to the Homeric myth. It then returns to the present, but in a different form. "Die Mauer aus Rücken" uses a noun phrase, rather than a verbal phrase. The use of a noun phrase throws the poem back into a present time continuum after its inner excursion to myth. It describes the spatial limits of a poetic boundary that emerges from the coincidental poetic act of translating impulses from the present, exploring these influences in a poetic (here mythical) dimension, and returning to the present, but in a different form. The whole process, however, is achieved within poetic boundaries that can be measured by the grammatical shift from gerundive to substantive, or from verb to noun phrase.

As a demonstration of a transforming *Grenzfallgedicht*, Domin's poem offered a thorough examination of its title-theme from both pragmatic and poetic perspectives. The differences between these perceptions of reality are compared in a poetic list: Domin offers variations on a theme taken from life. Hence the divisive reality of "walls" is overcome, by listing their various types that escape in the flow of the verses. This poem is not typical of most of those that were included in the anthologies which appeared after unification. The poem by Adelheid Johanna Hess, which was included in Conrady's anthology, might be regarded as typical for the style of poetry that appeared after the end of German division. A similar grammatical shift in the poem

Verfehlt directly contrasts with the transforming purpose of Domin's poem.¹³ The title *Verfehlt* indicates that the opposite of transformation will be achieved; and this leads to a summary of a poetic conflict:

Wir
Fanden
Zusammen
[...]
Der Blick
In des andern
Augen
Sah nur
Uns selbst
Unser Reden
Kein Verstehen
Unser Schweigen
Kein Erkennen
Die Mauer
Im verkopften
Herz

The participle "verfehlt", (rather than Domin's gerundive, "sortierend") has already defined the inner time of this poem in a past continuum. The preterit forms "Fanden", and "Sah" define the poem's "aesthetic time" in the past tense. A grammatical shift occurs in the change from participle to a compilation of nouns, which are stacked against each another in rapid succession, "Unser Reden/ Kein Verstehen/ Unser Schweigen/ Kein Erkennen." This creates a sense of confinement, restricting the poem to the contours of a closed monologue situation, within the first person plural ("Wir"). The "failure" of the poem's title-theme suggests a failure to progress from monologue to dialogue. The poem is still caught within the poetic boundary of monologue; it is just that this monologue context does not correspond to a harmonious transformation of time.

As already mentioned, a conflict between poetic and political factors can lead to satire or irony, which arises from a poetic transposition of observations that may intend to transform political impulses, but achieve the opposite result. In this case, a satirical

¹³ Adelheid Johanna Hess, *Verfehlt*, in: Conrady, *ibid.*, p. 89.

reversal, rather than a poetic transformation of reality occurs. The satirical intent is characteristic of the first verse of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's poem, *PRAGMATISMUS*, the relevant part of which is quoted below: ¹⁴

Alles, bloß keine Ahnungen! Wir
wissen doch längst, wo's langgeht:
Überschußanteile, Deko-Fronten,
Mediendeckung, schließlich
das höchste der Gefühle:
[...]

The upper cases of the title refer to a permanent monologue that traps the entire duration of this poem in a dialogue between partners of the same intellectual persuasion: namely pragmatism. This attitude of mind is reflected in the poem that is on the edge of a poetically defined boundary, for it is not possible to break out of a pragmatic focus on life. An attempt at release from monologue to dialogue fails. The temporal adverb "längst", in the superlative form, attempts to change the tense of this poem, but this is too superficial. The tense of the verb "wissen" remains in the present, "Wir/ wissen doch längst, wo's langgeht". This forces the poem to depend on the present. If there were a dialogue in the poem, it would be a conversation within the confines of the first person plural "Wir." Those potential conversation partners outside the boundaries of "wir" and outside the intellectual context reflected in the upper cases of the title must be assumed to be excluded. This creates the poem's irony: "Schließlich/ das höchste der Gefühle". The irony is that a complete change in the situation and conditions of a pragmatic viewpoint is unlikely to occur, because once this viewpoint has been taken on board, it is difficult to break the habit of taking a pragmatic view of things. ¹⁵ Yet only to be beholden to this viewpoint means that each new turn of events leads to unforeseen repercussions, such as outlined in the second half of the second verse:

¹⁴ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *PRAGMATISMUS*, für Cesare Cases. In: Chiarloni, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁵ This was also found in Winkler's "neo-platonic" dialogue context, where the pragmatist, Constantine, was essentially excluded from the conversation between Cosmas and Vigilus, see p. 190.

Alles kommt anders, ganz anders.
Die blaue Vene tickt,
ein rotes Wunder geht auf,
das wir nicht erleben. Die Wunde
des Möglichen blutet noch.

The satire hardly conceals the fact that there has been no change of heart from the pragmatic viewpoint: "Die blaue Vene tickt" represents the hands on a metaphorical clock, which continue to operate, regardless of the static reality that the poem reflects. A word play on "Wunder" and "Wunde" is a last attempt to release this poem from the mental attitude of pragmatism. "Die Wunde/ des Möglichen blutet noch" merely shows that there is no change, and no apparent ability to foresee the conflicts that pragmatic attitudes to reality might themselves cause, because of an inability to change in response to new situations.

The significance of Enzensberger's satire can be appreciated by comparing it with the lyrical quality that is achieved in Hans-Ulrich Treichel's poem, *Grenzübergang*.¹⁶ *Grenzübergang* is another example of a *Grenzfallgedicht*, which was not included in any of the post-unification anthologies: Treichel shows how a poetic translation of time leads to what Görner calls "aesthetic time". The border-crossing in this poem symbolizes a form of transgression beyond the idea of the 'border' as a threshold between pragmatic experience and art, to a new conception of a boundary experience. Hence this poem exacts a more fulfilling organization of time than Enzensberger's satire, since it is able to break out of the poetic conflict between satirical comment and lyrical intent. This is accomplished by transforming the experience of a border-crossing into a harmonious resolution of conflicting reactions to the progress of time. Hence the new organization of time is within poetic boundaries:

Dann verstand ich endlich,
daß die Feuchtigkeit für mich
gemacht war, der kalte Wind und
die steifen Knie. Alles braucht

¹⁶ Hans-Ulrich Treichel, *Grenzübergang*, in: Bender, op. cit., p. 209.

seine Zeit, [...]
und nichts bleibt so frisch wie die
Angst, die noch kommt. Augen auf,

[...] du bist nicht der
erste mit so viel Dreck an den
Schuhen und so wenig Gepäck.

In a similar manner to Domin's *Mauern sortierend*, the first two verses of this poem have already achieved an "aesthetic time". This means that the third verse can begin in a new dimension. The final verse is merely a recollection of the past, which implies that the poetic border-crossing has already occurred in the first two verses of the poem. The past tense is not the definitive form of this poem, since "endlich" qualifies "verstand" and implies that the past continues to effect the present.¹⁷ The lyrical identity of the poem is therefore exposed to the force of time itself: the "border-crossing" is a lyrical journey through layers of time to a purely poetic interpretation of time itself. The moment of the "border-crossing" occurs between the first and second verse, where the predicate, "braucht", is separated from "seine Zeit", which underlines a "border-crossing" from past to present.

This poem is also significant since it might be regarded as another example of a poetic translation of existential factors that have been studied in the first half of this work. As the poem's lyrical identity is exposed to the force of the future, - literally time itself -, a sense of existential *angst* takes over the lyrical "border-crossing". However, existential *angst* is poetically interpreted. In the final verse, there is a translation of monologue into dialogue, - "ich" is translated into "du." If Treichel's poem appears to draw its lyrical character from an existential interpretation of border experience, the existential implications of this border-crossing are overcome. The past, present, and

¹⁷ This creates Romantic continuity which PRAGMATISMUS could only satirize as "keine Ahnungen."

future are infused together within a poetic boundary that defines the limits of a qualitative transformation from monologue to dialogue.¹⁸

Another effective example of a poetic "border-crossing" is given by Heiner Müller's poem *Glückloser Engel 2*.¹⁹ Müller's poem compresses what Treichel interpreted as a systematic border crossing in three stages (past, present and future) into a single poetic image. Müller achieves this reduction by a parody of Walter Benjamin's concept of historical time. The parody on Benjamin's interpretation leads to the poetically ambiguous motif of *Glückloser Engel 2*. What Müller's motif intended can only really be understood by referring to Benjamin's original essay, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. In this essay, Benjamin interprets history as a metaphysical force, by linking this force to the face of an angel:

Der Engel der Geschichte muß so aussehen. Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine Kette von Begegnungen vor *uns* erscheint, da sieht *er* eine einzige Katastrophe [...] Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her, [...] Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft [...] Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist *dieser* Sturm.²⁰

Benjamin's "angel of history" is an apocalyptic vision that translates past, present and future into an essentially pessimistic perception of historical time. It is in the wake of this vision that historical progress follows, - Benjamin describes this as the turbulent winds that come from paradise. What this dualistic "angelic" force foresees is the ambiguity that is created by the progression of time in historical terms. Hence the future is not necessarily regarded as a benevolent force, and is possibly even to be

¹⁸ Both the existential moment and the dialogue form are absent in PRAGMATISMUS.

¹⁹ Heiner Müller, *Glückloser Engel 2*. In: Conrady, op. cit., p. 77. Conrady traces a number of intellectual links to an earlier prose text, Müller's *Der glücklose Engel* situated in the time before 1959, *ibid.*, p. 237. This is further linked to the text by Walter Benjamin. See Walter Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band I, 2, Frankfurt am Main 1991, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, Hermann Schweppenhäuser, with Theodor W. Adorno, Gershom Scholem, pp. 693-703. Müller's parody in the poem is based on Benjamin's interpretation of a painting by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, *ibid.*, p. 697f. *Glückloser Engel 2* and its counterpart *Der glücklose Engel* are both included in Müller's poetry anthology, *Gedichte*, Berlin 1992.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 697f.

regarded as malevolent. It is the unpredictable course of history that is parodied in Müller's *Glückloser Engel 2*. The number "2" implies such unpredictability. The "unhappy" state of the "angel" shows that stability has not yet been achieved: ²¹

Zwischen Stadt und Stadt
Nach der Mauer der Abgrund
[...] die fremde
Hand am einsamen Fleisch
Den Engel ich höre ihn noch
Aber er hat kein Gesicht mehr als
Deines das ich nicht kenne

Müller's poem is consistent with Benjamin's *Engel der Geschichte*: "Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet". The opening line of Müller's poem, - "Zwischen Stadt und Stadt" -, is also looking into the past. However, in his poem, Müller also seems to refer to a conflict between present and past. There is a wholly unrealistic return to the past, which is possible in a poetic context, so that the division of Berlin appears to be reinstated. The meaning of this poetic amendment is that it accentuates the difference between history and aesthetics, so far as each context works with a different conception of time. In this case, the experience of these different modes of time is ambiguous. The preposition "nach" can either mean "after" in a temporal context, or "after" in the geographical sense of "behind". From the opening line of Müller's poem, either of these terms could be relevant; and whichever interpretation is chosen, the idea of a "fremde/ Hand am einsamen Fleisch" suggests

21 Conrady's interpretative essay (op. cit., pp. 173-248) notes: "Immer noch ist Zwischenzeit" with no attempt to interpret the meaning of "Zwischenzeit", other than to suggest Heinz Czechowski's poem, *Die überstandene Wende* as an introductory "motto" for the concept of "Zwischenzeit", *ibid.*, p. 235. Czechowski's poem does not summarize any existential aspect to the meaning of "Zwischenzeit". This poem circles around whatever is meant by "Zwischenzeit", rather than highlighting its significance: "Was hinter uns liegt,/ Wissen wir. Was vor uns liegt,/ Wird uns unbekannt bleiben,/ Bis wir es/ Hinter uns haben. (November 1989)." Heinz Czechowski, *Die überstandene Wende*, in: Conrady, *ibid.*, p. 7.

Müller's *Glückloser Engel 2* describes the quality of the "Zwischenzeit" as a poetic translation of past, present and future, which is included in the single image, the parody of the *Glückloser Engel*. This would have been a more provocative introduction for Conrady's anthology, since the very first line of the poem names and defines the meaning of "Zwischenzeit". See also Rüdiger Görner, *Ausflug in die Quere*, in: *Die Presse*, 9 April 1994.

one side of the border attempting to appropriate the identity of the other.²² In Müller's parody, both the barriers of time and space seem to have fallen. The use of the preposition "nach" appears to show an incentive to return to the past. The "angel" in Müller's poem still symbolizes uncertainty about the progress of time; and it still leads to a state of flux, as in Benjamin's original text. However, the poem regards the past as a poetic idyll, not necessarily as a pessimistic reality.

Müller plays upon the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty that is a present concern after unification, as well as being implied by Benjamin's turbulent interpretation of history as a metaphysical and equally unpredictable force, "Den Engel ich höre ihn noch/ aber er hat kein Gesicht mehr/ als Deines das ich nicht kenne." In his conception of an idyllic reality, Müller also hints at Milton's *Paradise lost*.²³ However, the impression of lost paradise after the fall of the Berlin Wall remains a parody of Benjamin's, not Milton's text. *Glückloser Engel 2* is itself an ambiguous image, so that even though a poetic transformation of reality appears successful, it is difficult to ascertain for certain whether or not this was intended. In the same way as Walter Benjamin's interpretation of history, Müller's *Glückloser Engel 2* leaves an impression of turbulence and uncertainty that is created by the immediate confrontation of present, past and future identity.

Glückloser Engel 2 is finally to be contrasted with the poem, *Berliner Ring*, by Jurek Becker.²⁴ Becker's poem also derives its lyrical identity from a direct confrontation with the force of time. However, time is interpreted not so much as a 'storm from paradise', but as a flow of time that is invested in the image of a river. This

²² It is probable that the lyrical identity in this poem stands on the eastern side of what used to be the Berlin Wall, and that the "fremde/ Hand" stands for the Capitalist western half of Germany trying to unite with the eastern half.

²³ See further Werner Ross, *Klopstock gegen Milton*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 February 1993. In classical literature, poetic border-crossing is perceived by Ross to be natural: "Alle schauten über die Grenzen, um einmal über die Grenzen springen zu können, wie es zuerst gewaltig Goethes *Werther* tat."

²⁴ Jurek Becker, *Berliner Ring, die Bilder von Peter Berndt*. In: Conrady, op. cit., p. 108.

interpretation of time leads to a more harmonious result than was achieved in Müller's poem:

Ufer, Anlegestellen; ein Motiv
der Jahrhunderte, in denen der Landadel
Gedichte schrieb.

Berliner Ring relies on inspirations from paintings, - pictures by Peter Bernd. The effect of this relationship between words and pictures is found in a metaphorical refuge. The first line begins with the metaphor of the river-bank, the "Ufer" is a metaphorical mooring-place for the duration of the poem. Time itself is suspended in the image of the river, whose metaphorical flow encircles the poem and corresponds to the poetic field or boundary that is envisaged for the duration of this poem. Becker alludes to this boundary by placing his poem in a tradition of centuries of poetry writing.²⁵ After leaving this metaphorical mooring-place, the poem can journey through time, without the danger of a turbulent confrontation with history, which emerged in Müller's *Glückloser Engel 2*. In Becker's poem a different result is achieved:

[...] Bilder erzählen
es anders; man brauchte noch einen
Passierschein,
der nur fürs Tageslicht galt. Kaninchen
im Schußfeld; ein Korridor in der Luft.
das Geräusch einer freien Bewegung. Blicke
auf Ufer, Anlegestellen; die Angler auf
diesen Skizzen wollen nichts sagen

The inspiration of painting enables a connection to be made between poetic experience and observations of reality. "Passierschein" introduces the recollection of a forgotten reality, when travel between East and West Germany was only possible with a visa. The reality of death at the German-German border only interrupts the flow of this

²⁵ The Classic reference for the "Ufer"-motif is in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*, when Otilie's departure from the safety of the river bank is seen as the beginning of calamity: "Der Kahn treibt fast in der Mitte des Sees, das Ruder schwimmt fern, sie erblickt niemanden am Ufer [...]" Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften, Werke, Band I*, Munich, Vienna 1981, p. 742.

poem for a moment, since a poetic transformation of time has already been achieved in the opening lines. "Blicke auf Ufer" indicates that the poem has translated perceptions of reality into a metaphorical representation. A notable absence of monologue or dialogue means the fishermen are casting their lines in the river of time.

Becker's poem, as well as that of Heiner Müller, are to be regarded as examples of a *Grenzfallgedicht*, since in both, time is perceived not in historical, but in poetic terms. The inclusion of these poems in Conrady's anthology contrasts with the overwhelming majority of poems in this anthology that describe a conflict between the political reality at the end of Germany's division, and the continuation of political influences in poetry writing.²⁶ As there are few examples, other than those indicated here, of the meaning of a poetic transformation of time to a new aspect of border experience, it can be assumed that political implications of reality are still significant aspects of motivation for German contemporary poetry. A literary border experience implies transforming the meaning of the 'border' into a field, a 'boundary', or a circumference, whose definition and perceived reality are not necessarily interrupted by events occurring in the outside world. The process of literary transformation implies a new conception of time and space, as it has been outlined in this chapter. Enzensberger's satirical motto has been adopted as an indication of the style of poetry that is offered in Germany: "Die Wunde/ des Möglichen blutet noch" is meant to underline that contemporary German poetry has yet to match the end of Germany's political division. This outline of poetry on boundaries suggests that a new form of expression and corresponding poetic consciousness is necessary for the definition of a purely literary conception of border experience.

²⁶ From a total of 130 poems in Conrady's anthology there are few examples of poetic transformation, other than those poems by Müller and Becker, as noted in this chapter. At least nine of the poems in Conrady's anthology appeared in *Grenzfallgedichte*, published by Anna Chiarloni and Helga Pankoke.

Conclusion

1. Summary of essential ideas

The guiding principle for this study has been to inquire into the meaning of the leit-motiv of the 'border' in relation to philosophical thinking and contemporary literary experience. What this work has illuminated is an element of continuity in German thought about initially theoretical implications of a theme that was seen to date back to the Age of the Enlightenment. Amongst those contemporary thinkers who have studied these consequences are, in particular, Karl Jaspers and Helmuth Plessner, whose early philosophical work was shown in the first half of this study to be based upon examining what was seen as the rational principle of the 'border'. For Plessner, this principle was used to measure the authentic conditions of human experience, which were the primary focus of his anthropological theory. For Jaspers, his *existential elucidation* was seen to lead to an informed insight into the meaning of existential borders and their experience in political life. In theoretical terms, the work of Plessner and Jaspers transpired to be of a complementary nature. Although each of them considered aspects of the problems of 'borders' from different perspectives, the results of their enquiries were not seen to contradict one another. Moreover, Plessner's study showed that the existential category of interpreting the 'border' is a valid means of deducing the true nature of its experience.

To describe the value of an existential understanding of border experience, it was important to highlight in this study the methodological significance of the concept of existence, as used by Jaspers, who examined more closely its explanatory potential. The concept of existence was used as a paradigm, to follow the manifold and paradoxical circumstances of 'borders' as an intrinsic part of human consciousness.

Jaspers exposed a vitally important threshold, and stressed what he saw as the interconnection between life and existence, thus distinguishing our experiences of life from our understanding of them. When individuals are under extreme pressure, caused apparently by force of existential circumstance, there is a real chance to take the initiative and change the course of these oppressive conditions. Yet the problem is that in order to attain an awareness about this threshold between practical matters and their underlying meaning, we have to inform, or enlighten ourselves about their existential nature. The question to be asked by the individual is whether a particular situation really is existential, in which case, a change of oppressive circumstances can be initiated.

The reason that Jaspers set such store by the distinct nature of existence was that such a distinct consciousness of life could be used to gain the measure of the apparently perplexing circumstances of our own mortality, suffering, guilt or conflicts of opinion and ideas. The route to the existential nature of such experiences implied, in Jaspers' opinion, an individual response to his philosophy of existence, for he meant to encourage others to develop their own ideas about life, so as to cultivate a more rational environment in which individuals can peacefully coexist. His ethos was that of being generally responsive to the uniqueness of existence, which confronts us with new ideas and experiences, and encourages us even to share sympathetically in the difficulties experienced by others. In this sense, his existential philosophy was really born from a spirit of "otherness", for it was the transcendental implication of his concept of existence that was seen to date back to Kant's view of the significance of human reason during the Age of the Enlightenment. The influence of Kant's thinking led Jaspers to outline, and to explore, the limitations of contemporary experience and knowledge.

The ideological division of Germany for almost forty years was initially perceived by Jaspers in the light of his insight into guilt as an existential *Grenzsituation*. His critique of this 'situation' led him to question the theoretical quality of existential guilt, in order to apply this concept to an analysis of political affairs in

Germany. The nature of his political philosophy was seen to be closely related to the tradition of Platonic thought, with human existence being reflected in the essence of things. Accordingly, Jaspers' interpretation of political life earned its critical disposition, because he was aware how *existential* borders can be confused with *political* borders, if there is no recourse to the ethos of existentially reflected decisions and actions, both those of the individual and of the state.

Jaspers' analysis of political life in post-war Germany, up until the building of the Berlin Wall, plainly observed that democracy can only function because of the actions of the thinking, self-conscious individual in a freely organized state. We ought to be prepared to assume responsibility, Jaspers argued, and to admit openly a sense of moral awareness if individual initiatives are to be successful. The important thing, to Jaspers, was to turn the idea of existential guilt into a self-critical attitude of being accountable for political life. It was seen that whatever Jaspers advocated in his existential philosophy about guilt, in political terms, he argued for a reversal of its meaning. The existentially revised, yet no less enlightened concept of political accountability, (*politische Haftung*), enabled him to realize how openness to others is a matter of individual moral responsibility. Because of this idealism, however, there was a reversal of the method of existential reasoning, which came about in application to his political philosophy. The interconnection between Jaspers' existential and political philosophy was generally maligned and misrepresented by critics, who misconstrued the reason why Jaspers was able to describe the nature of political experience in post-war Germany as existentially invalid. Such an appraisal was facilitated because of the ethos of existential values, rather than the existential dimension *per se*. Jaspers' political critique was equally as astute as that of politicians, such as Willy Brandt, who in 1990 commended Jaspers' political commentary as wholly adequate to describing the really suspect nature of Germany's political division.

To have recognized that Germany's political border was based on an underlying paradox was a unique feature of Jaspers' political commentary. The paradox that he

recognized was evident to him because of his critique of guilt, which he made applicable to the political situation, by revising his existential theory. The revision showed Jaspers that the East German attempt to use guilt as an argument for division was flawed, since it concealed an underlying collective association of East and West Germany: East Germany needed to identify itself "in opposition" to the western half of Germany; and therefore a West German recognition of the 'other' German state would be an initial step towards overcoming the ideological border between them. However, it could not be clearly shown that Brandt's *Ostpolitik* was more than nominally aware of the existential reasoning behind the identification of the paradoxical status of German division, since Brandt seemed to imply that Jaspers advocated its unchallenged continuity. To describe division as existential meant to place the border between the two Germanies in question. Such questioning was not made possible in East Germany until the mass demonstrations in Leipzig, when in October and November 1989, the political slogan "Wir sind ein Volk" seemed symbolic of German unity, because it implied unity on the basis of accountability for all Germans, a basic democratic condition for which Jaspers had argued many years before.¹

A significant part of chapter one in the first half of this study was devoted to dispelling a myth, even perpetuated by Brandt's reappraisal of Jaspers' writing, that existential reasoning intended to support much more than a *de facto* recognition of Germany's internal border. What this study has sought to show is that the term "existential" can be used most effectively when it refers to a specific method of thinking. Indeed, in this study, great effort has been taken to demonstrate the convincing element of Jaspers' existential conception of borders, which is its method of "elucidation" that is crucial to describing "existential" situations of death, suffering, conflict, or guilt. Again, what an analysis of these situations aspired to was to

¹ The evolution of the slogan was from "Wir sind das Volk", to "Wir sind ein Volk", which became "Deutschland, einig Vaterland", quoted after Georg Stötzel, *Entzweiung und Vereinigung Zu äußeren und inneren deutschen Grenzen*, in: *Jahrbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 19, ed. by Alois Wierlacher et. al., Munich 1993, p. 348.

encourage an ability in others to turn the benefits of a rational insight into life into a productive way of thinking, so as to question hitherto unchallenged perceptions of particular existential experiences.

Furthermore, we have sought to deviate from an existential interpretation of 'borders'. The approach may be regarded as in the spirit of Jaspers' own style of thinking, which used the insights into theoretical aspects of reality as a first basis with which to illuminate the meaning of other contexts of experience. Although Jaspers himself did not deem his critique about existential experience applicable to the study of literature, such an application has been made in part two of this study. A valid basis was established, however, for this application by examining Kierkegaard's aesthetic discourse about the 'border', with which Jaspers was familiar, and which exposed an underlying dilemma of choosing between ethical and aesthetic ways of thinking. The psychological effects of this choice were thought by Kierkegaard to be also manifested in an aesthetic context, where the relentless passage of time leads to the will to suspend the flow of time itself. This circumstantial evidence of a transformation of time from its historical to its poetic conception was considered as an indication of a new understanding of border experience: its meaning did not emerge clearly until the final chapter of part two. At this point, the border was viewed as a principle of orientation in literature, and thus implying its aesthetic experience.

A further aim of this work was therefore to pursue *analogies*, as a means to connect the disciplines of philosophy and literature, thus supporting an underlying affinity between these different approaches to studying the implications of borders. An interdisciplinary approach is found to be inherent in the nature of the border theme, since connections and similarities emerge in philosophy and literature that together provide a broader understanding of the border leit-motiv, as evidenced in the cross-references that were used to connect each half of this enquiry.

The application of mutual insights into the abstract and poetic meaning of 'borders' has been made in those cases where authors themselves seem to have been

aware of existential influences and to have attempted to alleviate these influences through their writing. Alternatively, the application between the two disciplines has been made by comparing and contrasting the quality of an existential threshold between life and existence with the quality of a poetic threshold between reality and art. Eugen Gottlob Winkler's work was a pivotal contribution to the interdisciplinary nature of this inquiry, since he counted existential, political, and poetic influences as significant aspects of his literary exploration of the 'line' concept. He thereby confirmed the validity of seeking an outline of an affinity between thought and literature. At the same time, a change in the meaning of 'borders' was observed, from the threshold of worldly existence and its relation to the abstract realm of ideas, to a threshold between experience and its representation in art. If the philosophy of existence is bounded by the history of ideas, the poetic context of life experience is surrounded by a unique poetic consciousness of time and space. This new dimension of boundary experience might also be related to Jaspers' conception of *das Umgreifende*, which was merely alluded to in this study as the ensuing context of thought in which Jaspers latterly considered his entire study of existential circumstances to be situated. This final variation of the border leit-motiv applies in poetic terms alone, where the 'border' is no longer only a guiding principle, but a real threshold or entry point into a purely poetic approach to experience.

2. The dilemmas of tolerance

Shortly before his death, the East German author, Erwin Strittmatter, came to reflect not an existential threshold between life and afterlife, but on the insight into life

that the nearness of his death gave him.² In his book, *Vor der Verwandlung* Strittmatter's reflections about political conditions in East Germany were collated in notes that show how he came to reappraise not only the political function of the East German border, but his own attitude towards it:

Früher wurde die ideologische Grenze, die man sich ausdachte, um, was der eine denkt, von dem, was der andere denkt, zu trennen, durch einen inmitten Deutschlands gezogenen Drahtzaun befestigt. [...] Es währte nicht lange, bis ich merkte, daß ich mich selber hatte einsperren lassen. [...] Nun, da man diesen Draht nicht mehr benötigt, hat man ihn wohl an Kleingärtner verschenkt. Ein Nachbar zäunte damit seinen Spargelgarten ein, und wir haben die einstige ideologische Landesgrenze täglich vor Augen.³

Strittmatter's frank appraisal of the ideological border between the eastern and western sides of Germany was that it was *meant* to alter perceptions of reality on either side. It was intended to enclose East Germany behind a death-trap that actively discouraged openness towards West Germany and was to perpetuate the division between them. As Strittmatter suggested, the new situation in Germany confronts particularly the eastern side of the border with the task of remaining open to its neighbours in the west, without harbouring any intolerance, such as was inevitable in the past days of post-war division. The confrontation with the "true" nature of things, such as in the Platonic sense of the word, means that what occurred in East Germany in 1989 was a real transformation, in terms of a reversal of political fortune from ideological repression to political freedom. Yet this change of fortune left a dilemma of reconciling the old order with the new.

As we have seen, where accepted notions of time and space are poetically reworked, contemporary German poetry, by its very nature, is obliged to be tolerant towards change. Yet there were few signs that the political *Wende* has been matched by a literary *Wende*, for the typical form of a *Grenzfallgedicht* was satirical, and therefore

² Erwin Strittmatter, *Vor der Verwandlung, Aufzeichnungen*, Berlin 1995. See Martin Ahrends, *Der Geschichtensammler*, in: *Die Zeit*, 7 April 1995.

³ Erwin Strittmatter, *Vor der Verwandlung*, op. cit., p. 31.

not indicative of a parallel change in attitude having taken place in Germany since the end of her ideological division. Enzensberger's satirical reworking of pragmatic attitudes showed how they can deny the real need for change. The antagonistic element to his poem derived from the absence of a more tolerant representation of pragmatic experience, such as can be found in lyrical poems, or as in the analogy between poetry and the pictorial arts. Yet if it is only in an aesthetic context that the quality of life experience can be reworked, so that the harmonious resolution of antagonisms makes its quality seem wholly changed; and moreover, if such change is not even discernible in literature, then how is change to be really cultivated in political life?

A closing task is therefore to examine again whether existential reasoning, which Jaspers endeavoured to purge of bias to subjective opinion, is an adequate answer for exacting changes in political life. As Strittmatter's observations have indicated, the end of Communism in East Germany means that Germans on both sides of the ideological divide have been confronted with the possibility to grow acquainted with aspects of identity that hitherto remained at a distance from each other. If the harmonious rapprochement of eastern and western sides of Germany is to continue in the manner that Brandt implied in 1990, this suggests the need to refer to those aspects of thinking that can encourage others to remain open to the untapped potential for understanding other views and opinions. The moral implication of existence was its ethos of change, for as we have seen, behind the term "existential" is an ethical understanding of life that aims to highlight the importance of finding new methods of orientation in changed circumstances. The practical value of Jaspers' philosophy of "existential elucidation" seems not merely restricted to the 1930s when he wrote his study of border experience, but appears equally applicable to the post-war ideological division of Germany, as well as to finding new approaches after the end of her division.

That the underlying nature of division was really existential, is true because the existential category exposed its invalid basis. Existential philosophy, in Jaspers' conception of this, is intent on questioning the values and purposes of ideology. This is

because of the emphasis on the importance of appreciating "otherness", not only a new meeting with others, but with the aspect of difference that possibly lies within each individual. At the same time, it will be remembered that any hint of a new fictional quality of experience from reading Jaspers' philosophy would not only be an anathema, it would also imply an ontology of being that is contrary to the entirety of thinking behind the philosophy of *Grenzsituationen*. It is only within a poetic conception of time and space that entirely new, or "otherworldly" aspects of experience manifest themselves.

Jaspers argued that the best way to arrive at new horizons of experience and knowledge is to test, within the bounds of reason, the limits of what is possible. This approach to life contributes the realization that it is imperative that individuals resolve differences by rational thinking. The argument might not appear obvious to those who really are oppressed by damaging psychological repercussions that are effected by an experience of different tolerance thresholds in political life. If political conflicts remain unquestioned, such as in the period of ideological division in Germany, the extent of the consequences can lead to apparently irreconcilable divisions. Jaspers argued that differences of opinion can be reconcilable, but only if as individuals, we are prepared to leave no stone unturned in the quest to understand that the conditions in which antagonisms are most likely to arise are existential. This crucial aspect of the German post-war philosophical discourse on borders was found to have its enduring representation, not in ideological conflict, but in those cases where the existential conditions of this conflict were reworked and revised in some of the literary texts that this work has selected and studied.

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