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info@skenejournal.it

Daniela M. Schönle*

Theatrical Catharsis and Its Therapeutic Effect. Catharsis in Vienna at the Turn of the Century

Abstract

Around 1900, catharsis became "one of the most frequently discussed topics amongst scholars and an equally popular conversation topic at the Viennese salons" (Ellenberger 1970: 2.655). The so-called 'Viennese discourse on catharsis' emerged as a reaction to Jacob Bernays's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* in which he interpreted the effects of tragedy as a medical procedure. Another important premise for the diffusion and popularization of the topic in the Danube metropolis was the activism of Theodor Gomperz, who not only spread the position of Jacob Bernays amongst philologists, but also succeeded in stirring the enthusiasm of people working outside the Classics departments. In 1893, for instance, the Viennese physicians Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer presented a therapy that was supposed to cure hysteria. Influenced by Gomperz, and following Bernays's assumptions, Freud and Breuer named their treatment "cathartic method". Searching for novel means of expression and insight, and being particularly interested in the description of affective phenomena, the artists of the 'Wiener Moderne' also adopted catharsis as a theme and discussed Bernays's interpretation and Breuer's and Freud's explanation of it in their writings. This article elucidates the foundations of the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis' and shows how contemporary playwrights reacted to the debate, using the works of Arthur Schnitzler and Hermann Bahr as examples.

Theodor Gomperz and the Discourse on Catharsis in Vienna

> In der Hauptsache hat Bernays tausendmal recht, und seine These steht allen Anfechtungen gegenüber unerschüttert und unerschütterlich fest. . . . Die griechische Formel, welche die Definition des Trauerspiels abschließt, besagt nicht 'Reinigung der Leidenschaften', sondern 'von den Leidenschaften' oder noch genauer 'Ausscheidung der Affekte'; es ist eine dem Bereich der Heilkunst entlehnte, mit einem starken Erdgeschmack behaftete Metapher, welche die das Gemüt erleichternde Entladung der Affekte bezeichnen soll. (Gomperz 1905: 119)

* Freie Universität Berlin – daniela-schoenle@gmx.de

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> [Regarding the main issue, Bernays is a thousand times right, and his argument faces all challenges firmly and unshakably. . . . The Greek formula that concludes the definition of Tragedy does not describe a 'purification of the passions' but 'from the passions' or, even more accurately, the 'expulsion of the passions'; it is a metaphor derived from the art of medicine that is accompanied by a strong earthly taste and describes the kind of discharge of affects that offers relief to the mind.]

This quotation is taken from Theodor Gomperz's obituary on Jacob Bernays, who died in 1881. Gomperz, a well-known classicist who was teaching in Vienna at the time, emphasized in his necrology the medical aspects of Bernays's understanding of catharsis that had caused a heated debate several years before.

Turning away from poetic treatises of the eighteenth century, Bernays had liberated catharsis from its entirely moralistic interpretation, viewing it as a medical procedure instead. In his *Outline of Aristotle's Lost Treatise on the Effect of Tragedy* (*Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie*, 1857) he described it as a physical process that can lead to the discharge of the affects by way of their direct excitation. Referring to Aristotle's *Politics* (cf. Bernays 1968: 10), he compared the medical form of catharsis with the effects of theatre.[1] Bernays proved that Aristotle employs the concept of catharsis metaphorically. He also explained that the term was originally used to describe medical as well as religious purification processes, and that Aristotle was the first to transfer it into the realm of aesthetics (cf. ibid.: 6).

Shortly after Bernays's treatise on catharsis came out, Theodor Gomperz, whose philological works as well as his studies in the field of ancient philosophy had turned him into one of the most famous scholars of his time (cf. Gomperz 1865-66, 1883 1886, 1887, 1996), also began to study Aristotle's *Poetics*. From the winter semester of 1877-78 onwards, he repeatedly made it the central topic of his lectures. Gomperz, who was known not only as a scholar but also as a liberal politician, began to publish several treatises on the *Poetics* which were followed by his own translation of the text in 1897. In his rendition Gomperz used Bernays as a basis to support his own translation of "catharsis" as "discharge" ("Entladung", Gomperz 1897: 11) and interpreted the process (in the sense of the *genitivus separativus*) as a liberation from harmful affections. Thanks to his academic merits and his political

[1] Bernays translates Aristotle's essay on tragedy as follows: "[D]ie Tragödie bewirkt durch [Erregung von] Mitleid und Furcht die erleichternde Entladung solcher [mitleidigen und furchtsamen] Gemüthsaffectionen" (Bernays 1968: 21). ["Through the (excitation of) compassion and fear tragedy causes the relieving discharge of such (compassionate and fearful) affectations of the mind"].

prominence Gomperz was received gladly at Vienna's salons. There he consorted with scholars and public servants as well as artists and thus contributed to the exchange of ideas within the Danube metropolis. His examination of the *Poetics*, including Bernays's medical interpretation of the passage on tragedy, directed the attention of Vienna's society to the question of the effects of tragedy. He became the founder of the "Wiener Katharsis-Diskurs", the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis'.[2]

The assumption that art and science were engaged in an increased "introspection" in turn-of-the-century Vienna has long been a *topos* amongst researchers on the subject. As a reaction to the often invoked "situation of crisis" that took place around 1900 (cf. Schorske 1982; Le Rider 1990) and during which the subject experienced the loss of its autonomy, and also as a general response to the rationalization of the world, art and science were looking for new ways of gaining insight (of the human mind). They found it in the exploration of the affects and their epiphenomena. According to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the Danube Metropolis became the "porta orientis . . . for that secret inner orient, the realm of the unconscious".[3] It is not surprising, therefore, that Vienna's artists and intellectuals were intrigued by the phenomenon described by Gomperz and that they became exceedingly interested in the pleasurable experience of an affect-induced purification of the mind. It is no wonder indeed, that catharsis would become "one of the most frequently discussed topics amongst scholars and an equally popular conversation topic at the Viennese salons" (Ellenberger 1973: 2.665).

This article elucidates the foundations of the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis' and shows how the so-called 'Viennese modernists' reacted to the debate.

Sigmund Freud's and Josef Breuer's 'Cathartic Method'.

In 1880 the psychiatrist Josef Breuer began treating the then twenty-one-year-old Bertha Pappenheim. Under the pseudonym of 'Ms Anna O.' her case would make history (cf. Borch-Jacobsen 1996; Reicheneder 1983; Gödde 2009). As is well known, Bertha Pappenheim needed medical attention after falling ill while taking care of her dying father, especially when her condition worsened after his death. She was suffering from all kinds of mental infirmities (anxiety, hallucinations, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, etc.) as well as severe physical symptoms and was even confined to her bed by paralysis

[2] The term was first introduced by Günther Gödde (2009: 88-91).

[3] "[P]orta orientis . . . für jenen geheimnisvollen inneren Ort das Reich des Unbewussten" (qtd in Worbs 1983: 8).

and contraction of the limbs. Moreover, she was afflicted by a nervous cough as well as occasional dumbness and impaired vision. During her illness she lost the ability to communicate in her mother tongue and spoke and understood English only (cf. Breuer and Freud 1957: 21-5). Josef Breuer diagnosed her with hysteria, as it was common around 1900 (cf. Didi-Huberman 1997).

With his groundbreaking research at the Salpêtrière, a mental asylum in Paris, the physician Jean-Martin Charcot had brought hysteria to public attention. Throughout the 1880s his work was dedicated to describing and systematizing its symptoms. Like most physicians of his time he was convinced that hysteria was a hereditary neurological disease. In 1885 Sigmund Freud visited the Salpêtrière for four months as an intern. But he soon began to look for alternative explanations of hysteria that challenged Charcot's hypothesis as well as his attempts at curing it. Instead of further relying on the allegedly hereditary character of the disease, Freud focused on the patients' medical and personal history, especially on any kind of trauma they might have experienced. When Breuer told him about Bertha Pappenheim he rapidly became interested in the case (cf. Freud 1968: 47). Breuer told his colleague that, during the course of his work with Pappenheim, he had noticed that frequent conversation was able to alleviate her symptoms. In his medical report, Breuer mentions that his patient was actually "calm, cheerful" ("ruhig, heiter") and "completely reasonable" ("völlig vernünftig") as soon as she began to "tell her suffering away" (das Leid "weg[zu]erzählen"), thus "getting rid of all psychological stimuli" ("die psychischen Reize fortschaffen") (Breuer 1978: 348-64). Pappenheim herself called this process "chimney-sweeping" (Breuer and Freud 2007: 50, 280) and named the therapeutic process itself the "talking cure" (ibid.: 30, 31, 38, 40). In the course of this treatment both doctor and patient realized that the hysterical symptoms disappeared "as soon as the event which had given rise to [the hysterical phenomena] was reproduced in her hypnosis".[4] The traumatic event that caused Bertha's illness took place at her father's sick bed. While Bertha was drowsing, she noticed that a black serpent was approaching him. Fearing greatly for her father, she failed to remove the animal because her arm had gone numb on the armrest of the chair. In this moment of great distress she tried to utter a prayer, but all she could remember was a "children's verse in English" ("englische[r] Kindervers", ibid.: 39). The confusion of languages as well as the paralysis and anxiety originated in this instance were complemented by further symptoms caused by other forgotten traumata. Only by way of a systematic recollection and through 'talking away' these events could Bertha be freed from them. However, as Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen has shown

[4] "[S]obald in der Hypnose das Ereignis reproduziert war, welches das Symptom veranlaßt hatte" (Breuer and Freud 2007: 55).

in his impressive study, the alleviation of Bertha's symptoms was only of a short duration, as it took years for her health to become permanently stable again (Borch-Jacobsen 1996). Upon his return to Vienna, Freud began to collaborate with Breuer and to test the latter's newly discovered method on his own patients (cf. Freud 1893: 186). Ultimately he took the leadership in developing a theory that was first published in the 1893 issue of the journal *Neurologisches Zentralblatt* under the title "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication" ("Vorläufige Mitteilung über den psychischen Mechanismus hysterischer Phänomene"). An extended explication of Breuer's and Freud's findings, supplemented with five case studies, was published in 1895 in their *Studies on Hysteria* (*Studien über Hysterie*), where they argued that hysteria was caused by psychological traumata (cf. Breuer and Freud 1957: 3); a clinical case would emerge, they argued, if dramatic life events were not treated with an appropriate affective reaction (cf. ibid.: 8) and when the affects related to those events were instead suppressed (cf. Freud 1893: 193). In their opinion, the trauma would turn into an unconscious yet virulent memory provided that the person in question was, in the moment of affliction, in a "hypnotic state" (Breuer and Freud 1957: 28). The "excitation" ("Erregung") would then be "converted" and subsequently re-emerge as a hysterical symptom (ibid.: 206). This means that the "sum of excitation" ("Erregungssumme", Freud 1894: 63) of the traumatic experience would be "transposed into the body" ("ins Körperliche umgesetzt", ibid.) and the symptom would thus become the symbol of the suppressed injury. If the therapist was able to re-discover, with the help of hypnosis (Breuer and Freud 1957: 3), the 'missing link', i.e. the piece of memory that connected the symptom with the trauma, the unexpressed affect could retroactively be "abreacted" (Freud 1893: 195). In this process it was important that "the physical process which originally took place [was] repeated as vividly as possible; [that it was] brought back to its *status nascendi* and then given verbal utterance".[5] Because "[r]ecollection without affect" ("affektloses Erinnern") almost invariably produces no effect" ("fast immer wirkungslos"). The doctors named their cure the "cathartic method" ("kathartische Methode") (ibid.: XXIX, 108-9 ff.).

Like Gomperz, Breuer and Freud used Bernays's interpretation as a basis for developing their notion of catharsis, which bears strong similarities to the cathartic process of tragedy and ancient cult as it is depicted by classicists (cf. Gödde 2009). According to Freud and Breuer the "trapped affects" ("eingeklemmten Affekte") that they had discovered in their studies on hys-

[5] "[D]er psychische Prozeß, der ursprünglich abgelaufen war, . . . so lebhaft wie möglich wiederholt, *in statum nascendi* gebracht und dann 'ausgesprochen'" (Breuer and Freud 1957: 6).

teria (Freud 1910: 13) have to be discharged by re-awakening the traumatic experience and the "accompanying affect" ("begleitenden Affekt", Breuer and Freud 1957: 6) in order to repeat them "as vividly as possible" ("so lebhaft als möglich", ibid.), and eventually articulate them. This process, in turn, is strongly reminiscent of Bernays's representation of the "treatment of one under trepidation" ("Behandlung eines Beklommenen") and unable to suppress the "element oppressing him" ("ihn beklemmende Element"). This process was supposed to "excite" ("aufregen") and "force out" ("hervortreiben") that element (Bernays 1968: 16). "[B]oth are based on a concept of emotional 'release' through affective discharge", as Sanford Gifford describes the intersections between the two processes (1977: 179); he also adds that both depended on the arousal of affects before the symptoms were alleviated or calmed down (cf. ibid.: 179-80). In accordance with Bernays, Freud and Breuer interpreted catharsis as a process that liberated man from pathological states of mind caused by excessive excitation.[6]

Research on this subject has often speculated as to why Breuer and Freud became interested in catharsis in general and how Bernays's interpretation evolved in particular. Scholars such as Juan Dalma, Henry F. Ellenberger as well as Albrecht Hirschmüller, among others, have tried to explain this with the fact that Freud and Bernays were related (cf. Dalma 2004; Hirschmüller 1978; Ellenberger 1973). However, there is no immediate connection between Breuer's and Freud's interest in the "theory of catharsis [sic]" (Freud 1926: 300) and the fact that the latter's wife, Martha, was a niece of Bernays. There is no proof that Freud was personally acquainted with Bernays or that any direct exchange between them ever occurred. The fact that the two doctors contributed to the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis' might rather be explained by their close connection with Theodor Gomperz, with whom Freud had been in contact ever since he translated a volume of Gomperz's edition of John Stuart Mill's writings (Mill 1880). Breuer, on the other hand, was acquainted with them as their family doctor (cf. Hirschmüller 1978: 51, 179, 208). An elaborate exchange of letters between Josef Breuer and Theodor Gomperz, in which they talk about the limits and the effects of catharsis in theatre and in practical therapy, testifies to the intensity of their relation (cf. Langholf 1990).

On 2 February 1896, a review of *Studies on Hysteria* appeared in the Viennese daily newspaper *Morgen-Presse*. The author was Alfred von Berger, a

[6] The difference between the two approaches is that, in the best case, Breuer's and Freud's patients were permanently released from their suppressed affects, whereas the "psychological catharsis" (Bernays 1968: 65-6), as it was described by Bernays and as it occurred in the context of cult and theatre, could "only effect a temporary appeasement, never a permanent reconciliation" (ibid.).

professor of Aesthetics at the University of Vienna who would later become the director of the famous Burgtheater. He published an emphatic acclamation of Freud's and Breuer's work that was entitled *Chirurgie der Seele* ("Surgery of the Soul"). Nevertheless, Berger stated in a lapidary way that the two doctors had merely put down on paper an "age-old piece of poetic psychology" ("Stück uralter Dichterpsychologie", Berger 1896: 1; Urban 1978: 20). He exemplified his claim with a reference, among others, to Macbeth, who in his days would have been diagnosed with a "safeguard neurosis" ("Abwehrneurose", Berger 1986: 1); furthermore, he mentioned Goethe's description of the cure of Orestes, which, he argued, was nothing less than a successful "cathartic cure" ("Katharsiskur", ibid.). For Berger the attraction of the *Studies* did not consist in their originality, but in the realization that researchers and artists alike were connected in a "communal bond" as they struggled to uncover the "secrets of the human soul" ("Geheimnisse der Menschenseele", ibid.).

However, an analysis of contemporary publications makes it clear that there were significant differences between artists and scientists in the way they viewed this "internal world" and the world of affect in general. Psychoanalysis, being still young at the time, was primarily concerned with the potential dangers of certain mental states (cf. Jensen 2008) and investigated the effects of affect suppression and unsatisfied drives. The Viennese modernists, on the other hand, believed in the heuristic potential of such *états d'âme* ("Seelenstände"), which is why they were quite keen to feel as much as possible (cf. Fliedl 2006; Neymeyr 2007). For this reason, Viennese writers were sceptical about the medical or 'separatist' view of catharsis as it was popular around 1900 and began to develop their own perspective on the matter. Based on the writings of Bernays, Breuer, and Freud they introduced an interpretation of catharsis that promoted a positive view of affect which, using examples from the works of Arthur Schnitzler und Hermann Bahr, will be explicated in the following section.

Therapeutics as Theatre: Schnitzler's *Paracelsus*

Arthur Schnitzler, a trained doctor in his own right, was one of the first writers to turn the medical view of catharsis, especially the 'cathartic method' developed by Breuer and Freud, into a dramatic subject of his work. In *Paracelsus*, a one-act play published in 1898 and first performed in 1899, the famous physician meddles deliberately with the life of the self-confident Cyprian by insinuating that his wife has been unfaithful to him.

The action of the play is set at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Thirteen years after leaving Basel, Paracelsus returns to his home town as a

popular, albeit controversial physician with questionable methods. He draws some attention to himself by hypnotizing sick people on the market place of the town, thus relieving them of their suffering. During one of his public consultations he is discovered by Cyprian, a young armourer who recognizes him as a former rival in the suit of his beloved wife Justina. With much confidence he invites Paracelsus to his home in order to impress him with his standard of living and embarrass him by showing off his wife's devotion. Paracelsus reacts with a provocation: he hypnotizes Justina and makes her believe that she has been unfaithful to Cyprian. Consequently, Cyprian's view of the world begins to falter and when Paracelsus threatens him to never release her from this phantasm, Cyprian begs for mercy. Eventually, Paracelsus frees Justina from the suggestion of the (imaginary) affair. However, during a second hypnosis session he implants the suggestion that, until the end of the day, she can speak nothing but the truth. Awakening from the hypnosis she confesses to every man present that thirteen years before she was in love with Paracelsus. She also tells them that she is now committed to a life with Cyprian and no longer has any feelings for Paracelsus. Following this revelation, the doctor announces that he is going to leave the city. At the same time Cyprian declares that he is healed once and for all from his excessive pride.

In his play, not only does Schnitzler describe the cure of mental illness by means of hypnosis (cf. Ellenberger 1973), as was popular around 1900 especially with regard to hysteria, but he also introduces the basic features of the 'cathartic method' that had been developed as an alternative to hypnosis. Thus Paracelsus asks Justina:

> Scheut Ihr Erinnerung?
> Man kann ihr besser nicht die Schauer nehmen,
> Als wenn man sie zum Leben wieder weckt.
> (Schnitzler 1962: 477)

> [Do you fear your memory? / One cannot better rid you of your fear / Than when one wakes the past to life again. (Schnitzler 1913: 100)]

Justina, on the other hand, turns to her allegedly cuckolded husband, saying: "Let all now be told. 'Tis for the best" (ibid.: 114). In her fine piece on Schnitzler's conception of catharsis, Elsbeth Dangel-Pelloquin states that "Hypnosis", as Schnitzler uses it in this play, is supposed to "suppress emotions and brings to light phantasies" instead, "thereby following its use by Breuer and Freud" (Dangel-Pelloquin forthcoming, cf. Worbs 2009).

Being a member of the "communicative community" ("Kommunikationsgemeinschaft", Mayerhofer and Zand 2000: xii) of the 'Viennese modernists', Schnitzler was involved in the debates that were unfolding at the time. He

knew about the 'discourse on catharsis' as initiated by Gomperz. Thanks to his position as editor of the *Internationale Klinische Rundschau*, an international medical journal, he was aware of the ongoing debate on the treatment of hysteria. Furthermore, as a practicing physician who was specialized in the treatment of mental illnesses, he was familiar with the practice of hypnosis (cf. Schnitzler 1988; Müller-Seidel 1997). In his early play *Anatol* (1893), Schnitzler already introduced a critical perspective on this form of therapy and called into question the efficiency of the treatment as well as the position of power granted to the therapist (Stiles 2004-05, 64ff.). In the aftermath of the publication of Freud's and Breuer's *Preliminary Communication* as well as its review by Berger, Schnitzler had also begun to think about the 'cathartic method'. His ideas regarding this issue are expressed in *Paracelsus*. The play reflects the period's research positions on hysteria and represents precisely "the contemporary psychiatric controversies as well as a paradigm change in the research on hysteria", as Konstanze Fliedl shows in her fundamental study on Schnitzler (Fliedl 1997: 87).

The historical Paracelsus (1493-1551), who served as a model for the protagonist of Schnitzler's play, provoked doctors as well as apothecaries by questioning on their authority with vehemence and by casting doubt on their conception of medicine in general. His unconventional conduct culminated during the time he served as the town physician of Basel, when he publicly burned a textbook of Scholasticism in 1527, a provocation that elicited vehement attacks against his person and compelled him to leave the city (cf. Classen 2010: 1-20).

The counterpart of Paracelsus's character in Schnitzler's play is a town physician named "Doktor Copus". Schnitzler lets Paracelsus emerge as the winner of the argument; at the end of the play Copus is even forced to communicate a job offer from the city council to his opponent, which Paracelsus eventually turns down.

Oliver Pfohlmann recognizes in this setup a literary parallel to the controversy that emerged between Sigmund Freud and Theodor Meynert (cf. Pfohlmann 2006: 130) around 1900. At that time Freud was still a disciple of Charcot and was just about to turn into the representative of a new theory of hysteria. He had therefore already fallen from the grace of the so-called 'Vienna School', where he had received his education. Whereas the Viennese doctors were fixated on the physiological aspects of the disease, Freud attempted, independently of Charcot, to comprehend the phenomenon from a psychological point of view. As a consequence he lost the support of the university's medical school and was compelled to conduct his research on his own (cf. Worbs 1983: 205).

Schnitzler had a detailed knowledge of Freud's position. During his time as an editor of the *Internationale Medizinische Rundschau*, he reviewed

Freud's translations of the writings of Charcot and Bernheim and thereby supported him in his dispute with Vienna's medical school (ibid.: 196), where he had received his own education (Nehring 1977: 183; Stiles 2004-05: 61). As is well known, Freud regarded Schnitzler as a kindred spirit whose writings reflected his own ideas (cf. Freud's letters to Schnitzler: Freud 1955: 95-106, esp. 95-6, letters from 1906 and 1922; cf. Stiles 2004-05; Nehring 1977). In 1899, after a visit to the theatre, Freud writes to a friend: "I was recently quite astonished, as I was watching Schnitzler's *Paracelsus*, as to how much such a poet knows of these things" (Farese 1999: 83).

A closer look at the play makes Freud's praise seem astonishing, because *Paracelsus* is saturated with criticism regarding the doctor's methods; indeed, what Schnitzler accomplishes in *Paracelsus* is much more than the mere transference of psychiatric knowledge into literature. The special appeal of the play lies in the way it problematizes this particular form of knowledge. Even though Schnitzler has Paracelsus emerge victoriously from his dispute with Copus, he abstains from representing him as a shining hero. Instead he reveals the unethical practice of his protagonist. In the case of Justina, for example, the doctor does not actually use hypnosis for the purpose of curing her from hysteria but to the contrary he uses it to cause hysteria in her. He excites fake memories in the girl and pretends to be able to help with its 'abreaction'. Paracelsus' dubiousness is increased by the fact that he suddenly fears to lose control over the game, even though he initiated it himself as a shady master of ceremonies:

> Schlägt mir überm Haupt
> Des eignen Zaubers Schwall mit Hohn zusammen?
> Und wirren sich die Grenzen selbst für mich?
> (Schnitzler 1962: 490)

> [Doth the ironic flood / Of mine own magic close over mine head? / And the dividing limits e'en for me / Run into one another? (Schnitzler 1913: 115)]

A critical reflection on hypnotic suggestion and the 'cathartic method', as constitutive of the play's plot, also occurs at the formal level since Schnitzler devised the hypnosis experiment conducted by Paracelsus as 'play-within-the-play'. Adopting the function of a director, Paracelsus forces Justina into a private theatrical performance to be carried out in front of Cyprian. Schnitzler thereby alludes to the fact that the pre-Freudian therapy of hysteria was often performed in front of an audience, especially by Charcot who regularly exhibited his female patients during his *leçons du mardi*. Through this double construction Schnitzler is not only able to cast a critical look on the methodology of the 'Paris school', but he also calls into question the medical concept of catharsis of the time. Through the content of the 'play-within-the-play',

Paracelsus' promise of a cathartic experience is exposed and revealed to be a lie. Justina's hope to relieve herself of her sinful past fails because the painful memories invoked by the doctor are not actually her own. Cyprian, on the other hand, being the audience of the 'play-within-the-play', cannot escape a certain cathartic experience. Within Schnitzler's comedy, Justina's husband experiences a tragedy. By means of his theatrical production Paracelsus makes him pass through the emotions of fear and compassion. The outcome of this *tour de force* is not a medical form of catharsis but moral purification. Freed from his arrogance Cyprian utters the following epilogue:

> Ich weiß nicht, ob er Gutes wirken wollte,
> Doch war es gut, drum wollen wir ihn loben.
> Ein Sturmwind kam, der hat auf Augenblicke
> Die Tore unsrer Seele aufgerissen,
> Wir haben einen Blick hineingetan…
> Es ist vorbei, die Tore fallen zu. –
> Doch was ich heut gesehn, für alle Zeit
> Soll's mich vor allzu großem Stolze hüten.
> Es war ein Spiel, doch fand ich seinen Sinn; –
> Und weiß, daß ich auf rechtem Wege bin
> (Schnitzler 1962: 498)

> [I know not if he wished benevolence. / Yet was it good, and therefore will we praise him. / A whirlwind came, who for a moment hath / Torn open all the portals of our souls, / And we have looked within us for a while… / 'Tis over, and the portals close again - / Yet what I saw to-day, for future time, / Shall hold me safe from all excess of pride. / It was a play, yet I did find its sense, / And know that I shall keep the right road hence. (Schnitzler 1913: 123-4)]

The catharsis of Cyprian is reminiscent of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Instead of describing the dramatic art as a therapeutic method he represents the theatre as a place of *paideia*. In contrast to other trends of the time, Cyprian's purification experience is pre-Freudian, even pre-Bernaysian: in his case there is no 'abreaction' of suppressed affects, as he experiences a moral purification instead. He emerges from the play as a better person, just like Lessing had demanded (Lessing 1973: 592-6, esp. 595).

What Schnitzler wants to tell us here is that no therapy is necessary in order to be cured. Due to his practical experience as a doctor, Schnitzler, at least in *Paracelsus*, turns out to be a sceptic of therapy and this is why Justina does not experience a medical form of catharsis, because she is free of her former feelings already and does not need to be liberated from them. Without any psychotherapy, free from any fear of social consequences and only compelled by the truth, she reveals that the state of her feelings has changed over the years. She simply states that she does not love Paracelsus

anymore. And by doing so she liberates herself from the role previously assigned to her; she unties herself from Cyprian's proprietary claims and at the same time denies Paracelsus any control over her emotions. And what about Paracelsus himself? He does not require catharsis and consequently does not receive any. He does not suffer from any suppressed affects because he reacts directly to Cyprian's provocation by plotting revenge. As Freud and Breuer write in their *Preliminary Communication*, revenge is an "appropriate reaction" to an emotionally charged event (Breuer and Freud 1957: 8). The immediate 'acting out' prevents the affect involved from becoming pathological. Paracelsus' behaviour might be immoral, but regarding the affective outcome it is flawless. Berger also mentions the positive effects of revenge in his review of the *Preliminary Communication*:

> Die Entladung kann aus verschiedenen Ursachen unterbleiben, die Natur des Traumas kann eine entsprechende Reaktion ausschließen, die socialen Verhältnisse können sie unmöglich machen – wie viel Nervenübel sind wol dadurch in die Welt gekommen, daß unsere öffentliche Ordnung eine ausgiebige persönliche Rache für erlittene Beleidigung in den meisten Fällen verhindert! (Berger 1896: 3)
>
> [For various reasons the (affective) discharge may be unnecessary; the nature of the trauma may exclude a respective reaction, the social conditions could make it impossible – how much mental suffering must have come into the world because, in most cases, our public order prevents the excessive personal revenge of indignations suffered!]

In this respect it is an advantage that Paracelsus is a social outcast who does not feel compelled to adhere to social regulations.

To sum up, we have seen that Schnitzler discusses in his *Paracelsus* the different methods of treating hysteria. Even though he turns against the medical concept of the 'Vienna School', he is just as sceptical of modern forms of therapy. Thus, he problematizes both hypnotic suggestion and the 'cathartic method' through the form and content of his play. Schnitzler's approach is particularly remarkable when it comes to his criticism of the 'cathartic method'. He is is one of the first poets who refers to this modern form of therapy only in order to demonstrate its fallibility, thus committing to a traditional concept of catharsis.

Theatre as Therapy: Bahr's *Dialogue on the Tragic* (*Dialog vom Tragischen*)

Hermann Bahr had an exceptional position amongst artists and creatives in Vienna. Being the self-proclaimed leader of the 'Jung-Wien' ('Young-Vien-

na') group as well as a professed "man of the day-after-tomorrow" ("Mann von Übermorgen", Bahr 2011: 2), he had the ambition to recognize fashionable cultural phenomena before they became acceptable and to overcome them before they could become customary. He acted as a catalyst and multiplier of new ideas. In his writings on cultural theory, as well as in his feuilletons, he accumulated current discoveries from the spheres of art and science. Connecting those ideas to one another, he created new forms of knowledge that shaped the various discourses of his time. Bahr's contribution to the discussion of catharsis was particularly productive.

The self-proclaimed "Herr von Adabei" (Bahr 2011: 2) joined the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis' at a rather late point in time, which was untypical of him. Half a decade after Berger had recommended the 'cathartic method' to the poets, five years after Gomperz's translation of the *Poetics*, and four years after the publication of Schnitzler's *Paracelsus*, Bahr eventually started making notes on catharsis in his sketch books, headed by the words "Credo/Eros" (Bahr 1997: 83-131). There are no reasons to be found for such an astounding delay in one who may have been the 'most modern amongst the modern'.

In his sketch book Bahr first collected his thoughts on the meaning of the purification process and the proper translation of the Aristotelian passage on tragedy. In one of the passages from "Credo/Eros" Bahr compares different translation possibilities and wonders:

> heißt τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν eine Reinigung, die mit diesen Affecten [geschieht], (Lessing)
> oder eine Reinigung = Befreiung von ihnen, (Bernays) ("Entladung" Gomperz)
> oder kann es auch heißen:
> eine Reinigung, Erleichter[un]g der Seele, wie sie mit dem Durchmachen dieser Affecte verbunden ist? (meine Vermutung) Entladung des Zuschauers, wie sie sonst nur durch die Affecte selbst geschieht. (Bahr 1997: 83)

> [does τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν mean that these affects experience a purification (Lessing) or that there is a purification = liberation from them (Bernays) ("discharge" Gomperz) or could it also mean: a purification, liberation of the soul as it is related to the experience of these affects? (my supposition) discharge in the spectator as it otherwise happens only through the affects themselves.]

Like many interpreters of catharsis before him, Bahr is particularly interested in the various translations of the genitive construction τῶν παθημάτων. If one reads it as a *genitivus objectivus*, it means that tragedy purifies the passions themselves. If one interprets it as a *genitivus subjectivus*, it means that the purification happens through the passions. If a third possibility, the *genitivus separativus*, is considered, it means that the spectator is liberated from

his passions. In the passage cited above, not only does Bahr cast doubt on the objective variation preferred by Lessing, but he also questions the possibility of the *separativus*, an interpretation which, based on Gomperz, had become a "dogma" in Vienna (Egger 1883: 3). Instead, he boldly advocates the unpopular third possibility of the *subjectivus*. In the works following the "Credo/Eros" manuscript, he expands this idea and begins to search for a definitive answer to the questions related to catharsis.

The text that best reveals Bahr's interest in catharsis is his *Dialogue on the Tragic* (*Dialog vom Tragischen*), which first came out in July 1903 in the newspaper *Neue deutsche Rundschau* and was later published, along with other articles on the subject, by Fischer Verlag in Berlin. Bahr chose a form of representation that he described as a "form hovering between art and science",[7] namely the dialogic form, which was very popular in the years around 1900 (cf. Sprengel 2004: 727). Under the guidance of a Master, a narrator (Erzähler), a doctor, a young man, an artist, and a grammarian discuss the nature of the tragic and the effects of dramatic art. The first part of the dialogue, which comprises three parts in all, is dedicated to the idea of theatre as a kind of therapy as well as to the related phenomenon of catharsis. Bahr stages his idea about the emergence and history of this concept by having each participant in the discussion represent a specific stage of its reception (e.g. Lessing's moralistic and Bernays's medical interpretations). Then, he moves on to a psychoanalytical reading of catharsis. He writes:

> Die Tragödie will in der Tat nichts anderes, als jene beiden Ärzte tun: sie erinnert ein durch Kultur krankes Volk, woran es nicht erinnert sein will, an seine schlechten Affekte, die es versteckt, an den früheren Menschen der Wildheit, der im gebildeten, den er jetzt spielt, immer noch kauert und knirscht, und reißt ihm die Ketten ab und läßt das Tier los, bis es sich ausgetobt hat und der Mensch, von den schleichenden Dämpfen und Gasen rein und frei, durch Erregung beschwichtigt, bildsam zur Sitte zurückkehren kann. (Bahr 1904: 23-4)
>
> [Tragedy does not want to achieve anything but precisely that which those two doctors do: it reminds a people debilitated by culture of that which it does not want to be reminded of: of those wicked passions that it conceals; of the formerly wild man, who, though playing the educated man now, still crouches and gnashes; and he tears his shackles and releases the animal, until it has let off steam and until man, now freed and purified from those creeping fumes and vapours, appeased by way of excitation, can dutifully return to righteousness.]

Bahr takes catharsis, which had been separated from the question of its poet-

[7] "[Z]wischen Kunst und Wissenschaft schwebende Form" (Bahr 1997: 111).

ic effects by Breuer and Freud, back to the theatre – after identifying the parallels between the 'cathartic method' and Bernays's medical interpretation of catharsis. This is how he builds his argument that theatre is a sanatorium for hysterics, a place where suppressed memories can be re-awakened and repressed affects can be acted out. His way of thinking is splendid, but not original. In 1897 an article by Alfred Berger appeared as a supplement to Theodor Gomperz's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. It was entitled *Truth and Error in Aristotle's Theory of Catharsis* (*Wahrheit und Irrtum der Katharsistheorie des Aristoteles*, Berger 1991: 128-56). Motivated by his earlier review of the *Studies on Hysteria*, Berger further developed his reflections on the relationship between psychoanalysis and "poetic psychology" ("Dichterpsychologie", Berger 1896: 2), and, seven years before Hermann Bahr, he elaborated a psychotherapeutic conception of tragedy.

Bahr was aware of Berger's work. In notations dating from 1902 he refers specifically to Berger and lists him alongside other commentators of the *Poetics*, namely Lessing, Bernays, and Gomperz (Bahr 1902). In the *Dialogue on the Tragic*, on the other hand, Berger is not mentioned at all. It is impossible to explain why Bahr would obfuscate Berger's contribution to the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis', thus presenting himself as the initiator of a psychoanalytical interpretation of the tragic. This is particularly astounding if one considers that both worked together and were part of the same social circles. It should be mentioned, however, that Bahr's 'silence' is not limited to the case of Berger as it was indeed rather characteristic of the way he handled his sources. It is quite typical of Bahr's work attitude to appropriate the ideas of others without properly delineating the boundaries between his own and other people's thoughts. In the *Dialogue on the Tragic*, for example, not only does Bahr reference the *Studies on Hysteria* explicitly, but he also quotes them several times without identifying Breuer's and Freud's writings as his source (Bahr 1904: 25-7; Breuer and Freud 1957: 8, 211). Breuer and Freud probably forgave the error. At least so it would appear when Breuer writes in the *Studies* that, if a science is advancing swiftly, one cannot always

> vermeiden, daß er eine Menge Gedanken anderer ausspreche und wiederhole, die eben aus dem Individualbesitze in den Gemeinbesitz übergehen. . . . So möge es entschuldigt werden, wenn hier wenige Zitate gebracht werden und zwischen Eigenem und Fremdem nicht streng unterschieden wird. (Breuer and Freud 2007: 203-4)

> [avoid repeating a great quantity of other people's thoughts which are in the act of passing from personal into a general possession. . . . I hope, therefore, that I may be excused if few quotations are found in this discussion and if no strict distinction is made between what is my own and what originates elsewhere. (Breuer and Freud 1957: 186)]

The *Dialogue on the Tragic*, however, is not remarkable because it reiterates the ideas of others, but first and foremost because it develops them and takes them a decisive step further than Freud, Breuer, and Berger. While Bahr's predecessors understood catharsis as a means of curing individual suffering, Bahr construes it as a driving force of phylogenesis. As Konstanze Fliedl states in an article entitled "Aesthetic Masochism" ("Ästhetischer Masochismus"), Bahr thus initiates a "novel turn" ("neue Wendung") (Fliedl forthcoming) within the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis'. By considering the social implications of catharsis he expands the debate, which had previously focused primarily on aesthetics, psychology, and medicine, by adding an anthropological dimension to it.

Large parts of the preliminary studies to the *Dialogue on the Tragic* are already dedicated to catharsis as a regulative principle of society and to the civilizing function of an institutionalized way of discharging affects (cf. Bahr 1997: 101-7). Using Freud's and Breuer's hypotheses as a point of departure, in "Credo/Eros" Bahr develops a "three-part mechanism consisting of instinct suppression, hysteria, and a salutary discharge" (Fliedl forthcoming), which he will later publish in the *Dialogue on the Tragic*. In his preliminary studies he already states that the "whole development of culture" ("alle Bildung von Cultur") is unavoidably accompanied by the "expulsion of nature" ("Austreibung der Natur", Bahr 1997: 104) and that all advances of civilization are based on the suppression of "certain affects" (ibid.: 106). In the *Dialogue on the Tragic* he proceeds to explain at length that society occasionally needs to act out its restrained affects in order to prevent them from becoming harmful (cf. Bahr 1904: 23-4). Tragedy, he argues, was invented for the purpose of controlling precisely this process. Through the feeling of compassion for stage characters, the suppressed affects could be recognized and acted out (cf. ibid.). That way, an uncontrolled ab-reaction of affects through actual deeds would become superfluous, he concludes (cf. ibid.: 25). According to Bahr this development originates in antiquity. The Greeks invented tragedy, he claims, in order to create an institutionalized means of taming socially undesirable drives. Regarding this matter, the *Dialogue* says:

> Die ganze Kultur der Griechen . . . war rings von Hysterie beschlichen und umstellt. Wir sehen sie überall lauern, wir hören sie überall röcheln. . . . Aber da hatte die Nation noch die Kraft, eine Anstalt zu erfinden, die ihr half, ihre Hysterie auf die größte Art, abzureagieren'– die Tragödie. (Bahr 1904: 23).
>
> [The entire culture of the Greeks . . . was surrounded and crept upon by hysteria. We could see it lurking everywhere, we could hear it rattle in every place. . . . But at that time the nation still possessed the power to invent an institution that would help it to 'ab-react' its hysteria in the grandest of ways: tragedy.]

Bahr's remarks on the pathology of the Greeks were mainly inspired by Jacob Burckhardt's *History of Greek Culture* (*Griechische Kulturgeschichte*) (1898-1902) and Erwin Rohde's *Psyche* (1890-94). Both Rohde and Burckhardt are representatives of an anti-classicist reception of antiquity, which had become more and more popular since the mid-nineteenth century and probably had its most prominent advocate in Friedrich Nietzsche. The works of these authors focus on a version of antiquity that they imagine as cruel, irrational, wild, and unrestrained, an antiquity that is struggling with its passions and is therefore fundamentally different from the Hellenistic antiquity that Winckelmann had associated with "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" ("edle Einfalt, stille Größe", Winckelmann 1948: 20). Bahr was particularly impressed by the fourth part of Burckhardt's *History of Greek Culture*, in which the latter talks about the occurrence of a certain decadence that emerged from a repressive culture. He thus informs his readers about the mental state of Greek society and writes about the "morbid state of Athens", the "nervousness" of the Greeks, stating that it was the "infinitely repressed anger and sorrow of the citizen" that "had made him sick and anxious" (Burckhardt 1977: 189). In addition to this Bahr also found a model for the healing power of strong affection of the mind in both Bernays's remarks on Dionysian ecstasy and Rohde's descriptions of corybantism (cf. Rohde 1991: 50).

Contrary to the expectations of the reader the first part of the *Dialogue on the Tragic* ends with a spectacular turn. Based on his conception of cultural evolution according to which society is actually in the process of continual progression, Bahr suggests that, in the course of the advance of civilization, catharsis has reached its limits. Having thought intensely about the effects and functions of a psychoanalytical version of catharsis, even declaring it to be the *nucleus* of culture, he now questions its use for the civilized human being in general.

As Bahr argues, the "new man" ("neue Mensch", Bahr 1904: 10-12, 38), which is modelled according to Nietzsche's "Übermensch" (ibid.: 32), does not need the theatre as a site of purification because he is not plagued by the same passions as his forefathers (ibid.: 31). Man has evolved and strives to achieve an even purer natural state (ibid.: 10-12, 38). He wants to create a "higher being" ("höheres Wesen", ibid.: 32, cf. also Nietzsche 1882-84: 213), an "Übermensch", for whom the difference between good and evil no longer exists, for whom no drive is repulsive, and to whom every vice is tolerable (cf. Bahr 1904: 48-59, Nietzsche 1883-85: 6). For this reason, he argues, theatre has lost its function as an institutionalized site of affective discharge and is henceforth required to take on different tasks (cf. Bahr 1904: 31, 67, 78). These new responsibilities of the theatre are defined in the third part of the *Dialogue*. According to Bahr's opinion, the future goal of theatre would

be to transport the 'new man' to a state of intoxication (cf. ibid.: 73-4, 78). How to achieve such a state of ecstasy could be learned from the actor, he argues, because thanks to his profession the actor was capable of surrendering himself completely (cf. ibid.: 65, 67, 69-70). In the figure of the actor Bahr sees the descendent of the followers of Dionysus, of whom it is said that, as members of an ecstatic cult, they were able to transcend their individuality in order to become one with the external world (ibid.: 68). Bahr's argument in this matter is based on chapter 8 of the *Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche describes the dithyrambic chorus as a "chorus of the transformed". According to Nietzsche, "in the dithyramb a community of unconscious actors stands before us, seeing themselves as transformed" (Nietzsche 2012: 43). It is a community that acts as if "one had truly entered another body, another character" (ibid.). For Nietzsche the condition of such transformation is the "dionysian excitement" (ibid.).

Bahr's strong emphasis on the dissolution of the Ego can be read in relation to Ernst Mach's ideas on subjectivity, which the physicist and philosopher expressed in his *Analysis of Sensations* (*Analyse der Empfindungen*, 1886). According to Mach, the Ego can be reduced to a discontinuous sequence of mental states (qtd in Fliedl 2000: 175), a thought that Bahr summed up in the laconic formula "the ego is beyond salvation" ("das Ich ist unrettbar", Bahr 1904: 101).

Postulating a form of art that denies the autonomy of the Ego can therefore be regarded as a confirmation of the "Unrettbarkeit" of the Ego. What is interesting about this is that Bahr chooses a strategy to cope with the famous turn-of-the-century "crisis of the subject" (cf. Le Rider 1990) that is diametrically opposed to Freud's and Breuer's approach. While the two doctors were anxious to reconstitute the dissociated egos of their patients, Bahr aestheticizes the experience of being transported beyond one's Ego and considers it an appropriate mental state for his period. Bahr thus replaces a separative form of catharsis with the intentional dissolution of the Ego in a state of intoxication and proposes it as the central aesthetic mechanism of a renewed dramatic art. Instead of focusing on the ab-reaction of affects he demands the accumulation of affects in an ecstatic state. In opposition to Bernays (cf. 1968: 65, 8, 16, 66, 69) and Freud (cf. 1895: 393), who both believed that people enjoy the quiet that follows the storm of affects, Bahr is convinced that it is the storm itself that causes pleasure. Bahr's position can be connected to the tradition of Burke, Dubos, and other "theories of violent movements of the mind" (Menninghaus 1999: 52). Descartes was already convinced that the soul found it enjoyable to "feel the movement of the passions within itself" (1970: 309). Similarly, writers such as Dubos and Burke acknowledged that especially negative emotions could agitate the human mind to a considerable degree. Dubos tells of pleasurable chills that can be

experienced while watching gladiators fight (Dubos 1755: 12-25) and Burke mentions the pleasure that can fill the spectator of an execution (Burke 2008: 43-4). Nietzsche describes the stimulating effect of painful passions as well; he believes to have found evidence against the Aristotelian theory of catharsis. However, Nietzsche replaces the element of distance, which in Burke and Dubos is constitutive of aesthetic pleasure, with an immediate proximity to the horrors witnessed during the experience. In *Twilight of the Gods* (*Götterdämmerung*), he writes:

> Die Psychologie des Orgiasmus als eines überströmenden Lebens- und Kraftgefühls, innerhalb dessen selbst der Schmerz noch als Stimulans wirkt, gab mir den Schlüssel zum Begriff des tragischen Gefühls . . . . Nicht um von Schrecken und Mitleid loszukommen, nicht um sich von einem gefährlichen Affekt durch dessen vehemente Entladung zu reinigen — so verstand es Aristoteles — sondern um, über Schrecken und Mitleid hinaus, die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein, — jene Lust, die auch noch die Lust am Vernichten in sich schliess. (Nietzsche 1889: 160).
>
> [The psychology of the orgiastic as an overflowing feeling of life and strength, within which even pain still has the effect of a stimulus, gave me the key to the concept of tragic feeling. . . . Not in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge — Aristotle understood it that way — but in order to be oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity — that joy included even joy in destroying. (Nietzsche 1997: 210)]

Bahr follows Nietzsche in his rejection of a separative catharsis, just as he had used him in orienting his own new conception of man and idea of the actor. It is documented that he knew his works remarkably well (cf. Benne 2002). His *Dialogue on the Tragic* ends accordingly:

> [D]arum meine ich in der Tat, daß seine [des Schauspielers, Anm. D.S.] Kunst der Verwandlung . . . die tragische der Entleerung ablösen und das neue Geschlecht beherrschen wird, das uns erfüllen soll. (Bahr 1904: 78)
>
> [Therefore I hold the opinion that his (the actor's, D.S.) art of transformation . . . will replace the tragic discharge and that it will dominate the new generation that shall fulfil us.]

Although Bahr's last words suggest something else, he did not turn away from catharsis completely. In contrast to Nietzsche, Bahr did not attempt to prove Aristotle wrong (cf. Ugolini 2003: 333). Instead, he tried to re-interpret his cryptic passage on tragedy in the light of Nietzsche's theory of Dionysian pleasure. After finishing the *Dialogue on the Tragic*, Bahr intended to write another dialogue and it is documented that, in the years between 1904 and 1913, he was working on a book entitled *Dialogue on Vice* (*Dialog vom Last-*

er). Even though he never completed the manuscript, the plan for his new work can be reconstructed from journal entries in which he collected ideas for the project (Bahr 2000: 323-62). Lust was supposed to become the central topic of the book – the one particular vice that excited man most, that provided the most intense pleasure and that was therefore subject to especially strong regulations (cf. Eder 1993).

In the *Dialogue on the Tragic* Bahr wanted to overcome the paradigm of classical tragedy without actually leaving the theatre behind. In the *Dialogue on Vice*, on the other hand, he intended to explore the consequences of affective excitation beyond the stage. And thus he planned to represent lust in the figure of a female dancer who calls for the overcoming of instinct suppression and who propagates a more liberal approach to vice, even beyond the limits and regulations of art. Just like the *Dialogue on the Tragic*, the *Dialogue on Vice* describes the progress of civilization as a consequence of instinct suppression and strongly regulated desires. However, in contrast with the earlier text, in which Bahr outlined the utopia of a 'new' man freed from desires, he now presents the modern man as a victim of his tamed drives.

In his preliminary studies Bahr claims that surrendering to one's vices and desires can have the impact of a cure that would liberate society from the restraining effects of civilization and the instinct suppression it depends on (cf. Bahr 2000: 350). He writes that, in the enactment of vice, we

> [werden] durch Leidenschaften reif zum Höchsten . . . [und uns] geschieht . . . nach eben dem zu verlangen, wovor uns ekelt, gerade mit dem, "Göttlichen zum Tier" werden und in seiner wie der eigenen Qual Lust zu fühlen; und wenn wir diesem Entsetzlichen, weil es stärker als unsere Furcht und die Abwehr des Verstandes ist, gehorcht haben, kommt noch ein Widerspruch dazu, nemlich dass wir uns gerade durch dieses Schmutzige, ja mit sauberen Worten Unaussprechliche geläutert und gereinigt fühlen. (ibid.)

> [(become), through our passions, ready to reach the highest form, . . . (and) to desire exactly that which disgusts us in order to turn animal, together with the divine, and to experience the pleasure of our own anguish; and once we have submitted to the abysmal, because it is stronger than our own fear as well as the defences of reason, another contradiction is added, namely that we feel cleansed and purified precisely because of the filthy experience that cannot be put into sanitary words.]

According to Bahr the affective phenomenon at the core of the vice experience can be interpreted as cathartic. In a fundamental central passage of the dialogue, he finds an explanation for a supposition he had already expressed in "Credo/Eros", namely that catharsis is not a liberation from certain affects, but a purifying experience that is caused precisely by those affects. The same assumption is described by those who support the subjective translation

possibility of the Aristotelian passage on tragedy. By describing the state of extreme excitement as a pleasurable purification experience, Bahr continues his reflections on the transformative effect of Dionysian intoxication, which he began in the *Dialogue on the Tragic*. At the same time, he finds an answer to the questions regarding catharsis that already troubled him in the "Credo/ Eros" manuscript.

In 1913 Bahr's notes on the new dialogue stopped and his interpretation of catharsis remained unpublished until his diaries and notebooks came out in 2000. Of all of Bahr's writings on catharsis only the *Dialogue on the Tragic* was actually published in his own time. Nevertheless, his opinions on the matter found their way into the public discourse through the written and spoken exchange with his contemporaries: in 1907 an article entitled *Erotik der Grausamkeit* ("The Eroticism of Cruelty") appeared in the journal *Die Fackel*. In this article the writer Karl Hauer speaks out against a pejorative perspective on the erotic pleasures of cruelty and mentions the themes of instinct suppression as well as a catharsis achieved in the frenzy of affect (Hauer 1907). Many years later echoes of Bahr's work were still perceptible, for instance in the programmatic writings of Hermann Nitsch who described the effect of the "Orgy Mystery Theatre" he had developed as a purifying experience occurring in a state of affective frenzy (cf. Stärk 1987).

In summary, it can be said that the protagonists of the 'Viennese modernism' positioned themselves against the medical or 'separative' view of catharsis as it was common in Vienna around 1900. Even though, as a doctor, Schnitzler acknowledged the work of the authors of the *Studies on Hysteria*, and even defended Freud against the Vienna school, as an artist, he doubted that the 'cathartic method' had a general validity. In *Paracelsus* he describes different ways of regulating and curing strong affections that often go beyond the treatment of pathological mental states but that nonetheless have a purifying effect on the human mind. Bahr, on the other hand, criticizes the way Freud and Breuer pathologize the ecstatic state and the idea that man experiences the liberation from his affects as more pleasurable than the excitation thereof. The scope of his reflections is not limited to the realm of fiction, as is in Schnitzler. His conception of catharsis is expanded by an anthropological dimension and by the utopia of an alternative society. What Bahr's and Schnitzler's criticism of the medical or 'separative' view of catharsis have in common is a generally positive outlook on affect that refuses to pathologize certain states of mind. In Schnitzler, emotions have an educational purpose, whereas in Bahr, they are conceived of as a source of pleasure *per se*. According to the Viennese modernists, then, Bernays is actually not "a thousand times right", as Gomperz claimed in 1905. At this point in time, the authors had already developed their own interpretation of catharsis, thus reacting to the 'Viennese discourse on catharsis'. In an article

on Freud's reaction to Bahr's play *The Other* (*Die Andere*) Konstanze Fliedl describes this reaction quite fittingly as "a covert battle over sovereignty in the various fields of medicine, psychology, and poetry" (Fliedl forthcoming).

English translation by Kathrin Bethke

Abbreviations

GW Freud, Sigmund [1940-52] (1999), *Gesammelte Werke. Chronologisch geordnet*, ed. by Anna Freud, Marie Bonaparte, Edward Bibring, Willi Hoffer, Ernst Kris, and Otto Isakower, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

KGW Nietzsche, Friedrich (1967), *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Volker Gerhardt, Norbert Miller, Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, and Karl Pestalozzi, Berlin: De Gruyter.

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