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**Black Market: Emancipation Ideology,  
History and the Translation of Cabaret Song Texts**

*-ambitions, convictions, the works, why not? Enjoy  
these goods...for boy...these goods are... hot!*  
-Friedrich Hollaender.

***The corpus***

I have before me a recording of Weimar cabaret *Schläger*, recorded in 1996, arranged by Robert Ziegler, performed by Ute Lemper and the Matrix Ensemble, and released on the London Label as part of a series entitled *Entartete Musik* (degenerate music): music suppressed by the third Reich. Implicit in the title is a wound ideological spring, a notion of alternating compression and *release*, of political suppression and liberation through history. A quick glance at the liner notes consolidates the analogy:

“With the war lost, the Kaiser in exile, and inflation mounting, Germany began to experiment with democracy- a hesitant process punctuated by failed uprisings of the left (1919) and attempted putsches of the right (1920, 1923). Censorship having been abolished, cabarets were free to reflect on the rapidly changing times...”(Jelavich : 6).

Cabaret, emerging in Berlin at the turn of the century and developing under the suppression of the Wilhelmian monarchy, experiences its first explosive *release* after the First World War, when, under the teetering Weimar Republic, censorship is abolished. This period of liberation lasts just over a decade, until the descent of the Nazi boot. “Hitler was appointed chancellor, and the dream of German democracy was irreparably shattered. Weimar cabaret died with it, as the majority of its practitioners fled the Nazi state” (Jelavich: 7). Half a century later : a new liberation, a commercial resurrection and dissemination of this topical art form, once threatened by oblivion, into our highly

relevant modern cultural context: "...their songs can and must be resurrected...because their witty texts and sparkling melodies address themes that might have been new in their day, but are hardly *passé* in ours"(7).

And indeed the repertoire *is* topical. The cynical take on human nature, the mocking of revered institutions, the supplanting of absolute values with comic relativism: all of these devices are most familiar to the humour and philosophy of our time, and they set the tone in the first song, Mischa Spoliansky's *Alles Schwindel*: "Alles Schwindel, alles Schwindel,/ Überall wohin du guckst,/ Und wohin du spuckst!" (*Lemper*: 12).<sup>1</sup> Since this is the age of duplicity, to be anything other than duplicitous would indeed be... *dishonest*: "Alles sucht sich zu betrügen/ Na, sonst müsst ich *wirklich* lügen!" (12).<sup>2</sup> In the fourth song, *Das Gesellschaftslied*, Spoliansky lampoons high society snoot and its infuriating mediocrity: "Auf der Gesellschaft/ Trifft die Gesellschaft/ nur die Gesellschaft/ Das ist ne Gesellschaft/...Sie küsst die Hände, als wären sie was wert/ und fühlen sich mächtig geehrt" (16).<sup>3</sup> In the seventeenth song, *Wir wollen alle wieder Kinder sein!* (1921), Friedrich Hollaender targets all those who nostalgically long for a "utopian" pre-war Germany. Finally, in *Münchhausen* (1931), the most bitterly ironic Hollaender song in the repertoire, the poetic voice dismisses with dark laughter Münchhausen's tall tales of a Germany free of war and poverty: "Ich habe auch ein Land gesehen,/ Das will in keinen Krieg mehr gehen./ Es schmelzt die ganzen Waffen ein,/ Macht Betten draus für Kinderlein./..... Lüge, Lüge, Lüge..." (40).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please excuse the translations. There are meant as nothing more than *glosses* for those non-readers of German. "It's all swindle. It's all swindle. Wherever you look, wherever you spit!"

<sup>2</sup> "Everything is cheating and lying. If I did otherwise, I'd be truly lying!"

<sup>3</sup> "In High society/ High society meets/ Only high society/ Is a society/ They kiss each other hands, as if they were worth something/ And feel mighty honoured".

<sup>4</sup> "I have seen a nation, which no longer wishes to fight wars. It melts all its weapons down, and makes beds for children out of them. Lies, lies, lies, all lies!"

In these songs and others, the weapon is humour, which seeks to raise the critical voice above the very real injustices and, at times, palpable menaces evoked throughout. The duplicity of human nature, intolerance, discrimination and class conflict, the humiliation of lost wars and the threat of an even bloodier one, are all disarmed and beaten down by jaunty tempo, cleverly constructed texts and the vocalist's razor-edged enthusiasm. These songs recall Kenneth Burke's comment on the psychological function of humour: "Humour specializes in incongruities; by its trick of "conversion downwards," by its stylistic ways of reassuring us in dwarfing the magnitude of obstacles or threats, it provides us relief in laughter" (Burke: 58). Bakhtine, as well, would most assuredly find in cabaret, in its irreverence and relativistic spirit a twentieth century manifestation of *carnival laughter*, which suspends the barriers between *official* and *non-official* institutions and brings the mighty low.<sup>5</sup>

And following Bakhtine, we might further acknowledge that cabaret humour and its effect of bringing low, is chiefly mediated through the *body* in its most material sense, i.e. in its "base" sexual attributes and functions. This brings us to the second of cabaret's topical themes: the body, gender and sexuality. It is fair to say that all these are treated in these song-texts with a candour and liberality, which can quite easily be construed as *emancipatory*, both at the personal (affective) and at the political (intellectual) level.

In the category of *emancipatory/personal* fall those songs where women are seen to achieve through eccentricity, cunning, sexual conquest or, quite simply, supreme indifference, a certain independence from those forces, which subject them. In *Sex-Appeal* (Hollaender, 1930), a calculating starlet sets the summum of her ambition at no

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<sup>5</sup> The notion of carnival laughter and its effect on the boundaries, which separate institutions, is central to Bakhtine's study of François Rabelais' *Giant Chronicles*. Cf. Mikhail Bakhtine, *L'œuvre de François Rabelais*, (Andrée Robel trans.) (Paris : Editions Gallimard, 1970).

less than pure *Sex-Appeal* (not five appeal, not four-appeal...). She'd have directors on their knees. She'd eclipse Garbo herself, who'd beg in vain for a chance to shine. Elsewhere, a self-proclaimed vamp sucks men dry, bathes in a coffin and flaunts the trophies she has collected during her exploits (Spoliansky's *Ich bin ein Vamp*, 1932). On the list are Klemperer's piano, Brecht's cap, Valentino's kiss and Hitler's first moustache. She admits the baseness of her character with a playful, mock-repentant growl: "Ich wär' so gern sanft wie ihr! / Aber nein, aber nein! / Ich bin ja verpflichtet, gemein zu sein, / und da bin ich halt eben ein Tier!"<sup>6</sup> The heroine of *l'Heure bleue* (Spoliansky) finds more than just "a room of her own". She simply absolves herself of all responsibility and dissolves into a warm solvent dream world of perfume and bath salts. In *Wenn die beste Freundin* (Spoliansky), a song first performed in duet by Margot Lion and an emerging Marlene Dietrich (1928), pushy husbands are simply tossed aside so that wives and their "special girlfriends" might pursue other interests. Finally, the questions of love, of fidelity vs. sexual freedom, are posed rather more philosophically in Hollaender's *Ich weiß nicht, zu wem ich gehöre*. The subject simply reclaims possession of her person and her sexual feelings: "Die Sonne, die Sterne gehören doch auch allen! / Ich weiß nicht zu wem ich gehöre, / Ich glaub', ich gehöre nur mir ganz allein!" (30).<sup>7</sup>

Into the category of *politically engaged* fall those songs, which apply the principle of emancipation not only to individuals seeking to transcend their situation, but also towards oppressed collectives or gender groups. Hollaender wrote *Raus' mit den Männern* (1926) for Claire Waldoff, cabaret singer, darling of the Berlin proletariat, and

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<sup>6</sup> "I'd so like to be sweet like all of you. But no! But no! I'm bound by duty to be vulgar and low. And I am, quite simply, an animal!"

<sup>7</sup> "The sun, the stars belong to everyone, they do! / I don't know to whom I belong, / I think, I belong to me and me alone!"

acknowledged lesbian. As the title suggests, we have here a boisterous feminist cheerleading song, in which the mantra is, indeed, *emancipation and woman-power*: “Es geht durch die ganze Historie/ Ein Ruf nach Emanzipation/ Vom Menschen bis zur Infusorie/ Überall will das Weib auf den Thron...” (25). The afore-mentioned *Wenn die beste Freundin*, went on to become, as Jelavich notes: “the unofficial anthem for the German lesbian movement” and Spoliansky’s *Das Lila Lied* repeatedly alludes, in the refrain, to the 1919 gay themed film *Anders als die Andern*. The Song’s connection to the film ties it, directly or indirectly, to the *Lebensreformbewegung*, a movement for women’s and gay liberation developing in Germany in the first half of the century.<sup>8</sup> Similar in tone to ‘*Raus mit den Männern*, *Das Lila Lied* is essentially a cheerleading chant, reclaiming, quite simply, the right *to be different from others*: “Wir sind nun einmal *anders, als die andern*,/ die nur im Gleichschritt der Moral geliebt,/ Neugierig erst durch tausend Wunder wandern,/ Und für die’s doch nur das Banale gibt...” (31).<sup>9</sup> Finally, Spoliansky transposes the issue of gender confusion onto the linguistic/textual plain in *Maskulinum-Femininum*, in which the consistent and playful repetition and inversion of the two vocables of the title result in such confusion that the two terms, much like the lovers to whom they refer, end up blending into one, i.e. giving birth to a *hermaphrodite*: “Und das maskuline starke Femininum/ Schenkt dem femininen schwachen Maskulinum/ *Etwas schwaches, starkes masku-feminines*,<sup>10</sup> / einen kleinen Hermaphrodit!“ (33).

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<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive study on the gay emancipation movement in Berlin, see Steakley, James D., *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany*. New York: Arno Press, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Italics are ours. “We are, quite simply, different from the others/ Who, in morality, love and are loved/ We wander curious through a thousand wonders/ And for them, there is nothing but banality”.

<sup>10</sup> Italics are ours. “And the masculine strong feminine, sent the feminine weak masculine/ A little something weak-strong-masculine-feminine/ A little hermaphrodite!”

***Our argument: ideological manipulation through translation***

There is, of course, an obvious distinction between the sort carnivalesque lampooning seen on the stages of cabaret and a genuine argument for emancipation. It is our contention that this distinction is intentionally blurred in the cibliste translations of these songs, that there is a perceptible manipulation of the text to conform, in the neatest, most univocal fashion, to the ideologies of contemporary emancipatory movements (feminism, gay and lesbian activism). Although these songs do indeed reflect the political movements of the time, it is important to note that this reflection is, as are indeed most reflections mediated through art, highly deceptive, a game of smoke and mirrors. Cabaret preys indifferently on a vast cultural inter-text, assimilating its modes of representation but leaving its value systems undigested. It is a *chameleon* art form, able to assume indifferently, often simultaneously, the aspects of multiple, often incompatible cultural attitudes. It is therefore an *epicene* art form, a collusion (perhaps a collision) of contemporary ideas, trends and fads, which make it *unrecognizable* as a united ideological front. Its relativistic character affords it *no political affiliation*. Its aims are utterly *narcissistic*, directed back toward the intensely heterogeneous artistic medium from which they emerged. The notion of Art as a self-contained entity, as a superficial game of shadow and light, reflecting ideologies at the surface but in no way constituting a platform for ideas, is one of Nietzsche's, whose historical relevance to cabaret will be discussed later:

Dass gar der Maler und der Bildhauer die „Idee“ des Menschen ausdrücke, ist eitel Phantasterei und Sinnentzug... Die bildende Kunst will Charaktere auf der Haut sichtbar werden lassen; die redende Kunst nimmt das Wort zu dem selben Zwecke, sie bildet den Charakter im Laute ab. Die Kunst geht von der natürlichen Unwissenheit des Menschen über sein Inneres (in Leib und

Charakter) aus: sie ist nicht für Physiker und Philosophen da. (Nietzsche, *Menschliches*: 152 v.161)<sup>11</sup>

The translators have essentially removed these songs from this artistic medium, from the prevailing *text forms* (*die redende Kunst*) to which they demonstrate a direct or indirect relation: expressionism, surrealism, dadaism. Furthermore, they have removed these songs from the social and philosophical systems out of which they, again directly or indirectly, emerged: Nietzschean relativism and the collective psychosis of mass urbanization and industrialism which culminated in the post-war era of the “roaring twenties”. At the very best, these translations diminish the originals aesthetically, levelling their textual complexities for the sake of easy-reading. At the very worst, they reveal a further diminishment, one of *ideological displacement*, where those cultural attitudes of the twenties, which were deemed irrelevant, perhaps even antagonistic to contemporary attitudes, are toned down and/or discarded altogether; where that, which was once a complex “literary” entity, is reduced to the facile chant of “cause-celeb” cheerleading.

***The notion of “freedom”: artistic “freedom of imagination” vs. ideological “freedom from constraint.”***

Michael Haas, executive producer of the collection, underscores the importance of the song-texts and formulates the aim of the translations. He also, rather presumptuously, makes a statement on their success:

The text is crucial to the music and we have *successfully* striven to re-create in the English translations the irony, sauciness and fun of the original German.

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<sup>11</sup> “The very notion that the painter or sculptor expresses the “idea” of humanity is idle fancy, a delusion incurred by the senses. Fine art strives to reveal character from the outside, surface/skin level; literature uses the word to achieve this aim; it delimits character in sounds. Art presumes man’s natural ignorance of his *inner being* ( of his body and character). Art isn’t there for men of science and philosophy.”

So often the music underscores these elements and an immediate understanding is essential to appreciate to the full the extraordinary *freedom*<sup>12</sup> of imagination of pre-Hitler Berlin (Haas: 3).

The translations of these song-texts fall victim to the essential ambiguity surrounding the term *freedom*. The latter refers, in this statement, to *the unfettered life of the mind*, i.e. to the freedom of artistic expression at an historical point of culminating mental energy.

Indeed, the *Oxford Dictionary* echoes this sense in its primary definition of the term:

“The power or right to act, speak or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.”

The notion of empowerment to act and express oneself without censure is deemed the *principle* sense or denotation of the word. However, reading on, we have a series of superimposed connotations: “• absence of subjection to foreign domination or despotic government • the state of not being subject to or affected by (a particular undesirable thing) • the power of self-determination attributed to the will” (*New Oxford* : 730).

The essential difference between the principle definition and its subsenses is, quite revealingly, one of *positive* and *negative* definition. The main definition and the third connotation, define freedom *positively* and *ontologically* as *empowerment without restraint*. And they go on to clarify these powers: “to act, to speak, to think as one wants... self determination attributed to the will.” These two positive definitions shed light on the type of “freedom of imagination” seen in cabaret, a freedom formed on the principles of *relativism* and the *empowerment of the subject*. In humour and satire lie this sort of freedom, where the most conflicting of ideologies: the fascist and democratic, the sexist, racist and emancipatory, are divested, through humour, of their status as absolute values, are de-axiomatized and laughed down together.

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<sup>12</sup> (All italics are ours)



The intellect, which proceeds from this position of empowerment, harbours and jealously protects this freedom as the force by which a transcendent inner life is experienced and expressed, where its objects are, in turn, experienced by others. This freedom is not experienced as a right, inalienable or otherwise, but rather simply as an emergent aspect of the personality and the creative intellect, an attribute of the Subject, or Artist (no inverted commas please) who assumes an autocratic stance with respect to the constraints imposed from without. For this reason, such an intellect depends greatly on the flexibility of contemporary socio-political ideologies, which either bend to allow its expression, despite potential antipathies, or which reject it altogether, as in the case of Cabaret after the Nazis. In any case, the position of freedom, as *wielded* by the subject, is *yielded to*, or *rejected by*, the ideologies of those in positions of power.

Not so in the second and third connotations, which define *freedom* on the *yielding* side of the oppressive weaponry of socio-political ideologies. These secondary definitions are posed *ideologically*, rather than ontologically. We are given no information on what freedom is or on what constitutes it, only on what it *cannot be*, i.e. a subjection to despotic regimes, or to some undesirable thing. According to this view, freedom is essentially whatever lies on the other side of a “non-free” assumedly unpleasant situation. Underscored here are the prisons, which oppose, hinder, and indefinitely differ freedom (i.e. despotic regimes, undesirable situations).

These are the connotations, which most strongly resonate among those groups seeking emancipation, those who form a united front in the interest of confrontation, who draw their line in the sand. For at the heart of every movement is a battle cry, a univocal mobilization of the will, an unwavering attachment to the like-minded, and the a priori

conceptualization of the self as “imprisoned”- in a situation of forced surrender to undesirable value-systems. This imprisonment creates a complex of alienation, whereby the subject feels displaced, severed from those positive contacts, which foster the development of self-worth and validate his or her position in the scheme of things.

To this conflicting push and pull between bondage and weightlessness, this ill-defined “freedom” would be their ideal solution, an ideal predicated, paradoxically, on the very principles of *alienation and surrender, which enslave them*. As the institutions of the oppressor (academe, religion, marriage, family etc.) are re-appropriated, i.e. re-defined in terms of the emergent ideology, the subject renews his or her investment in them, continues to define him or her- self through them, to yield to them. As a result these institutions are *re-axiomatized*, achieving, once again, the status of *absolute* or *authentic* values, and assuming, by the by, a perplexing *identity* with those oppressive value systems they are meant to replace.

It is for this reason that freedom, defined negatively, i.e. on the *yielding* side of oppressive ideologies, situates itself *beyond* any imaginable possibility of achievement. Ironically enough, those who have polarized their own value-systems against those of some oppressive collective (the patriarchy, the heteros), are in fact little more than the latter’s prodigal sons (or daughters). Their movements, defined in binary opposition to the oppressor, (to adopt the language of Derridian post-modernism) are indeed reducible to the oppressor, to whom they inevitably give sharper definition and a stronger voice. Do the prodigal son’s rebellious actions not, in the end, empower the patriarch? Keith Harvey confronts this truth in attempting to define “gay identity” and “gay community”:  
 “Does the advancement of a definition contribute to an emerging transcultural

emancipatory strategy or, rather, does it constitute an Anglo-American neo-imperialist ruse?” (Harvey: 141).

Harvey can no longer tell whether he’s serving the cause of “freedom” or the cause of the oppressor. This freedom he speaks of is little more than *the ghost in the political machine*, the ill-defined objective of intellectuals who, in their pursuits, unwittingly think themselves into a bondage of their own manufacture. Their sole strategy is indeed that of the enemy. In the name of liberation, feminism and gay liberation choose their foe, ideological fire meets ideological fire, and the bodies pile up. Such a notion of freedom is indeed no freedom at all, but rather a re-thinking of one’s own prison, a personal arrangement, whereby one is chained-up or tied-down *in the way one is most comfortable*. The prison metaphor is appropriate, for “freedom”, so conceived, depends on this ideological prison-wall to form a stay against angst, on the filtered reception and constant reformulation of data *from the outside world* into the terms of this new-value system. We are a far cry here from the hedonistic indifference, from the all-inclusive, all mocking character of cabaret humour. (Is the autocratic vamp of Spoliansky’s song not, herself, a most fabulous fascist? Does she not lay claim to Hitler’s moustache?)<sup>13</sup> Instead we have a sort of humourless triage, often marked by reactionary hysterics, whereby that, which is *untranslatable* into the prescribed idiom of “freedom”, is suppressed, euphemized, *censured*.

***The prescribed idiom of freedom: Kathleen Komar’s translation***

Consider Kathleen L. Komar’s translation of Hollaender’s *Raus mit den Männern*:

Hollaender, Friedrich. <i>Raus mit den Männern</i> (für Claire Waldoff). (Lemper: 25).	Hollaender, Friedrich. <i>Chuck out the men</i> (for Claire Waldoff). Kathleen Komar (trans). (Lemper: 25).
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<p>Es geht durch die ganze Historie ein Ruf nach Emanzipation vom Menschen bis zur Infusorie überall will das Weib auf den Thron. Vom Hawai-Neger bis zur Berliner Range Braust ein Ruf wie Donnerhall daher: Was die Männer können, können wir schon lange und vielleicht 'ne ganze Ecke mehr.</p>	<p>The battle for emancipation 's been raging since hist'ry began Yes, feminists of every nation want to throw off the chains made by man. Hula girls and housemaids and wives in Maribou hear all our voices thunder in protest. Anything that men do women can do too and more than that we women do it best.</p>
<p>Raus mit den Männern aus dem Reichstag, Und raus mit den Männern aus dem Landtag, Und raus mit den Männern aus dem Herrenhaus, Wir machen draus ein Frauenhaus! Raus mit den Männern aus dem Dasein, Und raus mit den Männern aus dem Hiersein, Und raus mit den Männern aus dem Dortsein, Sie müssten schon längst fort sein. Ja: raus mit den Männern aus dem Bau, Und rein in die Dinger mit der Frau!</p>	<p>Chuck all the men out of the Reichstag and chuck all the men out of the courthouse. Men are the problem with humanity they're blinded by their vanity. Woman have passively embraced them when we could have easily outpaced them or better yet erased them. If we haven't made our feelings clear, we women have had it up to here.</p>
<p>Es lieg'n in der Wiege und brüllen die zukünft'gen Männer ganz klein. Die Amme, die Meistrin im Stillen, flößt die Kraft ihnen schluckweise ein. Von der vielen Flößung aus Flasche, Brust und Becher, Ach wir dummen Frauen sind ja Schuld! Werd'n sie immer stärker, werd'n sie immer frecher, Da verliert man schließlich die Geduld</p>	<p>As babies men all howl and bluster they cry through the night and the day perfecting the techniques they'll muster for the times when they don't get their way. Nursie holds the monster and feeds him form her breast and baby is contented for a bit But when he sees his nurse is trying to get some rest the little man decides to have a fit.</p>
<p>Raus mit den Männern, usw.</p>	<p>Chuck all the men out, etc.</p>
<p>Die Männer hab'n alle Berufe, sind Schutzmann und sind Philosoph, sie klettern von Stufe zu Stufe, in der Küche stehn wir und sind doof. Sie bekommen Orden, wir bekommen Schwielen, Liebe Schwestern, es ist eine Schmach.</p>	<p>The men get their pick of professions they're policemen or scholars or clerks. They get rich and acquire possessions like we wives who keep house for these jerks. They're ruining the country while we mop up the floor.</p>

<p>Ja sie trau'n sich gar, die Politik zu spielen, Aber, na, die ist ja auch danach.</p> <p>Raus mit den Männern, usw.</p>	<p>They're flushing this whole nation down the drain. Sisters stand together, let's show these men the door before they drive us totally insane.</p> <p>Raus mit den Männern, etc.</p>
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We can begin, at the crudest, yet perhaps most relevant level, with the prolixity of contemporary women's-lib clichés and buzzwords of feminist discourse present in the target-text. Already in the third line, *feminists are throwing off the chains made by man*. Then come the rallies and the smoking bras (*hear all our voices thunder in protest*). In the chorus, the barking anaphoric *Raus*, along with its vital prosodic function- it kicks off every line with a sort of Teutonic/proletarian punch in the face- all but disappears in the translation, along with the mocking riff on the term *Dasein* (*hiersein... dortsein... fortsein*). What we get from Komar is a piece-meal of preachy banalities (*Men are the problem with humanity/ they're blinded by their vanity/... We women have had it up to here*). In the last verse we find the familiar reduction of woman to man's material possession (*They get rich and acquire possessions/ like we wives who keep house for these jerks*). Indeed politics and emancipation are so crudely thrust to the fore in Komar's text, that a redundant clichéd explicitation: (*There ruining the country while we mop up the floor/ They're flushing this whole nation down the drain*) renders Hollaender's sole political commentary, stated with prosodic crass-poetic simplicity at the end of the last verse: (*Ja sie trau'n sich gar, die Politik zu spielen,/ aber, na, die ist ja auch danach!*) (Sure, they got the balls, to *play* with politics,/ And boy, sure as Hell, it looks it too!).

We have now a clear idea of what was retained in the translation, i.e. the deep story: the essential inequality between the sexes, and the principle exhortation: *out with men, in with women*. We have a clear idea, as well, as to those story elements, which were amplified in the translation, i.e. the poor job men are doing of running the country. So what has been, consciously or unconsciously, discarded in the translation? For starters, the self-mocking sub-text against which the humour of the deep-story is whetted and sustained.

In the source-text, a strain of grotesque realism undercuts the feminist cheerleading dramatics, assuring us that if the cause of emancipation is being screamed from the rooftops, it is a scream of *harpies*. The word is not chosen lightly, for the harpy, a mythic creature with the body of an animal, the head of a woman (with the big mouth to match), forms a comic counterpoint in this song's discourse. It might surprise readers of the translation, who, by the third line, have already encountered *feminists*, that the entire first stanza of the source-text never even mentions women explicitly, but rather sets up a mock zoological isotopy, out of which women emerge as a single link in a long chain of "females" descending from human to single-celled organisms (*Vom Menschen bis zur Infusorie/ Überall will das Weib auf den Thron.*) The *call* heard in the original is not quite that of feminists united in protest, but rather the dissonant cacophony (*Donnerhall*) of *all* females of *all* possible life forms, from the privileged human to the witless paramecium fed up with her pond-scum finishing school. Notwithstanding the curious image of a paramecium "casting off" the chains of the patriarchy (let alone burning her bra), we have yet a further affront to contend with. The second group of females mentioned in the first stanza ranges from *Hawai-Neger* to *Berliner Range* (Hawai

negroes to Berlin urchins). Obviously unwelcome to any ideology of emancipation, indeed utterly unacceptable in our politically correct context, this mock-dehumanization of women, compounded with the racially charged epithet (just where do blacks fall into the zoological hierarchy?), have been most intentionally discarded and/or euphemized in the target-text, where *Menschen bis zu Infusorie* becomes, curiously, *feminists of every nation*, and where *Hawai-Neger* and *Berliner-Range* become *Hula girls and housemaids and wives in Maribou*.

Discarded as well is an entire subtext of grotesque realism touching women's bodies. We intend the term "grotesque realism" in the sense employed by Bakhtine:

Nous l'avons dit, le grotesque ignore la surface sans faille qui ferme et délimite le corps pour en faire un phénomène isolé et achevé. Aussi, l'image grotesque montre-t-elle la physionomie non seulement externe, mais aussi interne du corps... souvent encore, les physionomies interne et externe sont fondues en une seule image. (Bakhtine : 318).

If the first stanza of the source-text playfully classes women in a hierarchy of female animals, the second stanza narrows the comic objective to the human genus and lampoons its reproductive relationship to the male of the species. The latter is, for all intents and purposes, described as a function of women's internal anatomy, as an estranged organ which, having been expelled from her body, continues to leach from it. The metonymical medium through which men are thus portrayed, i.e. as the anatomical *inside brought out*, is naturally *the breast, the act of nursing*, around which proliferates, in the source-text, an isotopy of parasitic nourishment at its most earthy level : flowing/swallowing milk, flowing/swallowing strength: (*Die Amme, die Meistrin im Stillen,/ Flößt die Kraft ihnen schluckweise ein/... Von der vielen Flößung aus Flasche, Brust und Becher...*). In the last stanza, men are still bawling their way up the hierarchy

of professions, and their transcendence is still at the expense of women's anatomy. This time, however, the punishment is inflicted on the *anatomical outside*. (*Sie bekommen Orden, wir bekommen Schwielen*). (They get medals, we get callouses).

Bawling and greedily sucking at the teat, swallowing power and gaining audacity and strength, these future men body forth the principle of dynamic transcendence (*brüllen, Kraft, frecher, stärker...*). All semiotic markers attached to woman, however, construct a sub-text of mindless passivity, implying their immanent function : (*stillen, dummen, schuld, Geduld...* ). Explicit in the source-text is a critical commentary on this passivity, a mocking portrayal of women as mindless milk trucks and a sharp jab at their acceptance of this situation : (*Ach, wir dummen Frauen sind ja Schuld*). Out of self-mockery, however, comes empowerment. In the absolute relativism of cabaret, no one holds the levers of power for too long. The final line of the stanza is a call to “get active”, to “get impatient”, and to turn the tables on these blow-hard blokes (*Da verliert man schließlich die Geduld*).

Such a critical commentary might, at first glance, seem desirable, to contemporary feminist thought, but for the ideological faux pas of polarizing women's reproductive, domestic function (lampooned as passive, negative) and their transcendent, get-impatient, get-out-of-the-kitchen-and-into-the-world function (characterized as active, positive). No making fun of women's role in bearing and nurturing children, please. In the target-text, there is no more parasitic swallowing of power along with breast milk. The grotesque-realistic connection between men's strength and women's anatomy is diminished (the idea of flowing nourishment from the body, the idea of men literally gulping-down the female body, is cut out), and nursie is no longer a passive milk truck,



but a hard-working, oppressed soul who simply needs some rest: (*But when he sees his nurse is trying to get some rest/ The little man decides to throw a fit*).

***A new metaphor for translation: “The Ladies Infidels”***

If we accept Lori Chamberlain’s metaphorical sexualizing of translation (Chamberlain: 57-63), along with her exploration of the manifold *sexual personae* that translation has assumed vis-à-vis source-text authors (faithful wife to creative husband, faithless seductress to unwitting lover,<sup>14</sup> paternal figure to mother tongue, vassal to unravished lady, and- Minerva help us!- the active *top* to the submissive *bottom* in missionary-position sex), then we are obliged to create a new persona for the type of translation we have just seen, one that is neither *faithful* nor *beautiful* nor *seductive*, but rather falls into the new and rather unfortunate category of “*les laides infidèles*”. An approximate, inter-linguistic anagram helps us characterize this new translation persona. We term “The Ladies’ Infidels” those translations performed under the influence of feminist ideological bias. The result, as we have seen, is an indigestible emulsification of *adulterous intention* (the translation attempts to body forth earthy realism, the taboo “sauciness” of the source-text) and *prudish, lady-like forbearance* (the translated text is kept from *penetrating* the body, of exploring and mocking it in all its earthy realism). This sort of forbearance is all the more perceptible when it occurs in the translation of song-texts, where the reciprocal penetration of text and body assumes a vital function. In performance, the song-text is re-motivated by the rhythms of the body. *Soma* rivals *logos* in the production of sense, and the text is very much *sexualized*. Words, as Meschonnic suggests, quoting Aristotle, become *ta en tê phone*, “things in the voice”, the verbalizing

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<sup>14</sup> Translation would be, in this instance, a *translatrix*, a much appreciated term brought to the table by my fellow-student and colleague Matthew Kayahara, who wasn’t so much sexualizing translation as he was aiming, in true cabaret fashion, at women translators.

of the of the body's compulsions (Meschonnic: 13). And we have it on the authority of Peter Jelavich, that Claire Waldoff was certainly one to sing from the diaphragm down:

She would employ a thick Berlin dialect, and take on the role of either the boy or the girl (it was well known that she was a lesbian in private life). In her most famous song, "Hermann heesst er!" (He's called Hermann, 1913),... she crooned: 'sometimes he nudges me with his knee' (mit de Knie manchmal stösst er). 'Stossen' (to nudge, knock, poke) was also a colloquial word for sexual intercourse, and Waldoff highlighted it by employing a ritardando and drawing out the vowel- *stöööööst*. (Jelavich, *Berlin*: 103).

The "Ladies' Infidels" reflect the essential paradox at the centre of academic feminist ideology, i.e. the conflicting principles of *relative* and *authentic values*. Like the ineffectual flouncing of the would-be seductress, the translation which demonstrates a coquettish movement toward the comic relativism of the source-text, but which subsequently pulls back, holds out in order not to violate certain inalienable values, becomes textually (as well as sexually) non-performative, the literary equivalent of an a-sexual spinster. The principle at work is, much like in the case of the incompetent seductress, *impenetrability*. The ideological prison wall forms a barrier between the translating subject and the text ("*hermeneutus interruptus*"?). It prevents the text, as poetic language object, from being properly seized, *pulled close*, *assimilated* into the seductive swing of the intellect. Nor is the intellect properly *penetrated* and assimilated by the source-text it confronts. If literature can be described, in the terms of Ezra Pound, as the *dance of the intellect among words*, then the Ladies' infidels evoke the sort of juvenile fifties prom where embarrassed and frustrated adolescents were forced to dance stiffly and at least foot apart.

Equally frustrated, however, are the "Ladies' Infidels" which proceed from a pseudo-relativistic vantage point. These translations scream Foucaultian relativism from

the rooftops: Everything is ideology. The vantage points are multiple and no single one can be qualified as better than the other. Therefore, we are as entitled to our position as anyone. Target-texts produced on this principle are hysterically over-sexualized, in a sort of offensive and/or pre-emptive manoeuvre: espouse relativism in theory in order to justify rejecting it violently in practice. Luise von Flotow underscores just such a translation, by which a line from *La nef des sorcières*: “Ce soir, j’entre dans l’histoire sans relever ma jupe”<sup>15</sup> becomes “this evening I’m entering history without opening my legs.”<sup>16</sup> (von Flotow: 69-70). The “freedom” that relativism affords may be brought to justify this sort of absurd overstatement for the purposes of proselytizing and/or pleasing the like-minded. But make no mistake. This relativism is a theoretical skill brought to bear, quite strategically, in the defence of values, which, far from relativistic, are held as *absolute* and *inalienable*.

What divides emancipation groups from any pretension of relativism is, quite simply, the notion of “conviction”, or the sense of rightness, which binds the subject to one value or principle at expense of all others. And this is only natural, for upon the strength of this bond depends the ability to withstand one’s ideological assailants, the ability to effect any practical change, i.e. social and political. In order to “fight the good fight”, one needs a mantra. Feminism and other emancipation movements couldn’t exist if relativism were truly a functioning principle in their thought systems, simply because “relativism”, by definition, precludes any notion of “rightness” (or righteousness). It consistently deflects, as Barbara Herrnstein-Smith points out, any motion toward self-justification:

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<sup>15</sup> Brossard, N., France Théoret, *et al.*, *La nef des sorcières*, (Montréal, Quinze, 1976). Quoted in von Flotow.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Gaboriau, “The Writer” in *Fireweed*, 5-6, 1979, 1980. Quoted in von Flotow.

Relativism, in the sense of a contingent conceptualization that sees itself and all others as such, cannot found, ground, or prove itself, cannot deduce or demonstrate its own rightness, cannot even lead or point the way to itself... Self-consistently, it conceives of itself as continuously changing, of all conceptions or the irreducibly various, and of the multiply configurable as always configurable otherwise (Herrnstein-Smith: 183).

To weigh opposing ideologies equally and against each other is to divest them of their axiomatic function, of their ability to inspire *conviction*, to compare and exchange them as the indifferent objects of *collective thought-systems*, justifiable only to the extent that they can be readily traded up, traded down, or discarded altogether.

***Cabaret: theft, relativism and the “black market” of ideology***

It is at this level that cabaret brings ideology to the table, *only* once the artist has thoroughly de-axiomatized it, reduced it to a *shadow* of its former self, to a mere “bauble” of thought, a curiosity or good to be exchanged among hedonists on the market of ideas. Friederich Hollaender’s *Black Market*, written in English for Marlene Dietrich, is a manifesto of cabaret relativism:

Black market: eggs for statuettes, smiles for cigarettes,  
Got some broken down ideals...like... wedding rings?  
Tiptoe! Trade your things.

You like my first edition. It’s yours, that’s how I am.  
A simple definition: You take art, I take spam.  
For you, for your k-ration, compassion... and maybe  
An inkling, a twinkling of real sympathy.  
I’m selling out, take all I’ve got,  
Ambitions, convictions, the works.... why not?  
Enjoy these goods, for boy...  
These goods are...hot! (Dietrich: track 20).

Steal it, rip off the tag and hawk it behind the screen for a pittance. Cabaret humour is predicated on precisely this sort of transgression, whereby ideas and institutions are stolen from the ethical sphere where their value is normally assigned, and scattered

carelessly among the bric-a-brac, to be pawned off in the shadows along with the wraiths of other “broken down ideals”. They are to be pawned off as quickly as possible, for this black market of empty values becomes cluttered and burdensome for the hedonist whose pleasure isn’t so much in the possession of these stolen goods (why possess something that is no longer worth anything?), nor in their re-sale value (“You take art, I take spam”), but rather in the *transgression itself, in the stealing*, i.e. the very act of relativizing, in motion of “configuring otherwise” that which once possessed a certain groundedness or intrinsic value. Once this motion is complete, once the object is divested of its value and can no longer be justified, it is cast mockingly into the realm of unofficial culture (the “black market” of ideas) or, simply, into the garbage. Another of Hollaender’s heroines, *Die Kleptomanin*, adopts a most expedient strategy in getting rid of her hot goods, after the initial ecstasy of the theft diminishes:

Ach, wie mich das aufregt! Ach, wie mich das aufregt!  
 Ach! Ich kann’s nicht länger nur verstecken,  
 Ich muss es haben, haben, haben haben!  
 Ach! Und was ich mause, kaum hab’ ich’s zu Hause,  
 Wird mein Kopf so dumpf und schwer,  
 Ich bin schon gar nicht sinnlich mehr,  
 Und ich schmeiß’ den ganzen Dreck weg! Weg! Weg! (Lemper, *City*: 22).<sup>17</sup>

### ***The role of History in relativizing ideology***

*Shock and ecstasy* are the comic effects of aggressive relativizing. They create a need for infinite variety, for the sustained renewal of ever more powerful sensations. And this notion of shock, by which, in twenties culture, the principle of the punctual, the fragmented and the variegated replace that of the durative, the articulated and the coherent, is a function of the history of industrial Berlin. Just as ideology (feminist,

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<sup>17</sup> “Oh, how it excites me! Oh, how it excites me! / Oh, I can’t hold back any longer. / I’ve got to have it! Have it! Have it! / Oh, and the things I pinch. No sooner do I have them home / Than my head gets dumb and heavy / And I no longer feel the rush / And I throw the lot, the whole damn lot away! Away! Away!”

queer or otherwise) can determine a politics of translation, history offers insight into the backdrop against which such ideologies are born and played out. History is indeed the missing link in the translation of these song-texts, i.e. the link between contemporary ideology and those forces (political, social, cultural) under which cabaret actually developed and thrived in the Weimar Republic. Where contemporary feminist and gender ideology binds (and blinds) the translating subject, placing her/him in a defensive stance with regard to history- (indeed, feminism is predicated upon the ideological re-definition of *his*-story)- we will derive from traditional historical discourse (i.e. from *his*-*story*) the tools, with which ideology itself can be relativized, i.e. compared and contrasted diachronically with previous and subsequent trends in thinking. History can thus be used as tool to explain the phenomenon of displacement, ideological, aesthetic and otherwise, which we have observed in the translated song-texts.

Two sources, one secondary and primary, have guided us in our research. Our secondary source, Peter Jelavich's study *Berlin Cabaret*, is an example of contemporary archaeological fieldwork. He states in his preface: "Cabaret was an ephemeral art, and its material remains are widely scattered" (Jelavich, *Berlin*: vii). An extensive search and compilation effort characterizes this history, which sets temporal parameters as far back as the seventeenth century, on one end, and concludes, on the other, with the Second World War in the chapter "Cabaret Under National Socialism". Our primary source, extensively discussed by Jelavich, is Georg Simmel, pre-eminent sociologist, whose ideas were formed through observation of social-historical phenomena of the period. He is a source and link to ideologies, both those surrounding the psychology of urban Berlin and the contemporary ideas on women and art.

The first important historical connection established by Jelavich, with extensive reference to Simmel, is that of contemporary politics and culture. What are the political events, which determine social attitudes? How do these social attitudes subsequently determine culture and its objects: theatre, literature and translation? A critical juncture is the revolution of 1848, when the first internal conflicts generated by massive industrialization and economic growth occurred in Berlin. In 1818, Prussia's internal tariffs were abrogated. In 1834 the German custom's union expanded, facilitating trade and opening new markets. Berlin, the former "Athens on the Spree" transformed rapidly into a "Chicago on the Spree",<sup>18</sup> a centre of mass-market industry. The growth of the working-class, compounded by a period of economic depression, led to revolt in 1848. This revolt compounded into revolution, as the "liberal" middle-class, discontent with royal authoritarianism, joined in the fight. Internal divisions in the rebel ranks gave the monarchy the upper hand. Martial law was declared, and a situation of socio-political polarisation was created, whereby authoritarian policies were instituted to govern an increasingly depoliticised public. This breach was sustained for the next seventy years, during which a begrudged obeisance on the part of the public and a begrudged bending on the part of the Wilhelmian monarchy, gave freedom to the venting of grievances on the podium of art. The rapid expansion of cabaret after 1918, when the monarchy and censorship were no longer the hindrance they once were, constitutes an understandable, energetic *release* of an art form, which had evolved under consistent, negative pressure.

***Industrial relativism, the cult of the object and the fragmentation of experience***

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<sup>18</sup> [Quoted in Jelavich, Berlin, 11] Anon. [Walter Rathenau], "Die schönste Stadt der Welt," *Die Zukunft* 26 (1899): 39.

The seeds of cabaret relativism are thus sown in the breach opened by a series of conflicting socio-political tensions: the conservative monarchy, the evolving liberal attitudes of the middle class, and a working class discontent to the point of desperation with both of the former. To these can be added those socio-economic tensions, exponentially greater, of the industrial metropolis itself, which was evolving rapidly into a tumultuous centre of mass commercialism, where the tempo of life, where the fluctuation of external stimuli (advertising, exhibition, display of commodities) underwent a dizzying acceleration. The importance of commodity exchange lead, naturally, to the alienation of absolute values (those derived from *qualities*) in the most relative of all value-systems, that of money (derived from *quantity*). As the *objects* of industry multiplied, were indeed spun out in hitherto unheard of masses, as the division of labour relativized people, who were shifted about in homogenous groups and evaluated in terms of profits and losses, as culture became pluralized, objectified, rendered tangible, superficial and sensational, the urban subject became de-sensitized, blasé, and adopted the *pure, quantitative relativism of money* as its measure of reality. Simmel defines money as a “reification of the general form of existence according to which things derive their significance from their relationship to each other... Money represents pure interaction in its purest form... It is an individual thing whose essential significance is to reach beyond individualities.” (Simmel, *Philosophy*: 128).

Motivated by the money economy, this *reification* of existence, with its consequent relativizing and de-axiomatizing effects, this movement of the mind beyond individualities and into the variegated realm of external relativities and their symbolic objects, needn't entail the sort of mind-deadening *objectification of individuals* that



Marxism, and later on Feminism would suggest (specifically in terms of women *reified*, quantified on the basis of their sex). This reification can indeed demonstrate one of the minds more lively, creative functions. Simmel goes on to argue:

The projection of mere relations into particular objects is one of the great accomplishments of the mind; when the mind is embodied in objects, these become a vehicle for the mind and endow it with a livelier and more comprehensive activity... Thus, money is the adequate expression of the relationship of man to the world, which can only be grasped in single and concrete instances, yet only really conceived when the singular becomes the embodiment of the living mental process, which interweaves all singularities and, in this fashion, creates reality. (Simmel, *Philosophy*: 129).

This parallel that Simmel draws between objectification and creation, between relativism and the active life of the mind, is analogous to the expressive thrust by which the Artist as subject moves beyond the self and into the world of phenomena. Artistic creation functions on the very principle, whereby the subjective thought, impression, emotion etc. becomes objectively materialized, a work of art, a cultural object. The conceptual facility of monetary relativism, with its potential threat to individualism, does not make it less relevant to the process of artistic creation, where the subject reifies an aspect of his or her mental existence, inscribes this aspect in a single object (a novel, a play, a poem, a composition etc.), an object which, by the by, enters into a far-reaching relationship with other such objects in order to be hermeneutically relativized (is literary discourse not a form of intellectual relativism?).

Indeed in their disapproval of this *alienation* of the subject in the *object*, of this instrumentalization of the subject by the object, and of the collective psychosis this instrumentalization can create (the object, understood *only in relation to other objects*, awakens a collective hunger for new and better objects, for evermore powerful stimuli),

Marxism and Feminism alike fail to take into account that the object is also a *creation* of the active intellect, a tangible investment of its mental energy. Mass production, both at the economic and cultural levels, implies a certain acceleration of the creative faculties, a strength and liveliness of the mind. And Simmel, writing as the events of history unfold, underscores this inherent *undecidability* regarding the effects of mass industry on culture. On the one hand, a lack of centre, a de-sensitization, a growing need for the superficial and the sensational. On the other hand, a liveliness, a vitalism spawned by a creative energy accelerating in proportion with mass production.

***Undecidability and polysemy: smashing open the binary***

Karin Littau's conclusions on the inherent *undecidability* of the Pandora myth (is the box a gift (present) or a *Gift* (poison) to mankind?) are applicable to Simmel's undecided stance on the Pandora's Box of industrial expansion. In the context of Derrida's deconstruction of univocal binaries, Littau uses the notion of *undecidability* to *break open* the self-contained *bifid* (present-poison) and to envisage a resultant *polysemy*, an infinite pluralizing of interpretations, which infinitely defers closure : "Undecidability then is not conceived in terms of a loss, but a potentially unstoppable gain...". Binary concepts and arguments (like the *binary word* of Littau's analysis : *Babel* ) are no longer reducible "from the two towards the one," but move instead towards an infinite semiotic production, a *polysemy* (Littau: 26-27).

Littau's argument is as *theoretical* as it is *allegorical*, i.e. as applicable to the interpretations of the Pandora myth (Pandora as inter-text) as they are to the *myth itself* (Pandora's opening of the box was, allegorically, a forcing open of a closed system, a movement towards infinite production, a polysemy). We might propose a similar, dual-

layered paradigm on the basis of Simmel's comments. At the theoretical, or inter-textual level, Simmel's conflicting interpretations regarding the positive and negative aspects of industrial relativism produce the very same undecidability, which fuels the polysemy of historical discourse on the era, particularly those, motivated by Marxist and Feminist ideology.

At the text level, if we permit ourselves to view the events of history in their quality as *text* (history as allegory), we might propose that this massive relativism subsequent to industrialization and economic expansion, that this casting of the mind into quantifiable symbolic objects, such as money, constitutes, in itself, a Pandora myth, wherein the intellect, as Littau suggests, is freed from its ascetic prison-box, from those "ideals" which have, in binary fashion, divided it from the "things" of this world. This dyad *spiritual-material*, implying a necessary reduction to the positive, or *spiritual* term, is but one of the many reductive binaries inherent in all ideology, in all values deemed absolute: good-evil, virtue-vice, man-woman, straight-homosexual etc. The result of this breaking open is a polysemy, which plays out at the economic level (mass production, the proliferation of icons and images inherent in advertising) and at the cultural level (variety shows, cabaret, the advent of popular cinema with its proliferation of images, the birth of celebrity cults).

Another Derridian binary brought to bear in Littau's argument, that of the *pharmakon* (understood by the ancient Greeks as both *poison* and *remedy*) elucidates, in the context of our song-text translations, the type of reduction imposed by feminist ideological bias on the inherent *polysemy* of the source-text (25). We are turning Littau's argument against her here, and proposing that the very *same* epistemology (the Derridian

binary) which caused medicine, through the history of western science, to reduce the sense of *pharmakon* to the acceptable one (remedy *instead* of poison), is behind the feminist ideology which has reduced, through translation, the polysemy of a song-text such as *Raus' mit den Männern* to the one acceptable historical argument, that of contemporary feminism. The latter re-polarizes the binary, distills out the poison and re-appropriates the text as feminist remedy.

This begs the question, naturally, of whether or not Littau herself is guilty, in her article, of the feminist *pretence to relativism* that we discussed earlier. Why is Pandora's polysemy, specifically, a *feminist* argument? How can the principle of the multi-form, the ever-producing and the infinitely varied be assimilated as feminist re-appropriation? Littau may use Derrida as a means to smash open the Pandora binary, but her feminist argument, i.e. the motivated connection of Derridian polysemy to metaphors specifically feminine (Pandora→polysemy→*feminine principle* vs. Babel→bifid→masculine principle), is predicated on the same sort of reductive dyad she strives to deconstruct in the context of the myth. In this case: a feminist reading vs. a traditional, phallogocentric one. *Masculine vs. feminine*, this is the binary, which governs feminist thinking, a binary consistently reduced to the *one* partisan position of the feminine. The very notion of re-appropriation implies a movement towards the one acceptable term. Littau, like the pharmaceutical companies, has extracted from the Pandora myth its soothing, remedial *pharmakon*.

### ***Comic relativism: Nietzschean vitalism***

In cabaret, comic relativism is the *remedy*, which doesn't *supplant*, but rather *complicates* the poison of the encroaching object. Humour is the means, by which the

subject alternately succumbs to and rises above those forces, which threaten to automatize it. Humour is the means, by which the object, which threatens constantly to annihilate the individual, becomes *the vehicle of its transcendence*. It is therefore no surprise that cabaret, an art form emerging from the variety and proliferation of objects, was partially rooted in *Nietzschean Vitalism*, which praised laughter and folly, the power of the fool to transcend his condition through laughter. *Also Sprach Zarathustra* found its way very quickly into the *Weltanschauung* of turn of the century Europe. By its second edition (1906), more than sixty thousand copies were printed, from a mere sixty copies when the book was first completed (1885). The eponymous anti-hero, having lived among stoics and ascetics, yearns to descend into realm of human foolery: “Und wenn mich einst meine Klugheit verlässt:- ach, sie liebt es, davonzufiegen!- möge mein Stolz dann noch mit meiner Torheit fliegen!” (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach*: 21).<sup>19</sup> He praises passion, folly and laughter as the most powerful weapons against the *heavy spirit*: “Ich würde nur an einen Gott glauben, der zu tanzen verstünde.... Nicht durch Zorn, sondern durch Lachen tötet man. Auf, lasst uns den Geist der Schwere töten!” (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach*: 36).<sup>20</sup> The infamous notion of the *Übermensch* is associated with those who create, those who reap, and those who celebrate life: “Den Schaffenden, den Erntenden, den Feiernden will ich mich zugesellen: den Regenbogen will ich ihnen zeigen und alle die Treppen des Übermenschen” (20).<sup>21</sup>

***“Breaking syntax”: relativism and the cult of the fragmented object in art.***

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<sup>19</sup> “And if my wits should ever abandon me- and..oh!..they like to fly off and leave me!- than may fly on proud in foolishness!”

<sup>20</sup> “I should believe only in a God, who knows how to dance. Not through scorn, but through laughter does man kill. Rise! And let’s kill the heavy spirit!”

<sup>21</sup> “With those who create, who reap, who celebrate shall I join company. I shall show them the rainbow and all the steps of the *Übermensch*.”

Cabaret developed out the industrial paradigm and its consequent relativizing effects on the attitudes of turn of the century Europe, attitudes not only displayed by philosophers of the era (Simmel, Nietzsche), but also by contemporary trends in art. The German *Jugendstil* movement broke the nineteenth century epigonal tradition of neo-classicism by adopting, as its principle, the heterogeneity, the fractured aspect of contemporary metropolitan experience. As its canvass, the *Jugendstil* adopted the objects of everyday life (house facades and interiors, wall-paper, even silverware) and *reshaped* them on the basis of organic and fragmented geometric forms. Otto Julius Bierbaum, in his novel *Stilpe* (1897), made the connection between this popular *art nouveau* and a potential revolution of the theatre along the same lines. A theatre based on the multiplication of objects, upon the fragmentation of experience, upon the principles of *shock* and ever-increasing sensations, a theatre of the metropolitan industrial paradigm, had indeed already been evolving throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. This was, of course, *Vaudeville*, or, more aptly termed *Das Variété*. Bierbaum conceptualized a theatre which, like Variété, would have massive appeal and which would, like the Jugendstil movement, have a higher artistic aim, would create a modern aesthetic appealing to, and reflecting the character of, the metropolitan spirit perceived in Nietzschean terms, i.e. as vital, sensual and epicurean. This theatre was cabaret, and the first German cabaret impresario, Ernst von Wolzogen, who opened the *Motley Theatre* in 1901, had a bust of Nietzsche in the foyer and nicknamed his enterprise, *das Überbrettl* (the over-stage).

Higher artistic aims for Cabaret were partly a result of failed French model, which Germans sought to imitate and improve upon. France was the original home of cabaret.

As Jelavich points out, the term had two denotations: a lower class wine-house or pub, and a tray that held a variety of different foods or drinks: “Both definitions came together in the “cabaret artistique,” where a variety of different numbers would be performed in a pub setting. Rudolph Salis created the first such establishment in Montmartre in 1881, *Le chat noir*, where a circle of Parisian artists would gather in an informal setting and entertain each other with their works, either completed or in progress. The format soon attracted a broader bourgeois clientele and the club became a fashionable venue. Later on, the club was taken over by Aristide Bruant, who renamed it *le Mirliton* and replaced Salis’ excessive courtesy vis-à-vis his clientele with a mock accusatory, satirical arrogance, setting the stage for cabaret relativism. The French enterprise lasted little over a decade, and its successors were little more than commercial tourist traps. The German proponents of cabaret, as Jelavich points out, were forewarned: “The Parisian prototypes demonstrated that such ventures could be centers of artistic innovation, experimentation and conviviality, but they could just as easily degenerate into commercial kitsch” (Jelavich, *Berlin*: 27).

***Cabaret: eroticism and bodily energy***

This *Nietzschean vitalism*, the proposed higher principle of cabaret, the substance, which was to intersect with the nervous metropolitan age and the fleeting, superficial desires of its subjects (or objects, depending on your perspective), naturally made the body and sensuality central in its artistic mission. Nietzsche had already begun a movement away from Christian asceticism and its reductive binary of soul vs. body, and toward an *integration* of the two: “Aber der Erwachte, der Wissende sagt: Leib bin ich ganz und gar, und nichts außerdem; und Seele ist nur ein Wort für ein Etwas am Leibe“

(Nietzsche, *Also sprach* : 29).<sup>22</sup> Those values deemed exclusively *spiritual*, to be held in contradistinction to the basely material here and now, to this ephemeral *fleshy* dimension of existence, now became *complicated* by the flesh, disseminated and expressed *through* the flesh. Zarathustra loves only those texts, “was einer mit seinem Blut schreibt. Schreibe mit Blut: und du wirst erfahren, dass Blut Geist ist”. As Jelavich affirms, *Variété* attracted the German proponents of cabaret: “because of its physicality and sensuality, its eroticism and bodily energy” (Jelavich: 28).<sup>23</sup>

And this flesh, through which cabaret values (vitalism, hedonism, relativism) were expressed, was preponderantly the flesh of *women*. Preeminent among those venues of *Variété*, upon which cabaret was modeled, were the low-end clubs termed *Tingeltangel*, where soubrettes would perform suggestive numbers while waitresses would walk about with trays collecting tips (coins tumbling onto trays made the *Tingeltangel* sound) and making *appointments* for later. From *Tingeltangel to cabaret*, Women and their bodies became the principle *medium*, through which a form of masculine artistic expression would create and disseminate its cultural objects.

It’s not our intention to decry the injustice inherent in this objectification of women. Nor do we define this role as *imposed* by a patriarchy seeking to *dominate* or to render the feminine somehow *passive*. Such an attitude is naïve, illogical, and *non-academic*, propagated mostly by those feminists who not only hold in contempt, but reject out of hand the objects of “male” culture, who have *no conception* (no conception being synonymous with no personal or scholarly understanding) of the aesthetic/intellectual influence of these cultural objects on both the mind and body of the receiver, specifically

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<sup>22</sup> “But the enlightened one, the philosopher says: I am body through and through, and nothing else. ‘Soul’ is but a word for a certain something of the body.”

<sup>23</sup> “... which are written with blood. Write with blood: and you shall know that blood *is* spirit.”



in an era where the object, as we have discussed, held such power over the desires of the urban subject. If women and their bodies were wielded by the predominantly *male* artists of cabaret, if they were *used* as conduits of masculine expression (and they most certainly were) ; it was because of the executive power women themselves wielded in the arena of *performance*. As objects, they lent their bodies and their voices to the texts of male writers and composers. As subject/interpreters, they lent their personalities and their judgement in bringing these texts to their executive completion, i.e. to the stage.

***Industrial relativism and the cult of the object: history polarized in terms of male-female.***

We do, however, wish to linger on this idea of woman as medium, as the principle instrument of this dissemination of men's cultural objects, or men's Art in its materialized, objective form, for the idea sheds a more revealing light on these song-texts as texts and on the de-textualizing evidenced in our much maligned translations. We have already turned to history to contextualize the development of cabaret out of the urban/industrial paradigm. We have discussed how, out of the fragmented experience of the de-sensitized urban subject who had cast his mental energies into relativism, i.e. the infinitely varied, sensational and quantifiable objects of culture, sprung this equally *fragmented* art form, which varied, sensationalized and multiplied its own objects to meet the desires of the urban subject.

We turn now to history one last time to find out how, and if, this objectification of culture can be viewed in terms of *masculine* and *feminine*, and to discover how women, as an attribute of the cultural objects under investigation here, i.e. cabaret song-texts, are themselves *textualized* by male writers.

Simmel, in his essay *Female Culture* (1911), directly links industrialization, the division of labor and its subsequent *fragmenting of experience* to the *male* psychology:

The “separation of the worker from the instruments of production” appears as only a quite specific economic instance of a general tendency to shift the praxiological and axiological emphasis of culture away from human beings and onto the perfection and self-sufficient development of objects...

The product of labor is coordinated with an impersonal structure whose objective requirements it is obliged to meet. This product is juxtaposed to each of those who contributed to it, as a *totality which he* [the male subject] *does not comprehend* and which *does not reflect his self*...

As the entire history of work demonstrates, it is obvious that the division of labor is incomparably more congruent with the male nature than with the female (Simmel, *On women*: 69-70).<sup>24</sup>

The notion, thoroughly antiquated from the vantage point of modern psychology (not to mention Feminism), bears, nevertheless, great *historical* weight, for it not only sheds light on the ideas on gender prevailing in the period, but it specifically links these ideas to a broader, socio-economic context. Men are more capable of objective relativism, more able to *separate* the *self* from those *objects* into which they project their mental energy, objects, which are, in and of themselves, the mere attributes of some unimaginable whole. Man can function in this fragmented way, because he is capable of separating the *intellect* from the *subjective center*, of devoting his mental powers to an arbitrary task with little or no investment of his personality. Man is thus the great producer of objects, commercial and cultural. Woman, on the other hand, is more *integral* and *subjective*, reflecting a mode of being “in which all the contents of life exist solely through the energy of an indivisible subjective center” (72).

According to Simmel, men are able to function at two specific levels of separation: firstly, they are able to divide the objectifying intellect from the self, or the integral, subjective center; secondly, at the level of performance- they are able to produce objects,

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<sup>24</sup> Our italics

which are mere *attributes* of some inconceivable *whole*, i.e. an unfathomable economic macrostructure. The first (psychological) level of separation is mostly applicable to the mechanistic activities of assembly-line type labor.<sup>25</sup> As far as artistic creation is concerned, the intellect *must* connect with an integral center. The effects, impressions, sensations, of this center *must* be fed through the channels of the intellect.

However, this second level, I would argue, *does indeed* pertain to the work of art as *cultural object* of the industrial era, and this for the following reason: *the subjective center, when channeled through an intensely objectifying and specializing intellect, seems to produce cultural objects which, in and of themselves, are abstract, fragmented, disjointed, incomplete, paratactic.* Indeed, the cultural objects of the era contest to this. Turn of the century trends in art, literature and music were all predicating a movement toward abstraction, a rupture of traditional internal coherences. From the geometric/organic forms of *art nouveau* to Beckett's theater of the absurd to the dadaists and Schoenberg's integral serialism in musical notation, the art of the period sought to break syntax, to reflect the fragmented experience of the urban subject, a subjectivity which knew no other expression than that of bewildering proliferation and discontinuity.

***Sex as "text": paratactic sexuality and translational synthesis***

Although certainly not to the extent of abstraction seen in more privileged art forms, the female characters of cabaret, in their qualities as sex/ text, reflect nevertheless this relentless objectification and fragmentation at the hands of the male writer/composer.

Thematically, we might speak in terms of a *paratactic sexuality* emerging from, and

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<sup>25</sup> Although interesting results emerge when the subject mockingly *re-connects* with such mechanistic labour paradigms. If the typical assembly-line worker needed to *mentally disconnect* from such drone work, to avoid going insane, he could later *re-connect* with it in the carnival context of cabaret, where "kick-lines" of scantily clad women dancing in perfect unison accorded a certain *aesthetic* to the mechanistic industrial paradigm. (Cf. Jelavich, 14).

supported by, the articulating (rather, the disarticulating) structures of the *text* matrix. As usual, considerations of form and considerations of sense overlap in poetic analysis. The term “parataxis” is particularly helpful in this regard, for we employ it both at the poetic structural level (referring to disarticulated text structures) and at the semantic level (referring to the disarticulated representation of women and sexuality). This will become clearer through source-text examples. As far as the target-texts are concerned, we would contend that they impose an undesirable *syn-tax* (or synthesis) at the structural level. They display a translation methodology of *re-articulation*, a methodology which results in the undesirable *synthesis* of those formal aspects, which, in the source-text, are paratactic and, therefore *sexsuisemblant*, i.e. reflecting the disjointed gender dynamics at the semantic level. Though all the song-texts display, to varying extents, this translation vice, we observe it most systematically employed in Spoliansky’s *Ich bin ein Vamp*.

Consider this excerpt from the first verse along with Alan Lareau’s translation:

<p>Spoliansky, Mischa. <i>Ich bin ein Vamp!</i> . (Lemper: 20).          Ich schlaf’ im Bett der Pompadour,          ich habe Lulus rotes Haar,          ich habe Salomes Figur,          ich hab’ die Gier der Pothiphar!          Ich trage Mona Vannas Kleid,          den Ring der Marie Antoinette,          ich trag’ sogar seit ein’ger Zeit          der schönen Helena Korsett</p>	<p>Spoliansky, Mischa. <i>I am a vamp</i>. Alan Lareau (trans.) (Lemper: 20).          My bed belonged to Pompadour          like Lulu I have bright red hair          I dance as well as Salome          and treat my Baptists just as fair          I wear Mata Hari’s dress          the ring of Marie Antoinette          The fairest Helen wore this corset          to a gala Trojan fête.</p>
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Although we certainly don’t have a Dali painting in front of us, the source text does construct a semantic jigsaw puzzle based on a disparate listing of vampish attributes, all of which have little or no connection with any imaginable central character, but which “vamp” their significance from a periphery of literary and pop culture references. The

character of the song is really no more than the sum of her stolen parts, more of a *re-vamp* than a vamp. At the formal or textual level, this gradual piecing together of the vamp Gestalt is an effect of strategic breaks in versification. Except for the seventh, each line contains a new and different vamp- trait, disconnected from the last by syntactic closure (the use of commas) and rhetorical divisions (the anaphoric reiteration of *ich* at the incipit of each line). The effect of the text form is that of *the articles of a list*, articles, which have no specific relevance to each other. The *ich* has, quite literally, *no* substantial complementing features. It can only repeat itself ad infinitum in a compulsive, broken spiral. For want of any specific, *qualifiable* central image, *ich* signifies through the compounding effect of *repetition*. The value of the vamp, in other words, is presented as a function of *quantity*, rather than *quality*.

Lareau's translation, on the contrary, re-synthesizes the paratactic sexuality emergent in the source- text structures. The anaphoric *ich*, with its fragmenting effect, is all but discarded, replaced with ad-libbed paraphrastic explicitations, which articulate nicely with their preceding clauses (*I dance as well as Salome/ and treat my Baptists just as fair... The fairest Helen wore this corset/ to a gala Trojan fête*). The most salient *re-connection*, however, occurs with the passage from *metaphor* to *simile*. Metaphor establishes a comparison *elliptically*, allowing for ambiguity and polysemy (we are free in the source-text to decide whether our vamp actually *possesses* Lulu's hair- like Pompadour's bed- or simply has hair *like* Lulu's). Simile, on the other hand, univocally *explains* the comparison, again with the appropriate articulating markers (like *Lulu I have bright red hair...I treat my Baptists just as fair* ).

As we mentioned before, this synthesizing effect is prevalent in most all the translated song texts. *L'Heure Bleue* (Spoliansky) reprises the fragmented list structure articulated (or rather disarticulated) by the self-indulgent *ich*: “Ich pflege mich, ich fette mich,/ ich pudre mich,/ ich creme mich, ich föhne mich,/ ich dufte mich, ich rieche nur...” (*Lemper*: 22). Alan Lareau insists on articulating this disjointed ensemble into a neat clause which pieces together a coherent image: “I’m busy making up my face/ Retracing brows, erasing age/ Applying lotions, powders, creams and mixing scents”. Finally, Hollaender’s *Sex-Appeal* projects, through artful punning, the *quality* of sex-appeal onto a strictly *quantitative* scale. Hollaender borrows the English term “sex-appeal”, and constructs his scale on the paronomasia between “sex” and “sechs” (German for “six”): “Doch ich hab’ noch ein höh’res Ziel:/ Am liebsten wär’ ich Sex-Appeal/ und 7-Appeal und 8-Appeal!/ Mir wär kein Sex-Appeal zu viel!” (*Lemper*: 14). Underscored here are, once again, the *list effect* (the graded increments of the sex-appeal scale, each *divided* and *differentiated* from the previous one), and the projection of an *unattainable quality* into *measurable quantity* (the scale itself). All notion of *sex-appeal as quantity* is lost in Lareau’s translation, along with the *listing* of scale increments: “They may all end up nervous wrecks/ While I count slow from one to sex/ That’s fantasy, it’s me/ Who makes the sex appeal.”

### ***Conclusion***

In way of conclusion: a brief recapitulation. We discussed how ideology is inherently axiomatic, i.e. grounded in inherent qualities, in values deemed absolute. A closer look at a current definition of *freedom* gave helped shed light on how ideologies, developing in response to oppressive regimes, tend to become reducible, i.e. *identical* to

the value-systems of these regimes. We have seen how comic relativism *de-axiomatizes* value-systems, *casts them low*, objectifies them and reassesses their value on a *quantifiable* scale. History (Jelavich, Nietzsche, Simmel) has shown us that these song-texts were conceived in *intensely relativistic* terms. Evolving out of the industrial metropolitan paradigm, they presented a picture of women and sexuality concurrent with the fragmentation of experience, the developing trends in art, and the overall proliferation of cultural and economic objects relativized by the money market. The texts themselves, in their very syntax, reflects on the canvass of women's bodies this fragmentation of experience. Current Feminist ideology has, however, *axiomatized* these song texts, *re-synthesized* their textual/sexual imagery and silenced their self-mocking, self-relativizing subtexts for the sake of those values they deem *inalienable* and *absolute*. It is guilty of *buying low* and selling ridiculously high, of plundering the *Kleinkunst* of the black market and translating its objects into talismans.

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