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Skeletons in the Basement? Family (and) Politics in Josef Haslinger's *Das Vaterspiel*

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In an interview about his 2000 novel *Das Vaterspiel*, Josef Haslinger summarized what he termed the *Vaterprinzip*: "Während des ganzen verfluchten 20. Jahrhunderts waren Vaterspiele im Gange. Das Vaterprinzip war vorherrschend und das bedeutete: Gewalt, Gewalt der Männer. In verschiedensten Formen." *Das Vaterspiel* was written at a moment when Haslinger's frustration with his native Austria was ascendant (a sentiment informed by the rise of Jörg Haider and the dismantling of the long-established *Große Koalition*), and his novel considers the many ways in which Austria in 1999/2000 had failed to adequately come to terms with injustices that the "Väter" of previous generations had inflicted. In this analysis, I examine how Haslinger uses the Kramer family's fall from grace, along with a consideration of (divided) space, performance, and self-presentation (embodied in particular by the constructed performance given by Jörg Haider on the European political stage), to metaphorize the disintegration of Austrian politics at the dawn of the new millenium. Further, I draw connections between *Das Vaterspiel* and Haslinger's political essays, and consider how several of the themes that emerge in his novel are also present in his published sociopolitical commentaries such as *Politik der Gefühle* (1987) and *Klasse Burschen* (2001).

I. Introduction

Josef Haslinger elaborated on his so-called 'Vaterprinzip' in an interview from 2000 about *Das Vaterspiel*, his then-new novel: 'Während des ganzen verfluchten 20. Jahrhunderts waren Vaterspiele im Gange. Das Vaterprinzip war vorherrschend und das bedeutete: Gewalt, Gewalt der Männer. In verschiedensten Formen.'¹ An author engaged in dialogues both political and aesthetic, Haslinger often conflates the *Familienvater* of domestic space with the archetypal Austrian patriarch in politics, and uses the dual motifs of fathers and families to metaphorize sociopolitical issues in his essayistic and fiction writing. *Das Vaterspiel* is both an Austrian family story and a political story, often with little distinction being made between the two. Haslinger repeatedly returns to the familial structure in his fiction writing, commenting that, in general, the parent–child relationships in his texts reflect 'das verfluchte Jahrhundert'

¹ In 2012, Haslinger was asked about this quote and its relationship to *Das Vaterspiel*; specifically, if the various father–son relationships in that novel should be juxtaposed with each other. He responded, 'Ein wenig war es so gedacht, anhand unterschiedlicher Vater-Sohn-Konstellationen das verfluchte Jahrhundert zu spiegeln' (Haslinger, pers. comm.).

(Haslinger, pers. comm.) because they contain a political dimension: 'Familiengeschichten sind politische Geschichten und umgekehrt' ('Geschichte'). *Das Vaterspiel* thus offers readers a multilayered narrative which functions in several ways: as a study of family relationships, a consideration of politically charged memory and an examination of Austrian politics, which together artfully combine in a text that appeals to popular and academic audiences alike.

About his novel, Haslinger remarked, 'Jeder hat in diesem Roman etwas zu verstecken [...] Der Roman ist also ein Versteckspiel' (Haslinger, pers. comm.). *Das Vaterspiel*, like its predecessor *Opernball* (1995), is a hefty work which traverses time and space and shifts between narrators and media. Though this thematically dense novel can be unpacked in an equal number of different fashions, my reading centres on Haslinger's notion of the *Versteckspiel*, the act of conspiratorily hiding someone or something, in its analysis. I argue that a majority of the principal characters in *Das Vaterspiel* engage in the act of hiding something from the world – from the abstraction of one's true nature, to an entity as tangible as another human being – as a means to metaphorize problems with generational memory and in Austrian families and politics. Though it may seem an unlikely springboard for a literary study, I first foreground my reading of the novel in a political analysis which centers on the FPÖ/BZÖ² figurehead Jörg Haider, whose highly curated presentation of self on the Austrian political stage and meaning for Haslinger as embodiment of inauthenticity leads to a discussion of space and its division into visible and invisible regions. I examine Haider as the corporeal manifestation of divided structural space, a motif that Haslinger employs to great dramatic effect in the final third of *Das Vaterspiel* through the story of Uncle Lucas. Second, I turn to a close reading of the novel and examine how the disintegration of Rupert Kramer's family mirrors what Haslinger perceived as Austria's political decline in the late 1990s, also described in his essay collections *Politik der Gefühle* (1987) and *Klasse Burschen* (2001). I discuss other family legacies in *Das Vaterspiel* as well, including the intergenerational conspiracy in Mimi Madonick's family to keep war criminal (Great-) Uncle Lucas hidden for decades in a Long Island basement.³ Third, I consider the theoretical dimensions of space, using arguments from Gaston Bachelard, Edward Casey and Dean MacCannell to discuss structural space, its alignment with the lived body, and how the intermingling of the two encapsulates Haslinger's critique of performance and inauthenticity in spaces of varying accessibility and visibility. I also consider Haslinger's previous deployments of structural and spatial metaphors to describe the failure of Austrian politics in adequately coming to terms with the past in the post-war era. Finally, I turn briefly to the character of Jonas Shtrom, whose explicit search for justice is thwarted repeatedly by Rupert. Engaged in an existential conflict, their narratives are separated by a chasm of experience: one of historical suffering, the other of contemporary privilege. Through this relationship, Haslinger shows how generations several times removed from historical transgressions, exemplified by Rupert and Mimi in *Das Vaterspiel*, are continually complicit in the struggles of those victims whose tragedies remain unresolved.

II. Die Haider Show

Asked in a 2000 interview about the role played by the 'österreichische Realität' in his works, Haslinger replied, 'Es ist meine Realität. Es ist die Realität, mit der ich aufgewachsen bin, die Realität, die mich in hohem Maße beeinflusst. Auch wenn ich die meiste Zeit nicht in Wien bin, habe ich das Gefühl, in Wien zu leben. Das ist die Realität [...] mit der ich mich

² The FPÖ and BZÖ, or the Freedom Party of Austria and Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, are both right-wing populist political parties in Austria.

³ For a more elaborate analysis of family trauma in *Das Vaterspiel*, see Martina Katrin Hamidouche's 2011 dissertation *Gedächtnis und Trauma im Zeitgenössischen Österreichischen Familienroman* (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign).

auch am ehesten auseinandersetzen muß' (Wildner). Despite his residency and employment in Germany,⁴ engagement and awareness of culture and politics throughout Europe,⁵ and his frequent travels to the United States (USA) for reasons both personal and professional,⁶ Haslinger's identity as an Austrian with permanent residence in Vienna profoundly shapes his lived experience. Often called a 'politisch engagierter Schriftsteller' (Wildner), he criticizes the troubled and troubling 'österreichische Realität' in his works because, in his words, literature 'hat eine [Aufgabe] in einem weiteren politischen Sinne [...] weil sie eine Möglichkeit ist, für soziale Themen zu sensibilisieren' (Wildner). For Haslinger, Austria is both the place that shapes his lived reality and also a country 'das mir von Tag zu Tag widerlicher wird', and which 'alles unternimmt, um den europäischen Nachbarn zu beweisen, daß ihr Mißtrauen nicht unbegründet ist' (*Klasse Burschen* 33, 36). Although few Austrian political figures or establishments are spared in his writing, Haslinger has devoted a greater portion of his critique to a single politician in particular: Jörg Haider.⁷ Haslinger is certainly not alone in doing so. For several reasons, including his own clashes with artistic and intellectual communities,⁸ Haider was the subject of countless editorials, plays, novels and academic studies before his sudden death in 2008.⁹

In *Defiant Populist*, a study of Jörg Haider's political ascent, Lothar Höbelt reminds us that "There's no business like show business" – and politics is obviously part of it all. There is no more fitting proof of that thesis than the career of Jörg Haider' (xiii). Perhaps more than anyone else on the stage of Austrian politics in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, Haider embodies the showmanship, hypocrisy and bold denial of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that Haslinger frequently targets. In life, Haider was obsessed with the cult of appearances, not only in the sense of his physical body (though, to be sure, the construction of a highly edited physical image was of central importance to him) but also in terms of self-presentation, how he appeared in public space. Much has been made of his charisma, his rhetoric, his 'suntanned, telegenic appearance' (Wodak and Pelinka xv). In a BBC profile of Haider, he is described as 'more like a pop star than a politician [...] he cultivates a young sporty image, running marathons, climbing mountains and even singing in pop concerts. He is

⁴ Haslinger is Professor of Literary Aesthetics and Director of the German Institute for Literature in Leipzig (Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig).

⁵ Haslinger is President of PEN-Zentrum Deutschland, was one of the initiators of the Austrian human rights group SOS Mitmensch (which, notably, was founded in 1993 in direct opposition to Haider's 'Austria First' FPÖ campaign) and a former editor of the Austrian literary journal *wespennest. zeitschrift für brauchbare texte und bilder*. He also wrote several collections of political and aesthetic essays, including *Politik der Gefühle* (1987), *Rotweissbuch* (1988), *Wozu brauchen wir Atlantis?* (1990), *Das Elend Amerikas: Elf Versuche über ein gelobtes Land* (1992), *Hausdurchsuchung im Elfenbeinturm* (1996), *Klasse Burschen* (2001), *Am Ende der Sprachkultur? über das Schicksal von Schreiben, Sprechen, und Lesen* (2003), *Wie werde ich ein verdammt guter Schriftsteller?* (2005) and *Schreiben lernen – Schreiben – Lehren* (2006).

⁶ To name just a few of his engagements in the USA, Haslinger was twice a member of the Iowa Writers' Workshop (first in 1994 and again in 2005), was a writer in residence at the University of Illinois in Chicago in 2006, has taught at Oberlin College and Bowling Green State University, and has been invited as a guest speaker to numerous US institutions. Many of his fictional texts are inspired by travelling, including several of the stories in his 2006 collection *Zugvögel*, while his collection of essays *Das Elend Amerikas: Elf Versuche über ein verlobtes Land*, informed by his experiences in different regions of the USA, examines the faltering dominance of the country in the world and discusses popular US culture.

⁷ *Die Haider Show: Zur Psychopolitik der FPÖ* is the title of Klaus Ottomeyer's 2000 study, referenced in this analysis, about Jörg Haider and the FPÖ.

⁸ Tony Judt summarizes Haider's attitudes toward the artistic community in Austria: 'In Haider's world the country is rotting from within, burdened with the cost of supporting *Sozialschmarotzern* – social parasites, among whom he includes not only government employees and pensioners but also the cultural "swine" (*Schuft*) in Vienna who take subsidies from the state for musical, artistical, and theatrical productions, sell the country short in their criticisms of Austria's conservative tendencies and its murky past, and lack national feeling' ('Ghost').

⁹ Haider died in a car accident on 11 October 2008.

every bit the trend-setter' (Baker). Tony Judt, a historian of European history, reminds us in his article 'Austria & the Ghost of the New Europe' that 'Jörg Haider was born in Upper Austria in January 1950, and thus had what he calls "die Gnade der späten Geburt" – the good fortune of a late birth; in other words, he cannot be tarred with the brush of Nazism and isn't responsible for Austria's past' ('Ghost'). Despite his fortuitous birth year, Haider's past is murky. As a law student in Vienna, he was active in FPÖ youth organizations and other *Burschenschaften* which retained 'Aryan' membership provisions until the 1970s; his parents were both active members of the Nazi party; and *Bärenthal*,¹⁰ a large estate in Carinthia valued at several millions of euros, was acquired by Haider's uncle after the *Anschluß* as part of the so-called 'de-Jewification' programme and inherited by Haider in 1986, making him one of the richest men in Austria (Marcus 'Shadows').¹¹

Haider's political persona is an amalgam of historical and political allegiances combined with contemporary Austrian xenophobia,¹² together presented to the public via hollow populist rhetoric. Haslinger objects to the slipperiness of this constructed 'Jörg Haider', who ascends beyond the scope of mere mortals to become, in Haslinger's words, 'Das Phänomen Haider' (*Klasse Burschen* 123). Christa Zöchling points out, 'In his youth Haider was an outstanding actor' (quoted in Baker), and in a review of Zöchling's biography *Haider: Licht und Schatten einer Karriere*, J. S. Marcus remarks that '[Haider] has no clear identity [...] [he has an] ability to change, or seem to change, his politics as often as he changes his clothes' ('Shadows'). Similarly, Haslinger calls the FPÖ, Haider's political party until 2005,¹³ 'ein reines Chamäleon' ('Austrian Spirit'). More than anything else, performance defines the Haider phenomenon, characterized by Haslinger as 'eine öffentliche Inszenierung, eine Polit-Show' with a 'braune Vorgeschichte und politische Rahmenbedingungen' (*Klasse Burschen* 126, 133).¹⁴ Haslinger sees Haider split between two selves: the politician and the spectacle that he represents: 'Das Phänomen Haider ist dem Aufstieg des Politikers gleichen Namens' (*Klasse Burschen* 123). Similarly, Haider's ideological universe is one of polar extremes in perpetual opposition to each other: 'die Lichtwelt im Gefolge von Jörg Haider [ist] jeweils von einer Schattenwelt bedroht' (*Klasse Burschen* 127).

The 'extreme Polarisierung' (*Klasse Burschen* 127) enacted by Haider's rhetoric and persona suggests the existence of two worlds: one of light and one of shadows. In other words, space in Haider's universe – both the space of the enacted lived body and experienced, habitable space – is divided into visible ('light') and invisible ('dark') parts. The public, visible world

¹⁰ In his novel *Opernball* (1995), Haslinger parodies Haider in the character Jup Bärenthal, the extremist leader of Austria's National Party.

¹¹ Lonnie Johnson even posed the succinct and provocative question in an article from 2000: 'One Austrian politician came to power democratically in Germany in 1933 and another has come into power democratically in Austria in the year 2000. Is it legitimate to spin out the parallels?' ('Austria's New Government').

¹² Wodak and Pelinka suggest that prejudice, whether it be anti-Semitism or rooted in some other form of anti-foreigner sentiment, is an unmovable feature of Austrian identity: 'Viewed from a historical perspective, racist, ethnicist, and xenophobic prejudices are strongly rooted in the Austrian tradition' (xiv).

¹³ Haider split from the FPÖ in 2005 and founded the BZÖ in April of that year.

¹⁴ In *Klasse Burschen*, Haslinger summarizes Klaus Ottomeyer's monograph *Die Haider Show*, which describes Haider's adoption of whichever persona is most politically advantageous:

Da ist zunächst einmal Haider als Rebell in einer Art Mafia-Staat, ein neuer Robin Hood, der trickreich und gewieft die Mächtigen aus der Reserve lockt und zum Halali des kleinen Mannes gegen die Bonzen bläst. Dann ist da der Sportler Haider, die Verkörperung des Gesunden, Erfolgreichen, Mutigen, der Neo-Macho, der nach dem erotischen Bad in der Menge für seine traumverlorenen Verehrerinnen den Kinderscheck zückt. Als dritte Teilfigur macht Klaus Ottomeyer den Bierzelt-Sozialisten aus, den 'Anwalt der Anständigen und Fleißigen', der mit kumpelhaftem Schulterklatschen die Illusion einer Aufhebung der Klassengesellschaft verbreitet. Und schließlich gibt es noch den generationsübergreifend identitätsstiftenden Haider, eine Art Vollwaschmittel für die 'Soldatengeneration', der die Kollektivschuldthese selbst vor SS-Veteranen so unermüdlich zurückweist, bis auch keine Einzelschuld mehr übrig bleibt. (*Klasse Burschen* 126–7).

of *The Haider Show* is presented as virtuous and good, but, as Haslinger and others would argue, it is strategically cultivated, illusory and inauthentic. In contrast, Haider's invisible world is private, inaccessible to the public: a revelatory space where the constructed self un.masks. Among others, the theorists Erving Goffmann and Dean MacCannell employ the terminology of the theatre to discuss the division of space into front and back regions, much like those imagined in Haider's dual worlds. Visible front spaces are defined by enacted performances for the public, while back spaces are exclusive and closed to audiences and outsiders (MacCannell 590). MacCannell emphasizes the necessary division of space into contrasting regions: 'the mere existence [of back regions], and the possibility of their violation, functions to sustain the commonsense polarity of social life into what is taken to be intimate and real and what is thought to be "show"' (591). In other words, that which occurs in front, visible space is a performed façade, an illusory 'show'. This theory of performance in space is crucial to understanding Haslinger's *Das Vaterspiel*. As I shall argue below, divisions of both self and space (and the self within space) are central, not only to a full reading of the novel as a *Familienroman* but also to understanding it as a metaphor for the political climate in Austria at the end of the twentieth century, as Haider's ascent seemed unstoppable and Haslinger's disgust with his homeland, a place so intrinsic to his personal, daily reality, grew at an equally rapid rate. Though Haslinger has, at several moments over the last four decades, exhibited his frank disgust at the Austrian political environment, I utilize his characterizations and critiques of Haider in particular for several reasons in this analysis. First, Haslinger has commented on the figure of Haider and the cult of personality surrounding him with more frequency than he has any other contemporary Austrian politician. Second, in late 1990s Austria there seemed to be no other political figure who better embodied the hollowness of performance – and the corresponding inaccessibility of the self in private back regions – than Jörg Haider. Last, the person of Haider and his attributive political parties are also a vehicle for Haslinger to demonstrate the failures of the SPÖ, which are metaphorized via the Kramer family and considered in the sections below.

III. Family + Politics

Writing for the *Wiener Zeitung* in 2000, Uwe Schütte referenced the *feuilleton*-chatter surrounding *Das Vaterspiel*, which had 'ein großes Aufheben darüber gemacht, dass das Buch, indem es den inneren Verfall der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie anhand der Familiengeschichte Kramers aufzeigt, das Ende der SPÖ-Ära vorhergesagt habe' ('Haslinger'). Schütte points out that Haslinger certainly began his work on the novel before the emergence of the Schwarz-Blaue Koalition in 2000 and, because of this, could not possibly have predicted the collapse of the SPÖ era.¹⁵ However, he also acknowledges Haslinger's canny analysis of shifting Austrian politics in the late 1990s, thematized in his book via the deployment of the Kramers, a dis-integrated political family aligned with the SPÖ. Austrian politics are a distinctly familial matter for Haslinger, and his scrutiny of several families in *Das Vaterspiel* is a medium for his commentaries on political change and rupture at the close of the twentieth century. In *Politik der Gefühle*, Haslinger's collection of essays written in response to the 1986 Waldheim Affair, he conflates Austria and the family unit, declaring, 'Man muß [...] Österreich als eine Familie sehen' (15), and 'Die Familie ist die Tabernakel unseres Staates' (14). In Austria, the political candidate 'gibt sich als Familienvater, der für alle seine Kinder da ist' (11), and

¹⁵ The formation of the so-called Black-Blue Coalition – the coalition between the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) and the FPÖ – in 2000 was met with protests at every level, both within Austria and beyond its borders. Protests against the coalition were staged on the streets of Vienna, while European Union sanctions against Austria were imposed almost immediately (the wisdom of these sanctions is debatable, however, as the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, while undesirable to many, was forged legally).

'verwendet den Segen der Familie als Füllstoff für die Risse im politischen Leben' (12). It is also this *Familienvater*, Haslinger later wrote in his 2001 essay collection *Klasse Burschen*, who maintains the spatial divide of front and back regions:

Es wird doch jeder besorgte Familienvater, jeder treue Freund ein wenig darauf achten dürfen, nein, achten müssen, wer zur Familie, wer zur Freundeskreis gehört und wer nicht. [...] Und wie ist das mit dem Land? Ist der Traum vom ehrvollen und treuen Familienvater nicht immer schon ausgeweitet worden auf den vom guten Landesvater, der seine eigenen Interessen hinanstellt, um dem Gemeinwohl zu dienen, und der darin, in der uneigennütigen Bestellung des Staatshaushaltes, sein wahres Glück, seine wahre Erfüllung findet? (160–1)

The *Familienvater* described by Haslinger in *Klasse Burschen* evokes the spatial divide in Haider's world. Domestic *Familienvater* is also political *Landesvater*, and, as such, he defines the rules for belonging and corresponding exclusion in private and public space. Haider's political performance thus also represents a paradigm of belonging which reflects, as Ruth Wodak writes, 'the simple division of "the world" into "good" and "bad" guys' (35). In a BBC Radio report from 2000, professors Klaus Ottomeyer and Walter Ötsch, both scholars of Jörg Haider and his political image, commented on this divide:

The important thing is this division of the world into one of light and one of shadow. The leader provides support to people with a weak ego. It's a way of getting rid of one's own negativity, greed and laziness by casting them into the shadows. [...] The 'us' are always exclusively good, efficient, hardworking, industrious, full of character. And the 'them' are always exclusively lazy, social parasites, corrupt criminals. (*The Haider Show*)

Wodak points out that, '[in politics] distinguishing between "us" and "them" [is] one of the most important functions to allow, on the one hand, positive self-presentation of the speakers/writers and, on the other hand, negative other presentation of opponents' (33). Her emphasis on self-presentation recalls Haider's curated public image, which is boosted when he splits space into regions of belonging and exclusion. Judt suggests that this division of the world into monolithic groups has larger implications for how we come to terms with the past; it leads to 'two moral vocabularies, two sorts of reasoning, two different pasts' ('Past' 89). Josef Haslinger plucks Haider's simplistic division of the world into polarized regions of good and evil, and inserts that paradigm into *Das Vaterspiel*, which leads to several pointed assertions. First, it engenders a moral relativism – akin to Judt's 'two moral vocabularies' – that permits Rupert Kramer, grandson of a Dachau survivor and son of an SPÖ minister, to blithely assist in the rehabilitation of Mimi's Uncle Lucas, a Lithuanian war criminal. Second, it translates to a physical division of concrete, lived space, manifested in Lucas' hidden basement bunker. And, last, it allows Haslinger to exercise a critique of the *Familienvater* in Austria – who is also the political *Landesvater* – and examine the ways in which hypocrisy and reductionism propagate the legacy of failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Austria, from the shared interiors of familial domestic space to the wide stage of Austrian politics.

Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler called *Das Vaterspiel* 'eine kleine Familiengeschichte der Sozialdemokratie' ('Ödipus'), and, indeed, the novel underscores the centrality of the 'Vaterprinzip' in families and politics alike: the role that fathers assume in developing their children's identities; the legacies of memory and agency passed from father to son; and the questionable, longstanding dominance of a political patriarchy in Austria which underwent several transformations at the end of the twentieth century. Writing for the *Berliner*

Lesezeichen in 2001, Ursula Reinhold focused on Haslinger's deployment of familial (de-)generations to metaphorize the disintegration of the SPÖ in the late 1990s:

Die Ich-Erzählung wird hier zu einem großräumigen Gesellschaftsbild der Gegenwart mit historischer Tiefenschärfe. [...] Es wird der soziale Aufstieg und politisch-moralische Verfall dieser Familie anschaulich, sie wird in der Spannung zwischen dem hauptstädtischen Wien und der österreichischen Provinz mit historisch psychologischem Tiefgang ins Bild gesetzt. Dabei werden der Filz, die Korruption und Vetternwirtschaft kritisch hinterfragt, in denen die Jahrzehnte sozialdemokratischer Politik geendet haben. ('Gesellschaftskritischer Familienroman')

Reinhold highlights the interplay between family and politics in *Das Vaterspiel*, where the decline of the Kramers mirrors what Haslinger perceived as a dangerous turn towards political extremism after the establishment of the ÖVP¹⁶–FPÖ coalition in 2000. Haslinger demonstrates how political engagement handed down over generations ultimately becomes trite in his contemporary Austria. Rupert's paternal grandfather, once a political prisoner in Dachau, was fiercely committed to the cause of social democracy. In 1988 during the Waldheim era, he called for transparency, declaring that 'Die Zeit des Schweigens ist vorbei. Jetzt muss auch in unserer Partei rückhaltlos über alles gesprochen werden, auch wenn es wehtut' (*Vaterspiel* 280). In contrast, Rupert's father, Helmut, having attained an even more influential position as *Verkehrsminister* in the SPÖ, hypocritically plays the part of ideologue, despite his abandonment of those same principles in his domestic life: 'Selbst als er schon Minister war und gleichzeitig in hundert Aufsichtsräten saß, am Ersten Mai zog er in aller Früh von unserem Designerhaus am Rande des Wienerwalds los, um für einen halben Tag in der Innenstadt den Proletarier zu spielen' (*Vaterspiel* 230). Later, Rupert realizes that 'mein Vater, der Sozialist, [nahm] das Leistungsprinzip ernster als alle aufstrebenden Jungkapitalisten zusammen' (*Vaterspiel* 231), and Rupert's grandfather, disgusted at his son Helmut's extravagant suburban home, points out that 'ein sozialdemokratischer Politiker dürfe sich in seinem Lebensstil nicht so weit von seinen Wählern entfernen' (*Vaterspiel* 282). While Helmut's success as a *Landesvater* is questionable, his prowess as a *Familienvater* is even worse, with his family's unravelling being a direct result of his extramarital affair. Rupert, meanwhile, disengages from his family's political legacy altogether, commenting, 'Mir war das damals alles gleichgültig' as he recounts stories of his grandfather's political involvement. Indeed, on just the second page of his novel, Haslinger introduces these intergenerational ruptures via the eponymous *Vatervernichtungsspiel*, which Rupert narrates while virtually slaughtering his father:

Weißt du [der Vater], sagte ich [Rupert], ich würde dir nichts Gutes tun, wenn ich dich länger am Leben ließe. Korrupte Schweine wie du müssen früher oder später geschlachtet werden.

Für meinen Vater hatte ich mir schon Hunderte Todesarten ausgedacht. Die mit dem Messer war eine vergleichsweise harmlose, ein beruhigender Gedanke zwischendurch. Ein schnelles Gegenübertreten von Mann zu Mann. In zwanzig Minuten wäre das Blut auf dem Boden geronnen. Natürlich würde ich Handschuhe tragen. Aber ich würde sie nicht im Garten wegwerfen, sondern in meinem eisernen Öfchen verbrennen. Mit der zufriedenen Miene eines Mannes, der getan hat, was getan werden musste. (*Vaterspiel* 10)

¹⁶ The ÖVP, or the Austrian People's Party, is a largely Christian democratic political party.

The provocative language with which Rupert details the scene of his father's virtual murder evidences an unsettling historical obliviousness, a twisting of the proverbial knife that makes the ritualistic killing that much more cruel. His scheme to burn his bloody gloves in an *Öfchen* after he declares with satisfaction that he has accomplished 'was getan werden musste' (which recalls Kurt Waldheim's insistent response 'Ich habe meine Pflicht erfüllt' during the Waldheim Affair) resuscitates a vernacular derived from the idioms of the Second World War. In other words, the political legacy represented by his father and grandfather is of such little consequence for Rupert that he casually employs language which directly calls to mind the Nazi past against which his forefathers strove. Fathers in *Das Vaterspiel* are always the losers of the 'father game', growing ever more irrelevant as their sons reject the legacies left for them to inherit.¹⁷

Though Rupert and his sister, Klara, are removed from the memory of Austria's fascist past, they are certainly not unaware of its impact. Klara, for example, provocatively declares, 'Hitler ist sexy', at a dinner party hosted by her parents and attended by the party secretary and his family:

Sie [die Gäste] kamen auf den Obmann der Freiheitlichen Partei zu sprechen, der unter Hitler bei der Waffen-SS war. Das Wort Hitler fiel, und im nächsten Moment schloss meine Schwester mit der Bemerkung heraus: Hitler ist sexy ...

Mein Vater rang nach Luft. Die Tochter eines sozialdemokratischen Ministers, der seinen Antifaschismus gleichsam mit der Muttermilch eingesogen hatte, die Enkelin eines Dachauhäftlings sagt einfach so über den Tisch: Hitler ist sexy. (139)¹⁸

Klara is cognizant of her statement's power, particularly in the company of her parent's dinner-party guests. Her reaction to Helmut's outrage is sheepishness mixed with rebellion; she continues to assert that Hitler is 'sexy', despite in the interim having become 'red in the face' (*Vaterspiel* 139). After he sends her away from the table, Helmut labels her outburst a 'Pubertätssache' (*Vaterspiel* 140), attributing the misbehaviour to simple teenage mischief. But the party secretary's wife has another theory about Klara's generation, which in fact does much to underscore the intergenerational dissimilarities present in the novel: 'Kinder [hätten] es heutzutage schwer, sich gegen ihre Eltern aufzulehnen. Für uns war es eigentlich leicht, sagte sie, wir waren umgeben von Reaktionären und Arschlöchern, die konnte man nur bekämpfen. Ohne Auflehnung keine Identität, das ist für die jungen Leute heute ein großes Problem' (*Vaterspiel* 140). The party secretary's wife identifies the central generational conflict in *Das Vaterspiel*, which is indeed not limited to the family sphere but rather suggests far-reaching social implications. Helmut, purveyor of political image in the post-war era, has raised two children almost entirely alienated from political engagement, despite their seeming awareness of which topics are incendiary. Indeed, Rupert is devoid of

¹⁷ At the end of *Das Vaterspiel*, Helmut commits suicide ('zwei Schachteln Schlaftabletten und eine Flasche Whisky'), but his self-inflicted death does not signal his victory over the *Vatervernichtungsspiel*. Haslinger commented, 'Die Väter verlieren immer. Auch wenn es lange nicht danach aussieht. Am Ende erscheint Rupert das 'Vatervernichtungsspiel' fast wie ein magischer Akt, ein Voodoo-Zauber, der seinem Vater das Leben gekostet haben mag, obwohl der Selbstmord des Vaters mit dem Spiel nichts zu tun hat. Helmut ist daran gescheitert, dass er der 'bessere' Kapitalist sein wollte, er hat sich verspekuliert. Der Sohn hat mit seinem Spiel Geld gemacht, mehr als er verkraften kann' (Haslinger, pers. comm.). Rupert's computer game, which he finally sells to a New York online gaming entrepreneur, places him into a perpetual conflict with his father for several reasons. First, the bloody destruction of his father is reproduced *ad infinitum* because of the viral success of his game. Second, because of the exponential increase in its exposure, Rupert has proved himself, as Haslinger writes, 'der bessere Kapitalist' with an earning potential that far exceeds his father's.

¹⁸ This is likely a reference to Friedrich Peter, a leader of the FPÖ from 1958 to 1978.

nearly all interests: with the exception of computer games, he is utterly apathetic. He receives only one moderately high mark in his university coursework, which he later discovers is due to his father's political relationship with the seminar professor. Rupert is the young man for whom Latin in high school became a favourite course, owing to 'die Tatsache, dass es offensichtlich nutzlos war' (*Vaterspiel* 177). He is also the man who, during his parents' later divorce proceedings, arranges to be financially supported by his father until the unspecified moment when he 'finanziell auf eigenen Beinen stehen kann' (*Vaterspiel* 85). Rupert, then, is complicated and occasionally likable, but more often than not appalling in his lack of personal accountability. His apathy is particularly problematic when considered in an historical context. Rupert and his sister, while aware of the power of the phrase 'Hitler ist sexy', are not moved enough by its weight to refrain from uttering it. After Klara abandons the dinner party, Rupert's parents comment on their children's perception of the world: 'Aber Klara hat doch keine Ahnung, was Faschismus ist, sagte meine Mutter. Das ist allerdings ein Problem, meinte mein Vater. Tatsache ist, meine Kinder interessieren sich für völlig andere Dinge als ich in ihrem Alter' (*Vaterspiel* 177). In identifying the ideological chasm that separates his offspring from both his own and his father's generations, Helmut is confronted by his simultaneous failures as *Familienvater* and *Landesvater*.

Haslinger has surmised that the generational divide in *Das Vaterspiel* is in fact irreversible: '[Es gibt] mittlerweile eine junge Generation [...] die sich für das, was in der Zeit der Nationalsozialisten geschah, nicht mehr verantwortlich fühlt. Es ist ein schleichender Prozess der Historisierung des Holocaust, der zwar da und dort aufgehalten werden kann, im Prinzip jedoch unumkehrbar ist' (Haslinger, pers. comm.). The dwindling sense of responsibility for National Socialism is, at least according to Haslinger's theory, directly equated to the passage of time and the development of ensuing generations. When asked if he found this diminished accountability problematic, Haslinger suggested, 'Solange es Menschen gibt, die sich als Opfer dessen fühlen, was die Deutschen und Österreicher in der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts getan haben, und seien es Opfer der dritten Generation, solange können wir die historische Täterrolle auch in der Gegenwart nicht ausblenden' (Haslinger, pers. comm.). For Haslinger, the legacy of fascism is inextricable and reproduced from one generation to the next. The roles of victim and perpetrator are transmitted over time, making possible such ideas as 'Opfer der dritten Generation:' victims many times removed from the original transgression. This process of enduring replication sustains the past, rendering it part of the present, making it a contemporary problem.¹⁹ Indeed, Haslinger sees the past and present in Austria as existing within a temporal palimpsest, where the 'nie geheilte Wunde Österreichs' (*Klasse Burschen* 7) is overlaid onto present time. In *Politik der Gefühle*, Haslinger writes that '[in Österreich sind] die Geschichtsprobleme in Wirklichkeit Gegenwartsprobleme' (80), perhaps because, as Judt wrote, '[the present is] built upon historical sands at least as shifty in nature as those upon which the postwar edifice was mounted' ('Past' 112). Similarly, Reinhold credits the continuity that links past and present for the sociopolitical conditions that allow for the possibility of someone like Jörg Haider ('Gesellschaftskritischer Familienroman'). And, finally, Ottomeyer argues that Haider's personal failure to come to terms with the past was used to his advantage in present time as a political tool, which he manipulated and thrust into the public spotlight, despite the private familial nature of his issue. He was only able to do this, Ottomeyer asserts, because so many Austrian families are still managing their own 'unfinished business' from the Nazi era: 'Er hat Österreich in eine große Pyschodramabühne

¹⁹ 'Letztlich geht es darum, ob sich in der gegenärtigen Realität noch Spuren, Kratzer oder gar Furchen der historischen Schuld finden. Wenn nicht, hat das Thema kein Brisanz mehr und man kann es den Historikern überlassen. Wenn doch, ist die Geschichte immer noch Teil der Gegenwart – und dann verschließt man nicht die Augen vor längst vergangenen Phänomenen, sondern vor der eigenen Realität' (Haslinger, pers. comm.).

für seine eigene Familientherapie verwandelt. Das konnte er nur, weil viele österreichische Familien auf einem ähnlichen “unfinished business” in der Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Eltern oder Großeltern sitzen’ (quoted in *Klasse Burschen* 128). Ottomeyer's emphasis on the *Bühne* of Haider's *Familientherapie* is notable here. He provides yet another example of Haider's obsession with an edited presentation of self on-stage, and also corroborates Haslinger's assertion that coming to terms with the past is an intergenerational problem in Austria. Rupert, part of the ‘third generation’ referenced by Haslinger, continues to be confronted with issues of unresolved family memory through Uncle Lucas, a person whose very existence, as I will discuss below, holds larger implications for Rupert's relationship to history and his own family legacy.

Although *Das Vaterspiel* is occupied with conflicts between Rupert and his father, theirs is not the only problematic relationship in the novel. Mimi's narrative, and that of her family, introduces another facet to the larger consideration of family legacies. After a fourteen-year separation, Mimi and Rupert reunite when she contacts him unexpectedly, requesting over the telephone that he fly immediately to New York to help her with a project which she cryptically leaves undisclosed, asking Rupert only for the reassurance, ‘Ich kann dir doch vertrauen?’ (*Vaterspiel* 12) and promising that, ‘Du wirst nichts tun müssen, was du nicht tun willst’ (*Vaterspiel* 13). Rupert leaves his mother's home outside Vienna the next day and remembers his first impressions of Mimi from college en route to the airport. Noticing her thick makeup, he ‘schaute auf ihre dicke Schminke und fragte mich, wie die Haut wohl darunter aussehe. Vielleicht war sie narbig, oder fleckig ... Ich dachte mir, dass sie etwas von einer Schauspielerin hat, etwas Geheimnisvolles’ (*Vaterspiel* 180). Even at their first meeting, Rupert identifies Mimi as a character deeply preoccupied with surface, to the point that the naked eye cannot penetrate her cosmetic mask to determine her appearance. Soon thereafter, Rupert agrees to help her move into a new apartment and repaint her bedroom there: ‘Alles weiß, sagte sie. Ich werde alles weiß ausmalen’ (*Vaterspiel* 181). When he arrives to start the job, he finds that the wall near the bed is ‘braun verschmiert’, sprayed almost to the ceiling with mysterious brown matter, and that, on closer inspection, everything else – the pillows, the sheets, the blankets, the floor – is saturated in the brown mess as well (*Vaterspiel* 187–8). It never becomes definitively established which brown substance has been so liberally sprayed from floor to ceiling in Mimi's new bedroom. Rupert theorizes the spots could be either blood or excrement, and, indeed, he even attempts a sniff test, but cannot determine the source of the stains. Regardless of their origin, what's most significant in Mimi's solicitation of Rupert is her enlistment of him in covering something up. Rupert whitewashes something for Mimi that, while never conclusively identified, nonetheless carries with it the unmistakable look and smell of shit.²⁰ Taken in context, this initial favour primes Rupert for the future dirty project in which Mimi will implicate him.²¹

The assignment that summons Rupert to New York reveals much about Mimi's family. With the task of hiding Uncle Lucas foisted on her, Mimi, like Rupert, is the beneficiary of a difficult lineage. After her grandmother falls ill, Mimi assumes the responsibility of caring for her great uncle, insisting that:

Ich tue das, weil ich es Oma Tanute versprochen habe. Ich kann nicht ihr Lebenswerk zerstören. Sie hat ihrem Bruder zur Flucht aus Litauen verholfen, sie hat ihn 32 Jahre

²⁰ Haslinger uses the motif of ‘Waschen’/washing/whitewashing at several points in his essays. For example, he calls ‘Familienglück’ ‘eine Art Reinwaschanstalt, aus der jeder unschuldig hervorgeht’ in *Politik der Gefühle* (11).

²¹ For an analysis of Haslinger's *Das Vaterspiel* and *Opernball*, see Anna C. Souchuk, *The Problem with Gemütlichkeit: (De)constructing Artificial Places in the Novels of Josef Haslinger, Robert Menasse, and Elfriede Jelinek*. Dissertation. Yale University, 2008.

lang versteckt. Auch meine Eltern haben davon gewusst und ihn gedeckt. Und da kann nicht ich daherkommen und sagen: Tut mir Leid, Oma, aber ich habe beschlossen, die Sache von einem Gericht klären zu lassen. (*Vaterspiel* 536–7)

Mimi is wrapped up in an historical inheritance of her own. Her legacy, however, is not to resist National Socialism but rather to tuck it away in her grandmother's basement, where it quite literally lurks just underground. The terrible refusal to make Lucas accountable for war crimes is thus realized by generations of Mimi's family before Mimi herself assumes it, despite her faltering conviction that Uncle Lucas is perhaps not so innocent as she first believed, which she cryptically reveals to Rupert: 'ich [bin] nicht hundertprozentig sicher, ob er [Lucas] wirklich unschuldig ist. Ich würde an deiner Stelle Lucas nicht allzu sehr trauen' (*Vaterspiel* 537). Mimi and Rupert enter into a covert collaboration to offer the old man a better quality of life in the secretly renovated basement rooms, a private space where a friendship between Lucas and Rupert will quietly develop.

IV. Upstairs, Downstairs

I should like to turn now to a more theoretical discussion of Haslinger's novel, foregrounded in his treatment of spaces and, more specifically, intentionally constructed places, such as residential dwellings and other similar structures. Karen Bermann writes that 'a building is a collection of opacities and transparencies, a theater of appearance and disappearance in which we mask our presence or make it known' (Nast and Pile 169). Much like the division of space imagined by Goffman and MacCannell, Bermann's conception of the building uses language characteristic of the theatre, with space divided into regions that offer dwellers the option to appear in visible space or to mask themselves and disappear altogether. Bermann goes on to call disappearance 'the ultimate camouflage' (171), appropriating a military idiom which, in the context of Uncle Lucas' basement bunker, seems fitting. Haslinger divides space into two kinds of region in *Das Vaterspiel*, burying Mimi's family secret so that it 'disappears', while enacting an alternate (hi)story in visible front space, where it masquerades as reality. In the following section I shall discuss the treatment of space in two principal ways: first, by considering how theorists and geographers discuss space, the body and the interplay between them; and second, through a close reading of *Das Vaterspiel*, where Haslinger uses the spatial divide to further construct his arguments about *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in domestic and political contexts alike.

Built spaces are purposely created; indeed, their intentional construction transforms them from spaces into places. As such, they are imbued with meaning, either by the function they serve or by the people who inhabit them. In a consideration of dwelling places, Edward Casey, one of the foremost philosophers of space and place, tells us that built places offer 'not just a measure of security but a basis for dwelling somewhere in particular' (109). Further, a constructed building 'allows the lived body to rest' (112). Casey emphasizes the dwelling place's security and stasis, which provide 'not just bare shelter but the possibility of sojourns of upbringing, of education, of contemplation, of conviviality, lingerings of many kinds and durations' (112). Built places thus give the physical body a sense of belonging as they also nurture the psyche, something to keep in mind as we realize the restorative properties of the place that Rupert builds for Uncle Lucas, a wanted war criminal.

A constructed place is not a monolith, however, and as Casey and others argue, different spaces within a single building can function in several ways. In his seminal work *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard emphasizes the verticality of domestic dwellings, which is ensured by 'the polarity of the cellar and the attic' (39). The cellar, a place of particular interest to this analysis, is defined by Bachelard in contrast to its polar opposite: 'it is possible,

almost without commentary, to oppose the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar' (39). Bachelard imbues these contrasting spaces of the home with a psychic dimension, equating the cellar with the unconscious mind (40), calling it the '*dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces' (39), and explicitly stating, 'the cellar becomes buried madness, walled-in tragedy' (41). He writes that 'secrets are pondered, projects are prepared' (43) underground – the cellar is a place for hiding secrets and hatching schemes. Characteristic of all these assertions is the cellar's invisibility, which Casey relates to the hidden parts of the lived body: 'the neglected backside of the house is reminiscent of the nether parts of the human body' (119). His description of the house's 'backside' makes use of MacCannell's language of theatre, which asserts, 'having a back region generates the belief that there is something more than meets the eye [...] back regions are still the places where it is popularly believed the secrets are' (591). Further, the geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan describes 'rear space' as being temporal in nature: 'frontal space is perceived as future, rear space as past' (70). Taken in the context of this analysis, the cellar is thus a place that exists in a temporal vacuum, where memories and secrets, together displaced from accepted social spaces and conversations, are contained.

It is little wonder then that the basement, Bachelard's dark space of buried madness, is the place chosen by Haslinger as the setting for the friendship between Rupert and Lucas to unfold. Casey argues that the body *in situ* demonstrates 'an elective affinity between houses and bodies: *our very identity is at stake*. For we tend to identify ourselves by – and with – the places in which we reside [...] we the residents also take on certain of [our dwelling's] properties' (120). Following from Casey's thesis, if the cellar is defined by secrets and irrationality, then whoever dwells within it adopts these characteristics as well. Haslinger emphasizes Lucas' inseparability from the basement – 'der Keller war seiner Arthrose zur Falle geworden' (*Vaterspiel* 485) – making the basement an undeniable container for Lucas, with his failed body rendering him a permanent fixture of the space. In *Das Vaterspiel*, Lucas is literally unseen by the rest of the world while the memory he represents is willfully forgotten by Mimi and her family, rendering him 'unseen' in every sense the word allows.²²

When he meets Uncle Lucas, Rupert responds with automatic, reflexive repulsion:

Sein Versteck verbessern. Einem Nazi helfen. Sonst noch etwas? Mein erster Gedanke war: Da darfst du dich nicht hineinziehen lassen. Das bist du deiner Herkunft schuldig. Großvater in Dachau, Enkel hilft seinem Peiniger. Das ist eine zu steile Karriere.

Mach ich nicht, sagte ich. Mit Nazis will ich nichts zu tun haben. Eine Erbballergie.
(*Vaterspiel* 472)

Rupert's 'inherited allergy' is soon unravelled by Mimi after he arrives at Oma Tanute's Long Island home and enters Lucas' hidden bunker. Despite his initial reluctance at her request, Rupert nevertheless allows Mimi to introduce him to Lucas, which she does with the prelude, 'Er [Rupert] kommt aus Österreich und wird dir eine Wohnung bauen. Du kannst ihm vertrauen' (*Vaterspiel* 488). At the point of their first meeting, Mimi insinuates that Rupert's suitability for the construction project is related to his nationality, which equips him to handle a person like Lucas. Lucas meanwhile, sullen and weakened, exists entirely within the four walls of the basement, where he watches television and, in the absence of a proper toilet, defecates in a bucket. In his isolation, he is reduced to his bodily functions, his perpetual routine of eating and defecating made all the more immediate by the bucket

²² For another consideration of the cellar's function in Austrian literature and film, see Anna Souchuk's 'Das Schreckliche Ist Schon Schrecklich Genug': Predators, Power, and Patriarchy in Three Contemporary Austrian Works', *Journal of Austrian Studies*, 48.1 (2015): 105–29.

loads of waste carried upstairs in a persistent and unending daily ritual. This burden, once shouldered by Mimi, is soon handed over to Rupert with increasing frequency. He no longer merely whitewashes over a questionable substance on the walls of Mimi's Vienna apartment; now he directly engages with her family's waste as he regularly hauls it upstairs. The intimacy of this act creates a spatial environment of belonging, and MacCannell points to the potential for intense connection in hidden spaces where masks are removed and artifice abandoned: 'Being "one of them" or at one with "them" means in part, being permitted to share back regions with "them". This is a sharing which allows one to see behind the others' mere performance, to perceive and accept the others for what they really are' (591–2). To be sure, there is no measure of acceptance more 'real' than that by which Mimi evaluates Rupert. When he quite literally evacuates her great uncle's shit from the basement, she is assured of his allegiance to her secret. In granting him entrance into the invisible world of Oma Tanute's basement, she also draws Rupert into her family's criminal legacy, which stands in direct theoretical opposition to his own.

Moreover, Rupert's reconstruction of Lucas' built environment parallels the rehabilitation of the old man's psychic and physical self. Casey underscores the interplay between built environment and lived body, suggesting that built places are 'extensions of our bodies' and that 'the longer we reside in places, the more bodylike they seem to be' (120). As Rupert improves Lucas' built surroundings, so too are Lucas' mental and physical faculties restored: 'In den ersten zwei Wochen hatte ich ihn kein einziges Mal gehen sehen, aber jetzt war er immer wieder auf den Beinen' (*Vaterspiel* 529). Rupert notices that the old man is 'lebendiger' – both 'more alive' and 'livelier' – since Rupert's presence creates the conditions in which Lucas might live with increasing energy (*Vaterspiel* 529). Further, Lucas' evolution from seated stasis to dynamic mobility is especially significant when considering the philosophical consequences of such a transition. Casey states, 'the upward action is more significant than we might suspect [...] when human beings stand in rooms, they are especially sensitive to their height, which echoes their own uprightness as beings [...] to be upright signifies self-assertion and ambitious reaching up and out [...] just as it also connotes moral forthrightness ("an upright character")' (117). Tuan likewise asserts that 'the prone position is submissive [...] a person assumes his full human stature when he is upright' (37). Casey and Tuan together emphasize the subjective dimension of the upright position, which signifies virtue, progress and potential. When Rupert fashions a habitable space for Uncle Lucas in Tanute's basement, he provides a nurturing environment for the old man to reclaim his autonomy and come alive again.

Mimi's relationship to her family's secret reveals another facet of intergenerational dynamics in *Das Vaterspiel* and reiterates the longstanding culture of silence that Haslinger criticizes. Revealing her family's long-held secret to Rupert, she explains that for six years she knew nothing of Lucas' existence, and had never seriously suspected her grandmother of hiding him: 'Ich meine, wer kommt schon auf die Idee, dass im Haus der Großmutter, die man regelmäßig besucht, eine Person versteckt sein könnte?' (*Vaterspiel* 474–5). The existence of Lucas, the proverbial skeleton in the closet, underscores the degree to which selective blindness can be applied. Indeed, Mimi admits that there were signs that left her questioning, and Oma Tanute's explanations for these inconsistencies were improbable at best. Mimi remembers clearing out her grandmother's garage, and finding there a large, empty box, which appeared to have contained a television. There was, however, no reasonable explanation for why the box would be there – Tanute did not have a new television – and Oma's reasoning that 'irgendjemand müsse ihn reingestellt haben' simply made no sense (*Vaterspiel* 476–7). The unlikely explanation that a stranger deposited an empty television container in the garage – when in reality the unit was purchased for Uncle Lucas in the basement – arouses

Mimi's scepticism at Oma Tanute's story. Mimi searches for proof that the cardboard box indeed once contained a television and even locates a kind of evidence: the styrofoam packaging materials lying in the box are still imprinted with the outline of the television's form. And yet, even after locating the truth, with tangible confirmation of her doubt, Mimi allows herself to be convinced by Oma's version of reality. In his deconstruction of Austrian politics, the philosopher Rudolf Burger generally concluded that 'reality does not exist, and what "really" happened does not matter. We all have different images of the past, images that are colored by our prejudices but apparently unrelated to any quaint notion about "facts."' Politically, for all intents and purposes, the only thing that matters is what people believe, or can be made to believe' (quoted in Höbelt xiv). Similarly, what 'matters' in the dialogue between Mimi and her grandmother is not the truth but rather the version of truth that Mimi can be made to swallow. Here then is evidence of an unspoken intergenerational collusion, what Enzensberger calls 'an agreement not to discuss certain matters in public, as a result of which they become obscured in recollection' (quoted in 'Past' 114). Mimi's selective blindness filters out signs of Lucas' existence despite all evidence to the contrary, and she colludes with her family in its legacy of wilful deceit. She may not suspect something as extreme as the harbouring of a war criminal from her grandmother, but there are nevertheless inconsistencies that leave her curious, which she abandons in the salvaging of her family's constructed narrative.

Under different circumstances, Rupert's call to action in Mimi and Tanute's basement would be commendable, an admirable change of pace from his requisite apathy. In the context of *Das Vaterspiel*, however, it takes on a sinister dimension in its indirect implication of the inner workings of Austrian politics. Haslinger's division of space between front regions of artifice and hidden back regions of the unseen and unspoken emerges not just in his fiction but in several of his essays as well. He refers to 'eine Teilung Österreichs in zwei Welten' in *Politik der Gefühle*, and in several other writings he discusses Austria's *Hinterzimmerpolitik*, a structural term which in its very formulation mirrors the front-back divide so often referenced in this analysis. In *Klasse Burschen* he describes *Hinterzimmerpolitik* as a shadowy Austrian phenomenon (15), and in his essay 'Austrian Spirit' the *Hinterzimmer* situation becomes even more Kafkaesque. The section of that essay entitled 'Politik in der Hinterzimmern der Hinterzimmer', a title which calls to mind the endless iterations of *Türhüter* in Kafka's parable 'Vor dem Gesetz', describes Austrian politics in the late 1990s: 'Plötzlich wurde [den "roten Gewerkschaftern"] bewusst, dass es hinter den Hinterzimmern, in denen sie jahrzentelang ein und aus gegangen waren, noch weitere Hinterzimmer gibt' (6). In *Politik der Gefühle* he specifically implicates the acquiescence of the SPÖ during the Waldheim era in the culture of sustained silence vis-à-vis the Austrian past that prevailed at the time. The party insistently suppressed the problems of the past, which, having never been challenged, persisted into the present: 'Nach dem ersten Präsidentschaftswahlgang beschloß die SPÖ, von nun an kein Wort mehr zu Waldheims (und damit Österreichs) Vergangenheit zu sagen' (112). In its silent acceptance of Waldheim in the 1980s, the SPÖ precluded any further consideration of Austria's guilt in the Second World War.²³ Nearly fifteen years later, Haslinger raised these same concerns anew, accusing the SPÖ of contributing to a sociopolitical environment in Austria that would make the ascent of a figure like Jörg Haider possible:

²³ Marcus reminds us that, in reality, 'Austria had a higher rate of Nazi Party membership than Germany, and Austrians had a major part in carrying out the Final Solution' ('Shadows'). Despite this complicity, Judt explains the counterintuitive ways that Austria (and France) proceeded in the post-war era: 'the emphasis was clearly placed upon the need to reduce the minimum of convictable and convicted persons, reserve for this select few a sort of symbolic and representative function as criminals and traitors, and leave the rest of the social fabric untouched or, where this was not possible, to repair the damage as soon as possible through a process of benign collective neglect' ('Past').

Die Entwicklung der SPÖ bereitet mir schon seit geraumer Zeit Unbehagen. Die Sozialdemokraten tragen einen wesentlichen Teil an Verantwortung, daß die politische Situation in Österreich so ist, wie sie derzeit ist. Die SPÖ hat Haider das Feld bereitet. Denken Sie an die zahlreichen Affären und Skandale, die die Partei in den achtziger und teilweise auch in den neunziger Jahre erschüttert haben, denken Sie an die Ausländerpolitik, die die Forderungen der Freiheitlichen an Restriktivität fast noch in den Schatten gestellt hat. ('SPÖ')

While it is difficult to assign a single party blame for failed attempts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Austria, there is still so much that can be – and has been – written about that country's complicated relationship to its past, its longstanding embrace of a mythological post-war victim status and its contemporary struggles with xenophobia.²⁴ Some of these mnemonic failings can be explained by history. Judt, for example, wrote that Austria, returned to full independence via the 1955 State Treaty, had been relieved of 'any responsibility for its years under Nazi rule, and [. . .] any last remaining need to remember those years or the enthusiasm with which all sides (many Social Democrats included) had greeted the idea, if not reality, of *Anschluß*' ('Past' 96). Further, he echoed Haslinger's condemnation of the SPÖ in the Waldheim Affair, this time implicating all of Austria, calling it 'an amnesiac postwar republic shorn of any usable past' ('Ghost'). Referencing Enzensberger, Judt further suggested that all of Western Europe had settled into a post-war "collective amnesia," resting their half of the continent on a number of crucial "foundation myths," the dismantling of which, at least for Austrians, was only initiated with the revelations of the 1986 Waldheim Affair ('Past' 95–6, 98). Similarly, Wodak and Pelinka suggest that the political environment of the 1990s, which included the divided world of an ascendant Jörg Haider, actually originated during the maligned political era of Kurt Waldheim in the 1980s. In their aptly named chapter 'From Waldheim to Haider', they argue that the division of the world into different regions, defined by the binaries of visibility/invisibility, front/back, light/dark or good/evil, polarities so successfully employed by Haider, began with the Waldheim Affair:

during the 'Waldheim Affair,' there was a perceptible shift in public discourse, which developed a distinctive 'us' vs. 'them' pattern. The in-groups in this discourse ('Us') were Austria (note the metonymic-synecdochic *totum pro parte*), Waldheim (often taken as a *pars pro toto* for all 'respectable' Austrians), the People's Party, the *Wehrmachtgeneration*, all the people who wanted to stop thinking about the past, those who were interested in the future, etc. The out-groups, ('them') were, apart from the Jews, leftists (note the directional metaphor), those Austrians who 'foul their own nest' (in German, *Nestbeschmutzer* – note the defamatory nationalist naturalizing metaphor), and *das Ausland*. (ix–x)

Waldheim made good use of the division of the world into 'in' and 'out' groups, but he was not the first to employ it. Wodak and Pelinka argue that this construction of a binary world is a phenomenon that exists on a continuum in Austria: the present and the past are linked through xenophobic speech that periodically surfaced throughout the twentieth century, nearly unchanged (xiv–xv). Austrian politics thus operate in a temporal vacuum, where Nazi-era propaganda is still 'relevant' in the present day. The anti-Semitism of the pre-war

²⁴ Haslinger is by no means alone in drawing attention to issues of memory, history and identity in post-war Austria. Several generations of Austrian writers, including Ilse Aichinger, Thomas Bernhard, Elfriede Jelinek, Eva Menasse, Doron Rabinovici, Arno Geiger and Maja Haderlap, have examined the intersections of family memory with collective amnesia in their works.

era is simply supplanted by other kinds of xenophobia in modern Austria, with the worst offender of all being the FPÖ (in 1999).²⁵ In this sense, the Austrian political stage is much like Lucas' basement in *Das Vaterspiel*, where the past is resurrected and (re)delivered into the world through the willing hands of subsequent generations. In the amnesiac version of Austria presented by Haslinger, history holds no lessons and only provides material to be recycled in an endless, repetitious cycle of its own transgressions.

V. Jonas Shtrom

Though there has yet been little mention of him in this analysis, Jonas Shtrom should not be reduced to a simple explanatory medium between Rupert's and Lucas' narratives. His story is indeed significant, and is repeatedly frustrated by Rupert's cooperation in keeping Lucas underground. Shtrom's interviews in *Das Vaterspiel* are excerpted not from a single session but rather from numerous reports made over a three-month period in Ludwigsburg in 1959 and a subsequent statement from 1967 to the Office of Special Investigations in Washington, DC, in which he accuses Algis Munkaitis, also known as Lucas Kraulikauskas, of war crimes against the Shtrom family.²⁶ The eight-year span of Shtrom's testimonies, coupled with his continued search for Algis/Lucas in the present day, demonstrate the chronic haunting of memory.²⁷ Rupert actively thwarts this search when he and Mimi only more efficiently hide Lucas on Long Island, presumably in the hope that he will die before the authorities locate him and charge him with war crimes. In this regard, Rupert and Jonas are not simply occupying opposite ends of a spectrum of privilege and experience; they are engaged in a conflict as Rupert undoes the labours of Jonas' enduring search.

When asked if the various father–son relationships in his novel should be juxtaposed, Haslinger responded, 'Ein wenig war es so gedacht, anhand unterschiedlicher Vater-Sohn-Konstellationen das verfluchte Jahrhundert zu spiegeln' (Haslinger, pers. comm.). Rupert's narrative contrasts starkly with Jonas', who repeatedly evaded capture and execution as a Jewish teenager in Nazi-era Lithuania, only to be prematurely thrust into adulthood following the murder of his family. While the chasm between these stories renders their extremes even more sharply, there is, however, one feature common to both: a mutual preoccupation with fathers. The discrete obsessions of both Rupert and Jonas are grounded in strikingly disparate circumstances, but both nevertheless illuminate the universality of Haslinger's *Vaterspiel*. Jonas seeks justice for his father's murder, while Rupert ritualistically fantasizes about the death of his own. As Haslinger suggests, these father–son relationships reflect 'das verfluchte Jahrhundert', particularly in light of Rupert's apathy vis-à-vis fascism and his family's political legacy. The previous century has moved ever towards indifference to, even

²⁵ Per Lonnie Johnson, 'It is worth noting that President Klestil refused to appoint two ministers that the FPÖ initially had on their list of candidates for ministerial posts: Thomas Prinzhorn, an industrialist designated to serve as minister of finance, due to his "verbal excesses" (*verbale Entgleisungen*) and Hilmar Kabas, the head of the FPÖ in Vienna designated as minister of defense who was responsible for posters during the October electoral campaign that explicitly appealed to xenophobic sentiment by warning against *Überfremdung* (the excessive influence of foreigners). These posters incidentally were a "local initiative" and only appeared in Vienna' ('Austria's New Government').

²⁶ Haslinger heavily researched source material for Jonas Shtrom's testimonies in *Das Vaterspiel*. He credits several individuals for their assistance in the acknowledgments at the end of the novel, and also thanks the staff at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Jewish Museum in Vilnius.

²⁷ It is worth mentioning that many characters' names in *Das Vaterspiel* also reiterate Haslinger's back–front divide. Several figures in the novel have assumed different names and identities: Uncle Lucas (Kralikauskas) is the pseudonym for Algis Munkaitis; Rupert's birth name is actually the same as his father's – Helmut – but he changes it legally to his middle name, Rupert, after learning of his father's infidelity; Jonas Shtrom masquerades as David Landau; and Mimi also has a different last name (Madonick) from that of her grandmother or great uncle.

an active resistance against, memory, represented here by Rupert and his energetic efforts to destroy his own father and Jonas' search.

Rupert's own position towards (family) history thus develops over the course of *Das Vaterspiel*, gradually transforming from an underwhelming apathy to a stance that naively aligns him with the perpetrators of the fascist past. Haslinger describes Rupert's gradual (d)evolution:

Nun hat Rupert aber von seiner Familie durchaus eine Sensibilität für die Verbrechen der Nazis mitbekommen. Deshalb auch seine erste, ablehnende Reaktion, als er erfährt, was er tun soll. Aber Mimi beruhigt ihn, es handle sich um ein Missverständnis. Auch ist ihm die Zuneigung zu Mimi wichtiger, als Klarheit über die Vergangenheit zu bekommen. Als er beginnt, das Versteck des Alten auszubauen, weiß er nicht mit Gewissheit, wen er vor sich hat. Im Laufe der Zeit entwickelt sich zwischen den beiden eine Art Freundschaft, während die vermeintliche Freundschaft mit Mimi zerbricht, weil Rupert sich von ihr ausgenutzt und hintergangen fühlt. Und dann hält er an dem Alten auch aus seiner Art Trotz fest, selbst als er weiß, was er getan hat. Er denkt sich sogar Verteidigungsstrategien für ihn aus. (Haslinger, pers. comm.)

Rupert's antipathy towards Jonas Shtrom continues to develop, despite additional information about his search revealed by Mimi. In his final testimony given in Washington, DC, Shtrom indicates that, after seeing a man whom he believes to be Lucas Kraulikauskas on a television programme about immigrants, he tracks Algis'/Lucas' location to a fish market in Chicago. He travels there under the guise of a newspaper reporter named David Landau – who, Shtrom explains, really did exist, was a reporter and a friend, and agreed to allow Shtrom to use his name – and interviews Lucas with the supposed intent to write an article about Kraulikauskas' adolescence in Lithuania and subsequent transition to US life. Shtrom follows through with the charade, and indeed writes a short article about Lucas, which he publishes under Landau's name. After Rupert arrives at the house on Long Island, Mimi explains how she learned about David Landau:

Das Haus [von David Landau] steht ungefähr hundert Meter von Oma Tanutes Haus entfernt auf der anderen Straßenseite. Dort zog ein alter Mann ein, der täglich mit seinem Hund spazieren geht und dabei an Oma Tanutes Grundstück vorbeikommt. Immer, wenn jemand auf der Straße vorbeigeht, beginnt Briska sehr laut zu bellen. [...] Oma Tanute beobachtete diesen Mann und hatte bald das Gefühl, er gehe nicht zufällig diesen Weg, sondern interessiere sich für das Haus. [...] Oma Tanute nannte ihn einen Juden, der sie ausspionieren wollte. Ich fragte sie, wie sie darauf komme, dass er Jude sei. Sie sagte, der Mann bekomme jeden Tag die *New York Times* geliefert. Die Zeitung wurde von einem Auto heraus auf den Straßenrand geworfen. Sie sei an einem Morgen vorbeigegangen und habe von der Zeitung den Namen abgelesen. Der Mann heiße David Landau, und das sei ganz klar ein jüdischer Name. (478)

Haslinger again points to the existence of a secret space rendered utterly invisible. Mimi's recollection suggests that, even in Oma Tanute's telling, Landau suspects the existence of something amiss in his neighbour's home. Even as he 'spies' on Oma Tanute as he walks the dog, he can find no material truth to justify his suspicion, despite its very real existence directly below his feet. Haslinger reveals the absurdity of two men, so deeply connected in a historical sense, essentially occupying the same space – one above ground, one below – yet unable to visually verify each other's presence. Further, Landau's narrative places Shtrom's

search, which had previously existed only in past recorded testimonies, in the present day, rendering it alive and immediate: 'Geschichtsprobleme [sind] Gegenwartsprobleme' (*Politik* 80). As he and his dog attempt to quite literally sniff out Uncle Lucas, Rupert frustrates their efforts by making Lucas undetectable. Rupert, allied with Lucas, resigns Jonas to an existence of permanent victimhood, and the debate over resistance and persecution comes full circle.

VI. Conclusion

Haslinger wrote *Das Vaterspiel* at a moment when his native Austria – a country which, like Jörg Haider, depends on a specific form of self-presentation for survival – was in the midst of a turbulent political shift. At that point he characterized Austria as:

ein Land, dem man nicht trauen kann, ein Land, das sich vor der historischen Verantwortung drücken will. Und ich muß sagen: Ganz zu Unrecht besteht diese Einschätzung nicht. Die Werbestrategien werden jedenfalls eine Menge zu tun haben, bevor sich das Image Österreichs wieder jenem Idealbild annähert, das sie so gerne hätten: Österreich als das heitere Land Mozarts und Hermann Meiers. ('SPÖ')

The country known as 'Austria' consists of two discrete places in Haslinger's telling: the 'Land, dem man nicht trauen kann', which refuses to confront its own past, and another Austria, a shinier place, strategically marketed and extracting profit from its famous sons. Austria, then, is also a divided space, like the person of Jörg Haider or Oma Tanute's house on Long Island. As Haslinger sees it, Austria privileges a carefully executed image of health, vitality, and culture – all hallmarks of what it means to be 'Austrian' according to his conception of it – while clinging to its *Opfermythos* and refusing scrutiny of its serious complicity in the Second World War. To survey Haslinger's body of work is to stumble over these conflicts time and again because the problem, however forcefully ignored, never really goes away. In *Das Vaterspiel*, Haslinger directly implicates the family as the purveyor, and consequent denier, of memory, demonstrating how the failures of the *Familienväter* lead to subsequent disengaged generations who are dangerously indifferent to memory. Further, his deployment of the Kramer family and its dissolution represents a critique of Austrian political failures in the late twentieth century.

Haslinger believes that 'das Grauen in der Gegenwart [ist] noch überall verborgen. Diese Gewissheit: "Jetzt haben wir das alles hinter uns" ist trügerisch und gefährlich. Man kann nicht einfach alles abstreifen. Das geht nicht von einer Generation auf die andere. Alles ist unter der Oberfläche noch lebendig' ('Geschichte').²⁸ *Das Vaterspiel* is indeed a *Versteckspiel*, one that considers how the many burnished surfaces in the text – the successful *Familienvater*, the orderly family home, the youthful political candidate, the tourist-friendly country – are tinny façades. In visible space, memory is edited and promoted as a socially accepted performance. When it is misaligned with communally constructed narratives, memory is rejected, denied. The space below the surface, however, is for Haslinger where memory resides. Like Uncle Lucas, it can be ignored, forgotten or left to rot as a 'lebendiger Toter' (Hamidouche 154) – but it endures. It is a pervasive thing that shapes lived experience in all its dimensions, from the performances enacted on the political stage to the secrets held close within family circles. Uncle Lucas, himself an example of 'das Grauen in der Gegenwart', languishes indefinitely as the embodiment of his family's secret in the Long Island basement. The ghosts underground, in the hidden rear places, Haslinger argues, are ubiquitous in Austria, and thriving too, becoming *lebendiger* just under the surface.

²⁸ The *lebendig* nature in his quote calls to mind Uncle Lucas' 'liveliness' in the renovated basement.

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