

**Alley-grave:  
The Boundary of the Ghetto in  
*Der Schrei, den niemand hört!*  
by Else Feldmann  
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Christina Färber

**Introduction**

The nearly forgotten play, *Der Schrei, den niemand hört!* by Else Feldmann, premiered in Vienna in 1916. Feldmann was an Austrian-Jewish writer of the Wiener Moderne and in 1938, the German Nazis placed her works on the “Liste des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums.” From that point on, Feldmann worked under great political pressure and eventually she was taken to the concentration camp Solibor, where she died in 1942. Only a few pictures remain of her today, and the few works which were preserved are little-known.<sup>1</sup>

As the play is set in an alley of a Jewish Ghetto in Vienna, the title seems to be an autobiographical reference to the author’s own unheard voice.<sup>2</sup> I would like to examine those acts of speech and walking that are indeed capable of being heard within the context of the play to determine which might be interpreted as the dead semantic spaces which I will refer to as “alley-graves.”

The play consists of three characters in the alley of a Jewish ghetto who wish to escape their bleak lives, but find opposition to their plans from the other inhabitants of the alley. This primary conflict informs my *Leitfrage* or guiding question: Are the borders of the ghetto only constructed from beyond the confines of its walls, or is there rather a language boundary which is built from within the ghetto itself? To answer this question I will discuss specific literary methods of analogous readings between spatial and speech acts. I want to examine the spatial concept or topos of the alley and the ghetto, and how these are articulated and negotiated by the characters in Feldmann’s play.

Alley and ghetto in the cityscape of a literary text appear as conceptual entities where different spatial ideas meet: the semantics of these words not only derive from their signifieds or in the simple description of their physical construction, but rather from their

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<sup>1</sup> Following one of the few recent works on Feldmann from Adolf Opel and Marino Valéz, *Else Feldmann (1884-1942). Arbeiten für das Theater. Gedenkbuch zum 65. Todestag von Else Feldmann*. The play *Der Schrei, den niemand hört!* was also published there for the first time. Until then, a reliable source was Eckhart Früh's publication based on the original manuscript which is held in the Vienna Museum of Theater; see the link for the pdf-document: [http://www.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/else\\_feldmann\\_schrei.pdf](http://www.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/else_feldmann_schrei.pdf) (last access: 22 July 2015).

<sup>2</sup> For a selection of contemporary, highly anti-Semitic reviews of the premiere of the play, please see the online publication by Früh 47-55 (compare note 1).

creation through the discourse of a city. Those spatial semantics are not only shown, but also created by literary texts: Literature not only describes topographies, but rather constructs topographies of its own (Stockhammer 7-21). This provokes a reformulation of the semantic connections between experienced/experiencing space and language, and can be seen as acts of walking and talking in narrative focalizations. New perspectives for the interpretation of literary texts in which spatial paradigms take place evolve from this reformulation. Interpreting those texts therefore means analyzing the spaces, places and borders articulated by the literary figures and allows the possibility of analogous readings between acts of speech and acts of walking. This also implies that “Raum ist [...] nicht mehr Ursache oder Grund, von der oder dem die Erzählungen ihren Ausgang nehmen, er wird vielmehr selbst als eine Art Text betrachtet, dessen Zeichen oder Spuren semiotisch, grammatologisch oder archäologisch zu entziffern sind” (Weigel 241). Alley-grave is thereby the spatial sign which I posit for the interpretation of Feldmann’s play as follow up to my *Leitfrage*.

In my theoretical approach, I analyze speech acts through the linguistic theory developed by John Austin in his 1962 *How to do Things with Words*, focusing on the aspects of verbally implanted references of the world which generate reality through illocutionary speech acts.<sup>3</sup> Further, I will explain the structure of acts of walking through the theoretical framework of Michel de Certeau. In *L’invention de quotidien. Arts de faire* (1980), de Certeau establishes a concept which explains the structural and functional connection between a topographical language and actual acts of walking as practices and performances in space (French: “pratiques d’espace,” also the name of the chapter upon which my interpretation focuses), as well as its narration. I will discuss and utilize this concept to highlight different forms of the articulation of boundaries within the ghetto. A short attempt to combine both approaches describes the transgressions of the urban borders by the characters in the play as “eventfulness” as defined by Yuri Lotman in his 1977 *The Structure of the Artistic Text*.<sup>4</sup>

## Semiotic and Etymological Considerations

Compared to streets, alleys are subordinate spaces which bear the added connotation of narrowness or confinement. In addition (despite the common representation of the alley as a dead-end-street), the alley is etymologically connected with the concept of passage, meaning one has the ability to walk through them. The English word “alley” has a semantic and phonetic correlation to the French verb “*aller*” which means go, walk, pass, or proceed, and which has its origin in late Middle English, deriving from Old French. Synonyms for alley also include narrow lane or passage way. As Feldmann’s text is originally German, the etymology of “*Gasse*” must also be compared to that of “*Straße*,” which requires further consideration. *Gasse* has undergone considerable semantic change: Not only

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<sup>3</sup> Working with Erika Fischer-Lichte's arguments for applying the structure of speech acts which are performed in a play (Fischer-Lichte 28), Austin's theory is applicable for fictional, performative or literary speech acts, although he himself excludes the space of fictional narratives from his theory. I view these as *per se* illocutionary (Petrey 109); under the guise of a declaration, fiction hides the illocutionary dimension to produce reality and ideas of the “world” in the readers’ imagination (Genette 41-63).

<sup>4</sup> Here cited as Jurij Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*.

topographically, but also etymologically, *Gasse* evades clear definition. This condition is evident in the remarks to *Gasse* in the Grimms' *Deutsches Wörterbuch*:

1) gasse in städten, orten, dörfern, in neuerer zeit von strasze immer mehr bedrängt, verdrängt. [...]

a) ga33e, gasse ist im hd. das alte wort, das da von haus aus den platz hatte [...]

c) unterschieden wird

α) im allgemeinen weite und enge gasse, während jetzt an gasse von selbst der begriff des engen hängt, aber keineswegs ursprünglich (vgl. mhd. wîte ga33e); grosze weite gasze, platea consularis, militaris, wofür heute nur strasze möglich wäre. [...]

β) nach bedeutung, lage, form u. ä. [...], sehr verschieden nach örtlichem herkommen [...]

γ) nach richtung, ziel, nachbarschaft, zweck, inhalt u. ähnl.[...]

δ) bemerkenswert in den alten städten die gassen nach den gewerben unterschieden [...]

2) gasse und strasze im verhältnis sind aber genauer zu betrachten, [...]

b) dabei wird doch auch schon früh ein unterschied gemacht, wie er noch jetzt in geltung ist, strasze als die breitere, gröszere, gasse als die engere, kleinere: vicus gassa, platea strasz. [...] daher wol auch früher schon strasze als der feierlichere ausdruck [...]

α) [...] strasze der gemeine verkehrsweg in der gasse, zu dem im genauen sinne auch der theil der gasse nicht gehört der noch innerhalb des trupfstals oder 'unter der dachtraufe' und eigenthum der einzelnen hausbesitzer ist. [...]

e) aber die geltung der beiden worte ist nicht überall gleich, sie zeigen eine merkwürdig verschiedene vertheilung über die deutschen, germanischen lande hin. [...] <sup>5</sup> (1984)

In addition to relating differing etymologies and semantic functions, this paragraph concludes with the observation that the foreign word *Straße* has come to displace the more indigenous *Gasse* in the German language. *Gasse* is also observed to have demonstrated a semantic instability across different German regions. Thus, even with the help of multiple examples and explanations such as those provided in the Grimms' *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, it seems apparent that a simple definition for the German-language concept of alley is not easy to provide.

Informed by this instability of semantic definition, I would therefore reason that alleys possess semantic borders which can be better defined within the organization of urban systems. Rather than engaging one particular, defining discourse (as would, perhaps, a "*Hauptstraße*"), alleys undermine specific discourse. They symbolize, instead, semantic fallout or emptiness—as Wolfgang Iser might conclude, a "*Leerstelle*": it is difficult to understand not only their semantic, but also their spatial status. Do alleys exist in front of, behind, or between places? To which system of urban space do they belong—public

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<sup>5</sup> Original italics removed by the author for ease of readability.

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infrastructure or nearly private spaces? Are they locations for potential criminal activity or a space of social refuge from the loudness of more conspicuous public spaces? Material and semantic borders of the alley space alike deny immediate categorization, a liminality reflected in the modern philological development of the word *Gasse*:

neu angelegte gassen wird es seit der eisenbahnzeit kaum geben, eine bahnhofsgasse, eine Göthe- oder Schillergasse sind undenkbar (doch z. b. in Siebenbürgen); aber auch die alten gassen müssen sich immer mehr umtaufen lassen und werden zu strassen erhöht, nur die gäßchen bleiben vor der hand von dieser titelerhöhung verschont [...] und diejenigen gassen welche gar zu wenig den heutigen ansprüchen an eine strasse entsprechen, sodasz für gasse nur der begriff des engen, geringen, winklichten u. ähnl. übrig bleibt. [...] gasse ist als lebendiges wort für sich von amtswegen beseitigt, fristet nur einzeln als alterthum sein absterbendes leben, während früher gassen das zusammenfassende wort war, das selbst die plätze umfassen konnte. (Grimm 1984)

One should also note that German and Austrian usage of *Gasse* evolved in different ways. In contemporary German use (as shown in the outline from the Grimms' *Deutsches Wörterbuch*), *Gassen* are distinctly distinguished from *Straßen*. In Austria, however, there is a lexical accumulation of *Gasse* and *Straße* which makes the narrow street as alley more difficult to define—in Austria, *Gasse* retains something of its older semantic function and is also used to denote longer, broader and more public streets; in Austria, a "*Hauptgasse*" as the main street of the city is quite common. This difference according to language area is reiterated in Feldmann's play—one character translates an English letter out loud by choosing "street" as a translation for "*Gasse*" (22).<sup>6</sup> Considering the structural topography as well as the literal description of the alley in question according to the stage directions, I interpret *Gasse* in the context of the play with the more German definition of a small, narrow way—the "*Enge*," "*Winklige*" of the urban landscape. The fate of the characters is described metaphorically: to run the "spitz zulaufende[m] Gäßchen hinunter, in dem sich Gewölbe an Gewölbe reiht" (29), furthering reinforcing the narrowness of the place and the spatial configuration of this specific *Gasse*.

Whereas the concept of alley (*Gasse*) is at first presented intangibly—left open to different, explicitly structural meanings, the use of "ghetto" more clearly aligns to a specific structural interpretation. According to *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, ghetto may have originated from the Venetian term "*ghetto*" or "*ghet*," which means slag or waste, and was used to refer to a place where slag was stored—originally located on the same island as the confines of the Venetian Jewish Ghetto instituted in 1516. Other etymologies suggest an origin from "*borghetto*," the diminutive of "*borgo*," meaning borough. In any case, ghetto originates from and refers to a particular kind of (small) place or the specific contents of the place (a place for waste) within an urban structure. Although these origins are semantically different, in contrast to the conflicting uses of *Gasse*, these different origins both refer to a specific kind of space. Ghetto implies a more semantically-fixed entity within the cityscape (a place in which restriction and segregation of socio-political minorities will come to take place).

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<sup>6</sup> Compare note 1, pagination of Feldmann provided according to the online publication.

*Der Schrei den niemand hört!*, is described as taking place in a “kleinen, engen, winkligen Gasse” in the “Ghettoviertel der Großstadt“ (4). Following the earlier etymological investigations, a specific interpretational conflict arises between the topographical entities of alley and ghetto and their semantics in the play’s discourse. I would like to focus on how this conflict is performed and articulated by the characters in the play, and on the implications which this topography offers for interpretation. To better inform my use of the terminology, I will briefly outline the spatial structures which contribute to the formation of this conflict.

## The Conceptual Entities of Space and Place in the Cityscape

Michel de Certeau describes in the chapter “Pratiques d’espace” of his most popular work, *L’invention du quotidien. Arts de faire*,<sup>7</sup> a sociological theory of the different structural and aesthetic aspects of everyday life. De Certeau takes the ideas of “panoptikum” and “heterotopias” from Michel Foucault and expands on them to restructure and oppose the constitutional, panoptical structure of space from “above” with “practices” or a performance of space from below. This structural urban concept informs my guiding question (whether the borders of the ghetto alley are articulated from inside or outside the ghetto) by imagining discursive powerholders as personifications—such as city planners or city rulers (or, as Foucault might argue: the panoptical city)—“leaning” over a city map, planning and drawing. In following this structure one can identify a correlation between above/outside and below/within, as well as the imagination of an urban system which is read/declared from “above” and practiced/questioned from “below.” The steps and traces of the pedestrians as they walk are, in de Certeau’s terms, potentially the performative shaping of spaces (“*espaces*”), and the creation of the principal structures of the urban concept are categorized as places (“*lieux*”). A city’s center for example is constituted by such practices or strategies of spaces and places. The spatial concept of a city center consists less in material or physical signifieds than it does within a practiced discourse. As long as no one physically walks in a city center which is introduced as such from above (the figure of speech for literally looking down upon a city map, deciphering the urban concept), such a space can scarcely retain its status as “center.” Additionally, so long as acts of walking on the actual street level are in some way dialogical and readable as speech acts (not only from above), pedestrians have the ability to undermine city maps and create the possibility for establishing new, unofficial centers. City maps and city concepts from above are described as “mapping”—as the strategies of producers exercising their institutional and structural power to generate places with the aim of describing (and therefore controlling) the city as a unified whole. The practices (“*parcours*“) of the pedestrians, the “*transhumantes*,” however, may undermine these strategies through informed tactics of walking—for example by using shortcuts through alleys, and thus avoiding the “official” ways. In this way, established structures such as city centers, high streets, and even the invisible barriers of ghettos may be undone.

I want to emphasize the linguistic and aesthetic dimensions of de Certeau’s terminological pairs in order to stress the analogous readings of acts of walking in the city and acts of speech in literary texts. As Peter Donahue points out in his 1998 essay on the

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<sup>7</sup> *Kunst des Handelns* as translation by Ronald Voullié in the following citations.

function of alleys in urban settings, the “difficulty (even impossibility) [of defining the alley] means that alleys function as *spaces* rather than *places*, recognizable not so much by their own actuality but by their boundaries, where they cease to be. This accounts for their usefulness as metaphors, particularly in regard to people who have lost their way” (Donahue 76). According to de Certeau, a topographical element can be a space and a place at the same time, it can be used for tactics or strategies and is at the same time also dependent on how it is experienced, articulated, or fixed. De Certeau attributes the *transhumantes* with the ability to understand the city and its text by walking through the urban landscape in the modus of spatial phrases, idioms, or tropes. These phrases again relate to a semiotic system (e.g. using language structures and walking in the city work conventionally) within which (speakers and) *transhumantes* develop variation.<sup>8</sup>

De Certeau develops his concept out of a particular terminology originating in rhetoric, and builds off of the ideas of speech acts advanced by John L. Austin. In Austin’s theory, the effect of language expression dominates, reformulating the epistemological problem of *ethos* with which rhetoric is occupied. In particular, he reexamines the problems of ethos, descriptive rules (as an inconsistency, a contradiction within itself), and the precondition of honesty for successful or unsuccessful speech acts (in the dual relation between speakers in a language community). For Austin, the attribution of meaning is no longer an additional, belated designation of a clearly structured, non-verbal reality, but is indeed produced through iteration and performance of speech acts. The meaning of reality is an articulation: verbal, performative and practical.

In Austin’s work, non-verbal reality is problematized as being recognizable “an sich” by the subject, a postulation similar to de Certeau’s concept of a “sens propre.” Nonetheless, Austin describes non-verbal reality as being affected and designed *through* illocutionary speech acts. Through this process, powerful conventions (e.g. promises, statements, orders, or prohibitions) are established which connote a “real” reference between the physical world and speech acts (Austin 99). The common ground between de Certeau and Austin is therefore an almost aesthetic structure or code— a system of conventions within a language community/urban city articulated, but not meaningful per se confronts and is confronted by both acts of speaking and walking which develop a corresponding (or deviant) relationship which can be described in an actualized, performative, communicable dimension. De Certeau defines this structure as a homology: “Il y aurait homologie entre les figures verbales et les figures cheminatoires [...] en tant que les unes et les autres consistent en ‘traitements’ ou opérations qui portent sur des unités isolables, et en ‘arrangements ambigus’ qui tournent et déplacent le sens vers une équivocité [...]”(de Certeau 152).<sup>9</sup>

Within the urban cityscape, de Certeau points out the very same structure as existing between acts of walking and acts of speech which he calls “l’*énonciation*” (148).<sup>10</sup> He

<sup>8</sup> A concept which is closely related to Yuri Lotman’s semantic model, discussed below.

<sup>9</sup> “Dadurch ergäbe sich dann eine Homologie zwischen den Sprach-Figuren und den Weg-Figuren [...], da beide aus “Verarbeitungen” oder Vorgehensweisen bestehen, die an isolierbaren Einheiten und an “doppeldeutigen Konstruktionen” vorgenommen werden, welche die Bedeutung [...] in eine Mehrdeutigkeit verkehren und verschieben.” (Certeau/Voullié 193).

<sup>10</sup> “l’*énonciation*“ is used by de Certeau as synonymous with “l’*acte de parler*” and “speech act,” therefore the speech act with all potential dimensions (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary); in the footnotes following this discussion, de Certeau repeatedly refers to specific works by John L. Austin and John Searle.

claims that by the acts of walking “une ville *transhumante*, ou métaphorique”—a “wandering” or metaphorical city (142)—inscribes itself onto the literal city map. This is in some way similar to the processes of a language with its open potential for subversion: negotiating linguistic rules, signs, and semantics; empowered and practiced by its users. Language not only has its own rules (vocabulary, grammar, etc.), it also has the potential to evolve and change. This structure is similar to the poetic experience generated by literary texts which work through subtexts—the interplay of functions, tropes, and imagination wandering into and within more easily readable texts.

In regards to Feldmann’s play, this could mean on the one hand that the ghetto may be more easily read as it is clearly designated within the physical cityscape, but on the other hand, that the topography of the alley could introduce a space of subversion through the very characters who negotiate its inner borders. In returning to Feldmann’s play, I wish to outline the positionality of those who negotiate (or decline to negotiate) these semantic borders, and to examine what the analogous reading of acts of speech and acts of walking might contribute to the play’s interpretation as a whole.

## Reading the Space and Place of the Alley and the Ghetto in *Der Schrei, den niemand hört!*

In Feldmann’s play, the reader at first observes as set a stabile topographical model—the place of a Jewish ghetto in Vienna, as introduced by the subtitle: “Trauerspiel aus dem Ghetto.” As the play progresses, there is no concrete articulation by the social collective concerning the exact borders of the alley which the play’s subtitle has declared to be a ghetto. Given the fact that the alley’s inhabitants are segregated because of their Jewishness, particularly within the socio-political circumstances of 1916 Vienna,<sup>11</sup> the non-negation of a semantic border to the ghetto strikes me as significant. The self-evidence of the Jewish community may alleviate the need to articulate this border specifically, as it has become naturalized and stable: accepted. But the play does articulate the desire of the characters Hanna, Adrian, and Simon to escape from the self-evidence of their reality—out of the ghetto—and establish spaces which promote social and intellectual advancement, and perhaps most important of all, spaces which provide them with security and freedom:

HANNA: Wohin wollen Sie?

ADRIAN: Wo wir frei sind, zunächst nach der Schweiz.

HANNA: In die Schweiz kann man flüchten, dort wird man nicht gesucht?

ADRIAN: Gewiß nicht. [...]

HANNA: Wann wollen Sie fort?” (34)

Prior to this passage, Hanna had left the alley to inhabit another part of the same city. This “disappearance” is tolerated by the alley community until the point of her return, after which she is regarded as a social outlaw, seemingly foreshadowing Simon’s and Adrian’s own destinies should they, too, decide to leave the alley. The place of the ghetto alley itself remains silent in a structural sense as it became the accepted identity for its inhabitants—here they are placed and here they belong: they accept the self-referential, performative speech acts of a non-negotiable “here.” This interpretation provided the basis for my

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<sup>11</sup> As reflected in the anti-Semitic reviews of the play’s premiere (compare note 2).

conception of the alley as a grave, but I will return to this concept below. It is first necessary for me to expand upon my current interpretation of Hannah's exodus: Those who physically leave their alley home deny its identity through their act of walking; they must consequentially be disavowed and exiled from the community.

Yuri Lotman's model for the structure of an artistic text argues for a model similar to that already provided for illocutionary speech acts, as well as for the potential of destabilization through an *art de faire*: a certain conventional system is the point of reference for acting in a divergent or convergent way. The spatial and/or semantic border which is built upon and within this structure remains self-referential. This can often be seen in texts with decidedly spatial paradigms, presenting itself as analogous acts of speaking and walking. The topographical function which can be observed in the speech act functions like the correlation "world-to-word,"<sup>12</sup> as posited by John Searle: evolving by establishing a sense of reality, in this case through a reassurance of the inhabitants' identity. The ghetto is a fixed point, where everything has already been said and done without eventfulness. The spatial model of this world becomes reality and imitates a former discursive power which initially established the ghetto. The other non-spatial characteristics remain in this classification and place (Lotman 316).

Building off of Lotman's literary structures, in the closed social system of the alley there is no imminent event because there exists no friction between oppositional semantic fields—the alley consists of only one homogenous semantic field where everything is settled, defined, and ordered. The characters are flattened into pure types, the things that happen in this cosmos (for example marriage plans, wage-earning and other interpersonal issues) are archetypes of emptied social interaction, and the specific circumstances of life in a ghetto are not discussed. The progress of semantification within the alley has ended and cannot, according to Lotman's structures, produce proper narrative events in itself, as such events would require two semantic fields. Narrative events evolve through negotiation and crossing of the border between oppositional fields which threaten one another's semantic structures:

Die Bewegung des Sujets, das *Ereignis*, ist die Überwindung jener Verbotsgrenze, die von der sujetlosen Struktur festgelegt ist. Die Verschiebung des Helden *innerhalb* des ihm zugewiesenen Raumes ist kein Ereignis. Daraus erklärt sich die Abhängigkeit des Begriffs "Ereignis" von der im Text gültigen Struktur des Raumes, von ihrem klassifikatorischen Teil. [...] Da aber aufgrund der Hierarchie der binären Oppositionen ein gestaffeltes System semantischer Grenzen geschaffen wird [...], ergeben sich dabei Möglichkeiten gesonderter Grenzüberschreitungen, die sich zu einer Hierarchie der Sujetbewegung entfalten. (338-9)

In order to examine the discursive barriers of the ghetto and explore whether they are possibly articulated from within, I want to emphasize the articulation of the "here" I introduced previously. This here is used with an almost phatic dimension, a deictic connection between the alley and the identities of several characters in the play. Not only institutional social exclusion performs the silent speech act of identification with the place here, instead the social collective within the alley opposes itself against the outside as a form of variation. To return to my previous example, Hanna who left the alley to live with

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<sup>12</sup> For the modification and reformulation of the illocutionary speech act (as described by Austin) as a "declaration" see Searle 1-29, esp. 4.

a man, is excluded not only morally, but also through the spatial articulation of her father Fleck:

FLECK: Ich wart' *hier*, *hier* werd' ich stehn, und wenn sie kommt, werd' ich mich *hier* vor die Tür stellen und werd' zu ihr sagen: von *hier* schau, daß du fortkommst! *Da ist kein Platz für dich!* Du könntest jetzt sein die Ehefrau von ein' reichen achtbaren Mann. Du hast das ausgeschlagen und nicht nach meinem Willen gehandelt *jetzt geh weiter!* Hast dich herumgetrieben zwei Jahre lang, *was weiß ich, wo überall [...]*<sup>13</sup> (Feldmann 23)

The social collective in the ghetto alley plays a central role, as it defies the existence of the subversive *transhumantes*, wanderers through the readable city text who cross borders and have the ability to transform places into spaces through nuanced articulation. The three characters in the play who physically step out and cross topographical borders violate the inside boundary and are consequently no longer allowed here.

One could say then that the social collective of the alley in some way reproduces, inside, the power structure of the city, outside, which initially declared it a ghetto. They too maintain the order of the place, attempting to deter the event of its residents departing. The border of the place is a physical connection to the discourse.

In the play, deictic articulation often aligns with spatial speech acts. This fulfills the role of declaration and definition, and attempts to diminish the threat to the here, just as it tries to uphold the separation between articulation and reality—producing identity. The three characters who attempt to negotiate the borders are not only threatened with losing their status as subjects (as they have a certain place and no space in their lives) but also sanctioned by the discourse of the social collective with losing their identity as an object. Erika Fischer-Lichte defines such speech acts as following: “Solche Äußerungen sagen nicht nur etwas aus, sondern sie vollziehen genau die Handlung, von der sie sprechen. Sie sind also selbstreferenziell, insofern sie das bezeichnen, was sie tun, und wirklichkeitskonstituierend, indem sie die soziale Wirklichkeit herstellen, von der sie sprechen” (28)

If the physical connection to here is no longer accepted—neither by the *transhumantes* nor by the social collective—it loses its deictic and semantic power. Those illocutionary speech acts which can be observed in the play generate borders, establish powerful conventions (the prohibition to leave or to return), and stabilize the positions from which they speak. Moving out of the alley thus becomes a potential statement where it disturbs the borders of both semantic and topographical reality. The reinforcement of a barrier from within the ghetto alley is also expressed in Hanna's description of the outside world:

HANNA: Mutter, was habe ich da alles gesehen! *Was für eine Welt, so ganz anders wie hier*, wie wenn's nicht dasselbe Dasein wäre! *Und jetzt bin ich wieder da*. Wie kommt mir das alles vor! Diese Stube Mutter, du mit deinem Sorgengesicht. Wie ist diese Welt anders, von der ich komme, und wie ist sie doch wieder ähnlich mit deinem Sorgengesicht.<sup>14</sup> (Feldmann 25)

The social collective of the alley apparently sanctions what de Certeau might refer to as the “*délinquants*” for leaving the ghetto alley, but in actuality they are punished for

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<sup>13</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> My emphasis.

negotiating the powerful semantic borders of the ghetto and the deictic reference of a here where “we and you belong” as a function of identity (190). Before the physical detachment but after the ideological rejection of the here, the *délinquants* Hanna, Adrian, and Simon are no longer semantically connected to their previous familiar discourse. They are seen as traitors, a position which is further facilitated through Simon’s theft of his father’s money for use in his future life “outside.”

F L E C K : Wo sind die Ringe? Dieb! (*Er nimmt ein großes Stück Holz und schlägt ihn damit.*) Dieb, wo hast du die Ringe?  
(*Simon steht kerzengerade, sieht ihm starr in die Augen und lässt sich schlagen.—Fleck läßt ab von ihm, schüttelt die Faust, wendet sich ab.—Simon stürzt laut weinend nieder.*)

F L E C K : Weg mit dir! Kommst du mir noch einmal unter die Augen, schlag’ ich dich nieder wie einen Hund!

(*Simon erhebt sich, wankt zur Tür.*)

F L E C K (*wirft ihm seine Mütze nach*): So, da! Ich geh’ jetzt die polizeiliche Anzeige machen!

(*Simon ab.*)

F L E C K : Geh, wohin du willst! (*Er zieht sich an.*) (Feldmann 37)

According to de Certeau, every form of articulating and narrating spaces is *délinquante*, wrong and offensive, against the rules and state of the place. The social collective, which reinforces the place sanctions this. Illocutionary speech acts, in generating reality, actually become reality once more: “en faire le principe de l’existence physique là où une société n’offre plus d’issues symboliques et d’expectations d’espaces à des sujets ou à des groupes, là où il n’y a plus d’autre alternative que le rangement disciplinaire et da dérive illégale, c’est-à-dire une forme ou l’autre de prison et l’errance au-dehors” (190).<sup>15</sup>

This enforces a quasi-natural meaning for those speech acts which are visible in physical acts of staying/leaving. The alley becomes a figure itself as it produces, reinforces, or denies identity within a closed discourse. Following the episodic plot of the play, the different social connections are shown within an opaque textural cosmos, easily accessible to those on the outside, yet difficult to manipulate from within. The spatial idea of the ghetto alley and the articulation of its borders from within is justified once more through the dimensions of topographies: In accordance with the Grimms’ *Deutsches Wörterbuch* one might explain that “die gasse gilt als dem ‘gemeinen’ verkehr und gebrauch gehörig, keines eigenthum (mit der ausnahme 2, c, δ), als ‘publicum’”<sup>16</sup> (1984). However, this exception mentions that *Straße* is more precise when referring to places with infrastructure and economy. This might explain the vague phenomenon which hinders pedestrians from entering certain alleys and using them only in passing, as they sometimes evoke the imagination of crossing a semantic border into the inhabitants’ intimacy, like entering their private living spaces. This may be evoked by the physical construction (small houses and doors which stand close together around a narrow way), but it is also a result of an

<sup>15</sup> indem sie “[...] sie dort zum Prinzip der körperlichen Existenz [...] machen, wo eine Gesellschaft den Subjekten und Gruppen keine symbolischen Auswege und Raumerwartungen mehr bietet, also dort, wo es nur noch die Alternative von disziplinierter Anpassung oder illegaler Abweichung gibt, das heißt die eine oder andere Form von Gefängnis oder des draußen Umherirrens” (Certeau/Vouillé 238).

<sup>16</sup> Original italics removed by the author for ease of readability.

interpretation of the city as text, the negotiation of its different unstable semantics. By destabilizing the peace and identity of the ghetto alley, the runaways produce an event in the structural sense of Lotman's *sujet* (338-9). They depart from the semantic field to which they should belong and trespass onto an oppositional field which exists only to affirm the identity of the first field by means of its otherness—a space which does not grant these intruders the privilege of residence.

## Alley-grave

I describe the overall structure rendered through re-negotiating the spaces and places of the alley and the ghetto in the play through the metaphor of an alley-grave. After briefly positing some structural similarities between the ghetto alley and a grave (the silent order of the place, its self-evidentness, and its permanence provide the physical connection to the discourse), I would argue that this metaphor is effective both for the interpretation of the play and the solution to my *Leitfrage*.

Alley-grave contains and unites the different approaches I work with in analyzing the play's spatial conception. The homology of alley and grave in the metaphor can be summed up as follows: Topographies, as pointed out by de Certeau, can be very powerfully articulated and ordered from above and yet be simultaneously be destabilized when their semantic meaning is jeopardized. The powerful conventions suggesting reality through speech acts, as defined by Austin, establish a place where condition and content are no longer questioned, but accepted in discourse. The effects of trespassing across semantic barriers as described by Lotman are offensive, eventful, and destabilizing for the field which is crossed. Structurally the rules of an indexical deictic of here and the silence of the ghetto alley establish peace, identity, and order in the quality of a dead sign for those who are incapable of moving (out); the *délinquants* as well as the inhabitants project structures of a symbolic death onto each other; the non-negotiation of the boundaries and semantics within a homogenous semantic field results in dead, unmovable semantics. Semantically the characters are held in a topography of a very narrow place; the silent agreements of here and the order of the homogenous, dead semantic field produces identity within the place, imitating a structure from the outside. There is a connotation of death for both the *délinquants* and the inhabitants of the ghetto (in the context of anti-Semitism and the fascist, socio-political circumstances in Vienna during this period).

The here is the primary articulation of the grave from above, a concept reinforced by Robert Stockhammer in his description of the rules of the deictic here. Here Stockhammer articulates why a normative power of discourse rejects disturbance to its order:

Über die Bedingungen des 'Hier'-Sagens und -Schreibens, der *lokalen* Deixis, ist Genaueres bei Charles S. Peirce zu erfahren, der das *indexikalische* Zeichen scharf vom *symbolischen* und *ikonischen* unterschieden hat. Im engsten Sinne des Terminus ist ein *index* ein Zeichen, das seinem dynamischen Objekt (seinem Referenten) "physisch [...] verbunden" ist, etwa ein Grabstein mit der Aufschrift 'Hier ruht'. [...] [E]in verschriftlichtes 'hier' [kann] immerhin so lange, freilich nur genau so lange, funktionieren, wie der Schrifträger selbst eine genau definierte Beziehung zum Raum einhält. Diese Beziehung wird gestört, wenn [etwa ein] Friedhof umgestaltet

wird, [...] ein Grabstein [müsse] nicht nur anzeigen, “wer begraben sei,” sondern auch “wo er begraben sei, und auf das Wo kommt es eigentlich an.”<sup>17</sup> (9-10)

Alley and grave function as mere signs, dead semantics which stabilize an identity which cannot be questioned. The power of the discourse of the social collective preserves the here until the end of their lives in the alley-grave. The *transhumantes* however, are labeled with a special knowledge outside of this cosmos (as displayed by Hanna’s statement as she returns to the alley); the disruption to their status provokes both the inhabitants and the established order of the place: alley/grave. Instead of negotiating the identity crisis, the inhabitants simply exile the transgressors and allow them to die from their symbolic order—they do not belong here anymore. This symbolic death is established as Hanna, Adrian, and Simon leave the system of the alley-grave by which they had been defined. Their destination is unknown, presumably they flee to Switzerland, as Hanna suggests: “In die Schweiz kann man flüchten, dort wird man nicht gesucht” (Feldmann 34). Adrian is concerned about Simon, the youngest of the three, whom symbolic death and the potential grave in fact change physically: “Diesmal hab’ ich ihn gerettet. [...] Er ist trotzdem verloren, er ist trotzdem eine Leiche! Eine lebende Leiche! Sieh, er hat sich schon bläulich verfärbt” (46). As Lotman defines it, this is the very structure of the sujet—after the transgression ends, the semantic fields which were crossed return to their previous order, resting in their semantic peace on both sides of the barrier (Lotman 142-3): The inhabitants in the ghetto alley remain in their graves—dead semantics; Hanna, Adrian, and Simon experience a symbolic death in the semantic field they leave behind.

The play’s subtitle “Trauerspiel aus dem Ghetto” supports this interpretation on another level. Although the narrative itself appears to conclude in a happy ending (three young people escape the ghetto into an unknown, yet optimistic world), the drama presents nothing positive for its protagonists from *within* the alley-grave. The ending can be interpreted in this way as tragic: the ideals of the three *délinquants* remain with them alone to evolve in their social exclusion, and the alley-grave remains self-evident, unmoving and unmovable after overcoming a temporary irritation.

## Conclusion

The effects of illocutionary speech acts are modelled in the alley-grave. The discursive power of the collective in the alley constitutes itself through the self-referential assurance of a closed identity—life in the alley. The right of the power holders to order and sanction—into an alley, into a grave—is a result of the strengthening of the connection “world-to-word;” articulated *references* to reality established by the power of a discourse, indeed *produce* reality.

The speech acts become performative, as reactions to or interpretations of that reality are manifest in acts of walking or not walking (out of the alley-grave). This condition speaks to my guiding question, demonstrating that urban society cannot be understood as a fixed entity, but rather one whose inside borders are negotiated by those who exercise their free will to navigate within the urban space, rejecting the dominant allocations of structural space. The inhabitants remain as silent signified objects within the ghetto, or

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<sup>17</sup> Stockhammer cites Peirce 193, and Charlotte from Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*.

they advance to subjects capable of moving between both topographical and semantic borders. The alley as a spatial idea provides a paradigm and stage for those (non-) movements—it is indeed a place for a grave, as well as a space for “*aller*,” for walking through: to pass. For de Certeau these are liminal spaces: “Entre ces deux déterminations, il y a des *passages*, tels que la mise à mort (ou mise en paysage) des héros transgresseurs de frontières et qui, *coupables* d’avoir attenté à la loi du lieu, en fournissent la restauration *par* leur tombeau [...]”<sup>18</sup> (de Certeau 174). The living dead in the play seek to escape their alley-grave: not simply to rest in peace, but to enact the subversive potential which lies in the structure of the alley. In one case, the processes of semantification are stopped (the stable characters in the play remain incapable of moving), and in the other case these processes are literally on the move as a narration of new spaces—agile and instable. The “promise” of the space is transferred to the act of walking away from here functioning, as well, for other, non-spatial semantics within the text. Through this promise of renegotiation, immovable characters become movable, navigating into a new life away from the alley-grave:

A D R I A N (*geht in seine Stube, kommt angezogen mit zwei Reisetaschen*): Nun, Hanna! Wären wir soweit! Hast du noch deinen Mut?

H A N N A : Ich habe den Mut der Verzweifelten:

A D R I A N : Was wir hier zurücklassen, sind Leichen, alles Leichen. Morgen geht uns die Sonne einer neuen Welt auf. Komm! (Feldmann 46)

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<sup>18</sup> My emphasis; “Zwischen diesen beiden Bestimmungen gibt es *Übergänge*, wie zum Beispiel die Tötung (oder Verbannung) von Helden, die Grenzen überschreiten und die, da sie schuldig sind, gegen das Gesetz des Ortes verstoßen haben, *durch* ihr Grab zur Wiederherstellung des Gesetzes beitragen [...]” (Certeau/Vouillé 219).

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