

Karin Boye, *Kallocaïn*

Dr. Theresa Thompson
Engl / Wgst 3330
Fall 2009

1930s: Political Institutions

- Totalitarianism: Stalin and Hitler
 - S. Payne (1980): "Totalitarian regimes seek to destroy civil society, i.e. communities that operate independently of the State." (cf. "Civilization is state life." *Kallocaïn* 131)
 - S. Kreiss (2000): "In the end, [Soviet] totalitarianism meant a 'permanent revolution,' an unfinished revolution in which rapid and profound change imposed from above simply went on forever." (cf. *Kallocaïn* 137)

Claude Levi-Strauss (1958): *Zero Institution*

- Zero Institution: a shared understanding (assumption) that is *never* represented.
 - Like Eichmann, Kall assumes that "right" understanding cannot be formed from one's own point of view (*Kallocaïn* 28).
 - Like Hitler, Kall assumes marriage is solely for procreation (10, 30).
 - Kall assumes humans are simply "cells" in the body politic, nothing more (8, 54).

Zero Institution and Power

- Slavoj Žižek: "It is the reference to such a zero-institution that enables all members of the tribe to experience themselves as such, as members of the same tribe."
 - Organic resistance v. organization (*Kallocaïn* 87, 90-91)
- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Without resistance, power becomes invisible.*
 - Self-Policing / self-hating: When a law feels "natural," no law is necessary. (163-164)
- D. Henry: "Nation-Building and the Body Politic: The Braiding of Eugenics, Aesthetics and Politics" (2005)
 - "...governmental policy appears cultural (natural) rather than political (partisan)" (cf. *Kallocaïn* 108-109, 130)

Hannah Arendt: Eichmann in Jerusalem

- Nazi extermination of the "unfit" did not depend on ideology. (cf: Kallocain 130, 132)
- "The member of the Nazi hierarchy most gifted at solving problems of conscience was Himmler."
 - Propaganda (Kallocain 116-117)
 - "[Himmler] coined slogans, ... which Eichmann called 'winged words' & the [Israeli] judges called 'empty talk.'"
 - "YOUR CLOSEST RELATION MIGHT BE A TRAITOR" (63, 70).
- Turn humane instincts around: Not "What horrible things I am doing" but "What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders." (cf: Kallocain 108-109)

Arendt: the banality of evil

- "So... as the months and years went by, [Eichmann] lost the need to feel anything at all. This was the way things were, this was the new law of the land, based on the Führer's order; whatever he did he did, as far as he could see, as a law abiding citizen." (cf: Kallocain 62)
- "Adolf Eichmann went to the gallows with great dignity.... It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lessons that this long course in human wickedness had taught us--the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil." (cf. Kallocain 113, 124)

Buddhism, *Kallocain* and the nature of human existence...

- Emptiness and loneliness (167)
- Fear (126, 131, 142, 148-9)
 - What is useful? Perspective (146)
 - Freedom from fear (150, 154)
- Power (158-160, 162)
- Compassion & Truth (168, 175-77)
- Impermanence (182, 190-1)