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Disappearances: Memory without Mastery in Ilse Aichinger

My paper will address Ilse Aichinger's "Journal des Verschwindens" as an attempt to create a cultural memory that is gendered both thematically (in its choice of objects) and theoretically (in its conceptualization of memory). I will argue that Aichinger's texts offer an important case study for thinking about the possibilities available for the development of an Austrian cultural memory, because they draw on the archives of personal and collective memory, the history of cinema and photography, and the resources of literary and journalistic writing.

In Vienna during the Second World War, Ilse Aichinger was classified by the National Socialists as a "first degree half-breed," having a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father. Aichinger survived the war and avoided being deported, as did her mother; her grandmother and her mother's younger siblings did not. From her 1948 novel *Die größere Hoffnung* to her current writings, Aichinger's imposed hybrid status, at once protected and exposed, can be found embossed as a literary and historical mark on her every word: as the coincidence of hope and fear, speaking and silence, survival and destruction, memory and forgetting.

In recent years, Aichinger has addressed these concerns in her regular contributions to the Viennese newspaper *Der Standard*. One of her series of columns, titled "Journal des Verschwindens," was published as part of her 2001 book *Film und Verhängnis: Blitzlichter auf ein Leben*. The column centers on films (usually older films) playing in Vienna's cinemas or on photographs from the 1930s, but Aichinger often refers to events in her own life as well current and past events in Austrian and international politics. "Journal des Verschwindens" frequently reflects upon the nature of memory and returns with insistence to a singular dilemma facing any project involving the past: how can one write about memory without fixating it – and thus betraying memory's essential fleetingness? Aichinger's newspaper columns include explicit, sustained discussion of this question, which is crucial for thinking about the complex task of creating and participating in a culture that would maintain an engaged, thoughtful relation to its personal and collective histories. "Die Erinnerung splittert leicht, wenn man sie zu beherrschen versucht," Aichinger writes, and she attempts to develop a way of writing about memory that does not depend on "Beherrschung" – and that nonetheless allows memories to appear in their full personal, historical, and political force.

Aichinger's writing in her "Journal" focuses on women in the history of cinema and photography as well as women in her family, but the gendered aspect of her writing is more than merely thematic and extends into the very conceptual aspects of her notion of memory. I will address the thematic and theoretical gendering of memory in Aichinger in a reading of the column titled "Entwurf einer Zukunft," in which Aichinger writes about "die mögliche Zukunft einer auf dem Photo noch jungen Frau: ein Leben, wohl noch ohne Feminismus, aber mit allen Gründen dazu."