

READING DEATH WORLDS AND LIVING DEAD IN *THE DIRECTOR* BY DANIEL KEHLMANN: A NECROPOLITICAL READING

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Abstract

*This qualitative research takes Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics as its theoretical framework for a close textual analysis of Daniel Kehlmann's novel *The Director*. Mbembe lucidly explains, in graphic detail, how the creation of fictionalized enemies leads to the creation of death worlds in which the conditions of the people are reduced to that of the living dead. According to Mbembe's theory within necropolitical regimes, the rights of the imagined enemies or marginalized people are suspended and they waver to and fro between life and death. In the fictional world of *The Director*, numerous representations of the living dead and death worlds can be found. The present study investigates how these dark living conditions are brought about in the novel in which the characters are reduced to the status of living dead and examines the role that cinematic art plays in this process. It is argued here that the moral agency entails freedom in the first place, and deprived of their basic human rights and freedom to live, the characters are rendered incapable of exercising moral agency.*

Key Words: Necropolitics, death worlds, living dead, *The Director*, Achille Mbembe.

Introduction

This research attempts to study the novel titled as *The Director* by the acclaimed novelist Daniel Kehlmann through applying the theoretical framework of Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics. This novel by Kehlmann was first published in German in the year 2023, and in 2025 came out its English translation by Ross Benjamin. In 2026, *The Director* was shortlisted for the prestigious International Booker Prize. Daniel Kehlmann's 2020 novel titled as *Tyll* was also shortlisted for International Booker Prize. *The Director* explores the themes of war mania, totalitarian regimes and misery of the human beings under such governments, relation between art and politics, and art as a form of ideology. Set across the continents, but primarily in Nazi Germany prior to the outbreak of World War II, this novel fictionalizes the life of G. W. Pabst, the famous and most envied film director who was forced by the Nazi regime to work for Joseph Goebbels' ministry of propaganda. The relationship between art and politics is a recurrent theme in Kehlmann's novels. On the surface level, in exploring this theme of the relationship of arts with politics through the historical character of G. W. Pabst, complicity and conformity of the eponymous director is critiqued in the novel, as has been noted by many critics, but in this research it is argued that no one could have acted otherwise in Pabst's place. Apparently, what appears as conformity to the Nazi regime on part of Pabst is in fact the state of being shackled and pinioned, as much mental as it is physical. In a political space where death and terror looms large, and are ubiquitous, the paralysis of morality at a societal level is a natural outcome in such a situation. The need for survival takes precedence over dictates of conscience and morality in any political space where "hell reigns" (Kehlmann 35). However, this does not amount to say or even hint that the historical figure of G. W. Pabst in the novel made a moral compromise by working under the Nazi regime. On the contrary, he tricked the regime through his artistic genius by making films that had

undertones of subversive political critique in them, and believed firmly in the power of art to better human life. What has been deemed by many as a moral compromise on Pabst's part is the most natural outcome of living under a necropolitical regime. It is by reading this novel through the lens of necropolitics as it has been theorized by Cameroonian Philosopher Achille Mbembe that we are able to construe in its entirety the dynamics that forced Pabst into working under the Nazi regime.

According to Mbembe, in a necropolitical world where life is precarious and large segments of the populations could be made to die or be deprived of their legal rights, the only way left to regain freedom is through death. These death worlds, as Dwyer tells us, are "justified through the state of exception and constructions of fictionalized enemies" (Dwyer 551). The Nazis justified their creation of the death world in Germany by imagining Jews as their enemies, and in turn by portraying them as the root cause of every problem that non-Jewish populace had to bear. In such a political space the whole populace through the fear of being subjected to death is reduced to the status of living dead.

Drawing on Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, this research first argues that the world of the Nazi Germany depicted in *The Director* is a death world, and then it is explored how lives of people living in this hell are reduced to mere living dead. In the end, it is also explored what role art plays in the creation of such dire circumstances. This research seeks the answers to the following research questions:

1- How does the Nazi regime in *The Director* create necropolitical conditions that reduce the population to the status of the living dead?

2- What role does art play in representing and negotiating the death worlds in *The Director*?

Literature Review

The Director by Daniel Kehlmann is the primary text of this study which is a recent novel in terms of criticism, and no research work has been produced upon it as of yet. This doesn't amount to saying that *The Director* isn't worthy of scholarly attention because by now the critics have just lavished praise vociferously upon Kehlmann's latest achievement. In her review published in *The Guardian*, Nina Allan extols *The Director* as having "all the darkness, shapeshifting ambiguity and glittering unease of a modern Grimms' fairytale: it is Kehlmann's best work yet" (Allan, 2025).

In his reading of *The Director*, Denby scathingly chides Pabst's decision to work for the Nazi state as "the unsurprising news in 'The Director' is that most of us fall short of moral heroism and will accommodate ourselves to power one way or another. Some of us even become rapt enthusiasts of the very things that had earlier repelled us" (Denby, 2025). It is argued in this research that to act as per the dictates of morality one ought to be free in the first place. However, what Denby points towards is that the Pabst who had returned to Nazi Germany didn't stay true to his previous ideological conviction: The Red Pabst, who had directed *The Three Penny Opera*. Pabst's existence had been reduced to a subhuman level, and still the films he directed under the Nazi patronage weren't Nazi at all.

Production and role of art under totalitarian regimes, life in societies ravaged by war, and art as a form of ideology are recurrent themes in almost all of Kehlmann's novels. In his previous accomplishment titled as *Tyll*, by "placing the hero of a rough farce amidst the desolation of humanity's bloodiest conflicts, Kehlmann explores the tenacity of the artist in the face of insurmountable odds, odds that bend the backs of emperors and warriors" (Shaheen et al., 2022). Tyll's tenacity and perseverance can be compared with that of Pabst who in the face of adversity twice as much as the former didn't give up his political and ideological convictions.

Theoretical Framework

In this research work the theory of necropolitics as it has been elucidated by Achille Mbembe, in his essay of the eponymous title has been used to study the *The Director* by Daniel Kehlmann. In this very essay Mbembe at the very outset makes clear that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die. Hence, to kill or allow to live constitutes the limits of sovereignty" (Mbembe 11). Mbembe draws upon the theories of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben while at the same time expanding their theories because in Mbembe's view the theories put forward by these two philosophers run short of the insight

that is required to explain in its entirety the experience of the plight and blight of the colonized subjects. Mbembe's theory of "death-worlds" and "necropolitics" aptly articulates the horrors to which colonized subjects in the African colonies were subjected to. Mbembe's necropolitics is firstly and foremostly a critique of modern Western political philosophy, and in particular Western liberal democracy: "his central claim is that political modernity, particularly Western liberal democracy, is founded on the systematic production and management of death [of its populace]. Far from being exceptional, such violence constitutes the very grammar of modern power" (Halidu 129).

Before we delve into Mbembe's theory of necropolitics it would be pertinent at this point in our discussion to answer a question that would naturally arise in mind of the reader that how could Mbembe's theory of necropolitics which sheds light on the dark side of the Western colonial rule be used to study a literary text that is set in Nazi Germany? It is true that the focal point of Mbembe's necropolitics is how racism allowed colonizers to resort to utmost brutality, but he argues that later on the same brutality was unleashed upon the Europeans themselves as the main argument of the regime of the Third Reich was nothing but racist to the core: preservation of the most superior race on the face of earth: Aryans. In order to secure the best living for the pure or the superior race, killing of the "other" was mandated as essential. Mbembe "sees racism as intimately concerned with the right to put others to death who seem different from oneself" (Coates 65). In drawing a comparison between the horrors that plantation workers were subjected to and those which colonized people were made to bear Mbembe argues that "it is most notably in the colony and under the apartheid regime that there comes into being a peculiar terror formation [and]

the most original feature of this terror formation is its concatenation of biopower, the state of exception and the state of siege. Crucial to this concatenation, once again, is race” (Mbembe 22). In Nazi’s theatre of destruction the Jews and all those who dared not to comply with the Nazi state’s agenda were labelled as different or better put as “the others.” This systematic racial othering of the German Jewish population is the theme of *The Director*, and in light of the above discussion, the notion of necropolitics is apt to be used as a lens to examine this text.

Foucault’s notion of biopower and Agamben’s theory of the state of exception are the two central theoretical references in Mbembe’s philosophy of necropolitics along with the Western political-philosophical definition of sovereignty. The notion of Biopower expounded by Foucault, as Barry Smart describes, is that it is “exercised over individuals and populations, and, in administering or governing life, it has the capacity to foster life or to disallow it” (Peggs and Smart 64). Biopower is exercised upon people not just to kill them but primarily to manage the populations. Only those who are deemed as threats to the managing body are killed. Formulating his theory of biopower further, Mbembe argues that, Foucault states that the “Nazi state was the most relevant example of a state exercising the right to kill” (Mbembe 17). In his essay, Mbembe disagrees with Foucault at this point. Mbembe, instead argues it is in the colony that “we first see the syntheses between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of the Western rationality” (Mbembe 23). He is pointing out in the above quoted statement that the special and sacred place accorded to rationality in the Western modernity was never without a dark or atrocious history because those who were labelled as “other” and devoid of rationality, as per the Europeans, were treated as mere brutes, and the root cause of this othering is racism. Mbembe further substantiates his thesis by quoting Hannah Arendt: “according to her [Arendt], the colonial conquest revealed the potential for violence previously unknown. What one witnesses in the second World War is the extension to the civilized peoples of Europe of the methods previously reserved for the savages”(Mbembe 23). It is in the treatment of the colonized by the European colonizers that we realize that the concept of mere biopower is not sufficient to explain how power and sovereignty works, and therefore he introduces his own concept of living-death because, in the words of Anuja Basu, “the notion of necropolitics captures facets of contemporary social and political life that work on biopolitics in political theory cannot adequately describe or theorize. In focusing on the state of exception, or the abrogation of the regime of rights, which endowed citizens with a legal and political identity, the framework of biopolitics focuses exclusively on the contradictions of the liberal democratic state judicial structure”(Basu). Oliver Coates lucidly explains this phenomenon of living-death: “necropolitics after all does not describe actual death, but rather conditions of life, that confer upon other people the status of living-dead...from this perspective, necropolitics epitomizes a form of living alienation experienced by those shorn of human dignity” (Coates 67).

Concluding the essay, Mbembe remarks that “under conditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred” (Mbembe 40). The intensity of the violence inflicted by the necropoliticians upon the people is so strong that the only way to reclaim life or in other words to regain agency is through death, that is, by perishing oneself in the process of retaliating. In such a situation freedom is gained through martyrdom.

It is important that we have a look at two other coinages other than that of necropolitics which

Mbembe has elucidated in this essay: “living dead” and “death worlds.” Mbembe, as has been argued above, explains that the mere notion of biopower as it has been expounded by Foucault is not sufficient to shed light on the kind of life which people live in states of exception created by modern Western political philosophy and defined as Western liberal democratic states. Their lives are characterized by uncertainty and precariousness, and at any point they can be relegated to the realm of death at the whim of the sovereign because in these states of exception, sovereignty is not limited to management of the lives of the population rather its power exceeds from management to deciding as to when and how they should die. Thus, necropoliticians create and reign over “death worlds”: death worlds are political spaces “where marginalized populations - racialized, colonized and displaced - exist in conditions between life and death”(Halidu 130). A question arises here that where do the living-dead people live their deaths before they are exterminated? These living dead people live their deaths in spaces “proximate to [real] death...[where] there is no recourse to legal rights, and death could come at any time”(Coates 68).

Mbembe’s notion of living-dead is informed by his reading of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s philosophy of bare life. According to Agamben, “bare life” comes into being in the political spaces where there is abandonment of law, that is, where there is no law enforcement to offer protection to the “otherized” in the society. Thus, bare life “indicates the exposure of natural life to the force of law in abandonment, the ultimate expression of which is the sovereign’s right of death” (Mills 64). Agamben identifies two basic forms of life namely “zoe” and “bio”. The form of life which Agamben describes as zoe is the form of life which existed prior to the evolution of political institutions and the form of life which he calls bio following Foucault’s notion of biopower is the political form of life. The lives of those who are condemned to death by the sovereign are those who are deprived of bio, that is, political participance. Their lives are reduced to zoe, that is, biological lives, for example the plantation workers or colonized people. It is this reduction from which the disposability of people springs up. Mbembe’s idea of the living dead which is informed by Agamben’s concept of the bare-life is that such people are “utterly excluded from human society, yet condemned to live on until the day that death is visited upon them”(Coates 68). A recent example of the living dead are people from war torn Gaza, who exist in a space where there is abandonment of law and precariousness looms large.

Research Methodology

The present study is a qualitative textual analysis of the novel *The Director* by Daniel Kehlmann. In this research the theory of *Necropolitics* by Achille Mbembe has been used as the theoretical lens in the light of which the primary text, *The Director*, is studied. This novel is set in Hitler’s Nazi Germany prior to the second world war, and within the fictional setting lays bare the horrors and cruelty to which Jews in particular and German population in general were subjected to by Hitler’s psychopathological and demagogic regime. The characters in this novel are reduced to the non-human others all in the name and service of racial superiority. Deprived of their rights guaranteed by political institutions, personal choice and freedom, will, and above all right to live these people have been reduced to mere puppets in the hands of the cruel state machinery that uses them or rather abuses them whichever way the state deems necessary. *The Director* is replete with

such instances wherein the characters are seen subjugated in a very nonhuman way by the Nazi regime. The plight of those who are forced into slavery or those who are exterminated in the gas chambers along with complicity of those who willingly give in to the regime's demands have been described in a very moving and lucid way. That being said, this novel raises serious questions with regards to the frailty of human sanity, morality, and obsession with authority of the power voracious lot. It is argued in this research that all these aforementioned questions and concerns that the primary text is made up of can be studied best by making use of insights provided by Achille Mbembe in his essay titled as *Necropolitics* (2003). Necropolitics, simply put, is defined as the power of the sovereign to consign their subjects to death. It is at this point in which Mbembe's notion of necropolitics differs from other philosophical formulations of power. In the course of this essay Mbembe also develops two other concepts namely: living-dead and death worlds. Mbembe's succinct formulations of power within the context of racism enables one to construe in its entirety the otherwise unfathomable darkness of the Nazi regime and misery of the characters within the fictional, though historically informed, world of *The Director*. It has been explained in this research why other concepts of power and terror aren't well equipped with the theoretical insights which are required to study this literary text and which are in abundance in *Necropolitics*. In this research this very point of the relevance and suitability of the theoretical framework is established prior to the analysis of the text. *The Director* was translated into English language by Ross Benjamin in 2025, and as of yet it has not been studied through the optics of Mbembe's theory.

Analysis

Creation of death worlds and reduction of populace to living dead:

The Director by Daniel Kehlmann is a historical novel set in Nazi Germany and is a captivating tale which revolves around G. W. Pabst's moral descent into complicity with the Nazi regime. On the surface level Pabst, the eponymous film director in the novel is lured into complicity by temptations and seductions of the fame that producing great art will earn him. Even his wife, Mrs. Pabst, thinks of his obsequious decision to give in to the orders of Joseph Goebbels as sheer expedience, turning a blind eye towards the suffering of fellow humans, but did Pabst really have a choice? Throughout the novel, as the tale progresses and Pabst ascends the new and unparalleled heights of glory, praise, and stardom, his wife's exhaustion and repulsion with Pabst's decision to serve the Aryan cinema grows in leaps and bounds. The main reason for her weariness in her opinion, as it is revealed to the reader, is Pabst's immoral decision. Whilst talking to a British prisoner of war held captive by the Nazi regime at a movie screening of one of Pabst's movies later in the novel her repulsion with and desperation to flee the Nazi Germany is evident in these lamenting lines: "I have seen enough of the masterpieces. If there were one less in the world, I shouldn't miss a thing" (Kehlmann 237). This critique of Pabst's compliance in obeying the Ministry of Propaganda and complacency with producing art under such grim circumstances by his wife resonates with Kehlmann's own views with regards to trials and tribulations German Jews underwent during the Nazi rule. In this regard Mrs Pabst is Kehlmann's alter ego. This being stated, W. G. Pabst had no choice in making the very decision that made his wife look down upon him. Making a decision or choice requires freedom whereas Pabst was coerced and manipulated to work as per the instructions of the propaganda ministry. What Kehlmann through the character of Mrs

Pabst implicitly suggests is that Pabst instead of living under the patronage of Hitler's totalitarian regime in capacity of a mere puppet should have reclaimed his agency through either martyrdom or extermination, as has been explained by Mbembe and discussed in the preceding sections of this study that the only way to reclaim agency and freedom in the death world created by necropoliticians is through sacrifice. Mrs Pabst reaction to her husband's "moral decline" establishes the fact that the reign described in this text is a death world, a necropolitical world where as it has been explained by Mbembe that the sovereign's right to impose death upon anyone makes people living in such necropolitical spaces living dead: people devoid of agency, basic human rights, and freedom. To act in a moral way requires one to be free in the first place. Once back in the Nazi Germany and in the shackles of government, Pabst was deprived of his freedom to act as per the dictates of his conscience. He was reduced to living dead though not through the use of brute force but by being terrorized. Pabst had in front of him the examples of those condemned to extermination camps: the wretched of the earth. In succumbing to the regime's orders Pabst wasn't being expedient; rather he was simply trying to secure the survival of his wife and son whose lives were at stake and would have been swallowed by the regime had he not yielded to the regime's demands to direct films. Pabst had no freedom to act otherwise.

Pabst had fled Nazi Germany to the States when the killing machinery of the Nazi German state had just started to operate, but once there he received a telegram in the name of his ailing mother that she immediately needed him back home. When Pabst announces to his friends that he is heading back to Germany to take care of his mother who hasn't been doing well lately he gets reprimanded by a small group of fellow self-exiled Germans who like him had fled the place where hell reigned. Zuck shouts "but you can't go back to Austria [annexed by Hitler's Germany]! Are you crazy?" (Kehlmann 83). Mehring, another fellow German living in exile, advises that "I'll tell you what I would do, not go back to the Nazis once you have managed to escape the Nazis. Not at any price. Your mother wouldn't want that either" (Kehlmann 83). Later on as the story unfolds the reader learns that Mehring's warning that his mother wouldn't want him to return back either proves to be true because his mother, who by then had started to suffer from dementia, had never sent the telegram herself. In the second part of the novel titled as "*Inside*" we are told that the telegram was sent by the caretaker, named Jerzabek, of Pabst's house in Germany to whose care he had entrusted his mother. Jerzabek had "become the leader of the local group of the Nazi party in the village Tillmitsch" (Kehlmann 100). Because the state needed Pabst to direct films for Nazi populace, Aryan films, the ministry through its accomplice and minion Jerzabek tricked Pabst to return back to his mother. It would be pertinent to share Jerzabek's views in full length here as it speaks volumes about the political climate of the Nazi Germany: "on the way back he spoke about the Jews. The Fuhrer was now driving out the vermin, making them crawl all over the world. Here in the Ostmark too, decency had finally prevailed since the Fuhrer had brought his homeland into the Reich. And now the Jews who were still here were keeping their mouths shut, just like the communists and the Catholics, they all were afraid because none would be forgotten. And he repeated: None!" (Kehlmann 83). Jerzabek's warning that "none would be forgotten" is directed at Pabst. It is as much a warning as it is a threat that if Pabst doesn't agree to make movies for the Goebbels' ministry his fate won't be different that of Jews, Catholics and Communists. The import of his caretaker's threat, who now wears a party uniform because he is a member of the village's Nazi party, isn't lost on Pabst. It is now at this moment that Pabst construes that he had been fooled

into believing that his mother needed him. The ministry through Jerzabek's cunning had outmaneuvered Pabst by making him return to Germany. How Jerzabek, mimicking Nazi Party's official stance towards Jewish populace, addresses Jews by calling them vermins corresponds to Mbembe's concept of the "enmity." In a necropolitical world, in order to otherize the racial other first they have to be condemned as a hated enemy, or better put "a fictionalized notion of the enemy" (Mbembe 16), just as Coates describes that it is "relation of hate or enmity that is central to Mbembe's thought about contemporary warfare, society and immigration... [Which] revolves around the belief that the existence of the other is an attempt on my life. Enmity targets societies' supposed enemies, including those perceived as foreign and racially 'other' (Coates, 65). An enemy is required by the sovereign to wage a war, and in a necropolitical world which is characterized by the abandonment of human rights due to war there ought to be an enemy, and for this purpose the necropolitical Nazi regime regarded the German Jewish populace as its enemy.

Furthermore, if Jerzabeks are considered for a moment the microcosm of the Nazi state machinery then it would be easy for us to construe what terror does to the people upon which it is inflicted and how it works. Before Pabst starts working for the ministry Jerzabeks had turned everything topsy turvy at his house. After donning Nazi uniform, Jerzabek becomes the master of the house and Pabsts are treated as servants in their own house at the hands of their former servants. We are told that "none of them [Pabsts] are allowed upstairs anymore. The Jerzabeks are now up in the living quarters, and Pabsts are downstairs in the caretaker's apartment...She [Mrs Pabst] washes the clothes in a tub of hot water on the stove, and not only theirs but also the Jerzabeks'. She [Mrs. Pabst] irons, she cooks—not only for her own family, but also for the caretaker's" (Kehlmann 127). This is an apt example of how all of a sudden those were declared as enemies, that is, the Jewish population or the communists were deprived of their rights.

Had Pabst returned back to Nazi Germany just to win the dignity of the greatest film director on the face of earth he would have happily accepted Kramer's invitation on behalf of the ministry of propaganda to produce films for the Nazi regime that was extended to him when Pabst was still in California. Pabst's euphoria would have hit the sky, but instead he lambasted Kramer: "I'll smash your face in, you swine!" (Kehlmann 48). Also, if it were the case that Pabst made a moral compromise later on then he could easily have been tempted by Kramer's cajoling and wheedling earlier on when he was back in California. Kramer says "Germany needs you. Our government is more pragmatic than people often think. You are a great artist, and you are not a Jew. And you have not always...Forgive me, maestro, but I must speak plainly. You have not shown yourself to be entirely uncompromising in your previous work" (Kehlmann 47). Pabst didn't even decline the offer politely rather reacted violently to Kramer's offer. The point that is being made here is that though on the surface it seems that *The Director* depicts Pabst's moral decline in the face of adversity, as many critics have pointed out, but Pabst was enmeshed in the quagmire of terror and brutality of the Nazi regime that any effort to reclaim agency would not only have been futile but also fatal for him and his family. Pabst had been reduced to the status of living dead in the death world of Hitler's Germany, and his acts were being orchestrated by the Nazi regime rather than his own free choice.

Pabst's so-called complicity and moral decline is in fact a vivid example of how totalitarian regimes create conditions through the use of terror, deterrence, and utmost abuse of power in which the populace is reduced to the status of living dead. Thus, it is not greed for fame rather out of sheer fear that Pabst is too careful not to let his family be dragged towards the gas chambers. Already horrified by the terror that a small village Nazi leader and Pabst's former servant, Jerzabek, has subjected Pabst and his son Jakob to by attacking the latter with a blade, Pabst is more wary of the propaganda ministry. At the start of the chapter titled as *Molander*, the reader is informed about Pabst's thought process in the following words: "declining an idea from the ministry about a nonpolitical film was certainly not without its dangers—because then they might come back with an idea for a less nonpolitical film which would be harder to decline, and suddenly you might end up like Kurt Heuser, who had refused once too often. Though Heuser had returned he was not clearly the same as before; something had happened to him, and of course you couldn't ask him what they had done to him"(Kehlmann 243). Apparently everything the ministry does is innocuous, sublime, and nonpolitical, but this nonpolitical-ness is as per the ministry because later on the reader learns that "all available cinematographers were working under high pressure on morale-boosting films, a large quantity of which would be needed to steel the people's resolve until the final victory" (Kehlmann 249). Another point must be made here in support of the line of argument that Pabst's decision in *The Director* to serve Goebbels's ministry for propaganda doesn't symbolize a moral decline rather it was purely a strategy for survival in a necropolitical world where his existence was reduced to a mere living dead phenomenon. In such a political space protestation does not matter, and no cause could be made to benefit from Pabst reclaiming his agency and freedom through death by sacrificing his life. In *Necropolitics*, commenting upon the idea of sacrifice, Mbembe quotes Georges Bataille for whom, in contradistinction to Hegel, "sacrifice in reality reveals nothing"(Mbembe 38). Bataille argues, against Hegel, that sacrifice instead is a comedy.

By creating death worlds where death is lurking around every nook and corner in the form of regime's sinister agents and local leaders such as caretaker Jerzabek, people are terrified to comply with the Nazi government's necropoliticians whereas the opportunist power-voracious ones side with the government which further strengthens the necropolitical regime.

Creation of a death world through art:

Upon his return back to the Nazi Germany, Pabst directed two movies under the patronage of Goebbels' ministry for propaganda: *The Comedians* and *The Paracelsus*. As Reimer tells us that the films that Pabst directed under Nazi regime "cannot be summarily dismissed as apolitical historical dramas"(Reimer 132). In *The Director* during Pabst's meeting with Joseph Goebbels, Pabst is offered both these movies as apolitical movies which, as per the minister, were being made to offer German decent entertainment to the public, but in reality production of such movies had a political purpose: to either fool people into believing the superiority of the Aryan race or to scare them into obeying the Nazi regime. *The Comedians* had political undertones as it depicts the roots of the German theatre and the role women played in its development to "strengthen the resolve of the German women to sacrifice for the Nazi Germany" whereas in *The Paracelsus* "Pabst conscripted the historical figure of Paracelsus into the service of the Nazi ideology" (Reminer

132). The production of these movies was part of the larger Nazi scheme to critique the degenerate modernist art that had in itself subversive tendencies. The Nazi regime planned to remove and banish any form of art, that had in it these subversive tendencies that could propel a rebellion against the regime, in the name of service to the people by making arrangements and policies that wouldn't let the modernist art lead the Germans towards decadence. The Nazi's claim to banish expressionist modernist art from Germany in service of the people is ironical and their efforts to make German or Aryan art weren't for the well-being of the German populace rather it had two motives: firstly, they wanted people to get scared from the might of Nazi regime so as to be able to suppress any resurgence in advance by this offensive deterrence through cinematic means, and secondly, through art they wanted to inculcate in minds of the people hatred for the fictionalized enemy, that is, Jews, that Nazi regime had created in order to justify in minds of the people their war mongering. Nazi regime's efforts directed towards production of arts in general and cinematic art in particular reveals that the Nazi intelligentsia were well aware of the potency of the medium to art to manufacture consent of the public. The efforts of the ministry to finish the production of *The Molander Case*, the last movie that Pabst directs in this novel which couldn't get premiered due to the advances Soviets made towards Germany, further substantiates the point made just above.

The Molander Case is an adaptation of a novel titled as *The Star Violin* written by Alfred Karrassch, who introduces himself as a "distinguished, multiple award winning member of the Reich Chamber of Literature"(Kehlmann 277). Karrassch is a bigoted Nazi ideologue upon whom Hitler himself has lavished praise. Earlier in the chapter titled as *German Literature*, Mrs Gertrude Pabst joins a reading circle at the home of Else Buchholz where Heidrun Hippler, the wife of an official from the ministry of propaganda is also present. All the literature enthusiast attendees have gathered to discuss Karrassch's latest novel, *The Star Violin*. The litmus test for new attendees to be admitted into the reading circle is whether or not they like Karrassch's works. When the question with regards to Karrassch's prowess and literary genius is put before Gertrude, she falters and out of politeness describes his latest novel as moving but silly nevertheless. Heidrun Hippler offers a correction to Gertrude's view: "it's moving...and it's powerful too, and not silly at all" (Kehlmann 160). Heidrun then goes on to explain the reason as to why Karrassch is her favourite novelist: "it was thanks to *Party Comrade Schmiedecke* that I truly understood the movement that was sweeping through our country."(Kehlmann 160). The *Party Comrade Schmiedecke* is a story of a Nazi-nationalist factory worker who doesn't let Communists convince him. Gertrude wasn't able to make sense of the bland and insipid *The Violin Star*, and much to the chagrin of Heidrun Hippler doesn't praise the Reich-sponsored novelist. Gertrude's reluctance to praise Karrassch must have been noted by the wives of the other officials who worked under the ministry because, later on, when Pabst had finished making *The Star Violin* and was busy editing the film, Alfred Karrassch himself barged inside the editing room and threatened Pabst: "Karrassch knew it! When they came to me, Hippler and Liebeneiner: we have found the right one with his stupid wife...to the concentration camp. Karrassch will make sure of it now" (Kehlmann 279). Karrassch had seen a little of the adaptation of his novel which he dismissed as Bolshevik and expressionist trash, against the morals and ideology of the Reich. It must be pointed out here that Karrassch's anger wasn't unfounded. Pabst's adaptation of Karrassch's novel indeed had expressionist and subversive, politically, undertones. When Pabst's assistant Franz Wilzek inquires as to what could have

angered Karrasch about their adaptation, Pabst replies “he has an instinct for quality”(Kehlmann 279). Pabst had in mind that Nazi apocalyptic horror will end soon, and afterwards when people would view his creation he’ll be remembered as someone who created art amidst all the stifling control and terror of the Nazi regime. The propaganda ministry wanted Pabst to create art that would help them strengthen and justify their control over people. This is why they created circumstances for Pabst in which he could not refuse to disobey Goebbels’ demands. In light of the above discussion it can confidently and safely be argued that the art played a major role in the Nazi Germany to reduce people to the status of living dead and in the creation of the death world.

Conclusion:

This research explains how death worlds are created and how people in these death worlds are reduced to mere living dead. Mbembe in his essay *Necropolitics* states that these death worlds are the political spaces where the sovereign has the right to relegate anyone, even masses to the realm of death. In such political spaces the populace residing has no rights to protect them from the wrath and whims of the sovereign power. Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Russia are two such examples of the necropolitical world from recent human history. The primary text in this research which has been studied through Achille Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics is *The Director* by Daniel Kehlmann which is set in Nazi Germany and revolves around the life escapades of a film director named G. W. Pabst. In reading *The Director* through necropolitics we reach the conclusion that death worlds are created by exercising power over the masses to the extent that their cognitive capacity as a society suspends in fear of the terror and torture which is inflicted upon the imagined and constructed enemy of the sovereign power. A vivid example of the exercise of such ruthless power and reign of terror from the novel is Pabst’s so-called moral decline or complicity in working under the Nazi regime. Pabst’s expediency is in fact a survival strategy. Though his wife finds his decision to direct movies for the Goebbels ministry of propaganda repulsive as a consequence of which even their marriage falls apart, and this line of argument has been taken by many critics, it was fear of death that made Pabst surrender. Had this been not the case then Pabst wouldn’t have got threatened by Karrasch at the end of the story where the latter finds undertones of expressionism in the former’s adaptation of Karrasch’s novel. It is argued in this research that applying Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics allows one to construe the story in this sense. Furthermore, after having established the notion that the world of Nazi Germany depicted in the primary text is indeed an apt example of the necropolitical world, this research addresses the question of how art helps necropoliticians sustain their rule. The regime’s policy to make good Aryan art whilst war is going on all the fronts is a testament to the fact that art in general and cinematic art in particular helped the government to inculcate in the minds of the masses their own *weltanschauung*.

The present research has only made use of Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics to study the primary text. Future researchers can make their contributions to study of this text by studying the relationship between art and ideology, in the light of other theorizations, as it has been depicted in the novel.

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