


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Method

Juli Zeh

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About the Book

Mia Hall lives in a state governed by The Method, where good health is the highest duty of the citizen. Everyone must submit medical data and sleep records to the authorities on a monthly basis, and regular exercise is mandatory. Mia is young and beautiful, a successful scientist who is outwardly obedient but with an intellect that marks her as subversive. Convinced that her brother has been wrongfully convicted of a terrible crime, Mia comes up against the full force of a regime determined to control every aspect of its citizens' lives.

The Method, set in the middle of the twenty-first century, deals with pressing questions: to what extent can the state curtail the rights of the individual? And does the individual have a right to resist? Juli Zeh has written a thrilling and visionary book about our future, and our present.

About the Author

Juli Zeh was born in 1974 and lives in Brandenburg. She studied International Law, worked with the UN in New York, and completed her studies in Creative Writing. Juli Zeh has won numerous awards, including the international Per Olov Enquist Award and the French Prix Cévennes for Best European Novel. Her work has been translated into thirty languages.

Sally-Ann Spencer studied Modern and Medieval Languages at the University of Cambridge. She is the translator of several contemporary German novels, including Frank Schätzing's *The Swarm*, for which she was awarded the Schlegel-Tieck prize. At present she is working on a PhD on literary translation at the University of Victoria in Wellington, New Zealand.

Also by Juli Zeh

Eagles and Angels
Dark Matter

For Ben

Juli Zeh

the method

Translated from the German
by Sally-Ann Spencer



Harvill *Secker*
LONDON

The Foreword

HEALTH IS A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of infirmity or disease.

Health is the unrestricted flow of life in the physical body, through every organ and cell. Health is body and mind in harmony, biological energy achieving its fullest potential without obstacle or interruption. A healthy organism will interact positively with its environment. A healthy human will feel invigorated and capable. He or she will feel invulnerable to infirmity, be mentally vigorous and emotionally balanced.

Health is not static; it is the dynamic relationship between body and brain. Health must be maintained and enhanced on a daily basis over a period of years and decades, long into old age. Health is not a statistical average, but a potentiated norm; the highest possible individual accomplishment. It is willpower in visible form, a lasting monument to the strength of our will. Health is the optimisation of the individual for the optimal social good. Health is what we naturally desire for ourselves and is therefore the natural objective of society, politics and law. If we cease to strive for health, we are not at risk of illness, we are already ill.

Foreword to Heinrich Kramer, *Health as the Principle of State Legitimacy*, Berlin/Munich/Stuttgart, 25th edition

The Judgment

In the name of THE METHOD

Judgment in the case of Mia Holl, German national and biologist

1. The Charge

The Defendant was charged with anti-Method activities.

2. Composition of the Court

Judgment was given in a public sitting of the second penal chamber of the criminal court, composed as follows:

- Dr Ernest Hutschneider, chairperson and presiding judge
- Dr Hager and Frau Stock, associate judges
- Lay judges:
 - Irmgard Gehling, housewife
 - Max Maring, businessman
- Dr Barker, public prosecutor
- Dr Lutz Rosentreter, defence counsel
- Herr Danner, clerk of the court

3. Decision of the Court

i. The Defendant has been found guilty of anti-Method activities on the following counts: orchestrating a terrorist campaign, conspiring to cause civil unrest, unauthorised use of toxic substances and non-participation in compulsory testing to the detriment of the general good.

- ii. The Defendant is sentenced to freezing for an unlimited term.
- iii. The Defendant is ordered to pay court fees and all associated costs.

4. Background to the Case

The court's decision was based on the following facts:

Midday, Mid-Century

THE HILLS FORM a tree-lined ring around towns that have grown into each other. Transmitters reach up to the clouds, where fleecy undersides are no longer grey with the foul breath of a civilisation that marked its presence on the planet by expelling filth on an epic scale. A few wide-eyed lakes with long, reedy lashes gaze up at the sky - gravel pits and quarries, now abandoned and flooded. Not far from the lakes, disused factories are home to community centres. A stretch of abandoned motorway and some abandoned churches with belfries are the main attractions of a scenic but seldom visited open-air museum.

These days nothing stinks here. Nothing is mined, drilled, burnt or covered in soot; the people here have found peace, have stopped fighting nature and stopped fighting themselves. White houses, small and box-like, are scattered across the hillsides; here and there they join together in rows, lining the slopes like tiers of an apartment block. A vista of flat roofs fills the horizon, mirroring the blue of the sky - a frozen ocean stretching endlessly into the distance, solar panels by the million, an almost unbroken expanse.

Magnetic train tracks cut long metallic pathways through the woods, heading straight for the middle of the glassy ocean of roofs. This is where our story begins, in the middle of the city, in the middle of the day, in the middle of the twenty-first century.

Beneath one of these roofs, longer and wider than most, Justitia is going about her usual business. Room 20/12, the room for conciliation hearings F-H, is maintained at a steady 19.5 degrees - the temperature at which humans think best. Sophie never comes to work without her cardigan, which in criminal hearings she wears beneath her robes. By her right hand are the files from the morning's session; by her left, a smaller stack of cases is waiting to be heard. With her blonde hair and high ponytail, Sophie looks like the eager student she once was. She chews on a pencil and studies the image on the wall. Noticing that the counsel representing the public interest is looking at her, she removes the pencil from her mouth. Eight years ago, when she and Barker were at law school together, he used to drone on incessantly about the dangers of placing germ-riddled objects near the mouth. Not that anyone was likely to find a germ in a civic building.

A short distance away, Barker faces her, his files distributed across the desk, leaving a small corner for the private counsel to stack his notes. To signal their unity of purpose, the defenders of the public and private interest share a desk - in practical terms, an uncomfortable arrangement, but a worthy legal tradition all the same. Barker raises his right index finger and a new image is projected onto the wall. The picture shows a man in his twenties.

'A trivial offence,' says Sophie. 'Any previous charges or convictions?'

Rosentreter, the private counsel, is a nice young chap. When nervous, he has a habit of pulling out his hair and dropping it quietly to the floor. 'Nothing,' he assures her.

'An isolated case of excessive blood caffeine levels,' says Sophie. 'A written warning and no further action. Are we agreed?'

‘Absolutely.’ Rosentreter turns and looks expectantly at the public counsel, who nods. Sophie transfers a file from the left to the right.

‘Well, folks,’ says Barker. ‘I’m afraid the next case isn’t quite so easy. You’re not going to like it, Sophie.’

‘Is there a child involved?’

Barker raises his index finger and the image changes again, this time to show a middle-aged man. Full body shots, naked. Front and back. Inside and out. X-rays, ultrasounds and an MRI of the brain.

‘You’re looking at the father,’ says Barker. ‘Multiple prior convictions for abuse of toxic substances, primarily nicotine and ethanol. This time he’s up for violating the laws on early detection of disease in infants and children.’

‘How old is the little one?’

‘Eighteen months. Female. Non-attendance at stages G2 plus G5 through to G7 of the compulsory medicals. More seriously, the father didn’t bring her for screening – cerebral condition unknown and no information on allergies.’

‘Very remiss. Couldn’t someone have acted earlier?’

‘The civic doctor did his best to remind the respondent of his legal obligations, but the situation couldn’t be resolved. In the end, a counsellor was appointed – not a moment too soon, I’m afraid. He found the child in a terrible state: undernourished with a serious case of diarrhoea and vomiting ... She was lying in her own filth. Another few days, and it would have been too late.’

‘How awful. Surely he knows a baby can’t look after itself?’

‘There were problems at home,’ explains Rosentreter. ‘He’s a single parent—’

‘We’re aware of the circumstances, but to treat your own daughter with such ...’

Rosentreter raises a weary hand to signal his agreement with Sophie. The gesture is barely over when the door

behind him opens. The new arrival doesn't knock or apologise for the disturbance: he moves with the confidence of a man accustomed to going where he pleases. His suit is perfectly tailored and worn with the carefully measured insouciance that true elegance requires. His hair is dark, his eyes are almost black, and his limbs are long but not lanky. He has the deceptive ease of a predator - a big cat with its eyes half closed, but ready to attack at any time. Only those who know Heinrich Kramer would notice the tremor in his fingers, which he disguises by keeping his hands in his trouser pockets. When outdoors, he wears a pair of white gloves, which he now removes.

'Santé, one and all!' He places his briefcase on a spare table and pulls up a chair.

'Santé, Herr Kramer!' says Barker. 'Still on the hunt for a good story?'

'The fourth estate never sleeps.'

Barker laughs for a second, stopping only when he realises that Kramer isn't joking.

Kramer leans forward with a frown, staring intently at the private counsel as if to remember who he is. 'Santé, Rosentreter,' he says, inflecting every syllable.

Rosentreter looks up briefly and buries his head in his files. Kramer straightens the crease of his trousers, crosses his legs, tilts his head, and cultivates the look of a casual observer, a difficult role for a man like him.

'Back to the case,' says Sophie briskly. 'Let's hear the recommendations from the public advocate.'

'Three years.'

'Isn't that overly harsh?' objects Rosentreter.

'Not in my opinion,' says Barker. 'The fellow needs to realise he endangered his daughter's life.'

'I suggest a compromise,' intervenes Sophie. 'Two years of correctional measures to be undertaken at home. In addition, appointment of a medical guardian for the little one and compulsory attendance at medical and hygiene

classes for the father. That way the child will be safe and the family will get another chance. What do you think?’

‘Exactly what I was going to suggest,’ says Rosentreter.

‘Marvellous.’ Sophie smiles and turns to Barker. ‘Can you justify your original recommendation?’

‘The father’s failure to fulfil basic sanitary and medical requirements was detrimental to the child’s well-being,’ says Barker. ‘Parents have rights, but that doesn’t include the right to endanger their offspring. Legally, there’s no difference between deliberately exposing a child to danger and inflicting actual injury. In other circumstances we’d be talking grievous bodily harm.’

Sophie makes a note. ‘Agreed,’ she says, placing the file to the right. ‘Let’s hope the matter has been resolved in everyone’s best interest.’

Kramer uncrosses and recrosses his legs before settling back down.

‘Next case,’ says Barker, raising an index finger. ‘Mia Holl.’

The woman on the screen could be as young as twenty or as old as forty. Her date of birth puts her somewhere in the middle, a predictable place for the truth to be found. Her face glows with a special aura of cleanliness, which we also detect on the other faces in the room; it imparts a sense of innocence, of agelessness – an almost childlike air. It is the look of human beings who have never felt pain. Mia seeks our gaze trustingly. Her naked body is slight, but her physique is wiry and resilient. Kramer sits upright.

‘Another petty offence.’ Sophie glances at the topmost file and barely suppresses a yawn.

‘What was her name again?’ The question comes from Kramer. Although the words are spoken softly, everyone stops at the sound of his voice. Surprised, lawyers and judge look up from their files.

‘Mia Holl,’ says Sophie.

With a leisurely gesture, as if to bat away a fly, Kramer signals for the hearing to continue. With his other hand, he pulls a digital notebook from his trouser pocket and starts to take notes. Sophie and Rosentreter exchange glances.

‘What have we got?’ asks Sophie.

‘Violation of duty to provide medical data,’ says Barker. ‘Nutritional records and sleep patterns overdue for the current month. Sudden cessation of sporting activity. Failure to provide home blood pressure readings and urine samples.’

‘What of her general stats?’

At Barker’s command, long lists of numbers appear on the wall: blood values, energy expenditure, metabolic rate, plus graphs recording physical performance.

‘She looks well enough to me,’ says Sophie, giving Rosentreter his cue.

‘No prior offences. A successful biologist with an exemplary CV. No signs of physical impairment or social disability.’

‘Has she availed herself of the Central Partnership Agency?’

‘They haven’t received her application yet.’

‘It’s obviously an aberration, isn’t it, chaps?’ says Sophie. She laughs at the lawyers’ faces: Barker, disgruntled, and Rosentreter, shocked. ‘I’d rather not issue an official caution,’ she continues. ‘Mediation seems appropriate. We’ll invite her to see us.’

‘Whatever you think,’ says Barker with a shrug.

‘An aberration?’ Kramer smiles and taps his handheld display. ‘That’s one way of putting it.’

‘Are you acquainted with the respondent?’ enquires Sophie in a friendly tone.

‘The judge’s discretion is admirable.’ Kramer’s eyes twinkle at her, full of charming scorn. ‘You’ve also met the respondent, Sophie, even though under different circumstances.’

Sophie thinks for a moment. If it weren't for her naturally ruddy complexion, it would be obvious she is blushing. Kramer returns his digital notebook to his pocket and gets up to leave.

'Finished already?' asks Barker.

'Far from it; I'm just getting started.'

With a brief wave, Kramer leaves the room, while Sophie closes the file and reaches for the stack to her left.

'Next, please.'

Pepper

'I'M TELLING YOU: it came from the nursery. Like this ...' Lizzie lets go of the stair rail, swoops forward dramatically and simulates a sneeze. 'Achoo!'

'Are you sure?' Pollie glances around nervously as if a ghost were ascending the stairs. 'You mean someone was actually ...?'

'Go on, say it!'

'Someone was sneezing?'

'Exactly! It came from the nursery; I was there in a flash!'

'Sneezing? What nonsense!' Completing the trio is Driss: tall, slender and without curves, like a sapling. Her flat face rests moonlike on the collar of her white tabard, her big eyes are mirrors, reflecting the others' gaze. Even without her freckles she would look younger than her years.

'Why is it nonsense?' asks Pollie.

'The common cold was eradicated in the twenties,' says Driss.

'Thank you, Fräulein Lightning.' Lizzie rolls her eyes.

'There was a warning just recently,' murmurs Pollie.

'Did you hear that, Driss? Pollie reads *The Healthy Mind*. So here's me, with my heart in my throat, standing in the doorway, and what do I see? Ute's little lad crouching next to my poppet, who's got her nose in a bag of pepper - sneezing for all she's worth!'

Pollie starts to laugh. 'Goodness,' she says, 'they were *playing!*'

'She was pretending to be sick!' says Driss, joining in.

'Honestly, I could have done with a doctor myself, they gave me such a fright.'

The three women are standing in the hallway, as if to recreate the constellation of the previous day - and the day before that, and every other day. The eternal chain of recurrence reaches forward as well as back, offering the exact same picture for days and weeks to come: Lizzie, propped against the coiled hose of the disinfection machine, Pollie resting on the bacteriometer, and Driss with both arms on the stair rail. The main door opens, and the women stop talking at once. It's him again: the man in the dark suit. The lower half of his face is obscured by a white cloth, but anyone can see from his eyes that he is dashing handsome.

'Santé! Good afternoon, ladies!'

'I've seen better,' says Lizzie, sticking out a hip and resting a hand on her waist. 'A really good afternoon is when there's nothing for us to do.'

Driss points to the man's face. 'You know you don't have to ...?'

'She means you don't need a hygiene mask,' says Pollie quickly.

'This is a monitored house,' explains Lizzie. 'You won't catch anything here.'

'Ah, the plaque by the door!' Kramer loosens the band at the back of his head. 'I should have realised.'

He stuffs the mask into his jacket pocket. Silence ensues.

Since no one is likely to speak for some time, we may as well go over some facts with regard to monitored housing. Certain households, selected for their reliability, have the privilege of carrying out prophylactic measures otherwise performed by the hygiene board. Duties include regular monitoring of air quality, testing of household waste and sewage, and disinfection of all areas accessible to the