**Disruption in the Arts**

# Culture & Conflict

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# Volume 11

# Disruption in the Arts

Textual, Visual, and Performative Strategies for Analyzing Societal Self-Descriptions

Edited by
Lars Koch, Tobias Nanz, and Johannes Pause

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Lars Koch, Tobias Nanz, and Johannes Pause

# Disruption in the Arts: Prologue

The essay collection "Disruption in the Arts" examines, from a comparative perspective, the phenomenon of aesthetic disruption within the various arts in contemporary culture. It assumes that the political potential of contemporary art is not derived – at least not solely – from presenting its audiences and recipients with openly political content. It rather derives from using formal means to create a specific space of perception and interaction: a space that makes hegemonic structures of action and communication observable, thus problematizing their self-evidence and ultimately rendering them selectively inoperative. The contributions in this volume conceptualize various historical and contemporary politics of form in the media, which aim to be more than mere shock strategies, and which are concerned not just with the "narcissistic" exhibition of art as art, but also, and above all, with the creation of a new "common horizon of experience" (Stegemann 2015: 156). In doing so, they combine the analysis of paradigmatic works, procedures and actions ranging from E.T.A. Hoffmann to Steve McQueen, with reference to central theoretical debates in the fields of literature, media, and art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By applying the concept of disruption from media and communication studies (Shannon and Weaver 1949) to configurations and constellations in the aesthetic domain, they show on the basis of concrete examples how, within a conflict-bound social frame of reference, textual, visual, auditive or performative strategies disclose their own ways of functioning, intervene in automated processes of reception, and thus work directly or indirectly to stimulate a sense of political possibilities.

Thus, if in what follows "disruption" is to be distinguished as a meta-category for the critical and artistic analysis of our times, the first thing that needs to be emphasized is the productive character of disruptions. Disruption designates interruptions – thus, not the definitive collapse or the destruction of habitual practices of reception and/or decoding. In the mode of disruption, the latter are not only rendered temporally dysfunctional but also rendered visible in the same stroke; to paraphrase a thought of Martin Heidegger, they exit the mode of a self-evident *ready-to-hand* (*Zuhandenheit*) and move into the problematizing mode of *present-at-hand* (*Vorhandenheit*) (Heidegger 2006: 73–75; see also Rautzenberg 2009: 165–175). Analogous to the "mediality of media," which becomes palpable in the course of disruptions (Kümmel and Schüttpelz

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2003: 10), artistic disruptions set in motion a dynamic of self-reflexivity, such that the constitutive conditions of art themselves become the implicit or explicit object of the works in question. In the aesthetic domain, disruptions can occur as the result of intentional strategies, that is, as "artistic means" (Gansel and Ächtler 2013: 8), as effects of the medium-bound conditions of a work of art, or as the effects of interference between different logics of the media. Disruptions additionally possess the character of an event, since, due to their relational nature, they are bound to the handed-down forms of representation and reception, which can only be challenged situatively.

A disruption becomes political when – following Jacques Rancière's theses – it is bound up with a "dissensus" concerning different possible perspectives on reality, such as when the contingency of a particular aesthetic regime is laid bare, and at the same time other "distributions of sensory experience and space" (Rancière 2010; trans. modified) are identified as possible. For this reason, works of art must always first reproduce the hierarchical, representative forms of representation that they want to disrupt, so that by means of aesthetic strategies of destabilization these forms can then be rendered fragile: political art "occurs" precisely where "a sense of order and ordered meaning [*geordneter Sinn*] comes into contact with chaotic sensuality" (Sonderegger 2010: 32) – that is, into contact with the noise [*Rauschen*] that constitutes the disruption, where contingency turns into aesthetic experience. This simultaneous "process of entering into and revoking power relations" is articulated in the aesthetics of disruption as a "break with one's own (pre)-suppositions, whether they are technical-modern determinants or aesthetic-romantic ideas" – which is why the "gesture of breaking with one's (pre-)suppositions" can be considered the feature that is common to most of the works examined in this volume (Robnik 2010: 26).

As a bi-stable (reversible) figure situated between order and disorder, aesthetic disruption produces a reflexivity that can be grasped methodically only if it is brought into relation with other aesthetic concepts such as "performance," "space," "presence," "body" or "affect." In the contributions assembled here, "disruption" is therefore a theoretical starting point that allows the most diverse aspects of the aesthetic to be comprehended: the particular logics of performance practices and physicality that resist representation, the different aesthetic, temporal and spatial effects of textual, visual or audiovisual media, the intervention of new techniques – such as digital techniques – in aesthetic traditions, the perturbation of the mechanisms and expectations of reception aesthetics. Such strategies do not necessarily have to produce subversive effects in a traditionally "leftist," politically progressive sense – the need for a differentiated view of forms of aesthetic disruption is made clear by the adaptation of classical concepts of disruptive guerrilla communication (Schölzel 2013) by the right-wing

"Identitäre Bewegung" (Kökgiran and Nottbohm 2014), as well as the perfect fit between the "new spirit of capitalism" and the forms of "artistic critique," and thereby certain aesthetics of disruption (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Pertinent to them all is a negative realism that critically addresses the contextual conditions in which worldmaking becomes possible. In the first place, however, and practically speaking, maneuvers of aesthetic disruption are a technique of communicative de-automation, whose attention-gaining potential can be capitalized on for quite different purposes.

The focus of the essay collection is accordingly on works and aesthetics of the present day which, through disruption, develop the perspective of a second-order critical observer on the "age of media immanence" (Hagener 2011), in this way demonstrating the potential of art to carry out a diagnosis of the contemporary world. Political aesthetics results from a virtualization of current orders of the sayable and the visible, which breaks through the surface of self-evidentness and brings to light latent social and aesthetic alternatives. These contributions are supplemented by the perspectivization of historical disruptive maneuvers that serve as a template for, or even anticipate, the poetics and aesthetics of the present. The overarching thesis of the volume is that experimental systems of aesthetic disruption harbor an epistemological potential that can prove seminal in observing and critiquing the political-cultural constitutive conditions of acts of referring to the world in the media. Disruptions in the arts, such as new forms of writing, new techniques of processing and montage in digital film, or unexpected performances in a conventionalized theater, always prove to be a political effort designed to perturb or introduce radical change into certain social arrangements. Scandals may, within a very short time, point to such breaches of norms and attract a great deal of attention. However, while some disruptions may be perceptible initially only on the micro-political level, and do not yet provoke a radical cultural break, they can nevertheless have an impact on the members of a society. For, in a second phase, through the accumulation of numerous disruptive processes, a certain agitational potential can be exceeded, whereby previously subversive disruptions then trigger larger controversies, whose aim is then the re-negotiation of power relations.

*Media* provoke disruptions and serve to trigger micropolitics that concentrate directly on the *body* of members of a society. They thus set in motion a process of subjectivization, which can also provoke new social formations and thereby realign *power relations*. Accordingly, the contributions in this volume are subdivided into the sections media, body, and power, without us wanting to assert clear lines of separation. Rather, the individual elements can be seen as mutually generative, as intersignificant, building a relationship of power. As Foucault put it: "The phenomenon of the social body is the effect [...] of the ma-

teriality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals" (Foucault 1980: 55). For the program of disruption in the arts, one can add that the media and their correlated politics of form cause individual bodies and the social body to stumble, and bring to light micropolitics as well as power relations.

The volume begins with conceptually-oriented contributions designed to open up access to the phenomenon of disruption in the arts from a theoretical as well as a cultural-historical perspective. Each article discusses a concept that is complementary to disruption, dealing respectively with experiments, scandals, miracles, and the imagination.

The article on "Aesthetic Experiments" by Lars Koch and Tobias Nanz systematically establishes the principle of disruption as a productive phenomenon, as well as a point of departure for social self-descriptions and self-assurance. In keeping with this perspective, which provides the theoretical basis for the other contributions in the volume, the arts can be understood as an experimental system that shapes the perception of the past, present, and future. Moritz Mutters's contribution, "Scandalous Expectations," examines scandals from the perspective of the social sciences as communicative forms of processing disruptions that expose the norms of modern societies and, in the interplay of de-normalization and re-normalization, give the lie to the alleged absence of moral principles. In his article on "The Miracle as Disruption," Mario Grizelj devotes his attention to miracles, which he sees as disruptions that serve as crossover points between anarchy and order – for miracles can demarcate, move, and overstep boundaries, and thus question concepts of the world and order. With the concluding contribution, "Imagined Scenarios of Disruption," the editors propose a model that analyzes imaginary scenarios of disruption with regard to their function for security policies and differentiates them analytically concerning their disruptive potential. In addition, they outline a typology of disruption that emerges from the history of security-policy apparatuses (*dispositifs*) and is derived from the relationship between imagined (i.e., artistic) and real disruptive events.

The section on media brings together essays that examine the operations of the individual arts and ask to what extent the idiosyncrasies of the media themselves, or an idiosyncratic approach to the media, can produce disruptions that in turn call for new practices of interpreting and viewing. The three contributions, therefore, deal with literary disruptions and demonstrate, on the basis of specific examples, that beginnning around 1800 and continuing into the literature of the present day increased competition from other media led and leads to experimentation with alternative modes of writing.

In her contribution on selected works by E. T. A. Hoffmann, Tanja Prokic develops a notion of "Disruptive storytelling," which triggers a process of difference and repetition, thus anticipating an aesthetic procedure that only came

into its prime much later, in the twentieth century. Christoph Kleinschmidt, in his essay "Perturbing the Reader," deals with Adorno's proclaimed concept of art as a riddle or enigma, and inquires into the function of this concept in contemporary literature, taking as examples works by Rainald Goetz and Christian Kracht. Johannes Pause's contribution, "Expansions of the Instant," is devoted to fantastic deformations of time in novels by Thomas Lehr, Helmut Krausser, and Daniel Kehlmann, among others, which point to a collision between models of time in technical and textual media. Two further contributions then go more deeply into the relationship between visuality and disruption. In her essay "Disruption, Photography, and the Idea of Aesthetic Resistance," Marie-Sophie Himmerich uses the example of Sophie Ristelhuber's photographs of the Gulf War to show that disruptive interference can be a productive phenomenon in the artistic production process. Lastly, Johannes Binotto's contribution, "Closed Circuits," deals with film and examines the disruptive potential and the limits of the electronic image, using Michael Mann's cinema as his main example.

The section on the body looks into the ways that the subject and the body are shaped or even fundamentally transformed through dependence on technical media. The body is thereby understood as a target object of (political) techniques of power, in that disciplines are trained into it; at the same time, the body is a source of disruptive potential which can influence techniques of the media and culture, and lead to a readjustment of power relations.

This is clearly illustrated in Anna Schürmer's article, "Interferences," which deals with the scandals and debates prompted by the introduction of electronic music in Germany in the 1950s, and which investigates the relationship between humans and technology, thereby also contributing to the debate concerning post-humanism. In "The Dis/rupture of Film as Skin," Daniel Eschkötter presents an analysis of Claire Denis's horror film, *Trouble Every Day* (2001). Dwelling on the French word *pellicule*, which can designate both film and skin, Eschkötter's analysis links the filmic operations with the form of the medium itself, thereby sounding out disruptions that generate perturbations on both levels. In her essay "They starve to death, but who dares ask why?," Tanja Nusser analyzes Steve McQueen's IRA drama *Hunger* (2008), where the focus is on the hunger strike as a self-destructive practice, a form of protest against the prevailing political order, but which as a "vanishing sign" is itself threatened with being extinguished. Finally, in "Writing Aphasia," Elisabeth Heyne deals with a disruption of physical health, namely a brain tumor which, due to the symptoms caused by the illness, inscribes itself into the texts of Wolfgang Herrndorf and thus documents itself.

The section on power presents reflections on disruption that help to describe political power relations and at the same time they discuss the extent to which

disruptions are able to alter existing power relations. Tobias Nanz's article "The Red Telephone" goes back to the Cold War, in which crises were induced discursively and socio-technically, and were counteracted by media-technical means, such as the fictional apparatus of the "red telephone" line between Washington and Moscow. Lars Koch's essay discusses "Christoph Schlingensief's Image Disruption Machine," which in the course of Schlingensief's talk shows and performances, was designed to disrupt media routines and hegemonic discourse, and thus initiate change in social realities. Katrin M. Kämpf's and Christina Rogers's contribution "Citizen n-1" concludes the section on power with an investigation of Laura Poitras's documentary film, *Citizenfour* (2014), which links a portrait of the paradigmatic troublemaker Edward Snowden with an analysis of the current security regime, examining the logics of paranoia as well as the possibilities of reflecting on an open future.

Following the research papers is an archive section, where in each case an artistic and an academic text on disruption is made available and commented upon. Thus, "Notes on Secondary Drama" by the Austrian writer, Elfriede Jelinek, is presented here for the first time in an English translation. Jelinek's essay can be considered paradigmatic when it comes to the question of the aesthetics of disruption, in that it explores the disruptive potential of her new "genre" for the conventional theater. Teresa Kovacs' commentary on Jelinek, "Disturbance in the *Intermediate*," examines the conception and procedures of secondary drama, whose disruptive function has parasitic features attributed to it.

The second contribution in the archive section comes from the media and literary scholar Friedrich Kittler, and deals with "Signal-to-Noise Ratio" in mathematical information theory, which refers to the ratio between background noise and signal in the course of a communication. The essay is a classical contribution in German-language media studies, since it addresses the materiality of communication as well as the disruptive function of the media, and at the same time aims to challenge the subjectivity that results from the advent of new media. Moreover, in his subsequent commentary "Disrupted Arts and Marginalized Humans," Tobias Nanz sees it as doubtful whether it is possible to identify a human source and referent for the arts, once the latter can be fabricated by technology.

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# I Conceptual Approaches

Lars Koch and Tobias Nanz

# Aesthetic Experiments

## On the Event-Like Character and the Function of Disruptions in the Arts

"Disruption" can be seen as a new meta-category in cultural studies dealing with the socio-political, epistemic, and medial conditions of the constitution of images of reality and society. The study of disruption combines individual perspectives from literary and media studies, sociology, the history of knowledge and is intended as a contribution to the deconstruction of certain still-powerful categories, such as the distinction between high culture and popular culture. Our goal is to demonstrate that disruption – as an object of scenarios that shift between factuality and fictionality, as well as an instrument of an aesthetics of uncertainty – plays an important role in quite different cultural fields; as an organizing principle of reflexive experimental spaces, disruption makes a significant contribution to the generation of socially relevant knowledge.

## 1 Cultural work on societal self-descriptions

The cultural processing of disruptions constitutes a major challenge for all self-descriptions of society. These would include the capacity for preventive anticipation or the classificatory evaluation and retroactive re-normalization of de-normalizing events. As agencies of complexity reduction, which create "imaginary constructions of the unity of the system," and thus make it possible "not to communicate in society with the society, but about society" (Luhmann 2013: 167), competing self-images have the function of making a particular version of reality appear self-evident; over time they also suggest that the notorious problem of the identity of complex societies is a problem that can actually be solved, after all (Luhmann 2013: 314 – 323). In their quest for hegemony, the conflicting descriptions of the "reality" of society – in the fraught domain of freedom and security, for example – are at pains to conceal their own contingency (i. e., their constructed character) by endeavouring to suppress the discursive and symbolic conditions of their own "world-making" (Goodman 1978), so as to keep them below the perceptual and discursive threshold of social communication. In addition

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to the competition for argumentative plausibility there is thus also constant competition in the management of perceptions, a kind of "poetics" of society which takes the form of affective and aesthetic activation or distraction and thus regulates the fields of what can be said and seen, thereby ensuring that "we don't see that we don't see what we don't see" (Luhmann 2013: 323).

The mass media are the central forum in which the acceptance of societal self-descriptions is negotiated. It is here that the coherence-creating narratives of normality are produced, in an exchange of symbolic, discursive, and affective elements that are in constant, and at the same time situation-specific, circulation between various specialized discourses (politics, economics, law, etc.) and different social constituencies. In medial scenarios of danger and threat, these narratives undergo a repercussive proliferation and then in turn feed back into negotiations between specialized discourses. Understood as an event- or process-based perturbation of orders of meaning and visibility that "disrupts the ordinary course of history" (Derrida 2007: 446), disruption is significant in two respects with regard to the dynamics of production of cultural schemata: first, it confirms the formulated order of things as the object of a first-order observation, the stability of the latter being based precisely on the exclusion of its respective other. This is exactly the way a multitude of strongly repercussive narratives of danger and disaster function: they portray an isolated intrusion of the other, but in fact narratively perpetuate the status quo of the supposed normalcy by deploying figures of exclusion such as the assassin, the rampage killer and the hacker. This discursivization transforms the complexity of the world into its own form of complexity, thus ensuring an opening to the future.

On the other hand, as the object and mode of a second-order observation, disruption develops its own reflexive potential that can be fruitful in a cultural-analytical sense. If one considers that disruption does not exist as an autonomous entity, but only in a perspectival relation, so that the determination of the disruption "depends on where we sit" (Bateson 2000: 413), then it can be used as an epistemological event. In this sense, the moment of disruption becomes a knowledge operator, which makes it possible to observe precisely those socio-political and technical-medial framings within which an event is registered as a disruption. This occurs either in the mass media format itself, which thus situates itself in relation to other instances of the medial processing of disruption,[1] or it occurs in the cultural-analytical observation of narratives of disruption and the various practices intended to counteract disruption that are de-

1 A good example here is Michael Haneke's film *Time of the Wolves*, which is seen as a troublesome case within the genre of disaster film. See Koch (2010).

ployed in these narratives. A connection can be made here with media-theoretical conceptualisations of disruption – for instance the communication models of Claude Shannon and Niklas Luhmann – which assume that disruption displays a high degree of systematicity; that, as noise or "unmarked space" (Spencer-Brown 1979), disruption constitutes a communicative a-priori, that it is always already a component and a medium of all communicative forms. Drawing on the thesis from media and cultural studies (Vogl 2001: 122) that, when a disruption occcurs, the focus of attention is placed on the conditions, otherwise hidden, that are a prerequisite for communication, Ludwig Jäger suggests that disruption makes the mediality of the medium observable:

> Disruption can be defined as that moment in the course of a communication which causes a medium to lose its (operational) transparency and to be perceived in its materiality, where transparency is defined as that state in which the communication remains free of disruption, thus the focus of attention is not on the medium as a medium, in the sense in which Luhmann assumes that, in the interdependent relationship between medium and form, the form is visible and the medium remains invisible. (Jäger 2012: 30)

Especially when, with regard to a cultural way of worldmaking (Nünning et al. 2010), the question is raised concerning the strategies of evidence that apply societal self-descriptions in order to achieve a high degree of general validity and bindingness, focusing attention on disruptions is of great benefit, since the latter make "the medial relativity of the real visible, and the system of symbolic representation itself as a mode of world-making" (Jäger 2012: 31). It is precisely here that aesthetic functionalizations of disruption arise, by implementing moments of interference and interruption in their experimental settings, either on the level of content or form, thereby reflexively exposing attitudinal expectations, conventions of attentiveness, and behavioural routines. Aesthetic-experimental spaces of disruption construct "hypothetically, a possible form of knowledge [...] which can then be evaluated in terms of its aptitude for reality" (Gamper 2010: 13).

## 2 Aesthetic-experimental spaces of disruption

The central feature of contemporary art is to multiply conceptions of reality. Aesthetic action increases our sensitivity to perceptual processes, reminds us of the wealth of discursive and medial conditions of every cultural reference to the world, and makes breaking points and blind spots of normal everyday life visible. Understood this way, art constitutively binds together aesthetics and epistemology. The aesthetic opens up a space of possibility in which, unlike the largely

planned (working) day, the unexpected can or may occur, or is even meant to occur:

> What art aspires to could be described as [...] a reactivation of deactivated possibilities. Its function is to allow the world to appear in the world, to depict the unity of the whole, whether in an improved form or (as currently preferable) a worsened form. (Luhmann 2010: 210)

Like the epistemological situation that prevails in the laboratory (Borck 2011), in art it becomes possible to test self-descriptions of society taken to be self-evident in the form of (fictional) scenarios and (participatory) experimental arrangements for latent alternatives, response reactions and/or underlying processual interrelationships. Pointedly formulated, one could thus describe aesthetic processes of disruption as a kind of experimental drilling in the discursive substrata of reality.

As Hans-Jörg Rheinberger writes, an experiment is a "system for the generation of differences" (Rheinberger 2006: 280). The emphasis on the productive nature of experiments allows us to understand differently the intrinsic logic of experimental knowledge generation, compared to the established theory of knowledge and classical scientific experimental practice. Whereas in 1917 Ernst Mach, following the teachings of nineteenth-century experimental science, was still able to define "the planned methodically-conducted quantitative experiment" (Mach 1976: 292) as an "operation designed to evaluate and confirm" (Mach 1976: 195) what had previously been "hypothetical conjecture, supposition or postulation" (Mach 1976: 214), in current scientific and laboratory research the prevailing view is rather that truly interesting results often arise in the mode of deviation from the planned/anticipated course of events. Surprising innovation occurs especially when, in the course of an experiment with its own internal dynamic, a disruption of the anticipated experimental operating procedure occurs that makes a difference, thus provoking a subsequent re-conceptualization:

> In science, novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation [...] The awareness of anomaly opens up a period in which conceptual categories are adjusted, until the initially anomalous has become the anticipated. (Kuhn 2012: 64)

In this quote Thomas S. Kuhn highlights in an instructive way the function of disruption, which, in the context of science as well as in connection with politics or aesthetics, sets in motion a permanent process of de- and renormalization. In this process is expressed a complex interplay of different temporal planes of reference of retrospection, anticipation, and presentness, in which the status of dis-

ruption is re-negotiated in each instance until the initial confusion stabilizes in the contours of a new "epistemic thing" (Rheinberger 2006: 27). The difference between aesthetic experiments and those in the natural sciences consists principally in the fact that, in the former, the future is always conceived as an open horizon in which singular events can occur, while in the latter case the unplannability of the future tends to come to light only when an experiment fails, meaning that the hypothesis-based production of measurement data is unrepeatable.

The theory of the laboratory has changed significantly thanks to the ethnomethodological work of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, Bruno Latour, and Karin Knorr-Cetina. Here, too, the creative production of knowledge, as compared to the mere causal and logical reproduction of results, is coming increasingly to the fore. Thus, Michael Gamper's definition of the experiment as a process that "produces knowledge through a fusion of performative and representative methods, knowledge that owes its existence to a particular provoked experience" (Gamper 2010: 11), has met with broad acceptance. The reference to the generation of a provocation is important to the extent that it allows the character of disruption in the experimental spaces of art to be determined with greater precision. Aesthetics of disruption are aimed at creating situations in which normal processes undergo a crisis-like intensification, accompanied by moments of de-differentiation, disadaptation, and the release of critical potentials.

Disruption as an experimental experience of crisis can take quite different forms. For example, the narrative evocation and communication of fictional events of disruption, a common literary process since the genre of the novella and novel established themselves widely in the nineteenth century, is still aesthetically effective today in countless variations in narrative media formats such as the feature film or the TV series. Fiction thereby becomes a semiotic space in which social, technical, or psychological instances of disruption can be presented in specific constellations and played out in various forms of reaction and process. In this sense, writes Evan Horn, fictions process:

> something narratively, in the mode of a hypothetical situation [...], something that structures our reality intensively. Provided fictions are not limited to the field of literary invention, and scientific thought experiments or philosophical hypotheses are also viewed as fictions, the latter are modes of exploring the domain of the possible in the midst of our social reality. (Horn 2010: 105)

Another form of aesthetic disruption is to be found in the post-dramatic theatre and in performance art. Their radical break with the classical idealist aesthetics

of the nineteenth century[2] seems particularly interesting for an inquiry into the "principle of disruption" because here, far more so than in fiction films, the disturbance shifts from the level of the represented to the level of representation. Experimenting with spectator participation – a central *modus operandi* of the avant-garde since Brecht's epic theatre – aims at an aesthetic experience in which, through the uncertainty surrounding the roles of actor and addressee, the "experience itself becomes a theme" (Gehlen 1986: 219), where the "open work of art," in the experimental production of an indistinguishability between noise and signal,[3] attains an "experience of experience" (Menke 2013: 85).

At the same time, for the underlying question here concerning the cultural-analytical potential of disruption as a category, it is important that, wherever disruptions appear, opportunities for observation exist that are linked with resources for the description and critique of references to reality and societal self-descriptions. Moreover, an obvious hypothesis is that moments of disruption – that is, moments of active, planned incitement of disturbance and interpretative uncertainty – are precisely designed to generate social knowledge, in a way that combines Jean-François Lyotard's pointed formulation "hiding (and) showing, that is theatricality" (Lyotard 1979: 282) with Ludwig Fleck's insight that "every empirical discovery [...] can be construed as a supplement, a development or transformation of a mode of thinking" (Fleck 2016: 125).

## 3 Disruptive fictions

Just as in the history of science in recent years it has been shown that human and non-human actors working inside a network are jointly involved in the production of scientific knowledge, so has it been demonstrated that, at the interface of literary and historical sciences, poetic texts or fictions produce knowledge to the same degree as supposedly objective scientific publications. Thus, not only are a variety of agents involved in the production of knowledge, but, in addition, knowledge takes on different aesthetic forms. Hayden White has

**2** Which does not mean that, in the nineteenth century, aesthetic disruptions were not already being theorized; the work of Friedrich Theodor Vischer is one example. In his aesthetics, Vischer points out that "disruptive accidents" clash with the paradigm of the beautiful (Vischer 1846: 149).

**3** See the corresponding deliberations in Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (Eco 1989: 44 – 83). The fate that befell Joseph Beuys's social sculptures, "Badewanne" (Bathtub) and "Fettecke" (Fat Corner) shows that an aesthetic intentionality of static and (signal) noise ("des Rauschens") can be readily overlooked.

pointed out that historiographical narratives are "verbal fictions" (White 1978: 82), the readers of which become familiar with past events through the careful composition of sequences of events and plot structures. In fictions as "a way of telling stories" (Rancière 2004), empirical data and reports are assigned significance, and events that are passed over in silence, along with unexceptional events, are also assigned a meaning. Using the example of William Shakespeare's work, Stephen Greenblatt has shown that the comedies and tragedies of the English poet – often in conjunction with another genre, namely historical documents – generate a literary world that is firmly integrated in the discursive network of its time and is thus extremely well suited to producing knowledge of the period (Greenblatt 1988). Here we are dealing with positions in poetics and the history of knowledge that, while not denying it, prefer to bypass the distinction between fact and fiction and focus instead on the different aesthetic organization and representation of historical events (Vogl 1999: 14). "Science and poetry are in equal measure forms of knowledge" (Deleuze 2006: 20), Gilles Deleuze once remarked, referring to the discourse analysis of Michel Foucault, that it is less important to determine whether a particular statement is *true* than to ask under what conditions of possibility a statement has come about and is held to be true. Poetry can point to the fundamental order of knowledge and a system of thought, when, for instance, poetic texts comment on the rules of discourse and thus limit what may or may not be said – or when, as an alternative literary form, such texts express the most secret and the unsayable, thereby disrupting the accepted conventions of the sayable and the visible (Vogl 1999: 15). Literally, and in the original Greek sense of the word (*poiēsis*), poetry creates a world that is a central part of our everyday reality.

As crazy as it may seem, a fiction always stems from a discursive network that has made it possible and on which it also in turn has a reciprocal effect. That may be the reason why, within a particular system of thought, many fictions are held to be credible, why they seem plausible and are not immediately rejected. Thus, for example, an apocalyptic vision that pictures the end of the world brought on by nuclear war falls on especially fertile soil where heavily-armed nuclear powers are engaged in a face-off, where civil defense films on TV constantly present warnings of a first strike, and scientists compute chain reactions and are continually constructing ever more effective nuclear weapons. The knots that bind fiction and fact, literature and science are difficult to unravel. The development of the atomic bomb is an example that demonstrates the constant exchange between literature and scientific thinking, and in which the researchers were even spurred on by fiction. For instance, in his 1914 novel, *The World Set Free*, H.G. Wells already imagined a weapon like the atomic bomb, thus a good number of years before scientists and readers of Wells such as Leó Szilárd

developed the atomic bomb in Los Alamos in the U.S. during the Second World War, and the U.S. military eventually deployed it in Japan. In this case, the connection between "science" and "fiction" is such that the atomic bomb was first invented by literature; the bomb thus existed in discourses before the scientific discovery of nuclear fission, before science exercized its apocalyptic power in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Dotzler 2004; Brandstetter 2010), which later gave rise to new literary and filmic fictions.

The fictional scenario of "nuclear war" may have been one of the most relevant stories of the second half of the twentieth century. As a "non-event", as a "fable, pure invention" (Derrida 1984: 23), this fiction shaped the reality of life during the Cold War in a fundamental way – even though the nuclear war did not take place – in that politics, culture and institutions were guided by the vector of the nuclear arms race, the potential destructive power and deterrence. "For the 'reality' of the nuclear age and the fable of nuclear war are perhaps distinct, but they are not two separate things," as Jacques Derrida described the node of fiction and reality (Derrida 1984: 23). The fictions of literature and film, but also the simulations of nuclear war and the thought experiments concerning life after a nuclear strike shaped the reality of life in the two power blocs during the Cold War.

Subverting the boundary between poetry and science, and between fiction and facts, leads to three considerations that we can relate to the function of disruption in artistic fictions and to the question of societal self-descriptions. First, historiography in general proves to be susceptible to disruption, and disintegrates into many possible stories. Fictions that perturb academic historiography by seeking out the sites of historical events, interviewing long-deceased witnesses or ordering the events differently, explore and construct through these methods a historical space of possibility that suggests other compossible stories (Vogl 2007: 126 – 127). However likely or unlikely they may be, such alternatives break open "the fiction of the more probable story" (Vogl 2011: 124) and thus enter into productive competition with monolithic histories and the vehemence of their narrative world production. They explore a "sense of possibility" that undermines the self-evidence of a hegemonic historiography, form hypotheses, and test them in the context of a literary "experiment" or "experimental design".[4] They make a case for a disruptive, discontinuous historiography that dissolves political, social, and cultural truths.

Secondly, in disruptive fictions precisely, psychological deliberations come into view that couple mental disorders with fantasies and fiction. Thus, as he

4 Albrecht Schöne referring to Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (Schöne 2010: 200).

was beginning to formulate his psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud states in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess that there are no "indications of reality" in the unconscious, "so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect" (Masson 1985: 264). The place where the drives and the repressed contents are "stored" and to which the therapist seeks to gain access as part of a psychoanalysis makes no distinction between imaginary and real experiences and, as Freud later writes, unconscious processes pay "little heed to reality," since the unconscious is subjected solely to the pleasure principle (Freud 2001: 188). In his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud states that a "psychic reality" is not to be confused with "*material* reality" and wonders whether "unconscious impulses [...] don't have the importance of real forces in mental life?" (Freud 1978: 781). In the talking cure, the psychoanalyst, like the information technologist, has to distinguish between the message and noise: do the patient's words and phrases emit a generalized noise – such as the noise of the unconscious – or do they constitute a message that offers the key to neurotic disorder? (Foucault 2001: 557) Mental disorders, according to what we know from psychoanalysis, can also arise from the imaginary or at least stem from that part of the psychic apparatus that does not draw a boundary between fiction and reality.

But the imaginary also plays a further role. Whereas the psychoanalyst devotes himself to the "instinctual-unconscious," the movie camera processes the "optical unconscious" (Benjamin 2008: 37–38). For film can provide new forms of perception and experience using techniques of montage, close-ups and slow motion, which, in combination with psycho-technical processes, such as aptitude tests, allow people to be trained and groomed. In his essay on *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin perceives the cinema as the place where the spectator can come to terms with the shocking experiences from the battlefields of the First World War, and at the same time be prepared for life in technologised modernity (Kaes 2011). For, while an auratic painting, exhibited in a museum, invites the viewer to contemplation and to form associations, film, due to its rapid sequence of images, is incapable of this. Film works against the disruptions of the technologized world, accustoms its audience to the perceptual demands of modernity, and distracts its spectators, but leaves them no time for the necessary contemplation and reflection on what they see. To a certain extent, going to the cinema provides a set of tools, serves as a "training device"[5] for dealing with the changing human environment, and in this way seeks to countervail human mental disorders.

**5** Benjamin uses the term "Übungsinstrument" (translator's note).

Through such a pure aestheticization of political life – here Benjamin is thinking of fascism – film can be deployed as a kind of instruction manual for neutralizing the masses and the necessary social as well as individual self-reflection, (Benjamin 2008: 41–42) with the consequence that the disruptive counter-version of history ends up being eradicated.

Thirdly, the question arises concerning the function that can be assigned to fictional disruptions. On the one hand, disruptive fictions contribute to the sphere of entertainment, by interrupting the normal course of life and by catering to a specific pleasurable fear ("Angstlust"); for instance, by providing stories about the dangers of a (bio-)technological absolute-worst-case scenario, or about a cyborg uprising (Sontag 1965). On the other hand, their function is to confront society with what is possible and to present it with the virtual forms that the future may take. Understood in this way, disruptive fictions constitute a major component of a "heuristics of fear" (Jonas 1984: 26), which plays out the implicit threat potential of current social and technological situations, thereby (at least in the context of a modernity that is open to the future) providing resources for reflection on, and the management of, situations that may arise. In the research on disasters and worst-case scenarios, however, it has been noted that the absolute worst cases that may arise largely depend on the standpoint of the observer. Disasters, says Lee Clarke, are part of normal life. The evaluation of a disaster depends on those that have already occurred and on the calamaties considered possible in the future, within a framework of the conceivable. While the tsunami that struck Thailand just after Christmas in 2004 was perceived as a worst case, from a certain perspective the tsunami in Japan in 2011, in combination with the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, may be considered an even worse disaster (leaving aside the fate of specific individuals, of course). What would be the new worst case? How can catastrophic scenarios of a "radically unknown future" (Opitz and Tellmann 2010: 29) be planned, in a way that does not exhaust itself in the extrapolation of past events? "To construct prospective worst cases [...] ," says Clarke, "we must somehow imagine the unimaginable" (Clarke 2006: 22). Imagination thus becomes the benchmark for the assessment of disasters and shapes the awareness and the (self-)perception of society with its individuals, institutions and policies. Worst case scenarios as they are played out and simulated in the sphere of politics or in the military turn out to be the doubles of what is imagined in literature and film. They refer to each other, exchange ideas, and draw inspiration from each other. So it is no coincidence that in Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler's Cold War novel *Fail-Safe*, published in 1964, the head of a think-tank prepares a report for the military and political leaders in the Pentagon on the benefits of a first strike against the Soviet

Union and develops scenarios for the war as well as life afterwards, complete with precise calculations.

Such fictions prove to be an experimental space in which possible futures or alternative pasts are tried out. Thus, literary research on the Apocalypse has established that fictions thematizing the end of the world not only play out different disaster scenarios, but also deliberate on the behaviors of individuals and entire societies that are coupled with the visions of doom. Bio-political questions about the selection of "human capital" in the face of an impending disaster – who is allowed to survive? who has to die? – can be worked through in fictions in an exemplary way and presented for discussion in the framework of an ethics of allocation. Putting such tragic decisions to the test gives "an eminently political thrust" (Horn 2010: 118) to the corresponding thought experiments. In this perspective, the cultural analysis of real or imagined threats or instances of disruption provide information on "how societies define themselves and provide security for themselves against the horizon of ongoing terror threats" (Engell et al. 2009: 5). Future actions and decisions are placed against the horizon of possible and imaginary calamities and provide a template for forms of social and individual behavior.

These three aspects – disruptive historiography and a sense of possibility, mental disorder and fiction, and disruption in the experimental space of fiction – may exemplify the possible themes of a specific sub-field of cultural studies that deals with the category of narrative disruption. Fictions of disruption are a specific and fundamental form of world-making, which opens up a vantage point for the problematization of forms of social self-evidence and helps to expose the "discursive relation to the world" (Legendre 2001: 15) on which forms of the social and the political are based. All knowledge is constantly exposed to the danger of disruption, thus to the danger of "counter-knowledge", which creates a multiplicity of stories and brings about change. This provides us with a description of the faltering of a foundation believed to be solid, a faltering that can also be found at work in the subject, whose unconscious tells a "counter-story" to that of the superego, and whose atavistic insistence can be discerned in mental disorders. Ultimately, disruptive fictions prove to be spaces of experimentation where stories of the possible are written, serving as a grid for future decisions and actions. These fictions in turn have an effect on the psyche of the people who read and view them; they can impose a direction on societies or make a decision to go in a certain direction appear necessary, make it seem as if a discursive problematization has been resolved. For what unites these three sets of reflections on the proliferation of stories, the psyche, and the possible courses that the future might take, is not just that they all media-based, but that they also involve a political dimension: who exactly is this great "Other" who writes

and who directs a society, and which versions of the past and the future do we have at our disposal?

## 4 The performance of disruption

As outlined above, disruption constitutes an essential principle of contemporary theatre and performance art. The space of the theatre serves as a "laboratory of social fantasies" (Müller 1975: 126), a "laboratory with spectators" (Primavesi 2012: 132) who are placed in a "crisis mode" and are confronted with the "intensification of extreme situations, with borderline and threshold experiences" (Primavesi 2012: 147). As a cultural practice that amalgamates religious, political and social elements, the theatre has always been a medium for the observation of, and reflection on, social relations of and to the self. In Brecht's epic theatre, "interrupting processes" (Benjamin 1998: 18) are deliberately used to create disruptions, an alienation effect that is intended to highlight and challenge social conditions. It was with this in mind that Benjamin pointed out that "interruption is one of the fundamental methods of all form-giving ("Formgebung"), [which] reaches far beyond the domain of art" (Benjamin 1998: 19), extending into politics and society. What has continued to change in the transformation from the dramatic to the post-dramatic theatre is a novel form of addressing the audience: while the classical drama was largely built on the organizational and structuring principles of the proscenium stage, on the observation of "the way people behave in closed situations, under readily comprehensible conditions, where the dramatic storyline manipulates these conditions in an easily intelligible way" (Primavesi 2012: 135), the post-dramatic theatre takes the radical step of doing away with the fourth wall that separated the space of the drama from the space of the spectators. This constituted the interim high-point of an aesthetic tendency towards an experimental opening-up, a tendency instigated by the various avant-gardes (Mersch 2002: 245), subsequently reinforced in the 1960s by the Fluxus movement (Stegemann 2012), and by the theatrical practice of the Situationists (Perniola 2011: 107–110), who extended the theatre into public spaces. For German post-dramatic artists such as René Pollesch or Christoph Schlingensief, this tendency became a kind of source-code for artistic endeavors. This is especially true of Schlingensief, who always viewed the theatre as metadrama, where the aim is to produce a calculated uncertainty in the audience regarding the status and boundaries of fiction and reality, breaking open the *cordon sanitaire* of the dramatic frame.

While the director's theatre of the 1970s still sought to accumulate the resources of attention-getting and disturbance mainly by staging traditional mate-

rials in unorthodox ways, by recontextualizing them and bringing them up to date, in the post-dramatic theatre these purely content-related aspects recede into the background in favour of an emphasis on form and experimentation with perception. Heiner Müller's trenchant phrase "theatres that are no longer able to provoke the question 'WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?' rightly end up being closed down!" (Müller 1996) expresses what can be seen as an intrinsic focal point of contemporary theatre: provoking audience reactions through aesthetic experiences, which – by blurring the distinctness of categories such as "authorship," "director," "staging," and "audience" – shake up political, social, and cultural certitudes and self-evidence, and thus generate disruptions that give rise to a quasi-ecological reflection on the otherwise unreflected, implicit political and economic conditions of the relations to one's social environment. It is precisely this cultural function of aesthetic disruption that Carl Hegemann (the longtime dramaturgical colleague of Christoph Schlingensief) has in mind when he reflects on Joseph Beuys's concept of social sculpture:

> Unlike in works of fine art or technical machines [...], in social sculpture perfection is not the goal. Achieving perfection would be identical with the end of social life, since social organisms function only as dysfunctional entities and they necessarily need a quantum of dilettantism; if all goes well, the fear of death spreads. (Hegemann 1998: 160)

The insistent attempts at activation are motivated by the thesis that the audience in the mass media apparatus of a "society of the spectacle" (Debord 1994) is placed in an attitude of uninvolved ignorance, and drilled in accepting the status quo of the distribution of power in society as an ineluctable fact. A critique of this passive aesthetic pleasure has much in common with the work of Stanley Cavell, who reflects on the ways the theatricality of classical drama results in forms of objectification that reify the characters on the stage in the detachment of being observed (Cavell 1969). Samuel Weber addresses the indifference of this form of spectatorship, and the cynicism associated with it, which he sees as a political effect of the dominance of television, the principal medium of contemporary culture:

> If we remain spectators/viewers, if we stay where we are – in front of the television – the catastrophes will always stay outside, will always be 'objects' for a 'subject' – this is the implicit promise of the medium. But this comforting promise coincides with an equally clear, if unspoken threat: Stay where you are! If you move, there may be an intervention, whether humanitarian or not. (qtd. in Lehmann 2006: 184)

Drawing on Aristotelian aesthetics, Cavell calls for an immersion of the spectator in the performance, with the hope of getting as close as possible to the represent-

ed world and thus experiencing an existential separation from the fates of the characters, which, in a reflexive turnaround, is then supposed to lead to a feeling of compassion (Rebentisch 2012: 25 – 38). By contrast, the post-dramatic theatre begins precisely with the form of the representation. Here, the goal is to prevent immersion, create incoherence, and provoke uncertainty in the spectators concerning the possible ways of understanding what they are presented with:

> When the staging practice forces the spectators to wonder whether they should react to the events on stage as fiction (i. e., aesthetically) or as reality (for example, morally), theatre's treading of the borderline of the real unsettles this crucial predisposition of the spectators, namely the unreflective certainty and security in which being a spectator is experienced as unproblematic social behaviour. (Lehmann 2006: 104)

The attempt to overturn the emotional security of spectators by drawing them into affectively charged situations of self-questioning does not necessarily have to lead to a crude, forced activism, of the kind exercized by Tino Sehgal when, at the Venice Biennale in 2005, with the help of paid cultural animators, he got visitors in empty exhibition rooms involved in a discussion about capitalism; nor does the releasing of the "safety catch" have to be as gratingly carried out as Santiago Sierra did in Cologne in 2006, when he transformed a synagogue into a gas chamber and required visitors to wear a respirator mask and to be escorted around by a fireman. Other artists, such as Cuqui Jerez, the group "Forced Entertainment" or the activists of "Gob Squad" begin at an even more fundamental level: their performances are such that the experience of being a spectator requires taking an active stance, since seeing itself is an act (Rancière 2009b). Here we are dealing with a principled endeavor to reverse the modern subject-object framework of aesthetics and to make the audience feel what it is like to be exposed to the gaze of others.

Advanced methods of viewpoint reversal are motivated by the realization that conventional theatre aesthetics, even when seeking to convey politically subversive content, collaborate with the dominant conditions, because, as Pollesch observes, in conventional performance practice the relationship between sender and receiver, between actor and observer, is simply reproduced:

> This is my problem. Outside democracy exists as some kind of template, but the actual processes that one encounters out there are not democratic. They are sexist, they are racist, they are characterized by hierarchies. This is exactly what the rehearsal processes are based on. For that reason I consider representation to be unsuited for dealing with our problems. (Hegemann and Pollesch 2005: 50 – 51)

It is precisely here that the identity politics-oriented counter-program of the Turkish-German activist group "Kanak Attak"[6] sets to work: in their performances, members of the so-called "culture of dominance" are filmed and induced in a provocatively ironic way to articulate subcutaneous prejudices and racisms.[7] In the group's manifesto, this programmatic strategy of disrupting images is described as follows:

> Kanak TV intervenes where racial hierarchies are held to be the norm. We emphatically reject any attempt to gawk at migrants, to measure them and to squeeze them into categories. Instead, we turn our gaze on the Alemanns, who think it is perfectly natural to examine and to question others, to belittle them. As a watchful companion of everyday life, Kanak TV disrupts customary viewpoints and cherished patterns of reception. Kanak TV spreads uneasiness among the self-righteous. Kanak TV offers neither liberating laughter nor feelings of compassionate solidarity. Despite everything, Kanak TV does make people laugh, however. And the more German and the more smug the audience, the deeper the laughter sticks in their throats. Kanak TV reverses the racist gaze. But we don't just want to expose racist views and fixed notions. Our focus is also on how images and notions are created, manipulated and used. Kanak TV exposes the media gaze as power, by in turn using the same power gaze. The power relationship is thus called into question, rejected and counteracted. (Kanak TV: 2016a)

There is, of course, an ever-present danger that the disruption-oriented and open-ended series of experiments, as carried out by "Kanak Attak", Schlingensief and others, can simply be consumed as scandalous happenings. The post-dramatic theatre endeavours to counter this danger by creating situations in which the stream of experience is interrupted; habits of perception are disrupted so that sensory experience is divided up in a new way, which, as Jacques Rancière sees it, is paired with special political potentials. The "emancipation" of the spectator is not brought about by means of didactic education or by confronting him with "revolting things" (Rancière 2010: 135), but rather by creating "dissensus" (Rancière 1999). This keyword of Rancière's political-aesthetic theory is used to designate the creation of ruptures and differences, the effects of which have not been prechanneled through the authority or messages of the artist (Rancière 2009a). Accordingly, political art today can be realized only as a politics of form, which, in

**6** The name of the group "Kanak Attak" is derived from the German pejorative expression "Kanak" which refers to people from the Mediterranean. When Germany started recruiting guest workers in the 1960s, "Kanak" was coined as an offensive collective term for people from Italy, Spain, and Greece. In German contemporary culture the expression is used mostly for people with Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Kurdish roots or, more generally, for immigrants from the South and South East of Europe.

**7** See for instance the video clip "Weißes Ghetto" (Kanak Attak: 2016b).

the performative mode of "liveness" and feedback loops (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 67), facilitates an active participation of the audience in the temporal metamorphosis of social structures, and creates politically effective constellations of "dissonant resonance" requiring subsequent reflection on the audience's part. The "non-coherence" that this produces, writes Dirk Rustemeyer,

> is not meaningless or flawed, it is neither a gap nor a desideratum, but rather a generator of meaning. Because it blocks routinized conclusions derived from formal differences, but also furthers the creation of new differences and at the same time serves as the basis for a pre-reflective correspondence between different semiotic forms, it remains a crucial factor in the dynamics of cultures. (Rustemeyer 2009: 13)

In concrete terms, aesthetically disruptive strategies, in addition to the already-mentioned suspension of the fourth wall, work with reception-overload that results from the seriality and simultaneity of moments of action, with forms of interruption of the temporal continuum of representation or with discontinuous arrrangements of representation, which result in a disruption of the distance between the internal perspective of the characters and the spectators. As Hans-Thies Lehmann notes in his work on post-dramatic theatre, the latter is strongly influenced by elements of an "afformativity". Thus, a post-dramatic aesthetics of disruption permeates "all representation with the uncertainty as to whether something is represented; every act with the uncertainty of whether it was one; every thesis, every position, every work, every meaning with a wavering and potential cancellation" (Lehmann 2006: 180). As a result, these perturbations produce moments of unconsumable opacity; using Heidegger's terminology, one could speak in terms of the loss of the taken-for-grantedness of reference, which renders perceptible the "conspicuousness, obtrusiveness and obstinacy" (Heidegger 2008: 69) of signifying materials. In such opacity, the register of perception changes from a mode of a "looking through" into a mode of "looking at". As a consequence, the discursive-medial, perception-configuring, enabling context of any worldview can be seen as a constitutive factor. By evoking disruption, performance art accordingly thematizes the conditions of possibility for something to be perceived as something: "Whereas we can normally only communicate about perception, art communicates through perception" (Rebentisch 2012: 90). The general provision that the medium of art "is present in every work of art, yet it is invisible, since it operates only on the other side – the one not indicated – as a kind of attractor for further observations" (Luhmann 2000, 118–119) has to be modified for the program of aesthetic disruptions. When Luhmann writes that art provokes "a staying-focused-on-the-work in a sequence of observations that attempt to decipher it" (Luhmann 2000: 126), then the disruption-induced uncertainty concerning the status of the representation

forces an enactment of understanding, "that at every moment of its own formations of form, that is, its own production of context on or in the artwork, always refers back to the medium, the unmarked space of the infinite possibilities of creating such a connection or forming such a form" (Rebentisch 2012: 93).

If from this vantage point one returns to the question of the reflexive capabilities of societal self-descriptions, it becomes clear that contemporary art has a major political role to play in the performance of disruption. As Lehmann points out, following on from Adorno's concept of form as an essential component of art (Adorno 2004: 180 – 214), theatre is no longer political by virtue of its political content, "but rather by virtue of the implicit substance of its mode of representation" (Lehmann 2006: 178). Theatre is a "practice in and with signifying material which does not create orders of power, but rather introduces chaos and novelty into orderly, ordering perception" (Lehmann 2006: 179), producing a social disposition in which the political as a "critique of world making" (Goodman 1978: 94) can take place first and foremost, precisely because the continual process of a power-induced identification of identities, roles, and system boundaries is situationally interrupted. The indecision that is opened up by disruption brings about a "politics of the theatre" as an experimental "politics of perception" (Lehmann 2006: 185):

> Politics consists in an activity that redraws the sensory framework within which common objects are determined. It breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the "natural" order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of ruling or being ruled, assigning them to private or public lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific "bodies," that is, to specific ways of being, seeing and speaking. (Rancière 2010: 139)

## 5 Disruption as narrative and event

In a series of essays and plays, the Austrian writer Kathrin Röggla has presented a literary reflection on the exchange between between fiction and reality, the momentum of which is maintained by the irruption of disruption. In her work, Röggla focuses on society's fear-laden approach to dealing with crises and disasters, describing the consequences of drastic disruptions of normal social processes, which as a result of constant, insistent breaking news has engendered a general state of social alarm (Koch 2013: 247 – 248). In her texts, Röggla diagnoses a "commanding presence of the disaster narrative" (Röggla 2013: 23), which has overrun the mass media, and, in its plot structures, organizes the knowledge of the world that is constantly updated in the news. Disaster films "dig deeper into real processes" and, by offering collective-individualistic opportunities for iden-

tification, they "determine our everyday life, our politics, our media" (Röggla 2013: 23). Röggla understands the mainstream cinema of spectacle on a first-order level of reception as a site of "distraction", which, by generating a desire for ever-new disaster stories, hinders reflection on the political dimensions of what is being seen. The catastrophic imaginary thus creates a situation that is "fantastically real, in complete contrast to the distressing unreality of our daily lives" (Röggla 2013: 27). By being constantly brought up to date in the media, "collective fears and paranoia plots" (Röggla 2013: 31) are inscribed in individuals, resulting in a de-politicization that hardly perturbs anyone because, paradoxically, it generates effects of unburdening, of relief, in the viewers. Thus, for many viewers, it is "better" to be connected to the (fictionally-induced) "hysteria out there, than to be exposed to the hysteria in here, to the feelings of panic that beset you, the origin of which can no longer be located." (Röggla 2013: 27)

A way out of the feedback loop of anxiety, prevention, further anxiety and the conservative model of being rescued can, however, be provided by those films, novels, and theatrical productions (or hybrid forms) that break through the disaster stories and their "hermetically-sealed images of rescue" (Röggla 2013: 37). They have to be disruptive, by producing dissonances, by being disintegrative, thus putting paid to the "classic narrative matrix" (Röggla 2013: 36) of the disaster spectacle.

What such a disruption of the medial infusion of fear might look like can be gleaned from the doomsday films of Michael Haneke (*Time of the Wolf*, 2003) and Abel Ferrara (*4:44 – Last Day on Earth*, 2011). In his play, *Rosebud*, dating from 2001, which thematizes the reactions to the attacks of September 11, Schlingensief also presents a disruption of the semantics of disaster: by confronting the spectator with myriad cognitive dissonances that render impossible any form of empathy or absorption in the actions on stage, the play enacts a "rhythm [of] derailment" (Kohse 2001), which, along with a flood of signs, references and plot elements, seeks to create a constant overload effect.[8] The "delay in meaning [that is thus generated] opens the text to a different approach to reception" (Nissen-Rizvani 2011: 178), which is meant to provoke spectators into reflecting on their own reactions to 9/11 and the ensuing politics of emotion. For her part, Kathrin Röggla goes a different way, in a formal sense, but which is still comparable in its critical thrust. Her collection of stories, *die alarmbereiten* (2010), which is based on her theatrical texts, is written almost entirely in the conjunctive

**8** On Schlingensief's *Bilderstörungsmaschine* (image-disruption machine), see the article of Lars Koch in this volume.

mood, using the distancing mechanism of a reported interior monologue; the assembled texts thus stress the reality and perception-shaping function of language, they illuminate different scenarios of fear and threat and illustrate how much the media, first and foremost Hollywood, influence the kinds of fear that are promulgated and the grounds for fear in the West. Fear, according to Ernst Bloch's central thesis (Bloch 1995: 300 – 301), is an effect of expectation; it is directed at what is coming and can therefore be exploited politically and economically to justify measures designed to prevent a threatening future from becoming a future threat. The scenarios within which potential dangers are imagined come from the stories told by cinema and literature, which serve as scripts for emotional and cultural fears. Whoever wants to find out and understand – this is the quintessence of Röggla's analysis – how present-day alarmism works, with its mixture of fear and desire, must take heed of the rhetoric of suddenness in the media and the worst-case scenarios of Hollywood films.

This would provide a description of certain features that seem central to the principle of disruption with respect to the social formation and societal self-description: disruptions facilitate a societal self-examination by bringing to light knowledge of the respective discourses, systems of thought, and their constitutive conditions. Whether literary, filmic or performance-based, fictions are experimental spaces in which to explore a society's possibilities and options, and social conditions are codified through ever-the-same plots and matrices. Disruption is the factor within the cultural work on societal self-descriptions that opens up this experimental space, that breaks up plots, thus potentially inducing a change. Disruption can produce "counter-stories" that unsettle uniform narratives, shake up and wake up somnambulistic audiences through new forms of staging, and show that individual anomalies can be traced back to social processes. In the most radical manifestations of disruption, it is a question of creating an open future, rather than a "defuturization" (Luhmann 1982: 278 – 279) of the future, or a closing off of future options through narrations or stochastic processes that anticipate possible events and bind them to the present.

However, it seems impossible for the media to grasp a disruptive event that cannot be assimilated into a pre-existing series by means of projections of the past or the present. For Jacques Derrida, "the event as event, as absolute surprise, has to fall on me" (2007: 451). Otherwise, the event would be predictable, divested of its radicalism. Each and every processing of disasters by the mass media, every fictional prognosis of a potential accident thematizes disruptive events that fit into the framework of a familiar system of thought and are thus perfectly foreseeable. Yet the absolute event, according to Derrida, cannot be calculated, predicted or theorized, since there is no horizon for such an irruptive disruption. Such an absolute disruption and disaster, such a major, irruptive

event defies discourse, just as in Röggla's play, *die unvermeidlichen* (2010), the interpreters at a large political conference reflect on their actions as representatives of the media and on the political rituals they are witnessing, yet they are unable to penetrate to the core of the political event (if one is actually taking place, that is). Such a fundamental disruption defies appropriation by the media, and thereby also defies politics and societal self-description. If such a disruption were ever to irrupt, society would have to be re-thought.

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Moritz Mutter

# Scandalous Expectations

## Second Order Scandals in Modern Society

## 1 Art in modern society

Modern society is accustomed to art. In systems theoretical terms, art is one of the functional systems of modern society (Luhmann 2000). Art certainly is not everywhere (or maybe it is, but the capacity for acknowledging it still remains finite), but there is an institutionalized acceptance of its existence. No one can reasonably be surprised by the fact that artists produce art, art galleries sell it, and consumers consume it. If this is true, how can art be a disruption? How can there still be scandals? The bases for this question are not factual assumptions about norms, which are difficult to make, but a public discourse: all boundaries, moral, political, or aesthetic, seem to have been crossed at least once or twice. Scandals have become *improbable*. Yet scandals occur, be it in an aesthetical or in a moral form. The question, then, is: *if* modern society is accustomed to art and its scandals, how can there still even *be* scandals? (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2014: 28)

For a theorist of society, it seems to be quite easy to find and define the codes under which different functional systems of society operate: payment/no payment in the economy, government/opposition in politics, true/false in science, legal/illegal in the legal system, etc. These codes and media have been described by systems theorists Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann (among others) in some depth, and most of the analyses seem to have come rather easy to them. The codes of the economic, political, scientific system seem to be *decidable* as well as to their *form* as to the respective *side* of the form. E. g., whether an action is legal or illegal is a clear and distinct question with a clear and distinct answer – within the framework of the legal system. There is a general frame (the functional system), as well as specific organizations like courts that have but one task: to label actions, if being called upon, as legal or as illegal. The same can be said of the economic system: it is based on the assumption that it is an observable fact if someone has paid for a product or not. And whether a political party is in government, or not, also is, under "normal" circumstances, not a question that takes too long to answer. For these questions to decide, functional systems develop *programs* that guide the attribution of the code values. This is the sociological framework for a theory of functional differentiation as laid out by sys-

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tems theorist Niklas Luhmann (in general, see for this Luhmann 2013). Almost all of modern society's functional systems work in this manner.

Yet there is one functional system of modern society that does not fit those schematics, a system that poses the question of its code *in the language of its code* and thus complicates things wildly. It is the system of art: while all functional systems *use* media, the art system, sociologist Armin Nassehi writes, "makes media themselves visible"[1] (Nassehi 2006: 183). Not only is there no clear-cut program for deciding whether a piece of art is beautiful or not; there is also no institutionalizing mechanism for producing a consensus on a piece of art; what's more, the evolution of modern art has made the *distinction* of beauty vs. ugliness itself doubtful. Performance Theatre, *ready-mades*, and modern art in general have made the boundaries of art quite unclear. There is a permanent double indeterminacy in the system of art, concerning the code itself *and* its programs, which is quite unusual. While the evolution of modern society in all its functional subsystems led to institutions for the *production of decidability*, modern art counteracts this by systematically producing ambivalence. This is what makes the system of art so unusual in modern society. In Luhmann's *Art as a social system*, the function of art is defined as follows: "Art radicalizes the difference between the real and the merely possible in order to show through works of its own that even in the realm of possibility there is order after all." (Luhmann 2000: 146) To abstract from the order of reality only to construct an order of the possible – that does not seem critical at all, much less radical or disruptive. To project an ordering function even into art seems to be a typically sociological bias, all the more when Luhmann compares art to a logical calculus (Luhmann 2000: 148). However, this is not as uncommon as one might think (see e. g. Poincaré 1910: 105). Once more, sociology presents itself not only as a "science of order"[2] (Negt 1974), but as a firm defender of modern society. For the logic of alternative orders is exactly that logic that was given birth to by modern, functionally differentiated society (Luhmann 1992: 48). Functional systems are characterized by a compulsion for self-substitution; they contain and produce their own alternatives.

1 "macht Medien selbst sichtbar."

2 "Ordnungswissenschaft."

## 2 The unobservable world

The production of order in the realm of possibility serves as a special mode "to make the world appear within the world": "a work of art is capable of symbolizing the reentry of the world into the world because it appears – just like the world – incapable of emendation." (Luhmann 2000: 149) But why should the world be "incapable of emendation," that is, perfect – while it clearly is not?

For Luhmann, as for Husserl, the world is, in the broadest sense, a horizon. It is that which in every intentional act remains as that which is not focused on. Luhmann, trying to avoid the subjectivist view of Husserl, reformulates this approach in the terms of George Spencer Brown's *calculus of form* (Spencer-Brown 1997). Basically, it then reads: the world is the observation itself. Observation, for Luhmann, consists of two elements: a distinction that "hurts" the world by parting it, and an indication of one side of the distinction. This leaves a twofold world, divided by the respective difference. The paradox of every binary difference, however, is the fact that the observation is actually not a twofold but a threefold scheme. For there to be an observation, there has to be an observer. As the reference point for Luhmann always is a social system that consists of communications that, in the moment they emerge, already disappear again, the observer cannot at the same time observe herself and something else. Observing herself is always *another* observation, one that takes place later, even if it is only slightly. Put in more concrete terms, this means that the observer is blind towards herself. She has to ignore her own contingency, the contingency of her distinction. And that in turn means that she ignores that there are other distinctions that *as well as hers* divide the world. In the moment of operation, the observation must consider itself the only possible one. This is, for Luhmann, not a question of arrogance or blindness or ideology, but of time.

*The world*, then, re-introduces the possibility of other distinctions by being an imagined state without distinctions – this unhurt state, of course, could not be observed because observing implies hurting the world. That is why it can be said that the observation actually *is* the world. As it is the distinction that divides the world, only it, which is not integrated in the twofold distinction because it is the act of distinguishing itself, can represent the world as that which must be presupposed for a distinction to be possible, but can never be observed.

More generally speaking, the "world" in Luhmann is the unity of a difference[3], that is, a distinction viewed as one. Like the observation, which can

**3** "Einheit einer Differenz."

never observe itself, the world is a paradox. It is in-different while it can only be defined via difference. This can mean a couple of things: first, the "world" can be the unity of a code, for example, the unity of the difference between power vs. powerless in the functional system of politics. Second, it can be the unity of the difference of system and environment. This is, so to speak, the "world" of systems theory. The world is that which must be presupposed for the distinction of system and environment to be possible. Thus, even though functional social subsystems work in an "autopoietic" manner – they have no contact with the world and reproduce their basic elements themselves – and perceive the world in very different ways that cannot even be compared to each other, the world is supposed to be the same for all systems. But even though it is *pre*-supposed, it is the distinction that creates it in the first place, that makes it observable by making it unobservable. So if the world is in fact "incapable of emendation," it is only because it is unobservable.

The solution to this unsolvable temporal problem lies in time. The world becomes observable only through the use of time. One can try to observe the world of an observer by distinguishing that world from something else. But that still leaves one with the problem of one's own world, which still is the unit of *one's own* distinction, and that can only be observed if another observation distinguishes it, just like one did with the one before. Second-order observation, the observation of observations, can solve *any* number of such problems, but never an *infinite* number, which is why every solution of the problem also reproduces it.

Art, this is its secret in Luhmann's theory, stops this process. A work of art is "incapable of emendation" because it stops this process of making distinctions at a certain point: no stroke, no color, no word, no note can be added without destroying it. In this perspective, art is in fact concerned with order. This is, as I will show further on, also true on a societal scale.

## 3 The functionless function of art – Luhmann and Adorno

In Luhmann, the "world" cannot be observed. To deal with the paradox of observing the unobservable world is the function of art. The art system does so by producing works of art that, like the world itself, seem "incapable of emendation" (Luhmann 2000: 149). It has been noted that this function appears to be rather useless for society and that it may be more realistic to merge the function of art with the function of entertainment, that is, the consumption of leisure time. Niels Werber proposes that art simply absorbs the growing quantities of lei-

sure time since the nineteenth century (Werber 1996). The function of art, then, is the absorption of functionless time, meaning time that is not claimed by functional systems like the economy, politics, or religion.

Even though Werber's definition of the function of art differs from Luhmann's, it is conspicuous that both definitions refer to a notion of dysfunctionality (Nassehi 2006: 171, 188); Werber criticizes Luhmann's concept of the function of art as functionless, just to introduce his own notion, which is exactly the absorption of a growing amount of dysfunctional time. Could it be that there still exists a link between the two definitions? The notion that the function of art has an intimate relationship to its dysfunctionality is quite traditional. In Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, it reads: "the necessity of art [...] is its nonnecessity" (Adorno 2002: 251); "Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness." (Adorno 2002: 227)

The necessity of art cannot, in Adorno's opinion, be deduced from a societal function. This is also the foundational lie the art system tells itself. Its function cannot tolerate any outside, not even in the subliminal form of a function: "The necessity of art cannot be propounded *more scientifico* but rather only insofar as a work, by the power of its internal unity, gives evidence of being thus-and-only-thus, as if it absolutely must exist and cannot possibly be thought away." (Adorno 2002: 77) This, once again, reminds us of Luhmann's notion that works of art are "incapable of emendation".

Functional systems, in Luhmann, are "functional" because they solve a general problem of society, e.g. the problem of the allocation of goods in the economic system or the production of collectively binding decisions in the political system. But what is the societal problem that such a function of art would address? If combined, Werber, Luhmann, and Adorno give a complete description. Firstly, it serves to absorb leisure time, as Werber suggests, *while keeping latent* that it does so, as Adorno describes; for leisure time has to be functionless by its own definition and self-description; it is that portion of time that is not used up by functional systems like religion, economy, science, or politics. Adding to its primary problem, art has to solve a problem concerning its problem. This *meta-problem* of the art system, then, is how it might be possible for a functional system to disguise that it serves a function. As spectators of art, we do not want to visit a museum knowing that we are just passing time; we tell ourselves we are doing something deeper. We see, all the time, that art is being bought and sold on the art market and used for speculation; still, we would never ascribe to art the function of being sold. We even exclude the artist herself; a work of art, we think, can never be explained purely out of the intentions of its creator. In these semantics, we isolate art from all functions beside its self-importance.

Secondly, according to Luhmann, art would fill this type of dysfunctional time with a certain sense of order that would otherwise be missing exactly because of its functionlessness. The closure of a work of art, its pretension to be perfect, "incapable of emendation," a world in its own right, is what allows it to seal itself from the "real" world. In modern society, function is at the core of social order; the principal order of modern society is the order of functional differentiation. Art compensates its *functionlessness* with its *compulsion for order.* Abstractly speaking: the function of art is the implementation of functionless order in the functionless space of leisure time.

## 4 Scandal as meta-disruption

The art system is a system that produces change to a large extent. "Originality" is its key value. If change is at the core of art, and everybody knows it, how can scandals occur in such an environment? How can such scandals be defined in systems theoretical terms? My suggestion is to define modern scandals as meta-disruptions. "Disruption" seems to be, on a rudimentary level, a stark disappointment of normative expectations. Expectations are, in a systems theoretical vocabulary, the basis of societal order. Norms are expectations that are not changed even if they are disappointed. (The counterpart to these are cognitive expectations, which are changed when not met.) The system of art builds up order, and thus expectations, in two ways: in its works of art, and in its evolution as a system. These expectations are disappointed all the time – works of art fail, existing styles are changed, new ones appear – otherwise there would be no evolution, no innovation. But what is it that transforms a variation not into innovation but into a scandal?

For modern society, this question can only be answered by switching to second-order observation, that is, by observing observers. Modern society produces a second, paradox form of expectation: the expectation of disappointment. Change and innovation are the rule, not the exception. Change is *expected* to occur. Taboos are *expected* to be broken. This expectation creates the illusion that in fact, no breaking of a taboo could be a scandal. In this way, the art system and society in general lull themselves. It provides an order that has always already dealt with its disruptions. This makes it hard to produce scandals, on the one hand. On the other hand, it seems to enlarge the scale of scandals *if* they occur. A modern scandal is a second-order scandal: the real scandal is that scandals can still occur, even though all boundaries seemed to have been crossed already, all taboos broken, every transgression made. Much more than just systems testing their own norms, as Sighard Neckel proposed (Neckel

1989: 251), in scandals, modern society surprises itself with the mere existence of a residual normative order. The contents of this order are secondary; its existence, however, cannot be presupposed in a society that has, in all its subsystems, made the transition to permanent change. Scandals are epistemic events that make explicit that this order still exists. In this way, scandals are disruptions that reveal order.

For sociology, engaging is not an option; sociology requires us to remain calm, to observe what it means when people (e.g. artists) call themselves "engaged," why they do it and what preconditions and effects it has. This attitude requires a certain distance that may seem "cold" to the sociologist herself and to her observers. But it pays; in the case of scandals, it can make us see what society cannot see.

It makes us see that the claim that scandals are no longer possible, because all boundaries have already been crossed, is exactly the precondition for the persistence of the scandalous. The assumption that scandals can no longer occur is exactly what drives the (post-?)modern economy of scandals. In other words: modern art shows the possibility of an order that the *theorist* of modern society cannot presuppose for modern society any more. Society and art mutually reassure each other of a residual form of order.

## 5 Conclusion

And yet Jean Baudrillard has suggested that the norms that are "defended" in scandals actually do not exist (Baudrillard 1978: 28); the function of scandal would, then, be a *simulation* of norms rather than the proof of their existence. My suggestion in this article is that it is *both*; or, rather, that it does not make that much of a difference. I will base this idea on the theory of "pluralistic ignorance".

The theory of pluralistic ignorance (Katz and Allport 1931), which is also used in systems theory, is the notion that norms that are *believed* to be shared can be as powerful as norms that *are* shared. The concept is simple: "Pluralistic ignorance is a psychological state characterized by the belief that one's private attitudes and judgments are different from those of others, even though one's public behavior is identical." (Prentice and Miller 1993: 244) This produces norms that are being followed, even though they are not, internally, shared. People who act according to pluralistic ignorance believe that their "own behavior may be driven by social pressure, but they assume that other people's identical behavior is an accurate reflection of their true feelings." (Prentice and Miller 1993: 244)

In the field of scandal, this leads to the following hypothesis. Even if the dense process of scandal with its tendency of personalization is not effective in producing norms, it might still be one of the most effective ways of producing pluralistic ignorance on norms. Scandals do not, this means, actually repair damaged norms of society; instead, they reinforce the belief that such norms exist. Scandals suppress the fact that the norms in question are not actually shared by the individuals involved. Pluralistic ignorance is one of the mechanisms that manage the difference of *norms* and *knowledge*, like the rule of law. Normally, these are opposed. Normative expectations are exactly those expectations that are kept even when people do not act according to them. The rule of law transforms normative questions into cognitive ones: the question, "Is it right to do so?," is transformed into the question, "What consequences will it entail?," which is something one can objectively know. Pluralistic ignorance, on the other hand, transforms knowledge about norms into norm-oriented behavior.

In his critique of the functional theory of scandals (Kepplinger 2009), that is, the conception that scandals *per se* have a sanitizing function in society, Hans Mathias Kepplinger has claimed that most scandals never even get scandalized by the media. Most of them are ignored. In the case of Germany, Kepplinger currently counts 250 *potential* scandals per annum, which clearly shows that scandals are not, as Wolfgang Weigel called it, "the Externality Case" (Weigel 1999). Scandals are common. Scandalization is not. Only 25 of these 250 scandals make it into the national media and thus actually become mediatized scandals. The public, this means, remains ignorant of 90% of all scandalizable events and facts. This fact not only confirms the notion that scandalization is in fact improbable, but also the thesis of pluralistic ignorance.

To conclude, I will sum up my argument:

1. Modern society is one of permanent change. This produces the notion that most norms have vanished.
2. Scandalization is unlikely. This is what makes scandals even more potent whenever they do occur.
3. Scandals show that the notion in (1) is not completely accurate. Some norms still exist. Scandals reveal these norms. These norms are deeply embedded in the function of modern society. They are norms that protect the different functional systems from each other.
4. Scandals do not reinforce these norms. They have normative effects, but these do not lie in the repair of norms.
5. Instead, they reinforce the pluralistic ignorance of the non-existence of norms. After a scandal, people will resume to believing in the abandonment of all morals.
6. The whole process can be iterated: return to (1).

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Mario Grizelj

# Ekstasis and Paradoxa

## The Miracle as Disruption

"And they were astonished with a great astonishment." (Mark 5.42)

The following line of reasoning is really quite straightforward: miracles can be regarded as moments of disruption and, precisely as such moments of disruption, they possess the positive quality of initiating redemption, recognition, truth, epiphany, exaltation, or a being-seized (*Ergriffenheit*). In the form of a miracle, disruption is not only a disruption, mistake, or rush but a category of knowledge; in the form of a disruption, a miracle is not merely a category of knowledge, but a problem that simultaneously also marks its own solution to a problem.

Reflecting on miracles almost inevitably places one in the position of having to argue in theological terms or least of having to consider theological discourse. After all, a miracle (whatever its ontological and epistemological status) is a religious event.[1] In what follows, this theological aspect will by no means be denied; however, this chapter focuses in formal logical terms on the miracle as a "*terminus technicus* für eine Form der Irritation" [*terminus technicus* for a form of irritation] (Tyradellis 2011: 17). Miracles will be understood as a specific form of disruption to the expected order, as moments that make the disruption itself part of a religious event. Miracles do not function as miracles in spite of the fact that they disrupt, but *because of* and *by means of* that very disrupting.

## 1 Anarchy and order

Miracles are questionable and uncertain extraordinary events. They astonish, fascinate, or frighten. They can be described as astonishing intrusions of the im-

Translation from the German by Jason Blake.

**1** In Latin and English, in stark contrast to German, one can easily differentiate between *mirabilia* (natural wonders, profane, relative) and *miracula* (transcendental miracles, sacred, absolute), and between *wonder* (an unusual event) and *miracle* (an unusual, religious event in reference to a transcendent God or some sort of transcendent power). In German no similar difference between "wonder" and "miracle" asserts itself. For a Thomistic viewpoint on this matter, see Matuschek (1991: 70).

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possible and of the unexpected that (mostly) suggest the transcendental. Because their epistemological and ontological status is uncertain, they are very much in need of explanation. For the modern observer, miracles generally indicate marginal phenomena that are written off as the mere superstitions of an antiquated, anti-modern religiosity, or as illusions. According to the secularization thesis, and in line with the "linear decline of religion in the form of an increasing secularization, a privatization of religious attitudes and of a rationalization of religious worldviews" (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 18),[2] miracles should no longer play a structure-forming role; at best, they might function as historical labels for describing bygone eras. But if we examine the secularization thesis more closely, we see that though modernity may have "effectively disenchanted or at least diminished the attractiveness of many traditional worlds of wonder," it also established its own, modernized worlds of wonder as well as a variety of mutually competing modes for observing those wonders (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 15).[3] If we accept this, a research path opens that allows us "to overcome the research-limiting opposition of the terms disenchantment and re-enchantment," because it brings to light the "changing interaction between miraculous events and miraculous acts within both the religious *and* the secular thought and knowledge systems" of modernity (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 15).[4] By observing miracles and the questions connected to them – questions such as which social and discourse formations render miracles plausible or implausible, which orders of knowledge assume an ontology of the miracle and which attribute them to superstition, which narrative, rhetorical, performative, pragmatic, institutional and political means make plausible the ontology of miracles and belief in miracles – we can challenge the simple replacement model according to which enlightened modern times used rationality to supplant miracles and belief in miracles. Miracles, thus, are both the object of observation and the moment of observing, since miracles are employed as a medium that makes it possible to describe models of reality, knowledge, and society.

**2** "linearen Religionsverfalls in Form einer zunehmenden Entkirchlichung, Privatisierung religiöser Einstellungen sowie einer Rationalisierung religiöser Weltbilder."

**3** "viele überkommene Wunderwelten effektiv entzauberte oder zumindest deren Attraktivität minderte"; "forschungshemmenden Begriffsgegensatz von Ent- und Wiederverzauberung zu überwinden."

**4** "wandelnde Umgang mit wunderhaften Begebenheiten und wundersamen Handeln innerhalb der zugleich religiösen *und* säkularen Denk- und Wissenssysteme" Also Gess contests the dichotomy of "Fortschritt versus Entzauberung" [progress versus disenchantment] (2013: 129).

To put it more pointedly, we can say that it is only through the observation of miracles that the specific modernity of modern times – that is, the simultaneous existence of religious *and* secular orders, the simultaneous existence of enchantment and disenchantment, and the afterlife of the religious (Treml and Weidner 2007) in modern literature, art and culture – is made visible. This is because modern considerations of the extraordinary can thematize, problematize, and historicize the ordering structures of modern society, "its social constitution, assumptions of normality and the limits of knowledge" (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 15).[5] It is precisely the marginal and the unusual, the inexplicable and the exorbitant, the disrupting and the disturbing, that sharpen the eye for what is "central" and "normal," for what is self-understood and usual within a society. It comes down to describing modernity and its literature and culture in terms of its disruptive moments, of its ambivalences and incommensurabilities – not for the sake of the disruptions themselves, but in order to use these disruptions to help us understand the ordering patterns of modernity. As Alexander Geppert and Till Kössler phrase it:

> By studying miracles, one can concentrate and connect manifold debates about the limits of perception, cognition and knowledge in the 20th century. Miracles stood in a highly ambivalent relationship to Western, supposedly enlightened societies. As sudden and unexpected intrusions of the inexplicable into existing orders they formed a counterpoint to the established social conceptions which, on the one hand, were characterized precisely by trust in the present and the future calculability and configurability [of nature and the environment], and, on the other hand, by the readability and controllability of nature and the environment. As extreme cases of inexplicable interruptions of normality, as unexpected and awe-inducing transcendences, as "fleeting errors in the system," they represented challenges for contemporary orders of thinking, pondering and believing that lay beyond the question of whether miracles in fact existed. In the raging debates, fundamental assumptions about reality and epistemology were always open for discussion and always negotiated anew. (2011: 15)[6]

**5** "ihre soziale Konstituierung, Normalitätsannahmen und Wissensgrenzen."

**6** "Durch die Untersuchung von Wundern lassen sich die vielfältigen Debatten um die Grenzen von Wahrnehmung, Erkenntnis und Wissen im 20. Jahrhundert bündeln und aufeinander beziehen. Wunder standen in einer höchst ambivalenten Beziehung zu den westlichen, vermeintlich aufgeklärten Gesellschaften. Als plötzliche und unerwartete Einbrüche des Unerklärbaren in gegebene Ordnungen bildeten sie einen Gegenpol zu den etablierten Gesellschaftsvorstellungen, welche gerade von Vertrauen in Plan- und Gestaltbarkeit von Gegenwart und Zukunft einerseits, in Les- und Kontrollierbarkeit von Natur und Umwelt andererseits geprägt waren. Als Extremfälle unerklärlicher Unterbrechungen von Normalität, als unerwartete und Staunen hervorrufende Transzendierungen, als 'Flüchtige Fehler im System', stellten sie jenseits der Frage nach ihrer faktischen Existenz Herausforderungen für zeitgenössische Wissens-, Denk- und Glaubensordnungen dar. Immer standen in den schnell aufbrandenden Debatten grundlegende Annah-

The very claim that an event is inexplicable or impossible is a fundamental epistemological statement, which depends on historical, socio-structural, cultural, and epistemological variables. In the Middle Ages the possibility or impossibility of miracles differed from in modernity because the conceptions of reality were not the same. That these conceptions of reality varied, and how they varied, can be read succinctly in the concept of the miracle. In the Middle Ages laws of nature were not yet as binding as they would come to be, so there was more room for the impossible than in modernity, since in the Middle Ages and into the Baroque "the order of nature appeared fundamentally violable" (Blumenberg 2009: 19).[7] Thus, the extraordinary could, fundamentally, always penetrate into an uncertain, unknown, and uncontrollable nature (albeit still as an exception), because miracles always stood above nature as evidence of the transcendent or the omnipotence of God. Moreover, because the Reformation, with its desire to explain miracles rationally, had not yet taken place, the Middle Ages were more receptive to the inexplicable, and miracles (albeit still as exceptions) were the order of the day. Only after the Middle Ages does this change, when the "idea of a nature that follows immanent laws" appears (Offen 2011: 25).[8] Nature then becomes more and more transparent, and discursively and technically controllable (at least according to the scheme of a discursively-negotiated world, which starts in the Renaissance and is consummated in the Enlightenment).[9] With that change, modernity's historical upheavals of basic epistemological assumptions become more pronounced. The inexplicable and the impossible are used as labels to help zoom in on the historical, socio-structural, epistemological, and culturally-conditioned delineations of the normal and the exceptional, of the discursive and the monstrous, of language and the world, of perception and the world, of the sensible and the intelligible, of nature and spirit (Daston and Park 1998). The idea is that the "miraculous" in particular can be used to observe and explain assumptions about reality and about social formations.[10]

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men über Realität und Epistemologie zur Disposition und wurden stets wieder aufs Neue verhandelt."

**7** "Naturordnung grundsätzlich als durchbrechbar erschien."

**8** "Idee einer immanenten Gesetzen folgenden Natur."

**9** On the transition from a dangerous, through a manageable, to an enjoyable nature, see Begemann (1987); on the transition to a scientific world view, see Frye (2011: 36 – 37).

**10** Though the difference between "miracle" and "wonder" is more pronounced in English than in German, I nevertheless emphasize that in this paper "miraculous" designates something that is closely linked to a religiously coded miracle, rather than a merely "wonderful" or "fantastic" occurrence.

In a roundabout way, the miraculous reveals that social, epistemic, pragmatic, and institutional models of reality, which have become routine, are in fact disruptable and thus negotiable and even fragile constructs. Reading miracles as figures of uncertain existence, as figures of disruption, serves to undermine social and epistemic orders, but it also serves to reorganize them. The miracle:

> is capable [...] of offering phantasmatic "explanations" and "justifications" and precisely therein of assuming cultural orientation functions. But it is also capable of creating confusion in habits of thought and in what is supposedly self-understood, or of rendering visible the culturally contradictory. (Begemann, Herrmann and Neumeyer 2008: 9–10)[11]

This perspective can be correlated to a contemporary definition of miracles:

> Believed to be impossible, miracles are transgressions of existing knowledge and thought limits which, for that reason, give rise to awe-inducing alternative concepts of order, and which are often interpreted as manifestations of the transcendent. (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 38)[12]

Hence, social and epistemic orders are not established in opposition to questionable figures, but in explicit confrontation with them. That which is questionable and ambiguous about miracles is not merely ordered away, and furthermore order does not come into being merely in spite of the miracle's uncertainty but because of it. It is on the ambiguous, phantasmatic, and transgressive aspects of the miracle – those moments that constitute its disruptive potential – that the stability of an order can be tested and subverted, engendering new or-

**11** "vermag es, [...] phantasmatische 'Erklärungen' und 'Begründungen' zu bieten und gerade darin kulturelle Orientierungsleistungen zu übernehmen. Er vermag es aber auch, Verwirrung in Denkgewohnheiten und vermeintlichen Selbstverständlichkeiten zu stiften oder kulturell Widersprüchliches sichtbar zu machen." – The authors ascribe this ability to order and to confuse at one and the same time to the figure of the vampire. However, in my view this function can also be ascribed to the miraculous. Vampires and miracles are *figures of questionable existenc*e which, in spite of their many specific differences, are formally and syntactically analogous at a higher level of abstraction. Moreover, Begemann's essay "Die Metaphysik der Vampire" very convincingly shows that there are extremely close relationships of equivalence and correspondence between vampires and Christian religious codes.

**12** "Wunder sind für unmöglich gehaltene und daher Staunen erregende Transgressionen existierender Wissens- und Denkgrenzen, die alternative Ordnungsentwürfe aufscheinen lassen und häufig als Manifestationen von Transzendenz gedeutet werden."

ders that encourage another way of dealing with the ambiguous, the impossible, and the phantasmatic.[13]

Daniel Weidner shows, referring specifically to the Enlightenment, that "not only is the miraculous central for Enlightenment knowledge, it is no less important for knowledge *about* the Enlightenment" (Weidner 2010: 123).[14] In other words, miracles allow us not only to observe especially keenly a society's assumptions of normality, and thus also of alterity, but they also illuminate the shifts, transgressions, and structural uncertainties of social, epistemic, and symbolic orders, as well as the limits of their knowledge and discourse.[15] Alexander Geppert and Till Kössler speak of a "potenziell anarchischen Qualität" [potentially anarchic quality] of miracles on which new orders, new forms of knowledge, can be established, which hold out the prospect of more possibilities (2011: 38).[16] But in the confrontation with this anarchy old patterns can also be confirmed, for just as miracles can destabilize (discontinuity), so, too, can they stabilize or even "contribute to the restoration or restoring of a world that has come out of joint" (continuity) (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 38).[17]

## 2 ἔκστασις and παράδοξα

But what can be designated a "miracle"? A major initial problem can be observed if we go back to the history of the Greek terms. In the Greek of the New Testament there is no superordinate term for a miracle. In terms of form and genre theory – and in contrast, for example, to the homogeneous use of

**13** Orsi is entirely in line with my perspective when he speaks of miracles and the sacred as being of a fundamental ambivalence: "The 'sacred' [...] is the space of activity, engagement, ambivalence, and doubleness" (1997: 12).

**14** "Wunder [...] nicht nur zentral für das Wissen der Aufklärung, sondern nicht weniger wichtig für das Wissen *von* der Aufklärung." Weidner shows that in miracles not only knowledge and an amorphous non-knowledge are condensed, but that various forms of non-knowledge can be identified (2010: 123). Thus, miracles serve to produce order in that which lies beyond order.

**15** Tyradellis speaks analogously of the miracle as a "Wunde" [wound], as an "Öffnung in der Welt" [opening in the world] which, in exceeding the expected, "Mehr an Möglichkeiten verspricht" [promises more possibilities]; the metaphor of the wound is well-chosen, since it (especially in a religious framework) is always doubly encoded: as a wound that irritates and hurts, and as a wound that serves as a medium for finding salvation (as in stigmata or the Passion of Christ) (2011: 13).

**16** The authors are referring to Orsi's "Everyday Miracles." See also Kahl's instructive essay "Neutestamentliche Wunder als Verfahren des In-Ordnung-Bringens."

**17** "zur Restauration oder Erneuerung einer gefährdeten oder aus den Fugen geratenen Welt beitragen."

the term parable (*parabole*) – "miracle" is used inconsistently and heterogeneously. Instead of a single term we find different semantic fields. First, there is the Greek τὸ τέρας (*to téras*; τά τέρατα [ta *térata*] = miracle, sign, token) which, in combination with σημεῖον (*sēmeíon*), became the catchphrase "signs and wonders" (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα; *sēmeia kai terata*), but this combination appears only sixteen times in the New Testament.[18] Of primary significance is that *ta térata* indicates a moment of *amplificatio*, it is a matter of exaggeration, of something sensational that, precisely for that reason, points to the extraordinary and the exorbitant; and yet the use of *amplificatio* does not seem particularly well suited for characterizing an act of Jesus, since these acts surpass the sensational and the exorbitant.[19] Jesus's miracles may indeed be sensational, which is why the people are beside themselves, astonished beyond measure (see below), but precisely because such events surpass the sensational, no lexical label is homogenously and consistently used to designate them. Furthermore, things become lexically problematic when *ta térata* and *ta sēmeia* are used to designate false wonders.[20] The Synoptic tradition invariably uses the combination σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα when referring, critically, to "false Christs and false prophets" (e. g. Mk 13.22). In the Gospel according to John, however, the compound is divided, and "miracle" (*ta sēmeia*) (without *ta térata*) now refers to the miracles of Jesus (see, for example, Jn 2.11, 4.54, 6.2, 6.14, 9, 16, 11.47,

**18** See Zimmermann (2011: 98; 2013: 19 – 20). See also the entry "Semeion" at *Bible Study Tool* <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/semeion.html>; for an analysis of terms in the primary sources, see Weiß (1995). Weiß shows that the pair forms a "*terminus technicus* der Missionssprache" [*terminus technicus* of mission language] and points to the "Funktionsträger, nicht aber auf konkrete Handlungen wie Heilungen" [the function holders, but not to concrete acts such as healing] (Weiß 1995: 144 – 145). (Zimmermann 2013: 20); on this mission thesis, see Weiß's exhaustive argument in *Zeichen und Wunder* (1995: 94 – 115).

**19** This is why the term *ta térata* appears so infrequently and why Jesus's acts are not designated as "τερατεῖαι (*terateiai*)" (Zimmermann 2013: 20). On the especially drastic aspect of miracles in the Gospel of John, see Welck (1994: 61 – 62). – Unless otherwise stated, the Greek bible passages and are taken from the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Nestle-Aland 2013). The corresponding quotations in English are from the King James Version, the German from the Einheitsübersetzung and the Luther Bible.

**20** An example: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs *and* **wonders**; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Mt 24.24; my emphasis); "ἐγερθήσονται γὰρ ψευδόχριστοι καὶ ψευδοπροφῆται, καὶ δώσουσιν *σημεῖα* μεγάλα καὶ ***τέρατα*** ὥστε πλανῆσαι, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς" (my emphasis). Positive use of the compound "signs and wonders" is, in contrast, found primarily in Paul (see Weiß 1995: 41 – 72); on "signs and lying wonders" (2 Thes 2.9), see Weiß (1995: 139 – 141).

12.37 and 20.30).[21] Thus, in John we can speak of a reasonably uniform use of the term *ta sēmeia* for referring to the miracles of Jesus.[22]

Since in the New Testament miracles are usually aimed at expressing the power of God, the terms ἔργον (*ergon*; works, e. g. Jn 10.25 – 38) and *δύναμις* (*dynamis*; mighty works, e. g. Mk 6.2, Lk 10.13, 19.37) appear. In referring to the terminological vagueness and doubt about the status of Jesus's acts, one can speak of a "contentiousness that is inherent to the phenomenon of miracles" (Zimmermann 2011: 100).[23] Crucial here is that this conceptual inconsistency in referring to miracles is redirected to the level of observation. As Ruben Zimmermann notes,

> Instead of a fixed *terminus technicus* and an accompanying text type we more frequently encounter verbal constructions that describe the reaction of people to the acts of Jesus with the verb *thaumazein:* they "wonder" (see Lk 11.14) and "are amazed." (Zimmermann 2011: 99)[24]

Evidently the contentiousness of the miracle phenomenon is difficult to clarify at the object level. The terms used make it clear that the key question is not "What is a miracle?" but "What effect do the miracles of Jesus have on the observers?" Accordingly, as Zimmermann determines, the Greek noun designating a miracle "*τὸ θαύμασαν* (*pl. τα θανμάσια ta thaumasia*) [...] is used not at all, [while] the nominalized adjective *θανμάσιον* (*thaumasion*) is encountered only once (Mt 21.15)" (2013: 22).[25] In contrast, the verb "*θανμζω* (*thaumazō* – to be amazed, as-

**21** In John 4.48, meanwhile, the composition is used again, though with a negative tinge. Jesus criticizes the people for their lack of belief: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." Zimmermann points out that in the Synoptics, in stark contrast to John, "σημεῖον niemals auf Handlungen bezogen wird, die der irdische Jesu vollbracht hat. Stattdessen werden damit künftige Zeichen (Mk 13,4; 16,17 – 20; Mt 26,48) benannt oder von Jesus erwartete Zeichen." [σημεῖον never refers to acts that the earthly Jesus has completed. Rather, it designates future signs (Mk 13.4, 16.17 – 20, Mt 26.48) or signs expected from Jesus] (2013: 21).

**22** On the systematic use of the term σημεῖον in the Gospel of John, see Welck (1994: esp. 49 – 58).

**23** "Umstrittenheit, die dem Wunderphänomen selbst anhaftet."

**24** "Statt eines festen *Terminus technicus* und einer dazugehörigen Textsorte treffen wir häufiger verbale Konstruktionen an, die die Reaktion von Menschen auf das Wirken Jesu mit dem Verb *thaumazein* beschreiben: sie 'staunen' und 'wundern sich' (see Lk 11,14)." Lk 11.14 reads "And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered."

**25** "*τὸ θαύμασαν* (*pl. τα θανμάσια ta thaumasia*) [...] [ist] kein einziges Mal verwendet, [und] das substantivierte Adjektiv *θανμάσιον* (thaumasion) begegnet nur einmal (Mt 21,15)." Zimmermann's claim should be qualified however, since "*τα θανμάσια ta thaumasia*" does indeed ap-

tonished) [appears] 43 times, 31 times in the Gospels, and the adjective *θανμαστος* (*thaumastos*) is encountered a further 6 times" (Zimmermann 2013: 22).[26] Here, miracles are described as a phenomenon of effect. One observes the miraculous by observing the people experiencing or witnessing the unusual event. With that, the focus is shifted because, although miracles are acts testifying to Jesus being the Son of God, they primarily serve to illustrate the performative and rhetorical impact of the divine. Underlining the astonishment – that is, emphasizing the observing and not the observed – makes it evident that a miracle's decisive aspect lies not its ontological status but in the sensory recognition that arises from being seized by awe. The point is to experience Jesus as the Son of God through sensory recognition. Because the people are entirely seized in their physical being, the miracles of Jesus are an entirely corporeal, polysensory, and multimedial experience: Jesus speaks (Jn 11.42: "And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth") or Jesus touches someone and applies bodily fluids (Mk 7.33: "And he took [the deaf-mute] aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue." Mk 8.23: "And he took the blind man by the hand [...] and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought"[27]). In terms of religious history this of course is a matter of "Kraftübertragung" (Ueberschaer 2013: 326), the transfer of power through healing gestures and touching, but it also presents the "Ganzkörperlichkeit" of Jesus, the fact this it is a total-body experience – one which includes words and gesture but also bodily contact, and one which finds its counterpart in the fact that the observers are entirely seized. After the passage in which Jesus cures the deaf-dumb,

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pear in the Bible, namely, in the Gospel according to Matthew: "ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς τὰ **θαυμάσια** ἃ ἐποίησεν καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς κράζοντας ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ λέγοντας, Ὡσαννὰ τῷ υἱῷ Δαυίδ, ἠγανάκτησαν." "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the **wonderful things** that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased" (Mt 21.15). Not the nominalized adjective but θαυμάσια (= neutral plural of the adjective θαυμασιος, ον) is used.

**26** "*θανμζω* (thaumazō – sich wundern, staunen) 43 mal, davon in den Evangelien 31-mal auf, das Adjektiv *θανμαστος* (*thaumastos*) begegnet noch 6-mal." Also mentioned at *BibleStudyTool* is that *thaumazō* appears 46 times and *thaumastos* 7 times (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/thaumazo.html>; <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/thaumastos.html>). – A suitable example: "And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel." (Mk 5.20) "Da ging der Mann weg und verkündete in der ganzen Dekapolis, was Jesus für ihn getan hatte, und alle staunten" (Einheitsübersetzung); in Luther: "und jedermann verwunderte sich."

**27** It is for good reason that Ueberschaer's essay is entitled "'Mit allen Sinnen leben!' (zur Heilung des Taubstummen in Mk 7,31–37)." She writes of the dominance of "Gesten und Berührungen" [gestures and touching] (2013: 324).

for example, one reads: "And [they] were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak" (Mk 7.37). The observers are astonished "beyond measure,"[28] which implies not only an astonishment of thought but a polysensoral apprehension. For this purpose the word ἐκπλήσσω (*ekpléssó*) is used: to strike out, to be utterly amazed, dumbfounded, to be left at a loss from witnessing the incredible, but also astonishment (see also Lk 9.43).[29] However, it must be emphasized that only in Mk 7.37 and Luke 9.43 does *ekpléssó* refer to the miracles of Jesus, since otherwise the people are amazed and astonished at Jesus's words as he proclaims his doctrine (e.g. Mt 7.28, 13.54, 19.25, 22.33, Mk 1.22, 11.18, Lk 4.32).[30] This, however, implies that Jesus's words are not only understood and interpreted but also, above all, experienced and ingested in sensory terms. Jesus's words are therefore more than words; they always also entail a seizing and grabbing hold of the entire, sensory and intelligible individual. They are directed not only at the body *and* the mind, but also at initiating understanding of the message *qua* and through the body.

The decisive element in the miraculous is not the existence of the miracle but the experiencing of the miracle through the observers. Indeed, an existential transformation occurs in them: "at the end of 7.37 Mark wants to show that the encounter with Jesus existentially changes and fills the people with astonishment and wonder. They proclaim Jesus to be the one who gives life a new quality" (Ueberschaer 2013: 329).[31] Interesting for our purposes is not the theological dimension of salvation but the media-theory argument that miracles address all the senses and that the key to interpreting miracles lies not in the ontology of miracles but in this: the miracle is a total-body experience that seizes the observer multimedially. In terms of media theory, here the salvation history functions not as a proclamation of God's word but as an "Epiphanie göttlicher Kraft" [epiphany of divine power] (Weiß 1995: 117). In such a way, miracles are not to be

**28** Luther's translation is in harmony with the King James Version: "Und sie wunderten sich *über die Maßen*".

**29** English, of course, allows also the sonorous translation: "to strike one out of self-possession" (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/ekplesso.html>).

**30** Further terms radically expressing the astounding, gripping, shocking, or estranging effects of Jesus's miracles and words are ἐθαμβήθησαν (*ethambēthēsan*, to be amazed and astonished; Mk 1.27, 10.24, 10.32) or, even stronger, ἐφοβήθησαν (*ephobēthēsan*, to be horrified, shocked, afraid (Mk 5.15, Lk 8.35, Lk 5.26) and φόβῳ (*phobō*) or φόβοὺ (*phobou*), see also Zimmermann (2013: 14–15).

**31** "Mit dem Chorschluss in 7,37 möchte Markus zeigen, dass die Begegnung mit Jesus existenziell verändert und den Menschen in Erstaunen und Verwunderung versetzt. Sie verkündigen Jesus als denjenigen, der dem Leben eine neue Qualität schenkt."

interpreted, but lived and experienced. That said, the experience should not rest at the level of being seized and astonished. Rather, by being seized and enchanted people should gain insight into the truth of the kerygma (Weiß 1995). Epiphany, being seized, being astonished, and being enchanted do not stand in opposition to insight and understanding, since the former gives rise to the latter. This emphasis on sensory knowledge makes miracles (also) aesthetic phenomena because, firstly, it is not a matter of observing the object, but of the sensory relationship to this object. And, since sensory knowledge can never be immediate, it is, second, a matter of medial employment and the media-induced potential of miracles to effect action. It therefore comes as no surprise when categories come into play that smack of aesthetics, for example, when one reads that ultimately "not the action [object level] but the appearance [effect and observer level] of divine *dynamis* [...] is raised to the decisive criterion" (Weiß 1995: 119).[32] And neither is it surprising when miracle discussion is replete with metaphors evoking theatre:

> The religious miracle is, in addition to its existential function as emergency aid, a "showpiece" made for the senses, a divine rhetorical device for arousing attention and amazement, a brilliant proof of his omnipotence and it leads via amazement to conversion of the doubters. (Schierz 2007: 13)[33]

With this shift to the rhetorical and the aesthetic, however, ambivalence also necessarily comes into play. Wolfgang Weiß points out that with the emphasis on the "phenomenon" it is not the message that legitimizes the miracle, but the miracle that legitimizes the message (Weiß 1995: 119, note 293).

Christian Welck, meanwhile, shows that the Gospel according to John has formal and narratological ruptures and inconsistencies precisely when it comes to miracles. The narration of miracles (*histoire*) is reflected in the mode of narration (*discours*), and through "insertions, accentuations and additions [...] the representation of the miracles is *compromised in its linearity*, it [...] *negatively* affects the miracle in its linearity, negating its single-stranded nature" (Welck

**32** "nicht die Tat [Objektebene], sondern die Erscheinung [Wirk- und Beobachterebene] göttlicher Dynamis [...] zum entscheidenden Kriterium erhoben wird."

**33** "Das religiöse Wunder ist, neben seiner existentiellen Funktion als Nothilfe, ein 'Schaustück', für die Sinne gemacht, ist rhetorisches Mittel Gottes zur Erregung von Aufmerksamkeit und Staunen, ist glanzvoller Ausweis seiner Allmacht und führt über das Staunen zur Bekehrung der Zweifler." In connection with this, Schierz speaks further of a "menschlichen Bedürfnis der Verifikation durch sinnliche Erfahrung" [human need for verification through sensory experience] (2007: 13).

1994: 62–63).[34] The ambiguity of a miracle forces an ambiguous narrating of the same. Further, Christian Welck speaks of the broken nature of the narrative structure and especially of the fact that this brokenness is to be interpreted as having a calculated effect on the reader (1994: 250–254). For Welck this ambivalence, disruption and brokenness is theologically productive. The reader who is repeatedly disturbed by the fractured narrative structure becomes a more careful, a more accurate reader,

> which enables him to identify the disruptive as an element of an innovative, peculiar literary context beyond the expected, through which a new, peculiar divine bearing towards people is made evident. From the narratively surprising factors, the reader can and should arrive at what is *for him* a surprising insight into the *universality* and thus also the *current relevance* of what has been represented. (Welck 1994: 253)[35]

Once again it is not the theological argument itself that is of interest, but the literary-theoretical and media-theoretical figure of argumentation: first, these permeate through the moments of ambivalence, uncertainty, disruption and fracture, and, second, these moments permeate the polysensory and multimedial-rhetorical sense of being seized. And it becomes apparent that the miraculous is not observable through rationalization and discourse, but through enduring its astonishing ambiguity.

To sharpen the argument, we can turn our attention to a much-discussed Bible passage – much-discussed because in this passage, more than anywhere else, the object level and the observer level correlate so closely, and because the observers are amazed and gripped to the point of fear. This is an *amplificatio* that concentrates and distills the previous considerations of miracles. In Luke 5.17–26 Jesus heals a paralytic and one reads:

> And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with *f e a r*, saying, We have seen **strange things** to day. (LK 5.26; my emphasis).
>
> καὶ *ἔκστασις* ἔλαβεν ἅπαντας καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεόν, καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν *φ ό β ο ὺ* λέγοντες ὅτι Εἴδομεν **παράδοξα** σήμερον.[36]

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**34** "Einschübe, Akzentuierungen und Nachträge wird [...] die Darstellung des Wunders in seiner *Geradlinigkeit beeinträchtigt*, die Einsträngigkeit aufgehoben."

**35** "das es ihm erlaubt, das Störende als Element eines neuartigen, eigentümlichen literarischen Zusammenhangs jenseits des erwarteten zu erkennen, durch welchen ihm ein neuartiges, eigentümliches Handeln Gottes gegenüber den Menschen vor Augen geführt wird. An erzählerisch überraschenden Zügen kann und soll der Leser zu der *für ihn* überraschenden Einsicht in die *Universalität* und so auch *Aktualität* des Dargestellten kommen."

**36** "Da *gerieten alle außer sich*; sie priesen Gott und sagten voller *F u r c h t:* Heute haben wir **etwas Unglaubliches** gesehen." (LK 5.26).

Significant here is, first of all, that we have a new term at the observer level, namely: ἔκστασις (*ekstasis*, ecstasy, to be beyond oneself, be utterly amazed, or even in a "trance"). This term appears in the Greek New Testament seven times and marks a significant increase over *θανμζω* (*thaumazō*), ἐθαμβήθησαν (*ethambēthēsan*) and also over ἐκπλήσσω (*ekplēssó*). *Ekstasis* is used, in addition to Luke 5.26, once again, this time with the striking translation "And they were astonished with a great astonishment" (Mk 5.42).[37] And yet, there is still greater *amplificatio*, as (*ekstasis*) is later increased to φόβοὺ (*phobou*, fear). At the observer level, thus, there is a complete, exorbitantly increased wonder, which is particularly emphasized through the doubling of the observer reaction. In Luke, the central position of being seized is a condition for the topic of forgiveness of sins, one that is so crucial for this story (Roose 2013: 563–564). Only in this extreme state and through this extreme state can the message of forgiveness of sins be conveyed.

Striking in Luke 5.26, however, is the emergence of the concept *tò* παράδοξον (*to paradoxon*; pl. τά παράδοξα [*ta paradoxa*]). This does not mark the observers' reaction but that to which they are reacting. We find ourselves at the object level; this is something that is "unerwartet bis 'unglaubwürdig, unvernünftig, paradox'" [unexpected, implausible, irrational, paradoxical] (Nanko 2001: 386). Karl-Heinrich Bieritz translates *parádoxa* with "Wunderdinge" [marvels] and Zimmermann opts for "Wundertaten" [miracles] (Bieritz 2007: 290; Zimmermann 2013: 19). In the King James Version it is "strange things," in the Einheitsübersetzung it is "etwas Unglaubliches" [something incredible] in Luther "seltsame Dinge" [unusual things], and in the Elberfelder Bibel "außerordentliche Dinge" [extraordinary things].[38] As with the use of the word τά παράδοξα in the New Testament, this forced merging of the observer and object levels is unique, appearing but once, namely, in the above description of healing the paralytic (Lk 5.26).

The lexical ambiguity of the miracle concept described here should not be read as a mere history of terms and definitions. Rather, this ambiguity makes

**37** This is from the miracle story about Jairus's daughter and the bleeding woman. At Bible Study Tool there is, for ἔκστασις, also the lovely translation "a throwing of the mind out of its normal state, alienation of mind." (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/ekstasis.html>). – In the Acts of the Apostles, meanwhile, *ekstasis* is translated three times as "trance" (10.10, 11.5, 22.17); in both the Einheitsübersetzung and in Luther it is translated as "Verzückung").

**38** In addition to the "strange things" of the King James Version, other English translations of τά παράδοξα are things that are "remarkable," "unimaginable," "extraordinary," "wonderful," "marvellous," "incredible," "amazing" and "unusual."

it evident how unusual events call for discourse, how unusual events give rise to religious and epistemological upheavals, and how, all told, the always precarious theoretical relationship between the observer and the object level is negotiable. The difficulty of placing the concept of the miracle into a clear category points to epistemological, theological, and disciplinary fault lines. We must also consider whether this difficulty is not linked with the fact that here we have to discuss the fundamental problem of which theoretical and discursive means are available to us when we are faced with phenomena that, because of their exceptionality, seem to undermine theory and discourse alike. The problems that the concept of the miracle imposes on balancing the observer and object levels go together in such a way that the concept of the miraculous fundamentally deconstructs the distinction between the object and observer levels, and thus also calls into question the distinctions between discourse and that which is beyond discourse.

## 3 Non-explanations of the non-explainable

For a long time the theology of miracles, which here primarily means the Protestant direction that was stamped by the enlightened rationalist eighteenth century, was an explanatory theology. The inexplicable, the supernatural, and the miraculous were collectively explained away through reason, examples being "accommodation theory" (Johann Salomo Semler [1725 – 91]), demythologizing (Johann Gottfried Eichhorn [1753 – 1827], Johann Philipp Gabler [1753 – 1826], David Friedrich Strauss [1808 – 1874] or Rudolf Bultmann [1884 – 1976]), form-critical analysis (Gerd Theisse [*1943]), or the redaction criticism approach (Udo Schnelle [*1952]).[39] All of these approaches have one thing in common: they explain away the inexplicable of that which cannot be explained; they use reason to domesticate the exceptionality and the impossibility of miracles. Referring to such miracle text exegeses, Zimmermann speaks pointedly of an "Ent-Wunderung," a doing away with the miraculous (Zimmermann 2013: 12). Especially in the past two decades, however, there has been a growing trend to once again take miracles seriously as miracles, and to regard the rhetorically and narratively staged inexplicable in miracle *texts* as a category of knowledge. It is to this trend that I now turn my attention.

**39** See Zimmermann (2011) and Alkier's: "Jenseits von Enthmythologisierung und Rehistorisierung" (1998).

As we have seen in the story about Jesus healing the paralytic, the witnesses to the miracle are beyond themselves with fear and astonishment. They marvel, because they have been utterly surprised by the unexpected event. This gives rise to moments of fascination and moments of terror, fear, or of an anxiety without directionality. There is, in the face of the miraculous a sense of "Schauder," of shuddering awe (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 62). As the Catholic priest and theologian Romano Guardini writes, "A miracle is a process that draws attention to the unusual. This unusualness, however, [is] meant in a radical sense: as something that stands out from everything that is of this world, something other than all that is earthly and natural" (1959: 12).[40] The miracle arouses terror because it is "completely different," and its occurrence is something "that we cannot even begin to understand" (Englisch 2006: 44).[41] For Rudolf Otto, miracles are an "'indirektes Ausdrucksmittel' und Bestandteil des Numinosen" ["indirect modes" and "elements of the numinous"] (Geppert and Kössler 2011: 16, note 15),[42] and the numinous, as a shapeless divine presence, is severed from any connection to language, reality, and human sense. It can neither be proven nor disproven. Only in the mode of *Mysterium tremendum* (awe, fear) or of *Mysterium fascinosum* (attraction) can the miraculous be experienced, can it be lived. As Otto writes, the miracle gives rise to this experiencing because:

> Nothing can be found in all the world of "natural" feelings bearing so immediate an analogy [...] to the religious consciousness of ineffable, unutterable mystery, the "absolute other," as the incomprehensible, unwonted, enigmatic thing, in whatever place or guise it may confront us. (Otto 1958: 63)[43]

As a result, the individual is transcended by means of the overwhelming formless divine that is not understood. Crucial is that the numinous, being an incom-

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**40** "Wunder ist ein Vorgang, der auf Ungewöhnliches aufmerksam macht. Diese Ungewöhnlichkeit aber [ist] in einem radikalen Sinn gemeint: als etwas, das sich aus allem Welthaften heraushebt; anders ist, als alles Irdisch-Natürliche." In Guardini this "completely other" is God, who is independent of the world (i. e. "der Welt gegenüber unabhängig[] Gott[]") (1959: 12). Experiencing a miracle leads one to a "überweltliche Wirklichkeit" [transcendent reality] (Guardini 1959: 17).

**41** "die wir nicht einmal im Ansatz verstehen können."

**42** The English translation is taken from John W. Harvey's translation of Otto's Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen.

**43** "Denn Nichts kann im natürlichen Bereiche der Gefühle gefunden werden was zu dem religiösen Gefühle des Unsagbaren Unaussprechlichen schlechthin Andern Geheimnisvollen eine so unmittelbare [...] Entsprechung hat wie das Unverstandene Ungewohnte Rätselhafte, wo und wie es uns immer aufstoßen mag." (Otto 2004: 83).

mensurably completely other, constitutively poses the question of discourse in recognizing and theorizing the numinous. That is why the theologian Karl-Heinrich Bieritz binds the matter of miracles to the distinction sense/nonsense or meaning/non-meaning. For him, incommensurable events, precisely because they are designated as miracles, become a part of the interpreted world, since otherwise they would be beyond perception. As Bieritz writes, "no miracle, however strange, however powerful it may be, can truly save, can truly heal, can truly redeem. Miracles are signs that point to the mysterious. They are not the mysterious itself" (Bieritz 2007: 299).[44] By understanding the miracle as the semiotization of something that fundamentally cannot be semiotized, Bieritz adds yet another level to those of object and observer. With that, however, the miracle is not rendered impotent by being made into a sign, a visible referential moment. Rather, visible in the referential power of the miracle is not only the reference but also that which is invisible, the mysteriousness to which the miracle can, by definition, only inadequately refer. That is why Bieritz understands miracles as phenomena of power. One experiences their completely strange power (in spite of the semiotization) and, in the mode of the inexplicable, permanently careens – without being able to opt for either side – between sense and non-sense, between meaning and non-meaning. Miracles are therefore "border phenomena": "Their location is neither in this or that world, but, as it were, on the border itself, a border that they both mark and cross" (2007: 291).[45] Ulrich Nanko puts forth a very similar argument when he writes, "the high information value of the 'unexpected' makes [the miracle] a convenient signifier for various types of signifieds, thus, an ideal 'sign'" (Nanko 2001: 386).[46] Crucial in this context is that the signifier will never cover the signified and that the miracle will always live by constitutively perpetuating the difference between the signifier and the signified. In this sense, a miracle could be read as a permanent deferral because the power behind it – the numinous, God, the Holy Spirit – can be marked as the

**44** "Kein Wunder, und sei es noch so fremd, noch so gewaltig, kann wirklich erretten, kann wirklich heilen, kann wirklich erlösen. Wunder sind Zeichen, die auf das Geheimnis weisen. Das Geheimnis selbst sind sie nicht." The very language Bieritz employs points to the difference between "miracle" as a term or designation and miracle as a "ganz und gar fremden Welt" [an utterly strange world], that is, as ununamable concept (2007: 294).

**45** "Ihren Ort haben sie nicht in dieser oder jener Welt, sondern gleichsam auf der Grenze selbst, einer Grenze, die sie zugleich markieren wie überschreiten." Consequently, miracles have metaleptic characteristics. See also Bieritz (2007: 301).

**46** "Der hohe Informationswert des 'Unerwarteten' macht es [das Wunder] zum geeigneten Bedeutungsträger für Signifikate verschiedenster Art, also zum idealen 'Zeichen.'"

difference between meaning and non-meaning, and can never be reduced to either a specific strange message or to kerygmatic message.

The distinction between meaning and non-meaning, however, is not so easy to contain. Indeed, one can, in the manner of Niklas Luhmann, apprehend this distinction by arguing that non-meaning must always be meaningful. As Urs Stäheli writes in a commentary on Luhmann, "The negation of meaning can only be, in turn, a sensible operation and it thus reproduces the meaning it negates" (2000: 69).[47] Luhmann himself states, "Any attempt to negate meaning on the whole would presuppose meaning. [...] A muddle of objects is never meaningless. A pile of rubble, for example, is immediately recognizable as such [...]" (1995: 62).[48] Rather than deconstructing meaning, the sensible negation of meaning increases the complexity of systems, thereby increasing the complexity of meaning (Stäheli 2000: 73). Although Luhmann also observes moments of non-meaning, these moments are always overarched by meaning or quickly extinguished:

> But everything that can be perceived and processed in the world of meaning systems must assume the form of meaning; otherwise, it remains a momentary impulse, an obscure mood, or even a crude shock without connectivity, communicability, or effect within the system. (Luhmann 1995: 63)[49]

Stäheli, in contrast, attempts in his deconstructive reading of systems theory to comprehend seriously the "crude shock" as a moment of non-meaning in theoretical terms, while also saving it as a moment of the incomprehensible. He conceives of non-meaning as a "transgression that has freed itself from the dialectic sublation and does not keep or potentialize the exceeded, but removes and displaces the meaning" (Stäheli 2000: 76).[50] However, this in no way entails a "neg-

**47** "Die Negation von Sinn kann nur eine wiederum sinnvolle Operation sein und reproduziert so den von ihr negierten Sinn."

**48** Translated by John Bednarz, Jr. and Dirk Baecker. The original reads: "Jeder Anlauf zur Negation von Sinn überhaupt würde also Sinn wieder voraussetzen. [...] Ein Durcheinanderbringen von Objekten ist niemals sinnlos, ein Trümmerhaufen zum Beispiel ist sofort als solcher erkennbar." (Luhmann 1984: 96–97).

**49** "Aber alles, was in der Welt der Sinnsysteme rezipiert und bearbeitet werden kann, muß diese Form von Sinn annehmen; sonst bleibt es momenthafter Impuls, dunkle Stimmung oder auch greller Schreck ohne Verknüpfbarkeit, ohne Kommunikabilität, ohne Effekt im System." (Luhmann 1984: 98) See also Luhmann (2013: 1–35) for a conceptual consideration that is specifically connected to religion.

**50** "Transgression [zu denken], die sich von der dialektischen Aufhebung befreit hat und das Überschrittene nicht beibehält oder potentialisiert, sondern den Sinn entrückt und verrückt."

ativer Essentialismus des Nicht-Sinns" [a negative essentialism of non-meaning] and there is no location of non-meaning, no form of non-meaning, no substance of non-meaning; rather, moments of non-meaning surface whenever they are "(mis)understood" in their own "impossibility" (Stäheli 2000: 74).[51] The relationship between meaning and non-meaning can only be detected through a misreading and therefore, in Derrida's phrasing, the "nonmeaning [...] keeps itself beyond the opposition of the positive and the negative" (Derrida 2001: 345).

I would now like to read miracles – which can also be interpreted with a "crude shock," as a crude disruption and as sudden interruptions of the impossible into systems of knowledge and meaning – as paradigmatic moments for negotiating meaning and non-meaning. I approach this in a strictly *formal-syntactic* sense, since miracles assume this paradigmatic function *regardless of whether one believes in them or not*, whether one sees them as an evocation of the numinous (*miracula*), whether one considers them as a natural wonder (*mirabilia*), or whether one argues along Catholic or Protestant lines. Because miracles, as ambiguous moments, radically arouse wonder and astonishment, because they radically confuse, put forth disrupting and inexplicable events, they transgress existing orders. Their "anarchic quality" radically confuses the well-honed relations between meaning and non-meaning, between the object level and the metalevel, between event and discourse, between experience and language. As anarchic moments they are border phenomena that have no antonym but, instead, mark, move, and cross the very border. Also, as anarchic moments, they can undermine orders in the service of laying bare structural conditions, while also bringing about new orders. I read miracles as paradigmatic moments that epitomize the break (the non-meaning) *and* the ordering and merging (the meaning).

It is mainly thanks to Ruben Zimmermann that the miraculous in wonders and marvels can again receive its due. In his works he emphasizes that "we may once again wonder," that it is not the explicability of the miraculous but the potential for wonder, those moments of being astonished beyond measure, and the inexplicable that should be the focus of the miraculous.[52] Zimmermann provides no ontological arguments in this regard, for he is not concerned with the issue of whether or not miracles are possible. Instead, as surprising as it may be for a theologian, he adopts what he explicitly calls a literary studies position. In a philological reading it becomes evident that the early Christian mira-

**51** "Sinn muss in Beziehung zu seiner eigenen Unmöglichkeit (miß-)verstanden werden warden [...]" (Stäheli 2000: 74).

**52** See especially Zimmermann (2012, 2013: 12–18 and 30–49) In the following section I argue along the lines of Zimmerman and I do not cite every single argument inspired by his work.

cle stories linguistically and performatively correlate extraordinary events (the acts of Jesus) with astonishment, being seized, terror, and the sensory. There is a staging, a putting on display of the immense and moving effect the miracles have on the observers. This especially intensive experiential effect, which is experienced also physically, is the focal point of the texts. The point of these texts is not to accommodate Jesus's miracles to the daily reality and the world view of the observers, and neither is it to use *logos* to bring them closer to the doctrine of Jesus or to present the miracle worker Jesus with the help of unusual events; the point is to place the observers in an extreme state, to evoke an intense experience that then, precisely on account of its intensity, can be the basis for the healing power of miracles, and at least hold out the prospect of an existential experience. The mode of radical sensory intensity (ἔκστασις), which is increased to the point of dread (φόβοὺ), receives another *amplificatio* in the foregrounding of "touching." Touching correlates to the intensive sensory aspects of astonishment and terror, and this correlation marks the nucleus of the New Testament miracle stories: "According to this thesis, the text should be understood as a miracle text insofar as it represents an action or an event as perceivable through the senses and concrete, while emphasizing the breaching of normality and of the expectable. (Zimmermann 2013: 12–13)[53] The textual intention of the miracle story is, thus, not mediation but disruption or disturbance. The "abnormal" events astonish the observers beyond measure, and it is here that the textually intentional vanishing point lies. Zimmermann's examples are Mark 2.12 ("We never saw it on this fashion") and Matthew 9.33 ("and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel"). Luke 5.26, as we have seen, has them "amazed" by things previously unseen ("strange things"; παράδοξα). By converging extreme, hopeless situations (being sick, possessed, dead) with exorbitant reactions ("beyond measure" or "beside oneself") and incredible acts (healing, etc.), the texts reinforce the miraculous, notes Zimmermann. Amplification of effect is the goal of these narrative elements:

> Considered narratologically, this involves retarding elements that, though they deliberately slow down and even disrupt the course of action, are nevertheless effective: readers should grasp that something is being told that breaches normality. Clearly, these texts should have "hair-raisingly miraculous" and "sensational" effects. (Zimmermann 2013: 13)[54]

**53** "Der Text möchte, so die These, als Wundertext insofern verstanden werden, als er eine Handlung bzw. ein Ereignis als sinnlich wahrnehmbar und konkret darstellt und dabei das Durchbrechen der Normalität und des Erwartbaren betont."

**54** "Narratologisch betrachtet geht es hierbei um retardierende Elemente, die ganz bewusst den Handlungsablauf verzögern und sogar Stören, aber damit ihre Wirkung nicht verfehlen: Die Leser und Leserinnen sollen begreifen, dass hier etwas erzählt wird, das die Normalität durch-

The miracle texts, therefore, fundamentally concern themselves with effects and act out the various possibilities of sensational-sensory experience. The divine message is, so to speak, so exorbitant that it cannot simply be explained, announced or reported, which is why an exceptional bodily and intellectual state must be created so that God's exorbitance and Christ's holiness can, rather than being understood, be experienced in a moment of intensity. It is also for this reason that in some stories there is even an amplification of the miraculous (from amazement, to astonishment "beyond measure," to fear). Nevertheless, astonishment and fear do not lead to a blinded staring, for, rather than being a simple arresting of sense and understanding, here astonishment, being beside oneself and fear combine to serve as a juncture for combining sensory aspects and sense; the meaning of miracles lies in the sensory aspect of experiencing them. When the sensory is involved, it is not only a matter of divine presence but also a paradoxical situation: the divine message should nevertheless be, for all the astonishment and awe, "understood" through this disruption. Here, sense and sensory aspects, meaning and presence, do not stand in opposition; rather, the adequate mode for relating revelatory knowledge is through the senses.[55] This paradoxical aspect is not always necessary – after all, the vast majority of the New Testament does not consist of miracle stories – and yet, again and again, it becomes necessary. In this sense I follow Vanessa Offen in interpreting the miraculous as a junction of two "theologies." On the one hand there is the idea of grounding faith in *logos* (and here Offen refers to Benedict XVI's exegeses of John and Paul); on the other, Offen brings Alain Badiou into play, who reads Paul completely differently, namely, through the lens of experience as "pure event" (Otten 2011: 28): "One has to start from the event as such, which is acosmic and illegal, refusing integration into any totality and signaling nothing."[56] And if we, additionally, address this referring to *logos* and "nothing"

bricht. Offenbar sollen diese Texte gerade 'haarsträubend mirakulös' und 'sensationell' [...] wirken."

**55** Similarly, Matuschek: "The goal is not to overcome the initial amazement, for then one would know how it conducts itself; rather [the goal is] to increase astonishment as devotion to human reason before the inexplicable. The intensity of the *admiration* becomes a measure for recognition in so far as it measures how much of God's greatness one is able to see." ("Das Ziel ist nicht die Überwindung anfänglicher Verwunderung, weil man dann wüßte, wie es sich verhält, sondern die Steigerung des Staunens als Devotion der menschlichen Vernunft vor dem Unerklärlichen. Die Intensität der *admiratio* wird zum Maß der Erkenntnis, insofern sich diese dadurch bemißt, wieviel von der Größe Gottes man zu sehen fähig ist.) (Matuschek 1991: 64).

**56** This is Ray Brassier's translation (Badiou 2003: 42) of the sentence Offen quotes. We will recall that Ulrich Nanko explained the miraculous on the basis of the "high information value of

in miracle *stories*, miracle *texts*, miracles, and *literature*, then we are always concerned with the media-induced presentation of "pure events" which, in their presentation, become moments that must also be interpreted exactly because they have been read *and* seen.

Precisely in this respect, too, is it important to take Zimmermann's philologically observations seriously. It is significant that the narrative strategy – since his is a narratological argument – proceeds not through sober reporting. Rather, "the narrated amazement at the story-level in the act of reading jumps over to the reader" (Zimmermann 2013: 14).[57] Fear beyond measure, astonishment and terror are made double, *histoire* and *discours* are so closely related to each other that also those reading can marvel utterly; thereby the extraordinary, in its enigmatic essence, is presented as something inescapably miraculous and thus an inexplicable event. Readers cannot assume discursive distance, for they too are drawn into the miraculous occurrence.

This constellation is dependent on the parameters of narrating and not on the ontological question of whether or not miracles can exist. Miracle stories tell, they do not lay out an argument, and the sensory knowledge miracles kindle is therefore conditioned by the textual constellations of the narration. It has no text-independent, and thus also no media-independent, no immediate, "being" in the world. As Zimmermann summarizes:

> What is narrated here should not be accommodated, made rationally plausible or palpably *relativized* in terms of history of religion. It should trigger fear and terror, give rise to irritations and questions also in the reader [...]. It should call into question precisely the known, the rational and the plausible. This uncertainty and fear must in no way be downplayed or rendered exegetically docile. But neither is this a fear that lames or makes one doubt. It is productive and effective and ultimately leads to knowledge. It calls for a "heuristics of fear" (Zimmermann 2013: 15)[58]

And a few pages later:

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the 'unexpected'", meaning that a miracle becomes a "convenient signifier for various types of signifieds, thus, an ideal 'sign'" – now as a "sign of nothing," now as a "sign of everything."

**57** "die erzählte Verwunderung von der Ebene der story im Akt des Lesens auf den Lesenden überspring[en]."

**58** "Was hier erzählt wird, soll nicht religionsgeschichtlich angepasst, rational plausibilisiert oder bildlich *relativiert* werden. Es soll Furcht und Schrecken auslösen, beim Lesenden selbst Irritationen und Fragen hervorrufen [...]. Es soll gerade Bekanntes, Rationales und Plausibles in Frage gestellt werden. Diese Verunsicherung und Furcht darf keineswegs heruntergespielt oder exegetisch gefügig gemacht werden. Sie ist aber auch keine Furcht, die lähmt oder verzweifeln lässt. Sie ist produktiv und wirksam und führt letztlich zur Erkenntnis. Sie befördert eine 'Heuristik der Furcht'."

> the narrative [is] targeted at action and reception and it fulfils a specific function for the *recipient*, which includes both cognitive and affective aspects [...]: Those reading are incorporated into a process that begins with irritation and uncertainty and can entail a change in knowledge and behavior. In any case, through the process of a refigured reading, they are invited to acquire a (new) "narrative identity" (Ricœr [...]). (Zimmermann 2013: 32)[59]

Zimmermann's philological theology of miracles provides us with the crucial background for our perspectives, since it shows that miracle stories are intentionally ambiguous, that they deliberately irritate, disrupt, disturb, and unsettle, thereby calling into question concepts of the world. Also, because astonishment, terror, and the incredible events are left ambivalent, they implement an epistemological mode that, instead of the cultural technology of logocentric comprehension, holds forth the cultural technology of ambiguous and sensory recognition.[60] Miracle stories deliver miracles to us that should be *experienced* as incomprehensible moments and *understood* as incomprehensible moments. In such a way, miracles function like art or, vice versa, art functions like miracles. Art and miracles correlate in moments of sensory recognition, intensity of experience, ambiguity, irritation, astonishment and terrors as media of experience and of understanding as well as – and because of this – in the tearing down of old orders, and showing of new possibilities of order, in trying out alternative, hard-to-integrate models of reality.[61] And yet art and literature are not miracles, just as miracles are not art or literature!

And in that case miracles cannot be interpreted in the surprising way that Michel de Certeau reads the miraculous, namely as an "act of showing" that merely reinforces "the Church representation" (Certeau 1995: 87). Reinforces because, as an "act of showing," the miracle is "a real modification of man's expe-

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**59** "die Erzählung [ist] auf Wirkung und Rezeption ausgerichtet und erfüllt eine spezifische Funktion für den *Rezipienten*, die kognitive wie auch affektive Aspekte einschließt [...]: Die Lesenden werden in einen Prozess hineingenommen, der mit Irritation und Verunsicherung beginnt und zu einer Erkenntnis- oder Verhaltensänderung gelangen kann. In jedem Fall aber werden sie im Prozess des refigurierenden Lesens eingeladen, eine (neue) 'narrative Identität' ([...]) zu erlangen." That miracle stories are written into the New Testament text as "Irritationen, Abweichungen" [irritations, deviations] and "Brüche" [ruptures] is Alkier's argument (1998: 30, see also 38).

**60** In the context of Medieval miracle *narratives*, Spangenberg speaks of an "ambivalent alterity of the texts" as well as of "leaps and paradoxes" "Sprüngen und Paradoxien" (1987: 9). It appears that the narrative and logical structure of texts that relate miracles have a tendency towards leaps and paradoxes precisely because they are reporting miracles, that is, ambiguous moments.

**61** Tyradellis has established similar correlations between miracles and art (2011: 18), as have Schierz (2007) and Schawelka (2007).

rience: vision slowly invaded the previous domain of touch or of hearing" (Certeau 1995: 89).[62] As we have seen, touch plays a crucial role in miracles, just as the entire polysensory apparatus and the entire narratological constellation plays a crucial role, which entails that by no means can one relegate miracles to being facile instruments of Church representation. The Church may well be tempted to put them to such use, but the aesthetic and epistemological ambiguity of the miracle (at both the object and the observer levels) can never be controlled. The miracle simultaneously reinforces and weakens Church representation. It reinforces representation when miracles are interpreted as acts of a transcendent God, but it weakens representation because affects (astonishment, awe, and fear) and media (miracle stories and reports of miracles) are beyond what can be controlled.[63]

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**62** Here de Certeau is writing about the period 1350–1450, for which his statement may be valid in terms of painting, optics and cartography; however, the miracle's ambivalent position cannot be adequately grasped.

**63** For an argument similar only in its approach, see Tyradellis's "Pfingsten und Babel" (2011: 64–65). See also Pfaller (2011: 237), who provides a specific, albeit a very generalizing, counterargument to de Certeau: "The more institutionalized religions are, and the more they are based on extensive apparatuses – with professional functionaries in established hierarchies – the more they require regular processes, orderly official channels and reliable 'liturgical' forms of enforcement. In that case, miracles have a destabilizing and disruptive effect. [...] A religion that is dependent on miracles, has, just like an economy that requires miracles, found itself in a deep crisis." ("Je institutionalisierter Religionen sind, je mehr sie auf umfangreichen Apparaten beruhen – mit professionellen Funktionären in festgelegten Hierarchien – , desto mehr benötigen sie auch regelmäßige Abläufe, geordnete Amtswege und verlässliche 'liturgische' Vollzugsformen. Wunder wirken da meist destabilisierend und Störend. [...] Eine Religion, die auf Wunder angewiesen ist, befindet sich, genau wie einer Wirtschaft, die Wunder braucht, in einer tiefen Krise.")

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Lars Koch, Tobias Nanz, and Johannes Pause

# Imagined Scenarios of Disruption

## A Concept

When in the course of a press conference in February 2002 US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explained the differences between "known knowns," "known unknowns," and "unknown unknowns," his peculiar turns of phrase met with derision worldwide. In reality, however, Rumsfeld had disclosed central concepts of the political discourse of security, which describe three different types and manifestations of disruptive incidents. A disruptive incident that occurs in the domain of politics and society, for example, is initially defined as an interruption of an empirical regularity or of a normal expectation, which, depending on the degree of its severity, either returns to normal without outside intervention or requires an additional effort on the part of society to deal with it and absorb it (Koch and Petersen 2011: 9). Intended as an appraisal of the security situation in the wake of 11 September 2001, Rumsfeld's triad differentiates between the kinds of threat potential linked to disruption and also represents three historically successive but now overlapping paradigms of society's imagined dangers and its defenses against them. Ulrich Bröckling assigns the concepts of "hygiene," "immunization," and "precaution" to these apparatuses, thus selecting designations that are partly rooted in medical discourse and which, over the course of time and in the wake of a metaphorical transference, have also served to guide the measures taken in the politics of security (Bröckling 2012).

Following on from this historicization, we attempt to derive a theoretical approach from the fourth notion, "unknown knowns," which revealingly enough Rumsfeld does not mention, and which enables us to conceptualize the connection between imagination and the discourse of security. In order to accomplish this, we combine research on the *future as catastrophe* (Horn 2014), as the latter figures in the popular imagination, with social and political analyses of historical as well as contemporary cultural techniques of security. In this way, the social role of the imagination and emotions – which is at best implicitly dealt with in sociological approaches to the production of security – is placed at the center of our deliberations. Our thesis is that modern societies are organized by historically varying "dominant fictions" of disruption (Silverman 1992: 15 – 51) and by the affective-political mechanisms and strategies of perceptual configuration that are bound up with them.

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In the first part of the article, we briefly explain Rumsfeld's triad, in order to elaborate on his omission, i.e. the security policy aspects of the "unknown knowns." The subsequent section then deals with the role of imagined scenarios of disruption, which are relevant to both older apparatuses of security and to the "unknown knowns" in the paradigm of *precaution*. In the third section, we present a model that makes it possible to lend plausibility to the importance of imagination and emotions in the self-regulation of society, which have become not just quantitatively but also qualitatively more important within this contemporary paradigm. For in order to understand why imagined scenarios play such an important a role in the discourse of security, one needs to examine the affective dimension of imagined disruptions. Lastly, we work out a typology of disruptive events, which differentiates between disruptions involving predetermined breaking points [*Sollbruchstörungen*], adaptive disruptions [*adaptive Störungen*] and disruptions caused by (system) overload [*Überlastungsstörungen*].

## 1 Unknown knowns

Referring to Philipp Sarasin (2001), Bröckling shows that in the second half of the nineteenth century, under the paradigm of "hygiene," known and in principle combatable dangers ("known knowns"), whether internal or external to the "homogenous body" of society, were identified, then isolated or neutralized in order to prevent a possible spread or "contagion." Within the framework of this paradigm, any deviation from a norm became a symptom of a social infection, the pathogen of which had to be eliminated from the social body in order to restore healthy stability. Social hygiene was therefore the responsibility of State institutions, which kept social life under close observation. By contrast, in the age of "immunization," which began with cybernetic thinking in the twentieth century, the adversary takes the form of a "known unknown." In this case, while the dominant figures of disruption are known, at least on the basis of their destructive potency, they nevertheless remain invisible as enemies, becoming manifest above all in probability calculations and in an economy oriented towards risk management. Media devoted to identification, to detection and tracking down, but also literature and films, all work together here in the process of compiling the "manifestations of enmity" (Blumentrath 2014: 16).

In this apparatus, those who constitute a danger to society – criminals, terrorists, rampage killers – are always present and factored in. As "abnormals" (Foucault 2003), they play a role in the constitution of normality, thus they are simultaneously a requisite condition of society, they have to be taken into ac-

count, and can therefore no longer simply be isolated and directly combated as foreign bodies coming from the outside, as they were in the age of hygiene:

> A range of theoretical perspectives – not only psychoanalytic, but also discourse-theoretical and even legal perspectives – make it possible to define such figures of exclusion not as the absolute other of these systems of order, but rather as their product. As such, they remain bound to the systems but, since they are subject to exclusion [...], they thus also potentially constitute a disruption and a threat to order. (Krasmann 2009: 140)

Society has to "vaccinate" itself against the enduring danger situation and its tangible and intangible agents (Esposito 2011, referring to Foucault). It does this by regulating the supply and management of disruptive stimuli on the social as well as the individual level, thus allowing the social body to develop tolerance to, and defenses against, danger situations and to learn to live with them. "Regulation" thus complements "regimentation," since security can no longer be ensured by the State alone. Rather, citizens are now induced to develop resilience themselves, via cybernetic mechanisms: "The 'activating State' releases its citizens from the 'safety net' of being cared for into the freedom of self-care and expects them to assume responsibility for managing their own life-risks." (Bröckling 2012: 99)

According to Bröckling, this immunization-oriented basic disposition of the modern State has been supplemented by a third security policy apparatus in recent decades, namely the paradigm of "precaution." This paradigm further strengthens the supposition that the source of danger is fundamentally obscure and is thus an epistemological problem, and at the same time re-establishes the State as a potent agent. In the face of new wars and asymmetrical constellations of enemies, society now faces the diffuse threat of the "unknown unknowns" that Rumsfeld invoked in order to legitimize the Iraq war. With the omnipresence of a fully indeterminate danger, which is no longer system-immanent but rather always imagined as a system-threatening, "ultimate MCA" (maximum credible accident), the necessity arises to be proactive and to ward off potential dangers before they emerge. *Precaution* endeavors to ensure that a dangerous future does not turn into a future danger. Security policy is determined by events that are not statistically ascertainable but in principle possible: the calculation of probability, which is based on experience and serves to guide expectation via a corresponding prognosis, is replaced by the scenario technique, which is increasingly marked by a catastrophic imaginary. This technique possesses a high level of political effectiveness even when it generates very unlikely or even completely fantastic visions of the future. For when it has become undecidable just what form the coming disaster will take, any kind of envisaged threat becomes an occasion for preventive action:

> Since we don't know what the threats look like against which we want to protect ourselves – the "sleeper" who lives completely inconspicuously and is planning an assassination; the unknown virus that triggers a pandemic and against which there is no effective vaccine – precaution consists first of all in imagining all possible threats, in the worst possible form. Instead of preventive defense against risks, risks are invented in a hyper-preventive fashion [...]. The activism of the precautionists generates what it wants to combat [...]. (Bröckling 2012: 101)

In these observations from Bröckling, which identify a constitutive blank space at the center of contemporary threat assessments, it becomes clear that imagined scenarios as well as socially produced emotions are of major importance for the contemporary discourse of security policy. The perpetual state of alarm characteristic of the regime of precaution (Ewald 2002) can only be produced by means of fictional scenarios that make it possible to anticipate and deal with the future by delineating danger situations *as if* they had already happened and actually been experienced. And far from being exclusive to think tanks and military or political command centers, these scenarios are now primarily developed in the popular mass media – in cinema and television, in computer games and internet forums, as well as in literary texts.

By presenting imagined threat scenarios in a concrete form, cinematic blockbusters and literary best-sellers are thus far more than pure entertainment. To the extent that it prepares society for possible disruptions and upheavals, popular culture becomes an interdiscursive agency of symbolic crystallization, of emotional intensification and the repercussive circulation of imagined threats. Using Richard Grusin's concept of "pre-mediation" as an additional point of reference, it can be said that in a world that is globalized and interconnected through the media, possible future scenarios are always anticipated and worked through in the mass media before the actual event occurs at all. In order to forestall the shock effect that live images of disasters can trigger, these disasters are played out in the mode of fiction before they become real or even probable (Grusin 2010: 38, 45). Leading the way, popular culture invents spectacular images and action plans for a future in which a disaster is unfolding or has already occurred. These imagined scenarios become politically effective because they produce communicative redundancy through their symbolic proliferation, they reduce complexity and, via the mode of narrative identification, they contribute to the establishment and consolidation of certain emotional regimes. Cultural scripts of disruption thus create a "reservoir of awareness" (Hartmann and Murawska 2015: 8), which – analogous to cultural and communicative memory – the individual and the social phantasy draws on to create images of the future, in which the disaster of the *diegetic present* could only come to pass because it was not foreseen and thus not prevented. In the twenty-first century, therefore,

popular fictions are of increasing social importance: they become central generators of a political imaginary, signaling urgency and justifying direct political action, and are thereby able to exert a strong influence on the occurrence of actual disruptive events and the way they are handled (Holm 2012).

It is interesting to note that the imagined scenarios of disruption with implications for security policy are subject to certain discursive conditions of possibility. The latter do not have their origin solely in the specialized discourse of security, but rather in a broader, interdiscursive milieu, a more exact profile of which can be brought to light by an analysis of pop-cultural productions. In order to designate these modalities of worldmaking – whose primary task is to provide a collectively shared version of reality with consistency – , Slavoj Žižek has proposed a fourth term, one that Rumsfeld neglects to mention, even though it is a self-evident constituent of his classification scheme:

> What Rumsfeld forgot to add was the crucial fourth term: the "unknown knowns," the things we don't know that we know – which is precisely the Freudian unconscious, the "knowledge which doesn't know itself," as the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) used to say. [...] "Unknown knowns" are the privileged topic of philosophy – they form the transcendental horizon, or frame, of our experience of reality. (Žižek 2014: 11)

In the context of the discussion on security policies, the "unknown known" thus refers to the implicit knowledge circulating in society about the instability of normality, the knowledge that also structures the ongoing attempts to think beyond the limits of the imaginable, in the direction of unpredictable disasters. This knowledge remains latent, but precisely because it is latent, serving as a framework for collective conceptions of reality, it provides evidence and plausibility for specific, professedly hegemonic statements about the world and its future. This latent knowledge draws its sustenance to a large degree from the storehouse of images and narratives characteristic of contemporary fantasies of disaster (Sontag 1968), a storehouse that is continually brought up to date in the quite different media formats and narrative configurations of popular culture. As modern(ized) versions of a constitutive externality, the contents of this storehouse are bound up with social conceptions of normality, which construct society as a stable entity and thus form the implicit impetus behind all security policy measures – an impetus which is not, however, itself the object of discursive problematization.

## 2 The political and emotional work carried out by fictions of disruption: anxiety [*Angst*] and fear [*Furcht*]

To illustrate the specificity of imagined scenarios of disruption situated between the poles of security and danger in present-day society, it is worthwhile to take a look at the forms of the imaginary that were characteristic of older security apparatuses. In a lecture on the history of governmentality, in which Michel Foucault describes the emergence of security apparatuses in the eighteenth century, the rules and regulations of the law, of disciplines and finally of security are distinguished from one another and differentiated with regard to their governmental techniques (Foucault 2007: 67–71). The law – the oldest of the three systems in question and which historically was established well before the regime of hygiene – , operates with a code of the permitted and the forbidden, and specifies precisely what one must refrain from doing. It thus argues negatively and therefore focuses on social disorder, using the latter to develop a specific social order. For this purpose, it makes use of the imaginary, precisely defining the things and deeds that are permitted and forbidden. According to Foucault, the disciplines also function in the mode of the permitted and the forbidden, but have a special focus on what is permitted and thus regulate in fine detail the things and acts which they impose on individuals. In this way, disciplines have a complementary, enhancing effect on everyday life: a discipline turns out to be a productive power when – if one thinks of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1995: 200–203; Bublitz 2010: 71) – policing observers are imagined for certain activities, thereby encouraging self-discipline in those under observation, and thus increasing productivity, to take just one example. Imagined scenarios of collectively binding behavioral standards that are subject to continual scrutiny can be effectively implemented in social reality and to a certain extent such scenarios provide the yardstick by which reality is to be measured.

Beginning in the early modern period, well before the modern conjuncture of the security policy paradigm, the imaginary played a central role in society's orientation towards the future (Hölscher 1999). Now, in the age of security technology, political processes are focused directly on reality: they take the latter as a basis and provide instruments which make it possible to rectify undesirable situations. The security apparatus, which spreads out centrifugally and thus encompasses all social spheres, carries out a permanent empirical inventory of the populace, the economy or other social spheres, in order to be able to intervene in the event of an emergency or a disruptive incident. In contrast to the dis-

ciplines, this does not depend on a pre-established norm, with which reality would then be brought into line; rather, the norm is constructed flexibly, in the course of observing social reality, and then attempts to influence it (Lemke 1997: 190; Link 1997). The goal of the security apparatuses can be described using the concept of resilience: society is meant to be able to absorb disruptions, without their leading to drastic changes. To accomplish this, society must be able to reorganize itself autonomously and demonstrate the ability to learn and adapt (Bourbeau 2013: 7). It is a question of constantly maintaining an always-precarious state of equilibrium in a society that expects and works with disruption, which cannot be ruled out, no matter what steps are taken.

The imagination of disruption is assigned an extensive role in this context. If in earlier times the power of the imagination was focused on conceiving an ideal, positive future for society and distinguishing right from wrong, one's own from what was proper to others, this imaginative power now finds itself in a dynamic field, in which it has to react to ever-changing danger situations. As already indicated, it does this by developing scenarios and narratives that are drawn from an array of other imagined scenarios and placed in the foreground in order to capture collective attention. Against the background of a general atmosphere of insecurity, which makes Rumsfeld's "unknown unknowns" more and more the central reference point of the political horizon of expectation, the work of concretization carried out by fiction thus assumes a function as important as it is ambivalent. This process, whereby the space of a diffusely catastrophic future is occupied by narratives that offer more clearly delineated figurations of anticipated threats, can – from a political-emotional perspective – be linked with the transformation of a diffuse anxiety [*Angst*] into a concrete fear [*Furcht*]. Whereas an unbridled imagination may give rise to a "liquid fear" (Bauman 2006) which does not refer to specific objects or possible states of affairs but instead solely evokes the potential dangers in an increasingly unsafe and uncertain world (Furedi 2007), fiction can invent specific scenarios of fear [*Furcht*] and provoke active reactions, position-taking or adjustments in behavior in the respective *emotional communities*. Fiction accomplishes this by providing a narrative link between the past, the present and the future, and by depicting specific menacing objects or specific constellations of menacing situations (Koch 2013). Anxiety [*Angst*] – understood as an undirected expectational effect that can be transformed into directed fear [*Furcht*] by means of symbolic operations (Koch 2011) – thus also proves historically to be an important driving force in the conception of security (Marciniak, 2015: 348; Robin 2006).

In these times of the so-called "war on terror," catastrophic events can no longer simply be extrapolated from the past. Indistinct conceptions of the enemy render this impossible, to the same degree that increasingly asymmetrical

warfare nullifies classical distinctions like the front line and the rear, periphery and center. The apparatus of precaution reacts to this confusedly complex threat situation by spurring the imagination to ever more intense efforts, which then endeavors to satisfy the demand to make the present more secure by presenting catastrophic versions of the future displaying the greatest possible variance and radicality. The closing words from the cinema blockbuster *World War Z* (USA 2013) – "Be prepared for anything. Our war has just begun!" – provide the imperative for the politics of security in this changed global situation, which results in fictions that overturn the habitual narratives and generate new worlds of the imagination, to which preventive security measures then explicitly refer, or at least implicitly draw on as a resource, in order to bestow plausibility on their assessments.

Contemporary fictions do not describe positive states of affairs or abstract ideals which are meant to become a concrete reality sometime in the future, but rather in their massive accumulation they always merely serve as exemplary, up-to-date versions of a general danger situation – thus, ultimately, they are hardly more than structural placeholders. They no longer contribute to the strengthening of immunity or resilience in dealing with real disruptions and emerging threats, but rather, as a generalized "emotional style" of an imagined future (Gammerl 2012), they increasingly produce reverse effects. The merely formal indication of this *unmarked space* at the center of danger, which fictions in the age of precaution endeavor to grasp and represent, no longer solely serves the (ultimately) unburdening function of translating anxiety [*Angst*] into fear [*Furcht*], but rather simultaneously leads in the opposite direction, to an unleashed imagination and thus to the proliferation of new, undirected anxiety [*Angst*]. To some extent, this is a self-destructive side-effect of the logic of *total awareness*. For only "the idea of a future that is radically unsafe" gives rise to the continual production of imagined scenarios of disruption, which "in the name of boundless contingency" repeatedly seek to transform "uncertainty into a cognitive-emotional security of expectation" (Opitz and Tellmann 2010: 34–35). This work on a future conceived as fundamentally unsafe and uncertain thus enables a politics aligned more and more with the "security principle" (Sofsky 2005). At the same time, however, it undermines public confidence that the progress of things remains controllable at all.

In this way, the imagination accomplishes two things: on the one hand, it sets the direction for determining and sounding out the boundaries of the possible and, in a gesture of transgression, it enquires into new, previously unthinkable disruptions. On the other hand, it annuls the difference between reality and fiction, since its imaginative power always constitutes the framework of justification for new or changed realities and fictions. By imagining ever more scenarios,

this boundless, constantly expanding "sense of danger" (Engell et al., 2009) seeks to create a state of comprehensive preparedness in which the occurrence of the coming catastrophe is ultimately always presupposed, and where all that remains is to practice dealing with the consequences (Anderson 2010: 791). This leads to a situation where emotional and imaginary processes become the essential driving forces of security policy discourse. In the model below these processes are therefore presented as central components of the social production of meaning.

## 3 Imagined scenarios of disruption: a model of social circulation

The model proposed here attempts to present and consolidate essential components of the social processing of disruptions (see Fig. 1):

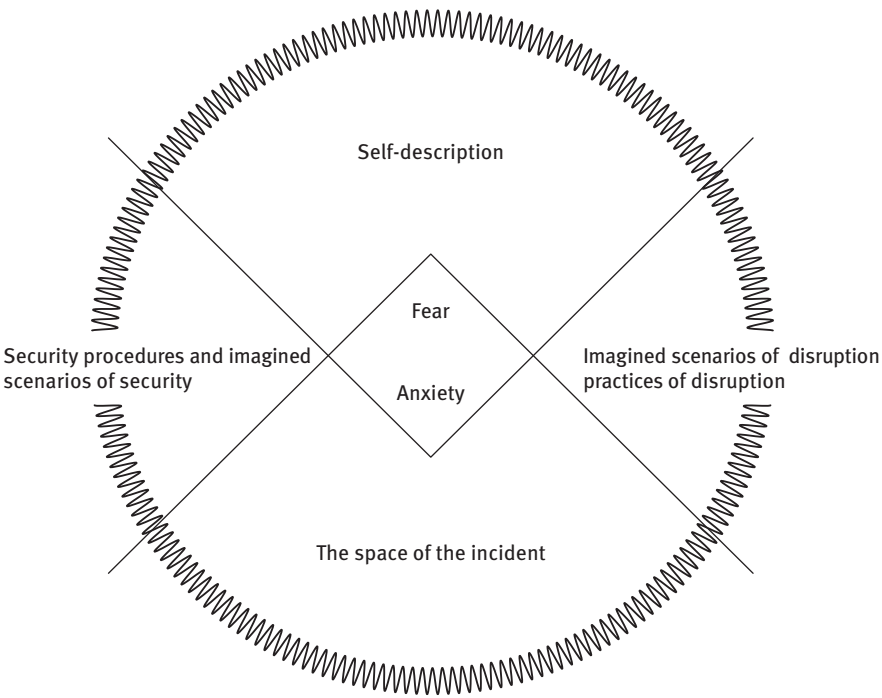


**Fig. 1:** A model of social circulation.

The space in which an incident occurs is a domain oscillating between expectation and surprise, a space in which threatening events are stored in a virtual form and generate a diffuse anxiety in line with certain social debates. Should an incident occur that was previously undetermined, a directed fear [*Furcht*] emerges, which then becomes an object of negotiation between security procedures, the imagined scenarios of security as well as the practices and imagined scenarios of disruption. In this space we situate self-descriptions but also fear-laden [*furchtbesetzte*] scenarios, to which specific techniques and rituals provide the response. For example, security scanners at airport baggage and security control points suggest protection against both imagined and real threats, while at the same time drawing the passengers' attention to a specific threat situation. Societal self-descriptions are also involved in this process of negotiation between security and disruption (Luhmann 2013: 167–174): they endeavor to process the respective disruptions and integrate them into their system. All three levels interact with each other in the media and discursively, exercising mutual influence, with the imagined scenarios, which mediate between the levels, being of central significance.

In the space of these imagined scenarios, two major, typical forms of the imagination can be distinguished. The imagined scenarios of security, which create a sense of identity and stability, provide society with positively connoted images: the American flag in the Hollywood film for example, or heroic figures who perform cultural scripts of crisis management and bring the behavioral standards of "disaster capitalism" (Klein 2007) up to date. In this form, the imagination establishes norms, values, and concepts of State-assured order, of national identity, history, and tradition, and creates collective ego-imagos, which allow a society to describe itself as a unity, in spite of ruptures and dynamic upheavals. In this process, indispensable to the functioning of every State is the imagination of power, as it is attributed to the State by the population, combined with traditional images of power. (Holert 2008)

This imagination of the State, its formation as a sovereign authority that guarantees security and order, is ensured by regularly repeated rituals, symbols, images and narratives all serving the purpose of self-assurance, and which, in turn, in the course of a politics of visibility and utterability are themselves pre-figured and re-configured. These acts and images that are supposed to underpin the State can, of course, come to nothing, can thus uncouple themselves from the citizens of a society. Once a supposedly solid, imagined framework no longer functions because its collective plausibility and self-evidence have been lessened as a result of unforeseen events, a misjudgment of the State's power is exposed (Legendre 2012: 35). The bond between State institutions and society turns out to be so disturbed that the sovereign exercise of power perhaps now

only exists as the construct of a deluded government and has less and less influence on the lives of individual members of society in the here and now. The Bush administration's poor crisis management after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which caused a high loss of acceptance among the population, can serve as an example here. When endorsement turns into rejection, State sovereignty and one of its central foundations – namely sovereignty as an imagined construct – are threatened (Koschorke 2002: 77), which can have serious consequences for a society's dominant self-descriptions: the "unknown knowns" of the hegemonic self-descriptions no longer function without being contested, but instead become visible as superseded premises of an inapt self-description. In this way, disruptive events can generate epistemic effects by putting the functionality of a society's positive self-conception to the practical test, laying bare their implicit premises.

States seek to pre-empt such crises of confidence by producing imagined disruptions and dangers beforehand, and citizens must be geared for the task of defending against them. Imagined scenarios of security as a motor for steering collective emotions are therefore coupled with a second motor, namely imagined scenarios of disruption. The aesthetic effect of the latter aims to render society more dynamic – a society in which perpetual uncertainty facilitates repeated reorganizations of its governmental structures. The scientific as well as popular fictions that generate possible futures and try to represent these in a plausible fashion thus have an effect on everyday practices: they can be expressed, for instance, in the form of new architectural structures, such as bollard systems, jersey barriers or safety glazing, which imperceptibly become accepted features of the cityscape, or in internalized forms of behavior and in instilled reactions, or in institutional handbooks – for instance, the *Zombie Preparedness Guide* of the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2011). Both types of imagination, which are interrelated and involved in constant mutual re-signification through corresponding *shifting images* (Richard 2003 f: 41), also have an effect on the emotions of the populace: as a condensation of communicative practices, they generate feelings of belonging and identification as well as a general form of "low-level fear" (Massumi 1993: 24), which places society in a state of diffuse apprehension in the face of the unknown, commits it to certain desirable outcomes and predisposes it to certain self-conceptions and conceptions of otherness.

Structurally, a security policy designed for the contemporary world, which is focused on future dangers but which no longer, or only to a limited extent, has the traditional security techniques and technology at its disposal, is faced with a multitude of problems. On the one hand, it has to deal with the fact that potential disruptions can only be reliably imagined to a limited degree: the Fukushima disaster or the terrorist attacks in 2001 left such an indelible mark in the constitution of modern western society because these events exceeded the bounds of

what was considered possible, geo-politically and technologically, despite the pre-(con)figurations available in the media. The virtual field of conceivable futures was durably shaken up, shattered, and consequently altered. On the other hand, the imagined events do not just prepare society for possible dangers, they also weigh up different problem areas and scenarios, or they even can take on a life of their own and prompt fatal auto-immune reactions (Derrida 2003). In this case, the imagination generates a kind of positive feedback: precisely because anxiety [*Angst*] tends to dispense with probability estimates and risk calculations in favor of worst-case scenarios (Sunstein 2005; Clarke 2006), preventive measures tend to lead to an accelerating, boundless spiral (Bröckling 2008: 42), which in turn produces further disruptions. This may provide an explanation for the present-day situation, where the talk is of a comprehensive dismantling of civil rights, a fetishization of transparency, and a security policy fixation on Big Data. Such diagnoses are also symptomatic in that they render especially palpable the implicit rules and structures of the imaginary production of danger scenarios, as well as the "unknown knowns" underlying these scenarios.

The dominant societal self-description thus ultimately results from the interaction of these two different types of imagination and from the emotions of anxiety [*Angst*] and fear [*Furcht*] which are bound up with them, which to some extent make up the two aggregate states of the social imagination: if the future can be conceived and described in clear scenarios, then anxiety [*Angst*] is successfully translated into fear [*Furcht*], and society then possesses a stabilized space of possibilities. In the age of precaution, however, this stability proves to be insufficient – even in the medium-term – to hold together a society that is exposed to manifold centrifugal forces, politically and socially, which is why the concrete scenarios have to be continually dissolved and re-figured, in a permanent process of generating potential new disasters. According to Frédéric Gros, contemporary societies can therefore no longer be characterized as stable orders, but can only be thought of as ecological systems in which security is exclusively the result of the constant balancing of irregularities, of a practice of continually rectifying disruptions in real time, and of a continuous, inexorable symbolic transformation of anxiety [*Angst*] into fear [*Furcht*]. As a "specific, irreducible form of power," work on the space of the social imagination, fluctuating as it does between regulation and intensification, is a hallmark of security apparatuses. It can be described as a "process by which a living entity preserves its inner balance, and thereby dynamically maintains itself," writes Gros, echoing Foucault (Gros 2015: 226).

Accordingly, society is not perceived as secure only when there are no more disruptions, but rather at a prior point, where disruptions can be reliably dealt with and assimilated by the security apparatuses. The socio-ecological resilience

of the system is manifested on the one hand by its self-regulating competence, which means it is robust enough to deal with disruptions by relying on existing institutions, such as the police, which to a certain extent also contribute to rendering disruptive events invisible. On the other hand, the system must be able to reorganize and thus renew itself, through productive impulses coming from outside (Bourbeau 2013: 7). The imaginative engagement with the disruption in question is coupled with the latter's magnitude as well as its degree of expectedness. As is suggested in the following section, resilient systems place ruptures that can be anticipated under the heading of "disruptions involving predetermined breaking points," whereas the reorganization of a security system requires adaptive competence in dealing with "unanticipated disruptions." "Disruptions caused by (system-)overload" stretch the collective imaginary as well as the security apparatuses to their limits or even cause the collapse of the prevailing schema of an imagined confrontation with a possible disaster.

## 4 Typology of disruption

Using the model outlined here, a typology of disruption can be drawn up which proceeds from the complex interference between events in the space of the incident and the imagined scenarios of security and disruption. In the poststructuralist theory of the event, two types of event were proposed (Baudrillard 2008: 100 – 121) in light of the terrorist attacks of September 11. On the one hand, there is the non-event, meaning an event that has been repeated countless times in one or another variation and is therefore well known in its structure and its sequences. Examples include royal weddings, the Olympic Games, or – although perhaps a controversial case – classical warfare. On the other hand, there is the event proper, conceptualized as an event that irrupts in a completely unforeseen way, an event that cannot be derived from the past and for which there are therefore no comprehensive cultural scripts and narratives available. While for Jean Baudrillard the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York belong to the latter event-type, Jacques Derrida (2007: 446) wonders whether the description of an unforeseen event is possible at all, because the event loses its uniqueness and becomes repeatable, once we put it into words and thus neutralize it.

Following on from this, disruptions – which are always also events – can be situated between the boundaries of the non-event and the singular event, and can be more finely differentiated. The categorization into *disruptions involving predetermined breaking points [Sollbruchstörung], adaptive disruptions [adaptive Störung]* and *disruptions caused by (system) overload [Überlastungsstörung]* al-

lows us to outline an array of possible disruptions, ranging from routine disruptions to singular disruptions, and, as a result of their varying potential to unsettle, the political, emotional and cultural work required to counteract a disruption is specific to each case.

Thus, the term *disruptions involving predetermined breaking points* describes disruptions that can be expected to occur at any moment. As is the case in cybernetic systems, which are equipped with built-in breaking points designed to prevent positive feedback in the event of a disruption and thus return the system to a state of equilibrium, disruptions involving predetermined breaking points are occurrences that society is familiar with, where institutions such as the fire brigade or the police are available to restore order and security. In other words, these are disruptive incidents that a society can deal with routinely, and which – individual cases aside – do not create a collective sense of insecurity. That said, such incidents nevertheless remain disquieting, and they are thus prominent in the social imaginary – as is illustrated, for example, by crime fiction and the detective novel. As a continually repeated, local destabilization of the sense of security in a social reality presumed to be "secure," the crimes depicted in crime novels make it clear that only through the constant imaginary eradication of possible disruptions can this reality be provided with an anchor point that is at all credible (Boltanski: 2014). Thanks to certain familiar scenarios or scenographies, such as the crime show or courtroom proceedings, institutions such as the police or the judicial system also generate imagined scenarios of security. Although it is clear that a disruption of the normal, everyday situation has occurred, the message conveyed is that the disruption is being dealt with in a predictable and presumably effective manner, and therefore the social order itself remains intact. If an incident is classified as a disruption involving a predetermined breaking point, this classification can be considered the result of functioning, institutionalized procedures and – above all – of communication processes, which refer to the social imaginary.

Adaptive disruptions, on the other hand, are characterized by ruptures that occur and unfold in a way that departs from what is envisaged by a society's preventive measures. At the same time, these are incidents that can be put to productive social use, since the disruption in question generates new forms of knowledge and appeals to a society's ability to learn. Such an event is narratively delimited, given a name, and processed in media such as film and literature, so that, in a second step, it can be integrated into the cultural narratives and thus be neutralized. In this process of working through and healing, which has to be thought of as a polyphonic interaction of a range of quite different actors, discourses and media, both the security institutions and the affective processing mechanisms are successively adapted, so that the rupture, should it occur

again, can be immediately dealt with as a disruption involving predetermined breaking points. From the point of view of security policy, adaptive disturbances alter a society in an evolutionary sense, and are processed within a framework of de-escalation and flexible re-normalization.

One example that allows us to comprehend the logic of adaptive disruptions is the Edward Snowden affair. On the one hand, the NSA revelations are bound up in complex legal, diplomatic and security-related procedures; on the other hand, as a collective symbol of the surveillance State, they are simultaneously the object of manifold practices of reflection and articulation in the spheres of popular culture, the arts, and civil society. How exactly a disruptive occurrence is to be grasped in each instance has to be examined on the basis of the individual case: on the one hand, we have terror scenarios in the sphere of popular culture, such as *24* (Fox 2001–2014) or *Homeland* (Showtime since 2011), which present the digital-electronic investigative work carried out by the secret services as a normal component of a world waging a "war on terror." While in these works surveillance is accorded the status of the self-evident, there are, on the other hand, fundamental critiques of the digitalized society of control, found in novels such as David Egger's *The Circle* (2014), in films such as *Citizen Four* (USA 2014), or in theory-oriented critiques, such as Geoffroy de Lagasnerie's *L'Art de la révolte: Snowden, Assange, Manning* (2015), where the whistleblower is presented as the emblematic, disruptive social figure, critically intervening against the powers that be.

As a third category, *disruption caused by (system) overload* designates a crisis or disaster that leaves a society or a person disoriented, confronting them with a completely unknown situation – thus an "unknown unknown" in Rumsfeld's sense. The term *disruption caused by (system) overload* encompasses, on the one hand, a psychological affliction such as a trauma, which can be the result of armed conflicts or violent attacks, both on the individual and collective level, and which is devastating precisely because it breaks through the mental and media mechanisms that protect us against stimulus overload, and that are meant to ensure the adaptive capability of the individual or the collective. The shockwaves of such a dramatic event manifest themselves in a particular referent, leaving traces in everyday reality that culminate in overload and some form of outburst or irruption.

On the other hand, the concept of disruption caused by (system) overload entails a coming apart of signs and referents, a world thrown out of joint, described in psychoanalysis as the irruption of the real (Žižek 2002: 16–17), and which can be interpreted as an epochal event. Such an event cannot be symbolized or imagined in advance and casts a fundamentally critical light on all existing symbolic security systems. As a horrifying social event which calls into question the

social order and its routines of normality as a whole, the disruption caused by (system) overload – one thinks of 9/11 – acts as a *shape-shifter*, effecting "a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it" (Žižek 2014: 10).

Disruptions caused by (system) overload do not necessarily have to mean the end of the world, but – as a result of absent or overtaxed routines of communicative normalization – , they are experienced as such a massive, anxiety-provoking rupture that their retroactive symbolic processing, at least in Western cultural circles, often draws on the semantics and narratives of the end of the world or the biblical Apocalypse. Applying an up-to-date form of these familiar cultural schemata and plots to a disruptive event makes it possible to gain some initial distance to it, which can then enable a follow-up process of reflection.

For their part, imagined scenarios of disruption seek to encompass all three types of disruption. While disruptions involving predetermined breaking points are always confined within their established horizons (Virilio 2007), the adaptive disruption takes the latter to their limits and alters them. Disruptions caused by (system) overload are located, by definition, beyond the limits of what is conceivable; at the same time, however, they constitute the techniques of the imagination that deal with these fundamentally unanticipated disruptions, techniques which, in turn, occupy the center of attention of political security apparatuses in the twenty-first century. Even if this type of disruption is the key political issue in the age of precaution, there is still a real space of events that exceeds even the imagined scenarios of disruption caused by (system) overload. What is presented in imagined scenarios as a disruption due to (system) overload and portrayed as the end of the world as we know it – an attack of extraterrestrials, a new ice age, a global blackout – is no doubt designed to remove all limits from the imaginary, but it can only be expressed because, ultimately, it is still conceived within the framework of the available categories and discourses, whether as a politically-charged instrument of orientation in an ever more confusing world, or as an unconscious registry in the sense of the *unknown knowns*. The model sketched out here thus shows that all three historical apparatuses delineated by Bröckling can actually exist simultaneously and in different states of mutual interference. The difference between them lies in the form of interplay and in the orientation of the imagination, which either transforms anxiety [*Angst*] into fear [*Furcht*] or, increasingly in our times, fear [*Furcht*] into perpetual anxiety [*Angst*]. Against this background, a cultural diagnosis of popular media that focuses on the symbolic production of security apparatuses and analyzes popular narratives and images of disruption makes it possible to advance to the foundations of hegemonic identity politics.

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# II Media

Tanja Prokić

# *Disruptive Storytelling*

## Notes on E.T.A. Hoffmann

Doppelganger, automata, androids, puppets, animated dreams and fictitious figures, changing images, reflections, echoes, undead, and light projections provoke fatal confusion, incurable insanity, disturbed developments, unfulfilled romances, or tragic suicides. E.T.A. Hoffmann's narratives, novellas, and novels not only repeatedly negotiate problems resulting from doubling, division, reproduction, and representation, but also evoke slight irritations, confusing interferences, and lasting disturbances through repetition, memories, and déjà vu moments that affect figures and intradiegetic narrators as well as readers. Where originals are doubled, motifs and figures double, where reproduction is thematized as mechanical and artificial, is where literature employs an arsenal of figures, motifs, and topoi in order to call attention to itself as representation. But should the effects and functions of representation be tested as such, it would not suffice to represent the representation; it must be virtually tangible in its nature. Through the reintroduction of motifs, figures, and processes of reiteration, repetition – the principle that initially necessitates representation – becomes the principle that counteracts representation, disrupts it, and finally makes its effects tangible. The following exploration of this connection focuses on the structural components of aesthetic disruptions in the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, but, in doing so, ultimately seeks to illuminate "aesthetic functionalizations of disruptions" in the realm of literature as a whole.

As will be demonstrated in this essay, disruption is in many ways related to seriality, which, by 1800, provided the basis for all differentiation processes of knowledge and aesthetics as a matrix and cultural pattern. By highlighting the specific features of disruption in Hoffmann's work, it becomes possible to simultaneously disclose the respective discourse formation which, as it were, constitutes the historical a priori on which the functionalization of disruption as an operator of knowledge is grounded (see the article of Koch and Nanz in this volume: 4). In the discursive configuration around 1800, multiple strands of discourse interconnected in the question posed by probability studies about probable reality. In particular, (romantic) literature generated a momentous answer to this question in its contention with historical narrative. In this respect, E.T.A. Hoffmann's narrative thereby marks an exception, as it reflects (natural) science topics in an aesthetic register, but further transforms academic themes, instruments, and questions into aesthetic figures. Fiction therefore takes on a political

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dimension. On one hand, it broadly provides special knowledge for interdiscursive connecting communication (Link 1988: 284 – 307; Link and Link-Herr 1990: 88 – 99)[1], while generating a separate aesthetically produced knowledge from specialist knowledge. On the other hand, it helps shape the facticity of the actual reality beyond the design of fictional worlds.

The following "Notes on Hoffmann" proceed with a certain force on the text, while individual passages are isolated from the complete context, great narrative contexts are actualized only cursorily, and intertexts and questions of genre are only touched upon. Although it is then the purposes of these remarks to extrapolate a media-cultural analysis from the writings of Hoffman, this selective access nevertheless makes a claim of his work, and has the ability to bring something about the modernism and foresight of Hoffmann to light. According to the thesis, this is reflected in a narrative principle that Hoffmann employs, and which I will call *disruptive storytelling*. Using four types of relationships between difference and repetition, Hoffmann programs disturbances that make fiction tangible in its reality-constitutive effects. It is upon selected text passages that these four types – imitation, reproduction, replication and duplication – will be based. In various ways, they negotiate effects that go along with representation, that are inherent to it. Something embodying imitation, meaning to recognize as a copy of an original, assumes the previous differentiality of object and representamen. That this differentiality itself must again become "recognized" assumes a repetitive activity (through an interpretant)[2]. Hoffmann uses the imitation in his "*Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht*" in order to illustrate precisely this triad as an intensely failure-prone condition for representation. According to Hoffmann, reproduction as a motif – which allows to reflect upon the human, his_her being, and purpose – is above all closely related to representation in *Der Sandmann*; to conceive of life as artificially reproduced reveals itself as a fatal and momentous figure of thought, which initially results from the differentiality of object and representamen contingent upon representation.

## 1 Figures of repetition: copy

With *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* [The Adventures of New Year's Eve] (1814), Hoffmann lays the foundation for an aesthetic program, which brings

**1** See the concept developed by Jürgen Link (1988).

**2** The terminology of object, representamen, and interpretant is borrowed from Charles Sanders Peirce.

forth disturbance out of the spirit of repetition. The four-part narrative of a travelling enthusiast, which contains an embedded story in addition to an account of the events of the aforementioned New Year's Eve in the first-person perspective, was left to an editor named Theodor Amadäus Hoffmann. He then again does not leave his readers the text without an annotating attunement towards what to expect. The enthusiast, as he is called, is able to say himself that the border between his inner and outer life is "hardly differentiable" (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 325). Thus, the editor demands a "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge 1907 [1817]: 6) from the readers, about which Coleridge will reflect three years after the publication of *Abenteuer:*

> But even so, because you, dear reader, do not clearly perceive this border, the ghostseer perhaps lures you over, and suddenly you find yourself in the strange magic kingdoms, whose peculiar forms step into your outer life and wants to interact and become familiar with you, like old acquaintances. That you incorporate them like this, yes, that you, completely addicted to their fabulous activities, some small shivering fits, which, grabbing you ever more strongly, could excite you, might willingly bear this, this I ask of you, dear reader, directly from the heart. (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 325)

This anticipation of a following indistinguishability between reality and imagination also posits the distinction, on the basis of which the evening's strange doublings need to be observed. Thus, the enthusiast believes that a woman, whom he alternatingly refers to as Julie and Julia, is one of the guests of the Sylvester party. Although she is the starting point of a series of strange encounters and mix-ups, the ontological character of the relationship between the enthusiast and Julie remains unexplained. Initially, he describes her as "Julie," but after that her figure seems to oscillate between poetry and reality:

> her complete form took on something unfamiliar, appearing larger to me, more formed in almost luxurious beauty than usual. The particular cut of her white, wrinkled dress, [...], her hair, parted in the front, braided oddly in the back, gave her an antique quality [...] (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 328)

The enthusiast gets carried away in a self-revelation: "and solely in the name, Julia! I wanted to pronounce all heavenly bliss that came into me" (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 329). As her as Shakespeare's "Julia" (the German name for Juliet) mystified figure is desacralized through the invocation "Jule – Jule" by her husband, who is described as "a foolish, spider-legged figure with bulging lizard eyes" (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 330), all that remains is the conclusion so typical for Hoffmann's male figures. Thus, she is "lost in perpetuity" (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 350) to him. For the significate (the singular woman) has glided for a

long time among the significates of the mytho-poeticized woman (Julia as the prototypical woman). And the following pages of the narration essentially go through the motions of the drama of this "first" repetition. Then the enthusiast, without a coat in the frigid cold – the reference is relevant, in order to emphasize that the figure, like the reader, has by now left the ontological conditions of the real world by crossing into a dream – stops by a cellar, where he comes upon two strange figures. And as the complexly interconnected story-in-a-story makes clear, one of these figures – Erasmus Spikher – will lose his Julie (named Giulietta) forever since he is not prepared to kill his wife and child in yet another deal with the devil as he already lost his reflection in the first deal. The loss of his reflection in a deal with the devil entangles the fate of Spikher with the other figure in the cellar, whose eventual identification as Peter Schlemihl is affected by the enthusiast's tentative approach – "but more and more, a notion stirred within me, and it seemed to me that I had not *seen* the strangers as much as *thought about* them" (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 334). His *wondrous tale*, written by Adelbert von Chamisso, was published only a year before Hoffmann's narration. Schlemihl famously lost his shadow through a pact with the devil and acquired a pair of seven-league boots during further events.

Both figures then begin to barter. It is exactly this that makes them tragic figures, because they seek to replace something that cannot be replaced. A shadow cannot be replaced by an inexhaustible bag of coins, nor a reflection through love. "Theft and gift," according to Deleuze, are criteria of repetition (Deleuze 1995: 1). And *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* orbits around the principle of repetition, (Kohns 2007: 229 – 242) insofar as *Die Abenteuer* themselves are marked as a repetition "undoubtedly of the kid [Erasmus Spikher] and the wondrous story" (Kohns 2007: 341) of the Chamisso narrative; a repetition, by the way, which the public of that time misunderstood as mere plagiarism.[3]

Already here, the narrative surrenders the orderly presentation of events and blends the levels as repetition of a disappointed love. In favor of this repetition, the ontological difference between real events on New Year's Eve and memories of the past life of Erasmus Spikher, as the enthusiast's dream, is offset by the chronology of events: "Instead of a direct linear progression through a series of events, we have a series of repetitions of the same basic plot to the point where it becomes impossible to tell what is original and what is a quote, what an event and what a memory." (Kontje 1985: 357) The motifs repeat and multiply themselves; the husband of Julie is the form of Erasmus – here he is Signor Da-

**3** Concerning this effect, see the commentary of the editors Gerhard Allroggen and Wulf Segebrecht in Hoffmann 2006: 799 – 800.

pertutto – who is in turn the figure of the devil, through whose persuasion Erasmus exchanges his reflection for the love of Giulietta. The "delicately polished goblet," which stands in "the middle of the glasses filled with steaming punch" (Hoffmann 2006 [1814]: 329), is the goblet, which Giulietta hands Erasmus during New Year's Eve (344). The descriptions of the two women are doubled, in similarly worded configurations. For example, Julie is described in the beginning similar to the virgins in the paintings of Mieris (328): she resembles the "warning signs of Breughel, Callot or Rembrandt" (340) in the dream, and ultimately corresponds to a "female model by Rubens or the delicate Mieris" (344). Everything becomes similar to everything else, so that it is simply no longer possible to say who or what is a copy of which original. The adventure of Schlemhil is superimposed onto the *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht*, so that, on the reception level, the question of precedence or originality is taken ad absurdum, since it can simply no longer add to a clarification of relationships.

With his "copy," his "literary Doppelgänger" (Matala de Mazza 2005: 156), Hoffmann generates an aesthetic rejection of the "norms of mimetic convention" (Lachmann 2005: 140), which simultaneously deals with an epistemological conflict of his time. The model of a linear chaining of a series of events, as it represents the law of (natural) history to date, is called into question and confronted with a series of repetitions across circularly linked, heterogeneous stories. While in the first model, difference is erased in favor of conformity and analogy, the repetition emphasizes the difference "as the differentiating aspect of differentiation" (Lachmann 2005: 107). Therefore, the contemporary reception of the *Abenteuer* as a copy, a simple recreation of the original *Peter Schlemhil*, is an anachronized and superficial conclusion, as Hoffmann carries over the underlying epistemology for the first time into an aesthetic form. He succeeds in the epistemology of representation, in which differentiation between copy and original becomes obsolete. To demonstrate this on an aesthetic level: the principle of representation denies Chamisso's Schlemhil, as well as the Shakespearian Juliet, the claim to one-to-one correspondence.

## 2 Figures of repetition: reproduction

In *Der Sandmann* (1816), this epistemology finds further configurations. The motifs of figures of doubling – like puppets, marionettes, automata, or mechanical people (as they are established particularly in *Der Sandmann*; see Müller-Tamm and Skyora 1999) – should not only be understood as simple anthropologic figures of reflection (Lieb 2008: 82–97), as they also negotiate the epistemological coordinates that are connected to a notion of the individual as a link in the chain

of all living beings. The *Iliad* first mentions the idea of the golden chain (*catena aurea*), i.e. of an unalterable order, founded in the transcendental, which links all things to "a wholeness and the dependence of this wholeness on God as the first and the absolute" (Halfwassen 1995: 688; Lovejoy 1976: 221).

Thus, the doubled opening of *Der Sandmann* reads:

> I resolved not to start at all. Dear reader, take the three letters that dear Lothar most kindly conveyed to me, and use them for the outline of the construct, in that I will now attempt to incorporate narratively more and more color. (Hoffmann 2009 [1816]: 30)

It is like an ironic replica of the problems of natural history, isolating the origin of the chain of all that is living, as the beginnings appear to multiply and not all living things (some mixed genres, extinct genres) can be seamlessly incorporated into one continuity. The literature of romanticism finds its expression of this resistive congruency between nature and its classification in the aurification of all figures that claim the status of living beyond classification in the chain of living things; those "artificially" created beings on the boundary, which radically call into question the idea of the absolute basis: artificial beings, marionettes and puppets, anthropomorphic animals, monsters. From their "hybrid factor" (Borgards et al. 2010: 10), which does not respect "borders of identity and physical integrity" (Brittnacher 2010: 154), these figures also invariably pose the "question of the borders of perception" (Borgards and Holm and Oesterle 2010: 11): as figures of the third party, they offer interference potential *par excellence* (Koschorke 2010: 9–31; Berger and Döring 1998: 1–18).

Therefore, the dread of the younger Nathanael understands itself as being an articulate machine, which stands out from the order of nature:

> "[...] but now we want to correctly observe the mechanism of the hands and feet." And with that, he [Coppelius] grabbed me so forcefully that my joints cracked, unscrewed my hands and feet, and soon reinserted them here and there. "It doesn't fit quite right! But it's just as good as it was! – The old one understood it!" Coppelius hissed and lisped this; but everything around me became black and dark, a sharp cramp flashed through my nerves and bones – then I felt nothing. (Hoffmann 2009 [1816]: 17)

The alliance between father and advocate Coppelius, who appears to be responsible for Nathanael's childhood terrors, is repeated in the coupling of the barometer merchant Giuseppe Coppola and Professor Spalanzani. Furthermore, his name's similarity to history's first reproductive physician (Herrmann 2006: 54; Nusser 2011; Spallazani 1780), Lazzaro Spallanzani, is anything but a coincidence, but instead is emphasized by the text: "Professor of physics, who, like the famous natural scientist, is called Spalanzani and of Italian descent" (Herr-

mann 2006: 54). Both figures embody literal recurring figures, just as in *Die Abenteuer.*

However, while these still experiment primarily on the terminological level of repetition, *Der Sandmann* approximates the repetition of the themes of doubling and proliferation under the guise of reproduction. Should one examine the etymological derivation from Latin, reproduction denotes "the manufacturing of a 'repetition' of something, which one gains through the 'abstraction' of something else" (Mathes 2005: 81–99). Spallanzani's real experiments in artificial insemination lean on the same discursive foundation as the experiments in the development of mechanical people, like those Wolfgang von Kempelen diligently promoted (Drux 1986; Strouhal 1996: 444–471; von Kempelen 1970 [1791]). In both occasions, the idea of "another beginning" beyond the chain of life, unravels the conviction of a single, continuous, immutable order. The idea of parallel-existing series of beings, which cannot be fit into any consistent continuum, suddenly becomes possible (Sarasin 2009).[4]

While the text establishes the "skillful mechanical specialist and automaton maker Spalanzani" (Sarasin 2009: 46) as the "father" of the mechanical woman Olimpia, he generates a superposition of both discourses on the diegetic level. After the deception is uncovered through a rupture in the alliance between optician Coppelius and creator Spalanzani, this is responsible for a "criminal investigation because of the automata inserted into the human society of deceitful ways" (Sarasin 2009: 47) – similar to the historical figure of von Kempelen – leading directly to the subsequent costs, which this configuration of problems creates. Artificial life, whether technologically or biologically created, poses the question of automatization and de-automatization of regular processes. *Der Sandmann* demonstrates that the latter is merely the reverse side of a thought, emerging parallel to the observation of disruption. While Nathanael transfers Olimpia's mechanical automatisms into bodily, even erotic arousal, his friend Siegmund is bothered by them:

> She could be considered beautiful, if her gaze would not be so lifeless, dare I say, sightless. Her stride is curiously measured; each movement appears dependent on the movement of wound-up clockwork. Her play, her singing has the unpleasantly accurate, spiritless cadence of a singing machine, and her dancing is the same. For us, Olimpia was completely eerie; we want nothing to do with her. It seemed to us as if she was trying to act in a living fashion, and indeed, she is a curious case. (Hoffmann [1816] 2009: 41)

**4** That is the basis for Charles Darwin's work on the theory of evolution.

The automatic, then, turns out to be a relational category of disruption, which, depending on each particular observation, develops into a disruption of function. Consequently, the fact that Hoffmann, time and again, conflicts natural reproduction and symbolic production over questions of identity, genealogy, ancestry, biography, or the legitimate addressability of individuals is due precisely to the relational character of disturbances (Koch and Nanz in this volume: 4).[5] While he generates parallel series of repetitions, interconnecting them through repetition of elements from the respective parallel series, he pushes disturbances of function, perception, or consciousness from the diegetic level to the formal level of the text. By doing so, he draws attention to the productive component of artificially created series (or artificial replication) of repetitions. It thus becomes possible to understand repetition not as identical repetition, but rather to observe it as condition, displacements, shift or change in general.

## 3 Figures of repetition: replication

Originally conceived for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, the narrative *Die Automate* was first published in 1814 in a shortened version, without a third of the original edition. It is only in the complete version, which was included in 1819 in the second book of *Die Serapionsbrüder*, that the serial poetology, already laid out in the edition from 1814, completely unfurls.

In the preface for *Serapionsbrüder,* Hoffmann bases his collection of texts on the form presented in Ludwig Tieck's *Phantasus* (1812–1817). With the explicit indication that a comparison cannot be made with the pretext, a comparison is implied as a matter of course:

> This would be the conversation of friends, which connects the various poetries together, but establishes the true image of the togetherness of the like-minded, who communicate the creations of their spirits and utter their judgments concerning it. [...]. Society is also lacking the fair women, who know to stir a manifold, lovely play of colors in Phantasos. (Hoffmann 2008 [1819a]: 11)

Hoffmann takes his place in the tradition of the novelistic narrative, which has been established since Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* from the fourteenth century. Most recently, Goethe had successfully taken up this tradition with *Unterhandlungen deutscher Ausgewanderter* (1795), while establishing an integral dif-

5 See, for instance, *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815/1816), *Doge und Dogaresse* (1818), and *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* (1819).

ference to well-known narrative cycles such as *One Thousand and One Nights*[6] or Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* (1592–1594) (Mielke 2006).[7] It was the goal of the social narrative to escape catastrophes, crises, or even the impending death of the narrator in *One Thousand and One Nights* through the power of narration, and it was a way for those emigrating to avoid the crisis situations evoked through political discussion. The discussed stories depict the large disturbances of the current situation of society on a small scale (Schneider 2005: 262). As with Tieck's *Phantasus*, it concerns a heterogeneous collection, already composed stories that are discussed in a group. Therefore, Tieck and Hoffmann convey the serial narrative in the age of the technical reproducibility of writing. Indicating through an addendum that no women attend the group, Hoffmann now goes yet another step further, insofar as gathering only professional writers in his group.[8] With their routine meetings, the four Serapion Brothers oppose "the impregnable time, which continually creates in eternal destruction" (Hoffmann 2008 [1819a]: 13). The series of events – "But who among us has not been carried by the wild maelstrom from event to event, even deed to deed?" (Hoffmann 2008 [1819a]: 15) – effectively answers with a series of repetitions. Once a week, the brothers get together under the rule of the hermit Serapion:

> Each should well consider whether he has also truly observed what he dares to proclaim, ere he dares to be heard. At the least, each should earnestly strive thereafter, to bear the image, which grasps him inwardly with all of his forms, colors, lights, and shadows, and then, when he feels rightly kindled by it, the external representation. (Hoffmann 2008 [1819a]: 69)

After a few considerations, this rule becomes synonymous with the compromise "to never completely struggle with shoddy effort" (Hoffmann 2008 [1819a]: 70); a typical shift by Hoffmann, which must be understood in the context of the serial narrative cycle of the *Serapionsbrüder*, and as the result of an altered experience of time. It is indeed the topic of identity, which worries the brothers; an identity absolutely resisting the change of time, appearing to them just as "unearthly" (Hoffmann 2008 [1819a]: 22), as the notion of a relentless, irrevocable coming-into-being (Hoffmann 2008 [1819a]: 13). Indeed, they acknowledge the latter and emphasize the productive side of the power of time via the continually recurring narrative situation, while they counter the serial narration with the com-

**6** The origin is difficult to date; sources go back to the year 200. Goethe studied the cycle in the Wrocław translation (1825); see Katharina Mommsen (2006).

**7** For a general view, see the comprehensive work by Christine Mielke (2006).

**8** The concept of authorship is also coded as male in the romantic period. See Friedrich A. Kittler (2003); Albrecht Koschorke (1998).

ing-into-being of time as a "constantly renewing, creative act" (Giesenfeld 1994: 1; Blättler 2003: 508). Manfred Schneider exemplarily demonstrated the sublime connection between "the revolution of probability in poetry and in the probability" of the saddle period (Schneider 2005: 267), and reformulated the situation as well as the negotiation of the brothers as a socio-narrative form of contingency processing accordingly: "They want to point out the equal probability of regular literary communication to the prevalent uncertainty, the improbability of ordinary communication" (Schneider 2005: 264).

The affinity between serial narrative and probability arises from a conversion from "aesthetic to statistical probability" (Schneider 2005: 267–268), provided that the craftsmanship of what is narrated cannot be ultimately evaluated as representative, as a majority agrees "to no longer struggle with shoddy effort" (Hoffmann 2008 [1819b]: 70). This thoroughly significant shift allows itself to be completely understood in the sense of Johann Jakob Breitinger's recommendation in *Critische Dichtkunst* (1740): that the writer should "at the very least limit [his narrations] according to the delusions of the greatest crowd of people" (Bodmer and Breitinger 1980: 86, 88).

Furthermore, the novella-narrations of the *Serapionsbrüder* handle repetition on two further levels. They not just repeat the narrative situation, but the narration receives an additional rule, which shapes the collection as a series of repetitions. Through the serial principle, the experience of time, changed through event-series of everyday reality, finds an adequate process of presenting identity in spite of change and shift. *Die Serapionsbrüder*, just as probability studies work on the fiction of probable reality (Esposito 2007), if the art of their narrations consists in making the improbable probable.

Integrated in the heterogeneous narrative cycle, *Die Automate* intradiegetically has the claim to cope with this "serapiontistic" measure of the brothers. Poetologically, however, beyond the judgment of the brothers, the narrative is interesting precisely for this reason, because it succeeds in reflecting the poetology in the diegetic. Often located in the context of contemporary societal skepticism and vague fear towards the phenomenon of magnetism, *Die Automate* is interpreted as a "nightmare scenario" (Gess 2010: 146).[9] Against the backdrop of the complexly arranged matrix of difference and repetition, which extends throughout Hoffmann's whole work, interpretation as a "nightmare scenario" may almost fall short. Hoffmann, however, actually supplies the critique for his own text, while also continually and suggestively dividing that which is narrated into the narration.

**9** For criticism of this, see Gess 2010, here 146.

Already in the opening pages, the titular protagonist from *Die Automate* undergoes a rapid change through the floating of signifiers, from the "speaking Turk" to the "wondrous living-dead figure," to the technical description of the "equipment of automata," to the "life-sized, shapely figure in opulent tasteful clothing" (Hoffmann 2008 [1819c]: 396–397).

Ultimately, the narrator leaves no more doubt that the story concerns a deceptively real, mechanically wrought automaton:

> [T]he whole figure was, as stated, shapely in the correct proportions, the head alone was exquisitely fashioned; a truly oriental and brilliant physiognomy gave the whole figure a life, the likes of which one seldom sees in wax figures, even when they themselves are formed in the likeness of the characterful faces of brilliant men. (Hoffmann 2008 [1819c]: 396)

Via shifting the adjectives, a difference invariably inserts itself into the repetition of signification. This creates an irritation on the observational level and suggestively repeats the assessment of the diegetic spectator, fluctuating between the heautonomy and autonomy of the Turk, on the level of perception. In addition, the fact that the observation of the narrator by those figures breaks away – in the following quote, suggested through the parentheses within the sarcastic speech of Ferdinand – adds to an enlivening of the automaton on the textual level:

> Not true, dear sir, none of you are especially comfortable with the wise Turk, but maybe that rests on us, our questions, which did not please the man – further, that he is now turning his head and lifting his hand (the figure indeed does this) appears to confirm my conjecture! – I do not know how it now crosses my mind not to ask a question whose answer, if appropriate, can all at once save the honor of the automaton. (Hoffmann 2008 [1819c]: 396)

Here, the odd transformations of the wise Turk serve Hoffmann not only as exposition for his problem of musical machines, as discussed in the dialog of both friends Ferdinand and Ludwig. Rather, to a greater degree, they play out on the textual level of this very principle that Ferdinand and Ludwig were afraid of – namely the possibility of remote control and programming of the human psyche through "psychic rapport". Whether the psychic rapport arouses the mind remains unclear in the narrative fragment. It is also unclear whether the mechanism of the poetic text is even in the position that the transformations of the speaking Turk suggest. For although it concerns a dead automaton, it becomes virtually reinvigorated through the questions, that is the fantasy of the coproductive counterpart. The mechanism of either the poetic text or the automaton nevertheless impairs perception and subsequently programs readers (Kittler

2003; Kohns 2007: 242).[10] That Hoffmann himself describes his own writing as mechanical (Hoffmann 1968 [1814–1822]: 349) sounds from this perspective almost like a reading instruction or a key for interpretation.

Correspondingly, Nicola Gess also concedes that Hoffmann's texts reproduce the impact of music, because "they strive with the linguistic 'mechanic' of rhetorical means after their own impact" (Gess 2010: 147). Hoffmann's textual movements are thus capable of evoking a conversion in the opposite direction: the machine is no longer becoming humanoid, but rather human is becoming, through textual affection, more mechanoid. Have we viewed the love or the beloved with our own eyes? Or is literature able to persuade us of the impression of déjà vu: to, eventually, program love? That Ferdinand is just now learning of that instance (of the program 'literature'), which injects the possibility of love in him that he will never experience again, retrieves the tragic nature of the narrative and the deconstruction of the imaginative power of literature. This is what Hoffmann allows to become tangible as repetition, which makes difference possible, yet not as mimesis or a portrayal of reality. Thus, when Friedrich Kittler criticizes the psychoanalytic lectures of Hoffmann, because they only read what the texts themselves knowingly construct, one could accuse Kittler of the same, insofar Hoffmann's literature has long known about the mechanism, i.e. about 'literature' as medial a priori. Yet, it objectifies this circumstance not simply for a reified, isolated motif, but rather produces, by way of its poetics of repetition, a difference on the level of reception, which enables the recipient to performatively re-experience what the text narrates.

## 4 Figures of repetition: duplication or re-writing reality

In his last narrative, *Des Vetters Eckfenster* (1822), it becomes explicit what was intrinsic in Hoffmann's texts already in 1814. The arrangement of the narrative includes an older writer, who is bound to a wheelchair as a result of illness, and his younger, dynamic cousin, who regularly visits the writer in his attic room with a view over a market. Approaching death's door, the older cousin wants to pass on the gaze constitutive for creating literature to the younger cousin: "At the very least, I want to see whether I can teach you to view the beginnings of art" (Hoffmann 1983 [1822]: 445). Using binoculars, the two men observe the happenings in the market below. What follows hereafter should be under-

**10** For the aspect of programming, see Kittler 2003; Kohns 2007: 242.

stood almost as a struggle for better perception, as it is perhaps most plainly put in the story between two natural scientists in *Meister Floh* (1822). While the younger cousin strives to follow mimetically the vast amount of happenings in the square (first-degree observation) – this is linguistically reflected in the breaking up of syntax towards a metonymic sequence (Lüdemann 2010: 119) – the older cousin condenses the series of events into a narration (second-degree observation).

Through the series of repetitions – the translation of mimesis into narration repeats itself twelve times – the younger cousin incrementally learns the difference of the poetological grasp of the happenings in the market. The genetic repetition of factual events (originals), as the narrative states, is not simply an identical repetition (copy), rather the fiction has repercussions on its part on facticity. Thus, it already demonstrates the old wives' tale that Nathanael shares in *Der Sandmann*, and it becomes now clear with the process of poiesis from cousin[1] to cousin[2]. "[W]hat is different about writing poetry," asks Breitinger, "when new terms and ideas form in the imagination, whose originals cannot be sought in the present work of real things, but in some other possible world-construction" (Bodmer and Breitinger 1980: 86, 88). That writer, who Breitinger then compares with a creator, "because he communicates through his art not only invisible things and bodies, but also quasi creates the things that are not for speculation, which jumped from the state of possibility into the state of reality" (Bodmer and Breitinger 1980: 86, 88), is nevertheless already obsolete again, according to Hoffmann. It is not in vain that he toils on the conceptual term in view of technical reproducibility (Benjamin 2002: 351–383).[11] If the author were a creator and his creations indistinguishable from the true objects – "The imagination 'produces reality', and provided that understanding accepts and secures this, 'its product becomes something real'" (Hermann 2006: 63; Fichte 1845: 234) – then literature loses any observational skills, even those observational skills, which the older cousin demonstrates with so much concentration to the younger cousin.

The flower girl episode ultimately tells not only of the disappearance of the writer behind the uniform rows of books in the lending library of Mr. Kralowski, i.e. behind the mechanisms of his consumability, "that proliferation of writings, that increasing acceleration and ephemerality of symbolic consumption" (Koschorke 1998: 595), as Carlos Spoerhase impressively presented,but it imagines the end of literature as a whole, while denying it the power of repetition. In

**11** Benjamin's argument can also readily be transferred to the consequences of book printing. See Benjamin's famous essay on the reproducibility of the work of art.

the euphoric encounter of the writer with his alleged ideal reader, the flower girl, it already comes to a first disillusionment because of her opinion on his book. It concerns "a completely comical book. Initially, it can be a little confusing; but then it is as if one sat in the midst of things" (Hoffmann 1983 [1822]: 454). It becomes obvious that the writer is involved with a reader, who just as rarely differentiates between the levels of context and form – "[t]o my no small surprise, the girl related to me the content of the little tale very clearly and succinctly, so that I well saw how she must have already read it many times." (Hoffmann 1983 [1822]: 454) – as she reflects upon the origin of the books, which she is in the habit of exchanging every afternoon in the lending library:

> It turned out that the girl never thought about how the books she was reading had to be written first. The concept of a writer, of a poet was very foreign to her, and I honestly believe that upon further inquiry, the devout childlike faith would come to light, that the loving God allowed the books to grow like mushrooms. Meanwhile, a completely different, dark idea about the producing of books must have arisen in the girl; For as I count up the money, she asks very naively and uninhibitedly whether I make all of Mr. Kralowski' books [...]. (Hoffmann 1983 [1822]: 455)

That Hoffmann now calls precisely the "kind God" the creator of nature is again no accident, yet it subliminally reiterates the conflict between a natural chain of living things, whose origin is secured through God as a first, absolute principle, and an artificial series, as which literature is to be completely understood. As an artificial series, literature is no longer to be included in a preordained, divine continuum (e.g. Brandstetter 2003: 187–203).[12] It also has to do with a deconstruction of the aesthetics of genius, as literature, given the understanding of a goodlike creation without models and medial conditions, exhibits the same structure of the idea of a chain of living beings. Hoffmann rejects the idea of such an original genius, but more than that, he shows much more how the idea of an author varies with the various medial and discursive conditions. It is ultimately to be differentiated from literature as an observational function of observations, whose game Hoffmann plays out using the relation of difference and repetition between cousin[1] and cousin[2] as a mechanism of communication, which can do without genius. Nevertheless, with the risky reception of the flower girl, one such thing appears to be on the line: not the author, but rather literature itself, when it is understood as nothing further than the mimesis of nature. In

**12** Ever since Goethe's *Die Wahlverandtschaften* (1809), the deception and imitation paradigms of art have become an object of literary deconstruction. See Claudia Öhlschläger's essay on Goethe's novel (Öhlschläger 2003).

this sense, Hoffmann's last text can also be understood as the negotiation of an aporia into which literature is necessarily entangled. As production, it is dependent on reproducing its relations of production, and that naturally also includes the reader as a functional place of decoding. If, despite medial and discursive changes (lending library), it does not succeed in reproducing the position of the reader appropriately – the flower girl represents this failure – it eventually means its "death." With *Des Vetters Eckfenster*, Hoffmann incorporates the approach of biological, artificial, and technical reproduction, as he had already negotiated it in *Der Sandmann*, and radicalizes it while testing the inverted alignment of literature and life. Consequently, the possibility of the ephemerality of literature will be questioned in addition to the process of creation.

## 5 State the difference: *disruptive storytelling*

As was demonstrated in exemplary texts, Hoffmann uses repetition as "an aesthetic principle of disturbance on the side of content and form" (Spoerhase 2009: 577–596), but does not only use this on the level of presentation, in order to generate a certain situation of observation on the level of reception; he also continually negotiates the level of production. Thus, in the most radical case of the construction of his texts, it concerns a repetition on three levels: the levels of production, presentation, and reception. The four types of the relationship between difference and repetition – *imitation, reproduction, replication* and *duplication* – allow access to Hoffmann's works.

For instance, when Hoffmann negotiates repetition in the figure of the *imitation*, it breaks into all three levels. *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* as *copy* of *Die wundersame Geschichte des Peter Schlemhil*, the doubling of the life of someone (Spikher) in the dream of the enthusiast, and finally the infection of the reception level through déjà vu effects, evoked through the repetition of motifs, sentences, and words. The four types cannot be fixed to various levels, but rather circulate through all three levels of production, presentation, and reception and clash – or appear to merge – as becomes especially apparent in Hoffmann's last narrative *Des Vetters Eckfenster*. To a certain extent, the narrative makes use of all repetitions in order to imagine the case of emergency, the disturbance par excellence: when literature would be merely a pure duplication of reality, then it would be unnecessary.

But he does not go so far in all of his narratives. The play with the similarities, which evoke the repetitions on the most diverse levels, serves Hoffmann to provoke disturbances of a mild degree in order to fit literature as a mechanism into the project and to attach a "profound fracture," "that difference that think-

ing makes in thought" (Deleuze 1995: 333). The programming of repetitions in order to allow difference is the narrative mode that I signified as disruptive storytelling in the beginning. To this extent, it is a modern project, as the theoretical basis for it was first presented at the beginning of the twentieth century. Hoffmann's texts aesthetically anticipate this, while developing a sensibility for the ambiguity of the term "reproduction" as the modern-defining term, along with the linked disciplines (aesthetics, biology, sociology, technology, and economy) and worldviews. It seems that Hoffman is already aware of the implicit problems, which, in the medium of literature, all of these discourses pile up and negotiate, in an interplay between difference and repetition. But in order to make sure that these problems (as knowledge of representation) will not be lost in discourse, they become impregnated as an experience in disruptive storytelling.

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# Perturbing the Reader

## The Riddle-character of Art and the Dialectical Impact of Contemporary Literature (Adorno, Goetz, Kracht)

In his criticism of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, Hans Robert Jauß argues that Adorno widely neglects the constitutive role of reception in art, particularly forms of interaction like enjoying, identification, or catharsis (Jauß 1982: 64 – 65). If he is right, every attempt to analyze Adornos *Aesthetic Theory* via strategies that evoke certain effects would be in vain. As a matter of fact, Adorno himself expresses reservation about the effort to understand artworks by their effects. He defines the logic of the artwork as "determined objectively in themselves without regard to their reception"[1] (Adorno 2013: 188). By this statement Adorno might think of a research tradition, which investigates individual reactions towards the experience of art. In contrast to these empirical studies, from which Adorno wants to distance himself, another research area, namely an abstract one, considers effects of reception as linked to the textual structures. Of course, it takes an act of reading to actualize those structures, but from the perspective of thinkers such as Wolfgang Iser or Umberto Eco, effects cannot be engendered without considering them as implicit models and intentional aims of the artwork. On the basis of this research line, this essay looks at whether and how it is possible to approach one of the most important aspects of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory:* the riddle-character of art. Without doubt the term implies an activating mode for those trying to solve the riddle. Regarding the different ways of interaction in the process of riddling, I am going to answer the two following questions. First, how does Adorno conceptualize the riddle-character of art, and in which ways does it relate to concepts of interpretation, sense, and truth? Furthermore, which role does the riddle-character play in the reconciliation, which is according to Adorno the great achievement of art in society? Second, on the basis of the novels *Irre*, by Rainald Goetz (1983), and *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, by Christian Kracht (2008), I am going to review whether the riddle-character, as Adorno understands it, actually describes all kinds of modern literature – particularly developments in contemporary literature, which strongly works in a dialectic mode of involvement and disruption. By answering these questions, I want to highlight another aspect of modern literature; namely,

**1** "objektiv in sich bestimmt ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Rezeption" (Adorno 1970: 206).

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that in addition to Adorno's paradigm of reconciliation it is essential to introduce a paradigm of perturbance.

## 1 Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and the riddle-character of art

"All artworks – and art altogether – are enigmas"[2] (Adorno 2013: 166). Adorno's well-known appraisal in the *Aesthetic Theory* means first and foremost: artworks are characterized by an offer of meaning that includes a gesture of hiding. To visualize this effect, Adorno uses the image of a picture puzzle, which indicates the "preestablished routing of its observer"[3] (Adorno 2013: 167). The more you try to understand the artwork the more it will cover its answers. Due to this ambivalent character Adorno criticizes the idealism of understanding underlying hermeneutics. According to Adorno it is not possible to resolve all lacks of clarity in arts so as to give concrete answers, although he assumes that artworks pretend to be understood, and therefore want to be interpreted. However, in addition to the sensual component, Adorno points out a second mode of interaction in art experience: a philosophical one. Presuming that the riddle-character arises from a rational mind, and is not an irrational effect, art can be understood as a mediated truth; and mediated in itself the truth can just be localized in a process of mediation. The process Adorno thereby has in mind differs from hermeneutic acts of interpretation, since philosophical reflection just shows how the riddle-character works: "The solution of the enigma amounts to giving the reason for its insolubility"[4] (Adorno 2013: 168).

Even though Adorno is not interested in the perceptional part of art, the metaphor of the riddle-character only makes sense by considering an active role of perception, which is guaranteed by being astonished and trying to solve the riddle. Moreover, art and its perception can be understood as a mode of communication, by connecting the truth of art with the rational sphere of critical philosophy, as Adorno assumes in his *Aesthetic Theory* (Sonderegger 2011: 422). Both are able to create something that does not exist in reality anymore: the reconciliation of all heterogeneity. According to Adorno, in a broken world only art and philosophy provide a synthesis of disparate elements. Regarding the reflection of art, rational discourse and aesthetic discourse are combined, and therefore rec-

**2** "Alle Kunstwerke, und Kunst insgesamt, sind Rätsel" (Adorno 1970: 182).
**3** "prästabilierte Niederlage ihres Betrachters" (Adorno 1970: 184).
**4** "Das Rätsel lösen ist soviel wie den Grund seiner Unlösbarkeit angeben" (Adorno 1970: 185).

onciliation has to be considered as a product of interacting. As I have shown before, this interaction relies on certain structures in the artwork, which are of particular interest for Adorno. By linking the reconciliation with the way the artwork is configured, he uses terms that are well known by the tradition he criticizes: that of hermeneutics. These terms are "unity" and "entireness," "consistence" and "coherence," or "balance" and "correlation." According to Adorno, all these elements are an expression of the quality of an artwork; it can be measured by its ability to synthesize its components into a single unit and therefore to offer an experience of reconciliation.

The criteria Adorno uses belong to the classical tradition and, as such, they build a contrast to aesthetic Modernity, which is formed on principles of ugliness, disharmony, and disproportion. Of course Adorno knows that there has been a crisis of meaning in aesthetic modernity, whereby creating harmonious art has become impossible. But that does not mean for him that reconciliation would be replaced by the irreconcilable. Adorno argues quite the opposite: "Today, reconciliation as the comportment of the artwork is evinced precisely there where art countermands the idea of reconciliation in works whose form dictates intransigence"[5] (Adorno 2013: 183). This statement is based on a dialectical figure, so that accordingly any negation of meaning, unity, and harmony remain dependent on these principles. They are present even in the act of their destruction. Adorno therefore asserts that even where the art insists "on the most extreme incoherence and dissonance, these elements are those of unity; without this unity they would not even be dissonant"[6] (Adorno 2013: 214). Based on these considerations Adorno establishes a rating scale for modern art. According to it, any attempt of still creating harmonious art, for example a metrical, uniformly composed poem in the style of romantic sensibility, has to be regarded as a failure. The dissonant modernity is measured according to whether it consciously stages a factor of destruction, or simply turns out to be just nonsense. Adorno argues: "Everything depends on this: whether meaning inheres in the negation of meaning in the artwork"[7] (Adorno 2013: 210). For example, he refers to the absurd theater of Samuel Beckett and avant-garde installation art. While Beckett still preserves the unity of space, time, and action in the absences of it, the collages and montages of the avant-garde art at first glance seem to be interested

**5** "Versöhnung als Verhaltensweise des Kunstwerks wird heute gerade dort geübt, wo Kunst der Idee von Versöhnung absagt" (Adorno 1970: 202).

**6** "auf dem Äußersten von Unstimmigem und Dissonantem besteht, sind ihr jene Momente zugleich solche von Einheit; ohne diese würden sie nicht einmal dissonieren" (Adorno 1970: 235).

**7** "Alles hängt daran, ob der Negation des Sinns im Kunstwerk Sinn innewohnt" (Adorno 1970: 231).

only in destruction. However, the compilation of materials such as newspaper cuttings or cans follows a certain order principle. It is a principle that negates the criteria of harmony, which are thereby inherent in its denial. The reason why Adorno prefers dissonant art in general is that it fulfills an essential social function. As the collages deal with garbage, they remind us of what is excluded by the rules of consumer society in its utilitarian thinking. The riddle-character of art thus gains a critical meaning. If art resigns this character, it gives away the opportunity to create an autonomous sphere, from which a counter-model to reality is possible.

## 2 Perturbance instead of reconciliation: Rainald Goetz's *Irre* and Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*

The polar constellation in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* leaves no room for alternative configurations of meaning and structures of destruction. However, such alternative setups can be found in a particular line of modern literature, which can be drawn from Romanticism to the present. Texts of this type deny the alternative of synthesis and disruption by not resolving the tension between meaning and meaninglessness. In these texts, no reconciliation can be developed dialectically, because the dialectic only seems to appear, and does not actually take place. I call this effect perturbance. In such an experience of perturbance, it is impossible for the reader to decide whether the incoherence of the text can be unified or the text as whole is constantly undermined by its disruptions. To illustrate this assumption, I will discuss the novels *Irre* and *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*. Both novels have been classified by critics as extremely confusing and prepossessing at the same time. Rainald Goetz's novel *Irre* is about a young doctor called Raspe, who works in a psychiatric institution and suffers under the working conditions of the clinic. To cope with his experiences, he starts writing; however, it turns out that it is impossible for him to break out of madness, because in his desire to recover he constantly reflects on the conditions of insanity. In representing madness, Goetz uses a strategy of a multi-perspective narration and a non-chronological structure. The three parts of the novel are arranged in a confusing relation of 'histoire' and 'discours.' In the logic of action, the middle part called "Inside" has to be considered as the real beginning, as it is about the initial euphoria with which Raspe started his job as a psychiatrist. This optimistic attitude is undermined by the first chapter "Remove oneself," which shows Raspe's suffering and failure. The last part is

anything but what its title "Order" suggests, because the confusing condition of Raspe is represented in an associative structure. His desire to be freed from his deranged state can only be described in an open question at the final end of the novel: "Is finally everything one, my work?"[8] (Goetz 1983: 331). With regard to this open ending, the novel represents a loss of unity and coherence, and at the same time the desire to recover from this loss. The text shows a desperate attempt by Raspe to gain control of himself through discourses that are extracted from the subject over and over again. The basic perturbance is that nothing leads to a whole, though constantly the desire for it is expressed. Thereby the reflection mode of the text, as Adorno understands it, does not reconcile the reader with the disparity of the text. It rather causes several disturbing moments. This connection between reflection and destruction is particularly evident in the statements that directly address the reader. The first of these passages strikes the difficult beginning of the novel, with its bewildering juxtapositions of paragraphs and multi-perspective representation of madness. In a fictional dialogue with a so-called benevolent observer, the narrator states:

> Now that I have constantly explained myself and the text in this passage, this short sentence: You should just wait for it, and because the sentence was so short, I repeated it: *You should just wait for it*. This you of course points to the benevolent neutral observer, but at the same time it seems to me that this you also refers to you, unlike the outset where I was meant [...].[9] (Goetz 1983: 22 f.)

This passage promises to resolve all irritations and is trying to encourage those readers, whose attentions were badly strained by the non-linear mode of presentation, to continue reading. It is particularly important that this form of confidential talk between the narrator and the reader creates a horizon of understanding, which is undermined below. Although the second chapter seems to be much more coherent, it is not true that "everything will be clear"[10] (Goetz 1983: 105), as promised by the motto of this chapter. Therefore, the way the text addresses the reader has to be considered as preparing a confrontational strategy. The polite form of "Sie" indicates a detached attitude against this type of reader, but in the two other clauses, in which the reader is addressed, it becomes even clearer

**8** "Ist endlich alles eines, meine Arbeit?"

**9** "Nachdem ich Ihnen in dieser Passage laufend mich selbst und den Text erläutert habe, dieser kurze Satz: Warten Sie es doch einfach ab, und weil er so kurz war, wiederholte ich ihn: *Warten Sie es doch einfach ab.* Mit diesem Sie war natürlich einerseits er gemeint, der neutrale wohlgesonnene Beobachter, doch zugleich sind diesmal, anders als eingangs wo ich gemeint war, mit diesem Sie auch Sie gemeint, wie mir scheint [...]."

**10** "alles klar werden [wird]."

that the communication between the narrator and the reader loses its suggestive immediacy. Both use the third person and can be found in the last chapter, where completely different opinions occur about the relation between the text and its perception. They are committed to what Roland Barthes has defined as a characteristic feature of the so called "writerly text": a "plurality of entrances" and an "opening of networks" (Barthes 1990: 5).

> This information was for users who have entered here by accident. Today I care especially for those users who are more likely to be etched by longer contiguous WordPassages, who, if they read such a book at all, prefer to browse through it, and for whom this super short AllSubChapters might have been logically a possible entry. My sympathy applies highly to these users. With them I share my desire for an accurate tight language (BUBBLE COOK SNOTS SPLASH), and my desire for pictures.[11] (Goetz 1983: 259)

The fact that the narrator sympathizes with this type of reader creates a paradoxical situation, because on the one hand, this narrator granted the readers of his text a wild usability; on the other hand, such a recommendation just makes sense if it is directed to a reader who is doing exactly the opposite: a reader of the hermeneutic orientation who tries to understand the novel by successive approximation. For him the title "Irre" as the primary reader orientation becomes an advisement. Therefore, the novel does not work as openly as it pretends to, but rather works in a dialectical reversal, as demonstrated in a retrospective at the end:

> There was no narrative thread any more, which treats the narrator and subtle reader so well. Instead it had been necessary: minced meat, theory, messes, brain and brain again, manic pamphlets, gossip and corny jokes and finding instead of groping. That's a shit, not literature, I am told. But I don't give a hang, because it concerns immeasurably the truth and nothing else, because nothing can be taken into account, except that the whole thing is true.[12] (Goetz 1983: 279)

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**11** "Dies war eine Information für Benützer, die zufällig hier gerade eingestiegen sind. Meine Fürsorge gilt heute vor allem jenen Benützern, die von längeren zusammenhängenden WortPassagen eher angeätzt sind, die sich so ein Buch wenn überhaupt mehr durchblättermäßig reinziehen, und für die dieses superkurze AllesSubKapitelchen logisch ein möglicherweise Einstieg gewesen sein könnte. Diesen Benützern gilt sehr meine Sympathie. Mit ihnen teile ich meine Sehnsucht nach einer treffend knappen Sprache (Blubber Koch Sprotz Spritz) und nach Bildern."

**12** "Und es gab auch keinen langen erzählerischen Atem mehr, der jedem Erzähler und feinsinnigen Leser so gut tut, sondern notwendig waren: Hackfleisch, Theorie, Sauereien, Hirn und nochmals Hirn, manische Pamphlete, Tratsch und Kalauer und Finden statt Tasten. Das ist eine Scheiße, keine Literatur, sagt man mir. Aber das muß wurscht sein, weil es maßlos um

The plea for coherence of the whole is not meant ironically, even if the narrator has already made clear: "If anybody wants me to explain how it all fits together, I will take the piss out of him"[13] (Goetz 1983: 60). Consistency and coherence are rather substituted by a different concept of totality. It is a totality that tries to master madness in all areas of its impact. Therefore the novel does not generate a coherent relationship between the whole of the text and its individual components, as for example the hermeneutic circle suggests, but forms a mazy set of passages that are sometimes more, sometimes less connected. Such a mission of incoherent totality challenges a new form of reading in the sense of de-concentration, chaos, oblivion, and a-linearity. Due to the structure of the novel, however, this attitude cannot be obtained seamlessly as the result of a successful reading. Rather it takes place in the contrary way: in concentration, order, remembering, and linearity. This tension between method and knowledge makes it impossible to break out of the discourse of madness, what is exactly intended by the novel. The question of the last sentence as a gesture of opening, in which the main character Raspe is mired, turns out to be also a figure of closure for reader. To get to the end of the novel, it must be read again.

Christian Kracht's novel *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* works initially as a dystopian story about an alternative reality. Furthermore, the permanent state of war between the fictional Swiss Soviet Republic and fascistic Germany represents the fundamental disruption of social interaction. Beside these chaotic circumstances there is a common thread in the text. The nameless protagonist, a high-ranking officer from the African colonies of Switzerland, gets the order to arrest the absconding Colonel Brazhinsky. For this purpose he sets out for the so-called "Réduit," a mountain massif, which has to be considered as the mystical power center of the Swiss and therefore works as the symbolic center of the text. When he finally arrives, the actual order turns out to be unfeasible, because Brazhinsky proves to be too powerful. Also the Réduit itself, which the African officer longed for since his youth, turns out as an elusive rhizome. This topographic significance can be described in terms of deconstruction as a promise of fixation of meaning that will never fulfill. The same postponement can be found in the shape of the drawings on the walls inside the Réduit, which no one knows who painted; as one climbs higher, they alter from the concrete to the abstract, until they become a primitive cave drawing again at the top. The paintings show symbolically the way the protagonist will take at the end of

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die Wahrheit geht und um sonst gar nichts, weil es nie keine Rücksicht nicht geben darf, außer darauf, daß das Ganze stimmt [...]."

**13** "Wer fordert, ich solle erklären, wie alles zusammenhängt, wird einfach verarscht."

the novel, which is to go back to Africa to the origins of mankind. With this twist, the goal of the plot turns into new possibilities of sense. At the end of civilization, there just may be a new approach to sense as an endless cycle of life.

In addition to this circularity, the narrative structure is based on a particular logical case. An indication of this can be found in the following passage, in which the narrator is sleeping with the female Major General Favre and meanwhile makes disturbing observations:

> We touched each other. Her fingers ran over my eyebrows. [...] There was a Korean print on the wall above her bed that showed a wave that threatened to overwhelm a small wooden boat. A mountain was visible in the background. In the picture it was raining, or it was not raining. When it was over, she smoked one of my cigarettes, the last Papierosy.[14] (Kracht 2010: 46)

The statement of the narrator "In the picture it was raining, or it was not raining" is a quote from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. It is used to illustrate an extreme case of elementary propositions, i.e. those sets of propositional logic, which can be asked whether they are true or false. Contrary to the impression that the sentence would be paradox, it must be considered as "unconditionally true"[15] (Wittgenstein 1971: 55), because, whether it is raining or not, the sentence is always true and therefore leaves maximum room for its fulfillment. Wittgenstein calls this a tautology, in contrast to the other extreme case of elementary proposition, the contradiction in which the sentence would read: "In the picture it was raining, and it was not raining." This statement is always wrong, because one argument repeals the other. The reason why the tautology is preferred by Kracht, compared to the contradiction, lies in its two-fold effect. Interpreted by mistake as an expression of an unreliable narrator (Hermes 2010: 52, 278), the tautological proposition provides a highly reliable and nonsensical statement at the same time. This tension between meaning and meaninglessness produces a subtle disturbance in reading. It is complemented by a second one between logical discourse and fictional context. Regardless of whether we are familiar with the rules of logic, the statement suggests a negotiation of truth. The categories 'true' and 'false', however, are not relevant in the perception of art. The fictional pact between the text and the reader actually works just by a dispensation of this alternative. Therefore the logical form itself generates disturb-

**14** "Wir berührten uns. Sie strich mit den Fingern über meine Augenbrauen. [...] An der Wand über ihrem Bett hing ein koreanischer Druck, der eine Welle zeigte, die ein kleines Holzschiff zu erdrücken drohte. Dahinter war ein Berg zu sehen. Auf dem Bild regnete es, oder es regnete nicht. Als es vorbei war, rauchte sie eine von meinen Zigaretten, die letzte Papierosy."

**15** "bedingungslos wahr."

ance. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the sentence provides no information about the constitution of the narrated world, although it refers to this. The reason why this statement is made at all is for the sense of undecidability, which appears as the crucial narrative strategy of Kracht, and forms an alternative to Adorno's opposition of coherence and dissonance. It is not by chance that a variation of the statement appears elsewhere in the text, namely where Favre says about Brazhinsky: "He is a danger to the SSR, or he is the hope of the SSR"[16] (Kracht 2010: 41). On the demand of the narrator, as he could be both, he gets the answer: "That is the nature of things"[17] (Kracht 2010: 41). Apparently the tautology is no more just a verbal case, but describes the basic conditions of the diegesis. Therefore the novel unfolds a world in which the logical form $A \vee \neg A$ applies to all circumstances. With respect to the description of the Korean print, there exists a perceptual situation, in which the narrator is sleeping with Favre and recognizes that it is raining, and a situation in which the narrator is sleeping with Favre and recognizes that it is not raining. This simultaneity and undecidability of alternatives, which overlap and claim parallel validity, affects all areas of the novel, particularly the subjective, historical, and poetical ones. Regarding the subjective plot line, Kracht has created a first-person narrator that embodies this superposition of different states of being in various ways. First, he strongly believes in the communist ideals, but always imagines Africa, where he grew up and was influenced by a shaman. Second, he remains nameless throughout the novel and therefore to some extent a stranger, although the reader gains insight into his thoughts and feelings. Third, and most importantly, different tenses change in the presentation of his experience: the perspective of the Swiss officer, who gets the order to arrest Brazhinsky, is in the epic past tense ("I was party commissioner in New Bern"[18]) (Kracht 2010: 12), whereas the escape fantasies are written in the present tense ("I am here, just briefly"[19]) (Kracht 2010: 27), and the prophecies of the Swiss final victory are formulated in the future tense ("We'll build golden villages and golden towns"[20]) (Kracht 2010: 27). By this diffusion of the past, present, and future, the novel thus creates a rupture in the linear plot, so that the safe place of narrative dissolves. The question of the narrator: "Which of my egos felt this?"[21] (Kracht 2010: 112) suggests that several subjects exist inside him, as a kind of tautological versions of himself. In the lan-

**16** "Er ist eine Gefahr für die SSR, oder er ist die Hoffnung der SSR."
**17** "Das wiederum liegt in der Natur der Dinge."
**18** "Ich war Parteikommissär in Neu-Bern."
**19** "Ich komme nur ganz kurz hierher."
**20** "Wir werden goldene Dörfer und goldene Städte bauen."
**21** "Welches Ich fühlte das?"

guage of logic, the narrator is therefore in Switzerland or in Africa, or at any place at all, or at all places at the same time.

The historical tautology of the novel can be explained by the relation between fiction and reality, which is particularly revealing in the story of the foundation of the Swiss Soviet Republic. According to this story "the great Swiss Lenin, who, instead of returning in a sealed train to the decaying, contaminated Russia, had remained in Switzerland to initiate the Soviet, in Zurich, Basel and New Bern, after decades of war"[22] (Kracht 2010: 57 f.). The passage provides not only information about the fictional founding of the Swiss Soviet Republic, but also refers by the "instead" at the same time to the historical fact that Lenin, in 1917, actually returned from exile in Switzerland to Russia. Within the fictional world, however, this actual history cannot be known. Therefore it is not the counterfactual narrative that is important, as many think (Irsigler 2013: 171–186), but the principle of the alternative itself. The novel is about the simultaneity of multiple parallel worlds in which opposite developments are possible. From this perspective, there is no difference between fact and fiction. Both turn out to be characterized as a realization form of an infinite number, which must always be thought of as alternatives.

The poetological tautology can be exemplified by the Réduit that works as a metaphor for the constitution of the text. Due to the simultaneous fixation and displacement of sense, by which this metaphor is characterized, two different interpretive perspectives intersect in the entire novel: one hermeneutical and one deconstructional. Following the hermeneutic track, the flashbacks to childhood and the current order of the narrator produce a relatively closed context that is indeed frequently disturbed by irritation and a-causal plot elements. On the other hand, the novel cannot be read solely in terms of deconstruction. Although the temporal and spatial configurations represent basic thought patterns of displacement and decentralization, the novel, however, pursues to a large extent a clear goal. Both approaches are thwarted by aspects of each other. This means that there is no interpretive perspective, which works as an exclusive model of explanation. That which, with respect to the subjective and historical reading, creates a perturbing effect – the simultaneity of alternatives – also applies to the poetical reading: it is possible to interpret and understand the novel, or it is not possible to interpret and understand the novel.

**22** "[war] de[r] grosse[] Eidgenosse[] Lenin, [...] anstatt in einem plombierten Zug in das zerfallende, verstrahlte Russland zurückzukehren, in der Schweiz geblieben [...], um dort nach Jahrzehnten des Krieges den Sowjet zu gründen, in Zürich, Basel und Neu-Bern."

# 3 Perturbance as dialectics of distance and closeness

Both novels send their main characters and readers on a search for sense, which is designed as an infinitive approximation. To quote Rainald Goetz's *Irre*, it is a "rotary standstill"[23] (Goetz 1983: 219 – 220) in which the main characters and the readers are enclosed. This hermetic model of narration reveals a different strategy than the dialectical one of reconciliation by neglecting any kind of synthesis. Both novels reflect the effort to gain unity, but ultimately leave the question unanswered if it is going to succeed. Adorno himself describes a kind of aesthetic structure that is quite similar to this open question. It is the "most extreme form"[24] of the riddle-character of an artwork, which is characterized by the insecure experience "whether or not there is meaning"[25] (Adorno 2013: 175). If you cannot decide whether a text generates sense in the meaning of coherence, it is not possible to transfer its different parts into a higher unity, although you are constantly trying to do just that. Reconciliation as a principle of unity, and destruction as a mode of disruption, are in irresolvable opposition to each other. This is the kind of aesthetic experience I call "perturbance." Perturbance has to be considered a literary strategy that does not deny the possibility of sense and meaning, but offers an alternative experience that changes between harmony and disharmony; or, to be more specific, an experience that is located in the middle of these extremes. Admittedly, in the philosophical reflection, perturbance can be understood as an organizing principle of the text, but the insight into this intention has nothing conciliatory. This makes it impossible to hold up the connection between art and philosophy through the rational, as Adorno suggests. Because perturbance does not maintain a clear position and awareness, it does not apply for what Ruth Sonderegger points out in her interpretation of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory:* that experience and reflection of aesthetic truth would generate a critical attitude towards the social reality (Sonderegger 2011: 423). Being perturbed by reading does not make the receiving subject look at reality in a different way, since the state of ambiguity of perturbing art makes it impossible for the subject to judge at all. Nonetheless, both gestures of reconciliation and perturbance share an important effect that Sonderegger calls "non-indifference" (Sonderegger 2011: 423). While the non-indifference in Adorno's

**23** "kreisender Stillstand."
**24** "äußerste Gestalt."
**25** "ob Sinn selbst sei oder nicht."

aesthetic of truth points to the social life, the non-indifference that arises by way of aesthetic of perturbance refers to art itself. The dialectic of this kind of aesthetic modernity is not about the relation between disorder and reconciliation, but about distance and closeness. Perturbance seems to keep us from art, but involves us even more in its aesthetic dimension.

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# Expansions of the Instant

## Disruptions of Time in Contemporary German Literature

Time stands still in Thomas Lehr's novel *42*. A cosmic "disruption" (Lehr 2005: 35) has caused a single moment to linger on for all eternity, time as an ephemeral experience has been suspended, brought to a standstill in the interface of a single, everlasting moment. The novel tells the story of the "chronified" (*Chronifizierten*), a small group of randomly assembled protagonists, who, for reasons that remain unknown to them as well as the reader, can continue to move through this frozen world, enclosed in their own small temporal spheres, in which their own private time goes on ticking as usual. The "time zombies," as they call themselves, soon begin to lead a nomadic existence: they traverse the world, which has become a mere backdrop, in which aircrafts hang motionless in the eternally cloudless sky and people remain frozen in mid-step. The visual presence of an – in principle – familiar reality, which is one of the major effects of the scenario, enters into a strangely incongruous relationship with its "unreality," with the mystery that the world of the eternal present seems to harbor. For in Thomas Lehr's work, time has stood still around midday, of all times, so that all of Europe is lit by never-ending bright sunlight, which literally illuminates reality right into the last nook and cranny. This maximum degree of visibility, this visual monumentalization of the existing world, is bound up with a deep ontological doubt: everything that is so clearly visible here suddenly seems like a facade, a copy, like a gigantic museum of the world, lacking the "wintery air of real reality"; it seems more like a "sculpture garden," populated by "mummies," "wax figures" and "shop window mannequins of a decorator suffering from delusions of grandeur" (Lehr 2005: 236, 33 – 34, 53 & 63). Leitmotifs involving metaphors of art, images, and photography are used to describe this world, thus alluding to a context drawn from the theory of the media: the world brought to a standstill appears as the purest "summer painting, across which a brilliant photo-realist has scattered his highlights, his intimate hues and life-like shadows," like a "painting by Spitzweg," or rather "a film by Spitzweg, [...] in which in principle everything would be able to move," were it not fixed in the immobility of a single snapshot (Lehr 2005: 11, 124 & 132). And elsewhere, concerning a spontaneous remark made by a "chronified" child, we read: "It seems to have been *photographed*, crystallized and fixed in place by the ad-

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hesive tape of the world – the child's formulation cannot be bettered, even for the third dimension." (Lehr 2005: 33) Like photography, the now-frozen reality is simultaneously a real presence and an artificial backdrop, simultaneously the present and the past, simultaneously a confirmation of the images in our memory and a de-familiarization of the familiar – "the living image of a dead thing" (Barthes 1981: 79), as Roland Barthes put it.

In the face of this omnipresence of timeless visuality, Lehr's protagonists reactivate the temporality of another, properly anachronistic medium, namely writing. "Whoever does not write will hardly be able to endure our world" (Lehr 2005: 161), says the protagonist, revealing his role as the fictional author of the text of the novel. But from the very beginning, writing is a losing battle against the overwhelming power of images; the attempt to rescue the temporality of writing from the presentist power of the visual is futile: "Imagine me as a stray dog that repeatedly lifts its writing leg on the lamppost of self-assurance." (Lehr 2005: 161)[1]

Against the excess of an omnipresent visuality, writing as a cultural practice becomes almost meaningless. The novel could thus be interpreted as indicating that a crisis of literature is in the making, under the sign of multimedia imagery. Writing thus tends to be associated with time, whereas the image is associated with the present, presence, and timelessness: by writing, the protagonist bestows a story on his experiences, by writing he creates a difference between the present of the writing and the past of what is written, between sign and reference. The written word awakens memories of the time before the present; it makes what is simply *there*, in a presentist and banal way, into a trace of a past, a sign of something else that is no longer present. Time thus emerges as an expression of the cognitive power to distance oneself symbolically from the presence of what is perceived – a power which, according to Lehr's novel, finds itself in an increasingly bad way in a world of images.

The event that Lehr makes the starting point of his narrative is thus to be read as a mediatic disruption, which also affects the relationship of both the protagonist and literature to the world. The visibility of this world appears to be colliding with its legibility, and this conflict manifests itself in the form of the collapse of an habitual temporal distance: the event, which, as in crime fiction, is presented right at the beginning of the story, and for which the "chronified" endeavor to provide an explanation, is no longer an event in the sphere of history, from an inaccessible past, which can be reconstructed only on the basis of traces

1 "Man stelle sich einen streunenden Hund vor, wenn man sich mich vorstellt, der immer wieder das Schreibbein am Laternenpfahl der Selbstvergewisserung hebt."

(Derrida 2007); rather, it is brutally evident, constantly staring one in the face. In addition to time standing still, this also applies to all sorts of other cases in *42*, such as the infidelity of the protagonist's girlfriend, which in this timeless world is presented in graphic clarity like a museum exhibit. No traces or indices have to be picked over here, no signs deciphered in order to identify the obvious. The disruption of the relationship is perpetuated in a kind of still life of infidelity. Only by means of a furious but ineffective manipulation of the image can it be put right, though not in historical time, which would enable the disruption to be integrated and thus normalized. The dynamic relationship between disruption and order is suspended, although there is still a suggestion of it in the novel's structure, with the five chapters comprising five phases of the (failed) processing of the event, beginning with the "shock" and ending in "fanaticism." The breakdown of a collectively binding time and temporality, the radical end of history in the timeless presence of the simulacrum, even leads to the collapse of the cultural function of narratives of disruption.

Against this background, the exploration of time in Lehr's novel and in the works of other authors can be read as a reflection on the mediatized nature of writing, as well as the function of literature and its poetics of disruption (Stegemann 2015: 65). For, in so far as the aesthetics of disruption are generally concerned with presence, and thus with creating effects of the present, the fantastic expansion of the present in Lehr's novel can also be read as a crisis of this form of reception aesthetics: if the attack of the present on the rest of time is already in full swing, if all routines have already been broken up and the disruption is set to last, why then go on trying to create enduring moments in the counterworlds of literature? Recent novels that thematize the contemporary world, such as *42*, combine the return of a form of narration – one unable to produce any closure – with citations from modernist figures of reflection, which also no longer represent ruptures, but are rather to be read as symptoms of a crisis of literature. The main focus is on aesthetic concepts of disrupted continuity, a characteristic feature of classical modernity, which is known for its "obsessive thematization of time" (Middeke 2002: 9). Against a growing dictatorship of the clock, which had become steadily more important in the wake of modernization and industrialization (Mumford 1934: 14), becoming especially noticeable thanks to the worldwide synchronization of time zones around 1900 (Galison 2003), modernist literature of that era articulated experiences of temporal discontinuity. These experiences combined a criticism of modern life, in particular of urban life and its speed, with a longing for a more meaningful form of time, for a revaluation of the inner experience of time, against the monotonous, empty arrow of physical or historical time.

The status of the present or the "moment" seems especially precarious in the literature of classical modernism. The immediate experience of presence in the present, of lingering "on the threshold of the moment," as Nietzsche once insisted (Nietzsche 1997: 62), forms one of the central phantasms of modern literature. At the same time, however, the possibility of a present and conscious experience of the moment is tendentially negated. In Hugo von Hofmannsthal's work, for example, one finds a veritable inability to live in the present, an inability that is essentially grounded in media theory: the translational power of a symbolically programmed mind introduces a gap between the moment of pure experience and its "coding" by the faculty of understanding, which is experienced as a loss of the present. The moment that passes is thus always only consciously perceptible when it has already passed; time itself emerges as the interval between an original experience and its retrospective comprehension, between the awareness of the moment and the moment of awareness. In order for "not just the experience of time, but time itself to be able to come into being [...] its non-being in every point in time, in every now its not-now must be *simultaneously* cognized" (Steiner 1996: 47). Uwe C. Steiner formulated this structure with reference to Derrida as follows:

> What is referred to as the present is the result of an operation of observation, with itself as object and which it therefore necessarily fails to grasp. Time thus occurs in a dual form: as operative time, the time of performance, and as observed time, as a reference. [...] The present is thus reclaimed as a reference, thereby relying on a [...] performance that it cannot catch up with, which first produces it and which inevitably eludes it. (Steiner 1996: 48 – 49)

Against this background, it becomes clear why the problem of time in the literature of classical modernism is primarily a problem of writing: in the oscillation between the presence of the sign and the absence of its meaning, in the immobilizing of meaning in the letter and its revitalization in the act of writing or reading, the primal scene (*Urszene*) of time is in a way being repeated again and again. Since the "reference" of writing is necessarily "subordinated" to its "performance," that is, to its graphic image, writing creates an awareness of the absence of the designated present, an awareness that is itself experienced as time (Steiner 1996: 46). According to Christina von Braun, it was in the first instance the invention of "phonetic alphabetic writing," to which the West and "historically-minded man" owe their "unshakeable sense of security," namely the unity and irreversibility of time, "the unchangeability of what has been [*des Gewesenen*]" (von Braun 1999: 103).

In the literature of classical modernism, the temporality of writing is seen as being opposed to the instantaneousness of the pre-linguistic, in a way still uncoded perceptual image, which, in the service of a capacity for immediate expe-

rience, is supposed to disrupt the assuring but also alienating certainty of writing. Sabine Schneider illustrates the contrast between image and language using the example of Hofmannsthal's novella *Das Glück am Weg:* here, during a boat trip, the protagonist catches a glimpse of a beautiful woman on another boat, and the sight of her immediately moves him. In its "fleeting, vague pictorial language," however, the moment remains pre-conscious, while its actual designation, which involves resorting to a concept, is only possible once the experience is already over. After the ship has passed by, its name becomes visible on the stern, "La Fortune": "As the gentle melancholic irony of the closing *pointe* puts it, only now, when the golden, glittering vision is extinguished and the golden gates to the inner eye are closed, does the previously unreadable name reveal its significance" (Schneider 2006: 293). Writing thus possesses a "melancholy structure of delay": it always arrives too late, fails to reach the goal of happiness, but at the same time the latter retains its meaning only through its subsequent designation. The "crisis of language," which has repeatedly been described as the central feature of classical modernism, is thus based on a crisis of temporal experience: language cannot do justice to reality because it always opens up a gap between what it means and the way in which this meaning is expressed. Around 1900, there was a widespread awareness that, compared to other, more sensual arts, literature had no means at its disposal in the struggle against the dead culture of concepts. Whereas the image "speaks directly to the soul," as Hofmannsthal himself once wrote (Hofmannsthal 1991: 169), language allows only a retrospective construction of reality, which distorts the original sensuous impressions and pictorial perceptions and renders them inaccessible, owing to a structure that is commensurable with the structure of conceptual thinking. In this way, rational language tends to be disempowered; it is now characterized by a lack, by its distance from life, which can be overcome only in rare moments of mute undifferentiatedness. To create such moments, a whole arsenal of new literary strategies is developed, designed to facilitate the simulation of pictorial effects of presence – this by disrupting diegesis, by empowering readers, by bringing writing to life, through the renewal of a real presence of the signified in the sign.

In the literature of classical modernism the instantaneousness of images is already deployed as a counter to the inherent temporality of writing, a move that is also fundamental to Thomas Lehr's novel. In this case, though, the confrontation is placed under a completely different set of signs: in Hofmannsthal's work, the "presence" of images does not appear as a threat, but rather as "the paradoxical pipe dream of language to escape itself, to transcend its mediality" (Andrée 2005: 24). According to Sabine Schneider, the literature of classical modernism had embarked on a program of "forgetting cultural codes," which was meant

to facilitate an escape from the deficiencies of language and time, and a return to the originality and unadulterated nature of sensory experience. Thomas Lehr's novel, however, appears to take the reverse situation as its point of departure: here, the temporality of writing is not the problem, but rather the solution, whereas the dream of a life "on the threshold of the moment" in the world of timelessness has become a frightening reality. The protagonist of *42* thinks back almost nostalgically to the volatility and impalpability of the moment, which was so problematic for classical modernism:

> The present was always the (distance) marker that had just disappeared under the locomotive. It was the flea in Heraclitus's hair that always jumped out of the way before the philosopher was able to squash it between his fingers, the sound that has just faded away, the hair's-breadth-wide segment of the watch face that the shadow of the second hand has just passed through, the irretrievable millimeter, the picometer, the nanometer in the mechanism of the atomic clock, ever elusive on its flight into the past, which itself no longer existed either, while the future was enduringly absent. What was, is no longer; what is, has already been; what will be, is still not there. Time ran out on us so swiftly whenever we thought about it. (Lehr 2005: 78)[2]

It is already clear from the opening sentence that Lehr quite deliberately takes up the central paradigms of classical modernism, when he quotes a famous time metaphor from Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities:* "The train of events is a train that lays down its own tracks as it goes along." (Musil 1997: 484) Lehr, however, describes these central paradigms of the classical-modernist way of conceiving time in the preterit, thus marking the fact that, in the world of his novel, they are no longer valid. In *42*, the moment lingers on indefinitely; there is thus no discrepancy between perception and designation. Frozen into a gigantic image, the world is now pure presence and, with the help of writing, has to be painstakingly re-temporalized by the isolated individual. This paradigm shift is confirmed by numerous other novels in contemporary German-language literature, in which the theme of "time" is experiencing a new boom. A noteworthy instance here is the reputedly brilliant young physicist, David Mahler, who in Daniel Kehlmann's short novel, *Mahlers Zeit*, manages to disprove the existence

**2** "Die Gegenwart war immer die gerade unter der Lok verschwundene Markierung. Sie war der Floh in der Haarwolle des Heraklit, immer schon davongesprungen, ehe die Philosophenfinger ihn zerquetschen konnten, der eben verklungene Ton, das vom Schatten des Sekundenzeigers verlassene haarfeine Segment des Zifferblattes, der unwiederbringliche Millimeter, Pikometer, Nanometer im Zählwerk der Atomuhr, nicht zu erwischen auf der Flucht in die Vergangenheit, die es selbst doch schon nicht mehr gab, während uns die Zukunft stets noch fehlte. Was war, ist nicht mehr; was ist, ist schon gewesen; was sein wird, ist immer noch nicht da. So rasch ging uns einmal die Zeit aus, wenn wir an sie dachten."

of time by means of a complex formula. At the same time, like an alchemical formula, this one actually changes the physicist's own life, which increasingly slides into temporal disarray. A change in the scientific *epistème* thus directly affects the object of investigation, namely time itself, which cannot remain what it was before: here, too, "fleeting" time is replaced in Mahler's experience by a new temporal structure. The more fervently David pursues his theses, the less reliable time becomes, the continuity of the existing world appears to be generally endangered. Objects simply disappear before David's eyes, processes accelerate or slow down in an unreal way, memories suddenly become present. Daniel first becomes aware of this temporal change when, shortly after writing down his formula, he witnesses an accident. The truck, which runs off the road and overturns, freezes – as in Lehr's work – into a still image:

> The truck stood perfectly still, balanced on two wheels, weightless. As if it could simply remain in that position. And the people were also motionless. In the middle of the road, frozen in mid-step, accompanied by the loud blaring of horns. Only a dove crossed the sky slowly, steadily beating its wings. (Kehlmann 2001: 18)[3]

Once again, the moment is divested of its fleeting character. The dove highlights the epiphany, but at the same time functions as a confusing factor, since it seems to belong to a different time sphere than the motionless truck. The situation thus also acquires an artificial character, with the result that it no longer appears as an immediate experience, like the emphatic momentary experiences of classical modernism, but on the contrary as alien and unreal. In Kehlmann's work, as in Lehr's, the "special" moment is a weird accident, a fateful disruption that transforms the world into a simulacrum.

In what then follows, the experience of such "presents" is replicated in almost serial fashion. Fleeting time is abolished and replaced by a new structure, in which various forms of the here and now, all placed on a largely equal footing, are played off against each other. David's every memory, his every phantasy or idea, then becomes his immediately experienced present moment. The leaps between these forms of the here and now soon take on grotesque forms. For instance, Daniel is sitting at his desk, writing a lecture, which he intends to present before a large audience:

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**3** "Der Lastwagen stand, ganz ruhig, auf zwei Rädern. Im Gleichgewicht und schwerelos. Als könnte es so bleiben. Und auch die Menschen waren erstarrt. Mitten auf der Straße, im Laufen, unter den schweren Akkorden der Hupen. Nur eine Taube durchkreuzte langsam, mit gleichmäßigem Flügelschlag, den Himmel."

> He had such a clear image of it in his mind that he was amazed when it suddenly – happened. And he found himself in the silent, many-eyed lecture hall, and people looked at him, so many of them, and waited for him to speak. His notes lay before him. He fixed his eyes on them and strove to get his nervousness under control; breathe deeply, he thought, I just have to breathe deeply; and he listened to his voice, but he didn't quite manage to focus on what it was saying. His thoughts wandered, for a moment he saw the sea very clearly before him, and detected the odor of seaweed, wondered if in reality he wasn't still there, and whether the lecture hall was only a product of his imagination; and then he felt himself lying in the grass [...], and an ant crawled along his neck, tickling him (Kehlmann 2001: 81).[4]

And so it continues, with concatenated temporal leaps between different, equally-weighted moments of the present. The cognition of the moment is here no longer characterized by retrospection, but by productivity: linguistic conceptions are not abstractions of original experiences, they now actually construct these experiences. The media-theoretical paradigm at work here is based not on reference, but on programming: like a computer code, language now creates the perceptual images that are immediately experienced as a lived present moment. If the problem of classical modernism consisted in failing to attain the primary reality of direct perception because it was unable to overcome the secondary world of writing, in Kehlmann's work the relationship is reversed: every perception is based on programming, which for its part remains hidden behind the apparent immediacy of the images and sounds. As a kind of source code, writing has inscribed itself into reality, which is why David, instead of describing reality with his formulas, is carrying out a cybernetic manipulation of its internal organization.

Thus, in the words of Friedrich Kittler, writing no longer operates as the medium of a "hermeneutic" interpretation of the world, but as a "programmed-programming" code (Kittler 1995: 31). The novel therefore acquires a distinctly poetological dimension: while Marcel – David's best friend, who is actually a writer – juxtaposes "short descriptions of everyday things" in his texts, which can no longer be formed into a narrative and thus indicate the crisis of a refer-

**4** "Er malte es sich so deutlich aus, dass er verblüfft war, als es plötzlich – geschah. Und er sich vor dem Saal fand, dem stummen, vieläugigen, und Menschen ihn ansahen, so viele davon, und darauf warteten, dass er sprach. Seine Notizen lagen vor ihm. Er heftete den Blick darauf und bemühte sich, seine Nervosität niederzukämpfen; tief atmen, dachte er, ich muss nur tief atmen; und er hörte seiner Stimme zu, aber es gelang ihm nicht ganz, ihr zu folgen. Seine Gedanken schweiften ab, für einen Moment sah er sehr klar das Meer vor sich und spürte den Geruch von Tang und fragte sich, ob er nicht eigentlich noch dort und dieser Saal nur ein Erzeugnis seiner Phantasie war; und dann fühlte er sich im Gras liegen [...], und eine Ameise krabbelte kitzelnd an seinem Hals entlang [...]."

ential access to reality, for David, who is ensconced in the discourse network 2000, every act of writing is an act of construction, so that perceptions and memories, as well as narrative connections, thus are newly created in every act of writing.

According to Vilèm Flusser, writing that has become a code is now the source of a world of new, synthetic images that replace "real," "original" perceptual images.[5] It is therefore not surprising that David Mahler's research is primarily aimed at transforming his own perception of the world into columns of figures and formulas, as if he were deciphering the code of a perfect, all-encompassing computer simulation (Kehlmann 2001: 55–56). Logically enough, this code does not appear to him as an image, but as the root cause of the world: "Numbers move through an infinitely distant mind; and the world becomes reality" (Kehlmann 2001: 66–67). In this new pictorial world, time can suddenly be instantaneously overcome, but – as in Thomas Lehr's work – these triumphs over time become visions of absolute hell. At one point in the novel, in a clear allusion to Robert Musil's *Young Torless*, Kehlmann has his protagonist lie in the grass, amazed at the boundlessness of the sky. In the same situation, Torless had once lamented the eternal alienation and falseness of this experience of pictorial totality. His idea of coming nearer to heaven, and, like the Biblical Jacob, of being able to "climb up and into it...if only one had a long, long ladder," ends in the well-known failure of the human mind when confronted with the visuality of the moment. The ladder is never long enough to reach heaven: "the further he penetrated, raising himself on his gaze, the further the blue, shining depth receded" (Musil 1986: 71–72). Here, understanding is opposed to true experience: "somewhere between experience and comprehension [...] incomparability" reigns: "Yet it is always of such a nature that what in one moment we experience indivisibly, and without question, becomes unintelligible and confused as soon as we try to link it with chains of thought to the permanent store of what we know." (Musil 1986: 73)[6]

**5** "The images that program us are [...] not of the kind that prevailed before the invention of book printing. Television programs are unlike Gothic stained glass windows, and the surface of a soup can is unlike the surface of a Renaissance painting. The difference, in short, is this: [...] Pre-modern man lived in a world of images which signified the 'world'. We live in a world of images that try to define theories about the 'world'. This is a revolutionary new situation." (Flusser 2005: 22–23)

**6** "Immer aber ist es so, dass das, was wir in einem Augenblick ungeteilt und ohne Fragen erleben, unverständlich und verwirrt wird, wenn wir es mit den Ketten der Gedanken zu unserem bleibenden Besitz fesseln wollen."

The "chain of thoughts" is a temporal link into the infinite, an infinite regress of the chain of signs, which can never catch up with the reality to which it refers. Truth is obscured by conceptual thought: "casual words" flow over the moment, blotting it out (Musil 1986: 21). While for Torless the sky seems to be so far away that the ladder of reflection he tries to build to it can never reach it, when David finds himself in the same situation, the sky is "suddenly very close," it shuts all other perceptions out, and hypnotizes the disturbed physicist by virtue of a "color he had never seen before." The sky still fills his entire visual field, when, drawing on his last strength, David closes his eyes:

> He didn't move. He tried to inhale, but there was no air. The sky embraced him firmly. Even the grass stood quite still, could no longer be felt. The sky came closer. He still could not breathe.
> He closed his eyes with all his might. It didn't help: the sky remained visible. A fit of panic, of helpless, burning fear ran through his body. It went on and on. And still it went on. (Kehlmann 2001: 89–90)[7]

Here the overcoming of time seems to have succeeded in a horrifying fashion: the moment really does come to a halt, the sea of boundlessness "embraces" David "firmly." In contrast to Torless, who is unable to overcome the limitations of the mind in any lasting way, David is no longer able to find his way back to reality from the "momentary" abolition of time; it takes a sudden loss of consciousness to free him from the prison of total visibility. For Torless, "pictorial" infinity is reduced to a linguistic "concept"; for Mahler, it becomes a total experience of the image which excludes all differential operations. The crisis of time in Kehlmann's novel is thus no longer characterized by the "mediacy" of conceptual understanding, but by the "immediacy" of perceptions, which resist all cognitive processing. These are no longer "original" or "authentic," but artificial: it is no coincidence that they remind one of a computer system crash, which can only be fixed by a reboot; after all, they are based on the programming of an "infinitely distant mind." As an avant-garde practitioner in the field of physics, Mahler himself triggers this temporal disruption. As in the novels from around 1900, the linear model of time is initially subjected to a critique and provisionally replaced by a new time structure, by "Mahler's time." In this case, however, unlike the texts from the turn of the century, the rebellion clearly goes well be-

7 "Er bewegte sich nicht. Er versuchte einzuatmen, aber da war keine Luft. Der Himmel umschloss ihn fest. Selbst das Gras stand ganz ruhig, war nicht mehr zu fühlen. Der Himmel rückte näher. Er konnte noch immer nicht atmen. / Mit aller Kraft schloss er die Augen. Es half nicht: Der Himmel blieb sichtbar. Ein Anfall von Panik, von hilfloser, brennender Angst lief durch seinen Körper. Es dauerte an, immer noch. Und immer noch. Und immer noch."

yond the intended goal: the linear order is no longer automatically restored, but is replaced by a different order of time, from which there is no way back to the old interval structure, and which ultimately destroys the subject "Mahler," whom the new order was supposed to serve.

As already pointed out, the temporal derailments in both Lehr and Kehlmann are connected with experiences that are related to the temporal modes of the audiovisual media. Audiovisual technical media manifestly produce an absolute "tyranny of proximity," which leads to a "leveling of symbolic difference and symbolic distance" (Großklaus 2004: 180). In the novels in question, the allusions to the ways in which these "new" media function are unmistakable: as if God were playing with the remote control of a cosmic DVD player, time jumps back and forth, with episodes alternating in time-lapse or slow motion. In the novel *Cliehms Begabung* (*Cliehm's Talent*) by Michael Wallner, for example, in which, as in Lehr's work, a physicist disproves the existence of time and thereby ends up in the midst of temporal calamities, the temporal paradoxes are coupled directly with mechanisms of media. Cliehm, the novel's protagnonist, uses his memory like a video recorder on which he can rewind and fast-forward his life: "Cliehm is on the lookout for memory. Go backwards! he calls. Now!" (Wallner 2000: 60). Like Kehlmann's protagonist, Cliehm jumps back and forth between the different phases of his life, each one immediately becoming the new here-and-now as soon as Cliehm activates it. In Wallner's work, time is indeed ultimately reduced to the present: every past moment not only continually becomes the present moment again, it can also unfold differently each time it is recalled, which is only logical. "I've been here before," Cliehm complains to his memory, after one of his leaps in time: "What am I supposed to do here a second time?" But his memory responds: "It's not the second time. It's now" (Wallner 2000: 151). Every conceivable moment in time becomes the here-and-now: "It's not the past that I'm shaping! It's not the future that I'm changing. It's the present," Cliehm realizes (Wallner 2000: 155).

As a result, however, sooner or later Wallner's time researcher loses track of the chronology of his life. Since each newly made decision in the past necessarily affects the future, an ever-increasing multiplicity of biographical permutations soon arises, which are mutually exclusive but nevertheless exist parallel to each other. For Cliehm, time is thus transformed into a network of different parallel courses of action, amongst which he always only experiences certain alternating moments in the present. In each case, a considerable effort is required to establish the connections: "What happened before? How did I get into this situation?," he asks himself over and over again: "Traveling in time, thinks Cliehm,

panic-stricken. Forwards or backwards? Tilly is standing opposite me, he notes, behind her is a café. When am I, damn it?!" (Wallner 2000: 181).[8]

This kind of leaping back and forth between different parallel time sequences can also be found in Helmut Krausser's *UC* or Juli Zeh's *Schilf*. The model of time that underlies this kind of fiction is described as the "multiverse," a concept that is widespread in various spheres of popular culture, especially in mystery films, and which probably goes back to Borges's famous story, *The Garden of Forking Paths* (Baulch 2003). Here Borges introduces the concept of a literature that does not distinguish between reality and possibility, but rather, in a gigantic network of parallel and irreconcilable stories, retroactively cancels every decision that has ever been made. Theoretically, this idea is illustrated by a novel in the novel, the gigantic encyclopedia of a forgotten Chinese author:

> In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses – simultaneously – all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. (Borges 1964: 26)[9]

Instead of a linear plot logic, the work thus consists of a network of different futures, pre-histories, and parallel worlds, all of which are placed on an equal footing and which, as a result of their incompatibility, reveal the constructed nature of each one of them. This world is described as "a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times," in which nothing is ever finally decided: "This network of times which approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces all possibilities of time." For the protagonist of the narrative – who finds himself in the middle of the war, is being pursued and is pursuing others, and who for several reasons is under significant time pressure – this idea offers a sense of relief, an aesthetic escape from linear time: he knows that in another world he will not kill and not die; in this other world, the other paths that he could have taken in life have become real.

This concept of multiversal time is especially prominent in Helmut Krausser's novel, *UC*. Here, the protagonist, the distinguished conductor Arndt Her-

**8** "Unterwegs in der Zeit, denkt Cliehm panisch. Vorwärts oder rückwärts? Tilly steht mir gegenüber, stellt er fest, hinter ihr ist ein Café. Wann bin ich, verdammt?!"

**9** "En todas las ficciones, cada vez que un hombre se enfrenta con diversas alternativas, opta por una y elimina las otras; en la del casi inextricable Ts'ui Pen, opta – simultáneamente – por todas. Crea, así, diversos porvenires, diversos tiempos, que también proliferan y se bifurcan."

mannstein, appears to be lost in this multiverse: for instance, an unusually harmonious night with his wife Laura – who now suddenly claims to have never been married to him – seems, on the occasion of their next (as usual, catastrophic) encounter to have never taken place; and a London prostitute appears to be identical with a very pretty girl from Arndt's former school, but who in fact became a doctor in Germany. With every change of place, Arndt seems to jump into another life, in which the people with whom he is mixing have also taken other pathways in life. Arndt himself sees the situation as follows:

> It could be that something that has never happened constitutes a virtual variant of my existence. Maybe that's the solution: everything that I might have been capable of at some point has subsequently become real, on an equal footing with what actually happened. (Krausser 2003: 46)[10]

It would seem, then, that Krausser's protagonist has irrevocably lost his way in the network of forking paths, a network that still offered Borges's protagonist an opportunity intellectually to transcend the monotony of his existence. In Krausser's work, however, the network of narratives has left the inner space of the novel within the novel and has mutated into the inner-fictional structural principle of reality itself. In Krausser, the entry into the multiverse is also initially interpreted as a liberating disruption of the uniformity and irreversibility of linear time, as offering access to "another time," which at first makes it seem as if Krausser is simply a dedicated follower of Borges's literary model. The abolition of time in a series of diverse and "incompossible" presents seems to make it possible to understand life as a freely malleable work of art, to free literature from all mimetic demands made on it, and to "seek one's salvation in a counter reality" (Krausser 2003: 202), as it is explicitly formulated at one point. Cliehm, too, is delighted with his remarkable "gift," and ultimately he even ends up developing powerful fantasies of omnipotence: "Nothing is moving, except on the paths in my head. I can be faster than light or infinitely slow. I am way out there, where the sun is no longer to be seen. I am right inside the ice. I travel. It's my gift." (Wallner 2000: 301)[11]

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**10** "Es könnte sein, dass sich manches, was nie geschehen ist, als virtuelle Variante meiner Existenz konstituiert. Das ist vielleicht die Lösung: Alles, dessen ich irgendwann einmal fähig gewesen wäre, ist nachträglich faktisch geworden, gleichberechtigt mit dem tatsächlichen Geschehen."

**11** "Nichts bewegt sich, außer auf den Wegen in meinem Kopf. Ich kann schneller sein als das Licht oder unendlich langsam. Ich bin weit draußen, wo die Sonne nicht mehr zu sehen ist. Ich bin im Innern des Eises. Ich reise. Es ist meine Begabung."

However, as we learn at the end of the novel, Cliehm is actually lying in a coma. Adrian, the protagonist of Thomas Lehrs *42*, has long been dead, and he is now experiencing the second of his death as eternity with those who died at the same moment as he did. And even for Krausser's and Kehlmann's protagonists, the freedom they supposedly attain by being temporally uprooted comes first at the price of their social death and ultimately their physical death. All these novels describe, in the first place, processes of isolation, paths leading to a solipsism in which the protagonists end up face to face solely with their own imaginations; the products of a mind that is no longer connected to the external world, but rather, following the logic of a computer, programs and simulates its own worlds and perceptions. In this situation, it is precisely the aesthetic approaches of classical modernism from Musil to Borges, namely the regression into the "pre-semiotic immediacy" (Steiner 1996: 173) of purely present experience, and the pluralization of time into conflicting but equally valid "fictions," that become the hallmarks of the crisis: the authorial power of determination over the "multiverse" of equally valid pasts is lost and present experience turns into an oppressive lack of distance. The epiphanies of classical modernism, in which the interval that is constitutive of time is supposed to be overridden or bypassed, are associated with anxiety-laden ideas about the temporal forms of the new image media, and in this way are revealed to be inadequate, or short-sighted. Placed in opposition to this is the protagonists' fundamental need for unequivocal historical or biographical contexts, a longing for the old, linear, fleeting time. As Ursula Heise puts it: "The time of the individual mind no longer functions as an alternative to social time" (Heise 1997: 7).

Fully in keeping with Jacques Derrida's critique of logocentrism (Derrida 1976), the novels of Kehlmann, Krausser, and Lehr thus deconstruct the mental constructs of immediacy, which are bound to the assertion that writing is subordinate. In these works, it is no accident that the presentist experience of the world is marked by its artificiality; it points to the mediating mechanisms of signs, codes, and technical media that are invisibly at work in it. Experiences of the present thus become recognizable as components of a simulation and therefore as secondary, while access to the source code of this reality threatens to prove elusive. The novels can thus be read as disruptions of a metaphysics of presence, which has apparently developed a new, calamitous efficacy in a reality structured by immersive and digital media. As portrayed in contemporary literature, temporal disruptions are no longer directed against a normalized understanding of time, against incremental time, against economization, unification and measurement, as was the case in the literature of classical modernism. Rather – as second order disruptions – they are directed against a potent aesthetic figure of temporal disruption, whose significance for contemporary media cul-

ture they uncover, and whose inherent promises of meaning they expose as illusory.

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Marie-Sophie Himmerich

# Disruption, Photography, and the Idea of Aesthetic Resistance

## Sophie Ristelhueber's Gulf War Photographs

## 1 Disruption in the history of art

In the history of art, the concept of disruption can be linked to a rich inventory, even though the term itself – besides its use in relation to the discussion of technical image media – has not received remarkable attention yet.[1] However, in spite of the multitude of their possible appearances, one common denominator of disruptive phenomena could be identified. As Nina Zschocke has shown, it is especially their contribution to the artistic creation of meaning that links together strategies of interference, ranging from intended irritations of perception to concepts of artistic sabotage (Zschocke 2005: 41). In this sense, for example, the early modern strategies of *trompe-l'œil* or *anamorphosis* may compromise the coherence of representation, while at the same time they compensate this supposed deficiency by figuring as emblems of mimesis or signifiers of latent meaning.[2] Within more recent artistic concepts, the appearance of disruptions has even emancipated from within the picture frame, the specific bodily experience created through the decentering effects within installation or situational aesthetics, being no longer a compositorial part of the art work's overall impres-

**1** For phenomena of disruption in the context of technical image media as they have been discussed within the interdisciplinary frame of "Bildwissenschaft" (Schneider 2011; Bredekamp et al. 2008). For an initiating approach to define disruptive strategies in the visual arts, see the writing of Nina Zschocke. In her short text that focuses mainly on art of the 20th century, Zschocke understands disruptive strategies as a form of mediation beyond traditional concepts of "direct presentation and representation". By creating a situation of second order reception through different modi of irritation, respective works forced the beholder to develop an individual intellectual approach, challenging the idea of a decipherable content of the art work (Zschocke 2005). For a discussion of strategies of physical irritation based on neurophysiologic research results, see also Zschocke's dissertation (2006).

**2** Here one could think for example of the technique of anamorphosis in Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors* (1533), in which the productive dimension of disruption could be associated with Jacques Lacan's famous reading of the picture as a primal scene of imagination. See especially the author's reflections about the "gaze" (Lacan 1981).

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sion, but becoming the latter's primary content.[3] My following reflections align with this idea of interference as a figure in positive terms within the artistic production process. Drawing upon a media-philosophical reading of disruption as it has been shaped in aesthetic debate, however, I will try to amplify its meaning with regard to the photographic medium. A short example from the history of neo-avantgardistic media art may illustrate the main concern of this approach. Citing the structure of a hall of mirrors, the video work "The Endless Sandwich" (1969), by Austrian Artist Peter Weibel, shows a sequence of screens that broadcast a studio setting that will become identical with the actual situation of the beholder: once the video has started, a fault occurs in the last TV, forcing the person sitting in front of it to get up and repair the problem (see Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1:** Peter Weibel, "The Endless Sandwich", 1969.

As in dominoes, the next TV in line becomes equally affected and the interference propagates itself until it arrives at the real TV set in front of the viewer. Considering the context of the work's reception,[4] its main symbolical message is clear: intended to intervene as part of the artist's now famous "tele-aktionen," in the program of national public television as it happened three years later in co-

**3** As combining the tradition of both tendencies, see for example the light work "Lichtraum" Carsten Höller installed at Kunsthaus Bregenz in 2008 and that overwhelmed the viewer with several walls of flickering light bulbs.

**4** This can be assumed even if the "Endless Sandwich" was also part of a general consideration of the illusionistic quality of television, or in Weibel's words: "the Sandwich character of real process and reproduction process" ["Sandwich-Charakter von Real-Prozess und Abbildungs-Prozess"] (Weibel 1972).

operation with the Austrian channel ORF,[5] the video epitomizes an aim shared by most media artists of the 1960s, that was, breaking with the structures of passive media consumption.[6] In "The Endless Sandwich" this idea is reflected by the only scope for action conceded to the contemporary television user: being an active spectator in relation to the official TV program seemed to be limited to the possibility of simply switching "on and off the appliance".[7]

This – even though metaphorically established – relation between visual disruption and spectatorship will also lead my confrontation with an artwork realized under completely different circumstances. Being the result of a journey to the former battleground of the Gulf War in the Kuwaiti desert, the photo work "Fait" (1992) by French photographer Sophie Ristelhueber (*1949) could be firstly described as challenging the classical genre of documentary photography. In fact, Ristelhueber's pictures of the war's aftermath have mainly been interpreted as symptomizing a structural reconfiguration of photographic eye-witnessing considered to be specific to an era of post-industrial warfare and a post-indexical mark of photography.[8] In contrast, trying to unfold a deeper conceptual dimension of the photo series besides this genre-related approach – and its affiliation to "the documentary" in recent art discussions (Stallabrass 2013) – three possible notions of disruption, as well as their intersections, will guide my argumentation: first, the idea of photographic interference understood as artistic play with the transparency of the photographic image; secondly, a media theoretical concept of disruption taken as prerequisite for an aesthetic disposition of photography; and, finally, the latter's points of reference to current considerations of "active spectatorship" as well as its counterpart, the reflexive figure of *resistant imagery*, as it can be found in contemporary French Theory.

## 2 *Fait*, 1992: from Post-Reportage to Late Photography

"How Targets Are Chosen" (Nelan 1991: 20) was the title of an article published by the American *Time* magazine on 25 February 1991, whose illustration with an

**5** The video was broadcasted June 29th in 1972 as part of the program "Impulse 7" on ORF (Weibel 1972).

**6** Nam June Paik's *Participation TV* (1963) could be mentioned here as one of the most prominent examples.

**7** "Zwischen dem TV-Apparat und dem Betrachter besteht eine Funktion, nämlich: Der Benutzer schaltet das Gerät ein und aus" (Weibel 1972).

**8** See my résumé of these interpretative patterns in the following chapter.

aerial shot of the Kuwaiti desert attracted the attention of Sophie Ristelhueber.[9] As part of the news coverage of the Gulf War (1990 – 1991)[10], the text presented a critical analysis of the misdirected bombing of a bunker by the American military, demonstrating the deficiency of highly developed aerial reconnaissance technologies. Accordingly, despite the analysis of satellite images and interception data, the military leaders of the US had failed to recognize the group of Iraqi civilians seeking shelter inside the building (Nelan 1991). However, it was not this political controversy, but the deep impression by the formal similarity between the photographed trench drawn in the desert ground and the fictitious image of an injured body, that finally led Ristelhueber to set out to the former theater of war. Driven by the desire to verify if the captured trench "really existed," [11] the artist left for Kuwait in October of the same year, spending four weeks tracking down and photographing the remnants of the war. Working through these photographs when back in Paris, she finally drew up a selection of forty-eight colored and twenty-three black and white pictures, giving its result in the twofold version of an artist's book and a collection of seventy-one large-sized framed prints the title of *Fait* (Ristelhueber 1992).[12] Since its first exhibition at the *Centre National d'Art Contemporain* in Grenoble in 1992 (Ristelhueber 1992), the photo series has been displayed on various occasions, its dominant form of presentation having been a site-specific, grid-like hanging of the variably compiled *tableaux* (see Fig. 2).[13]

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**9** It is a main working principle of Ristelhueber to document the aftermath situations of conflict. See for example the artist's first photo series about the traces of the civil war in the Lebanese capital Beirut (*Beyrouth*, 1982) or one of her recent works, *Irak* (2001), dealing again with the Gulf region.

**10** In English language use, the designation "Gulf War" (in other countries also known as Second Gulf War, contrasting the war between Iraq and Iran in 1980 – 1988) refers to the combats between a coalition of thirty-four national forces under U.S. guidance against Iraq, after the country had invaded its neighbor state Kuwait on 2 August 1990. After its beginning as a lengthy period of peaceful surveillance and reconnaissance activities undertaken by the international allies ("Operation Desert Shield"), the conflict ended with a combat period of only six weeks that is better known under its military encoding "Operation Desert Storm." The Gulf War's official ending is dated on 28 February 1991 (Herpfer 2009: 266).

**11** "Ganz besessen davon, wollte ich wissen, ob es ihn wirklich gab" (Jocks 2006).

**12** Due to a presentation of the work in the Imperial War Museum, London, the work also exists in an English version, its title "Aftermath" explicitly referring to the situation in which the photographs were taken.

**13** The present analysis is based on my visit of this installation-like presentation of *Fait* during the artist's retrospective at the Parisian *Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume* from 20 January to 22 March 2009.

**Fig. 2:** Sophie Ristelhueber: Fait, 1992; Installationsansicht Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2009.

Given the image of the Gulf War as a mere simulacra event of media society,[14] these photographs may surprise, revealing the war instead in its sheer physicality: photographs of burnt out combat vehicles and obsolete armament taken from the ground illustrate the destructive power of war with examples of material damage; aerial shots of a mine impacted landscape bring to the forefront its effects on the earth's surface, transforming wheel tracks, trenches or fortifications into abstract formal values. Moreover, it may be Ristelhueber's anachronistic approach itself, irritating by the use of analogue photography and the format of traditional war reportage to capture a war that had been mainly staged as a studio production by CNN, far away from the battlefield. Less than twenty years after the example of an already unprecedentedly mediated war in Vietnam, the Gulf War indicated a strikingly new kind of receptive experience, in which the figure of the embedded journalist had ceded its place to a real-time involved TV public. While photographic evidence of war victims and the battlefields was sparse (Spindler 2003), it was instead highly abstracted visualizations, such as the iconic view-finder of military tracking systems that contributed to the war's often-cited postmodern iconography (Paul 2004: 380). At the same time,

**14** See for example the famous designation of the war as a "guerre [qui] n'a pas eu lieu" [a war that did not take place) by Jean Baudrillard (1991: 6).

part of the war's visual profile was closer to movie aesthetics than to the visual conventions and informative concerns of documentary mediation, implementing glossy images of aircraft carriers and posing soldiers.[15] Since the 1990s, it has been widely discussed that these representations of the Gulf War constructed a highly contradictory logic, illustrating a striking disproportion between a "triumph of images" and an "intentionally produced deficiency of representation" at the same time (Paul 2004: 366, 374).[16] Visual information and factual circumstances diverging to their limits, the war was read as creating a previously unknown atmosphere of doubt, relating especially to the question of authentic image making.[17]

Following previous interpretations of *Fait* in the context of the recently established genres of "post-reportage" and "late photography" the photo series illustrates this scenario primarily by reconfiguring the traditional notion of photographic eye witnessing.[18] With an emphasis on the structural invisibility of the Gulf War, it was firstly Ian Walker who coined the genre term "post-reportage" through an examination of *Fait*, declaring the retrospective documentation of material evidence by means of analogue photography as a last resort to represent the event adequately.[19] In contrast with this focus on the medium's representational potential in terms of indexical validity, David Campany's critical discussion of "late photography" has referred directly to the question of pictorial content and its implications by formal means, tracing them back to a contemporary paragon between the media of video and photography.[20] Within today's media and information systems, following one of Campany's main arguments, video

**15** See for example the collection of photographs in *Bilder des Krieges* (Paul 2004: 395–406).
**16** All translations by the author. With the first quote Paul refers to the title of a publication *Triumph of the Image. The Media's War in the Persian Gulf – A Global Perspective* (Mowlana et al. 1992).
**17** See for example the war's relevance for the theorization of Simulation Theory (Weisenbacher 1995).
**18** For the initiation of these concepts relating to post-documentary photographic practice compare Walker's "Desert Stories or Faith in Facts?" and Campany's "Safety in Numbness: Some remarks on the problems of 'Late Photography'" (Walker 1995; Campany 2003). With the aim of establishing a tradition line of the post-reportage, Walker has also referred to the work of Richard Misrach. After Walker's essay the term "Post-Reportage" has been taken up by various scholars (Lister 2004; Matthias 2005a; Matthias 2005b).
**19** "There is however a final sense in which I use that term 'post-reportage,' to suggest not what photography cannot do, but what it *can:* record, document what comes *after*, what has been left, when the war is over. It can still speak in considered retrospect" (Walker 1995: 243).
**20** Campany initiates his text with a discussion of Joel Meyerowitz's documentary project *Aftermath* on 9/11 and mentions Ristelhueber's work, among the photographic positions of artists such as Willie Doherty or Paul Seawright, as other examples of "late photography."

had not only superseded photography by its capability of real-time transfer, but its technique of the frame grab had also replaced the core potential of the older medium to freeze historical events in the dense perceptual scheme of the "decisive moment" (Campany 2003: 129). Given video's higher practicability in documenting the latest news, in his argument, this explained why, by coming "not just in the aftermath of the event but also in the aftermath of video" (Campany 2003: 127), photography had been forced to introduce a semantically open, formally static, and uneventful pictorial dramaturgy, artificially reproducing its formerly unique characteristic, namely the evocative effect of photographic "stillness" (Campany 2003: 126). At this point, Campany's approach to the "late photograph" turns into critique: "in all its silence" being open to every kind of projection, the sublime effects of a mere stylistic operation could affect especially "those who gaze at it with a lack of social or political will to make sense of its circumstance" (Campany 2003: 132). So, even if the striking "banal matter-of-factness" of aftermath photographs engendered the reflective surplus of a "superior image" within the media flow, their openness endangered the traditionally critical stance of the documentary genre by "obliterating [...] a *need* for analysis" (Campany 2003: 132).

Considering the disturbing sensual and contemplative qualities that undoubtedly characterize most of the photographic works to be labeled as "late photography," this argument does not seem to be unfounded. Indeed, in the case of *Fait* the atmospheric mode of showing the aftermath of war as it may appear at first glance has repeatedly incited the reproach of aestheticization (Schlesser 2009: 404–427). Yet, by applying the analytical perspectives of both "post-reportage" and "late photography" to an interpretation of *Fait*, the photographs actual constitution cannot be grasped adequately; as genre-related considerations and, by concentrating on the "praxeological factor" of Ristelhueber's approach,[21] they provide no satisfying method to clarify the highly suggestive and, as it was frequently mentioned, ambivalent nature of the pictures.[22] By con-

**21** As Matthias has pointed out in another article with reference to Walker, the prefix "post" within the genre term obviously refers to the early stages of war reportage, when the mechanical system of the photo camera was necessarily linked to the "praxeological-methodological" approach of a belated recording of the events. As historical antecedent for this procedure could be mentioned Roger Fenton's Crimean War photographs (Matthias 2005b: 203).

**22** This observation in relation to the photographs has been shared by both journalistic as well as academic reference to *Fait*. Significantly, in this context, the term "ambivalence" was used less with reference to the image's aesthetic constitution than it was applied to a discussion of the serie's oscillating status between socially determined practices of photography, i.e. art and documentary (Rouillé 2005: 547; Schlesser 2009; Matthias 2005a: 106).

trast, a closer reading of certain photographs indicates a conceptual layer of the series that goes beyond a practice of simply banalizing the landscape of war. So for example the misrepresentation of real proportions as it repeatedly appears in the series – compare for instance the photograph of a piece of artillery (see Fig. 3), that, due to a certain viewing angle and specific image section, has been blown up to a size that corresponds with that of a car wreck in another picture (Ristelhueber 1992: No 58) – rather suspends the effect of aesthetic shudder as it could be linked to the confrontational experience of the "sublime."[23] In a comparable manner, *Fait # 68*, by staging the remnants of a building as a contemporary ruin in front of dark billows of smoke, is beyond any romantic projection via the irritation produced by the shading and blurring effects of the backlit shot (see Fig. 4). Less through an idealization of their object then through the programmatic restriction of an undisturbed view, these photographs counter traditional expectations towards the documentary genre.[24]

**Fig. 3:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait #* 60, 1992.

## 3 Disruption and the negotiation of photographic deixis

In the following lines I would thus like to propose another reading of *Fait*, analyzing the photo series less with regard to genre specific implications, but with a focus on the media-aesthetic nature of photography. In this context, Ristelhueb-

**23** It seems that Campany's characterization of the "Late Photograph's" pictorial rhetoric refers to a concept of the "sublime" as intrinsic phenomenon of the image.

**24** In other approaches to the photo series, the principle of an impaired visibility has only been descriptively mentioned, respectively in relation to a specific ambivalence of the pictures, see also note 25.

**Fig. 4:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait #* 68, 1992.

er's artistic tactics could be primarily described as a questioning of the idea of photographic transparency. As this refers to a common practice especially in contemporary photography, I will explore more precisely the artist's approach via a media-theoretical model of disruption, relating it to the strategy of a calculated negotiation of photographic deixis.[25]

In this case, the motif of disruption as it is understood here, must be differentiated from its comprehension as an unmotivated, "naturally" emerging phe-

**25** In contrast to my argument, Tamisier discusses Ristelhueber's work in relation to the concept of an "opaque photography." (Tamisier 2007: 141–159) This differs from my understanding of an interrelation between the categories of transparency and opacity that allows a general description of photographic deixis. Instead, Ristelhueber's method could better be associated with the idea of an artistic use of Gottfried Boehm's concept of iconic difference as it has been introduced by Bettina Lockemann to describe the qualities of an "artistic documentary photography." Yet, Lockemann's analysis of Japanese documentary photography does not provide a systematic exemplification of this idea with regard to a special organization or content of the interpreted photographs (Lockemann 2008: 108–110).

nomenon, as it has been described within the history of photography.[26] In this sense, for example Peter Geimer or Friedrich Weltzien have reflected on the appearance of photographic interference, interpreting it either as an "auto-iconoclastic act" (Geimer 2002: 315)[27] or as the expression of a "linguaggio di macchia" (Weltzien 2008: 73) of the medium of its own. Instead, given the artwork status of the work, the photographs' hybrid constitution in *Fait* could be better analyzed with the reflexive figure of a "double paradigm," as it has been described by interrelating the optic entities of "transparency" and "opacity" with regards to the communicative qualities of a medium.[28] According to a common definition of the operational logic of media, the term "transparency" addresses the potential of a medium to render itself "invisible" in the process of mediation, while "opacity" is associated with its material determination, revealing itself in the mode of interference.[29] In the cultural history of photography there exists a long tradition in reading photographs with respect to their transparent qualities similar to the representational scheme of the Vera Icon – referring to their mimetic potential of providing a naturalistic, indexical warranted reflection of the real.[30] At the same time, critical discourse has pointed out the medium's contribution to a constructed view of the world, while it was especially the early avant-garde that revealed photography's opaque qualities by its use as an aesthetic means.[31] In this sense, the "non-transparency of photography" can be associated with a wide expressive repertoire, including the visualization of the medium's alchemistic nature as well as the integration of meta-photographic motifs like reflections, shadow-casting, or framing that refer to the constructive power of the photographic

**26** This is even though the character of "real" photographic interference, as a mode of self-description of the photographic medium, may correspond with the effects of an artistic play with photographic deixis as discussed below. For a discussion of the former, see the concise study by Geimer (2002).

**27** It is important to mention that Geimer's reference to Martin Heidegger's thing theory has not least inspired Rautzenberg's and Wolfsteiner's reflections on a "double paradigm" of transparency and opacity, which I refer to below.

**28** For an initiating discussion of this "double paradigm" read Rautzenberg and Wolfsteiner (2010).

**29** For a discussion of this function principle of media, see for example Krämer (2008: 274).

**30** As is well known, this idea has been especially shaped by Roland Barthes phenomenological approach to photography in *Camera Lucida*. Due to Barthes, the illusionary effect of photographic images reflects the *noema* of photography, its true essence (Barthes 1981). For a modernist reading of photography in relation to its supposed transparency, see the writings of Clement Greenberg (1997 [1946]).

**31** For a discussion of this idea within a constructivist branch of photographic theory, see a. o. Joel Snyder (2002).

apparatus.[32] Today, transparency-breaking strategies are fully established as a preferred method of a self-reflective practice of photography, covering the material emphasis on photographic "objecthood" as well as the accentuation of photographic representationality (Kohler 2013).[33] Subsequently, in theoretical discourse, corresponding strategies have mostly been dealt with as linked to artistic concerns, distancing them from documentary uses of the medium as genre-specific expressions of an abstract or "reductionistic photography" according to their degree of autoreferentiality, while the entities of transparency and opacity have been treated as separate categories of the photographic image (Horak 2003; Nöth 2003). Yet, within the idea of a "double paradigm," as it has been identified by Rautzenberg and Wolfsteiner, the two sides of a medium only come into effect once the theoretical idea of media as an interference-free channel of communication is suspended (Rautzenberg and Wolfsteiner 2010: 13). So, by making reference to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger – especially the philosopher's idea of a "twofold concealment" as related to the occurrence of truth in *Sein und Zeit* – the authors have noted that the "double paradigm" of transparency and opacity defines itself particularly by a blurring polarity of media's un/concealment.[34]

As Markus Rautzenberg has pointed out by making use of Heideggerian terminology, "to be able to appear, something has to stand out within the plenitude of the perceptive material, i.e. to become *conspicuous* even before it can be useful, ready-to-hand, transparent in any kind of referential context." (Rautzenberg 2012: 141). Extending this thought in relation to the basic meaning of transparency and opacity as optical metaphors he has further stated:

> It appears that [...] transparency and opacity, handiness and presentness can never be clearly separated and that an appearance occurs precisely in and trough concealment. To put it pointedly, transparency and opacity are [...] two modes of the same dynamics of concealment, which not only shows itself within the "tendency to throw things away" that is caused by disruptions and irritations. Perturbation is not equal to opacity that could be confronted with transparency as its opposite. What appears within disruption is opacity *within* transparency [...]. In a second step, the term "conspicuousness" is meant to show that this fundamental figure of thought (which captures the conjunction of transparency and opacity in the sense of "handiness in its permanent objective presence") not only ap-

**32** Relating to the first, one could think, for example, of the avant-garde techniques of solarisation or brûlage as they were frequently used by surrealist photographers (Lüdeking 2005).

**33** As example for the latter, one could mention the practices within the so-called Düsseldorfer Photoschule.

**34** In recent aesthetic discussions, a respective reclassification of the entities in contrast to their traditional understanding in the scheme of an oppositional figure has received remarkable attention (Alloa 2011).

> pears in phenomena of disruption *but has to be considered as the basic principle of indicating itself.* (Rautzenberg 2012: 140 – 141.)

For a discussion of the representational laws of photography, this idea presents a fruitful approach.[35] Especially in relation to the present matter, it is in this sense that the occurrence of the opaque in *Fait* does not mark a clear break with the claims of photographic evidence value: characterized by the mise-en-scène of a gradual, subtle obliteration of the boundaries between transparency and opacity, Ristelhueber's series seems to demonstrate a nuanced spectrum of photographic visibility, which reaches to the heart of photographic representation itself. In this line, the transparent identity of the photographs documenting the indices of war as readable signs appear less reversed than complemented by the medium's materiality "obstinately" influencing the specific message of the photographic images.[36] As Eva Schürmann has emphasized with regard to the representational scope of photography, "[e]very photograph shows more and less than would be visible without it. The recording medium is at the same time a medium of image production as vision is already a form of the production of meaning, the mimesis being itself poiesis" [37] (Schürmann 2008: 15). In *Fait*, this potential of the medium becomes especially evident by looking at the pictures in which Ristelhueber has used the particular "twofoldness" (Dobbe 2010: 158) of photographic images as a malleable means for a fictional transcription of their object. However, due to the artist's formal decision the intersection of transparent and opaque qualities of photography does not exhaust itself in a

**35** For a methodically different discussion of photographic deixis in relation to the categories of transparency and opacity, see Martina Dobbe (2010: 165). According to Dobbe, the deictic structure of photographies can be located in their representational "twofoldness between reproduction and abstraction," arguing via a discourse-analytical crossing of the modern respectively postmodern positions of Clement Greenberg and Rosalind Krauss.

**36** See a former paraphrase of disruptive phenomena by Rautzenberg and Wolfsteiner in relation to Heideggerian vocabulary "'Conspicuousness, obtrusiveness and obstinacy' are the modes in which the play between transparency and opacity becomes alive, though, and this is central, not in such a way that both layers fall apart as chemical elements that could be observed isolated but in sort of a fluid state, a threshold phenomenon [...] being in constant change." ["'Auffälligkeit, Aufdringlichkeit und Aufsässigkeit' sind die Modi, in denen das Spiel von Transparenz und Opazität erlebbar wird, jedoch, und das ist zentral, nicht dergestalt, dass beide Ebenen wie chemische Elemente auseinanderfallen und isoliert beobachtet werden könnten, sondern in sozusagen flüssigem Zustand, als Schwellenphänomen, das [...] ständig changiert."] (Rautzenberg and Wolfsteiner 2010: 13 – 14).

**37** "Jede Fotografie zeigt mehr und weniger als ohne sie sichtbar wäre. Das Aufzeichnungsmedium ist zugleich ein Medium der Bildproduktion, wie das Sehen bereits eine Form der Bedeutungsgenerierung ist, die Mimesis ist selbst Poiesis."

poietic exegesis of the photographic referent that could be reduced to a mere renunciation of the medium's reproductive capacity. Rather the photographic suspension of a "logic of interference-free mediation" must be acknowledged in its epistemological "surplus value," emerging "in relation to the metaphysical intuition that the world we live in is not congruent with what appears" [38] (Krämer 2008: 274). With this in mind, the various figurations of visual deprivation evoked by the pictures through a break with photographic transparency arises as an overall questioning of the threshold of perception and the mediation of reality itself.[39] Assimilating the effects of restricted visibility within both the representative order and the receptive process of photography, the motif of disruption in *Fait* unfolds on another level: implicitly pointing to the epistemological "figure of a third" – that, according to the logic of interference, appears at the in-between of medial representation – it finally comes into play as a search for an adequate representational scheme of the war's *Unimaginable* in its traditionally non-depictable quality.[40] As an analysis of single photographs will show, not least, this specific recourse on the media condition of photography seems to be connected with an elaborate reflection on the hypertrophic, though deficient, visibility of the Gulf War itself.

## 4 Veiled visions: blindness and the rehabilitation of senses

That the functioning principle of media performance constitutes a key motif within *Fait* is revealed by a comparison of three photographs of the series. Covering about three-quarters of the picture, *Fait # 46* shows a square-shaped blanket typically used for defilade, placed over a row of jute bags that are partly buried in the desert sand (see Fig. 5).

The purpose and content of the blanket's fabric cannot be discerned. Instead, the viewer's focus automatically centers on the coarse net made up of orthogonally knotted strings that lie on top of the closely meshed structure of the

**38** "Er [der Mehrwert] steht im Zusammenhang mit der metaphysischen Grundintuition, dass die Welt, in der wir leben, nicht deckungsgleich ist mit dem, was sich uns zeigt." For Krämer, the epistemological surplus of media disruption emerges especially in relation to artistic uses of media (Krämer 2008: 274).

**39** At this point, Ristelhueber's photographic strategy structurally mirrors the phenomenal constitution of the "trace" as it has been described in Krämer (2007). Obviously, a deepening of this observation would demand a different focus of the present article.

**40** For a revision of the after-war concept of the *Unimaginable*, see Sabine Sander (2008).

**Fig. 5:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait # 46*, 1992.

blanket. In the history of art, the motif of the grid is primarily associated with early modern painting. Evoking the structure of the *velum*, it refers to the most emblematic auxiliary tool used for the construction of central perspective. Indeed, when looking closely at the formal structure of the knotted grid in the photograph, its appearance corresponds strikingly with Leon Battista Alberti's description of the *velum* in his second book of *De pictura* (1435): "Nothing can be found, so I think, which is more useful than that veil which among my friends I call an intersection. It is a thin veil, finely woven, dyed whatever color pleases you and with larger threads [marking out] as many parallels as you prefer" (Alberti 1966: 68–69). Turning to *Fait # 14*, an aerial shot of the desert, the motif of the square, woven veil appears again, though this time in the form of a linear inscription in the sand (see Fig. 6). The same applies to *Fait # 23*, which joins the previous images of the series through a disconcerting *déjà-vu*. Here, the photographed textile resembles the shape of a curtain, dropping down from the steep wall of a trench (see Fig. 7). Taking into account Ristelhueber's formal installation of *Fait*, as well as photography's affiliation with the representational

scheme of the *velum*, the motif of the grid presents itself as a conceptual leitmotif of the series.

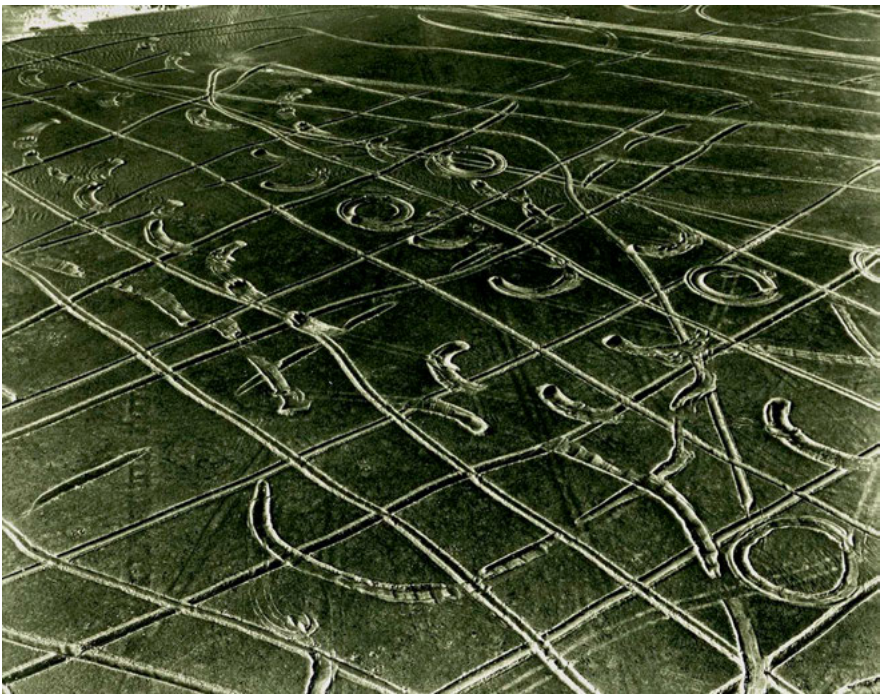

**Fig. 6:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait # 14*, 1992.

As is well known, the photo camera creates a static field of vision, similar to the model of central perspective in Renaissance paintings, drawing together orthogonal lines in a vanishing point. A camera's projective orientation corresponds with the mathematically determined constellation of eye point and compositional center that characterizes early modern painting after Alberti (Solomon-Godeau 2003: 71). Both techniques thus paint a picture of perception that contradicts the model of natural, human sight being marked by a mobile eye and its innate polyfocal vision that flexibly changes its degree of severity (Schulz 2005: 139). It is an academic common place that, in contrast to their claims to an unmediated view (reflected by the early modern ambition to reconcile *perspectiva videndi* and *pingendi* within the artistic process (Crary 2002: 67), photography and central perspective painting construct the pattern of a framed vision that differs from the reality of physiological perception (Belting 2009: 9). Within the three photographs discussed here, this abstract vision seems to have

**Fig. 7:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait # 23*, 1992.

been staged by the motifs they share: instead of putting into effect the central perspective's run-through towards the things depicted,[41] these grids rather suggest a reflection about the impermeable material conditions of the optical instruments themselves.[42]

Considering the visualization technologies that were in use during the Gulf War, this interpretation can be expanded further; particularly, as Ristelhueber's tactic play with an impaired vision alludes to a critical reading of militarily encoded spaces of perception. According to Paul Virilio, the motif of the frame in both photography and central perspective can be derived from a wartime logistical development of an increasing cession of human sensual competences to "vision machines" (Virilio 1989: 89; Virilio 1994). Over the course of the Gulf

**41** In the photographs, these things paralleled what was hidden behind the *vela*.
**42** In the case of *Fait # 17* this is comprehensible if understanding the grid-like structure as a projection on the 'opaque' desert ground.

War, this sensual loss – which had actually been initiated through the synchronization of reconnaissance aerial photography and shelling in World War I – had effectively translated into a previously unknown "prosthesis-like relation to reality"[43] (Frohne, Ludes and Wilhelm 2005: 133) among the Air Force soldiers (Virilio 1989: 159–160). In fact, synthetic radar and sonar technologies, as deployed in mapping systems of stealth aircraft or satellites, generate perceptive spaces that are, for the most part, decoupled from optical laws (Grevsmühl 2007: 272–273). Three years before the Gulf War, of which he would be one of the main analytical observers, Virilio had already predicted this new warfare reality as an upcoming "*industrialization of the non-gaze*" (Virilio 1994: 73). From Virilio's dromological perspective – due to which "representation" is no longer related to the conventions of geometric, thus optical, but rather to temporal space – this apocalyptic vision was linked to the paradigm of an "intense blindness" he attributed to both new, electronic image media and its recipients (Virilio 1994: 73). To a certain extent, this dystopic scenario of technical progress became reality in the year of 1992: automatically acting weapons attacked their targets via digitally encoded visualizations that were effectively able to "see for themselves," while the targets of ranged weapons had actually been spotted "blindly" (Frohne, Ludes and Wilhelm 2005: 137). During the Gulf War, the viewing public had been confronted with operational images that were produced along the same digital lines, their ontological status having been severely put into question.[44] Consequently, the TV-viewers' perception of the war via a media technological "icon of transparency: the screen" (Horak 2003:105) no longer corresponded with a view on what was actually happening, but rather with a "sightless vision" (Virilio 1994: 59) that finally exposed their – metaphorically spoken – own blindness. In an interview, Ristelhueber has pointed to this paradox of a heightened visibility that occurs simultaneously with perceptual loss as a result of modern visual media technologies: "Nous disposons de moyens modernes pour tout voir, tout appréhendrer, mais en fait, nous ne voyons rien" [we dispose of modern means to see all, to grasp all, but in fact, we do not see anything] (Virat 2009: 181). Read against this background, *Fait # 14* and *# 46* appear

**43** "Kampfhandlungen werden in diesem prothesenhaften Realitätsbezug nicht mehr als physische Bedrohung erfahren, sondern als ein zerebral gesteuertes Geschicklichkeitsmanöver, das bei minimaler körperlicher Beteiligung in erster Linie Datenpakete im virtuellen Niemandsland manipuliert." Quote translated from Frohne et al. (2005: 133). In their text, the authors refer to military exercises in flight simulators as they were used in preparation of, and during the Gulf War.

**44** Relating to the transgression of optical laws within digital image media, it was especially Virilio who had disqualified the image-term, naming it as an "empty word" (Virilio 1994: 73).

not only as allegories of a "blind spot" inherent to instrument-based perception. Equally, they could be interpreted as critical allusions to an ideologically marked paradigm of transparency, that in the context of media technologies used for military operations was also directed against the idea of proper warfare alleging a "clear sight" as well as "careful decision-making" (Holzer 2003: 17).[45] In contrast, the motif of the curtain in *Fait # 23*, with its symbolic address of the viewer's imagination, revalued the principle of a limited view in its productive potential, highlighting a main aesthetic production principle of the whole series.

In other photographs, it seems that Ristelhueber has countered the disembodied structures of vision described above by a blinding of the photographic surface, while concurrently transferring the motif of blindness to the receptive experience of the viewer. This effect applies especially to those aerial photographs, in which the desert ground has been emphasized in its material quality, appealing to a haptic "lecture" while irritating the view on their actual referent (see Fig. 8). Having been captured from a high vertical angle, *Fait # 41,* a black and white aerial shot of a multi-branched trench, has lost almost all of its spatiality (see Fig. 9).

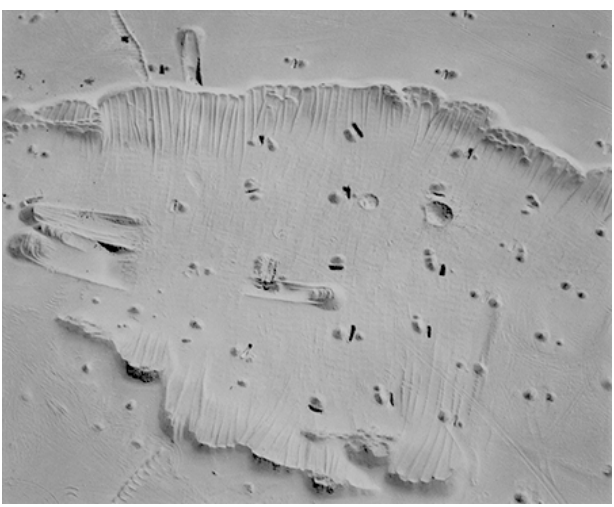

**Fig. 8:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait # 60*, 1992.

45 "Diese Bilder suggerieren einen klaren Blick und verweisen auf angeblich 'umsichtige' Entscheidungen."

**Fig. 9:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait # 41*, 1992.

As a result, desert ground and picture carrier optically seem to conflate on the picture's surface, with the capillary ruling evocative of scratches and cuttings in the upper left area being difficult to be allocated to either one of them. A contemplation of the trench is thus automatically lead, the tactile effects and optical codes of mutilation stimulating the imaginative projection of a wound or scar.[46] Commenting on the inspiration for her aerial photographs, Ristelhueber has repeatedly alluded to *L'Élévage de poussière*, a modern icon of photography realized as a co-production between Marcel Duchamp and the surrealist photographer Man Ray in 1921 (see Fig. 10) (Jocks 2006:183).

Showing a part of Duchamps life project of the *Grand Verre – La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (1915–23), this photograph has gained iconic sta-

**46** This association is strengthened by a comparison with the pictures from *Everyone* (1994), a black and white photographic series on surgical scars the artist realized with reference to the Bosnian War (1992–1995), two years after *Fait*. With this in mind, the relief-like grisaille-effect of the black and white photograph here not only emerges as auto-reflexive gesture of the medium, but also implies a dermatoid connotation.

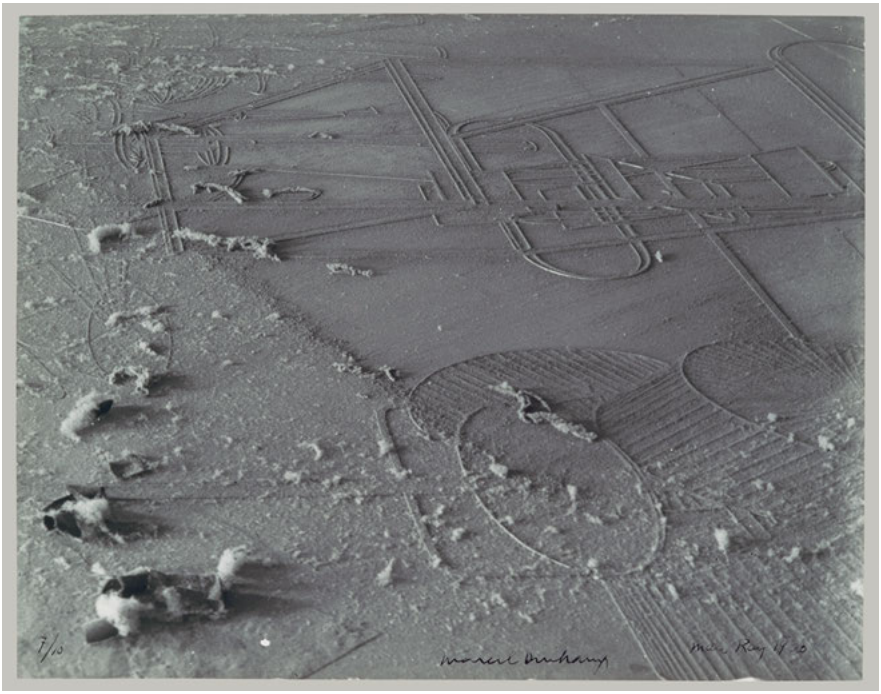

**Fig. 10:** Man Ray, *Dust Breeding*, 1920 (printed 1967).

tus, especially in relation to Man Ray's fictionalizing use of the camera, who, by choosing a particular viewing angle and light dramaturgy, had made the dusty surface of the glass appear as the illusive picture of a landscape. Duchamp later enforced this effect by deliberately addressing the viewer when he published the photograph, under the title "Vue prise en aéroplane par Man Ray," in the Dadaist-Surrealist magazine *Littérature* (Matthias 2005a: 101). Apart from Duchamp's specific artistic concern to make the photograph reflect an erotic gaze that differed from a mere registering mode of seeing – an usual approach within the Surrealistic aesthetic that could be demonstrated in particular with recourse on the automatic and unconscious working process of photography – both pictures thus share one crucial correspondence: the neutral, distanced view of the aerial perspective is complemented by the embodied vision of the viewing subject.[47]

**47** This is suggested by the motifs of the Grand Verre and their reference to a tactile reception, as well as the content of a poem that Duchamp published together with the mentioned photograph in *Littérature* (Didi-Huberman 1999: 179).

Against the backdrop of the Gulf War, Ristelhueber's subversion of a strategic image genre developed within military contexts not only suggests an attempt of rehabilitating the senses of an aesthetically incapacitated beholder. *Fait # 41* further articulates a critical affiliation with the iconographic tradition of photographic views on battlefields as they can be found in piles throughout the image archives of World War I.[48] Yet, Ristelhueber's suggestive evocation of the "moonscape," a stereotypical allegory of destruction linked to the memory of war, lacks the propagandistic value of these pictures having been primarily induced to demonstrate the destructive face of a new aerial warfare (Köppen 2009: 237). By staging the motif of the injured body as a purely mimetic effect, *Fait # 41* rather performs a symbolic deconstruction of the Gulf War's media image as a surgical intervention. As it is the case with the image of the scar evoked only by the imagination of the viewer, the idea of a "clear war" remains pure fiction. In contrast, in its reference to a formal concept of constitutive indecisiveness, the photograph seems to initiate a reflection about an emblematic fixation of the war. In this respect, Ristelhueber's transcription of the traces seems to fulfill a double function: on the one hand they offer the return to a symbolic order that had been blemished during the war by a collectively experienced loss of authentic perception.[49] On the other hand, the ambivalent visibility of the photograph rejects a static outline of the Gulf War as it played into the hands of mass media's reprocessing.

## 5 Camouflage, or, the dazzled surface of photography

Turning to *Fait #* 2, another photograph of the series, Ristelhueber's image tactic also can be analyzed in a more abstract way, recognizing the so far crystallized leitmotif of blindness less in its appeal to a sensual approach of the viewer, but rather as a figure of affective distance. Taken from a diagonal view, the photograph shows an accumulation of burst projectiles, rusty iron parts, and splinters of wood dispersed in the desert sand (see Fig. 11).

Given the artist's choice of viewing angle and image section the photographed objects have been sharply punched out from the actual space of the desert plain, their transposition into the planimetric order of the image via the projec-

**48** For a description of the function of the aerial shot in World War I, see Manuel Köppen (2009).

**49** For a philosophical diagnosis of the latter, see Dietmar Kamper (1995: 187).

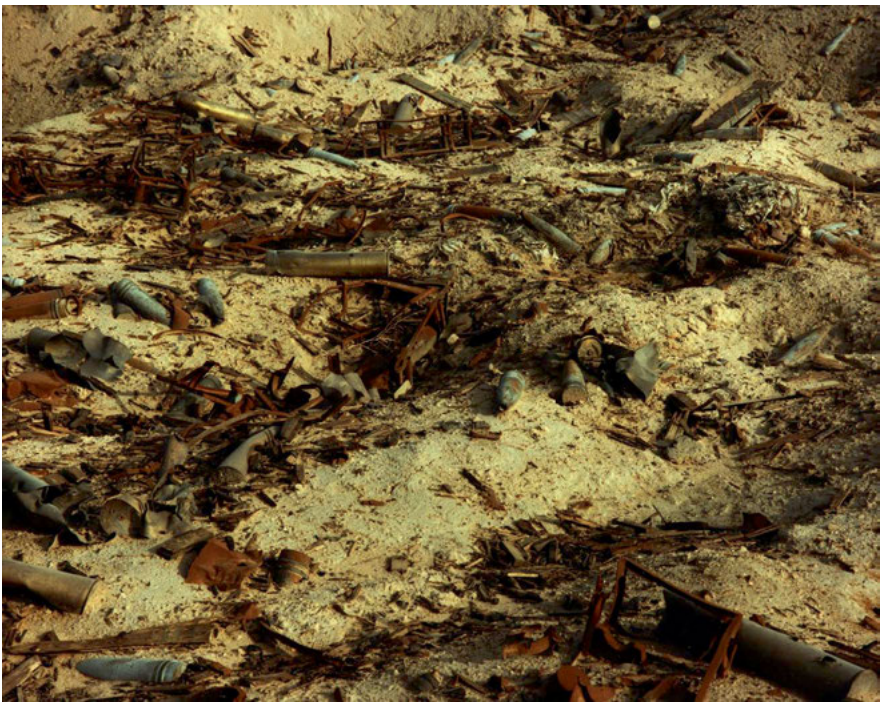

**Fig. 11:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait # 2*, 1992.

tive technique of the camera being intuitively comprehendible. Optically stepping out from the depth of the geographical space, the sand plains and debris now seem to have found their place in a neatly patterned plane, evoking another trait of the motif of the grid as it has been interpreted by Rosalind Krauss:

> In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface. In the overall regularity of its organization, it is the result not of imitation, but of aesthetic decree. Insofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves [...]. (Krauss 1979: 50)

Given the colored and compositional schematization of the representation in the photograph, an "aesthetic decree" can here easily be identified with the formal means of military camouflage, citing its familiar appearance via an irregular, though balanced dispersion of repetitively employed elements (Blechmann 2004: 66–67). By a comparison with the official pattern of the *Desert Battle Dress Uniform* (DBDU), as it was used by American soldiers during the Gulf

War, an association of the photograph with camouflage aesthetics may be further illuminated (see Fig. 12).

**Fig. 12:** Close-Up of an Army Pants with the American DBDU (Desert Battle Dress Uniform) Pattern.

As has been pointed out, not least from an art historian perspective, by affiliating the use of camouflage to the nascence of pictorial abstraction, defilade techniques had firstly been systematized in the beginning of the twentieth century, following the objective to hide gun emplacements and other military targets from their detection by the hostile aerial reconnaissance (Öhlschläger 2005: 228; Loreck 2011: 177–182). Claudia Öhlschläger has analyzed the concept of camouflage hereof as the marker of a blind spot of representation (Öhlschläger 2005: 200), sharing Volker Demuth's interpretation of defilade strategies as part of a modern "aesthetic of the invisible" (Demuth 2000). Obviously, being linked to tactics of assessing the relationship between transparency and opacity within the photograph, in *Fait # 2* this operational principle of camouflage equally comes into effect: by performing a visual bonding of the represented objects to the picture plane, the photograph exemplifies that a masquerading of shape analogue to camouflage can also be realized within the mimetic scope

of a reproductive medium. Again, the photographic potential of blinding its own surface here also relates to the receptive situation of the beholder. Being drawn into the picture without the orientation mark of a horizon, the viewer finds no vanishing point by which to measure a natural position towards the seen. In fact, with its extensive coverage of a multitude of objects, the image section of *Fait # 2* cannot be reconciled with a human field of vision. Being accustomed to an undisturbed pass through the materiality of the photographic carrier towards its referent, the recipient thus finds herself in a situation of conscious "image-viewing." Facing the photograph as an "image entirety" (Schürmann 2008: 15), the war debris is automatically ceding the patterned plane of a surface gone blind, imitating the representational task of defilade. As a consequence, the (supposedly) transparent function of photography as a readable sign gives way to a tarnishing effect that draws attention to the medium's apparently enacted representation ability.

It has been described as a main effect of the large-sized as well as confrontation-based photographic tableau to oscillate between the imperatives of an referential, indexical or more abstract, contemplative reading according to its pictorial qualities (Campany 2011: 14).[50] Yet, in *Fait # 2*, this double mark of the tableau realizes itself independently from its presentation via its internal visual structure, aligning it with the active view of the recipient who is enabled to distance himself from the ciphers of destruction. In the installation arrangement of the photographs, this experience is even transferred onto a bigger scale, since the chromatic interactions between the single pictures, with their fragmented segments of vision, play again with the rejected gaze of the beholder. However, in *Fait # 2*, the anti-mimetic concept of camouflage goes beyond a simple reference to the perceptive spaces of war, rather proving its affinity to a possible "depiction" of the event as an integrating entity of the non-representable (Öhlschläger 2005: 217). Furthermore, considering camouflage's allusion to the pictorial tradition of the *Allover,* in its discursive encoding as a formal equivalent of the "visual experience of the interminability, [...] the absolute, i.e. the unimaginable"[51] (Jürgens-Kirchhoff 1993: 328), Ristelhueber's compositional decision and instrument-based blinding operation evidently intertwine.

**50** Campany's reflection is based on the conceptualization of the photographic tableau by Jean-François, which refers less to an idea of photographic deixis than to the phenomenal experience of large-sized wall-mounted photographs.

**51** "[...] eine Malerei, die angeblich der epochalen Aufgabe der Darstellung des Undarstellbaren verpflichtet ist, interessiert sich für das all 'over' bildnerischer Strukturen und Prozesse, die die visuelle Erfahrung der Unabschließbarkeit, der Grenzenlosigkeit, des Absoluten, d.h. des Unvorstellbaren vermitteln sollen." For this context, see the author's comment on the relation between

# 6 Mimicry to the medium: against the traumatic gaze

It is a concomitant feature of the oscillating image and its *modus operandi* in the form of visual irritation that the reception process itself is prolonged. In *Fait* this circumstance is accentuated by the prevention of an immediate reception, which is the case with most of the photographs. Given their ambivalent visual structure or the strategic impairment of an instant identification of their referent, they undermine the time-based effects of either the monadic visibility associated with real-time media, or the category of the shocking image operating only in the register of the transparent picture.[52] I would like to conclude this interpretation with a final example, namely a colored photograph of a pair of shoes Ristelhueber has taken as a high angle shot (see Fig. 13).

The rounded toecap of the left shoe, with its sole on the ground, is pointing to the left edge of the image, while the instep of the right one, lying on the side, touches the other shoe's heel. Covered in sand, the shoes, and some small objects to their right are only distinguishable from their surroundings through shades of light that drench them in olive, brown, and black color. Expanding all over the picture plane, the grainy structure thus appears as a motif itself, directing the beholder's view back again to the mediating structure of photography. Structurally, the grain presents an amalgamation of the smallest unit of photography based on silver salts, which, once they have been exposed, lead to the creation of a visible image (Dubois 1998: 102). The "trace of fractionalization," writes Philippe Dubois with reference to the chemical transformation of the exposed silver salts during the photographic development process, thereby always remains part of the pictorial result: "The reconstructed continuity [of the picture] as it can finally be perceived is always illusory, even if the grain does not appear to the naked eye (and even more so if it does)."[53]

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postwar abstract art and the experience of the atomic bombing in Nagasaki and Hiroshima as traditional cipher of the *Unimaginable*.

**52** According to Barthes, as a "literal photograph," the "shock-photo" articulates the concept of a natural impression, even if it mirrors the point of view of the photographer or has been manipulated (Barthes 1988: 73).

**53** "In dieser Rekomposition [des fotografischen Bildes] bleibt unweigerlich, so fein die Punkte, die den Transfer besorgt haben, auch sein mögen, die Spur der Fraktionalisierung enthalten. Die in der schlussendlichen Wahrnehmung wiederhergestellte Kontinuität ist immer illusorisch, selbst wenn die Körnung mit bloßem Auge nicht sichtbar ist (und erst recht, wenn sie sichtbar ist.)" (Dubois 1998: 104).

**Fig. 13:** Sophie Ristelhueber, *Fait # 31*, 1992.

In *Fait # 31*, this reference to the specific illusionism of photographic images is revealed further when the optical overlap between the grainy structure of the image layer and the crystalline texture of the sand are taken into account. Whether the single color points within the composition are to be identified as photographic pixels, or whether they refer to the structure of the sand, cannot certainly be determined. Even for an attentive observer, it is thus not clear if the photo's development process has been interrupted by the artist fixating the capture in an incomplete condition, or if the rose shimmering lights on the brown ground indicate traces of petroleum in the sand. Hence, due to both its motif and the photographic play with truth and deception, the photograph seems to follow the tradition of van Gogh's painting *Pairs of Shoes* (1886), given its discursive construction as a paragon of mimesis reflexion.[54]

**54** A respective connotation of van Gogh's painting has been prompted by a famous discussion between art historian Meyer Schapiro and philosopher Martin Heidegger on the art work in the 1960s. While Heidegger read the painting as illustration of a pair of peasant shoes, an observa-

However, I will not go deeper into the apparent connotation of the photograph as an allegory of doubt relating to the phantasmagorical potential, which could be associated with the idea of photographic latency (Dubois 1998: 95).[55] Instead, I am interested in a conceptual motif underlying the photograph's mimicry to its material condition with respect to its symbolical reading as a *vanitas motif* or *memento mori*. First, this idea is evoked by the common identification of disrobed clothes as an emblem of mortality (Pape 2008: 50); secondly, by the traditional notion of photography as a symbolical reference to death, given the photographic image's interpretation as indexical trace of the past. In the words of Susan Sontag: "All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (Sontag 1977: 15). As Claudia Benthien has pointed out, the benefits of the aesthetic reception of vanitas representations in literature and painting could be conceived of as the possibility of a calculated approach to the illustration of "temporal inversions," characterizing the temporal structure of traumatic experience (Benthien 2011: 91). This interpretation refers to a definition of trauma as being caused by a disturbing event that affects the psychic apparatus too abruptly to be "experienced *in time*."[56] This explains why the expression of trauma is that of belated affection, as traumatic repercussions claim a reiterated experience to realize the primarily incomplete digestion of a traumatizing situation during its psychic inscription. Benthien's argument hereof is that, by confronting the metaphorical delay of processes of decay in an artwork, the recipient of vanitas motifs was enabled to deal with the accidental pattern of traumatic reception, offering her the possibility of a fictional play-through of the traumatizing sensation (Benthien 2011: 94). Returning to *Fait # 31*, this condition of traumatic relief seems structurally reflected in the photograph. Contrasting the motif of the shoes disappearing in the sand, with the material allusion to the photographic picture as representation of a spatio-

tion he associated with a reflection on the truth of the art work, in contrast, Schapiro interpreted the shoes as a possession of van Gogh and thus as an implicit self-portrait of the modern artist. Finally, the status of the painting as an icon of representational discourse has been strengthened through a postmodern relecture of the polemic by Jacques Derrida. For a short summary of the mentioned positions read Münker and Roesler (2000: 125).

**55** For a discussion of this effect with reference to the famous scene in Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Blow Up* (1966), in which the grainy structure of an enlarged photograph bears the indication of a murder that cannot clearly be recognized, see Torsten Scheid (2005).

**56** Quote from Cathy Caruth, whom Benthien cites as follows: "It is not simply, that is, the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*" (Benthien 2011: 93).

temporal cut within the flow of time, the picture illustrates an "anticipating and at the same time negating conception of temporality" (Benthien 2011: 92) as is manifested by depictions of vanitas. In this light, *Fait # 31* not only calls for a reflection about human mortality but figuratively alludes to the operation of a "symbolic mastering of absence" (Baudrillard 1995: 92) that traditionally features the reception process of photographs. That this reference to the natural historicity of the analogue photograph may be read as another reference to the Gulf War's phenomenological essence, can best described by Jean Baudrillard:

> The photograph is not an image in real time, it is not a virtual image, or a numerical image, etc. It is analogical, and it retains the moment of the negative, the suspense of the negative, this slight displacement, which allows the image to exist in its own right, in other words, as something different to the real object; in other words, as illusion – in other words, as the moment in which the world or the object vanishes into the image, which synthetic images cannot do because they no longer exist as images, strictly speaking. The photograph retains the moment of disappearance, whereas in the synthetic image, whatever it is, the real has already disappeared. (1997: 30)

Read against this background, it would be the media-historical caesura of real-time mediation as it has been associated with the Gulf War itself that presented the photo series traumatic motif. Hereof, the photographs of *Fait*, by staging the idea of a media-based loss of reality as perceptible element within photographic representation, countered the traumatizing measure of time that characterized the war's experience from the perspective of a Western civil public. Handing back the time span of reflection that had been undermined by the so called real-time war to the beholder, the photographs finally seem to provide her with the means for a "post-receptive" approach in the frame of an imaginative "poietic self-therapy" (Benthien 2011: 94).

## 7 War on screen: *Fait* and resistant imagery

At this point, it is useful to bring up David Campany's concept of the "late photograph" as standing out within "an image world dispersed across screens and reconfigured in pieces," through its specific visual vocabulary (Campany 2003: 132). But only to put in perspective its core notion – the existence of differential image logics within the visual sphere of contemporary media society – with respect to my precedent argumentation. This approach seems especially legitimate if one takes into account the writings of French film critic Serge Daney (1944–1992), which provide an enlightening diagnosis of the Gulf War's particular phe-

nomenality in relation to the present matter.[57] In one of his most cited texts on this subject, Daney differentiated between two types of media-based visibility, i.e. the competing institutions of television and cinema.[58] Here, the concept that Daney termed *l'image* could be easily identified with the cinematographic image, and referred to the idea of a heterogeneous structure of visibility that integrated the abstract figure of an "other" (Rafael 2013: 315). In contrast, *le visuel*, a term Daney introduced to refer to the televisual picture, represented an entirely decipherable and merely informative visibility. While this concept of the (artistic) image obviously referred to a familiar definition of "imageness" within French postmodern thought from Lacan to Derrida, nevertheless, according to Daney's particular argument, an image worth its name always bears an element of visual deprivation that provided it with the virtue of "une sorte de résistance obtuse" [a kind of obtuse resistance] (Daney 1997: 165): "L'image a toujours lieu à la frontière de deux champs de forces, elle est vouée à témoigner d'une certaine altérité et, bien qu'elle possède toujours un noyau dur, il lui manque toujours quelque chose. L'image est toujours plus et moins qu'elle même".[59] Michael Wetzel has aptly interpreted Daney's definition of the image as the expression of a specific "resistance," designating it as the only formula of an authentic visible against "the intrusiveness of optical spectacle" that Daney himself had associated with the ideological setting of image production during the Gulf War.[60] Significantly, in Daney's way of thinking, the representational system that the TV-Images stood for, could only be countered with artistic means that referred to the medium specificity of the cinematographic picture, namely the techniques of *l'arrêt sur image* and *montage*.[61]

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**57** During his work for the French newspaper *Libération* since the end of the 1980s, Daney, a frequent contributor to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, has commented on the TV-presence of the Gulf Crisis (Daney 1997).

**58** Today, this distinction represents a common subject of discussion in media and film studies (Rafael 2013).

**59** "The image always takes place at the border of two force fields, it is meant to bear witness to a certain otherness; and although it always has a hard core, it always lacks something. The image is always more and less than itself." (Daney 1997: 164).

**60** "Das *Bild* wird dagegen [gegenüber dem Visuellen, my addition] als eine Gebrochenheit des Blicks im Sinne einer Reflexion verstanden, die Raum schafft für eine gewisse Andersheit [*altérité*] des Gesehenen und mit dem Entzug des Bildes auch 'Widerstand' leistet gegen die Aufdringlichkeit des optischen Spektakels: [...]" (Wetzel 2004). In this sentence Michael Wetzel uses the terminology as found in Daney's essay (Daney 1997: 177).

**61** Subsequently, as Michael Wetzel has argued, the heterogeneity of *l'image* as conceptualized by Daney could be determined as "*temporal-ontological*" (Daney 1997: 185).

In recent scholarly discussions different paraphrases of this notion of an idealized image articulate itself via the exposition of its representational criterions, within a leveling of image products generated by commonly used technical media (Boehm 1994: 35; Dobbe 1999). For example, in this line of thought, Gottfried Boehm and Martina Dobbe have contributed to a conceptualization of different stages of "imageness," indicating the possibility of technical images to gain aesthetic value through artistic operations that reflect on their dispositional means (Boehm 1994; Dobbe 1999). However, by taking a look at the afterlife of the concept of resistant imagery, as it could be traced especially in French Thinking, this media-based argumentation has also been challenged, for example in the work of Jacques Rancière, whose political aesthetics explicitly refer to the semantic range of a "resistant" while drawing equally upon a concept of aesthetic delimitation within today's visual culture (Rancière 2008a; Rancière 2013). In his argumentation, as is the case with Daney, the idea of aesthetic resistance forms a unique characteristic of art, which by taking the form of a "sensible wrested from the sensible" equally becomes the object of a differential receptive situation.[62] Yet, this concept defines art as an alternative organization of visibility within socially shared spaces of perception, providing a displacement within the beholder's daily sensual experience. In Rancière's thinking, this displacement, though, is not owed to the specific properties of a medium but results from an artistic intervention – qualified as an "operation" – in the concept of resemblance (Rancière 2003: 33–34).[63] By embodying an internal *dissensus* that suspends a simple correspondence between the aims of artistic production and reception through an ambivalence in both appearance and meaning, art subsequently presents itself as a reframing of static orders of representation (Rancière 2008b: 66). Within this concept, as (true) art enables the viewer simultaneously to intervene in a "partition of the sensible" as it is undertaken by official, systemic, or ideological powers,[64] "resistance" can be understood in two ways: either as a passive feature relating to a necessarily autonomous state of art, or as relating to its emancipat-

**62** "Die Idee des aus dem Sinnlichen gerissenen Sinnlichen, des *dissensuellen* Sinnlichen, charakterisiert genau das Denken des modernen Regimes der Kunst, das ich ästhetisches Regime der Kunst zu nennen vorgeschlagen habe" (Rancière 2008a: 14). This concept of art refers to what Rancière calls the "aesthetic regime of art" and which he validates as dominant scheme of the conceptualization of art since the eighteenth century (Rancière 2006). For Rancière's concept of different "regimes of art," a subject that I will not take up here, see the wide range of literature on his thought (Davis 2010).

**63** For the idea of dissemblance as criteria of art, see also Rancière (2003: 33).

**64** For an idea of the latter, see also Rancière's anecdote about the emancipative strategies of French workers during the worker's revolution in the 1830s (Rancière 2008b: 24–26).

ing impact on the viewing community (Rancière 2008a: 9).[65] Making reference to the photo series *Westbank* (fig. 13), a project by Sophie Ristelhueber on improvisational road blocks in the border area between Israel and Palestine, Rancière has described a possible pattern of resistance artwork:

> Sophie Ristelhueber has in fact refused to photograph the great separation wall that embodies the policy of a state and is the media icon of the "Middle East Problem" [...] in this way, she perhaps effects a displacement of the exhausted affect of indignation to a more discreet affect, an affect of indeterminate effect – curiosity, the desire to see closer up. I speak here of curiosity, and above I spoke of attention. These are in fact affects that blur the false obviousness of strategic schemata; they are dispositions of the body and the mind where the eye does not know in advance what it sees and thought does not know what it should make of it. (Rancière 2009: 104)

Here, the operational principle of the resistant image is that of a metonymical order, as well as of a specific register of representation. Due to a formal strategy that counters the concept of mere resemblance, it makes the viewer see with his own eyes.

It is at the intersection between the thoughts of Jacques Rancière and Serge Daney that the idea of aesthetic resistance could finally be linked to the photographs of *Fait*. With their media-based materialization of a heterogeneous image, the pictures reconfigure the representational scheme of the Gulf War particularly through the organization of a differential sensual experience. As potential "anti-image[s],"[66] they thus embody an alternative way of depicting war that refuses a static precept of interpretation. This receptive setting even remains active if one considers the abstract figure of "dissemblance" and its metaphorical linkage to an "invisible," which appears as formal part of the photographs in its decipherable symbolic constitution. As the leitmotif of "blindness" also operates on the level of aesthetic reception, it activates the imaginative potential of the viewer, not least by confronting him with the *punctum caecum* of his own perception.[67] In any case, given that her photographs oscillate at the crossroads of these meanings, Ristelhueber's main artistic object should have been achieved: "Je

**65** In this context, see also Rancière's reference to Kant as antecedent of a model of aesthetic resistance and its relation to a specific idea of art's autonomy (Rancière 2003: 15 ff.).

**66** For a discussion of the 'anti-image' as genre term for an alternative depiction of war, which according to Petra Maria Meyer always positions itself within a whole of social respectively mass media's imagery, see Petra Meyer (2009). An equal idea has been perpetuated by the exhibition "Bild-Gegen-Bild" that took place at the *Haus der Kunst*, München, from June 10 until September 16, 2012.

**67** For a discussion of blindness in relation to imaginative processes within a "production theory of art" read Gisela Febel (2004: 56).

crois que mon travail avec la photographie consiste à recréer des ponts entre le monde tel qu'il est et une œuvre potentielle."[68]

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**68** "I think that my work with photography consists in bridging between the world as it is and an *œuvre potentielle*." (Ristelhueber in Brytan 2003: 6).

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Johannes Binotto

# Closed Circuits

## Immanence as Disturbance in High Definition Cinema

> "everything that is switchable also becomes feasible"
> Friedrich Kittler (2010: 226)

Near the end of his second cinema book, *The Time-Image* from 1985, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze famously muses about the new electronic images, which will eventually replace analogue, photomechanical film. He states:

> The electronic image, that is, the tele- and video-image, the numerical image coming into being, either had to transform cinema or to replace it, to mark its death. [...] The new images no longer have any outside (out-of-field), any more than they are internalized in a whole; rather, they have a right side and a reverse, reversible and non-superimposable, like a power to turn back on themselves. They are the object of a perpetual reorganization, in which a new image can arise from any point whatever of the preceding image. [...] And the screen itself, even if it keeps a vertical position by convention, no longer seems to refer to the human posture, like a window or a painting, but rather constitutes a table of information, an opaque surface on which are inscribed "data." (1989: 265)

## 1 Outside as lack and the lack of the outside

In order to fully grasp Deleuze's claim, one has to recapitulate what is meant by this "outside" of the cinematic image, of which the electronic image supposedly is devoid. In his earlier book, *The Movement-Image,* Deleuze describes the *out-of-field* [*hors-champ*] of the cinematic image as designating, on the one hand, what is simply outside the frame (the natural extension of the space only partially depicted on screen), while, on the other hand, also testifying to a "disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist,' a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogenous space and time" (1997: 17).

Looking for examples for this disturbing second aspect of the out-of-field as an ominous presence lurking at the borders of the image, one might think immediately of those mysterious scenes in the modernist cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni. Time and again, characters in Antonioni's films disappear completely, when they are stepping outside the frame, like Anna in *L'Avventura* (1960), who gets lost on a tiny island, which in reality would be impossible to escape; or, like the two lovers in *L'Eclisse* (1962), who promised to meet at their usual spot in the city, but never show up. In both cases, it seems like the characters got swallowed

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by that "radical Elsewhere outside homogenous space and time." As I have argued in a different context, this movement into that absolute outside could be seen as an encounter with what Lacan calls "the real," that frightening void, which resists both imagination and symbolization (Binotto 2009). The real, understood as lack, makes itself felt as that invisible outside, situated beyond the border of the frame.

The electronic images, however, as they are, according to Deleuze, devoid of any out-of-field, are therefore – to borrow the Lacanian phrase – lacking the lack itself. What is felt here as a disruption, is no longer what is absent from the image and can be felt as insisting in the out-of-field. Rather, what is disruptive in and about the electronic image, is its suffocating plenitude. Instead of not enough, the electronic images seem to show far too much. While Antonioni's films were concerned with a *melancholia* for that which transcends the film image, the electronic images are governed by the no less disturbing maniacal *paranoia* of immanence. In contrast to its photochemical precursors, electronic images are no longer oriented towards an outside, which they can never capture; rather, they are obsessed with their own plenitude and their internal, immanent "perpetual reorganization." This, at least, is the philosopher's claim.

## 2 Transformation image

While Deleuze in his texts on film rarely discusses specific technical aspects of filmmaking, his thoughts about digital imaging, as vague and far-fetched they may seem on first sight, are in fact very aptly describing the actual technological properties of these new images. In ascribing to the electronic images a "power to turn back on themselves," he is quite accurate in delineating what really takes place in the cathode ray tube (CRT), which first produced these electronic images. Indeed, CRT is by its very technology bound to turn the images "back on themselves," by constantly destroying and reconstructing them. In analogue film projection in cinema we were shown every frame of the film strip as a complete picture, following one after another. The cathode ray tube in a TV, however, never shows the pictures as a whole. Instead, it dissolves the image into lines, which the wandering dot of the cathode ray writes onto the TV screen's surface. While analogue film was projected image by image, electronic video is written line by line.[1] It is only due to our inert visual perception that we believe we

1 This can be made visible by filming TV screens with ultra slow motion. See for instance the

see complete images on TV, when in fact we have been shown nothing but fragments. This lack of detail is also the reason why Marshall McLuhan would list television among those "cool media," which ask for a large amount of audience participation:

> The TV image is not a still shot. It is not photo in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning-finger. The resulting plastic contour appears by light *through*, not light *on*, and the image so formed has the quality of sculpture and icon, rather than of picture. (McLuhan 2001: 341).

It is due to this completely different technology of electronic imaging that theorists such as Yvonne Spielmann have raised the question of whether what we see on a CRT monitor can even be called an image:

> The status of the image changes in video: it is electronically recorded, transferred to another device, and finally transmitted to a monitor. In fact, it can properly described as image only if we keep in mind that the electronic image is a constantly flow of signals. [...] So video is best understood as "transformation image," that is, because of the line-signal process, video produces an image that is constantly undergoing transformation. (Spielmann 2006: 57–58).

Although there are, of course, crucial technological differences between the video images produced by CRT and those produced by computers, and seen on liquid-crystal displays (LCD), Spielmann's definition of the electronic image as transformation image holds true for both. Also in digital formats, the image is broken up into lines, this time into rows of pixels, played back on an LCD screen line by line. The electronic images produced both by CRT as well as LCD are never static, even if (due to progressive scan, increased refresh rate of the screen and backlight strobing) they may look more and more stable to us. Even if the screen shows us a still image, the computer is constantly rewriting this same image, pixel by pixel onto its screen. Electronic images, therefore, are in a constant process of taking and losing shape. The analogue logic of *sequencing* complete images one after another thus gives way to a logic of *morphing*, where one images melts into the other. As Garrett Stewart puts it: "In post-filmic cinema, no image precedes the one we see – or follows from its sequence. All is determined by internal flux [of the single frame]" (Stewart 2007: 6).

Paradoxically enough, it is precisely this internal flux that ensures the immanence of the electronic image. Since the electronic image is in a constant process

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video "TV screen refresh in Slow motion @ 10,000 FPS in UltraSlo":<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lRidfW_l4vs> (accessed 3 January 2016).

of change, it can become everything. Deleuze's seemingly contradictory claim therefore also means that the electronic images neither have an outside, nor can be internalized in a whole. Never complete, the electronic image shows (potentially) everything at once. The outside is always already included in the fluctuating inside of the image.

While these internal fluctuations were strikingly (and often painfully) visible in early TV and video experiments (Spielmann 2008: 131–224), as for example in the art installations by Nam June Paik or the films by Steina and Woody Vasulka,[2] the advent of more detailed digital film images, shot and viewed in high definition, lets us forget the digital image's fundamental instability. While video experiments, such as those mentioned above, highlighted the fractures and disruptions inherent to electronic imaging, the vast majority of contemporary commercial movies use high definition digital images, not to disrupt but to enhance and stabilize cinema's illusionism.

However, I would argue that high definition in fact intensifies the disruptive aspect of digital imaging, precisely by trying to conceal it. There is an inherent paradox to the fact, that for rendering the digital image more detailed, one has to increase its pixel density. The extremely sharp images thus produced are in fact more pixelated, more fragmented and cut up than ever. Similarly, higher refresh rates of modern computer monitors, TV screens, or digital projectors, which make the images appear sharper, are in fact interrupting the flow of signals at an even higher rate: the faster you turn the image on and off, the crispier it looks. Be it pixel density or refresh rates, the price for the illusion of stability is an increase of fragmentation, and of transformation.

Taking this into account, I want to show how recent commercial movies, such as those by Michael Mann or David Fincher, seem not so much interested in camouflaging the instability of the digital film image, but rather are exposing it, both on the level of their narrative, as well as in their aesthetics. These movies are, in my view, perhaps less obvious than the above mentioned prototypical examples of experimental video, but certainly no less radical in their deconstructive exposing of the electronic image.

**2** See for example the Nam June Paik films under <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEAUjFLSqXY> (accessed 13 January 2016), or Steina & Woody Vasulka, *Noisefields (1974)*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbn00MgqURk> (accessed 13 January 2016).

## 3 Nothing but cover

In contrast to most of his contemporary filmmakers, which in post-production give an analogue look to their digitally shot movies, Michael Mann has, since his early experiment with digital filmmaking in the short-lived TV series *Robbery Homicide Division* (2002–2003), and the movie *Collateral* (2004), opted for an aesthetics that aggressively exposes its digital nature. Mann thus fits perfectly Simon Rothöhler's claim that "HD is most interesting and advanced, both aesthetically, as well as a reflection of our hyper-mediated times, when the digital image is set in striking contrast to any traditional system of 'cinematic quality'" (Rothöhler 2013: 26–27).

Michael Mann's underrated magnus opum *Miami Vice* (2006), despised both by critics and audience for its un-filmic digital look, has probably gone the farthest in terms of investigating the disruptive aspect of high definition. The film's jarring visual appearance is ultimately matched by its storyline. Like the digital images, which consist in a continuous transformation of data, so too are the movie's protagonists, the two undercover police detectives Sonny Crockett and Riccardo Tubbs, constantly on the move. It is not just that they are always driving around in fast cars, speed boats, and private jets, but their personalities also seem completely unanchored, always adapting to the different situations they find themselves in. Even when they are not passing themselves off as drug traffickers or pimps, but revert to their supposedly true identity of vice cops, they are nothing but simulations. The tragic irony of these undercover agents is thus that underneath their cover there is nothing at all. Or as Riccardo Tubbs phrases it: "There is undercover and then there is 'Which way is up?'" By playing their roles as well as they can, they have lost themselves within the make-believe. The "internal flux" of the digital image, which Garrett Stewart talks about, also defines the characters and their ever-shifting identities. For Crockett and Tubbs there is no kernel of identity, hidden behind their masquerade. Like the images, the characters have no "outside." What you see, is what you get. But what you get is never a whole, and rather only a simulation.

As Lev Manovichs has pointed out, in digital cinema:

> the very distinction between creation and modification, so clear in film-based media (shooting versus darkroom processes in photography, production versus post-production in cinema) no longer applies [...], since each image, regardless of its origin, goes through a number of programs before making it to the final film. (Manovich 2002: 302)

So too, the characters, as seen in *Miami Vice*, presented in a digital format, become indistinguishable from these avatars, which were completely designed on a

computer. And in fact, they are. Simply by the capturing and storing of their image digitally, the characters have become victims of what Fredrick Kittler highlighted as the fundamental process of the computer per se: "the successful reduction of all dimensions to zero" (Kittler 2010: 227). In *Miami Vice* this process of reduction is mirrored in the way Mann films his characters, just as French film theorist Jean-Baptiste Thoret described with such precision:

> The use of HD allows Mann to forge a dense image, often opaque and viscous, which deepens the backgrounds and engulfs the foregrounds. Thus, the characters gain in definition what they lose in contour, and thus in identity – visually, they free themselves with difficulty from the background and seem ceaselessly threatened with dissolution. (Thoret 2007)

Ivo Ritzer has similarly argued succinctly that: "The ecstatic-exhibitionist fixation on surface phenomena in *Miami Vice* mirrors the loss of identity. Mann shows how individuality is literally reduced to pixel values." (Ritzer 2011: 64–65). By thus rejecting the traditional filmic look, Mann's *Miami Vice* discloses its true nature, in that of both its characters and of its own mediality. What is experienced by the viewer as irritation of his or her viewing habits is a way to lay open what is actually going own, narratively as well as technologically.

## 4 Ghost Image Machine

One scene of *Miami Vice* may serve as a particularly revealing example for this self-reflexivity of the film's visual and narrational argument: Crockett and Tubbs, disguised as traffickers, are smuggling a drug load from Columbia into the United States, using small A-500 airplanes. The gorgeous shots of this flight sequence obviously serve as a showpiece for the stunning, crisp look of HD. At the same time, however, it is this very richness in detail and almost painful sharpness that make these shots look like they were not actually captured in nature, but created on a computer (fig. 1 bottom). This unclear status of what we are seeing, an actual plane or just a digital simulation, is also a concern on the level of the story: in order to enter the States without being picked up by the radar, Crockett and Tubbs have to fly their jet in close proximity to another, officially registered airplane, so that the radar of air control would only pick up the signal of this second plane. However, for a short moment, the officer on duty sees two signals on his radar monitor (see Fig. 1 top), but when he alerts his chief, the second signal has disappeared. It must have been "a ghost," the chief tells the radar officer, not knowing how apt this characterization is: indeed, the two protagonists in their

jet are nothing but ghosts, digital signals without substance, just a blip on the radar monitor.

**Fig. 1:** *Miami Vice*

It is significant to note that the apparatus we are shown in this scene, the radar monitor, is in fact one of the earliest devices to implement the cathode ray tube, and which, in fact, to this day still uses this same technology. Following McLuhan's famous rule, stated already in the first few pages of *Understanding Media*, that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (McLuhan 2001: 8), the film includes as a content the older electronic medium of radar, in order to explain the newer electronic medium of HD. Thus, in this sequence, the film reflects upon its own technological condition: in analogy to the dubious signals on the air control's CRT-monitors, where one can never be sure if they indicate an actual object, or just electrical noise (i.e., ghosts), the HD images of Mann's film are likewise exposed as being just electronic data, fragmented and corruptible. The crucial distinction between simulation and representation,

between signal and noise, collapses. The film's HD images of the plane in the sky and its counter-shot, the CRT radar monitor in front of the air control officer, mirror and comment on each other. They form a closed-circuit and thus, a self-referential mise-en-abyme (see Fig. 1).

This closed-circuitry of electronic images, which ultimately refer to no external reality (no outside) but only to their own technological condition, is the key to the film's claustrophobic narrative: everyone and everything is constantly changing, but nothing is getting anywhere. The electronic signal, captured in closed-circuits, only moves in loops. So too, every gesture, every event, every character in this film, seems from the beginning like a repetition. What we get are copies of copies, without original. It is fitting, though, that the film starts *in medias res* and ends without any big revelation. Things just continue, the flow of signals goes on, in circles, leading nowhere. The pixels remain the same, and just get re-switched over and over and over, with no final result. Deleuze's claim, that electronic images no longer have any outside, haunts the story, which does not develop, but runs in circles.

## 5 Lost island of the real

According to Garrett Stewart, there remains a nostalgia for that which lies outside this vicious circle: "In the age of digital generation rather than the chemical registration of images, there is, [...] a growing nostalgia for the real itself" (Stewart 1999: 238). As I would argue, this real that one has nostalgia for in the digital age is also the Lacanian real, that radical beyond, which in Antonioni's films could still be felt insisting in the outside of the frame. Another scene in *Miami Vice* may be symptomatic for this longing for the outside: in the midst of a briefing, Sonny Crockett looks outside the window and glances at the horizon. As Jean-Baptiste Thoret points out:

> It's a moment of existential solitude characteristic of Mann's cinema (silence on the soundtrack, gaze lost on the horizon) that already indicates the desire of the character to extricate himself from the flux, to reinvent lost time. Sonny is the desire of an elsewhere, the perpetual will to disconnect from the world, mentally as well as physically, as the escapade at Havana testifies. [...] Sonny embodies in his turn the Mannian imaginary of a mental and geographical extension, of a utopic elsewhere that the film will never realize but whose simulacrum it will fabricate (Havana). (Thoret 2007)

The "utopic elsewhere" (the out-of-field in Deleuze) evaporates by visiting it. In Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, Anna disappeared from the island into that realm of the real, and was never found again. In *Miami Vice*, however, we are driving with

Sonny Crocket to that promising island of Havana, only to find out that it is a simulacrum as well. There may be that "micromoment [...] of a different temporality" (Lie 2012: 240 – 244), which Sulgi Lie discusses in regard to that moment in the Havana sequence, when the film image freezes for a moment. But, I would argue, even this micromoment of bliss turns out to be a deception. In digital cinema, even freeze frames do not really stand still, but continue to be computed, continuously. The lack of the real, be it as out-of-field or temporal interruption, is lacking. The digital HD image knows neither pause, nor escape.

In this case, it is also striking how the film ends: in the final shot of *Miami Vice*, we see detective Sonny Crockett walking towards the hospital, in which one of his partners is recovering from a shoot-out. We see Sonny enter the building, and, the moment he disappears, the film cuts to black. The end. Sonny is not moving outside the frame, not walking into some mysterious out-of-field, but is going right into the image in front of us. He remains in there – reverted back into that flow of convertible data, which knows no outside but only its own perpetual reorganization. It is this that we experience as disturbing in *Miami Vice*, and probably in digital cinema per se: not the experience of a lack, but the sense of the digital image's inescapable immanence. We do not get out, we get in.

Picking up on Ludwig Jägers definition of media disruption, "as that moment in the course of a communication which causes a medium to lose its (operational) transparency and to be perceived in its materiality" (Jäger 2012: 30), I would argue that the HD cinema of Michael Mann is just such particular case, one in which disruption is perceived not so much as a moment in which the medium's operational transparency is interrupted, but one where it is totalized. Or to put in other words: what we experience as so disturbing about the constantly reorganized images in *Miami Vice* is precisely the impossibility to bring this process of perpetual reorganization to a halt. Iteration becomes irritation.

## 6 Second order observations

Such a claustrophobia of immanence also haunts the digital images in the more recent films by David Fincher. In his film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), the journalist Mikael Blomkvist investigates the assumed murder of Harriet Vanger, who disappeared forty years ago. In one scene of the film, Blomkvist sits in front of his laptop, staring at photos that show Harriet for the last time before her disappearance. The moment is marked as a fundamental breakthrough in Blomqvist's investigation, since, by looking closely at the photographs of Harriet's face, he detects anxiety, implying that she must have been confronted

with an imminent threat at that moment the pictures were taken. Although only forty seconds in length, Fincher is here quite obviously quoting the famous, over ten minutes-long sequence from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), in which the photographer Thomas, by investigating the snapshots, taken of a couple in a park, believes to have stumbled upon a crime scene (see Fig. 2). Once aware of this intertextual reference, one might also note that the pictures Blomkvist is looking at were, according to the narrative, taken in 1966, that very same year in which *Blow-Up* hit the cinemas.

**Fig. 2:** *Blow-Up*

Apart from the striking difference in length between the two scenes, their different media setting is significant, for obvious reasons: while Antonioni's protagonist discloses the secrets of his photos by pinning them on the wall of his studio, and putting them into a meaningful order, Fincher's Mikael Blomkvist scans the analogue photographs, and views them as a digital slideshow, which runs in loops on his computer. Both protagonists, by arranging pictures into sequences and putting them into a syntactical relation to one another, are in fact making movies. Antonioni's Thomas, however, is making an analogue film, in which the images are clearly separated from one another, like the individual frames on the filmstrip. In Fincher, on the other hand, the film made out of the set of photographs is a digital one, where the distinction between the individual shots is blurred, and in which one image is morphed into the next. Indeed, the slideshow on Blomkvist's computer, with its morphing effects, illustrates perfectly Deleuze's claim about the electronic image as one "in which a new image can arise from any point whatever of the preceding image" (Deleuze 1989: 265). Both scenes end with the same gesture: the characters, struck by what they have just discovered by viewing their images, turn away, and look over their shoulders, as if in search of that last piece of the puzzle. This turning away and looking over the shoulder in Antonioni addresses the off-screen-space. The gaze of the photographer is directed towards that mysterious out-of-field, with which Antonioni's films are so concerned (see Fig. 2 right). In the digital counter-example of

Fincher's film, however, there is no such outside. What Blomkvist sees over his shoulder, and which the film immediately puts into view in form of a long-shot, thereby showing the complete scenery, is nothing but the cabin Blomkvist currently sits in (see Fig. 3 right). However, the film set of the cabin, as Fincher revealed in interviews, was all fabricated digitally. The room, Blomkvist sits in, is nothing but a computer simulation.

Blomkvist's gesture of turning away from the computer screen is thus revealed to be all the more futile. The digital images he looks at are not just restricted to the LCD-monitor of his laptop, but in fact surround him. The pictures on Blomkvist's laptop, crudely pixelated as they were, revealed their digital nature immediately (see Fig. 3, left). The CGI-fabricated set around him, rendered in high definition, may not so easily be exposed as a simulation. Nonetheless, the two views are ultimately are the same, different only in regard to their pixel density. And when Blomkvist turns around, it is in fact the digital image that "turns back on itself" (Deleuze 1989: 265).

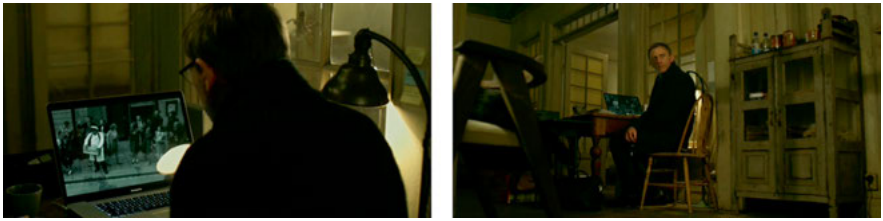

**Fig. 3:** *Dragon Tattoo*

The situation is strikingly similar to the one discussed above from *Miami Vice*. In that scene, showing the radar monitor becomes a recursive procedure, through which the film can bring into view its own electronic images. Accordingly, the computer monitor in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* points towards the film's own digital simulations. Radar and laptop allow for what in system theory would be called a "second order observation": by watching the characters looking at electronic images and misinterpreting them, we get a sense for our own (mis-)cognition of the two film's digital imagery. To quote Elena Esposito: "Every observer cannot see his own blindness, but he can see the blindness of others, and he is thus observing a phenomenon, that also concerns himself. Thanks to second order observation, he can see his own blindness, and he can see, up to a point, that he does not see." (Esposito 2005: 296).

# 7 Gone?

This self-reflexive closed-circuit between film technology and film narrative is brought to a further extreme in Fincher's next film *Gone Girl* (2014). Also shot digitally, the film tells the story of Nick Dunne, who becomes the primary suspect in the sudden disappearance of his wife, Amy. As the story unravels, we begin to realize that everything we thought to be true is an illusion. The supposedly happy marriage of Nick and Amy is a fraud, and so, as we ultimately find out, is the alleged kidnapping of Amy. The film's story is a mirage, and so too are the digital images with which it is told. At the end of the film, the couple is shown as being guests in a TV show, talking about how they were reunited. It is supposed to be an image of happiness and marital bliss, but we as an audience know that it is all a facade. Interestingly enough, however, the way Nick Dunne talks about his relationship with his wife in front of the TV cameras is surprisingly honest: "We communicate, we are honest with each other, we are partners in crime." Only the couple and we, the audience, get the double-entendre: indeed, these two people are partners in crime, and indeed they are honest with each other, each of them being aware of their mutual hatred. It is of course crucial to note that this charade is taking place on television, the first medium to process electronic images on a large scale. The scene is edited such that Fincher switches between shots taken within the TV studio and shots taken from the TV screen, in some of which we even see the logo of the talk show in the lower right corner (see Fig. 4).

**Fig. 4:** *Gone Girl*

Again, as in the examples discussed above, the film uses this insertion of a different kind of digital imagery into its own digital images as form of a recursive

re-entry, through which the film's own digital condition can be thematized. The two formats, TV image vs. HD film image, differ only gradually, both following the same digital logic. It is thus also fitting that with some of the shots we are unsure if they show a direct recording, or the recording of the TV screen. In the digital format the recording and the recording of a recording become indistinguishable. What holds true for the relationship between Nick and Amy, also applies for the film's form: there are only copies, only electronic simulations, only facades, but nothing behind them.

The final image of Fincher's film shows us Amy Dunne, looking up and staring directly into the camera. We remember that it is the same shot with which the movie started. However, if we look at the first and the last image of *Gone Girl* side by side, we will notice a subtle difference between the two. The last image is not just the mere repetition of the first, but its subtle revision (see Fig. 5).

**Fig. 5:** *Gone Girl*

The first and final shots are just two states within this "perpetual reorganization," which, according to Deleuze, is so particular for the electronic transformation image. The film has literally come full circle. It is as if it took the whole movie in order to let the electronic image "turn back on itself." Opening and ending thus could be regarded as a simile of the unstable electronic image as such. The two shots of Amy Dunne are nothing but one digital image, with a refresh rate of two hours, twenty-three minutes and forty-four seconds.

What Fincher's film expands over its whole length, and thus makes tangible, happens on contemporary HD screens up to 240 times per second, depending on the screens refresh rate. A film like *Gone Girl* only brings to the surface what is happening on the surface of electronic screens all the time: nonstop mutation, disfiguration in milliseconds, high speed simulation. Furthermore, what we ultimately find out about the female protagonist Amy Dunne may also serve as a paradoxical motto for the disturbing immanence of high definition:

She was never really here.
She was never really gone.

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## Films

*Blow Up* (GB 1966) Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni.
*Gone Girl* (USA 2014) Dir. David Fincher.
*Miami Vice* (USA, 2006) Dir. Michael Mann.
*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (USA 2011) Dir. David Fincher.

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# III Body

Anna Schürmer

# Interferences

## Posthuman Perspectives on Early Electronic Music

Electronic music offers many reference points to reflect on the topic of 'Disruption in the Arts', in particular in regards to experiments in music in the 1950s. This becomes especially apparent when using the prismatic concept of 'interferences'. In physics, the term refers to the superposition of two or more waves that leads to a new wave pattern. In the wider sense of communication sciences, 'interference' refers to anything that alters, modifies, or disrupts a message as it travels along a channel. In acoustics, it refers to the disruptive sound per se: white noise. The latter has become an object of media and cultural studies in which it has been considered as a disruptive element situated in between chaos and information that may constitute both crisis and progress (Sanio and Scheib 1995; Hiepko and Stopka 2001). Early electronic music has references to all of these implications and definitions. On a material level, the first music experiments were nothing other than noise interferences based on electronic sounds and created by means of communication engineering. On a socio-aesthetic level, this new sound based on interfering frequencies expressed a historical turning point, which was aligned by overlaying discourses criticizing medial, social, and aesthetic practices. By discussing interferences related to early electro acoustics as striking example of the principle of disruption in the arts, both of the mentioned levels will receive attention in the following sections. It is the argument, that these interferences indicate an epochal threshold and finally offer approaches for reflecting on a posthuman 'state of the art' in early electronic music.

## 1 The birth of electronic music

In 1951, the legendary Studio for Electronic Music was founded at the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* [WDR, West German Broadcasting] in Cologne. Here, the basis for producing synthetic sounds was laid: instead of manipulating tape recordings – as it was practiced by the Parisian *musique concrète* – the Cologne pioneers wanted to filter 'authentic' sound from noise interference using machines of communication technology, such as beat buzzers, ring modulators, and noise generators. On 19 October 1954, the small concert hall of the WDR bla-

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tantly became the birthplace of electronic music with its concert series *Musik der Zeit*[1] (see Fig. 1).

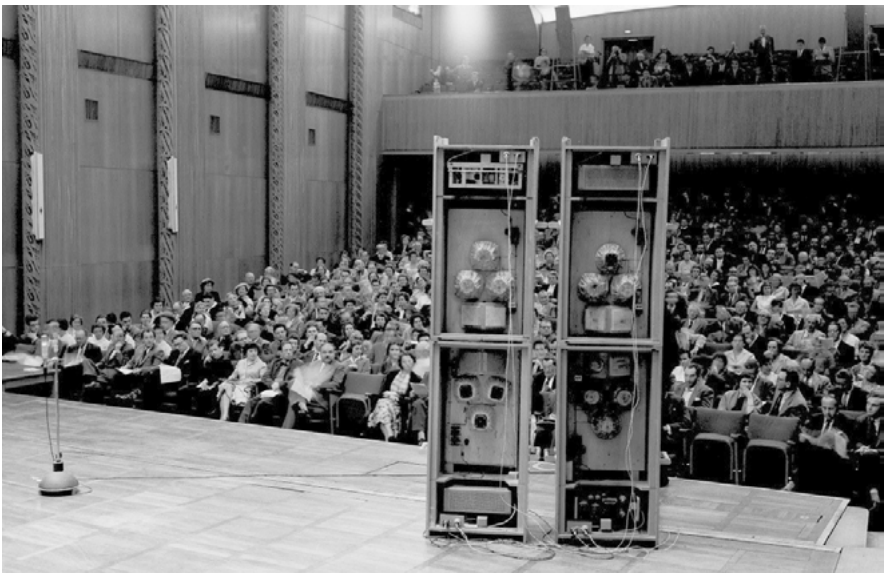

**Fig. 1:** Premiere of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* on 30 May 1956 at WDR (West German Broadcasting) in Cologne.

The program of the very first presentation included *Sieben Stücke* [seven pieces] (Eimert 1955), by Henry Pousseur, Karel Goeyvaerts, Paul Gredinger, Herbert Eimert, and in particular Karlheinz Stockhausen. The mastermind of techno culture did not want "to use any electronic acoustic sources, which generate already combined sound spectra (Melochord, Trautonium), but only sine tones of a frequency generator ('pure' notes without overtones)" (Stockhausen 1964a: 23).[2] To receive more complex sounds, the composer transformed 'white noise' into 'colored noise', which is comparable to the optical dispersion of white light with the help of prisms. At this point in music history, noise transformed from

1 *Musik der Zeit* means "Music of the Time."

2 "Nach einiger Zeit des vorbereitenden Hörens und Prüfens entschied ich mich, keine elektronischen Schallquellen zu benutzen, die bereits zusammengesetzte Schallspektren (Melochord, Trautonium) erzeugen, sondern nur Sinustöne eines Frequenzgenerators ('reine', obertonfreie Töne)."

being an interfering and disrupting element of acoustics into a musical work of art.

The most pathbreaking piece of the *Sieben Stücke* was Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Studie II*. The short etude of only three minutes and twenty seconds in length was an acoustic reference and source of the early media age: one hears a mix of tones of overlapping frequencies, filtered noise bands, and *Schwingende Elektronen* [swinging electrons] (Morawska-Büngeler 1988). The interfering frequencies and tones not only point to the technological sensation of this music ('electronic *éclat*'), but also to socio-cultural discourses and conflicts. While 'Adorno's critique', for instance, refers to the coherences between the German post-war avant-garde and critical theory, on a media-archeological level, electronic music was 'War Music': created with the help of military communication technology. Finally, electroacoustic sound art caused and provoked disruptions between the stage and the auditorium. The keyword 'dehumanization' thereby turned into a powerful expression that refers to a key problem in the history of ideas, concerning the tension between (hu)man and machine. These interferences on a media, social, and aesthetic level indicate a paradigm shift that was initiated by electronic music: the transition to a 'posthuman' music age.

## 2 Electronic éclat

Western classical music has always been created with fixed rules. The musical concept of the work by definition entailed: a music arrangement, created by a composer and noted in a fixed score, and a performance by artists with instruments in a closed performance situation in front of a spatially assembled audience. Its components were thus: composition, score, performer, and the performance situation. Electronic music broke with almost all of these standards and rules reaching from sound production to presentation, and therefore signified a fundamental challenge to the classical composition of music. In short, electronic music became an *éclat*, not only in the sense of 'scandalous', but also in a wider sense of the French term: as a sudden 'epiphany' and 'auratic' representation of the media age. The electronic music of the 1950s was 'unheard-of' in a literal sense: the synthetic sounds not only disturbed the conventional attention of the audience by delivering something completely unknown, but entirely shattered bourgeois concert rituals and aesthetic norms. Electronic media changed production, reproduction, and even reflection on music. Communication technology eliminated the need for interpreters and removed the stage as the focal point for listeners' affective engagement with the scene. Technicians be-

came composers and the widespread availability of radio sets turned living rooms into concert halls.

## 2.1 Composition: noise becomes music

From an aesthetic point of view, electronic music broke with all known parameters of the Western tradition of classical music. The Cologne group, above all Karlheinz Stockhausen, insisted that all the elements of music (succession of tones, rhythm, tone color) must be organized serially, bringing order to the compositional structure and setting limits to the exploitation of the otherwise unlimited possibilities. What they did was filtering noise, similarly to a selector. Any emphatic expression was omitted from their program by radicalizing the concept of atonality, which denied a tonal center in favor of a de-hierarchization of sounds. Figurative elements, such as themes and motifs, were avoided; instead, rows of numbers and codes now ruled the music event. One could say the German postwar avant-garde represented the ruptures and fractions of the present: they reconstructed and rearranged the music culture using interfering sound frequencies. Thus, early electronic music represented its time and culture in sonic terms.

What came out of and resonated from the loudspeakers was 'unheard-of' in the double sense of the phrase: unknown and shocking. Although the performed sounds were perceived by audiences as chaotic noise interferences, every parameter of electronic music was controlled by the composers, who were regarded as demiurge figures. They had the limitless power of combining all the elements of music known so far, applying the techniques made possible by new technological advances. The composers 'put together' (the literal translation of *componere*) the raw material, which was produced by electronic machines and not only worked as aesthetic creators, but also as technical sound engineers. They strictly organized the synthetic sound under serial principles and built it up from three basic factors, as Fred K. Prieberg pointed out in his reference work *Musica ex Machina* in 1960: the sine tone (tone without overtones), the impulse (a tone of such a short duration that its pitch cannot be perceived), and white noise (simultaneous presentation of all possible pitches within the tonal spectrum). This "music, that can be heard only on speakers"[3] was a sound of interfering frequencies and did not have any need for being interpreted by human musicians. It was

3 "Kennen Sie Musik, die man nur am Radio hören kann?" was the title of a contemporary radio show by Karlheinz Stockhausen at *West German Broadcasting* (WDR).

made for endless loops on tape, and, thus, repetition became the basis for the presentation of music, pointing to the future of popular music consumption.

## 2.2 Score: discourse networks

With the dispositif of electronic media, the tools of the composers resembled more those of sound engineers and demanded a mature knowledge of machine language. Instead of scores denoting harmony, dynamics, and instrumentation, the composers of electronic music created circuits that needed to be described in terms of frequencies and levels.

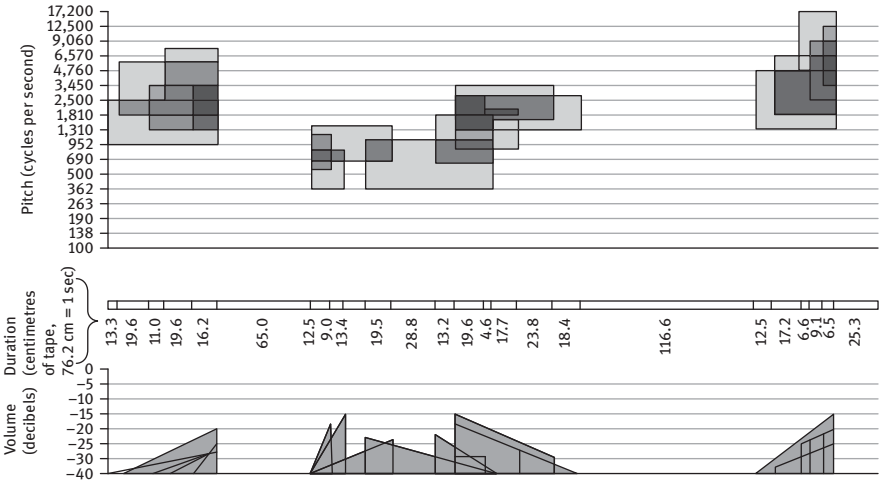


**Fig. 2:** Studie II – First Electronic Score (1953).

On 16 May 1956, the press reported that the Universal Edition "just released the first electronic score"[4] to Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Studie II* (see Fig. 2): The upper portion of the technical autograph denoted frequency ranges, the lower portion plotted amplitude as a function of time and specified envelopes (waves) of the prescribed sine tones. As he outlined theoretically in his influential article ...*How time passes by*... (Stockhausen 1959), electronic media changed the specific temporality of music as an acoustic phenomenon with its own order

**4** Press Release of the *Universal Edition*, in: Historisches Archiv des Westdeutschen Rundfunks: 5769.

and relationships in time. The score of *Studie II* shows how music had undergone a radical restructuring under new media conditions. Thus, it is an iconic sign for the changed discourse network within the cultural technique 'composition'.

In his habilitation thesis *Aufschreibesysteme*, German media theorist Friedrich Kittler developed the central hypothesis that literary texts are mainly determined by its technical design. The English translation of the title *Discourse Networks* points to text as an arrangement of interfering waves of communication. This media-archaeological approach sharpens the view on the technical conditions that allow and cause the emergence of social discourses. As Kittler pointed out in *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter*, communication (as well as art and music) is no longer a human affair, but technically determined:

> What remains of people is what media can store and communicate. What counts are not the messages or the content with which they equip so-called souls for the duration of a technological era, but rather [...] their circuits, the very schematism of perceptibility. (Kittler 1999: xl).

Technical media became the message and the medium of electronic sound art at the same time. They not only changed the social structure, the technology and the communication systems, but also the discourse on music. When Friedrich Kittler described media as "technology for storing, transmitting and processing information" (Kittler 1995: 519), electronic music made the invisible constitution of Marshall McLuhan's "magical channels" (McLuhan: 1964) audible: the acousmatic *medium* of sound waves became the *message* of music and changed its presentation in a striking way.

## 2.3 Presentation: invisible music

The audience of acousmatic sound/music[5] was deprived of something essential: the stage was dark and empty, or populated by speakers. With this change, the audience lost a reference point that usually received the most attention: the human genius on the stage. What poured out of the speakers was not only unheard of, but also invisible. After the premiere of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Ge-*

5 Acousmatic sound is sound one can hear without seeing an originating source. Acousmatic music is a form of electroacoustic music that is specifically composed for presentation using speakers, as opposed to a live performance. The term *acousmatique* was first used by the French composer and pioneer of musique concrète Pierre Schaeffer (Traité des objets musicaux: 1966).

*sang der Jünglinge* in 1956 (see Fig. 1), many critics were provoked by the magical effect of the disembodied and interfering sound waves:

> The spectator in the concert hall does not sit across from a podium with people and instruments playing music, but merely in front of machines positioned in several places of the room, and from which sounds reach the ear. The concert hall is devoid of the atmosphere that since year on determined the aura of artistic performance. (*Wuppertaler General-Anzeiger* 1956).[6]

With the loss of a physical exchange between musicians and audience, the electroacoustic performance of music was deprived of the presentist dimension of aesthetic experience (Gumbrecht 2004). Electronic music separated the temporal unity of sound production and reception; the human interaction between stage and auditory was interrupted. Instead of experiencing a live concert, the reception of loudspeaker music could as well take place in front of audio equipment by a sole listener in the living room. Furthermore, if concerts were formally linked to the place of their presentation, electronic music symbolized the spatial dissolution of sonic events under the "loudspeaker-dispositif" (Vollmer and Schröter 2013: 38 – 384); the term means that speakers are to be understood as technical devices as well as a complex interplay of techniques, performance practices, and discourses. The presentation of electronically generated music became a critical staging concept and a technologically generated variation of the cultural performance 'classical concert'. As music was characterized as a performing art until then, due to the specific performative co-presence of performers, spectators, and scene (Fischer-Lichte and Roselt 2001: 238), electronic music was now anti-performative, and simultaneously full of performative traits, because consternated listeners filled this lack with highly performative affects and reactions (Schürmer 2014a).

## 2.4 Performer: the machine as hyper virtuoso

With the new technical capabilities for calculating, pre-producing, storing, and reproducing sonic events, all parameters of music were placed under the sole control of the composer, who became the only human actor and agent in the creation of electronic music. For many composers, a centuries-long dream became

**6** "Der Konzertbesucher sitzt im Saal keinem Podium mit spielenden Menschen und gespielten Instrumenten gegenüber, sondern lediglich an mehreren Stellen des Raums postierten Apparaten, aus denen die Töne ans Ohr dringen [...]. Der Konzertsaal ist bar jener Atmosphäre, die seit je das Fluidum künstlerischer Darbietungen bestimmt."

true. Edgard Varèse, the French-American pioneer of electronic music, remarked in 1950: "In terms of the future [...], the interpreter will disappear [...]. Because it is logical to anticipate an apparatus with which any combination of rhythms and intervals can be produced [...]. No disrupting prism will stand between the composer and the listener." (Varèse 1950: 97)[7]. This "disrupting prism" was the interpretation by musicians. The quest for complete control necessarily led to a degradation of the performers: the "machine as a hyper virtuoso" (Ericson 2002) replaced human performers as mediators and the specific medium of sounds of music. The requirement for controlling the sonic expression via its spectral structure not only made traditional instruments obsolete, but also human interpretation and the stage (as focal point of the listener's attention). With this, machines for message transmission became musical instruments: electronic tubes, white noise generators, beat-buzzers, and ring modulators were turned into music instruments, while the tape recorder and speakers became interpreters, who took over the presentation of the fixed and therefore unchangeable sonic events.

Up until this point, individual virtuosity and personal emphasis were an essential part of a musical artwork. As the uncontrollable and never perfect element of human interpretation was excluded, the music, according to many, had been stripped of its 'aura', because precisely this unpredictable momentum was defined as the essence of the art of music. However, it is interesting to note the paradoxical fact that the liberation from interfering elements within the production of sound was perceived as an aesthetic interference. The human sound source perceived as flawed was emphasized as an integral part of creative uncertainty, while machine music was characterized as denaturalized and inhuman. In this context, the influential musicologist and critic Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt remarked, in 1955, that "just this perfection, this trouble-free and hazard-free reproduction and now even production of art, means dehumanization" (1955a: 214).

The word dehumanization became a prominent term in the critical discourses on electronic media and music. These debates, which I will outline in the following section, marked a threshold of music history and culture industries. This consideration is based on the hypothesis that cultural thresholds are typically accompanied by a sum of discourses and even media, social, and aesthetic practices. These cultural interferences disclose the liminal character of the transition

7 "Was die Zukunft betrifft [...], so wird der Interpret verschwinden [...]. Denn es ist logisch einen Apparat vorauszuahnen, auf dem jede beliebige Kombination von Rhythmen und Intervallen herzustellen ist [...]. Zwischen Komponist und Hörer wird kein verzerrendes Prisma stehen."

phase after 1945, in which new technologies formed a new era in the history of music and culture.

# 3 New ways: electronic music as an epochal threshold

As we have seen above, electronic music broke with almost all parameters of classical music and entered a new level in music history. This process was accompanied by a clash of opinions concerning the "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction":

> During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well (Benjamin 1968: 222).

If Benjamin already noted a "tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind" (1968: 223) as early as 1934, then this process is even more relevant after 1945. The cultural change, announced by electronic media, evoked polarizing reactions on the part of the recipients. While the technically (re)produced sound marked the end of the history of music for many, it was regarded as the beginning of a new sonic era at the same time; and, this new era was rarely welcomed within the history of Western classical music. Technology has always been considered as an element of disruption – not just in the middle of the twentieth century. This continuity in the critique of technology can be perceived as an expression of a cultural crisis and an evident conflict between tradition and innovation, which both provide evidence of a paradigm shift.

## 3.1 "The third era": volume up emotions

In 1955, the influential musicologist and critic Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt delivered reflections on music history with a focus on the material level, and characterized electronic music as the aesthetic expression of a "third era": While compositions of the first era – vocal music – were still closely tied to the "human body as an executive body," the emphasis in the second era – that of instrumental music – had moved to the role of "man as operator of instruments." The "dehumanized music" of the third era finally "emerged in the domain of pure spirit"

(Stuckenschmidt 1955b: 18 – 19)[8]. With this definition, Stuckenschmidt characterized the progressions within the history of music as a constant expansion of its media, and echoed an important claim of modern communication theory: that of *The Extensions of Man* (McLuhan: 1964).

Moreover, Stuckenschmidt was concerned with the affective impact of such technological progressions on its recipients. The interference and "discrepancy of transmission and reception" found expression in the "helplessness" of the listeners (Stuckenschmidt 1955b: 19). This anxious reaction precisely indicates a transitional crisis: these kinds of human affects accompany the conflict between the dissolution of old standards and the establishment of new rules. In the case of electronic music, the audience responded to the shattering of aesthetic norms with acts of disruption: people slammed doors, shouted boo, and sometimes even had fist fights. In order to explain these scandalous reactions, it seems too simple to merely bring the unfamiliarity of sounds into the argument; rather, the vehement feedback can be regarded as an affective marker of a historical breakthrough, as the musicologist Hermann Danuser outlined:

> At the ending of the historical development of new types of art, genres, styles, and aesthetics, usually conflicts, disputes, fights occur. Since anything outside the established boundaries of an art tradition [...], initially comes upon a refusal of acceptance concerning aesthetics of reception, which can only be overcome by dealing with a conflict. (Danuser 1999: 95)[9]

The reactions of listeners are therefore an affective sign situated at the boundary line of an epochal threshold, which Hans Blumenberg declared to be an "imperceptible line," visible only retrospectively (1976: 20). Viewing the scandals thus as a historiographical category (Schürmer 2018), the reactions to early loud-

**8** "Die erste war eng und innig an den Menschen selbst als ausführendes Organ gebunden; begrenzt wie der Umfang der Stimme, wie ihre Möglichkeiten der schnellen und lauten Intonation, die ihre Farbmodulationen war auch die Technik des vokalen Satzes [...]. Die zweite eroberte sich das Tonwerkzeug als Mittel; auch hier noch war die Bindung an den Menschen als notwendigen Bediener des Tonwerkzeugs gegeben, [...] während virtuose Geläufigkeit, Differenzierung und Farben, rhythmische Komplikationen und extreme Grade der Lautstärke vom Menschen wegführten. Die dritte, eben die elektronische Epoche, stellt den Menschen nur noch an den Beginn des Kompositionsprozesses, schaltet ihn aber als Mittler aus. Ihre 'dehumanisierte' Musik ist in der Domäne des reinen Geistes entstanden."

**9** "Am Ausgang der historischen Entwicklung neuer Kunstarten, Gattungen, Stile, Ästhetiken stehen meist Konflikte, Auseinandersetzungen, Kämpfe. Denn zunächst stößt alles, was außerhalb der etablierten [...] Grenzen einer Kunsttradition liegt, rezeptionsästhetisch auf eine Verweigerung der Akzeptanz, die nur durch den Austrag eines Konflikts überwunden werden kann."

speaker music show the impact on the listener's expectations. The electronic sound was something completely unknown, leading to audiences responding variously between surprise and disbelief, uncertainty and irritation, or shock and outrage. The scandals on stage indicate a fraction of norms, which are situated between two world orders: these emotional utterances were expressions of liminal border experiences between the breaking of old conventions and the establishment of new rules. Following Arnold van Gennep's prominent term of the *Rites de Passage* (1909), electronic music provided the stage for striking transformative ritual practices. Accordingly, the electronic *éclat* can be understood as a kind of sociocultural "liminal (or threshold) rites," which are "necessarily ambiguous" (Turner 1969:95). As music-sociologist Christian Kaden pointed out, the aesthetic scandal may be understood as a ritual custom: "as an acting out of an entropic situation until its dis-solution. Therefore, the escalation or the escalating conflict between negative forces is inevitable" (Kaden 2004: 587)[10]. The ritualistic escalation can be described as 'patterns of transit': they are performative acts through which new orders establish themselves.

## 3.2 Sounds of war

The scandalous reactions on the part of the listeners were not so much an expression of autonomous aesthetic debates; rather, these affects referred to heteronomous contemporary discourses revolving around electronic music and technologically mediated culture after World War II. The post-war period can actually be understood as an emerging phase between two orders: the war years and the consolidation of society under the technological sign of modernity. Patterns of description were missing for what the audiences of early electronic music heard. So, listeners and critics generated two contradictory topics in association with the invisible and unheard sounds: one pointed to the past and tradition, and the other to utopian future scenarios. One reviewer of the first concert of electronic music wrote in 1953, that the experience was like "to feel vibrations from space, as if we have insight to the language of the cosmos."[11] Even radio listeners wrote of a "fantastic interstellar music" in letters to the WDR: "This is probably the boldest step forward [...] a step into the unknown, a violent thrust

**10** "[D]er Skandal selbst äußerte sich als Ritual-Geschehen: als Aus-Leben einer entropischen Situation bis zu deren Auf-Lösung. Unvermeidlich daher die Eskalation, und das eskalierende Gegeneinander negativer Kräfte."

**11** Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 15.10.1953: "Schwingungen aus dem All zu spüren, als ob wir die Sprache des Kosmos vernähmen."

[...]. It is the music of tomorrow."[12] At the same time, the electronic music referred to the dangers of the recent past and the present. In this sense, Friedrich Blume, a well-known musicologist, remarked "that these sounds [...] are something that reflect our era of nuclear destruction" (1959: 17).

This assumption can be confirmed by looking at the reactions of listeners, which were often grounded in associations they had with experiences during the time of war. Exemplarily, critics of the first performance of electronic music, in 1953, wrote of a "crackling machine gun" (Ebert 1953) and "machine-gun fire" (Honolka 1953). Following a broadcast of Karlheinz Stockhausen, one listener bitterly wrote about a "scandal": Stockhausen's noise had "with music actually as much in common as a bomb exploding or a bursting grenade – he reminded me graciously of the good times on the front line" (Seemann 1965). This association to electronically generated music had a very specific, media-technical background. One can legitimately talk about early electro acoustics as 'war-music', because its development was closely connected to technical innovations of the war (Schürmer 2014b). It was Friedrich Kittler who described the Second World War as "the basis for our sensory perception":

> [T]he Blitzkrieg raged from 1939 to 1941. Without its media-technical innovations, sound would still be a mishmash of AM and steam-engine radio [...]. A nice symmetry holds: just as the misuse of military equipment that had been constructed for the positional warfare of 1917 led to medium-wave monophony, the misuse of military equipment that had been devised for tank divisions, bomber squadrons, and pack of U-boats led to rock music. (Kittler 2014: 159 – 160)

However, Kittler's theory titled "Rock Music as A Misuse of Military Equipment" fits much better to the experimental electronic music of the 1950s:

> Tape machines for sound montage, hi-fi technology for liberating overtones, stereophony for simulated spaces, synthesizers and vocoders for songs beyond the human sphere [*jenseits der Menschen*], and finally, FM radio for signal quality reaching the masses: [...] Every single one of these technologies goes back to Second World War. (Kittler 2014: 160)

The usage of discarded army equipment created a distinctive sound of the electronical post-war avant-garde. The noise interference that war-engineers had tried to minimize with beat buzzers now became the basic material of electronic music. Electro acoustics turned into art at this point and its origin in war was also perceptible aesthetically: as noise and interference. While this discourse re-

**12** From the file "Hörerzuschriften zu den Sendungen der Abteilung Neue Musik" 1960 – 1978, in: Historisches Archiv des WDR: 10868.

ferred to the technological and aesthetical level of electronic music, other debates pointed to a socially grounded critical theory.

## 3.3 Adorno's critique

In 1955, Theodor W. Adorno had witnessed the Cologne experiments of 'authentic' sound at the legendary *Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* [Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music]. In his position as philosopher and spokesman of the German postwar avant-garde, he criticized the electroacoustic experiments in his essay about "The Aging of the New Music" as a delusion:

> [E]lectronic music has failed to fulfill its own idea, that in practice; even though it theoretically disposes over the continuum of all imaginable sound colors, in actual practice – similar to the tin-can taste from the radio, only much more extreme than that – these newly won sound colors resemble one another monotonously, whether because of their virtually chemical purity, or because every tone is stamped by the interposition of the equipment." (Adorno 2002: 194)

Now, if Adorno regarded these synthetic sound products as disconsolate, then his statement is not only an expression of aesthetic or generational conflict, but also a critical attitude that creates an inspiring link between the German postwar avant-garde and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

The aesthetics of the electronic pioneers of the postwar decade become comprehensible with Adorno's famous sentence: "To write *poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric*" (1997: 33). In this context, the main artistic effort for a generation of young composers, which grew up under the conditions of World War II, was the creation of a new musical syntax that did not refer to the traditional forms and techniques of music. Under the widespread influence of Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* (1949/2006), the anti-affirmative became a key concept of the avant-garde. In his essay on "The Aging of the New Music" he outlined in 1954:

> The concept of New Music is incompatible with an affirmative sound, the confirmation of what is, even if this were beloved "Being" itself. When music for the first time came to completely doubt all that, it became New Music. The shock is dealt to its audience in its heroic period [...] cannot simply be attributed to unfamiliarity and strangeness [...]; rather it is result or something actually distressing and confused. (Adorno 2002: 181)

The pulse of the new music was not regarded as beautiful, but rather as disturbing; not allegiance to tradition but attention to progress and change was at its core. Although electronic music corresponded to Adorno's dictum for the most

advanced state of the material, for him the synthetic sounds denied historical memory via its abstract negation of tradition and history. While Stockhausen emphasized the utopian moment: "The cities are razed – and we can start from scratch, regardless of ruins and tasteless remains" (1963: 48)[13], Adorno argued more pessimistically, whereby he was not the only one who feared the loss of the critical potential of music. A good example is a letter that circulated at the famous Darmstadt after the presentation of electronic music in 1955:

> But wanting to construct a new world view out of a situation of ruin debris, which sanctions the failure of the European mind in the last hundred years as a future permanent phenomenon, would mean to support a conscious regression to the anonymous collectivity of [...] the present mass society. The abstract, seemingly progressive social idea that does not account for the human condition anymore, turns into the most bitter reaction against humanity. (Schiebler 1955 cited Borio and Danuser 1997: 67)[14]

Undoubtedly, these lines have been adapted from Adorno's critique of culture industry. He and his adepts feared that the mathematical nature would not only affect the meaning within the context of music due to the dissolution of traditional bonds, but also the relationships between individuals in this 'totally administered world': "In its organized operations there is no longer room for human impulses, indeed, the gift is necessarily accompanied by humiliation through its distribution, its just allocation, in short through treatment of the recipient as an object." (Adorno 2005: 42). Adorno's argument that the artistic engineering would take away the musician's (and therefore the human) self-determination points to a keyword within the debates on electronically generated loudspeaker music of the machine age: 'dehumanization'.

## 3.4 Dehumanization: (hu-)man versus machine

The dominant question raised by many opponents of electronic music was: is this still music at all? The most prominent and controversial example was Frie-

**13** "Die Städte sind radiert – und man kann von Grund auf neu anfangen, ohne Rücksicht auf Ruinen und geschmacklose Überreste."

**14** "Aus der Situation des Ruinenschuttes aber eine neue Weltanschauung mörteln zu wollen, die das Versagen europäischen Geistes in den letzten hundert Jahren als zukünftige Dauererscheinung sanktioniert, hieße, bewußte Regression in die anonyme Kollektivität der auf die Betätigung der dringendsten Lebensbedürfnisse abgesunkenen Massengesellschaft der Gegenwart zu fördern. [...] Die abstrakte, scheinbar progressive Sozialidee, die der conditio humana nicht mehr Rechnung trägt, schlägt um in bitterste Reaktion gegen Menschlichkeit."

drich Blume, who asked this question in his mischievous polemical essay "Was ist Musik?" in 1958:

> For the first time since the existence of music, it is attempted to kill natural sound by denaturation. [...] The result is exhausting, devilish or occasionally funny [...] for the audience [...]. It may well be that this generation of sound, only produced and reproduced by apparatuses is something that mirrors our era of nuclear destruction and full automation. But this denatured product [...] has nothing to do with music anymore. [...] Not the spirit, but only the machine, not the ethos of self-responsibility, but the logos of formulae are able to rule this realm (Blume 1958: 17).[15]

Even if Blume can be called a reactionary traditionalist with a dubious role in German Nazism (Prieberg 2004: 509; Prieberg 1982), the topic became a constant background noise on electronic music. Already in 1952, a special issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (2/1952) discussed the topic of music and technology quite controversially. One contributor remarked exemplarily that "a rationalization of art is a homicide of the soul," and added:

> Yet, concerning electronic music, which places uncanny sounds of mysterious origin from the field of physics in place of tones, [...] – they come from a world in which there is no man, only fiendish creatures, that the human, as a being with a soul, can probably not cope with, that destroy him, or drive him to insanity. If, here, it shall have truly succeeded to enter into a sphere of primal ground of the physical world than this would mean a threat to humanity that is no less than the one emanating from the atomic bomb. (Riezler 1952: 162)[16]

He concluded "that music was never so much in danger of total destruction of its intrinsic dignity." Herbert Eimert, head of the Cologne group of electronic music,

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**15** "Zum ersten Mal seit es Musik gibt wird versucht den Naturklang durch Denaturierung abzutöten [...]. Das Ergebnis [wirkt] auf den Hörer anstrengend, teuflisch oder gelegentlich auch komisch [...]. Es mag wohl sein, dass diese nur durch Apparate produzierbare und reproduzierende Schallgeneration etwas ist, was unser Zeitalter der Atomzertrümmerung und der Vollautomation spiegelt. Mit Musik aber [...] hat dieses volldenaturierte Produkt [...] nichts mehr zu tun. [...] Nicht mehr der Geist, sondern nur noch die Maschine, nicht mehr das Ethos der Selbstverantwortlichkeit, sondern der Logos der Formeln [vermag] dieses Reich zu beherrschen."

**16** "Was aber die Elektronenmusik anlangt, die anstelle der Töne unheimliche Geräusche rätselhafter Herkunft aus dem Bereiche der Physik setzt, [...] – sie kommen aus einer Welt, in dem es den Menschen nicht gibt, nur teuflische Wesen, denen der Mensch als seelisches Wesen wahrscheinlich nicht gewachsen ist, die ihn vernichten oder in den Wahnsinn treiben. Sollte hier wirklich mit den Mitteln der modernen Physik ein Einbruch in die Sphäre des letzten Urgrunds der physischen Welt gelungen sein, so würde das eine Gefährdung der Menschlichkeit bedeuten, die nicht geringer ist, als die durch die Atombombe."

countered such accusations by calling them "completely incomprehensible. Why should electricity be nothing natural? Whoever declared electroacoustic music as devilish is certainly waiting for the Enlightenment" (Eimert and Humpert 1973: 313)[17]. This statement was undoubtedly a critique of the humanistic tradition of bourgeois thought and artistic creation. It points to a threshold leading to a new era, which I wish to outline in a final paragraph.

## 4 Posthuman – all too human?

Following the hypothesis that the sum of interfering discourses concerning the electronic music of the 1950s indicates a cultural threshold, one has to ask: it is a liminal phase, but into what? Concluding this article, I want to propose the controversial and rather speculative term of the 'posthuman' as concept of thinking. Taking the discourses on electronic music at the time into account, there are various indications for what is cross-disciplinarily described as posthuman; not just in the sense of a humanistic critique of machines and technology, but most notably as a heterogeneous concept which also addresses questions of communication and aesthetics, of social systems and critical theory.

When the early electronic music was interpreted as a dehumanized expression of the technical age, it symbolized even more a specific change in the human condition which also touched the concerns in music culture. Once more, it was Stockhausen who delivered an early approach to a potential posthuman thinking in music culture. In his lecture "Four Criteria of Electronic Music," which took place at the Oxford Union in 1972, a contribution to the discussion reflected the term of 'dehumanization' in electronic music and summarized the main points of criticism:

> A lot of the questions of the dehumanization in contemporary music, that some people has been talking about, and I mean it especially of electronic music. The two criticisms of it made are both that the medium itself dehumanize, like the sine waves [...], they don't have the human eccentricities around them that we hear in a concert hall. The second criticism is perhaps a little bit more fundamental and that has to do with the actual content. [...] And the question is: In effect, is this phenomenon – so the dehumanization itself – maybe the art is going to die very quickly? I mean, if the art doesn't have a potential to touching basic human concerns, such as love, hate and these kinds of things: can it live, it is really valid art? (Stockhausen 1972)

**17** "Vollends unbegreiflich bleibt es, warum die Elektrizität nichts 'Naturbedingtes' sein soll. Wer sie als teuflisch deklariert, hat gewiß noch die Aufklärung vor sich."

Even if Stockhausen's answer was infiltrated by esoteric thoughts, it provides some insight to his emerging view of a posthuman music culture: The synthesized, auto-tuned music of the electronic age mirrored a kind of "evolution," which went along with an "expansion of the consciousness." The composer was not only confident that "we are a threshold of a new," but also noted the "transformation into a kind of supra-human-being," which is not dehumanized at all: "What you called the dehumanizing actually, is the fear of majority." His music, finally, would symbolize and resonate with this process of change:

> Certainly, the art reflects these processes as [...] a moment of extreme crisis [...]: The world ages where everything switches in new level [...]. What I mean is: Everything is transformed [...] and then ultimately what the human beings becomes, at least [...] – it is a sign of rebirth of humanity. (Stockhausen: 1972)

Apart from the esoteric touch, Stockhausen's remarks on the posthuman 'state of the art' in electronic music offers connections to several concepts, theories, and terms that pay attention to the posthuman condition. Stockhausen's words on "human evolution" in electronic music, for example, fits to Stefan Herbrechter's idea of a "critical posthumanism," which deals with the "question of the relation between humans and technics, or to be more precise, the role of technology for human (and nonhuman) evolution" (2013: 4). The composer's formulation of the "expansion of the consciousness," to name another example, could be related to Robert Pepperell's *Consciousness Beyond the Brain* (2003).

Even more striking than just written theories on the posthuman state of electronic music is the sound itself. Concluding this article, I want to integrate some theoretical conceptions of the posthuman condition with an emblematic piece of Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Gesang der Jünglinge* [Song of the Youth], which premiered in Cologne in 1956 (Figure 1, page 190). The title refers to the youth in the Bible's Book of Daniel, whom Nebuchadnezzar threw into a fiery furnace. Following the leading idea to seamlessly fuse the sound of the human voice with electronically generated sounds, Stockhausen analyzed sung verses by taking their elementary phonetic components and incorporating these sounds into a timbre continuum that ranged from pure tones to white noise. The unique synthesis of vocal and electronic sounds marked a techno-aesthetical leap in music and offers insights to some prominent posthuman issues. First, *Gesang der Jünglinge* is the first piece of 'spatial music' and, therefore, of disembodied sound art as Stockhausen noted in 1964:

> In this composition, the direction of sound and the movement of tones within the space are designed by the musician and made available as a new dimension for the music experience. The 'Gesang der Jünglinge' is composed for five groups of loudspeakers that are to

> be allocated around listeners in the room. From which side and with how many loudspeakers at the same time the sounds are emitted into the room, if pointed to the left or the right, if partly fixed or partly flexible – all this becomes essential for the work. (Stockhausen 1964b: 50)[18]

Via five groups of loudspeakers, the composer not only opened up the movement of sounds to the musical experience in a new dimension; he also freed the aesthetic expression "from the physical limitations of any singer": The tones "were to be heard as fast, as long, as loud, as silent, as dense and interwoven, in as small and big tone intervals and in as differentiated acoustic colors as phantasy wanted" (Stockhausen 1964b: 50)[19]. So secondly, when he emphasized the experience of bodily extension, he pointed to an important issue in the cross-disciplinary field of 'posthuman studies'. The sound of interfering and wandering frequencies not only references the classical media theory of the *Extension of Man* by imbedding them in concerns on music, but also provides connections to Donna Harraway's 'cyborg'-conception: "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (1991). So thirdly, the composition may be understood as a 'musical cyborg': "The work on the electronic composition *Gesang der Jünglinge* aroused from the idea to bring sung tones in accordance with electronically generated sound" (Stockhausen 1964b: 49)[20]. With this conception, the composer reflected the 'auratic' problem of the disembodied and rationalized music that had provoked the dystopian term of 'dehumanization'. He humanized the synthetic sounds by combining them with the most humane expression of all: the voice of a boy. Due to his studies of phonetics and his spectral analysis, Stockhausen knew that sung vowels mostly resemble pure tones, whereas plosive consonants resemble noises. These components became the sonic base of a hybrid composition in which it is no longer possible or even necessary to distinguish whether the human or the machine is singing. For the first time in music history, he

**18** "In dieser Komposition wird die Schallrichtung und die Bewegung der Klänge im Raum erstmalig vom Musiker gestaltet und als eine neue Dimension für das musikalische Erlebnis erschlossen. Der 'Gesang der Jünglinge' ist nämlich für 5 Lautsprechergruppen komponiert, die rings um die Hörer im Raum verteilt sein sollen. Von welcher Seite, von wievielen Lautsprechern zugleich, ob mit Links- oder Rechtsdrehung, teilweise starr und teilweise beweglich die Klänge in den Raum gestrahlt werden, das alles wird für dieses Werk maßgeblich."

**19** "Sie sollten so schnell, so lang, so laut, so leise, so dicht und verwoben, in so kleinen und großen Tonhöhenintervallen und in so differenzierten Klangfarbenunterschieden hörbar sein, wie die Phantasie es wollte, befreit von den physischen Grenzen irgendeines Sängers."

**20** "Die Arbeit an der elektronischen Komposition Gesang der Jünglinge ging von der Vorstellung aus, gesungene Töne mit elektronisch erzeugten in Einklang zu bringen."

brought together the two opposing worlds of human and nonhuman expression; creating a utopian duet, which is not so much dehumanized, but rather a song about the posthuman condition in music culture.

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Fig. 1: Premiere of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* on 30 May 1956 at WDR (West German Broadcasting) in Cologne. Source: Historisches Archiv des Westdeutschen Rundfunks, frame number 1426933.
Fig. 2: *Studie II* – First Electronic Score (1953). Source: Stockhausen-Verlag, Germany.

Daniel Eschkötter

# The Dis/rupture of Film as Skin

## Jean-Luc Nancy, Claire Denis, and *Trouble Every Day*

> It's on the inside of me
> So don't try to understand
> I get on the inside of you.
> (Tindersticks, Trouble Every Day)

## 1 Prologue: the skin of film (Abbas Kiarostami/Jean-Luc Nancy)

Film and skin, film as skin. In two of Jean-Luc Nancy's film-theoretical texts – his little book about the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, *The Evidence of Film* (Nancy 2001), and "Icon of Fury" (Nancy 2008a), an essay about Claire Denis's film *Trouble Every Day* (2001) – the French philosopher recalls this double meaning and etymology of *pellicule*, film. In French (and English) it can mean skin, a sensitive membrane that:

> is thinness and nothing else. This thinness defines a support that is unlike the support of painting and drawing: film is not a matter that easily takes on another material (paste, pencil, varnish), but rather a material that is sensitive to the singular material that light is, and this sensitivity is made up of thin, diaphanous substances (Nancy 2001: 46).

Abbas Kiarostami's film *Zendegi va digar hich* (Iran 1992, English title, in a literal translation: *Life, and Nothing More...*; French title: *Et la vie continue*) contains a scene that becomes, at least for Nancy, a *mise en abyme* for this precarious but persevering materiality of film. It is a scene in which the film's protagonist, a director, regards a painting that has been ruptured, torn by a crack in the wall caused by the big earthquake in Northern Iran in 1990 (see Fig. 1).
Kiarostami's film, which depicts how life goes on, takes place three days after the catastrophe. Nancy identifies the traditional rural portrait that has been torn in a physically impossible way as an emblematic image, an "image of an image" (Nancy 2001: 62). It is emblematic of the film's form and subject, of its configuration of continuation and rupture – the rupture that pervades the various layers of images into the country's reality; the continuation of film that asserts itself against the destruction:

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**Fig. 1:** An "image of an image," of continuation and rupture: Abbas Kiarostami, *Zendegi va digar hich*

> From one world to the next, the images work in continuity and discontinuity, just as the films [by Kiarostami] work with movements and interruptions [...]. In *Life and Nothing More* the torn picture is not just split by a crack: it is, in itself, both a crack or a fissure and a continuous tie between the past [...] and the present [...]. (Nancy 2001: 40)

For Nancy, the fissure of the image is not only an allegory of the filmic "*paradox of what continues*" (Nancy 2001: 58; emphasis in the original text); the doubling of fissure and continuation, the continuation that prevails against the catastrophe, express the "perseverance of being" (Nancy 2001: 60) in Kiarostami's recasting of neorealist cinema, a continuation beyond the mere continuity of images.

The director's gaze confronting the image, and the subsequent mobilization of the gaze that detaches itself from the protagonist follow, according to Nancy, "the axiomatics of a way of looking" (Nancy 2001: 12), one that "is respectful of the real that it beholds, that is to say it is attentive and openly attending to the very power of the real and its absolute exteriority" (Nancy 2001: 38).[1] And just like Kiarostami's cinema, for Nancy, embodies and operationalizes an ethics of looking where "looking just amounts to thinking the real, to test oneself with regard to a meaning one is not mastering" (Nancy 2001: 38), Nancy's philosophical project often returns to figures of a sense one is not mastering, a truth without depths:

1 This mobilization of the gaze manifests itself paradigmatically in the sequence containing the image (of the image): with the gaze of the director within the film, preceded by the image and the subsequent camera operation that "leaves" its diegetic source, the director, and the image of the peasant, directing itself towards and through a door next to the picture, eventually showing the landscape deframed.

> Something true right at the skin, skin as truth: neither the beyond-the-skin sought by desire, nor the underside that science aims for, nor the spiritual secret of flesh revealed. For us, the nude is neither erotic nor anatomical nor authentic. It remains on the edge of or beyond these three postulations. The truth right at the skin is only true in being exposed, in being offered without reserve but also without revelation. (Nancy and Ferrari 2014: 2)

This trope resonates in Nancy's philosophical project of the "exscription" of the body (Nancy 2008b), as well as in his deconstruction of Christianity, and it manifests itself in his work on dance,[2] on the iconography of nakedness and of *noli me tangere*. It also marks a point of convergence with the cinematographic aesthetics of French director Claire Denis, whose films Nancy frequently comments upon.[3] The question of a meaning beyond, or of a truth right at the skin or the surface also structures Claire Denis's films. [4] But an emblematic rupture that is framed by a larger continuation and contained by an ethics of looking, as in Kiarostami's *Life And Nothing More,* is impossible to be found in Denis's body of work. *And life goes on? Trouble every day.* Denis's films open up to a real of a different order, they open up "icons of fury," the fissures of and in the sensitive membrane of film. It is this opening-up, the ruptures and their operations, that will be the subject of the following remarks.

My essay will track these operations in and with Claire Denis's para- or meta-horror film *Trouble Every Day,* and will connect them first to a (film-)theoretical discussion of the structures of continuity and of what film and psychoanalytic theory call *suture*. In a second step, the essay will reevaluate the film's ruptures of suture, skin, and image as disruptions that not only install a discourse of non-normalization beyond a filmic archeology and analysis of the societies of control,[5] but eventually even affect the discursive formation Giorgio

**2** See Monnier, Nancy and Denis 2005.

**3** Apart from several essays by Nancy dealing with Denis's films, their correspondence and collaboration includes one feature film, *L'intrus*, which takes up motives from Nancy's autobiographical essay with the same name, two appearances by Nancy in the essayistic films *Vers Nancy* and *Vers Mathilde,* as well as several radio and stage conversations. It also has provoked a veritable Nancy-Denis scholarship, see for example the essays in Morrey 2012.

**4** The body and skin of film have been a prominent motif and motor of film theory over the last 20 years, especially in contemporary phenomenological theory. See especially Marks 2000. The limitations and fallacies of a phenomenological conceptualization of touch have often been the subject of Jean-Luc Nancy's work (See Nancy 2008b).

**5** As opposed to control society horror approaches that, from David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) to Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise* (2015), link the topic of (sexual) deviance and destructive desire to a class struggle both contained and configured by the audiovisual as well as architectural control-spaces. For the configuration of Deleuze's concept of the "societies of control" and contemporary horror cinema see Robnik 2015.

Agamben describes as the "anthropological machine." To try to get another glimpse beyond the paradigm of the bond of skin, (photochemical) film, and anthropogenesis the essay will conclude by briefly tracing it to and through a recent filmic reconceptualization of this relation: Jonathan Glazer's (in the context of this essay aptly titled) *Under the Skin*.

## 2 Skin, rupture, suture

A long, in the dark of night (especially given digital film compression and image capture; in the movie theatre, with a 35 mm print, we would see more) almost indistinguishable kiss of an anonymous couple marks the beginning of Claire Denis's 2001 film *Trouble Every Day* (see Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2:** The kiss preceding all ruptures and differentiations: Claire Denis, *Trouble Every Day*

This prologue or inverse motto receives its logos from the title song, composed by the Tindersticks and Stuart Staples, like many of Denis's film scores: "It's on the inside of me / So don't try to understand / I get on the inside of you."

A double motto: a kiss on the surface that is isolated from the film that follows, and which does not infect its tale of infection and infestation; a song and theme that at the same time evoke and neglect the desire to understand and to go inside. This kiss will not imprint itself onto the film that follows, the passionate kiss that does not seem to be in danger of turning into something violent, an act of carnivorous consumption, biting, devouring. It precedes the trouble of differentiating, of distinguishing between sexual desire and bloodlust, for example.

After the credits, establishing textures, images of fluidity and Paris, we hear the last beats of the title song and we see a woman, Béatrice Dalle, at the side of the street, waiting, presenting herself alongside a van (see Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3:** The predatorily Coré

This woman, who will not speak, who will only utter sounds that indicate lust or pain, will later be called Coré. It is an archetypical name, which not only refers to the myth and mystery of the "divine maiden" Persephone or Kore – the "Urkind" of C.G. Jung's and Karoj Kerényi's works, which Giorgio Agamben also discusses in an essay (Agamben and Ferrando 2014); it also alludes to the core of her sickness, which the films' scientists are looking for and do not find, since, as with Vampires, there is no cure.

German director Christian Petzold described the opening scene as follows (in a short weblog entry and memory protocol after seeing the first half hour of *Trouble Every Day* at a film festival, see Fig. 4 – 11):

**Fig. 4 – 11:** Crisscrossings: From inter-subjective relations towards a structural desire of the film-form.

> Béatrice Dalle stands next to a transformer station at the side of a road. A truck passes by. She briefly looks up. The driver has noticed her. And her gaze. He stops his truck. This stopping of the vehicle is shown in a complicated camera operation. The shots before were static. Simple. But now the camera is moving. Tracking the stopping truck for a moment. A

**Fig. 5.**

**Fig. 6.**

**Fig. 7.**

crane movement is crisscrossing the rear. The movement comes to a halt when the driver opens his door. Somewhat peculiar and strange is this whole operation, this shot. It does not seem to be caused by anything, to narrate anything. A decoupage and montage

**Fig. 8.**

**Fig. 9.**

**Fig. 10.**

with two, three shots would have told the stopping of the truck and the woman that caused it in a much simpler and clearer way. The sequence shot however stands out.

**Fig. 11.**

> Later we see a man on a motorcycle. The irritation that seems to affect the cyclist while passing the truck, this irritation is immediately understandable for us, because it originated in the complicated camera operation, the sequence shot. (Petzold 2005: 143; my translation)

In a precise manner Petzold maps out an operation that is, albeit seemingly uneconomical and isolated, nevertheless almost paradigmatic for Claire Denis's films. An economical and simple shot pattern is crisscrossed by a complex camera operation. The almost infectious irritation that Petzold notices is not only caused or prepared by the way the stopping truck is shot, but by the way the meeting of the driver and Dalle is arranged. It could also be described as being the result of a small structural puzzle that is part of the same sequence: the film seems to wait for the direct address, the gaze of the driver, right there in the middle of the road. This gaze is then matched by the counter shot of Béatrice Dalle, with her eye-line in a seemingly regular shot-counter-shot pattern, but it is only for an instant, because then Dalle seems to enter her own point of view, only to be established and positioned as the waiting, craving, fixating, desiring female presence once again. The subsequent backing-up of the red truck that takes over image and soundtrack alike not only prefigures the monstrosity of this desire; it also points towards a paradigmatic shift within and of the film: from inter-subjective relations towards a structural desire of the film-form.

The sequence and its puzzling camera operation evoke a gaze and object that we could describe, almost with an oxymoron, as a trans-subjective point of view, as the "uncanny detachment of an object-gaze without a diegetic source" (Lie 2012: 131; my translation). But what are the implications of this gaze, this operation in and for *Trouble Every Day?* For now we could say that the subsequent backing-up of the red truck that then fills image and audio track alike prefigures the monstrosity of the desire that is directed towards its surface and then the inside. It also marks a shifting between intradiegetic inter-

personal relations to something that would need to be described as a structural filmic desire evoked by an automatic, detached object-gaze or gaze-object.

Claire Denis's cinema is composed of erotic and political body-image-textures that go beyond aesthetical dualities of abstraction and concretion, or discursive polarities like politics and the sensual. In gliding and slipping motions between organic and inorganic surfaces and textures, between automatic and human gazes, it produces narrative and formal dissociations; it follows a double poetics of touch and dis/rupture.

Already with her first long feature film *Chocolat,* from 1988, it has been her concern to show French colonial history and its geopolitical effects as an affair of gazes and touches. Especially since her arguably most famous feature film to date, her French legion Billy Budd-variation *Beau travail* from 1999, many of her films add up to a project that tracks bodies in filmic and political spaces or zones in a tension of singular desire and political collectivization. *Beau travail*, *Trouble Every Day*, *Vendredi soir* (2002), *L'Intrus* (2004) and *White Material* (2009) could all be considered as filmic reflections of what Michel Foucault called the complex "investment of the body" (Foucault 1995: 25), and at the same time they de-vest, or "exscribe" the body. In particular, *Trouble Every Day*, *Vendredi soir* (2002), and *L'Intrus* (2004) could all be described as forming a trilogy of embodied spatiality. The three films follow, to radically condense and paraphrase them, a topological movement starting with the gory opening of the body surface in *Trouble Every Day*, continuing with the magical creation of an intimate space in a car during a traffic jam in Paris, in *Vendredi Soir* (that is foreshadowed in *Trouble Every Day*'s prologue), and, eventually, culminating in movements that crisscross and dissolve the borders of the body and its surface and global geopolitical borders in *L'Intrus*, which, taking up Jean-Luc Nancy's essay of the same name, short-circuits movements of illegal migration, globalization, and an illegal heart transplant.

*Trouble Every Day* is just as invested in mixing and blending these different connotations of filmed and filmic transplantations and invasions of the body. It relates the rupturing and violating of the skin of human bodies to the skin and stitches of filmic materiality and grammar, to the skin of film itself, to film as skin and to what is called "suture" in film theory. *Trouble Every Day* is a horror film paraphrase that reassembles motives from the vampire and cannibalism genres and takes up generic approximations of the logics of desire with the discourse of infection. But it is not the kiss of the vampire, but rather the "kiss *as* vampire" that is at the core of its gore (Nancy 2008a; my emphasis).

This configuration leads the film's four protagonists through Paris, the newlywed American couple Shane and June Brown, and scientist Léo Sémeneau and his wife Coré. They – and the film itself – are driven by searches, marked by

search images: searching for a cure against the desire for sex that turns into carnage (Shane and Léo), for objects and victims of their desire (Coré and Shane), for reasons for the husband's mysterious behavior (June), for the wife before she kills again (Léo). The searches do not form a narrative in any conventional sense, but lose themselves in textures, patterns, intensities.

The crane operation, the irritation and re-stabilization of a human point of view at the beginning of the film structure and infect the entire film. However, they do not set off a shift towards the totality of an automated gaze (as in some of Stanley Kubrick's films), or the total extimization of a subjective gaze (as in the somewhat related films by Philippe Grandrieux). The move and method of Denis's cinema follow a logic of indifference where it does not seem to make a structural difference whether organic and inorganic textures, acts of love and acts of violence, caressed or ruptured skin are filmed. The precariousness and double meaning of "film" resonate in this logic of indifference.

Agnès Godard's camera gives this and most of Denis's films their singular visual signature; its tactile gaze hovers over the film's bodies and textures, turns them into surfaces without clear borders and subject markers. Among their collaborations *Trouble Every Day* may be the film that plays on the double meaning of *pellicule* the most, pushing also phenomenological paradigms of the skin of film and the tactility and synaestheticism of film experience towards a territory of the uncanny, the untouchable, beyond the paradigm of touch.[6]

The skin that is desired and torn open by Coré and Shane, the film's two protagonists that are sick and infected in a way that is never really specified or receives a name, the skin that is ripped within and, to a certain (metaphorical) extent, by the film itself, is always photographed in a tender, fluid, but nevertheless precarious mode. In the scene of Shane's and June's arrival in their hotel in Paris the operation and irritation of the beginning is recast and radicalized. The sequence, again, takes up the trope of a subjective gaze becoming trans-subjective, detached from the human subject of the gaze, and creating an uncanny gaze-object/object-gaze that contaminates film and characters alike (see Fig. 12–14).

The shot-reverse shot with Shane's/Vincent Gallo's creepy stare and the neck of a chamber maid that will eventually be killed, bitten to death by Gallo's Shane, this operation, filmed and followed by a Steadicam, establishes a pattern and perspective that shortly afterwards is repeated without the subject of the appetent gaze (see Fig. 14). It generates what Slavoj Žižek, in his book on Krzysztof

**6** That film theoretical paradigms of touch are called into question by Denis's cinema has also been pointed out, with regards *to L'Intrus*, by Laura McMahon (McMahon 2008).

**Fig. 12–14:** The detachment of the gaze.

**Fig. 13.**

**Fig. 14.**

Kieślowski and film theory, calls “the spectre of a free-floating Gaze without a determinate subject to whom it belongs”:

> The ultimate threat [to the elementary matrix of classical Hollywood narrative cinema] is not that of an objective shot which will not be "subjectivised," allocated to some protagonist within the space of diegetic fiction, but that of a *point-of-view shot* which will not be clearly allocated as the point of view of some protagonist, and which will thus evoke the spectre of a free-floating Gaze without a determinate subject to whom it belongs. (Žižek 2001: 33)

Such a gaze is an irritation or exhibition of what film theory since the 1970s, following Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, calls "suture," the mechanism and grammar of stitching together the film via montage, and stitching-in the absent cause of the filmic image via a substitute or representation of the structurally absent force of signification (the camera, the enunciator, etc.). It is especially (if not exclusively) the convention of shot-reverse shot that interpellates the spectator, folds or sutures the off-screen into the onscreen, or what Jean-Pierre Oudart called "L'Absent," the Absent One, the absent source of the gaze into the diegesis by (re-)attributing the (automatic) gaze to a human source (Oudart 1977).

*Trouble Every Day*'s hotel hallway trackings suture and de-suture at the same time, they let us feel and see the suture in an operation that inserts the "Absent One" into the diegesis with a trans-subjective uncanny proxy gaze. The paradigm of continuity editing is not destroyed by an operation like this; it rather becomes a source of disruption, trouble, contamination, and transference itself. The chambermaid and her passages through the hotel's hallways and ground floor become the object of these free-floating gazes. From now on she is frequently shown and shot in perspectives that distinctly mimic point of view shots, that reframe, push and creep in on her, when she is undressing and washing herself in the hotel's employee rooms for example (see Fig. 15 – 18).

**Fig. 15 – 18:** The haunting "place of impossible subjectivity."

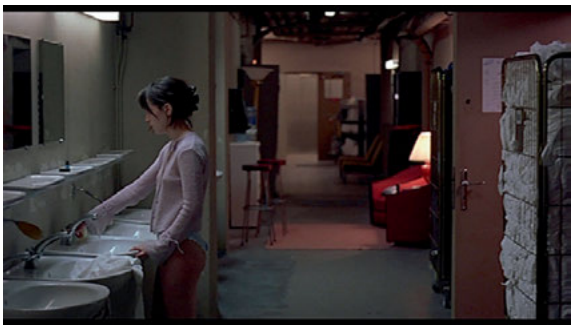

**Fig. 16**

**Fig. 17**

**Fig. 18**

What she seems affected or haunted by is an impossible subjectivity or trans-subjective filmic presence; one that is, of course, also the presence of the film itself: "So we are not dealing here with the simple reversal of a subjec-

tive into an objective shot, but in constructing a place of impossible subjectivity, a subjectivity which taints the very objectivity with a flavour of unspeakable, monstrous evil." (Žižek 2001: 36) Žižek's Big Other, the impossible subjectivity, is a constant presence that haunts *Trouble Every Day*'s spaces, just like the possibility of becoming a bite haunts its kisses. But it is essential for its poetics of indifference that, in a seemingly seamless manner (often even in one fluid shot and accentuated or triggered by the Tindersticks' score), the film introduces micrological differences, switches between potential crime scenes and scenes of (everyday) life and labor and their materialities.

The title's everyday trouble is thus recast or spelled out cinematographically as a consistent disruption within the configuration of gaze and its relation to the world. Since it cannot be contained by the metrics of montage, the rules of continuity and stable subject-object relations on screen, this trouble produces a structural horror of precarity in the entire film where monstrous desire, screen sensuality, and social observation turn out to be indistinguishable, mutable, part of the same realm of ruptured representation and their operations.

## 3 Disruptions of the "anthropological machine"

*Trouble Every Day* is not, however, altogether swept away by the frenzy of bloodlust and the filmic eroticism of tactility and textures. But where even grammar and structure prove to produce a precarious filmic body it might be safe to assume that the narrative structure and content cannot contain and account for the structural horror. The protagonists search for the roots of and a cure for the blood lust, the urge to understand and the desire to go inside will remain unfulfilled, unsuccessful, mere motivations of movements. Nevertheless, they receive fragments of a context: Allusions to laboratory scenes and a failed experiment with plants in the colonies of French Guyana haunt the film as screen memories of a different materiality; dissected brains and botanical experiments open up a larger framework of horror motifs that include mad scientists, experiments gone awry, and the outbreak of an infection that might eventually lead to an apocalypse of flesh-craving creatures.

All this does not amount to any sufficient intradiegetic explanation of the blood feasts. But not only do the references implant a material and genre historicity into the flow of surface images, they contribute to the installation of a discourse, a hybrid universal knowledge of biological life: *Universal Pharmakon* is the name of the company Shane Brown used to work for and for which he apparently stole Léo Sémenau's research; and universal is also the field of Semeneau's bioprospections and his pharmaceutical, neurobiological, and botanical

research that was aimed at researching and curing "nervous diseases, pain, mental diseases, and problems of libido..."

This speculative universality of life aside, *Trouble Every Day* is, on a diegetic level, not interested in any social pathology and pathogenesis, or any dangers that would affect a population; and it remains unclear if Shane, who can still medicate and masturbate, sublimate and sedate himself, and Coré are the only of their type, or indeed one of a kind. Although alluding to its universality these discursive traces obviously fail to lead to any positive concept of life, to its inside, its core, they rather remain a speculative, consistently implausible framework for the desire that turns into bloodlust. In that regard they are connected to the entire seeking system of the film, its aesthetics of indifference, its style of fluid search images, its characters who even in their gory excesses seem to search for something within the body and the blood.

Following Jean-Luc Nancy, we might relate this mode of searching, even the general aesthetics of indifference and permanent oscillation to the two Latin words for blood: *sanguis* and *cruor*, the blood that circulates internally and the blood that sprays and splatters out, the principle of life and the principle of pain and cruelty. Looking for the core, the principle and universality of life, in *Trouble Every Day*, leads to more cruelty, more blood spray, to images of gore that do not lead to anything, do not represent, but rather point to an inherent monstrosity of monstration itself.[7] The desire in and of *Trouble Every Day* is the mislead and ultimately failing desire to look for and show the inner principle of life (*sanguis*) in the splatter (of *cruor*) that affects the foundation of the filmic imagery:

> The screen is torn into a wound streaming with blood. The image becomes an image of a torn image: no longer an image, or a figure, but an icon of access to the invisible. The invisible, that is sanguis, the blood nourishing the body, life itself, pulsating beneath the skin. (Nancy 2008a: 6)

> This inside is the secret, the sealing of life in death by the fragility of the skin, the sealing of sense in blood. The fury wants this secret that is nothing other and that contains nothing other than the tearing apart of the integrity of life. (Nancy 2008a: 7)

This "tearing apart of the integrity of life" is a different formulation for what Giorgio Agamben frequently addresses as "the caesura between animal and human [that] first of all passes within man" (Agamben 2005: 16), within the knowledge and categorization of man:

**7** See Nancy 2005, 17, 25.

> The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, therefore passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible. (Agamben 2005: 15)

Not only does *Trouble Every Day*, a film that oscillates between mapping the qualified lives of lovers and laborers and the *factum brutum* of biological life, address this caesura, this division thematically. It structures and divides its characters and affects the film's unstable border regime of cinematographic imagery, always marked by the impossibility of a clear distinction between man and monster, monstrous and tender images. It manifests itself as the rupturing of the skin by the kiss and bite of the protagonists as well as the camera and even affects the material body of the film itself, radicalized in a scene where Coré burns to death, but it seems to be the material of film itself that goes up in flames.

Rupture and tender touch pose as uncanny doubles, not only for the two 'sick' characters but also for the film and its camera work, and it is this doubling where Denis's film opens up its very own zone(s) of indeterminacy. Its bloodthirsty protagonists and, on a different level, the film's very own operations correspond with what Giorgio Agamben prominently described as forms of life, which escape or challenge the concepts of *bíos* and *zoë* and raise the concept of a bare, unmarked life – in *Homo Sacer* the "werewolf," which exists in a zone of indeterminacy between human and animal, features as an example among many others (Agamben 1998: 105–108).

In Agamben's texts and other related cultural theories monsters and other hybrid beings are markers of the zone of the political: "Political hybrid beings haunt the body politic with disfigured mirror images of its abject social self" (Matala de Mazza and Vogl 2002: 212; my translation). With an ingenious phrase Agamben referred to the cultural institution of the "production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman" as the "anthropological machine." This machine of anthropogenesis:

> necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is also always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is also always already an exclusion). Indeed, precisely because the human is already presupposed every time, the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside. (Agamben 2004: 37)

This double bind also haunts cinema in general as one of the key anthropological machines of the twentieth century, which continues to reproduce and produce and present and represent the production of distinctions as an inner caesura, "the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and

their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew" (Agamben 2004: 38).

*Trouble Every Day:* the peculiar and euphemistic phrase of the title is almost a formula for the abjection and the ordinariness of exception that the film stages in extremis. "Life – in its state of exception that has now become the norm – is the naked life that in every context separates the forms of life from their cohering into a form-of-life" (Agamben 1996: 152), this is how Agamben prominently (and enigmatically) described this everyday trouble. With the term 'form-of-life' (*forma-di-vita*), Agamben refers to:

> a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something such as naked life. A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. [...] It defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all potentiality (*potenza*). (Agamben 1996: 150; translation modified)

Perhaps we could speak, in a structural analogy, of film-form, the form-of-film of *Trouble Every Day:* the caesura as the limes and inseparability of life and its form, which marks the *potenza* of the filmic, is its condition and effect at the same time. The opening of the suture, this structural disruption inscribes this caesura into the filmic body, "always dislocated and displaced anew." Not only does this haunt *Trouble Every Day*'s characters, but determines its operations, its filmic grammar, its tropes, as a process of disruption and de-figuration. By being affected or contaminated through a hypnotic gaze that is detached from its subjective source, the structure of the entire film is drawn into a maelstrom of inner distinctions and a zone of indeterminacy. It is through this process, where ruptured skin ultimately evokes the disruption of the continuity of images in *Trouble Every Day,* that the anthropological machine that produces film/life starts to stutter and falter.

## 4 Epilogue: beyond (under) the skin of film[8]

Beyond the human form, beyond the anthropogenesis of film lies the void of images as merely conventional or provisional effects of data, lie black box and white cube as the spaces of contemporary image projections. Under the skin

**8** Thanks to Tanja Prokic for suggesting the idea to address *Under the Skin* as a theoretical sequel to *Trouble Every Day* here.

lies another blank/black surface, not the spectacle of blood, not the principle of life or mystery of humanity.

Jonathan Glazer's experimental alien predator ethnography *Under the Skin* (2013) takes up the hyper-sensory exploration of surfaces and textures of Denis's cinema, along with its often quasi-anthropological drive, and radicalizes it, narratively and aesthetically. The film not only contains several points of reference to Denis's *Trouble Every Day* – a predatory woman (or alien in the body of a woman, played by Scarlett Johansson) in a coat and a van who eventually goes up in flames, a man on a motorcycle who looks and cleans up after her – ; its stalker and body horror also sets out to be a starting point to question or lead, ambiguously, beyond the caesura and the bond of film and human form once again, marked by a regime of image production and projection that confronts the dispositif of cinema with the spatial abstractions of installations.

Among the many issues and theoretical questions raised by Glazer's film (its quasi-anthropological method, its politics of color, its reflexive investigation of a Scarlett Johansson's star body, its doubling of alienness and absolute alterity with the exploration and evocation of femininity),[9] the de- and recentralization of the human form in confrontation with itself as other leads to the core of the title's "under." Before this confrontation plays out (rather generically) as a literary self-reflexion of the female sex and, in a complicated move, therefore as "a non-human difference masquerading fatefully as a sexual difference" (Gorfinkel 2016) – it is, once again, installed and mobilized by a gaze that is itself mediated in multiple ways (especially in the guerilla style direct surveillance cinema-sequences, where Glazer turned the van into a multi-HD-camera stalking arrangement for male citizens of Glasgow, and Scarlett Johansson incognito into an alien actress). In its opening (or rather: origin) sequence the film's alien predator seems to be born directly out of a configuration of the beam of the cinematic projector, a constellation of stars, a black lens in a white iris, and the cinema-eye that belongs to Scarlett Johansson, the film's and alien's vessel. Becoming – female, human; film – means receiving a skin that reflects and absorbs the light, means receiving a body with a distinct form and borders, means being differentiated, experiencing difference. Johansson's alien commands over the formless, abstract spaces without coordinates and spatial markers: the white cube of her becoming and the black space of her manhunts, where the men she lures into her van, where their bodies are absorbed and ultimately drained by an amorphous black matter. The violent drama of the alien's failed becoming (female / human) is, in consequence, performed as a film effectively split in half,

**9** See the essays in the dossier "Under the Skin / Scarlett Johansson" 2016.

and depicted as a collapse in processing the sensory overload of the world (i.e. Scotland), a failure to engage with the real of the own body. It is also the rupture between two spatial and cinematic modes (one more experimental and installative, the other more documentary and sensory) that renders the zones of indistinction encountered in Denis's cinema and *Trouble Every Day* into a fight zone, a confrontation of different regimes of representation. What both films show, however, is that to engage with the distinctions between man and monster, human and non-human, does not only mean to trace, following Agamben, the inner caesura within the human form, but to engage with its mediations and transferences, with the media of anthropogenesis and their form, with the ruptures and disruptions of film as skin – where the distinctions and forms are "always dislocated and displaced anew."

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Tanja Nusser

# "They starve to death, but who dares ask why?"

## Steve McQueen's Film *Hunger*

> "There's no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing, criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status." (Margaret Thatcher, 5 March 1981)

Disruptions dis- or interrupt and question an order or system – this seems to be a given. Even if this tautological formulation is not presenting fundamental new insights, it still highlights an important fact: a disruption needs an object for its activity, and this object is defined as a structure, system, or order that we perceive as normal exactly because of the rupture (Fleischhack and Rottmann 2011: 9). To formulate it differently: ruptures mark the order as such, in that it can be argued that disruptions are ambivalent. While they "disturb" existing orders or structures, and might inaugurate a shift in these structures, they also make it possible to get an understanding of the definitional categories, the ex- and inclusions, on which the order is based. Following the destabilization of a social order, system, or structure, the process of re-stabilization offers a chance to define and adapt to a new "normality" (Horn 2011: 11; Gansel and Ächtler 2013: 9).

Within an anthropocentric frame, these disruptions are often defined as natural catastrophes, wars, revolutions, humanitarian and medical disasters, and so on. Even if these disruptions target human societies in their structures, it is often the singular human body as exemplary object of the violence that is depicted in the different medias and genres. In literary texts, films, photography, documentaries, or even in news often one body, one person is singled out, standing in for the disaster we cannot portray in its totality. In identifying with this one person, one face, one story or fate we try to understand and make sense of the violent interruptions of our lives. On this structural level it makes no difference if we follow the story of a victim or hero; the important fact is that the person paves a new way (metaphorically speaking) for the viewers or readers to deal with the rupture. While this identification allows us to produce sense, the position of identification is a totally different one, depending on whether we follow the story of a victim or hero. Following a victim narrative, readers or viewers identify with an object position as victims of the disruption, whereas in the hero narrative they identify with a subject position that is established in reaction to the disrup-

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tion; here the viewer or reader identifies with a person who has or gains agency in dealing with the aftermath of the catastrophic situation.

Yet to make matters even more complicated, there is also the possibility that the object and subject of a disruption are actually the same. In this case, while the person reacts to violent situations, transforming him- or herself from object to subject, he or she at the same time causes other ruptures, which violently change societies, making his or her body a disruptive subjectivity. This means that I am not interested here in a psychosocial constellation, in which the victim of a disastrous situation becomes the hero and masters his or her life – the typical Hollywood or tabloid narration about a catastrophe happening, the nuclear family or lonely hero fighting against disastrous events and surviving them, comes to mind. I am interested in another configuration, in which the singular body can be described as the object and subject of the violence, as the victim and hero, but also perpetrator of the disruption. In occupying the different positions of a disruptive situation, this body can actually collapse the process of sense and meaning-making, and becomes in itself the sign of a fundamental rupture. Signifying an impossible situation, this body can be read as inaugurating a new order that it destroys in the moment it creates it.

I am particularly interested in the figure of the hunger striker or the death faster, who uses his or her body as a sign to articulate and manifest a protest and rupture of an existing political order.[1] While the body is transformed into a disruptive sign, it annihilates itself – or to be more precise: is annihilated – as exactly the (political) sign that inaugurates a new order. In transforming the body into, or performing the body as, a vanishing sign,[2] whose potential death opens the body to a multitude of narrations and interpretations, the death faster or hunger striker might, at the beginning, intentionally author and distribute meaning. However, the proliferation and dissemination of meaning detach the authorship from the fasting body and surround it with ever more meaning, the more the body vanishes[3]: the fasting body in itself is a rupture that needs interpretation, to make sense out of it. Embedding the fasting body in con-

**1** The title of this article – "They starve to death, but who dares ask why?" (Sands 1981) – raises the issue of hunger strike as a political signal.

**2** As Lauren B. Wilcox formulates it, the body in pain can be understood "as performative act of interpolating a community or audience" (2015: 66; 68 – 69).

**3** See also Patrick Anderson who formulates a similar idea: "The surface of the self-starving body fully takes on the paradoxical significance suggested in the pairing loss / resistance, for as it literally shrinks into oblivion it becomes larger and larger in the vernacular of its political effects." (2010: 10).

texts (how diverse and many they might be) questions the possibility of establishing a new order.

The following chapter will specifically focus on the depiction of the 1981 hunger strike in Northern Ireland, as depicted in Steve McQueen's 2008 film *Hunger*, viewing it as a disruptive bodily practice that strives for political and societal change through self-violent agency. The 1981 hunger strike of PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army) and INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) members resulted in ten deaths before it was called off on 3 October 1981. It was the second hunger strike within a year, through which PIRA prisoners attempted to regain their status as political prisoners. While the fasting men in 1980 and 1981 called the refusal of food intake a hunger strike, the more correct formulation is death fasting. I highlight the difference between these two forms of the refusal of food intake because they differ in their structure. A hunger strike is not necessarily based on the willingness to commit an "altruistic suicide"[4] (Emile Durkheim) or "politically motivated suicide" (Graitl 2012: 111), whereas death fasting, to quote Lorenz Graitl: "implies the refusal of food – in rare cases also of fluids – to enforce/assert political claims in the name of a collective interest. This abstinence is to be maintained until all demands are met. If this does not happen, the faster is willing to accept death."[5] While I am referring here to death fasting as an

**4** I am referring here to Emile Durkheim's concept of the altruistic suicide in his 1897 study on *Suicide:* "For society to be able thus to compel some of its members to kill themselves, the individual personality can have little value. [...] For the individual to occupy so little place in a collective life he must be almost completely absorbed in the group and the latter, accordingly, very highly integrated. [...] The individual thus has no way to set up an environment of his own in the shelter of which he might develop his own nature and form a physiognomy that is his exclusively. [...] It is thus natural for him to be yet less protected against collective necessities and that society should not hesitate, for the very slightest reason, to bid him end a life it values so little. [...] Having given the name of *egoism* to the state of the ego living its own life and obeying itself alone, that of *altruism* adequately expresses the opposite state, where the ego is not its own property, where it is blended with something not itself, where the goal of conduct is exterior to itself, that is, in one of the groups in which it participates." (1979: 220 – 221) While his assumption that "lower societies are the theatre par excellence of altruistic suicide" (227) has to be critiqued, his argumentation also shows the possibility for altruistic suicide in different social groups, such as Christians ("Christin Martyrs," 227) and Soldiers. This is interesting in the context of the 1981 hunger strike because the hunger strikers, especially Bobby Sands, were elevated to the status of martyrs of the cause. At the same time, the members of the PIRA and INLA perceived themselves as soldiers.

**5** "bedeutet die Verweigerung von Nahrung – in seltenen Fällen auch von Flüssigkeit – zur Durchsetzung politischer Forderungen im Namen eines kollektiven Interesses. Dieser Verzicht wird so lange aufrecht erhalten, bis die gestellten Forderungen erfüllt werden. Geschieht das

altruistic or politically motivated suicide, I do not want to suggest that hunger strikes or death fasts are private or personally motivated acts. Banu Bargu rightfully highlights, in her discussion of the Guantánamo Bay prison, "that these acts tend to be conflated, at times purposefully, with suicides in order to conceal the occurrences of resistance or to neutralize their reverberations [...]. [...] these acts do not often arise from personal despair or psychological pathologies but are conscious, voluntary, politically motivated, and orchestrated, thereby directly contributing to their political and subversive qualities as acts of protest" (2014: 13, 18). I still use the concept of a politically motivated suicide to underscore the fact that the individual, who is willing to transform his or her body into a sign of protest, is prepared to die for this cause by his or her own hands or actions. To perceive only personal despair or psychological pathologies as "legitimate reasons" to name a self-killing a suicide reduces and excludes the possibility of negotiating the different levels connected to politically motivated suicides. It also posits despair and psychological pathologies as personal / private reasons for committing suicide, whereas I would argue that both also have to be understood within their cultural, social embeddedness. In this sense, Emile Durkheim's differentiation between the altruistic and egoistic suicide reflects exactly the definitional difficulties to differentiate between distinct types of self-killing.

In terms of a temporal structure, the hunger strikers / death fasters react to a political situation, against which they protest. In the case of the North Ireland hunger strike in 1981, they specifically protested against the criminalization of PIRA and INLA prisoners. In a linear logic the PIRA and INLA prisoners in the Maze Prison perceived this form of protest as a reaction to a political structure (for example, the refusal to grant them political status as prisoners as well as, on the broader political level, the situation of the republican fight for identity, independence, and equality). They aspired to achieve, through death fasting, the re-negotiations and changes to the hereto existing political structures, as well as the acknowledgement of the political status of PIRA and INLA members as prisoners of war (a status that the British Government had withdrawn in 1976). Learning from the hunger strike, which took place a year before, the hunger strike / death fasting in 1981 was organized as a chain of fasters, in order to prolong the situation and to put more pressure on the British Government to fulfill the demands of the INLA and PIRA prisoners. They instrumentalized the body violently as a sign of the ongoing violence through the political system.

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nicht, ist der Fastende bereit, dafür den Tod in Kauf zu nehmen" (Graitl 2012: 63, translation by the author, T.N).

But the fasting body as an intentional sign (as victim, perpetrator, hero, subject, and object of the violent act of self starvation [Anderson 2010: 3]) is polyvalent and opens the space for a proliferation of meanings that do not any longer originate in the fasting body. The fasting body as a disruptive message becomes independent of the intentions of his author. This has been shown by Allen Feldman in his groundbreaking study on *Formations of Violence. The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (1991). Highlighting the bodily practices and oral histories in Northern Ireland as ruptures of "the appearance of lawful continuity between centers of legitimation and local acts of domination," (1991: 2) Feldman seeks to "excavate the different and discontinuous strata of historical time that structure political antagonism in Northern Ireland" (1991: 2). In the chapter on the 1981 hunger strike in the H-Blocks of Long Kech, Northern Ireland, he examines the different interpretations of this political act of self-annihilation: as a protest form that had a long-standing tradition in Ireland dating back to the "ancient Brehon legal codes (*Senchus Mor*)" (1991: 219), as religious narrative or as military campaign, as "journey to the inner truth of the British State" (1991: 227), as a "reenactment of the relation of domination that characterized Britain's historical relation to Ireland" (1991: 227), as "initiation rite," or "a final resolution of juridical-political-biological liminality, or as an eschatological rite of collective conversion" (1991: 227).

## 1 "He has chosen death"[6]

> Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
> Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
> An old and foolish custom, that if a man
> Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
> Upon another's threshold till he die,
> The Common People, for all time to come,
> Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
> Even though it be the King's. (Yeats 2011: 122)

The quote from William Butler Yeats's "The King's Threshold" shows that hunger striking in Ireland has multiple meanings and connotations, not least of which is a traditional sign of wrongdoing. Embedded in diverse traditions, it is at the same time signifying a just cause, blaming a wrongdoing, establishing martyrdom in the Christian tradition, and acting as a political message. This overlap

**6** William Butler Yeats, "The King's Threshold" (2011: 122).

of meanings evokes different categories, in which the 1981 hunger strike / death fast has to be read: historical, social, political, juridical, traditional, mythological, and so on. It narrativizes the body and makes it into a polyvalent text whose multitude of meanings work against a singular interpretation of *The Troubles* (the Northern Ireland "Conflict"). But at the same time, as the body is narrativized, it is also – this is important to not forget – commodified and instrumentalized by violent forces and a politics that uses the body as the ultimate (vanishing) bearer of a message (Feldman 1991: 8). "The eloquence of hunger striking lies," as Patrick Anderson argues:

> in its potential to throw into crisis the binary passive / active in terms of violence performed and to undermine the conception [...] of individual and state as absolute discrete entities at odds with one another, a conception that facilitates the dumbing-down of questions about political terror into the language of cause and effect. In other words, hunger striking rebuffs a particular notion of domination and simultaneously stages the seizure, resymbolization, and enactment – one might say the *ingestion* – of modes of violence typically performed by the state. (Anderson 2010: 122)

The body of the hunger striker / death faster is the ultimate sign and weapon in a fight over power, freedom, and the recognition of political rights.[7] Moreover, while the Northern Irish hunger strike / death fasting transports different meanings because of its polysemy, it also operates within a regime, whose bio-power targets what Giorgio Agamben defines as bare life. It uses the logic of the regime to turn it around in re-forming the hunger striker into a sovereign over his own body. However, even if death fasting reinstates, on one level, the agency of the death faster (his control over his body, his life and death), it operates on another level within a logic of subjectivation, as Patrick Anderson, referring to Foucault, argues. Subjectivation is a concept:

> that folds subordination and agential subjectivity into the very same function. The word subjectivation is intended to preserve both aspects of that function, suggesting that subjectivity, classically conceived as a somewhat pure form of human agency, is underpinned by subjugation to more dire forms of institutional and ideological power. (Anderson 2010: 3–4)

**7** Banu Bargu calls it a "weaponization of life." She refers with the term weaponization of life "to the tactic of resorting to corporeal and existential practices of struggle, based on the technique of self-destruction, in order to make a political statement or advance political goals." She also introduces the term human weapons "to designate the actors who forge their lives into weapons of political struggle by a resort to self-destructive techniques" (2014: 14–15).

So far, I have been discussing the disruptive potential of the hunger strike and the hunger striker within a discursive frame, highlighting the polysemy of the body as vanishing sign and the different levels of meanings it produces. Nevertheless, from today's perspective a hunger strike is also disruptive because it shows the limits of the legal system, as debates about force-feeding of hunger strikers in Guantánamo Bay have shown. Bringing up Guantánamo and force-feeding in this context might be surprising,[8] but Steve McQueen makes this connection in an interview talking about his film *Hunger:* "What's interesting for me about this film is not just what happened twenty-seven years ago, it's also about what's happening now, to a certain extent, with Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. For me that's the main accomplishment" (quoted in Crowdus 2009: 25). Although it remains to be seen if *Hunger* allows for a reading that makes a connection to the "political situation" of Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, Steve McQueen's quote shows that he locates his film, or the message of the film, in a broader context that focuses, through the prison and hunger striking / death fasting, on fundamental questions of (the disavowal of) human rights and legal definitions of human rights. The politically motivated hunger striker / death faster in a prison asserts his / her agency through the possibility of his / her own death, and in such fundamentally re-installs his / her sovereign power, as he/she also questions the state and legal system.

The legal and ethical debate surrounding death fasting and hunger striking marks the body of this "violent self-annihilation" as a territory that is defined through concepts that either acknowledge the fully legal status of the hunger striker / death faster as rational subject or not. If hunger striking / death fasting is perceived as suicide and the person is declared mentally instable, the state can intervene and try to prevent the person from committing suicide; if it is perceived as a political self-expression, the state cannot act because it would violate the freedom of speech (Tag and Groß 2012; Wilcox 2015: 69 – 79). While hunger striking / death fasting can be interpreted as a performative act that "fights," as this chapter argues, for agency, sovereignty, and recognition of the fasting person through an audience, it also violently disrupts – in the case of the 1981 hunger strike / death fasting, the (violent) prison regime and colonial power of the British Government—in making the body into a subject and object, as well as a vanishing sign that produces narratives that are originating in the fasting body but are independent from it. The body also marks the inconsistencies of a legal system that decides the legal status of the hunger striker / death faster as a suicidal

**8** Bargu also makes the association between the 1981 hunger strike and Guantánamo (2014:11).

and mentally instable or rational person, who instrumentalizes the body as a political message.

## 2 "And all of a sudden there's a rapid, your reality is being disturbed, disrupted"[9]

> "[...] we were trying to find the drama in what we were denying the viewer and then asking, when will they need this information. So the structure of the piece began to define itself by what we were denying the audience." (Corless 2008: 27) (Edna Walsh)

The film *Hunger* only gives minimal information about the historical situation of the 1981 hunger strike in the Maze Prison; it excludes broader knowledge about the North Irish *Troubles* and focuses instead – only marginally contextualizing the situation – on the body, its materiality in the prison.[10] This de-historicization is already apparent in the title. The hunger strike is reduced to, and at the same time expanded into, an undifferentiated *Hunger*. On the one hand, it is deprived of its political implication: hunger as a form of strike, as a politically motivated suicide. On the other hand, the implicit question asked is: hunger for what? The title *Hunger* shifts the hunger strike to the level of a fundamental lack (in the sense of hunger for something): of freedom, of agency, of knowledge, of human rights and so on. In addition, it puts the viewer right at the beginning of the film already in a position where he/she experiences this lack, this hunger, in depriving him / her of a clear meaning and message. This becomes even more obvious if we analyze the first forty-five seconds of the film. The film separates the different levels of narration and thus indicates right from the beginning a fundamental lack of understanding, a disorientation because information and narration are minimized and the viewer is put in a position where sense-making cannot rely any longer on hearing or seeing, since both are separated and transport different messages.

While the viewer hears a sound that reminds him / her of a metallic banging, the following white text is visible for two seconds on a black screen: "Northern Ireland, 1981 2,187 people have been killed in 'the troubles' since 1969." After being followed by a black screen while the sound continues, the next white text appears on the screen for seven seconds: "The British Government has with-

**9** Corless 2008: 26.

**10** Most literature about the film highlights the absence of the historical embeddedness of the plot. See for example Toni Ross (2012: 169).

drawn the political status of all paramilitary prisoners." This is followed again by a black screen, the same ongoing sound, and the next white text (for again seven seconds): "Irish Republicans in the Maze Prison are on a 'blanket' and 'no wash' protest." In the nineteenth second of the film the camera shows in a close up a movement that the viewer cannot identify. In a gold, brown, black coloring, something moves so fast that the impression is more of reflections of light on a moving surface than actually seeing and identifying a clearly defined object on screen. However, in this instance the sound (the metallic banging) becomes associated with the indistinguishable movement on screen, though the viewer still does not really understand what he/she is observing on screen. In the twenty-third second the film cuts for five seconds to a close up of a women's face in profile in the right half of the screen, looking to the left side of the frame. The face moves up and down to the sound of the banging while in the background something (or someone) is moving in front of the source of the backlight that illuminates the screen in the golden-brown hues. In the twenty-ninth second, the camera focusses again on the former fast-moving, blurry object to then finally show, in the thirty-ninth second, on the black screen in small lettering, the title of the film in the lower left half of the screen: *Hunger*. For six seconds – as long as the title remains on the screen – the film is completely silent, only to cut then to a close up of a washing basin, with hands reaching into the basin and the sound of flowing water.

I am describing the title sequence of the film in such detail because it establishes already, in less than a minute, the complicated relationship between seeing, hearing, knowledge production, and orientation that characterizes the whole film. While the viewer receives only minimal textual information about the situation, the three sentences nevertheless prelude the title and in such establish an interpretive horizon for the title *Hunger*. On the visual level the film intersperses, between the three sentences and the title, blurry moving images that at best give ominous clues, because they are filmed in (extreme) close up. This excludes the possibility of a location or framing of the non-recognizable detail on screen. The interpretation the viewer might have so far is based on associations. The sound is connected to the white text on the black screen and the close up of movements and a face in profile, but the viewer is still deprived of a narration that makes sense. What the viewer so far sees and experiences is a kind of violence: the three sentences locate the following story in the year 1981, in the murderous history of the North Ireland conflict, as the sounds seem to beat this information acoustically into the viewer's perception. While the viewer still struggles to make sense of the first thirty-nine seconds, he/she is then confronted with an abrupt and profound silence and blackness; everything stops, comes to a standstill, and out of this moment the title emerges as

a sign: *Hunger* takes its space on the screen. It is a sign against the noise of the first thirty-nine seconds that cannot be located, against a minimal narration, against a claim to make sense of the situation in North Ireland or what we have seen so far on the screen. It leaves the images on screen undefined and already produces a multitude of meanings[11] that are not solely connected to the hunger strike / death fast in North Ireland in 1981.

During the first forty-five seconds the title sequence of the film already establishes a complex relationship to knowledge production, by variously depriving the viewer of image, language, or sound. It also establishes a modus operandi for the whole film: the film is neither about a factual truth nor a retelling of a historical situation. Instead, it is about depriving people of their access to what is perceived as a normality and, at the same time, producing a reality, or perception of reality, that is based on a kind of censorship (what the viewer is permitted to see, hear, and experience; what the viewer is allowed to observe; and who has the power over the knowledge).[12] Positioning the viewer in a situation that is essentially defined by a lack (of language, sound, image, and knowledge) establishes an affective identification through the form of the narration (Brinkema 2014). The affective space the film opens is highly formalized, stylized, and aestheticized, and it does not target some kind of space before signification; it is already embedded in a history of filmic form and narration.

To analyze how Steve McQueen's film produces these affects is not to hint at a reading that perceives affect as something that has power to disrupt, interrupt, or question.[13] "The thing is," as Eugenie Brinkema rightfully points out in the

**11** Zach Horton describes this opening of the film as a "chaos that contains the totality of narrative possibilities" (2012: 117).

**12** I am following here Rob White's argument that "perhaps the most powerful device in *Hunger* is much less demonstrative. Reversing the censorious tactic adopted by the British Conservative government during this period – forbidding U.K. broadcasters to transmit the speech of Irish nationalists so that one would see Sinn Féin spokespeople on TV but hear nothing of what they said – McQueen uses fragments of Margaret Thatcher's combative speeches ('they have turned their violence against themselves') over images of darkly silhouetted foliage. In these moments, a narrative film that successfully adopts the defamiliarizing mode of conceptual art becomes politically charged, suggesting the ways in which rumor and folk memory, phantom voices of admonition and exhortation, weave fanatic spells." (White 2008/09).

**13** See Brinkema's polemical stance towards concepts of affect that are said to "disrupt, interrupt, reinsert, demand, provoke, insist on, remind or agitate for: the body, sensation, movement, flesh and skin and nerves, the visceral, stressing pains, feral frenzies, always rubbing against: what undoes, what unsettles, that thing I cannot name, what remains resistant, far away (haunting, and ever so beautiful); indefinable, it is said to be what cannot be written, what thaws the critical cold, messing all systems and subjects up. Thus, turning to affect has allowed the humanities to constantly possibly introject any seemingly absent or forgotten dimension of inquiry,

Preface to *The Forms of the Affects:* "Affect is not the place where something immediate and automatic and resistant takes place outside of language. The turning to affect in the humanities does not obliterate the problem of form and representation. Affect is not where reading is no longer needed." (Brinkema 2014: xiv)

Following this line of thought, I would like to argue that the disruption that hunger strikes / death fasts present is located in the film on a different level. The disruptive quality of the film is not centering on the state or politics (North Ireland, *The Troubles*, the British Government or Terrorism), or on an emotive reaction to the situation of the 1981 hunger strike as a politically motivated suicide in a concrete historical situation, even if the film tangentially references the historical situation. The affective space the film opens is connected to the "visual focus on various breaches of bodily integrity, on festering wounds and open sores, on the exchange of packages between disparate orifices, and on the excretion of urine, faeces, vomit and blood" (Mac Giolla Léith 2008). This visual focus "is complemented by a soundtrack that favors long silences punctuated by sudden, cacophonous irruptions of noise. *Hunger* might be said to mount a sustained assault on the body and on language alike" (Mac Giolla Léith 2008).

However, how is it done? How does the film produce affects? How is the materiality of the body staged? I would like to argue that the film centers on details, on fragmentation, on isolation as form or stylistic means (Brinkema 2014), to reduce the viewer's understanding of what is happening to the small space, the particular. This prevents the viewer from having an orientation, spatial as well as contextual (Ross 2012: 171). At the same time, the film favors long shots and minimal camera movement – both techniques establish the single shot as important, or even as more important than the flow of the narration. The single frames develop their own narrative qualities, exhibiting their status as image or tableaux that tell their own story, which disrupts or halts the narration of the film.[14] It can be said that the film, in using all these filmic and narrative techni-

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to insist that play, the unexpected, and the unthought can always be brought back into the field." (2014: xii).

**14** See for example Liptay's interpretation of the wall paintings made with feces in *Hunger*. "Aber es sind gerade die Nahblicke, in denen die Bilder die Schwere physischer Realität zumindest vorübergehend abstreifen, etwa wenn sie die flächig fotografierten Zellmauern und Bettlaken scheinbar in weiße Leinwände verwandeln, auf denen die Flecken wie abstrakte Malerei anmuten. [...] Einmal fokussiert die Kamera sogar ein skatologisches Gemälde, das in säuberlichen Kreisbewegungen gearbeitet ist, so dass die Reinigung der Zelle mit dem Dampfstrahl der Ausradierung eines Kunstwerkes gleichkommt. Eine Weißblende vollendet die Arbeit einer Reinigungskraft, die zuvor noch das Visier des Schutzanzugs hochgeklappt hatte, um das Bild ratlos zu bestaunen. In diesem Moment erfüllt die Figur eine Stellvertreterfunktion für den Betrachter,

ques, is de-historicizing the 1981 hunger strike to make it into a symbol for inhumane prison conditions. Reading the film in such a manner allows one to perceive *Hunger* as a political statement that is not concentrated any longer on one situation (the 1981 hunger strike / death fast in North Ireland), but on the inhumane conditions for prisoners of war. But I would like to argue that this politicization comes at a price: the 1981 situation in Long Kesh, the Maze Prison, is aestheticized. This aestheticization negates the political impact of the Blanket Protest and No Wash / Dirty Protests as "forerunners" of the hunger strike / death fast, as well as the hunger strike / death fast that the PIRA and INLA members had. As David Lloyd points out, the prisoners extended "the limits of their corporal presence" (2011: 147) and formed a "transcorporal space that exceeded the bounds of the individual body and the separate cells" (2011:147) in smearing the interior walls of their prisons with their feces. These protest forms, as well as the orality of prison communication, established a community that deconstructed the state prison apparatus, which was part of the British colonial system. While the "transindividual soundscape became the foundation of a collective recomposition of Irish as a medium of the community" (2011: 147) it also signified, as Lloyd further argues, something entirely different:

> Together with the inhabiting of shit-lined cells and the penetrating diffusion of odor that emanated from them, orality and the breaking-down of the bounding surface of the body into folds and orifices constituted [...] an inversion of what Norbert Elias has designated "the civilizing process," the development of forms of etiquette and self-control that accompanied the state's gradual monopoly of violence by disciplining the individual's impulses and comportment. (2011: 147)

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der sich verunsichert fragt, ob er es mit Kot oder mit Kunst zu tun hat. In diesen Bildern interpretiert McQueen die Gefangenen als politisch motivierte ‹Action Painters›, die Exkremente in ein künstlerisches Ausdrucksmedium zwischen Schrift und Bild verwandelten." (Liptay 2011: 137). "However, it is precisly the close-ups, in which the images strip off, at least temprorarely, the weight of their physical reality, when seemingly transforming for instance the surface-oriented prison walls and sheets into white canvases on which the marks appear as abstract paintings. [...] At one point, the camera even goes so far as to focus on a scatological painting, which has been designed in tidy circular motions, therefore turning the steam-cleaning of the cell into the annihilation of a work of art. A white fade concludes the work of the cleaning person who, just moments ago, had lifted the visor of her protective gear to marvel at the image cluelessly. In this moment, the figure stands in for the viewer of the film who is uncertain whether what s/he is dealing with is feces or art. In these images, McQueen turns the prisoners into politically motivated <Action Painters>, who transformed feces in an artistic medium situated between scripture and image." (Translation by the author, T.N.).

I want to highlight Lloyd's focus on sound- and odor-spaces, which produce the inversion and disruption of the prison system and, by extension, of the colonial power England executed in North Ireland. Both spaces are significantly absent from the film and are replaced by a visual aesthetic that works against an installment of a communal, transindividual movement that disrupts the system. Instead, it establishes a separation, fragmentation, and concentration that finally centers, in the structural middle of the film, on one figure: Bobby Sands emerges as the one person out of the until-then undifferentiated mass (not community) of prisoners, whose body will act as vanishing sign. He is the first hunger striker / death faster who died in the 1981 hunger strike. In narrowing the narration to the one hunger striker / death faster, and making him into and marking him as the quintessential figure, the political impact of the movement is lost to the narration. To circle back to the beginning of the chapter: although the film employs the structures I briefly described earlier – the hero as figure of identification for the viewer to make sense out of the disrupted lives, structures, system – it is no longer able to portray the dynamics involved in the situation of the hunger striker / death faster as object and subject, perpetrator, hero, and victim of a situation, whose body is the quintessential vanishing sign that disrupts the political order in an attempt to establish a new one through the radical act of self-exterminism. Instead, the film makes / transforms Bobby Sands into a martyr.[15]

In a tripartite structure, the film stylizes Sands as someone who is "reborn" in the middle of the film, as the single person who moves the protest of the PIRA and INLA prisoners to a new stage. In this sense, the tripartite structure of the film can also be read as citing the form of a Christian Triptych, which moves the story from the group to Sands in the middle of the film: a twenty-three-minute talk between Sands and a priest, in which both discuss Sands decision to go on hunger strike (Horton 2012: 126). Seventeen minutes of the talk are filmed in one single shot, and the affective space created through this shot establishes the situation as an intimate theatre. This marks this scene as the pivotal point in the film that transforms Sands, at the same time that he emerges as the singular person, into a symbolic sign (Scarlata 2014: 127) that is not able to question or disturb the existing order in the film, because the political struggle or the North Irish *Troubles* are shut out of the narration. In focusing on him, his weight loss, his handling and mistreatment by the prison wards, and finally, his

**15** As Jessica Scarlata formulates it: The "[...] fascination with Sand's body precludes the possibility of understanding the 1981 hunger strike within a wider historical and political framework and turns his death into martyrdom without clear cause." (2014: 128).

death in the prison hospital, the film allows the viewer to get affective impressions of a narrow prison situation.

However, in this depiction the cause for the death fast becomes unclear; the political momentum these death fasts had on the Republican Movement is excluded. In telling the story of the 1981 hunger strike / death fast through the focus on one figure, in using close ups and long shots, in aesthetically highlighting details, in minimizing language as well as separating sound and image, the film stylizes (even if beautifully) the prison situation and politically motivated suicide into a Catholic martyrdom, whose cause is more or less undefined. In interpreting the film as a beautiful aestheticization of the prison situation and the painful death through death fasting, I argue that the film moves the disruptive potential away from the hunger striker / death faster as a vanishing sign to the affective space of the viewer, who is "trapped" in a beautiful depiction of a structural, physical, and mental violence. This violence more or less deprives the viewer of any insights into and understanding of the historical situation. In observing the surface and the details through the camera, the film portrays a Foucauldian micro-physics of power that nevertheless is unable to narrate the story of the hunger strikes / death fast as inhabiting multiple definitional spaces, and as such operating as disruptive signs. In a way, the film removes the disruptive potential from the hunger strike / death fast, and locates it in the state system itself – the brutality of the beatings, the inhumanity of the body searches, the state of the prison cells, and also the conflicts of the single prison wards. Here, and only here, lies the political potential of the film: in the affective perception of the viewer, the system does destroy itself through the filmic depiction of the microphysics of power, from the single cell to the whole corpus of the state.

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Elisabeth Heyne

# Writing Aphasia

## Intermedial Observation of Disrupted Language in Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur*

"I am reading my own dialogues and realizing that I consider misunderstanding to be the essence of communication,"[1] notes German writer Wolfgang Herrndorf in his blog *Arbeit und Struktur*.[2] Herrndorf began this autobiographical and autopathographical blog in 2010, after being diagnosed with an incurable brain tumor, and continued it until his death in August 2013. The blog follows his life with a diagnosis of incurable cancer and psychosis due to initial surgery and an increasing number of malfunctions in language, coordination, and orientation caused by epileptic seizures. It also contains reflections on the process of writing the last two novels published during the author's lifetime. In *Arbeit und Struktur*, physical disruption both produces the writing and becomes its subject-matter.

Disruptions, disorders of speech, mental disorders, fragmentary language, misunderstandings, going mute, aphasia: by treating all these phenomena as objects of discourse, Herrndorf joins a modern tradition of writing about mental disorders and evokes the narrative of the creative aspects of disruption, which assumes that every rupture has a reflective and innovative potential (Habscheid and Koch 2014). The blog touches on the discourse of writing on madness, and is simultaneously disrupted by a secondary level that deals with the narrator's own medical condition experimentally and autobiographically in the medium of writing. For in the mode of autobiographical experience, *Arbeit und Struktur* renders visible the fact that, in Herrndorf's case, instead of creative potential, there is simply nothing to be found behind the epistemic category of disruption. Therefore, the narrative of the re-normalizing power of de-normalization is dismantled, and the regularity of disruption itself gets disrupted.

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**1** "Lese meine eigenen Dialoge und stelle fest, daß ich das Mißverständnis für das Wesen der Kommunikation halte." Entry from 3 October 2011, Herrndorf (2013: 254). Wolfgang Herrndorf published *Arbeit und Struktur* online via: http://wolfgang-herrndorf.de. It was published in book form posthumously 2013. Page numbers in brackets hereafter refer to the printed edition of the blog (abbreviated AS). There is no English translation available of *Arbeit und Struktur*, all translations are mine.

**2** The note refers to and was created simultaneously to Herrndorf's work on the last novel published in his lifetime, *Sand* (Herrndorf [2011] 2014).

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It is the process of writing about the breakdown of language that takes center stage: how can the failure of language be represented by language? How do you write of psychosis while afflicted with it? This paper examines the poietic and poetic aspects of both psychosis and disrupted language, and their representation in different media in *Arbeit und Struktur*, despite, or rather because of, the fact they accompany fatal disease. For Herrndorf's text is above all a chronicle of death: it relates the narrator's strategy of positioning himself between writing and death by means of self-observation in the course of the wholly unromantic process of degeneration, the hopelessness of which is not lost on the reader (Birnstiel 2014). In this process, *Arbeit und Struktur* does not follow the genre conventions of the sick artist's diary. Furthermore, this aspect of facing death does not stand in the way of analyzing the "scene of writing" (Campe 1991: 760; Stingelin 2004); on the contrary, the life-threatening – or life-sustaining – element adds to the levels of "staging of the return of the writing inside the written word"[3] (Zanetti 2009: 77, my translation), as it is fundamental to the logic of the literary writing process, but also has the potential to orient the narrator outside the world of the text.

There is a long-established literary tradition of merging art, cognition, and illness, especially when the latter is of the brain. Therefore, this essay will begin by discussing the specific textual form of *Arbeit und Struktur* and relate it to the question of autobiographical writing. Instead of a teleological, purely autobiographical or (auto-)pathographical reading, this paper employs a method that contextualizes the work with respect to strategies of inclusion in and exclusion from the classical traditions of autobiography and (auto-)pathography. The essay is based on the printed edition of the blog, partially edited and prepared by Herrndorf himself.[4] In a second step, the paper situates writing on disruption in

3 "Inszenierungen einer Wiederkehr des Schreibens im Geschriebenen."

4 Engagement with the genre of the blog, its specific digital "Schreibszene" and its inherent serial constitution is therefore omitted. Albeit this enquiry would offer the occasion of looking behind the trace (all that is left of the process of writing, perceived in book form), as changes and overwriting within the online protocols would be accessible in certain circumstances. See Michelbach (2016) for a more detailed examination. Michelbach closely examines the relation between the blog as a digital technology of the self and the literary novel: She traces the textual characteristics of *Arbeit and Struktur* as oeuvre and focuses on the connection between the death of the author, the closed structure of the novel, and the act of narration. But since I would like to focus on the version which includes the final edits that Herrndorf himself or his friends following his instructions undertook for the book manuscript, and since the seriality of the blog, its temporal processes of deletion, overwriting, and repetition – at the same time its availability for reception – necessarily breaks down with the author's death, I favour the printed form at this time. New blog entries were a sign that the author was living, while the publication of

the tradition of madness and art as well as aphasia and linguistics. In a third and last step, it examines the intermedial strategies of recording disruption in Herrndorf's other works, where writing about language disorders is linked with representations of maimed skulls, mental blackouts, and amnesia.

*Arbeit und Struktur* is fundamentally concerned with two forms of disruption, which are manifested in a double language problem. On the one hand, there is the medical problem of a language disorder, of aphasic episodes and psychosis, which the blog attempts to represent in constantly changing experimental arrangements. On the other hand, there is the problem of the finality of one's own death, which cannot be represented and, due to its imminent onset, disrupts every function of language. My hypothesis is that, in the struggle to symbolize the disruption within the medium of language and of the medium itself, the text successively employs different media and intermedial observation strategies.

## 1 "Work. Work and structure" – autobiography and (auto-)pathography[5]

"In terms of status, a brain tumor is of course the Mercedes of diseases. And glioblastoma is the Rolls-Royce. Anyhow, I would never have started this blog if I had prostate cancer or a cold."[6] (444) Following the diagnosis, which he describes with typical gallows humor, Herrndorf decided to use the time left to him to immerse himself in work; not a journey around the world, but: Work and Structure. In those last three years that remained for him, despite the statistical curve and the mean prognosis of seventeen plus one months he found on Wikipedia, he published two successful novels and began a third in addition to the considerable effort he put into the blog – in all, more production than in his

the book is the sign of Herrndorf's death. In the book, some entries have been integrated that are missing in the online version. Concerning this point and the collapsing of classifications, such as literary diary, blog and autobiography/autopathography, as well as autothanatography in *Arbeit und Struktur* see Siegel 2016; also, on these points and above all on death in the digital medium see Balint 2016. Yet I use the term blog at certain points, which is how the text refers to itself, even in book form. *Arbeit und Struktur* hereby relates to Herrndorf's other narrative texts and novels.

**5** "Arbeit. Arbeit und Struktur" (114).

**6** "Was Status betrifft, ist Hirntumor natürlich der Mercedes unter den Krankheiten. Und das Glioblastom der Rolls-Royce. Mit Prostatakrebs oder einem Schnupfen hätte ich dieses Blog jedenfalls nie begonnen."

prior career as a writer altogether. Originally conceived as a digital means of sharing information with his friends after his diagnosis, Herrndorf made the blog accessible to the public after six months.[7]

*Arbeit und Struktur* cannot be reduced to writing about the "nonsense of dying"[8] (93) – it is dedicated to the fight to have a death, the time and modalities of which are, at least to a small degree, self-determined. It thus considers itself an opportunity to provide information "for people in comparable situations,"[9] to let them know "how it was done, how it is done"[10] (445). In this essay, however, ethical questions concerning his "exit strategy"[11] that made life with the diagnosis possible, as "necessary element of my psycho-hygiene"[12] (50), will be excluded. For the purposes of this essay, the primary significance of the author – whose work was, ironically, not widely discussed in the German media until the actual death of the actual author – is that of an entity that lends coherence to the œuvre. For the questions and strategies by which *Arbeit und Struktur* approaches the representation of a state that is in fact unrepresentable are already contained in Herrndorf's literary debut, his first novel.

At first, *Arbeit und Struktur* begins wholly in the mode of the classical autobiographies of the twentieth century, with the evocation of the author's first memory: "I am maybe two years old and just woke up. The green blind is lowered, and between the bars of my bed I look into the dawn in my room which consists of nothing but little red, green and blue particles, like a TV screen when you go too close."[13] (7) In contrast to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* and Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser*, which are both mentioned in a later passage of the blog, and which begin with a theoretical prologue and the background story of the family, the beginnings of famous autobiographies from 1900 on, such as Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Elias Canetti's *The Tongue Set Free*, or Christa Wolf's *Patterns of Childhood* often describe the earliest memories of the autobiographical "I." A comparison of *Arbeit und Struktur* with Canetti's first volume of his tripartite autobiography turns out to be es-

**7** On the transition from private digital journal (to inform and communicate with his friends) to online blog under the eye of the public, see Balint (2016: 4) and Michelbach (2016).

**8** "Quatsch mit dem Sterben."

**9** "für Leute in vergleichbarer Situation."

**10** "wie es gemacht wurde; wie es zu machen sei."

**11** "Exitstrategie."

**12** "notwendiger Bestandteil meiner Psychohygiene."

**13** "Ich bin vielleicht zwei Jahre alt und gerade wach geworden. Die grüne Jalousie ist heruntergelassen, und zwischen den Gitterstäben meines Bettes hindurch sehe ich in die Dämmerung in meinem Zimmer, die aus lauter kleinen roten, grünen und blauen Teilchen besteht, wie bei einem Fernseher, wenn man zu nah rangeht."

pecially revealing: both first memories are colored in their own hue – for Herrndorf it is green, for Canetti red – , are concerned with their own death, and, in this respect, become conceptually productive for the whole work.[14] Canetti's initial sequence, colored red, recalls him on the arm of his nanny. The description of the sudden entrance of a man who threatens to cut out the boy's tongue introduces a mythical menace and the fear of death as central motifs of the whole work right at the start. In Herrndorf's "Dämmerung" ("Dawn") – the title of the sequence preceding the first dated entry – the two-year-old Wolfgang awakens in a crib. The green of the lowered blind with which the first memory is imbued unravels immediately into its red, green, and blue components. As in Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood*, here the memory begins between the lights and shadows of the blind (Benjamin 1987: 11). While Canetti's red memories and Benjamin's description of the loggia instantly lead the reader into a mythical world of childhood, Herrndorf's first memory is switched on along with the TV: "like a TV screen when you go too close."[15] (7)

The memory itself follows this depiction and decomposition of light and color:

> Mein Körper hat genau die gleiche Temperatur und Konsistenz wie seine Umgebung, wie die Bettwäsche, ich bin ein Stück Bettwäsche zwischen anderen Stücken Bettwäsche, [...] immer dachte ich zurück, und immer wollte ich Stillstand, und fast jeden Morgen hoffte ich, die schöne Dämmerung würde sich noch einmal wiederholen. (7)
>
> My body has the exact same temperature and consistency as its environment, as the sheets, I am a piece of the sheet between other pieces of sheet, [...] I always thought back, and I always wanted standstill, and almost every morning I hoped that the beautiful dawn would repeat itself once more.

This description immersed in the flickering light of the TV, accurately outlines Freud's death drive as a return to the inorganic.[16] What follows is clear: the au-

**14** "Meine früheste Erinnerung ist in Rot getaucht." (Canetti 1977: 9) ["My earliest memory is dipped in red." (Canetti 2011: 3)].

**15** "wie bei einem Fernseher, wenn man zu nah rangeht."

**16** "Es muß vielmehr ein alter, ein Ausgangszustand sein, den das Lebende einmal verlassen hat und zu dem es über alle Umwege der Entwicklung zurückstrebt. Wenn wir es als ausnahmslose Erfahrung annehmen dürfen, daß alles Lebende aus inneren Gründen stirbt, ins Anorganische zurückkehrt, so können wir nur sagen: *Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod*, und zurückgreifend: *Das Leblose war früher da als das Lebende*." (Freud 2000 [1920]: 248) ["On the contrary, it must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say

tobiographer does not blog about his life, but about the entropic movement of his body. But instead of mere autopathography or a chronicle of dozing towards death, the blog takes as its subject the process of writing itself. For as the earliest memory of Herrndorf decomposes light into its parts, the blog begins by outlining the poetological program of an experimental space in which body and writing can be observed in their components. Hence *Arbeit und Struktur* becomes a record that observes the very thing that renders its own composition possible: language and its bit-by-bit disintegration, from the destruction of syntax to a complete loss of the ability to speak.

The text's first explicit engagement with the question of genre follows almost two years and 300 pages later. In contemptuous disgust for Rousseau's autobiographical "I am resolved on an undertaking that has no model and will have no imitator,"[17] (Rousseau 2000: 5), Herrndorf explains:

> Ich erfinde nichts, ist alles, was ich sagen kann. [...] Das Gefasel von der Unzuverlässigkeit der Sprache spare ich mir, allein der berufsbedingt ununterdrückbare Impuls, dem Leben wie einem Roman zu Leibe zu rücken, die sich im Akt des Schreibens immer wieder einstellende, das Weiterleben enorm erleichternde, falsche und nur im Text richtige Vorstellung, die Fäden in der Hand zu halten und das seit langem bekannte und im Kopf ständig schon vor- und ausformulierte Ende selbst bestimmen und den tragischen Helden mit wohlgesetzten, naturnotwendigen, fröhlichen Worten in den Abgrund stürzen zu dürfen wie gewohnt – (292)
>
> I am not inventing anything, that is all I can say. [...] I will not waste my time blabbering about the unreliability of language, [it is, Author's Note] only an irrepressible impulse due to my profession, to tackle life like a novel, that idea which keeps appearing during the act of writing, which makes it much easier to continue living, which is false and is only true in the text, the idea of pulling the strings, of determining that end myself which I have known of for so long and have constantly been formulating, to let the tragic hero fall into the abyss with well-chosen, natural, cheerful words –

This description, which ends so abruptly, is programmatic for the process of writing *Arbeit und Struktur,* and also applies to Herrndorf's novel *Sand*, the protagonist of which meets a cruel and arbitrary death. Although the text of the published blog claims to be non-fiction, this mode of writing, which is constantly aware that it may be silenced at any point, can only engage with life as though it were a novel. Thus a narrator is superimposed over the narrated "I," that holds the power of describing the death of the narrated "I," and therefore of making it

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that '*the aim of all life is death*' and, looking backwards, that '*inanimate things existed before living ones*'." (Freud 1961: 32)].

**17** "Unternehmen, das kein Vorbild hat und dessen Ausführung auch niemals einen Nachahmer finden wird" (Rousseau, cited in: AS, 292).

occur in the first place. The blog in contrast to the book ends with the chapter "The End: Wolfgang Herrndorf shot himself on Monday, 26 August 2013 around 11.15 P.M. on the bank of the Hohenzollern canal."[18] The book concludes with an epilogue, which cites Herrndorf's last wishes concerning the publication of the blog and explains "medically, technically"[19] (445) how he killed himself. In this manner, death is rendered true on the textual level, where life and text are actually entangled in this case. "He insisted on the authorial end"[20] (Friebe 2013), friend and author Holm Friebe wrote in his obituary about Herrndorf's suicide.

Thus, while Herrndorf concedes the fact that in an autobiographical project the rules of the novel will of necessity govern the writing and the structure of memory, and fiction has not only found its way into writing, but also into life and "living on" ("Weiterleben"), he does not include language itself in that meta-commentary: "I will not waste my time blabbering about the unreliability of language [...]"[21] (292), since the language at the center of *Arbeit und Struktur* is no longer simply unreliable.

# 2 The artistic promise of disruption

## 2.1 Promise I: Madness and system of notation ("Aufschreibesystem")

Herrndorf's blog employs the traditional forms and topoi of autobiographical writing, and seems to contribute to the tradition of autopathography. Art has commonly been linked with disorders of the mind and language in the genre of pathography since 1900; this link is simply affirmed in some instances, and forms the object of an enquiry in others. There has also been a great deal of research on this topic in the last few years.[22] Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur* is neither primarily concerned with genres of the artists diary nor of the digital blog, but with the idea of writing his own illness (Siegel 2016: 365). Yet, by doing so he

**18** The last entry of the blog: <http://www.wolfgang-herrndorf.de/page/2/>. "Schluss": "Wolfgang Herrndorf hat sich am Montag, den 26. August 2013 gegen 23.15 Uhr am Ufer des Hohenzollernkanals erschossen." Concerning the dissemination of the message announcing his death via Twitter see Balint (2016: 1).

**19** "medizinisch-fachlich."

**20** "Das auktoriale Ende hat er sich nicht nehmen lassen."

**21** "Das Gefasel von der Unzuverlässigkeit der Sprache spare ich mir."

**22** See Gockel (2010); Bormuth et al. (2007); Brugger et al. (1997); Milner (1989).

already reflects on genre traditions and establishes a border between them and his own text.

The foundational acts of the humanities contained already this linking of madness and art, which then grew into a topos: the way that the imagination – "Of all the powers of the human mind the imagination has been least explored, probably because it is the most difficult to explore"[23] (Herder 1989: 302; Herder 1969: 301) – has been conceptualized using madness, at the very least since Romanticism. In this vein, Dilthey emphasizes the strong link between the imagination and madness, both of which are based on the same mechanism, i.e. "metamorphosis of reality"[24] (Dilthey 1962 [1887]: 165; Dilthey 1985: 67). Thus it is not only that the "lunatic" is predestined to be an artist; observing a description of madness from the inside also promises to represent the imaginary more accurately. In the poetics of the beginning of the nineteenth century, the prescriptive model of unselfconscious writing is drawn from the medical study of madness – which, according to Friedrich A. Kittler, only creates the text proper and actual authorship in a subsequent re-reading (Kittler 2003: 138). This retrospective agency is then eliminated with the beginning of the "discourse network 1900" (Aufschreibesystem[25]), by the basic psychoanalytic rule that the unconscious is made visible in unconscious streams of speech. The *écriture automatique* of the Surrealists and the free association of psychoanalysis regularly attempt to produce such unconscious states of mind.

Hence, madness that affects the mechanisms of language has already been detached from the pathological since 1800 and has been connected with literature instead. Today, we still wonder whether the fleeting and vague phenomenon of the imaginary is only comprehensible in precisely these enraptured states of madness and hallucination. There is a long list of scientific and literary attempts to create these states consciously or unconsciously, and include the protocols of drug consumption from Charles Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin, Ernst Jünger and Henri Michaux.

One of the most prominent and most frequently analyzed examples of writing out of madness is *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, by Daniel Paul Schreber, as it was and is ascribed a particular "authenticity." This text was written between 1900 and 1902, and its analysis influenced the theories of Benjamin, Deleuze and Guattari, Freud, Canetti, Lacan, and Foucault. Canetti, for instance, holds that

**23** "unerforschteste und vielleicht die unerforschlichste aller menschlichen Seelenkräfte."

**24** "die Metamorphose des Wirklichen."

**25** The notion "Aufschreibesystem" can be translated either as "discourse network" or "system of notation." Kittler's study was translated as "discourse network." However, "system of notation" emphasizes the practice of writing and writing down, which is central for the notion.

the nature of paranoia is nowhere elucidated clearer than in Schreber's statements. A contemporary reading of the text in the light of the current surveillance scandals almost makes us forget that we are reading a paranoiac text from 1900, and leads us to suspect that we live in a time of paranoia:

> Man unterhält *Bücher oder sonstige Aufzeichnungen*, in denen nun schon seit Jahren alle meine Gedanken, alle meine Redewendungen, alle meine Gebrauchsgegenstände, alle sonst in meinem Besitze oder meiner Nähe befindlichen Sachen, alle Personen, mit denen ich verkehre usw. *aufgeschrieben* werden. Wer das Aufschreiben besorgt, vermag ich nicht mit Sicherheit zu sagen. Da ich mir Gottes Allmacht nicht als aller Intelligenz entbehrend vorstellen kann, so vermuthe ich, daß das Aufschreiben von Wesen besorgt wird, [...] die [...] des Geistes völlig entbehren und denen von den vorübergehenden Strahlen die Feder zu dem ganz mechanisch von ihnen besorgten Geschäfte des Aufschreibens sozusagen in die Hand gedrückt wird, dergestalt, daß später hervorziehende Strahlen das Aufgeschriebene wieder einsehen können. (Schreber 1973 [1903]: 90)

> *Books or other notes* are kept in which for years have been *written-down* all my thoughts, all my phrases, all my necessaries, all the articles in my possession or around me, all persons with whom I come into contact, etc. I cannot say with certainty who does the writing down. As I cannot imagine God's omnipotence lacks all intelligence, I presume that the writing-down is done by creatures [...] lacking all intelligence; their hands are led automatically, as it were, by passing rays for the purpose of making them write-down, so that later rays can again look at what has been written." (Schreber 2000: 123)

Without delving too deeply into Schreber's universe at this point, the close connection between madness and the "Aufschreibesystem" (Schreber 1973: 60) – the term Kittler later extracts from Schreber's notes and on which he bases his theory of media – emerges most plainly here. While writing, especially taking notes in a diary, may often help avert madness,[26] and the diary, as a space of reflection and observation, often has a regulative function (Simonis 2000: 196), this phenomenon is completely reversed in Schreber's case: the madness is triggered by the graphomania of the others, and which he in turn puts into writing himself.

Schreber's ability to write out of his own madness is what renders his documentation so unique. As former president of the Senate in Dresden, he had the ability and the means to put his experiences into writing. At the same time, he was fortunately "no poet, so that one can follow his thoughts without being seduced by them"[27] (Canetti 1981 [1960]: 488; Canetti 1981: 505). Kittler's terminology meets its limit at this point, as he considers literature since 1900 to be just

**26** A very characteristic literary example for this is Jonathan Harker's diary from Bram Stoker's *Dracula:* "As I must do something or go mad, I write this diary," (Stoker [1897] (1993): 327).
**27** "zum Glück kein Dichter: so kann man ihm überallhin folgen und ist doch vor ihm geschützt."

simulation and "mimicry of madness"[28] (Kittler 2003: 370; Kittler 1990: 307) – yet Schreber was in fact mentally ill. Schreber's treatise represents "the essence of Paranoia"[29] (Canetti 1981 [1960]: 488; Canetti 1981: 505) for Canetti, a lucid anticipation of the dictators and crises of the twentieth century for Benjamin, or the mass-neurotic truth of religion for Freud. Nevertheless, as Schreber emphasizes at the beginning of his notes, he had to wrestle with a problem of representation just like his reader: "I cannot of course count upon being *fully* understood because things are dealt with which cannot be expressed in human language; they exceed human understanding"[30] (Schreber 1973: 8; Schreber 2000: 16).

## 2.2 Walther's, Wilhelm's and Wolfgang's delusional episode

Herrndorf's psychosis, like Schreber's illness, is not a mimicry of madness – it is not feigned. Similarly to Schreber, Herrndorf's delusional episode is concerned with writing and written down by himself. Although one can draw such connections between Herrndorf's blog and Schreber's Aufzeichnungen, my argument by no means follows the assumption that these two texts are in any way analogous. Schreber and Herrndorf cannot be juxtaposed as historical persons or patients, nor are the two genres of their texts comparable in matters of their potential for self-reflection.[31] Instead, mentioning Schreber's pathographical texts helps to shed light on Herrndorf's description of his delusional episode, which forms only a small part of *Arbeit und Struktur,* and is therefore easily overlooked in analyses. It may also help to understand how the blog evokes the tradition of writing and "madness" – in the double sense of writing about "madness" and writing one's own "madness." The discourse of "madness" is then brought

**28** "Mimikry von Wahnsinn."

**29** "das Wesen der Paranoia."

**30** "Auf volles Verständniß kann ich von vornherein nicht rechnen, da es sich dabei zum Theil um Dinge handelt, die sich in menschlicher Sprache überhaupt nicht ausdrücken lassen, weil sie über das menschliche Begriffsvermögen hinausgehen."

**31** In addition, Schreber's spiritualistic universe, composed of divine rays and a telegraphic nerve-language, certainly describes a different "Aufschreibesystem" ["notational system"] than Herrndorf's. According to Kittler, they are split between the "Aufschreibesystem 1900" ["discourse network"] (Kittler 2003) and "Aufschreibesystem 2000." Furthermore, "God" or different institutions (such as his psychiatrist Dr. Flechsig, the juridical context of his project) play a fundamentally different role in Schreber's *Memoires.*

into the text by Herrndorf himself, as a citation whose function on a textual level I analyze in more detail below.[32]

*Arbeit und Struktur* begins with Herrndorf's admission to the Berlin neuropsychiatry ward. The description of the psychosis itself that leads to his admission follows in a flashback in ten parts, half a year and one hundred pages later. After Herrndorf's diagnosis and first surgery, fear of death and manic fits alternate; five days prior to his admission, the "strange exhilaration/euphoria"[33] heightens, and, at the same time, Herrndorf starts carrying a notebook for the first time in his life: "Author with notebook: Always seemed to me a touch too vain. Now the desire for it is overpowering"[34] (115). Simultaneously, and before he even begins to note anything in it, he starts to fear losing the book. So on its first page, he enters a finder's reward, which, as his megalomania increases, he raises from fifty to 1150 euros by adding more ones in front of the initial amount. The notebook, which is the precondition of writing something down, contains the possibility of its own dysfunctionality – if it is lost, everything that has been written down is lost – even before the process of writing begins. Loss of language thus becomes an intrinsic and constitutive component in the use of language in the first place.

During the following days, he writes diagrams and lists about the conditions within his head.[35] In order to deal with his fear of death, Herrndorf installs a Walther PPK, a semi-automatic pistol, within his head to shoot the thoughts of

**32** Concerning Herrndorf's posthumously published last novel *Bilder deiner großen Liebe* (2014) ["Pictures of Your Great Love"]), and its protagonist Isa, understood as a reflexive figure of social and "normality" see Cho 2014.

**33** "sonderbare Hochgefühl."

**34** "Autor mit Notizbuch: Schien mir immer eine Spur zu eitel für einen Behelfsschriftsteller wie mich. Jetzt ist der Wunsch danach übermächtig."

**35** Later in the blog he says: "Man sollte keine Bücher schreiben ohne Listen drin." ["You should not write books without lists in them."] (212) In accord with these poetics, enumerations and lists occur frequently in *Arbeit und Struktur:* from lists of books yet to be read, inventories of different medicinal facilities and lists of "Jack-Nicholson-Momenten" in psychiatry to the description of the self as a bookkeeper who writes the inventory (13, 16, 17, 44, 303, 319, 214). On lists in literary texts, see Mainberger (2003). Regarding this point in relation to *Arbeit und Struktur*, see Balint: "The bookkeeper cannot but fall short of writing the 'full inventory' because a unity of the self that the metaphor implies is essentially unattainable." (2016: 7). And concerning lists and the question of genre in Herrndorf's blog, see Siegel (2016: 364 – 365). See also Michelbach (2016: 112, 124 – 25). Equally rewarding would be an analysis of the role of diagrams in the blog, which are not only frequently mentioned, googled, and used as a benchmark and measure of time for Herrndorf's own life, but are also included in the blog and printed in the book, and along with many photos break up a continuous reading experience (already inhibited by web links within the blog) and render it more incontinuous. See, among others, Krämer (2009).

death that emerge every minute or second. This life-saving device gets blocked more and more by an entity that reveals itself at first as "Disruptor,"[36] then as "Wilhelm Disruptor"[37] (120). The increasing "madness" that unfolds in the battle between these entities is observed from the outside at the same time: "Despite all the panic I'm simultaneously so amused [...] that I throw my head back and laugh out loud in front of my computer, and this laughter sounds like that of a really bad actor in a really bad movie when they perform the 'completely mad lunatic'"[38] (122). Thus, "being mad," just like the light unraveling in the memory of two-year old Herrndorf, is always something that springs from TV and films. "Madness" emanates from media and is staged by means of media; it is medial mise-en-scène by way of medial doubling.

The psychotic sequence finally culminates in "The Great Speech"[39] (124), as Herrndorf terms it. In a nocturnal email he summons all his friends to the apartment of a friend, but while preparing the speech in his notebook, he is seized by a fear of losing it or of destroying it himself, instigated by the disturber entity within. To save it from himself or Wilhelm Störer, he contrives a scheme to copy out the text and to bury these copies. The Great Speech, eventually, is supposed to be entitled "Narcissistic Structure of Personality and Fear of Death – talk by Wolfgang Herrndorf," to include an obituary on J.D. Salinger and at the same time the Theory of Everything. Between the fear of being insane, the idea of writing the text of his life, and his circular thoughts ("your thoughts are the text, the text is a text about the text, the text returns to its starting point"[40] [135]), he concludes that the Theory of Everything is itself circular reasoning: "we revolve endlessly in a loop, hell and now the text comes again, my text, the great text. [...] *I'm in my own text*"[41] (136, emphasis mine). In this manner, Herrndorf becomes a character in his own text, which necessarily presupposes that a narrator narrates that character. It becomes manifest that this loop, ascribed to the psychosis, must be seen as valid for the text of *Arbeit und Struktur* as a whole, not least by looking at the character of the narrator,

**36** "Störer."
**37** "Wilhelm Störer."
**38** "Bei aller Panik bin ich gleichzeitig so amüsiert [...], dass ich den Kopf in den Nacken werfe und laut am Rechner auflache, und dieses Lachen hört sich an wie sehr schlechte Schauspieler in sehr schlechten Filmen, wenn sie den 'total verrückten Irren' geben."
**39** "Die große Rede."
**40** "deine Gedanken sind der Text, der Text ist ein Text über den Text, der Text kehrt zu seinem Ausgangspunkt zurück, [...]."
**41** "wir kreisen ewig in einer Schleife, Hölle und jetzt kommt der Text schon wieder, mein Text, der große Text. [...] *Ich bin in meinem eigenen Text*."

who in the end will in fact be able to recount the death of the author's character as well as of the real Herrndorf.

In writing this text, he writes down that he writes down the text. "The system of notation Herrndorf" (Birnstiel 2014) consists of this text, which is designed "to administer oneself, to write oneself forth"[42] (214). This is at least what the manual claims, which is provided in the following year. Consciousness, he notes on 5 July, 2001, is a bookkeeper writing inventory lists.[43] This results in ephemeral media and the hope that these could "one day to be played under noise and crackling on a similarly dubious operating system as my own"[44] (214).

The text not only administers oneself and itself, but at the same time explicitly drafts a typology of its readers. Only when the latter are understood as receivers that are identically structured as the sender, does the text assume them capable of resisting disruptive signals such as noise and crackles and ultimately able of decoding the text. In that case, the discourse system is continued, even if the Great Speech naturally did not achieve its desired effect (the Nobel prize). For the storage media are malfunctioning: while the notebook has not been lost, it does not contain THE text, which is also not found on any computer – the insane search for it makes two paramedics appear, who finally remove Herrndorf from the scene.

Only now does the reader of the main text, *Arbeit und Struktur* as a whole, become conscious of the circular structure of the text that he or she is reading: the flashbacks end where the first dated entry begins. The reader's suspicion is confirmed eventually, in the postscript to the flashbacks: "Needless to say, the text I was desperately looking for has turned up after all: It is this text."[45] (149)

In this loop, the blog matches the claims of madness: we circulate eternally in a loop and the text repeats itself endlessly. If we begin to reread the text from the start, in the second entry we come across the description of an elderly woman, who meticulously protocols her daily routine in the clinic. Herrndorf asks her: "Are we mad, because we write everything down, or do we write everything down, because we are mad?"[46] (11). This is how the circular structure of the

**42** "sich selbst zu verwalten, sich fortzuschreiben."

**43** Concerning the function of lists, see footnote 35.

**44** "eines Tages auf einem ähnlich fragwürdigen Betriebssystem wie dem eigenen unter Rauschen und Knistern noch einmal abgespielt werden."

**45** "Überflüssig zu erwähnen, dass der [...] von mir verzweifelt gesuchte Text später doch noch aufgetaucht ist: Es ist dieser Text."

**46** "Sind wir verrückt, weil wir alles aufschreiben, oder schreiben wir alles auf, weil wir verrückt sind?"

"insane," as well as the no longer insane, discourse system continues to writes itself endlessly.

It is not easy for the blog to escape this circle: "Describing the madness makes me mad again"[47] (154), it says after the flashback. Even if Herrndorf manages to escape circular reasoning and psychosis while writing the protocol, the experience of the lost text remains. The fear of the loss of (the) speech in both senses soon manifests itself literally both in Herrndorf's life and blog. Thus, just as in the case of Schreber, the "madness" which made Herrndorf think that he was capable of seeing the future is no longer madness, but rather the reality of the illness which increasingly finds expression in aphasia, caused by epileptic seizures.

## 2.3 Promise II: Aphasia and maimed skulls

The discovery of aphasia in the nineteenth century made it possible to differentiate between the ability to speak and to understand speech for the first time. Motoric aphasia, discovered by Paul Broca, and sensorial aphasia, described by Carl Wernicke, imply the breakdown or malfunction of one ability with the other continuing to function.

> Apoplexien, Kopfschußwunden und Paralysen haben die grundlegende Entdeckung ermöglicht, auf die jede Zuordnung von Kulturtechniken und Physiologie zurückgeht. [...] Die Aphasieforschung markiert eine Zäsur in den Abenteuern des Sprechens. Sprachstörungen hören auf, alle in der schönen Wortlosigkeit romantischer Seele zu konvergieren.
>
> Apoplexy, bullet wounds to the head, and paralysis made possible the fundamental discoveries upon which every connection drawn between cultural practices and physiology is based. [...] Research into aphasia marked a turning point in the adventures of speech. Disturbances in language no longer converged in the beautiful wordlessness of the romantic soul. (Kittler 2003: 260; Kittler 1990: 215)

Injuries of the cerebral cortex make it possible – through their local limitation – to dissect the speech and writing of a living individual. Neurolinguistics, a discipline that emerged from these insights, focuses on those "locations" of language in the brain thanks to imaging procedures.

In this manner, language as cultural technique, understood here not as the total sum of techniques applied in a culture, but as self-techniques, "techniques de soi" (Foucault 2001 [1982]) of the second order, which are by their recursive

47 "Die Beschreibung des Irrseins macht mich wieder irre."

aspect the basis and technique of the constitution of the self, becomes explorable by disturbance and physical deficits. The patients, for example, from whom Kurt Goldstein gained his insights on aphasia (Goldstein 1948) – which in turn become crucial for Roman Jakobson (Jakobson 1974 [1956]) – suffered brain injuries in World War I. Jakobson constructs a double system out of Goldstein's; he describes a similarity disorder and a contiguity disorder corresponding to his theory of the two aspects of language, combination and selection. Thus for Jakobson, the "apathic structure of linguistic systems"[48] yields to the linguist's "new insights into the underlying regularities of language"[49] (Jakobson 1974 [1956]: 118). In *Child Language, Aphasia and Phonological Universals*, furthermore, he claims to have found in aphasia the reverse image of ontogenetic development of language and, with that, recognizes the inner link between language acquisition and language breakdown (Jakobson 1974 [1956]: 118 and Jakobson 1968 [1941]). Freud's early text *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien* lines up with this tradition as well, as he constructs his topical model of the conscious and the unconscious by working with the accumulated material of deficits.[50] Hence physical disorders, which are already held to reflect language and consciousness by 1800, are considered by various disciplines in the twentieth century to be a cognitive category beyond the body, as the internal rules of a system become particularly evident when it is disrupted (Jäger 2012: 30). Particularly in the case of language, disruption as disorder remains the place where communication turns self-reflexive, that is to say, its reflexivity becomes more clearly apparent (Shannon and Weaver, here: Neubert 2012: 277).

In analogy to the promise of the creative potential of so called "madness," language disruption thus has a reflective potential for the medium of language and for privileged access to insights on language. This creative aspect of disruption also triggers an artistic process in *Arbeit und Struktur*. However, the reflective potential that disruption has for the medium can only be represented when the fundamental decomposition initiated by language disorder is restructured by a medial transformation into writing, image, and video. In *Arbeit und Struktur*, aphasia writes itself: the breakdown of language represents itself in language and, in employing analogous and digital means of recording, writing becomes a writing against disruption, on disruption and along with disruption.[51]

**48** "aphatische Aufbau des sprachlichen Systems."

**49** "neue Erkenntnisse über die der Sprache zugrunde liegenden Gesetzmäßigkeiten."

**50** On this point, see Kittler (2003: 336) and simultaneously Freud's differentiation from neurophysiology by refraining from locating his system anatomically.

**51** See Neufeld (2016). She focuses on the comparison between blog and novel as well as on the birth of the author via suicide. In terms of writing as vital function, the autonomy of the author is

## 3 In search of lost texts, words, mines, miens – intermedial findings

It starts with a headache and a computer malfunction.[52] The literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has a penchant for using the headache as a motif to depict the fragmented perception of traumatic events.[53] Herrndorf's works are also teeming with characters who suffer from headaches, feverish dreams and mental blackouts, shattered skulls and leaking cerebral matter. In his first novel, *In Plüschgewittern*, the protagonist, constantly pained by headaches, experiences the initial stages of aphasia.[54] However, the traditional reading which understands the exposed unreliability of the narrator as a poetologically productive or metafictional element reaches its limits with *Arbeit und Struktur*. There is no playful fiction of disturbed narrative stances, only a narrator who dies. Yet consulting Herrndorf's "desert novel" *Sand*, created contemporaneously, turns out to be instructive. There, too, everything begins with a headache. Every day at four o'clock sharp, the protagonist of *Sand* suffers from headaches that are ironically healed only by a momentous head injury, through which

maintained through writing, especially through writing about the own death, as she points out. In addition, the loss of the ability to speak is compensated by presenting a texture of different voices within the text/blog.

**52** See Herrndorf (2013), "Rückblende 1: Das Krankenhaus" ["Flashback 1: The hospital"], 97–106. In that passage, Herrndorf gives an account from the beginning: how, after initial misdiagnoses, the incurable brain tumor (a glioblastoma) was diagnosed.

**53** Often right at the attempt of the narrator to dispose of his/her own responsibility. On this point, see e.g. Louis-Ferdinand Céline's depiction of the journey through devastated post-war Germany. During this journey, he gets hit in the head by a brick, resulting in the narrator's lack of accountability for the disrupted scraps of memory, letting him hide behind fragmented speech and dismembered memory by the token of his external injury (Céline 1987).

**54** When attempting to look from a rooftop into the courtyard of an apartment building in Berlin, where in all likelihood a guest of the ongoing party has fallen, the edge of the roof blocks the protagonist's view. To him it is as if "würde einem ein Wort nicht einfallen, das einem seit Tagen auf der Zunge liegt." ["a word would not come to mind that had been on the tip of one's tongue for days"] (Herrndorf 2002: 98). There as well, the plot teems with (partly only imagined) blackouts, memory problems (mostly under the influence of drugs, e.g. [Herrndorf 2002: 86, 102]). The inner perspective of normally inaccessible mental states is rendered important there already: "So sieht ein Filmriß von innen aus, denke ich, und lege mich in das Bett." ["This is what a blackout looks like from the inside, I think, and lie down in bed."] Head injuries and headaches are constant motives in the novel *Sand* (Herrndorf (2014) [2011]: 111, 117, 187). A similar situation involves feverish fits in *Diesseits des Van-Allen-Gürtels* (Herrndorf 2007).

he loses his memory.[55] Amnesia and aphasia are carefully linked in the novel by the thematization of dysfunctional media: the mind of the amnesia patient for example is to be imagined like someone "who for days, recognizes inside himself nothing but a blank piece of paper"[56] (Herrndorf 2014 [2011]: 308).

Wolfgang Herrndorf suffers his first epileptic seizure on 8 May 2011: he can't speak anymore, has trouble orienting himself and forgets what he meant to say. Looking at text files of his novel, they are just as fragmented as the structure of his thoughts (222–224). The next morning, he recites out loud, as if to reassure himself that he has regained his language, a poem by Georg von der Vring: "In der Heimat" [Back Home]. From then until the end of *Arbeit und Struktur*, the first lines of the poem run through the protocol of the aphasic seizures:[57] "On the Weser, Unterweser / You will be again as you were before. / Through the reeds and the grasses of the bank / The water flows in as it did before"[58] (224). At times they are spoken in unison by other persons and voices in his head, at times he hears them in English or hears only their vague sound. While generally only the first four verses are repeated, the last stanza, only recited once, is the most important, for it describes the aphasic experience: "And the stars, seven stars / Stand in the window pale like before, / And still it calls from a distance, / And you don't know what, like before"[59] (von der Vring 1996: 19).

One still perceives the phonetic sound of a call from a distance, yet its sense can no longer be understood. This experience, already known inside the world evoked in the poem and yet painful every time, thus repeats the loss of access to intact communication in language. The first four verses, used as a leitmotif, carry the experience of losing language or the possibility to understand language silently within them, since the crucial last lines are always withheld. These verses thus link the loss of understanding and language, and, exactly by that token,

**55** On this point, see also the parallels between Driss Chraïbi's novel *Une enquête au pays*, which starts with a headache as well and to which *Sand* possibly refers. For the reference to Chraïbi, see Maar 2012.

**56** "der in sich selbst seit Tagen nichts weiter zu erkennen vermag als ein unbeschriebenes Blatt Papier."

**57** Herrndorf's aphasic episodes change between difficulties to speak, while knowing what to say and difficulties to understand, including the voices inside his head. That means his speechlessness during his epileptic seizures cannot generally be categorized as Broca or as Wernicke aphasia. Nevertheless, the term "aphasia" is used here to characterize both states at the same time and as a mode of self-description: Herrndorf himself writes of aphasic experiences (297).

**58** "An der Weser, Unterweser / Wirst du wieder sein wie einst./ Durch Geschilf und Ufergräser/ Dringt die Flut herein, wie einst."

**59** "Und die Sterne, sieben Sterne / Stehn im Fenster blass wie einst, / Und noch immer ruft's von ferne, / Und du weißt nicht was, wie einst."

are used as an instrument to make sure of language by mechanical repetition. Aphasia is fought by a citation of aphasic experience. Language beyond understanding thus becomes a mechanical construction of sound.

While Herrndorf's neurosurgeon was of the opinion that Wittgenstein's "The borders of my language are the borders of my world" was "probably oversimplified"[60] (170) with respect to the language disorders of cancer patients, Herrndorf describes himself after the epileptic seizure as "thinly built out into a somewhat papery world"[61] (224). His world, which consists of paper and writing, is just confined by language: "This pile of shards on the inside coupled with a simultaneous inability to speak, this is not my world."[62] (224) A short while later, when the second seizure occurs, it does become his world after all: the disorder of language begins to write itself. Miming, he gestures for pen and paper and jots down in a notepad that he is having a seizure. "Grammar shot into pieces, handwriting normal. [...] Partial amnesia. I suggest performing little Oliver Sacks experiments next time."[63] (229) This is followed by a photographic reproduction of Herrndorf in which he holds the note up to the camera. He attempts to keep a protocol of the following seizures, too:

> Ein Satz, der aus meinem Roman zu stammen scheint, geht mir als Hall und Widerhall durch den Kopf. Kann den Satz nicht verstehen, kann ihn mir nicht merken, versuche ihn Wort für Wort und Buchstabe für Buchstabe zu notieren.
>
> davor
> ein wenig
> z
> zu wenig wenig
> zuwenig zu (240)
>
> A sentence that seems to belong to one of my novels reverberates and echoes through my head. Can't understand the sentence, can't remember it, try to note it down word for word, letter for letter.
>
> before
> a little
> t
> too little little
> toolittle too

**60** "vermutlich zu plakativ."
**61** "dünn in eine etwas papierene Welt hinausgebaut."
**62** "Dieser Scherbenhaufen im Innern bei gleichzeitiger Unfähigkeit zu sprechen, das ist nicht meine Welt."
**63** "Grammatik zerschossen, Schriftbild normal. [...] Teilamnesie. Ich schlage vor, das nächste Mal kleine Oliver-Sacks-Experimente durchzuführen."

Again, he simultaneously recites the poem, and has particular trouble with it this time. After the seizure he recites the poem again, "concentrated on the mechanics of speaking"[64] (241). He films himself in the process and puts up a link to the video on the blog.[65] Thus, he not only suggests using his seizures to experiment, but already begins to act as a test subject in front of the camera and on paper. The disruption of language establishes a reflexive experimental space (see the article of Koch and Nanz in this volume: 3) in which different medial strategies are meant to set out the breakdown of language in writing, in the course of which analogous and digital media as well as written and oral forms alternate. If, for Herrndorf, "human life ends where communication ends"[66] (224), then the documentation of noise still is communication.

The diverse language problems of *Sand*'s characters arise from a similar configuration: the text is a minutely constructed game of mistaken identity, interspersed with homonyms, homographs, and homophones, which in turn cause new and grave mistakes of identity on different levels. The protagonist Polidorio, for example, blunders into an ultimately lethal pursuit by being mistaken for Agent Lundgren. This character has language problems himself that are best described by the "tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon" of aphasiology (Arnold 2013: 31). The narrator of the novel too gets infected with that *logic of the near-enough* and describes Lundgren, for instance, as trembling like pea leaves [*Erbsen*laub] instead of aspen leaves [*Espen*laub] (Arnold 2013: 31). In this context, loss of memory is persistently equated with loss of language, and time and again, "[a] numb feeling," "like cotton wool"[67] remains on the characters' tongues: "The word was gone" / "Das Wort war weg" (Herrndorf 2014: 444). The core of the story, finally, is a desperate search for a "mine" or "mien" / "Mine" or "Miene,"[68] lost in semantic games of similarity and homonyms, that later reveals itself as a microfilm hidden in an empty ball point pen refill (Stift*mine*). Everywhere in the novel (along with gold mines, land mines, miens, etc.), ball point pens turn up and lead to the theft of a suitcase, are used to stir coffee, are used as the backbone of a doll made from grass and provoke endless chains of fatal causality – on the

**64** "konzentriert auf die Mechanik des Sprechens."

**65** In the book, a link to the blog and video is marked down in the endnotes: <www.wolfgang-herrndorf.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Film-am-06 – 09 – 2011-um-18.25.mov>. Elke Siegel underlines the performance character of his video, which brings the body into the text by filming Herrndorf while eating, and contributes to constructing a posthumous "I" of the author as a public figure (Siegel 2016: 360).

**66** "[m]enschliches Leben endet, wo die Kommunikation endet."

**67** "ein taubes Gefühl," "wie Watte."

**68** On the extensive diversification of the "Minenspiel" in the novel see Maar 2012.

one hand they get lost again, on the other hand they are never actually used to write.

The text of the Great Speech, the "Mine" [refill], and the words themselves are searched for maniacally. During his first stay at the hospital, in the course of which the tumor is diagnosed, Herrndorf, "despite an hours-long search"[69] (100), does not succeed in finding his friend Holm's telephone number on the small hospital bed stand: the few objects lying there "drive me almost insane in their confusing mess"[70] (100). The scraps of paper never turn up again, the ballpoint pen (its "Mine") does not work, the computer too fails when the illness sets in. Until the end of his blog, Herrndorf looks for better words to describe the wordless state that goes along with the process of depersonalization – but in vain. "Maybe because no describer is present in the moment to be described"[71] (273). In spite of the missing observer, he tries to "fix" the shreds of words that remain in his head during the epileptic seizures "in writing" ("durch Aufschreiben festzumachen.") – "But no idea. I can't figure it out. If I do recognize something like 'Jesus Christ has saved the world', I will get back to you"[72] (262). The physical disruption is reflected in the material disruption of the text, but neither refers to "another," deeper truth.

Schreber's *Memoirs*, too, try to attain the goal of "a rehabilitation through writing, through a book"[73] (Hagen 2001: 13). Yet at the end of their "reparation strategy"[74] (Hagen 2001: 13), we find the restitution of Schreber's place in society, which he tries to achieve by the exact transcription of those experiments which are performed on him and during which sound perceptions are projected directly onto his nervous system. Herrndorf's rehabilitation by writing aims for a whole other level: it attempts a "restructuration symbolique"[75] of the disturbed symbolic function that is perhaps most clearly manifest in blank pages, which cannot be written upon and in malfunctioning writing devices that do not write. Against these failures of writing utensils, *Arbeit und Struktur* resorts to the mechanics of language, on the level of sound and its repetition, to sequences of video footage and metaphors of film, in which new attempts are constantly made to re-

**69** "trotz stundenlanger Suche."
**70** "machen mich in ihrer Unübersichtlichkeit fast verrückt."
**71** "Vielleicht, weil im zu beschreibenden Moment kein Beschreibender mit dabei ist."
**72** "Aber keine Ahnung. Ich krieg's nicht raus. Falls doch noch mal irgendetwas wie 'Jesus Christus hat die Welt erlöst' erkennbar wird, melde ich mich wieder."
**73** "eine Rehabilitation durch die Schrift, durch ein Buch."
**74** "Reparationsstrategie."
**75** Félix Guattari: *Monographie sur R. A.* (1972 [1956]: 19; quoted Schmidgen 1997: 92).

structure the disturbed symbolic function and thus to restore it.[76] For the essence of the Theory of Everything, mentioned again and again even after the psychosis, is – in the logic of the closed system which generates Herrndorf's text – simple in the end: "Nothing: contextless hell"[77] (435). Behind disruption, for Herrndorf and in his categories, nothing is to be found but that hellish incoherence. This Real, to which there is no possible access, can only be dealt with by proxy, by an attempt to symbolize. But his attempt to turn the experience of disruption into an experiment is now only an automatized reflex of belief in a cognitive category that, in this case, does not lead to cognition anymore.

Just as research on aphasia around 1900 understood itself as a first vivisection of speech and writing, in this case, too, the two fall apart: the written media consistently fail, notebooks go missing, the data disappears, the writing devices do not write – all these demonstrate how the written medium falls short, is too liable to disruption to be equal to the task of confronting that "contextless hell." For *Arbeit und Struktur*, there is nothing left but to fall back on other media.

Therefore, attempts are made, for example, to transfer orality to text via transcriptions, phonetic pictures, and finally the video sequence described above. Language then figures as a mechanical apparatus of sounds, as a machine in the context of other machines adduced by the text. The patient's trust in and unavoidably close connection to measurements and medical devices reappear again and again: "The sight of the machines calms me down"[78] (101), it says before the first operation. Herrndorf describes and names them, as in the case of the Clinac 3: "Very beautiful device, could be even more futuristic for my taste"[79] (32) or of the follow-on device Novalis: "Novalis's discoveries in the natural sciences weren't all that ground-breaking in the end."[80] (276) Herrndorf dreams of the devices and, after seeing Andreas Dresen's *Stopped on Track (Halt auf freier Strecke)*, particularly notes the experience of virtually looking at himself lying inside the machine in place of the lead actor (281). Ultimately, film is the medium with which one can deal with the two language problems, the medical problem and the problem of finality: the disorder of lan-

**76** On this point, see the analysis of Guattari's report on the psychotherapy of R.A. and the role of tape recordings, of copies in writing and the therapeutic diary in Schmidgen (1997: 91–97).
**77** "Nichts: kontextfreie Hölle."
**78** "Der Anblick der Apparate beruhigt mich."
**79** "Sehr schönes Gerät, könnte für meinen Geschmack noch futuristischer sein."
**80** "So bahnbrechend waren Novalis' naturwissenschaftliche Entdeckungen dann ja auch wieder nicht."

guage becomes a *Filmriss*, a broken film, a blackout.[81] On the one hand, by emphasizing the "nothing" beyond the aphasic experience, Herrndorf's text can not only be read in the traditions of autobiographical or autopathographical writing, but also has to be seen in the light of "autothanatography," as an aporetic term for a genre which focuses on the writing of one's own death.[82] On the other hand, by citing common genre traditions and classical topoi, confronting them with the "contextless hell" and replacing them with observations of and by media and machines, Herrndorf writes a pathography of the second order.

## 4 "EVERYTHING EVERYTHING OVER – Theory of everything not in sight"[83]

Inside the "Aufschreibesystem" *Arbeit und Struktur*, "madness" does not give privileged access to disruption as cognitive category. It does not involve the potential of innovation. And for Herrndorf, there is nothing to be found behind unconscious language, either: no Jesus, no experience of transcendence, only Nothing. Even when he, by taking notes of the epileptic seizure, gets hold of the English text that he mysteriously hears in rhythm and melody during each seizure, he is disappointed by the lines from the famous Rolling Stones song: "I see a red door and I want it painted black. Nicht ganz so interessant, wie ich gedacht hatte." ["Not quite as interesting as I thought."] (311) Nevertheless, it is written down – the poietic force of disruption writes itself without requiring any cognition, lurking behind it and only coming to light by way of the disruption. Within the process-based protocol of the blog, the borders between the poem and the aphasic experience are increasingly blurred, and the search for words to describe the wordless becomes its own poetic device that stands for itself.

Bodily experiences become possible not when blackouts set in, but only by parallel medial experience from the start. With the beginning of the illness the computer fails, and the first experience can only be recalled as if through the TV's light. However, *Arbeit und Struktur* is by no means primarily a critique of

**81** Gertrud Koch has shown, for example, that film has a wholly different relationship to death and dying than that of writing, but also than that of photography, since, among other things, it's capable of showing immobility in the medium of movement, see Koch (2008).

**82** A discussion of the notion in a very broad sense ("every autobiography, we might say, is also an autothanatography," because death can't be avoided), see Miller (1994: 12). For a more specific understanding in the tradition of Jacques Derrida and above all Maurice Blanchot, see Secomb (2002).

**83** "ALLES ALLES ZU ENDE – Weltformel nicht in Sicht" (136).

media; it is about placing physical experiences into mediated experiences, which can be trusted more than the fragile body. For it is through them that a discourse system writes itself in the first place, and possibly writes itself on through others.

The blog ends with the authorial note of the death of the author. The book concludes with an epilogue by Kathrin Passig and Marcus Gärtner. The external narrator who first appeared at the beginning of the blog during the psychotic event, thus interferes with the autobiographical records. On the last pages, as the entries become sparse and there are fewer and fewer words, he twice writes, in the past tense and from a post-death perspective of a place, "there, where I died"[84] (421, 432). Thus, the discourse system *Arbeit und Struktur* writes itself beyond death, by honoring what was programmatically promised: that one cannot come to grips with life other than in the form of a novel, and Herrndorf himself, therefore, becomes a character whose death is predicted, written down and, through this action, marked as having taken place by a narrator. This is how Herrndorf succeeds in writing about speechless states in language – and about his own death, as it occurred.

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**84** "dort, wo ich starb."

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# IV Power

Tobias Nanz

# The Red Telephone

## A Hybrid Object of the Cold War

## 1

One wrong word, a moment of inattention or a technical malfunction could have unthinkable consequences. At stake is nothing less than the complete devastation of the Soviet Union and the United States. The interpreter-translator and first-person narrator of the short story "Abraham '59 – A Nuclear Fantasy" (Aiken 1959: 18 – 24) is sitting with the American President in a room in the basement of the White House and has just been informed of a dramatic situation. A bomber squadron of the US Air Force has not returned from a routine flight and – now beyond the reach of American fighter-interceptors –, acting on its own authority, has announced a nuclear attack on Moscow in order to force the US leadership to go to war against the Soviet Union. But the President has no intention of giving in to the extortion. He wants to contact Nikita Khrushchev "via transatlantic telephone" (Aiken 1959: 23) and, if the Soviet defense cannot stop the attack, offer New York as a compensatory sacrifice, in accordance with the biblical formula, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." The American ambassador in Moscow and the Soviet ambassador to the UN in New York have now been brought into a conference call on the red telephone. According to the plan, if the connection to Moscow is severed by the detonation of the atomic bombs, the President would then order the bombing of New York, which in turn could be verified by the disruption of the telephone connection. The destruction of their own city would provide credible proof that the US attack on Moscow was an accident, instigated by pilots who are clearly mentally disturbed, from whom one would have in fact expected "fanatic devotion to their superiors" (Aiken 1959: 20).

The situation facing the American Commander-in-Chief can be described using ideas from game-theory dating from that period, which were further developed by specific think tanks in order to be applied to crisis situations in the Cold War. The narrator of the short story refers in his recollections to the "new-model theorists of Cold War" (Aiken 1959: 18), who had developed a series of formulas

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which could be used to determine the outcome of possible military conflicts. The possible moves which the President considers and presents to his interpreter concern the steps to be taken after the bombing of Moscow: were the American Government not to respond at all, then a comprehensive Soviet retaliation would be likely. Alternatively, out of necessity, the American military could provide flanking support for the rogue bomber squadron and undertake an all-out attack, deploying all forces. How would the Soviet leadership react? Since, in the case of a US first strike, they would have sufficient potential for a counter-attack, there would be a strong likelihood that the Soviet leadership could order and carry out a comprehensive retaliation. "As near as we can figure it," says the President, concluding his first thoughts on the matter, "the odds are not favorable in either case" (Aiken 1959: 22). In both cases, the obliteration of the United States would be possible and the fate of the country would hang in the balance.

The President's strategy is to carry out a unilateral and unconditional move (Dixit and Nalebuff 1991: 119 – 141): through his declaration to order the destruction of New York should Moscow be bombed, he seeks to restore credibility and to prevent a concurrent move or a counter-strike by the Soviet military. A prerequisite for this is, on the one hand, the cooperation between the two leaders, which in the short story takes the form of the announced negotiations via telephone. The telephone also constitutes the basis of the trust that needs to be restored, since the destruction of New York can be transmitted in real time thanks to the transatlantic telephone connection. On the other hand, the destruction of New York must not be seen as an aggressive act on the part of the Soviet Union, since otherwise the strategy of tit-for-tat could lead to a spiral of violence in which the American President would see himself forced to carry out a retaliatory attack, which in turn would provoke the Soviet side to launch a further attack. This series of strikes and counter-strikes, of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" – precisely, tit-for-tat – , could be pursued indefinitely, ultimately leading to the complete destruction of both countries. By deciding in favor of the obliteration of New York, the President opts for an unconditional move, which leaves no room for misunderstanding and establishes credibility.[1]

The American President now plans to telephone his Soviet colleague to explain the situation to him, to explain his intentions and the strategy for preventing a nuclear war. Hence the warning to the interpreter: there can be no translation errors and he must choose his words precisely.

1 On the following reflections from game theory see Dixit and Nalebuff (Dixit and Nalebuff 1991: 109 – 113, 119 – 141).

In "Abraham '59," three factors are mentioned that appear important for coping with a crisis and averting a disaster on an unprecedented scale during the Cold War. First, in a situation such as this where time is a critical factor – the bombers need four hours to reach Moscow – the medium and technology of the telephone is an indispensable prerequisite to being able to negotiate a strategy at all. The classic diplomatic path during the Cold War, which would have involved an exchange of letters and telegrams between the Embassies in the respective capitals (Berridge 2005: 97), is clearly too time-consuming as a response to the crisis.

Secondly, the American President is depicted as an actor who exhibits his authority and his composure through strategic thinking. The reader of the short story is not privy to his negotiations with the Soviet side; rather, one witnesses solely the strategic considerations derived from game theory that guide the dialogue. The telephone with the direct line to Moscow is rather peripheral in the story, since the focus is plainly on the deliberations and the way they unfold. What is being deployed here is the "old figure of the master political leader," as Jacques Derrida once remarked, a figure that has a rather secondary "relationship with the machine." The relationship with technical media is mediated by the "secretary-slave" who is able to observe the master "absorbed in thought" (Derrida 2005: 29–30). The President, who has consulted his advisors, is established in the literary text as an authority figure, independently able to weigh up the pros and cons of a decision and think it through to the end. A "power of symbolization" (Legendre 2001: 41) is constructed that validates the elements and filiations of society, and ultimately conveys the impression that, in a crisis situation, the institutions do indeed function and the best possible decisions are made, even though these decisions may have disastrous consequences, as in "Abraham '59." Here literature is contributing to the construction of the political imaginary in a crisis situation.

Thirdly, the story demonstrates the dependence of the President not only on a technical medium, but also on an human actor. The role of the interpreter is not restricted to that of a figure on whom the President tries out his strategy; the interpreter is also the third party without whom the negotiations could not come about at all.[2] That the American head of state exhorts the interpreter to choose his words as precisely as possible not only indicates how tense the situation is, but also points to the threatened loss of the President's authority due to his linguistic incompetence. This may be what the "dialectic of human power" consists in: from the moment a holder of power consults an advisor or requires

**2** See Serres on the function of the third (Serres 1982).

an interpreter, his direct exercise of power is "subjected to indirect influences" (Schmitt 2008: 21). The President's discourse is situated in the midst of a larger discourse on authority that examines the roles, as well as the legitimacy, of the speakers, since the interpreter is not subject to democratic election.

All these deliberations and questions have a common centre that is introduced rather indirectly in the story and then barely mentioned further; namely the "transatlantic telephone" with the "extension phone" for the interpreter, which in the course of the discussions is integrated into a larger telephone network. In the transatlantic telephone several discourses are bundled together that are able to shed light on crisis management strategies during the Cold War and provide us with knowledge concerning the fear of a possible nuclear war – discourses in which fiction and facts intermingle. In "Abraham '59" what is beginning to take shape is what would later become famous as the 'red telephone,' an object in which a number of epistemological questions come together: how is the political imaginary generated in times of crisis and what role is assigned to human and non-human actors in this process?

## 2

The nuclear fantasy in question was published in *Dissent Magazine*, a periodical that adopted a critical position on McCarthyism in America in the 1950s. The supposed author, a certain F.B. Aiken, is described as an "industrial consultant and one of the founders of control system analysis" (N.N. 1959: 24). Thus, one might view the story as input from an expert who, in the context of fiction, is taking a position on what could happen if, due to a psychological disturbance, automated processes involving non-human and human actors within the military deterrence and defense system do not function according to plan. In all likelihood, the author was also not unfamiliar with issues related to speech/orality and writing: if "F.B. Aiken" is pronounced in different ways in English, it can sound like F. Bacon, that is, like Francis Bacon. This *différance* points to the actual author of the story, the American professor of political science Harvey Wheeler (Ruddick 2012: 164), who was a great proponent of the early modern English philosopher and politician, considered to be the precursor of empiricism. Wheeler's word play can also be read as a commentary on Ferdinand de Saussure's reflections on articulated sounds being closer to the "truth" (Saussure 2011), and places the President in a phonocentric and logocentric light (Derrida 1976: 10 – 12), where the voice carries more weight in negotiations and is supposedly closer to thought processes and the truth.

At the same time, however, a deconstructive *pointe* is seemingly being made: the precision in simultaneous interpreting, which the President in Wheeler's story is calling for, proves to be a difficult undertaking. Is it really that easy to assign clear meaning(s) amidst all the signal-noise of interpreting and the telephone line? Would not a written message be a much more precise form of communication? Along with the book *Red Alert* by Peter George, published in 1958, the story "Abraham '59," written in 1956 (Ruddick 2012: 163), is one of the earliest texts in which the 'red telephone' makes its appearance as a *dispositif* (Foucault 2001a: 298–304) [an apparatus] and object of knowledge.

The red telephone is an object that since the 1950s and 1960s has become known to an ever-larger public in the United States and Western Europe. The model for it is doubtless the radio-telephone link between Washington and London that was set up under the strictest secrecy during the Second World War and first used in 1943. A sophisticated encryption system meant that, for the first time, these transatlantic radio-telephone calls could not be intercepted (Hodges 2012: 247–248). Rooms full of technology and countless phonograph records, which had to be synchronized for encoding and decoding at both ends, were shipped from America to Britain. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill made extensive use of this voice communication to coordinate military operations and to cultivate the alliance. The 'red telephone,' which began to take shape during the Cold War, has a further peculiarity: it is not merely a material object that can be used for telephone calls in the event of a crisis, it is rather a hybrid object (Latour 1993: 10) in which materiality and factuality are intermingled with stories and fictions.

It is a (technical)-communicational apparatus (dispositif) that facilitates an analysis of the theatrical strategies the decision-makers devise to carry out their actions. At the same time, it facilitates an examination of technical aspects such as the susceptibility to disruption of the transmission lines and the technical apparatuses, as well as the question of the distinction between a message and signal-noise. It is part of an actor-network in which fictional stories about possible crises are as significant as the 'hotline' itself, which was set up as a teletype connection in Washington and Moscow after the Cuban missile crisis. While the 'red telephone' never actually existed *in reality*, it nonetheless circulated as fiction in the cultural, social, and political discourses of the Cold War, as is testified to by films and books, anxieties and fears, and the ways that political actions are staged.

In other words it can be said that, when it first appeared, the 'red telephone' was somewhat amorphous and rather insignificant. For the constitution of the notorious Cold War apparatus, an increase in the production of signs was required, along with an increase in symbolic attributions, narrative strategies,

and rhetorical figures. In turn, as a discursive object, the 'red telephone' can provide us with specific knowledge about its time. Any knowledge or order of knowledge privileges and produces specific forms of representation (Vogl 1999: 13) that can take on material form in an object such as the 'red telephone.' It is traversed by and formed out of discourses and was a non-human actor in fictional crises, while the operations of the actual teletype connections mostly faded into obscurity in real crises. The 'red telephone' provides us with answers to questions concerning the role assigned to technical media in a crisis situation, and how politicians want to be portrayed in office.

## 3

Three years after the release of "Abraham '59" – and coinciding with the Cuban missile crisis – Harvey Wheeler, together with the political scientist Eugene Burdick, published the novel *Fail-Safe*. The affinity between the two texts is unmistakable: in *Fail-Safe* a malfunction in the system also triggers a US attack on the Soviet Union, again unsought by the political or military leadership. The President is unable to stop the bombers and therefore contacts Khrushchev by telephone. This time, however, the disorder is not psychological, but technical: the attack is not caused by a deranged flight crew, but rather by a technical defect at the Strategic Air Command in Omaha. In both texts, nuclear war is prevented in accordance with the Old Testament principle of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." The "conference line" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 189, 213, 257, 275) between the two state leaders is supplemented by dedicated lines to the ambassadors in New York and Moscow; when the "shriek of the melting telephone" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 262) indicates the atomic destruction of the Soviet capital, an aircraft of the US Air Force bombs New York as a self-imposed retaliatory strike, and the obliteration of the city is verified by a further telephonic "shriek." In the short story, Abraham's sacrifice is presented as a thought-experiment on the part of the President prior to the activation of the 'red telephone'; in *Fail-Safe* it becomes a proposal that is finally enacted through the destruction of both cities.

In several chapters of *Fail-Safe* the "conference line" occupies center stage, as the two leaders seek to de-escalate the crisis. In the novel, the term "red telephone" or "red phone" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 56, 129, 187) is reserved for the apparatuses that, in urgent cases, provide the connection between the President's bunker and Strategic Air Command in Omaha or the Pentagon, whereas the dedicated line to Moscow is not yet assigned any specific color, with the designations "conference line" and "hot wire" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 129)

highlighting its mediating function. Buck, the President's interpreter, provides the translations via an extension telephone while the Soviet interpreter remains in the background. After providing his translations, Buck occasionally senses "a long moment of tension," which might be an expression of the "wills of two men," whose "strength poured through the line" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 190). The pauses in the dialogue and the resulting strained silence are agonizing – "it was physically unpleasant" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 194) – and experienced as a "test of will" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 193), but the pauses also take on a strategic value when Buck can listen in to the background discussions in the Soviet operations center: "Buck could pick up only a few of the words. He quickly wrote a sentence on a pad and turned it to the President. It said, 'Someone is trying to persuade him that it is a trick, arguing for 'strike-back in full power' or something close to that'" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 195).

At one point the President deliberately speaks too quietly, in order to play for time by using Buck's request for him to repeat what he said and to allow Khrushchev's temper to cool off (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 196); at a further point in the exchange, Buck gives the President a sign that Khrushchev feels cornered and indicates that the President is not allowed to ask any more questions – "From a long distance came the single word, "No. [...] Khrushchev had given everything" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 221). Or alternatively, just the right translation has to be found, one that will have a de-escalating effect – how should one formulate in Russian the President's question "Why did you not launch an offensive?" As Buck realizes, "offensive" can have multiple meanings in Russian, for example, "masculinity" and "potency" as well as "challenge." He opts for a reformulation of the question: "Why did you not defend yourself by counterattacking?" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 215), thus providing a translation that has a de-escalating effect in the chain of signifiers. Khrushchev's voice reveals his determination, which Buck registers in the President's notebook with the words "Finality. Tone heavy, final. K. has decided," or even "rage" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 260). Finally, after the President has put forward his proposal to sacrifice New York, both sides fall into silence: "Then there was a deep silence. Suddenly, like a mechanical mockery, there was a flare-up of static on the line. It sounded like some macabre laugh, something torn from the soul of the mechanical system" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 262). The flare-up of static from the vaporized telephone, which indicates the destruction of Moscow, has "an animal-like quality [...]. The screech rose sharply, lasted perhaps five seconds, and then was followed by an abrupt silence" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 279).

The 'red telephone' is constituted in the course of a serious crisis and opens up an arena in which the technical aspects such as telephone lines, extensions,

microphones, or static interference and other forms of signal noise come together with human actors, and dramatic storylines ensue. The drama is characterized in particular by the fact that the 'red telephone' reverses a classic feature of media theory. As Marshall McLuhan observed, media are fundamentally characterized by the fact that they disguise their operations, become imperceptible, and draw attention to themselves and their own agency only when they malfunction (McLuhan 2001; Vogl 2007). With the 'red telephone,' however, disruption seems to be the standard case: breaks in conversational exchanges that seem infinitely long, telephone lines that transmit not just signal noise but apparently also the will or the strength of the negotiating parties, the microphone in the mouthpiece that functions inadvertently as a tool of espionage, or transmitting the noise made by the vaporized telephone when the atomic bomb is dropped – all these technical disruptions, strategies, and (catastrophic) events are a constant reference to the material basis of the dedicated line between Washington and Moscow. Amongst the fictional and poetological aspects of the 'red telephone' is the fact that there is no attempt to camouflage its technical operations; on the contrary, instances of disruption are actively disclosed. This is the condition of possibility of the negotiations and at no point is it concealed that the technical basis of the discussions is highly unstable. The crisis-laden storyline thus acquires additional drama and an arena is opened up in which the likelihood of rectifying disruptions is rather low.

This constellation of technical media is supplemented by human actors whose rhetorical strategies and emotional outbursts further enrich the fictional dimension of the 'red telephone.' Thus, the functions of the body politic seem to be reversed and to have taken on new roles as a result of the crisis-ridden state of emergency. This is confirmed by the President's request at the beginning of the discussions to use only one interpreter, so as not to waste precious time on intricacies. Although not equipped with the necessary credentials, Buck empowers himself to play the role of ambassador by modifying the words of his superiors in order to de-escalate the situation. It may be due to this role reversal that the leaders at each end of the telephone line place such emphasis on their sovereignty as decision makers. Thus, Buck notices wrangling going on in the background in the Soviet operations center, following which Khrushchev feels compelled to assert his authority with the statement "I will make my own decisions" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 195). The American President also occasionally has to assert his identity as commander: "I have already given that order" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 194), he says into the 'red telephone,' affirming that he has ordered the shooting down of the American bombers.

In addition to this threat of dispersal on the level of command, the boundary between human and technical actors becomes permeable. The telephone line ap-

pears to mock the President and to burst into macabre laughter when he relates his plan for the destruction of New York, prompting the narrator to conjecture on the presence of a soul in the technical system. The 'red telephone' thus proves to be an affect-laden technical apparatus (dispositif), a locus that rules out neutrality, where emotions are generated and exchanged.

And finally, in the process of interpreting, the question of message versus noise arises repeatedly, and which in the first instance is a question concerning channel noise in a communicational apparatus. In his mathematical information theory, Claude Shannon points out that a disruption in the communication channel is to be viewed as a message source on par with a message transmitter (Shannon and Weaver 1971: 3 – 8; Schüttpelz 2003: 16 – 17). If the signals from the message source are strong enough to be distinguished from the signal noise, the message can be decoded by a receiver. This is relevant in this instance, since Khrushchev's subdued as well as his decidedly strident, apocalyptic remarks are audible. The same is also true for "static interference" of human origin, however. Buck has to interpret the linguistic signs and at the same time decide whether the disruptive background noises at the Soviet end of the line are relevant messages (Luhmann 1990). The signal-to-noise ratio (Kittler 2013, for a reprint of this article see the "archive" in this volume) is therefore a problem on both the technical and the physiological level, and requires of Buck a feat of translation that goes well beyond mere translation from Russian into English. He cannot afford to wait for the encrypted messages to come to an end, since that could mean nuclear war, but after a phase of listening to what has been said he has to intervene, translate, and interpret in order to prevent the situation from escalating.[3] During the preliminary briefing, the President stipulates that Buck should provide a translation that is "literally perfect," that it should convey "every emphasis I intend" (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 129), but, in addition to serving as an extension of the body politic, simultaneous interpreting is also ultimately about listening in to Khrushchev's distinctly audible emotions and deciding how to interpret them.

As it is presented and takes shape in *Fail-Safe*, several discursive lines traverse the 'red telephone.' It is a medium that, far from attempting to conceal its susceptibility to disruption, actually foregrounds it. First of all, it is the locus of dramatic actions that raise questions regarding the sovereign ruler who communicates by telephone, encompassing not only specific constellations of personnel but also involving specific technical actors. The President's dis-

**3** For the distinction between the activities of a doctor and an ambassadorial vice-consul read Foucault (Foucault 2001b: 559).

course is equally dependent on his interpreter and the media technology that transforms sound into signals and mixes it with the noise and static of the communication channels. This also shows that knowledge of game theory, of military strategies, and mathematical information theory is embedded in the technical apparatus (dispositif) as such, thus linking it with scientific discourses of the time. The 'red telephone' is thus marked as an object of knowledge that can provide insight into a Cold War culture in which science and fiction have an equal impact.

## 4

Sidney Hook, Professor of Philosophy at New York University, was outraged. He vented his annoyance in the slim volume *The Fail-Safe Fallacy*, in which he endeavors to refute central facets of Burdick's and Wheeler's bestseller. His criticism mainly targets three aspects. First, he accuses the authors of misleadingly representing the American defense system, pointing out that there are security measures in place to deal with human failure as well as technical malfunctions. He thus finds it scandalous that *Fail-Safe* creates the impression that a nuclear war triggered by a technical defect is not only possible but unavoidable (Hook 1963a: 15). Human failures are more likely in this respect but could not lead to war, he maintains, because a single person acting alone never has access to nuclear weapons. In addition, the military personnel in question are screened for mental balance and subjected to intelligence tests carried out by machines (!) (Hook 1963a: 15 – 16).

Hook's second criticism is that the government's civilian experts in *Fail-Safe* are, as he sees it, cast in entirely the wrong light. Representatives of the Rand Corporation, such as Herman Kahn (who made it possible to utilize mathematical models such as the Nash equilibrium in the development of political strategies [Pias 2009]), and is represented in the novel by the fictional character Groteschele, are presented as sadistic, cold, calculating scientists who actually hankered for a nuclear war in order to be able to test their hypotheses. According to Hook, it was precisely the members of the think tanks who, thanks to their deliberations, were the ones who reduced the risk of accidental nuclear war (Hook 1963a: 19 – 23). Lastly, the New York philosopher is irritated by what he sees as the idealization of Khrushchev, who according to Hook is presented as "a philosopher pledged to reasonable compromise" (Hook 1963a: 24). The authors are accused of failing to understand both Khrushchev and the underlying political system; making the Communist "sound like a noble Roman senator" (Hook 1963a: 26), as Hook puts it, is absolutely beyond the pale. Hook's critique

is of particular interest at those points where the question arises concerning the influence the novel could have on its readers.

> There was a time when the themes of science fiction in novel and cinema were pure fantasies. Today a new genre has developed that prides itself on its concern with important and grim truth underlying the fictional detail. This pretension exacts a correspondingly great intellectual and moral responsibility to avoid fomenting hysteria. Intelligent fear may be a preface to appropriate action, but hysterical fear blinds one to alternatives. It would be commonly admitted that it is cruel to write a piece of science fiction or produce a film that, by distorting the facts, scares people witless about the incidence of some dread disease, thus making them gullible and receptive to fraudulent claims of cure. It is far worse to exaggerate the risks involved in the defense of freedom to a degree that dwarfs, in the minds of readers and viewers, the much greater and more immediate danger confronting a free and peaceful world. This is the great offense of the authors of *Fail-Safe* (Hook 1963a: 32).

Hook's main worry revolves around the possibility that the readers of *Fail-Safe* could find the plot of the novel credible. He fears that a work of science fiction could be utilized politically (Hook entitled a shorter review of the novel "The Politics of Science Fiction" [Hook 1963b: 82–88]) and jeopardize the security of the United States by conjuring up an overstated danger. "The authors," write Burdick and Wheeler in their preface, "have not had access to classified information but have taken some liberties with what has been declassified." But the entanglements of fact and fiction do not end there:

> Thus the element in our story which seems most fictional – the story's central problem and its solution – is in fact the most real part. [...] The accident may not occur in the way we describe but the laws of probability assure us that ultimately it will occur. (Burdick and Wheeler 1999: 7–8)

This compositional procedure is the main target of Hook's critique: Burdick and Wheeler composed the story so skillfully, drawing on technical details and technical knowledge, that citizens might be thrown into a state of panic that could be channeled into political pressure, which in turn could lead to disarmament and thus a weakening of America's defense capability. In Hook's view, science fiction as exemplified by *Fail-Safe* thus becomes a danger to national security.

Some twenty years later, Jacques Derrida also described the relationship between an imaginary nuclear war, that is, between the "fabulous textuality" that deals with nuclear war, and the "reality of the nuclear age" (Derrida 2007: 394) that Western society was and is living through. This reality:

> is constructed by a fable, on the basis of an event that has never happened [...]. [It is] an invention because it depends upon new technical mechanisms, to be sure, but an invention also because it does not exist and especially because, at whatever point it should come into existence, it would be a grand premiere appearance. (Derrida 2007: 394)

For Derrida nuclear war is "fabulous" to the extent that it only arises and exists in the imagination – in texts, in myths, in rhetorical figures, in images or in scientific calculations. While the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to the classical, conventional form of war, they did not trigger a nuclear war. The imaginary nuclear war has an effect on technical developments, on diplomatic and military strategies, on policy decisions, as well as cultural and civilizational formations. The fear of a fictitious event propels an insane arms race (Derrida 2007: 394–395). In his critique of *Fail-Safe*, Hook is dealing with just one constituent of the comprehensive textuality that characterized the Cold War era, and he is less concerned about the arms race than about the spread of hysteria in society, which could weaken public acceptance of the system of military deterrence. Fictions – on this point, Hook and Derrida are in agreement – can fabricate facts.

## 5

The 'red telephone' is one component of these Cold War fictions that left their mark on everyday reality. Conceived as a direct telephone link between Moscow and Washington, it made its way from literature and film into everyday culture and 'melded' with the hotline that was set up in 1963. The 'red telephone' thus finds its place at the interface between fact and fiction. For, on the one hand, it is a literary and filmic invention that adds drama to critical moments in storylines, and charges them with emotion. In addition to *Fail-Safe*, one should mention in this regard Peter George's novel, *Red Alert*, published in 1958, which assigns a central role to the 'red telephone.' Also pertinent are Sidney Lumet's film version of *Fail-Safe* and Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, the former a political thriller, the latter a satire based on George's novel. On the other hand, an actual teletype link was indeed set up between Moscow and Washington, precisely in order to avoid the emotions that in discussions via telephone could lead to an escalation of the situation. A considered decision was made to dispense with a telephone connection so as to be able to examine an incoming message carefully, and to discuss and compose a precise answer. Walt Rostow, National Security Advisor to the American government at the time, highlighted this in an internal memorandum after the hotline was first

used during the Six-Day War in 1967, closing with the words: "a message in writing is better than one spoken" (Rostow 1967: Doc 13).[4] The hotline is a temporizing device that allows one to buy time in a crisis.

In 1931, the psycho-technician Franziska Baumgarten wrote a brief and fascinating article entitled "Psychology of Telephoning." She came to the conclusion that telephoning is both destructive and constructive. On the one hand, it can have a damaging effect on relationships: since one's counterpart is not visually present, telephoning encourages "a lack of emotional restraint." One can let oneself go, present oneself as more intrepid than one is, ignore facts or even tell untruths; in this regard, the telephone is a medium of escalation. On the other hand, the lack of visual interaction – and thus non-verbal communication – can be an advantage, conducive to de-escalation: it can make for an objectivity that can be helpful when talking to people:

> who are insufferable when dealing with them in person [...]. The telephone not only provides us with a technical means of human communication but also makes it possible at a given moment to block out what we find objectionable about a person or persons and to maintain dispassionate relationships with those who are useful to us but otherwise disagreeable. (Baumgarten 1989 [1931]: 188–189)

This tension between escalation and de-escalation is a key circumstance that shapes the hybrid object 'red telephone' and defines its dramatic aspect. It is actively involved in a double crisis: first, there is the level of the political crisis that threatens to end in disaster, and where the 'red telephone' offers the last chance for a solution to be found. If the negotiations via the 'red telephone' should fail, then war appears inevitable, since there is no other diplomatic channel – whether telephonic or telegraphic – that stands above this privileged connection. Moreover, the telephone itself is marked by technical and linguistic disruptions, and is thus implicated in minor crisis situations, consequently redoubling the intensity of the crisis-laden events proper. It is this that constitutes the hybridity of the apparatus, of the dispositif: stories that, as a disruptive incident unfolds, are able to furnish us with knowledge of the respective operational chains and the conduct of the actors involved, stories which then progressively 'attach' themselves to the object 'telephone' and fashion it into the legendary apparatus that made its way into Western popular culture – and which then, after the Cold War, lapsed into increasing obscurity.

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Lars Koch

# Christoph Schlingensief's Image Disruption Machine

It is simply not possible to provide a single, uniform categorization of Christoph Schlingensief's art. It ranges from films made for the cinema and works for television, to opera productions, theater productions at the Berlin Volksbühne and other theaters in Germany and around the world. Not for nothing is Schlingensief described as a "total artist" [*Gesamtkünstler*] (Jank and Kovacs 2011). A text on Schlingensief in an anthology devoted to "Disruption in the Arts" is justified, however, by a single, specific aspect of his *oeuvre*, an aspect that bestows continuity on all of his work and identifies him as a paradigmatic representative of an aesthetics of disruption.[1] This aspect concerns his repeated efforts to undermine the expectations of his audience by creating moments of irritation and confusion, as well as semantic, narrative, and aesthetic breaks. Schlingensief strives for an art form that does not rest content with sleek, smooth meaning, an art form that attacks all forms of closure – of the world, of the subject, of meaning – accentuating instead the provisional character and openness of art and life.

This stance of refusing closure, which is simultaneously the motivation and result of his aesthetics of disruption, cannot be pinned down (solely) on the basis of content. Rather, as a formal program of a meta-art, it addresses the audience in the mode of a calculated uncertainty regarding the status and boundaries of fiction and reality in the audience's own practices of reception and reflection. The substantial thrust of Schlingensief's action art "no longer consists in a demand for changing the world, expressed in the form of social provocation, but rather in the production of events, exceptions and moments of deviation" (Lehmann 2006: 105),[2] which first and foremost create a space of reflection on the relationship between the symbolic order, semiotic practices, and "reality." In other words, Schlingensief's "total art" is concerned above all with the quasi-transcendental question of under what conditions it is possible to form an idea of the society and the world in which we live.

**1** Originally published in German (Koch 2014) and translated into English by Gregory Sims. On the concept of an "aesthetics of disruption," see the contribution by Lars Koch and Tobias Nanz in this volume.

**2** Translation slightly modified.

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Theater critics repeatedly described Schlingensief as an *agent provocateur,*[3] a term that is accurate and inaccurate at the same time – inaccurate because Schlingensief's art could never be reduced to the gesture often attributed to him, namely spectacular provocation for its own sake; accurate, because Schlingensief always adhered to Heiner Müller's *aperçu* that "theaters that no longer manage to provoke the question 'WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON HERE?' are closed down, and rightly so"[4] (Müller 1996). The moment of provocation is not an end in itself for Schlingensief, but rather a perceptual and political instrument. In this sense, his aesthetics of disruption is an epistemological mode of action that exposes latent power constellations as well as the socially and economically permeated configurations of subjectivity, by provoking communicative and affective reactions that derail a society's routines of discursive normalization.

It is precisely these forms of discursive normalization in the mode of scandalization that Schlingensief has in mind when he points out: "It's always others who create the scandal."[5] (Schlingensief in Bierbichler et al. 1998: 19) Schlingensief interprets the commotion in the media regarding "scandals" as an attempt at communicative repair work that becomes necessary when – and because – art unsettles the cultural schemata of everyday "world-making" (Goodman 1978) and thus calls into question things that are considered normatively and politically self-evident:

> Provocateur, *enfant terrible*, the terms don't interest me. At the very most, I provoke myself. [...] This is the trick of System 1, to immediately fix on something that enables a comforting classification: Aha, a provocateur, I understand. Aha, a nutcase, now I understand even better. [...] From that point on, everything can simply go on as before.[6] (Schlingensief 1998: 17)

To use Niklas Luhmann's terminology, Schlingensief perfected an aesthetic approach that undermines the established codes and spatial "situatedness" of

**3** For example by Irmgard Schmidmaier in the newspaper article *Nazi-Hamlet: Schlingensiefs Aktionismus provoziert Zürich* (Schmidmaier: 2001).

**4** "Theater, denen es nicht mehr gelingt, die Frage WAS SOLL DAS zu provozieren, werden mit Recht geschlossen."

**5** "Den Skandal erzeugen immer die anderen."

**6** "Provokateur, enfant terrible, die Begriffe interessieren mich nicht. Es ist doch höchstens so, daß ich mich selber provoziere. Aber ich freue mich, wenn funktionalisierte Humanisten verstrickt werden. Vielleicht merken einige, wie lächerlich es ist, immer den Konsens zu suchen. [...] Das ist der Trick von System 1, sofort etwas festzumachen, das beruhigende Einordnung ermöglicht: Aha, ein Provokateur, verstehe. Aha, ein Spinner, verstehe noch mehr. [...] Von da an kann alles so weiterlaufen wie bisher."

communication, thereby shifting the focus of attention onto the wealth of preconditions for these codes and situations.[7] He thus provokes "collapses of meaning" (Stäheli 2000) in which the eminently political procedures of a society's self-description – which otherwise remain suppressed below the collective perceptual and discursive threshold – can then become the object of reflection and critique (see Luhmann 1998: 867).

## 1 Aspects of an aesthetics of disruption

To gain a more accurate idea of Schlingensief's disruptive work, it may be helpful to situate his artistic actions within the constellation of contemporary postdramatic theater. As Hans-Thies Lehmann points out, theater today "does not become political[ly] [effective] through direct thematization of the political, but rather through the implicit content and critical value of its *mode of representation*"[8] (Lehmann 2006: 178). Contemporary theater is

> a practice in and with signifying material that does not create orders of power, but rather introduces chaos and novelty into orderly and ordering perception. Theater can be political by opening up the logocentric procedure – in which identification is paramount – in favor of a practice that does not fear the suspension and interruption of the designating function.[9] (Lehmann 2006: 178)

The audience is thus meant to understand that all formations of form are at one and the same time evident *and* contingent, and that any choice – "[since] every use of form has an effect of rendering [certain things] invisible"[10] (Luhmann 2008: 301) – of formations of form rules out other possible choices. In this sense, "the politics of theater is a *politics of perception*."[11] (Lehmann 2006: 185)

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**7** "For Luhmann, the achievement of a work of art consists precisely in the fact that it presents its form as necessary, and at the same time makes [its] contingency manifest [...]." ["Die Leistung eines Kunstwerks besteht für Luhmann genau darin, daß es seine Form als notwendig vorführt und zugleich die Kontingenz erkennen lässt [...]"] (Werber 2008: 467).

**8** "[...] kaum mehr durch die direkte Thematisierung des Politischen [politisch wirksam], sondern durch den impliziten Gehalt seiner Darstellungsweise."

**9** "[...] eine Praxis in und mit signifikantem Material, die nicht Macht-Ordnung schafft, sondern Neues und Chaos in die geordnete, ordnende Wahrnehmung bringt. Als Öffnung des logo-zentrischen Procedere, in dem das Identifizieren überwiegt, zugunsten einer Praxis, die das Aussetzen der Bezeichnungsfunktion, ihre Unterbrechung und Suspendierung nicht fürchtet, kann Theater politisch sein."

**10** "Jeder Formgebrauch hat einen Invisiblisierungseffekt."

**11** "Politik des Theaters ist Wahrnehmungspolitik."

In his actions, performances and stage productions, Schlingensief pursues the "lines of flight" (Deleuze) of just such a disruptive politics of perception.[12] In endeavoring to destabilize modes of perception, he stands in the tradition of the avant-garde, which has always sought to deconstruct a passive immersion in art. Like Brecht or Handke, Schlingensief also strives to create an alienation effect, although it is much more ambivalent and less clearly didactic than was the case in the epic theater.[13] Even when concrete socio-economic and political issues are dealt with in Schlingensief's art, he finds it just as important to involve the audience in a game that, by means of extremely diverse aesthetic strategies, focuses on the procedure of the production and legitimation of societal self-images, a procedure oscillating between transparency and opacity. In order to problematize self-evidence and authenticity, Schlingensief repeatedly creates situations in which the self-evident can become clearly recognizable as a construction. In such constellations, it becomes apparent that the plausibility of the seemingly self-evident is created by the mechanisms that govern perception in media productions. If one wants to describe Schlingensief's disruptive maneuvers more precisely, there are three main significant distinctions which are repeatedly deployed in integrative combinations.

In order to thematize shared conceptions of normality – the constitutive conditions of which generally go unnoticed – Schlingensief works first of all with techniques of cognitive dissonance: he repeatedly builds disruptions or incomprehensibility into his theatrical texts and performances,[14] which as discursive

**12** "After all, people, thoughts and images are all just waiting to be disturbed," ["Die Leute warten doch nur darauf, die Gedanken warten darauf, die Bilder warten darauf, dass sie gestört werden"] (Schlingensief in Kuhlbrodt 2002: 142).

**13** Another genealogical line connects Schlingensief with the shock aesthetics of surrealism. André Breton's statement that the simplest surrealistic act would be to take a revolver and shoot into the crowd corresponds with Schlingensief's repeated calls for the assassination of various politicians (including Helmut Kohl and Jürgen W. Möllemann), which he presented as an empowerment of art, the idea being to recode aesthetic statements politically, in the public's reaction to them.

**14** For example, the recorded aircraft noise used in the post-9/11 piece "Rosebud", which, because of its sheer volume, made the communication on the stage incomprehensible, thus making it palpable that September 11 had created a massive scarcity of discourse in the mode of fear. At the same time, this irruption of turbine noise also makes clear just how much the audience's cognitive associations are determined by images and sounds from the media: "This tonicity was recognized by almost 80% of the audience and condemned as too blatantly obvious. In the course of the premiere, the sound was replaced with the sound of a Cessna. At that point, only 20% of those present recognized the allusion. It was only weeks later, after a fifteen-year-old in the USA had crashed his plane into an office building, that once again 80% of the spectators understood the allusion and felt that the sound was interesting and authentic"

aporia render discernible the principle of representation itself. Schlingensief himself appears on stage as a frame-breaking commentator and acts as a second-order observer, who, often equipped with a megaphone as a medium of disruption,[15] comments on the reactions of the audience to the occurrences on stage, thus initiating a dynamic communication in the form of a feedback loop. Furthermore, the audience of a Schlingensief action must always expect to be subjected to a constant process of sensory overload – Schlingensief works with such a flood of signs, references, and plot elements that one inevitably loses the overview and one's perceptual capacities are stretched to the limit. This involves a permanent sampling of media content, a vortex of pop-cultural and political quotations, their presentation cadenced by disruptions in the representational flow. Schlingensief's "rhythm is derailment" [Rhythmus ist die Entgleisung] (Kohse 2001). He uses the resulting cadence "to create gaps in perception, to produce blank spaces that confuse and unsettle the audiences. By delaying meaning, the text is opened up for a different approach to reception"[16] (Nissen-Rizvani 2011: 178).

A second major strategy of disruption, which supplements the cognitive dissonance, results from the implicit or explicit thematization of the co-presence of actors and spectators, which always plays a role in Schlingensief's performances. Schlingensief works with a complex interplay of distance and proximity, withdrawal and contact, reproduction and *liveness*, which completely dismantles the fourth wall that conventionally structures the theater space. The experimental space of the theater thus becomes a

["Diese Tonizität wurde von fast 80 % der Zuschauer erkannt und als eindeutig verurteilt. Noch während der Premiere wurde das Geräusch gegen das Geräusch einer Cessna ausgetauscht. In dem Moment erkannten es nur noch 20 % der Anwesenden. Erst Wochen später, als ein 15jähriger in den USA mit seinem Flugzeug in ein Bürogebäude krachte, verstanden es wieder 80 % der noch anwesenden Zuschauer und empfanden das Geräusch interessant und aufrichtig"] (Schlingensief 2002: 48 – 49).

**15** The megaphone is thus the medium of a metacommunication, which is not used to convey a message, but rather to eliminate the possibility of an unambiguous, supposedly correct reception.

**16** "[...] um Lücken für die Wahrnehmung zu erzeugen, Leerstellen zu produzieren, die die Rezipienten irritieren. Die Verzögerung des Sinns öffnet den Text für eine andere Rezeptionshaltung."

> social system that is [...] structured by the reciprocal perception of those present [...] and thus, typically oscillates between the acclamation of warmth and proximity on the one hand, and the criticism of confinement and violence on the other.[17] (Baecker 2003: 16)

This gives rise to a communicatively and atmospherically created communality in the form of an event, which as a transient phenomenon initially resists hermeneutic interpretation, and is only retrospectively interpretable as a fissure, disruption, or division: "Art is thus no longer viewed as a hermeneutic undertaking but becomes instead an arena of aesthetic experience that invariably forestalls hermeneutic understanding and enables experiences that initially elude logical categories of thought."[18] (Steiner 2012: 461)

A third aspect, which places Schlingensief in the tradition of Joseph Beuys, the founder of anti-elitist "social sculpture" [soziale Plastik] (Harlan 1986), is the recurring use of amateur actors, some of them with physical and/or mental handicaps. In their supposed otherness, these actors unsettle customary social viewing habits and, through their physical presence and habitual non-conformity, bring out into the open the latent mechanisms of social exclusion, generally concealed by the self-image of an open, democratic society. "Their lack of a guise," writes Catherina Gilles,

> allows them to break into our standardized image of humanity like a piece of reality, a truth, like Lacan's *a*, the small other [...]. This makes a point beyond all theatrical, demonstrative effects and makes the events a touch more unpredictable than is generally the case in the theater.[19] (Gilles 2008: 93)

Thus, it is understandable that Schlingensief's art, as composed as it is, necessarily retains elements of experimentation and improvisation. Even if the public discourse about his work is strongly configured by his personality and, especially during the final creative phase, in the confrontation with anxiety, illness, and death, it becomes a kind of "cross-fade" of social and biographical problems,

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**17** "[...] sozialen System, das [...] durch die wechselseitige Wahrnehmung der Anwesenden strukturiert ist [...] und daher typischerweise zwischen Akklamation von Wärme und Nähe einerseits und Kritik von Beengung und Gewalt andererseits hin und her oszilliert."

**18** "Kunst wird damit nicht mehr als hermeneutische Aufgabe betrachtet, sondern Kunst wird zum Austragungsort eines ästhetischen Erlebnisses, das dem hermeneutischen Verstehen stets zuvorkommt, das Erfahrungen möglich macht, die sich den logischen Denkkategorien zunächst entziehen."

**19** "Das Unverstellte an ihnen lässt sie in unser genormtes Menschenbild hineinbrechen wie ein Stück Realität, eine Wahrheit, Lacans a, das Andere [...]. Das trifft einen Punkt jenseits aller theatralen Vorführungseffekte und macht das Geschehen eine Spur unberechenbarer als im Theater üblich."

Schlingensief's performances are unmistakably decentralized in their organization, perhaps most clearly so in the mid-phase of his career, around the turn of the millennium.[20]

Where the performance takes over public space and extends the circle of possible actors far beyond the readily discernible range of informed participants, an unpredictable dynamic comes into play. This dynamic results in an experimental opening, becoming politically more resourceful thanks to the experimental arrangement, in which, through the conceptual disruption of hegemonic images, zones of spontaneity are created. Schlingensief is well aware that images are "not a window on reality" [kein Fenster zur Wirklichkeit] (Belting 2006: 7), but rather, as a product of a complex chain of signification involving manifold selection processes, they constitute a merely "tendentious version" of reality. Accordingly, Schlingensief describes his art as "an image disruption machine" [Bilderstörungsmaschine]. What he means by this in concrete terms will now be discussed in detail, on the basis of several of his works.

## 2 *Chance 2000* as a code collapse

A spectacular action, with which Schlingensief caused a sensation far beyond the field of artistic discourse, was the founding of the *Chance 2000* political party in March 1998, with which he intended to stand for elections to the German Bundestag the following September. The party's declared goal was to give a voice to "the socially invisible" [den Unsichtbaren]. (Schlingensief and Hegemann 1998: 18) The political initiative was accompanied by a large number of corresponding actions – for example, a shopping expedition together with unemployed and handicapped people in the luxury department store "Kaufhaus des Westens" in Berlin, or an excursion involving group bathing at Helmut Kohl's favorite holiday location, Lake Wolfgang in Austria – which were intended as a critique from different perspectives of the fiction of a fully open, participative German society.

With regard to the question of the aesthetics of disruption, *Chance 2000* is interesting for two reasons. On the one hand, Schlingensief gives the principle of social sculpture a significantly broader basis by radically reinterpreting the

**20** I have in mind above all the actions *My Fat, my Felt, my Hare – 48 Hours* (Kassel 1997), *Passion Impossible – 7 Day Emergency Call for Germany* (Hamburg 1997), Schlingensief's deconstructions of the talk show *Talk 2000* (RTL and Sat1 1997) and *U 3000* (MTV 2000), the founding of the political party *Chance 2000* (1998), the container action *Please Love Austria!* (Vienna 2000) and his staging of *Hamlet* in Zurich (2000).

space of art as a public space of social action, with the intention of disrupting perfect "staged performances" of everyday life and reallocating social roles. By applauding all visitors as they entered and left the *Kaufhaus des Westens*, Schlingensief and his companions were able to revitalize the concept of "breaching experiments" [Krisenexperimente] (Mehan and Wood 1975: 24),[21] which originates from ethnomethodology, "in which a break in reality is generated which forces one to examine self-evident assumptions and perceptions" [22] (Albers 1999).

> While Garfinkel disrupts social order in order to investigate it, and provokes a "breach" in order to examine the hidden "routines of everyday life," Schlingensief's theatrical actions and experiments – aided by his intruding as a dilettante and outsider on a 'perfectly staged event' – consist in breaking open familiar social and medial scenarios, smuggling in the invisible and the non-representable, whatever is held to be other or excluded by the prevailing order.[23] (Albers 1999)

It is no longer a question of sabotaging or setting fire to the department store (as was the case in the days of the Rote Armee Fraktion) – "resistance is over, they have to produce inconsistency, contrariness"[24] (Schlingensief 2000) – but rather a question of rendering visible, of an alienation effect, which functions as an image disruptor.

*Chance 2000* works against the invisibility of so-called "marginal" social groups such as the unemployed and people with disabilities, an invisibility based on insidious mechanisms of selection, and thus promotes a new regime

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**21** "People interact without listing the rules of conduct. Continued reference is made to this knowledge nonetheless. This referencing is not ordinarily available as long as the reality work continues normally. When the reality is disrupted, the interactional activity structuring the reality becomes visible" ["Personen interagieren, ohne die Verhaltensregeln genau zu verzeichnen. Trotzdem wird ständig auf dieses Wissen Bezug genommen. Solange Realitätskonstruktionen normal verlaufen, ist dieses Bezugnehmen üblicherweise nicht statthaft. Sobald die Realität zerbrochen ist, wird das Interaktionshandeln, welches die Realität strukturiert, sichtbar"] (Mehan and Wood 1975: 24).

**22** "[...] bei denen ein Realitätsbruch erzeugt wird, der zur Überprüfung selbstverständlicher Annahmen und Wahrnehmungen zwingt." Thus Irene Albers in her very clever essay, largely ignored by the research on Schlingensief.

**23** "Während Garfinkel die Ordnung stört, um sie zu erforschen, die Krise provoziert, um der verborgenen 'Routine des Alltags' nachzugehen, bestehen Schlingensiefs Theateraktionen und Experimente darin, mit Hilfe der Intrusion als Dilettant und Außenstehender in eine 'perfekte Inszenierung' vertraute soziale und mediale Szenarios [...] aufzubrechen, das jeweils Andere und Ausgegrenzte der Ordnung, das Unsichtbare und Nichtrepräsentierbare einzuschleusen."

**24** "Widerstand ist vorbei, sie müssen Widersprüchlichkeit erzeugen." See the interview with Christoph Schlingensief in the materials accompanying the DVD "Ausländer Raus! Schlingensiefs Container" (*Ausländer raus!* 2000).

of visibility that calls for the articulation of non-hegemonic positions and at the same time attempts to lay bare the power of the social mainstream to muzzle, to render mute. By creating confrontational situations in which the participants (for example, the employees of the security service, who initially look on helplessly at the humorous goings-on at the *Kaufhaus des Westens*) lose their sense of assuredness and effectively fall out of their social role, a space of possible re-negotiations opens up. The disruption resulting from the supposed out-of-placeness of the handicapped people and the unemployed, categorized as "other," suspends the invisibility of the normal.[25] The physical presence of the otherwise marginalized social groups creates a non-discursive fissure in the normality of the capitalist temple of consumption, a fissure that rejects[26] the "hitherto prevailing confines of the visible" [bis dato maßgeblich sichtbar] (Diederichsen 1998: 119).

The second, even more significant function of *Chance 2000* consists in its exploration of the relationship between authenticity and staged performance in the field of politics on different political, social, and aesthetic levels. In a way, the founding of *Chance 2000* is a form-oriented response to the thesis regarding the complete virtualization of reality, transmuted into hyper-reality, which was much discussed in the 1980s and 1990s.[27] Schlingensief reacts to the disappearance of the category of "truth" from political debate by deliberately merging art and politics. In the ensuing uncertainty about the nature of *Chance 2000* – is it art or is it politics?[28] – Schlingensief is aiming to draw attention to

**25** "Due to its lesser significance, the normal eludes representation. It becomes visible either in the abstract forms of mathematical visuality or indistinct symbolism, or even by remaining invisible itself, namely in the staging of what is opposed to it, where the normal then appears as the latter's other." ["Das Normale entzieht sich aufgrund seiner geringen Signifikanz seiner Repräsentation. Sichtbar wird es entweder in den abstrakten Formen mathematischer Visualität bzw. unscharfer Symbolik oder eben, indem es selbst unsichtbar bleibt, nämlich durch Inszenierungen seiner Gegenteile, als deren Anderes das Normale dann erscheinen kann."] (Cuntz and Krause 2012: 197)

**26** Schlingensief's repeatedly criticized collaborations with physically or mentally handicapped people are also to be understood in this sense, namely as an image disruption arising from a kind of social interaction that is often perceived as unsettling. The facial expressions of the handicapped actors, for instance, are particularly important, since they perturb standard viewing habits: the less premeditated play of facial expressions, the fractured staging of unfamiliar affective images, brings the grimace as a borderline case of the semiotization of affects into the foreground. This provokes a disruption of signifying practices in the sense that the hermeneutics of communication – which is still largely verbal – is rendered more complex (see Löffler 2003).

**27** See for example Baudrillard 1993.

**28** *Chance 2000* fulfilled all the formal criteria required of a political party: it had a proper executive committee, a set of policies, etc. (Schlingensief and Hegemann 1998).

the staged character of "real" politics: "We're being perfectly serious. The really frivolous parties are sitting in the Bundestag." [29] (Schlingensief in Albers 1999)

In line with this, in the "election campaign circus," the official founding event of *Chance 2000* in the Berlin Prater, the prevailing thesis was that a totalization of the staging of reality on all levels had taken place and that the staged event could be understood as a problematization of distinction between art and politics. *Chance 2000* is a project that functions as a reflexive staging of – and a staged reflection on – the permanently (unreflected) staged forms of everyday life, of social life and politics. For Jean-Francois Lyotard – whom Schlingensief could have invoked as a philosophical authority – "mise-en-scène [...] is not an "artistic" activity, it is a general process affecting all fields of activity, a profoundly unconscious process of selection, exclusion and effacement." (Lyotard 1978: 56) In order to expose this latent staged character, *Chance 2000* refuses all attempts at categorization, which would inevitably produce a reductive, pigeonholing effect. On the contrary, Schlingensief is concerned with maintaining the tension that results from a constitutive undecidability by making the disruption of order-imposing discursive patterns a paradoxical principle of his political actions: "Theater today is politics. Politics has long been theatrical. And politics is even in the process of becoming better at theater than the theater itself [...] Learning from politics means learning how to stage an event."[30] (Schlingensief 2003)

What is interesting here is that Schlingensief bids farewell to the old position from the sociology of art – manipulative politics on one side, critical theater on the other – and instead introduces a new distinction derived from the position of a second-order observer:

> What up to this point sounded like an accusation directed exclusively against the pseudo-reality of politics has now become a complaint directed at the very being of contemporary theater, its retreat to the stage, into fiction, a theater that contents itself with allusions. [...] Politics and the media are really much better at this now! Isn't this what makes the theater truly outrageous? Withdrawing into itself and contenting itself with aesthetic commentary over a nice glass of sparkling wine at a premiere?[31] (Schlingensief 2003)

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**29** "Wir meinen es erst. Die wahren Spaßparteien sitzen im Bundestag."

**30** "Theater heute, das ist Politik. Politik, das ist schon lange Theater. Und sie schickt sich an, sogar das bessere von beiden zu werden. [...] Von Politik lernen, heißt Inszenieren lernen."

**31** "Was bis hierhin wie ein ausschließlicher Vorwurf an den Wirklichkeitsschein der Politik klang, das ist jetzt bereits eine Klage gegen das Sein des aktuellen Theaters, seinen Rückzug auf die Bühne, in die Fiktion, die sich mit wortwörtlichen Anspielungen begnügt. [...] Das können Politik und Medien nun wirklich besser! Ist das nicht das tatsächlich Unfassbare am Thea-

Based on this critique of the theatrical status quo, which is derived from a sensibility for the sedative effect of the bourgeois reception of art, *Chance 2000* develops a social experimental arrangement that forestalls all forms of the self-assured distance and the comfortable setup behind the fourth wall separating the stage from the auditorium, and seeks to replace passive consumption with an insistence on self-positioning responsibility:

> We carry out our actions seriously and with gusto. Everybody can participate, we don't want to be perceived as an art party, where System 1 can then simply talk its way out again, claiming it's all only theater after all. And the unemployed, who should actually be at the center of our efforts, fall by the wayside yet again. (Schlingensief and Hegemann 1998: 52)[32]

In concrete terms, *Chance 2000* is thus an experimental arrangement composed in a poly-perspectival fashion, which endeavors to establish a position from which to observe the latent stage-managed character of media scripts and political-cultural routines. Because actors and spectators encounter each other directly, or rather because under the motto "failure as an opportunity" they become functionally equivalent, leading to a system-amalgamating border transgression, an infringement of otherwise neatly distinct spheres of action: "Schlingensief's actions counteract the fundamental 'impotence' of the aesthetic, by collapsing the boundaries between art and non-art, as well as generating double binds, undecidability, paradoxes, thus exposing the hidden rules of hermetically sealed systems such as politics, economics and art, or taking them to absurd extremes." [33] (Schößler 2006: 270) *Chance 2000* is therefore to be understood as a breaching

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ter? Der Rückzug in sich selbst und die Genügsamkeit des ästhetischen Kommentars bei einem Gläschen Premierensekt?"

**32** Hans-Thies Lehmann makes it clear that *Chance 2000* can indeed be characterized as post-dramatic art: "Instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside, [post-dramatic theatre] can shift the disturbingly mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the center of things and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception." ["An Stelle der trügerisch beruhigenden Dualität von Hier und Dort, Innen und Außen kann [...das Theater] die beunruhigende wechselseitige Implikation von Akteuren und Zuschauern in der theatralen Bilderzeugung in den Mittelpunkt rücken und so den zerrissenen Faden zwischen Wahrnehmung und eigener Erfahrung sichtbar werden lassen"] (Lehmann 2006: 185–186).

**33** "Die Schlingensiefschen Aktionen begegnen der grundsätzlichen 'Impotenz' des Ästhetischen, indem sie die Grenzen zwischen Kunst und Nicht-Kunst kollabieren lassen, zudem double binds, Unentscheidbarkeiten, Paradoxa generieren und so die verborgenen Regeln der vielfach hermetisch abgeschotteten Systeme wie Politik, Wirtschaft und Kunst kenntlich machen bzw. ad absurdum führen."

experiment with the principle of democratic representation, which creates a vortex of oblique representations through the mutual disruption of events, situations and actions, whereby the aesthetic strategy of "taking things literally" is repeatedly deployed as a mode of language criticism. For example, the metaphor of the "tug of war" loses its apparent political harmlessness when, on an evening of the "election campaign circus", two groups enter into an actual physical contest, and the antagonism of their exchange of political views acquires a violent, physical dimension. Schlingensief thus proves to be a destroyer of language images, the hegemonic power of which is exercized in the form of performative speech acts and thereby obscured.[34]

Apart from the disruption of set phrases, *Chance 2000* also works in other respects with the performative enactment of abstract concepts. For instance, in response to heckling from the audience, an evening of the "election campaign circus" is interrupted (the ensemble withdrew backstage for half an hour), thus countering the monologic political flow of television with a confrontational, dialogical situation in which the political – properly speaking – can actually take place. In the feedback loop that is thereby induced between the actors and the audience, in a dramaturgy that uses the out-of-control situation and the mounting excitement curve as a way of rendering aporia visible, a self-provocation occurs that brings to light the conditions of possibility of political opinion: "What we're doing here is a self-provocation – an empty space on which to project your image – your film – and you continually have the problem that the images turn against themselves."[35] (Schlingensief in Lilienthal and Philipp 2000: 100) Juliane Rebentisch, drawing on Adorno, notes that "the social potential of art [...]" consists precisely in the fact that "it interrupts an immediate, 'practical impulse' in favor of a reflective distantiation [...]" (Rebentisch 2012: 265). Martin Wuttke's response to this comes when, during the party launch where the audience is comfortably addressed as "we," Wuttke ruptures the consensual community of feelings, insulting the party supporters in a wild litany, and starts addressing them as "you." This thematization of the affective dimension of the political is also pursued in other contexts – for instance, it always eventuates when the question of the limits of the representable and the sayable arises in response to the intrusion of individual vulnerability into the smooth surface of the media world: "The

**34** Schlingensief works with the same effects of ambivalence, for example in his stage play *Atta Atta*, which playfully draws on the phantasm of cleansing and its underlying xenophobic resentment in connection with the figure of the 9/11 terrorist, Mohamed Atta.

**35** "Das, was wir machen, ist eine Selbstprovokation – eine leere Fläche, auf die projizieren Sie Ihr Bild drauf – Ihren Film –, und Sie haben pausenlos das Problem, dass sich die Bilder gegen sich selbst kehren."

whole project is embarrassing. Read what our candidates are proclaiming as their program. It's embarrassing in the positive sense because it is honest and not functional."[36] (Schlingensief in Albers 1999) Focusing on the thresholds of embarrassment helps to subject the political-medial "pathos inventory of our times" [Pathos-Inventar der Gegenwart] (Schößler 2006: 290) to a critical revision and thus to delineate the objectives of image disruption. This is then developed further, especially in his Viennese *Container Action*, which took place two years later, and in Schlingensief's confrontations with the reality-constituting dramaturgy of the talk show. The fact that, ultimately, *Chance 2000* was not elected to the Bundestag prevented it from being corrupted by the so-called "System 1," the political establishment that subscribes to market conformity. The slogan of the election campaign encapsulates the fact that, for programmatic reasons alone, it would not have been possible to make it into the Bundestag: "failure as an opportunity" [Scheitern als Chance].

## 3 The talk show as a fiction of authenticity

While *Chance 2000* focused above all on the stage-managed character of politics, in the essentially simultaneous actions *Talk 2000* and *U3000*, Schlingensief subjected the simulation of authenticity and consternation in the genre of the "talk show" to a similarly biting critique. As was the case with *Chance 2000*, Schlingensief in his own version of the talk show sought to subvert the format from within, a format which in the 1990s had reached inflationary proportions, especially on private television stations, selling the voyeuristic "view through the keyhole" as an opportunity for self-expression for the audience. Through his appropriation of the established dramaturgies of the genre, Schlingensief brought to light the aporias in its professed authenticity. *Talk 2000* and its successor *The Pilots: 10 Years of Talk 2000* (2008), function as a disruption of the purported discussion platform, which conceals its own commercial, constructed character and its pornographic economy behind the aggressively promoted offer of discursive participation by the television audience.[37] Schlingensief counters any suggestion of an authentic program taking a genuine interest in the stories of the talk show guests by deploying an aesthetics of exaggeration, of framework rup-

**36** "Das Projekt ist peinlich. Lesen Sie mal nach, was die Kandidaten als ihr Programm verkünden. Es ist im positiven Sinne peinlich, weil es ehrlich ist und nicht funktional."

**37** Ironically, in accordance with legal stipulations, *Talk 2000* was broadcast on Channel 4, a special interest television channel that had to be operated by Sat1 and RTL due to a provision in the State Broadcasting Agreement.

ture or technical failure, repeatedly making it clear that the talk show in commercial television has to meet certain requirements of the medium and the advertisers, and is thus far from open or spontaneous.[38]

The dramaturgy of *Talk 2000* is characterized by a formal design that seeks to attain a comic book-like, flagrant quality in order to point up the commercially conditioned nature of the talk show format, which it achieves by accelerating the succession of edits and topics, thus creating an impression of superficiality and agitation. In the first episode, for example, Schlingensief remains demonstratively silent over a long period, but on the other hand continually interrupts his guests and on other occasions he breaks the flow of conversation with the slogan "Kill Helmut Kohl!" [Tötet Helmut Kohl!] His guests, such as Hildegard Kneef, Rudolf Mooshammer, and Ingrid Steeger, find themselves confronted with questions that force them to make political statements.[39] In the final episode, entitled "[A Matter of] Life and Death" [Auf Leben und Tod], Schlingensief even gets into a fight when taken to task for the superficiality of his show – "it's just faked shit, an exercise in brainlessness" [Fake-Scheiße, eine Verblödungsmaschine] – by a supposed member of the audience, the actor Bernhard Schütz. The paradox of his own role is thus symbolically underscored: a talk show in which disputes are settled not with arguments but with brute physical strength is an indication of the overall violent nature of the genre, a genre that is not even remotely interested in establishing a discourse relatively free of domination, but solely in gratifying a sensation-seeking curiosity. The implicit core question regarding the authenticity of the content broadcast in the media – which is also the object of a similar discussion in Schlingensief's persiflage of a casting show, *Freakstars 3000* (2002 on Viva) – is explicitly answered by Schütz when he hits Schlingensief in the face, accompanying his action with the words, "Here, this is real!" [Da, das ist echt!]

This form of self-referentiality – irritating precisely because it openly states what one has long known but, in keeping with the format, generally sweeps under the rug in favor of the "normal" pleasure of media consumption – is

**38** This deconstruction of talk show normality was in turn productively taken up by the television talk show *Roche and Böhmermann* (2012–2013 on ZDF-Kultur). Here, too, it was a question of establishing another form of the talk show, which constantly fed its format-bound character reflexively back into the content it produced, for example through the fact that, at the end of each episode, the two moderators stood in front of the camera and presented a preliminary critique of the program's machinations.

**39** With quite embarrassing consequences in the case of Mooshammer in episode 2: following an absurd dialogue on happiness, work and money, Mooshammer expounds on the pleasure that one can also take in a rainbow, adding that this kind of happiness is free of charge.

also at work in the 2008 sequel, *The Pilots*,[40] which was produced in cooperation with the Berlin Academy of the Arts. The forms of self-destruction that were developed in *Talk 2000* are re-deployed here, although with an additional aspect, since the production focuses less on Schlingensief himself and instead leaves more room for the invited guests. Precisely because they are all media professionals and behave accordingly, in the slightly displaced frame of reference of the "Pilots" they come across as remote-controlled, uncanny ghosts from "real" life. This is precisely the case, for example, with the involuntary self-destruction of the journalism of solicitude and dismay embodied by the TV pastor Jürgen Fliege, where Schlingensief creates a situation on the stage in which the typical exploitation routines of simulated solicitude are only ostensibly operative. Fliege, whose great popularity resulted from the authenticity and attention-gaining he offered, is exposed in his calculated media-resonance, solely because, when confronted with a mother and her mentally handicapped adult son in the context of the meta-talk show, he does what he always does, namely ask simple questions that are meant to signal empathy. Fliege does not realize that he has thereby fallen into the trap of unmasking himself, but it does not elude the audience.

Schlingensief produced a similar disruption of the talk show's impression of authenticity when on another evening he agreed to the Green politician Claudia Roth's request to join her in drinking a glass of red wine in honor of her friend, Hrant Dink, who had been shot dead that same day in Turkey. Contrary to Roth's expectation that the thematization of death would induce an appropriate degree of concern and compassion, Schlingensief had the live scene replayed, referring to a poorly done transition to the next wide-angle shot, and thus essentially had it re-enacted. The repetition of the pathos-filled *in memoriam* gesture makes it clear that emotions on television are always subject to a mediatization effect. Death is no laughing matter, this much becomes evident, but this certainly does not put an end to the work of staging emotions in a television show.

The end of the opening episode of the *Pilots* makes it clear that the standards of so-called "political correctness" are not part of an ethical or political debate, but rather as preset breaking points of discursive normalization they are meant to prevent the quality standards of television from being scrutinized. Here, too, Schlingensief is principally concerned with seeing, with visibility, and rendering

**40** The show, which was supposed to consist of eight episodes, was abandoned after 6 episodes due to the serious illness of Schlingensief's father. These episodes are documented in a 90 minute condensed version produced by the director Cordula Kablitz-Post under the title "The Pilots – Christoph Schlingensief."

visible. After commenting on A4-size medical images of his inner eye and describing his fear of going blind in his later years due to a hereditary defect, as his father did, Schlingensief directs his attention to a woman in the audience wearing a Burka, with the words "I take this masquerade as a personal offense"[41], and rips the veil from her head. In the ensuing turmoil, which, along with Schlingensief, involves the actor Rolf Zacher, another spectator and a voice-off coming from the studio technicians, it remains completely unclear whether the scene is to be taken as staged, partly staged, or as a genuine scandal. It is precisely this liminality of an aesthetics of disruption that reveals that political confrontation only begins when one oversteps the boundaries of the sayable.

All in all, Schlingensief's television projects are in keeping with his entire œuvre: the disruptive potential of his actions results from the undecidability concerning the sphere of encoding and decoding of the event in question. It is never quite clear whether we are dealing with authentic emotions or staged feelings; the comprehension of reality develops into a crisis that opens up the possibility of reflecting on modes of medial world-making. With its claim to "reality content," the talk show becomes a field of experimentation for putting mere reality effects to the test. When in his TV hybrid *U3000*, produced for MTV, Schlingensief has the actor Peter Kern collapse from a heart attack, the distinction between actor and role collapses along with the cardiovascular system of the person concerned. In *U3000*, produced three years after *Talk 2000*, Schlingensief travels on a special underground train through Berlin, at night. Next to a "talk" carriage, there is a "dressing-room" carriage and a "music" carriage, in which in each show a different prominent band performs. As a result of the constant shuttling back and forth between the "talk" carriage and the "music" carriage, the communicational connections are constantly interrupted, thus making it clear – "in vitro, underground" (Schlingensief 2011: 430) – that television is above all based on keeping a flood of images and sounds in incessant motion, and which do not necessarily have to be bound to any actual prior content. The guests selected from the typical celebrity repertoire also contribute to the situational artificiality of this anti-show, just as Schlingensief himself does by repeatedly changing costumes before introducing his guests and by reproducing the exaggerated procedures characteristic of television entertainment – for example when he "slaughters" a soft toy (in this case, a cat) or reflects with his

**41** "[...] diese Maskerade empfinde ich als persönliche Beleidigung."

guests on the social function of rituals.[42] Overall, the composition of *U 3000* is governed by the principle of incessant information and stimulus overload, which creates a form of white noise, thus rendering visible the latent social function of television as a debilitating flow of images and feelings (Williams 1974).

## 4 *Container Aktion* as a breaching experiment

It was in the context of the *Container Aktion* that Schlingensief mounted in 2000 on the occasion of the Vienna Festival and in the context of the verification of the E.U.'s compliance with European civil rights, that the formulation "image disruption machine" (Schlingensief in *Ausländer raus!*) emerged, a formulation that deftly encapsulates Schlingensief's aesthetics. In the process of image disruption, the approaches to the critique of the staged character of politics and the simulation of authenticity in the media converge and amalgamate with an awareness of the effects of "imaging" [*Bildgebung*[43]][44] into a two-level strategy of communicative disturbance, which simultaneously involves the destruction of the socially and politically self-evident. With the Viennese container action, Schlingensief undertook a radical political action in the medium of art in the sense that, in the course of the several days that the action lasted, he managed to produce a form of publicness in which conflicts in all their antagonistic explosiveness managed to be articulated.[45] Given the large number of participants and

**42** As a consequence, one finds a lot of background information, historical documents, etc., but no videos on the documentation page U3000 (Schlingensief 2000).

**43** "Imaging" [Bildgebung] is to be understood here in a broad, non-technical sense, only loosely referring to terms such as "medical imaging" and "digital imaging" (translator's note).

**44** Schlingensief could have gained theoretical reinforcement of his position from Hans Blumenberg, who in his *Metaphorology* points out: "It is not just language that thinks ahead of us and backs us up, as it were; in our view of the world we are determined even more compellingly by the supply of images available for selection and the images we select, which 'channel' what can offer itself for experience in the first place" (Blumenberg 2010: 63).

**45** "What is decisive is that public art is not 'public' simply because it is placed in a 'public space' defined as urban instead of in the semi-private space of a gallery. Rather, art is public when it takes place in public, that is, in the medium of antagonism. [...] Only when a conflict flares up and is actually played out is a public created [...] Publicness is nothing but the collision itself." ["Entscheidend ist, dass Public Art nicht deshalb 'öffentlich' ist, weil sie ihren Ort in einem urbanistisch zu bestimmenden 'öffentlichen Raum hat' statt im semi-privaten Raum einer Galerie. Sondern Kunst ist öffentlich, wenn sie im Öffentlichen stattfindet, d. h. im Medium des Antagonismus. [...] Erst in dem Moment, in dem ein Konflikt ausgetragen wird, entsteht über dessen Austragung eine Öffentlichkeit [...] Öffentlichkeit ist nichts als der Aufprall selbst"] (Marchart 2007: 239 – 241).

the prolonged duration of the action, Schlingensief was no longer alone in deliberately targeting and interrupting communicative routines. Rather, triggered by the image politics of the *Container Aktion*, a political dynamic developed that in turn disrupted the routines of media regulation. "The antagonistic public always has something disruptive about it with respect to the logic of the institution and the ruling ideology: it interrupts regulated processes, responsibilities, hierarchies." (Marchart 2007: 243)

Schlingensief's political actions, especially *Please Love Austria – The First Austrian Coalition Week* and *Chance 2000*, mainly make use of techniques of "embodiment and visualization, in order to concretize abstract political speech in the form of liminal images, which disrupt the evidential effect of the visual" (Schößler 2011: 118). In this action, Schlingensief used the Internet as a forum to allow people to vote on the deportation of the "interned" [in the container] asylum seekers, thus making tangible the practical consequences of the national-conservative policies of the FPÖ-ÖVP [Austrian Freedom Party-Austrian People's Party] coalition by personalizing the fate of those concerned. The action, which not only drew on the (at the time) highly popular TV show, *Big Brother*, but at the same time invoked the camp as a bio-political paradigm of modernity, was a "complex play with discursive positions, forms of address and the implications of appropriation and demands for solidarity" (Hochreiter 2011: 444), in which the FPÖ and the [right-wing tabloid] *Kronen Zeitung* were also involved, as were passers-by, Internet users and Schlingensief himself. The "happening", which highlighted its own character as an event through the use of spotlights and a brass band, was disruptive in the sense that, while all forms of media entertainment were invoked, they were not presented within the framework of a coherent overall tableau-image [*Gesamtbild*]. Using the strategy of "deliberate affirmation" – as Dietrich Kuhlbrodt described Schlingensief's strategy with regard to the similarly commotion-filled production of *Hamlet* in Zurich – , it becomes possible "to gain access to the political and social stage and to disrupt from within the powerful or feeble work being staged there, and to steer it in the desired direction" (Kuhlbrodt 2002: 142). At the center of this parallax-like image disruption, however, stands the container, sporting a banner on its roof with the slogan "Ausländer raus" ("foreigners out") – an extreme, heterotopic site in the middle of Vienna, rendering visible the boundaries between inside and outside, between issuing and obeying orders, between decision-making power and those at the disposition of this power.[46]

**46** Dirk Rustemeyer, for example, argues along similar lines: "Camps and prisons can themselves become symbols that mark cultural differences and can occasion conflicts or stories, if

The direct confrontation with Austrian asylum policy is constructed around a refined experimental arrangement, which uses image disruption as a method of criticizing the Austrian self-image of an open, democratic society. "Schlingensief's images are, to use Roland Barthes' terms, 'crazy', not 'tame'; in Lacan's sense, they are disquieting 'trompe l'oeil'."[47] They mark out a wound in the order of representation and discourse which cannot be closed by means of simple narrative operations. Schlingensief is aware of the power of "*doing images*," (Burri 2008) of performative image-acts, which configure our conception of normality by establishing regimes of visibility. His image disruption machine implements a subversive counter-strategy which sets in motion" an interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function." (Foucault 1980: 195) The container action is first of all a disruption of public order, but at the same time it is a dismantling of binary right-left codifications: the leftist demonstrators, who after several days of heated discussion end up destroying the "foreigners out" banner, are unwittingly improving Austria's public image. By having the banner put in place and subsequently, using his megaphone, repeatedly getting worked up about it, Schlingensief positioned himself as a trickster[48] in Canetti's sense, as a parasite on the routines of sensation-seeking in the media (Serres 2007: 422–423). It is not just a question of criticizing the right-wing populism of the FPÖ in a simplistic, didactic fashion. Rather, the container-action creates a new cultural and political forum in which a communicative conflict about the actual meaning of "publicness" can take place. Accordingly, Schlingensief is not concerned with an ontologization of concrete political content – on the contrary, he aims to bring out the contingency of all political and social orders and thus brings about a liquefaction of ideologically-hardened standpoints, which is the prerequisite for facilitating a renewal of politics. As Jacques Rancière has pointed out, the prevailing "post-democracy" has led to a situation of complete conformity between the forms of the state and the state of social relations, deter-

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not myths. They are sites of surveillance, which can be the center of social awareness, even though – and because – they minimize the possibilities of observation." ["Lager und Gefängnisse können selbst zu Symbolen werden, die kulturelle Unterscheidungen markieren, und zum Anlass zu Konflikten oder Erzählungen, wenn nicht Mythen werden. Bei ihnen handelt es sich um Orte der Beobachtung, die selbst im Mittelpunkt gesellschaftlicher Aufmerksamkeit stehen können, obwohl und weil sie die Möglichkeiten der Beobachtung minimieren"] (Rustemeyer 2009: 165–166).

**47** "Schlingensiefs Bilder sind im Sinne Roland Barthes' 'verrückt', nicht 'zahm', sind im Sinne Lacans beunruhigende 'trompe l'oeil'."

**48** Elias Canetti writes: "[W]ie von keiner anderen Figur, die man kennt, lässt sich von ihm das Wesen der Freiheit ablesen. [...] Er belustigt [... die Leute], indem er ihnen alles durch Umkehrung verdeutlicht" (Canetti 2011: 192–193; see also Schüttelpelz 2010).

mined by a neo-liberal realism that has all the trappings of an undisturbed processing of opinion formation but in reality does not present any alternatives and thus discredits utopias (Rancière 1999). To counter this kind of totalizing discursive homogenization, Rancière deploys – and Christoph Schlingensief's performance art follows Rancière here – the notion of "dissensus," a principled dissent derived from the margins and boundaries of the sayable and the visible that brings to the fore the "part of those who have no part" (Rancière 1999: 9) in the political process. It is precisely here that Schlingensief's container action intervenes: by involving the mute asylum seekers in the artistic production, the possibility of a different social and political communitarization emerges in the aesthetic experience, which invokes a new partition of the sensuous and an alternative politics of the visible as a (utopian) possibility.

## 5 Schlingensief's radicality

Even in his early films, Schlingensief always refused the predictable narrative structures and aesthetic patterns that threaten to turn cinema into a merely functional medium for exercizing influence and hegemony. When Georg Seeßlen speaks of "radical art" with regard to Schlingensief's film œuvre, what he has in mind is precisely the "critique of world-making" (Goodman 1978: 94), which is being referred to here as an "aesthetics of disruption" in order to render productive Schlingensief's confrontation with society's powerfully effective self-descriptions. Schlingensief's aesthetics of disruption encompasses an aesthetic experience that does not primarily depend on representation, but rather above all on exposing the different conditions of constitution that underlie reference to what is usually known as the "world" or "reality." Starting from the "constitution of meaning as a process" (Lehmann 2006: 102), Schlingensief took on the various communication systems of television, theater, film, and opera without allowing himself to be compromised or appropriated by their symbolic routines. He produces "nomadic art," which means that "an artist can wander through different artistic and social spaces, change them, but also leave them again."[49] (Seeßlen 2011: 76) Schlingensief's post-dramatic performances and actions operate "in the crisis mode," inciting a corresponding "intensification of extreme situations,

49 "nomadische Kunst [der es darum geht, dass] eine künstlerische Person verschiedene Räume der Kunst und der Gesellschaft durchwandern, sie verändert, sie aber auch wieder verlassen kann."

border and threshold experiences" [50] (Primavesi 2012: 147), and thus endeavoring to spread "active viruses" [aktive Viren] (Kuhlbrodt 2002: 142), a process of contagion[51] out of which a new politics and society is meant to develop. The metaphor of the viral is cleverly chosen: if one follows Rancière's reflections on the "aesthetics of politics" (Rancière 2009), then political art can only occur in the contemporary world as a politics of form. *Contagion* here means an activist art that realizes aesthetic experience in the mode of performance and feedback loops, as a process of contradictory participation in the temporal metamorphosis of social structures. The nucleus of Schlingensief's image disruption machine lies precisely in this functionality without a precisely defined function. Or in the words of its creator: "What I actually want to do is get back to, get inside the image. And I can't accomplish that without movement. So what should I do?" (Schlingensief in Heineke and Umathum 2002: 5).

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**50** "Zuspitzung von extremen Situationen, Grenz- und Schwellenerfahrungen."

**51** Schaub, Suthor and Fischer-Lichte 2005.

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Katrin M. Kämpf and Christina Rogers

# Citizen n-1

## Laura Poitras's *Citizenfour* as a Reparative Reading of a Paranoid World[1]

> The 4 D's: Deny / Disrupt / Degrade / Deceive [...]
>
> 'Blitz' style approach: Creating as much disruption as possible within a short period of time
>
> (GCHQ – Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group (2012) *Cyber Integration: The Art of the Possible*)
>
> It's supposed to be difficult to invade somebody's privacy. Because of how intrusive it is. Because of how disruptive it is. (Ladar Levison, *Citizenfour* 2014: 1:38:27)

## 1 The art of the possible

As a powerpoint presentation of the British GCHQ's Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group leaked by Edward Snowden states quite bluntly, "Creating disruption" is one of the key elements of current "cyber" intelligence operations (2012). The presentations define "Effects," among them "The 4 D's," in two broad categories: "Information Ops (influence or disruption)" and "Technical Disruption" (GCHQ/JTRIG 2012), meaning cyber attacks and propaganda operations (Cole et al. 2014). These propaganda campaigns use deception, pushing stories via twitter, facebook, or youtube, discrediting targets by changing their photos, "getting another country to believe a 'secret'" (GCHQ/JTRIG 2012), while other cyber attacks entail stopping people from communicating by mass messaging, deleting online presences, blocking fax machines, conducting a "Denial of Service attack to their computer," or infecting a computer with a virus. These methods have been labeled as "dirty tricks" of British spies by the press (Cole et al. 2014), while the intelligence agency gives these operations the promising title *The Art of the Possible*. If disruptions, to take this example, can oscillate between "dirty tricks" and an "art of the possible," it becomes clear, that exactly due to their relative position the concept or principle of disruption proves to be employable for cultural analysis, because it leads us to question *what* is perceived

**1** The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) / ERC grant agreement n° 312454. Similar thoughts on *Citizenfour's* reparative potential – without focus on its disruptive qualities – have previously been published in German: Kämpf 2015.

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as disruption, by *whom*, and with what *effect*. Disruptions hinder, stop or irritate the normal course of things and therefore have analytical potential: they allow an observation and a critique of "references to reality and societal-self-descriptions" (see the article of Koch and Nanz in this volume: 8), and thus generate knowledge on society (Koch and Petersen 2011). Understood in this way, and combined with feminist Science and Technology Studies, using disruption as an analytical figure is very much linked to a *dirty art of the possible*, because it makes visible conflicting perceptions (such as on spying) and can be used to describe the transitions between disruption and order.

Surveillance is indeed viewed as a disruptive invasion of privacy by many, among them Edward Snowden's former e-mail provider and privacy activist Ladar Levison, and has bred not so much disobedience against intelligence agencies, but rather a certain kind of suspicion towards digital media. This affect has been employed by Laura Poitras in her documentary *Citizenfour* (USA 2014). Viewing the film, it not only becomes clear to spectators that they are inextricably connected to the happenings on screen and its protagonists, via the smart phones and tablets in their pockets, but that they are also simultaneously affected by a deep suspicion towards these media. This is because digital medias are uncanny, even dangerous in *Citizenfour:* telephones turn into potential listening devices, smart phones are bugs and detectors at once. MetroCards, e-mail addresses, or credit cards serve as selectors for almost unlimited tracking and digital communication only functions via complicatedly encrypted channels. With *Citizenfour*, audiences experience a double invasion into their privacy: they are confronted with the biggest whistleblowing event in US history, which gave evidence to the intrusions of the NSA and the GCHQ into the private lives of citizens, and at the same time the film links itself to the digital media in the pockets of its spectators by delivering a detailed description of their function within surveillance systems.

Besides causing these feelings of unease towards digital media, the film has distinct disruptive qualities of its own, such as its situatedness, its reparativeness, and its portrayal of resistant potentialities. We propose that by discourse analytically dissecting the Snowden disclosures as a disruption that can be interpreted as a post-structuralist event, "a nexus of power-knowledge" (Foucault 2007: 61), and focusing on reparative registers, the film engages in a disruptive *art of the possible* that points beyond the realm of the movie, towards discourses on securitization and disruptions yet to come.

This chapter analyzes these disruptive qualities, by first interpreting *Citizenfour* with the help of Donna Haraway's concept of situated knowledge. In a second step, we introduce Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theories on reparative and paranoid interpretations of the world, and connect them with the current dispositif of

security, hence using them to carve out the film's reparative potential. In a third step we outline how far the film also works as an examination of an evental disruption (for this concept, see section 2.4). The final section combines aspects of the investigation and points to possibilities that lie within aesthetic experiments, such as the documentary at hand.

# 2 Situated knowledge, reparative readings, and "événementialisation"

## 2.1 Citizenfour

Other recent works on Snowden, such as Oliver Stone's biopic *Snowden* (2016), or Geoffroy de Lagasnerie's essay *The Art of Revolt* (2016), focus very much on the power of Snowden's exposures and his status as an exceptional individual. In Stone's film, for example, Snowden is portrayed as a struggling, patriotic all-American hero who pretty much single-handedly tries to save American democracy. In Lagasnerie's text, he is described as one of the poster children of a new kind of subjectivity, one of ultra-libertarian individual heroism, no longer bound by the rule of law, and willing to leave behind the constraints of statehood in order to expose state secrets. *Citizenfour*, though, offers a different interpretation of the events. The documentary is the completion of Poitras's Post-9/11-trilogy, in which the first part portrays an Iraqi doctor and his family during the first election after the war (*My Country, My Country*, USA 2006), and the second Osama Bin Laden's former body guard Abu Jandal and his detained brother-in-law in the Guantanamo Bay prison (*The Oath*, USA 2010). The final piece tells the story of the massive surveillance of digital communications conducted by intelligence agencies that were exposed by whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013, and which was often described as an exceptionally paranoid film in the press (e.g. Burr 2014; Edelstein 2014; Murray 2014). On first sight, *Citizenfour* indeed has almost all key components of a paranoid espionage thriller: a former system administrator with a hardly bearable tend to pathos, a journalist known for his venomous political commentaries, lying politicians, perfidious attorneys arguing for mass surveillance, uniformed national security agents, plenty of nerdy conversations on technology, computer security, and intelligence. Time and again fearful, almost paranoid gazes at computers and telephones, dominate the film. And yet, *Citizenfour* can also be regarded as a feminist negotiation of filmic objectivity, and an attempt to counter the paranoid and desired all-seeing gaze of the intelligence agencies with situated knowledge. The film disrupts narratives of

individual heroism, avoids a primarily paranoid reading in favor of a reparative depiction of the Snowden disclosures and engages in documentary cinema as a medium of critique, as an "art not to be governed quite so much" (Foucault 2007: 45).

## 2.2 A view from somewhere

When the lights go off in the cinema, viewers are silently confronted with a text-card detailing Poitras's work and the surveillance she experienced since 2006. Out of the dark, ceiling lights of a tunnel and taillights of a vehicle trailed by the camera emerge, accompanied by an industrial noise. We are guided through the dark by the glimpse of two moving red dots when a female voice (Laura Poitras) reads:

> Laura,
>
> at this stage I can offer nothing more than my word. I am a senior government employee in the intelligence community. I hope you understand that contacting you is extremely high risk and you are willing to agree to the following precautions before I share more. This will not be a waste of your time.
>
> The following sounds complex, but should only take minutes to complete for someone technical. I would like to confirm out of email that the keys we exchanged were not intercepted and replaced by your surveillants. Please confirm that no one has ever had a copy of your private key and that it uses a strong passphrase. Assume your adversary is capable of one trillion guesses per second. If the device you store the private key and enter your passphrase on has been hacked, it is trivial to decrypt our communications.
>
> Understand that the above steps are not bullet proof, and are intended only to give us breathing room. In the end, if you publish the source material, I will likely be immediately implicated. This must not deter you from releasing the information I will provide.
>
> Thank you, and be careful.
>
> Citizen Four

The beginning of Poitras's *Citizenfour* seems like a dystopian science fiction movie, the letter could have just as much come from the future and been addressed to Sarah Connor. What follows, though, is not a dire film of coming disasters and catastrophes that need to be prevented in a race against time. Rather, *Citizenfour* depicts the origin of what has become history, in a calm, informative, and intimate manner. As audiences have learned from the instructions in Citizen Four's first e-mail, all protagonists try to maintain a high degree of control over their electronic communications. What proceeds is a highly dangerous act of

whistleblowing, patterned in an almost nerve-rackingly calm arrangement that conjoins long conversations about technology and journalistic tactics with visuals of a bathrobe clad whistleblower and his clumsy attempts at hair styling. Poitras's film constitutes an example of sophisticated documentary film-making, which declines the claim of an all-encompassing representation of the event it portrays by placing the person behind the camera as present beholder, and integral part of the story into the film. Spoken in her own voice, "Laura" is the first word we hear, and "Laura" materializes as a mostly invisible presence that guides us and the other protagonists through the unfolding events "speaking nearby" (Minh-ha: 1992). *Citizen Four* denies telling *the* objective story of the Snowden leaks by delivering a situated perspective, and mostly manages to counter a constant state of alert by being exactly that: alert and precautious. Most importantly, Poitras positions herself within discourses on technology, securitization, and surveillance beyond paranoid modes: as early as the 1980s, feminist scholar Donna Haraway developed a concept of feminist, embodied objectivity with her feminist criticism of science and Techno Sciences – situated knowledges (Haraway 1988). The technologies of the Star-Wars-era had provided vision with "unregulated gluttony," a "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway 1988: 581). Haraway not only demonstrated that the idea of an "unrestricted vision" is an illusion, but insists that every vision is always particular, situated, and embodied – be it organically or technologically or both (Haraway 1988: 581–582). Consequently, feminist objectivity always entails "specific embodiment," faces the generativity of all visual practices and distances itself from a "false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (Haraway 1988: 581–582).

What Haraway explained about disembodiment, objectivity, and the production of knowledge in the Star-Wars-paradigm of the 1980s, applies even more for the era of progressing digital connectivity, securitization, and for the framework of the so-called "War on Terror": as Jutta Weber describes, the collection of all imaginable data with the hope to map the world, which is perceived as "unpredictable and full of risks," and to preempt all imaginable risks, plays a key role in the present security dispositif (Weber 2015: 14). For Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson, the "Surveillant Assemblage" produces a surveillance network consisting of interdependent media, people, institutions, practices, signs, and knowledge (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 608). This fantasy of unregulated "vision" creates Data Doubles, digital doublegangers that are detached from their territorial setting and converted into information flows (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 606). These doubles are the objects of surveillance by intelligence agencies, firms, institutions, or individuals. They enable the monitoring of organic bodies in border regimes, in police operations, in healthcare systems, or in the

drone wars, where, with the help of tracking operations, people are identified as drone targets, as was conveyed by documents from the Snowden cache (e. g. Scahill and Greenwald 2014). The intelligence agencies' desire for the full take, for the collection, storage, and processing of all tangible data, can be described as "the dream [...] of the perfectly known in high-technology," as "god trick" of the view from nowhere that seeks to transcend all boundaries and responsibilities (such as human- or civil rights) (Haraway 1988: 589 – 590).

To affiliate herself with an objectivizing view from nowhere or to reproduce it, is what Poitras insistently refuses in *Citizenfour*. Indeed, her camera addresses the viewers not only as objects of secret service surveillance, but likewise puts them in the position of "sousveillance," the surveillance of surveillance, yet even the latter perspective remains distinctly particularistic and embodied. Emerging from the darkness of a traffic tunnel, the camera rises to the happenings on the surface and at the moment of the first contact with the whistleblower, we receive a Bird's-eye view onto Hong Kong buildings – a drone perspective simulating a creepy surveillant gaze onto the hotel where the meeting with Snowden took place. But Poitras disrupts this classic representation of surveillance as panoptic view on many levels, and merely triggers it to show its fallacies.[2] First, the conversations in the hotel room explain that surveillance and tracking function as a network of a surveillant assemblage and have little to do with a singular all-seeing view of an eye. Second, we only see what Poitras and her cutter and co-producer Mathilde Bonnefoy let us see, what the hand camera draws our attention to, pointing to an embodied and always framed perspective. A fact that the two make very explicit by including a shot of Poitras visible in a mirror for a few seconds whilst setting up her equipment in the Hong Kong hotel room, by journalist Glenn Greenwald and Snowden addressing her directly, and by her strategy of speaking nearby during the film – as the female voice reading Snowden's emails to us, and via text on screen detailing her own involvement in the story.

This is how we learn that she stood on a government watchlist long before her first contact with Snowden, that she herself got into the grid of intelligence agencies, and that her own data shadow is an integral part of the film, and probably one of the reasons for Snowden's attempt to contact her. Hence, against the intelligence agencies' strategy of the view from nowhere, she sets an embodied, partial, and situated view, which defies a solely paranoid reading of the Snowden disclosures and offers reparative moments. This is particularly provided, be-

**2** By making a film, Poitras of course cannot avoid panopticism as cinematographic paradigm, but manages to avoid representations of surveillance as always structurally panoptic.

cause she assists in giving insights into resistant subjectivities capable of dealing with surveillance practices, working on or with their own and their others data doubles. The collaboration between the whistleblower, the documentarian, and the two journalists goes beyond the traditional encounter between a member of the press and a source. In this case, what the source has to expose sets new terms for journalistic cooperation and makes necessary a sort of skill and knowledge sharing that could be described as digital care work. Thus, their resistant practices culminate in a dangerous encounter of shared vulnerability, in which the care for each other's data double takes on a vital dimension.

With Poitras's situated perspective on this particular encounter it becomes clear that the precautious measures against spying must not only be regarded as acts functioning in the paranoid logic of securitization, but also as a form of digital care work for oneself and others. The encryption tools, safe communication methods, the disconnection of phones, etc., are part of creating a safer space for creative cyber-resistance. While *Citizenfour* definitely is a documentary of primarily white, highly educated, and technologically-skilled people, the film also delivers several hints to its viewers on how to deal with technology in an age of surveillance or data monitoring. The letter from Snowden to Poitras at the very beginning of the film sets the terms for communication for everybody wanting to stay somewhat beyond the reach of the NSA or the GCHQ. Even if his instructions are not "bullet proof," and will most likely not be understood by common audiences, the viewers receive some key words with which they can begin to gain knowledge on encrypted ways of communication. The conversations between the protagonists in the hotel also reveal many little things to be aware of, if wanting to stay beyond the reach of spies. Throughout the film, we see people engaging in similar kinds of digital care work. The closing credits show that *Citizenfour* was born out of encryption software. It reads: "This film would not be possible without the Free Software Projects and encryption tools The Tor Project, Tails, Debian GDU/Linux, Off-The-Record Messaging, GNU Privacy Guard, True Crypt, Securedrop" (*Citizenfour* 2014: 1:51:43). Poitras delivers access to situated knowledge on resistance – an initial tool kit to get started and, with her, Snowden, and Greenwald, examples for where one might arrive. The encounters Poitras portrays are ones that make evident that "cyborg is our ontology" (Haraway 1991: 150), that data-shadows are a part of social reality and have to be part of our care work practices. Which is a decidedly reparative perspective, to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's terminology.

## 2.3 A reparative reading of a paranoid world

The present security dispositif, dominated by a rationality of premediation, meaning to be prepared for and to preempt all thinkable events in the light of a world increasingly perceived as threatening (Krasmann 2013; Grusin 2010), is informed by paranoid postulates of permanent danger and a hermeneutics of suspicion. This interpretation of the world as permanently threatened, and only to be controlled with the aid of technological surveillance apparatuses, can be described in the words of queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as a "paranoid reading" of the world we live in (Sedgwick 1997). Sedgwick suggests to think of paranoia not only as a psychiatric diagnosis, or as a mental condition, but also as an epistemological practice to organize, search and find knowledge (Sedgwick 1997: 7). Paranoid readings are anticipatory, reflexive, and mimetic, and represent a "strong theory" of negative affects with an imperturbable faith in the power or efficacy of knowledge in form of exposures, and thereby preferably attempt to anticipate any surprises (Sedgwick 1997: 8, 15, 22). As an alternative she proposes a "reparative reading" that evades the logic of premediation, remains open to surprises – good and bad – avoids cynicism, and maintains hope for future changes (Sedgwick 1997: 22).

While the Snowden disclosures presented in the press hardly make use of reparative registers – rather, they display a strong belief in the power of exposure, and mainly offer paranoid interpretations – Poitras's film functions somewhat differently: besides the fact that Snowden's partner, Lindsey Mills, lives with him in Moscow (an anecdote only of interest to gossip columnists) – practically nothing is exposed. In defining moments, such as when Snowden and Greenwald discuss the existence of a further whistleblower on pieces of scrap paper, Poitras's camera moves away from what is written. We are largely excluded from the new story that points beyond the film, towards disclosures that have yet to come. Poitras neither attempts to tell a complete, self-contained, or finished story of *the* surveillance scandal of the twenty-first century, nor does she align herself with paranoid logics of premediation or a predominantly paranoid reading of the unfolding events. While the film puts the spectators in a position of sousveillance, her situatedness forbids them a full insight into what is happening, and they also hardly set eyes on the actual Snowden documents. On the other hand, *Citizenfour* did reveal previously unseen images and happenings of the Hong Kong hotel room, and delivered one of the most authorized back stories of the Snowden leak. The film thereby not only appears as a witness to the unfolding of the Snowden disclosures, it can give audiences the feeling that they are experiencing the famous whistleblow almost in real time from within their cinema seats. Although this is an overstatement, the film can be regarded an as-

tounding examination and editing of the act of disclosure, because it stretches time, it manages to let viewers take part in what became the Snowden scandal step by step, with all its lunch-breaks, fire alarms, and waiting for the right moment, its banalities like comfortable clothes and proper hairstyle for an interview, its *inter*-ruptions. By emphasizing *what lies between* during the event that causes difference, by analyzing its texture, *Citizenfour* turns the sudden disruption that the disclosures constituted within surveillance discourses into calmly patterned processes. It is exactly here, that *exposure* is not regarded as a good matter per se, but rather aligned with reparative perspectives: while *Citizenfour* delivers a discourse analysis on surveillance and imagery of the Snowden event, our gaze is directed to other, smaller stories. Firstly, to the work that is needed to fulfill acts of whistleblowing, respectively acts of civil disobedience[3] (that might entail, but do not necessarily include, exposure). As detailed in the section above, beyond a technologically-informed situated perspective, *Citizenfour* delivers an insight into the work and care it takes to perform cyber resistance, meaning just as much using encryption software, debating on strategies with British journalists and taking showers between interviews. As Sedgwick writes:

> What we can best learn from such [reparative, AUTHORS] practices are, perhaps, the many ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them (Sedgwick 1997: 31).

This means the film not only screens how Greenwald, Poitras, Snowden, and members of the Guardian perform a whistleblow, but also which measures and processes were put into place to actually make it happen with as little harm to the people in play as possible. Governments decidedly take procedure not to sustain disobedient behavior, meaning that any kind of reproductive work to sustain such people and actions has to come from them, as well as whatever support they extract from the given system that tries to prevent or annihilate such behavior. The above-mentioned digital care work, which includes working on or with data doubles, is an example for such reparative practices that extract sustenance from that which strives not to sustain them.

**3** Concerning acts of whistleblowing that are understood as civil disobedience, see Kumar 2013.

### 2.3.1 Snowden and beyond

Another point to stress is that the film draws our attention to the story of "Citizen Four." The title alludes to the pseudonym that Snowden used in his first e-mail contact with Poitras, allegedly to position himself as the fourth in a row of US-Whistleblowers (Pasternack 2014). The very existence of a person like "Citizen Four," a disobedient person who takes a massive risk, and – as he says himself – will not let himself be intimidated, is just as much the focus of the film as the people that accompany and participate in the portrayed acts of disclosing. The reparative dynamic of *Citizenfour* also lies in the idea that the world could look differently, and that everything could and maybe will happen in another way, if *CitizenFives*, *Sixes* and *Sevens* materialized, if acts of civil disobedience were more commonplace. The film thus narrates the Snowden event as one with serial potential. By affirming Snowden's self-description, the film becomes a reflexive analysis of disruptive and reparative interplays of disobedience, with whistleblowing serving as example. The Snowden leak was initially described by the press as an act that shocked the world and hit many governments with its explosive power of disclosed information: *Citizenfour* aptly presents a broadcast of the CNN show *The Situation Room*, where Wolf Blitzer informs his audience that "an explosive new report is reigniting the concerns that your privacy is being violated to protect America's security" (*Citizenfour* 2014: 00:44:35). If one takes this at face value, then Snowden is simply his pseudonym abbreviated as C4. Retrospectively, this perception has to be classified as an overestimation. Especially concerning ways of governing, the Snowden disclosures have not shattered the logics of governmental power, but have widened the scope of paranoia towards whistleblowers and people working on or with encryption technologies. The disruptive potential of whistleblowers is used to construct them as figures at societies' margins and as enablers of terrorism, and to put everybody with any kind of access to information or technologies considered relevant to state security, under even more surveillance. This act of exclusion is used to constitute societies' center with all traits of supposed normalcy and to legitimize the prevailing systems of government.

Correspondingly, the film avoids portraying Edward Snowden as a member of radical deconstructive politics. As he says in the now famous Hong Kong hotel room interview, he was a long-time member of US intelligence agencies and affiliated contractors, a patriot, who believed in the code of law and the necessity to spy on others for the sake of American hegemony, and only changed his mind when the US government started to spy on "its own people." Snowden's decision to disclose information can be described as a desire for "the good old times," for conservative American politics, when the good and the bad were

clearly identified and the world was structured along binary categories. This is exactly the point where *Citizenfour* has to be situated as the third film of a trilogy, because the first two films portray people in places of massive human rights violations by the US military and the effects of the "War on Terror" on their lives. Snowden's own motivation to disrupt the course of intelligence agencies could be interpreted as aimed for reactionary politics, for a renormalization of highly racialized dichotomies, of surveillance practices with underlying racist anti-Muslim attitudes, and of clear geographical mappings of dangerous and non-dangerous individuals.

Instead of affirming the anxiety-driven association of bombing – which forgets the content of the disclosures, as the documents contain details on lethal US drone targeting practices – , or to portray Snowden as a savior of "good" democracy and American exceptionalism, *Citizenfour* draws attention to disruptions that are linked to seriality and reiterations, and strengthens them as a form of autopoietical means of change. Because Poitras's film was completed and screened after the first waves following the Snowden disclosures, her film is an interplay between the present events she documents and retrospection, a film that analyzes Snowden's disruption as an event – an "événementialisation" (Foucault 2007: 59) as the next section examines. The film, though, takes Snowden's number four to mark a disruptive series, explains what it takes to fulfill an act of civil disobedience, and creates a sense of possibility without idolizing exposure per se. The reparative reading of the Snowden event therefore shall not be thought of as a simple description of normalizations that can follow de-normalizing ruptures in the given system, but rather as a presentation of a sustainable disruptive mode: focusing on the repetition of disruptions, it points to the potential of forthcoming acts of disobedience – which might or might not have a strong effect on societies – and holds the chance of continuous shifts, of disruptions and continuous reparative work. The film points to the potential power of difference and repetition, and delivers some cues to read the title *Citizenfour* somewhat against the grain, by avoiding an additive logic of exceptional subjectivities that the series of *Citizensfive, six, seven* etc. might imply (n+1): by highlighting the fact that acts of civil disobedience are also joint ventures that hold the chance of affecting large groups of people, these "*citizens*" can be regarded as subtracted (as figures of discourse) from the manifold (n-1) (see Raunig 2012; Deleuze and Guattari 1993). Focusing on digital care, on the collective work that is needed to fulfill acts of whistleblowing and pointing towards possibilities that might lie within acts of civil disobedience in general, a reparative reading can create a sense of the many that withdraws from representational logics of singular subjectivities as *sole* providers of such disruptions. Taking into account that Snowden also lost his citizenship, one can go so far as to erase "citizen"

from the equation. Thus, a reparative reading disrupts paranoid logics of the current security dispositif, draws the attention towards series of disruptions to come, and detaches acts of civil disobedience from dominating discourses on specific subjectivities.

## 2.4 The Snowden event

Formally, Poitras executes in three acts – Pre-Snowden, the Snowden Event, Post-Snowden – what Michel Foucault calls an "examination of 'eventualization' (événementialisation)" (Foucault 2007: 59). For Foucault, an *event* is a "nexus of knowledge-power"; it is an evental disruption or rupture that, in connection to processes of normalization, sustainably changes and coins the order of knowledge (Foucault 2007: 61). As Roberto Nigro and Gerald Raunig carve out, the concept of the event makes it possible to ask questions concerning the difference and singularity of the present, which means to consider an event as a constellation that "constitutes and cuts across us," and, on the other hand, regard it as an "evental rupture, introducing a difference to the present" (Nigro and Raunig 2011: 58)[4]. For Foucault, the examination of "eventualization" allows us to identify "connections between mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge," to analyze them regarding effects of power and to ask how "a procedure of coercion acquires the very form and justifications of a rational, calculated, technically efficient element, etc.," whereby this shall not be about legitimacy or illegitimacy of certain predictions, but about their conditions of acceptability (Foucault 2007: 59).

Against this backdrop, the discourse analytical first act of the film can be interpreted as analysis of the constellations before the Snowden event. Here the question evolves to address why and the ways in which the Snowden disclosures were possible and plausible on the level of discourse. The film sketches the state of the US-American debates on surveillance: court rulings on surveillance and telecommunication companies; a short portrait of former NSA-whistleblower William Binney; the construction of the NSA-Utah Data Centre in Bluffdale, in which data on communication will be stored; congressional hearings on surveillance with former director of the NSA Keith Alexander; an anti-surveillance teach-in as part of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the first e-mail contact with Snowden create a collage of the discourses on surveillance. Here Poitras gathers,

4 [Translation by the authors]: "uns konstituiert und durchquert"; "ereignishaften Bruch, der in die Gegenwart eine Differenz einführt" (Nigro and Raunig 2011: 158).

on the one hand a configuration of the perspective of the US government and intelligence agencies, and, on the other, of emerging moments of resistance tapering these discursive fragments towards the evental disruption. In this act, almost all protagonists, from the director of the NSA to the anti-surveillance activists, primarily service paranoid registers and remain in a logic of securitization: security – be it security *by means of* surveillance or security *from* surveillance – is the paradigm and shall be achieved via premediation (Grusin 2010), the anticipation of all probable and improbable uncertainties, and a forward looking readiness for the future via technologic measures. What is more, viewers already know the scandal the disclosures initiated in the year before the screening of the film. So, the first act is not only a prelude to the second act examining the unfolding of the Snowden event, it is already an observation of the second order that shows self-descriptions of the US government, cultural conventions and how the common order is installed and deals with smaller incisions, such as charges. The film not only shows what happened before, by contextualizing the setting of the event to come, but also examines how certain monolithic ideas of governing and society persist, and how the Snowden disclosures have meanwhile already molded our perception of past occurrences.

The seemingly claustrophobic second act turns spectators into witnesses of the days in Hong Kong in the summer 2013, as the film maker and journalists Glenn Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill had first contact with their source and made the initial documents available for the public, a moment that can be interpreted as the starting point of the evental rupture introducing difference into the present. Again, paranoid readings are set apart in favor of reparative and more positive interpretative approaches in the second act: admittedly, the protagonists read their environment of the hotel room, and especially digital media, as suspicious and potentially dangerous, they disconnect phones and assure each other to "never again" leave their laptops unattended, but at the same time, this is also a story of four people that, despite their justifiable suspicion, precisely are not dissuaded to exercise criticism as an "art of not being governed quite so much" (Foucault 2007: 45), and to de-subjugate to the logic of the security dispositif with a highly risky act of civil disobedience.

The described suspicion towards the media in the hotel room gives rise to one of the most comical sequences of the film, which simultaneously delivers a key component or aspect of the concept of disruption: as the protagonists discuss how to proceed with their disclosures via the press, a fire alarm goes off at the hotel. It rings and then stops, then rings again (*Citizenfour* 2014: 39:18 – 39:20). Snowden says: "That's a fire alarm" in an insinuating tone. With each ring tone and its intermediate pause, Snowden's eyes more excitedly travel across the room, staring anxiously at his fellow supporters while his body

freezes. He says "Maybe they got my end and they couldn't listen to us through the phone anymore" while reconnecting the phone and stating "That's unusual." As the alarm goes off a third time, he holds up his computer not really knowing where to put it. He finally calls the lobby to figure out what is happening and learns that it is a "fire alarm testing maintenance" while the others laugh. In this sequence, Snowden is only moderately presented as cyber hero: his suspicion towards the phone does not turn out to be the right assumption of a highly skilled intelligence agent or a genius detective with the power of abduction; he rather seems like a man, who has watched too many spy movies. Glenn Greenwald's statement minutes before: "You've been affected by the paranoia bug!" turns out to be amusingly appropriate. Generally, Snowden, aptly called a "mousy person"[5] by Dietmar Dath of the German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2014), does not turn out to be a classic example of heroic masculinity. Most of the time he sits, pale and barefooted, on a white bed wearing a white shirt – as an unlikely poster child for the iconography of innocence and virginity – or is only dressed with a bathrobe, and says praiseworthy, somewhat precocious things about freedom and democracy. And finally one of the main insignia of hegemonic masculinity is lost: his passport is declared invalid by the US government and he is turned from Citizenfour into a refugee without papers in search of asylum.

While the section with the alarm shows that disruptions are usually understood as daily occurrences – a power cut, a flickering TV station, a ringing cell phone in the cinema – it is also the epitome of Sedgwick's reading "you can never be paranoid enough" (Sedgwick 1997: 6) and leads to laughter. Disturbances considered as minor breaks in the daily course of things thus may evolve to happenings with major symbolic power. A disruption can be decidedly different in quality, and even affect societies as a whole, showing that the principle of disruption provides different features for the analysis of social structures from the absolutely normal, over the upsetting irritation to epistemological shifts (see the article of Koch, Nanz and Pause in this volume). Regarding the film as an examination of eventualization (événementialisation, in Foucault's term) means that a disruption can be perceived and examined as an event that holds the quality of epistemological shifts. *Citizenfour* investigates the disruptive power of the Snowden disclosures with such an événementialisation, while at the same time itself disrupting paranoid and popular modes of representing the disclosures: beyond portraying what the protagonists of the film regard as irritating or disturbing instances, the plot structure of *Citizenfour* is designed as an intimate story of nerds,

5 [Translation by authors]: "nette graue Maus" (Dath 2014).

proud journalists, and situated filmmakers who gather as a support group for the coming-out of a whistleblower. It thereby declines to reproduce the style of the media coverage that scandalized such an intrusive act and flawed system of government, and depicted Snowden as a dangerous explosive phenomenon. It also does not feed into overall paranoid readings towards life under surveillance, because the film proposes to be technologically secure and simultaneously willing to put oneself into vulnerable or risky positions by shared acts of civil disobedience. The latter can be interpreted as part of an epistemological shift, because the paranoid stance of wanting to be invulnerable within an all-encompassing security dispositif is subverted by a reparative reading of the Snowden event: what was perceived as paranoid is the new normal, and a position of critique or disobedience always entails digital care work *in conjunction with* embodied, situated, and vulnerable positions.

Likewise, in the third act, *Citizenfour* remains faithful to its reparative direction, here the film examines the quality of the Snowden event, and sketches the discourses on surveillance post-Snowden: snippets of news coverage from the USA, Brazil, or China; a scene in which the GCHQ forces journalists from the British Guardian to destroy hard drives on which documents of the Snowden cache are stored; negotiations with human rights advocates; Barack Obama's whitewashing of the scandal; the surveillance of Angela Merkel's telephone a.s.o.. The film not only follows up on the news-circus after the first revealing publications, but also documents the political consequences of the disclosure of mass surveillance. An example is the testimony of William Binney at the German parliamentary inquiry into NSA activities that Poitras stages as a signum of a hopeful optimism in political changes initiated by Snowden's civil disobedience.

That political changes are necessary and urgent is again insisted on in the final scene of the film: Greenwald reports months later to Snowden in Moscow– completely analog, via news scribbled on tiny pieces of scrap paper – of Citizen-*Five*, a new intelligence whistleblower, who was motivated by Snowden's act. Among other, he has information on the drone war: the final power of decision lies, writes Greenwald, with "POTUS," the President of the United States. Who is determined as a drone target, is not decided in court, but on the desk of the sovereign – government manifests itself in the form of classical sovereignty. Biopolitics turns to bio-sovereignty, where the sovereign "makes die and lets live" (Foucault 1983: 134).[6] The final sequence hints towards the disturbing insight,

**6** On the similarity between the practice of approving targets and sovereign concepts of power, See Weber 2014; on the distinction between biopolitics and bio-sovereignty, see Lorey 2007: 276; on sovereign power, see Foucault 1983: 134.

that the disruption to come might not just be the next whistleblower, but again the lack of democratic oversight in allegedly democratic states. It also shows, that citizens such as Snowden are pushed into precarious positions by becoming stateless persons for criticizing the dissolution of democracy, finally ending up living in countries with even more repressive and authoritarian forms of governance. With this realization of sovereign logics of power, the expulsion of unruly citizens, and the involvement of classic cold war players *Citizenfour* finally does come alarmingly close to the fictional and paranoid realm of spy, war, and science fiction movies.

## 3 To be continued …

*Citizenfour* does not develop a *strong* or comprehensive theory on how to deal with securitization and surveillance, or which political solutions could be installed against intelligence agencies out of control, but rather tells a story of an act of civil disobedience, which – this is already implied by the title – calls upon imitators. The film assures us that things could take a different course, if differences were implemented with continuous disruptions. By narrating the Snowden disclosures as event with serial potential instead of a completed tale, Poitras's "art of the possible" focuses upon the field of "possibles, of openings, indecisions, reversals and possible dislocations which make them fragile, temporary […]" (Foucault 2007: 66) and shows that the present is contingent, fragile, and not immutable. The filmmaker succeeds in using narrative documentary cinema not only as a media for criticism, but also to transform it into a critique of media, which affects spectators with a – as we know from the Snowden-documents, precisely not so paranoid – suspicion against digital media and the state apparatus. Poitras summarizes in the German *taz* that digital communication has proved itself to be "vulnerable" (Busche 2014). Thus, by presenting situated knowledge on the Snowden disclosures, examining it as an evental disruption, and creating counter- or reparative readings open to the future, which highlight acts of civil disobedience as joint digital care work that show how societies' structure is vulnerable, *Citizenfour* proves itself to be a complex in(ter)vention that resists "'simplification in the last instance'" (Haraway 1988: 590).

The Snowden event has meanwhile become the "object of desire in the struggles on the classification of the event in different ideological, mostly nationally formed memories and in the battles for the interpretational sovereignty on the

various narratives,"[7] as Raunig and Nigro characterize the "Mai 1968" event (2011: 159). Indeed discussions on mass surveillance and securitization have become virulent in many places, a promising political handling of the authoritarian tendencies of current exercises of power, or a wider discussion on human rights abuses within the framework of the so-called "War on Terror," is still not in sight. Instead, struggles on how to interpret the Snowden event are in full swing: cultural and media pessimists, privacy groups, libertarian sceptics of the state, post-privacy supporters, or crypto-evangelicals sometimes conjure the beginning of the end of the internet, sometimes preach radical individualistic self-reliance and data parsimony, or, they crave technological fixes in anonymization tools and cryptographic implementations, the salvation of surveillance via communication security, and thereby do not disrupt, unlike *Citizenfour* proposes, the paranoid premediation-logic of processes of securitization, but rather affirm it. The final shot of the film shows Greenwald picking up snippets of paper he tore apart after using them to communicate with Snowden about CitizenFive. With a paranoid reading, the close-up of his hands can be interpreted as an attempt not to leave any traces behind, because intelligence agencies might reassemble them and uncover the private conversation. With a reparative reading, the sequence insinuates that it is up to us to dirty our hands to create an *actual* art of the possible: "to pick up the pieces" and to rearrange them into something different.

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7 [translation by authors]: "[...] Objekt des Begehrens in den Kämpfen um die Einordnung des Ereignisses in verschiedene ideologische, meist national geformte Gedächtnisse und in den Kämpfen um die Deutungshoheit über die vielfältigen Narrative [...]" (Raunig and Nigro: 2011: 159).

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# V Archive

Elfriede Jelinek

# Notes on Secondary Drama

As a boost to the business of theatre, I am now ready to offer an increased supply of secondary dramas meant to run, barking, along the classics (or as wallpaper to be rolled out behind them and pasted to a wall. I already tested it once with Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, but now I gratefully accept orders also for other dramas for which I will provide secondary dramas. Shakespeare is the only one I would not do that to on principle. But I will gratefully accept all other orders; currently Goethe's *Urfaust* is in the works, two down, more to go, maybe, but without me, for art doesn't go along with me, it rather goes against me, an ongoing guilt, but guilelessly so). Thus, as an artist I might have found a new strategy, this time on the safe side, because people are always watching the classics and people will forever see them; I can also viking-ize them, bleach them blond or even give them a perm. None of it has to last forever. None of it should last forever. The last thing the classics need is being sustained or entertained by me. However, I will fail once again, because, as usual, I won't understand the specifics of a given classic (or I'll get it all wrong); so I'll either write the right secondary drama for the wrong play, or, more likely, I won't understand the original drama and add something totally wrong. Although, whatever I write is always wrong to begin with. However, if the specifics are wrong (and that is also a specialty of mine, at math tests I always copied the specifics on the blackboard incorrectly), none of my speechifying will do me any good; I am barking up the wrong tree and I stop being an artist, at least for the duration of my failing project. I am a secondary artist, but perhaps I will still be able to submit a new application as a primary artist. In any event many thanks for letting me introduce a small excerpt from my extensive catalogue.

A word with regard to staging: the options are unlimited. The main drama could integrate scenes from the side drama, the text could be run as a ticker in the back, it could also just be just heard from off stage like a radio play, or spoken, even performed on stage alongside the main play. The main play can briefly recede to make room for the secondary play and vice versa. Spectators can download the text to read along on their laptops or smart phones (there could even be an app for secondary dramas). The secondary play can replace parts of the main play, but there is one thing it must not do: the secondary

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play can never be presented as the main drama, as a solo, so to speak. One modifies the other, the secondary drama derives from the main drama and accompanies it, in different ways, but it always is: accompaniment. The secondary drama is a companion piece. That takes a lot of stress off me, phew, and so I am glad I invented the secondary drama for my own relief and to release upon the great who have to struggle with it, no, they don't really have to, but they can if they want to.

Translated from the German by Gitta Honegger.

Teresa Kovacs

# Disturbance in the *Intermediate*

## Secondary Drama as a Parasite

Elfriede Jelinek's essay (for a reprint see this volume: 337–338) describes a concept that can be viewed as a form of editing, that, however, extends well beyond parody, contrafactum, travesty, etc.[1] What Jelinek calls for with the "genre" of secondary drama she introduced, cannot be referred to as a *counter-song* or a *sequel*; her concept is about *concurrence,* about making two texts simultaneously present in the moment of staging, as suggested by the characterization of secondary drama as an accompanying drama (*Begleitdrama*). By this requirement, Jelinek intervenes in the theatre business more extensively than texts usually do, thus continuing to question its historical and present conditions, a constitutive principle of her dramatic work (Haß and Meister 2015: 113–114). Jelinek associates two of her theatre texts with secondary drama: *Abraumhalde* (2009), created as a secondary drama to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, as well as *FaustIn and out* (2011) that cites Goethe's *Urfaust* as the central referential text. Formulated in this essay, the instruction to stage the plays only along with Lessing's and Goethe's dramas respectively was at first actually enforced by Jelinek's publishing house. Both premieres thus chose a form, in which primary[2] and secondary dramas were connected, and yet showing very different approaches at the same time.[3]

*Notes on Secondary Drama (Anmerkung zum Sekundärdrama)* has to be seen in the context of the much-debated issue concerning the progressing economisation of public theatre. In the first sentence of the text, Jelinek links aesthetic considerations primarily to economic conditions and presents the secondary drama

**1** Jelinek (2010) published *Anmerkung zum Sekundärdrama* on November 18, 2018 on her website. It has since been reprinted repeatedly in programme booklets for productions of secondary dramas.

**2** This too is a term the author introduced (Behrendt 2013).

**3** *Abraumhalde* (Mining Dump) was integrated in *Nathan der Weise* (Nathan the Wise) by Nicolas Stemann as part of his new staging in the Thalia Theater in Hamburg in the form of an interruption (premiere: October 3, 2009). The director Dušan David Pařízek premiered Jelinek's *FaustIn and out* together with Goethe's *Faust I* (combined with quotations from *Faust II*) under the title *Faust 1–3* in the Schauspielhaus Zürich (premiere: March 8, 2012). Goethe's *Faust* was initially seen on the big stage of the Schauspielhaus while Jelinek's secondary drama was staged in a soundproof music room in the basement of the building. In the last third, the production from the basement was merged with Goethe on the main stage.

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ironically as a well sellable, innovative form. Alone the context of the essay's origin makes it clear that Jelinek's reflections aim at a critical questioning of the economic conditions of theatre. The first version of this essay emerged as a response to the question regarding whether Jelinek thinks of herself as an artist, given the neoliberal trends in cultural activities. Jelinek's response was published under the title *Reichhaltiger Angebotskatalog* in the June 2009 issue of the *Theater heute* magazine (N.N. 2009).

In addition, the essay comments on the current debate about the so-called *postdramatic theatre* or *Regietheater* (director's theatre), which have been increasingly accused of having developed a peculiar affinity to neoliberalism, of reproducing their concepts of work and production and thus forfeiting the potential to reflect critically and undermine subversively these concepts (Stegemann 2014; Jürs-Munby and Pelka 2015: 17–32). Confronting the aesthetics of *postdramatic theatre* and *Regietheater*, authors such as Peter Handke, Daniel Kehlmann, and Peter Turrini have been levelling criticism for several years, partly in general, partly directly at Jelinek's textual form, demanding a return to realism, to the historical category of drama and therefore to dialogue, plot, and character (Kehlmann 2011, Turrini 2011). Jelinek responded repeatedly to the rejections she had to cope with due to her specific text-form: for instance, quite decidedly in *Grußwort nach Japan* where she confronts the rhizomatic structure of her texts with the eighteenth-century dramatic form:

> The notion of text surface is now frowned upon in Europe, at least in the German-speaking countries, for it means: boredom. Nothing happens. No interesting stage figures playing with and against each other. We would prefer a juicy life on stage! My bamboo also wants its juicy life and it takes it easy: it is beneficial to watch it spring up, even if it can get extremely annoying, threatening to harass the pond liner and the dear goldfish. My plays also grow, I don't know who benefits from that and how. (Jelinek 2012)

Secondary drama can be seen as part of this critical debate; it responds to the discussions about the distinction between dramatic, pre-, post- and again-dramatic theatre texts[4] by identifying such distinctions as problematic, undermining them and making them eventually impossible.

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**4** Lehmann introduced the terms pre-dramatic and post-dramatic in his 1991 study *Theater und Mythos* (Theatre and Myth) based on Andrzej Wirth, pointing to the fact that plays of Greek antiquity and contemporary theatre texts resemble each other in their variety of forms, while drama as a historical category has established itself since the Renaissance and follows another, very specific understanding of theatre and theatre text, in which dialogue and acting subjects are central. (Lehmann 1991: 6) With the concept of *post dramatic theatre* having gained acceptance as a categorization of all those theatre texts that do not correspond to the dramatic form

The considerations mentioned in the present essay thus cannot be viewed in isolation from Jelinek's other reflections on theatre aesthetics. Since her first play *Was geschah, nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte oder Stützen der Gesellschaften* (1979),[5] her writing has followed the intention of arousing, disturbing, and destroying the representation theatre and the bourgeois dramatic form of the eighteenth century. Jelinek's early texts actually dealt with the destruction of established forms, which one of her most important essays on theatre aesthetics also points out, saying: "Ich schlage sozusagen mit der Axt drein, damit kein Gras mehr wächst, wo meine Figuren hingetreten sind."[6] Throughout her work with theatre texts, however, the critical analysis of dramatic conventions, with a simultaneous inscription within the dramatic tradition, was becoming more and more important. This is proved, for instance, by the play *Ulrike Maria Stuart* (2006) that uses Schiller's *Maria Stuart* as its background by picking up on the metrical language while constantly demolishing it with Jelinek's peculiar *Textflächen* (text surfaces). The author herself declares her intention to "force her way" ("hineindrängen") into Schiller's tragedy with *Ulrike Maria Stuart*, "nicht um sie zu etwas andrem aufzublasen wie einen armen Frosch, der dann platzt, sondern um mein eigenes Sprechen in diese ohnehin schon bis zum Bersten vollen Textkörper der beiden Großen Frauen, dieser Protagonistinnen, auch noch hineinzulegen."[7] The principle of addition and parasitic invasion in what already exists is being continued and enhanced through the concept of secondary drama, namely by implementing the process of invading in the moment of staging and making it comprehensible for the audience. The complexity of the relationship between critical negation and productive appropriation becomes eventually intentional in formulations such as "viking-ize" ("Aufnorden") and "bleach them blond" ("Blondieren") of the classics or in the description of the way secondary drama works, defined by Jelinek as a down pillow used to hit the marble blocks Lessing and Goethe with who stand at the top of the German-language literary canon (Jelinek and Koberg 2012). All this emphasizes the fact, that it is simply

(following the 1999 publication of Lehmann's eponymous book), the notion of again-dramatic theatre is often used in current research on more recent plays in order to describe a turn towards the dramatic form among young generation of authors (Tigges 2008).

**5** This text uses two Henrik Ibsen's plays as its basis: *Nora oder Ein Puppenheim* (1879) and *Stützen der Gesellschaft* (1877).

**6** "I swing the axe, as it were, so that no grass grows there where my characters appeared." (Jelinek 1984: 14).

**7** "not to inflate it into something else like a poor frog, which then bursts, but to insert my own speech in the textual bodies (full to the bursting point already) of the two great women, the protagonists." (Jelinek 2005: 12).

not the destruction of tradition, but an arousal and disturbance that should help establish a new perception of the dramas.

The *aesthetics of disturbance* Jelinek pursues with her secondary drama concerns both the dramatic texts themselves, their content and form, as well as the larger system of literary and theatre business (Kovacs 2016). It is therefore the issues of incest, domestic and systemic violence, and totalitarianism that make Jelinek's secondary dramas visible as a repressed side of the primary dramas, linking them to the values of the Enlightenment such as freedom, tolerance, and equality. It becomes clear that all these idealistic demands are to be understood as forms of inclusion and exclusion, that the community of enlightened citizens implies the exclusion of women, of the economically and socially less well-off, of minorities and foreigners, etc. The dramatic form is unmasked as a construct which contributed heavily to these exclusions by remaining reserved, as a *royal genre*, for white men for a long time. Jelinek also criticizes drama in connection to the concept of *genius*, which emerged in the eighteenth century, resulting in the far-reaching exclusion of women from literary production. She compares, for instance, the demands for originality, authenticity, uniqueness, and durability, associated with the equation of artists with geniuses, with the idea of quoting and that what is not authentic, elevating transience to a constitutive feature of secondary drama. Emphasizing the lack of understanding of the classics also reminds of the cult of genius, namely of the deliberate misreading and *slaying* of the father's generation and tradition to make room for something entirely innovative (Schabert and Schaff 1994: 12). Last but not least, the reference to Shakespeare's singular position problematizes the orientation of German-language protagonists of the *Sturm und Drang* movement to this author, as is evident, for instance, in Goethe's speech *Zum Schäkespears Tag*. In the context of secondary drama, Jelinek also refers to Schleef and adds his critical examination of the reception of Shakespeare to her concept: Schleef links this reception with the exclusion of women from the tragic conflict in the German classical period (Schleef 1997: 10). With the ironic subordination, however, secondary drama also points to the hierarchies associated with the act of canonization and establishing of classics. By means of conscious engagement in the theatre business, the whole concept responds to questions of repertoire and programming. It points out to the fact that canonized texts continue to be played on the main stages of state theatres whereas new and experimental texts are assigned to smaller stages.[8] Furthermore, by emphasizing a woman perspective,

**8** The statistics of the German Stage Association for the seasons 1990/91 to 2012/13 show that Jelinek's "ironic" gesture of dependence on the "classics" is not that ironic, considering the fre-

the concept displays the gender gap that is still more noticeable in theatre than in other areas.[9]

Building upon Michel Serres's study *Le Parasite* (1980), Jelinek's concept can be described as a parasitic, disruptive element, clamping two texts and systems and thus creating interfaces to attach itself to and cause irritations by processes of fragmentation and interruption, inversion and non-hierarchy, creation of ambivalence, polyphony and self-reflexivity (Serres 1982). The term *secondary drama* itself gives rise to a disturbing noise that includes all the constituent elements of the concept: establishing a binary dichotomy of secondariness and drama, it creates an uncertainty which remains unresolved and thus leads to a replacement of either–or with both–and or neither–nor. Using the term *drama*, Jelinek cites exactly that historical category that her theatrical texts do not correspond to: they formally resemble prose and are, in research, also categorized as *postdramatic* (Lehmann) or *no-longer-dramatic* (Poschmann) theatre texts. With the notion of *secondariness*, she introduces a term which, following Szondi's central definition of drama, opposes the drama irreconcilably:

> [T]he Drama is primary. It is not a (secondary) representation of something else (primary); it presents itself, is itself. [...] The Drama has no more room for quotation than it does for variation. Such quotation would imply that the Drama referred to whatever was quoted. Variation would call into question the Drama's quality of being primary ("true") and present it as secondary (as a variation of something and as one variation among many). (Szondi 1983: 196)

In this uncertainty, the generic term opens up an *interspace* where seemingly fixed categories like *drama* and *secondary* become negotiable again. Secondary drama counteracts the fact that the form becomes transparent in favor of the content and, through the generic term, focuses attention to the question as to what is meant by drama and by the concept of secondariness or how the relation between these categories would be thinkable. With the secondary dramas penetrating very specific plays that are at the forefront of the German literary canon, they get to the bottom of established expectations and habits of perception of the spectators in order to evoke a feeling of alienation when the secondary drama bursts in, a feeling that also or directly applies to these seemingly well-known dramas. In the combination of primary and secondary drama, there is a mutual

quency of productions and the number of visitors which demonstrate the singular position of Lessing, Goethe and Schiller (Deutscher Bühnenverein 1990 – 2013).

**9** This can be seen, for instance, in the Goethe Institute list of fifty currently most important directors in the German-speaking countries with thirteen women and thirty-seven men mentioned (Goethe Institut n.d.).

fragmentation of the texts, a creation of blank spaces that challenge the audience to occupy these spaces themselves, thus allowing for new ways of perception and abandoning practised patterns.

Since binary oppositions eventually permeate the whole concept, Jelinek differentiates between primary and secondary drama, major and minor drama, original and copy or she cites the dichotomies inscribed in the primary dramas such as those of woman/man, private/public, up/down, inside/outside, life/death in order to finally penetrate them as a *third* element, to make the supposed obviousness of these distinctions brittle and to create growths on these breaking points that make that what was made invisible and excluded re-emerge on the visible surface. Even the information on a possible realization of the texts described in this essay refers to the *excess,* to the refusal to create meaning through permanent overproduction and to the generation of "language waste" (Schößler and Bähr 2009: 18). This lets the texts repeatedly pass into a *noise* seemingly devoid of meaning, which also applies to the primary dramas in the moment of staging, inscribing the disturbance as ever-present possibilities in the dramas.

By the principle of addition, the concept of secondary drama undermines the reduction of complexity as it occurs in the production of social self-images and norms (Koch and Nanz in this volume: 3). The method pursued by secondary drama makes us aware of the (usually hidden) exclusion of plurality in favor of unambiguity. Any apparent certainty and clarity is broken up by the concept, the texts work with constantly conflicting voices, they cite supposedly verified categories, in order to eventually and even more certainly cut the ground under the recipients' feet. Secondary drama breaks with the established forms of memory and of remembrance culture that draw a distinction between what is memorable or significant and not memorable or insignificant and that understand history as the history of the rulers, refusing to create meanings in the sense of assessable entities. Secondary drama combines canonized literature with everyday banalities, thus following a non-hierarchical principle of equal juxtaposition. In the mixture of identity-establishing canon and *perishable* textual material, the decay is inscribed in what remains, yet due to this strategy, the volatile aspects might conversely participate in it.

In the meantime, the notion of secondary drama begins to establish itself – not only in the arts section and in theatres but also in the research on Jelinek – as a description of the intertextual method and of Jelinek's appending to canonized theatrical texts. Secondary drama and *parasitic drama* (Parasitärdrama) – a term Jelinek introduced shortly after publishing this essay as a category describing her plays – are often used interchangeably (Jelinek 2011). When applying the concept of secondary drama to all other texts of the author, we run the risk of overlooking the specific disturbance potential and the rich forms of the *aesthet-*

*ics of disturbance* this concept comprises. Jelinek herself claims she does not want to write secondary dramas anymore and inhibits partially that the concept should be applied in the staging of other theatrical texts.[10] This suggests that secondary drama is not intended to give rise to a new "genre;" it manifests itself as a single event disturbance in order to develop a potential to produce irritation and disagreement in the longer term.

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**10** See for example *Die Schutzbefohlenen* at the Schauspiel Leipzig, directed by Enrico Lübbe, where she forbade the combination with Aeschylus's *The Suppliants* in the form of a secondary drama and only allowed a succession of both texts.

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Friedrich Kittler

# Signal-to-Noise Ratio

If the place were not so distant,
If words were known, and spoken,
Then the God might be a gold ikon,
Or a page in a paper book.
But It comes as the Kirghiz light–
There is no other way to know it.
(Thomas Pynchon, "The Aqyn's Song")

Materialities of communication are a modern riddle, possibly modernity itself. It makes sense to inquire about them only after two things are clear. First, no sense exists – such as philosophy and hermeneutics have always sought between the lines – without physical carriers. Second, no materialities exist which themselves are information or, alternately, might create communication. When at the turn of the century, that hypothetical "Ether" – which Heinrich Rudolph Hertz and many of his contemporaries believed necessary to explain the distribution of wireless high-frequency signals (which would soon yield radio) – sank into the theoretical void, information channels without any materiality became part of the everyday itself. Electromagnetic waves as the modern outbidding [*Überbietung*] of all writing simply follow Maxwell's field equations and work even in a vacuum.

The information technologies of the last two centuries first made it possible to formulate (as Claude Shannon put it) a mathematical theory of information. As is well known, this theory not only disregards the fact that "frequently [...] messages have meaning; that is they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities" (Shannon and Weaver 1964: 31). Rather, because systems of communication that would transmit a single message (e. g., the number π, a determinate sine wave, or the Ten Commandments) are now superfluous and can be replaced by two separate signal generators (Shannon and Weaver 1964: 62–63), the messages themselves are as meaningless to information theory as their statistics are meaningful. The Messenger of Marathon, whose life and course coincided with a single message, has forfeited his heroic glory.

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That happened not long ago. For until the parallel development of railways and telegraphy, Europe's state postal systems – which functioned more or less regularly after the Thirty Years' War (Beyrer 1985: 54) – transported people, letters or printed matter, and goods in the same carriage. In other words, because all three elements of the transport system were material beyond doubt, there was no need to distinguish further between addresses and persons,[1] commands and messages, or data and goods in terms of communications. Accordingly, philosophers could write of the "spirit of man" or the "sense of things" on the basis of actual material reality.

Modernity, in contrast, began with a process of differentiation that relieved the postal system of goods and persons and made them relatively mobile on tracks or national roads. As a matter of course, it placed officers in first class, noncommissioned officers in second, and troops in third; weapons were loaded onto freight cars (Hedin 1915: 75). All this occurred, however, to separate material entities form pure streams of command, which it brought up to the absolute speed of light or electricity. In North America, the new system was instituted during the Civil War – the "first 'technical' or 'total' war, which, unfortunately, has been studied far too little."[2] In Europe the shift occurred through Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke's two campaigns in 1866 and 1870. The flight path of the postcardwhich, according to Derrida, is one with Destiny or History itself – no longer went straight from Socrates and Plato to Freud and beyond. (Derrida 1987) It abandoned the routes of literature and philosophy – that is, the path of the alphabet and its restricted possibilities of communication – in order to become a mathematical algorithm.

Shannon's famous formula reads:

$$H = -\sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i \log p_i$$

1 That *person*, *individual*, *subject*, and other titles of "man" [*der Mensch*] do not refer to "the unity of an object" but simply to an address might be gathered from the words' traditional definitions – since Deconstruction, at the latest. For a more elegant derivation, however, see Niklas Luhmann (1994: 371–388).

2 That said, the author of these words – Wehrmacht rail engineer Blum – posits an exception that illuminates the status of literature under high-tech conditions: "Cf., moreover, the novel by Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (long-winded, but exceptionally instructive)" (Prof. Dr.-Ing. e. h. Blum 1939: 73).

Here quantity *H* measures how much freedom of choice – that is, how much uncertainty – governs the output when an information network [*Nachrichtensystem*] selects a specific event out of a number of possible events with probabilities that are all known. If the system – for example, in the orthographically standardized sequence of *q* and *u* – worked with a single signal of material certainty, *H* would sink to its minimum level of 0 (Shannon 1949: 657). According to Lacan, the sign of the sign is that, by definition, it can be replaced (Lacan 2007: 712–713); in contrast, all that is Real sticks in place (Lacan 2007: 17). Even measuring its travels through the space and time of an information channel would yield only physical data about energy or speed, but nothing concerning a code.

Therein lie the difficulties for materialism; for example, when Marx, contemplating the Second Industrial Revolution, affirmed the law of the conservation of energy. Messages are calculable, but not determinate. Also (and especially) if Shannon's formula for information, including the controversial sign that precedes it (Bell 1955: 35), is identical with Boltzmann's formula for entropy, the possibility of information does not derive from physical necessity – that is, from a Laplace universe – but from chance. Only if system elements have the chance, here or there, to be open or closed, does the system produce information. That is why combinatorics came about on the basis of dice (Lacan 1988: 299–300), and computer technology through endlessly repeated grids (Shannon 1938: 713–722). In the elementary – that is, the binary – case, *H* achieves its maximum of 1 when *p1* and *p2*, that is, the presence and absence of modern philosophemes, have the equal probability of 0.5. Both would reject a die whose six faces had unequal chances of occurring, even if a player, who bets on advantages for either side, might not.

The fact that the maximum of information means nothing other than highest improbability, however, makes it almost impossible to distinguish it from the maximum degree of interference. In contrast to the concept of logical depth, which IBM researchers have been working on recently, Shannon's index *H* serves "as a measure of the statistical characteristics of a source of information, not as a step towards finding the information value of any given waveform or function" (Bell 1955: 35). And so it happens that on the one hand, the highest information rate per time unit makes it advisable to use "all parts of the available frequency [in the channel]," while on the other, "one of the main characteristics of random noise is that its power spectrum is uniformly spread over the frequency band" (Bell 1955: 97). In other words, signals, whenever possible, mimic interferences. And because the thermal noise that all matter – and therefore also resistors or transistors – radiates when operating (according to another one of Boltzmann's formulas) is white noise of the same kind, information without matter and mat-

ter without information are coupled just like the two ways of reading a picture puzzle.

As strange as it sounds, applied engineering solves problems of this sort through what is called "idealization." One treats every signal, which after passing through a real channel is necessarily laden with noise, as if it had been generated by two different sources: a signal source and a noise source, which in the most straightforward case are simply added to each other. For all that, it is equally valid to assume that the signal already coded was coded once more by an enemy intelligence, and that this second coding is successful and enigmatic in proportion to the whiteness of the noise. According to Shannon's "Communication Theory of Secrecy Systems" – a paper that for good Pentagon reasons itself remained sealed for years – the only way out of this fundamental undecidability is offered by the experiential fact that encrypting systems are mostly selections from a number of chance events that, while large as possible, are ultimately finite, whereas noise can assume infinitely many values (Shannon 1949: 685). For this reason, numbers theory, which was formerly so purpose-free,[3] has today become a hunt for the highest possible prime numbers, which – as encryptions of military-industrial secret messages – necessarily appear as noise to an enemy who has not yet cracked them. Turing, the well-known computer theorist and unknown cryptographer of the World War, formulated that laws of nature can be replaced by code systems, matters of evidence by intercepted messages, and physical constants by daily keying elements – that is, the natural sciences as a whole can be replaced by cryptanalysis (Turing 2004: 421). The difference between chaos and strategy has become just that slight.

It is this "return of the Chaos of old within the inside of bodies and beyond their reality" with which Valéry's technical Faust terrifies a Devil whose "entirely elementary science" is, as everyone knows, simply speech. Experimental interconnection of information and noise makes "discourse a side issue" (Valéry 1957–1960: 300–301). After all, the orders of a culture of writing, whether literary or philosophical, could only construct meaning out of elements that had meaning themselves. Sentences emerged from words, but words did not come from letters. In contrast:

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**3** As late as 1940, the leading mathematician at Cambridge could still write: "The 'real' mathematics of 'real' mathematicians, the mathematics of Fermat and Euler and Gauss and Abel and Riemann, is almost wholly 'useless' (and this is true of 'applied' as 'pure' mathematics). [...] It is the dull and elementary parts of applied mathematics, as it is the dull and elementary parts of pure mathematics, that work for good or ill" (G. H. Hardy, "A Mathematician's Apology," quoted in A. Hodges (1983: 120). Hodges has no difficulty showing how the Second World War definitively refuted such statements.

> Let us consider the signifier quite simply in the irreducible materiality that structure entails, insofar as this materiality is its own, and let us conjure the signifier up in the form of a lottery. It will be clear then that the signifier is the only thing in the world that can underpin the coexistence – constituted by disorder (synchronically) – of elements among which the most indestructible order ever to be deployed subsists (diachronically). (Lacan 2007: 551)

Shannon demonstrated just such a logic of the diachronic chaining of chaos all the more strikingly for purposefully shaping his writing experiment – in contrast to the ancient play of letters that occurs in Cabbala – in a way that does without semantics. His point of departure is our conventional alphabet, that is, not some twenty-six letters, but rather these same letters and a *space* (as one finds on typewriters).

Here, in a purely statistical sense, a finite quantity of signs is to approach or simulate a language; in this case, English. As a matter of course, zero-order approximation, with twenty-seven symbols that are equally probable and independent of each other, provides only noise or gobbledygook: "xfcml rxkhrjffjuj zlpwcfwkcyl [...]" First-order approximation, that is, given probabilities or frequencies of letters as they occur in texts written in English, begins to admit articulation: "ocro hli rgwr mielsswis en ll [...]" Second-order approximation, which as a Markov chain also considers diachrony (that is, the probability of transition between all possible pairs of letters in a language), readily yields short words such as "are" or "be." Approximation of the third order, involving triads of English letters, can already compete with the mad, with Surrealists, or (as Shannon observed[4]) with *Finnegan's Wake:* "in no ist lat whey cractict froure birs grocid pondenome of demonstures of the raptagin is regoactiona of cre." Finally, when Markov chains no longer draw their elements from letters, but from words, second-order approximation already produces the neatest self-references of orality, typography, and literature: "the head and in frontal attack on an English writer that the character of this point is therefore another method for the letters that the time of who ever told the problem for an unexpected" (Shannon and Weaver 1964: 43–44).

This frontal attack on English writers (or, alternately, devils) is led of course by noise, which Shannon's formula – as "another method for ... letters" – introduced to written culture. Henceforth, letters received no better treatment than numbers (which exhibit unlimited manipulability); henceforth, signals and nois-

**4** See Shannon and Weaver (1964: 56): "Two extremes of redundancy in English prose are represented by Basic English and by James Joyce's book *Finnegan's Wake*. The Basic English vocabulary is limited by 850 words and the redundancy is very high. [...] Joyce on the other hand enlarges the vocabulary and is alleged to achieve a compression of semantic content."

es were defined only numerically. Communication (to use Shannon's language) is always "Communication in the Presence of Noise" (Shannon 1949a: 10 – 21) – and not just because real channels never do not emit noise, but because messages them-selves can be generated as selections or filterings of noise.

Technical idealization, according to which the noise-laden output of networks counts as the function of two variables – of a signal input presumed to be noise – free and a separate source of noise – enables nothing more and nothing less than the specification of signal-to – noise ratios. In a first step, this interval indicates (on the basis of voltages, currents, or power) only the quotient of medium signal amplitude and the initial degree of interference. However, simply because electric networks, via their interfaces, are connected to human senses and these senses – according to Fechner's constitutional law of psychophysics – react to a geometric increase of stimulation as if it occurred only arithmetically, it is better to record the signal-to-noise ratio logarithmically. Accordingly, the unit *decibel* (named in technological – i. e., nearly unrecognizable – honor of the inventor of the telephone, Alexander Graham Bell) transforms a fraction into twenty times or (in the case of output) ten times its logarithm:

$$S_N^{\#} = 20\ \mathrm{dB}\ \lg \frac{U_{g\,eff}}{U_{r\,eff}}$$

Hereupon, spoken language – once, for the ears of philosophers, the auto-affection of consciousness itself – loses all interiority and becomes just as measurable as otherwise only the quality transmission of radio and television systems is.

A signal to noise ratio of 60 dB guarantees the seemingly noise-free communication that others would call "undistorted." One between 40 and 0 dB still affords understanding (albeit understanding that is not hermeneutical). Beginning at -6 dB, the hearer is left only with the general impression that language is "happening." And because our senses – as has been clear since psychophysical experiments, at the latest – are themselves information technology [*Nachrichtentechnik*] by nature, "the realm between the threshold of hearing and the threshold of sensation" (that is, between the minimum and maximum of acoustic perception) "practically" bridges "the entire realist for which air possibly can provide the transmission medium for sound: at the lower end, the threshold of hearing lies between 20 and 30 dB above the noise level, which is determined by the thermal noise of air molecules; and at a sound pressure level of 160 dB" – approximately 30 dB above the pain threshold – undesired, "non-linear effects of sound distribution in the air occur" (Sickert 1983: 44), as is the case with bad stereo systems. More poetically, and to speak with Rudolf Borchardt, if

our ears were ten times more sensitive, we would hear matter roar – and presumably nothing else.

Poetry, however, Borchardt and Adorno notwithstanding (Adorno 1974: 536), is not supposed to admit noise. Ever since the Greeks invented an alphabet with vowels that also served the purpose of musical notation – which, that is, was lyric and there – fore constituted the first "total analysis of the sound-forms of a language" (Lohmann 1980: 174) – its system of communication has rested on the interconnection [*Verschaltung*] of voice and writing. At the same time, however, the quantity of operations that was possible with these graphic phonetic elements also limited the degree of literary complexity. To this extent, poetry formed an autopoietic system that produced its own elements as self-referential components – and for this same reason (and like any system of the kind) could not make further distinctions between elements and operations (Luhmann 1986: 321). Necessarily, then, there was no possibility for analyzing the input and output elements of this Greek analytic system again, until the voices or graphic traits had vanished again into the *quanta* of noise that, in physical terms, they are. On the contrary, according to Jakobson's definition, the "poetic function" assured focus "on the message as such," an immediate palpability of signs" (Jakobson 1987: 70), and therefore maximized the signal-to-noise ratio.

"What is it, everywhere, / That Man is well [*Worauf kommt es überall an, / Daß der Mensch gesundet*]?" asked Goethe – poet and psychiatrist in one – in *West-Eastern Divan*. He answered his own question with the self-referential emphasis of rhyme and spondaic meter: "All hear the sound gladly / That rounds itself into a note [*Jeder hoeret gern den Schall an, / Der zum Ton sich rundet*]." In strict fashion, poetry excommunicated, in the name of the articulated communication that it is, its environment – inhuman sound or "primordial echo [*Erzklang*]" (Goethe 1905: V, 13). Only madmen, like the anonymous "N.N." of 1831, whose verses represent the oldest poetry left behind in German asylums, had the audacity to choose, of all things, Goethe's poem "Audacity" [*Dreistigkeit*] as the motto for verses that hymned the very opposite: not articulated notes of speech but rather "Carnival's Good Friday-Easter-Cross-Wood-Hammer-Bell-Sound" [*Des Carnevals-Chartag-Ostern-Kreuz-Holz-Hammer-Glocken-Klang*] (Bird 1835: 7–15; Kittler 1990).

Of all the instruments, wood and hammers, metals and bells, have the highest quotient of noise. They function phatically – as a call to church or to a conflagration – and not poetically. For this reason, idiophones do not produce pure intervals, which Greek musical notation made storable and Pythagoras considered *Logos* itself. Mixtures of sound of innumerable frequencies – which moreover do not form integral relations (Stauder 1976: 142–158) – cannot be recorded as sheet music. However, where the system of poetry and music stops, the math-

ematical "return of the Chaos of old" (as Valéry put it) begins. In the same Age of Goethe, which for solid poetic reasons had to excommunicate and lock up self-declared "sound-catchers" [*Klänge-Fänger*] like the anonymous N.N., a departmental prefect appointed by Napoleon, Baron Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier, developed a method of calculation that paved the way not just for thermodynamics but also for all media of technological sound-catching, from Edison's cylinder phonograph up to the music computer.

Fourier analysis made it possible for the first time, through integration and series expansion, to evaluate periodic signals of finite energy – that is, all physical signals, whether their harmonics were integral multiples of a tonic note or not – as numbers. The equation,

$$S_c(f) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} s(t) \cdot e^{-2j\pi ft}\, dt$$

transfers quadratically integrable functions of time, *t*, into functions of frequency, *f*, and in trigonometric conversion, provides the entire spectrum of partial sounds, $S_c$, according to magnitude and phase. A fundamental operation of poetry and music – repetition – is now thoroughly quantifiable, whether in the case of perceptible rhythms or in that of sounds which human ears hear as such only because they cannot break down their complexity into discrete elements. Above 60 hertz (or vibrations per second), our physiological capacity for distinction ends – if only because one's own vocal cords begin at this frequency.

With all its applications – from convoluting and correlating given signals up to the fundamental sampling theorem demonstrated by Nyquist and Shannon at Bell Labs – Fourier analysis changed the signal space just as much as, once upon a time, the vowel alphabet of the Greeks had done, this anonymous act that founded our culture. To be sure, in everyday life, the fundamental law of systems theory continues to hold that "communications systems cannot undermine communication" by reverting to, say, the frequency range of nervous impulses (Luhmann 1987: 24–33). Only Thomas Pynchon's novels present mathematical-neurological characters such as, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the drug-addled disc jockey Mucho Maas or, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Private First Class Eddie Pensiero (89th U.S. Infantry Division): their perception has already learned, whether by "measuring" or "thinking," to oscillate [*einschwingen*] into feedback loops by way of technical Fourier analysis; that is, to circumvent their own limitations and separate elements of communication from their operations. (Pynchon 1983: 703 ff; 1999: 113–114) However, for the voices of people to be subject to spectral anal-

ysis – which after 1894 proved the superiority of female employees to male ones in telecommunications [*Fernsprechdienst*] even to the Reichstag deputy August Bebel (Siegert 1986: 185), and after 1977 made it possible for the U.S. Air Force to establish an optimal and infallible means of regulating personnel access (Sickert 1983: 261–262) – the system of everyday communication has also changed in an institutional framework.

Therefore, under modern – that is to say, media-technical – conditions that mock all phenomenology, media have taken the place of the arts. A "new illiteracy," as Salome Friedlaender called it long before McLuhan or Ong declared the end (in a celebratory tone) of the "Gutenberg Era," erected "antibabylonian towers." These "radio towers" (Friedlaender 1985: 156–170) in cities and in brains have positivized the anonymous madman of 1831. All "guitars" and "bells" – about which "N.N." could only dream or write verses – achieve the honor they are due in the Real. Chuck Berry (and with him our own communication system, the Libertas disco in Dubrovnik) hymned an illiterate electric-guitar player, who – as if that were not yet enough – is called "Johnny A. B. C. Goode."

> There was a lonely country boy
> Named Johnny B Goode
> Who never ever learned to read and write so well
> But he could play the guitar like ringing the bell.

Entertainment electronics simply means feeding back all operative rooms of free play [*Spielräume*] in analog – and more recently, digital – signal processing into the ears and eyes: as a trick, gadget, or special effect (Kittler 1999). As is well known, the founding hero of such effects was Wagner. In the form of *The Ring of the Nibelungen*, music abandoned its native realm of *logoi* or intervals in order to measure out all the possible spaces and transitions between sound and noise. The prelude to *The Rhine Gold*, because its Rhine is a pure river of signals [*reiner Signalfluß*], begins with an E-flat major chord at the lowest bass register, over which eight horns then lay an initial melodic motif. However, it is not melody but rather (and as if to test out the musical transmission bandwidth) a Fourier analysis of that E flat from the first to the eighth overtone. (Only the seventh, somewhere between C and D flat, cannot occur, because European instruments will not play it.

And so, after the absolute beginning of Wagner's tetralogy has revoked, via music drama, Goethe's poetic filtering of "sound" into a "note," the absolute ending – Act III of *Twilight of the Gods* – can again leave overtones and again

submerge into pure noise, that is, liquidate the signal-to-noise ratio.[5] Brünnhilde, who as the excommunicated Unconscious of a god can communicate with Wotan, the imperial author of her days, just as little as N.N. could communicate with Goethe, instead sings to him, as a finale, an "uninhibited lullaby" (Adorno 2005: 125):

| | |
|---|---|
| Weiß ich nun, was dir frommt? | Do I now know what avails you? |
| Alles, Alles, | All, all, |
| Alles weiß ich, | All do I know, |
| Alles ward mir nun frei. | All now is free to me. |
| Auch deine Raben | Even your ravens |
| hör ich rauschen: | I hear rushing: |
| mit bang ersehnter Botschaft | With anxiously desired embassy |
| kehren die beiden nun heim. – | Now they both homeward wing. – |
| Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott! | Rest, rest, you God! |
| | (Wagner 1970: 1273 – 1277) |

Wotan's unconscious desire goes into fulfillment, then, as soon as a heroic soprano and a full orchestra implement it. What ends with the *fading* of a god in Valhalla's sea of flames is European art itself. For the two ravens – dark messengers or angels of media technology – neither speak nor sing; in their flight, the transmission and emission of information – indeed, "message" and "noise" – collapse. *Twilight of the Gods* means the materiality of communication, as well as the communication of matter.

In the years between Fourier analysis and Wagner's tetralogy, the same thing motivated the Scottish botanist Robert Brown. To be sure, matter has been noisy since time immemorial, but Brown's chance discovery first transferred this stochastic message into a fitting concept. In 1872, the strange zigzag movements that pollens dissolved in water were performing under a microscope inspired him, like another Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, to believe he had discerned the hidden sex life of living matter for the first time. This sexualization of the realm of plants was in a sense appropriate for the Age of Goethe and its eponymous hero (Goethe 1905: 329). Unfortunately, however, Brown's further experi-

5 Accordingly, the musical apocatastasis of all noise sources in and since Wagner has led poets to indulge in impossible Fourier analyses when offering descriptions. On Strauss and Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*, Anton Wildgans reported from the Kleines Theater in Berlin: "One feels as if one were in a temple. Then, from its concealment, the orchestra sounds and the tragedy begins; it rushes past one in a movement uninterrupted by acts, like a heightened dream-experience, without relenting in tension, yet comparable to the line of wave, up and down. The whole time, one's own soul vibrates along with it [*Aber immer Schwingung und Mitschwingungen der eigenen Seele*]" (Wildgans 1947: 55; reference thanks to Martin Stingelin, Basel).

ments revealed the same phenomenon occurring with dead pollens – indeed, with pulverized rocks. A spontaneous irregularity, the noise of matter, dissolved the fundamental concept of the Age of Goethe, just as Fourier had dismantled the articulated music of language [*Sprachton*]. But instead of providing an explanation that does not exist, Brown simply lent the phenomenon his name: "Brownian motion" (Heims 1982: 63–64).

It was only half a century later, when Maxwell and Boltzmann opposed anatomic-statistical model to the received physical theory of constant energy, that Brown's item of curiosity arrived at the touchstone of scientific truth. To the technologically equipped eye, the zigzags demonstrated nothing less than the infinite ping-pong that molecules play with each other above absolute temperature *T*. A Brownian particle experiences approximately $10^{20}$collisions with other molecules per second, so that "the periods during which [it] moves without abrupt change in direction are too rare and too brief to be caught even by modern high-speed photography" (Heims 1982: 437). For this reason, Boltzmann's formula expressed the noise of matter simply as the statistical mean:

$$\frac{\Delta PN}{\Delta f} = 4kT$$

Telecommunications specialists [*Nachrichtentechniker*] may content themselves with medium-level noise on wave bands, but not modern mathematicians. Whereas classical analysis limited its realm to regular forms and constant functions, the twentieth century – very much to its "fear and horror" ((Heims 1982: 70) – went over to formalizing irregularity. In 1920, Norbert Wiener formulated Brownian movement as a function that cannot be differentiated at any point, that is, as a function whose zigzags form innumerable angles without tangents. On this basis, he was able to assign a measure to thermal noise that not only includes average values, but also its actual paths. After this mathematical formalization of the Chaos of old, it was no longer difficult to approach the materiality of music and language as well. Wiener's Linear Prediction Code (LPC) has become one of the foundational procedures enabling computers to simulate the random generators in our larynxes. On the basis of past but discretely sampled (and therefore storable) sonic events ($x_{n-1}$ to $x_{n-k}$), linear prediction prophesies a probable future event:

$$x_n^* = -\sum_{k=1}^{k} a_k x_{n-k}$$

Needless to say, it thereby miscalculates the Real in its contingency, yet this very error (as the difference between $x_n$ and $x^*_n$) determines the next valuation, in order to minimize it progressively and adapt the coefficient $a_k$ to the signal as it actually occurs.

During the Age of Goethe – according to standing psychiatric definitions – the madness [Wahnsinn] or "idiocy" [Blödsinn] of patients like "N.N." consisted of "hearing a wild noise everywhere, but no intelligible tone, because they are not capable of extracting one of them from the multitude, of tracing it back to its cause, and thereby recognizing its meaning" (Reil 1803: 417). Wiener's Linear Prediction Code positivized this very Chaos. That is, his Fourier analysis can demonstrate mathematically that "the minimization of middle quadratic prediction error is equivalent to the determination of a digital filter that reduces the power density spectrum of the linguistic signal [at the input] as close as possible to zero" – or alternately, "transforms the spectrum of the prediction error into a white spectrum" (Sickert 1983: 137–138). Whereas other filters (for example, in Shannon's writing experiment) also introduce, by way of transition probabilities, redundancy as the simulacrum of meaning, the Whitening Filter literally makes discourses "a side issue."

For this same reason, Shannon's mathematics of signals and Wiener's mathematics of noise return in structural psychoanalysis – which, after all, analyzes (or eliminates) discourses in the same way that Freud analyzed souls (or translated them into "psychic apparatuses"). In the first place, Lacan's concept of the Real refers to nothing but white noise. It celebrates "jam" – this keyword of information technicians – as modernity itself:

> The quantity of information then began to be codified [i.e., by Shannon]. This doesn't mean that fundamental things happen between human beings. It concerns what goes down the wires, and what can be measured. Except, one then begins to wonder whether it does go, or whether it doesn't, when it deteriorates, when it is no longer communication. It is the first time that confusion as such – this tendency there is in communication to cease being a communication, that is to say, of no longer communicating anything at all – appears as a fundamental concept. That makes for one more symbol. (Lacan 1988: 83)

Second, and as a matter of due consequence, Lacan's symbolic order – far from what philosophical interpretations hold – is a law of probability that builds on the noise of the Real; in other words, a Markov chain (Lacan 2007: 33–41). Psychoanalysts must intercept the improbabilities in (and out of) repetition compulsions just as cryptographers extract a secret message from what seems to be noise. Third, this media-technical [*nachrichtentechnische*] access to the Unconscious liquidates the Imaginary – which as a function of initial optical pattern recognition has already equated the philosophical concept of insight [*den Er-*

*kenntnisbegriff der Philosophie*] with misrecognition (Lacan 1988: 306 – 307). That is why it is only by means of psychoanalysis that a subject's chances can be tallied in terms of game theory – that is, calculated. (Lacan 2007: 730)

What can be calculated by means of computerized mathematics is another subject, and a strategic one: self-guided weaponry. Wiener developed his new cybernetics not to analyze human or even biological communication. As he put it himself, "the deciding factor in this new step was the war" (Wiener 1963: 28). On the eve of the Second World War – given the extremely accelerated air forces of the enemy – it was strictly a matter of optimizing Anglo-American artillery systems to compete. Because the actual flight path of bombers involves the complex interplay of commands, errors of navigation, air turbulence, turning circles, maneuvers evading artillery fire, and so on, it cannot – in as much as it is the chance movement of human beings – be predicted. And yet, prediction proves vital simply because artillery projectiles, whose speed exceeds their target's only in relative terms (unlike that of human targets), must intercept the bomber in its future position, and not at its present location. Therefore, to minimize the problem of incomplete information – this noise from a future[6] – Wiener implemented the Linear Prediction Code in an automated artillery system, which soon operated on a computer basis. The United States of America entered the Second World War armed in this capacity.

In less than two hundred years, mathematical information technology transformed signal-to-noise ratios into thoroughly manipulable variables. Along with the operational borders of the system known as everyday language, those of poetry and hermeneutics were exceeded, and media established whose address (all advertising to consumers notwithstanding) can no longer be called "human" with any certainty. Ever since its foundation [*Stiftung*] in Greece, poetry had the function of reducing the chaos of sound to recordable and therefore articulated tones, whereas hermeneutics – ever since it was instituted by Romanti-

**6** Only minimization occurs because no filter – whether analog or digital – can foresee the future without itself consuming time. A gifted engineer formulated the aporia as follows: "Another limitation is that filters cannot be expected to predict the future! While this may seem obvious, a low-pass filter specification with zero phase shift at all passband frequencies is asking exactly that. For example, if the filter were presented the first three samples of a low-frequency yet high-amplitude wave, it would have no way of "knowing" whether it really was part of a low-frequency or part of a high frequency but low amplitude cycle without further data. Zero phase shift implies that such a decision is made immediately and the samples either pass to the output or are blocked." (Chamberlin 1980: 433 – 434.) On this uncertainty principle [*Unschärferelation*] of communications technology, which ever since the work of Dennis Gabor has confronted the measurement of frequency and time in the same way that quantum physics faces waves and corpuscles, see also Bell (1955).

cism – secured this complexity reduction intellectually [*geisteswissenschaftlich*]: by assigning it to the address of a poetic subject called the "author." Interpretation purified an interior space of all noise, which in the beyond of events, in fits of delirium and wars, never ceased not to stop.

Ever since noise, through the interception of enemy signals, has not been evaluated by interpreting articulated discourses or sounds, the yoke of subjectivity has been lifted from our shoulders. For automated weapons systems are subjects themselves. An unoccupied space has emerged, where one might substitute the practice of interception for the theory of reception, and polemics for hermeneutics. Indeed, one might inaugurate *hermenautics* – a pilot's understanding of signals, whether they stem from gods, machines, or sources of noise.

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Tobias Nanz

# Disrupted Arts and Marginalized Humans

## A Commentary on Friedrich Kittler's "Signal-to-Noise Ratio"

A commentary on Friedrich Kittler's essay, "Signal-to-Noise Ratio" (for a reprint see this volume: 347–361), is necessarily intimately bound up with the topic of the essay in question, since in the semantic sense every commentary aims to establish a signal-to-noise ratio. Michel Foucault understood the commentary as an instrument that controls and restricts a discourse, that unearths and elaborates what was already silently articulated in it. Thus, "fundamental and creative discourses" (Foucault 1981: 57) are repeated and confirmed, since the same signals and messages are always filtered out of a background noise of countless possible meanings. Following on from this, Kittler was particularly interested in the way in which technical media are involved in the formation of discourses. He coined the term "discourse network," which "designate[s] the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data" (Kittler 1990: 369). Thus, every author is embedded in a specific contemporary or historical context and network in which the media s/he uses/used to write his/her texts are relevant actors in the discourse network. In Kittler's case, as from the 1980s these media were the electric typewriter, the personal computer and word processor, which transformed each of his texts into the binary code and displayed the writing on monitors or on the printed page, as a surface effect of algorithms (Kittler 1988: 298–299). In the current discourse network, an author's text production cannot be separated from the digital processing carried out by a computer. Thus, a commentary on Kittler's text can be interpreted literally and metaphorically as an adjustment of the signal-to-noise ratio: from the noise of the sequences of 0 and 1, a short text emerges on the screen or on paper, which filters out a specific message from numerous possible meanings.

"Signal-to-Noise Ratio" was first published in 1988 in the anthology *Materiality of Communication* [*Materialität der Kommunikation*], edited by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, and sought to divert attention away from questions of hermeneutics and the search for meaning in texts to the materiality of the media, which are the conditions of possibility of communication, texts, and cultures (Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer 1988). Meaning, according to Kittler, would not exist without a physical medium that can establish communication,

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by which he means material media such as books as well as immaterial media such as electromagnetic waves. This shift in focus is designed to open up a perspective that, building on Foucault's discourse analysis, attempts to reveal the media-technical conditions of possibility of communication processes. Since Foucault's studies mostly did not cross the threshold of the twentieth century, Kittler's authority for the twentieth century is the mathematician Claude Shannon. His mathematical information theory dealt with the problem of how to transfer data without information loss, using electronic channels (e. g., telegraphy or telephony). In Shannon's case, the primary goal was to ensure a message is sent, that is to say, to describe the technical conditions of possibility of a signal transmission, and to provide the necessary mathematics – regardless of the significance of what the transmitter is sending to the receiver and regardless of the medium used to transmit the data. This bracketing out of the different modes of operation of the media – which, by contrast, play a fundamental role in Kittler's theory – is probably due to the war-time conditions in which Shannon's theory was conceived. The central premise was "get the message through," which, in accordance with mathematical information theory, was oriented towards the largest common denominator amongst many different channels and did not entail a subtle differentiation between media (Schüttpelz 2002: 64 – 65).

For the topic of the present volume, Kittler's text "Signal-to-Noise Ratio" appears interesting in three respects. Firstly, from Shannon's work it develops the aspect that is fundamental to the theory of the media, namely that disruption – noise or interference – is a prerequisite for all communication. Consequently, Kittler no longer defines the process of reception and the interpretation of texts as a hermeneutic process, but rather as a processing of signals. Secondly, he discusses the effects of mathematical information theory on the arts, and, thirdly, examines the status of human beings in the context of the computerization of society.

Thus, first of all, Shannon's mathematical information theory is based on the fundamental assumption that a communication channel never operates without interference. Shannon developed this thought during the Second World War when working for the Bell Laboratories in the United States. There, he designed a communication model that described the transmission of information from a transmitter to a receiver with continuous background noise, which can be caused, for example, by the channel, by the media technology, or by atmospheric discharges (Shannon 1949). The signal-to-noise ratio defines the ratio of signal power to noise power, and thus indicates whether a useful signal – i. e., a signal not drowned out by noise – arrives at the receiver's end and can be filtered out. The higher the signal-to-noise ratio, the less interference there is impeding a signal from reaching its destination. Since then, successful communication has always had to be considered in the context of disruption. As

epitomizing what he had in mind, Shannon introduced a noise source into his model, which was on the same level as the source of the sender, to which, if necessary, an encryption instrument is connected. Since Shannon was dealing at the same time with questions of encryption during the Second World War, his work resulted in a close link between communication theory and cryptography. In his essay, "Communication Theory of Secrecy Systems," he noted that from a cryptographic perspective "a secrecy system is almost identical with a noisy communication system" (Shannon 1991 [1946]: 113). The noise of the channel and the noise of the encrypted (and thereby disrupted) signal can in a way be added together, since an enemy intelligence service cannot distinguish between chaos (background noise) and strategy (noise deliberately introduced into the signal through encryption). Mathematically, both types of noise are thus approached in the same way (Winthrop-Young 2005: 140 – 141).

The principal aspect for Kittler is that the premises of mathematical information theory are valid not only for the technical side of communication, but that the correct setting of a signal-to-noise ratio also holds true for the semantic side. Processes of understanding and the assigning of meaning function analogously to information-processing systems and have to filter out signals from noisy channels. For Kittler, *understanding* means *signal processing*; it is no longer a question of interpreting, but rather of encoding.

Secondly, this mathematization of understanding implies that the status of the arts would be opened to debate, since – as Shannon's approximations to the English language are intended to make clear – works of art are no longer solely created by humans, but can also be produced by technical agents. By means of his experiments, he showed how, with the help of Markov chains, English literature can be calculated on the basis of a defined character set such as the alphabet. Markov chains describe stochastic processes that can provide prognoses for future developments. If one includes in a calculation the probability – for a specific language – of one letter of the alphabet being followed by another letter (in English, for instance, a meaningful word can never be created by placing an "x" directly after a "z"), this gives rise to individual word series, which may not necessarily engender meaning, but, as Kittler notes, they can compete with modern literature (as in *Finnegans Wake*). Thus, literature can also be calculated using mathematics, which – as Shannon formulates it – amounts to a "frontal attack on an English writer."

According to Kittler, this attack may have begun in the nineteenth century. Thus, on the one hand, the poetry of Goethe's time was characterized by the exclusion of noise, in the sense that voices or noises were transferred into the clearly defined sign system of the alphabet. Writing was supposed to ensure that the message reached its recipients and thus – thanks to discrete, noise-free letters of

the alphabet – raised the signal-to-noise ratio to a maximum. This was not to remain the case, however. For, using the example of Fourier analysis, which was created at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Kittler develops the mathematics of art. Fourier analysis makes it possible to express all physical oscillations – be it music or a reciting voice – in numbers and thus to notate intelligible speech as well as incomprehensible noise in numerical form, side by side. This quantification of sounds and voices made it possible to create a new form of art, such as music that does not follow the rules of classical harmony, but which can measure out the transitions between sound and noise. Kittler refers to the operas of Richard Wagner, which feel their way across the range of tones and ultimately end in pure noise; or the electronic music of the twentieth century, which can emit frequencies that a human listener is unable to perceive. The signal-to-noise ratio increasingly becomes a factor that brackets out human concerns and is relevant only to technical systems (Kittler refers to Norbert Wiener's system for controlling anti-aircraft fire). The production of art can now be carried out by technical agents, meaning that the addressee of art becomes increasingly inhuman.

For – thirdly – this is how Kittler concludes his deliberations: with the marginalization of the arts and human beings. If technical media generate frequencies that humans are unable to perceive, or if these media inaugurate processes of communication that bracket out human beings and, as a result of high speeds or encryption techniques, take place exclusively between computers and machines, then human beings are no longer the referent and the subject of communication techniques and art (Krämer 2004: 217–218). The media have gone through a genesis in which human beings are no longer a point of reference. The god of prostheses, who has outsourced many of his shortcomings to tools and technical media, seems to be in the process of being overtaken by artificial intelligence. The movement that began with processes of disruptive interference, their elimination or their targeted implementation, ends in computer-controlled and cybernetic systems, which "condemn human beings to remain human beings" (Kittler 2014: 210).

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