

Conflicting Tales: Subjectivity  
(Quadrilogy, Part 1)  
Burger Collection  
Quadrilogy

Volume 1:  
Subjectivity

Volumes 2–4:  
Narration, History, Language  
Burger Collection

Quadrilogy, Part 1

## Subjectivity

# Conflicting Tales

Edited by Daniel Kurjaković

JRP|Ringier

For Max and Yves who discover the world of art with me.

Monique  
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## Preface

Monique Burger

Since the early 1990s I have been acquiring works of art to build a collection that now consists mainly of contemporary American-European and Asian art. The Burger Collection has become a long-term engagement with art—both established artists and new voices. As patrons we participate in the funding of art spaces and institutions of art. From the outset we have been committed to lending works of the collection if the artists and interested parties required their inclusion in exhibitions. Art has always been a personal challenge for me, impelling me to reconsider who I am and what I want. It is not a question of picking winners. It is a question of paying attention to artists who are making interesting contributions, because what you get is not what you see, but what you learn. For me the quest is the most interesting thing about collecting—nothing is definite, everything can and will be questioned at some point. Why this artist over another? Collecting works of contemporary art is a way of dealing with issues artists of my generation, and younger ones, bring up, and it gives me an appreciation of our times that is quite distinct from the insights of the media or science.

When I started acquiring works, my choices were mostly based on intuition. Now my focus has shifted to art originating from cultures where historical and political issues are more pressing than in the Western world. Art represents a different kind of knowledge, not just a form of information. If you consider the way art deals with historical events, it unearths repressed phenomena that are absent from the general media and history books and makes them available to the collective memory. Then again it is not only about political, but also about mythological and philosophical issues which art manages to convey in a deeper and more sincere way.

Because works of art can only be fully appreciated first hand, as a collector I feel I have a responsibility, both towards artists and their art, to facilitate this experience. To this end, the Burger Collection will be holding temporary exhibitions on subjectivity, narration, history and language in four different locations around the world as well as publishing catalogs in the

near future. I hope that sharing our works in this way will catalyze a fruitful dialog and lasting insights.

## Vorwort

Monique Burger

Seit den frühen 1990er Jahren sammle ich Kunst. Mittlerweile ist eine Sammlung entstanden, die aus amerikanisch-europäischer und asiatischer Gegenwartskunst besteht. Die Burger Collection setzt sich langfristig mit Kunst auseinander, und zwar sowohl mit Arbeiten etablierter KünstlerInnen als auch mit neuen Positionen. Als Förderer beteiligen wir uns am Programm von Kunsträumen und Institutionen. Seit Beginn leihen wir Arbeiten aus, wenn sie für Ausstellungen angefragt werden. Kunst war immer eine Herausforderung für mich, insofern sie mich antreibt, meine Überzeugungen in Frage zu stellen. Es geht nicht darum, auf Ranglisten zu spielen, sondern darum, Künstler, die interessante Beiträge machen, aufmerksam zu beobachten: Denn was man bekommt, ist nicht, was man sieht, sondern was man lernt. Was ich am interessantesten finde, ist die Suche: Nichts steht fest, alles kann und wird irgendwann hinterfragt werden. Warum diese Arbeit und nicht jene? Zeitgenössische Kunst erlaubt mir, mich mit Themen auseinanderzusetzen, die Künstler meiner Generation beschäftigen. Kunst behandelt die Themen dabei auf eine Art und Weise, die sich von derjenigen der Medien und Wissenschaften unterscheidet. Sie erlaubt mir eine andere Sicht auf unsere Zeit. Als ich begann Kunst zu sammeln, folgte ich meiner Intuition. Jetzt liegt mein Interesse bei Kunst aus Gesellschaften, in denen historische und politische Themen virulenter sind als im Westen. Die Kunst repräsentiert eine andere Art von Wissen, nicht nur Information. Wenn man bedenkt, wie Kunst mit historischen Ereignissen umgeht, so ist es erhellend, wie sie unterdrückte Phänomene aufdeckt, die in den Medien und Geschichtsbüchern fehlen. Die Kunst holt das Verdrängte hervor und macht es dem kollektiven Gedächtnis zugänglich. Aber es geht mir nicht nur um das Politische, sondern auch um mythologische und philosophische Themen, die die Kunst auf eine tiefere und aufrichtigere Art vermittelt.

Weil Kunst ihre Wirkung nur entfaltet, wenn man sie direkt erlebt, sehe ich es den Künstlern und ihren Werken gegenüber als meine Verantwortung an, diese Erfahrung zu ermöglichen. Deshalb möchte ich die Werke mit der Öffentlichkeit teilen. Temporäre Ausstellungen zu Subjectivität, Narration, Geschichte und Sprache an vier unterschiedlichen Orten weltweit sowie Publikationen werden das Bild der Burger Collection in Zukunft vervollständigen.

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Boredom is a powerful tool

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www.c-collection.org | "folded to be ... an airplane,

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All compression generates expansion (Cildo Meireles,

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DISTANCE/PROXIMITY/SCALE/RELATIONSHIP

---

NEVER MORE SO / TWO-DIMENSIONAL

---

VIOLENCE AS POETRY

HIPROCRACY AS POETRY

WAR AS POETRY

PARTECIPATION AS POETRY

NEVER MORE SO AS POETRY

MONOLOGISM AS POETRY

IDENTIFICATION STRUGGLE AS

A FALSE GRAFIC MIRROR OF THE

a house, a house but looking like a.....

Tate, etc Nr. 14 / Autumn 2000) | African Art: - extreme elegance  
- synthetic capacity  
- economy of forms

~~ENTIRE~~ FUTILE DISTINCTION Paris 08. Oct. 08

AFTERLIFE / VISUAL POLLUTION

Paris - Montmartre 17 nov 08

Mean piece

Paris 11 Dec 2000

No mirror could contain an area larger than the world.

the reflection was not only identical to the object reflected but also 'provided' it

POETRY

WORLD AS POETRY

- Perspective creates distance between
- Relentless analogies
- Interruption and resumption of

Hunger a film by Steve McQueen

"The conversation scene between Bobby Sands  
17 of those min. in a single uncut shot."

Gravesend, the town were Joseph Conrad's

ANY CINEMATIC DISTANCING

UNINTERRUPTED CLOSE-UPS

A SERIES OF PARALLELS

A production / Performance Linda + Stephanie  
moving back and forth between the "stage"

EMERGING DURING A PERIOD

SIMPLE BINARISM as poetry

SOME OF THE QUESTIONS



human beings and things.

light and image produces a flicker

Paris 23. Apr. 09

and the priest is 22 min of the 96 min film,

"Heart of Darkness" begins

DEVICES as poetry  
or poetry

as poetry

zooming "V & VI" in the gallery space  
and the "viewer space"

OF DIFFERENCE as poetry

| FARCE poetry

poetry | EXCEPTION WITHIN CULTURE

Conflicting Tales: Subjectivity (Quadrilogy, Part 1), the opening exhibition of a four-part project, marks the beginning of a new phase in the activities of the Burger Collection, as it now comes to the public under its own name and with its own curatorial concept. The four parts of the quadrilogy correspond to four exhibition sites in different cities around the world, where in coming years the Burger Collection will be holding temporary exhibitions focused around the four aesthetic key terms subjectivity, narration, history, and language. Holding the exhibitions in different cities reflects the transnational character of the Burger Collection and underscores its interest in various cultural contexts. This interest leads us to link the collection's holdings expressly with the philosophical discipline of aesthetics, which suggests a discursive engagement with art, whether this be conceived as a set of teachings on perception, a theory of art, or the study of the aesthetic sign.

When a private collection seeks out the public, it needs on the one hand to take account of the recent history of this very contemporary phenomenon and the diverse models that already exist, and at the same time to choose a form that corresponds to the collector's own personal ambition and stance as well as his or her own possibilities and "politics." In so doing, the Burger Collection is taking a process-oriented path with the quadrilogy. The quadrilogy consists not only of a series of exhibitions, each with a pre-defined focus, but begins as a temporally open structure. Step by step, the intention is to trigger reflection on the process by which an assembly of artworks evolves into a collection with a specific profile. However the four parts with the different aesthetic key terms—conceived as points of orientation that can be linked to one another in many theoretical and philosophical ways—are put together in the future, the Burger Collection will be committed over the long term. The Burger Collection will seek out adequate forms of presentation for its works, developing formats for the reception and discussion of artistic, curatorial, and theoretical questions.

In the framework of subjectivity as aesthetic key term, this catalog presents a first selection of works from the collection, and with its textual contributions represents the discursive context of the exhibition in the temporary Berlin space. The texts essentially oscillate between two struc-

turally different methods of approaching subjectivity. On the one hand, the essays by Manuel Cirauqui, Daniel Kurjaković, Robert Pfaller, and Jörg Volbers show how differently subjectivity manifests itself in the field of aesthetics. These individual essays are matched on the other hand by the fundamental question of how to think the relationship between a specific artwork and the

discourse about art. By expressing the notion of subjectivity in the form of a speech act directed at the works, the exhibition not only claims such a relationship, but actively contributes to it. The question of how the relationship between art and discourse can be positively formulated is treated in a series of conversations in which art historians and theorists explore this productive problem. A program with artist conversations, tours, forum discussions and work shops—published on the exhibition homepage [www.quadrilogy.org](http://www.quadrilogy.org)—enables a more profound engagement with the exhibition. Two installations in public space produced especially by the Burger Collection in Berlin, also temporary works, further expand the exhibition. In Vittorio Santoro's neon installation *Monologism as Poetry* on the firewall of Zimmerstraße 88–89 contradictory voices deceptively evoke concepts like power, hallucination, or amnesia as purely aesthetic phenomena (preparatory notes from the sketchbook of the artist on pages 8–11). Fiete Stolte's bronze sculpture *Night between 7th and 8th Day / 27th Week / 2009*, installed in front of the entrance to the exhibition site, captures the physical traces of a sleeper as a negative volume who not just abandons the waking state, but also the conventional calendrical order (photographic studies on pages 16–18). Photographs of the installations from *Conflicting Tales* and subsequent exhibitions will be placed, together with event information, on the homepage. They will be documented in the fifth volume, which closes the series.

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## Einleitung

Daniel Kurjaković, Seraina Renz

Conflicting Tales: Subjektivität (Quadrilogie, Teil 1) markiert als Eröffnungsausstellung eines vierteiligen Projekts eine neue Phase der Aktivitäten der Burger Collection, die unter eigenem Namen und mit einem eigenen kuratorischen Konzept an die Öffentlichkeit tritt. Die vier Teile der Quadrilogie entsprechen sowohl vier Ausstellungsorten in verschiedenen Städten weltweit, wo die Burger Collection in Zukunft temporäre Ausstellungen organisieren wird, als auch vier unterschiedlichen ästhetischen Leitbegriffen: Subjektivität, Narration, Geschichte und Sprache. Die wechselnden Ausstellungsorte bilden den transnationalen Charakter der Sammlung ab und signalisieren das Interesse der Burger Collection für unterschiedliche kulturelle Kontexte. Die Leitbegriffe verbinden die Sammlungsbestände ausdrücklich mit der philosophischen Disziplin der Ästhetik, die eine diskursive Auseinandersetzung mit Kunst nahelegt, ob man Ästhetik nun als Lehre der Wahrnehmung, als Theorie von Kunst oder als Wissenschaft des ästhetischen Zeichens begreift. Wenn eine private Sammlung die Öffentlichkeit sucht, so hat sie einerseits die jüngste Geschichte dieses sehr zeitgenössischen Phänomens bzw. die diversen existierenden Modelle zu berücksichtigen und andererseits eine Form zu wählen, die der persönlichen Ambition und Haltung sowie den eigenen Möglichkeiten und der eigenen »Politik« entspricht. Die Burger Collection

beschreibt dabei mit der Quadrilogie einen aufwändigen und prozessorientierten Weg. Denn die Quadrilogie besteht nicht einfach aus einer Serie von vornherein bestimmten Ausstellungen, sondern ist zunächst eine zeitlich offene Struktur. Sie soll schrittweise die Reflexion über den Prozess in Gang setzen, bei dem aus einer Ansammlung von künstlerischen Arbeiten eine Sammlung mit einem spezifischen Profil wird. Wie auch immer sich die vier Teile mit den ästhetischen Leitbegriffen, die als vielfältig aufeinander beziehbare theoretisch-philosophische Orientierungspunkte gesetzt sind, in Zukunft manifestieren, die Burger Collection engagiert sich dadurch auf jeden Fall langfristig. Das Engagement drückt sich konkret darin aus, dass die Burger Collection für die Werke adäquate Formen der Präsentation sucht und aktiv Angebote für die Rezeption und Diskussion von künstlerischen, kuratorischen und theoretischen Fragen erarbeitet.

Der vorliegende Katalog zeigt im Rahmen des ästhetischen Leitbegriffs Subjektivität eine erste Auswahl von Werken der Sammlung und stellt durch diverse Textbeiträge das diskursive Umfeld zur Ausstellung in den temporären Räumen in Berlin dar. Die Texte stehen im Wesentlichen im Spannungsfeld von zwei strukturell verschiedenen Methoden des Umgangs mit dem ästhetischen Leitbegriff Subjektivität. Auf der einen Seite zeigen die Essays von Manuel Cirauqui, Daniel Kurjaković, Robert Pfaller und Jörg Volbers, wie unterschiedlich sich Subjektivität im Feld des

Ästhetischen manifestiert. Den einzelnen Aufsätzen steht auf der anderen Seite die grundsätzliche Frage gegenüber, wie das Verhältnis zwischen einem spezifischen Kunstwerk und dem Diskurs über Kunst zu denken ist. Indem die Ausstellung den Begriff der Subjektivität in Form eines an die Werke gerichteten Sprechakts äußert, behauptet sie ein solches Verhältnis nicht nur, sondern bringt es aktiv hervor. Wie das Verhältnis zwischen Kunst und Diskurs positiv formuliert werden kann, wird in einem Gesprächsteil verhandelt, in dem sich verschiedene KunsthistorikerInnen und TheoretikerInnen mit diesem produktiven Problem befassen.

Ein Programm mit Künstlergesprächen, Führungen, Diskussionsrunden und Workshops, das auf der Ausstellungs-Homepage [www.quadrilogy.org](http://www.quadrilogy.org) publiziert ist, macht eine vertiefte Auseinandersetzung mit der Ausstellung möglich. Zwei von der Burger Collection neu für Berlin produzierte, ebenfalls temporär installierte Werke im öffentlichen Raum erweitern die Ausstellung. Bei Vittorio Santoros Neoninstallation *Monologism as Poetry* auf der Brandmauer der Zimmerstraße 88–89 evozieren widerstreitende Stimmen Begriffe wie Macht, Halluzination oder Amnesie als scheinbar rein ästhetische Phänomene (vgl. die Notizen aus dem Skizzenbuch des Künstlers auf den Seiten 8–11). Fiete Stoltes in den Boden vor dem Eingang des Ausstellungsgebäudes eingelassene Bronzeskulptur *Night between 7th and 8th Day / 27th Week / 2009* bannt die physischen Spuren eines Schlafenden, der nicht bloß den Wachzustand, sondern auch die konventionelle Kalenderordnung verlässt, als negatives Volumen (vgl. die fotografischen Studien auf den Seiten 16–18). Installationsansichten von *Conflicting Tales* und den folgenden Ausstellungen werden zusammen mit den Veranstaltungen auf der Homepage und im fünften, die Katalogserie abrundenden Registerband dokumentiert.

16 *Subjectivity Conflicting Tales*

17 *Night between 7th and 8th Day/27th Week/2009 (photographic studies)* Fiete Stolte





The following essays discuss various meanings of subjectivity, one of the pivotal notions in aesthetics. From different perspectives, they propose arguments for its current relevance without necessarily touching upon historical dimensions. Jörg Volbers traces from a philosophical perspective the paradoxes of the subject. Robert Pfaller tackles the issue by providing its psychoanalytic diagnosis while Manuel Cirauqui ventures into redefining the function of the author in terms of the narrative center of subjectivity. Together with the text by Daniel Kurjaković, which describes some of the works and outlines the curatorial perspective of the present project, these contributions create the discursive context for the exhibition *Conflicting Tales* with works from the holdings of the Burger Collection.

a) Detours to Subjectivity

Daniel Kurjaković

b) The Difficulty of Self-Encounter

Jörg Volbers

c) The Anonymous Manuscript on Subjectivation

Robert Pfaller

d) Paradigm

Manuel Cirauqui

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*Conflicting Tales*

a) Detours to Subjectivity

Daniel Kurjaković

Fast sequences of images showing various sites around the world cut like mental knives into our iris, political uprisings from orange to green on flags, T-shirts, and armbands combine to form a color surface that sometimes animates, sometimes paralyzes our field of vision (with people as the amorphous background), reports about purloined baby snakes in Colorado, or how a worn-out child star has her pubic hair shaved, or wax mummies that take the form of pop stars and die before all our eyes (as if that were at all possible), or return as models with overly long extremities and extremely small doll faces, tantalize our brains. Reality is contradictory, and if the pain of an excessive existential demand presents itself, what society calls “media” comes onto the scene, robbing the matter of seriousness by giving us literally everything, or at least everything else . . .



Does art communicate differently than the media? Under what conditions is it not a prosthetic for a subjectivity that misrecognizes itself (that can be removed from the cycle of knowledge achievements and action patterns with only relative consequences)? Is it something other than the mirror from which variations of a biography with acceptable, because anticipated, changes look back at us, that are more or less equally calculated on the scales of an existence already thought through, and gradually shift, depending on need: life and death, youth and age, wealth and poverty, emotion and intellect, pleasure and commitment . . . ?

Subjectivity is not a container, not a fixed site, not a clear function, but a problem that cannot be ignored. The relationship between the exhibition *Conflicting Tales: Subjectivity (Quadriology, Part 1)* and the aesthetic discourse of subjectivity is not illustrative: subjectivity is not the “subject” of the exhibition, but rather serves as a leading point of orientation. The works from the Burger Collection are placed as those objects or rather obstacles against which notions of subjectivity can be worked out. If the project begins with the question of what kind of subjectivity art produces, then in the sense that the subject in the present is caught in a fundamental dilemma: how, if at all, to answer the growing challenges presented by insecure economic relations, migrations, and demographic changes or ecological-climatic transformations? The necessary examination of our own standpoint can hardly only be expected from political will or academic knowledge, but also needs

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to be set in action by way of “aesthetic scenarios,” for they address and develop modes of perception and thought in the subject that are receptive in a different way than those responsible for politics, media, or scholarship. Hence, the gaze is reversed. What part do specific artistic works have in the emergence and formation of subjectivity? Even if such a question is difficult to answer, it remains necessary even if it only seems to allow for the temporary systematization of fleeting and contradictory impressions and considerations. Perhaps more is possible: to discuss what contemporary constitutiveness might be, even if in the current geopolitical and transcultural situation this cannot take place in a universalizing fashion, but must remain culturally specific. Now, the question of subjectivity not only raises positive questions such as “What is the specific modality with which art impacts on our way of thinking and our perception?” It also brings us to the quicksand of skepticism, where the subject is confronted with doubt and indecision, with enduring processes of reconsideration, with impurities and paradoxes.

Obstacles

If artistic work is not just to illustrate a certain discourse (here, subjectivity),

but also to problematize it, direct evidence cannot be presented; instead, only a detour can be taken. This detour can lead through the description of several conditions under which the subject exists. One of the most important is the law: for each subject the law—of society, the group, the father—is one of the most profound and mysterious experiences, its validity is not only relative and changing, but merciless, irrevocable, and capable of asserting itself against the subject (the subject as subjected). The patterns in which one revolts against the law are multiple: the attempts to refuse it, to attack it, to trick it, to seemingly obey it . . . But as the well known Kafka short story “Before the Law” shows, the law operates long before individual consciousness realizes it. Its impact begins before the oversight. And without it needing the power, because one has always already subjected oneself to the law—in a desire for the law that precedes all else. Steven Shearer’s five coal drawings *Poems VI* present themselves with a consciously misleading title, to the extent that the “poems” are not poetry, but a scatological listing of apparent invectives, sacrilegious invocations, and insults (that turn out to be names of various kinds of heavy metal<sup>a</sup>): “SODOMIZED BY

a—See Nigel Prince, “From Breughel to Cradle of Filth,” in: Steven Shearer, ed. Nigel Prince, exh. cat. (Ikona Gallery, Birmingham/The Power Plant, Toronto, 2007), no pagination.

22 En Subjectivity

Conflicting Tales

THE CROSS / RAPTUROUS DISEMBOWELMENT / TORMENTING HOLY FLESH / STERILIZING THE UNWORTHY / GRIM SATANIC BLACK METAL / SCREAMING IN ECSTASY / BLACK FUCKING SODOMY / FAITHFUCKED EXCLAUSTRATION / NOCTUARY OF AGRIMOR . . .”. This suggests a reversal of hierarchies, the highest values are attacked, ideology seems murderous and intellectuality is only conceivable as perverse. The serial listing in identically large boards lends the drawings a certain monumentality and makes them tablets of the anti law, the black combines to form a visual wall that rises behind the continuing writing—this negative litany—(sometimes literally, when the *Poems* cover large outdoor surfaces). But here, the law is not simply repressive and latently violent, it is equally orgiastic, lustful, eruptive. What the *Poems* ultimately bring to the foreground is the complicit relationship between subject and law, the pleasure with which the subject subjects itself to the “force” of the law. For enlightened conceptions of the subject as well, this entanglement, according to which the subject willingly accepts the violence of the law—and in Shearer above all the religious or sexual law—is a touchstone.

The girl in Douglas Kolk’s *Suicide Girl* appears caught up in very special kinds of festivities. She occupies in a very physical way changing sites that



are only implied with very few lines, usually pure contours. The surface of her body is repeatedly brought into focus: blood dripping from her nose, writing that is (almost) scratched into the skin, other bodies that press into hers. But the girl does not become truly physical in these strangely distancing drawings, always sketch-like, as if the (incidentally androgynous) girl were not intended as a biological entity, and perhaps not even as a representative of gender, but as something symbolic—a personified state of feelings full of flexibility, lightness, and vulnerability vis-à-vis the world, its seductions, challenges, and its violence, but also an openness to the physical events of a society caught under so much pressure, with at best temporary idylls.<sup>b</sup> Beyond psychologisms, the exemplary aspect of a physically represented vulnerability becomes palpable: Kolk's drawings seem to imply the intelligence and creativity, but also the instability and division treated in recent films such as *Ken Park* (Harmony Korine, Larry Clark, and Ed Lachmann, 2002) or *Donnie Darko* (Richard Linklater, 2001), in coming of age scenarios where social violence and alienation are projected onto the ultimately rather defenseless minds of young people.

23 a) Detours to Subjectivity  
Daniel Kurjaković

In *Suicide Girl* the social state of affairs is not pathetically spread out, but transferred from the affected subject to the surroundings, the sites, the objects, the machines. By way of this shift, the ground torn open by a digger “bleeds” like the body of the protagonist. Such techniques indicate that Kolk in contrast to the media image tries to shift conflicts and difficulties of the subject to the surroundings, dividing them in space, occupying the space

in: Douglas Kolk, ed. Oliver Zybok (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2006), pp. 57ff.

c—It is also striking how a loose and yet rather coherent world emerges for this “suicide girl,” a world of locations and sites, but also of thoughts and imaginations, in which everything is not subject to everyday rationality, but dream, reverie, anesthesia, and

b—For more on this, see the artist's comments in conversation with Sarah Valdez: “‘It Isn't Me Mother.’ Douglas Kolk im Gespräch mit Sarah Valdez,”

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Conflicting Tales

sized sculptures.<sup>c</sup> Finally, Olaf Metzel's subversive *Votivtafel* takes recourse to idols, models, paradigms, and the compensatory function that idols have in light of the dynamic of identity of groups, societies, and nations, in the work; however that is also a certain form of erosion, the melting and decaying nimbus of the idols (which in turn refers to the more or less bearable coincidence and contingency of individual existence; this is exactly why the death of idols is so cathartic, as seen most recently in the case of Michael Jackson . . . ). The subjects in Julian Rosefeldt's *The Perfectionist* or

parasitically with non-psychological scenarios of emotionality, instead of banning it and spectacularizing it in icons. Kolk thus reactivates an animistic method according to which the inanimate object world is ascribed a soul. *Suicide Girl* not only presents the beholder with the obstacles of a girl—a “girl under influence,” to vary the title of the well-known Cassavetes film—but demonstrates the non-compatibility of a reconciliatory anthropological animism and an alienation that saturates contemporary consumer society.<sup>c</sup>

There is an entire series of artistic positions in *Conflicting Tales* where individuals stand under observation.<sup>d</sup> The artistic works here tend towards description; they depict situations in which individuals are sociologically graspable, individuals from contemporary society (although in one case, Fernando Bryce's *Bismarck TV*, the historical axis moves into view). Subjectivity here has nothing of the “interior gaze,” but becomes recognizable as that formation in which subjects are included after mechanics of social formation have had their impact upon them: Adam Adach's works, for example, represent phenomena of grouping, or perhaps community, for Rafal Bujnowski, collective “disciplining” is apparent; at issue in Norbert Bisky, in turn, are effects of standardization, coupled with the phantasm of perfectibility. In Lee Dongwook, morbid variants of dressing and training can be observed, along with the reduction of the individual to object and product; in Muntean/Rosenblum, in turn, those effects can be studied that provide possibilities of social behavior in a very physical sense, here the standardizing and yet identity granting potentials of poses. It is interesting how the poses attest ex negativo to the “amorphous” quality of the subject (its awkwardness, etc.) before it stages itself on the basis of rules of behavior and bodily engineering in a social role, a link that we can also posit behind Mathilde ter Heijne's gender critical contributions on the image of the woman in the form of life-

various intensities of a wake state mix with one another.

d—Here is not the place to address the scientific foundations of such observation. They can be traced back to behavioral research; their significance for the renewal of artistic methods at the intersection of performance and installation in the post-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s can hardly be overestimated.

in Hubbard/Birchler's *Night Shift* are also under observation, albeit not in the sense of a self-observation saturated with self-reflexivity.

An orientation towards idols, forms of treatment and discipline challenge the liberal notion of the free subject. They also show that the “freedom of the subject” is not only subject to external threat, but also due to the “voluntary” subjection to regulatory authorities, a structure that Foucault referred to again and again. It is a relationship that in media societies is communicated through visual records like images and, in so doing, can become a general reality for the community as Guy Debord already summed up in the fitting formulation: “The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.”<sup>f</sup> Artists like Grayson Perry, Verne Dawson, Olaf Metzel, Jaishri Abichandani or Wim Delvoye try to



expose these treatments of subjects by way of powerful visual triggers (e.g. national symbols or seductive consumer icons) in a satirical, parodic, and hyperbolic way.

Now, to what extent are these forms of the entanglement of the subject not only described and depicted in art, but also violated or even suspended? How does it reformulate the processes according to which subjects articulate their ideals and their desire and their relationship to the other? How does art make approaches visible beyond the opposition of individual and society, allowing them to be reconceptualized?

Jaume Plensa's sculpture Tel Aviv Man IX seems to be a materialization of the notion that language shapes bodies. Materialism, which directs thought about bodies to the organs, the palpable materiality, the substantiality and

25 a) Detours to Subjectivity  
Daniel Kurjaković

object of the individual, is opposed by a kind of "mentalism," where fleeting components like word and speech move to the foreground, and with this the metaphysics inscribed in the West of language, breath, and spirit. As a bellows is used to produce air, the bodies are formed as volume that is perceptive through a temporary architecture of letters, apparently fragile. A transparent "skin" of words refers to the emptiness of the volume, the sculpture becomes a kind of domicile of air that one ultimately breathes as a beholder of the sculpture. In so doing, the identificatory-psychological process moves to the background, the process that allows the individual artwork to seem like a kind of mirror for the beholders, permitting them to reassure

e—The work of Muntean/Rosenblum allows the beholder to think about the relationship between body and society, which is not so easy to represent, not only by placing diverse verbal mottos in the figures' (metaphorical) mouth, but in that the bodies and their attitude rise before us as mute signs of "youth." These youth people are not simply realistic depictions, but constructions, that is, staged bodies that do not seem "natural," but unnatural, moving them close to dolls and automatons.

f—Guy Debord, The Society of

the Spectacle, translated by Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 1983), p. 7.

g—For the mirror, this is not the case because if I look

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world (the set of all possible descriptions of the world) but redesigns its inner relationships; he does not create parallel worlds or even a new world that would replace an old one. Instead, he adds a changed world reference, which exhibits consequences in its simultaneity—or not. Is the eight-day week, which like any invention represents a new perspective on the given, an idiosyncratic and/or exemplary (referring to the artist only) addition to social reality,

themselves (or to narcissistically disappear in their reflection). From now on, the artwork is a site bound to the body, at a real and not only imaginary "distance" to the beholder; a palpable, and no longer just imagined "there."<sup>9</sup> Already the principle of construction—the positive body is only visible as a negative outline—refers to the fact that the figure itself is not present here, but only the idea of a figure, in other words, a suggestion. This in turn moves the figure towards an ideal unity, or more precisely, a speculation about the extent to which at issue is an implied body that is only palpable through the constant process of reading and re-reading, decoding and interpreting, speaking, saying, and mumbling (which, in turn, are basic physical techniques for spiritual exercises). The work is no longer representation and depiction, but rather a trace of and testimony to reality.<sup>h</sup>

The process is the method that materializes for a certain period of time to grant a certain meaning to a free trace. The trace is transformable. In the case of Fiete Stolte's 8 Sunrises—8 Sunsets (from: 8 Day Week Trip), Series E, an eight-part series of two Polaroids each takes on this witnessing function. Each Polaroid documents the (necessarily) unique moment in which the sun rises or falls, the beginning and end of the day. In the internal system of the artist, in turn, the factor "eight" refers to the reorganization of the weekly rhythm: the 7 days, 24 hours each of a week are reorganized to eight times 21 hours.<sup>i</sup> From this can be derived: the drive to play, the transformation of the inner logic of a given system without altering the external framework, the manipulation of quality (how something is made) while maintaining quantity (the set of elements that makes up a system). Stolte does not change the

into the mirror my body immediately changes place, thus leveling the distance between here and there. Narcissistically, the subject thus traps itself in a non-spatial reflexivity of the gaze, according to the foundational myth.

h—Hans-Jürgen Buderer speaks in a different context of "containers," of "vessels," that absorb immaterial meanings in them. See Hans-Jürgen Buderer, "Jaume Plensa—Réceptacles," in: Jaume Plensa (Paris: Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, 1997), pp. 31ff.

i—For a narrative derivation of the eight-day week, see also the text by Katrin Witteven in Fiete Stolte, Cahier 14, ed. Sassa Trülzsch, 2008, no pagination.

and thus to be treated as a curiosity? Or is the character of possibility at its core an ethical option to the extent that "possibility" here means what appears on the background of the necessary and is inextinguishably linked to it, yet also distinguishes itself from it? And can this option, if it is an ethical one, be generalized? This might improperly propagate the artwork as a life model. Ultimately, the Polaroids are simply visual equivalents of a cultural technique. The sun does not really go down, it does not really go up, it is only a way of rhythmifying a movement, to construct a non-social (natural) rhythm of society, and hence to make everything that happens coincidentally, heterogeneously, and incommensurably in terms of events, comparable.

When something splits, reality changes. A split is not just a doubling. Instead, a new space emerges, that opens between two similar elements. In Vittorio Santoro's *How Can I / Make it Right*, March–August 2005, the fact of a reference between the two drawings of the diptych seems obvious; on closer inspection, we see how deeply inscribed the writing is in some places, that it goes through the paper.<sup>j</sup> But what presents itself as a drawing does not correspond to the topos of immediacy, straight-forwardness, or lightness, the symbolic seismographic of “artistic sensibility” that is traditionally associated with the medium. The letters are standardized, a stencil of a certain typography is the model, not spontaneous handwriting. It seems that the piece is about choosing a starting point that is decidedly not subjective, that at least does not aspire to this form of individuality, but as a standard, as a rule and a guide, marks an objective starting position. From this standpoint, *How Can I / Make it Right*, March–August 2005 does not begin with a dramatic act—the gesture of drawing—but with the identification of a social standard in the form of a text that is repeated, and as the title indicates, on both sheets of paper at the same time for the period of six months. Each day the pencil follows the stencil, pressing its way down, following the furrows as they form in the paper; the paper is given different depths.

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At issue here is not a symbolic process, where significance only appears, but a process of imprinting, the archeological site of a ritual. The ball of the hand distributes again and again minimal traces of graphite across the paper, resulting in cloudy traces of dirt as signs of the daily ritual. The multiple question, which touches on both the aesthetic and the moral-political

<sup>j</sup>—See on this Ulrike Groos, “Between (Milan: Charta, 2008), no pagination. I act properly? How can I fix it? These are

‘Merely’ Seeing and ‘Already’ Reading,” in: Vittorio Santoro. *Everything’s Not Lost*, ed. Daniel Kurjaković (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2006), pp. 61-65.

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the attempt to speak from more than one perspective.<sup>m</sup> Another artistic position where perspectives are multiplied is *Night Shift* by Teresa Hubbard/Alexander Birchler, a looped and varied scene in a parked police car. Its impact: in its repetition, it decreases slowly but surely its degree of reality, and in creases the slippage on the symbolic axis of perception, imagination,

complex,<sup>k</sup> seems arrested in constant repetition and splitting, as if this were about delaying the answer or gaining time for the question.

Brain, anus, death, cosmos, animal, weapon, woman, child, monster, entrails, sun, soldier, cell, worm, plant, airplane, skull . . . through an imaginary microscope the researcher observes countless smears from the body that represents a world in metamorphosis, a world where the name is not decoded (Apocalypse? Genesis? . . .!). In Nalini Malani's *Listening to the Shades* the elements and objects swim chaotically together, collide, freely floating on the ground of the drawing, a phantasmatic screen. Airplane and entrails collide on a backdrop shaped like a brain. This suggests a diagnostic situation, the repeated gaze inside a body, in which foreign and perhaps dangerous ingredients have mixed. The artist/researcher structured the drawings in groups of two, three, or four, so that a pattern of similarities is formed, perhaps resulting in a narrative and meaning, but surely in interior motions from one sheet to the next, that balance out the general delirium of signs with an additional internal logic. The chaotic mixing of motifs, the implied “illness” of the unnamed body, its crises, that here perhaps is above all a crisis of a coherent worldview, is relativized and in part moderated by the healing interaction of microcosm and macrocosm, conducive to meaning: the entrails become a bridge and the cells become suns and thought bubbles. The danger that the world falls apart or that the body breaks from inside is contained by the similarities that the analogy of micro- and macrocosm engenders. It calms the crisis-like dynamic, the incurable chaotic element. Malani uses an analytic method of study to make the body visible, dividing it into parts; at the same time she completes the analysis with the magical method of analogy, a poetic technique that creates links in the most unusual places. Even if this approach might seem surprising against the backdrop of a secular worldview, even suspicious, it represents

ambivalent: How can I do it right? How do I—For this reading, see Robert Storr, Nalini Malani. *Listening to the Shades*

<sup>k</sup>—Semantically, the question remains

possible interpretations. Whether the question refers to the sender (artist) or the receiver (beholder) shifts depending on the accent of the question.

memory, projection, simulation.

Subjectivity that relies on itself is a Panic Room,<sup>n</sup> a bunker overloaded with projections, in which consciousness has imploded and the subject turns in the carousel of compulsive acts. Ultimately such an ideological extreme is a mere exaggeration of horror, and easy to discredit. But *Conflicting Tales* does not simply move towards visions of an enlightened worldview that would fulfill themselves if—entirely in a late modernist sense—self-reflexivity could only be increased by qualitative information, instruction, and progressing science. Art's part in the perceptive, socio-political, and spiritual openness of the

subject seems not to be fulfilled along a direct route. Conflicting Tales instead suggests several “detours,” as if subjectivity were not a site that could precisely be measured, but rather a terrain that can be cartographically surveyed. Descriptive works are placed alongside those that lead our gaze and experience and multiply the perspectives; and some, like Sabine Hornig’s *The Destroyed Room* or Fiona Banner’s *Full Stop*, simply keep them suspended, without a goal. The exhibition *Conflicting Tales: Subjectivity* (Quadrilogy, Part 1) makes a start, and the expansion towards history, language and narration in the coming exhibitions will focus on the questions raised: how do we construct subjectivity in an aesthetic sense? Or more radically: how can we shape our subjectivity by way of an aesthetic discourse in an obviously ethical sense? Is that at all possible, should we want that, or are such intentions idealistic false conclusions? Furthermore, how can we

on the (Western) model of progress (which culminated in the one “correct” method) but is based more on a transcultural and comparative approach that is still much too little manifest in current contemporary culture. An additional work that represents a transcultural approach is Atul Dodiya’s *Sayno Bolona*. See on this Nancy Adajania, “Reading the Clouds. Sabari in Singapore. The Testimony of a Pirate King,” in: Atul Dodiya. *The Wet Sleeves of My Paper Robe* (Singapore: Tyler Print Institute, Singapore, Bodhi Art, Singapore/New Delhi, 2005), pp. 7-17.  
n—Named after the film by David Fincher, 2002.

expand in a sensible way the notion of subjects not just with the concept of the other and the community, but re-conceptualize it looking at a geopolitical and transcultural situation? This dimension is only pre

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liminarily conceptualized, it is the asynchronous reality of the global age, in which the same does not take place at the same time, where the past of one continent is the future of the other, even if this past were to be proved impossible and the future inevitable.

m—This is obviously not so much built

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b) The Difficulty of Self-Encounter

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## Primal Scenes

For modern contemporaries, the subjectivity of our own experiences, of our own worldview is taken for a given. Everything seems to confirm that the individual's perspectives and judgments are inseparably linked to his or her own, "subjective" perspective. Numerous customs of language and thought that have become second nature in our culture contribute to this impression. The customary conception is most clearly shown by the contrasting term "objective," which refers to the scientific ideal of an impartial, natural knowledge, free of any subjective distortion. "Subjectivity" is here a residual category: it includes everything that does not fall into the noble category of objective truth—perspectives, individuality, feelings, and interests. This classification of the term cannot provide anything more than an initial orientation. The purely negative definition is unsatisfactory and not very helpful, since it is oriented toward a self-understanding based on research in the natural sciences, which is still quite young and new in historical terms. The history of science has clearly shown that the strong notion of objectivity, common today, only became established in the mid-nineteenth century. "Subjectivity," however, as can be seen when consulting philosophical reference works, is primarily understood as an age-old discovery of a general phenomenon. It is intended to describe the fact that all experiences and judgments also include a self-reference, in other words, that all experiences and judgments are also "mine," and have to be so.

This initially innocent observation is where the problem begins—the problem bears the name "I." This refers to the subjective unit that entitles us to claim experiences, actions, and judgments as our own. But who am I? What am I? The standardized great narrative of modernity offers a familiar answer, just as ostensibly plausible as it is mistaken. According to this, the subjective emerges from the liberation of man from his own self-imposed immaturity. In the Renaissance, the thoughtful individual finally frees itself from the medieval yoke of theology, to be reborn in the womb of reason, autonomous and self-determined. No longer subordinate to the Church, but

also unable to return to a Greek worldview, philosophy develops a unique logic of reflection that ignites on the contrast between the subjective to the objective. The "I" is thus, sociologically speaking, the product of liberating the individual from social constraints. This classical narrative of modernity has proven to be a myth. Historically, the generously overlooked gaps and the numerous forms of external treatments, without which this smooth image

of the civilizational development of the West would never have emerged, begin to reveal themselves. None theless, I would like to follow the intuition that is associated with the concept of subjectivity. For even if every definition of subjectivity as such has to be historically informed, this concept awakens in us by no means random associations as participants and members of the culture. Subjectivity is used to treat interiority, will, and conscious individuality. It stands for our own wishes, intimate feelings, and mistaken projections. Subjective affects are felt to be a danger, but also Dionysian liberation from the normalizing burden of social reality. All these thematic links circle around the imaginative core, which, now as then, despite post-modernism, systems theory, and mass culture, stands at the center of our ideological self-understanding: the self.

Jacques Lacan's well-known thesis of his 1949 lecture "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949) provides a good sense of the difficulties linked to the "ego" and subjectivity. The French psychoanalyst challenges us to place ourselves in the situation of a child that has not yet developed a coherent sense of self. The primal scene of subjectivity is the moment when the child sees itself for the first time in a mirror. Only now, by way of this visual encounter with its own image, is the child able to gain a sense of the fact that its movements and perceptions belong to a united body. The child recognizes that it sees itself in the mirror and at the same time identifies itself with a person from which it will be forever separated by the impenetrable glass surface of the mirror.

For Lacan, identification with the mirror image is an essential and yet mistaken act. The first self-assessment that the child gains from the mirror image is already an over-assessment. Who looks at the child from the mirror? For us, a helpless, dependent being. The child however recognizes a body whose "total form" (Lacan) is already familiar to him through his parents. And thus in the moment when the child recognizes itself in its body image, a fateful transference begins. The child invests all the power that his nearest have at their disposal into this image, and thus into itself.

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Its physical appearance suggests an autonomy with which the child identifies without actually possessing it. In this way the first impression of what it means to be a "self" results from a picture that does not correspond to our reality and never can.

Lacan's "mirror phase" should be read as a parable. It illuminates the paradox of subjectivity that stands behind its changing story, a paradox that can be grasped in epistemological terms as well. Man as a thinking and feeling being tries to gain an image of himself, of himself as a thinking and feeling being. He does not want to learn something about himself, but gain insight into what seems to be a rudimentary condition of his existence: lived experiences are his experiences, regardless of what is experienced. Thoughts thought are his thoughts, regardless of what their concrete content might be. He wants to understand the "I" that seems to accompany all his references to world and self, the experiences and thoughts, relationships to people as well as to things. Man seeks to understand his subjectivity, but to do so he needs to appear opposite himself and thus differ from himself: how should he be able to do that?



The encounter in the mirror is the perfect metaphor for this self awareness, since it illustrates this utter impossibility. In the mirror we appear opposite ourselves, but we are not the person looking back, and never can be. As soon as the person himself becomes the object of thought, recognition, or description, he must divide himself. He can only direct his attention toward a part of the self, the other part is already occupied with this act of directing attention, which is also his attention, his awareness, and act of reflection. In so doing, self-recognition becomes a figure of retreat, for the recognized always also refers to something unrecognized, that it simultaneously makes possible. The child and the mirror image cannot touch one another, between them is the reflecting glass, mediating and separating at the same time. An unbridgeable gap will always remain, one that is covered by projections, replacements, and phantasms. And yet, the unity of the self is and was constantly sought that Lacan reveals as phantasmatic mirror image. The self-reference is one of the great riddles of modern philosophy and at the same time an "indubitable fact" (Kant) from which it repeatedly serves as a starting point.

The scene of (impossible) self-encounter in the mirror helps us to understand that the history of subjectivity is above all an expression of a problem with subjectivity. Philosophical anthropology, as the true inheritor of classical subjective philosophy, pragmatically summed this up in

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speaking of humanity as the "unfixed animal," or "das nicht festgestellte Tier." It describes the individual as jutting into the world, unable to assert itself without surrendering to it. Required are compensatory images, institutions, practices, and self-conceptions that make the human being a unity, as he imagines himself to be. The individual, and thus subjectivity, is open, opened, and this, depending on the political point of view, can either be seen as a danger (Gehlen), a gaping wound, or as a gain (Nietzsche), as a guarantee of radical transformation.

This anthropological thesis is individually palpable in liminal experiences and scenes of transition. These include birth and death as well as adolescence, illness, and violence. These experiences, since they describe crises and turning points, touch on the paradoxical core of subjectivity. They open a new world where forms of self-assertion that were anchored in the past world no longer apply. The unity of the subject, always only imaginary, has to be adjusted to the new relations, without there being any clear instructions or a targeted method available. It is perhaps no accident that deep mental conversions and radical breaks in his own biography are repeatedly symbolized as a birth (or rebirth): birth is the primal form of an anthropological transitional situation. To succeed in the world, the natural qualities of the newborn are not sufficient: this is indicated by the term human "instinctual poverty." Far beyond the initial assistance of the nest, that all mammals

provide for the offspring, the child is also dependent on a culture that precedes it. Without it, the child cannot survive, never mind create an image of itself and the world. Only by submitting to this new world is the child able to act, suffer, ever become a "subject." To that extent, man's "instinctual poverty" as a natural being is actually a fact of culture, perhaps the ultimate fact of culture: our individual experiential spaces can be formed, and without this formation, that can only take place in cultures, there is no experience.

In these crisis-ridden moments, it is also apparent that the notion of the human being, like that of the subject, generates a false opposition, as if the human being were a "state in the state" (Spinoza), a closed system. The subject, that always only encounters a world, is the fiction of a human being that does not need to learn to act and experience. Denied is the necessity to be born from a site, a body, a spirit and obsessed by it, to at all become a human being. "It is the fundamental neurosis of Western culture to have to dream of a subject that observes, names, possesses all, without allowing anything of themselves to be contained, named, or possessed,

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even if the most discrete god offered himself as a spectator, container, or executor" (Sloterdijk).

Sloterdijk can call the notion of the subject a "neurosis" because the subjective has always been held up as a bastion against the impositions of others, as a defensive reaction, as it were. Here, the malleability of the subjective even stretches to the realm of pain, at least as claimed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The seemingly deepest foundation of individual experience, still private, inexpressible seeming pain, bears the traces of cultural formation through language, symbols, and practices. Wittgenstein does not deny that we have our own pain, but the fact that we perceive it as pain (and not, for example, as an intense form of pleasure) is a result and product of our subjectivity. This philosophical insight picks up the strange lack of words that we experience when it comes to pain and other feelings. We mean our deepest, irredeemable pain, but to say it, we are reduced to the general repertoire of language that we have at our disposal. To express pain, to pour it into images, words, and media, indeed to identify it as pain, means to give it a defined, public form, and to inscribe oneself in this form, to recognize oneself and acknowledge oneself in it.

Here again, Lacan's mirror scene comes into view. The asymmetry of the young child, de facto still long dependent, who sees its imagined, already complete self in the mirror, repeats in the imbalance between the culture and its new arrivals. The exaggeration of the self-image with which the child identifies is not an erotic mistake. It results structurally from the fundamental dependence of the child on dominant symbols, practices, and ideologies. Birth is the most profound, but by no means the last or only threshold that confronts us with this power differential. Still searching, touching, questioning,

and learning, infants and children see themselves confronted with culture that knows already fixed and apparently clear answers. They cannot oppose it with a language of their own, for they first have to learn to master the established “language games” (Wittgenstein). New arrivals are forced to accept an identification that, like the mirror image, has an “orthopedic” (Lacan) function for their development as subject. Without these distortions and challenges, their abilities and experiences, that is, their subjectivity could never take form.

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### Obstacles

According to these considerations, the impression could arise that subjectivity is fully externally determined. Have I not said that our experience is inexorably prefigured by culture and its languages, ideologies, and languages? But if the opposition of man and world is an exaggeration, then the corresponding counterhypothesis that the subject dissolves in the world without difference is just as much so. Foucault’s expectation in *The Order of Things*, that the tides of history will solve the problem of man by erasing it “like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,” will not come to pass. The problem is stubborn, for it is of a (linguistic-)logical nature. The claimed unity of the “self,” required for all experiences and actions, can only be solved phantasmatically, in the rear projection of the mirror image onto our own person, in the imaginary completion of a self-recognition that is always incomplete. Conversely, this does not mean that subjectivity is nothing but that transfer. Ultimately, the initial glance into the mirror comes from the child, who is striving to identify with its visible appearance. This recalls that the cultural codes and conventions are not the only agents in this game. Subjectivity does not just land in our laps; it needs to be approached.

This is a decisive point. Lacan’s mirror scene, like the anthropological description, assumes that we are not already subjects, but rather that we become subjects. The clean conceptual difference between the general and the particular leads to an all-too schematic description of this process that is difficult to grasp. Becoming a subject is reduced to an act of subjection in which the subject ties itself to general codes and schema: it is conceived as compensation, which grants the small, fragile individual the stabilizing identity of culture. In these images, the subjective pole is largely ignored. This can be attributed to a certain inherent blindness. The worn out oppositions of bourgeois individualism force us to treat the processes of subjectivation always according to the model of the conflict between the general and the particular. This brings the dialectic of subjection and resistance to the foreground. An undistorted look at the concrete processes of subjectivation, however, shows that these transitions are above all exhausting. The individual is not passively formed; it struggles with culture. In

so doing, the new arrival indeed shows a longing to find its way in culture, that places it so in the wrong. It was not for nothing that Plato assigned to truth its own erotic attraction. It is to overcome the resistance that truth

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encounters everywhere and that the student of Socrates knew all too well. For Plato, breaking this resistance requires some of the strongest magic known to the human soul: the magic of love. This is an erotic movement that makes those seeking the truth into lovers of the truth, philosophoi. The practice of forms and conventions, the production of subjectivity, always takes place as a labor that is threatened by setbacks, transformations, and misunderstandings. The general also needs to seduce in order to be conquered.

Learning is difficult. This triviality helps us acquire an open gaze for the paradoxes of subjectivity. Where do we encounter the resistance and obstacles that until now have been described as a problematic of the subject? In the process of learning, in the difficult labor by which we acquire new abilities and points of view. From this perspective, subjectivity itself is not the problem, as if there were a single substance (perhaps paradoxical) that is generated from the difficulties generated up until now. Instead I would like to pick up Foucault’s suggestion, who a decade after the prophetic final words of *The Order of Things* returned to the problem of the subject in his later work. The foundational concept in this reorientation is the concept of practices of the self. Foucault understands subjectivity not as a problematic aspect of actors or agents, but the experience that surfaces in the practices and is worked on there. A practice of the self is a technique with which people work on what we call subjectivity. The way that they perceive the world and understand it; their spontaneous actions and reactions, their attitude to the events.

Foucault’s approach revolves elegantly around the diagnosis with which this essay began. Subjectivity is not problematic because it cannot truly be grasped; rather, the fact that subjectivity is and remains a problem is what makes it possible to grasp. A problem not of a conceptual nature, but a practical one: the problem that we can become for ourselves. Self-practices revolve around the goal of taking influence on our own forms of action and experience. “Subjectivity” is then the collective notion for the resistance against which these practices turn, as well as for the ideal state towards which these “technologies of the self” (as Foucault calls them) are directed. The general question of subjective knowledge, which asks whether an action or experience can be attributed to the subject or not, does not arise from this perspective, it is always treated in the respective practice itself. The answer is always: it depends, which ultimately means rejecting the philosophical question itself.

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The ancient ethical and political literature that were the primary focus of Foucault's historical studies are full of such exercises in subjectivation. The Stoics suggested to prepare a sumptuous banquet, and then not to touch it. The exercise is to tame our temperaments and the stoic rest of moderation to become flesh and blood. Another suggestion was to end the day with an account of what happened that day: in this way, we recall the goals that we pursue, and can see how far we have come. Foucault takes quite different examples from religious life: confession, like prayer, is a practice of the self that is intensely directed at one's own subjectivity, which is judged to be problematic. This comparison also shows how locally different the various experiences can be grasped and treated: the Christian concept of sin and penance was foreign to the Stoics, although they also knew a form of accounting for oneself. Leaping to modernity shows that psychoanalysis is a practice of the self, this time scientifically legitimized. The analysis that Freud himself describes as a technique should help us "to love and work" (Freud). This takes place through the labor on those phenomena that form the epitome of subjectivity: resistance, obstacles, and difficulties that the subject has with itself.

From Foucault's perspective, Lacan's mirror scenario loses its central role, for the mere gaze in the mirror is not a practice on its own. While Lacan celebrates this gaze as a jubilatory act of self-identification, Foucault moves the obstacles and resistances that surface in completing this newly gained self-understanding to the foreground. This entails the image that we encounter in the mirror not from its "orthopedic" function. We can now formulate this more precisely: the phantasmatically charged look in the mirror can only fulfill its task if it is a repetitive component of a practice of the self. Imagine a child that suffers its first setbacks: it is constantly being shown that it is a long way from the autonomous unit glimpsed in the mirror. But then the gaze returns to the mirror image, and the child again finds its way back to the evidence that threatened to slip away, and towards which it is striving (even if not consciously). Like a mantra that the ancient philosophers repeated over and over, or the photograph of a loved one in whose countenance the partner finds rest, the mirror here fulfills a stabilizing function.

The change in perspective completed with Foucault turns the problematic of subjectivity inside out. The conflict in which "the subject" winds up becomes a practice that confronts it with stabilizing and disturbing experiences. This results in a decisive new role for the artifacts with which we surround ourselves. They themselves now become a part of our subjectivity:

individual experiences is not just an accessory of self-conception. The possibility of storing experiences over a longer period of time and to compare them is an essential part of the dimension of experience that is being trained here. It is also key that the written articulation—not unlike the mirror image—objectivizes the reflections and experiences, and thus at the same time alienates them.

Since the diary can be consulted over and over, a paradigmatically modern practice of self-interpretation can insinuate itself, a "hermeneutics of the self." The modern understanding of the individual, which usually appears to us as evident, proves to be the product of material practices that can be concretely situated in history.

### Images of the Self

The concept of self-practice is based above all on one observation that the prior considerations have revolved around: the observation that the understanding of the self is essentially precarious. It is "open," as anthropology informs us, it is "paradoxical," as the epistemologists have determined, it is "imaginary," as Lacan claims. By way of a conclusion, I would like to discuss the precariousness of our own subjectivity in terms of the notion of "visibility," a term that has repeatedly surfaced in the prior discussion. In so doing, we complete the last step in the "expostulation" of the concept of subjectivity that has been attempted in this essay.

"The human body is the best image of the human soul," as we read in Wittgenstein. Lacan uses this link when he declares the image of our body in the mirror to be the foundation of our self-imagination. In the visible body, an entire subjectivity is manifest. This includes that the mirror-child looks at his real opposite. The gaze of the other is touching, because it bears a moment of our own self-experience. The affirmative, confirming gaze of the other surrounds us and gives us space: only due to this constitutive proximity can it injure us and reject us.

In the returned gaze, the other confirms the bodily image that we present and which thus strengthens us. This can also mean: the gaze of the other fixes what and who we are, and according to our appearance: this equation is especially true when the immediate body is not visible but concealed by clothing. As in all essential things, the requirement placed on the individual

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to bring the body into contact with others results in the virtue of its constant cultivation. The body is both a sign and the bearer of signs. The permanent visibility of the body allows it to become the social medium par excellence.

As the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu once pointed out, in our social encounters the principle *esse est percipi* applies: our being is how we are perceived.



What job interview trainers sell as a strategic insight is seen by sociologists as a structuring final principle of modern social reality. Style and appearance fix power relationships, for they attribute identities without even being directly accessible to the agents: “Le style, c’est l’homme même.” Even before the conscious exchange of gazes and arguments there is a registration of physical appearance, the assessment of the other based on his or her appearance. This estimation is itself a physical and to that extent unconscious reaction. Disgust and awe, as well as power of attraction that people exert on others, leaving them spellbound, are not just palpable in the entire body (where numerous metaphors testify that these affects project toward the inside of the body: he makes me gag, I have butterflies in my stomach). They also manifest themselves, visible for others, in our own behavior: the body retreats or opens, remains stubbornly in place or shivers with excitement.

Before this backdrop, it becomes clear that the seamless self-evidence of everyday communication, at the workplace, for example, is itself already an expression of belonging to a group, and thus of power. Those who recognize and acknowledge the appearance of the other feel themselves to be on familiar and sure terrain: this is someone of our kind, and if not, we know immediately with whom we are dealing. Belonging to a group, in so doing, is not only controlled by visible codes of fashion and other sign systems: the goal of recognition involves the entire physical appearance that Bourdieu calls “habitus.” Included in the evaluation is not only what is presented; important is also how it happens. We see immediately that someone follows conventions without truly mastering them, the individual seems awkward and inept, perhaps even laughable, at any event somehow misplaced, to use an extremely fitting idiom.

According to Bourdieu, the precariousness of our subjectivity expresses itself in that this socially regulated identity requires confirmation and renewal over and over. The group mutually confirms its identity by distinguishing itself from the others, and these distinctions take recourse to the visible manifestation of group-specific habitus. In more traditional social forms, manifest belonging is ritually managed: more or less explicit laws

prescribe who can publicly dress, wear their hair, and present themselves in a certain fashion. With the loss of traditional authority, such prescriptions live on, almost silently, distributed among countless groups and groupings that distinguish themselves from one another or emphasize their shared characteristics. Perhaps the fact that these laws of everyday social life exist only in unwritten form, and thus one is always in need of interpretation, leads to the modern impression of an open, unfixed subjectivity.

Foucault’s “work on the self” becomes in Bourdieu’s eyes primarily a work of representation—the work on one’s own subjectivity takes place above all in work on one’s appearance. As mentioned above, this includes both the

clothing on the body as well as the body itself, it stretches from fashion to physical shape to the dexterity with which an agent can play its role, including the most minute mannerisms. This stylization is undertaken through media and individual artifacts, as are the practices of the self generally. Leisure athletes like snowboarders shoot photographs to document and evaluate their own achievements. Runners objectivize their ability with pulse monitors; students shape and compare their rhetorical abilities in debating clubs.

The role optics plays in a more narrow sense is worth considering when it comes to the visibility here discussed. Is it a coincidence that central forms of subjectivation operate through vision and with the image that we present to ourselves and others? To put this in extreme terms: are the blind not able to become subjects? Of course they are, to the extent that they participate in a shared public whose sensual structure allows them to perceive and be perceived in one and the same medium. Decisive here is an awareness of the exchangeability of subject and object position in a grammatical sense: who sees can be seen, who speaks can be addressed, who feels can be felt.

The visibility of the subject illustrates this general media condition so well because the everyday phenomenon of crossing gazes exemplifies the structure of mutual reassurance: I see that you see me; if I see you, I see that I am being seen. The intersecting gaze is the medium of subjectivation par excellence, for it is completed in a single motion of mutual recognition, that in other media can only take place with temporal displacement. It is no coincidence that the panopticon analyzed by Foucault, the architectural machine of surveillance, relies on the elimination of all reciprocity. The guard in the high prison tower can see all, while seen by nobody; like God and the “invisible hand” of capitalism, he remains unseen, and is thus omnipresent.

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Jörg Volbers

Seen in this final perspective, the paradoxes of subjectivity with which this essay began prove to be the result of a grammatical necessity. An individual can never entirely become an object, simply because the interchangeability of subject and object in the media space of perception guarantees his subjectivity. The observer must himself be observed to constitute himself as beholder. The open-endedness of this process is simultaneously a guarantee of diversity with which the Western experience of subjectivity produces itself ever again anew, falls short of itself, and reforms itself.

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Everybody has his or her own taste, which also means: there is nobody without one. First of all, we should be more surprised—more so than we usually are—by the fact that we have a taste at all. While other things and properties

sions is something quite different, more covert: the distributional justice expressed within it.

#### Preface

At Oslo-Gardermoen Airport in the spring of 2009, I made a mistake: waiting at the baggage claim, I picked up a piece of luggage that I thought was mine, and I opened a side pocket to take out my sunglasses. In their place I found several things that undoubtedly did not belong to me: colorful wrapped presents in bright colors. Who could have put them in my suitcase (and removed my sunglasses)? My paranoia was eased when I realized that the entire suitcase was perhaps not mine. I closed it, returned it to the conveyor belt and looked hopefully towards another that finally proved to be mine, sunglasses included. Just as I wanted to leave, I spotted a few pieces of paper lying on the floor. It was the fragment of a text written in English, without a title or the name of the author. Due to a professional weakness, I immediately began to read. Although the text took a strange point of departure, and in its further course clearly did not develop according to an orderly argument, it fascinated me quite a bit, not least because it was about aesthetic judgment, taste, and in so doing touched on the issue of subjectivity, which I had then been thinking about, having been commissioned by a Swiss private collection. The text, it seemed to me, explored the question of subjectivity in a fully ahistorical and so-to-speak eternal sense, just as, for example, the philosopher Louis Althusser explored ideology as “eternal,” as a necessary authority belonging to all social forms. Taste is assigned a decisive role: it is not (as I would have thought logical) considered a product of subjectivity (according to the principle: what I like betrays what kind of person I am), but rather the other way around: subjectivity is declared the product of taste and/or its appropriation by an individual (according to the principle: without something pleasing me, I am not a subject). The subject is not considered the maker of taste, but taste is seen as making the subject. Aesthetics thus becomes key to understanding subjectivity. Here, taste seems to take on the strange role of a foreign body that incorrectly needs to be considered as something that belongs to us, so that individuals are at all able to call anything their own with any justification. What the text claimed about taste then happened to me with the text itself: it penetrated my thinking about subjectivity as a foreign body, and I see myself today unable to say something meaningful about subjectivity that would not be developed from these considerations on taste. I cannot with certainty say whether this piece of

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writing fell out of a suitcase that did not belong to me, or whether it was on the floor beforehand. Despite a long search, I never found the text published. I assume that the author wanted to edit it—if he had not tossed the ideas entirely from his mind. After long consideration, I have chosen to act against the author’s likely intention, because I think only in this fashion can the text receive the respect that it deserves

due to the place that it takes in my thoughts. So I present it here to the public unchanged, only with a few cuts for readability.

of this world—homes, cars, securities accounts, love affairs, or university degrees—are quite unjustly distributed, and by no means to everybody, in the realm of taste a strange kind basic justice dominates: everyone has at least one, even if it’s just bad taste.

Of course, it’s sometimes said that people have no taste: but this is only an imprecision of everyday language, a beginner’s error. Just as beginners in physics always mistakenly think the term “mass” means “large mass,” beginners in aesthetics always consider every taste to be good taste. But we need to remember: even bad taste is taste: for it enables us to make taste judgments. So nobody comes entirely without taste: rather, in almost everyone there is immediately a spontaneous capacity for judgment, that immediately and almost compulsively generates opinions on questions of taste.

If I ask why I have a taste, just like everyone else, I can specify the question as follows: how does a certain taste become my taste at some point in time? How did I come to consider something that operates as taste to be my own property? Might I not be mistaken in thinking this?

Or is it impossible to be mistaken here, because when it comes to this matter there is no truth? That would mean that I do not choose my taste assertively, with a constative judgment, possibly true, possibly false, but rather by acting, through a performative judgment; I simply say: that’s my taste, and by saying this it becomes my taste, just as soldiers or astronauts place their flag in the terrain they have arrived in, inevitably making it their home territory.

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(Beginning of the anonymous manuscript) According to most philosophers, taste—the capacity that makes it possible for something to please us, and enables

us to express judgments accordingly—is something subjective. They show this using typical expressions such as, “Everyone has his or her own taste,” “So

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many minds, so many opinions,” or “Tastes vary as much as our minds,” and the like. But the interesting thing about these expressions is not so much the familiar plurality of tastes and the questions related to this (whether there really are so many different tastes, or maybe there are fewer—for example, a small number of standard tastes). The important thing about these expressions is, as the artist Mona Hahn once put it, is “a reality that belongs to the person that claims it.”

A great deal speaks for the latter: I do not doubt for long, but I simply take a taste, regardless of whether it’s my right or not, and start to use it. By using it, it becomes my taste. Maybe it helps my taste if I use it, in so doing it becomes known to others. And finally, as Bertolt Brecht wisely demanded, things should belong to those who are good for them. If I am of use to my taste by using it, it rightly belongs to me.

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But my taking on a taste means that it was there before me. I did not invent

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Later, it was probably my taste that comforted me about this imposition: just  
05 09 it myself or create it. Otherwise it would be impossible for everyone to have a taste. For if everyone had to produce their own, there would be many who are not entirely finished. But precisely the reverse seems to be the case. All tastes are finished from the very start. Only some people later start to subject their finished taste to individual modifications.

as in some cultures those forced to enter an arranged marriage might say to one another—“Look how it’s worked out so well, since in the end you’ve gotten me, you don’t need to be angry about the rather authoritarian way that it took place.” What I now find loveable about my taste suggests to me that I would not have chosen any other taste, even if there had been a choice. But this point of view comes from looking through the rose-tinted lenses

Whatever later becomes my taste already has to be there. And even if I don’t

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create it myself, then others must have done so. I imagine the act of acquiring taste as Blaise Pascal explains the emergence of religious convictions:

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others first get you accustomed to a certain religion, and then, one day, you suddenly see it as your own. The taste that the others produced is so-to-speak held under your nose for a while or made tasteful, and one day I make

it my taste.

I could now say that my taste is the “taste of others” (the title of a lovely film

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by Agnès Jaoui). In this, it seems to be like so many other things (for example, desire, according to Jacques Lacan’s formulation). It is at least definite that others must have made use of my taste before sending it on to me. Maybe they created my taste, perhaps with the help of their own taste, and then

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left it to me to use, as some people plant trees where the fruit can only be eaten by their grandchildren.

These others have not necessarily left me their own taste, the same way parents give their surname to their children. But perhaps, there is something that they found and that pleased them, or even something entirely new that they thought up and handed on to me, the way parents give children their first names. My taste is thus, as I must admit, the taste of someone else, it is not necessarily a used taste (as another Brecht song puts it so incom

of taste, so precious to me today, was, to be precise, a subjection to an imposition.  
that my taste provides me with.

But I have to forget this realization, or at least put it in its proper place. I now have to say to myself, no matter how correct it might be to accept on the cognitive level that I have my taste imposed on me by others, it is imperative on the level of action that I treat it as my own.

It is paradoxical: I've just been able to see something, and now I have to admit the need to disregard this insight at once. Although I know better, I cannot allow any doubt to arise. Otherwise, I fall out of taste's distributive justice, if you will. As soon as I no longer use my taste, it stops existing, as it were; it dissolves into thin air.

And as I now have to admit, something similar happens to myself. If I can no longer call a taste my own, then I dissolve myself into thin air. Only by taking hold of my taste and calling it my own—subjectivizing it—do I myself become a subject. If I maintain the quite correct realization of its foreignness, and stubbornly stick to that position, I am entirely lost, or as a psychoanalyst would say, psychotic. In contrast, by seizing my taste, I escape being lost and psychosis and become a subject.

Here we can see why aesthetics are so decisive for the realization of what subjects are: because it is by way of aesthetics (perhaps as one way along side others, equally unavoidable, for example, ethics) that subjectivation takes place. Only by considering my taste as my own, by generously looking away from the facts, do I become and am a subject. This might well be quite different in logic or epistemological theory: whether it is necessary that I consider my own reason as my own, in order for it to function or for me to operate as a subject, seems dubious to me.

If, for example, there is something to calculate, I often use a calculator and accept its result usually without objection. (If the result seems improbable, I assume that I mistyped, and start the calculation again. Then I accept the new result without objection.) But could I imagine something like that in terms

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parably well, "in my mouth still the taste of another man.")

But I have to admit: I had no choice. The others clearly did not produce several  
08 tastes to then let me choose one, I was given exactly one, which I then had to accept (that's probably why I only have one).

They probably also had no choice, I now think. They couldn't let me choose. For to be able to choose a taste, I would have had to possess a taste already. For now it is my taste that makes other tastes appear attractive or horrible. Without already having a taste, I cannot reject a taste. My choice

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of my taste judgments? Let's say I enter a museum with a new device, my

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"pocket sensor." This "interpassive" device scans an artwork with its aesthetic sensibility;<sup>a</sup> it thinks and calculates for a while, and then tells me if the work is fantastic, amazing, mediocre, redundant, or awful. Would I accept its result without contradiction? Would that ever be enough in the same way as a pocket calculator? Or would such a device not take away exactly what I so treasure in my taste, that is, the pleasure of judgment and the moment of subjectivation?

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I myself pulled myself from the quagmire of psychosis using the pylon of taste.

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Now I can proudly walk about in the world and look at those things my newly acquired taste longs to judge. Judgments are already lying on the tip of my tongue. But for a moment, I look around, well brought up, and note that there are others around who might be bothered by my speaking, and who even keep their own judgments to themselves for similar reasons. Happily, I am more closely associated with some (for reasons that are of no relevance here). With them I can whisper in the white cube or even speak somewhat

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more loudly in public space: at the university, they even give me a bit of money for that. Either whispering or speaking more loudly, we discover that we share the same taste. (We say we have the “same” taste, and not two “identical” tastes.) Encouraged by this, I begin to reveal my taste to others as well. The same thing once more. Now I can approach them, due to our shared taste.

Telling ourselves a charming little lie, we act as if it were due to an astonishing fact and a parallel achievement that we have the same taste. Seen soberly (or psychotically), of course, it’s not very surprising at all. It might ultimately result from the fact that we (like Adam and Eve) have simply eaten from the same tree. This fib is useful not only for the subjectivation of my taste—for its salvation and my own—but also for my sociality. By claiming that it is mine, I can join together with others who claim that it is theirs as well. My appropriated foreign taste associates me with others who have appropriated the same taste and allows me their (and them my) appropriation.

a—To further compound the weirdness of this event at Oslo Airport, the author of this anonymous manuscript was clearly familiar with my theory of interpassivity. (Note by the editor.)

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Naturally, this does not always happen. On the contrary, I often encounter those who are enraged by my taste. Not because they think that it’s theirs, but because they have an entirely different one. And indeed it has to be different, for they judge differently. Now I recall, I didn’t leave my taste entirely unchanged in the course of appropriating it. Instead, I engaged in several modifications, just to be quite sure that it is mine, and nobody could contest it; maybe even my taste itself compelled me or animated me to make these modifications.

The others might well have done the same thing; but now their taste varies minimally, yet significantly from my own. But why do we get excited? Might it not be the case that this disagreement of various opinions is primarily intended to distract us from the fundamental link, the shared genealogy of our taste? Would those entirely without any connection to one another argue in such a way? Are those with whom I argue not just as important as those with whom I agree to ensure that I properly own my taste?

As I am now beginning to realize, taste allies and taste enemies thus have the function of supporting me when it comes to owning my taste. They help me, strengthen me (not without something in return) in feeling entirely responsible for the form my taste takes.

With this view of the others, something else is apparent: my taste proves receptive to theirs. Because the others (or their tastes) please me, I begin (or rather, my taste begins) to find pleasure in certain objects. I become interested in the objects and try to allow them to please me, so that I myself can please others. And here I mean others that please me—because of my taste. It is like John Maynard Keynes’ thought experiment of the beauty contest, a competition between jury members, where the winner is not the one who chooses the most beautiful contestant, but the one whose judgment agrees with those of the other judges. My taste also does not simply judge objects as it sees fit. Instead, it is already concerned about the possible judgments made by other tastes. But my taste has to anticipate the assessments made by other tastes for a very different reason than in Keynes’ model: not because it wants to win the game, but because it wants to appear attractive to the other tastes.

For this, it need not entirely share the assessments of the others; on the contrary, it is even better if it is a nose length ahead of the others. But it must anticipate what the other tastes understand as “ahead,” which is no easy task. But if it succeeds, then it pleases itself even if it stands alone with its estimation, because this lonely position is one not shared by the others, but desired.

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I thus recognize that my taste is simultaneously directed towards other people and towards objects of taste. In so doing, it is saturated by a certain unease and tension. This synchronicity allows it to become discordant with itself: As it is, my taste allows me to desire certain people (or desire that they are interested in me). And it thus brings me to look at (or listen to) objects that do not please me at all as they are. Through the people that please it, my taste presses to change itself, so that other things begin to please it. Once more—but now in a somewhat altered sense, in



terms of the question of the original acquisition of taste—I can say: my taste is the taste of desired tastes) can objects at all please it. This self-pleasing is a condition of its object pleasure.

the others. And I can adapt Spinoza's famous statement on this subject as follows: It is not just that I only judge things as good because I already desire them: instead I judge things to be good because others that I desire already desire them, and judge them to be good. My tricky taste, just as would be expected of it, here also reverses the order of things: it claims that the proximity to certain people is the result of a shared pleasure in objects. What took place happened exactly the other way around.

Because my taste, as it is, desires other people, it strives not to remain as it is  
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in relation to objects. It wants to please other people (and/or other tastes), and thus constantly transforms the principles of its own pleasure in objects. In other words, my taste is dynamic, but it not only feels pleasure in objects, but enjoys being the object of pleasure for other tastes. Who would have

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thought that? My taste is vain!

I now think that my taste is entirely like myself. (I admit one could have arrived at this conclusion by simpler means. But then it has a very different meaning.) What my taste shares with me is the fact that just like myself, it permanently doubles itself. It not only has a reality, but an ideal notion of itself, an ideal ego, so-to-speak. It wants to please others that please him, and only in so doing can it please itself. Its being self-content is dependent upon the good will of those desired. In so doing, it constantly has a hurried aspect: it is chasing after its own ideal. Only rarely, in those few moments of happy triumph, does it catch up with itself; it is usually a bit behind, forming, as it were its own after-taste.

But in so doing, it is not alone. Clearly, this tendency towards doubling and  
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division is a necessary functional condition of every taste—a precondition of being able to find pleasure in something. Only if a taste in experiencing

This must be true of all tastes. This means that not only my taste is divided and doubled: they all have an ideal ego. depend ent on the good will of other tastes in its functioning, but also all others. The other tastes also want to be wanted when they Since they are all striving for an ideal, tastes are not just faculties desire something and find it attractive. They are in themselves for feeling

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pleasure in an object pleases itself (because it imagines pleasing other, pleasure. They are not just pleased by something; instead they want some thing to please them. For they want with their pleasure to correspond to an ideal of themselves. If something pleases them, then not just because the object conforms to their ideas, but because they seem to meet the notions of other tastes in finding pleasure in this object. Not so much the pleasure in this or that object provides taste with one of its rare triumphs, but above all the felt sensation of agreement with the ideals ("Now the others will also think I'm great.") Just as taste in itself and its ideal are doubled, the same is true of pleasure: if something pleases him, he is pleased that it pleases him (as captured by the song line, "I love to love you, baby"). The object pleases a taste, because it pleases itself in allowing itself to be pleased.

Every taste, to be able to function as taste, is a mechanism of socialization (Vergesellschaftungsmechanismus) with other tastes. It pleases itself in not being alone in being pleased by an object, but enjoying the (real or only imagined) company of other tastes, that also

please themselves in feeling pleasure with this object and in this company. Tastes combine and are grouped around an ideal of a taste that they all strive towards; they behave like a mass in the Freudian sense.

Now if all tastes have an ideal, then it's clearly easy to imagine they all rarely achieve this ideal. All tastes have a certain taste-ideal, but it is frequently the case that at a given point in time not a single one of them is able to correspond entirely to this ideal. This is more likely than one of them

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from rare exceptional moments, a taste that is striven toward by all tastes,

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but none of them is identical with this taste. An anonymous taste, so to speak, a taste that is nobody's taste. It is not mine, for my taste never achieves its ideal, but it is also not that of my neighbor, for her taste equally never achieves its ideal. Through their doubling in reality and ideal, tastes produce a taste without an owner.

Just because it belongs to nobody, this taste does not dissolve into thin air. Instead, this ideal taste, possessed by nobody, forms a perhaps spectral, but quite stubborn reality. For it is supported and fed by the actual, idealizing tastes. It is like cultures ruled by cruel gods: while nobody ever saw these gods, indeed perhaps nobody ever believed in them, but they still had their real effects; people were sacrificed to them.

Models could be such poor victims today. I never really liked them, I now have to admit, somewhat shamefacedly. And I always thought that other people didn't like them either (and that they just would not admit it). The models are the fleshless correspondent of a spectral taste. "It would be lovely

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if I could find that lovely," every taste secretly thinks, but without admitting its failure to all the others. And the models have to starve themselves for this. At least in this case, it would seem, as in Andersen's fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes," desirable that finally somebody break out with the embar

being able to reach this pinnacle. (And, as Blaise Pascal subtly implied in another context, this is only possible in a momentary effort, a leap, but not over the long term.)

All tastes imagine an ideal, but none achieve it. It is like children telling one another jokes that they do not understand. As a rule this means there is, apart

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rassing truth and end the unbearable state whereby each gram that a model might have on her bones is thrown to this spectral Moloch.

But—I now have to object—such a revolution must take place for the right

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reasons; the ideal must be toppled because it is a bad ideal (that is, actually no ideal at all). The specter should by no means simply be toppled because it is a specter, that is, because no taste succeeds in being able to achieve

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its ideal. The argument cannot be: that is surely nobody's real taste, so why bother?

For it seems that we are experiencing currently (in the age of post modernity) a massive trend towards aggression against all ideals—a twilight of the idols pursued with an almost religious fervor. All tastes seem to rise

up against any ideal, not just bad ones; for they feel slighted by the ideal, their pleasure in themselves is disturbed. Almost as soon as an ideal surfaces, they feel bothered by it, placed in the shadows. Our tastes have stopped being good sports, as it were. When they notice that they are a bit behind their ideal, then they no longer decide to make any effort to achieve it, but rather simply begin to yell: away with the ideal!

Especially if many individual tastes have reached the same conclusion, as currently is the case, such a taste revolution is a simple and easy matter. As soon as the ideal is gone, the sense of slighting would disappear, or so one might think. Each taste is then on its own, and undisturbed by anything that had usually been a nose-length ahead. Away with the strange, weird thing that belongs to nobody! Each taste then enjoys its unlimited, critique-less respect and can finally, as is said so often, "tell its own story!"

But the problem is that nobody cares about that story. A taste that no longer strives toward an ideal has no sex appeal for other tastes. But as soon as it has an ideal of itself and responds to this drive with a sporting ambition, even if with countless defeats, other tastes begin to find pleasure in it. And this is not only pleasant for the other tastes, but also for the taste itself. The other tastes' pleasure is indeed the condition for its pleasure in itself.

And since I had to realize that taste's pleasure in itself is the condition of object taste, I can figure out that without this pleasure in itself it would not be pleased by anything at all. Without an ideal, taste is incapable of being pleased with itself, and then it is no longer pleased by any object. Taste clearly needs an ideal of itself, so that it not only pleases itself, but then can also be pleased by something else. Its anger about the ideal has lured it into a trap: after toppling the ideal (the supposedly foreign, authoritarian idols) it fell at the same time towards an absolute low, a zero point of dignity and capability. (This seems quite similar to all those spooky stories where the hero tries to do away with his unbearable doppelgänger.)

Accordingly, my taste seems to be made like a muscle. It needs challenges and stimulation to maintain its capability. The ideal needs to provide a stimulus to get it going. Such a stimulus can consist in being challenged by new, unusual taste objects, as offered by contemporary art. For the new, unusual taste object presents my taste with a new ideal ego. The object signals to my taste, as it were, "If you want to be pleased by me, you have to make a bit of an effort. For I only please especially clever, refined, cunning tastes."

If my taste accepts the challenge, it usually quickly begins to feel pleasure. It might still be far from the ideal, but simply the state that it has set itself in motion seems to multiply its forces: and the multiplication of force, according to Spinoza, is nothing but joy itself.

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But if my taste reacts in an unsporting manner, and does not accept challenge from my ideal taste that the object holds beneath its nose, it begins to wither. It is not the ideal or its unattainability that paralyzes it, but rather its own laziness in relation to it. This withering of taste is the reason why beau

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it to love objects. And the same thing seems to be true of other tastes; they euphorically collectively affirm an object which nobody before would otherwise have been able to access.

ty operations today are usually followed by more beauty operations. For

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with the removal of the first unusual aspect that a body presented, the taste that belongs to said body has refused the first challenge. It has rejected the chance to increase its forces. In so doing, it loses strength. As a result, it discovers new aspects on its body that now seem to be unbearable impositions, and wants to see them operated away. The more we are disgusted by objects (for example, those on our own body), the more we betray that our taste is out of shape, and will no longer satisfy any ideal demand.

It is at this point that I begin to suspect where the idea might come from that

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models are beautiful. For a taste that has become lazy, that does not want to follow any ideal, these beings are obviously exactly what they might not consider beautiful, but at least do not see as an imposition. Models are what taste is without posing a challenge to anybody. This means, however: it is not the spectral ideal taste that has an appetite for models, but real existing taste that can comfortably accommodate its lack of appetite there: that is, the very couch potato of taste that will tolerate no spectral ideal taste at all. Taste without an ideal is itself the Moloch that it fears and against which it rebels so strongly. Just as taste has to double itself into a real taste and an ideal of taste, on the other hand it itself becomes a monster when it defames and struggles against its ideal as a strange monster.

But if my taste is sporting and measures itself against other tastes, in order to

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impress others, then it seems to sprout wings. Elated about pleasing other tastes, it is capable of the unexpected—just as many speakers are suddenly able to say things before an audience that would otherwise never have occurred to them on their own. In the benevolent society of other tastes, it is able to say yes to objects that would otherwise remain inaccessible to it, objects that either surpass or fail to reach its standards. It thus becomes possible for friends to enjoy something especially precious that they would never have afforded themselves alone, like a large amount of expensive champagne, but also something unusually cheap, like a television soap opera or the Eurovision song contest.

In the security of having the benevolence of other tastes, my taste can suddenly waste its own benevolence on objects. To be loved by tastes allows The euphoria of tastes gathered around an impossible object seems to be due to the fact of transgression: they represent an exceptional situation that they enter together, as if on their own,



collective order, to transgress their normal principles, and in which they celebrate their exceptional collectiveness.

And this is exactly what they try to display. They mark the celebration of the exceptional situation with an object that otherwise, as a rule, might well not please them. This means that if they transgress their usual rules, they then choose an object intentionally that seems to allow no doubt about the source of their joy. The impossible object shows them that it is not the object that pleases them, but their relationship to other tastes. In this both subjective and general position, a festive mood arises, but what they celebrate is nothing but their own, astonishing power of transformation, through which they can even transform unpleasant objects into occasions of collective pleasure. With the help of an inappropriate object the tastes ultimately celebrate themselves.

The joy of pure taste is ignited in the presence of the sullied object.

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Or put differently: in the long run, the only thing that allows us

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Reason as a mobile theater.

If there is a “space” in which tales meet and collide, it has to be “subjective space.”

Before consulting the dictionary, I try to provide myself with the simplest definition possible: a metaphor more comprehensive and less literary (“subjective space” is already a metaphor).

I rule out several variants, essentialist or not: the mind, the soul, interiority, the heart of hearts, the psyche, the self, etc. However, it seems almost inevitable to assume intuitively that subjectivity exists in a space, no matter how virtual and illusory it might be. We can even say: subjectivity is (or behaves like) a surface, the epitome of bi-dimensionality. Infinitely persuasive, reflected in it are the existent and the nonexistent, the particular and the universal. An all-encompassing screen, in any case one without borders. A self reflexive mirror, irregularly curved, paradoxical, double, invisible. Subjectivity: this term expresses the reflexivity of the subject, its capacity to see and question itself (internally, linguistically, consciously).

Within the notion of the subject there is the implication of a capacity for reflexive action, within the idea of action there is the implication of freedom, and within the notion of freedom there is the implication of the opposition between at least two possibilities, two norms, two tales, two scripts.

A relation to itself that the imagination projects across numerous spatial metaphors that are not as easy to wear out as it might seem. Subjectivity is a mirror framed by the body, or better: a voice that listens/a hearing that speaks.

How do scripts coexist? The imagination reads them in an interlineal fashion.

Action: it only tears at those capable of lying.

To perform: agents are actors and actors are agents. In which scene do they appear, and what is the nature of the action? Action = fiction. It is only possible to remain truthful by not saying, not doing.

What matters most is neither the difference between theater and life (to perform/to act) nor the (type of) suffering an action can trigger. (In strictly veritative terms, is pleasure less valuable?)

to distinguish between fictions are the types of death produced in them. Irreversible deaths define “serious fictions,” and the reversible ones entertainment. Not only can serious fictions and entertainment be confused, they can also mix. One can act in two or three or more pieces at once, and not realize which is (or are) serious until the arrival of death. This difference between real and fictional deaths tends to erase itself as the real is converted into spectacular information, and vice versa.

There is always a script. A subject narrates, speaks, acts. The narrative act calls the script into being, while at the same time this act continues a script of another order: a more abstract and ungraspable one. The subject narrates, hears the narration, and is able to analyze its own tale. Listening to it, the subject changes it; reciting it, the subject perpetuates himself in it. With the act of narration, the subject responds to the violence of the world’s unresolved contradictions. The permeation of tales is always formally prior to consciousness.

Tidbits

Harlin: Since then you’ve written four novels that consist almost entirely of facts and anecdotes about artists and thinkers, along with quotations by and about them, again in a list-like style. How do you go about compiling information for your books?

Markson: I just pour books on top of my head. I grab this book on art, that book on philosophy, this book on the classics, that book on the lives of the poets. My own books I’ve got floor to ceiling in a couple of rooms—about 2,500, though I’ve dumped as many as 400 at a time throughout the years—and they’re all marked up in the margins. But for every ten tidbits that I think interest me, I wind up keeping only one.<sup>a</sup>

David Markson’s latest novels use as their points of departure the fragmentary/fragmented condition of memory and the state of futility, each time more unrealistic and mythological than before, producing homogenous and linear narratives. While the aim of these books differs from their “themes” (death, the poverty of some celebrated artists, the sexual clumsiness of others, the anti-Semitism of certain people, etc.), it is still possible to say what they contain. This aim has two aspects: one represents the decomposing of the literary discourse as a reflection of the decomposing of the subjectivity of our current age; the other the necessity of “reorganizing” this decomposition without betraying it.

Comprised of thousands of anecdotes extracted from countless historical sources, every David Markson novel is a “piece,” in a musical sense, but also in a sculptural sense. In this case, the parallelism between the sculptural and the musical derives from the sensation that the actual reading generates a volume as it progresses. As if, after hours of listening to a storyteller beside a bonfire, we were to realize that all contents have evaporated from our memory of the tale, and that all we remember is music. This confusing, indirect, retrospective music is an image of meaning. Moving towards Nietzsche, we could say that the nihilism of the fable of meaning once again finds its own truth when this fable is heard as pure music.



a—Tayt Harlin, "Interview with David Markson," on: <http://www.conjunctions.com/webcon/harlinmarkson07.htm> (consulted July 29, 2009).

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A semi-nonfictional semi-fiction.  
Obstinately cross-referential and of a cryptic interconnective syntax.  
Probably by this point more than apparent—or surely for the attentive reader.  
As should be the Author's experiment: to see how little of his own presence he can get away with throughout.<sup>b</sup>

The need to vanish from the story expresses the pursuit of an extreme, de-subjectifying objectivation. This implies forgetting or (perhaps mythologically) questioning the profound link between the object and the subjective authority that makes its appearance possible. Actually, this hardly concerns a desiderative anti-Kantianism, be it purely literary or fantastic. What Markson seeks to do is not to erase the "subject" in order to allow the "text" to emerge, but to produce a form of pre-narrative transmission from reader to reader. The problem is not the fiction as such, but rather the consistency of the voice as both fiction and the corner stone of the story.

This situation affects every narrator as a fictional figure, and not only the narrator in the novel nor the narrator in all of what we traditionally call "fiction." The linearity of theoretical language is no less illusionary than that of the modern novel, and it needs a narrator to the same degree, and even more importantly: if in the novel, as "assemblage" or "collage," the fragmentation of the narrator's voice expresses the decomposition of biographical substance, in the essay the fragmentation (or "spatialization") of discourse posits not only the representation of thought as a variable and disjointed authority, but also the radical instability of the thinkable itself. The problem is no longer the protocol of writing employed, but rather the type of legitimacy granted to each modality of it. In other words, the basic problem lies in the opposition between realism and formalism, between the conception of writing as mimesis (projecting the real through a code of representation) or as a purely mannerist exercise (exhibiting the "useless" functions of the code).

Defending some tales against others turns the conscious subject into a commentator. The appearance of dilemma implies a suspension of the plot, its interruption by commentary or at least by the need of it.

At times one strives to defend the truth of a story that is useful to survival, as if refusing to turn off a radio's brainless noise only for fear of silence. Yet anyone who insists on defending a vision of the world against others immediately seems suspect.

Though I've never had the patience to keep a diary ["tenir un journal"], in highly problematic situations I record my problems in writing. Then the doubts end up dissipating as a result of being overly exhibited.

Who narrates, who listens? Subjectivity does not coincide with the "self" that operates subjectively. Instead, this application is abstract, impersonal. We are less interested in locating it physically than in studying the spatial analogies that render it.

The conception of subjective space as a battlefield is only acceptable assuming that everything it contains can be embraced by a single master narration. Just as two combatants need a common-continuous medium to confront one another, worldviews or value systems require a space of compatibility in order to collide. In other words, distinct layers of what

b—David Markson, *Vanishing Point* (Berkeley, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), p. 93.

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is to come, or diverse futures envisioned within the conscious subject simultaneously (for example, being in love at the same as being an Orthodox Christian, who goes to work at 9 in the morning and wants to eat a bag of peanuts) must refer to a single subjective time.

As Mikhail Bakhtin concluded in this study on the "novelistic" discourse, the unity of style posits the unity of language as a system of general normative forms, as much as the unity of the individual that is accomplished in or by this language.

Less important than the content of a tale, whatever it might be, is its form. We can think of the linear, continuous, and homogenous model of discourse as a structural exponent of the classical Western idea of subjectivity (inherited and perfected over the course of modernity), as a compact, organic, and complete entity. This idea of a unique subjective territory (the subject as "a-country-with-a-history") is the necessary prerequisite for discussing a "moral crisis" (of whichever kind) in the individual.

#### Subjectivity and Collage

Very briefly, Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitute an utterance or a meaning. . . . Meaning the new [Saussurean] view is the movement from signifier to signifier. What we generally call the signified—the meaning or conceptual reference of an utterance—is now rather to be seen as a meaning effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves. When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of rubble made of distinct and unrelated signifiers. . . . If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience of psychic life. . . . With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, to a series of pure and unrelated presents in time. . . .

In our present context, this experience suggests the following: first, the breakdown of temporality suddenly releases this present time from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make of it a space of praxis; thereby isolated, that present suddenly engulfs the subject with indescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material—or better still, the literal—signifier in isolation.<sup>c</sup>

For Fredric Jameson, the proliferation of simultaneous and radically heterogeneous representations to which the contemporary subject attests in current society has decisive effects on the configuration of contemporary (postmodern) forms of subjectivity. His argument begins by recognizing the growing dominance of space and the logic of the spatial in societies dominated by late-capitalist logic, whose result is the dismantling of the organic model of subjectivity (for example, the Kantian one) and the cited "breakdown of the signifying chain." This last aspect greatly affects the construction of biographic information on the part of the subject, which is to say the effective capacity the subject has and exercises in narrating its own existence.

c—Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

In Jameson's discourse, the notion of the collage plays a brief but intense speculative role, delineating a two-directional passageway between properly post modern subjectivity and the artwork as a manifestation of the said situation of cultural rarefaction. It is no accident that Jameson arrives at this notion not by analyzing Cubist still-lives but video installations by Nam June Paik: The postmodern viewer . . . is called upon to do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference; such a viewer is asked to follow the evolutionary mutation followed by David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (who watches fifty-seven television screens simultaneously) and to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship: some thing for which the word collage is still only a very feeble name.<sup>d</sup>

What has changed is not subjectivity, but rather the internal economy of subjectivity, the manner in which the reflexive subject furthers itself in terms of perception and memory. We have moved from an organic subjectivity that could only be explored by way of a linear description of its emergence—a temporality generated/reflected analogously in linear reading, monologically ordered, that of a novel or the painting—toward a collagist's subjectivity that can only be described by the asystematic presentation of its elements, one by one.

The idea of linearity applies to certain modes of representation not in terms of structure, but rather according to its relation to the perceptive subject or—which is the same thing—to its mode of reception. The notion of linearity is highly problematic due to its frequent assimilation to one single channel of transmission, be it the sole line of the text or the cinematographic or musical track. Regardless of which, schematic thought assumes that there is simultaneity when the observer confronts various channels of transmission operating at the same time. This is a purely material conception of the opposition between linearity and simultaneity, and it should not block an epistemological conception, where the ideas of rhythm, layer, montage, and collage can be applied both to time-based and space-based modes of representation.

Intact or not, each isolated element described in the subjective space is a sample, a fragment, something incomplete. The secret of its inscription in a totality, be this a body or an environment where it remains absent already, has been lost forever. From the start, everything appearing this way in the subjective space is inevitably allegorical.

Collagist subjectivity is neither a battleground nor the opposite of one. It is the Desert of Las Vegas, where the specters of those who were buried without a tombstone congregate, at night and without witnesses. It is a space of holographic projections as distant as they are eloquent.

d—Ibid, p. 31.

Think of a battle of holograms. For two holograms to engage in a conflict, to confront one another, they have to be projected by the same device.

Materially speaking, each of these fragments, samples, or specters is an incommensurable, without ceasing to be a representation. They coexist in their own “unconnected presents.”

Subjectivity is at once a screen and a system of screens. So the so-called “classical” metaphor of the mirror without borders, develops toward a visually impossible and aberrant simile. In the current state of affairs, subjectivity is similar to a store that sells televisions, where an allegorical figure, which we call “consciousness” or “narrator,” wanders about. This scene forms part of an unending film sequence, live and broadcast on the LCD monitors that are, among many others, displayed in television stores. And so on.

Perhaps this is something an Escherian filmmaker (should we not say videomaker?) would have been able to represent.

Proust/Freud

If for Proust and Freud modern subjectivity was organized around a narrative—the search to identify that singular, private, and unique childhood experience, which had defined the identity of the adult—subjectivity in the information society may function more like a search engine. In Texas, this search engine endlessly mines through a database that contains personal experiences, brand images, and fragments of publicly shared knowledge. . . . While the jumps are always triggered by something—a question in the conversation, the taste of a drink or meal—the retrieved records are only loosely connected to the outside world and to each other.<sup>e</sup>

Lev Manovich and Andreas Kratky's *Soft Cinema Project* seeks to renew the model of traditional cinematographic narration in accord with the conditions of the linguistic and representational existence of the contemporary subject. For Manovich, these conditions are determined by the digital computation of information as the all-mediating and structuring operation for subjective space. As we know, computation involves two axes: the storage and visualization of data. In *Soft Cinema's* films, an attempt is made to grant equal importance to both. Put another way, an attempt is made to keep the axis of visualization from hierarchically intervening in the perception of diverse and plentiful information (in *Soft Cinema* there exists a schematic and non-detailed identification between data and memories, between artificial and subjective memory). Diverse screens within a screen simultaneously disseminate various fragmentary narratives from an artificial memory that constantly and randomly recombine them. This allows each of the film's visualizations to present a distinct combination of screens and episodes (within a limited number of possible ones, generating the illusion of repetition). As aesthetic objects, the films of *Soft Cinema* are problematic on distinct levels: the first and the most banal, the purely narrative: the fragments of a mono-channel discourse presented as memories seem more or less constructed, and vaguely documentary-style footage. The films' second problematic level, concerning the disposition of discourse, is far more relevant. The simultaneous visualization of diverse micro-tales (as banal as they might be) is a good illustration of the

e—Lev Manovich, “Proust/Freud,” in: *Soft Cinema* (DVD booklet), (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

Jamesonian concept of the new economy of postmodern subjectivity as a collage. All the same, in Soft Cinema distinct screens are separated by moving strips of color whose purely decorative function is reminiscent of the crude aesthetics of airport signage. This is especially deceiving if we consider the importance of the intermediate spaces between the screens, as a transcendental image of a "schizophrenic" disconnection between the tales.

The subjective, metaliterary figure of the narrator is subject to infinite splitting: narrator–character, narrator–commentator, narrator–commentator– (as)–character, meta–narrator–commentator, meta–narrator–commentator– as–character, and so on. We all experiment with these fluctuations of the inner voice, on a regular basis.

The collage as an artistic technique would reveal, then, its mimetic origins, as much as the modern novel, subjectivist and linear, had done before. Mimesis of non-organic subjectivity, where everything exists as a part without a whole, and where fragments are "stuck," fixed on a surface equivalent to absolute space.

As blank as a projection screen. This pure space of wakefulness, analogous to the imagination, in which any image can be suggested; but now we know that its borders do not coincide with those of the screen, and that the image does not succeed in saturating or subsuming the blank medium that receives it.

Collagist logic implies the duplication of the screen's borders. Every screen exists inside another screen (the television store syndrome), and every image, every sentence, is a quotation. Any expressive effect is a mere coincidence.

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Conversation on Skype, May 26, 2009

visual/formal and something that is discursive. This is also why it is, as you said, so complicated

Daniel Kurjaković: [. . .] One of the reasons why this whole question [of how artwork and discourse are related] popped up is that there is this curatorial problem as soon as you deal with thematic exhibitions. It might be interesting to question more deeply the relationship between the empirical entity of the artwork and the discursively informed production of knowledge in contemporary art (if knowledge is the right word).

### e) From Ventriloquism to Ontological Difference A Series of Conversations on the Relationship between the Artwork and Discourse

Daniel Kurjaković/Seraina Renz talking with: Giovanna Zapperi, Manuela Ammer, Berni Doessegger, Frédéric Wecker, Stefan Neuner, Beate Söntgen, Michael Gnehm, Catrin Misselhorn

63 e) Giovanna Zapperi, Manuela Ammer

the artwork, and the production of theory and how they interact, is how an artwork can problematize some questions—if I think about the questions I am interested in: identity, narration, subjectivity . . . There can be a discursive line, a discursive questioning of the artwork that we can interpret. But on the other side the plasticity, the visuality, the "formality" of the artwork always opposes itself to any kind of reduction. And what is interesting for me in that is a certain tension that emerges. I don't know if I make myself clear because English is not my first language. I like the idea to think that the work of art can be the site of an experiment, and of an ambivalence, and of a tension between something that is

• Giovanna Zapperi, art historian, Paris

"Art generates a certain kind of knowledge," this statement can be considered one of the more taxing demands made of art. The example of the discourse produced in or as the context of art is used as an indication for this kind of postulated knowledge production. This means, first of all, that art today is linguistically framed in several ways: academic commentary, experiential prose, or art-historical exegesis, but the philosophical purpose of this productivity is not quite clear. Does it always contribute to clarifying questions of art, or does it distort the gaze on aesthetic experience, which itself is perhaps not knowledge, but rather gives cause for a method of experience and thought? Despite the evident lack of focus when it comes to the concept "discourse," which is

surely the result of its popularization since the 1970s in the humanities, we have retained it for the discussions below, quite aware that the term due to its popularization is perhaps a symbol of a cultural desire or ideal, rather than a concept with a particularly precise content. Now this formatting is not only linguistic in the narrow sense, but—and this is certainly the most significant facet of discourse as a term—conceptual: making a concept of an issue, an experience, relationships, and constellations entails more than just linguistic self-reassurance, it includes also the relationship to the notion and imagination, as well as to concepts, hypotheses, and speculations. In this sense, since modernism a spreading "discursivation" of art has been taking place in the form of its "intersection" with ever new discourses.

In linguistic terms, this could be described as passing from a syntagmatic functioning to a paradigmatic, nominalistic functioning of subjectivity undoubtedly determined by the realization of capitalism as an ontological project (money assimilated as the substance of all substances).

This process of extreme objectification (centrifugal and nominalistic) does not imply the destruction of meaning, but the rupture of its articulations. Reality becomes text, word returns to image, and the fable/tale is reified. For its part, the exterior medium subjectivizes, becomes collection, sculpture, the "étui" of the subject. Interiority, on the contrary, returns to being a dwelling, a department store, a mall: at best a bazaar full of lovely objects from lost eras. An auratic business. Imagination disarticulates and becomes a showroom.

Narration (as discursive chaining) does not disappear. Instead, it becomes irredeemably hypothetical, artificial. One among many possible combinations of signs. Any illusion of meaning acquires nostalgic, sentimental connotations.

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Manuel Cirauqui

In such a disjoint space, the disappearance of all possibility of ("moral") crisis is the exponent of an ultimate crisis, which obliges us to redefine the basics of the subjective apparatus.

June 2009

The following conversations with philosophers, art historians, curators, and critics were about staking out the field in which such a context could again be made visible. Central here were not so much models or options about how art and discourse can relate, but rather the conditions of this relationship itself. What might we mean with when we—so self-evidently—presume this relationship? Some starting questions

should serve to prepare the terrain, so that questioning can (again) be set in motion: To what extent

does a discourse reveal itself by way of an artwork, a certain truth about a certain object? How can we imagine this kind of statement, without making out the work into an



illustration of a previously existing discourse? How does the work (help to) produce this aesthetic state ment? And how could such an “activity” of the artwork be described? The following texts are based on oral discussions, mainly conversations on Skype (a form of communication with a very strange way of organizing the relationship between gaze, voice, time, and thought). These texts, that sometimes provide answers, and sometimes shift, criticize, or reformulate the focus of the study, combine to form a single, albeit provisional horizon: the comments deal with the discussion of affects, the critical function of detail, the project of an art of disappearance, which stands in contrast to the disappearance of art, the function of the discourse itself, the ways in which art is able to multiply the perspectives of knowledge, or historical models in which the two poles of art and discourse seem to fuse. The occasion for

Giovanna Zapperi: The question also is whether we can consider artworks as producers of knowledge, which I think is the case. I think the images and artworks have a very deep way of producing knowledge even though it is maybe less recognizable, and another form of discursivity (let's put it this way).

Can you say a little more about what this other form of discursivity could be? For example, since when does it exist historically? Is it something very much

these conversations—if not their sole reason—was the art-sociological fact that in exhibitions, that is, the social sphere of an aesthetic theater or rite, the attempt is undertaken over and over to stage anew the relationship and knowledge, sometimes aggressively, sometimes reservedly (Conflicting Tales is an example of the latter, an exhibition that is focused on the notion of subjectivity). Of course, there is often a lingering comfort, and the respective exhibitions of contemporary art—and certainly not only those with a declared proximity to theory—are subject to the general suspicion of instrumentalizing artworks. But what would the terms of the discussion have to be if we posit that it is not productive to refuse the challenge of a discursive engagement with art?

related to recent discussions in contemporary art? Or do we—once again—have to go back to Kant?

I am really not thinking about Kant! (Laughing.)

Some people have been going back there!

This can be a position, it is not mine. I am not a philosopher. I would think of this issue historically: on the one hand, I would say, images that produce knowledge and discourse and that affect the viewer have always existed. We can go back to the Pygmalion myth, some thing I am currently working on; it refers to the idea that images respond to the desire of its creator and become alive. I think this is one point; it is almost structural within the production of images, even though I don't believe artworks can be reduced to the ideas of the artist (while of course it's part of it). On the other hand, in the contemporary modes what is so interesting is that there are so many interesting and contradictory ways of making art, but I have the impression that there is among this multiplicity . . . that there emerges maybe since two decades something that is very linked to the production of theory. As you know, some artists are also theorists, when you think of someone like Renée Green for example. She is not the only example, but she is an artist who has this two-faced work; she remains an artist and she expresses herself mainly visually, but there is a deep—how can I say—involvement with theory.

Is the production of theory, or of critical writing, which I think are not the same, since the 1960s, somehow related to the problem of truth? Do you think that the fact for example that Robert Smithson produced a very hybrid and new style of writing—which I think influences the way we speak and think about art today—has something to do, on a deep level, with the problem of truth in art (or of art)? Or is it just something more systemic within art—the role of criticism and its shift et cetera?

That is a very complex question. I feel a bit unease with this idea of truth in relation to art. If we would assume that the artwork is about expressing some kind of truth, whose truth would that be? The first answer would be: the artist's truth. And that's where the problem starts. I consider that art can be rather a site of experimentation, including the experimentation with truth. If we assume that the artwork is about a truth, then “it” suddenly closes. Also, it's ambivalent . . . One of the things I am interested in, in the object, to make thematic exhibitions. The works of art always go beyond the theme (if they are good, of course).

In a previous chat, you mentioned the term “affect,” the emotional factor. I wanted to bring up this term again in relation to our present discussion.

This term can be maybe related to what I was just saying: Images are capable to produce a reaction, to activate the viewer. Think again of the story of Pygmalion which is a kind of foundational story: it is about desire, love, . . . the mythical origin of the power of transformation the affect can produce. Maybe this question of the affect can be considered as part of what is precisely irreducible to theory, to discourse, . . . and once we consider artworks within affective relations, as activators of affect, of course they become sites of tension, of ambivalence, of something that is more complex.

Would you agree that this is not only about the introduction of desire into the aesthetic experience, but the disclosure of the role of desire within thinking?

I am not sure I understand the question. You think of desire only in an erotic sense. I am thinking of it in a broader way.

What I was saying is that desire is not only linked with the reactivity, but deeply embedded in the concept of thinking.

Absolutely. We could also say that the affect in this sense is part of the way art thinks. [ . . . ]

• Manuela Ammer, art historian, Vienna  
Conversation on Skype, June 15, 2009

Manuela Ammer: [ . . . ] While reading your informational text, I thought about when in recent art history this proximity between discourse and artistic production came about. Three currents, if you will, occurred to me, which can all be located in the 1960s and 1970s. There is for one the expanded cinema movement, which, parallel to the highly psychoanalytically oriented apparatus debate in film studies, had the analysis of the cinematographic apparatus as a goal, as it were placed the voyeuristic eye at the center of attention and tried to refuse the spectator the immersion in the film illusion, or rather to exhibit the immersion as such.

Seraina Renz: You're probably thinking of artists like VALIE EXPORT?

Yes, exactly. In the 1970s, the journal Screen was probably the central discursive platform, initially primarily for the medium of film, but then increasingly also received by artists who worked with film and video like Dan Graham or Dara Birnbaum. Through this journal, a great deal of French theory found its first widespread reception in

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the English-speaking world. In this context, a very tight intermixing of artistic production and theoretical engagement with a media environment came about, and the question of where the subject is located within it. Laura Mulvey published her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” there for the first time in 1975, which was incredibly influential and interested many artists.

At the same time, at the end of the 1960s, early 1970s, there were also strong points of connection between discourse and artistic production in feminist art. Traditional artistic media like painting were increasingly pushed to the margins, their social relevance was denied, and new media like performance, photography, and video were given the task to participate in social discourse.

And to shape it as well . . .

To shape it as well. We can see how art uses more activist forms. One example would be Mary Kelly, who in 1970 took to the streets of London to demonstrate against the Miss World pageant. The separation between artistic production and social-political participation or involvement becomes more difficult to locate, or rather it is irrelevant on what level one is productive.

Yes, Mary Kelly is a typical example. Also thinking of her Post-Partum Document, in which feminist discourse, everyday life, and art are completely subsumed in one another.

A third area in which one can speak of the increasing proximity of discourse and artistic production is institutional critique, in which at issue not least is the relationship or the examination of the relationship between artist subject and art system. Here, increasingly artists are active who passionately participate on the theoretical level. Think here of Daniel Buren, who can show an extensive textual production, or later Andrea Fraser, who already published her first article on the works of Louise Lawler in Art in America as a 19-year old. These are examples of artists engaged in institutional critique who also played a strong role in setting the discourse about institutional critique. This brings us to an issue that could be considered alongside this, and would perhaps be



interesting in this context, that is, to what extent artists themselves produce texts, that is, play a role in text production. One might go back to the Futurist manifestos or similar early positions, and then look at how things developed until today. A look at the current situation would show that for individual positions the separation between the artist and textual producer is no longer productive. John Miller, say, is an artist, has a band, and writes articles for Texte zur Kunst.

Is it a modern phenomenon that artists also take a hand in creation of the discourse and no longer leave it to the critic alone, but actively seek to help shape it?

In the time before modernism, one could probably speak of artists' correspondence, as for example the letters of Cézanne, a phenomenon that has certainly always existed. But using the medium of the article to locate one's own position within the art system is a modern phenomenon. It begins with the manifestos of the classical avant-garde movements.

Apart from the general thoughts on the question of where and how discourse and art production especially fertilize one another or have done so, I have considered whether I cannot think of an example that is perhaps in those terms informative. I remember an article that I read with great astonishment and pleasure two or three years ago, which was published in Real Life Magazine. Real Life Magazine was a very important magazine in New York in the 1980s. In an issue from 1987/88, an open letter was published by Adrian Piper, which targeted Donald Kuspit, at the time a very influential

critic. The prehistory here is that Piper had invited Kuspit to write a catalog contribution for her exhibition at New York's Alternative Museum, which he then did. But somehow a disagreement arose, and the text was not published in the catalog. Subsequently, Kuspit published his text, only slightly altered, in Art Criticism, a journal where he was the editor. In response to this text, or rather to the way in which it was published, Adrian Piper reacted with her open letter, in which she quite aggressively commented on both Kuspit's text and the intentionally omitted corrections, revealing the author as a masculine critic subject. For me, that is the moment in which two "institutions" collide: Adrian Piper is of course anything but an antipode to discourse: on the contrary, she stands for an artistic practice that is very laden with discourse. In this encounter, however, she embodies the artist subject or artistic practice, and Donald Kuspit is the discourse producer. Piper's letter reveals deep ideological gaps and demonstrates where she sees herself as a feminist artist misunderstood by the macho critic subject, leading up to the most absurd schoolmasterly arguments about spelling, that are really odd to read. For me this is an example that, regardless of the fact that it's funny and a bit embarrassing, sums up with what violence the struggle over meanings is carried out, and how important it seems to control this discourse. Usually this happens beneath the surface and in a more diplomatic way, but here it comes to the surface with a real primal force.

Now I would like to come back to something you said earlier, that the division between discourse and artwork from a certain point in time is no longer interesting. Would you call the question that we have raised here irrelevant?

I wouldn't say that. I think that the division certainly exists, but in part was not very productive in terms of the judgment

of artistic production. Institutional critique would be here an example, or individual positions like the already mentioned John Miller, who is an artist, art critic, author, and so in one person, and sees no need to maintain customary divisions. Apart from that, I think that the division between discourse and artistic practice in a certain way is perhaps even greater than it was before, simply because the production of discourse and texts, as well as artistic production itself, are both more comprehensive than ever before. This results in a stronger differentiation with millions of discourses from millions of target audiences that exist in parallel and do not perceive one another respectively. There is also no universally received main medium that dominates discourse — they only do that from the perspective of a certain target group. To cut a long story short: I believe that the said separation indeed exists, now as it did then, but that it cannot be taken to the extreme, because it manifests itself in so many different places that it is impossible to retain a clear overview. [ . . ]

• Berni Doessegger, philosopher, Zurich  
Conversation on Skype, June 10, 2009

Daniel Kurjaković: [ . . ] Our starting point is as follows: on the one side the artwork, which by definition and in an essential sense is not identical with itself (which is why it perhaps calls for a discourse), and on the other the discourse, which is linear, that is, at least has a kind of formal identity (a notion that naturally can also be called into question). My first question: Do you agree with this starting point?

Berni Doessegger: I think there's a certain longing for discourse, which is quite closely linked to the artwork, that is, with a concrete

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object that appears in a certain context. But artwork and discourse are not identical, and the abyss between them produces a desire to overcome the difference. It's strange: on the one hand, the discourse demands that the art object somehow has to be there, and on the other hand the discourse, by way of which the artwork is discussed, is seen as something that first produces the artwork. Usually, the discourse interrogates the artwork in terms of its visibility, in terms of its material status and informative content. The artwork is seen as an object or a bit of information that is simply there, in whatever form, and somehow must be there, which makes discourse purely ideational or accidental.

In contrast to what other notion?

Well, visibility is what is wanted, and it is said that the artist produces something visible. But there is a misunderstanding there, to the extent that the artist does not just produce something visible, but examines becoming visible or refers to it by making it visible. In other words, it is assumed that art is visible, but I would say that art is not at all visible. It is something invisible because the way it makes something visible is itself invisible. That is the ontological difference. And that is soon forgotten in the discourse about the artwork, because the discourse in general limits itself to treating the visible, and does not deal with the question of how something becomes visible, that is non-negotiable.

On first glance, your comment is astonishing. As you yourself said, there is a longing for the discourse,

and that is surely linked to a concrete object?

I think for example when something is exhibited, somehow a certain longing develops for a kind of celebration, a celebration in terms of the artwork. The artwork as something autonomous appears at the center, or should appear at the center. It has an independent status. For this, a certain reaction, a discourse is needed. This is also the usual way an exhibition proceeds. Exhibitions also always try to produce a discourse somehow, and not just an exhibition. Whatever is produced as part of this results in a conceptual location within art, in society or on the economic map, that is, a relevance. The desire is then perhaps to locate the artwork, the representation. One seeks to allow the artwork to become "real" through reflection. But the behind-the-scenes operations — the funding channels, the scandal, and so on, everything that lies behind it or is presumed behind it and is quasi invisible — people find more interesting than the artwork itself.

Fine, let us assume that actually "nobody" is interested in the artwork: why is there this turning away from the artwork?

There is a turning away from the artwork to the extent that what the artwork produces is more interesting than the artwork in itself. Interest is directed at the contextual background, the strategy and the logic that are hidden behind it and that are necessary to make the artwork visible at all. This shows that the beholder is really more interested in the invisible, which has to do with the ontological difference, while in comparison the visible, the artwork, is actually irrelevant. The beholder is really interested in the invisible. All the same, the argument is constantly made that the artwork has to be there, to at all be. It is argued that the artwork is what the beholder wants to see. But in this way, the gradual disappearance of the artwork is overlooked, which, however, is the genuine event of art. I think that the disappearance of the artwork was demonstrated by the avant garde. This is part of historicity, the historical dimension of the artwork — the disappearance. The disappearance is not only revealed in that the artwork in the avant-garde is ever more narrowly coded,

that for example the attempt is made to generate a media code, as in the case of the readymade or the black square. In both cases, the artwork disappears, in that the context or the support is referred to. The avant-garde indeed had as its goal to have art make itself disappear, that is, to abolish all mimesis. And today, since postmodernism, we have arrived in a place where disappearance is varied, where variations are made on different forms of disappearance.

Let us return again to your claim whereby the artwork disappears.

What disappears is, as Benjamin said, the auratic aspect of the artwork, which for Benjamin is the indication of an art to come. This art to come is then no longer particular, but universal. It is not longer about saying this is art and this is not art. And in that the difference is suspended, art also disappears. It is somehow paradoxical: in that the artwork disappears, it seems to dematerialize itself, but as we see, the artwork is not dematerialized, but it refers increasingly to its material supports or to the media, cultural, and economic context. In modernism, the artwork referred more to the material context, to the medium or support, and now it often refers to the social, political, or discursive space or other corresponding contexts— recently also

to ecological contexts as well — which are also all media supports. The artwork raises the claim to no longer be a thing that stands around, but seeks to make the overarching contexts visible. It seeks to change vision, how we perceive things and thus the world. Discourse is then the indication that the artwork takes place, in that the artwork changes the discourse.

Is that not a commentary on what you call the longing for a discourse? Discourse seems, when I listen to you, to be on the other side of the work, as if the singular work and the discourse mutually excluded one another.

As I said, the discourse belongs to the surroundings of the work. There is a dependence here because discourse is a productive force in the materialist sense. And this productive force is somehow not visible or negotiable, which is then the philosophical dimension of art.

It seems as if the "singular," as for example distilled by the phenomenologists as the physical-presence, were becoming non-existent, and prove to be a philosophical dream . . .

Originally, the work begins with the invisible. In that increasingly reference is being made to the invisible, to the supports, to the surface of the image, or to the socio-cultural environment, the invisible has come increasingly to bear, and thus art as something singular has disappeared. But this disappearance has somehow come to a standstill. There is a kind of ideological reluctance to transgress this limit. Hence, the discourse remains stuck at the limit that is constitutive of desire. In so doing, discourse remains linked to desire. There is a desire for discourse, but no discourse, because the limit is not transgressed, but only used to generate the desire for discourse. The art is thus kept from really disappearing or fulfilling itself.

But if art were on the same level as discourse, so that the difference between artwork and discourse were suspended, then the discourse itself would be up for disposition. If the image were destroyed, that would not only be the destruction of art, but destruction as an aesthetic program would take the place of the image and become the absolute artwork. In this way, the ontological difference could be overcome, which is an old avant-garde idea. Exactly the same thing would result if discourse made art disappear through art. That would then mean that discourse would take the place of art, which has already all been played through.

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Conversely, the impossibility of overcoming the ontological difference is the continued existence of art as something visible, as well as the discourse of the visible itself. This negativity could indicate that desire is nothing subjective, but transhistorical, a kind of ontological dimension. But by talking about it, as we are doing now, we keep art from following its natural course . . . This simply shows that today the discourse has become deconstructionist, regardless if one likes it or not. There is a certain status quo. And that's what's at issue today: not the disappearance of art, which can only be a sentimental production and remains barren with desire, but an art of disappearance: the art of allowing art to disappear. [ . . ]

• Frédéric Wecker, philosopher, Paris  
Conversation on Skype, June 14, 2009

Daniel Kurjaković: [ . . ] One could begin by discussing the general form of the question. Having read the English version of the text which outlines the

problem considered here, you have noticed a rather crude scenario, a scenario that is taken quite at face value, which lies between the work of art as a singularity, on the one hand, and the linear and teleological discourse, on the other. Do you accept that one asks the question in such terms at this point?

Frédéric Wecker: The general form of the question is based upon an opposition the terms of which seem doubtful to me: the supposed singularity of the work of art, on one side, and the linearity of the discourse, on the other. Now, both terms could easily exchange their attributes: the work of art could be linear and the discourse singular; but above all, the artwork could be discursive and the discourse a work of art. Saying this, I not only think of my own position, of the philosophical assumptions which mark my own discourse and which allow me to organize the intelligibility of such categories. Rather, I think of the current situation of the young French scene as well, on which art 21 also focuses, and for which one issue consists in the subtext, i.e. precise references to different discourses. Let us take for example Benoît Maire who calls one of his installations *Le réel est l'impasse de la formalisation*. La formalisation est le lieu de passe-en-force du réel, thereby referring to an eponymous seminar by Badiou which he attempts not to illustrate but to put in a form or to execute. Thus, with a certain candor in the reference itself, he indicates the place of the discourse in his work. This frankness is a true novelty as one does not find it with others before him. These days, young artists take explicitly hold of discursive segments with which they intend to work, to make art. You will admit that the singularity of Maire's display is certainly not to be found in the objects he presents but rather in the complex and entangled way the latter are referring to the philosophical discourse of Badiou. Already for this first reason I would not see an opposition by principle between discourse and work of art. However, it seems to me that there is a more profound reason for the opposition to be false. In fact, we do have no immediate access, i.e. an access without mediation, to the "singularity" of the artwork. The ontology of the artwork, which interests me, is coming from analytical philosophy. It does not cut the artworks from their context at a place where it would seem to be most facile: the one of the artefact. So, if you dismiss this possibility, the whole problem amounts to correctly individuating the artwork without enclosing it in a false singularity. A work of art deprived of any accompanying text, decontextualized in the exhibition space, is not correctly individuated. As a matter of fact, under such conditions it is not the artwork that one sees but the product of the latter: the residue of an ultimate reification. The relationship to the artwork does not construct itself in the aesthetic experience

or in whatever else could have occurred instead. Rather, it requires an investigation, a historical one, in what is shown under its title or in its name. The notion of singularity for me does not refer to anything precise within the said aesthetic experience. And with reason: the material substrates always determine the works of which they are always the incarnations. . . . I do not have any phenomenology of aesthetic experience that would allow me to believe, as the French phenomenologists did at their time, that the specificity of our relation to art lie in the seizure of a hic et nunc where something essential for our understanding of the concept of art occurs. To my mind, this is not how things take place or should take place. The product of the artwork is always mediated. Be it or not accompanied by a "verbal" discourse or a "note of intention" which so many artists have now learnt to write, the work of art is always received within an order of reasons and an order of intentions. I am not at all afraid to express my attitude like this: I am not at all an anti-intentionalist, rather I am a moderate real intentionalist.

Whether one can refer to the real intentions of the artist or postulate the necessity to go back to his intentions (be it only with the aid of ad hoc criteria to evaluate the failure of the artefact) allows to reinsert the product of the work into something which is of the order of a discourse.

And yet you seem to give priority to the discourse.

To begin with, the singularity is not the only polarity of the work of art one could be tempted to oppose to the discourse. There are also diffuse works, ambiance machines. . . . Even the thought of artworks that strive to reify the conditions of experience is terrifying to me. As to them, I am inclined to say with Jean-François Chevrier that "I am not going to the museum to take baths; baths—I like to take them in the sea, when I go to the museum, that is for something altogether different". However, put aside the case of "artworks" that propose themselves as simple baths of experience, for me there is no longer any opposition between the singularity of the work and discourse, unless the latter is understood as verbal discourse. However, it is a truism that this is not always the case with a work of art. As soon as one adopts a more generic conception of discourse, which does not limit itself to verbal discourse, the aforementioned opposition dissolves.

If the opposition dissolves, to follow your argument, one relationship nevertheless remains: a functional relationship. So, without essentializing the term of the singularity of art, it is possible to ask: In what does the function of the work, of a specific work, consist within the discursive field?

I agree with you on this point. But to enlarge somewhat the subject, one should consider the way in which an artwork always articulates a statement, even if the latter is not always propositional. Therefore if one admits that the singularity which you posed at the beginning becomes a problem of individuation of the artwork, one must find appropriate criteria so as to know what to include in the perimeter of the artwork. It is only at the level of the aesthetic properties that one can determine what Eddy Zemach calls standard observation conditions. In fact, there are "time-sensitive aesthetic properties" which imply sometimes a quasi-archaeological work, so as to re-establish the historic conditions of observation which will allow their re-emergence. Taken in the sense Kendall Walton understands them, the categories of art are themselves historical concretizations which one should learn to make function correctly. It is only if one undertakes this delicate work of individuation that such a thing as the singularity of the artwork appears. Of course, it is always easier to reduce the works of art to luxury articles. What is more, even if correctly individuated, certain works are nothing but vectors of the dominant ideology that deliberately deploy a biased terminology.

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Shouldn't one distinguish discourses from ideology?

In any event, many artists are ventriloquists of ideologies. . . . Recently I had the opportunity to comment on an extraordinary text by Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni ("Cinéma/idéologique/critique") which was published during the "red" period of the Cahiers du cinéma. In the ideological cinema, the discourse is certainly always present. However, without being aware of it, this discourse presents itself as the common one and contributes to the reproduction of the status

quo. It should be noted that also here the discourse does not reduce itself to a verbal one, to dialogues exchanged in a film, for instance. Fortunately, there are works which address their relationship to their real conditions of existence in a dialectical manner and which attempt to dissociate themselves from common opinions. They are neither in the realm of the imaginary nor in that of an ideology. In a way, they are, well, more singular as they do not enter into the customary relations with their category of art, patrons or their public.

I would find it interesting to come back to the individuation and its rules of behavior, to its "standard conditions of observation." Could you specify them, as well as the act of individuation?

The individuation is an ontological problem. Having dared ask again ontological questions is the recent contribution that the analytical philosophy has made to general aesthetic questions. No doubt they have been asked again as questions pertaining to the definition of art were wearing somewhat out in analytical philosophy. Very quickly it had been realized that there is no such thing as the essence of art. If one considers Morris Weitz' article "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" as its founding act, analytical aesthetics had historically emerged with the rejection of the hypothesis according to which disjunctively necessary and conjunctively sufficient conditions have to exist for an object to be a work of art. As the search for a relational property of substitution went on, more and more sophisticated definitions of art were formulated. Today most of the "analytical" definitions of art are disjunctive or bundled definitions which aggregate all sufficient conditions, or mixed models which tend to synthesize earlier approaches such as the historical functionalism of Robert Stecker. In any case, these are open definitions. I imagine that this is not very satisfactory for someone who is looking for a simple and conclusive answer to the question: What is art? The ontological investigation has allowed to approach things in a different manner and to formulate radical hypotheses. One certainly must not be afraid of ontology and of the question: What kind of entity is a work of art? The most interesting hypotheses that have been advanced in the course of the last twenty years were those that were, to my mind, the most counter-intuitive a priori, i.e. considerations of monistic ontology which start with the somewhat crazy assumption that all works of art, in spite of their obviously irreducible diversity, could belong in the last instance to the same ontological category. The hypothesis of the action type, which its author (Gregory Currie) no longer, at least publicly, defends, or more recently the hypothesis of the artwork as performance, presented in an authoritative manner by David Davies, amount to the idea that what one thinks is the ordinary artwork (the public object presented to "amuse the gallery") is, at best, a small fraction of it. As an art critic, these ontological considerations interest me a lot as they seem appropriate for more complex modes of individuation than those that the standard models impose on the art critique. . . . as well as on the artists! [ . . . ]

• Stefan Neuner, art historian, Florence/Zurich  
Conversation on Skype, June 26, 2009

Seraina Renz: [ . . . ] When looking at the question of the relationship between discourse and artwork, it is rare to find positive formulations of this relationship. While it might well be generally accepted that there is such a positive relation, it is

usually defined  
ex negativo.

Stefan Neuner: Classically speaking, the relationship between art, discourse, art history or theory or critique to production is considered in a similar way to how Barnett Newman claimed in his famous statement that the artist is to the aesthetic as the bird to ornithology.

What was he implying?

That the relationship between art production and art theory is an absolute mis-relationship, in that artists and theorists operate in completely different realities. And separated in this way is usually how things are conceived: there is, first of all, something like an artistic production following its own logic and ex post its reflection, its theory, discourse in the broadest sense of the term. The idea of this difference has a quite decisive importance in modern art theory and aesthetics. Here, we should think first of all of Kant, who in his system assigned the aesthetic a place fundamentally opposed to rational cognition. This continues to inhere in the notion, picked up in romanticism and modernism and still present today, that artistic practice operates, as it were, on this side of cognition, and that within art insight and invention operate under very different conditions, related to a fantasy of a greater immediacy and primacy. This notion today can by no means be brought to coincide with reality. Louise Lawler once answered the question of who is an important influence for her by naming in a single breath Andy Warhol, Benjamin Buchloh, and Craig Owens. And accordingly also the practice that often is either clearly emanating from discursive questions or theoretical fashions, or can result in something able to pass as a contribution to academic discourse. Here, for example, we should think of the essays of Dan Graham or Alan Sekula. They can neither be classified clearly in the realm of discourse or art practice, since they de facto operate in both, or it could also be said that they operate on the threshold between them. At any event, the classical order that keeps discourse and practice at a distance from one another has become obsolete.

This reality is historically related to certain developments at the end of modernism and the transition to the neo-avant-garde. The phenomenon begins to announce its presence in modernism. One root naturally is the manifesto-writing of avant-gardism, where aesthetic programs were set before the fact. The Surrealist manifestos, for example, were written at a point in time when surrealist practice was still in emergence. Quite decisive for this relationship is the Greenberg reception in the 1960s. Summed up briefly, Greenberg presented his writings in 1961 in book form, a theory of the inner logic of the development of modern art, which in the 1960s was read by a younger generation of artists as a program from which the next steps could be theoretically derived. This was laid out in the artist writings of this time, for example, Robert Morris' "Notes on Sculpture," or in Joseph Kosuth's writings. These articles show, with the gesture of objective argumentation, the next steps required by the previous development of modern sculpture or art. With its foot notes, these texts make a claim to scholarly cogency. With the success of this paradigm of art production and its penetration in the institutions of higher education, the theoretical training of artists has also taken on more importance. In Barnett Newman's terms, we could thus say that the theorist is probably not so much an ornithologist

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thologist who is approaching the state of a bird. More accurate is perhaps an image that could be taken from Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*: maybe the theorist or art historian is an ethnologist, who like Claude Lévi-Strauss penetrates the deepest depths of the Brazilian rain forest, to discover a people not yet visited by whites, and I believe at the river that marks the border of



the territory, comes upon representatives of the people who themselves have come upon the idea of moving out into the world. The colonial fantasy of the other collapses. The fantasy of the difference of the aesthetic comes from the same historical root. Now today, they stand opposed to one another, the theorist, the artist. A relationship which, as you quite rightly assess, is not so easy to take account of.

So you would question whether art today is primary, and that theory follows?

Yes, precisely, and we should perhaps note that this relationship, which has taken the lead in the last fifty years, indeed stretches back much further. I would even say that modern art, that is, art as we understand it, came out of a situation in which the order of theory and practice was produced in exactly this fashion. If we think of the Quattrocento, with inventions like perspective or Alberti's treatise on painting, at issue in the latter is not simply a reflection of an existing art practice. Instead, theory precedes practice, naturally seen on the whole, apart from some individual pioneering achievements. At issue here is a proposed model — in thousands of art-historical analyses, the attempt has been made to show what influence these texts have on production. Perspective is thus a theoretical position, that in a certain sense surely systematizes a practice of spatial representation, but ultimately is a strongly theoretical model. There were enough pictures to follow — think of Uccello — that are clearly based on mathematical-theoretical prescriptions: that's all old hat. But from this, it follows that art must be understood as a duality, a divided unity of discourse and production: theory and practice should be considered equally original. What this means for art . . . is one thing. For my trade, in any event, it means that it would have to be understood or undertaken as a moment of artistic production, and not as scholarship. [ . . ]

• Beate Söntgen, art historian, Bochum  
Telephone conversation, June 12, 2009

Seraina Renz: [ . . ] In our previous discussion, you mentioned moments where art and the discourse of subjectivity come quite close to one another.

Beate Söntgen: My starting point is the 1960s: the critique of authorship that was formulated in a particularly forceful way by Foucault and Barthes, and the development that the arts then took: roughly speaking, the displacement of the completion of the artwork to the beholder. This notion is rooted at the start of the modern age, in the late eighteenth century, with the notion of "imagination," and reached a climax in the 1960s. I'm thinking of minimal art, on the one hand, and on the other hand the practices of participation that include the beholder actively in the production of the artwork. This is not just about the artwork being completed in the reaction to what the beholders see, but beholders actually become part of the work of art, in performances, actions, and so on. I'm also thinking of newer forms of relational aesthetics, as Nicolas Bourriaud termed it, where art is much more directed at actual use. Kant's notion that art should cause disinterested pleasure, that is, it precisely should not have a targeted purpose, was more cast in more drastic terms with the notion of autonomy, especially by Adorno, who demanded that artworks refuse all use, in particular any political use. Since the 1980s, there have been artistic practices that propose this very

kind of use of art, as in the work of Andrea Zittel, Rikrit Tiravanija, or Jorge Pardo: these artists shape living spaces, forms of living, and rituals in works that are in fact conceived for use, be they interiors or communal meals.

Why has use suddenly found a place in art?

It is certainly a logical further development of artistic practices from the 1960s. Here there was the idea of a blurring between art and everyday life, an idea with a history rooted in the reform movements of the nineteenth century and in the Bauhaus. Artists should design life or everyday life differently in the hope that the aesthetic would also have an ethical impact, the idea being that good surroundings would produce good people, an utopian formulation. It's not so easy to say today if an ethical aspect still plays a role, but I think the orientation towards the community surely also contains this aspect.

And an element of participation is that artists carry out their art in community. Not only that they form a community with the audience, but that there are artist collectives that work together.

Yes. Working together is always also a blurring of the artist's own subjective signature. For most artist collectives, it is part of the program that it is not recognizable who does what: this is true of Fischli/Weiss, Hubbard/Birchler, or Gilbert and George. When these artists speak about their work, they consciously avoid assigning tasks or realms of work to the individual artists in the couple or group, instead it is always emphasized that what they do is created in collective thought and work, and that the process cannot be traced back to an artistic subject, which then articulates itself in the work. This form of collective work might create a higher form of commitment, through communication, reaching an understanding during the process of creating the work.

To step back for a moment: you locate the beginning of this process in the 1960s. Where exactly, in which historical moment would you place it? You mentioned minimal art, for example. That is somewhat counter intuitive.

Minimal art is perhaps not about participation, but it is about the question of authorship and the artistic signature. The artists work with industrial materials, they reduce the formal language and emphasize that the artistic work is only completed in exchange with the beholder. Michael Fried harshly criticized this idea in the late 1960s in his very important article "Art and Objecthood," which, although rather implicitly, raises a central question in relation to the blurring between the artistic and the non-artistic. Where do the borders lie? This question is still interesting today, or rather has again become interesting. When Pardo designs a bar, how is his bar different from other well-designed bars? If art can no longer be distinguished from other life practices, what does artistic work mean?

How is the problem exactly grasped, how can we conceive the limit? In the end, can it be articulated?

One technique, on the one hand simple, and yet also complicated, is labeling. Here, the question of authorship is posed in a very vehement way, not only artistically, but also economically. Individual artists approach this quite differently. Pardo for example works with a large team of designers, architects, and others. He controls everything himself, even the craftsmanship techniques. He brings the people into his studio, organizes the necessary tools, and keeps control over the entire collective effort. But the final decision

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Söntgen, Michael Gnehm

remains in his hands: it is Pardo's signature that shapes everything and it is Pardo who appears, even if he lets the others surface as figures in his works.

So a mixture of authorship and a strong role for commonality.

Exactly. The aspect of commonality is also interesting in relation to group exhibitions: Who takes which space, how do the works relate to one another? Especially when the works have been made for the exhibition, and artists have to reach an understanding with one another in an intense way. That is an entirely different form of community. It also emerges in the awareness that the framework of a presentation has a strong influence on the works. [ . . ]

• Michael Gnehm, art historian, Zurich  
Discussion in Zurich, June 19, 2009

Michael Gnehm: [ . . ] If we want to find out something about an artwork, then I don't think it's about wanting to be informed about a particular issue that somehow relates to the artistic work. I rather look for resistance in the artistic work. And resistance is then primarily something that interrupts the desire. It provides an impulse that redirects our longing for more explanation.

Daniel Kurjaković: The aspect of information doesn't necessarily have to stand at the foreground. The modalities of what takes place in beholding art can be described in other terms. Let us try using the philosophical texts of aesthetics: What do we have there? We can observe how thinking about art materializes, how the process of thought runs its course. You were skeptical about the term "discourse." Maybe we could find a different, more precise term. We could thus correct our way of posing the question, and no longer start with the opposition between the artwork and discourse, which you criticize so strongly. The question is rather: What kind of thinking takes place in the realm of art?

We certainly hope that an access to the work takes place. That's how I understood this longing, as you put it. But it is something else to follow a process of thought that is formulated in engaging with a work of art. That's the way it is — and that often bothers me about texts on art, that you can't exactly see why these texts that present a thought process should have anything to do with art. In a way, it can divorce itself to such an extent that it is interchangeable: art becomes a foil that can be applied to the front or rear. The text might be interesting, but I doubt that any transfer between work and text still takes place, or it only takes place circularly in the art context. This is why I don't see the relevance in many theoretical considerations about art.

You are now criticizing generally a theoretical engagement with art. Where would you place the focus?

I see the perspective in detail: in detail in contrast to discourse writ large. In details, there it's possible to do

something, and there it's interesting to experience something. The detail can be theorized further, and in so doing we are back to the circle. But the lovely thing about it is when from this detail something concrete happens in our approach to an artistic work; and in the textual engagement so that it becomes understandable in its own way. In my view, this is possible if an artwork is looked at in its details. And by details I mean minor aspects that perhaps were relevant for the overall

work, perhaps even focus on one aspect, so that by no means does everything come into view. That is a kind of focus that can bring something to flash up.

What do you mean with "flash up"? What is "working with details"? Can you elaborate more on that?

It's surely possible to become more poetically elaborate when working with details. For me, it is the thing that can trigger something. It stands in a context, but can liberate itself under certain circumstances and trigger something further, and I would indeed call this a poetic process. What concerns me about such considerations is: How can I produce something like that or receive it, without becoming hermetic? That it does not "just" remain stuck in the artistic? I would be interested in how it might be possible to reach far enough to get to a socially relevant context through poetic production and reaction to details of an artwork. And that should be understood in a political sense. Then we would be at the point where we have to ask ourselves about the currency of such an observation of details. Or what does the detail say about a certain currency or urgency? Of course it should not be overlooked, and this is meant as a footnote on being "current" and "urgency", that we not only live in the now. Everything is weighed down by historical ballast, it would be lovely if the poetic could be able to achieve such traces.

To what extent can the detail in its very concrete form, which it indeed has as detail, refer to this other dimension of the historical-political?

This is obviously the time to produce an example. Let's take the work of Nalini Malani, Listening to the Shades. These 42 paper works form an ensemble of individual components. Even if I don't remember the entire work, certain details fascinate me in a way that makes them for me an emblem for the entire work. And even for the question of detail, that is, its connection to the whole and what even goes beyond the whole, that is, into the temporal dimension, going beyond the here and now of the work.

Interestingly, it is a work that has to do with anatomization: it's about dissection, autopsy in a certain sense. It also explores X-ray vision, dissecting. There are several parts that show brain sections. Clearly, here the human being is taken apart, and of course using drawing and painterly means, that should be looked into more closely. But in a purely figurative sense, what we also see in the work is the individual that has been dissected and divided up. It is placed in contexts that make up his lifeworld, but not the world of his imagination. It is thus the real and the imaginary that is shown here. It's helpful to know that the artist has a Pakistani-Indian background, but perhaps it's clear even without knowing that, with Buddha figures and fighter planes, explosions, war events, and all that in connection with a dissected person, of which we often only see the brain, perhaps the head and the entrails as well. The human being surfaces in a certain context, and that is obviously also political, warlike . . .

The work itself also explores the question of how I can artistically intervene or at least bring something from the closed art circle to the world. Interesting here is how this works — apart from clearly recognizable figurative forms, for it happens clearly via the

artistic work as such, and with this I mean the way it is drawn and painted. Drawings and ink painting flow into these figurative forms. The winding shapes of the brain sections show a formal analogy to other organic forms, for example the intestines. Furthermore, there are forms that are not so easy to interpret, that look more like ink or paint blots. So we have a gradual transition to strictly formed shapes — from undefined intestines to the “intellectual” twistings of the sections of the brain. That is a process without a beginning or end. Here the artistic process indicates how such transferences from the field

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of art to another field might look; as associative transitions through the form, but also the color as well as the way in which something is shown and shaped. And that is a mute formulation of something that is quite clearly also linguistically structured. Such a visual muteness cannot be separated from an eloquent voice. [ . . ]

• Catrin Misselhorn, philosopher, Tübingen  
Telephone conversation, June 19, 2009

Daniel Kurjaković: [ . . ] I've already explained to you our question: Do you think it's important?

Catrin Misselhorn: I think the question is absolutely relevant and very current. It seems to be at the center of the question: What kind of relevance does art have? Of course, it's problematic as well, to the extent that one should clarify the state of this relationship. A question you posed was: To what extent does the discourse show itself in the artwork? Or: a certain truth about the object. I would say that in many artworks truth is present in a symbolic form. Now what do I mean by symbolic? Here, I would turn to Goethe's notion of the symbol as representation of the general in the particular. I am not averse to the idea that the symbol is a kind of bearer of significance that is not entirely arbitrary. This does mean that conventions do not play a role for aesthetic experience; but in my view, no convention fixes what the symbolic content of an artwork is. How do we find this out? I think this is a matter of interpretation. The goal of interpretation, and here truth comes into play, is to attribute to the artwork as convincing a symbolic content as possible. With this I mean a symbolic content that is as close to truth as possible. This does not mean that we have access to this truth independent of the artwork. Instead the only access to this truth is through the artwork.

Can we return for a moment to the concept of the symbol? What structure does this symbol have? Is it visual, linguistic?

Visual and linguistic would both be bad alternatives, because the concept is then narrowed too much to certain genres. I would rather say: it is a kind of sign where the content of the sign is tied in a certain way to the sign's mode of appearance, and it can be of multiple kinds, that is linguistic, visual, or auditory. At issue is thus indeed a kind of conceptual, if not linguistic content.

That is precisely the problem. For how does one distinguish the linguistic from the conceptual?

I begin with ordinary, that is, not necessarily aesthetic perception. It also has a content that is not symbolic, but is conceptual in a certain sense. This means the content has a structure that is somehow analogous to the division between an object and a quality. For example, I perceive that a tree is green. Green is referred to by the concept, but in this linguistic description I have a loss of perception content, for example, how exactly this specific green feels. For some contexts, this plays absolutely no role at all, of course. But for the symbolic content of the artwork, it does play a role. There always has to be a sensory basis that the general content cannot be divorced from. This foundation on the one hand is influenced by the sensory modality whereas the visual perception differs from the auditory or the tactile. On the other hand, it implies a certain affective aspect, that is, feelings that trigger certain associations in our minds, and by associations I mean perceptions or imaginations. These feelings depend on the one hand on what kind of object is being depicted—this plays a role naturally especially for repre

sentational art—but on the other hand, depend on so-called expressive qualities. We thus consider some color combinations to be garish, some sounds shrill, or a melody to be sad. These moments define in what ways the symbolic content is colored in both a sensory and affective sense. And this is one of the reasons why this content cannot be reformulated in a sentence and divorced from the sensual-affective basis.

Starting from this, can one think about how language is problematized? With what demands do you see speaking about art confronted?

A key point is the mutual reference between artwork and discourse, in both directions. On the one hand, interpretation contributes essentially to being able to grasp this symbolic content, naturally before the backdrop of a certain discourse. This would be the one direction, a direction leading from the discourse to the artwork. It is part of the special nature of works of art that they do not just formulate a statement. Good artworks provide us at the same time with an explanation or evidence. And this explanation or evidence is dependent on the process that we go through in reception. This context would be lost in translating the artwork to a linguistic statement, or even a set of linguistic statements; there does not always have to be just one. And this of course is again a problem, the reduction to one statement cannot be reconciled with the potentially multiple character of artworks. On the other hand, the attempt to grasp the symbolic content in words stimulates the discourse. For artworks confront us with questions, options, and perspectives, where reflection leads beyond the artwork.

Could you be more specific about the term “evidence”?

If for example I say, “A good life is not possible in an unjust society,” then that is a claim. But how do I explain it? Artworks have a structure so that they not only posit claims or have a content, but at the same time they provide certain explanations, for example in the way they were developed, or which guidelines they provide for reception. Going through

the perception of the artwork offers at the same time an explanation of content, without being limited to the linguistic realm.

This is particularly obvious in certain works about individual's life problems, their decisions and the consequences that these decisions have. Let us take for example the film Letter from an Unknown Woman by Max Ophüls. There it is about the question of romantic love as well as the dependency of romantic love on illusion or even a certain form of obsession, and the question of whether that is indeed a good thing. Ultimately the film provides no answer, but offers various perspectives for this issue. Aspects that are positive, aspects that are less positive, and that each have to be developed in the psychological characterization of the individuals: camerawork, lighting, and so on and so forth. I always encounter a statement with a certain reservation, because a statement could always be considered a fixed conclusion. In the film, however, a subject is run through, various aspects are shown, for example, the narcissistic character of romantic love with its strong dependence on projections. The mechanism by which this operates is shown to us in the film, and the problems of the alternatives are also shown: the conventional marriage, then the good “catch” or a marriage based on reason, where passion plays no role at all.

Can we sum this up by saying that the artwork plays through the modalities of a problem or a question that certainly can be grasped in discourse as well, showing them, fanning them out perspectivistically?

I would agree with that.

## 71 e) From Ventriloquism to Ontological Difference Catrin Misselhorn

You have already spoken of the concept of interpretation, which is also very important in this constellation of artwork, symbol, and truth.

It is in any case central. I would say, the symbolic content emerges in the collaboration between work and receiver. The work offers him or her the sensual, affective, and cognitive basis, on the basis of which the receiver constructs the symbolic content, before the backdrop of his or her experiences, sensations, and knowledge. This process takes place in part unconsciously and involuntarily, but also on the basis of the conscious attempt to understand the artwork. For interpretation, we presume that the artwork was intentionally produced, or at least placed in a certain context, for example objects trouvés. And we then look for the reasons why it was given certain characteristics, or placed in a certain context. With interpretation, we presume that the artist pursued a certain intention with the work. But all the same, in my view art reception is not about finding the artist's real intention, but this assumption can be used to leap to the most convincing interpretation — there can, of course, be several interpretations.

We can presume a hypothetical intention without having to prove it in a biographical-material sense?

Exactly. I would even go so far as to say that actual intention

even plays a subordinate role because artists, like all agents, can miss their intentions, in a positive or negative sense. The artwork can fail to meet an intention, or exceed it. And let's assume I find out what the artist intended by reading his biography, but I cannot find it actually realized in the work. Then I would say that this kind of interpretation was in error. Even if, heuristically speaking, consulting the biography or other sources remains a possibility.

So in your view, when it comes to the level of intention, there are no standards in interpretation?

No, that's not what I wanted to say. In my view, it is not decisive to find out the intention of the actual artist. The standard is rather to produce most successful interpretation of the work possible. Of course, information that seems plausible from the actual biographic and historical background is part of this. But we still want more. Letter from an Unknown Woman is so interesting because it lives from the confrontation of two perspectives. The one is the perspective from which the film is narrated, the perspective of a woman writing letters. But now the film itself offers — and this is what makes it so convincing — a commentary about the obsession depicted on the visual level. We see for example that the protagonist once sees as a young woman how the man, who is basically an extortionist, accompanies a woman up the stairs to his apartment to a night of love, and exactly the same perspective is shown to us later, when she herself spends the one night of love with this man. This suggests: she is only one of many. Due to the structure of the film, this can be read as an indication of how the implicit author comments on events, although I naturally do not know what Max Ophüls actually thought. But the way in which the film is made allows us to make certain conclusions about how to judge what we see. It thus becomes clear that love has an illusionary character.

Letter from an Unknown Woman seems to provide no answers to the nature of the necessity of the illusion of romantic love. You spoke already of the function of the artwork in building up a statement from conflicting perspectives.

Of course, on that point you're running through open doors with me. That's what I especially like about the title of your exhibition

Conflicting Tales. In my view, art is especially capable of making conflicting perspectives clear and allowing them to come forward with their power to convince. In so doing, it is superior to linguistic or descriptive argumentative discourse. Letter from an Unknown Woman is thus so successful because it shows where the problems or weaknesses of this romantic love lie; at the same time, it lets us feel empathy with the protagonist and show us her perspective as also justified. It is an underlying characteristic of human life that we are confronted with conflicts in an insoluble way. Art offers the possibility of playing through these conflicts again and again, bringing them to erupt in all their virulence. [ . . ]



The Covenant		Angry Words
75—Fiona Banner Full Stop		115—Paul Winstanley Utopia 1
76—Grayson Perry An Ultimate Consumer Durable		116—Collier Schorr Cut Out Kate
77—Tim Gardner Untitled (Carmichael)		117—Zhang Dali Demolition (Ciqikou, Beijing)
78—Muntean / Rosenblum Untitled (Promises, after all, introduce the possibility of their being broken, which was not there before they were)	98—Muntean / Rosenblum Untitled (You need the experience, because time tells what after all stays true to us)	118—Steven Shearer Poems VI
79—Olaf Metzel Votivtafel	99—Wim Delvoye Donata	119—Norbert Bisky Ebbe
80, 81—Damien Roach Chapter 7: Self and the Common World	100—Collier Schorr Jens F (Page 48)	120—Collier Schorr Sheepskin
82—Jaume Plensa Tel Aviv Man IX	101—Mathilde ter Heijne Mathilde, Mathilde	121—Mathilde ter Heijne Drawing Down the Moon
83—Monika Baer Unter Birken (schwarzes Haar)	102—Hugo Markl Mamatschi	122—Gwon Osang Eye Capture
84—Urs Fischer The Grass Munchers	103—Collier Schorr Charlie as He Was	123, 124, 125—Nalini Malani Listening to the Shades, no. 1–42
85—Tim Gardner Untitled (Track Team)	104—Grayson Perry Taste and Democracy	126—Lee Dongwook Drive
86, 87—Vittorio Santoro How Can I / Make it Right, March—August 2005	105—Collier Schorr Torso	127—Verne Dawson Gnome in the Vines
88—Muntean / Rosenblum Untitled (It's pretty hard to explain your own life)	106, 107—Rafal Bujnowski Drill 1, Drill 2	128, 129—Teresa Hubbard / Alexander Birchler Night Shift
89—Zhang Dali Demolition & Dialogue (Chaoyangmen Wai Avenue, Beijing)	108—Muntean / Rosenblum There's a mystery here that discredits and disturbs me. But I think heaven and hell are both around the corner if we look closely	130—Charles Sandison Question Exclamation Stop
90, 91, 92, 93—Douglas Kolk Suicide Girl	109—Adam Adach Ivernia	131—Dennis Scholl Bläschen
94—Bharti Kher Warrior with Cloak and Shield	110—Tim Gardner The Nature of Things	132—Atul Dodiya Sayno Bolona
95—Hans Op de Beeck Loss	111—Monika Baer Ohne Titel	133—Monika Baer Ohne Titel
96, 97—Julian Rosefeldt The Perfectionist (Trilogy of Failure Part III)	112, 113—Fernando Bryce Bismarck TV	134, 135—Fiete Stolte 8 Sunrises / 8 Sunsets (from: 8 Day Week Trip ), Series E
	114—Adam Adach	136—Tim Gardner Brought Up in Mom's Arms (Airport Goodbye)



## a) Umwege zur Subjektivität

Daniel Kurjaković

Schnell geschnittene Bildfolgen wechselnder Orte weltweit, die sich wie mentale Messerscheiden durch die Iris arbeiten, politischer Aufruhr in Orange bis Grün auf Flaggen, T-Shirts und Armbändern, die sich zu einer das Gesichtsfeld bald belebenden, bald lähmenden Farboberfläche verbinden (mit Menschen als amorphem Hintergrund), Meldungen über entwendete Babyschlangen in Colorado, über die Intimrasur eines gebeutelten Kinderstars oder über wächserne Mumien, die sich als Popstars verkörpern und vor aller Augen sterben (als wäre das überhaupt möglich) oder die als Modelle mit überlangen Extremitäten und kleinen Puppengesichtern wiederkehren, reizen das Gehirn. Die Wirklichkeit ist widersprüchlich, und

Die folgenden Essays erörtern verschiedene Bedeutungen des Begriffs Subjektivität, der im Kern ästhetischer Diskussionen steht. Aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven entwickeln die Essays Argumente für die aktuelle Relevanz des Begriffs, ohne notwendigerweise auf seine historische Dimension einzugehen. Jörg Volbers zeichnet einige Paradoxien der Subjektivität aus philosophischer Perspektive nach. Robert Pfaller untersucht Subjektivität von einer psychoanalytischen Warte aus, und Manuel Cirauqui unternimmt eine Neudefinition der Funktion des Autors, der den narrativen Drehpunkt jeglicher Subjektivität darstellt. Zusammen mit dem Text von Daniel Kurjaković, der einige Werke der Ausstellung charakterisiert sowie die kuratorische Perspektive umreißt, bilden die Beiträge den diskursiven Kontext für die Ausstellung *Conflicting Tales* aus den Beständen der *Burger Collection*.

## a) Umwege zur Subjektivität

Daniel Kurjaković

## b) Schwierigkeit der Selbstbegegnung

Jörg Volbers

## c) Das anonyme Manuskript zur Subjektwerdung

Robert Pfaller

## d) Paradigma

Manuel Cirauqui

wenn sich die Unruhe einer existenziellen Überforderung meldet, tritt auf den Plan, was die Gesellschaft »Medien« nennt, damit sie der Sache den Ernst etwas nehmen, indem sie uns buchstäblich alles geben, oder zumindest alles andere ... Kommuniziert Kunst anders als die Medien? Unter welchen Bedingungen ist sie nicht eine Prothese für eine sich selbst verkennende Subjektivität (die sich kaum aus dem Zyklus von Erkenntnisleistungen und Handlungsmustern mit nur relativen Konsequenzen herausreißen lässt)? Ist sie etwas anderes als der Spiegel, aus dem Variationen eines Lebensverlaufs mit akzeptablen, weil antizipierten Veränderungen zurückblicken, die mehr oder weniger gleichmäßig auf den Skalen einer vorneweg durchdachten Existenz berechnet und je nach Bedarf graduell verschoben werden: Leben und Tod, Jugend und Alter, Reichtum und Armut, Gefühl und Intellekt, Vergnügen und Engagement...?

Subjektivität ist kein Gefäß, kein fixer Ort, keine klare Funktion, sondern ein Problem, das nicht ignoriert werden kann. Die Beziehung zwischen der Ausstellung *Conflicting Tales: Subjektivität* (Quadrilogie, Teil 1) und dem ästhetischen Diskurs der Subjektivität ist nicht illustrativ, Subjektivität nicht das »Thema«, sondern vielmehr ein Leit- und Orientierungsbegriff. Die Werke aus den Beständen der *Burger Collection* sind gesetzt als jene Gegenstände oder vielmehr Widerstände, auf deren Folie sich die Vorstellungen über Sub

Subjektivität je spezifisch ausarbeiten lassen. Wenn das vorliegende Projekt von der Frage ausgeht, welche Art von Subjektivität Kunst produziert, dann in dem Sinn, dass das Subjekt in der Gegenwart in einer fundamentalen Zwangslage steckt: Wie –wenn überhaupt – den wachsenden Anforderungen  
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etwa durch unsichere ökonomische Verhältnisse, durch Migrationen und demographische Veränderungen oder durch ökologisch-klimatische Transformationen gerecht werden? Die notwendige Überprüfung des eigenen Standpunkts ist kaum nur vom politischen Willen oder von wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnis zu erwarten, sondern muss auch über »ästhetische Szenarien« in Gang kommen, da sie Wahrnehmungs- und Denkweisen im Subjekt ansprechen und entwickeln, die auf andere Art rezeptiv sind als jene für Politik, Medien oder Wissenschaft zuständigen.

Der Blick ist also umgekehrt: Welchen Anteil haben spezifische künstlerische Arbeiten an der Entstehung und Formung von Subjektivität? Auch wenn eine solche Frage schwer zu beantworten ist, bleibt sie doch notwendig, auch wenn sie lediglich die flüchtigen und widerstreitenden Eindrücke und Überlegungen dazu zeitweilig zu systematisieren erlaubt. Vielleicht aber gelingt mehr: nämlich zu erörtern, was zeitgenössische Verfasstheit sein könnte, auch wenn dies in der aktuellen geopolitischen und transkulturellen Gemengelage nicht universalisierend geschehen kann, sondern kulturell spezifisch bleiben muss. Nun wirft man mit der Frage nach Subjektivität nicht nur positive Fragen vom Typ »Welches ist die spezifische Modalität, mit der Kunst auf unsere Denkweise und unsere Wahrnehmung einwirkt?« auf. Man tritt zugleich auf den Treibsand des Skeptizismus, wo das Subjekt mit Zweifel und Unentschiedenheit, mit andauernden Prozessen des Wiedererwägens, mit Unvereinbarkeiten und Paradoxien konfrontiert ist.

#### Widerstände

Soll das künstlerische Werk einen gewissen Diskurs (hier der Subjektivität) nicht einfach illustrieren, sondern problematisieren, so kann kein direkter Nachweis erbracht, sondern nur ein Umweg eingeschlagen werden. Dieser Umweg führt über die Beschreibung einiger Bedingungen, unter denen das Subjekt existiert. Eine der bedeutsamsten ist das Gesetz: Für jedes Subjekt gehört das Gesetz –der Gesellschaft, der Gruppe, des Vaters –zu den tiefgreifenden und mysteriösen Erfahrungen, seine Gültigkeit ist nur selten relativ und veränderlich, vielmehr unerbittlich, unabänderlich und durchsetzungsfähig gegen das Subjekt (das Subjekt als Unterworfenes). Die Muster, wie man sich gegen das Gesetz auflehnt, sind vielfältig: Versuche, sich ihm zu entziehen, es anzugreifen, es zu überlisten, ihm scheinbar zu gehorchen ... Aber wie die bekannte Kafka'sche Miniatur »Vor dem Gesetz«

versinnbildlicht, wirkt das Gesetz, weit bevor es das individuelle Bewusstsein realisiert.

Seine Wirkung tritt ein, bevor man sich versieht. Und zwar ohne dass es dazu der Gewalt bedarf, weil man sich dem Gesetz immer schon unterworfen hat – im vorausgehenden Begehren nach dem Gesetz. Steven Shearers fünf Kohlezeichnungen Poems VI kündigen sich mit einem bewusst irreführenden Titel an, insofern die »Gedichte« nicht Lyrik darstellen, sondern eine skatologische Aufzählung scheinbarer Invektiven, schändlicher Anrufungen und Schmähungen (die sich als Benennungen diverser Genres von Heavy Metal herausstellen<sup>a)</sup>): »SODOMIZED BY THE CROSS /RAPTUREOUS DISEMBOWEL MENT / TORMENTING HOLY FLESH/STERILIZING THE UNWORTHY /GRIM SATANIC BLACK METAL /SCREAMING IN ECSTASY /BLACK FUCKING SODOMY / FAITHFUCKED EXCLAUSTRATION /NOCTUARY OF AGRIMOR ...«. Hier wird eine Umkehrung der Hierarchien suggeriert, werden die höchsten Werte angegriffen, Ideologie scheint mörderisch und Intellektualität nur als perverse denkbar. Die serielle Anordnung in identisch große Tafeln verleiht den Zeichnungen eine gewisse Monumentalität und macht sie zu Anti-Gesetzestafeln, das Schwarz verbindet sich zu einer visuellen Wand, die sich hinter der fortlaufenden Schrift –dieser negativen Litanei – erhebt (manchmal buchstäblich, wenn die Poems große Flächen im Außenraum überziehen). Doch ist hier das Gesetz nicht einfach repressiv und latent gewalttätig, es ist ebenso orgiastisch, lustbetont, eruptiv. Was die Poems letztlich in den Vordergrund rücken, ist das kompliziertere Verhältnis zwischen Subjekt und Gesetz, die Lust, mit der sich das Subjekt der »Gewalt« des Gesetzes unterwirft. Auch für aufgeklärte Konzeptionen des Subjekts ist diese Verstrickung, wonach sich das Subjekt lustvoll der Gewalt des Gesetzes, und bei Shearer vor allem des religiösen oder sexuellen Gesetzes, hingibt, ein Prüfstein.

Das Mädchen in Douglas Kolks Suicide Girl erscheint innerhalb eines Reigenes besonderer Art. Es besetzt auf ganz körperliche Weise wechselnde Schauplätze, die nur mit ganz wenigen Strichen angedeutet sind, in einem sehr graphischen Stil, meist in reiner Kontur. Die Oberfläche seines Körpers wird immer wieder in den Fokus gerückt: Blut, das aus der Nase rinnt, Schrift, die (fast) in die Haut eingeritzt ist, andere Körper, die sich an seinen pressen. Doch wirklich physisch wird das Mädchen in diesen seltsam distanzierenden, immer auch skizzenhaften Zeichnungen nicht, als sei nicht das – übrigens androgyne –Mädchen als biologische Entität und vielleicht nicht einmal als Repräsentantin von Gender gemeint, sondern als etwas Symbolisches: eine personifizierte Gefühlslage voller Beweglichkeit und Leich



Überforderungen und ihrer Gewalt, voller Anfälligkeit, aber auch Offenheit gegenüber den physischen Ereignissen einer so unter Druck geratenen und von höchstens temporären Idyllen punktierten Gesellschaft.<sup>b</sup> Jenseits vereinfachender Psychologismen wird das Exemplarische einer körperlich dargestellten Verletzlichkeit fassbar: Kolks Zeichnungen scheinen die Intelligenz und Kreativität, aber auch Labilität und Zerrissenheit anzudeuten, von denen in den letzten Jahren auch Filme wie Ken Park (Regie Harmony Korine, Larry Clark und Ed Lachmann, 2002) oder Donnie Darko (Regie Richard Linklater, 2001) in »coming of age«-Szenarien handelten, wo gesellschaftliche Gewalt und Entfremdung auf den Hintergrund eines letztlich eher schutzlosen psychischen Schirms von Jugendlichen projiziert wurden. In Suicide Girl wird diese gesellschaftliche Gewitterlage nicht pathetisch ausgewalzt, sondern vom betroffenen Subjekt in die Umgebung übertragen, in die Schauplätze, die Objekte, die Maschinen. Kraft dieser Verschiebung »blutet« der Boden, die ein Bagger aufreißt, vergleichbar dem Körper der Protagonistin. Solche Verfahren weisen darauf hin, dass Kolk im Gegensatz zum medialen Bild

tigkeit, aber auch Verletzlichkeit gegenüber der Welt, ihren Verführungen,

a—Vgl. Nigel Prince, »From Breughel to Cradle of Filth«, in: Steven Shearer, Hrsg. Nigel Prince, Ausst.-Kat. Ikon Gallery, Birmingham/The Power Plant, Toronto,

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dert werden, nachdem Mechaniken sozialer Formung auf sie eingewirkt haben: Adam Adachs Werke etwa stellen Phänomene von Gruppierung, vielleicht auch Gemeinschaft dar, Rafal Bujnowski macht kollektive Disziplinierung augenfällig, während Norbert Bisky wiederum eher Effekte von Standardisierung, gepaart mit dem Phantasma von Perfektibilität, sichtbar macht. Bei Lee Dongwook lassen sich morbide Varianten von Zu- und Abrichtung sowie die Reduktion des Individuums auf Objekt und Produkt beobachten; Muntean/Rosenblum wiederum lassen jene Effekte hervortreten, die gesellschaftliche Verhaltensangebote in einem ganz körperlichen Sinn haben können: hier die standardisierenden und zugleich identitätsstiftenden Potenziale von Posen. Es ist interessant, wie die Posen ex negativo von der, wenn man so sagen darf, »amorphen« Qualität des Subjekts (Schlaksigkeit u.Ä.) zeugen, bevor es sich aufgrund von Verhaltensregeln und Körperengineering in eine soziale Rolle inszeniert—ein Zusammenhang, den man auch hinter Mathilde ter Heijnes genderkritischen Beiträgen zum Frauenbild in Form lebensgroßer Skulpturen vermuten darf.<sup>e</sup> Olaf Metzels subversive Votivtafel schließlich rekurriert auf Idole, Modelle, Vorbilder bzw. auf die kompensatorische Funktion, die Idole hinsichtlich der Identitätsdynamik von

versucht, Konflikte und Schwierigkeiten des Subjekts sozusagen in den Umraum zu verschieben, sie im Raum zu verteilen, den Raum parasitär mit unpsychologischen Szenarien von Emotionalität zu besetzen, anstatt sie in Ikonen zu bannen und zu spektakularisieren. Kolk belebt damit eine animistische Methode wieder, wonach dem Nichtlebendigen der Objektwelt eine Seele zugeschrieben wird. Suicide Girl führt dem Betrachter nicht lediglich die Fährnisse eines Mädchens vor—»a girl under influence«, um den Titel des bekannten Cassavetes-Films zu paraphrasieren—, sondern demonstriert die Nichtvereinbarkeit zwischen einem versöhnlichen anthropologischen Animismus und einer die zeitgenössische Konsumgesellschaft durch ziehenden Entfremdung.<sup>c</sup>

Es gibt eine ganze Reihe von künstlerischen Positionen in Conflicting Tales, bei denen Individuen unter Beobachtung stehen.<sup>d</sup> Die künstlerischen Arbeiten tendieren hier zur Beschreibung: Sie geben Situationen wieder, bei denen Individuen auf soziologische Weise fassbar sind, Individuen der zeitgenössischen Gesellschaft, in einem Fall—bei Fernando Bryces Bismarck TV—rückt die historische Achse in den Blick. Subjektivität hat hier nichts von »Innen-schau«, sondern wird erkennbar als jene Formation, in die Subjekte eingeglie-

2007, keine Pagina.

b—Siehe hierzu die Äußerungen des Künstlers im Gespräch mit Sarah Valdez: »It isn't me mother«. Douglas Kolk im Gespräch mit Sarah Valdez, in: Douglas Kolk, Hrsg. Oliver Zybok, Ausst.-Kat. Arndt & Partner, Berlin/Zürich, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2006, S. 60–67, besonders S. 66 ff.

c—Auffallend ist auch, wie zeichnerisch eine lose und doch kohärente Welt entsteht für dieses »suicide girl«: Eine Welt von Plätzen und Orten, aber auch von Gedanken und Imaginationen, in der nicht alles der

Alltagsrationalität unterworfen ist, sondern sich Traum, Gedankenverlorenheit, Betäubung und verschiedene Intensitäten von Wachzustand vermischen ...

d—Es ist hier nicht der Ort, um eingehend auf die wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen einer solchen Beobachtung zu sprechen zu kommen. Sie gehen auf die Verhaltensforschung (Behaviourismus) zurück; ihre Bedeutung für die Erneuerung der künstlerischen Methoden im Kreuzungspunkt von Performance und Installation bei der Postavantgarde der 1960er und 1970er Jahre ist kaum zu überschätzen.

Gruppen, Gesellschaften und Nationen haben. In das Werk ist aber zugleich eine gewisse Form von Erosion eingearbeitet, der schmelzende und zerfallende Nimbus der Idole (was wiederum auf die mehr oder weniger erträgliche Zufälligkeit und Kontingenz individueller Existenz verweist; genau aus diesem Grund auch ist der Tod von Idolen kathartisch, zuletzt so gesehen im Fall von Michael Jackson ...). Unter Beobachtung, wenn auch im Sinn einer von Selbstreflexivität durchdrungenen Selbstbetrachtung, stehen auch die Subjekte in Julian Rosefeldts The Perfectionist oder auch in Hubbard/Birchlers Night Shift ...

Ausrichtung auf Idole, Zurichtung und Disziplinarisierung fordern die liberale Vorstellung des freien Subjekts heraus. Auch zeigen sie, dass die »Freiheit des Subjekts« nicht nur äußerer Bedrohung unterliegt, sondern auch der »freiwilligen« Unterwerfung unter regulatorische Instanzen geschuldet ist—ein Gefüge, auf das Foucault wieder und wieder zurückkam. Es ist ein Verhältnis, das in medialen Gesellschaften durch visuelle Protokolle wie Bilder kommuniziert und dadurch zu einem allgemeinen Faktum für die Allgemeinheit werden kann, was ja schon Guy Debord auf die griffige Formel brachte:

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»Das Spektakel ist nicht ein Ganzes von Bildern, sondern ein durch Bilder



vermitteltes gesellschaftliches Verhältnis zwischen Personen.«<sup>f</sup> Künstler wie Grayson Perry, Verne Dawson, Olaf Metzger, Jaishri Abichandani oder Wim Delvoye versuchen, diese Zurichtungen von Subjekten mittels mächtiger visueller triggers wie zum Beispiel nationaler Symbole oder verführerischer Konsum-Ikonen auf satirische, parodistische und hyperbolische Weise bloßzustellen.

Inwiefern nun werden in der Kunst diese Formen der Verstrickung des Subjekts nicht nur beschrieben und abgebildet, sondern aufgebrochen oder gar aufgehoben? Auf welche Weise reformuliert sie die Prozesse, wonach Subjekte ihre Ideale und ihr Begehren artikulieren und ihr Verhältnis zum Anderen gestalten? Wie macht Kunst über die Schlagwörter von Individuum und Gesellschaft hinaus Ansätze sichtbar, die uns das Verhängnis des Subjekts anders und neu begreifen lassen?

Bei Jaume Plensas Skulptur Tel Aviv Man IX scheint sich die Idee zu materialisieren, wonach die Sprache Körper formt. Dem Materialismus, der das Denken über den Körper auf die Organe, die fassbare Materialität, die Stofflichkeit und das Objekt des Individuums lenkt, wird eine Art »Mentalismus« entgegengesetzt, bei der flüchtige Komponenten wie das Wort und Sprechen in den Vordergrund rücken und damit auch jene dem

e—Die Arbeit von Muntean/Rosenblum lässt den Betrachter über das nicht so einfach darstellbare Verhältnis von Körper und Gesellschaft nachdenken, und zwar nicht nur dadurch, dass diverse verbale Mottos den Figuren in den (bildlichen) Mund gelegt werden, sondern indem sich die Körper und ihre Haltung

als stumme Zeichen von » Jugendlichen « vor uns erheben.

Diese Jugendlichen sind nicht einfach realistische Abbilder, sondern Konstruktionen, das heißt inszenierte Körper, die nicht »natürlich«, sondern

»unnatürlich« wirken, was sie in die Nähe von Puppen und Automaten rückt.

Französischen von Jean-Jacques Raspud, Edition Nautilus, Hamburg, 1978, S. 6.

seinen Platz sofort tauscht und damit die Distanz zwischen Hier und Dort eingeebnet wird.

Narzisstisch verfährt sich somit das Subjekt, gemäß der mythologischen Urerzählung, in einer raumlosen Reflexivität des Blicks.

f—Guy Debord, Die Gesellschaft des Spektakels, aus dem

g—Dies ist beim Spiegel insofern nicht der Fall, als mein Körper, wenn ich einmal in den Spiegel hineinblicke,

es sich um einen angedeuteten Körper handelt, der alleine durch den unentwegten Prozess des Lesens und Wiederlesens, des Entzifferns und des Auslegens, des Sprechens, des Sagens, des Murmelns fühlbar wird (was wiederum körperliche Grundagenten für spirituelle Übungen sind). Das Werk ist nicht mehr Repräsentation und Abbild, sondern eher Spur und Zeugnis von Wirklichkeit.<sup>h</sup>

Der Prozess ist die Methode, einer freien Spur, die sich innerhalb einer bestimmten Dauer materialisiert, eine gewisse Bedeutung zu verleihen. Die Spur ist wandelbar. Im Fall von Fiete Stoltes 8 Sunrises–8 Sunsets (from: 8 Day Week Trip), Series E übernimmt eine achteilige Serie von je zwei Polaroids die Funktion der Zeugenschaft. Jedes Polaroid dokumentiert den (notwendigerweise) einzigartigen Moment, an dem die Sonne auf- bzw. untergeht, Beginn und Ende des Tages. Im internen System des Künstlers wiederum verweist der Faktor acht auf eine Reorganisation des Wochen

Abendland eingeschriebene Metaphysik von Sprache, Atem und Geist. So wie ein Blasebalg Luft erzeugt, formt sich hier der Körper als Volumen, das wahrnehmbar wird durch eine fragil wirkende temporäre Architektur aus Buchstaben. Eine transparente »Haut« von Wörtern verweist auf die Leere des Volumens, die Skulptur wird zu einer Art Wohnstätte von Luft, die man letztlich als Betrachter der Skulptur selbst atmet. Dadurch rückt der identifikatorisch-psychologische Prozess in den Hintergrund, der dem Betrachter das einzelne Kunstwerk wie eine Art von Spiegel erscheinen lässt, in den er hineinblickt, um sich seiner selbst zu vergegenwärtigen (oder um sich narzisstisch darin zu versenken). Nunmehr ist das Kunstwerk ein mit dem Leib verbundener Ort, in einer realen und nicht nur imaginären »Distanz« zum Betrachter, ein fühlbares und nicht mehr nur gedachtes »Dort«.<sup>g</sup> Bereits das Konstruktionsprinzip—der positive Körper wird nur als negatives Schema wahrnehmbar – verweist auf die Tatsache, dass hier nicht die Figur selbst präsent ist, sondern lediglich die Vorstellung über eine Figur, mit anderen Worten eine Suggestion. Das wiederum rückt die Figur in die Nähe einer ideellen Einheit, genauer: einer Spekulation darüber, inwiefern

rhythmus: Die sieben Mal 24 Stunden einer Woche sind auf acht Mal 21 Stunden umgelagert.<sup>i</sup> Daraus lassen sich ableiten: Spieltrieb, die Umwälzung der inneren Logik eines vorgegebenen Systems ohne Antastung der äußeren Rahmenbedingungen, die Manipulation der Qualität (wie etwas beschaffen ist) bei gleichzeitigem Festhalten an Quantität (Menge der Elemente, die ein System bezeichnet). Stolz verändert nicht die Welt (die Menge aller möglichen Beschreibungen von Welt), sondern gestaltet ihre inneren Beziehungen um, er schafft nicht parallele Welten oder gar eine neue Welt, die eine alte ersetzt. Vielmehr fügt er einen veränderten Weltbezug hinzu, welcher in seiner Simultaneität Folgen zeitigt—oder auch nicht. Ist die Acht-Tage Woche, die wie jede Erfindung eine neue Perspektivierung von Gegebenem darstellt, eine idiosynkratische bzw. exemplarische (auf den Künstler bezogene und auch beschränkte) Hinzufügung zur gesellschaftlichen Realität und deshalb zu behandeln wie ein Kuriosum? Oder ist ihr Möglichkeitscharakter im Kern eine ethische Option, insofern als »Möglichkeit« hier jenes meint, was auf dem Hintergrund des Notwendigen erscheint wie auch unauslöschlich mit ihm verbunden ist, sich zugleich aber von ihm abhebt? Und lässt sich diese Option, wenn sie denn eine ethische ist, verallgemeinern? Das mag schon

das Kunstwerk ungebührlich als Lebensmodell propagieren. Letztlich sind die Polaroids auch lediglich visuelle Äquivalente einer kulturellen Technik: Die Sonne geht ja nicht wirklich unter, sie geht nicht wirklich auf, es

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ist nur eine Weise, eine Bewegung zu rhythmisieren, einen außergesellschaftlichen (natürlichen) Takt für die Gesellschaft zu konstruieren und damit alles jenes, was an Ereignissen zufällig, heterogen und miteinander unvereinbar geschieht, vergleichbar zu machen.

Wenn sich etwas spaltet, verändert sich die Wirklichkeit. Eine Spaltung ist nicht lediglich eine Verdopplung. Stattdessen entsteht ein neuer Raum, der sich zwischen den zwei ähnlichen Elementen eröffnet. In Vittorio Santoros *How Can I /Make it Right, March–August 2005*, scheint die Tatsache des Bezugs zwischen den beiden Zeichnungen des Diptychons offensichtlich; bei genauerer Betrachtung zeigt sich, wie tief eingegraben die Schrift an einigen Stellen ist, so tief, dass sie durch das Papier hindurchschlägt.<sup>j</sup> Doch was sich hier als Zeichnung ausgibt, entspricht nicht den Topoi von Unmittelbarkeit, Geradlinigkeit oder Leichtigkeit, jener symbolischen Seismographik »künstlerischer Sensibilität«, die traditionell mit dem Medium assoziiert wird.

Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1997, S. 31 ff.

i—Für eine erzählerische Herleitung der 8-Tage-Woche siehe auch den Text von Katrin Wittneven in Fiete Stolte, Cahier 14, Hrsg. Sassa Trülzsch, 2008,

h—Hans-Jürgen Buderer spricht in einem anderen Zusammenhang von »Behältern«, von »Gefäßen«, die gedankliche, das heißt immaterielle Bedeutungen in sich aufnehmen. Vgl. Hans-Jürgen Buderer, »Jaume Plensa – Réceptacles«, in: Jaume Plensa, Ausst.-Kat. Galerie Nationale du

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Conflicting Tales

Hirn, After, Tod, Kosmos, Tier, Waffe, Frau, Kind, Monster, Eingeweide, Sonne, Soldat, Zelle, Wurm, Pflanze, Flugzeug, Schädel ..., durch ein imaginäres Mikroskop betrachtet die Forscherin unzählige Abstriche eines Körpers, der eine Welt in Metamorphose repräsentiert, eine Welt auch, deren Name nicht entschlüsselt ist (Apokalypse? Genesis? ...!). In Nalini Malanis *Listening to the Shades* schwimmen die Elemente und Objekte durcheinander, stoßen aufeinander, frei flottierend auf dem Grund der Zeichnung, die hier ein phantasmatischer Schirm ist. Flugzeug und Darm kollidieren auf einem wie ein Hirn geformten Untergrund. Das legt eine diagnostische Situation nahe, den wiederholten Blick in einen Körper, in dem sich einander fremde und vielleicht schädliche Ingredienzen vermischt haben. Die Künstlerin/Forscherin hat die Zeichnungen gruppiert, in 2er-, 3er- und 4er-Gruppen, damit sich ein Muster von Ähnlichkeiten, vielleicht eine

Die Buchstaben sind standardisiert, eine Schablone einer bestimmten Typographie ist die Vorlage, nicht eine spontane Handschrift. Es scheint so, als ginge es darum, einen Ausgangspunkt zu wählen, der entschieden nicht subjektiv ist, oder zumindest nicht auf diese Form von Individualität aspiriert, sondern der als Standard, als Regel und Richtschnur eine objektive Ausgangslage bezeichnet. Von dieser Warte aus beginnt *How Can I /Make it Right, March–August 2005* nicht mit einem dramatischen Akt – der zeichnerischen Geste –, sondern mit der Identifikation eines gesellschaftlichen Standards in Form einer Typographie, die wiederholt wird, und zwar, wie der Titel verrät, auf beiden Blättern zugleich über den Zeitraum eines halben Jahres. Jeden Tag einmal zieht der Stift die Vorlage nach, gräbt sich ein, folgt den sich bilden den Furchen, das Papier erhält verschiedene Tiefen. Es handelt sich nicht um einen symbolischen Prozess, bei dem bloß Bedeutung erscheint, sondern um einen Abdrucksprozess, um die archäologische Stätte eines Rituals. Der Handballen verteilt immer wieder minimale Spuren von Graphit über das Papier, so dass sich wolkige Schmutzspuren als Zeichen des täglichen Rituals ergeben. Die mehrdeutige Frage – die sowohl den ästhetischen wie auch moralisch-politischen Komplex touchiert<sup>k</sup> – scheint fest in stete Wiederholung und teilende Spaltung eingebunden, so, als ginge es darum, die Antwort aufzuschieben bzw. Zeit zu schaffen für die Frage.

keine Pagina.

j—Vgl. hierzu Ulrike Groos, »Zwischen ›nur‹ Sehen und ›schon‹ Lesen«, in: Vittorio Santoro. *Everything's Not Lost*, Hrsg. Daniel Kurjaković, Ausst.-Kat. Kunstmuseum Thun, Bundesamt für Kultur/Revolver, Frankfurt a. M., 2006, S. 56–60.

k—Semantisch bleibt die Frage mehrdeutig: Wie kann ich es recht machen? Wie handle ich richtig? Wie kann es gelingen? Wie kann ich es wiedergutmachen? Dies sind mögliche Ausdeutungen. Ob sich die Frage auf den Sender (Künstler) oder auf den Empfänger (Betrachter) bezieht, verschiebt zusätzlich auch den Akzent der Frage.

Erzählung und ein Sinn ergeben, sicher aber Binnenbewegungen von einem Blatt zum nächsten, die den all gemeinen Taumel der Zeichen ausgleichen mit einer zusätzlichen internen Logik. Das Durcheinander der Motive, die sich andeutende »Krankheit« des unbenannten Körpers, seine Krise, die hier vielleicht vor allem die Krise einer zusammenhängenden Weltsicht ist, wird relativiert und ansatzweise gemildert durch das heilende, dem Sinn gegenüber zuträgliche Wechselspiel von Mikro- und Makrokosmos: Der Darm wird zur Brücke und die Zellen zu Sonnen und Gedankenblasen. Der Gefahr, dass die Welt aus den Fugen gerät bzw. dass der Körper von innen her auseinanderbricht, setzt sich die Ähnlichkeiten hervorbringende Analogie von Mikro- und Makrokosmos entgegen. Sie beruhigt die krisenartige Dynamik, das unheilbar Chaotische. Malani setzt eine analytische Untersuchungsmethode ein, die, um den Körper sichtbar zu machen, ihn in Teile zerschneidet. Zugleich ergänzt sie die Analyse mit der magischen Methode der Analogie, einem poetischen Verfahren, das Verbindungen an den ungewöhnlichsten Stellen herstellt. Auch wenn dieser Ansatz auf dem Hintergrund eines säkularen Weltbildes überraschend, ja sogar verdächtig

sein könnte, so stellt er doch den Versuch dar, von mehr als einer Perspektive aus zu sprechen.<sup>m</sup> Eine weitere künstlerische Position, bei der die Perspektiven vervielfacht werden, ist Night Shift von Teresa Hubbard/Alexander Birchler, eine geloopte und variierte Szene in einem geparkten Polizeiauto. Ihre Wirkung: In ihrer Wiederholung vermindert sie

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langsam, aber sicher den Grad an Wirklichkeit und verstärkt das Gleiten auf der symbolischen Achse von Wahrnehmung – Imagination – Erinnerung – Projektion–Simulation.

Subjektivität, die sich aufs Eigene verlässt, ist ein Panic Room<sup>n</sup>, ein durch Projektionen überbesetzter Bunker, in dem Bewusstsein implodiert und das Subjekt sich im Karussell von Zwangshandlungen dreht. Sicherlich ist ein solches ideologisches Extrem ein reines Schreckbild und einfach zu diskreditieren. Doch bewegt sich Conflicting Tales andererseits nicht einfach auf die Vision einer aufgeklärten Weltsicht zu, die sich erfüllen wird, wenn – ganz im spätmodernistischen Sinn – nur die Selbstreflexivität erhöht würde durch qualitative Information, Aufklärung und fortschreitende Wissenschaft. Der Anteil von Kunst an der wahrnehmungsmäßigen, sozio politischen und spirituellen Offenheit des Subjekts scheint sich auf direktem Weg nicht

l—Für diese Lesart siehe Robert Storr, Nalini Malani. Listening to the Shades, Mailand, Charta, 2008, keine Pagina.  
m—Offensichtlich baut dies nicht so sehr auf dem (westlichen) Modell des Fortschritts auf (was in der einen, der richtigen Methode gipfelte), sondern geht eher von einem transkulturellen und vergleichenden Ansatz aus, der sich in der gegenwärtigen zeitgenössischen Kultur immer noch viel zu wenig manifestiert. Eine weitere Arbeit, die einen transkulturellen Diskussionsansatz darstellt, ist Atul Dodiya's Sayno Bolona.

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Delhi,  
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S.  
7–17.

n—Nach dem gleichnamigen Film von David Fincher, 2002.

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Conflicting Tales

## b) Schwierigkeit der Selbstbegegnung

Jörg Volbers

### Urszenen

Für den modernen Zeitgenossen ist die Subjektivität der eigenen

einzulösen. Conflicting Tales schlägt stattdessen einige »Umwege« vor, als sei Subjektivität nicht eine genau bemessene Stelle, sondern eher ein Gelände, das kartographisch zu vermessen ist. Eher deskriptiven Arbeiten sind solche an die Seite gestellt, die den Blick und die Erfahrung umleiten, um einige Perspektiven vervielfältigen–und manchmal wie bei Sabine Hornigs The Destroyed Room oder Fiona Banners Full Stop für Momente einfach auch richtungs- und ziellos in der Schwebe halten. Die Ausstellung Conflicting Tales: Subjektivität (Quadrilogie, Teil 1) macht einen Anfang, und die Erweiterung in Richtung Geschichte, Sprache und Narration in den kommenden Ausstellungen wird die aufgeworfenen Fragen präzisieren: Wie konstruieren wir in einem ästhetischen Sinn Subjektivität? Oder radikaler: In welcher Weise können wir unsere Subjektivität mittels des ästhetischen Diskurses in einem offensichtlich ethischen Sinn formen? Können wir das überhaupt, sollen wir das wollen, oder sind solche Intentionen idealistische Trugschlüsse? Wie können wir darüber hinaus die Vorstellung von Subjekten nicht nur um den Begriff des Anderen und der Gemeinschaft sinnvoll erweitern, sondern auf eine geopolitische und transkulturelle Situation hin neu bedenken? Diese Dimension ist erst in Ansätzen gedacht, es ist die asynchrone Realität des globalen Zeitalters, in der das Gleiche nicht zur gleichen Zeit geschieht, wo die Vergangenheit des einen Kontinents die Zukunft des anderen ist, auch wenn sich vielleicht diese Vergangenheit als unmöglich und jene Zukunft als unausweichlich herausstellen sollten.

Erfahrungen, ja der eigenen Weltsicht eine Selbstverständlichkeit. Alles scheint ihn darin zu bestätigen, dass seine Wahrnehmungen und Urteile untrennbar mit der eigenen, eben »subjektiven« Perspektive verbunden sind. Zahlreiche Denk- und Sprachgewohnheiten, die in unserer Kultur zur zweiten Natur geworden sind, tragen zu diesem Eindruck bei. Am deutlichsten wird das herkömmliche Verständnis durch den Kontrastbegriff des »Objektiven«, der das wissenschaftliche Ideal der unparteilichen, von aller subjektiven Verzerrung befreiten Naturerkenntnis bezeichnet. »Subjektivität« ist hier ein Residualbegriff: Er umfasst alles, was nicht in die noble Kategorie objektiver Wahrheit fällt–Perspektiven, Individualität, Gefühle und Interessen.

Diese Einordnung des Begriffes kann nicht mehr als eine anfängliche Orientierung leisten. Die rein negative Definition ist unbefriedigend und wenig



aufschlussreich, da sie sich an einem Selbstverständnis der Naturforschung orientiert, das nach den Maßstäben der Geschichte noch jung und neu ist. Die historische Wissenschaftsforschung hat deutlich gezeigt, dass sich der heute übliche starke Begriff der Objektivität erst Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts etablierte. »Subjektivität« jedoch, so belehrt ein Blick in die philosophischen Nachschlagewerke, wird vor allem als die Entdeckung eines allgemeinen Phänomens begriffen, das über die Epochen hinausreicht. Sie soll die Tatsache beschreiben, dass alle Erfahrungen und Urteile immer auch einen Selbstbezug mit einschließen – mit anderen Worten, dass alle Erfahrungen und Urteile immer auch »meine« sind und sein müssen.

Mit dieser zunächst unverfänglichen Beobachtung beginnt das Problem – es trägt den Titel »Ich«. Damit wird die subjektive Einheit bezeichnet, die dazu berechtigt, Erfahrungen, Handlungen und Urteile als die eigenen zu reklamieren. Doch wer bin ich? Was bin ich? Die standardisierte große Erzählung der Neuzeit bietet hier eine wohlbekanntere Antwort an, die ebenso eingängig wie irreführend ist. Demnach geht das Subjektive aus der Befreiung des Menschen von seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit hervor. Der denkende Mensch streift in der Renaissance endlich das mittelalterliche Joch der Theologie ab, um wiedergeboren zu werden im Schoß der Vernunft, eigenständig und selbstbestimmt. Nicht mehr der Kirche untergeordnet, aber

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zugleich auch außerstande, zur griechischen Weltsicht zurückzukehren, entwickelt die Philosophie daraufhin jene eigenartige Reflexionslogik, die sich an dem Gegensatz des Subjektiven zum Objektiven entzündet. Das »Ich« ist somit, soziologisch gesprochen, das Produkt einer Freisetzung des Individuums aus den gesellschaftlichen Zwängen.

Diese klassische Erzählung der Neuzeit hat sich als ein Mythos erwiesen. Sachlich und historisch zeigen sich zunehmend die großzügig übersehenen Lücken und die zahlreichen Zurichtungen, ohne die jenes glatte Bild der zivilisatorischen Entwicklung des Abendlandes nie entstanden wäre. Trotzdem möchte ich hier der Intuition folgen, die mit dem Begriff der Subjektivität verbunden ist. Denn auch wenn jede Bestimmung der Subjektivität sich historisch belehren lassen muss, weckt dieser Begriff für uns, als Teilnehmer und Mitglieder dieser Kultur, doch keine beliebigen Assoziationen. Mit der Subjektivität wird die Innerlichkeit verhandelt, der Wille und die bewusste Individualität. Sie steht für eigene Wünsche, intime Gefühle und irreführende Projektionen. Die subjektiven Affekte werden als Gefahr empfunden, aber auch als dionysische Befreiung von der normierenden Last der sozialen Wirklichkeit. All diese thematischen Verknüpfungen kreisen um jenen imaginären Kern, der nach wie vor, trotz Postmoderne, Systemtheorie und Massenkultur, im Zentrum unserer ideologischen Selbstverständigung steht: das Ich.

Jacques Lacans bekannte These des Spiegelstadiums als Bildner der

Ichfunktion (1949) gibt eine gute Vorstellung von den Schwierigkeiten, die mit dem »Ich« und der Subjektivität verbunden sind. Der französische Psychoanalytiker fordert uns auf, uns in die Situation eines Kindes zu versetzen, das noch kein zusammenhängendes Selbstbild hat. Die Urszene der Subjektivität ist der Moment, wo das Kind sich das erste Mal im Spiegel erblickt. Erst jetzt, in der anschaulichen Begegnung mit seinem eigenen Bild, gewinnt es eine Vorstellung davon, dass seine Bewegungen und Wahrnehmungen einem einheitlichen Körper angehören. Das Kind erkennt, dass es sich selbst im Spiegel gegenübersteht – und identifiziert sich mit einer Person, von der es durch die undurchdringliche Glasfläche des Spiegels auf immer getrennt sein wird.

Für Lacan ist die Identifikation mit dem Spiegelbild ein unverzichtbarer und zugleich fehlgehender Akt. Die erste Selbsteinschätzung, die das Kind am Spiegelbild gewinnt, ist bereits eine Selbstüberschätzung. Wer tritt dem Kind da im Spiegel entgegen? Für uns ein hilfloses, ein abhängiges Wesen. Das Kind erkennt jedoch einen Körper, dessen »totale Form« (Lacan) ihm bereits durch seine Eltern vertraut ist. Und so beginnt in dem Moment,

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wo das Kind sich in diesem Körperbild erkennt, eine verhängnisvolle Übertragung. All die Macht, über die seine Nächsten verfügen, legt das Kind in dieses Bild und damit in sich selbst hinein. Die körperliche Erscheinung suggeriert eine Eigenständigkeit, mit der sich das Kind identifiziert, ohne über sie zu verfügen. So entsteht der erste Eindruck davon, was es heißt, ein »Ich« zu sein, über ein Bild, das uns nicht entspricht und uns niemals entsprechen kann.

Lacans Spiegelstadium muss als ein Gleichnis gelesen werden. Es veranschaulicht die Paradoxie der Subjektivität, die hinter ihrer wechselhaften Geschichte steht – eine Paradoxie, die sich auch erkenntnistheoretisch fassen lässt. Der Mensch als denkendes und fühlendes Wesen versucht, ein Bild von sich zu gewinnen – von sich als einem denkenden und fühlenden Wesen. Er will nicht irgendetwas über sich erfahren, sondern Einblick in das gewinnen, was ihm eine unhintergehbare Bedingung seiner Existenz zu sein scheint: Die gelebten Erfahrungen sind seine Erfahrungen, unabhängig davon, was er gerade erfährt; die gedachten Gedanken sind seine Gedanken, egal was ihr konkreter Inhalt ist. Er will jenes »Ich« begreifen, das all seine Welt- und Selbstbezüge zu begleiten scheint – die Erfahrungen und Gedanken; die Beziehungen zu den Menschen wie zu den Dingen. Der Mensch will seine Subjektivität begreifen – doch dazu muss er sich selbst gegenübertreten und sich somit von sich selbst unterscheiden. Wie soll er das können?

Die Begegnung im Spiegel ist die perfekte Metapher für diese Selbstkenntnis, führt sie doch zugleich ihre Unmöglichkeit vor Augen. Im Spiegel treten wir uns selbst gegenüber, und doch sind wir nicht die Person, die uns da anblickt, und können sie nie sein. Sobald sich der Mensch selbst zum



Gegenstand des Denkens, Erkennens oder Beschreibens macht, muss er sich spalten. Er kann seine Aufmerksamkeit nur auf einen Teil seiner selbst richten; der andere Teil wird bereits von dieser Aufmerksamkeit selbst in Anspruch genommen, die ja auch seine Aufmerksamkeit ist, sein Erkenntnis und Reflexionsakt. Damit wird die Selbsterkenntnis zu einer Entzugsfigur, verweist das Erkannte doch immer auf ein Unerkanntes, das es zugleich ermöglicht. Das Kind und sein Spiegelbild können sich nicht berühren, zwischen ihnen steht das spiegelnde Glas, vermittelnd und trennend zugleich. Immer bleibt eine unschließbare Lücke, die mit Projektionen, Ergänzungen und Phantasmen überbrückt wird. Und doch wird, und wurde, immer wieder jene Einheit des Ich gesucht, die Lacan als phantasmatisches Spiegelbild, als Imaginäres, bloßstellt. Der Selbstbezug ist eines der großen Rätsel der neuzeitlichen Philosophie und zugleich ein »unbezweifeltes Faktum« (Kant), von dem aus sie immer wieder ihren Ausgang nahm.

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Die Szene der (unmöglichen) Selbstbegegnung im Spiegel hilft zu verstehen, dass die Geschichte der Subjektivität vor allem Ausdruck eines Problems mit der Subjektivität ist. Die philosophische Anthropologie, als rechtmäßige Erbin der klassischen Subjektphilosophie, hat diese Einsicht systematisch auf den Punkt gebracht, wenn sie vom Menschen als das »nicht festgestellte Tier« spricht. Sie beschreibt den Menschen als ein in die Welt ragendes Wesen, das sich in ihr nicht behaupten kann, ohne sich ihr auszuliefern. Es bedarf kompensatorischer Bilder, Institutionen, Praktiken und Selbstverständnisse, die den Menschen zu jener Einheit komplettieren, als die er sich imaginiert. Der Mensch, und damit seine Subjektivität, ist offen, geöffnet –was je nach politischer Ausrichtung als Gefahr (Gehlen), einer klaffenden Wunde gleich, oder als Gewinn (Nietzsche), als Garant umwälzender Veränderung, wahrgenommen wird.

Individuell spürbar wird diese anthropologische These bei Grenzerfahrungen und in Szenen des Übergangs. Dazu gehören Geburt und Tod ebenso wie die Adoleszenz, Krankheit und Gewalt. Diese Erlebnisse rühren, da sie Krisen und Wendepunkte beschreiben, an den paradoxen Kern der Subjektivität. Sie eröffnen eine neue Welt, in der die Formen der Selbstbehauptung nicht mehr greifen, die in der alten Welt verankert waren. Die stets nur imaginäre Einheit des Subjekts muss den neuen Verhältnissen angepasst werden, ohne dass dazu ein klarer Leitfaden oder eine zielgenaue Methodik zur Verfügung stünde. Vielleicht ist es kein Zufall, dass tiefe geistige Konversionen und radikale Umbrüche in der eigenen Biographie immer wieder als eine Geburt (oder als Wiedergeburt) symbolisiert werden: Die Geburt des Menschen ist die Urform der anthropologischen Übergangssituation. Für ihren Erfolg reicht die natürliche Ausstattung des Säuglings nicht hin – der Terminus der menschlichen »Instinktarmut« zeigt das an. Weit über die ersten Hilfeleistungen des Nestes hinaus, die alle Säugetiere ihren Sprösslingen

angedeihen lassen, ist das Kind auf die ihm immer bereits vorausgeeilte Kultur angewiesen. Ohne sie kann es nicht überleben, geschweige denn sich ein Bild von sich und der Welt machen. Erst indem das Kind sich dieser neuen Welt fügt, wird es handlungsfähig, leidensfähig, ja überhaupt jemals ein »Subjekt«. Insofern ist die »Instinktarmut« des Naturwesens Mensch selbst eine Tatsache der Kultur, vielleicht die Tatsache der Kultur überhaupt: Unsere individuellen Erfahrungsräume sind formbar, und ohne diese Formung, die immer nur in Kulturen stattfinden kann, gibt es keine Erfahrung.

An diesen krisenhaften Momenten zeigt sich auch, dass der Begriff des Menschen, wie der des Subjekts, eine falsche Opposition erzeugt – als sei der Mensch ein »Staat im Staate« (Spinoza), ein geschlossenes System.

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Das Subjekt, das einer Welt immer nur gegenübertritt, ist die Fiktion des Menschen, der nicht lernen muss, um handeln und erfahren zu können. Geleugnet wird die Notwendigkeit, von einem Ort, einem Körper, einem Geist getragen und besessen zu werden, um überhaupt Mensch zu sein. »Es ist die Basisneurose der okzidentalen Kultur, von einem Subjekt träumen zu müssen, das alles beobachtet, benennt, besitzt, ohne sich von etwas enthalten, ernennen, besitzen zu lassen, und wenn der diskreteste Gott sich als Zuschauer, Behälter und Mandant anböte.« (Sloterdijk)

Sloterdijk kann die Idee des Subjekts eine »Neurose« nennen, weil das Subjektive immer auch als Bastion gegen die Zumutungen der anderen stark gemacht wurde, gleichsam als Abwehrreaktion. Dabei reicht die Formbarkeit des Subjektiven bis in den Bereich des Schmerzes hinein – das zumindest behauptet Ludwig Wittgenstein. Selbst der scheinbar tiefste Grund individuellen Erlebens, noch der private, unveräußerlich wirkende Schmerz, trägt die Züge kultureller Prägung durch Sprache, Symbole und Praktiken. Wittgenstein leugnet nicht, dass wir unsere eigenen Schmerzen haben – doch schon die Tatsache, dass wir sie als Schmerzen wahrnehmen (und nicht, zum Beispiel, als intensive Form der Lust), ist ein Resultat und ein Produkt unserer Subjektivität. Diese philosophische Einsicht greift die seltsame Sprachlosigkeit auf, die wir dem Schmerz und anderen Gefühlen gegenüber erfahren. Wir meinen unseren tiefsten, unteilbaren Schmerz, doch um das zu sagen, werden wir auf das allgemeine Ausdrucksrepertoire zurückgeworfen, das uns zur Verfügung steht. Den Schmerz auszudrücken, ihn in Bilder, Worte und Medien zu gießen, ja bereits ihn als Schmerz zu identifizieren, bedeutet, ihm eine bestimmte, eine öffentliche Form zu geben – und sich in dieser Form einzuschreiben, sich durch sie zu erkennen und anzuerkennen.

Wieder kommt hier Lacans Spiegelszene in den Blick. Die Asymmetrie des de facto noch für lange Zeit abhängigen Kleinkinds, das im Spiegel sein imaginiertes, bereits vollständiges Ich erblickt, wiederholt sich im Ungleichgewicht zwischen der Kultur und ihren Neuankömmlingen. Die Überhöhung

des Selbstbildes, mit dem sich das Kind identifiziert, ist keine erotische Fehlleistung. Sie resultiert bereits strukturell aus der grundsätzlichen Abhängigkeit des Kindes von den vorliegenden Symbolen, Praktiken und Ideologien. Die Geburt ist die prägnanteste, aber beileibe nicht letzte und einzige Schwelle, die mit diesem Machtgefälle konfrontiert. Selber noch suchend, tastend, fragend und lernend, sehen sich Säuglinge und Jugendliche gleichermaßen mit einer Kultur konfrontiert, die auf alles bereits feste und scheinbar klare Antworten kennt. Sie können ihr jedoch keine eigene Sprache

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entgegenzusetzen, da sie dazu erst lernen müssen, die etablierten »Sprachspiele« (Wittgenstein) zu beherrschen. Den Neuankömmlingen wird eine Identifikation aufgezwungen, die wie das Spiegelbild eine »orthopädische« (Lacan) Funktion für ihre Entwicklung als Subjekt übernimmt. Ohne diese Überformungen und Überforderungen nähmen ihre Fähigkeiten und Erfahrungen, kurz: ihre Subjektivität, niemals Form an.

#### Widerfahrnisse

Nach den letzten Überlegungen könnte nun der Eindruck entstehen, Subjektivität sei völlig fremdbestimmt. Habe ich nicht gesagt, dass unsere Erfahrung unüberwindbar präfiguriert wird durch die Kultur, durch ihre Bilder, Ideologien und Sprachen? Doch wenn die Opposition von Mensch und Welt eine Übertreibung ist, dann auch die ihr entsprechende Gegenthese, die »das Subjekt« differenzlos in die Welt auflöst. Foucaults Erwartung aus der Ordnung der Dinge, dass die Gezeiten der Geschichte das Problem des Menschen von selbst erledigen, indem sie diesen verschwinden lassen »wie am Meeresufer ein Gesicht im Sand«, wird sich nicht erfüllen. Das Problem ist hartnäckig, weil es (sprach-)logischer Natur ist. Die behauptete Einheit des »Ich«, das alle Erfahrungen und Handlungen begleiten können, lässt sich nur phantasmatisch einlösen – in der Rückprojektion des Spiegelbilds auf die eigene Person, in der imaginären Ergänzung einer Selbsterkenntnis, die immer unvollständig ist. Umgekehrt bedeutet dies nicht, dass Subjektivität nichts als jene Übertragung ist. Schließlich geht der anfängliche Blick in den Spiegel vom Kind selbst aus, welches danach strebt, sich mit seiner sichtbaren Erscheinung zu identifizieren. Das erinnert daran, dass die kulturellen Codes und Konventionen nicht die einzigen Akteure in diesem Spiel sind. Subjektivität fällt einem nicht in den Schoß; man muss sich ihr nähern.

Dies ist ein entscheidender Hinweis. Lacans Spiegelszene geht wie die anthropologische Beschreibung davon aus, dass wir Subjekte nicht sind, sondern werden. Die saubere begriffliche Trennung von Allgemeinem und Besonderem verführt dabei zu einer allzu schematischen Beschreibung dieses schwer zu fassenden Prozesses. Subjektwerdung wird reduziert auf

einen Akt der Unterwerfung, in dem das Subjekt sich an allgemeine Codes und Schemata bindet; sie wird gedacht als Kompensation, die dem kleinen, zerbrechlichen Individuum die stabilisierende Identität der Kultur angeeignet lässt. In diesen Bildern wird der subjektive Pol weitgehend ignoriert. Dies ist auf eine gewisse Betriebsblindheit zurückzuführen: Die eingefahrenen

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Oppositionen des bürgerlichen Individualismus drängen dazu, die Prozesse der Subjektivierung immer nach dem Vorbild des Konflikts des Allgemeinen mit dem Besonderen zu verhandeln. Dies rückt die Dialektik von Unterwerfung und Widerstand in den Vordergrund. Ein unverstellter Blick auf die konkreten Prozesse der Subjektwerdung zeigt jedoch, dass diese Übergänge vor allem eines sind: anstrengend. Das Individuum wird nicht passiv geformt; es ringt mit der Kultur. Dabei zeigt der Neuankömmling durchaus ein Begehren, sich in die Kultur einzufinden, die ihn doch so ins Unrecht setzt. Nicht umsonst stattete Platon die Wahrheit mit einer eigenen erotischen Anziehungskraft aus. Sie soll die Widerstände überwinden, denen die Wahrheit überall begegnet und die der Schüler von Sokrates nur zu gut kannte. Um diese Gegenwehr zu brechen, bedarf es für Platon eines der stärksten Zauber überhaupt, den die menschliche Seele kennt: der Magie der Liebe. Es ist eine erotische Bewegung, die aus Wahrheitssuchenden Wahrheitsliebende macht, philosophoi. Die Einübung der Formen und Konventionen – die Produktion von Subjektivität – vollzieht sich immer als eine Arbeit, die von Rückschlägen, Wandlungen und Missverständnissen bedroht ist. Auch das Allgemeine muss verführen, um erobert werden zu können.

Lernen ist mühsam. Diese Trivialität hilft, einen offenen Blick auf die Paradoxien der Subjektivität zu gewinnen. Wo begegnen uns die Widerstände und Hindernisse, die bisher als eine Problematik des Subjekts geschildert wurden? Im Prozess des Lernens, in der mühsamen Arbeit, durch die wir uns neue Fähigkeiten und Sichtweisen aneignen. Aus dieser Perspektive ist nicht die Subjektivität selbst das Problem – als gäbe es eine (womöglich gar paradox zu denkende) Substanz, die von sich aus die bisher genannten Schwierigkeiten generiert. Stattdessen möchte ich den Vorschlag Michel Foucaults aufgreifen, der ein Jahrzehnt nach den prophetischen Schlussworten aus der Ordnung der Dinge das Problem des Subjekts in seinem Spätwerk neu fasst. Der Grundbegriff dieser Umorientierung ist das Konzept der Praktik des Selbst. Foucault versteht Subjektivität nicht als eine problematische Eigenschaft der Akteure, sondern als jene Erfahrung, die in den Praktiken aufscheint und bearbeitet wird. Eine Selbstpraktik ist ein Verfahren, mit dem Menschen an dem arbeiten, was wir Subjektivität nennen: die Weise, wie sie sich und die Welt wahrnehmen und verstehen; ihre spontanen Handlungen und Reaktionen; ihre Haltung zu den Ereignissen.

Foucaults Ansatz kehrt auf elegante Weise die Diagnose um, mit der dieser Essay begann. Subjektivität ist nicht problematisch, weil sie sich nicht so

richtig fassen lässt – sie lässt sich vielmehr gerade deshalb fassen, weil sie ein Problem ist und bleibt. Ein Problem, das nicht begrifflicher, sondern

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praktischer Natur ist: das Problem, dass wir uns selbst werden können. Selbst praktiken drehen sich um das Ziel, Einfluss auf die eigenen Handlungs- und Erfahrungsweisen zu nehmen. »Subjektivität« ist dann der Sammelbegriff für die Widerstände, gegen die sich diese Praktiken wenden, wie auch für den Idealzustand, auf den sich diese Techniken des Selbst (wie Foucault sie auch nennt) richten. Die allgemeine Frage der subjektiven Selbsterkenntnis, die wissen will, ob eine Handlung oder Erfahrung nun dem Subjekt zuzurechnen ist oder nicht, stellt sich aus dieser Perspektive nicht–sie wird stets in der jeweiligen Praxis selbst verhandelt. Die Antwort ist immer: je nachdem–was darauf hinausläuft, die philosophische Frage von sich zu weisen.

Die antike ethische und politische Literatur, der Foucaults historische Untersuchungen bevorzugt galten, ist voll mit solchen Übungen der Subjektivierung. Die Stoiker empfahlen, ein üppiges Bankett aufzutischen und es nicht anzurühren. Diese Übung soll die eigenen Temperamente zügeln und die stoische Ruhe des Maßhaltens in Fleisch und Blut übergehen lassen. Eine andere Empfehlung war, den Tag mit einer Bilanz des Geschehenen ausklingen zu lassen–auf diese Weise rufen wir uns die Ziele in Erinnerung, die wir verfolgen, und können sehen, wie weit wir gekommen sind. Ganz andere Beispiele entnimmt Foucault dem religiösen Leben: Die Beichte ist, wie das Beten, eine Praktik des Selbst, die intensiv auf eine Formung der eigenen, als problematisch empfundenen Subjektivität abzielt. Dieser Vergleich zeigt auch, wie lokal unterschiedlich die jeweiligen Erfahrungen aufgefasst und behandelt werden – das christliche Konzept der Sündhaftigkeit und der Buße war den Stoikern fremd, obwohl auch sie eine Form der Rechenschaftslegung sich selbst gegenüber kannten. Ein Sprung in die Moderne zeigt, dass auch die Psychoanalyse eine, diesmal jedoch wissenschaftlich legitimierte Praktik des Selbst ist. Die Analyse, die von Freud selbst als eine Technik bezeichnet wird, soll wieder dazu verhelfen, »zu lieben und zu arbeiten« (Freud). Dies geschieht durch eine Arbeit an gerade jenen Phänomenen, die den Inbegriff der Subjektivität bilden: Widerstände, Hemmnisse und Schwierigkeiten, die das Subjekt mit sich selbst hat.

Aus Foucaults Perspektive verliert Lacans Spiegelszenario seine zentrale Rolle, denn der bloße Blick in den Spiegel ist noch keine Praktik. Während Lacan diesen Blick als jubilatorischen Akt der Selbstidentifikation beschreibt, rückt Foucault die Hindernisse und Widerstände in den Vordergrund, die im Vollzug dieses neu gewonnenen Selbstverständnisses auftauchen. Dies entlässt das Bild, das uns im Spiegel begegnet, aber nicht aus seiner »orthopädischen« Funktion. Sie lässt sich jetzt vielmehr

präzisieren: Der phantasmatisch aufgeladene Blick in den Spiegel kann seine Aufgabe nur dann erfüllen, wenn er ein wiederkehrender Teil einer Selbstpraktik ist. Ich stelle mir zum Beispiel das Kind vor, wie es die ersten Rückschläge erleidet. Ständig wird ihm vorgeführt, dass es längst nicht jene autonome Einheit ist, als die es sich im Spiegel gesehen hatte. Doch dann geht der Blick zurück zum Spiegelbild, und das Kind findet wieder zu jener Evidenz zurück, die ihm zu entgleiten drohte und auf die es (wenn auch nicht bewusst) hinarbeitet. Wie ein Mantra, das sich die antiken Gelehrten immer wieder ins Gedächtnis riefen, oder wie die Fotografie eines Geliebten, in dessen Anblick der Partner wieder Ruhe findet, erfüllt das Spiegelbild hier eine stabilisierende Funktion.

Der mit Foucault vollzogene Wechsel der Perspektive stülpt die Subjektivitätsproblematik um. Aus dem Konflikt, in den »das Subjekt« mit sich selbst gerät, wird eine Praxis, die es mit stabilisierenden und verunsichernden Erfahrungen konfrontiert. Daraus resultiert eine entscheidend neue Rolle für die Artefakte, mit denen wir uns umgeben. Sie werden nunmehr selbst zum Teil unserer Subjektivität: Das Tagebuch, mit dem der gewissenhafte Bürgersohn seine individuellen Erlebnisse festhält und formt, ist kein bloßes Requisit der Selbstverständigung. Die Möglichkeit, die schriftlich fixierten Erlebnisse über einen langen Zeitraum hinweg zu bewahren und miteinander zu vergleichen, gehört essenziell zur neuen Erfahrungsdimension, die hier eingeübt werden soll. Ganz wesentlich ist auch, dass die schriftliche Artikulation–nicht unähnlich dem Spiegelbild–die Reflexionen und Erfahrungen objektiviert und damit gleichzeitig verfremdet. Da das Tagebuch sich immer wieder konsultieren lässt, kann sich so eine paradigmatisch moderne Praxis der Selbstausslegung einspielen, eine Hermeneutik des Selbst. Das moderne Selbstverständnis als Individuum, das uns gewöhnlich als Evidenz entgegentritt, erweist sich so als das Produkt materieller, historisch konkret situierbarer Praktiken.

### Selbstbilder

Das Konzept der Selbstpraktik geht vor allem von einer Beobachtung aus, die die bisherigen Überlegungen immer wieder umkreist: Das Selbstverhältnis ist wesentlich prekär. Es ist »offen«, wie uns die Anthropologie mitteilt, es ist »paradox«, wie der Erkenntnistheoretiker feststellt, es ist »imaginär«, wie Lacan behauptet. Diese Prekarität der eigenen Subjektivität möchte ich nun abschließend am Leitfaden des Begriffs der »Sichtbarkeit« diskutieren,

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der in den bisherigen Ausführungen immer wieder mitschwang. Mit ihm vollziehen wir den letzten Schritt der zunehmenden »Veräußerlichung« des Begriffs der Subjektivität, die in diesem Essay versucht wird.

Der menschliche Körper ist das beste Bild der menschlichen Seele, heißt es bei Wittgenstein. Diesen Zusammenhang nutzt Lacan aus, wenn er das im Spiegel sichtbare Bild des eigenen Körpers zur Grundlage einer Ich-Imagination erklärt. Im sichtbaren Körper manifestiert sich eine ganze Subjektivität. Dazu gehört, dass das Spiegelkind sein reales Gegenüber direkt anblickt. Der Anblick des anderen berührt, weil er ein tragendes Moment der eigenen Selbsterfahrung ist. Der zustimmende, bejahende Blick des anderen umhüllt uns und gibt uns Raum; nur dieser konstitutiven Nähe wegen kann er dann auch verletzen und abstoßen.

Im zurückblickenden Anblick bestätigt der andere das Körperbild, das wir präsentieren, und bekräftigt damit uns selbst. Das kann auch heißen: Der Blick der anderen legt uns daraufhin fest, was und wer wir sind, und das nach unserer Erscheinung. Diese Gleichung gilt erst recht dann, wenn der unmittelbare Körper nicht sichtbar, sondern durch Kleidung verhüllt ist. Wie bei allem Unverzichtbaren münzt der Mensch die Not, den Körper in der Begegnung mit anderen immer mitführen zu müssen, in die Tugend seiner ständigen Kultivierung um. Der Körper ist Zeichen und Träger von Zeichen. Die permanente Sichtbarkeit des Körpers lässt ihn zum sozialen Medium par excellence werden.

Gerade im sozialen Miteinander gilt, wie der Soziologe Pierre Bourdieu feststellt, das Prinzip *esse est percipi* – unser Sein ist unser Wahrgenommensein. Was Bewerbungstrainer als strategische Einsicht verkaufen, wird vom Soziologen als strukturierendes Grundprinzip der modernen gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit angesehen. Stil und Auftreten verfestigen Machtverhältnisse, da sie Identitäten zuschreiben, ohne dass dies den Akteuren unmittelbar zugänglich ist: *Le style, c'est l'homme même*. Noch vor dem bewussten Austausch von Blicken und Argumenten liegt der Abgleich der Körpererscheinungen, die Einschätzung der anderen aufgrund ihrer Erscheinung. Diese Einschätzung ist selbst eine körperliche und insofern unbewusste Reaktion. Ekel und Scheu, wie auch die Anziehungskraft, die Menschen gegenüber Menschen in ihren Bann nimmt, sind nicht nur im ganzen Körper spürbar (wovon die zahlreichen Sprachbilder Zeugnis ablegen, die diese Affektionen ins Körperinnere projizieren: Ich finde ihn zum Kotzen; ihr Anblick macht mich trunken). Sie manifestieren sich auch, sichtbar für andere, im eigenen Verhalten – der Körper weicht zurück oder öffnet sich, verharrt auf seinem Platz oder zittert vor Erregung.

Vor diesem Hintergrund wird deutlich, dass die bruchlose Selbstverständlichkeit der alltäglichen Kommunikation – etwa am Arbeitsplatz – selbst schon Ausdruck einer Gruppenzugehörigkeit und damit von Macht ist. Wer die Erscheinung des anderen erkennt und anerkennt, fühlt sich auf vertrautem und sicherem Terrain: Hier hat man es mit seinesgleichen zu tun, und wenn nicht, so weiß man jedenfalls, mit wem man es zu tun hat. Die Zugehörigkeit zur Gruppe wird dabei nicht allein über sichtbare Codes der Mode und anderer Zeichensysteme geregelt; das Spiel der Anerkennung fordert die ganze körperliche Erscheinung, die Bourdieu den Habitus nennt. In die Bewertung fließt nicht nur ein, was präsentiert wird; wichtig ist auch, wie das geschieht. Man sieht sofort, dass jemand den Konventionen folgt, ohne sie wirklich zu beherrschen – die Person wirkt plump und unbeholfen, vielleicht sogar lächerlich, jedenfalls irgendwie, um es mit einem äußerst treffenden deutschen Idiom auszudrücken, fehl am Platz.

Die Prekarität unserer Subjektivität drückt sich hier dadurch aus, dass diese sozial regulierten Identitäten Bourdieu zufolge immer wieder der Erneuerung und Bestätigung bedürfen. Die Gruppe versichert sich ihrer Identität wechselseitig, indem sie sich von den anderen abgrenzt – und diese Distinktionen greifen vor allem auf die sichtbaren Manifestationen des gruppen-spezifischen Habitus zurück. In traditionelleren Gesellschaftsformen ist diese manifeste Zugehörigkeit rituell geregelt; mehr oder weniger explizite Gesetze schreiben vor, wer sich wie kleiden, frisieren und überhaupt körperlich präsentieren darf. Mit dem Verlust der traditionellen Autorität leben solche Vorschriften fast nur noch stillschweigend weiter, verteilt auf unzählige Gruppen und Gruppierungen, die sich voneinander abgrenzen oder auch ihre Gemeinsamkeiten betonen. Vielleicht trägt die Tatsache, dass diese Gesetze des sozialen Alltags nur in ungeschriebener und damit immer stark interpretationsbedürftiger Form fortexistieren, zum modernen Eindruck einer offenen, nicht festgestellten Subjektivität mit bei.

Die von Foucault untersuchte »Arbeit an sich« wird unter dem Vorzeichen der Soziologie Bourdieus so vornehmlich zu einer Repräsentationsarbeit – die Arbeit an der eigenen Subjektivität geschieht vor allem durch die Arbeit an der eigenen Erscheinung. Diese Erscheinung umfasst, wie gesagt, sowohl die Kleider am Leib als auch diesen selbst; sie reicht von der Mode über die körperliche Gestalt bis hin zur Gewandtheit, mit der ein Akteur seine jeweilige Rolle bis in die kleinsten Manierismen hinein auszufüllen vermag. Diese Stilisierung wird, wie bei den Selbstpraktiken im Allgemeinen, über Medien und einzelne Artefakte betrieben. Freizeitsportler, z.B. Snowboarder, schießen Fotos, mit denen sie ihre eigene Leistung

festhalten und bewerten können; Läufer objektivieren ihre Leistungsfähigkeit mit Pulsmessern; Studierende formen und vergleichen ihre rhetorischen Fähigkeiten in Debattierclubs.

Es ist eine ausführlichere Überlegung wert, welche Rolle die Optik im engeren Sinne für die hier diskutierte Sichtbarkeit spielt. Ist es Zufall, dass zentrale Formen der Subjektivierung über den Blick funktionieren und mit dem Bild operieren, das wir uns und anderen präsentieren? Überspitzt gefragt: Können Blinde nicht auch Subjekte sein? Natürlich können sie das—insofern auch sie an einer gemeinsam geteilten Öffentlichkeit teilnehmen, deren sinnliche Struktur gestattet, in ein und demselben Medium wahrzunehmen und wahrgenommen zu werden. Entscheidend ist das Wissen um die Austauschbarkeit der Subjekt- und Objektposition im grammatikalischen Sinne: Wer sieht, kann gesehen werden; wer spricht, kann angesprochen werden; wer selber tastet, setzt sich der Berührung aus.

Die visuelle Sichtbarkeit des Subjekts veranschaulicht diese allgemeine mediale Bedingung so gut, weil das Alltagsphänomen sich kreuzender Blicke die Struktur der wechselseitigen Versicherung paradigmatisch vorführt: Ich sehe, dass du mich siehst; wenn ich dich sehe, sehe ich, dass ich gesehen werde. Der kreuzende Blick ist das Subjektivierungsmedium par excellence, vollzieht er doch in einer einzigen Bewegung die wechselseitige Bestätigung, die in anderen Medien nur zeitlich versetzt erfolgen kann. Nicht zufällig funktioniert das von Foucault analysierte Panopticon, jene architektonische Maschine der Überwachung, durch die Eliminierung jeglicher Reziprozität. Der Wärter im hohen Gefängnisturm kann alle sehen, während er von niemandem gesehen wird; wie Gott und die invisible hand des Kapitalismus bleibt er ungesehen und ist deshalb allgegenwärtig.

Die Paradoxien der Subjektivität, mit denen ich diesen Essay begonnen habe, erweisen sich aus dieser abschließenden Perspektive als das Resultat einer grammatischen Notwendigkeit. Der Mensch kann sich selbst nie vollständig zum Objekt werden, weil nur die Austauschbarkeit von Subjekt und Objekt im medialen Raum der Wahrnehmung seine Subjektivität garantiert. Der Beobachter muss selbst beobachtet werden, um sich als Beobachter zu konstituieren. Die Unabschließbarkeit dieses Prozesses ist zugleich die Garantie der Vielfalt, mit der sich die abendländische Erfahrung der Subjektivität immer wieder aufs Neue produziert, verfehlt und neu formiert.