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The subtitle could just as well have announced a talk about *networks* and *figments of the imagination*, since when there is talk of the possibilities of *new media*, the most popular rhetorical weapon by far is the unreflected appeal to *networking* and the *synergy effects*. These are, however mere *figments of the imagination*, the borders of which can be defined more precisely than barely ever before. The gatekeepers of these windows of opportunity, which are allegedly open everywhere, may not be called *Gog and Magog*, but can be titled well enough with the words »arrogance«, »ignorance« and altogether »incompetence«.

This contribution is divided into four parts. The four different sections address (very cursorily) three questions: How can one talk about media? What can one say about media? Which possibilities are available to the humanities, cultural and social sciences to increase their presence in these areas?

One motivation for this question is that the author has been instigator and planner of a platform for Central-East-European research (*Kakanien revisited*), which was submitted and granted in 2001, so that he now leads this project. Hence, questions like these have had to be addressed. The platform went online in October 2001 in order to bring together into fruitful dialogue differently qualified research methods and the objects of their research, multifarious voices, border-crossings and interpretations; furthermore to develop networks and support their differences as well as similarities.

A condensed version of this contribution was given at the 6th conference of the Institute for Strengthening Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Democracy and Human Rights in Multi-Ethnic Societies*. Bosnia-Herzegovina, again, is a country where it has so far not been possible to implement a nationwide terrestrial television program – only a radio program is aired throughout the country. The basic supply of print media, such as daily or weekly newspapers, has to be judged on a different scale from the of EU and successor states, taking into consideration vast average wage differences. Such a situation (as fatal as it may otherwise seem) obviously begs for a contribution like this one (as failed as it may or must appear).

Finally, this contribution should be an attempt – limited by the brevity of the essayistic piece – at a theoretical approach to thematizing the role of media, the transformation of its contents and the question of media sets, as well as their limits and further more their observability. As already mentioned, this includes the problem of whether one can at all speak appropriately about media, as electronic media, without falling into the »traps« of medial discourse – and if so, how.

1. Talking about media....

...means among other things to confront a complicated situation, to recognize the enormous complexity of this topic, since progressive modernity can also be associated with progressive artificiality, a condensation of the constructed. The main challenge is to formulate a critique of any form, being, as one is, obstinately obstructed by the growing technologization. Only treatment of the topic can open the doors to its terminology. However, in ontological terms, the nature, the mode of being of this army of machines cannot at all be comprehended, since machines are incompatible with ontological status. The signification process and the semantic production of »meaning« as well as referentiality is in such a way directed by simulation, that any attempt to differentiate distinctively between signifier and any original *Onto*-reference has to fail *a priori*. Embedded in this conflict between signifiers and significata we find the traditional opposites of nature and technology. Machines, simulacra and the chain of signifiers appear neither to have an eidetic origin, nor to originate *eidoi* themselves. This will continue to be the case as long as nano-technology and similar systems remain incapable attaining independence – like in the significantly popular Hollywood productions *Matrix* or *Terminator*, to reproduce themselves, to develop their own intrinsic patterns of *Fuzzy Logic*, which could still be discussed by us within their relevant framework.

In other words: Currently, we can observe numerous inappropriate uses of language, which are probably even necessary¹, in application to such phenomena and the description of these developments. We have to struggle with inappropriate terms and their outdated, falsified

¹ In his lecture on *The constitutive Denial: On Teams of Liars and Stress Collectives* (March 26 1998, Messelpalast Vienna, Introductory Speech for the event *Literature in March*), Peter Sloterdijk spoke of »necessarily lie« in a similar context.

2 Hartmann, Frank: Die Angst vor der Informationsgesellschaft [Fear of the Information Society]. In: Der Standard (October 25 1996) [supplement Album].

meanings when problematizing the alleged utopias based on the growth of new media: the idea of hypertext revolutionizing access to text, the connection of vertical and horizontal levels, limited access, commercialization of the nets, alleged democratization, archival problems of insufficient data-carriers and essentially inefficient pathfinders etc. However: This is not about the justification of philological neuroses, which would have to be dealt with more or less successfully with the comment that:

Text has lost its holy aura of intellectuality in the era of electronic availability and has been reduced to one minor cultural organizational principle among others. Hypertext only defines yet another frame of reference, no longer a center.²

More appropriate would be to point out potential problems and the need for critical treatment of hypertext. Contrary examples of success (such as the compilation of the entire legacy of Robert Musil on CD-ROM) are, in all cases known to this author, based on the idea of service, aimed at granting different modes of access and usage as well as retaining accuracy.

3 Cf. Borso, Vittoria / Krumeich, Gerd / Witte, Bernd (Eds.): Medialität und Gedächtnis. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur kulturellen Verarbeitung europäischer Krisen. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler 2001.

2. Mediality and Cultural Memory

I would like to approach here the question of the oft-mentioned mediality and the no more rarely discussed problem of memory, storage, forgetting and their relevant references. One of the cases made can be summarized as follows: Media and storage or transmission share both the difficulty of insufficient reflection of their possibilities and limits and the problem of their basically retrospective interpretation in the moment of their creation.

While it is relatively easy to express the issue of the media complex, it is more difficult to do so where memory, remembering and forgetting are concerned: Such themes at this point have to be expressed disregarding neuro-biological research, since otherwise we would have to delve more deeply into the facts and their consequences – namely that, generally put, in the case of the human brain, we have available to us a time span of a mere three seconds, everything beyond which is already reconstruction. Hence, I will restrict myself here to a cultural approach, guided by its symbolic structures, the operation of which rests primarily in the iconographic and symbolic realm.

This raises the question not only of power and rule, but – on another level – of the materiality of media,³ meaning also communication, its construction and its conditions.⁴ Here, criteria of space and time as well as related questions of perception (the »gaze«), as it separates, selects and finally orders, play an elementary role.⁵ In other words, we are talking here about aspects of boundaries, of order and selection, further also constructions of identity or authentication. The relation between these and factual events and experiences is complex. They are contextualized culturally, socially and situationally in both their encoding and their use – and are in any case valued on an emotional level.

Media, their specific format and the resulting modes of »perception« these imply are vital here: for example in the question, which ethnotypical modes of observation are employed. These media, particularly the »optical-technological«, have »engraved« within them not only dominating ideologies and debates, but also traces of an »Other«, of differences and alterities, confrontations with the »Other« and unresolved traumas. This is caused by a heterogeneity of cultures, which are already themselves, and even more so in their interaction, complex methods of forgetting, denying and remembering foreign and own elements.

Memory creates – roughly – a primarily cognitive category, a »shaping« of what has occurred onto the matrix of the present. »Memory work« is itself a form of interpretation that could be characterised as a contribution to identity creation. The other side of the same coin is *forgetting*⁶ of all kinds and origins. The material which both of these are made of is in this context *Memory* – an achievement that is (not necessarily in the Freudian sense) reached subconsciously: it cannot be directed by the subject.

Collective remembering and *cultural memory*, it seems – following on from the terminological thoughts above – the elementary condition for the constitution and the functioning of (national) ideologies and mythologies. Their potential forms to the outside reach from public celebrations with »national« character and state exhibitions of achievements (such as the world fair) via architectural, painting and sculpture commissions, press, public discourse and personal memory triggers to the seemingly private realm of autobiographical writings.

4 Cf. Assmann, Aleida: Zur Metaphorik der Erinnerung. Ein Rundgang durchs historische Museum der Imagination. In: Neue Horizonte 97/98: Gedächtnis und Erinnerung. Ed. by Ernst Peter Fischer. München: Piper 1998, pp. 111-164; Esposito, Elena: Soziales Vergessen. Formen und Medien des Gedächtnisses der Gesellschaft. With an epilogue by Jan Assmann, transl. by Alessandra Corti. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 2002.

5 Cf.: Bachelard, Gaston: Poetik des Raumes. Transl. by Kurt Leonard. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer 1982; Yates, Frances A.: Gedächtnis und Erinnern. Mnemonik von Aristoteles bis Shakespeare. Weinheim: VCH 2 1991 (Acta humaniora); Haverkamp, Anselm / Lachmann, Renate (Eds.): Gedächtniskunst. Rau – Bild – Schrift. Studien zur Mnemotechnik. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1991; Haverkamp, Anselm / Lachmann, Renate (Eds.): Memoria, Vergessen und Erinnern. München: Fink 1993 (Poetik und Hermeneutik 15).

6 Cf. Weinrich, Harald: Lethe. Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens. München: Beck 1997.

7 Cf. the ›Classic‹ Halbwichs, Maurice: Das kollektive Gedächtnis. With an introduction to the German edition by Heinz Maus. Transl. by Holde Lhoest-Offermann. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer 1985.

8 For new network theory, meaning a change of paradigm beyond the mere rhetorical use of the term ›network‹ with regard to questions of memory-functions, see: Barabási, Albert-László: Linked. The New Science of Networks. Cambridge/Mass.: Perseus 2002; and Manovich, Lev: The Language of New Media. Cambridge/Mass. et al. MIT Pr. 2001.

Collectives and individuals aim to constitute or construct their own history, to attain their own clearly identifiable contents, to design their own matrix and to keep this ›own‹ potentially (!) on view, meaning memorable and finally productive.

The question of media and their functionality in memory constructions is usually decided in stable, pre-constructed concepts of identity in the current discourse, while approaches of communication theory and the question of the materiality of media has slipped into the background. But ›memory‹ can never be called up exactly as it had been planned in advance: environments and systems – including social ones – do play a decisive role in the relevant moment of consumption of the pillars of memory.

The work of academics in this realm would consist of appropriately investigating the diverse categories and structures of artificial memory in the various textual markers and hence take up the challenge of comparing the diverse modes of memory production in different groups and to decode the diverse (competing) modes of development of traditions, which are relevant for the adoption and continuation of themes in one's own and others' history.

These media, particularly the ›optical-technological‹, have ›engraved‹ within them not only dominating ideologies and debates, but also traces of an ›Other‹, of differences and alterities, confrontations with the ›Other‹ and unresolved traumas. This is caused by a heterogeneity of cultures, which are already themselves, and even more so in their interaction, complex methods of forgetting, denying and remembering foreign and own elements.

It can hardly be denied that there is such a thing as ›stores‹; these – or rather, their ›contents‹ – are, however, to be viewed as a part of ›memory‹, as a result of interpretation or reconstruction and hence as a *process* – and as a semantic problem. In the end, it is about recognizing what is going on politically, aesthetically or socially. One cannot fully comprehend the formats and their triggers, when there is not a sharp enough differentiation between the (inaccessible, alleged, moreover in its structure hardly graspable) material and the process of its preparation. In this sense, useful terminology such as ›collective memory‹⁷, ought maybe to be reinvestigated with specific attention paid to its functionality (since from the view of the élite, it is about directed connectivity of the way individuals deal with the past). Collective identities and their alleged ›memories‹ are social constructs and are doled out in the form of associations.

Hence, the attempt to grasp ›memory‹ with metaphors of space alone will soon lead to the point, where the concept of the ›network‹ can help us out, both for linguistic-terminological regulations as well as for methodological approaches. Memory work then means the conscious, preferably well-organized (inter-)knitting of a new network, which will not necessarily be smaller, but more orderly.⁸

3. Ten Theses on Dealing with Media

1. McLuhan's proclamation that ›the medium is the message‹ was true already in 1962, when he proclaimed the end of the Gutenberg Galaxy, and it is in some way still true in 2003. Media transmit formatted information, but what they really tell and reveal at the same time are their own limitations – that is, if there really is such a thing as a medium in itself:⁹ Speaking against that is the fact that...
2. ...at the latest with the onset of the technological revolution around the beginning of the 19th century, we ought to stop speaking of media in the sense of individual phenomena with their specific effects, but it would be far more useful and insightful if we talked of media sets.¹⁰ This term could represent not only the mere addition or combination of media tactics, but rather a new form of systematic connection, which can also create new effects and different types of cultural techniques.
3. Computers and their internet or user surfaces are such media sets: altogether, all appearances around us that are shaped by media are defined by the conditions that arise out of this circumstance, be that the publication of a scientific essay or the enjoyment of a sitcom.
4. Production, distribution, and reception - the boundaries of which need to be drawn more clearly – are delimited (if there even remain any limits they could have stuck to). Producers receive, produce and distribute. Distributors receive and format contents, and thus produce themselves, receivers close the circle in which contents are caught, they absorb contents and pass them on, etc.

9 Cf. McLuhan, Marshall: Das Medium ist die Botschaft. Ed. and transl. by Martin Baltes et al. Dresden: Verl. der Kunst 2001 (Fundus-Bücher 154).

10 Cf. Kittler, Friedrich: Optische Medien. Berliner Vorlesung 1999. Berlin: Merve 2002.

11 Cf. the above-cited books by Barabási and Manovic.

5. The formatting processes (as well as their triggers) cannot be adequately understood without a sharp differentiation between the material, which is hardly perceptible in its structure, and the processes of its preparation.
6. According to the currently latest research on the complex of networks,¹¹ these are by no means randomized, but rather follow distinctly laid-out power laws – and can hence *per se* never be democratically structured. Here, at the very latest, networks, hubs and links fit into the idea of media sets.
7. At this point, we suddenly have to resort – to the great surprise of many – once again to the humanities, social and cultural sciences, since only they can analyze and speak about those aspects and spheres of interest which can only with great limitation be expressed in the natural sciences (barring a very few exceptions): power, capital and élites.
8. »Stores« are to be imagined flexibly, in the sense that the given medium of storage must change its content in the moment of being called up: not only medially but also related to the context of reception. It is particularly vital to consider not only the conditions of the »data carrier« but also the aspects of selection; (What was selected out of which choices for which mode of »storage«: in favor of which perspectives?).
9. The more people are connected via media and are hence active and move in the same media sets, i.e. the more crossover and alleged competition between areas that had hitherto been seen as separated occurs, the stronger will be the demand on capacities and the more intensive will be the background noise, which can itself be productive. We find its advantage in analysis: it is only made possible by background noise and disruption.
10. In future we will no longer be talking only about media sets, but also have to address links, nodes and channels, decentralized steering mechanisms, filters, noise, functional and damaged stores and disfunctionalities altogether.

4. Humanities and Cultural Sciences in the Net – Are We Allowed That?

It will be a long time yet before we have overcome the shock of the »two culture sciences«. Secretly, the distinction is still being made between »serious« and »objective« science on the one hand and on the other hand »non-serious« science, which has no contact with »reality« and is therefore understood as »subjective«.

The division between natural sciences and humanities is not always clear, but it appears ever more clear-cut with regard to the ever-increasing and intelligent use of new media, especially the internet, apparently confirming the claim that while the natural and social sciences are progressive, humanities and cultural studies are outdated. Of course this categorization is not very convincing and is not supported by any compelling factual evidence. Cultural Studies are not, have not been and will not be limited solely to the Humanities domain, but much rather find their distinguishing characteristic in the interdisciplinary crossover between humanities, social and even natural sciences.

The University of Vienna, for example, has recently decided to divide its faculties – by name and by competence – into the new combinations of »Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften« (»Humanities and Cultural Studies«) and »Human- und Sozialwissenschaften« (»Human and Social Sciences«). Admittedly, this categorization goes little further than the names: The focal point of Cultural Studies is not to be found in those parts of philology that do not strive beyond advanced studies of literature and linguistics, but rather in other disciplines. One could even go as far as saying, with some resignation, that the old discipline of national philology often doesn't even bother to acknowledge the accusation leveled at it that »Cultural Studies« are nothing more than advanced literary studies.

There are other problems with this separation of the old and the new humanities, beyond such »ideological« differences: These are of an institutional and medial nature. Research institutions and their researchers and students are, to a large extent, not immobile – not least because they find themselves confronted with an ever-regressing financing and prestige situation. However, they are in the deplorable situation that while there are in fact important widespread individual and small projects, they have to manage without any extensive international exchange of experience. Hence their results are only known within their respective narrow fields of expertise. The situation is observable at any university, but becomes even more appa-



rent when looking across borders. There is hardly any flow of information or an efficient, border-transcending form of publication available to interested researchers, whether they work independently or as part of an institution.

The pressure to publish (»Publish or perish!«) is a particularly harsh circumstance for the young generation of academics, as print costs are increasing everywhere, leading to a shortage of resources in academic publishing: hence, there is a drastic reduction in the opportunity for quick publishing projects. As long as it is intelligently used, the internet can offer solutions for these problems. Even if it is not quite a »savior«, it is nonetheless indicative of a type of paradigm shift, which so far only natural scientists seem to have recognized and made use of, having transferred a large part of their technical journals from print to the electronic domain. Recognizing new paradigms, the mere willingness to do so, even, and the subsequent implementation of them, represents a change of the intellectual context.

Students of Humanities and Cultural Studies, on the other hand, still often regard internet publication as publications of »second (i.e. inferior) rank«: They would not have great value when cited in an application. The very democratic potential of the internet – its democracy of production, the idea that everyone can put anything online and then sell it as a publication, without any article ever having been appraised, edited or fine-tuned by professionals and publishers – often relegate any genuine Internet publication to the realm of the arbitrary and inferior.

Again, we find innovation-wary criticisms and doubts: the internet platform is always faced with suspicious concern at the manipulability of the on-screen text. The ubiquitous, prevailing feeling of insecurity whether one is looking at an original or an arbitrarily modified version of a text has as yet hardly been outweighed by the advantages of virtual texts. Any critical look at the existing contents of digital libraries (or rather collections of texts), reveals that here the situation is no different. Indeed, every philologist knows that this insecurity can also be applied to many print publications, because here, too, every new, revised or critical edition changes the perception of a text. As far as precision and »scientific integrity« are concerned, secondary authors, under pressure from increasing stockpiles of knowledge, make fewer and fewer references to the original text, and instead chose far too often to cite a statement from another secondary author. There is no difference between reproduction of a text by copying it by hand, by taking a book to a copy shop or pressing buttons on a computer beyond the physical activity - which is hardly a measure of hard work or precision. Admittedly, it cannot be denied that the »theft of intellectual property« has become much easier through the ability to quickly copy electronic data, as opposed to the longer processes involved in copying a »conventional« book. However, the difference in security gained from holding a tangible, weighable book in one's hand as opposed to a CD or a virtual text is a slight, not a fundamental one.

Peter Plener, born 1968, studied German literature and language and history in Vienna. Reader at the German literature and language institute at the University of Vienna since 1993, at the German Inst. at the ELTE Univ. in Budapest from 1993-1997. 1998-1999 civil service at the Documentary Archive of Austrian Resistance. He attained his PhD from the Univ. of Vienna in 1999. 1999-2000 Project Manager at EDVg and t-systems. Since 2001 he has been editor in charge of the Internet platform *Kakanien revisited*. 2001-2003 involved in the FWF-Project 14727, currently guest lecturer at ELTE Univ. in Budapest. He has been a member of the Working group *Cultural Studies* at the University of Vienna since 2002.
Contact: peter.plener@kakanien.ac.at