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Passion and Exposure: New Paradoxes of the Actor

Masculin-Féminin

In Jean-Luc Godard's Masculin-Féminin (1966), a film made up of »15 precise actions«, as its subtitle asserts, the actor Jean-Pierre Léaud, who plays the budding writer Paul, waits in an austere cloak-room for the young woman who is to become his lover. Paul is aware of his fragile sensuality to which the young woman is so strongly attracted that her hesitation seems coquettish. And he is aware of himself as a fictional figure which he at once both plays and presents. But his appeal does not stem from the character he portrays, it emanates from himself as a corporeal presence. Love, which always appears unbidden, is as uncanny as the success of seduction is uncontrollable, and cannot be understood by reflection. Like happiness, it is an inter-ruption of the fleeting moment, a blink of the eye, an occurrence that can at best be occasioned. The viewer recognizes the actor as an instable element because of this doubling of the performance within the performance[1] which marks the difference between the theatrical play of the performance and the real game of the sexes. This instability comprises the gap which—like the Lacanian *objet petit a* that can never be completely symbolized—marks the difference separating reality from fiction. We see in the actor first and foremost the *figure* he embodies—the writer—who is someone different from his self, in order to *enter* a seduction scene. At the same time we see in him the person *he himself is, who is experiencing the same as the figure he portrays*, which he therefore annuls. Is the staged ensnaring game of desire to be mistaken for the passion that we are exposed

385

to and that we receive? What happens when the desire that we only feign coincides exactly with the passion awakened in our own bodies? Desire retains an inscrutable, secret element, bottom and bottomless abyss of the longing that can never be only simulated.

This scene reveals a paradox which in this case is transposed onto the actor himself and which Godard seeks to restage and reproduce in the medium of film. Godard's ploy is that the actor not only bodily experiences that which he plays—a motif that looks back on a long history in the arts, particularly in literature and the opera—[2] but that the paradox recurs within the film, which leaves open whether it will double the budding drama of love with increasing refinement or only document it.

The *Paradox of the Actor* has been applied to theater alone since Denis Diderot's times. Godard's variation projects it onto film, thus multiplying undecidability due to the specific characteristic of the medium, because film continuously poses the question of *what it is that I see*. In fact, from the very beginning film was linked with enhanced visibility, concurrent with a never-before-seen manifestation of the human body. At the same time, what is seen cannot be doubted. This is a characteristic film shares with photography. We see not only the inhibition of the person afflicted, we are aware of his cautious movements, his insecurity vis-à-vis the woman; we feel with him and yet every second we know that the setting is staged, the narrative carefully constructed; we are aware of the apparatus and the editing which, as Walter Benjamin puts it »has penetrated so deeply into reality that a pure view of that reality, free of the foreign body of equipment, is the result of a special procedure—namely the shooting by the specially adjusted photographic device and the assembly of that shot with others of the same kind« (Benjamin 2008: 35). The »apparatus-free aspect of reality« has therefore become impossible and its »view« (*Anblick*) the »Blue Flower in the land of technology« (Benjamin 2010: 28).[3] Yet Godard nevertheless manages to add a further twist, because the real in the artificial and the artificial in the real mirror one another in such a way that the surety of the performance, in particular because it is played on the level of desire, requires the body as its accomplice and therefore can never be mastered. It begins, as it were, to flicker.

The Paradox and Mediality of the Actor

Most theories of the actor are about this paradox. It reflects the precarious existence of all portrayals, caught between being and seeming, the role and reality, figuration and embodiment or presence and

re-presentation. The actor shares this paradox with the image, the narrative, and the performative; in all of these forms of representation, the rupture, the difference between what they *are* and what they *show* or *enact* is a constitutive element. Clearly this aporetic structure applies to the art of acting as well, as long as it is about pretense, the »as if« of disguise. Since antiquity its emblem has been the long robe, cothurnus, and mask of the tragic figure which simultaneously designated and annulled its precarious status. All of these devices exhibit the same twofold structure of concealing and revealing, or transparency and opacity, which can be attributed to media as well, or which act as the very paradigms of media. In this way a homology ensues between acting and its properties such as the veil, the scenery or the praxis of masquerade and the practices of mediation which are realized to the same extent in which they negate themselves.[4] And just as they consist of passageways—per-(*dia*)meations or transitions that situate themselves, as it were, »in reality« in a simultaneous act of demarcation and denial—so too do the instruments of the theatrical thrive on transitions that take place *in* and *with* these objects.[5] So too can we see the actor as a transitional figure, neither »here« nor »there«, locatable neither wholly within the imaginary, nor entirely within the body that opens itself to the gaze. Rather he occupies a risky interstice, an ambiguity or indeterminateness which, like mediality itself, refuses to be localized precisely and which he must live through (*diazin*) or perambulate (*diabainein*) ever anew, because it is this passage that first act-uates the mutation (*metabolé*) or transitionality (*Übergänglichkeit*). Perhaps one should rather say »throws across« (*dia-bolé*) retaining all associations of crossing and of the diabolical (*dia-ballein*), of transmutation and shifting as well as the confusion of literally strewing falsity and deception. »Spirit the actor has, but little conscience (…)« Friedrich Nietzsche therefore wrote, »Tomorrow he will have a new belief and the day after tomorrow an even newer one. He has hasty senses (…) and a fickle ability to scent« (2006: 37).

The caprice and the paradox of the actor—analogous to the aporias of media—reveal the confusion and inauthenticity of mimesis which Plato discredited and debased ontologically. The discourse of suspicion meets its chronic non-identity, passed on to the mimes, the personification of mimesis that holds masks and funnel as sites of concealing/revealing faciality and veiled/unveiled vocality. But we should not forget that in antiquity, theater began as one of the religious rites of Dionysus and thus was part of those rituals that celebrated the non-difference of humans and animals in order to expose the split or »sundered« (*dia-ballein*) state of human existence caught between culture and nature. The exemplary alteration

performed through (*dia*) this enactment concerned in particular the actor's adaptation of the animal, which at the same time made him a holy horned one (*Geweihten*), adorned with the signs of the exception, the markings that both cross and »mark« or signify his body. His holy insignia were, aside from the elements of his outfit such as cloak and mask, the scene itself, the actual *skené*, the site of the altar and the site of the staging of humans' prototypical lapse between fate (*tyché*) and frenzy (*hubris*). This is why Heiner Müller directly correlated theater and death: The urgency of mime and mimesis, like that of all living things, comes from death: »The core of theater is metamorphosis. Death. And everyone is afraid of this last metamorphosis (...) It's the actor's fear and the audience's fear. Theater's distinguishing feature is (…) the presence of potential death« (Kluge 1996: 95). The theatrical act is thus simultaneously the living out and reflection of life. The transformation that chains actor and audience to one another is—via (*dia*) the distance it allows—both symbol and means of coping with this last transformation. It is also reminiscent of the archetype of the passage into the realm of the dead, and since the elderly ferryman Charon at the helm of his skiff is the medium of this transfer, he serves like no other as a metaphor for the actor (ibid.: 176). All performance, all portrayals, all mimesis, participates in this passage; its messengers and transmitters, *mime*, are like ferrymen who, each time anew, must brave the risky journey, taking on the task and exposing themselves to it. Plato's misjudgment was to denigrate this function of acting and mimesis. It affects humanity as regards our dependence on media—the imperative of the portrayal and its instruments, mirroring, reflectivity, can be seen as the progeny and representatives of the *mime*—and thus as regards the insurmountability of mediation with respect to the divine ideals that have no need of being mediated and are the measure of the *theoria* which, through the power of reason, participates in the immediacy of its »show«, while the *theatron* attempts only its indirect invocation.

Solidifications: Rational Reflexivity and Media Reflexivity

The body marks the real as surplus that cannot be removed from the playing field. It is the performance's breaking point at which—as in Masculin-Féminin—the performance is no longer play—at which, consequently, instability becomes visible. The body in its negativity (regarding the role) is, as it were, the ante—it is at stake and thus remains fragile, vulnerable, literally unbearable. Although the topos of the »paradox of the actor« traces back to Diderot, since then it has

been shifted, built upon, reinterpreted, and misunderstood count-
less times.[6] According to Diderot the paradox emerges not so much,
as has often been claimed, as a result of the ambiguity between the
performance and the *persona*, which the body must bear and deliver,
but rather in the necessity of rationalization, the control of affect in
order to create a distance. Illusion, impersonation, Diderot says, is
all the more believable and impressive the cooler and more sober it
is acted out. It is therefore not the »mask« and the »visage« that are
bound in irresolvable contradiction[7] and confuse the performance
ever anew, making it literally un-bearable for the actor, but the dif-
ference between sovereignty on the one hand and authenticity or
»being one's self« on the other hand. The actor comes closer to his
»character« the *less* he is moved by his passions. »Nature« is only
talent, it supports the ability to perform, but is counterproductive
when it is duplicated and »played«. A great actor, says Diderot, »must
have a deal of judgment. He must have in himself an unmoved and
disinterested onlooker. He must have, consequently, penetration and
no sensibility. (…) It is the head, not the heart, that works in and
for him« (1883: 7–8, 14). [8] Therefore, following Diderot, the para-
dox of otherness, the difference between presence and *re-praesentio*
and the removal of the media is not found in the performance itself
(Mersch 2010a: 133ff.), but in the narrative which rings »truer« the
more reflectively it is performed. To put it another way, the actor is
a *mime*, a performer, who must subject him or herself to the rules of
the performance, which Diderot, as befits the Enlightenment, sees as
rationale.

Diderot's theory of the actor is thus first and foremost a the-
ory of art and artistry, the *action* of which is bound to reflectivity.
It stems from—and in this Diderot is opposing in particular the
seventeenth century's aesthetics of affect—the ability to reason,
which must always resist succumbing to the physical connotations
of the emotions. Aesthetics are thus an expression of knowledge.
This model, which obeys the pathos of rationalism and postulates a
corresponding norm, became popular not only in classic theater—
immediately Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's »Rules for Actors«
(1927) spring to mind—but also later in Bertolt Brecht's epic the-
ater. Goethe, whose maxims refer mostly to language, to the form of
recitation and declamation, explicitly states that »the reciter, to be
sure, follows with the voice the ideas of the poet and the impression
which is made on him by the mild or horrible, pleasing or displeas-
ing subject; (…), but (…) he does not disown his nature, his indi-
viduality« (rule 19). Only in »declamation or heightened recitation«
must the actor »leave [his] inborn character, disavow [his] nature,
and place [himself] wholly in the attitude and mood of him whose

389

role [he] declaim[s]« (rule 20): »First, the player must reflect that he must not only imitate Nature, but must also present her ideally (…)« (rule 35); »If picturing gestures must be used let them appear unintentional« (rule 55). Brecht perhaps turned this idea around in his distancing effect, but in this way he brings it to a peak. The art of acting follows the explicit gesture that knows it is a gesture and shows itself to be so. Reflection and revelation become the main criteria of the *theatron*, the exposition, but Brecht refers not to rational distance, but to the reflexivity of the medium itself: it is theater and its machinery of illusions, of which the actor is one, that must become transparent through performance (Heeg 2000). This transparency—through *Verfremdung* (defamiliarization)—is itself a function of disillusionment that indirectly rationalizes the theatrical anew. The effect which it teaches is the rupture of mimesis through (*dia*) the self-distancing of the *performare*. It thus teaches a new economy of seeing. It does not release the actor from his paradox, as Brecht suspected, but only solidifies it, because at the same time it confronts him with the task of being possessed by and obsessed with the figure and simultaneously shedding the *passio* of this state. He *is* and *is not* that which he is. The duplicity of the mimetic is imposed upon him to the same extent to which it transmogrifies; it is sublated in the Hegelian sense and made conscious.

Brecht's mistake however is that the dialectic he calls upon to revolutionize theater was first put in the service of the movement of the concept (Hegel), the doctrine of which consisted precisely of that ideality of self-reflection that seeks to eradicate, step by step, any admixture of »impure« materiality (Mersch 2002: 133 ff.). He thus remained true to the principles of the Enlightenment while making them political, because Enlightenment—almost as a development of the Platonic *ethos*—that attempts to free theater from its inherent deception and seductiveness ignores the ambivalent mediality of the actor. The actor cannot escape his schizophrenic corporeality, which he takes on only to reject more forcefully. It was therefore only consistent when during the same period Antonin Artaud, or later Jerzy Grotowski, countered the sobriety of epic theater with the dissipation of »expression«. In the latter the body becomes the arena of the insolvable conflict between the flesh and symbolic conditioning.[9] Simply making the paradox conscious does nothing to resolve it; rather we are confronted with *exstatis*, a standing outside oneself that is linked to the being inside oneself of ardency. This state drives the actor into a frenzy, she is unable to detach herself from herself. The body can be neither governed nor escaped; it persists and perhaps »interferes« or »falls out of line«. The theater of distance is therefore confronted equally with

the impossibility of eradicating the body and with its undistanced character, its literal obscenity (*obscenus*). Not to be taken out of the performance, it marks the spot at which it turns, where it—as in MASCULIN-FÉMININ—exposes its fragility or where its intractability breaks out, disclosing its inaccessible and indomitable nature.

The Indestructibility and Antecedence of the Body

When we speak of corporeality we mean the whole body, but in particular the face, gestures, and the voice; those sites of human presence that divulge possession. Corporeality contains a moment of auratization.[10] To a great measure it shows the traces of the powerlessness that reveals our principal passivity. Diderot declared the body to be an arsenal of »symbols« (Diderot 1883: 5), and yet nothing adheres to it without simultaneously thwarting that which it tries to ex-press. The body cannot be possessed, it is always the Other, a strangeness or alterity that we ourselves are and through (*dia*) which it signifies both enablement and recusance.[11] For this reason corporeality is always the site of *passio*, not desire alone, but at the same time an alienating incidental passivity (*Mitgängigkeit*) that continuously exposes itself and simultaneously keeps itself in reserve. The »exposition« of an actor therefore means first and foremost the »ex-», the necessity of stepping outside of oneself, a displacement which is always »more« and »different« from an »affect« or »expression« (*ex-pressio*). Rather it is an »exposure« that does not own itself, but instead literally exhausts itself »before the eyes« of others. Refuting Diderot, the actor never merges completely with his role. To say he em-bodies a figure, a character is trite, more interesting is the question of the measure to which he does not embody it, the extent to which every attempt at embodiment must fail, because the corporeality of the body is essential to every figuration and thus represents an ineradicable remnant that imposes itself on the performance to the same extent to which it undermines and disrupts the same.[20] The body is thus the prerequisite that was always there before the performance and is therefore its basis, its dis-enchantment and its surplus. It signifies, one could also say, the Lacanian »real« that can be experienced only in trauma and at the same time marks, as he says in *Seminar XI*, »an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us«. And further: »The real is beyond (…) the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs (…)«—it lies behind the net of the signifiers (Lacan 1977: 53–54, passim). This means, as Lacan says elsewhere, that it »always lies on the edge of our conceptual elaborations, which we are always thinking about, which we sometimes speak of, and which, strictly

391

speaking, we can't grasp, and which is nonetheless there, don't forget it—I talk about the symbolic, the imaginary, but there is also the real« (Lacan 1991: 96).

In conjunction with the body of the actor, the key element is the duality of negativity and the inability to negate this body (Mersch 2010a: 97, 113 ff.). The double negative implies an affirmative: The staidness of something that we can neither grasp with symbols nor overlook performatively. The body irritates, it intervenes naughtily in our intentions and processes, turns them around and rejects every attempt at analytical understanding. It is an experience of resistance (*Widerfahrung*). It is thus a *passio* within the *actio*, an action through (*dia*) which passion emerges as well as the revocation of the actor as a subject executing an act. If modern subjectivity asserts itself as someone who acts, as self-assured will based on choices and decisions and the actor attempts to assert himself as the same by determining his role, he is at the same time unable to tame his »nature«; rather he obeys its condition of mediality which rejects all commensurate stateliness. The will is thus articulated though a mediality that has dispensed with the will. Thus, while the art of acting presumes subjectivity, at the same time it revokes what it has called upon. It is thus a sovereignty which both, qua the body, eludes and repeatedly dissipates the same. In fact, the dominance of reason demanded by Diderot thus becomes its own enemy: too much rationality prevents the presence of the figure and works against the success of the performance. But making *intentio* the *sine qua non* of every performance proves to be equally impossible. Intention aims in this case at *mimesis*, the perfection of *re-prasentatio*, which film as a technology can realize through repetition, but at the same moment subverts through its mediality. This is where the paradox of the actor can be seen: the dependence on mediality concurrent with its unavailability—and not in the illusion of mimesis, the equally calculated and emotionless evocation of feeling.[13]

392 Diderot's paradox is in the end an amplification of Platonism—the expulsion of the mimes from the court of truth, which he has occupied as his exceptionalism—whereby in conjunction with the structure of the media, the paradox must be turned around and exposed in its negativity. The way in which actor and medium act analogously creates the aporias of the mediation of its actual inscrutability—the literal im/possible communication of, for example, the completely inextricable entanglement of *actio* and *passio*. To put it another way, *passio* in *actio*, *actio* through (*dia*) *passio*, the mutual entanglements of »in« and »through« (*dia*) are the key markers of the paradox. They increase the paradoxes of actors from Diderot's times to the facets of the actor's paradox existence, to the extent

that it must be taken on and worked through in each act. At the same time, this creates a strange reversal: it is success which astonishes. Non-actors demonstrate this fact: *as* actors they behave so self-consciously that their consciousness gets in the way and their performance is transformed into »pure too-little« as Rainer Maria Rilke puts it in his »Fifth Duino Elegy«. In return, the riddle of acting—as of every performance—is that its success is characterized by the opposite: the perplexity of non-knowing because the »laborious nowhere« the »unsayable spot« as Rilke continues »where the difficult calculation becomes numberless and resolved«, is a happening (*Ereignung*) that cannot be made conscious (Rilke 2009: 33). In the act of exposure, the uncanniness of mimesis happens. The mime, both *homo ludens* and *animal symbolicum*—alongside performance or embodiment—is a paradox in and of itself. The ambiguity which the actor suffers from also proves to be constitutive for his performance; it is at the same time his signature and the signature of the symbolic.

Phenomenon and Phenomenology of the Actor

Phenomenological theories in particular have corrected Diderot on this point. Especially Maurice Merlau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and —from a more strictly anthropological viewpoint—Helmuth Plessner have focused not on the difference between emotion and rationality, or art, illusion, and reflexivity, but on the split within the actor: the division of *persona* and corporeality as a schizophrenic doubling that people meet inside themselves. This is illustrated particularly well in the ideas Sartre explores in *The Family Idiot* (1987), his study on Gustav Flaubert's childhood. The second volume of this monumental study, entitled »From Imaginary Child to Actor«, centers around this forced schizophrenia (ibid.: 119–195). Sartre sees acting as estrangement, defamiliarization grounded in tradition, a kind of eccentricity: »[I]t is not me I am playing«, Sartre writes, taking on the actor's role, »I am taking the role of another who does not exist, or if he exists, is not me (…) [A]nd if by chance I become my own actor, I am not portraying myself, but only a caricature of myself. (…): The unreal is frankly unmasked in its unreality and is presented at first as such« (ibid.: 134–135). Therefore to play a role, to take it on and to adopt it is to wear a mask that is *necessarily* split: »[A] third person singular is playing himself in the first person, a He saying »I« (ibid.: 121). We are thus confronted with two people, who do not oscillate as a kind of reversible figure, but rather they are welded to one another through the mediality of mimesis. One character shows itself in another, both

are intertwined and cannot be untangled. This corresponds exactly to that which we have called the »*exstatis*« of the actor: a state of being at the same time inside and outside of oneself. Sartre adds a *third* person to these two, namely the second person singular or plural, the *you* of the audience *for* whom he plays and spends himself and *in front of* whom he presents and exposes himself; however in such a way that he is first instituted through his public, whose introjection he is. For an actor only counts as such when he is recognized as such. Worth, in his case, is based on collective affirmation, which is as fickle as public opinion. Therefore no actor invents himself as the *persona* that he is, or believes he is. Rather he himself is invented as the persona that he plays to the extent to which the audience gives him the power to be this *persona*. He is therefore plagued not only by the role that »alters him (*transponare*) and is therefore abhorrent«, but also by his audience, which celebrates him and lifts him up, or rejects and topples him. He is invested with the real power of fictionalization, which according to Sartre is nothing other than the creation of an imaginary figure—which of course needs to be sanctioned or substantiated as such. At every moment his attempts are therefore haunted by the fragility of failure; the blemish of estrangement or alienation that the actor owns as his own remains precarious, because it invokes the danger of suddenly becoming ludicrous.

This also means however that the actor is not a pre-made character, not a part in the play, not a mechanical doll or mockup of a script, and not the marionette of an author who uses him by providing the template. Rather he must—this is the fate of mimesis—bring his paradoxality to life in each individual scene anew so that others can validate its successful or unsuccessful attempt at equilibrium, at resolving the tension between alienation and overacting. In fact this drama of triplicity is mirrored according to Sartre by a second drama that one could call the »triplicity of embodiment« and which exhibits the structure and logic of the performance. For the actor embodies a »being«, to continue with Sartre, whose reality »is to play roles«, whereby this simultaneous derealization and unrealization contains an unpredictable element (ibid.: 130, 131 ff.). The difficulty of acting is namely, in a kind of inverted Münchhausen syndrome, to bring one's self into this process, to introject the split that must be undertaken and incorporate it, thereby simultaneously using up one's own fundament. Sartre refers explicitly to the reality of the actor, his voice, his stature—the actor, he says, »gives himself away« to the role (ibid.: 137)—but only to, in this act of embodiment, both produce the imaginary to the extent to which he destroys himself as a person. Every evening he will have to, as Sartre puts it, »recapture the loss of his being«—and it is this act

of recapturing, of repetition, that comprises his madness, his true obsession (ibid.: 131).

However Sartre's elaborations on the inner logic of the paradox remain in the realm of the imaginary, and thus within the fictionality of the figure. He is interested in portraying the problem of the portrayed, in the reference rather than in its mediality. For the actor is doubly dependent: he is at the mercy of the normativity of the character, which he obeys, and at the mercy of the audience's adoration and aversion. His public's favor is his dishonor—the peak of humiliation is the audience's pity, its alms. In this way he recapitulates a topos that held a firm foothold into the dawn of modernity at the turn of the century and that was first consecrated by Charles Baudelaire in his prose poem »The Old Clown«. Baudelaire paints an allegorical picture of, as he says, the unhappy and repulsive »old writer«, a »poet without friends, without family, without children, degraded by poverty and the ingratitude of the public, and to whose booth the fickle world no longer cares to come« (1970: 27). Sartre paints the same image of the actor and turns him into a slave of the triangulation of *persona*, figure, and audience through which (*dia*) the portrayal that he represents is first formed. In contrast to Diderot, Sartre sees all acting as bound *to* the body, entangled *in* his corporeality and given power *through* the body, but this entanglement and empowerment is based in triangulation. The actor, with his body, lends something which no body owns, but this »gift« exists only as long as it is accepted and substantiated by the audience. But the triangulation of the body of the actor is also constituted as *symbolic*. Sartre's assumption of triplicity reveals his discourse as understanding mimesis as primordial symbolization, and thus a reconstruction of the actor as a *sign*. The *persona* thus truly becomes a *persona*, a mask behind the person, the visage. Corporeality as something that can be experienced, grasped or lived through is literally revoked. The character, the mask, the symbol always references an Other. Even if the actor plays himself and thus duplicates himself, when his masquerade ends and the act of instituting becomes visible, he still embodies a figure, a symbolization that has entered into the most intimate complicity with his own body.

395

Indomitability and Ex-istence

Naturally it is impossible to escape the symbolic. The art of acting is first and foremost the art of portrayal and every portrayal is also an act of symbolization. But it is just as impossible to escape, as regards mediality in its state of negativity, the non-symbolic. Although the

triangulation always references a primary symbolization, at the
same time there is a *fourth* element: the indomitability of conditions
and their materiality; on the one hand, corporeality as »being«, on
the other the ability to grasp the body (*Habhaftbarkeit*), following
Helmuth Plessner's famous differentiation between having a body
(*Körper-haben*) and being a physical entity (*Leib-sein*). As long as we
see the relation of the actor to his body as an act of alienation and
make him the object of the audience—who accepts and rejects him
as an actor in equal measure—we remain wholly in the realm of the
symbolic and its reception. The body of the actor is then limited to
a sublimation that is subject to the ordering of the semiotic triangle
and denies the moment of irreducibility of his materiality. But in
fact, the reality of the cultural can never be grasped by means of this
semiotic triplicity. There is always something left over that does not
obey the symbolization and concurrently the act of embodiment; it
is the condition of the possibility of the embodiment itself, the tran-
scendentality of physicality, which first gives the symbolization its
ex-istence (Mersch 2010a: 133 ff.).The figure—the symbol—is para-
doxical in its very structure, or, to be more exact, it is permeated by
a chiasmus with multiple folds which divides the media in horizontal
and vertical lines (ibid.:121). Thus a gateway, a passage is added to the
symbolic which both divides it and ensures it a position in the world,
the presence or »*exstasis*« of which (the »ex« in »ex-istence«) cannot
be spelled out again on the symbolic plane. The passage, the process
of »realization« in its literal sense does not mean surmounting one
body in order to pass to another by means of a figuration. There is
no transcendental »meta« or jump from a *praesentia in absentia* to
an *absentia in praesentia* that is therefore inherent to the symbolic.
Neither is it the magic of transference—with all the psychoanalyti-
cal baggage attached to the term—that rules the relationship of the
actor and the audience. Rather it is the accomplishment of a »per-
corporeation«, an act of mediation in the sense of *dia* as intimated
above; the »per« of a performance. Mediality thus reproduces itself
as an inexhaustible series of media practices, innumerable in their
applications and modulations. Their only limits are the limits of the
body. This also means that the actor is not a body who »fills« a role,
but the role first takes on form through (*dia*) him, through (*dia*) his
practices, just as the power of their performativity allows the figure,
as a figure, to take on a face and thus also a presence.

However, here we touch on theoretical considerations of the
concept of mediality that cannot be investigated further within the
scope of this article. The decisive point is that the actor cannot sim-
ply be described as a character whose *imaginary being* he creates,
nor as a figure that develops in the context of a narration. He is first

and foremost a *performance* with all attributes of an »event of postu-
lation«. It is a presence and structure that borrows from responsivity
and the requisite of which is the body and its relationship to alterity.
The *persona* of the actor is a *persona* that has gone through (*dia*) the
body: the *diastase* of an embodiment and embodiment as *diasta-
sis* that includes performativity and responsivity in equal measure.
At the same time, it calls up negativity and non-realization which
makes the situation before the performance, before the play—and
this applies of course to artistic performances and movies alike—
both an aesthetic and an ethical situation. Beyond the symbolic, the
relation to the other becomes important. It goes—and this is key
to acting—through (*dia*) the body. In this context Plessner linked
performance overall to human beings' fundamental mimetic ability.
That which is expressed in acting is a general human asset shared
by all people, albeit in exaggerated or distilled form. Plessner was
examining this asset less from the perspective of arts and aesthet-
ics and more from the perspective of dialogue and the relation-
ship to others. He devoted a series of short essays to the actor from
an anthropological perspective. Most important is *Anthropologie
des Schauspielers* (Anthropology of the Actor) from 1948 (1979)
and more specifically in *Deutung des mimetischen Ausdrucks*
(Interpretation of the Mimetic Expression) as well as, once more in
1961 (1966), in *Der imitatorische Akt* (The Imitative Act). Plessner—
similar to Maurice Merlau-Ponty and later Bernhard Waldenfels—
points especially towards the dimension of »eccentric positionality«
as a behavior open to the world and to imitation as an idea useful
for a theory of the actor (1979: 173). »People have a monopoly on
imitation«, *Der imitatorische Akt* begins (1966: 173). Like mime-
sis, the imitative act is a complex phenomenon that runs the gamut
from childish copying to caricature, to the *imiatio Christi*, spiritual
succession in a religious sense. Reflexivity and dialogicity are both
constitutive elements of imitation. Most importantly however, as
Plessner discovered, imitation is a process of translation, whereby
for the actor this act of translation is an act of embodiment (1966:
173). Once again we touch on a much broader discussion of media,
in that the concepts of »translation« or »transference« as defined
by Benjamin have dominated debates on the philosophy of media
for decades (Benjamin 1996a, 1996b; Tholen 2002). Here too an
exploration of the consequences would go beyond the scope of this
work. Most interesting for us is that for Plessner, the act of transla-
tion in acting took place not so much through speech, visualization,
etc, but mostly through (*dia*) the body which, as a medium, always
includes both a relationship »to itself and to the others« (Plessner
1966: 177). To put it another way, physicality and the experience

of alterity have a correlative relationship. The body exposes itself, it allows another to develop, makes the other appear *while showing itself*; by presenting others, pausing and displaying itself *to* others.

Physicality and Alterity

My argumentation has now reached a decisive turning point. Obviously it is not enough to stress the *art* of performance in acting, or the talent for impulsive transformation (*Anverwandlung*) through which (*dia*) a *persona* turns herself into another, or the process of triangulation that proves mimesis to be a primordial symbolization. Neither is it sufficient to look at the body as the medium of this symbolization, validated as such by the other. Rather this mediation always takes place *for* a glance, *for* others, and as an elementary means of *being-for-others* that binds humans to alterity. Acting is one of many possible variants. This alterity is characterized by the simultaneity of withdrawal and conjunction, which always also comprises a disjunction. The reason for this is that it is the body that mediates acting *as* acting, that allows us to see and enjoy the imitative act *as* such, and there would be no understanding if the portrayal did not go through (*dia*) the body of the actor and he, through (*dia*) his abilities, presented us with a mirror of our own corporeality. Christiane Voss speaks of the relationship of the audience and its emotions as a »surrogate relationship«;[14] but this could be said of the actor as well, in that his embodiment borrows a body that must touch ours to first become clear *as* such, that is as a figure or role. And if I repeatedly stress the prepositional relation of »through« in the sense of *dia*, I do so in the main to underline its *performative nature*. The basis of this disposition is in materiality and practices that first manifest its fictionalization: voice, movements, gestures, masks, make-up or costumes. These elements invent a secondary, symbolic body through (*dia*) a primary body and invest the former with power. But it is the primary body that, through the sound of its voice, the singular qualities of its movements, and the expressiveness of its gestures, not only contributes the respective meanings of these characteristics, but also guarantees intensity and forcefulness and, through (*dia*) them, bestows believability. It is not the symbolic that makes acting interesting, but the event of transference by means of a presence.

Plessner only intimates this. He too sees acting as an art of the imagination, he interprets the diversion—as does Diderot—beginning with the *image* (Plessner 1979: 211 ff.) and thus prolongs the stereotypical discussion of reading acting either from its language or imagery. Furthermore, Plessner remains mostly in the realm of

the symbolic when he describes the actor's body as »covered« by the figure or role in order to reformulate the paradox of the actor in this way (ibid.: 205). However, siting the paradox *in* the body, the transitory physique, gives it another quality that already anticipates the moment of alterity. »People detach themselves from themselves, transform themselves into others. They play another Being«, Plessner writes in *Anthropologie des Schauspielers*. They play this being for others, not just to communicate something about themselves, but to use their selves to show something that applies equally to others. Acting has a kind of exemplary element that allows identification whereby for the actor, Plessner continues, »the support of the role, in which he can develop his individuality and in which it at the same time disappears« is decisive, because it requires that all »metamorphosis« be »carried by the personality« (ibid.: 205, 206 passim). As in Sartre we are confronted with a division, in this case however a split of the body in order to form a relationship to others: »He is his own means, that is to say he splits himself in himself« (ibid.: 209). However Plessner—completely in keeping with the difference between body (*Körper*) and physical entity (*Leib*)—insists on the simultaneity of mediatedness and immediacy: »He is only when he has himself« (ibid.: 210). If the two are sundered, the result is estrangement or incomprehension.

Understood correctly, Plessner is thus speaking not only of an *actio*—or of a combination of *actio* and *passio*—but always also of an *interactio*. Because mimetic ability is anchored in the body from an anthropological perspective, because through (*dia*) this shared capacity, corporeality is reflected as a mirroring in others, others recognize the effect of acting in their own abilities and find it again in their own bodies. »(W)ould humans be able to recognize in a figure performed for them a side of themselves, their own possibilities or a person in light of an idea (…) if they did not already naturally have ›something of‹ an actor in themselves?« Plessner therefore asks in *Anthropologie des Schauspielers*: »Must he not in this respect already be that to which he makes himself? Does the actor not reveal (…) a particular respect of the human configuration?« (ibid.: 211) This idea, it can be said, is the main thesis of his work: No acting would be comprehensible if it were not already in us, given us as our ownmost possibility through which (*dia*) we are able to position ourselves as regards the transitions or metamorphoses that are presented to us. The body is sharing (*partage* according to Jean-Luc Nancy). This is why dolls are amusing, because as caricatures of recognition they allow, through exaggeration, shared being to become a reflexive act; this is also why films irritate us that—by means of graphic embellishment or digital ani-

399

mation—transcend corporeal dimensions. They create a distance that rejects us and does not clarify the relationship we can have to that which we see. This is the site at which the true volatility of the ethical relationship *in face of* the image can be seen, the attractions of the visible and the gaze that will penetrate us, the betrayal of corporeality and the manifestation of its uniqueness; in short, the singularity of the other that strikes us or attracts us. Irritation can also of course be a means of eliciting reflection, as art proves, just as distances are not per se precarious, because, as Plessner adds, when the real person disappears, the distances grow, but they can also be played with. Instabilities appear only where hybridization generates indecidabilities, where the digital programming of avatars is tied to a misguided realism and we, *without consideration,* do what we wish with it—going as far as cruelty and the distortion of all familiar characteristics of *humanitas*. In this case, the experience of self and other and the manifold threads tying together performativity and responsively systematically come apart.

The Question of Cinema

This calls for reposing the question of identification, which also experiences a shift. The so-called identification of the audience member with the actor, recognizing him as a doppelgänger, has less to do with the level of the symbolic and more with the intimate connection of the body and alterity. To see an actor act is not to want to be like him or her; we do not even identify with his or her role or with the position taken in the narrative. What the actor presents is not an imaginary landscape in which we would also like to be situated, because it is not the representation of a character that captivates us. Neither are we enthralled by similarities or adaptation. Rather, identification means awakening to an other who acts out *my* possible paths *through* himself, who consequently does something I, in principle, could also do, and who only embodies this because he or she is also capable of doing so. We bestow our own monstrosity upon the actor; we recognize in him or her the passion that enflames *us*, the desperation that *we* are tormented by, the wound inscribed in *our* bodies. Like all art, acting—whether on stage in a theater or as a performance or projection in the movies—performs an epistemological function. It is, similarly, a knowledge medium in its own right, though (*dia*) it we understand, as Plessner writes »human life (…) as embodiment« (Plessner 1979: 215). To avoid misunderstanding here: this does not mean the embodiment of a human life. Rather the human element presents itself here in the first place in its compulsion to embody, in its depen-

dency upon a medium that also opens a dia-logue. For this reason, through the other we ourselves become others: »We must visualize all such guises of human behavior in order to recognize within the actor's action the typical conditions of human beings with which the actor plays. His acting makes us conscious of them, analyzes them in the figure he has created« (ibid.: 216).

The thesis that follows from this is that this necessary inter-action, which goes through the body of the actor so that we may recognize ourselves, is not restricted to the theatrical scene in the theater, to the so-called co-presence of actor and audience.[15] Rather it creates an unavoidable draw in every performance, including on screen in the technical media of projections, which since Benjamin have been stripped of their »aura« or the presence of a »here and now« and consequently of the effect of singularity.[16] The relevant passages are well-known from *The Work of Art* on the actor who becomes someone else *in front of the camera* and receives, in the blink of an eye, another status than that of the stage actor. The latter must perform anew each night in front of a different audience, he is placed in front of this abyss and it exacts from him a performance just as he attempts to meet its demands. The film actor in contrast—Benjamin is citing Luigi Pirandello—is »exiled […] from his own person.« His movements are no longer centered around his body, which in turn first acts out his actions, but the body has »lost its substance«; he is robbed of his reality and his voice (Benjamin 2008: 31). The given »situation« (*Tatbestand*) is the loss of the aura, because »for the first time—and this is the effect of film—the human being is placed in a position where he must operate with his whole living person, while forgoing its aura. For the aura is bound to his presence in the here and now. There is no facsimile of the aura. The aura surrounding Macbeth on the stage cannot be divorced from the aura which, for the living spectators, surrounds the actor who plays him. What distinguishes the shot in the film studio, however, is that the camera is substituted for the audience. As a result, the aura surrounding the actor is dispelled—and, with it, the aura of the figure he portrays« (ibid.). For this reason the actor loses his correlate, so that he no longer portrays an other, but »represents himself before the apparatus« (ibid.) and thus loses exactly that which Plessner emphasizes about mimetic play: his alterity. From this, Benjamin extrapolates the film actor's specific »estrange-ment« in front of the camera, which he compares to the estrange-ment felt before a mirror, which we do not face up to, but face in order to communicate with ourselves (ibid.:32–33). Because the mirror does not look back and gives no answer, it solicits poses, as Benjamin will later remark as regards photography using almost the

401

same argumentation (1997: 145 ff.). Poses do not respond, they are struck. They are representations of *themselves*. By the same token the film actor does not enter into a dialogue with anyone, at best she is working for a market. Trying out different attitudes, in the end she adopts their image, becomes the handmaiden of the masses who have chosen her: »The film responds to the shriveling of aura with an artificial build-up of the ›personality‹ (…). The cult of the movie star (…) preserves (…) the ›spell of the personality‹« that has long been reduced to a commodity.[17] For this reason the movies and their industrial machinery bestow a halo of exceptionalism upon the film actor, even those who are only starlets or supporting actors. Pamela Anderson's insight is fitting here: »I don't think I am an actress. I think I've created a brand and a business« (Cable News Network: 2002). She can be nothing other than a label, because from the beginning she put her existence as a person at the service of an economic process, the product of which is a brand made mysterious through (*dia*) its withdrawal from real addressability. Her presence is making an exit—absence is her collateral. This is why the star *imago* is always the result of a medial structure that simultaneously cloaks its creations.

Convergences and Divergences of the Film Setting

Benjamin however goes one step further. He correlates the dissolution of the aura with the loss of unity within the portrayal. Not only is alterity lost, but also the unity of the figure (2008: 31). It no longer acts (*agieren*), but is fractured by the apparatus into a series of shots that are recombined using optical criteria alone. Just as little as the film actor is confronted with an audience, Benjamin claims, is he confronted with a whole to whose drama he lends his soul. Instead, he meets only fragments with no recognizable coherency: »His performance« the relevant passage continues »is by no means a unified whole, but is assembled from many individual performances«, »split (…) into a series of episodes capable of being assembled« (ibid.: 32–33). They serve an economy of the gaze whose principle is editing. To it belong a lack of perspective, the loss of »single viewpoint(s)« as well as the repetitive element of filming which obeys an economy of optimization, of the »record«, as Benjamin says, which is the result of continuous »testing« (2010: 28 f., 22 passim; 2008: 30). Its goal is technical perfection, whereas on stage repetition is an event, a trauma. Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida have both shown that repetition means difference.[18] This is not true of film as a medium of reproduction, the liberating act of repetition is lost in

the editing. At the same time performance is assigned to the logic of visual representation (*Verbildlichung*). It is not so much the figure who fills the narrative who counts, but the image and the scene played *for the image*, because acting in film is always embedded in a net of cinematographic visualization. Whatever an actor embodies, it is embodied with an eye towards its delivery in the visuals and their presence, it shows itself pictorially. Interpretive creativity resides with the audience, which, testing, discovers previously unnoticed aspects in what is seen and seen again. If in theater each appearance is singular and precarious and must be consummated with the entire body, actors in film cannot fail—at most they can play badly—because in the moment of their presence their existence is not at stake, but only in the moment of their reproducible image. Benjamin sees this as the reason for the chronic mediocrity of film acting, it is due to the actor's status as one of the narrative's »props« (2010: 24; 2008: 32 esp. note 22).

We thus must take one more constitutive element into account when dealing with film as opposed to theater: the visibility of the scene in the imagery, which gives the film a dimension of distance. This turns the actor into an artifact from the beginning. In truth we are confronted with a complex structure, a fourfold arrangement of role/scene, figure/*persona*, image/affect and presence/body. Film is not only about the scenic elements and the embodiment of a role, but also about their visual representation, not only about the shot and the editing, but also about the body in the act of becoming visible, not the body showing itself, but corporeality in its perpetually revoked resistance. This should be the starting point for any phenomenology of the film actor (Sobchack 2004). His presence is always *in* an image and *for* an image, at the same time he acts through (*dia*) himself, as bodily presence for another body. The volatility of this can be seen in particular where this relationship becomes fragile, where the fourfold enters a crisis, e.g. in animation or in the doll-like character of 3D, which no longer discloses visagity (*Gesichtigkeit*). In this case the experience of alterity fails; the visage of the other, which accompanies the ethics of representation and of which film, despite all technical visualization, bears its own witness. This loss can be seen in the excess of violence which increases *ad absurdum* the more that special effects can be controlled, and which can only be tolerated when the observer abstracts from the person. If technology is the last locus of European intellect, as Martin Heidegger has contested (1977; 2009), and demands identical mathematical repetition, then the corresponding last locus of the cinema is simulation. It contains only a remainder, a residue of the body of the performance, the presence of the other. And

403

yet, as Benjamin's note on the dissolution of the aura of the actor suggests, the paradox is not fully resolved. This becomes clear if we apply Plessner's *Anthropologie* to Benjamin's diagnosis. Trained, as was Benjamin, on the theater, he too was among the first who attempted to carefully delineate the convergences and divergences of film and theater. The foremost role, Plessner says, is played by historical continuity. Classical theater was a continuation of the consecrated narrative of Dionysian celebrations, and the latter leave traces even in the movies, because the same anthropological powers are active (Plessner 1979: 206 ff.). Breaks and continuities prove to be intermingled. Once again, thought is articulated through a change in position as regards the apparatus. Plessner is less interested in the change in the gaze, the difference between the »answering« and »gazeless gaze« which the camera requires, and more in the technical »loss of distance« which allows an unexpected jump from a long shot to a close up. We are thus confronted with an opinion that contrasts with Benjamin, and which by the way seems to bear out Siegfried Kracauer's filmic realism (1997), *strengthening the impression of reality by the process of producing illusion*. Because the camera, Plessner writes in *Anthropologie*, »explodes the framework of the stage, it destroys the scene, puts the audience at the center of events without reminding them of their remote reverie—the condition of their pleasure.« Film therefore aims at »direct reality, not mediated by scenery«; the »actors should not show that they know the gaze of the audience is on them, and the audience should forget themselves as observers and listeners.« This creates the impression that the actor is not an other, but solely »embodies himself«.[19] One can call this analysis naive because it falls for the nature of the production of illusions, nevertheless it reveals a weak point in Benjamin's theory of the film actor. Plessner touches on this again in a later text on the *imitative act* in which the realism of film is connected directly to the realism of photography; not a duplicate-realism , but that which Phillipp Dubois in reference to Roland Barthes will later call its »indexicality« (Dubois 1998; Barthes 2010).[20] The photograph fixates »the result of a process (…), that took place during the photographing« (Plessner 1966: 180).

The same is true of film in terms of technical prerequisites, at least for analog productions. It can perhaps not be said that we have »reality before our eyes« (ibid.), but it cannot be denied, despite all visual delusions. This is also true of the actor. What we see on screen is not a fragmentary body »its manifold parts […] assembled according to a new law« as Benjamin has said (2010: 29)—and Friedrich Kittler would apply this same idea from Jacques Lacan to frames moving at the rate of 24 images/second (1999: 15 ff.)—but a spe-

cific body with all attributes of attraction, vulnerability, and mortality; a body whose inimitable singularity we are forced to recognize. Despite all differences between theater and film, the phenomenality of the other, his experience of alterity, is the indelible result of the intelligibility of what happens on screen. Recording the minutiae of life, Godard says in MASCULIN-FÉMININ, is a commonality of filmmaker and philosopher. We take this exceptional intuitive idea and circumscribe it in the form of the idea that corporeality, the presence of the visage, the *Grain of the Voice* (Barthes), create the indelible foundation on which we can begin to discern the figure, the *sujet* of the film in both meanings of the word. For this reason it is mistaken to fixate on the projection alone, on the technical apparatus and reproduction that brings forth nothing other than the image, on the secondariness of the figure, its retroactiveness or a-presence—ideas which have long dominated cinematographic discourse. Editing is not a means of escaping »bare« existence, this bareness is the condition of the editing itself. If, as Heiner Müller claims, the »presence of the potential dying man« is the basis of theater, then film may subvert this, but in such a way that it not only must restitute *physis* differently, but it is also only then believable when it makes the irreplaceability of *physis* to a precondition.

L'INTERVISTA

Therefore, beyond the imaginary landscapes that film can draw with its arsenal of technical apparatus, the indispensability of that which we have called »alterity« arises and, in a curious manner, needs the singularity of the body in order to manifest itself. Film and photography have their own special relationship to this alterity. The multiple meanings of this are illustrated nowhere better than in Federico Fellini's L'INTERVISTA (1987), which Bernard Stiegler looks at in his essay »Verkehrte Aufzeichnungen und photographische Wiedergabe« (1993). One after another, the members of a film team drives their machinery through the dark light of the night. While an aerial lift provides light and camera, the aging director, in front of the camera of the young journalists who want to interview him, develops the visions of cinema by feeling with his hands through a world of imagination. Constant filming is shown within the film, the interviewers film the film team and vice versa, the actors photograph other actors while passersby waylay them, so that they may take pictures in turn. The incontestable climax however is the arrival of the two unforgettable stars, Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg, who made their biggest splash in LA DOLCE VITA (Federico Fellini, 1960), but are

now only memories who live from their own remembered images. This is particularly true of the once celebrated Anita Ekberg who, a shadow of herself, only plays herself. What is more, while in this role, the famous fountain scene from La Dolce Vita passes before her. The film in turn plays with exactly this replication, the indecisiveness of playing within playing which is at the same time not play: a dance of illusions which a hairline fracture can collapse. Fellini, the grand magician of film, has the actor Marcello Mastroianni portray a magician who, using the paraphernalia of theater, makes a screen appear behind which, as in a shadow play, the one-time cinematic couple dances again, only to take the role of the audience and wallow in sentimentality. The split thus generated creates that by which every film exists: Not only is the art of pretense able to awaken a never-ending chain of stories, the illusion is also carried by the quiet melancholy that it shares with photography, its saturation, as Bernard Stiegler extrapolates from Roland Barthes, with the »that's the way it was« of the past moment. Here we are again confronted with the question of indexicality. Every film—at least analog film—whatever else it may be, is a documentation of the past. It is this documentation itself that Fellini makes visible in L'Intervista and stamps with the seal of insurmountable sadness. We know this sadness from repeatedly recalling films of past beauties and seeing the irretrievable that reminds us of death. Therefore what Heiner Müller says of theater is just as true of film: what we see are, so to speak, dying people. The unavoidable melancholy hints at that which most studies of the actor caught between figure, role, paradox, and the cult of the star are missing: *the eradicable trace of alterity*.

It would however be wrong to say that fiction and reality meet in this unique episode from L'Intervista. Rather the actors Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg watch a past *that is themselves* and that holds for them *the same irrevocability* that is holds for the audience. They suspend the difference between person and character, because what the two are watching is not nostalgia, rather they see in the present their own past which immediately affects them painfully and which they can only stand by quickly drinking a *grappa*. Stiegler comments: »Anita finally sees herself, one has to write, ›played out‹« (…) Anita says: (…) I'm mortal (…). I'm mortal«— a mortality which the film, or rather the cinematic return of the famous scene, simultaneously repudiates (ibid.: 203).What Fellini shows in L'Intervista is therefore playing that repudiates itself as playing to the extent that it is replayed. No level of playing leaves the playing—and yet at all levels there is a fragility that allows something else to shine through: The other, his past and, by calling on them, his finitude, his death. »We *are not able to see* Anita as a figure in this scene«, Stiegler continues, »and yet we can nevertheless see

her only as a figure« (ibid.). There is thus in playing something that cannot be played, just as something exists in the figure that is not a figure—and it is this which Fellini's L'INTERVISTA refers to: »In cinematography, where the flesh of the actor merges with the figure and the passage of the film is necessarily also the past of this actor, the moments in the life of the figure are just as much and immediately moments in the past of the actor«, Stiegler writes accordingly (ibid.).

Looked at from another point of view, we can say that in playing, the figures recognize something which is literally out of character and this falling-out-of-character is the wound of mortality which constitutes them—as actors and as people in equal measure. At the same time, this is not so much an indication of desire and its transgression, an unrealizability that serves the same finitude, neither does it indicate the damage we do to ourselves by living and enjoying, rather it shows the thorn of futility—the »useless passion« as Sartre aptly called it—that we recognize only in the face of death. The wound that Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg embody, each for himself and herself alone, is the same wound that we carry in ourselves and that allows us to understand and go with (*miterleben*) this harrowing and subtly comical scene. It is the recognition of our own decrepitude, a literally prefigured death, which no other medium portrays more clearly than photography and film.[21] In contrast to theater—which thrives on presence so as to, through (*dia*) the fragility of the »bare« body, make an example of the experience of alterity—reproduction media allow a similar experience, notwithstanding the loss of aura, through (*dia*) the *dwindling difference between present and past*. Both actors become aware of that which catches our own consternation in the consternation of the young viewers as in a concave mirror. It is impossible to see the scene without being startled and without feeling within ourselves that the tears Anita Ekberg is wiping from her too heavily made up eyes are our own. We feel something similar when we look at old photographs in which we simultaneously see ourselves at the same time *as* others—subject to the inexorability of time—and as a present that can in no way ever be present again. In this way, both actors function as our doppelgänger as subjects, just as the interviewers, who sit down beside them to see the scene they know only from the movies portrayed on the makeshift stage, function as our doppelgänger as viewers—whose reactions on the other hand are gratifyingly registered by both actors. The experience of alterity thus mixes with the experience of time as something which cannot be experienced yet constitutes every experience. If we can speak of »cinematic reality« at all, this is it, admittedly as *negative reality* that only exists through (*dia*) the grief of time and the reversal created by reproduction. This

is why Bernard Stiegler also writes: »*For us,* La dolce vita is not *just* fiction: It is a film that exists in reality, that is our reality. (…) reproduced in L'intervista, this fiction seems real on a manifest level, a reality of fiction that overcomes and includes the contradiction in which we find ourselves when we, while watching a film, say: It's only a movie« (1993: 206).

Beyond Fictionality

To this should be added that it is never only a movie—just as little as we can say of a dream that it is only a dream, even when we do so in a dream. Rather it is always in ourselves in whom the dream and the phantasmagoria of the movies or other magical illusions are connected to our lives. For this reason we can go one step further, because the undeniability of alterity postulated here cannot be stricken from any scene or performance, no matter how trivial or monstrous: It precedes the mediation and the symbolization or representation, whether cinematographic or theatric. *This is the source of its elementary and often unrecognized ethicalness.* We have no choice but to accept it, because both theater and film—just as literature and its figures and fates—are part of our own fate. Cinema, despite all visual fragmentation, carves a path to this realization because of its inherent ability to stop time, to turn it on its axis in order to move it in ways that were never known before, to transform and multiply it. In this way not only does our relationship to time change, at the same time something else happens heralded by the feelings of sadness or melancholy described above: An inversion of *time in time*, its reproduction that creates a disparity through (*dia*) the fissures of which we become aware to an equal extent of our own otherness and distortion. »In the evening, we lay to bed with ourselves; but in the morning we see another in the mirror« reads a passage from Hans Henny Jahnn's novella *Die Nacht aus Blei* (1994: 142), the Night of Lead. Alienation is not so much a sign of this distortion of seeing ourselves as an image, as it is the temporal caesura that »disoccurs« (*vereignen*) to the same extent in cinema. Disturbing in daily life, film, like photography, is able to record these moments precisely and make them manifest through the irritation of the real that they produce. Beyond the spectacle and the imagination that characterize its fictions, it allows in this way an awareness of the extraordinary. It is the wound of time that transforms our own into the other and the other into our own, that is not visible and cannot become so and the invisibility of which, exactly because we share it, makes it an ethical relationship.

Hans Henny Jahnn's novella stages this in an almost cinematic manner. Written in 1956, this surreal or Kafkaesque novella draws us into the cruel labyrinth of the soul. At its center emerges the experience of otherness as the experience of that incurable wound that we ourselves are. Interwoven with the narrative is an analogous experience of temporalization, such as that also awakened by Fellini's L'Intervista. Young Matthieu is released by an angel into the deep of a night that becomes ever darker and more inscrutable. After a brothel scene that confuses him, he meets, caught in severe loneliness, a younger man who is, down to the last detail, like himself at age 15. The young man is called »Anders« (other/different) and suffers from a wound named »blemish« which others inflicted upon him so that he might be open for the entrance of angels and demons. Hans Henny Jahnn clearly constructs the situation of otherness within ourselves as the perception of our own youth only to subvert it irrevocably into alienation: »If I am the return of yourself at fifteen or sixteen«, Anders says, »something saved, your internal and external similarity (…), the key to your most important experiences that have not been resolved (…); if I am this shadow, who has followed you from afar (…)—then you know my wound« (ibid.: 162–163). The wound refers not only to injuries caused by time—»to show that we can become ugly« as Jahnn writes (ibid.: 163)—but it is inflicted by those who we once trusted and tried to love. That's why its growth in time is unstoppable, it begins to change, to spread, in parts to form scars, but it will never close completely. Matthieu, who tries to help his alter ego—whose intestines are meanwhile gushing from his stomach—by pushing the ecstatic protrusions back into the cavity, in the process falls into him and kills him while the black of the night begins to ensconce him completely.

That which Hans Henny Jahnn stages as a literary nocturne corresponds in many ways to the visual nightmare of cinema. It is not the illusion that fascinates, nor the realistic effects, the spectacle of which is created using great technical effort. What mesmerizes us is instead the meeting with doppelgänger who act out that of which we are capable, but cannot be, or who we were, without becoming so. And what binds us to them is the same uncanniness that we carry within ourselves and that sometimes, particularly when confronted with the riddle of a temporal shift, breaks out only to immediately, by accident or inaptitude, be killed. This, the stigmata or signs of a wound that actors carry in their own bodies—to play themselves as much as they play others—allows us to get close to the filmic world. The actor is thus like our *alter ego* who reveals his flesh in which we participate and which we long to meet, while the dreams of the cin-

ema or theater send us to repress them again to the same measure with every new story.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Translators note: The German text plays with the German word Spiel (play/to play), also present in the German word for actor, *Schauspieler*, literally »show-player«. Since »play« in English is tied so closely to the theater, the reader will have to reinsert this playful element into almost every »performance«.

2   We are reminded of Denis Diderot's pair of actors who hate one another, but must play a couple, see *The Paradox of Acting* (1883: 32 ff.) [Translators note: The more exact translation of the French title is *The Paradox of Acting*]. See also the reverse case in the scene in *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo in which the convolution of play and jealousy takes a turn to the tragic.

3   Walter Benjamin, »The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducability« (second version, 2008: 35), »The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducability« (first version, 2010: 11–37, cit. 28). This article usually cites from the second version, but cites the first version when it is more exact.

4   On this see my approach towards a »negative theory of media« in »Medialität und Undarstellbarkeit. Einleitung in eine ›negative‹ Medientheorie« (Mersch 2004: 75–96), »Tertium datur. Einleitung in eine negative Medientheorie« (Mersch 2008: 304–321).

5   On this see my thoughts in »Meta / Dia. Zwei unterschiedliche Zugänge zum Medialen« (Mersch 2010b: 185–208).

6   One should also take note of the fact that the original title of Diderot's work is »Paradox *sur* le comédien« or Paradox on/about the actor, and thus marks a genre which aims to reveal the absurdity of a position through exaggeration. It is not the actor or acting which is paradox, but a discourse that contradicts common sense, the general *doxa*—even if Diderot does ascribe a paradox character to main elements of acting itself as well as to simultaneously feeling two contradictory emotions.

7   The term »visage« has been consciously chosen—facing out (*Entgegenblickend*)—because if the face can be interpreted as a public mask, the visage is the manifestation of singularity, as in particular Emmanuel Lévinas has noted. See »La Trace de l'Autre« (1982). See also by the author, *Was sich zeigt*. (2002: esp. 47ff), *Posthermeneutik* (2010a: 7 ff.).

8   Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, p. 7–8, 14; see also 27 f., 80, 95 and elsewhere. Diderot built in the main on the debates of his time as is shown in particular in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Theatralische Bibliothek* ([1754-1758] 2010).

9   Accordingly Christopher Balme distinguishes between three different approaches to acting: *Firstly* the actor project himself into a role by drawing on his own imagination and memory (Konstantin S. Stanislavsky); *secondly* acting means a precise technique, showing an aloofness through the conscious execution of symbolic behaviors (Denis Diderot, Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold), and *thirdly* the actor expresses himself by anchoring the performance as much as possible in his own personality and thus exclusively presenting himself in a direct interaction with the public (Jerzy Grotovski). See Christopher Balme, *Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft* (2008: 123–126).

10 As I have tried to illustrate in *Was sich zeigt*, the concept of the »aura« reflects key phenomena of showing-oneself (*Sichzeigen*); (ibid.: 75 ff.).

11 For this reason, acting elicits physical reactions within the actor which are hard to bear. Acting is accompanied by feelings of shame and guilt: Exposing oneself means differentiating oneself, means claiming one is that which one is not, means having an effect without being. In this case, desire is restricted by taboo; see also Susanne Valerie, *Schauspieler außer sich* (2011: esp. 37 ff.).

12 In fact it is the gaps, the moments in which it doesn't work, the embarrassments, through which the difficulty of embodiment becomes manifest. Instead the body, as Susanne Valerie aptly says, becomes blatant and jarring (ibid.: 108). Here too we can see the close tie to the logic of media: Just as failure reveals the risky and endangered nature of exposition, dysfunctionality allows it to appear.

13 In fact, Diderot's dialogue »The Paradox of Acting« revolves constantly around this idea.

14 On this see in particular Christiane Voss, »Film Experience and the Formation of Illusion: The Spectator as ›Surrogate Body‹ for the Cinema« (2011: 136–150). Voss draws from Vivian Sobchack's »cinesthetic subject/body«, which sees all bodies involved in the film experience, the bodies on screen and the

affective bodies of the audience as »subversive bodies«; see Sob-chack, *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004: esp. 65 ff.). Similar ideas on the role of the body as affecting and affective sounding board can be found in Siegfried Kracauer; on this see also Gertrud Koch: *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction* (2000: esp. 114 ff.). The decisive act in all of this is touching/being touched: our experience of the world—including the world of theater and the movies—goes through our bodies, just as conversely the corporeality of the other represents the site at which aesthetic production and reception come together.

15 See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004). Similarly, Valerie writes in *Schauspieler außer sich*: »The central code of the theater is the *physis* of the actor. His sensuous body. His singular presence (…)« (2011: 73).

16 Walter Benjamin, »The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducability« (second version, 2008: esp. 22–25). On the concept of the aura see also my own thoughts in *Was sich zeigt* (2002: 75 ff.).

17 Walter Benjamin, »The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction« (1969: 231). I have cited from Harry Zohn's translation rather than from my preferred translation as the latter skipped over this sentence.

18 See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (2004); Jacques Derrida, »Signature Event Context« (1988: 1–23).The idea of course is already present in Kierkegaard's work.

19 Plessner, *Anthropologie des Schauspieler* (208 passim). Benjamin too contests that the »typical film actor plays only himself«, but his conclusion is the opposite: his identity documents his alienation all the more, »The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducability« (2010: 25). However put to the test, when non-actors are put before the camera—as is often the case in daily soaps and reality shows—the performance is not believable, its stiffness belies the topos of the absent presence. Movies too participate in the paradox of the actor, the porosity of the body; a body-like a membrane, both permeable and opaque which resists being made to fit into a whole.

20 »Photography is truth—and cinema is truth 24 times per second« is the relevant Godard quote.

21 Recordings on tape, vinyl or other audio storage media have analogous effects.

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