

AUSEINANDERSETZUNGEN

Fragments of an essay in photographs and words (some borrowed, some owned)

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Photographs by Lale Rodgarkia-Dara, 1999-2015.



Allmählich über Monate hin, stellt sich das Dilemma heraus: sprachlos bleiben oder in der dritten Person leben, das scheint zur Wahl zu stehen. Das eine unmöglich, unheimlich das andere. Und wie gewöhnlich wird sich ergeben, was dir weniger unerträglich ist, durch das, was du machst.

– Christa Wolf, Kindheitsmuster

Mit Zeit läßt sich leben –
läßt sich verbinden, was sich in den letzten Jahren so zusammengetragen hat, aber eigentlich bleibt es ein Schatten, so wie fast alles in einer Weile auskommt, verkommt mit einer Zustandsbeschreibung, nicht mehr als ein Zustand, nicht weniger, als die Handlangerin zu der wir selbst werden, abgestumpft und ausgelagert, vital und vermischt.

When I was three years old, the war walked into my life. It had the shape of a very kind and wonderful young boy. By then I didn't know his age but he was twelve. He carried this vulnerable feeling of neglected kindness with him.

My beloved mother didn't share my feelings, she was annoyed by this young man who was lonely and sad on the peak of his puberty and didn't want to go to boarding school. He hated Vienna and the life in this foreign city, far away from his friends and family.

The diaspora always carries a cousin who has a cousin who has a cousin who might not be a real cousin but is called cousin.



The point of no-return is a constant struggle of causality and the interpretation of the language and the chain of offered interpretations is limited to its own function and this function is grounded in an eerie source, the sub-conscious, one is tempted to argue. In 1976, my year of birth, Christa Wolf lets her character Lenka comment on a photograph that shows violent actions, a critique on general passivity.

‘Sie lehnt die gängige Einteilung ab: Einer muß sterben, ein zweiter bringt ihn dazu, der dritte aber steht dabei und beschreibt, was der zweite dem ersten antut. Sie fordert bedingungslose Einmischung.’

A year later, in 1977, Susan Sontag is pointing out the power of the photographer – let alone the camera as a weapon itself – not only by gesture and terminology: ‘To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge and therefore, like power.’

‘*Einmischung*’ to avoid the failure ‘to assist a person in danger’ as it is laid down in Anglo-Saxon and Roman Law comparably? What kind of *Einmischung*? Is it interference (*Störung*), intervention (*Eingreifen*), hectoring (*Einschüchtern*), intrusion (*Eindringen*), meddling (*Hineinpfuschen*)?



Next time I saw my cousin he was a grown-up oral surgeon who came for a visit from Moscow, where he has been living half of his life and where I came to visit him 10 years later in 2007. I arrived in Saint Petersburg in March, just a week after ‘Марш несогласных’ had been successfully put down by Putin. This dissenters’ march was followed by a first flood of digital images – from Russia with love.



(By the way, neither Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, nor the the iPhone – released in January the same year – played a major role in documenting or organising the manifestation.)

Young men of the Omon, a special force of the Russian police, were beating up pensioners. Hope was at stake, the general idea of Putin as a reliable partner of the Germany of Gerhard Schröder found a profound rebuttal. By then Schröder himself had been employed by Gazprom Nord Stream AG for two years already. I didn’t witness the demonstration in Saint Petersburg on the 3rd of March 2007 but the follow-up-demo two weeks later.

Uncanny feelings, a crowd of protesters, not more than 300 and a large advent of international press, and 300 to 400 police men. I was shocked by the bizarre presence and counterintuitive juxtaposition of the hammer and sickle in a Nazi-flag of the National Bolshevik Party.

Let alone the question of language. My Russian was not (and still is not) sufficient enough to understand the speeches – transmitted by crackling and rattling loudspeakers – apart from the melodic phrase: революция, революция!



I was depending on the interpretation of the general atmosphere, acoustic climate, the visuality, the relations of the people interacting, my uncanny feelings, and on my friends who had taken me to the demonstration and translated what they thought was necessary to be understood out of this pile of noise.

I wasn't so much worried about the language problem as the setting of a demonstration hardly ever demands language skills unless, one is the speaker. I hardly remember the conversation with my cousin on the violent acts of the Russian militia weeks later, but he mentioned that he didn't really care what the Russians do as long as he knew his way around.

By then he was married to a Russian wife and had a daughter and quite a happy life or at least that was what I assumed when going out with them. I had met the diaspora.

'Was wenn einfach ein Vorteil der Moderne und ihrer Wissenschaft in dem exponentiellen Wachstum der Bevölkerung liegt und nicht umgekehrt', höre ich mich selbst denken und Christa Wolf antwortet:

Im Kreuzverhör mit dir selbst zeigt sich der wirkliche Grund der Sprachstörung: Zwischen dem Selbstgespräch und der Anrede findet eine bestürzende Lautverschiebung statt, eine fatale Veränderung der grammatischen Bezüge. Ich, du, sie in Gedanken ineinanderschwimmend, sollen im ausgesprochenen Satz einander entfremdet werden.

Ich halte Wache, ich bin wach.

Alienation doesn't include the natural idea of a different body. The process of alienating can start in yourself without the necessity for the other. I am back in the picture, look onto a picture of my real cousin, my brother, my sister, my friend, my former partner, my former friends.

The picture is never complemented if you only look at one generation, so I borrow other generations, look at my niece and my nephew and argue with my mother and father. Rage is the soft variant of an argument. It might seem aggressive and uncontrollable but in most cases it precludes the arousal of the real feeling.

This means it treats your body without any shifting, development.



I call my writing companion and the idea is yellow again. I am happy and sad and in-between I find a big pile of anger. Why is it the case that I fall for the others. Not the ones that seem stable in the realm of possibility. I constantly fall for the others and the others, though don't realise my masking.



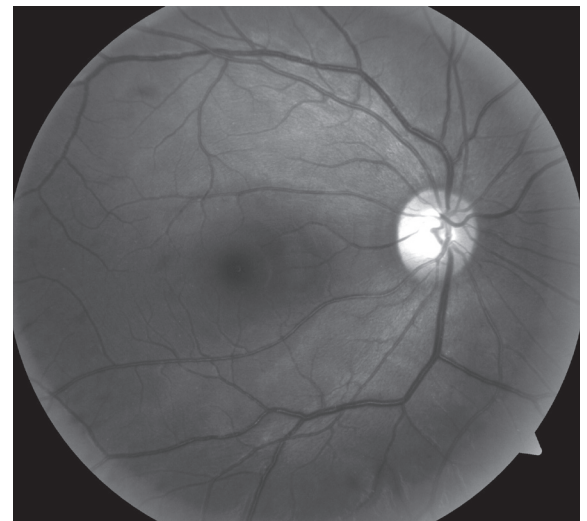
The Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern is in the news and suddenly his voice inherits an international conclusion. He is standing in front of the UN General Assembly during the Summit for Refugees and Migrants. It is 2016, he is wearing a tight suit, well trained body. He was mentioning it to a young author the other day, and she didn't react to it. No 'well, don't worry about your figure, you are a politician and not a model, Mr. Kern', no dissonance.

The character of a certain perception constructs the other. What do we see? I wonder. What do we see that some others are eliding. Can I learn to tune out? I am back in reality. You can withdraw yourself to a certain degree, climate-change, migration, decentralised battlefields, new realism, and 'Stützen der Gesellschaft in neuen Bahnen'.

Shortly before he has mentioned the iPhone as a positive example of interaction between science and commerce in his inauguration speech. I was gasping for breath. Still, his voice precise, he is a socialist and I start to determine, goods shall migrate, people not, ideas shall migrate, ideology not. Hermeneutic distance. Is it the proper way of being a politician not to be recognised? Has the age of Narcissus reached an end by fully accepting the idea of every individual's sphere without any distinction between the private, the public or the political sphere, without any distinction between the analogue and the digital space – without any distinction at all.



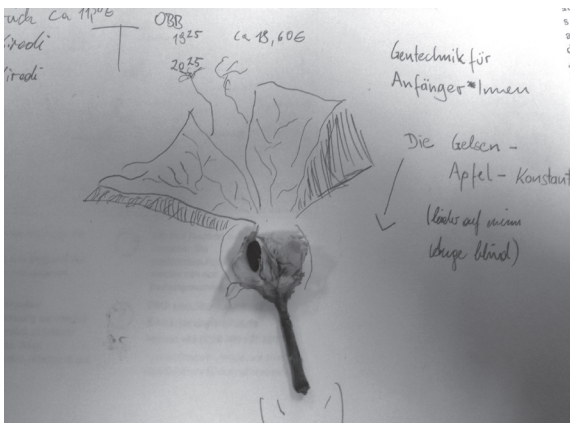
Shall we raise the voice in this augmented sphere that for me seems to be dominated by iconography and substitutability? I wonder if parallel balance fails in case the analogue interpreter decides on a different path. Slack. Introduce anarchism, serendipity, uncertainty.



The presence of a hermeneutic difference between the individual's span of interpretation and this presented augmented sphere is not called into question by bureaucracy and technocracy. It has never been taken into consideration at all. It is *Auseinandersetzung* (examination) that is reintroduced but what kind of *Auseinandersetzung*.



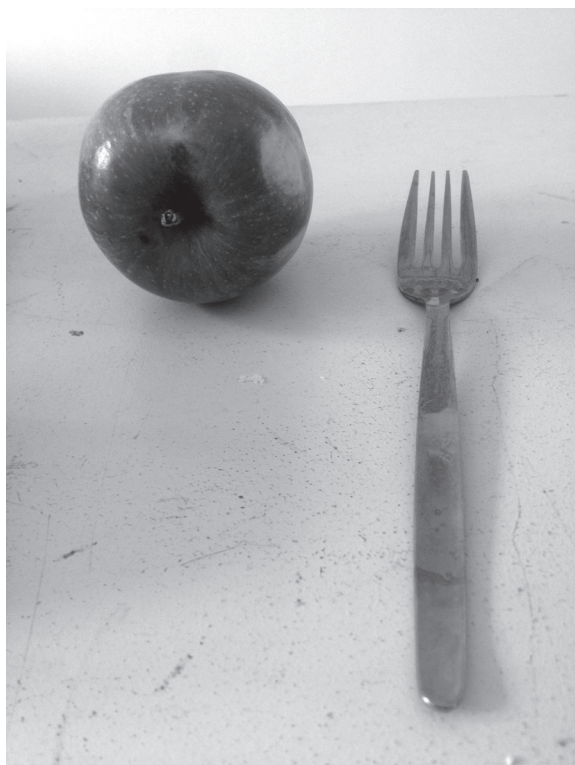
Is it controversy (*Kontroverse*), altercation (*Streiterei*), hassle (*Zank*), contestation (*Anfechten*) or examination (*Prüfung*). I call for Asterix. When I was a little child *Asterix* meant this intergenerational sphere of reference to me, and when I grew older it became *Das Schlaue Buch* (*Junior Woodchucks Guidebook*) of *Auseinandersetzung* in a (hetero-) normative world.



We – my siblings and me – were reading the comics on the toilet. They were common goods and common knowledge, common problems, common characters. I asked my cousin, but in Great Britain they didn't read *Asterix* as it was a French comic and by the time he was in Iran he missed the window of opportunity to enter this world, plus he is not sure whether this window was there at all.



It was only two days ago when I realised the ambivalent secularist connotation of *Asterix*. Goddesses and Gods are mentioned all the time but only in speech bubbles. My feet didn't reach the ground while I was sitting on the toilet accepting conflicts, as they are part of our human nature.



Hence at the end we all sit together and eat food the women have cooked for us and torture the musician slash artist, we hang him on the tree or bond him in the corner. I recognised the village – they were living in, I could relate it to the world – I was living in, and I must admit I still can.