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Disruptive Storytelling

Notes on E.T.A. Hoffmann

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

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

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

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

1 Figures of repetition: copy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Figures of repetition: reproduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Figures of repetition: replication

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Figures of repetition: duplication or re-writing reality

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

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

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

Through the series of repetitions – the translation of mimesis into narration repeats itself twelve times – the younger cousin incrementally learns the difference of the poetological grasp of the happenings in the market. The genetic repetition of factual events (originals), as the narrative states, is not simply an identical repetition (copy), rather the fiction has repercussions on its part on facticity. Thus, it already demonstrates the old wives' tale that Nathanael shares in *Der Sandmann*, and it becomes now clear with the process of poesis from cousin¹ to cousin². “[W]hat is different about writing poetry,” asks Breitingner, “when new terms and ideas form in the imagination, whose originals cannot be sought in the present work of real things, but in some other possible world-construction” (Bodmer and Breitingner 1980: 86, 88). That writer, who Breitingner then compares with a creator, “because he communicates through his art not only invisible things and bodies, but also quasi creates the things that are not for speculation, which jumped from the state of possibility into the state of reality” (Bodmer and Breitingner 1980: 86, 88), is nevertheless already obsolete again, according to Hoffmann. It is not in vain that he toils on the conceptual term in view of technical reproducibility (Benjamin 2002: 351–383).¹¹ If the author were a creator and his creations indistinguishable from the true objects – “The imagination ‘produces reality’, and provided that understanding accepts and secures this, ‘its product becomes something real’” (Hermann 2006: 63; Fichte 1845: 234) – then literature loses any observational skills, even those observational skills, which the older cousin demonstrates with so much concentration to the younger cousin.

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

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

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

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

That Hoffmann now calls precisely the “kind God” the creator of nature is again no accident, yet it subliminally reiterates the conflict between a natural chain of living things, whose origin is secured through God as a first, absolute principle, and an artificial series, as which literature is to be completely understood. As an artificial series, literature is no longer to be included in a preordained, divine continuum (e.g. Brandstetter 2003: 187–203).¹² It also has to do with a deconstruction of the aesthetics of genius, as literature, given the understanding of a goodlike creation without models and medial conditions, exhibits the same structure of the idea of a chain of living beings. Hoffmann rejects the idea of such an original genius, but more than that, he shows much more how the idea of an author varies with the various medial and discursive conditions. It is ultimately to be differentiated from literature as an observational function of observations, whose game Hoffmann plays out using the relation of difference and repetition between cousin¹ and cousin² as a mechanism of communication, which can do without genius. Nevertheless, with the risky reception of the flower girl, one such thing appears to be on the line: not the author, but rather literature itself, when it is understood as nothing further than the mimesis of nature. In

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

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

5 State the difference: *disruptive storytelling*

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

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

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

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

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