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Writing Aphasia

Intermedial Observation of Disrupted Language in Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur*

"I am reading my own dialogues and realizing that I consider misunderstanding to be the essence of communication,"¹ notes German writer Wolfgang Herrndorf in his blog *Arbeit und Struktur*.² Herrndorf began this autobiographical and autopathographical blog in 2010, after being diagnosed with an incurable brain tumor, and continued it until his death in August 2013. The blog follows his life with a diagnosis of incurable cancer and psychosis due to initial surgery and an increasing number of malfunctions in language, coordination, and orientation caused by epileptic seizures. It also contains reflections on the process of writing the last two novels published during the author's lifetime. In *Arbeit und Struktur*, physical disruption both produces the writing and becomes its subject-matter.

Disruptions, disorders of speech, mental disorders, fragmentary language, misunderstandings, going mute, aphasia: by treating all these phenomena as objects of discourse, Herrndorf joins a modern tradition of writing about mental disorders and evokes the narrative of the creative aspects of disruption, which assumes that every rupture has a reflective and innovative potential (Habscheid and Koch 2014). The blog touches on the discourse of writing on madness, and is simultaneously disrupted by a secondary level that deals with the narrator's own medical condition experimentally and autobiographically in the medium of writing. For in the mode of autobiographical experience, *Arbeit und Struktur* renders visible the fact that, in Herrndorf's case, instead of creative potential, there is simply nothing to be found behind the epistemic category of disruption. Therefore, the narrative of the re-normalizing power of de-normalization is dismantled, and the regularity of disruption itself gets disrupted.

1 "Lese meine eigenen Dialoge und stelle fest, daß ich das Mißverständnis für das Wesen der Kommunikation halte." Entry from 3 October 2011, Herrndorf (2013: 254). Wolfgang Herrndorf published *Arbeit und Struktur* online via: <http://wolfgang-herrndorf.de>. It was published in book form posthumously 2013. Page numbers in brackets hereafter refer to the printed edition of the blog (abbreviated AS). There is no English translation available of *Arbeit und Struktur*, all translations are mine.

2 The note refers to and was created simultaneously to Herrndorf's work on the last novel published in his lifetime, *Sand* (Herrndorf [2011] 2014).

It is the process of writing about the breakdown of language that takes center stage: how can the failure of language be represented by language? How do you write of psychosis while afflicted with it? This paper examines the poietic and poetic aspects of both psychosis and disrupted language, and their representation in different media in *Arbeit und Struktur*, despite, or rather because of, the fact they accompany fatal disease. For Herrndorf's text is above all a chronicle of death: it relates the narrator's strategy of positioning himself between writing and death by means of self-observation in the course of the wholly unromantic process of degeneration, the hopelessness of which is not lost on the reader (Birnstiel 2014). In this process, *Arbeit und Struktur* does not follow the genre conventions of the sick artist's diary. Furthermore, this aspect of facing death does not stand in the way of analyzing the "scene of writing" (Campe 1991: 760; Stingelin 2004); on the contrary, the life-threatening – or life-sustaining – element adds to the levels of "staging of the return of the writing inside the written word"³ (Zanetti 2009: 77, my translation), as it is fundamental to the logic of the literary writing process, but also has the potential to orient the narrator outside the world of the text.

There is a long-established literary tradition of merging art, cognition, and illness, especially when the latter is of the brain. Therefore, this essay will begin by discussing the specific textual form of *Arbeit und Struktur* and relate it to the question of autobiographical writing. Instead of a teleological, purely autobiographical or (auto-)pathographical reading, this paper employs a method that contextualizes the work with respect to strategies of inclusion in and exclusion from the classical traditions of autobiography and (auto-)pathography. The essay is based on the printed edition of the blog, partially edited and prepared by Herrndorf himself.⁴ In a second step, the paper situates writing on disruption in

3 "Inszenierungen einer Wiederkehr des Schreibens im Geschriebenen."

4 Engagement with the genre of the blog, its specific digital "Schreibszene" and its inherent serial constitution is therefore omitted. Albeit this enquiry would offer the occasion of looking behind the trace (all that is left of the process of writing, perceived in book form), as changes and overwriting within the online protocols would be accessible in certain circumstances. See Michelbach (2016) for a more detailed examination. Michelbach closely examines the relation between the blog as a digital technology of the self and the literary novel: She traces the textual characteristics of *Arbeit und Struktur* as oeuvre and focuses on the connection between the death of the author, the closed structure of the novel, and the act of narration. But since I would like to focus on the version which includes the final edits that Herrndorf himself or his friends following his instructions undertook for the book manuscript, and since the seriality of the blog, its temporal processes of deletion, overwriting, and repetition – at the same time its availability for reception – necessarily breaks down with the author's death, I favour the printed form at this time. New blog entries were a sign that the author was living, while the publication of

the tradition of madness and art as well as aphasia and linguistics. In a third and last step, it examines the intermedial strategies of recording disruption in Herrndorf's other works, where writing about language disorders is linked with representations of maimed skulls, mental blackouts, and amnesia.

Arbeit und Struktur is fundamentally concerned with two forms of disruption, which are manifested in a double language problem. On the one hand, there is the medical problem of a language disorder, of aphasic episodes and psychosis, which the blog attempts to represent in constantly changing experimental arrangements. On the other hand, there is the problem of the finality of one's own death, which cannot be represented and, due to its imminent onset, disrupts every function of language. My hypothesis is that, in the struggle to symbolize the disruption within the medium of language and of the medium itself, the text successively employs different media and intermedial observation strategies.

1 “Work. Work and structure” – autobiography and (auto-)pathography⁵

“In terms of status, a brain tumor is of course the Mercedes of diseases. And glioblastoma is the Rolls-Royce. Anyhow, I would never have started this blog if I had prostate cancer or a cold.”⁶ (444) Following the diagnosis, which he describes with typical gallows humor, Herrndorf decided to use the time left to him to immerse himself in work; not a journey around the world, but: Work and Structure. In those last three years that remained for him, despite the statistical curve and the mean prognosis of seventeen plus one months he found on Wikipedia, he published two successful novels and began a third in addition to the considerable effort he put into the blog – in all, more production than in his

the book is the sign of Herrndorf's death. In the book, some entries have been integrated that are missing in the online version. Concerning this point and the collapsing of classifications, such as literary diary, blog and autobiography/autopathography, as well as autothanatography in *Arbeit und Struktur* see Siegel 2016; also, on these points and above all on death in the digital medium see Balint 2016. Yet I use the term blog at certain points, which is how the text refers to itself, even in book form. *Arbeit und Struktur* hereby relates to Herrndorf's other narrative texts and novels.

⁵ “Arbeit. Arbeit und Struktur” (114).

⁶ “Was Status betrifft, ist Hirntumor natürlich der Mercedes unter den Krankheiten. Und das Glioblastom der Rolls-Royce. Mit Prostatakrebs oder einem Schnupfen hätte ich dieses Blog jedenfalls nie begonnen.”

prior career as a writer altogether. Originally conceived as a digital means of sharing information with his friends after his diagnosis, Herrndorf made the blog accessible to the public after six months.⁷

Arbeit und Struktur cannot be reduced to writing about the “nonsense of dying”⁸ (93) – it is dedicated to the fight to have a death, the time and modalities of which are, at least to a small degree, self-determined. It thus considers itself an opportunity to provide information “for people in comparable situations,”⁹ to let them know “how it was done, how it is done”¹⁰ (445). In this essay, however, ethical questions concerning his “exit strategy”¹¹ that made life with the diagnosis possible, as “necessary element of my psycho-hygiene”¹² (50), will be excluded. For the purposes of this essay, the primary significance of the author – whose work was, ironically, not widely discussed in the German media until the actual death of the actual author – is that of an entity that lends coherence to the oeuvre. For the questions and strategies by which *Arbeit und Struktur* approaches the representation of a state that is in fact unrepresentable are already contained in Herrndorf’s literary debut, his first novel.

At first, *Arbeit und Struktur* begins wholly in the mode of the classical autobiographies of the twentieth century, with the evocation of the author’s first memory: “I am maybe two years old and just woke up. The green blind is lowered, and between the bars of my bed I look into the dawn in my room which consists of nothing but little red, green and blue particles, like a TV screen when you go too close.”¹³ (7) In contrast to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* and Karl Philipp Moritz’s *Anton Reiser*, which are both mentioned in a later passage of the blog, and which begin with a theoretical prologue and the background story of the family, the beginnings of famous autobiographies from 1900 on, such as Walter Benjamin’s *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Elias Canetti’s *The Tongue Set Free*, or Christa Wolf’s *Patterns of Childhood* often describe the earliest memories of the autobiographical “I.” A comparison of *Arbeit und Struktur* with Canetti’s first volume of his tripartite autobiography turns out to be es-

7 On the transition from private digital journal (to inform and communicate with his friends) to online blog under the eye of the public, see Balint (2016: 4) and Michelbach (2016).

8 “Quatsch mit dem Sterben.”

9 “für Leute in vergleichbarer Situation.”

10 “wie es gemacht wurde; wie es zu machen sei.”

11 “Exitstrategie.”

12 “notwendiger Bestandteil meiner Psychohygiene.”

13 “Ich bin vielleicht zwei Jahre alt und gerade wach geworden. Die grüne Jalousie ist heruntergelassen, und zwischen den Gitterstäben meines Bettes hindurch sehe ich in die Dämmerung in meinem Zimmer, die aus lauter kleinen roten, grünen und blauen Teilchen besteht, wie bei einem Fernseher, wenn man zu nah rangeht.”

pecially revealing: both first memories are colored in their own hue – for Herrndorf it is green, for Canetti red – , are concerned with their own death, and, in this respect, become conceptually productive for the whole work.¹⁴ Canetti's initial sequence, colored red, recalls him on the arm of his nanny. The description of the sudden entrance of a man who threatens to cut out the boy's tongue introduces a mythical menace and the fear of death as central motifs of the whole work right at the start. In Herrndorf's "Dämmerung" ("Dawn") – the title of the sequence preceding the first dated entry – the two-year-old Wolfgang awakens in a crib. The green of the lowered blind with which the first memory is imbued unravels immediately into its red, green, and blue components. As in Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood*, here the memory begins between the lights and shadows of the blind (Benjamin 1987: 11). While Canetti's red memories and Benjamin's description of the loggia instantly lead the reader into a mythical world of childhood, Herrndorf's first memory is switched on along with the TV: "like a TV screen when you go too close."¹⁵ (7)

The memory itself follows this depiction and decomposition of light and color:

Mein Körper hat genau die gleiche Temperatur und Konsistenz wie seine Umgebung, wie die Bettwäsche, ich bin ein Stück Bettwäsche zwischen anderen Stücken Bettwäsche, [...] immer dachte ich zurück, und immer wollte ich Stillstand, und fast jeden Morgen hoffte ich, die schöne Dämmerung würde sich noch einmal wiederholen. (7)

My body has the exact same temperature and consistency as its environment, as the sheets, I am a piece of the sheet between other pieces of sheet, [...] I always thought back, and I always wanted standstill, and almost every morning I hoped that the beautiful dawn would repeat itself once more.

This description immersed in the flickering light of the TV, accurately outlines Freud's death drive as a return to the inorganic.¹⁶ What follows is clear: the au-

14 "Meine früheste Erinnerung ist in Rot getaucht." (Canetti 1977: 9) ["My earliest memory is dipped in red." (Canetti 2011: 3)].

15 "wie bei einem Fernseher, wenn man zu nah rangeht."

16 "Es muß vielmehr ein alter, ein Ausgangszustand sein, den das Lebende einmal verlassen hat und zu dem es über alle Umwege der Entwicklung zurückstrebt. Wenn wir es als ausnahmslose Erfahrung annehmen dürfen, daß alles Lebende aus inneren Gründen stirbt, ins Anorganische zurückkehrt, so können wir nur sagen: *Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod*, und zurückgreifend: *Das Leblose war früher da als das Lebende*." (Freud 2000 [1920]: 248) ["On the contrary, it must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say

tobiographer does not blog about his life, but about the entropic movement of his body. But instead of mere autopathography or a chronicle of dozing towards death, the blog takes as its subject the process of writing itself. For as the earliest memory of Herrndorf decomposes light into its parts, the blog begins by outlining the poetological program of an experimental space in which body and writing can be observed in their components. Hence *Arbeit und Struktur* becomes a record that observes the very thing that renders its own composition possible: language and its bit-by-bit disintegration, from the destruction of syntax to a complete loss of the ability to speak.

The text's first explicit engagement with the question of genre follows almost two years and 300 pages later. In contemptuous disgust for Rousseau's autobiographical "I am resolved on an undertaking that has no model and will have no imitator,"¹⁷ (Rousseau 2000: 5), Herrndorf explains:

Ich erfinde nichts, ist alles, was ich sagen kann. [...] Das Gefasel von der Unzuverlässigkeit der Sprache spare ich mir, allein der berufsbedingt ununterdrückbare Impuls, dem Leben wie einem Roman zu Leibe zu rücken, die sich im Akt des Schreibens immer wieder einstellende, das Weiterleben enorm erleichternde, falsche und nur im Text richtige Vorstellung, die Fäden in der Hand zu halten und das seit langem bekannte und im Kopf ständig schon vor- und ausformulierte Ende selbst bestimmen und den tragischen Helden mit wohlgesetzten, naturnotwendigen, fröhlichen Worten in den Abgrund stürzen zu dürfen wie gewohnt – (292)

I am not inventing anything, that is all I can say. [...] I will not waste my time blabbering about the unreliability of language, [it is, Author's Note] only an irrepressible impulse due to my profession, to tackle life like a novel, that idea which keeps appearing during the act of writing, which makes it much easier to continue living, which is false and is only true in the text, the idea of pulling the strings, of determining that end myself which I have known of for so long and have constantly been formulating, to let the tragic hero fall into the abyss with well-chosen, natural, cheerful words –

This description, which ends so abruptly, is programmatic for the process of writing *Arbeit und Struktur*, and also applies to Herrndorf's novel *Sand*, the protagonist of which meets a cruel and arbitrary death. Although the text of the published blog claims to be non-fiction, this mode of writing, which is constantly aware that it may be silenced at any point, can only engage with life as though it were a novel. Thus a narrator is superimposed over the narrated "I," that holds the power of describing the death of the narrated "I," and therefore of making it

that 'the aim of all life is death' and, looking backwards, that 'inanimate things existed before living ones'." (Freud 1961: 32)].

¹⁷ "Unternehmen, das kein Vorbild hat und dessen Ausführung auch niemals einen Nachahmer finden wird" (Rousseau, cited in: AS, 292).

occur in the first place. The blog in contrast to the book ends with the chapter “The End: Wolfgang Herrndorf shot himself on Monday, 26 August 2013 around 11.15 P.M. on the bank of the Hohenzollern canal.”¹⁸ The book concludes with an epilogue, which cites Herrndorf’s last wishes concerning the publication of the blog and explains “medically, technically”¹⁹ (445) how he killed himself. In this manner, death is rendered true on the textual level, where life and text are actually entangled in this case. “He insisted on the authorial end”²⁰ (Friebe 2013), friend and author Holm Friebe wrote in his obituary about Herrndorf’s suicide.

Thus, while Herrndorf concedes the fact that in an autobiographical project the rules of the novel will of necessity govern the writing and the structure of memory, and fiction has not only found its way into writing, but also into life and “living on” (“Weiterleben”), he does not include language itself in that meta-commentary: “I will not waste my time blabbering about the unreliability of language [...]”²¹ (292), since the language at the center of *Arbeit und Struktur* is no longer simply unreliable.

2 The artistic promise of disruption

2.1 Promise I: Madness and system of notation (“Aufschreibesystem”)

Herrndorf’s blog employs the traditional forms and topoi of autobiographical writing, and seems to contribute to the tradition of autopathography. Art has commonly been linked with disorders of the mind and language in the genre of pathography since 1900; this link is simply affirmed in some instances, and forms the object of an enquiry in others. There has also been a great deal of research on this topic in the last few years.²² Herrndorf’s *Arbeit und Struktur* is neither primarily concerned with genres of the artists diary nor of the digital blog, but with the idea of writing his own illness (Siegel 2016: 365). Yet, by doing so he

18 The last entry of the blog: <<http://www.wolfgang-herrndorf.de/page/2/>>. “Schluss”: “Wolfgang Herrndorf hat sich am Montag, den 26. August 2013 gegen 23.15 Uhr am Ufer des Hohenzollernkanals erschossen.” Concerning the dissemination of the message announcing his death via Twitter see Balint (2016: 1).

19 “medizinisch-fachlich.”

20 “Das auktoriale Ende hat er sich nicht nehmen lassen.”

21 “Das Gefasel von der Unzuverlässigkeit der Sprache spare ich mir.”

22 See Gockel (2010); Bormuth et al. (2007); Brugger et al. (1997); Milner (1989).

already reflects on genre traditions and establishes a border between them and his own text.

The foundational acts of the humanities contained already this linking of madness and art, which then grew into a topos: the way that the imagination – “Of all the powers of the human mind the imagination has been least explored, probably because it is the most difficult to explore”²³ (Herder 1989: 302; Herder 1969: 301) – has been conceptualized using madness, at the very least since Romanticism. In this vein, Dilthey emphasizes the strong link between the imagination and madness, both of which are based on the same mechanism, i.e. “metamorphosis of reality”²⁴ (Dilthey 1962 [1887]: 165; Dilthey 1985: 67). Thus it is not only that the “lunatic” is predestined to be an artist; observing a description of madness from the inside also promises to represent the imaginary more accurately. In the poetics of the beginning of the nineteenth century, the prescriptive model of unselfconscious writing is drawn from the medical study of madness – which, according to Friedrich A. Kittler, only creates the text proper and actual authorship in a subsequent re-reading (Kittler 2003: 138). This retrospective agency is then eliminated with the beginning of the “discourse network 1900” (Aufschreibesystem²⁵), by the basic psychoanalytic rule that the unconscious is made visible in unconscious streams of speech. The *écriture automatique* of the Surrealists and the free association of psychoanalysis regularly attempt to produce such unconscious states of mind.

Hence, madness that affects the mechanisms of language has already been detached from the pathological since 1800 and has been connected with literature instead. Today, we still wonder whether the fleeting and vague phenomenon of the imaginary is only comprehensible in precisely these enraptured states of madness and hallucination. There is a long list of scientific and literary attempts to create these states consciously or unconsciously, and include the protocols of drug consumption from Charles Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin, Ernst Jünger and Henri Michaux.

One of the most prominent and most frequently analyzed examples of writing out of madness is *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, by Daniel Paul Schreber, as it was and is ascribed a particular “authenticity.” This text was written between 1900 and 1902, and its analysis influenced the theories of Benjamin, Deleuze and Guattari, Freud, Canetti, Lacan, and Foucault. Canetti, for instance, holds that

23 “unerforschteste und vielleicht die unerforschlichste aller menschlichen Seelenkräfte.”

24 “die Metamorphose des Wirklichen.”

25 The notion “Aufschreibesystem” can be translated either as “discourse network” or “system of notation.” Kittler’s study was translated as “discourse network.” However, “system of notation” emphasizes the practice of writing and writing down, which is central for the notion.

the nature of paranoia is nowhere elucidated clearer than in Schreber's statements. A contemporary reading of the text in the light of the current surveillance scandals almost makes us forget that we are reading a paranoid text from 1900, and leads us to suspect that we live in a time of paranoia:

Man unterhält *Bücher oder sonstige Aufzeichnungen*, in denen nun schon seit Jahren alle meine Gedanken, alle meine Redewendungen, alle meine Gebrauchsgegenstände, alle sonst in meinem Besitze oder meiner Nähe befindlichen Sachen, alle Personen, mit denen ich verkehre usw. *aufgeschrieben* werden. Wer das Aufschreiben besorgt, vermag ich nicht mit Sicherheit zu sagen. Da ich mir Gottes Allmacht nicht als aller Intelligenz entbehrend vorstellen kann, so vermuthe ich, daß das Aufschreiben von Wesen besorgt wird, [...] die [...] des Geistes völlig entbehren und denen von den vorübergehenden Strahlen die Feder zu dem ganz mechanisch von ihnen besorgten Geschäfte des Aufschreibens sozusagen in die Hand gedrückt wird, dergestalt, daß später hervorziehende Strahlen das Aufgeschriebene wieder einsehen können. (Schreber 1973 [1903]: 90)

Books or other notes are kept in which for years have been *written-down* all my thoughts, all my phrases, all my necessities, all the articles in my possession or around me, all persons with whom I come into contact, etc. I cannot say with certainty who does the writing down. As I cannot imagine God's omnipotence lacks all intelligence, I presume that the writing-down is done by creatures [...] lacking all intelligence; their hands are led automatically, as it were, by passing rays for the purpose of making them write-down, so that later rays can again look at what has been written." (Schreber 2000: 123)

Without delving too deeply into Schreber's universe at this point, the close connection between madness and the "Aufschreibesystem" (Schreber 1973: 60) – the term Kittler later extracts from Schreber's notes and on which he bases his theory of media – emerges most plainly here. While writing, especially taking notes in a diary, may often help avert madness,²⁶ and the diary, as a space of reflection and observation, often has a regulative function (Simonis 2000: 196), this phenomenon is completely reversed in Schreber's case: the madness is triggered by the graphomania of the others, and which he in turn puts into writing himself.

Schreber's ability to write out of his own madness is what renders his documentation so unique. As former president of the Senate in Dresden, he had the ability and the means to put his experiences into writing. At the same time, he was fortunately "no poet, so that one can follow his thoughts without being seduced by them"²⁷ (Canetti 1981 [1960]: 488; Canetti 1981: 505). Kittler's terminology meets its limit at this point, as he considers literature since 1900 to be just

²⁶ A very characteristic literary example for this is Jonathan Harker's diary from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: "As I must do something or go mad, I write this diary," (Stoker [1897] (1993): 327).

²⁷ "zum Glück kein Dichter: so kann man ihm überallhin folgen und ist doch vor ihm geschützt."

simulation and “mimicry of madness”²⁸ (Kittler 2003: 370; Kittler 1990: 307) – yet Schreber was in fact mentally ill. Schreber’s treatise represents “the essence of Paranoia”²⁹ (Canetti 1981 [1960]: 488; Canetti 1981: 505) for Canetti, a lucid anticipation of the dictators and crises of the twentieth century for Benjamin, or the mass-neurotic truth of religion for Freud. Nevertheless, as Schreber emphasizes at the beginning of his notes, he had to wrestle with a problem of representation just like his reader: “I cannot of course count upon being *fully* understood because things are dealt with which cannot be expressed in human language; they exceed human understanding”³⁰ (Schreber 1973: 8; Schreber 2000: 16).

2.2 Walther’s, Wilhelm’s and Wolfgang’s delusional episode

Herrndorf’s psychosis, like Schreber’s illness, is not a mimicry of madness – it is not feigned. Similarly to Schreber, Herrndorf’s delusional episode is concerned with writing and written down by himself. Although one can draw such connections between Herrndorf’s blog and Schreber’s *Aufzeichnungen*, my argument by no means follows the assumption that these two texts are in any way analogous. Schreber and Herrndorf cannot be juxtaposed as historical persons or patients, nor are the two genres of their texts comparable in matters of their potential for self-reflection.³¹ Instead, mentioning Schreber’s pathographical texts helps to shed light on Herrndorf’s description of his delusional episode, which forms only a small part of *Arbeit und Struktur*, and is therefore easily overlooked in analyses. It may also help to understand how the blog evokes the tradition of writing and “madness” – in the double sense of writing about “madness” and writing one’s own “madness.” The discourse of “madness” is then brought

28 “Mimikry von Wahnsinn.”

29 “das Wesen der Paranoia.”

30 “Auf volles Verständniß kann ich von vornherein nicht rechnen, da es sich dabei zum Theil um Dinge handelt, die sich in menschlicher Sprache überhaupt nicht ausdrücken lassen, weil sie über das menschliche Begriffsvermögen hinausgehen.”

31 In addition, Schreber’s spiritualistic universe, composed of divine rays and a telegraphic nerve-language, certainly describes a different “Aufschreibesystem” [“notational system”] than Herrndorf’s. According to Kittler, they are split between the “Aufschreibesystem 1900” [“discourse network”] (Kittler 2003) and “Aufschreibesystem 2000.” Furthermore, “God” or different institutions (such as his psychiatrist Dr. Flechsig, the juridical context of his project) play a fundamentally different role in Schreber’s *Memoires*.

into the text by Herrndorf himself, as a citation whose function on a textual level I analyze in more detail below.³²

Arbeit und Struktur begins with Herrndorf's admission to the Berlin neuro-psychiatry ward. The description of the psychosis itself that leads to his admission follows in a flashback in ten parts, half a year and one hundred pages later. After Herrndorf's diagnosis and first surgery, fear of death and manic fits alternate; five days prior to his admission, the "strange exhilaration/euphoria"³³ heightens, and, at the same time, Herrndorf starts carrying a notebook for the first time in his life: "Author with notebook: Always seemed to me a touch too vain. Now the desire for it is overpowering"³⁴ (115). Simultaneously, and before he even begins to note anything in it, he starts to fear losing the book. So on its first page, he enters a finder's reward, which, as his megalomania increases, he raises from fifty to 1150 euros by adding more ones in front of the initial amount. The notebook, which is the precondition of writing something down, contains the possibility of its own dysfunctionality – if it is lost, everything that has been written down is lost – even before the process of writing begins. Loss of language thus becomes an intrinsic and constitutive component in the use of language in the first place.

During the following days, he writes diagrams and lists about the conditions within his head.³⁵ In order to deal with his fear of death, Herrndorf installs a Walther PPK, a semi-automatic pistol, within his head to shoot the thoughts of

32 Concerning Herrndorf's posthumously published last novel *Bilder deiner großen Liebe* (2014) ["Pictures of Your Great Love"], and its protagonist Isa, understood as a reflexive figure of social and "normality" see Cho 2014.

33 "sonderbare Hochgefühl."

34 "Autor mit Notizbuch: Schien mir immer eine Spur zu eitel für einen Behelfsschriftsteller wie mich. Jetzt ist der Wunsch danach übermächtig."

35 Later in the blog he says: "Man sollte keine Bücher schreiben ohne Listen drin." ["You should not write books without lists in them."] (212) In accord with these poetics, enumerations and lists occur frequently in *Arbeit und Struktur*: from lists of books yet to be read, inventories of different medicinal facilities and lists of "Jack-Nicholson-Momenten" in psychiatry to the description of the self as a bookkeeper who writes the inventory (13, 16, 17, 44, 303, 319, 214). On lists in literary texts, see Mainberger (2003). Regarding this point in relation to *Arbeit und Struktur*, see Balint: "The bookkeeper cannot but fall short of writing the 'full inventory' because a unity of the self that the metaphor implies is essentially unattainable." (2016: 7). And concerning lists and the question of genre in Herrndorf's blog, see Siegel (2016: 364–365). See also Michelbach (2016: 112, 124–25). Equally rewarding would be an analysis of the role of diagrams in the blog, which are not only frequently mentioned, googled, and used as a benchmark and measure of time for Herrndorf's own life, but are also included in the blog and printed in the book, and along with many photos break up a continuous reading experience (already inhibited by web links within the blog) and render it more incontinuous. See, among others, Krämer (2009).

death that emerge every minute or second. This life-saving device gets blocked more and more by an entity that reveals itself at first as “Disruptor,”³⁶ then as “Wilhelm Disruptor”³⁷ (120). The increasing “madness” that unfolds in the battle between these entities is observed from the outside at the same time: “Despite all the panic I’m simultaneously so amused [...] that I throw my head back and laugh out loud in front of my computer, and this laughter sounds like that of a really bad actor in a really bad movie when they perform the ‘completely mad lunatic’”³⁸ (122). Thus, “being mad,” just like the light unraveling in the memory of two-year old Herrndorf, is always something that springs from TV and films. “Madness” emanates from media and is staged by means of media; it is medial *mise-en-scène* by way of medial doubling.

The psychotic sequence finally culminates in “The Great Speech”³⁹ (124), as Herrndorf terms it. In a nocturnal email he summons all his friends to the apartment of a friend, but while preparing the speech in his notebook, he is seized by a fear of losing it or of destroying it himself, instigated by the disturber entity within. To save it from himself or Wilhelm Störer, he contrives a scheme to copy out the text and to bury these copies. The Great Speech, eventually, is supposed to be entitled “Narcissistic Structure of Personality and Fear of Death – talk by Wolfgang Herrndorf,” to include an obituary on J.D. Salinger and at the same time the Theory of Everything. Between the fear of being insane, the idea of writing the text of his life, and his circular thoughts (“your thoughts are the text, the text is a text about the text, the text returns to its starting point”⁴⁰ [135]), he concludes that the Theory of Everything is itself circular reasoning: “we revolve endlessly in a loop, hell and now the text comes again, my text, the great text. [...] *I’m in my own text*”⁴¹ (136, emphasis mine). In this manner, Herrndorf becomes a character in his own text, which necessarily presupposes that a narrator narrates that character. It becomes manifest that this loop, ascribed to the psychosis, must be seen as valid for the text of *Arbeit und Struktur* as a whole, not least by looking at the character of the narrator,

36 “Störer.”

37 “Wilhelm Störer.”

38 “Bei aller Panik bin ich gleichzeitig so amüsiert [...], dass ich den Kopf in den Nacken werfe und laut am Rechner auflache, und dieses Lachen hört sich an wie sehr schlechte Schauspieler in sehr schlechten Filmen, wenn sie den ‘total verrückten Irren’ geben.”

39 “Die große Rede.”

40 “deine Gedanken sind der Text, der Text ist ein Text über den Text, der Text kehrt zu seinem Ausgangspunkt zurück, [...]”

41 “wir kreisen ewig in einer Schleife, Hölle und jetzt kommt der Text schon wieder, mein Text, der große Text. [...] *Ich bin in meinem eigenen Text.*”

who in the end will in fact be able to recount the death of the author's character as well as of the real Herrndorf.

In writing this text, he writes down that he writes down the text. "The system of notation Herrndorf" (Birnstiel 2014) consists of this text, which is designed "to administer oneself, to write oneself forth"⁴² (214). This is at least what the manual claims, which is provided in the following year. Consciousness, he notes on 5 July, 2001, is a bookkeeper writing inventory lists.⁴³ This results in ephemeral media and the hope that these could "one day to be played under noise and crackling on a similarly dubious operating system as my own"⁴⁴ (214).

The text not only administers oneself and itself, but at the same time explicitly drafts a typology of its readers. Only when the latter are understood as receivers that are identically structured as the sender, does the text assume them capable of resisting disruptive signals such as noise and crackles and ultimately able of decoding the text. In that case, the discourse system is continued, even if the Great Speech naturally did not achieve its desired effect (the Nobel prize). For the storage media are malfunctioning: while the notebook has not been lost, it does not contain THE text, which is also not found on any computer – the insane search for it makes two paramedics appear, who finally remove Herrndorf from the scene.

Only now does the reader of the main text, *Arbeit und Struktur* as a whole, become conscious of the circular structure of the text that he or she is reading: the flashbacks end where the first dated entry begins. The reader's suspicion is confirmed eventually, in the postscript to the flashbacks: "Needless to say, the text I was desperately looking for has turned up after all: It is this text."⁴⁵ (149)

In this loop, the blog matches the claims of madness: we circulate eternally in a loop and the text repeats itself endlessly. If we begin to reread the text from the start, in the second entry we come across the description of an elderly woman, who meticulously protocols her daily routine in the clinic. Herrndorf asks her: "Are we mad, because we write everything down, or do we write everything down, because we are mad?"⁴⁶ (11). This is how the circular structure of the

42 "sich selbst zu verwalten, sich fortzuschreiben."

43 Concerning the function of lists, see footnote 35.

44 "eines Tages auf einem ähnlich fragwürdigen Betriebssystem wie dem eigenen unter Rauschen und Knistern noch einmal abgespielt werden."

45 "Überflüssig zu erwähnen, dass der [...] von mir verzweifelt gesuchte Text später doch noch aufgetaucht ist: Es ist dieser Text."

46 "Sind wir verrückt, weil wir alles aufschreiben, oder schreiben wir alles auf, weil wir verrückt sind?"

“insane,” as well as the no longer insane, discourse system continues to writes itself endlessly.

It is not easy for the blog to escape this circle: “Describing the madness makes me mad again”⁴⁷ (154), it says after the flashback. Even if Herrndorf manages to escape circular reasoning and psychosis while writing the protocol, the experience of the lost text remains. The fear of the loss of (the) speech in both senses soon manifests itself literally both in Herrndorf’s life and blog. Thus, just as in the case of Schreber, the “madness” which made Herrndorf think that he was capable of seeing the future is no longer madness, but rather the reality of the illness which increasingly finds expression in aphasia, caused by epileptic seizures.

2.3 Promise II: Aphasia and maimed skulls

The discovery of aphasia in the nineteenth century made it possible to differentiate between the ability to speak and to understand speech for the first time. Motoric aphasia, discovered by Paul Broca, and sensorial aphasia, described by Carl Wernicke, imply the breakdown or malfunction of one ability with the other continuing to function.

Apoplexien, Kopfschußwunden und Paralysen haben die grundlegende Entdeckung ermöglicht, auf die jede Zuordnung von Kulturtechniken und Physiologie zurückgeht. [...] Die Aphasieforschung markiert eine Zäsur in den Abenteuern des Sprechens. Sprachstörungen hören auf, alle in der schönen Wortlosigkeit romantischer Seele zu konvergieren.

Apoplexy, bullet wounds to the head, and paralysis made possible the fundamental discoveries upon which every connection drawn between cultural practices and physiology is based. [...] Research into aphasia marked a turning point in the adventures of speech. Disturbances in language no longer converged in the beautiful wordlessness of the romantic soul. (Kittler 2003: 260; Kittler 1990: 215)

Injuries of the cerebral cortex make it possible – through their local limitation – to dissect the speech and writing of a living individual. Neurolinguistics, a discipline that emerged from these insights, focuses on those “locations” of language in the brain thanks to imaging procedures.

In this manner, language as cultural technique, understood here not as the total sum of techniques applied in a culture, but as self-techniques, “techniques de soi” (Foucault 2001 [1982]) of the second order, which are by their recursive

47 “Die Beschreibung des Irrseins macht mich wieder irre.”

aspect the basis and technique of the constitution of the self, becomes explorable by disturbance and physical deficits. The patients, for example, from whom Kurt Goldstein gained his insights on aphasia (Goldstein 1948) – which in turn become crucial for Roman Jakobson (Jakobson 1974 [1956]) – suffered brain injuries in World War I. Jakobson constructs a double system out of Goldstein's; he describes a similarity disorder and a contiguity disorder corresponding to his theory of the two aspects of language, combination and selection. Thus for Jakobson, the “apathic structure of linguistic systems”⁴⁸ yields to the linguist's “new insights into the underlying regularities of language”⁴⁹ (Jakobson 1974 [1956]: 118). In *Child Language, Aphasia and Phonological Universals*, furthermore, he claims to have found in aphasia the reverse image of ontogenetic development of language and, with that, recognizes the inner link between language acquisition and language breakdown (Jakobson 1974 [1956]: 118 and Jakobson 1968 [1941]). Freud's early text *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien* lines up with this tradition as well, as he constructs his topical model of the conscious and the unconscious by working with the accumulated material of deficits.⁵⁰ Hence physical disorders, which are already held to reflect language and consciousness by 1800, are considered by various disciplines in the twentieth century to be a cognitive category beyond the body, as the internal rules of a system become particularly evident when it is disrupted (Jäger 2012: 30). Particularly in the case of language, disruption as disorder remains the place where communication turns self-reflexive, that is to say, its reflexivity becomes more clearly apparent (Shannon and Weaver, here: Neubert 2012: 277).

In analogy to the promise of the creative potential of so called “madness,” language disruption thus has a reflective potential for the medium of language and for privileged access to insights on language. This creative aspect of disruption also triggers an artistic process in *Arbeit und Struktur*. However, the reflective potential that disruption has for the medium can only be represented when the fundamental decomposition initiated by language disorder is restructured by a medial transformation into writing, image, and video. In *Arbeit und Struktur*, aphasia writes itself: the breakdown of language represents itself in language and, in employing analogous and digital means of recording, writing becomes a writing against disruption, on disruption and along with disruption.⁵¹

48 “apathische Aufbau des sprachlichen Systems.”

49 “neue Erkenntnisse über die der Sprache zugrunde liegenden Gesetzmäßigkeiten.”

50 On this point, see Kittler (2003: 336) and simultaneously Freud's differentiation from neurophysiology by refraining from locating his system anatomically.

51 See Neufeld (2016). She focuses on the comparison between blog and novel as well as on the birth of the author via suicide. In terms of writing as vital function, the autonomy of the author is

3 In search of lost texts, words, mines, miens – intermedial findings

It starts with a headache and a computer malfunction.⁵² The literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has a penchant for using the headache as a motif to depict the fragmented perception of traumatic events.⁵³ Herrndorf's works are also teeming with characters who suffer from headaches, feverish dreams and mental blackouts, shattered skulls and leaking cerebral matter. In his first novel, *In Plüschgewittern*, the protagonist, constantly pained by headaches, experiences the initial stages of aphasia.⁵⁴ However, the traditional reading which understands the exposed unreliability of the narrator as a poetologically productive or metafictional element reaches its limits with *Arbeit und Struktur*. There is no playful fiction of disturbed narrative stances, only a narrator who dies. Yet consulting Herrndorf's "desert novel" *Sand*, created contemporaneously, turns out to be instructive. There, too, everything begins with a headache. Every day at four o'clock sharp, the protagonist of *Sand* suffers from headaches that are ironically healed only by a momentous head injury, through which

maintained through writing, especially through writing about the own death, as she points out. In addition, the loss of the ability to speak is compensated by presenting a texture of different voices within the text/blog.

52 See Herrndorf (2013), "Rückblende 1: Das Krankenhaus" ["Flashback 1: The hospital"], 97–106. In that passage, Herrndorf gives an account from the beginning: how, after initial misdiagnoses, the incurable brain tumor (a glioblastoma) was diagnosed.

53 Often right at the attempt of the narrator to dispose of his/her own responsibility. On this point, see e.g. Louis-Ferdinand Céline's depiction of the journey through devastated post-war Germany. During this journey, he gets hit in the head by a brick, resulting in the narrator's lack of accountability for the disrupted scraps of memory, letting him hide behind fragmented speech and dismembered memory by the token of his external injury (Céline 1987).

54 When attempting to look from a rooftop into the courtyard of an apartment building in Berlin, where in all likelihood a guest of the ongoing party has fallen, the edge of the roof blocks the protagonist's view. To him it is as if "würde einem ein Wort nicht einfallen, das einem seit Tagen auf der Zunge liegt." ["a word would not come to mind that had been on the tip of one's tongue for days"] (Herrndorf 2002: 98). There as well, the plot teems with (partly only imagined) blackouts, memory problems (mostly under the influence of drugs, e.g. [Herrndorf 2002: 86, 102]). The inner perspective of normally inaccessible mental states is rendered important there already: "So sieht ein Filmriß von innen aus, denke ich, und lege mich in das Bett." ["This is what a blackout looks like from the inside, I think, and lie down in bed."] Head injuries and headaches are constant motives in the novel *Sand* (Herrndorf (2014) [2011]: 111, 117, 187). A similar situation involves feverish fits in *Diesseits des Van-Allen-Gürtels* (Herrndorf 2007).

he loses his memory.⁵⁵ Amnesia and aphasia are carefully linked in the novel by the thematization of dysfunctional media: the mind of the amnesia patient for example is to be imagined like someone “who for days, recognizes inside himself nothing but a blank piece of paper”⁵⁶ (Herrndorf 2014 [2011]: 308).

Wolfgang Herrndorf suffers his first epileptic seizure on 8 May 2011: he can’t speak anymore, has trouble orienting himself and forgets what he meant to say. Looking at text files of his novel, they are just as fragmented as the structure of his thoughts (222–224). The next morning, he recites out loud, as if to reassure himself that he has regained his language, a poem by Georg von der Vring: “In der Heimat” [Back Home]. From then until the end of *Arbeit und Struktur*, the first lines of the poem run through the protocol of the aphasic seizures:⁵⁷ “On the Weser, Unterweser / You will be again as you were before. / Through the reeds and the grasses of the bank / The water flows in as it did before”⁵⁸ (224). At times they are spoken in unison by other persons and voices in his head, at times he hears them in English or hears only their vague sound. While generally only the first four verses are repeated, the last stanza, only recited once, is the most important, for it describes the aphasic experience: “And the stars, seven stars / Stand in the window pale like before, / And still it calls from a distance, / And you don’t know what, like before”⁵⁹ (von der Vring 1996: 19).

One still perceives the phonetic sound of a call from a distance, yet its sense can no longer be understood. This experience, already known inside the world evoked in the poem and yet painful every time, thus repeats the loss of access to intact communication in language. The first four verses, used as a leitmotif, carry the experience of losing language or the possibility to understand language silently within them, since the crucial last lines are always withheld. These verses thus link the loss of understanding and language, and, exactly by that token,

55 On this point, see also the parallels between Driss Chraïbi’s novel *Une enquête au pays*, which starts with a headache as well and to which *Sand* possibly refers. For the reference to Chraïbi, see Maar 2012.

56 “der in sich selbst seit Tagen nichts weiter zu erkennen vermag als ein unbeschriebenes Blatt Papier.”

57 Herrndorf’s aphasic episodes change between difficulties to speak, while knowing what to say and difficulties to understand, including the voices inside his head. That means his speechlessness during his epileptic seizures cannot generally be categorized as Broca or as Wernicke aphasia. Nevertheless, the term “aphasia” is used here to characterize both states at the same time and as a mode of self-description: Herrndorf himself writes of aphasic experiences (297).

58 “An der Weser, Unterweser / Wirst du wieder sein wie einst. / Durch Geschilf und Ufergräser / Dringt die Flut herein, wie einst.”

59 “Und die Sterne, sieben Sterne / Stehn im Fenster blass wie einst, / Und noch immer ruft’s von ferne, / Und du weißt nicht was, wie einst.”

are used as an instrument to make sure of language by mechanical repetition. Aphasia is fought by a citation of aphasic experience. Language beyond understanding thus becomes a mechanical construction of sound.

While Herrndorf's neurosurgeon was of the opinion that Wittgenstein's "The borders of my language are the borders of my world" was "probably oversimplified"⁶⁰ (170) with respect to the language disorders of cancer patients, Herrndorf describes himself after the epileptic seizure as "thinly built out into a somewhat papery world"⁶¹ (224). His world, which consists of paper and writing, is just confined by language: "This pile of shards on the inside coupled with a simultaneous inability to speak, this is not my world."⁶² (224) A short while later, when the second seizure occurs, it does become his world after all: the disorder of language begins to write itself. Miming, he gestures for pen and paper and jots down in a notepad that he is having a seizure. "Grammar shot into pieces, handwriting normal. [...] Partial amnesia. I suggest performing little Oliver Sacks experiments next time."⁶³ (229) This is followed by a photographic reproduction of Herrndorf in which he holds the note up to the camera. He attempts to keep a protocol of the following seizures, too:

Ein Satz, der aus meinem Roman zu stammen scheint, geht mir als Hall und Widerhall durch den Kopf. Kann den Satz nicht verstehen, kann ihn mir nicht merken, versuche ihn Wort für Wort und Buchstabe für Buchstabe zu notieren.

davor
ein wenig
z
zu wenig wenig
zuwenig zu (240)

A sentence that seems to belong to one of my novels reverberates and echoes through my head. Can't understand the sentence, can't remember it, try to note it down word for word, letter for letter.

before
a little
t
too little little
toolittle too

⁶⁰ "vermutlich zu plakativ."

⁶¹ "dünn in eine etwas papierene Welt hinausgebaut."

⁶² "Dieser Scherbenhaufen im Innern bei gleichzeitiger Unfähigkeit zu sprechen, das ist nicht meine Welt."

⁶³ "Grammatik zerschossen, Schriftbild normal. [...] Teilamnesie. Ich schlage vor, das nächste Mal kleine Oliver-Sacks-Experimente durchzuführen."

Again, he simultaneously recites the poem, and has particular trouble with it this time. After the seizure he recites the poem again, “concentrated on the mechanics of speaking”⁶⁴ (241). He films himself in the process and puts up a link to the video on the blog.⁶⁵ Thus, he not only suggests using his seizures to experiment, but already begins to act as a test subject in front of the camera and on paper. The disruption of language establishes a reflexive experimental space (see the article of Koch and Nanz in this volume: 3) in which different medial strategies are meant to set out the breakdown of language in writing, in the course of which analogous and digital media as well as written and oral forms alternate. If, for Herrndorf, “human life ends where communication ends”⁶⁶ (224), then the documentation of noise still is communication.

The diverse language problems of *Sand*’s characters arise from a similar configuration: the text is a minutely constructed game of mistaken identity, interspersed with homonyms, homographs, and homophones, which in turn cause new and grave mistakes of identity on different levels. The protagonist Polidorio, for example, blunders into an ultimately lethal pursuit by being mistaken for Agent Lundgren. This character has language problems himself that are best described by the “tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon” of aphasiology (Arnold 2013: 31). The narrator of the novel too gets infected with that *logic of the near-enough* and describes Lundgren, for instance, as trembling like pea leaves [*Erbsenlaub*] instead of aspen leaves [*Espenlaub*] (Arnold 2013: 31). In this context, loss of memory is persistently equated with loss of language, and time and again, “[a] numb feeling,” “like cotton wool”⁶⁷ remains on the characters’ tongues: “The word was gone” / “Das Wort war weg” (Herrndorf 2014: 444). The core of the story, finally, is a desperate search for a “mine” or “mien” / “Mine” or “Miene,”⁶⁸ lost in semantic games of similarity and homonyms, that later reveals itself as a microfilm hidden in an empty ball point pen refill (*Stiftmine*). Everywhere in the novel (along with gold mines, land mines, miens, etc.), ball point pens turn up and lead to the theft of a suitcase, are used to stir coffee, are used as the backbone of a doll made from grass and provoke endless chains of fatal causality – on the

64 “konzentriert auf die Mechanik des Sprechens.”

65 In the book, a link to the blog and video is marked down in the endnotes: <www.wolfgang-herrndorf.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Film-am-06-09-2011-um-18.25.mov>. Elke Siegel underlines the performance character of his video, which brings the body into the text by filming Herrndorf while eating, and contributes to constructing a posthumous “I” of the author as a public figure (Siegel 2016: 360).

66 “[m]enschliches Leben endet, wo die Kommunikation endet.”

67 “ein taubes Gefühl,” “wie Watte.”

68 On the extensive diversification of the “Minenspiel” in the novel see Maar 2012.

one hand they get lost again, on the other hand they are never actually used to write.

The text of the Great Speech, the “Mine” [refill], and the words themselves are searched for maniacally. During his first stay at the hospital, in the course of which the tumor is diagnosed, Herrndorf, “despite an hours-long search”⁶⁹ (100), does not succeed in finding his friend Holm’s telephone number on the small hospital bed stand: the few objects lying there “drive me almost insane in their confusing mess”⁷⁰ (100). The scraps of paper never turn up again, the ballpoint pen (its “Mine”) does not work, the computer too fails when the illness sets in. Until the end of his blog, Herrndorf looks for better words to describe the wordless state that goes along with the process of depersonalization – but in vain. “Maybe because no describer is present in the moment to be described”⁷¹ (273). In spite of the missing observer, he tries to “fix” the shreds of words that remain in his head during the epileptic seizures “in writing” (“durch Aufschreiben festzumachen.”) – “But no idea. I can’t figure it out. If I do recognize something like ‘Jesus Christ has saved the world’, I will get back to you”⁷² (262). The physical disruption is reflected in the material disruption of the text, but neither refers to “another,” deeper truth.

Schreber’s *Memoirs*, too, try to attain the goal of “a rehabilitation through writing, through a book”⁷³ (Hagen 2001: 13). Yet at the end of their “reparation strategy”⁷⁴ (Hagen 2001: 13), we find the restitution of Schreber’s place in society, which he tries to achieve by the exact transcription of those experiments which are performed on him and during which sound perceptions are projected directly onto his nervous system. Herrndorf’s rehabilitation by writing aims for a whole other level: it attempts a “restructuration symbolique”⁷⁵ of the disturbed symbolic function that is perhaps most clearly manifest in blank pages, which cannot be written upon and in malfunctioning writing devices that do not write. Against these failures of writing utensils, *Arbeit und Struktur* resorts to the mechanics of language, on the level of sound and its repetition, to sequences of video footage and metaphors of film, in which new attempts are constantly made to re-

69 “trotz stundenlanger Suche.”

70 “machen mich in ihrer Unübersichtlichkeit fast verrückt.”

71 “Vielleicht, weil im zu beschreibenden Moment kein Beschreibender mit dabei ist.”

72 “Aber keine Ahnung. Ich krieg’s nicht raus. Falls doch noch mal irgendetwas wie ‘Jesus Christus hat die Welt erlöst’ erkennbar wird, melde ich mich wieder.”

73 “eine Rehabilitation durch die Schrift, durch ein Buch.”

74 “Reparationsstrategie.”

75 Félix Guattari: *Monographie sur R. A.* (1972 [1956]: 19; quoted Schmidgen 1997: 92).

structure the disturbed symbolic function and thus to restore it.⁷⁶ For the essence of the Theory of Everything, mentioned again and again even after the psychosis, is – in the logic of the closed system which generates Herrndorf's text – simple in the end: "Nothing: contextless hell"⁷⁷ (435). Behind disruption, for Herrndorf and in his categories, nothing is to be found but that hellish incoherence. This Real, to which there is no possible access, can only be dealt with by proxy, by an attempt to symbolize. But his attempt to turn the experience of disruption into an experiment is now only an automatized reflex of belief in a cognitive category that, in this case, does not lead to cognition anymore.

Just as research on aphasia around 1900 understood itself as a first vivisection of speech and writing, in this case, too, the two fall apart: the written media consistently fail, notebooks go missing, the data disappears, the writing devices do not write – all these demonstrate how the written medium falls short, is too liable to disruption to be equal to the task of confronting that "contextless hell." For *Arbeit und Struktur*, there is nothing left but to fall back on other media.

Therefore, attempts are made, for example, to transfer orality to text via transcriptions, phonetic pictures, and finally the video sequence described above. Language then figures as a mechanical apparatus of sounds, as a machine in the context of other machines adduced by the text. The patient's trust in and unavoidably close connection to measurements and medical devices reappear again and again: "The sight of the machines calms me down"⁷⁸ (101), it says before the first operation. Herrndorf describes and names them, as in the case of the Clinac 3: "Very beautiful device, could be even more futuristic for my taste"⁷⁹ (32) or of the follow-on device Novalis: "Novalis's discoveries in the natural sciences weren't all that ground-breaking in the end."⁸⁰ (276) Herrndorf dreams of the devices and, after seeing Andreas Dresen's *Stopped on Track (Halt auf freier Strecke)*, particularly notes the experience of virtually looking at himself lying inside the machine in place of the lead actor (281). Ultimately, film is the medium with which one can deal with the two language problems, the medical problem and the problem of finality: the disorder of lan-

76 On this point, see the analysis of Guattari's report on the psychotherapy of R.A. and the role of tape recordings, of copies in writing and the therapeutic diary in Schmidgen (1997: 91–97).

77 "Nichts: kontextfreie Hölle."

78 "Der Anblick der Apparate beruhigt mich."

79 "Sehr schönes Gerät, könnte für meinen Geschmack noch futuristischer sein."

80 "So bahnbrechend waren Novalis' naturwissenschaftliche Entdeckungen dann ja auch wieder nicht."

guage becomes a *Filmriss*, a broken film, a blackout.⁸¹ On the one hand, by emphasizing the “nothing” beyond the aphasic experience, Herrndorf’s text can not only be read in the traditions of autobiographical or autopathographical writing, but also has to be seen in the light of “autothanatography,” as an aporetic term for a genre which focuses on the writing of one’s own death.⁸² On the other hand, by citing common genre traditions and classical topoi, confronting them with the “contextless hell” and replacing them with observations of and by media and machines, Herrndorf writes a pathography of the second order.

4 “EVERYTHING EVERYTHING OVER – Theory of everything not in sight”⁸³

Inside the “Aufschreibesystem” *Arbeit und Struktur*, “madness” does not give privileged access to disruption as cognitive category. It does not involve the potential of innovation. And for Herrndorf, there is nothing to be found behind unconscious language, either: no Jesus, no experience of transcendence, only Nothing. Even when he, by taking notes of the epileptic seizure, gets hold of the English text that he mysteriously hears in rhythm and melody during each seizure, he is disappointed by the lines from the famous Rolling Stones song: “I see a red door and I want it painted black. Nicht ganz so interessant, wie ich gedacht hatte.” [“Not quite as interesting as I thought.”] (311) Nevertheless, it is written down – the poietic force of disruption writes itself without requiring any cognition, lurking behind it and only coming to light by way of the disruption. Within the process-based protocol of the blog, the borders between the poem and the aphasic experience are increasingly blurred, and the search for words to describe the wordless becomes its own poetic device that stands for itself.

Bodily experiences become possible not when blackouts set in, but only by parallel medial experience from the start. With the beginning of the illness the computer fails, and the first experience can only be recalled as if through the TV’s light. However, *Arbeit und Struktur* is by no means primarily a critique of

81 Gertrud Koch has shown, for example, that film has a wholly different relationship to death and dying than that of writing, but also than that of photography, since, among other things, it’s capable of showing immobility in the medium of movement, see Koch (2008).

82 A discussion of the notion in a very broad sense (“every autobiography, we might say, is also an autothanatography,” because death can’t be avoided), see Miller (1994: 12). For a more specific understanding in the tradition of Jacques Derrida and above all Maurice Blanchot, see Secomb (2002).

83 “ALLES ALLES ZU ENDE – Weltformel nicht in Sicht” (136).

media; it is about placing physical experiences into mediated experiences, which can be trusted more than the fragile body. For it is through them that a discourse system writes itself in the first place, and possibly writes itself on through others.

The blog ends with the authorial note of the death of the author. The book concludes with an epilogue by Kathrin Passig and Marcus Gärtner. The external narrator who first appeared at the beginning of the blog during the psychotic event, thus interferes with the autobiographical records. On the last pages, as the entries become sparse and there are fewer and fewer words, he twice writes, in the past tense and from a post-death perspective of a place, “there, where I died”⁸⁴ (421, 432). Thus, the discourse system *Arbeit und Struktur* writes itself beyond death, by honoring what was programmatically promised: that one cannot come to grips with life other than in the form of a novel, and Herrndorf himself, therefore, becomes a character whose death is predicted, written down and, through this action, marked as having taken place by a narrator. This is how Herrndorf succeeds in writing about speechless states in language – and about his own death, as it occurred.

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84 “dort, wo ich starb.”

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