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Introduction

1 A Scene of Beginning

When Robinson Crusoe finds himself shipwrecked on a deserted, unfamiliar beach, he has but barely managed to save his life. Spending a night freezing, hungry, and in fear of unknown dangers, he realizes that his survival means nothing more than a merciless reprieve – the prospect of a slow death from wasting away instead of a quick death in the sea. Nature, to which Robinson finds himself exposed, appears to offer no means of securing his existence; indeed, it confronts him as a dangerous force. Only the following day, when he discovers his ship stranded not far from the coast, is he able to escape this resignation. This is followed by days of hard work during which he recovers preserved food, weapons, and tools from the wreck, and finally various nautical instruments, writing materials, and books: objects of use that seem capable of ensuring his survival in the short, medium, and long term. These are objects that Robinson could not have produced himself but are products of complex, specialized practices of labor, or, in other words, that are the product not only of individual actions but of operational chains reaching far back into the (cultural) history of humankind. In order to be able to start his life anew on the island, Robinson must be able to connect to a cultural tradition that he does not carry within himself but that is condensed into material things. The shipwreck functions as a container of everything that makes human beings human. And the lonely island is the place where Robinson is able to (re)create himself as a human being by connecting to all these things.

Read this way, Daniel Defoe's literary island-experiment is not so much the fiction of a new beginning far removed from civilization. Rather, it draws attention to what precedes (or underlies) this beginning: objects and practices that, by entangling material and symbolic dimensions, create not only "culture" but also "the human being." It is only at first glance that there appears to be a sequence of steps from the objects that make survival possible during Robinson's first few days (food), to those that allow him to establish himself on the island in the medium term (weapons, tools), to those that can only be useful in the long term (various "mathematical instruments," paper and ink, books – specifically, several Bibles). Precisely these things, whose immediate benefits are difficult to discern, soon

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prove to be indispensable. For example, it is paper and ink that allow Crusoe to capture and record the thoughts spinning in his head amid his despair and to sort them, like an accountant, into columns of “debtor” and “creditor.” It is only when he makes a list comparing “good” and “evil” that Robinson gains clarity about his chances of survival, which turn out not to be so bad.¹ An earlier scene in the novel already emphasized the necessity of a self-distancing induced by media. When Robinson and the captain disagree during a storm over which course to take, they retreat into the cabin and, “looking over the charts,” come to a carefully-weighted mutual decision. When the next storm arrives, they are not able to take a step back from the situation. The crew panics and abandons the ship:

In this Distress the Mate of our Vessel lays hold of the Boat, and with the help of the rest of the Men, they got her slung over the Ship’s-side, and getting all into her, let go, and committed our selves being Eleven in Number, to God’s Mercy, and the wild Sea.²

The hasty decision, as it turns out later, is a mistake. The small boat is unable to withstand the storm, while the abandoned ship survives with only slight damage.

An education in *sang-froid*, or a suppression of spontaneous reactions that the anthropologist Marcel Mauss described 300 years after Defoe as the decisive effect of culturally specific “techniques of the body,” proves itself here – or fails.³ Robinson’s example also shows that these techniques of the body work in conjunction with specific spaces (the protected cabin as opposed to the storm-battered deck) and media (the map). Their use, moreover, presupposes further objects:

And now I began to apply my self to make such necessary things as I found I most wanted, as particularly a Chair and a Table, for without these I was not able to enjoy the few Comforts I had in the World, I could not write or eat, or do several things with so much Pleasure without a Table.⁴

A chair and table are not absolutely necessary to eat, but they make eating a cultural act. Like the fence with which Robinson surrounds his home, they create

¹ Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventueres of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York and London: Norton, 1994 [1719]), 49–50.

² Defoe, *Crusoe*, 32–33.

³ “La principale utilité que je vois à mon alpinisme d’autrefois fut cette éducation de mon sang-froid qui me permit de dormir debout sur le moindre replat au bord de l’abîme. / The main utility I see in my erstwhile mountaineering was this education of my composure [sang-froid], which enabled me to sleep upright on the narrowest ledge overlooking the abyss.” Marcel Mauss, “Les Techniques du Corps,” *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, introduction par Claude Lévi-Strauss, 365–388 (Paris: PUF, 1985 [1950]), here 385; translated as “Techniques of the Body” by Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2, 1 (1973): 70–88, here 86.

⁴ Defoe, *Crusoe*, 50.

a sphere of culture that sets itself apart from the surrounding nature, thus also distinguishing Robinson as a human from the wild animals on the island. They create a body kept upright not only by muscles and bones but also by rules that are learned.

The plasticity of this depiction positions *Robinson Crusoe* within a series of founding narratives about acts that engender culture. The furrow that Romulus ploughs to separate what will become the city of Rome from the surrounding wilderness is such an act. With the plough, he establishes a connection to the agricultural cultivation of the soil and thus to a spatial and symbolic demarcation that is fundamental, at least for the West.⁵ Even before Romulus “misused” the plough to mark the city boundary, farming had always produced not only food but also a space that was no longer that of nature. Yet it is not only the relationship of human beings to “their” environment and “their” bodies that is determined in such an entanglement of material and symbolic practices; rather, it is such practices that define human beings in the first place. It is this entanglement that Marcel Mauss first observed in his “techniques of the body” and that has since become both a premise and an object of research in anthropology, the history of science, and media studies.⁶ Viewed from a *cultural-technical* perspective, Robinson’s attempt to assert his humanity in solitude proves to be a paradoxical enterprise. It is only possible in operations that always include what the human being should not be: those technical-medial objects recovered from the wreck and the nonhuman animals whose domestication, after many failed attempts, will eventually provide Robinson with sustenance and company.

The “expulsion of the spirit from the humanities” with which Friedrich Kittler initiated a media-technical turn in German cultural studies forty years ago has, in recent years, affected broad areas of the international humanities (→ Bernhard Siegert).⁷ Critical animal studies, new materialism, or research on artificial intelligence (along with many other suggestions for reshaping the field of cultural studies) are united by an interest in questioning the anthropological difference,

5 See Bernhard Siegert, “Kulturtechnik,” in *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Harun Maye and Leander Scholz (Munich: Fink, 2011), 95–118.

6 For an exemplary treatment, see the works of Timothy Ingold (e.g., *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* [London and New York: Routledge, 2000]), Bruno Latour (e.g., “Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together,” *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture and Present* 6 (1986), 1–40) and Bernhard Siegert (e.g., “Media After Media,” in *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft, Media After Kittler*, ed. Eleni Ikoniadou and Scott Wilson [New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015], 79–91).

7 See Friedrich Kittler (ed.), *Austreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften: Programme des Poststrukturalismus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1980).

defined as the exaltation of the human being as a creator of culture.⁸ What a cultural-technical perspective has to contribute to this endeavor is, first and foremost, the possibility of operationalizing the border crossing this research strives for – precisely by making it possible to recognize the borders to be transgressed as the product of specific operations linking human and nonhuman actors. In the process, such an approach can build on the field of media studies as shaped by Kittler, while at the same time expanding on what this approach describes solely in terms of a capacity of technical media to include the cultural practices that, as this cultural-technical perspective fundamentally assumes, precede the concepts and objects constituted in and through precisely these practices.

This volume aims to take up the impulse that has emanated thus far primarily from media studies and to test this approach in a broader disciplinary field. This is, however, by no means intended as a transfer in only one direction. History and literary studies, as well as the history of science (all of which stand here together with media studies), each have their own specific theoretical and historical expertise, which is what makes research into cultural techniques a comprehensive field in the first place. What repeatedly emerges in this research are situations in which people enter into constellations with (media)technical and natural objects that do not simply yield to their actions or interpretations. These are scenes in which human beings are transformed from anthropological constants into variables in operations that elude human mastery by chaining together diverse actors and making them interdependent. This would be *Robinson Crusoe*'s message: survival is not ensured by the – vain – attempt to assert oneself as *human being* over and against an overpowering nature. Attention must be directed toward the many practices that mediate between human beings and nature, and in which both humans and nature are transformed. To put it another way: Robinson learns that he is as much an environment of nature as nature is his environment. But in order

⁸ On critical animal studies, see Philippe Hamman, Aurélie Choné, and Isabelle Hajek (eds.), *Re-thinking Nature: Challenging Disciplinary Boundaries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), in particular the overview article in that volume by Roland Borgards, “Animal Studies,” 221–321; on new materialism see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); the classic introduction to artificial intelligence was authored by Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, vol. LIX (October, 1950): 433–460; see also Selmer Bringsjord and Navee Sundar Govindarajulu, “Artificial Intelligence,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall 2018/entries/artificial-intelligence/> (visited on August 27, 2019). On the adaptation of human-machine-hybrids in the context of a posthuman theory of culture, see Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London and New York: Routledge, 2000 [1985]), 291–324.

to discern this message, a specific kind of attention is required, which we propose here to understand as a cultural-technical attitude, and which we hope to make use of in order to cast more or less familiar key scenes in a new light.

If we assume that an operational concatenation of specific practices produces “culture” in the first place then the case study is an indispensable instrument for researching culture. This might apply to “grand narratives,” such as the culture of writing or a revolution, but an approach attuned to cultural techniques will always dissolve these *grands récits* into the many *petits récits* (“small narratives”) of concrete objects and operations, such as the manufacturing of ink and paper (which Robinson fails to achieve, forcing him to eventually abandon writing in his diary) or the construction of barricades (→ Tom Ullrich). In order to illustrate the specific theoretical application involved, however, it is necessary to begin with several more fundamental deliberations.

2 What Are Cultural Techniques?

Priority of Practices

As these introductory reflections on Daniel Defoe’s novel have shown, Robinson does not start from scratch on his deserted island. In other words, he does not begin in some kind of *état de nature* (“state of nature”) – even if Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his educational treatise *Émile*, gives his pupil the book *Robinson Crusoe* to help him imagine such a state, which might have been one reason for the continuing fascination of the Robinson paradigm in the history of literature and culture.⁹ Rather, Robinson is busy deploying the objects and supplies he has recovered from the shipwreck (or storing them for later possible use) in such a way that they become not only fragments of a lost civilization, but building blocks for new practices. He assembles these practices using his own body as well

⁹ The educator in *Émile* excepts *Robinson Crusoe* from the ban applied to all other novels that might give the pupil a detrimental image of civilization. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou De l'Éducation*, in J.-J.R., *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 454ff; *Emile, or On Education*, trans., introduction, and notes Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 184ff. On this fundamental supplementarity, which is thus inscribed precisely in the imagination of an original state, see Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967); *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

as his organizational abilities, supported by media, to create what recent cultural studies research calls “operational chains.”¹⁰

Engaging with Robinson Crusoe’s arrival on his island in this way makes clear that, from a perspective concerned with cultural techniques, concrete practices and operations always precede the orders and concepts they constitute. This priority of practices is a perspective that allows research into cultural techniques to reformulate, in terms of practice and action, fundamental assumptions about the conditions under which cultural orders emerge. There is no *human being* independent of cultural techniques for becoming human; there is no *time* independent of cultural techniques for measuring time; and, above all, there is no *space* independent of cultural techniques of spatialization.

It is cultural techniques that historically produce, reproduce, shift, and hybridize the fundamental distinctions of a civilization with its ideas, representations, concepts, and actions – not least of which is the opposition between nature and culture. Formulated grammatically, thinking in terms of cultural techniques thus means thinking primarily in verbs. Hence, when cultural techniques take the place of the predicate, the roles of things (the object) and people (the subject) trade places: things become observable as acting subjects and humans become observable as objects.¹¹

Which Cultural Techniques?

Until now, research into cultural techniques has focused on what has been called elementary cultural techniques, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and image making,¹² as well as on modern information and communication technologies.¹³ Even our cursory glance at two “founding scenes” (Romulus’s Rome, Robinson’s

10 See specifically, with reference to André Leroi-Gourhan, Marcel Mauss, and André Haudricourt: Erhard Schüttpelz, “Die medienanthropologische Kehre der Kulturtechniken,” in *Archiv für Mediengeschichte* 6 (2006): *Kulturgeschichte als Mediengeschichte (oder vice versa?)*: 87–110.

11 See Cornelia Vismann, “Kulturtechniken und Souveränität,” *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 1, 1 (2010): *Kulturtechnik*: 171–182, here 171: “If media theory were or had a grammar, this power to act would be expressed in the fact that objects assume the grammatical position of the subject and cultural techniques represent verbs. Persons (meaning: people) then move to the place in a sentence that is reserved for the grammatical object. This reversal of positions is perhaps the most obvious characteristic of a theory of cultural techniques, considered from the perspective of media.”

12 See Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (eds.), *Bild – Schrift – Zahl* (Munich: Fink, 2003).

13 See Christian Holtorf and Claus Pias (eds.), *Escape! Computerspiele als Kulturtechnik* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2007); Valérie November, Eduardo Camacho-Hübner, and Bruno

island) has shown that it is worth investigating the entanglement of these reflexive cultural techniques with the agricultural origins of the concept of cultural techniques. This agricultural origin of the concept of culture, which also remains present in the concept of cultural techniques, among other things, can be rejected as an unmodern legacy of the past. But in it, we can also recognize a particularity that allows us to ask new questions about cultural techniques and the founding fictions associated with them. For example, one can ask what happens when the soil to be cultivated in an (aquatic) landscape is unable to sustain any distinction between (stable) ground and figure (→ Jörg Dünne).

After (post)structuralist cultural theory, which attempted to understand culture primarily in analogy to sign systems,¹⁴ research into cultural techniques since the turn of the millennium¹⁵ has begun reflecting on the operability of cultural processes, as these were fundamentally described by Actor-Network Theory.¹⁶

Considering the history of research into cultural techniques that can be used for this purpose, we can distinguish three different approaches¹⁷: The term “Kulturtechnik” (1) has existed in Germany in the context of agriculture since the end of the nineteenth century to denote procedures developed in science and engineering, as relevant dictionaries indicate. The term goes back to an understanding of culture (lat. *colere, cultura*) that has referred since antiquity to techniques for cultivating the land and for settling the earth with dwelling places and cities. From the 1970s on (2), the primary school subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic are referred to in Germany as “elementary cultural techniques.” In the 1980s, the term was also applied in Germany to the use of television and, since

Latour, “Entering a Risky Territory: Space in the Age of Digital Navigation,” *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 581–599.

14 For an exemplary treatment of cultural semiotics, see Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1970 [1957]); for an examination of the question of the “legibility” of culture against the background of research into cultural techniques, see Gerhard Neumann and Sigrid Weigel (eds.), *Lesbarkeit der Kultur: Literaturwissenschaften zwischen Kulturtechnik und Ethnographie* (Munich: Fink, 2000).

15 See especially the contributions in *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 1, 1 (2010): *Kulturtechnik* (edited by Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert), as well as in *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, 6 (2013): *Cultural Techniques* (edited by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Ilinca Iurascu, and Jussi Parikka).

16 See the anthology by Andréa Belliger and David J. Krieger (eds.), *ANThology: Ein einführendes Handbuch zur Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006); Mike Michael, *Actor-Network Theory: Trials, Trails and Translations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016).

17 See Siegert, “Kulturtechnik,” 79–101, and referring to Siegert in his overview of the history of German research into „Kulturtechniken,“ see Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, “Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks,” *Theory Culture & Society* 30, 6 (2013): 3–19.

the 1990s, to the use of information and communication technology. However (3), the use of the term “cultural technique(s)” that has persisted until today, with its increasingly international usage, comes from the media studies and cultural studies of the late 1990s. Here, the term continues to refer to the “elementary cultural techniques” in the sense just noted, while also pointing, with recourse to the older, agricultural meaning of the word, to those areas of *graphé*, writing, that go beyond the alphanumeric code.¹⁸

Spatialization

This recourse to the meanings of cultural techniques from agricultural engineering is crucial in terms of spatialization: it makes it more plausible to assume that every form of cultural-technical operationality already implies an elementary form of spatialization possessing a special quality compared to categories such as subjectivity and temporality. On a spatial level, it is not only the processual character of cultural-technical operations (which is, in itself, barely observable) but also associated processes such as subjectivization and temporalization that become visible and describable in a particular way.

Cultural-technical operational chains do not simply inscribe themselves into an existing physical space. First and foremost, as in the case of Robinson Crusoe’s island, they constitute the accessible and thus adaptable spatiality of the island setting in which Defoe’s novel unfolds, through the exploration of the terrain, the fencing in of pasture land, or agricultural development. In a cultural-technical sense, then, spatiality cannot simply be described as the prerequisite for an inert, natural “container space” in which cultural-technical operations take place,¹⁹ even if novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*, resort to already stabilized ways of charting space and to the symbolic occupation of topographical spaces.²⁰

18 For an exemplary treatment, see Wolfgang Schäffner, “Topographie der Zeichen: Alexander von Humboldts Datenverarbeitung,” in *Das Laokoon-Paradigma: Zeichenregime im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Inge Baxmann et al. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2000), 359–382; and Bernhard Siegert, *Passage des Digitalen: Zeichenpraktiken der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaften 1500–1900* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 2003).

19 See Stephan Günzel for an overview of this belief as found in recent research into space: *Raum: Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Einführung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017), especially 60–68.

20 On cartography in this context, see especially the exemplary work of Robert Stockhammer, *Kartierung der Erde: Macht und Lust in Karten und Literatur* (Munich: Fink, 2007); and Jörg Dünne, *Die kartographische Imagination: Erinnern, Erzählen und Fingieren in der Iberischen Welt der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Fink, 2011).

Spatialization through cultural techniques thus means, first of all, the establishment of spatial relations between actors that can be described topologically. Examples are operations such as differentiating between inside and outside by drawing boundaries. Such operations can also be used to process techniques of temporalization or subjectivization in spatial form. For example, the measuring of time by sundials or calendars,²¹ the establishment and stabilization of anthropological difference,²² the distinction between figure and ground,²³ or between word and number²⁴ can all be described through different types of spatial articulation or spatialization. In addition to the spatialization operations mentioned above, which are based on distinctions and demarcations, the operability of less settled cultural practices, based on the habitualization and regulation of practices of movement, must also be taken into account.²⁵ Since critical revisions and elaborations of Actor-Network Theory have begun to focus on the concept of assemblage,²⁶ operations of assembling and condensing have attracted increasing interest, generating spaces and places that are not, however, based on demarcations. Hence the investigations of this volume begin with a cultural-technical view of processes for assembling spaces, texts, bodies, and collectives.²⁷

Techniques of the Body

In his attempt to define techniques of the body, Marcel Mauss primarily examines habitualizations and regulations of movement. His lecture “Les Techniques du Corps” (1934) examines techniques of walking, swimming, washing, or giving birth, the theorization of which is based on the observation and narration of such concrete techniques and practices (→ Kathrin Fehringer).²⁸ Yet Mauss does

21 See also Thomas Macho, “Zeit und Zahl: Kalender- und Zeitrechnung,” in *Bild – Schrift – Zahl*, ed. Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (Munich: Fink, 2003), 179–192.

22 See Siegert, “Kulturtechnik,” 115f.

23 See Manfred Sommer, *Von der Bildfläche: Eine Archäologie der Lineatur* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), especially 66ff; as well as the problematization of the basic distinction between ground and figure by Timothy Ingold in *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007).

24 See Denise Schmandt-Besserat, *Before Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

25 For an exemplary introduction to mobility studies, see Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “The new mobilities paradigm,” *Environment and Planning A* 2, 8 (2006): 207–226.

26 See especially Manuel De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, 2006), and Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

27 See below, 3.

28 Mauss, “Les Techniques du Corps,” 365–388; “Techniques of the Body,” 70–88.

not stop at a general observation of techniques of spatialization. Rather, he sees techniques of the body as a motor for the formation and connection of (concrete) places and spaces through cultural techniques – a question that is also explored in this volume.

It is no coincidence that, since Mauss's fundamental considerations, techniques of the body have been at the forefront of more recent research into cultural techniques,²⁹ given that the body is one of the first sites where the operationality of techniques is articulated at all, in the form of heterogeneous spatial links. However, the body remains a resistant, ambivalent actor in the field of cultural techniques.³⁰ This can be seen, for example, in Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of movement from the end of the nineteenth century, which assembled techniques of the body such as walking, standing up, or jumping into series of images of movement sequences, thus making them observable in the first place. However, such studies of the body only become significant – in the case of Muybridge, for instance, as a deviation from the norm for bodies regarded as healthy – in the context of an interest in controllable techniques of the body that produces, in the course of the twentieth century, additional (classifying) cultural techniques (→ Jürgen Martschukat).

Techniques of the body thus play a central role in the constitution of cultural techniques (and vice versa), since, as techniques of spatialization, they can render concrete spaces describable in a particular way. This is the case even if, and especially as, research into cultural techniques increasingly advocates for positions that point beyond the anthropocentric reference associated with the question of spatial constitution: while the view of techniques of the body emphasizes the specificity of certain collectives (or “cultures”), it remains fundamentally focused on human practices. The engagement with cultural techniques therefore raises the question of the extent to which the spatialization associated with these techniques is already inherent to relations among different species of

29 Mauss's techniques of the body also form an important basis for work of his student, André Leroi-Gourhan, in paleoanthropology; see *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964); *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1993). See, however, Gilbert Simondon's detachment of technical objects from the human body and the formation of independent technical-geographical milieus: *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1989 [1958]); *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017 [1958]).

30 For example, despite all supposed increases in performance, the body ultimately eludes the dynamics of accumulation (“everything always gets better”) that the consideration of cultural techniques might occasionally imply, but which techniques of the body “presumably elude permanently”; see Erhard Schüttpelz, “Körpertechniken,” *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 1, 1 (2010): *Kulturtechnik*: 101–120, here 113.

things (between solid, liquid, and gaseous bodies above and below the earth's surface, such as between humans and animals, plants, and bacteria), as well as the question of which relations between animate and inanimate objects trigger and shape spatializing processes.³¹ Such considerations lead to questions about processes of assembling.

3 Assembling Spaces, Bodies, Collectives

Assembling

A “thinking in verbs,” as Cornelia Vismann asserts in examining what cultural techniques are and what they perform, focuses on those processes, operations, and practices that make it possible to describe not only material infrastructures but also the entanglement of actors and objects, bodies and media, and not least of all symbolic orders (→ Katrin Trüstedt).³² This volume aims to present and develop three central aspects of this insight: processes of spatialization, the assembling of bodies, and techniques of the collective. The following elucidations of the concept of assemblage make it clear, however, that the three terms in the title of this volume cannot be separated from each other: bodies are collectives just as they form spaces, collectives are composed of bodies that extend in space. Although the groupings of contributions in the subsections of the book thus focus on the constellations defining these respective points of emphasis, they should ultimately always be thought within this triad. What connects these three terms is the fact that they allow collective techniques of spatialization (and temporalization) to come to the fore that are determined by idiosyncratic bodies, both human and nonhuman.

In *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory* (2006), Manuel De Landa has proposed the concept of assemblage to describe these kinds of processes. Building on sociological concepts, he understands these processes to generate “a wide range of social entities, from persons to nation-states ... constructed through very specific historical processes” – what he defines as “inorganic, organic and

³¹ See Michel Serres, *Hominiscence* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003); Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).

³² Vismann, “Kulturtechniken und Souveränität,” 171.

social assemblages.”³³ The parts of the assemblage “do not form a seamless whole”; assemblages form wholes in a completely different way: as “wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts.”³⁴ As a concept, assemblage thus allows us to see and describe, in a particular way, processual relations between diverse bodies and their integration into differentiated networks (→ Bernhard Siegert).³⁵ In a critical reading of Félix Guattari’s and Gilles Deleuze’s *Mille Plateaux (A Thousand Plateaus, 1987 [1980])* De Landa proposes that we understand assemblages as a fluid connection of bodies and their individual components by considering effective practices that produce historically significant processes and make them analyzable. Guattari and Deleuze used the concept of *agencement* to investigate processes of coding and stratifying bodies, with the aim of describing processes of territorialization and deterritorialization and thus the complexity that De Landa attributes to assemblages.³⁶ De Landa then develops a theory of the collective by expanding Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of a social ontology and arguing that “nested” assemblages such as language, science, nature, and culture have been erroneously considered to be composite, homogeneous wholes and must be reinterpreted from a theoretical perspective that he calls “neo-assemblage theory.”³⁷

De Landa extends Guattari’s and Deleuze’s reflections, developing them into a theoretical approach that emphasizes, through a confrontation with Bruno Latour’s concept of the network, the heterogeneity of what comes together in assemblages: according to De Landa, parts of the assemblage remain autonomous, i.e., independent of their network, and are not defined by the whole but by a function of the immanent material interrelations of their parts. Since each assemblage is itself historically singular and individual, De Landa sees the primary function of describing and theorizing it in analyzing the individual processes that found the assemblage in its complexity.

What is decisive here from a cultural-technical point of view is that assemblages consist of parts whose autonomy can never be completely dissolved, with the consequence that they should never be thought of as solid structure, for

33 De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory*, 3.

34 De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory*, 4–5.

35 See also Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

36 The French word *agencement* literally means an arrangement or *Anordnung*, as a collection of things (that are gathered together, assembled); see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Minuit, 1980), especially 112; *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Brian Massumi (London and New York: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 86.

37 De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory*, 4.

example, as dispositives.³⁸ Rather, they are dependent on constant stabilizations, on those “processes of assembling,” in other words, that “thinking in verbs” attempts to comprehend.

In understanding techniques of the body as a “series of assembled actions,” Marcel Mauss fundamentally ascribes to all cultural techniques, such a collecting, serial character that condenses in operational chains.³⁹ As habituations, these actions are thus also understood as collective, technical knowledge and are subject to effective processes of (de)coding, (de)territorialization, and (de)stabilization. Seen in this way, the teachable body and all cultural techniques are, on the one hand, accumulations and condensations of such historically significant, technical knowledge, which makes them media.⁴⁰ And on the other hand, these techniques can themselves be described in terms of significant processes of assembling that underlie every cultural technique and highlight precisely those idiosyncratic objects that shape and are shaped by places and spaces, as well as human practices.

Spaces, Bodies, Collectives

One such idiosyncratic assemblage is the *montage* of horse and rider: not only does the body of the rider change to match that of the horse, but also vice versa. This assemblage, equally central and successful, demonstrates not only an interspecific history of techniques but also the emergence of interspecific network actors requiring a long period of preparation in which human beings and animals came to resemble each other (→ Michael Cuntz). The term “assembling” makes it possible to describe, from the perspective of cultural techniques, the combination of pieces of clothing and equipment (such as bridles with tack, and saddles with stirrups) with the gestures and techniques of the body required for riding to develop. A comparable operation is also performed by the writing and drawing pencil, and in this regard those (still unanswered) questions that attempt to

38 In contrast to the concept of dispositive as it has generally come to be used in media studies, however, Michel Foucault (from whom this concept originates) understood “dispositif” (usually translated as “assemblage”) to mean an “ensemble résolument hétérogène” (“thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble”) composed of discursive and nondiscursive practices. See the interview “Le jeu de Michel Foucault,” in *Michel Foucault: Dits et écrits*, vol. III: 1976–1979, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 298–329, here 299; “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194.

39 “série d’actes montées,” Mauss, “Les techniques du corps,” 372; “Techniques of the Body,” 76.

40 See Schüttpelz, “Körpertechniken.”

distinguish techniques of the body from cultural techniques by means of the instrument used in practice must be asked in a different way. Body and pencil cannot be separated from each other inasmuch as they represent an assemblage that is indeed similar to that of the horse and rider. Such effective, collective practices of assembling – and hence also practices such as arranging, collecting, selecting, directing, commuting – intrinsically connect diverse materials and/or bodies (for example textiles, leather, or paper) and operators (for example vectors that negotiate between one-, two- and three-dimensionality; → Wolfgang Struck) and thereby constitute concrete topographical, linguistic, cultural, and textual spaces.

The way in which culture and collective are oriented against each other is directly related to techniques and procedures of assembling – the accumulation, gathering, joining together, and building of text-, image-, and object-worlds that go hand in hand with the question of collection, collectivization, and the collective “use” of holdings and inventories, such as bundled textual bodies,⁴¹ furniture for assembling,⁴² or (museum) architectures.⁴³ The practices of collectivization endow topographic spaces with dimensions (for example, by piling or stacking), just as they fit into spatial structures (for example, in bindings or cupboards). As a body, the literary text in this respect derives less from textile fabric than from the convolute (lat. *convolutum*, “rolled up”). By means of cultural techniques, the flat parchment or the paper sheet undergo a change of dimension to become the massive three-dimensional body: by rolling, folding, flapping, layering, bundling, binding, and accumulating.⁴⁴ Paper develops the ability to bind objects and/or bodies in a way that goes beyond Latour’s *immutable mobiles*, i.e., to do more than merely record them – for example, to merge with objects/bodies in the self-imprinting process of nature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to form operational structures that hold their contents together

41 On the materiality of book and paper and the associated spatially constitutive operations, see Heike Gfrereis and Claus Pias (eds.), *Das bewegte Buch: ein Katalog der gelesenen Bücher* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2015).

42 See Anke te Heesen and Anette Michels (eds.), *Auf/Zu: Der Schrank in den Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2007).

43 See Anke te Heesen and Margarete Vöhringer (eds.), *Wissenschaft im Museum: Ausstellung im Labor* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2014).

44 Helga Lutz, “Folding Bodies into Books,” in *Presence and Agency: Rhetoric, Aesthetics and Experience of Art*, ed. Caroline van Eck and Antje Wessels (Leiden: Leiden University Press, forthcoming); H.L., “Räume aus Falten, Falten aus Mustern, Muster aus Fäden: Interferenzen bildlicher und textiler Ordnungen an Beispielen burgundisch-niederländischer Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts,” in *Texturen von Bildlichkeit*, ed. Mateusz Kapustka, Martin Kirves, and Martin Sundberg (Emsdetten and Berlin: Imorde, 2018), 99–118.

(or stabilize them), endowing them with new dimensions (→ Jörg Paulus). The assembling of texts into collectives cannot therefore be described without considering correlating spatial constellations and spatial interventions, such as the dimensionality mentioned above and the media associated with it (text, image, map, book, body, etc.).

Several contributions to this volume explore the connection between literary and media practices and procedures, on the one hand, and cultural techniques, on the other. They ask, in other words, how collectives are assembled as/ by textual worlds or how convolutes of texts are assembled as collectives. What implications does this initially philological ordering and rearranging have for a concept of cultural techniques and of the collective that builds on literary studies and media studies? Collective cultural techniques do not form classical symbolic systems, but they do participate in and modify the symbolic social communication. Inasmuch as symbols constitute a fundamental part of culture, literature opens up a linguistically coded cultural space in which symbol production can be described and demonstrated in an exemplary way – and within which this production again and again recursively takes up, or self-reflectively positions itself toward, its relationship to symbolic meaning.

Literature can be described as a collective that both deploys collective procedures and emerges from such procedures. It is worth recalling here the etymological origin of *legere* (lat. “reading,” “collecting”) of letters (*littera*) that is the foundation of literature. This etymology makes it clear that reading and writing are by no means always directed movements but can also be based on the automatic accumulation of letters, words, phrases, or entire parts of text, as in Baroque aleatorics – a nonintentional knowledge that is being suppressed, and more consistently so, by modernity’s theories of the subject and their aesthetics of autonomy.⁴⁵ This deliberate forgetting entails a forgetting of the cultural techniques of literature and philology (→ Bettine Menke), which, in this fundamental sense, carry out and represent movements of collecting and dispersing.

Assembling – in the sense of accumulating and collecting – thus forms a starting point for a spatial-processual thinking of culture, whose processuality (leafing through, cutting out, excerpting, stapling to, tearing out, pushing or clapping open or closed, sifting, walking through, etc.) are rendered tangible and comprehensible by the procedures of the book, the reference library, the archive, the booklet, the supplement, and the sheet, i.e., by material practices and operations.

⁴⁵ See Stefan Rieger, *Speichern/Merken: Die künstlichen Intelligenzen des Barock* (Munich: Fink, 1997).

Literature stands as a self-reflexive model not only for its own (eminently cultural-technical) procedures such as *reading* and *writing*, but also for other cultural techniques, which it seeks to experimentally imitate, subvert, and reproduce in its medium, at the level of its textual operations (not to mention the fact that many areas of knowledge, such as law, are, in any case, based on philological, i.e., exegetical and rhetorical procedures; → Katrin Trüstedt).

A consideration of cultural-technical procedures questions the phantasm of originality in several areas; the art of invention turns out, instead, to be a matter of digging something out again, of cropping or clipping and piecing together, of splicing and patching. Ultimately, the writing and collecting of texts is hardly distinguishable in operational terms, inasmuch as existing material is “only” rearranged and thus transformed (→ Nicolas Pethes): Here, too, concept and idea remain secondary phenomena that can subsequently appear. The potency of collecting and what is collected does not lie in its systematizing power but in its monstrous, grotesque exuberance, which yields (yet to be reconstituted) generic forms and allows them to proliferate (→ Nicolas Pethes, Bettine Menke).

Instead, innovations and new knowledge emerge – stealthily, in secret, as a shift or experiment from what is written out in advance, rather than being brought into the world by regulated provisions (prescriptions) or creative acts. This applies even to epochal phenomena such as the Enlightenment that spreads collectively and manifests itself less in a corpus of knowledge, in an attitude of consciousness or spirit (ideology), than in an infectious form of communication that “disseminates” itself through tricks, processes, and dynamics of its implementation, which are set in motion in the first place by textual techniques and their material, by letters, paper, the copyist and his excerpts, i.e., by cultural techniques (→ Stephan Gregory, Bettine Menke).

The cultural techniques of the text or the interference of cultural techniques and the intellectual transparency of a (mental) message decoupled from them become a theme in the literature of the eighteenth century itself; they become text-work. In the nineteenth century, in particular, practices of writing and the archive become institutionalized and institutionalizing practices of acquiring and generating knowledge (both in the philologies and the natural sciences),⁴⁶ with a significance that goes beyond any one epoch, as can be seen in the nineteenth century encyclopedia, whose accumulation and distribution of knowledge fluctuates between supplementation and systematization (→ Kristina Kuhn). Collectives,

⁴⁶ See Kristina Kuhn and Wolfgang Struck, *Aus der Welt gefallen: Die Geographie der Verscholtenen* (Paderborn: Fink, 2019), and Anke te Heesen and Emma C. Spary (eds.), *Sammeln als Wissen: Das Sammeln und seine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001).

however, are also formed quite concretely through operations of collaging, which engender dimensions in the space of travel and the space of knowledge created by messages sent in bottles, and which not only accumulate the results of a scientific community but also themselves produce this community (→ Wolfgang Struck).

Cultural techniques, thus, are shared collectively and form collectives. They participate in the formation of communities and societies, for example, in the form of language, rituals, or religious practices. The collective can be understood as an equal and productive assembly of people and things or human and nonhuman actors.⁴⁷ It thus functions not only as a true-to-scale but also as a *relational* alternative to the concept of society.⁴⁸

Collective cultural techniques/cultural techniques of the collective enable the temporary association (i.e., the combination and connection) of actors to form a collective. If collectives in a certain sense always represent an “event of connection,” then one must also ask with which media and cultural techniques (of spatialization, synchronization, cooperation, and assembly) these connections are established, stabilized, and then once again dissolved.⁴⁹

The paradox that emerges in any movement of assembling (of objects, texts, people) consists in a unifying, analogizing tendency that transforms the collected into the whole, while the collected objects, in their very difference, become an individual “valuable” component (of an assemblage) – a paradox also shared by the “small forms” of a modern media landscape when, for example, they process a parallel crossing of similarity and difference with the like button on Facebook, thereby producing belonging and exclusion (→ Christiane Lewe).⁵⁰ The definition of the collective, its specific spaces and the media of its cohesion, play a decisive role in determining how cultural and social processes (of exchange) are

47 Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004 [1999]). See Georg Kneer, Markus Schroer, and Erhard Schüttpelz (eds.), *Bruno Latours Kollektive: Kontroversen zur Entgrenzung des Sozialen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008); Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Bourin, 1990); *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Philippe Descola, “From Wholes to Collectives: Steps to an Ontology of Social Forms,” in *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology*, ed. Ton Otto and Nils Bubandt (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 209–226.

48 Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert, “Editorial Focus Collective,” *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 3, 2 (2012): *Kollektiv*: 5–11, here 5, 9, 10.

49 Urs Stäheli, “Infrastrukturen des Kollektiven: alte Medien – neue Kollektive?” *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 3, 2 (2012): *Kollektiv*: 99–116, here 111.

50 See the research program of the eponymous research training group (*Graduiertenkolleg*), <http://www.kleine-formen.de/forschungsprogramm/> (visited on September 12, 2019).

conceived. This applies not least of all to the question of cultural transformation and the possibility of social openness and cooperation.

Since the modern period, processes of collectivization have been tied to an unprecedented extent to technical instruments and interventions that link physical techniques to foundations of social identity, be it through the construction of barricades in nineteenth-century Paris or the modern barricades of exclusion anchored in antihomeless-devices (→ Christoph Eggersglüß) found on the streets of socially stratified cities. Cultural techniques that unfold space and structure it – physically, mathematically, geographically, geopolitically, infrastructurally – prove to be socially effective techniques of power, especially in the instrumentalization of technical media, such as the balloon, in the service of a (humanizing) scientification (→ Hannah Zindel). The space-constituting dimension of cultural techniques, however, always contains a temporal index, as can be seen from the double meaning of “waiting” that is intertwined, in infrastructure, with cultural-technical competences; here, waiting places both human and nonhuman actors in a kind of “organic” relationship to each other that takes their own temporalities into account (→ Gabriele Schabacher).

This volume does not clarify different types of spatial articulation or spatialization in opposition to each other. Rather, it thinks them in terms of process, in logics of assembling techniques, objects, and spaces. It presents and stages, sometimes spectacularly, processes of (de)stabilization, (de)coding, (de)territorialization, and dimensioning that become spatially visible, observable, and theorizable through cultural techniques and techniques of the body that are inherent to processes of assembling. These are scrutinized here, as the contributions from various disciplines collected in this volume show, through analyses of diverse materials and heterogeneous case studies.

This volume builds on the work of the Laborgruppe Kulturtechniken (“Cultural Techniques Research Lab”), a cooperative project between the disciplines of history, literature, and media studies at the Universität Erfurt and the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, which was funded by the State of Thuringia from 2015 to 2017, and which is now continuing its activities as the research group on spatialization and cultural techniques at the Universität Erfurt.⁵¹

The focus of the volume on the assembling of collectives as a core idea of cultural techniques and techniques of the body comes from the Laborgruppe’s conference on “Cultural Techniques of the Collective,” which was conceived and

51 See <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/projekte/kulturtechniken/> (visited on September 12, 2019).

organized by Anne Ortner and Kristina Kuhn and took place in winter 2017 at the Universität Erfurt in cooperation with the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.

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