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MATTER'S PERFORMANCE IN CHRISTOPH SCHLINGENSIEF'S "ANIMATOGRAPHISCHE EDITIONEN"

ABSTRACT: German director Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Animatographische Editionen* (2004-06) included a series of three geographically-distinct labyrinthine walkthrough installations with a constellation of rooms and rotating platforms, leading to an Animatograph – a spinning carousel of material upon which videos were projected. Diverging from the current tendency in Schlingensiefel scholarship towards Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, this paper focuses on the role of material in the Animatograph to show how it sympoietically enfolds autopoietic systems of communication. In particular, I investigate how humans explored the installations' tight spaces, foul smells, swirling sights and cacophony of sounds, transforming materials and animals into performers. To do so, I derive concepts from Rebecca Schneider, Karen Barad and Donna Haraway to argue that in the encounter with the human, matter looks, touches back, and performs. In addition to providing a compelling site to investigate the intra-active entanglements of humans, animals, and materials in an aesthetic context, Schlingensiefel's Animatograph allows us to see the ongoing (re)configuration of these entanglements, putting posthumanist performativity on display and highlighting the aesthetic contributions of the non-human.

KEYWORDS: aesthetics, posthumanism, new materialism, posthumanist performativity, participation, spectatorship, autopoiesis, sympoiesis

German director Christoph Schlingensiefel's artistic projects introduce a form of participation that includes matter and bodies in the performance, unsettling the hegemony of the human. This posthuman participation reached an apotheosis in *die animatographischen Editionen* (2004-2006), a series of four installations that disrupted the hierarchical division of audience, performer, and stage. In an interview with Ahrens (2005) discussing the second edition of the Animatograph in Neuhausen, Germany, *Der Animatograph – Odins Parsipark* (2005), Schlingensiefel emphasized the importance of participation, suggesting that not only the public but also nature and the location is involved. Taking Schlingensiefel's claim seriously that everyone including the non-human can participate, this article analyzes the impact of matter and bodies

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in Schlingensief's *Animatographen* to rethink the existing limits of participation beyond the human. Deriving concepts from Karen Barad, Donna Haraway and Rebecca Schneider, I argue that posthuman performance depends on material intervention that disrupts the hegemony of human cognition and spectatorship and draws the public into the ongoing materialization of the artistic project. In what follows, I reorient the discussion from participation as largely an epistemological, socio-political phenomenon to participation as "onto-epistemological" entanglement in artistic creation (Barad 2007). The former centers around debates on aesthetic autonomy and the cognitive activities of the human, while the latter is a form of participation through which aesthetic engagement occurs as co-creation with and through the non-human. I place a particular emphasis on the second edition of the Animatograph, because the public's encounter with this installation was recorded in Katrin Krottenthaler's documentary *Odins Parsipark* (2005).

Describing Schlingensief's Animatograph is tricky, because each *animatographische Edition* is a singular, self-contained project that evolves with and through its environment and the other editions. The impetus for the project(s) occurred during Schlingensief's first staging of Richard Wagner's opera *Parsifal* (2004) in Bayreuth, Germany, which included a rotating stage on which film fragments were projected. This so-called 'Ur-Animatograph' or 'Bayreuth-Animatograph' was not yet named as such when it appeared on the Bayreuth Festspielhaus stage. What seems to be an origin of the Animatograph only emerged and became recognizable with and through the subsequent *animatographische Editionen*. The installation in Bayreuth thus served as a quasi-prototype for 'the Animatograph,' a carousel of matter and film made accessible to the public and transported to different locations around the world. From 2005 to 2006, Schlingensief and his team carried out the Animatograph project(s) by integrating the Animatograph – or Animatographs – into walkthrough installations in the basement of the Klink & Bank Art and Culture Centre in Reykjavik, Iceland, in the fields, barracks, and hangars of a secret Nazi military airfield in Neuhausen, Germany and in the renowned *Burgtheater* in Vienna, Austria. A stand-alone Animatograph was installed in the container village of Lüderitz, Namibia as a central feature of Schlingensief's failed film project *The African Twin Towers – The Ring – 9/11* (2005).

The 'Bayreuth-Animatograph' unsettled institutional norms by emphasizing the problems of spectatorship and participation that motivated the later Animatograph project(s). This disruption began during the production process for Schlingensief's *Parsifal*. Rather than utilizing an elaborate backdrop painted by the set designers of the highly conservative Bayreuth Festspielhaus, Schlingensief and his own creative team introduced matter in perpetual motion, layered with film projections. Their construction was neither a mere background nor prop, but an art installation. In an interview with dramaturg Carl Hegemann discussing Schlingensief's first *Parsifal* staging, scholar and critic Boris Groys emphasized the significance of including an art installation on the conventional stage. He explained that an installation requires a close encounter. While

the performers on the stage were able to see and explore the Animatograph, the norms of Bayreuth Opera kept the audience in their seats. This was incredibly frustrating for Groys, who wanted to join the performers on stage. While the audience typically has a privileged position outside of the scene, the Animatograph required close examination such that the spectators experienced a blind spot and were unable to fully see what was going on. This disruption deviated from those typical of Schlingensiefel's performance aesthetic, which involves excess that cannot be perceived in the visual frame – what Koch (2014) describes as an "Überforderungsprozess" (Koch 2014: 120). Here, Schlingensiefel played with the limitations of perspectivalism, making them overly apparent. Perspectivalism always contains a blind spot, which is traditionally unnoticed by the public due to their disembodied gaze from outside the scene. Staging the Bayreuth-Animatograph took this perspectival limitation to a ludicrous extreme so that the audience only watched the performers engage with the Animatograph while they could not see the installation themselves. Their sight was reembodyed, as the Animatograph made them aware of the physical limitations relating to their spectatorship. With its material intervention on the stage, the Animatograph unsettled the hegemony of perspectivalism and brought the tense binary of spectatorship and participation to a head.

In the four *animatographische Editionen* that followed, the public was able to experience the close encounter that Groys had wanted by transporting the Animatograph outside of the theater to a museum, airfield, and rural village. The Bayreuth prototype evolved with and through each station and returned to the theater institution with *Area 7 – Matthäusexpedition* (2006). At each location, the audience was encouraged to climb onto the Animatograph and experience its motion. According to Kovacs (2019), "Was die Drehbühnenkonstruktion auszeichnet, die im Zentrum der animatographischen Projekte steht, ist eine ganz spezifische Form der Bewegung, die an ein Karussell erinnert, das die Teilnehmer/innen zu immer neuen Fahrten animiert" (Kovacs 2019: 171). Encountering the Animatograph is like climbing onto a sort of children's ride, which animates new directions for the participants to explore rather than facilitating the close examination and contemplation of an art installation that the Bayreuth-Animatograph demanded. This quality is particularly apparent in the *Afrika Edition* installed in Lüderitz, Namibia as part of Schlingensiefel's failed film project *The African Twin Towers*. Built in "Area 7," a newly constructed settlement for the poor, this Animatograph became a local playground. The documentary of the failed film project shows children participating in the construction of the Animatograph, painting faces and animals on the large arch and enjoying the spinning stage as a carousel. By encouraging the public to ride on the installation, spectatorship was not eclipsed by participation. Locals utilized the Animatograph as their own stage, drawing a crowd of spectators. When night fell, video projections and lights translated the public arts event into an experiment with cinematographic ways of seeing. After watching footage on a makeshift screen made of canvas material, the crowd spun the Animatograph, blending the projections into the matter of the Animatograph and animating new possibilities for engaging with the

rotating stage. This interplay of spectatorship and participation is at the heart of the Animatograph project(s) and is made possible through the embodiment of the public and the performance of matter.

Embodied Sight

The problematic relationship of spectacle and participation that motivated the Animatograph project(s) reverberates through 20th and 21st century aesthetics. Perhaps among the most frequently cited works is French filmmaker Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*. This anti-capitalist text pits participation against spectacle, arguing that the spectacle pacifies the public and contending that the public needs to be roused from its stupor. Art thus needs to be an art of action rather than of passive viewing. Critical of this tendency in scholarship, Bishop (2012) writes that discourse on participatory art "revolves far too often around this unhelpful binary of 'active' and 'passive' spectatorship" (Bishop 2012: 8). She argues that upholding the distinction between active and passive art "serves only as an allegory of inequality" between audience and performer (Bishop 2012: 38). Either the spectator is disparaged for their passive behavior, or the performer neglects their own spectatorship in the performance. According to Bishop, art need not be either active or passive. Good participatory art holds this binary – among others – in tension to reveal social contradictions. Bishop's argument is illuminating in that it makes a case for an art form that is socially engaged without giving up a claim to aesthetic autonomy. However, her approach remains within the realm of society, not yet considering the human and non-human as one of the "binaries [that] need to be taken to task" (Bishop 2012: 8).

What would it mean to not only rethink the binaries of spectatorship and participation without affirming the binary of human and non-human? Schneider (1997) begins to take steps towards answering this very question by focusing her discussion of spectatorship on the body. She introduces embodied sight, or what she calls "re-embodied gaze" (Schneider 1997: 85). This is viewing that disrupts the disinterest and distance of "disembodied perspectivalism" – safe viewing from a distance that does not implicate the body (Schneider 1997: 85). Embodied sight is not limited to the subject's own gaze but includes the literal body on display "look[ing] back," (Schneider 1997: 122) disrupting the secure position of the subject viewing and enacting power over his object. This becomes most clear in Schneider's discussion of Annie Sprinkle's "Public Cervix Announcement" in *Post Porn Modernism*, in which Sprinkle's cervix – made viewable by a speculum – looks back at the spectators that have crowded around to look inside her vagina. Splayed out on the stage, Sprinkle opens herself to the audience as a feminine, 'passive object' to be observed. Yet, Sprinkle's staging makes her cervix "so blatant, so apparent, that it is clear she is taking voyeurism to a ludicrous extreme" (Schneider 1997: 65). Spectators are forced to choose whether or not to approach Sprinkle, joining the crowd of porn-enthusiasts eagerly peering into her open vagina.

By staging the public's voyeurism, Sprinkle turns the audience member's spectatorship on its head. Her body disrupts their secure position as spectators by implicating them in the performance as objects of spectatorship and as participants themselves. As a result, "[t]he spectators are not dislocated disembodied viewers but very much part of the scene" (Schneider 1997: 175). To once again use Schneider's phrasing, Sprinkle's cervix looks back. It becomes "a theoretical third eye" that eliminates the safe, perspectival distance of the viewer, disrupting the symbolic order of active subject and passive object, or viewer and viewed (Schneider 1997: 55).

Matter Touches Back

Although still centered on the human, Schneider's discussion is a productive site from which to begin to analyze posthuman participation in the *animatographische Editionen*, because Schlingensiefel claims that sight is embodied in the Animatograph. He describes a core feature of the device in each of its iterations on his official website: "Der Animatograph ist kein künstliches Auge, [...] sondern ein menschliches Sehorgan. Es ist der Betrachter, wie er sich selbst sieht." The Animatograph is a human visual organ that disrupts the symbolic order of subject and object, viewer and viewed, or spectator and performer. It does so not merely by looking back at the spectators and incorporating their spectatorship in the performance but by *touching back* and involving their bodies in matter's performance.

Prior to the public's entry into the second edition of the Animatograph *Odins Parsipark* in Neuhausen, Germany, Schlingensiefel instructed his team to encourage but not lead the public through the Animatograph. This encouragement was necessary, because tight spaces and obstacles made free movement difficult. The rooms were situated so that the audience could not walk directly from one side of the room to another. Constructions, including the first rotating Animatograph in the "Parsifal Haus," blocked a path across the room, forcing the public to walk around the periphery to explore the writing on walls and televisions in the corners of the room. The public was restricted even more when moving from the second act "Klingsor Raum" or "Vagina Raum" to the third act room, which could only be done by crawling through a small hole labeled "Vagina." While Sprinkle's cervix looked back by making the spectator aware of their own spectatorship and their gaze a part of the performance, the Animatograph's 'vaginal opening' *touched back* by making the spectator aware of their own embodiment and their body a part of the performance. Schlingensiefel emphasized this embodied experience during his presentation to the public preceding the walkthrough, during which he claimed that an old woman fell and broke her hip while attempting to move through this hole. Whether or not an old woman truly broke her hip is not the point. Schlingensiefel's remark is noteworthy, because it highlights how the Animatograph implicated the body. Loud sounds from the overlapping film fragments invaded the public's ear drums and foul smells permeated their nostrils,

including the stench of standing water just outside the entrance and of the rotting flesh that was incorporated into the installation. In the “Klingsor Raum”, the Animatograph ironically thematized the impossibility of avoiding physical contact by showing a video on repeat, in which Schlingensief says “Bitte nicht berühren” with a whining tone. While the spectator could attempt to isolate themselves and engage with their surroundings as they would an art exhibit, they became entangled with matter and bodies – what Barad (2003) would call “cut together/apart.” The public could not interact with the Animatograph as autonomous, bounded individuals and instead engaged “intra-actively” as a single, entangled phenomenon such that together the human and non-human participate in the “ongoing materialization” of the Animatograph (Barad 2003).

When matter touches back, it subverts the aesthetic contemplation typical of an art installation. In *Odins Parsipark*, peep holes in the wall highlight the impossibility of distanced spectatorship, undermining the binary of spectatorship and participation. While the peep hole is typically associated with the privileged position of the voyeur – who watches safely from the other side of a wall – the Animatograph’s peep holes confronted the public with strobing footage that was disorienting and difficult to watch for an extended period of time. Spectatorship thus involved a precarious position, in which the human eye was bombarded with film’s material effects. This disorientation intensified when a narrow passageway forced the public into close proximity with the Iceland Animatograph, funneling them onto the rotating stage. The stage itself was structured like an art exhibit. There was a constellation of walls and narrow passages with pictures and drawings to be more closely examined as well as a large amount of handwritten text to be read. Unlike the typical arrangement of art within the security of the art institution, safe aesthetic contemplation of the ‘exhibit’ was impossible since sensory overload overwhelmed cognitive capacities. In addition to the shear excess of text fragments to take in and the Animatograph’s rotation that made focusing difficult and even nauseating, on repeat was a shrill voice shouting “This is a world announcement,” which aurally interfered with reading and critically examining each feature. The participants rode the Animatograph, taking a moment to rest on couches and the toilet on the rotating stage, as at once both spectators and performers. This is the course of action that Schlingensief encouraged them to do in his initial presentation, because the Animatograph does not present concepts to be understood or art to be interpreted but a material construction whose motion makes the flow of conceptual boundaries and material properties visible. By climbing onto the Animatograph and joining in its motion, matter literally carries the human, forcing established cognitive categories into the backseat as participants in the process of materialization. This is matter’s performance, which is overlooked in daily life when ways of understanding the world take the priority of the human for granted.

Without the dominance of mind over matter, human spectatorship and material/bodily participation were cut together/apart in the intra-activity of the Animatograph, making communal, artistic creation possible. In the final, climactic scene of *Odins Parsipark* Schlingensief allegedly carried out the transport by putting a chicken inside

a basket with a balloon attached and releasing it into the night sky. In his initial presentation, Schlingensiefel called for a vote to decide whether or not a brown or a white chicken should be sent to the next location of the Animatograph in Lüderitz, Namibia. The audience responded with the brown chicken. To 'release' the chicken chosen by the public, Schlingensiefel and artist Klaus Beyer stand on a balcony with a small wall that obscures the audience's view. From below the public could not see anything more than a large, yellow balloon, Schlingensiefel, and Beyer – who held up a live chicken. After explaining that they will put the chicken and the basket and release it into the sky, Schlingensiefel and Beyer joked about having bought extra balloons in case this one pops, discussing the cost, and claiming that they insured the balloons. This drew attention to the precarious position of the chicken and its inevitable death insofar as it is released with the balloon. During a previous stage of the performance – in the *Ragnorök Haus of Odins Parsipark* – the chicken's death was indirectly thematized as the public enters a Nazi transport container in which Schlingensiefel claims that it is only possible to survive inside for forty-two minutes. Rather than acknowledging that sending a live chicken into the sky would inevitably kill the chicken, Schlingensiefel and Beyer celebrated the send-off as the beginning of the next *animatographische Edition* in Namibia and continued life of the Animatograph project(s). This is no mere blurring of staging and reality that creates the possibility for the spectator to ontologically intervene, by deciding that the situation is “no longer a play' and must be stopped” (Rebentisch 2015: 42). In the deathly 'release' of the chicken, reality and staging were cut together/apart, and so aesthetic contemplation and ontological intervention were as well. Allowing the apparent demise of the chicken was neither a failure to intervene nor a sacrifice for the sake of art to dialectically resurrect the new but an intra-action that (re)configured the boundary of *Odins Parsipark* and continued the ongoing materialization of the Animatograph. While the public was implicated in the possible death of the chicken, a mere ontological intervention such as freeing the chicken or demanding to know if a chicken was really in the basket would enact the negation that destroys the project, preventing the chicken from performing its role, and bringing the ongoing, aesthetic creation of the *animatographische Editionen* to an end. Instead, as the balloon flies off into the night sky, art is enfolded into reality without eclipsing it entirely. Allowing the chicken's performance not only celebrates the meaningful role of the non-human in aesthetic creation but ensures that matter's performance extends beyond the limits of art in the here and now and into the world.

“Die aktionistische Photoplatte”

'Ending' with the chicken's send-off to Namibia, already begins the next *animatographische Edition*. This follows the very design of the Animatograph projects, which enfolds each iteration into the next as an “actionistic photoplatte” – a travelling device

that facilitates physical encounters around the world and documents these encounters in film, images, objects, sounds and music to be incorporated in the next Animatograph(s). The particular cascade of intra-actions at each location flows back into future iterations as documentary materials. For instance, the televisions included in “Klingsor Raum” of *Odins Parsipark* are described as Schlingensief’s video diary from his experience in Bayreuth, the Icelandic Animatograph was incorporated into *Odins Parsipark*’s “Island” and the ship built for the African edition of the Animatograph was integrated into the Animatograph staged in the *Wiener Burgtheater* for *Area 7 – Matthäusexpedition*. While the chicken sent-off in Neuhardenberg, Germany did not actually appear in Lüderitz, Namibia, Schlingensief ran around in a penguin character suit, as a sort of bird arriving from the north, flapping his wings, and playing with local children.

The ongoing incorporation of matter and bodies has a sort of self-referential function, drawing the various stations of the Animatograph into one system. Following the tendency in Schlingensief scholarship towards Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory,¹ Berka (2010) argues that the Animatograph functions as an “aktionistische Fotoplatte” superimposing projections to enact patterns of self-reference that “formed a system of meaning that was coherent in itself” (Berka 2010: 180). This flow of information from station to station can be traced in the second edition of the Animatograph *Odins Parsipark* in Neuhardenberg, Germany, since the various sections of the German edition of the Animatograph make explicit reference to past and future *animatographische Editionen*. The first section of the installation thematizes Schlingensief’s *Parsifal* staging and embeds elements from the Edda and Norse Mythology, a topic of exploration for the previous Icelandic edition of the Animatograph. The second section, “Island,” is a direct reference to the Iceland Animatograph and the third section, “Mausoleum,” is also called the “Ragnarök Haus,” referencing the Norse apocalyptic story and alluding to the context of the Iceland Animatograph. In addition to calling forth the Animatograph that will be constructed in Lüderitz, Namibia, the chicken’s ‘release’ alludes to the first act of Schlingensief’s *Parsifal* staging, which included the killing of a chicken. Other themes from *Parsifal* emerge with reference to Wagner’s source material. Drawing from Wolfram von Eschenbach’s poem “Parsifal,” the second edition of the Animatograph makes reference to Parsifal’s half-brother Feirefiz, who is born of Parsifal’s white father and a black Moorish queen. These references to the previous and future iterations of the Animatograph highlight the autopoietic system of meaning that evolves through each *animatographische Edition*. This autopoietic system purports to be “coherent in itself” by reproducing its boundaries of self and other at each location

¹ Scholarly discussions of the Schlingensief’s performances in general (e.g., Koch 2014; Scheer 2018) and of the Animatograph in particular (e.g., Berka 2010) tend to be considered through the lens of Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory to explain the possibility of meaning without an origin. This is likely because Schlingensief read from Luhmann’s *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* in the staging of *Atta Atta die Kunst ist ausgebrochen* (1998) and because Luhmann’s theory is referenced in the Manifesto of Schlingensief’s *Chance 2000* (1998).

(see Berka 2010: 180). While such autopoietic self-reference is involved in the Animatograph project(s), Schlingensiefel's staging of the Animatograph as a system of meaning with operational closure exaggerates the blind spot involved in the binary separation of meaning and matter that governs the self-production of autopoiesis.

Before entering the second *animatographische Edition* in Neuhardenberg, Schlingensiefel began with a presentation of his sketch of the labyrinthine walkthrough installation, ironically presenting the Animatograph as a self-contained autopoietic system. The drawing was a nearly illegible map, with a pathway leading to various sites to explore (see Figure 1). Along with smaller arrows depicting possible detours, large arrows indicated that the audience enter and exit at the same point and move clockwise from one location to the next. The rooms themselves, depicted in the style of a haphazard floor plan, combined filmic, organic, and inorganic materials with a particular internal organization and flow. In three of the rooms, the sketch showed the eponymous *Animatograph*en: revolving stages, carousals of organic and inorganic material upon which videos were projected. By speaking about the installation with reference to the map, Schlingensiefel took the limitations of autopoiesis to a ludicrous extreme by overwhelming the audience both aurally and visually. Scribbled words and phrases took up nearly every inch of the map, making both the rooms, floorplans, themes, and descriptions difficult – if not impossible – to discern. Schlingensiefel's cursory, rapid-fire introduction of the eclectic spaces did not add any clarity but disrupted the image further by overloading the audience with concepts and terms. This coincides with what Koch (2014) describes as one of Schlingensiefel's "Störmanöver", in which Schlingensiefel works with a flood of references to make the aporia of representation visible (Koch 2014: 119). While Schlingensiefel appeared to authoritatively instruct the audience, his explanation did not communicate what to expect in the Animatograph with the help of pictorial representations. Instead, the inadequacy of map-image and his excess of information and images exaggerated the blind spot of autopoiesis.² This is what the dramaturg for the Animatograph project(s) Jörg van der Horst emphasizes in his commentary on the Animatograph in the program for the performance: "Bilder sind immer nur Abbild. Sie sind das verspiegelte Fenster einer Darstellung, die zwangsläufig schon an Authentizität eingebüßt hat, Bildern mangelt es buchstäblich an Durchblick." By making the representation of the Animatograph incomprehensible in its very presentation, Schlingensiefel ironized the image, making apparent that the observer of the map is blind to the material world that it purports to represent.

² This is not the first time Schlingensiefel intervenes with an ironic didacticism. In Rocky Dutschke '68 (1997), Schlingensiefel – who performed as Dutschke – appeared on the stage to instruct the audience. Scheer (2018) describes this intervention as a disruption, because Schlingensiefel's presentation does not provide a matrix of meaning or a way to connect the fragments, instead operating as an autopoietic system of self-generation that avoids fixed positions and specific political ideology. Koch (2014) discusses Schlingensiefel's interventions on the stage as an aesthetic strategy of disruption that encourages second order reflection on the performance itself, generating an autopoietic system of meaning.

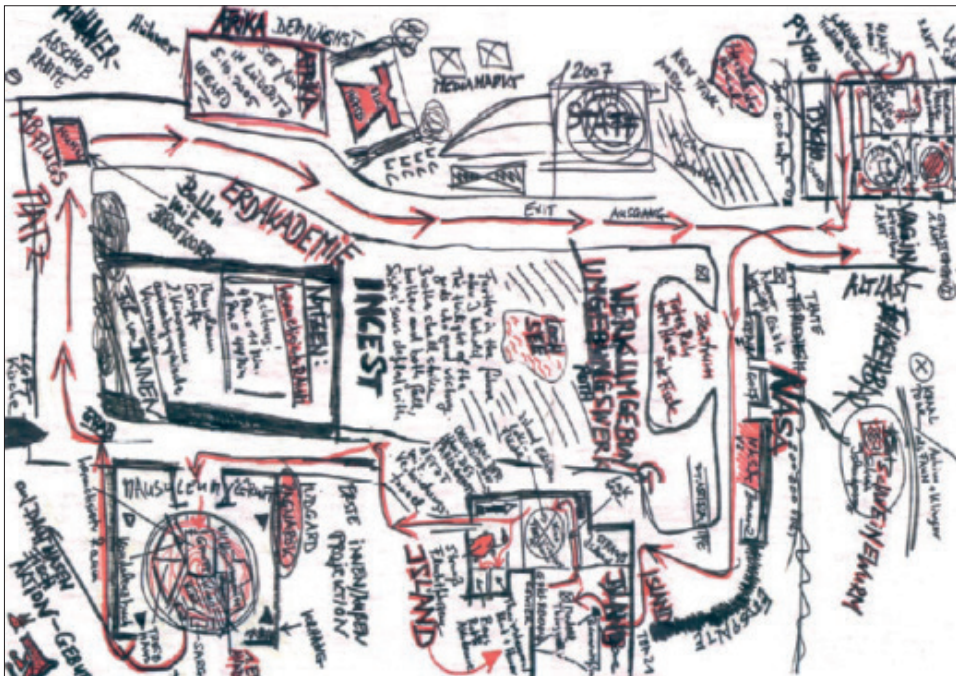


Figure 1: Schlingensiefel's sketch of *die Deutsche animatographische Edition am Flughafen Neuhardenberg*. (Schlingensiefel 2005)

The blind spot of autopoiesis is at the core of the Animatograph project(s) only to be sympoietically extended and unfurled as matter performs with and through the encounter with the public. This is most clearly illustrated in the Icelandic section of *Odins Parsipark*, where objects and filmic material from the first edition in Reykjavik, *House of Obsession* (2005) were included largely for their material effect rather than as autopoietic communications. Performers involved in the first edition – including Karin Witt and Klaus Beyer – shouted and used megaphones to talk about their work in Iceland, to describe the films, and to encourage the crowd to keep moving through the series of rooms of the walk-through installation. The overlapping sounds produced by the film projections and the performers' voices mediated by poor-quality megaphones obscured any single piece of information or individual sound. This effect was exacerbated by strobing lights that made it difficult to focus on a particular film fragment. Instead, form and matter – or communication and noise – flowed together so that the 'communications' did not merely function as self-reference that reproduced the autopoietic system but enfolded matter into form, transforming the system of meaning into an entirely unexpected form. Individual communications reverberated as cacophonous waves of sound and projections spilled over onto the walls and ceiling, becoming a part of the material extension of the room. Here, we can begin to understand Schlingensiefel's claim that the place is involved in the

performance. The old Nazi airport did not merely house the Animatograph but became an intra-active surface for the autopoietic systems of communication, transforming the Animatograph transported there into something nearly unrecognizable. Such evolution is characteristic of systems configured through the interplay of matter and meaning – what Haraway describes as sympoiesis. As opposed to autopoiesis – which maintains the separation of meaning and the environment – sympoiesis crosses this binary and unravels the coherent boundaries of autopoiesis so that the impact of the environment transforms the system into something surprisingly different.

Recurrent footage in the Animatograph project(s) puts the unfurling of autopoiesis on display. This footage, which scandalized audiences in Schlingensiefel's *Parsifal*, begins with a dying rabbit; the creature's autonomous, autopoietically organized systems are failing. Once the rabbit perishes, it begins to move again in the sped-up footage as its flesh is consumed by maggots. Fur dances in rolling movements and openings in the skin become gradually larger. Filmed at a distance, the dead rabbit and the critters that aid its decomposition become mutually implicated, entangled systems, in which life and death are cut together/apart. This stands in stark contrast with another stand-out feature of the Animatograph, the grotesque "Hasenfisch" – a hybrid construction of a dead rabbit and a fetid fish head that is incorporated in the third Parsifal room. While the "Hasenfisch" forces together a rabbit with a fish, the boundary between the critters is autopoietically maintained. The rabbit and the fish do not evolve together but remain still and stagnant; they are not cut together/apart and the sort of surgical operation involved in creating the "Hasenfisch" monstrosity does not reanimate the dead forms. The rabbit – which Schlingensiefel describes as a "Fruchtbarkeitselement" and so comically invokes the imagery of religious salvation in life after death with the descriptor "Osterhasen" – 'lives' with and through the maggots that thrive off its body. The intra-activity of critters unsettles the binary of life and death or action and inaction, as the autopoiesis of the individual is unfurled and extended through sympoiesis (Haraway 2016). Bounded (autopoietically-organized) individuals intra-act or are cut together/apart in the collective performance of their materialization.

The decomposing rabbit footage makes visible the dynamic at work in the Animatograph itself and how its function as an actionistic photoplate that sympoietically unfurls autopoiesis making surprising evolution possible. Schlingensiefel claims, "Der Mensch ist das Organ, das den Raumkörper, "die Lebensmaschine" [d.i. den Animatograph] aktiviert. [...] Der Animatograph wird nicht nur sichtbar, er wird einsehbar. Es gilt, ihn seinerseits zu animieren und zu erforschen, ihn als offene, als buchstäbliche "Bühne des Lebens" wahrzunehmen." Like the maggots permeate the rabbit's airways, tissues, and organs, the Animatograph is animated by the human critters that enter into it and explore its various passageways, walls and structures. This animation is recorded in film to then be integrated into a new environment so that these materials are not merely documentations but undergo a surprising transformation. The one-sidedness of the image – the blind spot of autopoiesis – morphs into a multi-dimensional, moving, and evolving sympoietic organism.

“zum Raum wird hier die Zeit”

Schlingensiefel included the footage of the decomposing rabbit at the climax of his 2004 *Parsifal* staging, where Wagner’s original performance (1882) staged a flight of doves to the heavens. Although reviewers criticized Schlingensiefel’s choice as repulsive and nauseating – a mere provocation (Ross 2004) – the footage was far more subversive since the materialization of life and death in all of its immanence appeared on the stage at the moment of supposed peak transcendence. Wagner’s *Parsifal* (1882) provided a phantasmagoric transportation into an otherworldly plane by means of the technical prowess of the *Bayreuth Festspielhaus* that hid the apparatus from the spectators. Far from transporting the viewer to another plane, the Bayreuth-Animatograph’s function mirrored that of the rabbit footage. With the intervention of the Animatograph, the creative apparatus that produced the images was made visible on the stage (Todorut 2021). Like the maggots that made the rabbit dance again, the Animatograph’s rotation disrupted the static materials of the Bayreuth stage. The never-ending flow of images interrupted the linearity and chronology of the performance so that the Animatograph could not be used as a backdrop or prop with fixed properties to produce a particular aesthetic and carry out the scene according to artistic intensions. This is how the Animatograph disrupted the highly structured four-hour opera and made room for improvisation (see van der Horst 170).

Although the Bayreuth-Animatograph disrupted the linearity of time, this iteration of the Animatograph did not yet transform time into space – as the famous line in Wagner’s transformation scene suggests – because the Animatograph’s sympoiesis did not yet extend and unfurl the boundary between Animatograph and its environment. The situation in Neuhardenberg was quite different, because this iteration of the Animatograph took place in the fields, barracks, and hangars of a secret Nazi military airfield that became a part of the performance. By evolving with and through its surroundings, the Animatograph was able to achieve the spatialization of time that the Bayreuth-Animatograph only began to realize. In an interview with Ahrens (2005) describing the creation of *Odins Parsipark*, Schlingensiefel says, “Nicht zu sagen, wir gehen in den großen Hangar, sondern wir gehen in den Bunker, um dort anderthalb Stunden zu spielen.” Schlingensiefel and his team playfully discovered the artistic possibilities of the old Nazi airfield, allowing the place to participate in the creative process and the formation of the installation. The environment was neither merely a backdrop nor staged as a disruption of artistic vision but a performer in its own right since their material surroundings became meaningful in the intra-activity of their exploration. When Schlingensiefel and his team played in the bunker, they did not see the site as a historical location with an established form and predetermined properties. Instead, the passage of time became palpable in the physical remains playing a role in the very materialization of the installation. Allowing the place to perform/materialize with and through its history – allowing time to become space – initiated a cascade of intra-actions,

(re)configuring the dominant narratives surrounding World War II. Schlingensiefel describes this process to Ahrens (2005): "Man fährt dann mal irgendwann auf dem Flughafengelände herum, reißt das Steuer nach links, fährt in den Wald und entdeckt einen Schornstein und noch eine Mauer. Und dann denkt man, die Konstellation muß doch irgendeine Logik haben, fast so wie Gestirne. Da muß irgendwas plötzlich hinführen oder irgendeinen Sinn haben." Wandering through the old airfield, the structures did not have an already established logic and form constructed by Nazi engineers. Like searching for constellations in the night sky, structures emerged in the immediacy of the encounter. The place participated in the performance of meaning in the here and now, extending and unfurling the autopoietic systems of information that arise from discourse on German history.

The disruption of human history through the spatialization of time was central to the staging of *Odins Parsipark*. Before entering the installation, the public listened to a presentation on the nearby town of Seelow, the site of a World War II battle in April 1945. Such didactic instruction not only exaggerated the experience of disembodied spectatorship and the blind spot of autopoiesis but provided a coherent system of meaning – a dominant narrative – to be surprisingly transformed. The history lesson was interrupted by a performer in an ostrich suit, a featured animal in *Odins Parsipark's* "Island." The ostrich invaded the autopoietic system, unfurling the strictly informational presentation into an ongoing performance of meaning that came to a head when the public entered the "Ragnarök Haus" or "Mausoleum" in the old Nazi bunker. Here, the public was presented with the overlapping and entangling of history and Norse mythology. Horst Gelloneck, who is dressed as Adolf Hitler, used a megaphone to shout, "Hitler war ein Arschloch! [...] Wir wollen Frieden!" This condemnation cuts the apparent representation of Hitler together/apart from Gelloneck, who appeared as himself in the performance despite the Nazi garb and iconic mustache. Wearing the swastika was neither an affirmation of Nazi ideology nor a mere provocation by transgressing a taboo but a material encounter that initiated a cascade of intra-actions and the (re)configuration of the boundaries surrounding fascism in Germany. Gelloneck's shouting overlapped with an explanation of a great war that destroyed everything, leaving the remnants found here. The combination of voices brought together the myth of Ragnarök with the actual events on World War II, resulting in a sympoietic system that entangled the atrocities of Germany's fascist history with the apocalypse story. Neither narrative offered a meaning nor even a plurality of possible meanings. Instead, the threads were woven into the material present so that the place itself was cut together/apart with the human discourse that seeks to define its history. The airfield was able to perform without the structural limitations of the human history.

This performance occurred inside the Nazi bunker or "Ragnarök Haus," where the Animatograph's images and objects from national socialism were incorporated into a glass structure that looks like an overgrown green house. The bunker, which was built to keep the outside world out was infiltrated by nature, and was transformed into

something wholly other. Unlike the portraits with Nazi imagery on the walls, the glass constructions of this Animatograph did not have the one-sidedness of the image that van der Horst describes as “verspiegelte Fenster.” As the Animatograph spun, the public looked through the windows at various angles. They could both look in from outside and enter the ‘greenhouses’ to look out from within. Video projections illuminated moving surfaces, which the public could observe by either walking around the outer edge of the rotating stage or climbing up the Animatograph’s staircase to assume a higher vantage point. This is no mere perspective taking, in which there is always a blind spot but a way of engaging with matter in which time can become space. Integrating filmic materials and fragments into the rotation of the Animatograph turned the scarcity of time characteristic of time-based media into excess time. As Groys (2009) describes, such a transformation dissolves the spatio-temporal order of the event, which allows the spectator to put different scenes in tension and see the possibilities in the space between them. Here, the Animatograph not only offered up the eclectic collection of media and objects as potential points of exploration outside of a spatio-temporal order but materialized the flow of time itself by making palpable the excess that resists ordering. Put differently – rather than simply exploring possible relations between objects and discovering different interpretative possibilities by thinking Naziism and Norse mythology together – the public was confronted with the sympoietic evolution of meaning, narrative, and history in the Animatograph’s matter and its performativity. The Animatograph thus transformed the passage of time into a spatial event, in which the iterative intra-activity of the Nazi bunker and the historical excess outside of human history was made palpable.

The spatialization of time not only occurs in *Odins Parsipark* but is a central feature of the Animatograph project(s). Rather than merely providing a point of aesthetic engagement that could be put in tension with the others, each *animatographische Edition* made the determination of an aesthetic concept or form impossible by allowing the place itself to perform and intra-act with the public. As matter was transported from station to station along with filmic materials that documented the public’s exploration of the Animatograph, each edition extended beyond its own limits. The Animatograph provided an aesthetic encounter with the material excess that refused the ordering of human cognition by performing in its right. This development is what allowed the Animatograph to return to the theater institution with *Area 7 – Matthäusexpedition* in the Wiener Burgtheater as more than the art installation that appeared on the Bayreuth stage. With the seats removed, the installation was not only the central feature for the public to explore but a performer in its own right.

Conclusion

The varied names of the Animatograph – “Lebensmaschine” “Bühne des Lebens,” “aktionistische Photoplatte” – reflect its function as an active, living device – as a performer.

The deafening sounds, and nauseating sight, smells, and motion of the Animatograph may seem to be a provocative staging intended to make the public uncomfortable. However, understanding the Animatograph as merely disruptive of human cognition and agency – as shocking – overlooks the transformative capacity of matter's performance. By touching back with lights, smells, and sounds, the Animatograph made the spectator aware of their own embodiment, drew them into the ongoing materialization of the Animatograph project(s), and made palpable the excess that resists ordering of human categories in the spatialization of time. This not only extended and unfurled the hegemony of human with each iteration of the Animatograph, but also transformed the isolation of aesthetic contemplation into a creative network of aesthetic activity where human discourse, understanding, and perspectivalism works in tandem rather than dominating matter's performance. Allowing matter to perform in this way not only interrupts linear time but spatializes it. As time becomes space in the Animatographs, matter disrupts human history, demanding a new engagement with place and space; one that considers both artistic creativity and world-making as a joint project, in which the non-human plays a vital role.

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