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Johanna Rolshoven

## Culture – a theatre of complications

### Inchoate thoughts over suicide attacks

« *Toute acte anthropologique est un acte politique.* »  
 “*Every anthropological act is a political act.*”

Michelangelo Giampaoli, Paris 2013

#### Prelude

We<sup>1</sup> are indebted to Martin Scharfe for the manner of carving out depths and shallows of the fields of culture, explored through analytical figures of thought that draw from folkloristics, philosophy, psychoanalysis and critical theory. For many decades and in ever changing, unusual and unsettling ways he crystallises the episteme of cultural studies from seemingly non-descript material.

Though, he is concerned less with the satisfying furor of relishing interpretation and pacification of the material, than with the attempt to leave the world and its unpredictability and contingency. Here, culture arises as a “theatre of complications” and ceases to resemble the pattern of a kind of Clifford Geertz<sup>2</sup> “fabric of meaning”, which we tend to imagine as well-structured, meaningful or even periodical.

Scharfe compels us to mistrust as well the surfaces and the physiognomy of the phenomena as the habits of thought and conventions, and to turn things upside down in order to attain – after having bathed in the scents of concise coinings – take ambivalence as the starting point of cultural analysis. When reading his writings, we virtually pass through a school of thought, the texts being unfamiliar, demanding and mostly not easy to access: a pitiless gaze on culture, on scare, lust,

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<sup>1</sup> If we frequently use the “we” in this text, we do not intend to revive the forme *pluralis maiestatis*. The purpose is rather to underline the with bourgeois European “we” and the implied, geographically and class-specifically limited reach of the compiled perspectives – less for the sake of ‘auto-ethnography’ than in order to mark the post-folkloristic eye in need of reform.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Clifford Geertz, [‘Thick description. Toward an interpretive theory of culture’, Chapter 1 of *The interpretation of culture. Selected essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)] or [*High points in anthropology*, 1988, pp. 531-552]

and vertigo, wrapped into circumstantial, de-centred or ex-centric topics, and, with a preference for having them published in remote publications, ignoring all “impact” factors.

Like life and thought the humanities that deal with them are not linear, but complex and intertwined. Yet Martin Scharfe doesn't guide us to *entrelacs* or *rhizomes* in order to get this but draws from the cultural theoretical resources that he has tapped and formed. Just take the example of mountaineering. Familiar with the drama of the experience of mountains he has documented the addiction to the mountain in his confessions, which are amazingly similar to those of Augustine and Rousseau, though with a modern acuteness. The very first illustration of his book “Bergsucht” (Mountain Addiction)<sup>3</sup> that deals with early alpinism, is a deceitful glass, that blurs the situation. We see in the painting the rope party of Horace Bénédict de Saussure on its way to the Montblanc summit in 1787. Over them hovers the free balloon of Jacques Charles, with which he has, four years prior to that, in summer 1783, been the first to succeed sixteen kilometres of manned flight. Never ever he would have been able to fly over the Montblanc. But even if one knows that de Saussure himself has been observing the development of the Montgolfière hot air balloon, one is trapped in the narrative interstice of the four years between the two groups that can be seen in the picture. The illustration of this purely imagined situation has been created into the bargain in the second half of the following century only. But this is not historical misrepresentation but a “complication”, like the so-called complication in advanced horology, aiming to indicate more than conventional hours, minutes, and seconds: things beyond, the unexpected, the unconscious, the unwanted, but also the craved for.

In Scharfe's empirical cultural studies situations like this one are not inventions. They are findings, as the illustration has been found: less a product of memory than a product intended to fudge memory. Almost a hundred years after the event reported by it the illustration has been carved in wood, and we are quick with the judgment that it is no longer “authentic”. However, the spirit of critical assessment of sources transmitted by Scharfe, doesn't judge the content of the source, but its emergence, it explores how the ever somehow wrong-headed paths of thought interlock, paths of which we always hope that they will, somewhere in time and space, as Kleist has written, “suddenly reappears on the other side after passing through infinity”<sup>4</sup>; and eventually prove to be straight and clear. He has never been waiting for the advent of clearness and consequently didn't grant it to anyone.

I now want to introduce a topic that has been looming large in an unexpected way when reading again Scharfe's writings. First I draw a quick sketch, then I discuss the concepts of culture, and finally turn to my theme, the jihadist suicide attack.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Scharfe: *Bergsucht. Eine Kulturgeschichte des frühen Alpinismus 1750 – 1850* (Wien: Böhlau, 2007), 25

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, ‘On the Marionette Theatre’, translated by Idris Parry, *SouthernCrossReview* 9 2001, <https://southerncrossreview.org/9/kleist.htm> <accessed 2019-04-30>; H. v. Kleist, *Marionettentheater* (1810).

From a far-fetched story, I plunge into the present, from the mountain into the city, to its pivotal places and its social housing monuments. The new coverage of the attacks in Paris and Brussels in 2015 and 2016 familiarises us with the names of neighbourhoods and streets that otherwise we wouldn't certainly have known. Pioneering French urban ethnographer Colette Pétonnet<sup>5</sup> was already familiar with these areas in a time when a taboo reigned over their ethnographic exploration. She always found a clear-cut language in order to describe the living conditions she found there. For instance, the general situation in France towards the end of the 1950s:

“Of course, the isolation of the inhabitants of the *banlieue* was general, and from this arose a certain despair, to which I was not prepared, give my prior experience with the modest population of poor neighbourhoods.”<sup>6</sup>

Since then we are familiar – we here in Germany, and in France everybody – with the names of the neighbourhoods where Pétonnet has been pursuing her fieldwork for a couple of decades, for instance Gennevilliers near Paris, the so-called problem neighbourhood Le Luth, but also the proximate bourgeois-looking Rue Basly. In this area had lived the brothers Kouachi, Chérif and Saïd, who were killed on the run after the events of June 7, 2015. According to their residential biography they were on the way from the Paris banlieue to the Rue Nicolas-Appert, into the centre of the perhaps most charismatic modern city of Europe. Today, the names of these streets are forever linked with the magazine Charlie Hebdo, which exercised the right of a secular freedom of opinion. The banlieue, almost totally unexplored by folklorists, appears in this story not so much as a neighbourhood than as a social position apportioned by society at large.

Pétonnet stated early in the 1990s in her homage to her colleague for many years, the Jewish religion ethnologist and co-pioneer of urban ethnography, Jacques Gutwirth:

“Exaggerated piety can any time lead to sectarianism and intolerance, and make [render] people vulnerable till insanity, and pave the way to wars. All fanatisms, integrisms, extremisms and other kinds of blind bigotry that no doubt wake up old fears, determine me to keep aloof my interest into human thought from everything religious.”<sup>7</sup>

She writes that she couldn't help doing so, the urban anthropologist writes, and she would, if she had lived to see the assault on the kosher supermarket (*Hyper Cacher*) near *Porte de Vincennes* in January 2015 certainly counted this among her worst nightmares. In one period her very tremendous clairvoyance exudes:

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<sup>5</sup> cf. also Monique Selim, ‘Rapports sociaux dans un quartier anciennement industriel un isolat social’, *L'homme* 22(4), 1982, pp. 77-86.

<sup>6</sup> C. Pétonnet, *Libres pensées* 1993, 17; own translation.

<sup>7</sup> C. Pétonnet, *Libres pensées* 1993, 19

“And there a Muslim father who, ashamed on behalf of his godless children, has fallen completely silent.”<sup>8</sup>

Here, the theoretical game is no longer only *Glaube und Zweifel in der Volkskultur*<sup>9</sup> (Faith and Doubt in Popular Culture, the theme of Scharfe’s reflexions on religion), but also *Shame and Anger in Urban Culture of Post-Colonial Society* – a title that yet has to be written. Cultural analysis doesn’t inquire into piety, but into radicalisation as a form of “revival of religious antiques”<sup>10</sup>. But at the same time, the word “radical” is challenged, since it could well be the spearhead of martial law as normal condition. In lieu of an afterworld 72 virgins are installed in an irritating manner, and the exegetes immediately exorcise the image as not being of koranic origin and give it over to satire. Travel to Syria replaces pilgrimage and death appears more like a fortunate incident, at least in western media, where for good reasons no bodies are shown, except of migrant toddlers.

This kind of entanglements and complications characterises the open society devised by Karl Popper in 1945 as democratic society; it portrays a world that has become increasingly mobilised and globalised, less on political and social, but economic grounds. It is *this* world we have to deal with if we are to deserve the concept of culture in our methods, theories and also names of the departments.

In the Switzerland of 1946, simultaneous with Popper’s open society, Richard Weiss, marked by the experience of fascism in the big neighbour nation, writes that every generation of folklorists will have to determine anew and on their own their subjects. In the words of Martin Scharfe, “every period had its own ears”, always a “new mouth”<sup>11</sup>. Or with Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch who has, in the last years of the very active life, asked time and again, “in what society do we live?”<sup>12</sup>. This is a pathfinder question and a call of duty: the invitation to determine the everchanging material of culture which we, ourselves cultural actors, bring into existence, and from which we draw and create. From it the burning questions of the present are deduced, which we have agreed on during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are easily enumerated: the social consequences of a responsibility-free exaggeration of a society of economic growth and increasing consumption, with a logic leading towards warfare and flight, mass murder and death; the worldwide divergence of low and high incomes, dearth and affluence, desperate living conditions in the periphery of society – to name but a few. The social approaches our discipline and invites us to change time and again the display of our topics, to hone our procedures, to sort out items, to fetch forgotten ones, to tailor new ones.

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**8** Ibid. 17

**9** M. Scharfe: *Über Religion* 2004

**10** G. Sautermeister: *Werther* 1985, 440

**11** M. Scharfe: *Signaturen* 2011, 9

**12** Vgl. E. Katschnig-Fasch: *In welcher Gesellschaft* 2006

## The misunderstanding of the concept of culture

Tailoring new items: the concept of culture, for instance! Carefully, as we do, observing discourses, we notice that the instance of culture pervades almost all of the mentioned situations and events, producing ambivalence and contradiction that, according to Scharfe, can be used as starting point for cultural analysis.

The concept of culture was and still is contradictory. It is historically charged with significances and connotations, on the move in an interdisciplinary migration, from theatre to theatre, constantly redefined, multiplied, compacted, complexified. It has yet become more interdisciplinary and democratic, but also more laborious, and so, even in cultural studies, it is increasingly avoided. Still, culture has a prevailing positive connotation: It nowadays gilds not only a host of pretendedly renovated humanity disciplines and departments, but also everyday practise, political representation and commodities. The cultural boom has its roots in society, and its aura masks the difficulty that the polyphony of this concepts offers – or perhaps the success offered by the “definitional openness” as Heidemarie Uhl<sup>13</sup> puts it.

All this may appear as neither novel nor with a continuative potential, but it applies to the discipline “empirical cultural studies” respectively “cultural anthropology” by its very *name*; it applies to “cultural analysis” or “cultural studies” by their *methodologies*; and, given the lifeworld as subject, i.e. social everyday of the present and historical popular culture, by *theory*.

Recently, Innsbruck has initiated an important debate on culture. Ingo Schneider and Martin Sexl postulate a “Notions of Culture and its Discontents”<sup>14</sup> interrelated with the core of the event of the day. My own argumentation is following their backwash and addresses an academia that neither succumbs “to the shine of idealisation” nor shies “at the renegades”.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst killings are perpetrated in the name of “culture”, western academic cultural concepts exclude war, mass murder and precarious living of the others. Heterogeneity and diversity, social movement and poverty, suffering and flight – *opera hominis*<sup>16</sup> – are conceptually suppressed; the insight that cultural achievements are, according to Terry Eagleton, grounded in exploitation<sup>17</sup>, are displaced; and the contention that, according to Aman Attia, all racism and antisemitism is supported by a hybrid of biologist and culturalist stigmatisations is shunned.<sup>18</sup>

The discontents with the nobilitation of the concept of culture are not novel. In almost all pieces of his oeuvre Scharfe lets us sense: “War, violence, brutality”, he writes in his book on culture, “the animal, the chaos, is taken by us as the

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**13** H. Uhl: ‚Kultur‘ und/oder Gesellschaft? 2003, 245

**14** I. Schneider, M. Sexl (Hg.): Unbehagen 2015

**15** M. Scharfe: Menschenwerk 2002, 5

**16** Ebd.

**17** T. Eagleton: Wider die Kultur 2015, 66

**18** I. Attia: Religion und die Kultur der Anderen 2015, 181f.

counterpoint to culture, culture then being the clean frame”<sup>19</sup>. In the meantime, the public discourse has adopted two contrary meanings have started to intertwine into a popular to populist imbroglia, where culture is both noble achievement and denunciatory label. They can be met in the singular “culture” and in the plural “cultures” in problematic contexts of interpretation. The theoretical amplification of the intellectual bourgeoisie [Bildungsbürgertum] and its hegemonial concept of culture has been achieved hand in hand with the democratisation of the sovereignty of interpretation. John Storey comments that the broad concept of culture cannot rule the spirits it has been calling.<sup>20</sup> Not only nationalist narratives of *leitkultur* but also everyday interpretations carrying an innocuous praise of one’s own culture raise suspicion that they denunciate the *Other* in the name of law, “wrap themselves in the tempting dresses of culture, when they want to avoid looking too abstract and too daunting.”<sup>21</sup>

These are not ideological collateral effects but a problem from the very core of the concept. Contemporary politicisation and commercialisation of culture are based on substantialist lockings: own and foreign, female and male, white and black. They make the concepts of culture and ethnos seem suspect for academic use. A weakend concept of culture, Wolfgang Fritz Haug writes, barely suits its use as a scientific category, at the most it is a “water-level report of contemporary spirit”<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore, according to Scharfe, we should refresh the critical capacity of the concept of culture and generally expose our cultural studies to the antagonisms and differences, the paradoxes and inconsistencies. Conceiving culture from difference would follow a notable intellectual genealogy, from Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Ina-Maria Greverus and Gottfried Korff to Rolf Lindner. Culture considered not as a matter, but as „analytical perspectivation of society“, in the manner of Sabine Eggmann<sup>23</sup> uses the concept as spectacles und thus as a heuristic instrument.

Can the method of cultural analysis answer our question, how the hypothetical “theatre of complications” accounts for the essence of culture?<sup>24</sup> I come back to the earlier examples of the political attacks and try to approximate this focus of the present. All the scholars I have mentioned, sit on my shoulder, if I may use and vary the image of the giants’ genealogy attributed to Bernard of Chartres but generally know through Robert Merton<sup>25</sup>. We don’t play off against each other as either giants or dwarfs of intellect: *they* are on our shoulders, exert pressure and prompt into our ears. I am often reminded of the statement Hannah Arendt’s

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**19** M. Scharfe: Menschenwerk 2002, 4

**20** Oral statement of John Storey at the conference “Unbehagen an der Kultur”, Universität Innsbruck 22.-25.9.2014. His contribution “Kultur in den britischen Cultural Studies” can be found in I. Schneider, M. Sexl: *Unbehagen* 2015, 67-84

**21** T. Eagleton: *Wider die Kultur* 2015, 62

**22** Oral statement of W. F. Haug at the conference „Unbehagen an der Kultur“, Universität Innsbruck 22.-25.9.2014. His contribution „Was ist kulturell an der Kultur“ can be found in I. Schneider, M. Sexl: *Unbehagen* 2015, 39-59

**23** S. Eggmann: *Forschen mit Kultur* 2014, 281

**24** Vgl. R. Lindner: *Kulturanalyse* 2003

**25** Vgl. R. Merton et al., *Shoulders of Giants* 1993 (1965)

made in the interview by Günter Gaus of 1964<sup>26</sup>: “Ich muss verstehen!“ (I’m obliged to understand!). What has to be understood here, is the suicide attack, which I will discuss now.

### The suicide attack

I take the suicide attack as an example for outlining a critical cultural analysis, as it emerges from empirical cultural studies rooted in former folklore studies (Volkskunde). The example is certainly triggered by the impression that made the recent events – and the event to be expected – for a tentative draft of a *cultural analysis of the jihad*.

The so-called suicide attack is a scandal, a cruel public spectacle. Yet it fulfils all prerequisites for masculine heroism. Since the 1990s western societies’ symbolical central urban spots are targeted by attacks with bombings and massacred civilians by automatic guns. They represent political acts with configurations of paramilitary violence that repress the collective memory of attacks and assassinations during the latter half of the century, as of cultural violence generally. The term terrorism<sup>27</sup>, coined during the French revolution and denoting violence against dominant power, has, among others, been applied during World War II by the German Wehrmacht for the partisans and resistance movements in general, thus charged with a meaning that asks us today for a cautious use.

The recent events were designed with the intention to find a maximum possible attention. Consequently, they are subject to a discursive repression to the fringes of notions of culture that seems also to be the fringe of discretion. The recent attacks in Paris, Brussel, Istanbul, Nizza, Lahore, Kabul, Orlando – but also other regions of the world repressed from the consciousness of western media – unsettle by their factual breach with every routine, by their imageless presence, whose horror charges imaginations and triggers collective repression. All this clots into diffuse everyday fears that are receptive for political promises of control and security that can never ever be redeemed. They make climb the mercury of West-East and North-South variations of xenophobia. In an interview of 1977, Michel Foucault stated: “Terrorism alarms the government and stirs up its wrath that is fairly unplayed, since it is targeted on a level where it raises the claim to be able to guarantee people that they will not be harmed.”<sup>28</sup>

The coverage of television and newspapers by means of specials and addenda, extra talks with trusted or self-proclaimed experts produces, according to political scientist Sebastian Hunholz a “culturalisation of terror”<sup>29</sup>, which assign the social causes for a political act to culture and in particular religion. Currently Islam is a minefield of misunderstandings, where barbarians acts of killing or warfare are in

<sup>26</sup> Hannah Arendt im Gespräch mit Günter Gaus. TV-Aufzeichnung 1964. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9SyTEUi6Kw> (20.6.2016)

<sup>27</sup> Vgl. D. Freudenberg: *Theorie des Irregulären* 2008, 212; P. Waldmann: *Terrorismus* 1998

<sup>28</sup> M. Foucault: *Sicherheit* 2010 [1977], 349

<sup>29</sup> S. Hunholz: *Kulturalisierung des Terrors* 2010, 69

monocausally ascribed to ritual special ways of killing, disseminated of a in the wake of a radical religious war in the internet. This dissemination gets hold of the majority of western society in their most frequent location: in front of the screens. The sound anchoring of killing in culture gives a glimpse of culture's reverse, which Martin Scharfe has repeatedly crystallized: the repressed, the evil, horror and terror, destruction and sabotage as "cultural gesture", precisely "culture as violence", but also the tilted picture: self-destruction as cultural act<sup>30</sup> – figures that we cannot get around.

The analysis of contemporary events asks for the differentiation on several levels, of which we cannot offer but a few ones, exemplarily. A first approach is the rational scrutiny of insight of war and terrorism. Secondly, the establishment of accounts of general and mental history, of the positions of the actors, of their acts, reactions, and understandings, to open up taboos and to identify the deep-rooted defence against the examination of acts and perpetrators, to which Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch has been pointing in the 1990s in the context of the Yugoslavian war<sup>31</sup>.

Thirdly, a cultural anthropology of killing and masculine heroism could be useful. But also approaches from urban anthropology, youth research or ethnology of religion are eligible, in addition to fields of knowledge with the capacity to enrich the theoretical and thematic context.

### *War of the moment*

In military research, the "suicide attack" is labelled as "small weapon"<sup>32</sup> and identified as the central device of guerrilla warfare. It turns "upside down all conventions of war and power"<sup>33</sup>. This war of the moment creates, thanks to the unequal adversaries the so-called *asymmetrical* warfare. Were we by the side of the assassins, we would probably pay them the same admiration that we had paid to Tito's partisans, to the French maquisards or more generally Résistance, to Che Guevara und to many other guerrilleros in freedom movements in Latin America. In a pugnacious spirit, they put up with the risk of death, defied the enemy; they killed themselves quite a number of people, a fact that we would have probably accepted as a side contradiction in the sense of Marxism.

Armed women were in their ranks.<sup>34</sup> They lend themselves less as objects of hero worshipping. More often than their masculine counterparts they fall through the cracks of Wikipedia entries, history textbooks und the collective memory in general, simply because nothing can happen that isn't allowed to happen: women and killing? For some time already, Ann Jones and Klaus Theweleit have thoroughly and hard to refute identified the underlying political, social and psychoanalytical causes of this cultural paradox.<sup>35</sup> However, of course they exist,

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**30** Vgl. M. Scharfe: *Wie die Lemminge* 1993, 122

**31** E. Katschnig-Fasch: *Gewalt des Helden* 1993, 98

**32** S. Hunholz: *Kulturalisierung des Terrors* 2010, 69

**33** D. Freudenberg: *Theorie des Irregulären* 2008, 223

**34** Vgl. J. Rolshoven: *Revolver meiner Großmutter* 1993

**35** Vgl. A. Jones: *Frauen, die töten* 1986; K. Theweleit: *Männerphantasien* 1985 [1977/78]

and in fact a few famous but nameless heroines (there is no contradiction in this...): so Goldy (Elisabeth Charlotte) Parin-Matthèy, born and raised in Graz, anarchist, interbrigadist and Tito-partisan, later well-know psychoanalytic of the Morgenthaler- and ethnopsychanalysis-group; or the Kurdish Peshmerga combatant Margareth George Shello and the Italian Red Brigade member Margherita Cagol, both martyrs of their respective bands.

The suicide attack has a long story of warfare and resistance, in Orient as well as in Occident, its moral assessment is always embedded in the spirit of the age, of the reigning discourse, and of the reach of the political camp. Had one of the not too small number of meticulously prepared attacks on Adolf Hitler<sup>36</sup>, *succeeded* instead of *failed*<sup>37</sup>, Germany would have written its post-war history differently, the pedestals of monuments would carry different heroes, or Germans would live in a socialist order, as devised by the Kreisauer circle, with a constitutional equality of the regions.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the “European planetarian”<sup>39</sup>, folklorist Adolf Reichwein, would have become the first post-war minister of cultural affairs, similar to the colleague Bertalan Andrásfalvy in Hungary after the fall of the Iron Curtain, who was in office in the first post-socialist government.

We shouldn't speculate about a future that has not turned into history. If we consider man according to the cyborg-model as a martial, technology-equipped murder weapon – Hunholz coins the “weapon character of suicide”<sup>40</sup> – the usual distinction of a civilised from a barbarian culture cannot be maintained. Then, an extended notion of suicidal killing is no longer applied to the Japanese kamikaze-pilots or German Wehrmacht fighter bombers, but every foot soldier who intentionally risks his life as cannon fodder, and is forced to do this, be it for the Führer, God, Fatherland, or for the reward of 72 virgins. There is no lack of ideologically underpinned incentives in the hortory of Christianity, too.

The study of terrorism acknowledges that suicide attacks account for only three percent of the war theatres of the present. Their prominence bears on their unpredictability and high efficiency.<sup>41</sup> The majority of these attacks happen far from Europe and without religious motives (e.g. by the Fatah or PKK), whereas the majority of victims are muslims.

Attacks declared as being part of the jihad, a holy war with evident temporal and political aims, emerge from the *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* or *Da'esh*, established with the intention to install the kalifate proclaimed in 2014, which

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**36** Vgl. P. Hoffmann: Widerstand 1979

**37** Vgl. hierzu Martin Scharfes kulturwissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit den von Sigmund Freud psychoanalytisch formulierten Fehlleistungen in der Kultur als „kritische Formen“. Vgl. u.a. M. Scharfe: Bagatellen 2011 [1985], 41

**38** Vgl. H. Mommsen: Neuordnung Deutschlands 1994; U. Karpen (Hg.): Europas Zukunft 2005

**39** Vgl. A. Reichwein: Museumspädagogische Schriften 1978, 14. Adolf Reichwein, who worked at the Berlin Folklore Museum, was a member of the Kreisauer Kreis and, like most of his comrades from the 20th July-resistance group, was sentenced to death by Roland Freisler at the People's Court in Berlin and executed on 20 October 1944.

**40** S. Hunholz: Kulturalisierung des Terrors 2010, 74

**41** Ebd. 72; B. Sausal: Gare au terrorisme 2016, 9

shall extend from Northern Africa to Central Asia. It departs from a multiple warfare by approximately 30'000 combatants who act in a decentred way, with the means of classical warfare, but also by suicide attacks and assaults outside the Geneva Conventions<sup>42</sup> that settle humanitarian treatment in war. We are tempted to call this "postmodern" action in war. The archaic aspect of the ideological concerns<sup>43</sup> is in a paradoxical relationship to their strategic, technological, and communicational proficiencies, which allowed them a stunning progress in the first phase.

The efficiency of the attack method can be cast in figures. Hunholz undertook to establish these: The comparatively considerable number of casualties of suicide attacks, in which an assailant can carry with him or her up to 300 victims, corresponds to the casualties that the military powers of the Middle East inflicted to Da'esh. Therefore, the fatal balance of this kind of attack can be considered as a strategic means to compensate for the "given higher power of damage of the superior enemy".<sup>44</sup>

Rationalising the "efficiency of attack" looks plausible yet affects the futility of suicide attacks only superficially and is hence deficient. The location of the attacks in Europe cannot be justified by territorial motives; compared to the Middle East they grant no gain of terrain. On the one hand, they are symbolic, an act of resistance that realises the "freedom to one's own death"<sup>45</sup>, characteristic for the martyr and his becoming a hero, highly functional for the entire movement; on the other hand, they are political, since they involve the humiliation of the overpowering enemy.<sup>46</sup>

### *Actors and actants*

As far as there is a posthumous evidence of the protagonists of the attacks perpetrated in Europe, they lived in a network of families, friends, companions and institutional actors. A closer look shows, speaking with Rolf Lindner, how "social, cultural and biographical components combine in a way that is specific for time and place"<sup>47</sup>, and make cultural constellations visible.

The chief parts of the Paris and Brussels attacks of 2015 and 2016 were cast with French citizens: the brothers Kouachi and Abdesalam, Omar Ismaïl Mostefai, Mehdi Nemmouche, Amedy Coulibaly or Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, to

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**42** Vgl. S.T.: *Maître de la terreur* 2015, 15. Ad « International War Law » see Art. 2, United Nations Charter.

**43** Quote from the fundamentalist Islamization movement of the Muslim Brotherhood: Islam is "dogma and cult, fatherland as well as nationality, religion and state, spirituality and action, Koran and sword" (Hasan Al-Bannā, translation from the French JR). In 1938, al-Bannā glorified the death of the individual believer for religious reasons as a means of enforcing political demands in the tract "The Death Industry".

Cf. N. Mouhine: *Genèse du Djihadisme* 2015, 14

**44** S. Hunholz: *Kulturalisierung des Terrors* 2010, 72, formuliert in Anlehnung an Herfried Münkler 2006.

**45** Ebd. 74

**46** Ebd. 75

**47** R. Lindner: *Kulturanalyse* 2003, 184

mention but a few of the identified main perpetrators. All were born in France, their parents or grand-parents having been socialised in French-colonial territories. Almost all are of French-Algerian, -Tunisian or Moroccan descent, from families that have emigrated or fled to the promising home country France – into a France that is until now called in its former colonies, due to the ongoing effective amalgamation of capital and nation, “metropole”. The repressed atrocities committed during the colonial liberation wars in the North African Maghreb (Lebanon until 1943, Morocco, Tunisia until 1956, Algeria until 1962), in Syria (French Protectorate 1920-1946), and Libya (French Protectorate 1943-1949) are just starting to be worked up in France. For a too long time it was simply forbidden to take notice of the collateral damages caused by the *Grande Nation*, not only by the central archive access block but by a kind of national discretion for victims and perpetrators, the “masking”<sup>48</sup> and “concealment”<sup>49</sup> of many engaged in torturing, mass killing and rape, many army members and politicians that only recently retiring.<sup>50</sup> Those guilty for the Paris massacre of 1961<sup>51</sup>, where hundreds of Algerian Frenchmen had died, was assumed only in 2001, by Paris’ mayor Delanoë in a first, still contested commemoration<sup>52</sup>; the first president who has assumed the responsibility of France for this event, was François Hollande in 2012.

These Arabic families, affected by the revolutions of decolonisation and emigrating to continental France were, in a first time, forced to live in the disreputed shantytowns. In the 1960s and 1970s the makeshift settlements were transformed into the so-called *banlieues*, by building huge blocks in the former periphery. The children of the immigrants that Colette Pétonnet describes were following the call of the secular nation state, which promised equality, freedom, and brotherhood. They have been adapting and living their lives low-key in their traditional culture, whereas their children and grand-children fell between two stools and express this in a politicised way.<sup>53</sup>

“Although these young Muslims were born and raised in France and have passed through its educational system, many realise how their everyday is marked by racism, joblessness and inequality of opportunities.”<sup>54</sup>

To get to know the lifeworld of the actors is an important task. But sociological and ethnographic facts separately, on their own, fall short of offering the needed insights and modes of understanding.<sup>55</sup> They risk to become another instance of incapacitation of the subjects. Martin Scharfe’s “symptomatology of culture”

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**48** M. Scharfe: *Kultur als Oberfläche* 2011, 83

**49** M. Scharfe: *Es und Es* 2011, 95

**50** Cf. My interview with French entrepreneur, politician and ex-military, July 2014 in S.

**51** Cf. J.-L. Einaudi: *La bataille de Paris* 1991

**52** Access to the effects of the implicit ban on speaking about these events, this discursive absence, is given, among other things, by the 1983 crime novel by Didier Daeninckx: *Meurtre pour mémoire* 1983 or the 2005 movie «Caché» by Michael Haneke.

**53** N. Tietze: *Laizismus und Islam* 2016, 139

**54** S. Schmitz, R. Karaca: *Geschichte des Islams* 2016, 118

**55** Vgl. J. Manemann: *Dschihad* 2015, 31

offers the opportunity to read the suicide attack as an indicator, a symptom und “gesture of the era”<sup>56</sup>. But of which era, and in which society?

The diagnosis of a “problematic present” currently meets a discourse that considers “our”<sup>57</sup> illuminated civilisation misapplied by the foreign culture, by its “toxic mixture of religion and culture”<sup>58</sup>, as it has been discussed in the German press during the first months of 2016. Ulrich Beck states, in his diagnosis of the early 1990s of the “dark side of modernity” where “nationalism, ethnozentrisism, xenophobia and violence” discharge as result of a unfinished “dialectics of modernity and counter-modernity”.<sup>59</sup> We are well advised to include *repressed conditioning and traces*.

The two World Wars of the last century reveal modernity as “modernisation of barbarism”<sup>60</sup>, a barbarism that extends beyond the generations that executed it or suffered from it, a barbarism that is expressed and discharged in culture. Aleida and Jan Assmann suppose, backed by Maurice Halbwachs, a memory<sup>61</sup> span, social remembrance half-life period, of three to four generations. With the insights of Scharfe in mind we should assume even more than this. The “aftermath of the politics of colonisation and expansion since the early modern era”, Katschnig-Fasch contends, “and the clerical violence supported by a Christian revealed religion”, accompanies European history into the present.<sup>62</sup>

Following Rolf Lindner’s instructions for cultural analysis, we have to deal with the “hidden foundational thoughts of a generation”<sup>63</sup>, the “cultural unconscious of an era”<sup>64</sup> and the “emotional pattern”<sup>65</sup> of a generation. Our attention should be not only be, as we use to, directed towards the victims, with which we are familiar thanks to many differentiated studies, but also the perpetrators. Their traces can be found in the ethnographies of the suburban by Pétonnet. They record the experience of loss, of humiliation<sup>66</sup>, of misery, but also of hope and confidence.<sup>67</sup> The second volume of her *banlieue* ethnography, published in 1979 as “We are all in the fog”, closes with a moving chapter describing the “self-

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**56** M. Scharfe: Signaturen 2011, 11

**57** Vgl. Anm. 1

**58** Among many other links to find in <http://ef-magazin.de/2016/02/01/8331-religion-und-politik-wenn-der-koran-zum-gesetzbuch-wird-teil-2> (21.06.2016)

**59** U. Beck: Erfindung des Politischen 1993, 16; Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* (Cambridge, Malden MA: Polity Press, 2018), translated by Mark Ritter, p. 56.

**60** Ebd., 6

**61** Vgl. J. Assmann: Kollektives Gedächtnis 1988, 11; M. Halbwachs: La mémoire collective 1950 [1925]

**62** E. Katschnig-Fasch: Gewalt des Helden 1993, 102

**63** Alfred North Whitehead, zit. n. R. Lindner: Kulturanalyse 2003, 182

**64** Pierre Bourdieu, zit. n. R. Lindner ebd., 182

**65** Raymond Williams, zit. n. Lindner ebd., 183

**66** Psychoanalyst H.E. Richter quotes Orhan Pamuk: „Unfortunately, the West has no idea of the sense of humiliation that a large majority of the world's population experiences and has to overcome without losing their minds or getting involved with terrorists, radical nationalists or fundamentalists.“ In: Moral in Zeiten der Krise 2010, 169

**67** C. Pétonnet: Ces gens-là 1968, C. Pétonnet: Brouillard 1979. The new edition of 2012 is preceded by a quotation from Herbert Marcuse: « Leur opposition est révolutionnaire, même si leur conscience ne l'est pas. » (mgl. from Eros und Zivilisation 1963)

punishment and self-destruction” of the Maghrebian population of the urban fringe:

“The death wish for oneself that lurks in the depths of their minds like in everyone of us is more convincing for them, as is the daily hard fight that a desperate vitality delivers.”

«Le désir de mort pour soi qui veille au fond d’eux-mêmes comme en chacun de nous est plus persuasif chez eux, et le combat plus fort que livre au jour le jour une virulente force de vivre. »<sup>68</sup>

Pétonnet describes the social situation of these sub-proletarians in terms of the guilt to be this under-class. Their living forces these people to a behaviour sanctioned by the state and at the same time projected on them and expected from them by society. Caught in this double bind situation the death wish, violence against themselves and others, drug addiction and mental illness offer the individual “liberating stratagems”<sup>69</sup>:

“One can start delinquency like one starts religious practise, to avoid folly”.

« on peut entrer en délinquance comme on entre en religion, pour éviter la folie ».<sup>70</sup>

“To aggress the other and oneself, to fight back and to afflict oneself a wound does not exclude one another but sometimes as blended into one action or in alternating actions without directional priorities.”

«Aggresser autrui et soi-même, riposter et se meurtrir ne s’excluent pas mais parfois se confondent dans une action simultanée ou dans une alternance sans priorité.»<sup>71</sup>

Once “freedom is incapacitated to become concrete”, philosopher Jeanne Hersch writes, “it turns against human life and denies its deeper value”.<sup>72</sup>

Like her friend and contemporary Michel Foucault, Colette Pétonnet identifies the social benefit of this policy of discrimination that precedes all self-devaluation of man as the constitution of the “self in indirect ways, by the exclusion of others”<sup>73</sup>. She concludes her book:

“For the moment, it seems pretty much that people who are unanimously considered as marginal, asocial, inadapted or handicapped would be for society what the phamakoi have been to the Athenians, i.e. at the same time the disease and the remedy.”

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**68** C. Pétonnet: Brouillard 2012 [1979], 477; own translation

**69** Ebd. 466

**70** Ebd. 471; own translation

**71** Ebd. 477

**72** J. Hersch: Hoffnung 1991 [1976], 10

**73** Vgl. M. Foucault: Politische Technologie 2010 [The Political Technology, 1988], 46 – a lecture given by him in 1982 in Vermont, in which he talks about his important work on „Discipline and Punish“.

«Pour l'heure, il semble bien que les gens unanimement désignés comme marginaux, asociaux, inadaptés ou handicapés, soient à la société contemporaine ce que les *pharmakoi* étaient aux Athéniens, c'est-à-dire, à la fois, le mal et le remède.»<sup>74</sup>

Paradoxically, self-devaluating and heroising are proximate. Not only the suicide of the assassin, but also the concussion triggered by the attacks contribute to the hero status of the martyr and transform his powerlessness and the one of the group from which he speaks into power. By this “most noble death”<sup>75</sup> he becomes the hero others want him to be; he attains a personification that “promises to lift out of individual powerlessness”, whereas frees himself by his act of violence from his “right to powerlessness”.<sup>76</sup> The identification of juvenile jihadists, even of the western “pop-jihadists”<sup>77</sup>, empowers him to become “himself part of the hero” and to deliver them from the “temporal promise of salvation”<sup>78</sup> that is hold off for them, and to “fulfil their metaphysical homelessness”, as Gert Sautermeister<sup>79</sup> has put it. With the cruel heroes of the Balkan wars in mind, Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch states that “thoughts, sentiments and affects are nurtured by the unconscious”, no longer recognisable as images and “becoming live real”.<sup>80</sup> Practices and representations get mixed up, as their outlines become blurred and the spectacle grows into a false reality.<sup>81</sup>

But a perpetrator doesn't become just by his feat or the refusal of action – resistance – a hero. The spectacle he has caused, the feat and its fame need spectators.<sup>82</sup> Jacques Rancière points to the “paradox of the spectator”, referring to Antonin Artaud's “Theatre of cruelty”<sup>83</sup>, which says: „There is no theatre without spectators“<sup>84</sup>. Since the social representation of the hero is masculine, the spectacle of the making of a hero needs in particular the she-spectator.<sup>85</sup>

### Anthropology of killing

**74** C. Pétonnet: Brouillard 2012 [1979], 520

**75** Vgl. D. Freudenberg: Theorie des Irregulären 2008, 221

**76** Pétonnet headlines the book chapter "Disorder, violence and order" with a quote from Henri Lefebvre : «Mieux vaut la persécution que le droit à l'impuissance. » Vgl. ebd. 384.

**77** Vgl. J. Manemann: Dschihad 2015, 13

**78** E. Katschnig-Fasch: Gewalt des Helden 1993, 106

**79** G. Sautermeister: Werther 1985, 449

**80** E. Katschnig-Fasch: Gewalt des Helden 1993, 106.

**81** Umberto Eco describes the "spectacle as a fallacious life" in: Kultur als Spektakel 2013 [1973], 185, and Jacques Rancière on the passivity of the spectator in: Der emanzipierte Zuschauer 2008, 14, 18

**82** This thought is based in the „hero theory“ of Graz sociologist Christian Fleck, which says that the hero in order get a hero needs both the action and the spectator. Cf. C. Fleck: „Partisans who (allegedly) fought in the Ostmark for Austria's freedom and why they never became heroes“, lecture on 16.3.2016, Dep. For Cultural Anthropologie, Graz University.

**83** Vgl. J. Rancière: Der emanzipierte Zuschauer 2008, 15; A. Artaud: Theater 2012 [1938]. By „cruelty“ Artaud does not mean the evil but the relentlessness of the human existence.

**84** J. Rancière: Der emanzipierte Zuschauer 2008, 12

**85** This gender specific perspective stands at the very heart of our master project 2016/17 „Heroes. Repräsentationen männlicher Einzelkämpfer“ [Heroes. Representations of male lone warriors] at Graz University and will be published in 2018.

Members of western society consider themselves as being on a higher, enlightened level of civilisation, something I don't want to deny here. Nevertheless they are – as Scharfe highlights in his book on religion – young and fragile, and forgetful, too. Many examples from earlier and more recent criminal history shed doubts on this self-representation. Just think of the history of the Europeanisation of the guillotine, the last act of the “theatres of punishment”, as Foucault calls it, which have been for a long time public. He wanted to clarify the connections between form of government, idea of man, and concepts of law and punishment.<sup>86</sup>

The invention of the guillotine has been started with the aim to humanise the capital punishment, it served executions in Switzerland until 1940, in FRG until 1949 (last time in Tübingen), in DRG, called “Fallschwertmaschine”, until 1968. In tradition-minded France, until 1981<sup>87</sup>: the last execution took place in the notorious prison *Beaumettes* in Marseille, where we had, in 2015, the opportunity to talk to inmates in the very wing where this had taken place, about the lasting horror of the imagination of this penalty.

Killing by the knife, the clean cut (as Michael Haneke shows with the death of an Algerian Frenchman in his film *Caché*), or the death blow are deeply rooted in the imaginary of our society. They are present as a practice, even though they have an archaic character compared with the blasting of human bodies in war or daily a million times in computer games, pre-programmed, where gamers and their avatars dissolve into pixels after being hit.

American cultural anthropologist Joel Halpern, a scholar of ex-Yugoslavian countries, has been asked in the 1990s why the killings during the first Yugoslavian war have been so extremely cruel. He thinks that “killing in this war in ex-Yugoslavia has absolutely to be connected to the ways of killing during World War II”, that “the barbarism of the Third Reich” had been produced by one of the highest developed European countries of the time, a country with a tremendous intellectual heritage [...]”<sup>88</sup> The numerical, technological and organisational superiority of German invaders in Southern Europe has created the “asymmetry” of the autochthonous killing techniques. Halpern doesn't accept the classification of the latter as “archaic brutalism”, which goes along with the cultural emblem of “Balkanism” that reaches into the construction of the villains in Austrian detective TV-series. He interprets these as “symbolic acts that aim to hit the enemy in his *political* totality”, without exterminating him as Hitlerfascism had attempted.<sup>89</sup> In sum, a cruel theatre, a tragic theatre, which offers its audience a synoptical and performative mirror of the dramas of life, but also, according to Rancière, “the last location of confrontation of an audience with himself as a collectivity”<sup>90</sup>.

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**86** M. Foucault: *Überwachen und Strafen* 1994 [1975], 143-145

**87** Vgl. die Übersicht in: [wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillotine](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillotine) (20.7.2016)

**88** [K. Kaser]: *Töten mit dem Messer* (1994), 104

**89** Ebd. 105

**90** J. Rancière: *Der emanzipierte Zuschauer* 2008, 15

For Hannah Arendt and for the cultural anthropologist the dimension of understanding is absolutely crucial. In the face of atrocities however, “understanding”, a basic concept for humanities, is compromised. Stephan Wehovsky states that whoever attempts to retrace motives “that intend condemnable deeds, concedes that he isn’t an entirely good man”. He writes of a “tabooisation of understanding” with respect to crime, violence, torture and war: One understands, “and yet doesn’t understand, looks closely and represses”.<sup>91</sup> The idea of understanding has to be newly constructed at this threshold of pain. Martin Scharfe writes that we “have to take the idea of violence out of the cupboard of dark affects and to light it, in order to understand violence,” not as an instance of tolerance, “but in terms of finding an intellectual approach, which is, in the present case to ethnologise, semiotise, structuralise [...] the problem with the academic tools that we handle with competence”.<sup>92</sup>

The task of the cultural analyst is to unshell the complications of culture and to estrange and alienate our look on our [own accounts: “das Eigene”] that we presuppose to understand. As social actors and academics we barely cannot be but an audience, in the way Rancière understands this, as those who are, “severed from both, the capacity to gain insight and to act”<sup>93</sup>. Culturalisations, ethnisations and essentialisations depoliticise und construe “the Other of the West”<sup>94</sup>, relieving their “speakers” from the obligation of social responsibility. At this point *we* have “to stop just being spectators and to become actors of collective practise”<sup>95</sup>, and academic practice must become “intervention, action, politics”<sup>96</sup>.

The cultural analytical opening up of phenomena as a cultural studies’ guidelines – here exposed at the example of a tragedy – starts from the paradox of the social phenomenon, takes the claim of the contrary and objection seriously. It is in favour of intellectual back roads, pathless situations and absences, where losing one’s way can become productive. Or simply “to read the exceptional situation as burning mirror of normality”<sup>97</sup>.

### Conclusion

Haïm Korsia, chief rabbi of France, says, under the impression of the attacks of November 2015 in Paris: «Ce sont des enfants de France». We can translate this by “they are children of *France*”, but also, “they are France’s *children*”, which means they are like us, or still more and in unsettling ways, they are like us.<sup>98</sup>

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