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Who owns the images? Image politics and media criticism in theater: a separation of powers

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Publication date
2007

Published in
Image & Narrative

IMAGE [&] NARRATIVE

Who Owns the Images? Image Politics and Media Criticism in Theater: A Separation of Powers

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Published: September 2007

Abstract (E): This article investigates the ownership of images analyzing not only the place and mode of image circulation, but also the question of who can access these images under what circumstances. It is not only concerned with the technical or electronic media that are often held responsible for the increasing global circulation of images; rather, the relationship of theater to these "newer" media as a place and medium of a potential redistribution of images will be analyzed. It will focus on the specific conditions of seeing and being-seen *within and through* technical media and the way theatre can grant special insights into this process, an analysis which also makes the discussion of the power of the media and violence in media necessary. Of significant importance in this context is theater's special capacity to reflect the medial violence in images and thus make them visible and distributable. We will illustrate this capacity with Peter Sellar's 1993 production of Aeschylus' *The Persians* and Armin Petras' *Mach die Augen zu und fliege oder Krieg böse 5* (2004) and show that today political theater is hardly conceivable without an explicit criticism of images and their media.

Abstract (F): Cet article analyse la question de la propriété des images, en analysant non seulement les lieux et modes de la circulation des images, mais aussi le problème de leur accès: qui peut consulter une image, et à quelles conditions? L'article ne se limite pas à examiner les médias techniques ou numériques que l'on tient pour responsables de la circulation accrue des images, il se concentre plutôt sur le fait que ces "nouveaux" médias fonctionnent comme une sorte de théâtre, c'est-à-dire comme un espace où les images sont redistribuées. Plus particulièrement, cet article veut examiner les conditions dans lesquelles les médias techniques permettent de voir mais aussi d'être vu et la manière dont le théâtre peut offrir de nouvelles idées à une meilleure compréhension de ce processus où interviennent le pouvoir et la violence des médias. Un élément essentiel dans ce contexte est la capacité du théâtre à faire voir la violence des médias et ce faisant à permettre le débat critique à leur égard. Nous illustrerons cette capacité à l'aide d'une pièce de Peter Sellars de 1993 qui adapte Les Persans d'Eschyle et une pièce d'Armin Petras de 2004, Mach die Augen zu und fliege oder Krieg böse 5. Le but de l'analyse est de démontrer que le théâtre politique contemporain ne peut plus être dissocié d'une critique explicite des images et des médias visuels.

keywords: Opera, war imagery, Medusa/Visor effect, politics of vision

Article

1. Introduction: Theater And Images

There is good reason to investigate the ownership of images: in fact, this question can no longer be excluded in a time when images are less and less perceived as physical objects and more as intangible elements of electronic image spheres. It is important to analyze not only the place and mode of image circulation, but also the question of who can access these images under what circumstances. Such an analysis inevitably focuses on the media in which these images appear. In this article we are not only concerned with the technical or electronic media that are often held responsible for the increasing global circulation of images; rather, we will analyze the relationship of theater to these "newer" media as a place and medium of a potential redistribution of images.

By analyzing images in theater we are entering a field of research that is gaining complexity as a part of *image studies [Bildwissenschaft].* [1] This makes necessary some restrictions that provide us with seven steps that serve as a structural guide for our article and clarify the opening question: After having analyzed the connection between electronic image spheres and information policy as constitutive parts of what is generally called globalization with Peter Sellars' *The Persians* in the third step we will give the first example to show how the medium of theater as a special place of images can demonstrate to its audience that the violence of images refers to a physical dimension that is inherent in media and not in the images. In the fourth step we will then focus on the specific conditions of seeing and being-seen *within* and *through* technical media and the way theater can grant special insights into this process, an analysis which also makes a discussion of the power of media and violence [2] in media necessary. This is why, in our fifth step, we will make a distinction between *power* and *violence* which will lead us to the two parts of our core argument. Step six will look at images of violence and analyze the extent to which one can also talk about a violence of images. Of significant importance in this context is theater's special capacity to engage the *physical, corporeal co-presence of performer and audience* in an event (*Spiel*) that can reflect the medial violence in images and thus make them visible and distributable. We will illustrate this capacity in our seventh and last step: we will focus here on the political dimension of theater using Armin Petras' *Mach die Augen zu und fliege oder Krieg böse 5* (2004) and show that today political theater is hardly conceivable without an explicit criticism of images and their media.

2. Electronic Image Spheres a nd the Politics of Globalization

With globalization and a networked world, images have become indispensable for global cultural communication. Media such as television and the internet continuously provide us with a trans-nationally receivable program of images. However, simultaneously, a field of global image politics emerges, whose dimensions and effects cannot yet be estimated since the accelerated process of 'networking the world' is accompanied by a continuous process of world

creation (Nancy: 2002). We are increasingly confronted with cultural, political and religious issues *with* images that appear, at the same time, *in* a special image language. There is still little understanding of the relationship between media and images within this process. One approach sees the Internet as a new "agora" in a democratic global politics [3], another regards this new medium as a crisis for democracy (Rogers: 2004).

In his text *Die zeitgeschichtliche Bilderfrage* (2005) Otto Karl Werckmeister addresses the problems for civil societies in the 21 st century that result from the new media. He especially focuses on new photographic images that are generated in electronic networks. Werckmeister diagnoses an *increasing polarization between two image spheres:* an operational image sphere and an informational image sphere. The operational image sphere is the virtual space that is created by the new computer based media, in which images are produced, processed, saved and transferred as datasets. This virtual space is inaccessible to the public and invisible. The far-reaching operational sphere contains the informational image sphere as a sphere within a sphere that, in turn, pretends to be public and grants visual access to selected and frequently repeating images. However, this sphere reveals only a small proportion of what the operational image sphere records, produces and provides. The relationship between these two spheres is prone to conflicts: on the one hand the operational sphere is inaccessible *for* the public while, on the other hand, it contains the technical possibility to create and control images *of* the public (i.e. video surveillance, iris scans). Because of this tension the connection of images to reality is often doubted. According to Werckmeister, what is missing today is a democratically legitimated politics that grants unrestricted access to the operational image sphere and guarantees the exchange between the operational and informational image spheres. Only such a politics makes an open image critique possible.

Werckmeister cites the image coverage of the second American Gulf War as an especially revealing example. Whereas the first American Gulf War 1990/91 was covered almost without images, now an *embedded journalism* made selected images publicly available. These images, however, do not shed any light on the destructive results of the digital strategy and broadcast of the war and its almost invisible weapons. The two-part television documentary "War of Images" [4] about the change in US-war journalism since Vietnam confirms this diagnosis: interviews with various war journalists from the first and second Gulf war reveal how the television images that were broadcast became increasingly removed from any reality. Despite the fact that the recent Iraq war officially only lasted one month, three years worth of images were produced that the American public never got to see. Instead, military spokespersons presented "clean" images that were recorded by the weapons themselves. The credits of the documentary sum up the development as follows:

> The images of war are released by the military and its weapons of destruction.
> Who shall show us the real face of war in the future? 31 years ago, the
> Pentagon swore never again to let war imagery slip beyond its direct control;
> from now on television was never to be able to pose political or moral
> questions as it did during Vietnam. The Pentagon wants television itself to be
> a weapon - aimed at ourselves. [5]

Kijk hoe het vliegtuig
over het gebouw vliegt

According to Werckmeister, the interaction between operational and informational image spheres manifests itself in the so-called "Medusa-effect": it represents the medial production of visibility that creates anything from blindness up to death while it also destroys the material side of reality:

> On the one side we have, secretly and out of sight, the video electronic image technology that is manipulating society and making war, the 'subject-less' points of view (digital authorities, camera-directed weapons) defining changes and destroying reality. On the other side we have the culture of the image that is produced more and more to capture the gaze on this terrible reality, replacing the images by symbolic fictions and reflections of doubt. (23, transl. K.R.)

It is not the images that alter reality but the (invisible) mechanisms of their medial distribution. For Werckmeister, the strength of the mythical image of the Medusa is to sum up concisely the political dimensions of the fact that we rarely get to see anything of what *really* takes place and appears in images around the globe in the media. It is here, on the other hand, that Werckmeister's approach contains a certain weakness or rather a desideratum. Werckmeister sets out to resolve the political context of the mythical image through rational thinking. But instead of pleading for a contribution to image criticism and image politics in the humanities by actively working *with* the image of Medusa, Werckmeister retreats into a rationalism that allows for a universal schematism and, indirectly, an old, norm-based control

mechanism. Therefore, we will expand Werckmeister's approach. Instead of tracing back the image of the "Medusa-effect" to existing explanations or doctrines (such as working with an already sufficiently developed mythology) we will strengthen the critical potential of the image by taking into account the *effect of the medium* - namely its lethal gaze. Before we will develop this idea theoretically further with Jacques Derrida's metaphor of the 'Visor-effect' we will exemplify it on the site of theatre: more concretely we will show in how fare especially theatre is able to demonstrate the violent effect of the medium that produces the image.

3. Theater and the violence of the image in its mediality.: Peter Sellars' *The Persians*

In 1993, three years after the Second American Gulf War, the American director Peter Sellars staged "The Persians" by Attic tragedian Aeschylos in Los Angeles. Sellars' selection of the first war play in theater history revealed his intention to take a clear stance towards the Gulf War and its mediatized version. When the play was first staged in Athens it was already part of the medial propaganda of Athens against its archenemy Persia with its King Xerxes. Thus, Sellars' production allowed its audience both a fresh look onto the Attic tragedy and also its political function within a *polis*. To strengthen this point, we will include a few historic facts: Aeschylos' "The Persians" was first staged in 472 BCE towards the end of the Greco-Persian War. It is the first tragedy with two actors that exists completely: "The Persians" thus marks not only the beginning of dialogue on stage, but also a game of seeing and being-seen that presents itself to the spectators. The location of the play that Athenians perform for Athenians is the far-away palace of Susa in the year 480 BCE, eight years prior to the actual performance. Attosa, the king's mother, is awaiting news from her son Xerxes who is facing the Greeks in the sea battle at Salamis. When the messenger delivers a detailed report of Xerxes' devastating defeat, Attosa and the chorus conjure up the shadow of her husband and the specter of king Daraios appears. Daraios had been defeated by the Greeks at Marathon ten years earlier, in 490 BCE. Now, Daraios' counsel from Hades has good reason to call for restraint: he foresees further defeats in the future. This first evocation and apparition on a occidental stage is remarkable for various reasons. First of all, this is an instance in which a specter or ghost appears as a medium of horror. Daraios foresees what the Persians are incapable of seeing: the fall of their empire. Second, Athens can see " Susa " and "Daraios" with the help of the medium of the stage whereas Susa cannot see Athens. Not only the living, far-away Persians but also their dead appear on the Greek stage in form of an image. *The Persians* reveals a media-technological revolution: theater asserts itself as a space where it is possible to transform other peoples' images of the dead and appropriate them as external, foreign images. For the Athenians, Medusa has lost her horror. The plot itself, however, remains an act of war or violence.

Sellars transfers this Greek representation of a powerless Medusa into the year 1993 and gives her a new, a different face. The specter of Daraios appears 2400 years later on a stage in L.A. to mourn war and foreign rule. In a radicalization of the idea of prototype and recreation. Sellars uses the old image of Daraios in a new language:

> This little boy over here with his legs blown off.

He looks like me at his age.

His eyes - maybe it is me, the child Daraios, with its legs blown off.

The children will be shown no mercy,

500 children a day marked for death [.]

They have to know what they're attacking, don't they?

Their plains and satellites constantly taking pictures,

They had to know that was a shelter for the human being

For they see, but they do not think about what they are seeing.

They know but they do not want to comprehend what they know,

Because there are more important things in their minds, the winning of the war. [6]

The request for a turnover of violence into power and its distribution is clearly visible and audible. This image becomes even more explicit in the representation of Daraios body that visibly and audibly stresses violence: the actor playing the specter of Daraios is deaf-mute and exclusively acts with his hands and body. A narrator translates his body language for the audience into English. By transferring the message of the medium of the body into the medium of a foreign language a gap (threshold) opens between image and medium and its violence becomes visible in its own mediality.

Let us conclude: theater can provide a stage for intervals, in which the feigned violence *of* the image becomes visible in its mediality. This way a new possible interaction with images emerges: they become negotiable and distributable. The possibility of a distribution of images allows us to participate in their power. Such a participation is a political act (Röttger 2007) since power can be distributed while violence cannot. It is theater's special capacity to provide a *stage for image politics.* How is this to be understood?

4. Media and Orders of the Gaze: The Visor-effect

In 1993, ten years prior to Weckmeister, Jacques Derrida also dealt with the asymmetrical gaze in his widely discussed book *Specters of Marx*. Of central interest for Derrida is the encounter of Hamlet with the specter or ghost of his father. Since the specter's armor hides its contents Hamlet can only believe the words "I am thy father's spirit". Derrida calls this being-seen by something that we cannot see *Visor-effect*. "We cannot behold what beholds us. [...] Despite its apparition it remains invisible under its armor"(23). The specter's gaze may not be violent and lethal as that of Medusa but is as powerful since it also subjects the visible to an invisible law, a decree (25). Derrida introduces this ambiguous image to invite and encourage dealing with the difficulty of the constantly recurring specter of communism. This article focuses more on the *medial* qualities of both effects with respect to the special configuration of perception that theater provides.

The Visor-effect expands the Medusa-effect in two essential respects: first, it transforms the callous and lethal boundaries that the gaze of Medusa presents for her vis-à-vis into a *threshold*. By being located between encounter and gaze the visor opens onto a liminal experience, an *in-between* for reflexions and actions. This quality leads to a second medial expansion: while we encounter Medusa as a mythic figure the specter of Hamlet's father appears on stage as a *coup de théâtre*. It appears in the realm of reflection that the stage represents and thus appears directly in front of the spectators. The *gaze-destroying Medusa-effect* thus becomes visible and discernible before the spectators' eyes *in the image of the Visor-effect* when it appears on stage. Although this transfer cannot block the lethal gaze-effect of latest weapon technology the Visor-effect allows insight into its medial *status quo* by revealing both the hidden mechanisms of the operational image sphere and the violence of media. The interaction of Medusa-effect and Visor-effect reveals not only an image but also its medium as an iconic collision [7] that provokes what Bruno Latour calls "revision of the critical spirit [.] a common stage which allows the spectator to perceive an image and understand its politicity" (2002, 14). This comparison of Medusa-effect (as violence) and Visor-effect (as power) illustrates that any further analysis also has to investigate the political impetus of theater. To avoid obscurities, we will at this point differentiate and critically compare the political concepts of power and violence. [8]

5. Power and Violence

In 1970, during the Vietnam war and the global student revolution, Hannah Arendt presented her study *On Violence*. Arendt not only showed very convincingly that the relationship between power and violence (in the sense of state force) changed significantly in the course of the industrial revolution and especially after WWII; she also demonstrated that these changes remained unnoticed by most theoreticians up to that point. In our context, three aspects of her work are of special interest:

a) Historic approach

Arendt noticed that, long into the 20 th century, state or also revolutionary violence were simply considered means to an end justified by higher principles. Thus, violence was considered a necessary though bad *instrument* of power. According to Arendt, this perspective cannot be maintained when these violent means or instruments can not longer be controlled because of their technological development. When this point is reached, violence has to be considered as an independent phenomenon and an independent force. This conclusion leads Arendt to a systematic examination of violence.

b) Political theory: Inter-est in the Present

Arendt ascertains for her own time (let us bear in mind at this point that already in 1972 the US dropped bombs on Vietnam that had built-in television cameras) that violence can no longer be understood as a simple extension of power and power structures. More importantly: even though power and violence often occur together [9] they are polar opposites (184).

Power, according to Arendt's analysis, is a phenomenon that is always possessed by a majority of a group that accept and support it in a great variety of ways. Force, in turn, is exercised by a few against many and requires *instruments* of violence: i.e. the technology of the police or the army. The most extreme case of power is when everybody faces the one, violence, on the other hand, when the one faces everybody. The last case can only take place with the help of instruments of force.

c) Future or Present

Following the digital revolution, Arendt's explications have to be expanded by a few significant aspects. First of all, the question arises how these majorities that legitimate power are constituted. Or more precisely: who creates majorities today? Who decides how and who is counted? What votes do count and which ones are silenced? Today, the function of the mass media, television, and increasingly the internet, in this process has to be considered. Using Werckmeister, we have explained how media play an important yet latent role in creating the operational image sphere. If these media are indeed *means* to the creation of power then they become not only elements of power but rather potential instruments of violence from Arendt's perspective. It is interesting to note that public discourse, which is established primarily by media, hardly ever mentions the violence of media while it often brings up images of violence in media or - going even farther - a general violence of images. This observation suggest that media - and especially television - always simulate themselves as power by hiding their potential for violence. Reformulated into a hypothesis, this means: instead of revealing their own violence, media, especially electronic media, direct one's gaze to an apparent violence of images that hides the coherence of medium, material reality, and violence. Consequently, as we have shown with Werckmeister, this leads to a scepticism about the truth of images and not about a truth of media. Theater can make this paradox visible by providing a stage for images and media in the combination of the Medusa-effect and Visor-effect. Only thus can the audience become an active part of the decision-making process regarding the specific violence or power of media and images. This leads us to the next question: "Who owns the images?"

6. Power or Violence of Images?

As we have shown above, any violence of images has to be understood as a clear reference to the latent and invisible violence of those media that transport these images. If one recognizes the simulated power of media that is based only on an apparent agreement as violence then one cannot help but ask about the power of images. Such an approach not only recognizes the inherent violence of media but also helps us to react systematically. Also, this approach brings us close to the central question of this paper: who owns the images? Power, as Arendt has elaborated, is founded on distribution (numbers) and participation. There are various ways to participate and distribute but only a power that is shared by many creates leaves a margin for (political) participation. When this definition is applied to theater, this margin preexists literally if an open critique of images and media (in the sense of Werckmeister) not only conceivable but also feasible.

Based on these thoughts we propose the following hypothesis: *The question about the*

ownership of images can be answered by analyzing the power of images and revealing how this power is distributed.

Of course, this analysis also raises other questions, such as: What is the mediality of images? What media originally generated these images? What do they convey? Whom or what do they represent? To whom do they appear? The list of these question can never be complete simply because the question always depends on the image and situation of its perception, in other words the conditions of perception. Any definite and complete list of questions in the spirit of Kant's complete and pure *schema* (see *Critique of Pure Reason*) that intervenes between image and beholder would also be a form of violence.

This critique of schematism is based on Jean-Luc Nancy's text *Image et Violence* (2003). On the basis of this text, we will connect our analysis of the power of images to an analysis of the mediality of images. For this purpose we have to go back to the truism that images - especially in the mass media - are normally directly identified as violent. Jean Baudrillard, for example, called them "murderers of reality". One cannot imagine a more direct accussation: violence directly originates in images. It is important to add, however, that Baudrillard does not consider the specific mediality of images. Nancy calls this a case of 'familiar allegations': "First, that there is a violence of images […] second, that images of violence […] are omnipresent and - simultaneously or alternately - objectionable, shocking, necessary, disruptive" (31). [10] Nancy points out several causes for the existence and pervasiveness of these allegations, two of which are of special interest for our analysis: first, images are commonly understood as an imitation or copy of real objects. Nancy explicitly objects to this notion. Images, according to Nancy, do not imitate objects, they compete with them in a *rivaling* fashion. Rivalry, in turn, implicates competition or *agon* rather than imitation. More precisely, it is a competition for presence: "The image undermines the presence of the object. Instead of simply showing an existing object, the image shows the being and mode of being of the image" (41). With this particular feature the image pulls the object out of a state of simple attendance into presence, direct actuality: "In an image or as an image, and only thus, the object - be it an immobile object or person - is elevated to become a *subject. It presents itself [se présente]* " (41). This is another *iconoclash* because what operates at its base is the competition for subjectification *in* becoming an image. Of essential importance thereby is the monstrosity of the image that appears initially in its capactiy *to show* (de-monstrate) as "to illuminate and to highlight" (42), in other words to show its mediality. It is in this capacity that violence becomes apparent: "Without any doubt violence dominates; or, at least, the always latent potential for an imminent violence" (43). But what is Nancy's definition of violence? This brings us to the second origin of the common allegations that is relevant to our analysis. To quote Nancy:

> Violence is no interplay of forces. Violence does not play at all, it hates playing, all plays, intervals, articulations, pulsations, rules, that does not rule anything else than their pure relationship. [.] Violence is on this side of power und on the other side of the actions (33).

It is this immediacy of violence that is often equated with the immediacy of the impact of images. When we use these considerations for a closer analysis of the violence or power of images, a reference to their mediality without doubt becomes necessary. For violence has, at first glance, two characteristics: violence cannot be fooled with while it delegates its effect to

the images. Violence does not reveal itself in its medial monstrosity, it only appears in the image. Consequently, for the violence of mediality to appear it has to be made visible in the image. Our claim that the Visor-effect takes place on the threshold of reflection that is created by the theatrical stage simultaneously holds that theater can make visible the Medusa-effect (and thus the violence of media) *qua* the Visor-effect. Thus, the Visor-effect transports the Medusa-effect into the *realm of a separating force of power:* the visor opens up unto a liminal experience, a *threshold* for reflection and agency in the space of time of the theater. By allowing for intervals, theater thus clears the stage to negotiate and distribute the power of images. Power "happens" in association *with* images but not *in* the images. At the same time images and their media become publicly accessible for reflection and critique by being distributed via the Visor-effect and transported into the theatrical threshold. This has two effects: first, the image becomes political by revealing its *politicity*. (Remember here Latour's idea of the the common stage which allows the spectator to perceive an image and understand its politicity).. The fact that violence does not necessarily embed itself into the image but ultimately has to be read as a reference to the medium of the image also constitutes its *embodying* dimension. Second, there is a chance that the public - via the perspective of the theater - recognizes itself as a medium (or instrument) of an image culture (image sphere) and thus as a force. The opposing model for this concept would be the immanence of the Roman arena (Sloterdijk: 1999, 314-329). Its complete lack of a visual horizon makes it impossible for the spectators to recognize that they themselves are the place of violence: they become a part of a seamless loop of visual acts of violence. The medium becomes invisible. In other words, at this point, the power of images turns into powerlessness. Medusa refuses to appear and retreats into her medium. Where there is such powerlessness violence reigns.

7. Places of Image Politics: Theater, Body and Global Image Sphere. "Mach die Augen zu und fliege oder Krieg böse 5"

Our first theatrical example illustrated how theater can become the place in which the politics of visibility and invisibility can visibly be acted out. The role of the body in this context, however, is crucial. Why? If the violence and power of images are closely connected to their mediality the body becomes also important as a place and medium of images as soon as we consider theater as a place of images. Here, we follow Hans Belting who defines the human body as a medium of images with its capacity to absorb and produce internal and external images (Jackob/ Röttger 2003). Belting's approach allows us to find a more precise answer to the question about the ownership of images, even more so if we follow the now generally accepted notion that the specific mediality of theater is defined through both the co-presence of performers and audience and the concrete locality of action, the scenic plot. We have already shown that theater has the additional, special capacity not only to circulate images from the global image sphere, but also to allow an open image critique. The essential intersection at which this opening-up of the image in theater takes place is the real and medial presence of bodies. From a consideration of the body (of both actors and spectators) as a medium of images follows, on the one hand, that in theater the body forms a part of power of *global multitude* [11]; on the other hand, the body becomes the place of a

differential and a heterogeneity. It is important to stress that the dialectics of a production of visibility and invisibility of power of course takes place, of course, at the (perceiving and perceivable) body of the individual and the crowd. The following example illustrates theater's role in this process and, respectively, explains why this dialectics functions so well in theater.

In 2004 the German author and director Armin Petras staged a production with blind dancer Pernille Sonne whose title is programmatic for our analysis: " Mach die Augen zu und fliege oder Krieg böse 5" (*Close your eyes and fly or war evil 5*). Petras got the idea for the play in São Paulo, Brazil, where he noticed the peculiar conditions of life for the blind in the metropolis. For him, these conditions seemed like a constant state of war. He found a literary equivalent for this image of blindness and disorientation under a permanent threat of violence in Jakob von Grimmelshausen's "Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus" that was published after the Thirty Years' War in 1668 and depicts the experiences of the simple-minded cattle drover Simplicissimus during that time. Combined with autobiographical passages from Pernille Sonne's personal experiences with her increasing blindness and fragments of works by Marx, Kant, Art Spiegelman's *Maus II,* and Sophocles' "The Trachiniae", Petras created a collage spanning a time from antiquity to today and a place from Germany during the Thiry Years' War to today's Brazil and Papua-New Guinea. It is impossible for us to conclusively cover the complexity of the production at this point. Instead, we will point out the political dimension of the production, which stems from the special configuration of body, image, violence and mediality. The following quote from the collage that also serves as implicit thematic connection provides a first impression [12] of the play:

> In regional war and individual battle it is possible to increase chances of survival by an accumulation of sense-perceptual and mind-expanding techniques/

> With the increase in and spreading of global wars in the 20 th and 21 st century just these techniques of sensuous and rational training to overcome crisis become less successful / because these wars do not only aim at annihilating the individual thereby maximizing the profit for the other, but also destroy more thereby inevitably upsetting the global cultural climatic and social balance and thus destroying or at least undermining the basis of living of those who are attacked and those who attack (.) we define war as all those measures that lead to the cutting and destruction of all forms of life even if that was not intended by the responsible party/ (transl. K.R.)

According to Petras, the central aspect of the play is the destructive force of war and violence in the double sense of a military warfare and private struggle for existence that is demonstrated primarily on the site of the body. The sight of the blind dancer (Pernille Sonne), who repeatedly needs a guide for orientation, reveals for the audience the permanent physical insecurity that war or not-seeing (blindness) causes. The production points out that this war, which takes place in the media, directly affects the body. This image de *monstrates* almost archetypically [vor *bildhaft*] the Medusa-effect, the medial production of visibility that presupposes blindness and destroys reality. Already the opening of the play stresses this effect: filmic images are projected on the dark stage that depict the blind dancer standing in the middle of chaotic traffic at a bus stop in São Paulo with her eyes covered by dark sunglasses.
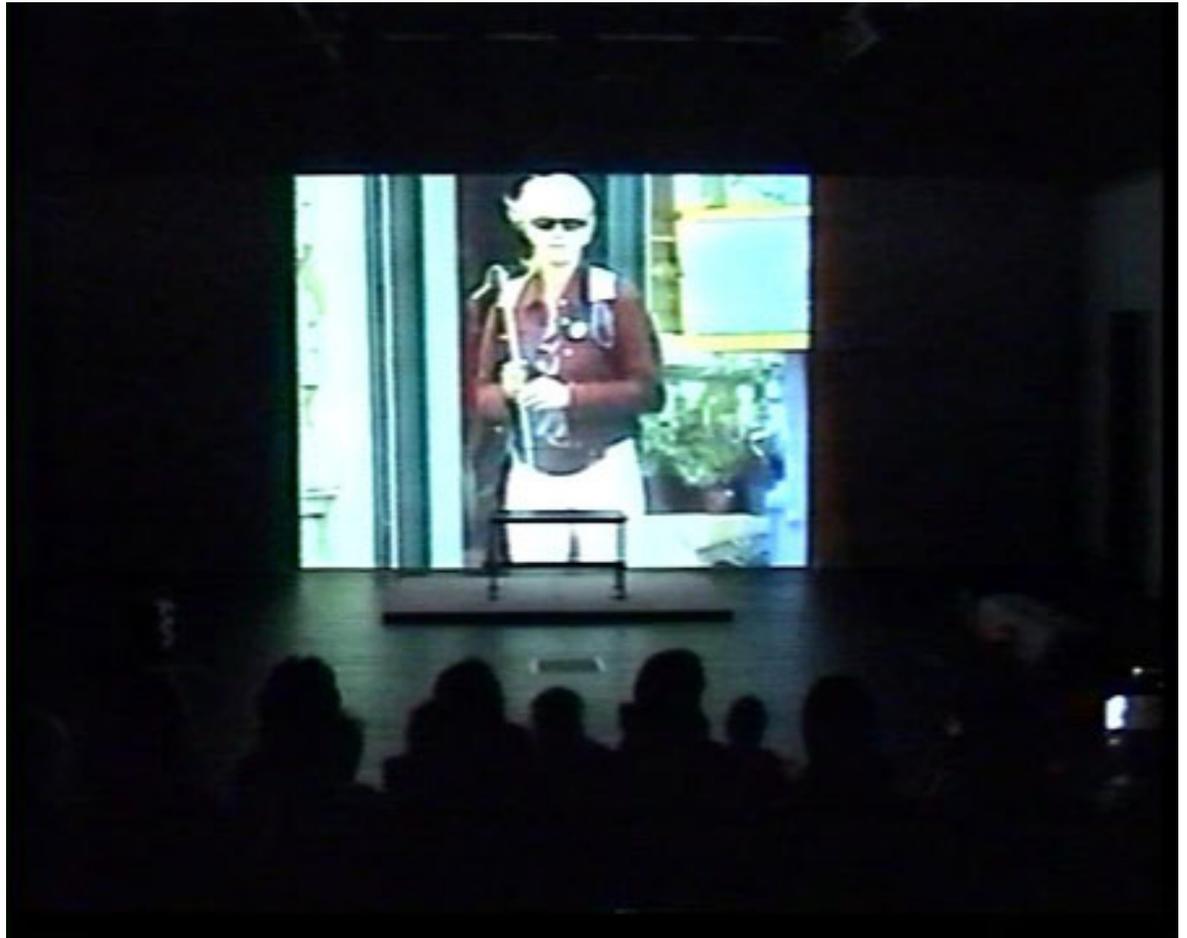
By directly confronting the audience with the visible image of blindness and the knowledge that they can see just what their opposite cannot, the production explicitly points out the (latent) violence of mediality. Guided by the camera the audience meets the blinded gaze of the dancer: a visible image of 'Medusa'. This image is followed by famous images from *Apocalypse Now,* the movie about Vietnam *par excellence:* The Doors' "This is the End" accompanies images of falling napalm bombs and burning jungle. These two projections form the visible frame for the allegories of personal struggle for existence and military warfare that the production negotiates. The projections also frame the entrance of the performers. The performance invites or even directly asks [13] the audience to participate in the game of orientation and disorientation and thereby also to participate in the experience of the latent possibility of violence in a permanent state of war. Of central importance are the intervals of reflection that the production creates in between staged images, bodies and media by disrupting the watching gaze. In front of the audience, the body of the performers becomes the site of this process by splitting up the sensory functions of movement (orientation in space by feeling), vision, speech, and the body becoming an image. The blind dancer is guided through the space by choreographer and dancer Lara Kaufmann in order to be able to orientate herself dancing while actor Milan Peschel simultaneously raises his voice to tell the audience about the barbarities that "Simplicissimus" experienced in the war. Later Lara Kaufman blindfolds herself with a black cloth and makes dance-like movements while a movie on the big screen in the back of the sage shows a somewhat clumsy (slightly handicapped) man wearing a cowboy shirt who - accompanied by tango music - also makes dancing

movements as if recorded by a webcam- in his own private rooms. Simultaneously, Pernille Sonne is carried by Milan Peschel who, again, quotes "Simplicissimus". Then the actors form a chorus in front of the movie that is still playing and speak the following words with closed eyes:

It is not amazing that music and dance are so important they are the tools we use if words fail

too private -

that is the formula of suppression

that keeps unusable life from expressing itself socially

and it therefore becomes private and gets suffocated. (transl. K.R.)

What emerges on stage before the audience's eyes is the threshold between going blind and becoming visible that is located in the mediality of the seeing and visible body. The process of becoming an image is part of the process of becoming a subject that takes place in the iconic clash, the visible *agon* between object and image, image and medium on stage. We can finally conclude that our imagination and its fear of her lethal (medial) gaze is a part of the image of Medusa and part of the Medusa-effect. Thus, her image is (for the audience) up for debate. We will quote one last passage from the play:

The more sensuous images we acquire the less we can get surprised the more we can experience changes in our life as possible the more we will be capable of handling the catastrophes that inevitably will strike us/ that means to get to know them as a possible world by our sensuous imagination and to counter the inevitable shock that will follow this crisis and will ram a black hole in our body with other images and on the background of these other images this black hole will produce a new image that will not really enable a survival but at the same time will not necessarily hinder it. (transl. K.R.)

Through the presentation of the destructive gaze of subjectless vision (medium) as an image on stage the spectator receives the power of reflection and participation in the face of the necessary (re-)distribution of images.

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Notes

[1]See for example Martin Schulz, *Ordnungen der Bilder. Eine Einführung in die Bildwissenschaft,* München 2005.

[2]*Translator's note:* The authors use the German phrase *Gewalt,* which contains notions of both physical violence and authoritative force. Both connotations are important in this context: to maintain a certain consistency, and since the public debate is more about the representation of violence in media, I have decided to use the term *violence* throughout this paper, except in a few instances where the context required the term *force.* To maintain the integrity of the argument the reader is strongly advised to bear this in mind and think "violence" in terms of both physical violence and force.

[3]Al Gore, for example, announced a new democratic agora of the Internet in 1993. Horst Bredekamp notes that this utopia was announced the same year it was possible to transmit images over the Internet, in: "Drehmomente - Merkmale und Ansprüche des Iconic Turn", in: Christa Maar, Hubert Burda (Hg.), Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder, Köln 2004, pp. 15-26, especially p. 21.

[4]A production of France Television, broadcast by the Belgian television network Canvas on July 1st and 7th, 2006. The name of the director is neither displayed in the credits nor are there any details about the production on the Internet.

[5] Translated from Dutch by K.R. and G.D.

[6] This quote is cited from a recording of the production.

[7] In this context see Bruno Latour's concept of iconoclash in: "What is iconoclash? Or is there a world beyond the image wars?", in: Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel (eds.), Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art. Catalogue of the Center for Art and Media (ZKM), Karlsruhe 2002, p. 14-37.

[8] Translator's note: The authord use the German phrase Gewalt, which contains notions of both physical violence and authoritative force. Both connotations are important in this context: to maintain a certain consistency, and since the public debate is more about the the representation of violence in the media, I have decided to use the term violence throughout this paper, except in a few instances where the context requires the term force. To maintain the integrity of the argument the reader is strongly advised to bear this in mind and think violence in terms of both physical violence and force.

[9] For a long time power and force/violence were considered identical and power equaled organized state force. This can still be seen in the German term "Gewaltenteilung" (literally: division of forces); to strengthen her argument, Arendt quotes Max Weber who defined the state as "a proportion of sovereignty of human being over human being that is based on the means of a legitimate (meaning: considered as legitimate) violence". See Hannah Arendt, "Macht und Gewalt", in ibid.: In der Gegenwart. Übungen im politischen Denken II, München 2000, pp. 145-208, especially p. 167.

[10] All quotes of Nancy are translated from the German edition into English by G.D..

[11] We refer directly to Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's concept of the "power of the global crowd" in the face of a "false dichotomy between global and local". See ibid., Empire. Die neue Weltordnung. Frankfurt a.M. 2003, p. 58-59. See also the more recent Multitude. War and Democracy in the age of Empire, New York 2004, p. XV: "Insofar as the multitude is neither an identity (like the people) nor uniform (like the masses), the internal differences of the multitude must discover the common that allows them to communicate and act together." We would like to emphasize that in German the term "multitude" can mean both 'number' and 'multiplicity'.

[12] See (also concerning the following quots) working script from September 2004. Published by schauspielfrankfurt. We would like to note that the quoted passage has been crossed out in the working script.

[13] At a later point during the performance a (random) member of the audience is called on stage to memorize a few dance movements with Pernille that are later performed together with the other actors.

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