

Writing Scenes and Telling Time:
Post-War German *Journal* Literature, Between Diary and the News(papers)

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Abstract

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Located at the intersection of literary, journalistic, and socio-historical discourses, “Writing Scenes and Telling Time” looks at diaristic texts in Post-War German Literature through the lens of news reporting and mass media. Since the 1970s, diaristic texts in German emerged across genres in the works of canonical authors. These works are widely read as subjective texts and linked to their authors’ supposedly diaristic interest in introspection and self-expression. However, these texts’ orientation towards the outside world and their interest in the temporality and scene of writing does not fit into this existing narrative. This dissertation looks at four decades worth of *journal* texts by Peter Handke, Sarah Kirsch, Jürgen Becker, and Rainald Goetz. Considering these texts between the poles of diary and news(papers), “Writing Scenes and Telling Time” argues that the modes of writing that emerged must be read as a new genre. Looking at novels, poetry, prose, blogs, and epics, “Writing Scenes and Telling Time” analyses writing as the site of narrative experiments that resulted in new attempts to define literary categories.

“Writing Scenes and Telling Time” establishes links between the accelerating and alienating effects of mass media and the narratological impact of journalistic reporting on literary writing. The project takes reporting and the report as its methodological cornerstones and looks at the journal’s conception of scene, time, image, narrative, and writing through the lens of

contemporary literary theory. My project situates itself within the *temporal turn* and contributes to recent studies on literature and time.

The three chapters of this dissertation trace different modes of *journal* writing emerging since the early 1970s. Chapter I investigates how the texts of Jürgen Becker focus on the temporality of short-term memory and its implications for a new definition of plot. Chapter II traces *journal* writing in Sarah Kirsch's poetry and prose and the way in which it focalizes settings of spatio-temporal liminality. Chapter III looks at the works of Peter Handke and their focus on the temporal simultaneity of writing and its relation to the surrounding scene. My conclusion revisits these modes through the lens of 2000s *journal* writing in the works of Rainald Goetz.

“Writing Scenes and Telling Time” suggests that these texts' very rigid repudiation of mass media and journalistic reporting lies at odds with the extraordinary phenomenological influence both have on the conceptions of writing contained in them. This dissertation, therefore, intervenes in a literary history of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s by challenging common center/periphery binaries that imply an author's supposed degree of (non)involvement with the modern world. It expands existing theories on diaristic writing, looking at *journal* writing as a specific genre that transcends existing categories. “Writing Scenes and Telling Time” concludes that a broad range of supposedly diaristic texts from the German post-war era must be reconceived with regards to their genre status. Through its focus on writing, this dissertation ultimately aims at establishing *journal* writing as a new theory of genre.

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For Noah & Amy

INTRODUCTION: Between Diary and the News(paper): Writing *Journal(s)* in the German 1970s

I read the news today, oh boy

John Lennon, *A Day in the Life* (1967)

I.

“South Saginaw, Washington, Birmingham, New York, Naples, Rome, Los Angeles, Niagara Falls, Paris, Tulsa, Denver, London ...” At 5pm on June 1, 1980, businessman Ted Turner launched CNN as the first ever cable network providing 24/7 news coverage. Following his opening remarks, a flood of euphonious toponyms enunciated by a male voice-over crescendoed into what was about to emerge as worldwide reach of the network.¹ Minutes before, Turner himself had recited a (fairly clichéd) dedication by poet Edward Kessler to highlight what he perceived as the seminal shift in new communication technology. In the poet’s word, CNN’s purpose was “to provide information to people when it wasn’t available before.” This truly global endeavor was underscored by the network’s launch itself. The inaugural ceremony at the Turner Studios in Atlanta, Georgia, was aired as CNN’s first minutes on air, completed by a panning close-up on the network’s ‘satellite farm.’ Following a drumroll, the accelerating list of locales made accessible via these giant satellite dishes then seamlessly morphed the opening ceremony into the network’s first ever news broadcast. Aired from the World Trade Center in New York, it opened with the attempted murder of the black civil rights leader Vernon Jordan.

¹ CNN’s first hour on-air can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWhgKuKvvPE>

In a 2012 article for the network, Randy Harber, the newscast's first copy editor, recounted his view of their first hours on air as well as of the months and years to follow. Elaborating on what, to him, was the essence of changes brought about by round-the-clock news, Harber offered the idea of an entirely new reality – available on a daily basis – that had fundamentally changed audiences' relation to the world around the globe:

When [President] Carter came out of [Vernon] Jordan's room and stepped up to the waiting microphones, CNN was live. The three broadcast networks [ABC, CBS and NBC, the author] would air portions of Carter's remarks later on their 30-minute evening newscasts, but CNN was live as it happened. [...] Cell phones were still a few years away. There was no internet, but people could look at CNN and see history unfold before their eyes.²

Seeing “history unfold in front of their eyes,” the first decade of live global news coverage was shaped by the broadcast of numerous historic events “live” on screen.³ Satellite communication, a technology invented for the purpose of military interventions, now enabled networks like CNN to live-broadcast these interventions on a global level.⁴ Framed by the first Gulf War in 1990/91 and the terror attacks of September 11 in 2001, a single decade of this new form of coverage fundamentally altered the way people went about their everyday lives: “As video of bombs falling on targets and reports from the field streamed in, people were reluctant to be away from

² Randy Harber, “At CNN From the Beginning, A Ringside Seat to History.” Opinion piece on CNN.com from 02/23/12. Accessed online via: <https://www.cnn.com/2012/02/23/opinion/harber-cnn-32-years/index.html>

³ E.g., the launch and explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* in 1986 or the protests on Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

⁴ Paul Virilio in the 1970s rendered “technologies of seeing beyond the horizon” such as satellite communication the matrix of his newly found *science of speed*. In his *Essay on Dromology*, the Virilio identified speed (initially a byproduct of military technology and later an effect of mass media as its civil offspring) as the driving force of modernity. Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*. Transl. Julie Rose (New York, London: Verso, 1997), 42, a. Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* Transl. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986)

their televisions. They carried pocket radios into business meetings to listen to CNN Radio. They were unwilling to be unplugged.”⁵

In 1990, Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai subsumed the diverging effects of cultural globalization under the metaphor of various landscapes that reshape the reality of human existence. In his essay *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, Appadurai suggests to regard the entirety of “images of the world created by [the] media” under the concept of “mediascapes.”⁶ As a set of virtual landscapes, the anthropologist proposed that these mediascapes in the latter half of the 20th century replaced or supplemented real existing landscapes with constructed or “imagined worlds.”⁷ In a rapidly globalizing world, networks like CNN became both a cause and a factor in the development of these mediascapes in the run-up to the new millennium.

Establishing the news as a landscape unfolding live in front of people’s eyes, CNN finally elevated broadcast journalism to where it was headed since the 1970s.⁸ A “state of consciousness,” as communication historian James Carey predicted even a decade before CNN’s launch, journalism resembled its own “cultural form” as a “way of apprehending, of

⁵ Randy Harber, “At CNN From the Beginning.”

⁶ Arjun Appadurai: *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press 1996, 35.

⁷ “The lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes are blurred, so that the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences [...], the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects.” Appadurai, 35.

⁸ Michael Schudson, *The Sociology of News* (New York: Norton, 2003). On the notion of a journalism as a global phenomenon and a “brainchild of the age of globalization” see Miki Tanikawa, “Is ‘Global Journalism’ Truly Global? Conceptual and Empirical Examinations of the Global, Cosmopolitan and Parochial Conceptualization of Journalism,” *Journalism Studies*. Volume 20, Issue 10 (London: Routledge, 2019), 1421-1439. On “media globalization” and the notion of “transnational television,” Jean K. Chalaby, “Towards an Understanding of Media Transnationalism,” *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a New Media Order*. Ed. by Jean K. Chalaby (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 1-13.

experiencing the world.”⁹ Upending the regimen of a periodical and asynchronous news coverage with three newscasts a day – morning, noon, and evening – CNN and other networks who followed suit only accelerated what was there before. Through its round-the-clock coverage, 24/7 news instituted the principles of cyclicity and simultaneity.¹⁰ Causing newspapers and radio networks to adapt and to speed up their own coverage, CNN elevated the mediascape of the “news-cycle” to what Niklas Luhmann characterized as a “background reality.”¹¹

II.

“Reality today: the weather map / from last night,” the writer Jürgen Becker observed in a poem from his 1974 volume *The End of Landscape Painting*, adding in a reflective self-address:

– this, you see
is how we are living these days, these days
nothing
is happening anymore.
I say at noon.
Now the afternoon
doesn’t pass by
[...] while the weather map,
quite surprisingly,

⁹ James W. Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” Eve S. Munson, Catherine A. Warren (eds.), *James Carey: A Critical Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 86-94.

¹⁰ Schudson, *The Sociology of News*, 10.

¹¹ Niklas Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995), 49.

has proven to be right today.¹²

Spanning an arc from the night before to noon and afternoon, the unit of one day is the temporal landscape of this and other poems in this volume. Written in what appears to be a year-long scroll, the texts of his 1977 follow-up volume *Don't Tell me About War* form an almost daily journal; dealing, as Becker suggests in the blurb on the dust jacket, “with the course of one year and its seasons, and with a biographical phase.”¹³ In fact, the author’s volumes of the time could all be read as one long diary, capturing the struggle to distinguish between reality as perceived on screen, on paper or via the radio and what actually happens on a daily basis:

This summer, a lot is happening, but this
we know only because I brought the radio
along and fetch the newspaper in the mornings. What is
important and what I am supposed to think of, only slowly
fades my addiction to live
with news.¹⁴

“A lot is happening,” and yet “nothing / is happening anymore” at all. Wedged between those two observations emerges the central conundrum of Becker’s writing. When news journalism establishes a “state of consciousness” and whole “way of apprehending, of experiencing the world,” the answer to the question of “what happened” is to be found

¹² “Wirklichkeit heute: die Wetterkarte / von gestern abend / – so, siehst du, / leben wir heute, heute / nichts / passiert mehr. Sage ich mittags. / Nun geht der Nachmittag / nicht mehr zu Ende / [...] während / die Wetterkarte, / ganz überraschend, / heute, im Recht bleibt.“ Jürgen Becker, *Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei, Gedichte: 1965-1980* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), 58. All translations are mine.

¹³ Jürgen Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg: Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), dust jacket.

¹⁴ “In diesem Sommer passiert viel, aber das / wissen wir nur, weil ich das Radio mitgenommen / habe, morgens Zeitungen hole, nur langsam / schwindet die Sucht mit Neuigkeiten / zu leben.” Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 42.

somewhere between the author's personal experiences and the data from weather maps. And yet, these volumes are devoid of actual plot or actors. *Nothing* is happening anymore, in fact, but this is not where the volumes' inquiries stop. What happens, for instance, when nothing is happening anymore at all, while simultaneously more reports than ever are available about what is happening around the globe? Becker's journals ultimately aim for a new definition of plot. Turning a gaze shaped by the constant reception of news to the turbulence at the bird feeder, Becker's writing as a steady report covers the beat of the garden with the same diligence that the media covers the world:¹⁵ "The newspapers in the morning / and then afield / into the meadows, to forget everything. I am rumored / to be addicted to news, well, what is / the state of the radishes ..."¹⁶

III.

In the mid-1980s, the poet Sarah Kirsch started a series of prose journals which she kept up until her death in 2013. In these texts, Kirsch describes her daily reality on the countryside, oscillating between her sheep at the dyke, her cat on the sofa, her donkey in the barn, and her adult son Moritz who lives with her. Like to the plants in her garden, Kirsch tends to these texts on a daily basis. Following the gardening year and the farmer's almanac, both Kirsch's texts and their

¹⁵ Becker conceives of literature as a "special form of reporting [*besondere Form des Berichtens*]," Jürgen Becker, "Gegen die Erhaltung des literarischen status quo," *Über Jürgen Becker*. Ed. by Leo Kreuzer (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 16.

¹⁶ "Die Zeitungen am Vormittag, danach hinaus / auf die Wiese, um alles zu vergessen. Man sagt mir / die Sucht nach Neuigkeiten nach, nun gut, wie ist / der Stand der Radieschen ...," Jürgen Becker, *Journal der Wiederholungen: Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1999), 12.

peripheral setting seem to have their own proper time. This setting is constantly expanded by an outward-bound gaze to other times and places. These enter Kirsch's world through the radio and, after 1990, through television. Obsessively following the news during the First Gulf War or the events in the aftermath of the hijacking of TWA Flight 847, Kirsch keeps up her descriptions of the live broadcasts for days on end. These descriptions fuse seamlessly with the agricultural year at the Northern German periphery when she abruptly wraps up these reports with phrases like "Wir aber machen Heu" – "But we are making hay."¹⁷

Since the mid-1980s, Kirsch's texts effectively morphed into one large work that is neither diary nor prose text, poetry collection or novel. This corresponds to the hybrid spatiotemporal setting of her journals, where the dawning war's political protagonists, like Bush, stand side by side with the ones of her daily home life, such as her cat with the equally monosyllabic name Schott. In a short entry from her journal *Floating Bog* [*Schwingrasen*], Kirsch allegorically connects this borderline-quality of her writing to her own writing position between the North and Baltic Sea coasts:

In order to be able to grasp or even convey something of the storms, you have to be based at the border between water and land, where they hit the world, fresh and unbowed, directly from the ether.¹⁸

Conveying daily reports from the periphery, the genre status of Kirsch's texts strikes as liminal as her act of conveying or writing is, located in the metaphorical "ether" between discourse. But

¹⁷ Kirsch, on June 25, 1985, wraps up her daily reports of the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 with this phrase. Sarah Kirsch, *Krähengeschwätz*. (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2010), 35.

¹⁸ "Um vom Sturm etwas zu begreifen oder gar vermitteln zu können, muß man an der Grenze zwischen Wasser und Land angestammt sein, dort wo er sich auf die Welt wirft, frisch und ungebrochen direkt aus dem Äther," Kirsch, *Das simple Leben*, 497.

what is this ether? And what is its relationship to the metaphorical storms or (air)waves battering its coasts?

This liminality, I suggest, is an innate quality of Kirsch's texts which stems from their ambiguous relation to mass media. Kirsch is at the same time drawn but also repelled by the news. This is true for her texts long before they morphed into prose poems and longer prose miniatures. In a 1975 poem Kirsch wrote: "If you don't hold a newspaper around here / the world is in order."¹⁹ But what is this order and how is it conveyed in writing? Wedged between diary and newspapers, these texts seem to resist any sense of order – they hover in-between. Her poetry from the mid-1970s and her prose volumes from the 1990s and 2000s all pose the same question: how can this complicated relationship to mass media be made productive in terms of these texts' unclear genre status?

IV.

In a 1980 letter to his colleague Hermann Lenz, writer Peter Handke set out to sketch the picturesque scene of his current living. Providing Lenz with a vivid written report on the goings-on at this "quiet spot" in the world, Handke in the letter pictures himself as far away from any war or turmoil as possible. Instead, he transmits to Lenz the seemingly scenic image of an idyllic and "beautiful" existence in his garden. "It's a marvelous day here," Handke sets off,

¹⁹ "Wenn man hier keine Zeitung hält / Ist die Welt in Ordnung," Sarah Kirsch, *Rückenwind: Gedichte* (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1976), 59.

and until now I have more or less just been sitting outside and tried to be its rapporteur [*sein Berichterstatter*]. The cats are lying around on their backs a lot, which supposedly is a sign that they feel safe, and the peasants cry, as if they gagged something out each time. The “papyrus” over there at the well shows many new sprouts [...] It’s a boring life altogether but I suppose there isn’t anything more beautiful than that (if one knows how to be grateful for this). After all, this little spot gradually grows dear to me (and what’s more, there are no wars going on right now).²⁰

Handke here undertakes an almost journalistic coverage of the day, providing Lenz with the image of what appears to be a “boring,” uneventful life at the Salzburg periphery. For the writer and his feline fellows, the absence of war accounts for an overall sense of safety that facilitates the coming about of text, referred to metonymically in the sprouting paper reed “over there at the well.”

In its focus on the day and on writing as the former’s coverage, this letter excerpt is representative for an entire body of Handke’s texts from the time.²¹ Its interest in time and space is one of the centerpieces of a programmatic reorientation in this author’s writing in the 1970s and 1980s. This process resulted in more than four decades worth of published *journal* volumes, as well as an entire body of epics, poetry and prose works that also shows *journal* qualities. But what exactly is this quality? Handke’s understanding of *journal* writing not only seems to work across genres but establishes an entirely new genre in itself. The letter to Lenz – a writer

²⁰ “Hier ist ein wunderbarer Tag, und ich saß bis jetzt fast nur draußen und versuchte, sein Berichterstatter zu sein. Die Katzen liegen viel auf dem Rücken, was ein Zeichen dafür [sein] soll, dass sie sich sicher fühlen, und die Fasane schreien, als würgten sie kurz etwas heraus. Der ‘Papyrus’ steht am Brunnen und hat viele neue Triebe [...] Ein langweiliges Leben, aber es gibt wohl nichts Schöneres [...]. Allmählich wächst einem der kleine Fleck doch ans Herz (und Krieg ist auch gerade keiner),” Handke, Lenz, *Berichterstatter des Tages*, 161.

²¹ The letter exchange between both writers were often used not only as vehicles to communicate and negotiate programmatic conjectures, but also to simultaneously explicate and exercise these concepts. Linking his writing as well as himself to the role of a “reporter,” Handke’s letter takes up an idea that the two writers had previously laid out in numerous instances of their written exchange since 1972 revealing both authors’ shared interest of both in the descriptions of marginal and everyday life settings.

similarly inclined in terms of daily writing – frames this major reorientation of Handke’s writing and, at the same time, can be read as a *journal* text itself.

As a report from the periphery, the letter offers important clues as to what this *journal* writing might be. Handke offers the idea of an attempt to be the day’s “rapporteur,” while at the same time noting the marked absence of anything which, like in Becker, for a “rapporteur” in the conventional would be note- or even ‘news’-worthy. Yet any definition of the report prominently features the local proximity between the reporter and the action of interest, their position in and towards the turmoil of events and the distant locale of their origin.²² Handke’s understanding of the report and the reporter’s relation to the scene seems to work on different terms. Carey suggests that the “idea of the report” reflects “the changing notions of what has been taken to be an adequate report of the world [as one] form of rendering” or even “interpreting reality.”²³ At the end of the 1970s, and under the influence of fundamental changes in mass media, the foundations of narration as a form of making written sense of the world is a central concern for writers. Understanding what a report is in Handke is the first key in an understanding of writing, and of *journal* writing in particular.

²² The *reporter*, Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan point out, relays from the midst of ‘action,’ gathering “information for its recounting as news” and, “like stenographers,” giving “accounts of interest from local institutions such as the courts and police.” Correspondents, in contrast, traditionally operate “from generally distant places,” covering “a specific topic and/or geographical area, such as war.” Barbie Zelizer, Stuart Allan, *Keywords in News and Journalism Studies* (New York: Open University Press, 2010), 26, 135.

²³ Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” 90f.

Reminding himself to not “let this turn into a diary here,”²⁴ Handke distinguishes his journals from prevalent diaristic projects of the 1970s. Freed “from any sense of intimacy,”²⁵ Handke – like Becker and Kirsch – conceptualizes his idea of writing in opposition to the literary diaries that some of his contemporaries published.²⁶ Exploring the historically close connection between diary and journalism instead,²⁷ texts by all three of these authors conceive of the journal as a hybrid in-between.²⁸ The hybridity of these *journal* texts corresponds with their peculiar reception status. Even in cases where the oeuvre of the respective author is widely acclaimed, journals in the context of the *New Subjectivity* movement of the 1970s were only occasionally considered seriously.²⁹ If at all, critics and scholars look(ed) at them as a “workshop for

²⁴ “laß das hier nicht in ein Tagebuch ausarten,” Peter Handke, “Notizbuch Mai-Juni 1976, 50b. Quoted from: Ulrich von Bülow, “Die Tage, die Bücher, die Stifte: Peter Handkes Journale,” Klaus Kastberger (ed.), *Peter Handke: Freiheit des Schreibens – Ordnung der Schrift* (Wien: Zsolnay, 2009), 238f.

²⁵ “von jeder Privatheit befreit,” Peter Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt: Ein Journal (November 1975 - März 1977)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979), 8.

²⁶ Max Frisch’s diaries, for example, chronicle the illustrious life of a famous writer and his prominent friends and grant historical insight into the literary circles of a specific time. Martin Walser’s diaries of the time feature similar contents but have only been published recently. Max Frisch, *Tagebuch 1966-1971* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), a. Max Frisch, *Aus dem Berliner Journal* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

²⁷ One that Rüdiger Görner dates back to the 18th century. Görner, in 1986, highlights the diary’s position between “Diarium und Journalismus.” Rüdiger Görner, *Das Tagebuch* (München/Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1986), 19.

²⁸ Michel Tournier developed the idea of a *journal extime*. In the preface to his own *journal extime*, Tournier elaborates: “I have long been in the habit of noting not only the stages and incidents of my travels, but the small and large events of my daily life, the weather, the metamorphoses of my garden, the visits I receive, the hardships and the sweet blows of fate. We can probably talk about ‘diary,’ but it is the opposite of a “diary.” I forged the word ‘extime’ to define it.” This outward-bound definition of the journal comes close to Handke’s, Becker’s, and Kirsch’s writing, however, it lacks the distinctly temporal aspect of their approaches. Michel Tournier, *Journal extime* (Paris: Muscardine, 2002), preface.

²⁹ Sometimes referred to as the “Neue Innerlichkeit,” Anne-Rose Meyer-Eisenhut, Burkhard Meyer-Sieckendiek, “Eine Einführung,” *Fluxus und/als Literatur: Zum Werk Jürgen Beckers* (München: edition text + kritik, 2014), xif., a. *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. 8th edition (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), 643f.

sentences” or as a supplement or addendum to an author’s actual work. In the entire German-speaking world since the mid-1970s, an interest emerged in what contemporary critics like Peter Wapniewski dismissed as “prose that is stuck” or as diaries “in a ‘stammering’ look.”³⁰ Since these authors’ had turned away from the urban centers and abandoned earlier experimental or political poetics, critics linked this surge of *journal* writing to a supposed interest in introspection and self-expression, two aspects with which diaries are traditionally associated.³¹ Since the late 1970s also saw massive improvements in communication technology, e.g., the world-wide distribution of satellite TV,³² journals were (dis)regarded as the endeavors of literary dropouts and quickly linked to an author’s supposed disinterest in the present time. Only recently have scholars started to turn to these *journal* texts in their publications.

The central assumption of this dissertation is that typically diaristic categories like subjectivity and introspection are much too narrow to fathom the programmatic diversity and range of texts like Kirsch’s, Handke’s, and Becker’s. Their journals form an integral part of these authors’ oeuvres and, in some cases, are even the biggest part of it.³³ Under the impression of what sociologists at the time described as an immense, massive acceleration of the present in connection to mass media,³⁴ their programmatic significance is the possibility to mediate

³⁰ “was heute als Lyrik angeboten wird und prosperiert, ist steckengebliebene Prosa, [...] ist Tagebuch im Stammel-Look.” Peter Wapniewski, “Gedichte sind genaue Form.” Article in *die Zeit* from 04/02/77, Accessed online at: <https://www.zeit.de/1977/06/gedichte-sind-genaue-formen/komplettansicht>

³¹ Ulrike Vedder, Sabine Kalff, “Tagebuch und Diaristik seit 1900: Einleitung,” *Zeitschrift für Germanistik. Neue Folge. XXVI – 2/2016* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 240.

³² CNN launched its 24/7 news coverage in 1980.

³³ Undermining, thus, some of the basic assumptions which most scholars made on the diary over the last couple of decades.” See footnote 45 of this introduction

³⁴ Hartmut Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (Malmö: NSU Press, 2010) 72, a. Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 51.

experience, description, and reflection of complex temporal structures in the late 20th century. Acknowledging these texts' relation to time and space is a first step to understanding their character, their genre, their writing. They are not diaries, prose or poetry, but journals. But what precisely is a journal? And what is *journal* writing? Instead of reading the hybridity of genres in these texts as a weak point, this dissertation renders this friction productive, reading it in conjunction with the hybridity in the content of these texts.

VI.

The three chapters of this dissertation trace the impact of mass media and, in particular, the idea of reports and reporting on the literary production in three authors from the 1970s to the 2010s. The particular order of these chapters is not essential, since I do not describe special cases, case studies, or a peculiar set of comparable poetics that merely fit together. Instead of tracing a historical development, the three chapters each highlight different aspects of *journal* writing that build on each other. Rather than a literary history, I tell a story about the development of a new genre of time-writing or that emerged under the influence of new media and that defies, obfuscates, and collapses existing genre distinctions.

In terms of methodology, this dissertation takes reporting and the report as points as conceptual cornerstones. Therefore, I look at the journal's conception of scene, writing, narrative, and image through the lens of contemporary literary theory since the 1970s. In order to rethink what plot and narrative are, all of these texts share a focus on writing that aims at scenes of writing which are utterly devoid of any form of eventfulness. But how in particular? Rather

than a particular form or genre, the readings in this dissertation look at *journal* as a mode of writing. By applying Barthes' concept of an *écriture*, I argue that the subsequent 'diarization' of oeuvres by writers like Kirsch, Becker, or Handke can be read as the opposite of a lack of interest in form.³⁵ *Écriture* as one of Barthes' "realities of form," entails such aspects as "the choice of tone," the "ethos" of a text or its "rhythm," all of which "arise [...] from a confrontation of the writer with the society of his [sic] time."³⁶ If regarded as a mode, *journal* writing "dissolve[s] the boundaries between literary genres [*Gattungen*]"³⁷ – a potential which Rüdiger Campe attributes to Barthes' concept of *écriture*.

A thread in my analyses is how writing verbalizes elapsing time through a thorough attention to the surrounding environment. Here my analyses draw on journalistic definitions of the report. The reporter *on scene* is commonly defined in their relation to the scene, i.e., both their local and temporal proximity to the action as well as their spatial and often temporal distance to the receivers of the information transmitted. I look at the journal's interest in local and global environments with regard to what Campe defined as the "writing-scene." Campe describes the scene as the "fluctuating constellation of writing which happens within the

³⁵ In Barthes' own conception, the writing in or of diaries is not considered in his definition of *écriture*. Barthes regards the diary extra literature and thus in strict correlation to an author's 'actual' work. Barthes was not alone in his dismissal of the diary as actual writing (s. footnote 41). Philippe Lejeune points out that Barthes' stance might have been connected to his own "mediocre attempts in the genre." Philippe Lejeune, "The Diary on Trial," *On Diary*. Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin, Julie Rak (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 162.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*. Prefaced by Susan Sontag. Translated from the French by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 1, 13-16.

³⁷ Rüdiger Campe, "Die Schreibszene: Schreiben," Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Ludwig K. Pfeiffer (eds.), *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche: Situationen offener Epistemologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 759.

framework that is established by language (semantics of writing), instrumentality (technology of writing) and gesture (physical aspect of writing).”³⁸

While I am using Mieke Bal’s concept of *focalization* to address these texts’ particular angle at their scene,³⁹ my analyses draw on Campe’s concept of the *writing-scene* in particular with regards to its juncture of living and writing. In his discussion of the ramifications of the *writing-scene*, Campe identifies the “nexus of the date of writing and of writing the date” as one of the parameters of *écriture*.⁴⁰ This corresponds to the journal’s characteristic focus on the scene of the writer through the daily inscription of the date, highlighted by definitions that establish connections between autobiography and diaristic writing. Through the writing of space and scene, the *journal* texts at the center of this dissertation ultimately aim at the writing of time. Despite their general plotlessness, I read their particular liminality as a distinctly narrative interest in writing.⁴¹ To think through these texts’ spatio-temporal liminality, I make use of Paul Ricœur’s concept of a narrative as a “third time.” In his 1984 study *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur describes the paradox of a cosmological time or “time of the world” and a phenomenological time or “time of the soul.”⁴² Reconciling both, Ricœur designates narrative the role of a “third

³⁸ Campe, “Die Schreibszene,” 760.

³⁹ *Focalization*, in Bal’s definition of the term, describes “the relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees” (or *focalizer*), “and that which is seen” (*focalized objects*). Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Third Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 149

⁴⁰ Campe, “Die Schreibszene,” 762.

⁴¹ I am defining “eventfulness” with Mieke Bal’s definition of *plot* through *events*, with an *event* being “the transition from one state to another state.” Bal, *Narratology*, 5f.

⁴² Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Vol. 1-3*. Transl. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). My readings expand Ricœur’s concept, who works with the distinction between “the epic, the drama, and the novel” and does not consider the journal in his triad of literary genres. Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 12-59, 104-109 a. 127-132.

time” that allows for reflections on the interdependence of both layers and, through the narrative’s temporal complexity, for the exploration of alternative proper times.⁴³

VII.

Reading narratives as acts of imitating an action, Ricœur in his theory turns to mimesis and in particular discusses life writing.⁴⁴ I understand the diaristic proximity of these largely autobiographical *journal* texts to work similarly. The way in which these texts make use of diaristic features goes far beyond definitions of diaries as either a (non)form, a (non)genre, or *paratext*.⁴⁵ However, these texts also go beyond what Lejeune identifies the employment of a mere “series of *effets de journal*” as a “homeopathic dose of the features of the diary.”⁴⁶ Most of the theoretical assumptions that have been made in scholarship about the diary over the last

⁴³ I could also have used Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the *chronotope*. However, Bakhtin does not consider diaries as literature at all and draws a strict line between the represented world and the world outside of the text. Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁴⁴ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol 1, 52-76.

⁴⁵ Blanchot, for instance, conceived of the diary as a “safeguard against the danger of writing.” Reflecting this conception of Blanchot’s, scholars in the last decades for the most part treated (and continue to treat) journals either as literary by-products or as documents of mere biographical interest, pre-dating or framing the “creative experience” that characterizes the production of actual *text*. In contrast, Gräser regards the diary as a “literary genre” with an aesthetic of its own. Lejeune identifies autobiography or “antifiction” as the “fundamental constraint” for the diarist. Kalff and Vedder sum up the “hybrid character” by regarding it as a “literarisches Experimentierfeld.” Maurice Blanchot, “Diary and Story,” *The Book to Come*. Transl. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 185; Albert Gräser, *Das literarische Tagebuch: Studien über Elemente des Tagebuchs als Kunstform* (Saarbrücken: West-Ost Verlag, 1955); Lejeune, “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” *On Diary*, 203. Ulrike Vedder, Sabine Kalff, “Tagebuch und Diaristik seit 1900: Einleitung,” *Zeitschrift für Germanistik. Neue Folge*. XXVI. 2/2016 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 235.

⁴⁶ Lejeune, “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” 207.

couple of decades do not discriminate between the writing of a diary (or found in a diary) and the various assumptions about the content, function or purpose of diaristic writing. In order to highlight the temporal dimension of this writing, I render this difference productive by using the term journal instead of diary or diaristic writing.

I look at the journal under what Lejeune calls the diarist's "mystical alliance with Time."⁴⁷ As the "anchor that scrapes against the bottom of day-to-day,"⁴⁸ the diary's relation to the newspaper dates back to the 18th century tradition of the journal rather than the 19th century idee of the *journal intime*.⁴⁹ In Blanchot's definition, the calendar with its repetitious sequence of the ever-same unit of one day constitutes, on a formal level, "the demon of the diary."⁵⁰ Arno Dusini's proposes a take on diaristic writing that relates *journal* writing back to the calendar as its technological predecessor: "Keeping a diary represents the kind of human activity in relation to time [that is] signified by the time unit 'day.'"⁵¹ More recent research on the materiality of writing explores this temporal dimension of *écriture* as one of the many aspects that constitute the parameters of a writing scene, considering writing a "process" ("Verfahren") and "zeroing in on writing's temporal extension and the latter's poetological relevance."⁵²

⁴⁷ Lejeune, "The Diary as 'Antifiction,'" 204.

⁴⁸ Blanchot, "Diary and Story," 185.

⁴⁹ Görner, *Das Tagebuch* (München, Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1986), 19. On the journal *intimé*. See Vedder/Kalff in the introduction to their 2016 volume. Vedder, Kalff, "Tagebuch und Diaristik seit 1900," 240

⁵⁰ Blanchot, "Diary and Story," 183.

⁵¹ "jenes menschliche Tun im Verhältnis zur Zeit mit der Zeiteinheit Tag," Arno Dusini, "... im Leben Blättern. Das Tagebuch als materialisierte Zeit," Helmut Gold et. al. (eds.), *Absolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), 97, a. Arno Dusini, *Tagebuch: Möglichkeiten einer Gattung* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005), 94ff.

⁵² Michael Gamper, Helmut Hühn (eds.), *Zeit der Darstellung: Ästhetische Eigenzeiten in Kunst, Literatur und Wissenschaft* (Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2014), 14f.

Lastly, the texts of this dissertation not only draw heavily on images in their attempts of writing scenes. Handke and Becker first explored their interest in journals through polaroid photography and photographic series, respectively. In their texts, images serve as indicators of passing time. I look at this relation to photographic time with Barthes concept of a *punctum* that captures complex temporal relations between anteriority and now. Additionally, I use Susan Sontag who identifies a “new sense of the notion of information” in the photographic image in “a world ruled by photographic images,” connecting the former to narrative and the news media: “The information that photographs can give starts to seem very important at that moment in cultural history when everyone is thought to have a right to something called news.”⁵³ My analyses show that the writing and narrative use of images in *journal* texts both challenge and expand these contemporary ideas of photography.

VIII.

While this dissertation is itself not a journal, I follow my texts’ methodological focus on microanalysis and make it my own methodology in the chapters. Through close readings, I look at how these authors reconceive literary categories such as storytelling, seriality, plot, image, narrative, world-building, and reports. I have described contemporaneous developments in mass media and their impact on perceptions of time and space at the start of this introduction.⁵⁴ The

⁵³ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 22

⁵⁴ I look at these developments with contemporary theories of time and space, such as Paul Virilio’s dromology, Vilém Flusser’s idea of a “telematic culture,” a growing branch of time sociology in the 1980s, Niklas Luhmann’s

late 1970s and early 1980s are widely perceived as a neuralgic point in the development of an accelerated time perception in the 20th century.⁵⁵ I consider these developments as the socio-historical context of my interpretations, while my analyses themselves turn to the challenges these changes pose for literary writing.

Confronted with the mass media reality of their time, writers like Handke, Kirsch, and Becker were faced with the question of what it means to write and narrate.⁵⁶ Their texts look for answers through writing the scene of writing – the most characteristic feature of the daily account, both in journalistic reports and in diaristic texts. My analysis in the three chapters traces a mode of writing that is focused on short-term memory and its temporality (Chapter I), on liminality and focalization (Chapter II), and on the temporal simultaneity of writing (Chapter III). Further chapters could have included texts by Christa Wolf, Hermann Lenz, or Rainald Goetz (see my conclusion). Wolf and Lenz also employ *journal* modes of writing. Where Lenz's autobiographic novel-cycle connects this writing to the experience of war and trauma, Wolf's texts address the political dimensions of *journal* writing. The "fascinating narrative potential in almost any given day"⁵⁷ for Wolf serves as a means to counter narratives of stately propaganda and the competing daily writing of secrete services agents and their intelligence reports.

system theory, and Appadurai's concept of cultural globalization. Vilém Flusser: *Virtuelle Räume – Simultane Welten* (= *Arch+*. Issue 111 (1992)). Ed. Nikolaus Kuhnert (Aachen: Arch+ Verlag, 1992), 46.

⁵⁵ Metin Genç, *Ereigniszeit und Eigenzeit. Zur literarischen Ästhetik operativer Zeitlichkeit* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016), 18, a. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 83, Hartmut Rosa, *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005), 24.

⁵⁶ On the historic connection of mediated experiences and crises of writing and narration in modernity, Walter Benjamin, "Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows," *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1977), 438-465.

⁵⁷ Christa Wolf, *Ein Tag im Jahr. 1960-2000* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2008, München: Luchterhand, 2005), 1.

My project contributes to existing scholarship on three canonical authors by filling gaps.⁵⁸ Furthermore, this dissertation situates itself within debates about a *temporal turn* – a large body of works that advocate for a temporal reorientation or renaissance in cultural studies.⁵⁹ My dissertation contributes to recent studies on literature and time⁶⁰ and connects to research on literary aesthetics and everyday life.⁶¹ With regard to German-language texts from the 1970s on, this everyday focus is often considered through the lenses of *Pop Literature* and *New Subjectivity*.⁶² Here my dissertation intervenes, adding to a literary history of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s by challenging common center/periphery binaries that imply an author’s supposed degree of (non)involvement with the modern world.

My project also expands existing theory on the journal, the diary, or diaristic writing, connecting to recent discussions of the diaristic form in German literature in particular.⁶³ Lastly, I look at *journal* writing as a specific genre that transcends these categories. Through its focus on writing, this dissertation ultimately aims at a new theory of genre. *Journal* writing for all three authors started before their turn to (prose) journals in the late 1970s/early 1980s. My three

⁵⁸ While all of the authors mentioned have been subject to more or less extensive scholarly research, no work has been done so far that considers their oeuvres under the shared premise of socio-temporal change in the late 20th century. This is also due to the fact that, while the majority of critical literature deals with canonical texts by these (partly canonical) authors, only a small number of essays and books engage in a discussion of their journal texts at all.

⁵⁹ See the 1997 volume *Die Wiederentdeckung der Zeit*, Antje Gimmler, Mike Sandbothe, Walter C. Zimmerli (eds.), *Die Wiederentdeckung der Zeit: Reflexionen – Analysen – Konzepte* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997).

⁶⁰ Gamper, Hühn, *Zeit der Darstellung*. Öhlschläger, Claudia, “Augenblick und lange Dauer: Ästhetische Eigenzeiten in epischen Kurzformen der Moderne und Gegenwart,” Claudia Öhlschläger, Lucia Perrone Capano (eds.), *Figurationen des Temporalen: Poetische, philosophische und mediale Reflexionen über Zeit* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013).

⁶¹ Thomas Wegmann’s project of a literary history of dwelling: <https://www.uibk.ac.at/forschung/magazin/8/28.pdf>

⁶² Klaus Briegleb, “Weiterschreiben!: Wege zu einer deutschen literarischen ‘Postmoderne’?,” Klaus Briegleb, Sigrid Weigel (eds.), *Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968* (München, Wien: Hanser, 1992) 380-398.

⁶³ Vedder, Kalff (eds.), *Zeitschrift für Germanistik. Neue Folge. XXVI. 2/2016* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016).

chapters, therefore, first turn to each author's earlier poetry. As a mode of writing, these authors' utilization of *journal* in the following four decades imbues all forms of writing, ranging from poems, epics, and stories to *journal* novels, *journal* sentences, and even letter writing.

CHAPTER ONE **Ruminating Plot: Approximating Photographic Narrative in
Jürgen Becker's Journal Texts**

I.

What's the buzz? Tell me what's a-happenin'

Andrew Lloyd-Weber, *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970)

“Grübelnd über der Zeitung” – “Ruminating over the newspaper” –, this is how we first encounter the protagonist of Jürgen Becker’s 1977 volume *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*⁶⁴ – *Don’t Tell Me About War* –, a 100-page poetry collection featuring a notoriously scatter-minded individual at its center, pondering incessantly over the volume’s central question of “what happened yesterday?” – “was passierte denn gestern?”⁶⁵ Central, that is, to more than the narrative setup of the meandering opening poem, wherein this question is pondered for three pages by an individual sifting through an array of short-term memories – ranging from yesterday’s news and weather to workday schedule and private life – only to discover that such an account is not so easy to arrive at after all. Reconstructing from the tatters of the mind, both plot and structure of a bygone day emerges, for this individual, as a quest so comprehensive that

⁶⁴ Jürgen Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg. Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977). All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

⁶⁵ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 7.

its attempted answer takes up no less than the 100 pages of the volume to follow. Most texts of this volume stage this individual in similar scenes or contexts, perched over a paper or glued to the radio, wondering what it was anyway that had occurred over the course of a previous day, week, or even month.

Yet as in this volume, for the various like-minded individuals in Becker's poetry collections of these years, the peek into today's paper rarely yields any viable indication as to the 'actual' nature of events in this immediate past. In contrast, throughout this and similar volumes of the time,⁶⁶ the shorter time frames in question all turn out to be completely nonexistent entities altogether. "Yesterday," as the musing reader of the news problematizes their undertaking right at the beginning of the 1977 collection, in fact "nothing has happened to me" at all, "Say what happened yesterday. / It was raining here."⁶⁷ Veering off, instead, from the attempted past simple of the immediate into the past progressive⁶⁸ of a more extended past, the shape of 'yesterday' as an empty temporal canvas for the individuals here and in other poems emerges from a reservoir that reaches back much further in time, and also way beyond the confines of the single day(s) or week(s) in question: "Yesterday," the individual completes his flashback towards the end of the poem, "was a decade, days as if never existent."⁶⁹

By tapping into bits and pieces of the considerably longer *durée* of "The Years Before," as the title of this poem suggests, the previous day ultimately emerges through an account which

⁶⁶ Jürgen Becker, *In der verbleibenden Zeit. Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979); *Odenthals Küste: Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986); *Journal der Wiederholungen. Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1999).

⁶⁷ "Gestern / passierte mir nichts; was passierte denn gestern. / Es regnete hier," Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 7.

⁶⁸ The change of the grammatical tenses is marked by adverbial qualifiers such as "nachts," "bald," "täglich," or "nie."

⁶⁹ "Gestern / war ein Jahrzehnt, Tage wie nie gewesen," Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 9.

quickly outgrows the narrow timeframes in question. Here and in the remainder of the volume, Becker departs from that which is either being read periodically in the news or written in the individual's account of busy days at work. This interest in lived experience and time in Becker's writing of the 1970s shall be at the center of this chapter. While this interest, at first glance, reflects an amalgamate of the programmatic "hunger for experience" or *Erfahrungshunger*⁷⁰ typical for the German literary production of the time, the author's disposition for the remembrance of his biographic past consistently interferes with this approach: Popping up randomly and in fact, non-chronologically, the bits and pieces retrieved from the vastness of associations with earlier times consistently sidetrack the various individuals in their quests to approximate an apt account of what happened "yesterday," "for instance last week" or "back then, one hour ago,"⁷¹ resulting in a unique approach to writing which departs significantly from Becker's earlier texts.

1.1 Mining the Past – "Rolls of Never-Developed Films"

Between the overbearing dominance of memory on the one hand, and the hollow presence only of a current, yet not particularly instructive sequence of events in the news, Becker lays out the metaphor of "never-developed films" in an attempt to understand what actually "happened." The focus on everyday life emerges both as the setting and central problem of much of Becker's work

⁷⁰ Michael Rutschky, "Erfahrungshunger: Ein Essay über die siebziger Jahre." (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1980).

⁷¹ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 56f.

throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, guiding his countless autobiographical alter egos in his works in their task to understand or reconstruct the immediate past. However, in the course of this quest, these individuals delve significantly deeper into the memory of “what was” or “has been”⁷² than the initial query from the onset of the 1977 volume would suggest. With each line the opener of *Don't Tell Me About War* progresses further in its meandering layout. The individual's engagement with his long-term memory thereby further deters his main mnemonic efforts about 'yesterday,' rendering the pathways through which the random fragments seem to open up only dead ends in his central quest. Given the much broader scope of the biographic pluperfect, the very nature of long-term memory here and elsewhere in Becker naturally conflicts with the considerably smaller timeframes at the center of the individual's mnemonic attention.

However, casting doubt on the rather fragmentary nature of the tatters from the past, as well as on their relevancy for an account of yesterday, the parts of the poem that delve into this biographic pluperfect themselves appear just as scattered in their syntactical layout as the ones that showcase Becker's engagement with the immediate past or present at the start of the text. The very last line of the opening poem in the 1977 volume openly exhibits this discrepancy, comparing the bits of long-term memory the poem just lengthily presented to what the individual identifies as “rolls of never-developed films” in his possession.⁷³ Considering the central effort of the book, we can read this last line as both an indicator of renewed failure with regard to the individual's interest in yesterday, but also as a hint at Becker's methodological approach in this volume.

⁷² “Was ist gewesen,” Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 56.

⁷³ As the title of the poem suggests, these rolls stem “From this time,” a period which the surrounding poems identify as the days and “Years Before” yesterday, referenced through the WWII allusion in the volume's title. Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 5.

To understand what happened the day or week before, and to “develop” an account of this happening, as one develops rolls of film, one may employ the metaphor of photographic exposure as a litmus test. As ends in themselves, the lengthy trips down memory lane provide an array of segues into what appears to be a significant mnemonic operation throughout this poem and ultimately the entirety of the volume. Ultimately, however, these operations, despite their similarities, are categorically different from one another. This is where the photographic metaphor of “never-developed films” emerges. The long-term exposure necessary to develop these films is not available for the fresher images that stem from yesterday. In order to effectively recollect yesterday in writing, however, the writer would have to make ‘proper’ use of this technique of photographic exposure for these images as well. Only this would allow the writer to transform the latent image from the short-term memory into visible, permanent structures on the pages in a book – a book that Becker himself in the blurb labels as a *journal*.

1.2 Not in the News(papers), But Not in the Diary Either

Never fully resolved nor reconciled, the conflict between long- and short-term memory as two altogether incompatible, and even conflicting, sources of memory over the course of the 116 poems figures as an *idée fixe* that sheds light on Becker’s approach to writing. This conflict sheds light on the concrete implications of this prominent programmatic term⁷⁴ that the author

⁷⁴ Sven Hanuschek, “‘Was man wegläßt, ist nicht da:’ Die Journalform als poetologisches Prinzip,” Anne-Rose Meyer-Eisenhut, Burckhard Meyer-Sieckendiek (eds.), *Fluxus und/als Literatur: Zum Werk Jürgen Beckers* (München: edition text + kritik, 2014), 108ff.

himself uses for more than four decades in works that follow this approach. Realized in what appears like endless scrolls of texts, subdivided into single, discrete poems only at second glance, Becker from the 1977 volume on subsumes this approach to writing under this working definition of the *journal*, a term that casually features on the volume's dust jacket and from the late 1990s on explicitly also in the subtitles or titles of subsequent books.⁷⁵

In an essay on Becker's use of the term, scholar Sven Hanuschek suggests that the conflicting notions of everyday writing as "a tendency" in Becker's texts are reflected in the author's use of this term. The *journal* features⁷⁶ as early as in the poetry collection *Snow* [*Schnee*, 1971]⁷⁷ in the author's oeuvre. Tackling the question of whether the *journal* in Becker represents "a form," an "anti-form," the "refusal of form" altogether, "a simple act of designating the medium, in which writing has been done" or rather "a programmatic metaphor for the purpose of describing Becker's own approaches and repertoire," Hanuschek in this analysis ultimately resorts to the etymology of the term to describe an approach that seems to work across all the categories just mentioned.

Attempting to outline "something close to a poetology of Becker's journal sentences," Hanuschek suggests that the term is captured best in its semantic relation to the French syllable *jour* [*day*] and its double meaning in German where it can be used interchangeably both to

⁷⁵ As a (sub)title (or part thereof), the term *journal* is first featured in Jürgen Becker's work in 1999, namely in the volume *Journal der Wiederholungen*. Since the early 2000s, it is no longer restricted to poetry only but expanded to *journal* prose, *journal* novels and *journal* sentences as well, such as in works like *Schnee in den Ardennen* (2003) or *Jetzt die Gegend damals* (2015). Jürgen Becker, *Schnee in den Ardennen: Journalroman* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), a. Jürgen Becker, *Jetzt die Gegend damals: Journalroman* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015).

⁷⁶ "Seit Ende der 1990er Jahre tragen eine ganze Reihe Jürgen Beckers das Journal im Titel [...]. Damit ist eine Tendenz explizit geworden, die auch schon in früheren Texten zu sehen war," Hanuschek, "Was man wegläßt, ist nicht da," 108.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Becker, *Schnee: Gedichte* (Berlin: Literarisches Colloquium, 1971).

designate a word diary and a newspaper. Hanuschek finally captures the term *journal* in Becker as a form of “protocol of the consciousness” [*Bewusstseins-mitschrift*]⁷⁸ about whose writing mode and daily structure [*Schreibverfahren und Tagestruktur*] we learn only little.”⁷⁹ This definition of the *journal* evokes both a mode of writing and a mindset, both of which programmatically refer back to the term’s etymologic duality.

[When,] from the 18th century on, the term ‘journal’ was used instead of ‘diary’ in Germany, it was in order to emphasize the report-character, and therefore the proximity to the professional newsmonger.⁸⁰

While not yet explicitly appearing in the title of *Don’t Tell Me About War*, this idea of a *journal* mode of *writing*, rather than (the) idea of an (anti-)form or genre, is expressed metaphorically in the imperative of the 1977 volume’s title. There, the colloquial idiom “Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg” – “Don’t Tell Me about War” – forestalls the figurative daily battleground for the writing individual in the book to find out “what happened yesterday.” Specified in the blurb⁸¹ as the various “necessities, anxieties” and “assimilations” characteristic of everyday life and its experiences, and thus likewise contained in the ubiquitous, but dreaded, possibility to be reminded of “war,” Becker on the volume’s dust jacket expands the martial analogy to writing

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the possible translations of the term “Mitschrift,” see page 152 in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

⁷⁹ “eine Bewusstseins-mitschrift, über deren Schreibverfahren und Tagestruktur wir wenig erfahren,” Hanuschek, “Was man weglässt, ist nicht da,” 123.

⁸⁰ “Wenn man, wiederum seit dem 18. Jahrhundert, in Deutschland den Begriff ‘Journal’ statt ‘Tagebuch’ verwendet hat, wurde damit der Bericht-Charakter betont, also die Nähe zum professionellen Neuigkeits-Übermittler,” Hanuschek, “Was man weglässt, ist nicht da,” 110.

⁸¹ This blurb, as many other paratexts in Becker’s oeuvre, were written by the author himself and must be seen as part of the text they frame, reflected by the first person account this blurb resembles: “Ich verrät kein Geheimnis, wenn ich sage, die meisten meiner Klappentexte habe ich selber geschrieben.” Jürgen Becker, interview by Romina Vogt and Moritz Gause, “Poesie und Praxis: Jenaer Vorlesung – Aus dem Gespräch mit Jürgen Becker,” Jan Volker Röhnert (ed.), *Poesie und Praxis: Sechs Dichter im Jahr der Wissenschaft* (Jena: Verlag IKS Garamond, 2009), 113.

itself, implying that the idea of a battle or conflict metaphorically also extends from the retroactive recollection to the actual *experience* of everyday life in itself as a writing scene or ‘war’ that informs his *writing* of the time. Building up, in fact, “along with the agenda [*Programm*] of experiences which every day, that is everyday life [*Alltag*], poses with its irritations and conflicts,” in the volume itself, the individual’s experience of yesterday appears as one of a completely heterogeneous, chaotic entity even that consists of a multiplicity of competing “yesterdays” rather than one fixed idea of anteriority. As a result, the volume engages an equal number of conflicting means to recall these “yesterdays” in writing retroactively.

This mix echoes the techniques and means present throughout Becker’s entire *journal* work. Playing out in the multiplicity of different types of information and narrative strands that overlap and interfere with each other in the single poems, a particularly intricate *mélange* of different ‘yesterdays’ ultimately urges Becker to expand ‘war’ metaphorically to the definition of the very “state and mode of being of the own self [*ein Krieg als Zustand des eigenen Ichs*],” where an individual has to both “defend itself against attacks from the outside as well as uproars from within.”⁸² Emerging from the ‘scattered’ nature of the opening text, every single one of the poems following in this volume can be read as forming part of or continuing this mnemonic ‘battleground’ which, as a *scene of writing*,⁸³ is the point of departure for the scatter-minded individual in his act of writerly self-“defense.” From a temporal standpoint, each poem in this and subsequent *journal* volumes of Becker’s thus establishes its own micro-yesterday –

⁸² All Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, dust jacket.

⁸³ With Rüdiger Campe the “fluctuating constellation of writing which happens within the framework that is established by language (semantics of writing), instrumentality (technology of writing) and gesture (physical aspect of writing).” Rüdiger Campe, “Die Schreibszene: Schreiben,” Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Ludwig K. Pfeiffer (eds.), *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche: Situationen offener Epistemologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 760.

heterogeneous, chaotic, and hybrid, yet instructive – adding to the seriality of the single days of one year or a month what could be read as the much more vague seriality of one long *journal* text that sets out to chronicle the shadows cast on each day by its immediate predecessor.

1.3 The Narrative(s) of Elapsing Time

As a mode of writing, the *journal* in Becker's texts emerges from an interplay of both writing and its interference(s). Hovering on the border between diary, long-term memory, and the news(papers), the idea to detect what actually happened from the variety of conflicting sources is subsumed in the *journal*. All three sources of information, I suggest, are alluded to in the 1977 volume's extended martial title metaphor. The notion of "war" refers to the idea of writing and its various interferences as scenes of an everyday war with the writing individual at the center. With Roland Barthes' definition of writing [*écriture*] as something that "arises from a confrontation of the writer with the society of his [sic] time,"⁸⁴ *journal* as a mode of writing in Becker could be defined as the friction that arises from the writer's daily confrontation with both autobiographic long- and short-term memory, as well as the media.

But how do these three sources work together? Rather than programmatically embracing either the diary or the newspaper in the writing of his texts, Becker's idea of writing *journal* establishes something in between both. While at first the writer's task to find out what happened yesterday emerges as a mnemonic battleground in proximity to diaristic writing, the term 'war'

⁸⁴ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*. Prefaced by Susan Sontag. Translated from the French by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968) 13-16.

in the title also alludes to interfering sources that significantly complicate this project.

Sidetracking the individual's mnemonic efforts, a second dimension of war refers to the bits and pieces from the autobiographic past, which for the individuals in Becker's mostly autobiographic work is always the author's childhood during World War II and the later desire not to constantly be "told about war" anymore. And finally, within the temporal context of the volume for Becker the present time is riddled with wars too. Considering the Cold War backdrop of the 1970s and 1980s, the presence of war is spread all over the globe. Brought to the attention of Becker's individuals as the daily updates in their at times obsessive⁸⁵ occupation with the papers or the radio news, war for these individuals is a reality not in an immediate locale, but in a *mediated* temporal vicinity. Becker notes in a poem about halfway through the collection, "This summer, a lot has happened, but this / we know only because I brought the radio / along, and fetch the paper in the mornings."⁸⁶

This media-related dimension of Becker's texts has been neglected in scholarship so far. Here is where this chapter aims to intervene. Becker's engagement with his past and childhood memory has yielded a number of scholarly contributions in recent years.⁸⁷ Yet, it is the

⁸⁵ Describing the atmosphere of a summer vacation that was deliberately planned to be spent *without* the news, Becker here indicates that even during these holidays the quest to find out what has happened, via the media, actually is a problem or a "habit" for his writing individual similar to an "addiction" or a form of substance abuse. An everyday scene paralleling the futile consultation of the newspaper right in the opening poem, Becker closes this poem by stating "only slowly / fades my addiction to live / with news," asserting that "What is important and what I am supposed to think of" these days actually emerges as something that yet again circumvents the mediascape of his time: "I sleep longer now; more time / for the land/country in the dreams," Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 42

⁸⁶ "In diesem Sommer passiert viel, aber das / wissen wir nur, weil ich das Radio mitgenommen / habe, morgens Zeitungen hole," Ibid.

⁸⁷ Eugenio Spedicato, "'Jetzt, jetzt ist der Krieg aus ...': Fiktion, Geschichte und Erinnerung in Jürgen Beckers Roman *Aus der Geschichte der Trennungen*," Meyer-Eisenhut, Meyer-Sieckendiek (eds.), *Fluxus und/als Literatur*, 199-212; Lutz Seiler, "Nie hört die Nachkriegszeit auf: Über Jürgen Becker," *Sonntags dachte ich an Gott* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 2004) 57-70, a. Patrick Siebert, "Dressels Garten: Ein Ort und die Erinnerung des Autors," Jan Volker Röhnert (ed.), *Poesie und Praxis*, 134-146.

metaphorical ‘war’ of synchronous interference in the media which, in conjunction with the inward gaze of the diarist resonates on a programmatic level with the *journal* writing in the author’s work. As a consistent dimension in Becker’s work, the media-oriented aspect of the *journal* in Becker’s texts is the same at the end of the 1990s as it is in the early 1970s and it informs his writing as a process. The first stanza of the short poem “Creative Writing” from *Journal of Repetitions* [*Journal der Wiederholungen*, 1999] captures this writerly significance from a programmatic angle, displaying the way in which the tension between writing and interferences departs from Becker’s extensive autobiographic engagement with the past:

Will you be writing something today? It seems to stay
dry today, and the grass is growing high, up
to the knees. In the valley the noises leave unimpaired
your syntax; there are many among the neighbors,
who have never spoken with one another.

Or will I be working on a sketch, which *discusses*
The missed opportunities ... please, not like that.⁸⁸

The two-stanza poem, like much of Becker’s journal works since the 1970s, arises from the idea of writing that springs from an act of tension between both extremes, staging inward and outward, or diary and newspaper, as two poles of a mode of writing literally centered around the *day* or *jour* (or yesterday). Staging how the dichotomy of news and diary informs (and actually is presupposed by) this writing on a syntactic level, the start of the second stanza, in combination

⁸⁸ “Schreibst du was heute? Es scheint heute trocken / zu bleiben, und das Gras wuchert hoch bis / zu den Knien. Im Tal die Geräusche lassen unbehelligt / die Syntax; es gibt viele unter den Nachbarn, / die haben noch nie miteinander gesprochen. // Oder sitzt du an einer Skizze, die das Versäumte / *thematisiert* ... bitte so nicht,” Becker, *Journal der Wiederholungen*, 32.

with the poem's ironic title, attempts to assess the actual "creative"⁸⁹ portion contained in this writing. This creative potential, however, is being problematized with regard to its largely autobiographical content. The poem at first seems to suggest that this writing, as a self-centered, navel-gazing activity, is altogether unaffected by anything other than the author's inner life. However, with the noises streaming into his garden from the nearby autobahn in the valley, at second glance, the very syntactic structure of the last sentence in the first stanza implies that the opposite is the case. Syntactically actually "impaired," the inversion of the very word that claims that the structure remains unimpaired suggests that the outside world is indeed a crucial factor for the composition of this text.

1.4 Exposing Autobiographic Subjectivity

In one of their semi-fictional manifestations,⁹⁰ this attic and the farmhouse in the Bergisches Land periphery where it is located form the writing scene grounding Becker's *journal* texts from the early 1970s on. Audible from the writer's garden, the "noises" from the valley feature as a constant source of distraction in this semi-autobiographical set-up. Yet, these noises appear to be an integral part of this scene, rather than indicating its limits or even causing its collapse, as the intricately balanced correlation between form and content in the 1999 poem shows, where these

⁸⁹ See the title of this poem – "Creative Writing."

⁹⁰ Becker's playful handling of the autobiographic nature of this *journal* prose, challenged by the presence of several narrative layers and fictional alter egos. This (meta-)fictional dimension distinguishes later *journal* novels and stories such as *Schnee in den Ardennen* (2003) or *Die folgenden Seiten* (2006) from Becker's earlier *journal* poetry of the 1970s and 1980s.

noises in the end even affect the poem's content. Without them, one might conclude, there would have been no need to write this stanza in the first place, let alone to connect the noises from the valley with the ones from within the writer's mind. The correlation between focus and distraction, in fact, seems to presuppose the much wider question of "What happened yesterday?" that features at the programmatic center of the 1977 volume as well. Neither the reflection of daily encounters and the inner turmoil of the individual's soul nor long-term memory and the autobiographic past yield any comprehensive information. As a concerted interplay of distractions, it is only together that all these sources, in their meandering and at times cursory nature, form the disparate, jumping, and associative text that passes as the *journal* of one year.

As an autobiographically shaped *Schreibszene*,⁹¹ Becker's attic and garden in the Bergisches Land periphery form precisely *not* an ivory tower. In fact, as the scene of the autobiographically shaped individuals'⁹² daily writing, these settings feature their own temporal and spatial integrity while making necessary concessions to the larger spatiotemporal environment of the surrounding world. The entire 1999 collection is imbued with such an interplay between remoteness and the daily news updates of the media. While the setting of this volume almost entirely resembles the autobiographically informed settings of Becker's prior *journal* volumes, it slightly alters them by adding a fictional dimension that renders the individuals inhabiting these settings what Hanuschek characterizes as semi-fictional

⁹¹ Campe, "Die Schreibszene," 760.

⁹² Such as Micha in *Schnee in den Ardennen*. In the novels *Schnee in den Ardennen* and *Jetzt die Gegend damals*, Becker's fictional alter ego Jörn – like Becker himself an author – appears as the fictional 'real-life' model of another one of Becker's personas, Micha, who, unlike Jörn (and Becker), escapes the remoteness of his German everyday life and as a dropout withdraws to the remoteness of a Greek Island.

“Spiegelfiguren” of the author.⁹³ Featuring slightly different set-ups, with Becker’s individuals living in Cologne or commuting between the urban center and the surrounding periphery, all of these books ask the same central question of whether the disruption and the presence of distraction, by drawing attention to them and writing them down, are not already always part of what seems to tolerate no distraction at first glance.

The answer to this, I propose, is to be found in the idea or tension of *journal* itself, if one connects it to the very mode of writing that critically informs Becker’s texts, whether they resemble or are labeled as *journal-sentences*, *journal-poems*, *journal stories*, or even entire *journal-novels*. What connects all of these texts across traditional genre-borders, I argue, is a scene of writing that becomes the main topic of these texts, emerging as a distinct focus on yesterday or similar shorter time frames. Departing from this autobiographic and supposed subjective dimension, the 1977 volume *Don’t Tell Me About War*, on the very level of syntax, implies that this scene is ultimately the key to an answer to the text’s ubiquitous question for yesterday’s plot. In the opening text, a second look at the quote from the beginning reveals the actual nature of yesterday: “nothing” had actually “happened to me; say what happened yesterday. / It was raining here.” While at first we are presented with the by now familiar pattern, a close reading of this passage shows that the relevant ‘info’ presented in the last line is yet something entirely different from both realms of experience. Featuring at first the dative prepositional object (“gestern passierte *dir* nichts”), the line seemingly redirects the question of what happened from the individual’s preoccupation with the newspaper in the first line, only to refer his restless inquiry for “plot” to the realms of personal experience instead.

⁹³ Hanuschek, “Was man wegläßt, ist nicht da,” 116.

The apparent shift in focus on a syntactical level from the second to the third line is one that is by now familiar. However, with the immediate and all but exact reiteration of the opening question minus this prepositional specifier (“was passierte denn gestern”), the pondering individual itself refutes this personal dimension of the own immediate biographic past. This is familiar too. What we are presented with instead – “It was raining here” – in the following line opens up an entirely new category of information. This information originates neither in the news nor the personal experience of the diarist, but rather in a reflection on yesterday’s weather. This at first seems odd: As a piece of information that would in fact scaffold any account of a given day, yesterday’s weather would typically not necessarily be taken to formulate a bygone day’s bottom line. Here, it features climatically as the final statement after the colon, where it closes the first array of futile self-inquiry.

Approaching thus the shape of a bygone day by way of its rather unremarkable, (grammatically) ordinary structure – “it was raining here” –, this day, just like any other, appears as a temporal canvas that only gains in color once any usual idea of actual plot is absent from it. Featuring, in fact, a plethora of such utterly unremarkable, invisible, and seemingly negligible events, this day gains in shape only the moment it is cleared from the twofold nature of its usual narrative cargo. Relating thus, via the colon, the central question of “what happened” to a statement about yesterday’s weather in the next phrase instead, we are ultimately introduced to a third dimension of information that actually warrants a sufficient answer to the volume’s leading question. The absolute absence of any distinct, unique or, in a literal sense, *extra-ordinary* incidents for Becker’s individuals is rendered the key feature of this day gone by and, subsequently, of the very nature of immediate past in this and other volumes: the “moving shadows cast by the leaves” that had “changed the office” for instance, or a “new toothache” that

had begun – but “nothing was precise” –, and then “suddenly a droning sound / in the evening, but no noises anywhere nearby” – “thus / elapsed time.”⁹⁴

Similarly departing from the individual’s own biography and its overlap with a wider history as the sole sources of information, in the 1977 volume the method of photographic exposure ultimately provides further intelligence as to the actual nature of yesterday. Like snapshots taken over the course of a single day these single pieces of information emerge in the course of the poem. Indicating elapsing time, the single frames of the moving shadows on the wall or the start of the toothache mark temporal thresholds that furnish a possible account of this day with a basic scaffolding, as if they were evidence that time has actually “elapsed.” The photographic nature of the information Becker ultimately arrives at in his quest corresponds to what Hanuschek identified as the *journal’s* “Berichts-Charakter,” however not as a means in itself but as a segue into a different kind of literary operation that lies underneath. Describing “a change of state” or affairs over time, the observations from above, all detailing rather ordinary occurrences, ultimately do not appear so menial after all, but rather as distinct events⁹⁵ in themselves which, in the waxing and waning dynamics of their occurrence, for the individual reenact a bygone day’s dramaturgy. This plethora of unremarkable images in itself forms a distinct narrative or plot. This plot emerges from the interconnection of single incidents through the needle-and-thread of elapsing time.

⁹⁴ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 7.

⁹⁵ The idea of a perceptible change in the course of an event, being a transition between one state and another, grounds narratologist’s Mieke Bal’s definition of *narrative* or ‘plot’ as a temporal order or sequence, resulting from a logical or chronological construction of a preexisting order which Bal terms *fabula*. This order which might significantly differ from the order of the *story*, i.e., the order in which the course of events is represented. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Third Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 5f.

1.5 From Landscape Stills to Motion Pictures

Rephrasing the central question from the beginning of this chapter, it is not merely the desire to know “what was” or “what has happened” that permeates Becker’s *journal* texts. The central question is how “time” as an indicator of what happened, between the weather report in the papers, the emotional weather inside, and the actual weather outside the window, “elapsed.”

Writing in them serves as a means to uncover this order from the mnemonic rubble that conceals it by making this order visible. As the ubiquitous photographic metaphor suggests, these texts’ interest in plot first and foremost emerges as a visual-temporal problem, rendering their writing an effort in translation. Taking events such as the moving shadows on the office wall or the periodic turns of a nearby construction crane outside the writer’s window as different clocks,⁹⁶ the diegetic individuals of these texts constantly are on the lookout for miniature narratives as devices that visualize the mechanics of elapsing time as an otherwise invisible process.⁹⁷

Forming longer and longer *journals*, Becker’s texts of the time resemble extended efforts to verbalize these visual indicators. This process for the author thus allows for a process that translates single perceptions into written text. Norbert Elias suggests that one cannot talk or write about time without using comparisons and metaphors.⁹⁸ As a mode of writing, Becker appears to

⁹⁶ See the brief poem “In der Stille“ from the 1974 collection *Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei*: “der Kran, heute, ohne Bewegung / und ich sehe nichts, heute, / im Ausschnitt des Fensters, / Was sich bewegt,” Jürgen Becker, *Gedichte 1965-1980* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), 63.

⁹⁷ Norbert Elias, *Über die Zeit. Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie II* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), 9.

⁹⁸ E.g., the movements of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Elias, *Über die Zeit*, 53f.

refurbish the *journal* as a way of *metaphorizing* or *materializing*⁹⁹ time as an otherwise invisible dimension of reality by way of analyzing the surroundings of the very scene of writing or *Schreibszene*, where incremental changes in space make it visible and palpable.

Featuring words like “Notes,” “Phase,” “Transition,” “Sketch-Pad,” “Dusk,” “Interim Report,” or particular specifications of times, days, and even months in their titles, Becker’s writings make explicit this connection without ever fully succumbing to it. Writing itself in poems of volumes like *Don’t Tell me About War, In the Time Remaining*,¹⁰⁰ *Odenthal’s Coast*, and *Journal of Repetitions* thus appears as the process through which a translation or verbalization of time into text is possible. These volumes’ distinct focus on temporality thus approximates what the author himself outlined as the importance of “diaristic writing” for his conception of poetry, detailed in a programmatic 1975 essay titled “Das Gedicht als Tagebuch”¹⁰¹: Referencing his Austrian colleague Peter Handke there and the latter’s seminal reflections on daily writing in his 1971 long poem “Life Without Poesy” [*Leben ohne Poesie*]¹⁰² Becker subscribes to this mode of writing himself as a distinctly temporal process that resembles “a principle in any case for the writing of poems, and that means, for working on a structure which, for a moment, brings time to a halt.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ I am borrowing this idea from Arno Dusini. Arno Dusini, “... im Leben Blättern. Das Tagebuch als materialisierte Zeit,” Helmut Gold et. al. (eds.), *Absolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), 97-99.

¹⁰⁰ Jürgen Becker, *In der verbleibenden Zeit: Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979).

¹⁰¹ Jürgen Becker, “Das Gedicht als Tagebuch,” *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung Darmstadt. Jahrbuch 1975* (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1976).

¹⁰² Peter Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” *Leben ohne Poesie: Gedichte*. Ed. Ulla Berkéwicz (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2007), 224-234. For a discussion of this poem, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹⁰³ Becker, “Das Gedicht als Tagebuch,” 40.

Through its focus on temporality, this mode of writing draws upon a shared quality of both *journal* texts and poems. Even though Becker in this essay is inconsistent with his terminology and uses *diary* and *journal* more or less interchangeably, the interconnection of narrative, time, and writing here already heralds the key methodological step that this mode of writing will be taking in his works for the next three decades. This interest in making time visible and traceable is ubiquitous in the entire 1977 volume, ringing through as the constant repetition – in different variations – of the volume’s central question in connection with concrete, interconnected imagery implies. “For Instance, the Last Week,” as a text from the middle of the book is titled, renders in its very first lines what seems to be yet another variation of the by then familiar call and response pattern a stand-in for the very question of narrative and, hence, the idea of what constitutes a text:

What was. In mid-October, the leaves
stopped falling; warm and green
days – [...]
– this week,
on the road in the Rhine Valley, I wrote a sentence, for
an entire, unlived story [*Erzählung*], then
everything broke off, [...]
nothing to narrate –
what was. It is getting dark early
these days.¹⁰⁴

The idea of “narrating” or “narration” is one that appears at multiple points in the 1977 collection. Only in the poem at the halfway mark of the book, however, does the idea of a

¹⁰⁴ “Was ist gewesen. Mitten im Oktober, die Blätter / hörten auf zu fallen; warme und grüne / Tage – [...] – in dieser Woche, / im Rhein-Tal unterwegs, schrieb ich einen Satz, für / eine ganze, ungelebte Erzählung, dann / brach alles ab; [...] nichts zu erzählen – / was ist gewesen. Es wird früh / dunkel,” Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 56.

possible narration explicitly break with any form of autobiographical approach. This narration replaces any kind of entity that could be interpreted as a diaristically inclined narrator and instead calls on time itself as the initiator of this process. Reinforcing, however, yet again the familiar claim from the beginning of the volume, the individual here summons *time* rather than his own private memories to guide his voice as if it were the proto-Greek muse of this journal-endeavor: “tell me [*erzähl mir*], / all that has been.” This climax was well prepared by the text leading up to it. After having actually just “narrated” a loosely associative series of mostly work-related incidents, all of which seem to have occurred as “pieces” [*Stücke*] over the course of an altogether “fragmented week” [*zerstückelte Woche*] and lead to nothing at all other than a syntactically likewise fragmented text, the individual once and for all dismisses the idea that it could be himself who, through a recount of remarkable events, might guide this endeavor. Rather, by refuting them altogether as acceptable indicators for how time in this week has actually “elapsed” – “nothing to narrate”, as the individual states –, *time* itself appears as the segue that guides the individual’s efforts of finding an alternative way to tackle this “narration” of a bygone day.

However, only the title of the following poem, “Time elapsed Sunday Afternoon,”¹⁰⁵ ultimately resolves this tension and relates it to Becker’s photographic eye as the origin of that method, following through on its predecessor’s promise by offering a seemingly direct response to the invocation of the muses of time there. This follow-up poem retrospectively retraces every single step this Sunday afternoon has hitherto taken through what appears to be a set of five plain images, compacted into an eight-line layout:

These were the meadows at the river.

¹⁰⁵ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 57.

Thus ran the path over the field.
In the distance the refinery, glowing.
Here stood the bench.
It was two women, two kids,
passing by chatting.
More hasn't been and hasn't happened.
Back then, one hour ago."¹⁰⁶

Indicated, not least, by the steady hypotactical flow of verse, this text not only opposes the indeed utterly scattered and “fragmented” content and structures of the previous one, which like most texts in the volume’s first half appears dispersed by parenthetical interjections and illogical non-sequiturs that reflect the “fragmented,” scatter-brained week of this media-addicted individual. Ultimately, this poem offers an entirely different take on narrative or plot through images and sequence, all contained in the very idea of *journal* writing.

Through an assemblage of what appears to be still images and their interrelation in time through writing, Becker shows how the question of *écriture* in this *journal* volume is a decidedly visual problem. Highlighting, as if they were photographs, the incremental advances between the single images of the poem, these images appear to be the single still frames of what, in the background, could be the hypothetical motion picture of that day. The text thus suggests that an opposition to mnemonic fragmentation can be achieved through retracing a temporal progression that presented itself to the individual in single snapshots over one afternoon. By rephrasing the question of “What happened yesterday” to the query “How elapsed time?”, temporality emerges as a much more palpable trajectory for an analysis of the volume’s mode of writing. Endowing, in fact, (grammatical) agency to the mental snapshots of the trees and rivers and benches themselves encountered over this afternoon – “These were,” “Thus ran,” “Here stood,” “It was”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

–, and thereby reconstructing their “path” as if it were a sequence of temporal and local coordinates that flows and meanders just like the river at the center of this series, this ultimately leads the beholder to an acceptable account of this day. In this way, the volume at its halfway mark provides us with an idea of what narration can be, one that emancipates the flow of events from their mediation through diaries or newspapers and thereby relieves the individual from any responsibility to mediate or select, as diarists or reporters would have to.

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Analyzing, in retrospect, the contents of the entire past year – the year of the biographical “crisis” that this “journal” encompasses – in the last poem of *Don’t Tell Me About War*, we find the ever-pondering individual of this volume at the end of a journey, “ruminating” again, yet no longer over the notorious newspapers, but “at different tables” now, “beholding / the year’s photos, no amendments.” Just like in the poem at the volume’s halfway mark, the order in which these images appear here, rather than their actual content, preoccupies the beholder’s attention: “Now in the later time I know more,” the individual states, “it is enough ultimately to cast a glance around / in order to note the changes, for instance / in the images’ arrangement, / which now narrate, what I did not see.”¹⁰⁷ While the volume’s central photographic metaphor and its emphasis on seeing and narration here at once collapse, the poem also marks the point in the book where metaphor turns into a method for writing. Only from the retrospective “glance around” does the volume’s backward-looking temporality emerge as the central characteristic of

¹⁰⁷ “Jetzt, in der späteren Zeit, weiß ich mehr, / es reicht ja ein Blick rundum, / wahrzunehmen die Veränderungen, zum Beispiel / in der Anordnung der Bilder, / die nun erzählen, was ich nicht sah,” Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 102f.

the *journal* method, resulting in a twofold process that replaces writing with the steps of bookkeeping and arrangement.

Programmatically, this last text in the book thus offers a resolution of the tension at the center of Becker's writing at the time, brought up first in this volume by the meandering layout or scattered "arrangement" of the volume's opener and its intricate quest to find out "what happened." Here, at the endpoint of this volume as well as of the year which it details, this final evaluative glance at the single poems reveals something that at first glance or sight was not yet visible to both the individual *in* and the reader *of* the volume: The countless tatters and fragments of the individual's short-term memory now, through arrangement, form a whole similar to the photos in their correct order – a series, that as such "narrates" what the individual, from a shorter distance, "did not see." This idea of being able to accurately reproduce the latter in writing is reflected in Becker's explicit and repeated use of the verb "to narrate" throughout the book. Important here is the idea of a roll of film and the way in which its contents chronologically order an afternoon. The poem quoted above, in fact, lists everything that is the world as the entirety of that which is (or actually was) the case this afternoon – "Mehr war und geschah nicht." Through the five terse images, the text is in a position to wager the potential end point of the individual's plot-related query. The initially fragmented week or previous day stands in for the scatter-brained individual and his scene of writing as a scene of "war," torn between everything that has happened in no particular order and sidetracked by memory of earlier times. Here, this week assumes a semblance of wholeness that enables the individual to retroactively state that actually "more hasn't been and hasn't happened" – a sense of satiation and oversight only rarely found in the volume. At the end of the volume, this implicit reference to images is again connected to the process of "developing" film. "Developing" writing as one step of the

writerly process and becomes an almost curatorial act. Becker suggests that it works similar to the act of developing film, i.e., as an act of developing a metaphorical photo-negative that is already imprinted on the page. Transcending the limits of a mere metaphor, the photographic image becomes the very ideal to which Becker's *journal* writing aspires.

II.

Photographic representation, as Susan Sontag pointed out in her 1973 book *On Photography*, works from an ontological standpoint with the very “presumption that something exists,” inasmuch as a photograph “tell[s] one what there is” and thus “make[s] an inventory” of the world it catalogues and captures.¹⁰⁸ In its quest for a form of temporal wholeness or exhaustion, Becker's engagement with *journal* as a mode of writing both metaphorically and as an aspired ideal is an effort to translate this inventorial nature of the photograph into a mode of writing through words on a page rather than through images on rolls of film. Hanuschek points out that, in German, using the term *journal* instead of *diary* means to “underscore the report-nature [of the diary], hence [its] proximity to the professional newsmonger.”¹⁰⁹ Becker's photographic take on *journal* writing terminologically approximates the 18th-century roots¹¹⁰ of the term, indicating a

¹⁰⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 5 a. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Hanuschek, “Was man wegläßt, ist nicht da,” 110.

¹¹⁰ Rüdiger Görner highlights the journal's position between “Diarium und Journalismus.” Rüdiger Görner, *Das Tagebuch* (München/Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1986) 19.

writing that works as a form of chronicle or book-keeping, an operation as closely tied to time as it is to ontology.¹¹¹

The title of an earlier volume of Becker's indicates this endeavor originate in "a time without words." This inconspicuous book for Becker heralded his image-centered approach to the chronicle. In *A Time Without Words* [*Eine Zeit ohne Wörter*, 1971],¹¹² entire series of time-based photographic stills, subdivided into panels of four, anticipate the scatter-brained and fragmentary character of the later collections of *journal* poetry. Over the course of its pages, this volume seems to illustrate the breaking up of the world which is also present throughout the better part of *Don't Tell Me About War*. However, while Sontag emphasizes the photographic image's tendency to split the world through framing into a "series of unrelated, freestanding particles," the single images of this volume seem to resemble the exact opposite. Arranged into series, small narrative-like arches emerge between the single panels. All but estranged from the linguistic experiments undertaken at the beginning of his career, Becker in this volume, through the use of photography, and under the temporary absence of both words and writing, re-defines for himself what narration as a time-oriented practice actually entails.

As a form of pictorial arrangement, Becker's writing in *Don't Tell Me About War* can be read as an attempt to imitate and to translate back this effort into words, making an inventory of the afternoon depicted similarly to the way his photographic series do.¹¹³ However, a comparison of the methods employed in the photographic volume and the later volumes of *journal* poetry

¹¹¹ On the history of book-keeping, Jane Gleeson-White, *Double-Entry: How the Merchants of Venice Created Modern Finance* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2012).

¹¹² Jürgen Becker, *Eine Zeit ohne Wörter* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971).

¹¹³ On the intermediality of writing between images and photographs in Becker's oeuvre, Erk Grimm, "Tempi passati: Zeitbilder und Bildzeiten im Werk Jürgen Beckers," *Fluxus und/als Literatur*, 213-246.

raises the question: why concretely did photography emerge for Becker as the aspired ideal for the later methodological approach to writing as arrangement? Considering Becker's four-decade long preoccupation with this mode, the question is how exactly a *journal* mode of writing first emerged as problem of perception and how in particular it morphed from an approach to photography into a "principle [also] for the writing of poems."¹¹⁴ In the second part of this chapter, I shall ask how the idea of an arrangement of images as a new form of narration or storytelling models for Becker his understanding of not only what writing is, but what an author is – in particular, an author of texts concerned with the detection and arrangement of images rather than the act of creating as such. I will not only show the implications that Becker's approach in the 1971 photo-book had for his later writing of *journal* texts, but also the incongruities that remain in a comparative reading.

1.6 Writing *Journal* and Recording Time

Detailing, for the most part, a snowy landscape panorama, trees and dirt tracks, fields, interiors, facades and rippling water surfaces from what appears to be incremental variations of one and the same angle of view, the single panels in Becker's 1971 "photo-book" form small series of loops and repetition that echo the practice of arrangement evoked at the end of the 1977 volume. Offering a total of four variations of what appears to be the same shot, the first four panels showcase this central method of the volume. Departing from the single close-up shot of a bare

¹¹⁴ Becker, "Das Gedicht als Tagebuch," 40.

deciduous tree that opens the series, its four variations show the same tree as it appears to a beholder from different angles and distances while walking away from it, thereby detailing how “time elapsed.”

In the 276-page, cheaply bound paperback with black-and-white photography, the double pages are almost entirely filled with panels of mostly four landscape format stills. They stage what the first two subheadings indicate as the photographic stroll or glance around in the “old” or “familiar surroundings” [*in den alten Umgebungen*]. In the later journal texts, these surroundings will assume a programmatic role with regard to the virtual surroundings that make-up the *Schreibszene* or scene in which Becker’s individuals write. However, where the process that leads to this oversight is long and obscure for the most part of the 1977 volume, Becker’s photography cuts to the chase right away. While at the end of *Don’t Tell Me About War*, it was the “glance around” the photos laid out on the tables in front of the individual that as an activity sufficed in order to note “the changes / in the arrangement of the images,” the photographer’s glance here also reveals the implied first step of this twofold process: taking the pictures that later form the basis for the act of arrangement, resulting in a mode of production that materializes time through an act of taking inventory and a second step only of the latter’s arrangement into series and order. In this process, the materialization of time, and later on the retrospective arrangement of its material indicators, become the sole center of attention in this volume.

This gradual emergence of an interest in time over the first couple of series in fact parallels a gradual estrangement of Becker’s from words openly exhibited in this book. Rather than a sharp break, however, this estrangement is not one of language or of verbal expression in general, as a closer look at the German title reveals. Detailing a time without words [*Eine Zeit*

ohne Wörter], the volume's title not only indicates a form of transition with regards to the writerly means engaged by its author. It also explicitly uses the plural form of 'word' as a distinct semantic, lexical, or grammatical entity. *Wörter* are countable. The alternative and abstract plural form *Worte* instead signifies a general utterance, and explanation or an unspecified number of single words that form the latter. In this way, the estrangement from words, and not language or utterance, appears as a gradual fade-out. The first series reenacts one of the thirty-eight sentences in this book that is printed on an opening page preceding this series: "The last sentence in the surroundings." These sentences in the book work as initiators or headings for each series. The first series starts off by offering the vista of a snowy countryside scene to the photographer's right. Featuring, image by image, the very same dark line of bare-branched deciduous trees in the background that frame a vast expanse of snow-covered earth and a shaky barbed-wire fence on the left, it appears as if the slow progression of this opening series in fact would come to change guard with this "last sentence in the surroundings" or the semantic particles (i.e., the words that comprise it) rather than merely following or reenacting this transition by furnishing it with images.¹¹⁵

What at first appears as an alternating pattern of text and images in the book soon turns out to be a hierarchy of image over sparse insertions of text. Following the programmatic clue from the last series, and preceded by the book's altogether second sentence – "Thirty minutes in the old surroundings" –, the following, second panel of the book repeats the same exercise, yet indicates that time is about to be put in place instead of words. Insinuating that now, after the

¹¹⁵ The sentence, referencing "Umgebungen", also hints intertextually at the text directly preceding *A Time Without Words* in Becker's oeuvre – namely the 1970 *Umgebungen* [*Surroundings*], which still belongs to the author's experimental phase. The photo volume marks a stark departure from this phase. Jürgen Becker, *Umgebungen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970).

“last sentence” has been spoken or written or quoted and has been replaced by altogether 30 photographic stills, the actual method of this volume can resume. Indicating the passage of time, described here as the “thirty minutes” that we are supposed to assume have passed between the two initial images of a black creek in the middle of a snowy forest leading off to the background and its altogether twenty-eight variations, the opening series in this way does not merely detail this creek’s further journey through the landscape. Becker’s estrangement from words rather appears as a gradual fade-out – not by entirely banishing the operational elements of his previous linguistic experiments, but rather by subsequently reducing their number and frequency, replacing them with an emerging focus on time and its materialization through images.

The slow winter walk along the meandering course of an icy creek thus emerges as the photographic trail of the different sites and vistas encountered in the thirty minutes that it takes to make this walk. Indeed translating, into images, the actual content of Becker’s very last sentence in his 1970 volume *Umgebungen*, the panel here embeds the utter linguistic fragmentariness at the center of the author’s earlier experimental volumes in an overarching frame that interconnects the single particles rather than exhibiting them as dysfunctional.¹¹⁶ What in Becker’s writing used to be broken through a focus on its integral parts and mechanics – the ability of language to signify images rather than just forming semantic analogues – through image here seems to be taken to another level. Instead of an effort to accurately detail what is meant by words like “fields,” “fringes,” or “surroundings,” (i.e., both the motives of the first

¹¹⁶ Hans-Ulrich Müller-Schwefe, *Schreib’ alles: Zu Jürgen Beckers ‘Ränder,’ ‘Felder,’ ‘Umgebungen,’ anhand einer Theorie simuliert präsentativer Texte* (Munich: W. Fink, 1977), a. Doris Janshen, *Opfer und Subjekt des Alltäglichen: Denkstruktur und Sprachform in den Prosatexten Jürgen Beckers* (Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Forum Litteraturum, 1976).

couple of photo-series as well as the titles of Becker's three experimental volumes¹¹⁷ preceding *A Time Without Words*), photography here enables Becker to depict, in all its variations and angles, the fields, fringes, and surroundings of his daily peripheral scenes of writing as something that, under certain conditions, is able to form a whole temporarily.¹¹⁸ The titling, non-intact *Umgebungen* from his 1970 volume thus become the surroundings or scenes in the photo book. Instead of focusing on the particles of language and its deconstruction, the aspired, but previously impossible whole in photography, is tackled from a new avenue, which is the framing device of the walk with the camera, here realized in interconnected image series.

Words really do give way to time for Becker, or rather to the question of how time elapsed in the first couple of series in this volume. As an uninterrupted polyptych, and in a one-image-per-minute ratio, the second series of the book, without any further interruption by sentences, confirms this process. This suggests that not only have words now finally given way to photography, but that indeed this changing of guards is to be understood as the simultaneous advent of a new sense of wholeness that interconnects the single, almost indiscriminate, shots, and their fragmentariness. Depicting the river leading temporarily out of the forest – we see a snow-covered acre on the left, forest edge on the right – and then, again, back into the forest and leading into an open field and finally to an old stone bridge, the semblance of a narrative

¹¹⁷ Becker's first book, *Felder*, and his second and third publications, *Ränder* and *Umgebungen*. Jürgen Becker, *Felder* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1964) a. Jürgen Becker, *Ränder* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1968) a. Becker, *Umgebungen*.

¹¹⁸ Sylvia Volckmann links Becker's lost connection to images [*Verlust lyrischer Bildhaftigkeit*] in the 1960s to a broken relationship to nature, in particular the writer's realization that the aspired "landscape painting" is a thing of the past and unattainable in writing at his time. Sylvia Volckmann, *Zeit der Kirschen?: Das Naturbild in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur, Jürgen Becker, Sarah Kirsch, Wolf Biermann, Hans Magnus Enzensberger* (Königstein: Forum Academicum in der Verlagsgruppe Athenäum, Hain, Scriptor, Hanstein, 1982), 53f.

emerges the moment in which words have left, and the idea of perpetual, yet incremental change prevails, solely visible in the one sight of a winter landscape utterly deplete of people, animals, or anything noteworthy at all.

I argue that this shared focus on images and photography between both photographic and the later non-photographic volumes suggests a continuum that renders Becker's short, but critical stint in the realms of photography a period that led the author to actually culminate (and not to abandon, as scholarship argues)¹¹⁹ his experimental approach to writing from the 1960s, by first utterly depleting writing not only of actors, plot or agents, but also of words and language itself. Assembled into several page-long series, the actual order in which the single images of a given series in the photo-volume appear assume a level of completeness or wholeness as it is aspired, and occasionally achieved, by the individual in *Don't Tell Me about War*. This sense of completeness contrasts both with the superficial fragmentariness of the later *journal* texts as well as the dysfunctional semantic fragments central to Becker's earlier experimental writings. In both reflecting a major linguistic crisis, and in breaking with the writerly technique adopted to face this crisis, the 1971 volume inaugurates this technique for Becker. Starting in 1977 with *Don't Tell Me About War* and predated by earlier journal poems that similarly do not yet form an entire volume of journal texts, such as "Berlin Program Poem" ["Berliner Programmgedicht," 1971]¹²⁰ or *The End of Landscape Painting* [*Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei*, 1974],¹²¹ the altogether 38 image-series of the 1971 photo volume in fact explore the later idea of a

¹¹⁹ See Meyer-Eisenhut, Meyer-Sieckendiek, "Eine Einführung," *Fluxus und/als Literatur*, ix-xii.

¹²⁰ Jürgen Becker, "Berliner Programmgedicht," *Gedichte 1965-1980* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), 41-55.

¹²¹ Jürgen Becker, *Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei, Gedichte 1965-1980*, 39-132.

retrospective arrangement of images in time as the central element of a mode of perception that is foundational to the later writing found in the subsequent *journal* texts.

1.7 Approximating Narrative(s) Through Photographic Time

While the relationship between fragmentariness and wholeness figures prominently in the photovolume, I suggest that *A Time Without Words*, in its particular interest in narrative structure, order and sequence, can be read as a *journal* too. Right from the beginning of the volume, a number of series aligns the multitude of image-panels in this book into a series of distinct and interrelated narrative threads, highlighting, in his almost complete absence, the particular role of the photographer as one who arranges the series itself into one larger thread in the book, resembling an entity whose scene of writing or *Umgebung* through these very image-series emerges as the volume's main concern, namely as a scene similar to the *journal* volumes does entirely without a fixed center. Instead, the idea of the surroundings and of a peripheral sense of photographic vision emerges in the volume. In its focus on detail, I suggest to not read this book as a mere compilation of different series that differ in length or focus but rather as one big narrative that emerges with the first series (or its header) on page one and continuously meanders forward to the last image of the closing series, a close-up of a withering radio mast near Cologne.¹²²

¹²² Becker, *Eine Zeit ohne Wörter*. (no pagination)

In this way, the “words” that could be read as “headers” or titles for each series really form a list of interrelated sentences which structure and, though more and more infrequently, interrupt and comment on the steady flow of images provided by the book, continuously meandering forward, sometimes only in incremental variations of almost the same sight, and sometimes, heralded by an explanatory or impetus sentence, jumping from one sight to another that never is too unrelated to the sight of the previous series. As an experiment in utter minimalism, the table of contents that in this volume precedes the very first series can be read as an assemblage of sentences that, not unlike the descriptions one could venture of the particular content on a given roll of film, forms an utterly reduced narrative in 28 intermediate steps.¹²³ As this narrative’s utter abstraction, the table of contents forms the essence of the 28 series it precedes, reading like the formal template of any of Becker’s later *journal* volumes to come.

The detail here mirrors Becker’s method at large. While mostly lacking any concrete, let alone explicit interconnections, the single items of this table of contents, just like the series themselves, are linked through the greater whole of their arrangement into order, as if they were the result of a somewhat elevated, in any case retrospective glance from the top of the withered radio mast that forms the conclusion of the volume. This ominous “Object in the Dellbrück Landscape,” as the last header specifies the series’ central sight, the slow approach to which, via train tracks, barbed wire fences, underbrush and countless other obstacles in the surrounding landscape, is detailed over the course of the 23 panels of the ultimate sequence. Meandering closer and starting off with the tower in the distance of the photographer’s vision, growing bigger

¹²³ Note the distinct sense of both temporal and spatial progression of these sentences when read in order, starting with “The last sentences in the surroundings,” “Thirty minutes in the old surroundings,” “The approaching catastrophe of the approaching motorway feeder” via “Then we ate at the Paris Bar,” “How to continue,” “Everything changes,” and “The Sunday” to “Cologne Bay,” “Cologne Bay with Cologner [*mit Kölner*]” to “Procession.” Becker, *Eine Zeit ohne Wörter*. (no pagination)

and smaller and bigger, we are finally provided with the full and unobstructed vista of this *objet trouve*. The volume's last image resembles a close-up of this elevated outlook. From the top of this tower, it seems, it would be easy to oversee the full distance covered over the course of the series that leads up to it.

Here, at the end of the 1971 volume and as far removed from words as possible,¹²⁴ the methodological parallels to the 1977 collection of *journal* texts are noticeable: Considering, for instance, the five images evoked in the poem from the halfway mark of *Don't Tell Me About War* – “These were,” “Thus ran,” “Here stood”, “It was” etc. – Becker's approach to writing *journal* resembles an act of recording similar to the book- or timekeeping in images the 1971 volume aspires. This is even reflected in grammatical makeup of the 1977 volume: Read as an equivalent to the photographic series, the five images evoked in the poem from the halfway mark of *Don't Tell Me About War* – “These were,” “Thus ran,” “Here stood,” “It was” – yield five completely parallel and overall static paratactic structures, referring in the simple past of a photographic anteriority to a world that exists or existed at one point in time prior to the act of arrangement. This bookkeeping in time or chronicling renders the retrospective arrangement an exclusively temporal task, that is one which, unlike collage or montage, has only one direction: forward.¹²⁵

While the poem reveals through words “what there is” or was, the actual interconnection of this rather immaterial inventory emerges as an operation that lies beyond the realm of syntax and vocabulary. In this context that the idea of narration becomes important for Becker, first as a

¹²⁴ 16 pages since the last header, to be concrete.

¹²⁵ See Augustine's conjectures on the nature of time and its unidirectionality in book 4 of his *Confessions*. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. by Sarah Ruden (New York: The Modern Library, 2017), 91.

term and then methodologically. Only through temporal arrangement of its five strictly paratactic structure the poem ultimately establishes the phantasm of a “Sunday Afternoon” from its title, reflected on a scale of then and now, or of before, during, and after. The entire volume repeats this process on a macrotextual level by arranging the single poems from page 1 to 103 into “a journal” which, like a story in photos, “tells” or – “narrates [*erzählt*] about the course of a year and the seasons.”¹²⁶ At the end of the last poem, the individual also makes this connection between time and narrative:

Now at a later time I know more
it is ultimately enough to cast a glance around
in order to note the changes, for instance,
in the images’ arrangement,
which now narrate what I did not see.¹²⁷

Creating effortlessly the compact images at their center though similarly plain and compact sentence structures, Becker’s *journal* poems in their best moments reflect in their syntagmatic structure the “thin slice of space as well as time”¹²⁸ which Sontag defined to be the spatio-temporal matter of the photographic image. In their multitude, these slice of time and space are the visual raw material with which Becker in his photo-book works. As a mode of writing, *journal* in the later volumes only translates this method back into words and sentences, using grammatical structures and paradigmatic choices as a means to imitate, in writing, the plain structure of a photographic series that features almost identical images and their minimal,

¹²⁶ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, dust jacket.

¹²⁷ “Jetzt, in der späteren Zeit, weiß ich mehr, / es reicht ja ein Blick rundum, / wahrzunehmen die Veränderungen, zum Beispiel / in der Anordnung der Bilder, / die nun erzählen, was ich nicht sah,” Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 102f.

¹²⁸ Sontag, *On Photography*, 22.

incremental variations over time, dispersed here over the case of an entire afternoon and several sights encountered in the course of one walk.

Read as a mode of perception, however, the essence of the *journal* part in Becker's writing emerges as something visible outside the reams of words and sentence. Contrary to Sontag's notion that photographs do not form narratives, the very act of taking or creating images in Becker is already always centered around the attempt of creating narratives. Through the later arrangement into series, these narratives imitate the act of taking a walk as a trail which can be retrospectively reconstructed. The main concern is, it seems, vision: While taking photos is a visual act, their later arrangement engages in a kind of after- or post-vision that reinspects the material at hand. This process aspires chronological proximity to the original succession of sights in time. This method is comparable with Becker's approach in his later *journal* poetry. There, the single poems in themselves resemble images or clusters of several images. Each poem thus can be read as a "structure that brings time to a halt." The poems can be read as snapshots or containers for a number of snapshots resembled by the single paratactic lines. Ultimately, through their arrangement as series Becker arrives at narration. Both in the photographic volume and the later *journal* texts narratives emerge between the single frames or steps. In doing so Becker underscores the narrative idea of change that occurred between each frame of these *journals*. This emphasis on change,¹²⁹ as I argue, would be lost in a continuous "film" or flow.

The results of Becker's method of retrospective arrangement in their perplexing vicinity to the original chronological order of events strives for an agreement what in narratological terms can be defined as *fabula* (a series of (chrono)logically related events in a story), and *story* or *plot*

¹²⁹ Bal, *Narratology*, 5f. See also footnote 32.

(one of many possible orders in which these events are looked at). Becker's writing and taking photos in this sense is a decidedly narrative process, in that it forms narrative texts and arranges single steps or frames of a story in an order that (ideally) most closely resembles the chronological order of the *fabula*. Approximating thus a motion pictures, the stop-and-go of Becker's single image frames more often than not fails to achieve the aspired chronology, being sidetracked, distracted, digressing and meandering. This discrepancy of what in screenplay analysis is referred to as 'plot' and 'discourse' for Becker emerges in the (in)ability of his image series to form a motion picture, i.e., to tell what has actually happened. This discrepancy between the *fabula* and the *story* becomes in Becker the main subject of writing. Paradoxically, this prominent role of narrative in Becker shines through in texts that are characterized by a complete absence of any actual actors and events, of meaningful *plots* or *stories* in a conventional sense, and ultimately of a traditional first-person diarist-narrator.

1.8 Retroactively Arranging *Zeit* and *Schrift*

But what is it in particular that is seen in retrospect, on top of the radio mast tower or at the end of the 1977 volume, well in view of the distance covered? And, conversely, what was under the weight of all the non-essential information and topographical obstacles earlier, with barbed wire fences and underbrush and newspapers in between? What could not be seen, both in the act of taking the (mental) photo as well as once the images have been assembled into series that compose the book? Just like the snapshots in the poem from the end of the 1977 volume, Becker ultimately considers his photos in their given order as they appear on a roll film, with "no

amendments,” as the photographic analogy in the poem extends. Only this order or arrangement “without amendments” strikes as more or less exhaustive to the individual with regards to what had actually “happened.” Time and again not only aspired but actually attained in the 1977 volume, *Don't Tell Me About War* shares this ideal with the 1971 photo-series.

Both volume's fragmentary appearance only in a superficial reading contradicts this sense of wholeness or completeness. The unamended “roll of film” is both the aspired ideal in the metaphoric framework of the 1977 volume, as well as the original medium where this method first originated. The very rigid chronology of events, or the respective order of the writer's scene or his surroundings at any given point in that timeline, comes closest to a satisfying answer to the all-pervading question and its temporal derivative that ground a *journal* mode of writing: “What happened yesterday,” and “how elapsed / time.” In the discrepancy between these questions the critical relationship of fragment and whole becomes critical. As a time-based, chronological operation with regards to time that relies on temporal order and changes of state, any generic definition of *narration* or *narrative*¹³⁰ at first glance seems to naturally conflict with the overall fragmented nature of Becker's texts, as well as with the various tatters and sources that constitute it. At a second glance, however, the act of uncovering an underlying order from the entirety of these fragments in Becker's photographic series and his *journal* texts retroactively endows his writing with the ability to reconstruct an ideal or idealized wholeness.

¹³⁰ Wolf Schmid in his summary of narratological approaches points out that in structuralist theory, narrative texts generally “contrast with descriptive texts in that they contain a temporal structure and represent changes of state,” rather than through the fact that they are narrated or mediated. Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction*. Transl. by Alexander Starritt (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 1f.

On a metaphorical level, the 1977 volume thus seamlessly continues the statement from the end of its opener as a time where the “rolls” of yet “nonenveloped film” could then not aid such an act of reflective “ruminating.” Ruminating now “at different tables” rather than aimlessly perched “over the newspaper,” the photographic terminology exceeds the metaphoric framework introduced at the beginning of the book. The photograph-like statements, just like in the poem at the halfway mark, certify for the individual that something exists or “has happened” yesterday, something that, only through arrangement or assemblage, becomes interconnected so it can form the narrative of a *journal* that makes the course of this day visible. In the poem quoted above with the five terse images, at the very end of this methodological journey, “ruminating” no longer over the notorious newspapers, but “at different tables” and “beholding / the year’s photos, no amendments,” the individual can now in fact utter “Mehr war und geschah nicht” as a remark on the ideal of a wholeness in the midst of all the various fragmentations – mnemonic and attention span, information and linguistic – than can be achieved through retrospective and retroactive arrangement.

Offering one and the same sight over and over again, the inconspicuous and photographically reproduced landscape snippets of the 1971 volume thus foreshadow the poems from the end of the 1977 volume in their attempt to trace, as the author himself offers in the blurb, “moments in which objects trigger a visual experience: moments of time standing still and moving along.”¹³¹ This statement similarly anticipates the later idea of poems bringing “time to a halt.” Transcending the limits of a mere metaphor, this photographic approach is reflected more explicitly in an entire series of poems at the end of the 1977 volume as a method that defines the writing in this book. While, at the beginning of the volume, the individual’s quest to find out

¹³¹ As the volume’s dust jacket formulates the idea of the project. Becker, *Eine Zeit ohne Wörter*, dust jacket.

what happened yesterday was still complicated through the interfering force of memory and its associative sidetracking of the chronological order, a time the opener identifies as a time from which the roles of “undeveloped film” stem, at the end of the volume, we see the individual – in a poem titled “Contact Printings”¹³² – leafing through a stack of photo negatives over the course of two full pages, simply detailing what can be seen on the single images as a very different kind of memory. Reconstructing the course of the day and its happenings as a sequence in sites and of sights as they appeared chronologically over the course of one afternoon, indeed indicating passage of time as a temporal series, the writer at the very end of this text addresses the writing of this text by way of the image of “patterns on the earth,” followed by the sight of a “sky with several weather fronts / approaching “ as well as the “wet streets before the rain” first, and, “after the storm,” the “drawings of the rain / on the windows.”¹³³

In the context of this writing or “drawing” of the rain in the window, the metaphor of photographic exposure becomes relevant again. Developing film and exposing it to daylight or sunlight recalls a process of writing that is based on the temporal unit *jour* or *day*. Both *jour* and *day* have the same root in Latin *dies*, which is derived from Indo-European **dyeu*, meaning “to shine (like the sun).”¹³⁴ The *journal* writer’s writing metaphorically exposes to the light what is written down already. The images of this poem read as if the phenomena themselves for Becker had inscribed themselves onto the pages. Taking the temporal adverbial qualifiers in this quote – “before,” “first,” and “after” – as well as the idea of the rain literally drawing patterns on the windows (or the earth forming patterns in deep time), the ideas of temporal progression, change

¹³² Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 97ff.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ https://www.etymonline.com/word/*dyeu-

and arrangement stage the natural phenomena's literal inscription on a surface as one essential part of Becker's scene of writing. In its focus in the scene of writing, Becker's approach echoes metaphorically the inscription of time through light on photo negatives or contact printings through the lens or, generally, of time through light on the retina of the human eye. Through this window the author looks about and, via vision, connects the inside of his attic room to the outside world, telling time for instance by way of the disproportionate 'hour hand' that of the moving construction crane in front of the sky-blue clock face.

One of the very last poems in this volume endows this idea with a future-oriented dimension, with regard to Becker's own work but also to what Sontag identified as a generally fragmented and dismal outlook on a society in the grips of the photographic image. In the end, the poem designates this approach as "A Future for Images" or "Pictures," referring writing in the ambiguous German term 'Bild' to both mental and actual images, and to a sense of futurity and temporality that conflicts with a purely first-person-led, subjective or diaristic narration that would rely on memory or reports. "You proceed again," Becker's individual reminds itself of this approach, yet again relating it to the idea of narration, "and take [*nimmst ... mit*] a few pictures along the way; / if no one anymore, the images will narrate."

This last sentence pertaining an impersonal narration has serious implications for Becker's understanding of authorship, in particular the authorship of *journal* texts that hover in proximity to autobiographic subjectivity. In the agency endowed to the images very ability to narrate, Becker here proclaims the death of the author in this volume (and thus the traditional, subjectivity-oriented idea of the diarist) and at once, in the idea of the *journal* writer, puts forward the idea of a writer whose writing is limited to a form of uncovering, detecting and arrangement of a preexisting order or narrative recorded by the elements of his writing, be it by

way of sentences in a journal or photographs. By the time we arrive at the volume's closing text, the photographic metaphor itself has emerged as an actual "principle" for "the writing of poems" in Becker, and thus as a mode conducive to the "working on a structure which for a moment brings time to a halt."

The act of writing as an operation in time thus becomes a *journal* itself in Becker, a literal writing in or of time (a "Zeitschrift" or *journal* as Hanuschek suggest, and thus a writing in or of "days") one possible translation of *journal* into German that parallels and at once contrasts the other "Zeitschrift," namely the "Zeitung" and the futile first-person account of a diary that feature at the beginning of that volume and programmatically resemble the origin of both the sense of scatteredness and fragmentariness that throughout the book necessitates this writing in the first place. As a stand-in for the idea of what writing itself is in this volume, however, the act of taking photos emerges as a proper method for Becker's writing only at the moment this writing, as a decidedly *journal* mode writing, resembles the "daily, regular practice [*Tätigkeit*]" that is in close proximity to bookkeeping¹³⁵ – a process that emerges in two temporally discrete steps: recording and arrangement.

Reenacting this double step through recording and arrangement, Becker's method in the later journal text really does draw on the idiosyncratic nature of the photographic act. Roland Barthes, in his essay on "The Rhetoric of the Image," highlighted this temporal ambiguity at the very center of the photographic image itself, elaborating on the idiosyncratic temporal nature of photography and diagnosing that the latter, rather than underscoring just "the consciousness of the being-there" of a thing, actually "establishes an awareness of its *having-been-there*, and thus suggesting that the "type of consciousness a photograph involves" therefore "is truly

¹³⁵ Hanuschek, "Was man weglässt, ist nicht da," 109.

unprecedented.” In its ability to thus document the world, Barthes concluded, photography would ultimately operate within the limits of an entirely “new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority,” with “the photograph being an illogical conjunction of the here-now and the there-then.”¹³⁶ This temporal anteriority that is present in Becker through the retroactive act of looking back and ruminating, of arranging the images taking over the course of an afternoon into series, which is almost the order which they are on the undeveloped film, and filling in the spaces in between. The “here now” aspect is present in the act of writing, which is an act of uncovering or recording, of making traces visible like the crane in front of the window or the rain.

Writing *journal*, or the act of assembling sights as narratives and series, like photography for Becker becomes a process of making visible the order encountered. Via the shadows of the forms perceived throughout a given day, as an act of Platonic maieutic this writing through mimesis¹³⁷ gestures at the hidden light or flame of time that remains unseen, such as the construction crane, the changing shadows on the wall, or the growing toothache. As a writing in, with and through images – rendering writing, narration, a practice that is, like in the poem “Contact Printings,” the literal imprint of the rain on the scene of writing, the 1977 volume and all following volumes of Becker’s continue the method first rehearsed in images in the 1971 volume. As narrative texts, Becker’s volumes in their method follow the approach from his earlier photography. The method of distinguishing between the *plot* (or *fabula*) and *story* of a text, I argue, emerges as a temporally ambiguous progress in both photography and writing,

¹³⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” *Image, Music, Text*. Transl. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 44.

¹³⁷ Barthes connects the etymology of image to *imitari*, or mimesis, a “re-presentation [of] lived life,” Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” 152.

echoing Barthes' notion of "spatial immediacy" and "temporal anteriority" as the new space-time category of photography.¹³⁸

1.9 The Shadow of the Photographer

Through its interest in an imprint of time on the almost absent writer-photographer's surroundings, *A Time Without Words* can be read Becker's first *journal* text. As a *journal*, Becker's "photo-series," just like their later translation into words on paper, grapple with Sontag's diagnosis of a point in history when the camera renders the world more "atomic, manageable, opaque" by producing exactly the opposite of a photographic "view of the world which denies interconnectedness [and] continuity"¹³⁹ that Sontag in her book resolved to be a characteristic of the time. While Sontag argued that the fragmentation of reality happens precisely "at that moment in cultural history when everyone is thought to have the right to something called news," Becker's own struggle with an utterly scattered and fragmented sense of time and information in his journals at the time that stems from the excessive engagement with the news results in a slightly different outcome, namely one that emphasizes wholeness or completion.

¹³⁸ Since Becker's method originated in photography, I am using Barthes's theory of photography here rather than with his narratology.

¹³⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 22f.

This reflects the larger programmatic turn in Becker's works at the time. The volumes directly preceding¹⁴⁰ the 1971 photo book still engage in and culminate the kind of experimental avant-garde writing that atomically disperses the world at hand and scatters its various representation into countless tiny linguistic splinters. In the 1971 volume with its distinct focus on time, Becker's preoccupation with *journal* writing resolves this programmatic tension through image and sequence. This leads up to a mode of writing which from the 1977 volume and onwards no longer actively participates in a linguistic imitation of this scatteredness, but attempts to rescue from the melee of all the different accounts, a narrative assumed to exist underneath.

As a twofold process of bookkeeping and arrangement and two different temporal layers, this writing stands in contrast to the typical diaristic subjectivity that is so deeply embedded in these texts when read for their autobiographic content. Considering the author's strikingly stark presence on most of Becker's volumes' dust jackets as the narrator of his own blurb,¹⁴¹ the vastness of information contained in the individual's accounts in the single poems may appear to be information that could easily be traced back to Becker's own experience as a radio journalist and freelance writer at the time.¹⁴² As a mode of writing rather than a genre or formal endeavor, however, *journal* in Becker ultimately leaves the (diaristic) writer behind, fashioning in its place a rather strangely shaped entity which only at first glance deals in autobiographical coin. This de-subjectivized and strangely detached entity emerges slowly over the course of these volumes as

¹⁴⁰ The triptych *Felder* (1964), *Ränder* (1968) and *Umgebungen* (1970).

¹⁴¹ Captured there in the idea of a "biographical phase" that underlies this volume. Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, dust jacket.

¹⁴² Having moved, in 1965, from the urban center of Cologne to the Nord-Rhine-Westphalian periphery, Becker's everyday life in the newly acquired farmhouse and his commute to the WDR-studios in Cologne frames the experiences related his fictional alter ego in this volume. Becker, "Poesie und Praxis," 111f.

one about who we don't actually know that much; and while it is not clear whether the individual of the 1977 volume corresponds to the one in subsequent volumes, and whether it is the same as the one that stands in for the photographer of the 1971 volume, the unifying element is an entity whose writing is limited to a form of uncovering, detecting and arrangement of a given order, an order hidden under the autobiographic ballast that has to be cast aside first.

The concrete nature of this entity is best resembled in its strange absence in the 1971 photo volume. At a time when Becker was in fact struggling to overcome what manifested itself as a significant crisis of writing, providing the endpoint of his prior engagement with a form of avantgarde or experimental writing that characterized his text from the 1960s,¹⁴³ Becker's temporary departure from writing or words as well as the simultaneous onset of a longer stint of Becker's in the realms of photography made the author all but disappear. Reproduced on the back of the dust jacket of the original edition of the volume, the faint long shadow of the presence of a photographer is cast by the evening sun in the photo. Taken from a series of photos that all stage the same sight over and over again, however, almost unchanged and just seconds later, this same shot appears almost like an accidental byproduct of the process of taking a photo, revealing the shadow of the photographer and later arranger as the byproduct of image-taking, rather than the image-taking as something that is an extension of the photographer. The position of the photographer as the shadow of an altogether non-acting, observing and recording entity is at the center of the entire volume, which here prefigure the strangely prominent, but ultimately menial role of subjective experience and diaristic autobiography in Becker's later *journal* texts.

¹⁴³ And which was influenced by artists of the fluxus movement. Meyer-Eisenhut, Meyer-Sieckendiek, "Eine Einführung," *Fluxus und/als Literatur*, ix, xi-xiii.

The opening and the end of the 1977 volume showcase this process syntactically. In the poem at the beginning of the volume, the individual highlights this ambiguity between objective content and subjective agency in the relevance of personal information when posing their leitmotif-question from the second line – “Was passierte den gestern” – as what appears to be an almost verbatim-reiteration of a negating statement featured in the line before – “gestern passierte dir nichts.” By scrapping the seemingly inessential dative prepositional object here that at first endows the predicate of this sentence a personal dimension with regard to its subject, the text explicitly diverts the focus from the individual’s personal experience: The diarist’s typically inward-turned gaze here is labeled as equally futile and insufficient with regards to the history of yesterday – just like the ruminations over the newspaper that are refuted in the opening line and the trip down memory lane that is debunked in the remainder of the text – since if answered with this idea of “oneself” in mind, the answer has to the question of what happened has to be “nothing.”

The remaining carcass question-and-answer, however – “was passierte denn gestern. / es regnete hier” – echoes the carcass only subjectivity of the photo volume. The task, in any case, is the same. Just like his written *journal* texts, Becker’s photos chronicle how “time elapsed” – on a Sunday afternoon, during a period of thirty minutes in the surroundings or while nearing the construction site of a new motorway feeder. Both mental images in the texts though virtual photography and real photos in this volume thus provide a non-intervening and unbiased, since non-subjective, answer to the question stated at the beginning of Becker’s 1977 volume, of what precisely happened, whether it was yesterday or in the week before, or over the course of a month, than a glance in the newspaper does.

“Es regnete hier” seems to suffice as an information that answers this question, and, moreover, elevate the act of “regnen” or the rain itself at the position of the writer, making the writer himself in a twofold process merely an administrator of the natural *écriture*. This process is wonderfully staged at the end of the 1977 volume, where Becker’s writer-individual addresses the writing of this texts by way of the image of “patterns on the earth,” followed by the sight of a “sky with several weather fronts / approaching “ as well as the “wet streets before the rain” first, and, “after the storm,” the “drawings of the rain / on the windows.”¹⁴⁴ In this sequence of images, the idea emerges that the actual writing is done by the rain itself. The writer uncovers this writing of the rain by way of its visible manifestations on the window or the ground. In this way, single points in time becomes visible in the environment surrounding the writer. Later on, Becker’s writer assembles these single traces or indicators into trails that reenact the passing by of time over longer periods.

According to Philippe Lejeune, the “fundamental constraint” of the diary is autobiography or “antifiction.”¹⁴⁵ As such, the diary in Becker’s becomes a problematic category that poses significant friction in his texts. To the degree in which the dual nature of seriality is prefigured in Becker's use of the term *journal* in the blurb, both diary and newspaper as categories significantly complicate our reading of his texts in terms of questions such as subjectivity and objectivity. This applies throughout the author’s work. In the 1977 volume, diaristic autobiography both applies to the individual’s central endeavor and ultimately fails to

¹⁴⁴ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, 97ff.

¹⁴⁵ Philippe Lejeune, “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” *On Diary*. Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin, Julie Rak (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. 2009), 203.

describe this undertaking adequately. In Becker's poetry, diaristic autobiography thus assumes a highly ambiguous role, since his poems resort to both the newspaper and to personal accounts such as they feature in a diary as sources of information. In order to problematize the role of autobiography in Becker's work at the time, the diary is similarly problematic because of its strong connotation with subjectivity. *Journal* as a mode of writing instead emerges as something with an interest in temporality that is the common denominator of both the newspaper and the diary, resulting in a writing that restricts itself to the simple acts of recording, uncovering and reconstructing this temporality.

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By bringing "time to a halt," the (mental) images like Becker's idea of the poem in general capture states and stills in time that freeze the single moment and encapsulated in this writing. As a time-based and utterly dynamic process that works with temporal progression, however, writing in an effort to interconnect these stills over the course of a day or a week ultimately always results in the complete opposite in Becker's *journal* texts, a flow or trail or train of thought that recreates or reenacts, through increments between images, the course of a day by way of its mental representation. This ambiguity is even reflected in the grammatical makeup of some of his texts: the five images from the poem above translate effortlessly, to words, in a similarly terse and compact sentence structure which, on a level of syntagma, yields five completely parallel and overall static paratactic structures in the simple past of the "there-then." As a whole, however, the series of these images that is the resulting poem, in its parallel structure ultimately suggests a flow or sequence that renders past experience present, the "here-now" of

the remembered scene that form the single images into the valid progress of a day that is the opposite of bringing time to a halt.

The two temporal layers interfering here programmatically, past with present, the act of beholding, assembling and repeating an act posterior to the taking of photos, contrast a point in time where the single images have not yet made sense and a point in time – “now in the later time” – where the individual “know[s] more.” Only the retroactive act of looking at them, of “ruminating,” if one will, over pictures as a form of “narration” results in a sense of wholeness or completion. This second step which, stretched over the course of a volume, creates the flow so typical for Becker’s writing of the time, where single poems and lines don’t stick out, but almost disappear under the flow that is the resulting “journal of one year.” As to the temporal nature of this flow, Becker refers again to a manifold chronology in the volume’s blurb:

Thinking of the readers, I guess they should read these poems one after another, in the order in which they were written and printed; they should read them as a journal which deals with the course of one year and its seasons, and with a biographical phase.¹⁴⁶

As a whole, the poems assembled in one volume, thus becoming *journal* poems, result in the ‘mental motion pictures’ of a day or “of one year and its seasons,” the “biographical phase,” hence, which ultimately is the point of departure for Becker’s poems, but never translates into a simple diary. Like the photo series or series of 24 images, played at a 24 images per second frame rate, both Becker’s photographs and his later mental images results in a film, the aspired “roll of film,” which, if played or read at the right speed, starts moving in the beholder’s eyes.

The idea of a “film” emerges here as an effect in the act of beholding and reading. As a metacognitive process, this assumed third step lies in the beholder/reader and breathes the life

¹⁴⁶ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, dust jacket.

into these *journals*. Likewise, to stay in the metaphoric framework of photography, imagination makes Becker's series and, hence, his *journal* volumes/poems a film. Challenging thus Sontag's notion that photographs do not form a narrative, inasmuch as narratives are based on a sense of "temporal progression,"¹⁴⁷ Becker's use of *series*, both in photos and where photos are only metaphors for writing, ultimately does construct "a type of narrative content"¹⁴⁸ via image in, in the way that they imply temporal succession and interconnection in between them. By way of leaving that which is not depicted, but implied – the spaces in between the photos, the split seconds between the pushing of the trigger – the film that would eventually result if only enough images per second were present to create the illusion of a motion picture emerges through the myriad of conceivable angles that have been omitted, ready to be filled in by the reader-beholder.

III.

As stated in his essay "The Poem as Diary", "[t]aking photos" in the 1971 photographic volume emerged for Becker as a technique similar to "the way one takes notes, in the way in which one writes down sentences of experiences in a diary."¹⁴⁹ The program of the various *journal* texts following this foray into photography can be defined in reversal of this quote, defining the

¹⁴⁷ Bal, *Narratology*, 5f.

¹⁴⁸ "Eine Art von erzählerischem Inhalt." Becker, *Eine Zeit ohne Wörter*, dust jacket.

¹⁴⁹ "Photographieren, wie man Notizen macht, wie man Sätze der Erfahrung in ein Tagebuch schreibt." Becker, "Das Gedicht als Tagebuch," 39.

journal as to ‘write sentences and to take notes (in a diary) in the way one takes photographs.’

This mode of writing is based on the position of the author towards the world that surrounds him and how this relation or angle informs his perception. The photographic volume in this way heralded for Becker what the title of the volume directly following the photo-book implied to be *The End of Landscape Painting* [*Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei*, 1974]. Both the quest for sequence of events in this book and for the sequence of stills in the photographic volume challenge the notion of one fixed sight, expressed here in the topographic metaphor of a landscape. Instead of poems that are concerned with contemplating one particular sight or a day, the sequence of poems in the volume suggests the importance of temporal progression and narration as essential elements in every scene or landscape; be it the landscape of a day or a year or a week, the local surroundings of the author’s “Cologne Bay,”¹⁵⁰ or the slightly more marginal space opened up by the idea of “Odenthal’s Coast,” as the titles of two of Becker’s later volumes read.¹⁵¹

Writing poems emerges as a technique similar to a long exposure shot, especially when these poems are assembled into a long *journal* text. This technique works with the assumption that every landscape exists within the flow of passing time, a temporal aspect which painting does not capture. Becker labels this method, in another analogy to photography and film, as his “camera gaze [*mein Kamera Blick*],” focusing on a landscape in motion with a fixed and

¹⁵⁰ See the title of the 2009 collection *From the Cologne Bay*. Jürgen Becker, *Aus der Kölner Bucht: Gedichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Andreas Wirthensohn shows how painting serves both as a metaphorical context and an antagonist in Becker’s writing. Wirthensohn suggests to read Becker’s *journal* texts as a “new form of landscape painting,” Andreas Wirthensohn, “*Die Türe zum Meer: Einübung einer neuen Landschaftsmalerei*,” *Fluxus und/als Literatur*, 187-198.

immobile observer.¹⁵² Comparing his gaze to the handling of a camera, I argue that Becker's focus on everyday settings can be related to Dziga Vertov's technique of the "Kino-Eye" – a montage technique from 1920s avantgarde Soviet cinema that also focused on processes of everyday settings imperceptible to the human eye.¹⁵³ Both Becker's poems and Vertov's camera shots utilize the long exposure of an at first glance unremarkable surrounding scene. In Becker, this scene can be "a room. / Where / nothing changes," and where a missing object stands in for "the slow / progress / of disappearing."¹⁵⁴ *The End of Landscape Painting*, where this poem features, does not yet engage the manic, obsessed task from *Don't Tell Me About War*, where the individual chronicles how in particular time elapsed. In both volumes, however, the landscape of one day repeatedly serves to explore the slow progression of time by way of the inventory of a room, a house or a landscape. What emerges between the single poems is the unnoticed skeleton of this day rather than the flesh with which it is filled each day anew. For Becker's individuals, not people indicate time and temporal progression in their goings-on *in* a landscape or a room, but the changing layout of this room or the changes noticeable in this landscape.

Utterly depleting his volumes of both actors, agents, authors and any meaningful sense of plot, Becker uses writing as a tool to transmit plot, i.e., the sequence of things, in order to rethink plot and its definitions. To find that out what plot is, Becker's texts work with what appears to be an entirely plotless setting. Only by removing plot from the center of his attention, these texts tackle the question of what plot actually is. By extension, these texts challenge narrative, story,

¹⁵² "Ebene; mit Weizenfeldern, in Bewegung. Ich liege / und rühre mich nicht; mein Kamera-Blick," Becker, *Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei*, 68.

¹⁵³ Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁵⁴ "Verwüstung, ein Zimmer. / Wo / sich nichts ändert. Irgendetwas / verschwunden; der langsame / Fortschritt / des Verschwindens," Becker, *Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei*, 69.

and writing, i.e., the narrative transformation of that which has happened into that which is being told and the way in which it is told and transformed. *Journal* thus emerges as a mode of writing which Becker delineates both from the diary and the newspaper, while maintaining both mediums' interest in time and every day and setting. Instead, the 15-page long poem "Berlin Program Poem" develops the idea of a "consciousness" that encapsulates the idea of *journal* as both the acts of writing and perception as parts of the same problem

The "Programmgedicht" is one of Becker's earliest texts and was published right after the photo book. Qualifying this idea of a *journal* consciousness, the notion of a "program," contained in the subtitle, takes on *programmatic* meaning here, in a double meaning. Flagging diaristically inclined writing as a *programmatic* dimension, the title at the same time problematizes the existence of a competing, ever-present television program. With both writing and watching the news as forms of (self-imposed) schedules or regimes, the title alludes to a third dimension of *program* in the idea of a consciousness that is 'programmed,' i.e., drilled or conditioned to write and watch the news. The long poem thus negotiates pre-determined reality and the possibility of experience, as the poem "Weather Report" shows when it describes the problem that "reality today" appears as "the weather map / from last night."

Adding a reflective self-address, the poem suggests that the possibility of experience is a way out of this *program*:

– this, you see
is how we are living these days, these days
nothing
is happening anymore.
I say at noon.
Now the afternoon
doesn't pass by
[...] while the weather map,

quite surprisingly,
has proved to be right today.¹⁵⁵

Constantly reassuring himself that “you can compare it, / your experience, / in and with words and sentences,”¹⁵⁶ Becker’s approach can be read in front of the backdrop of the “hunger” for personal, subjective experience [*Erfahrungshunger*] characteristic for many literary texts of the 1970s. The characterization of that period is very much still dominated by discussions of genre, plot, or form, but less often by a focus on distinct modes of writing that originates in this experience.¹⁵⁷ This focus on genre, and the misunderstanding of the extent of *journal* in Becker’s work, resulted in an inclusion of his poems under the poetics of writers of the 1970s *New Subjectivity* movement and their “poetry of the everyday [*Alltagslyrik*].”¹⁵⁸ These writers, like Becker, frequently worked with diaries as a means to write about subject-centered experiences. However, these texts are centered on feelings, thoughts, opinions, and personal relationships and thus very different from Becker’s journals. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will show that this misconception is based on the understanding that *journals* represent a diaristic genre, rather than a mode of writing that focusses on the opposites of the *New Subjective* ideas and intents.

¹⁵⁵ “Wirklichkeit heute: die Wetterkarte / von gestern abend / – so, siehst du, / leben wir heute, heute / nichts / passiert mehr. Sage ich mittags. / Nun geht der Nachmittag / nicht mehr zu Ende / [...] während / die Wetterkarte, / ganz überraschend, / heute, im Recht bleibt,” Becker, *Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei*, 58.

¹⁵⁶ “du kannst sie vergleichen, / deine Erfahrung, / mit Wörtern und Sätzen,” Jürgen Becker, “Berliner Programmgedicht,” 53.

¹⁵⁷ Such as discussions of an *écriture féminine*, for instance.

¹⁵⁸ Also known as “Neue Innerlichkeit,” Meyer-Eisenhut, Meyer-Sieckendiek, “Eine Einführung,” *Fluxus und/als Literatur*, xif.

1.10 The *Journal* Consciousness of Photograph and Newspaper

In “The Poem as Diary,” Becker seems to work through the amalgamate of terms and interest that imbue his writing. In the essay, Becker reflects on the semi-autobiographic nature of his lyric approach by questioning the extent to which the poem as such in his opinion actually corresponds to the diary at all and, at least in the idea of a conventional diary, resists the formal conventions typically attributed to it. Reflecting on his “Berlin Program Poem,” Becker describes how the writing that ultimately led to this text had originally evolved out of a commission by a publisher. With other writers he shared the idea to spend a month in Berlin and to keep “a form of notebook”, a “protocol,” or “diary” that records, on a daily basis, what each writer had “perceived [*wahrgenommen*], undergone [*erlebt*], experienced [*erfahren*]" on each day. Becker Four years later, Becker in his essay reflects on “which sort of diary” had emerged from this assignment.

In the essay, Becker does not retrace the autobiographical context in which the poem originated, but the autobiographic situation that had provided the writing scene for this month-long text:

So, what was it that had come into existence with these notes? Most certainly not a diary-text in the sense of the literary category, but also not a self-contained, self-explanatory poem. The text had developed in compliance with a particular reality [*Wirklichkeit*]; it reported on current events [*meldete aktuelle Vorgänge*], informed about the weather and the events on tv [*Geschehnisse*], took note of facts and dates; it demonstrated feelings and moods, quoted things overheard and spoken; it blended impressions with recollections and conveyed [*vermittelte*] the results of sensual perception; it pretended to be responsible for everything that can enter a human consciousness and trigger thoughts and linguistic processes there.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ “Was war nun mit diesen Aufzeichnungen entstanden? Sicher kein Tagebuch-Text im Sinne der literarischen Kategorie, aber auch kein abgeschlossenes, sich selbst erklärendes Gedicht. Der Text war entstanden nach Maßgabe

Considering the various verbs with which he describes his artistic operations in this statement, Becker's conception of the "diary" is the opposite of what the conventional idea of a diary entails; as a "sort" of diary only, Becker's connection of a poem borrows from the 19th-century idea of the *journal intime* only the journal part. Reacting to "reality" and its perception [*Wirklichkeit, Wahrnehmungen*], texts like his "Berlin Program Poem" draw from both diaristic and journalistic conventions. The nouns in this passage focus on "Vorgänge," "Geschehnisse," and "Ergebnisse" [*occurrences and results*] rather than the personal experiences of the author – terms which also terminologically oppose the much more autobiographic term of "(lived) experiences" [*Erlebnisse*]. Instead, the poem aims at "facts and dates and quotes" that are "vermittelt" – "mediated" – both of which appear as the traditional realms of both the calendar and the newspaper, referring to the "reporting" [*melden*] of "current affairs or events" as the domain of the news-media.

For Becker of writing is a report in itself.¹⁶⁰ Demonstrated by the verbs he uses, Becker focusses on the text rather than the author. He describes what this poem "does:" to "report," to "inform," to "take note of," and to "quote" – all traditional spheres of action for the journalist.¹⁶¹ "Blend[ing]" impressions with recollections, "convey[ing]" perceptions and "purport[ing]" responsibility, writing in Becker fuses the methods of the diarist with those of the newspaper

einer bestimmten Wirklichkeit; er meldete aktuelle Vorgänge, informierte über das Wetter und Geschehnisse im Fernsehen, notierte Fakten und Daten; er demonstrierte Gefühle und Stimmungen, zitierte Gehörtes und Gesprochenes; er vermischte Eindrücke mit Erinnerungen und vermittelte die Ergebnisse der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung; er gab sich zuständig für alles, was in ein menschliches Bewusstsein eindringen und dort an Gedanken und sprachlichen Vorgängen auslösen kann," Becker, "Das Gedicht als Tagebuch," 39f.

¹⁶⁰ Becker conceives of literature as a "special form of reporting [*besondere Form des Berichtens*]," Jürgen Becker, "Gegen die Erhaltung des literarischen status quo," *Über Jürgen Becker*. Ed. by Leo Kreutzer (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 16.

¹⁶¹ Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News*. Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217.

journalist. Feelings (where they appear) and moods (as far as they are concerned) –the more traditional domain of the *journal intime* – in Becker are not felt but only “demonstrated” by the text (and not the individual). These texts thus resemble a “blend [...] of recollections and impressions” that are part of “sensual perception” [*Wahrnehmung*] rather than singling out the sensual recipient. Finally, these perceptions are centered around the “human consciousness” as the lens and common denominator of the “particular reality” with which the text is “in compliance.”

When Becker reflects on “which sort of diary” it was that had emerged through the writing of the “Programmgedicht,” he pushes back on the idea of a traditional diary, opening up, instead, what other types of diary there are or could be. In his essay, Becker refers to the idea of a *consciousness* which is at the center of his journal *writing*. Referring to a poem that had originally evolved out of a commission, Becker lists the various sources of input that end up in his poem, stating that ultimately “it pretended to be responsible for everything that can enter a human consciousness and trigger thoughts and linguistic processes there.”¹⁶² The position of the photographer as the shadow of an altogether non-acting, observing and recording entity from the photo book anticipates this particular position of the writer and their writing.¹⁶³ Becker’s idea of an imprint of time itself on the scene complicates the autobiographic origin of most of Becker’s texts, affording a reading of them that problematizes the idea of subjectivity through introducing the concept of perspective. In its unusually stark emphasis on photographic techniques, Becker’s

¹⁶² “er [der Text, the author] gab sich zuständig für alles, was in ein menschliches Bewusstsein eindringen und dort an Gedanken und sprachlichen Vorgängen auslösen kann,” Becker, “Das Gedicht als Tagebuch,” 39f. Similar to Becker’s understanding of diaristic poetry, his photo-series also go beyond the momentary by documenting one long “visual experience.”

¹⁶³ This reminds of the fact that, while the photos are seemingly objective representation of reality, their arrangement, bundling together, and presentation in series are all acts of mediation.

approach to texts can be read with Sontag's notion of photography as a passive, "voyeuristic relation to the world." "Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention,"¹⁶⁴ Sontag characterized the a-political character of the medium, comparing it to the passive, reflexive, automatic operations of perceptions in a consciousness.

1.11 Towards a *New Subjectivity*, Beyond Diary and the News

Autobiography and (diaristic) subjectivity emerge as exceedingly difficult categories for an understanding of journal *writing*. Although undeniably an essential part of the process, diaristic autobiography for Becker becomes a problematic dimension for his writing; a problem that characterizes much of his "Berlin Program Poem." Refuting the kind of "radically private, secret, and dirty" diary that fails to aid the 1977 individual in their quest for plot, for Becker "the poem makes a person disappear and brings into existence / the perception of a person / and their surroundings."¹⁶⁵ This passage from the "Berlin Program Poem" recalls Becker's later theoretical thoughts on how poems "transform the material of the life into language."¹⁶⁶ Autobiography and subjectivity pose constant sources of friction for a reading of Becker's texts with regards to the categories of consciousness and perception. The poem expands the idea of the "disappearing"

¹⁶⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 6.

¹⁶⁵ "im Gedicht verschwindet eine Person und entsteht / die Wahrnehmung einer Person / und ihrer Umgebung." Becker, "Berliner Programmgedicht," 43.

¹⁶⁶ "eine Schreib-Praxis, die [...] das Material des eigenen Lebens in Sprache verwandelt." Becker, "Das Gedicht als Tagebuch," 40.

person at its center with the “prose of the weather reports / [...] daily, in the *Tagesspiegel*,” containing “observations / at 2pm / forecast and further prospects / travel weather for Europe.”¹⁶⁷

Essentially a diary or daily log, this poem details a sequence of observations. However, since this diary is “also a poem,” the individual at their core “disappears”, giving way to the “perception of this person / and their environment” instead. The individual’s consciousness stands in competition with two *journals*, namely the newspapers (i.e., the Berlin daily, *Tagesspiegel*) and the diary as the other *Tages-spiegel*, i.e., the diary as a daily mirror and medium of subjective self-reflection. In his *journal* texts, the diary serves as a foil of comparison and often as a point of departure. What emerges instead is what the author himself labels as “a new subjectivity,” outlined in Becker’s reflection on the writing process that led to his 1971 long poem. As a type of “first-person experience [*Ich-Erfahrung*], which also included every experience of the ambient reality,”¹⁶⁸ Becker crafts a presence which “exists isolated and at the same time in context [*das isoliert und zugleich im Zusammenhang lebt*].”¹⁶⁹

This idea of a “new” subjectivity terminologically and, perhaps coincidentally, contrasts with the *New Subjectivity* movement which often informs scholarly discussions of Becker’s work.¹⁷⁰ The tagline *New Subjectivity* serves as a means of contrasting Becker’s earlier experimental works from his later “diaristic” ones. This misses the point that Becker developed his mode of *journal* writing not only in direct continuation of his earlier experimental writing,

¹⁶⁷ “die Wetterberichts-Prosa, / [...] täglich, im *Tagesspiegel* [...] / – Beobachtungen / um 14 Uhr / Vorhersage und Weitere Aussichten / Reisewetter in Europa,” Becker, “Berliner Programmgedicht,” 43.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Becker, *Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg*, dust jacket.

¹⁷⁰ On Becker’s use of the long poem and the latter’s role in the writings of the New Subjectivity, Burkhard Meyer-Sieckendiek, “Von der freien zur notwendigen Rhythmik des Gedichtes: Walter Höllers Poetik und die Alltagsrythmik von Becker, Brinkmann und Kiwus,” *Fluxus und/als Literatur*, 87-107.

but out of an engagement with photographic series as a highly experimental form of time ‘writing.’ Erk Grimm highlights the influence of mass media as a source for images in Becker’s work.¹⁷¹ CNN’s 24/7 news coverage and the ensuing flood of images from around the world recall Sontag’s claim that the “information that photographs can give starts to seem very important at that moment in cultural history when everyone is thought to have a right to something called news. [...] In a world ruled by photographic images, [...] a new sense of the notion of information emerges from the photographic image.”¹⁷² *Journal*, as an avant-garde mode of writing, thus arises from the writer’s confrontation with the mass media reality of his time, which poses an image crisis.

Becker’s idea of a “new subjectivity” emerges from his use of a *journal* mode of writing that is neither only subjective nor truly objective, but it arises from the friction in the daily antagonism between diary and mass media.¹⁷³ Becker highlights this problem when contrasting ‘experiences’ (“Erlebnis”) with ‘events’ (“Ereignis”) in his “Berlin Program Poem.” Paul Ricœur, in *Time and Narrative* [1984], renders the question between subjective and objective perception a temporal problem. He contrasts the existence of a blind material universe indifferent to humankind with the idea of a human consciousness that in itself creates time. By sketching out the paradoxical coexistence of a temporality the movement of the heavenly bodies can measure, for instance, and an understanding of temporality that is internal to the human consciousnesses,

¹⁷¹ Erk Grimm, “Tempi passati,” 214, 233, 236.

¹⁷² Sontag, *On Photography*, 2, 22.

¹⁷³ On the historic connection of mediated experiences and crises of writing and narration in modernity, Walter Benjamin, “Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1977), 438-465.

Ricœur in his book describes the paradox of a cosmological time or “time of the world” on the one, and a phenomenological time or “time of the soul” on the other hand. In a third step, however, Ricœur reconciles both seemingly opposing perceptions of time by introducing his original invention of *narrative* as a “third time” that allows for the reflection of the interdependence of both layers of temporal perceptions and also for the exploration of alternative times through the narrative’s temporal complexity.¹⁷⁴

The ubiquitous world of newspapers, tv-screens, weather reports, and radios assume the role of the heavenly bodies in Becker’s journals. The diary reflects the subjective dimension. Becker’s texts in their quest for sequence, plot, and, ultimately, narrative reconcile both the subjective “experience” of time and the objective “events” that indicate the passage of time. His writing thus allows for the reflection of the interdependence of both and the exploration of alternative times. Ricœur attributes this possibility to his concept of a “third time.”¹⁷⁵ In Becker’s texts, both newspaper reading, long term memory, and private diaristic ruminations fail to answer the questions of “what has happened.” Instead, *journal* opens up a “third” in-between time of the aspired narrative in Becker, one that could be the *journal* time sought after by his individuals and Becker himself in his writing. Through the film-like arrangement of images, this idea of narrative is the closest Becker’s writing gets to the ever-puzzling question of how time actually and finally elapsed.

¹⁷⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Vol. 3*. Transl. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 12-59.

¹⁷⁵ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Vol. 3*, 104-109 a. 127-132.

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Sticking, out in fine clarity, a massive tower without a roof outlined at the edge of the forest, and with black burn marks, only that it seemed to him that there was still a very pale blue layer of haze hovering over the ruins. It was an uncanny thought, that, in this very moment, there might be the tremendous turmoil of war going on and things happening which could tear apart a human heart; but in the vastness of the world and the forest, the tower itself was but a tiny point. Of the war turmoil, absolutely nothing was to be perceived here, only the smiling beautiful calmness stood in the sky and over the whole waste land.¹⁷⁶

Adalbert Stifter, *Der Hochwald* (1841)

At the center of Sarah Kirsch's poem "In Summer" [*Im Sommer*"] lies an image of almost otherworldly tranquility.¹⁷⁷ Divided into three stanzas, the brief text from the halfway mark of the volume *Tailwind* [*Rückenwind*, 1975] appears to almost effortlessly capture a blend of shimmering air and languid inertia that is characteristic of long summer evenings in the countryside. However, on second glance, the seemingly descriptive ease and lack of effort are

¹⁷⁶ Adalbert Stifter, *Der Hochwald, Gesammelte Werke in sechs Bänden*. Vol. 1.: Studien (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1959), 306.

¹⁷⁷ Sarah Kirsch, *Rückenwind: Gedichte* (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1976), 59.

carefully orchestrated effects of the poem. The starring landscape is described as only “sparsely populated” with people (line 1), featuring “sleepy” villages (3) amid “giant fields” as well as parked agricultural equipment (2), and, finally, roaming cats only “rarely bothered” (5) by the odd stones thrown at them. The poem thus engages a chain of concrete structural operations that translate an image of inertia and tranquility into a set of six paratactic structures. These structures *describe* (rather than conjure up or capture) the poem’s diegesis throughout its first two stanzas:

Sparsely populated the land.
Despite giant fields and machines
The villages lie sleepy
In box-tree gardens; the cats
Are rarely bothered by stones thrown at them.

In August the stars fall.
In September the horns announce the hunt.
Still the graylag goose flies, the stork strolls
Through uncontaminated grounds. Oh, the clouds
Like mountains they fly over the forests.¹⁷⁸

Abandoning almost all forms of movement, the first two stanzas’ clauses encapsulate a palpably inert atmosphere that might just as well be the photographic reproduction of a landscape. This photographic character also applies to the text’s spatio-temporal layout. Like a long exposure panorama shot, Kirsch’s poem traces only the kind of incremental change invisible to the human eye. Increasing the “sleepy” atmosphere, several large-scale temporal operations frame and anchor the poem’s diegesis in space-time rather than red hot action: “In

¹⁷⁸ “Dünnbesiedelt das Land. / Trotz riesiger Felder und Maschinen / Liegen die Dörfer schläfrig / In Buchsbaumgärten; die Katzen / Trifft selten ein Steinwurf. // Im August fallen die Sterne. / Im September bläst man die Jagd an. / Noch fliegt die Graugans, spaziert der Storch / Durch unvergiftete Wiesen. Ach, die Wolken / Wie Berge fliegen sie über die Wälder,” Sarah Kirsch, *Rückenwind*, 59. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

August the stars fall” (6), the beginning of stanza two reads, and the line “In September the horns announce the hunt” (7) closes a series of events of such universal nature that they hardly resemble any form of actual plot.¹⁷⁹ Displayed in the present simple rather than the present continuous of current affairs,¹⁸⁰ the iterative or cyclic nature of these recurrent fixtures embeds the position of any potential observer to this setting within the larger framework of agricultural and cosmic calendars that easily exceed the individual lifespan of a human being.

Finally, corroborating the complete insignificance of any earthly matters possibly at stake here, this macroscopic framework appears as if it would remain unbothered by any sense of mundane turmoil potentially waiting at the poem’s diegetic thresholds. Rendering, retroactively, even the initial image of its diegesis – “sleepy” villages in the vastness of the surrounding pastures – a terrene miniature version of itself, the planetary scale of these temporal patterns instead intensifies the notion of insignificance and transience at the bottom of this setting. The poem’s vast sense of space completes this large-scale grasp on time: Diminishing the hypothetical significance of any earthly matters whatsoever, the world at hand appears as if it were part of a model train set table, located “in the midst of box tree gardens” rather than actual forests or trees.

¹⁷⁹ I am using Mieke Bal’s definition of *plot* through *events*, with an *event* being “the transition from one state to another state,” Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Third Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 5f.

¹⁸⁰ Indicated through temporal adverbial qualifiers that imply iterativity, e.g., “In August,” “rarely,” “still” or “In September.” (Unlike in English, in German there is not differentiation between continuous and indefinite verb form in present tense verbs themselves.)

2.1 The News(paper) at the Horizon

Volker Klotz claims that every “lyric poem” – as which he regards neither epic nor dramatic poetry, or lyrical epics – is at its very core “plotless” [*fabel-los*], i.e., in a narratological sense it is unable to develop any “extensive sense of temporal sequence.”¹⁸¹ With respect to Klotz’s theory, the apparent lack or absence of *narrative* engagement emerges as the single most defining feature of this and many other of Kirsch’s *descriptive* lyrical texts from the 1970s. Moreover, as a single image from a bird’s eye view, the first two stanzas of “In Summer” appear to establish a diegesis as flimsy as the “thin slice of space as well as time” that Susan Sontag characterized to be the spatio-temporal characteristic of the photographic image.¹⁸² In itself resembling an almost photographic representation, the poem’s temporal layout as one *single* state of affairs seems to be at odds with structuralist narratology’s definition of a narrative text,¹⁸³ as it does not depict a series of “chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.”¹⁸⁴

On the contrary, Kirsch’s text is entirely devoid of either action, plot, or agents, alluding to narrative only through the pages of a flimsy newspaper. Anticipated first by the tentativeness

¹⁸¹ Volker Klotz, *Verskunst: Was ist, was kann ein lyrisches Gedicht?* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2011), 32.

¹⁸² Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 1973), 23.

¹⁸³ “Only that which narrates can make us understand.” With Brecht, Sontag in her 1973 book *On Photography* stated that it is the photo’s sense of time which excluded it from providing any “ethical or political knowledge.” Understanding, Sontag closed, is based on the knowledge of how something functions, “and functioning takes place in time, and must be explained in time,” Sontag, *On Photography*, 23.

¹⁸⁴ Narratologist Wolf Schmid points out that in structuralist theory, narrative texts generally “contrast with descriptive texts in that they contain a temporal structure and represent changes of state” rather than through the fact that they are narrated or mediated. Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction*. Transl. by Alexander Starritt (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 1f. Mieke Bal defines narrative texts through their *fabula*, i.e., “a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.” Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, 5f.

and fragility evoked via the adverbial qualifier “still” in line eight, as well as the possibility of change contained in the diegesis’ yet “uncontaminated grounds” in line nine,¹⁸⁵ the poem’s closing stanza poem ultimately addresses the *narrative* potential waiting at its diegetic horizon also. These potential narratives challenge the provisional state of affairs as it emerged through stanzas one and two:

If you don’t hold a newspaper around here
The world is in order.
In plum butter pots
One’s own face is reflected beautifully and
Fiercely red the fields glow.¹⁸⁶

Referring to the transience evoked by retrospectively looking at a slice of photographically frozen space-time, Roland Barthes identified the idea of a temporal *punctum* contained in every image as its “anterior future” of which, ultimately, “death is the stake.”¹⁸⁷ While not contrasting the descriptions of the single image ‘shot’ at its center with any other potential slices of time or place, the particular temporal capsules of the single poems from Kirsch’s 1975 collection contain their own *punctum* too. The concrete possibility of change, as an eerie but never realized potential, imbues the tranquil setting of “In Summer” and is also omnipresent as a point of friction in both this poem and in most of Kirsch’s other contemporaneous texts.

¹⁸⁵ In conjunction with the neologism “unvergifted,” the mentioned wildlife stalking through the poem’s diegesis evokes the image of a “toxic” influx as the source of potential disturbance.

¹⁸⁶ “Wenn man hier keine Zeitung hält / Ist die Welt in Ordnung. / In Pflaumenmuskesseln / Spiegelt sich schön das eigene Gesicht und / Feuerrot leuchten die Felder,” Sarah Kirsch, *Rückenwind*, 59.

¹⁸⁷ Roland Barthes describes photography’s *punctum* as “Time” itself and connects it to “death,” expressed by the photograph’s emphasis on and representation “of the noeme (‘that-has-been’).” Roland Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” *Image, Music, Text*. Transl. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 96.

Right at the onset of its third stanza, the poem provides this programmatic counterpoint – or *punctum* – to the first two stanzas’ image-like appearance. Here the poem highlights the fragility of its diegesis, noting the absence of another text – namely the extensive daily supertext of the “newspaper.” Directly foreshadowing the diegesis’ eventual disintegration, the hypotactic two-line caveat of line eleven specifies the “world” at hand as one that is “in order” in an almost photographic manner. At the same time, this caveat also introduces the idea of this order’s eventual disarray by hinting at the concrete possibility of a world that hypothetically could be “out of order.”¹⁸⁸ A diegetic breaking point, this caveat reveals the poem’s *punctum* and hints to this point as the text’s “anterior future” and eventual “death.” The noted absence of any actual narrative through the “news” confirms the poem’s stagnant state and setting, and confronts both with the ubiquitous potential of their termination.

Klotz suggests that every poem “deviates” from the “familiar world of prosaic experience” by constituting a temporal framework of its own. This space Klotz designates to be “a verse zone for proper time.”¹⁸⁹ In this sense, “In Summer” is both a *non-narrative* (i.e., *descriptive*) as well as a *narrative* text at the same time. Even though any form of “plot” in a stricter sense is absent from its purely *descriptive* surface, Kirsch’s poem *is* a *narrative* text. In order to establish its all-encompassing sense of tranquility, the poem draws attention to the absence of plot that has to be noted in the first place. *Narration*, as a constant intradiegetic possibility, is a precondition of this text’s existence. Only against the backdrop of this absence of

¹⁸⁸ The poem’s “world in order,” (as of yet) unperturbed by the paper, can be described as a state of ‘presence’ that is enabled only by a multifaceted absence. This is demonstrated by the consistent use of present tense verbs in their indefinite rather than their progressive forms, the odd elliptic omission of verbs, as well as a multitude of impersonalized “it is”-constructions.

¹⁸⁹ Klotz, *Verskunst*, 40.

potential events and eventfulness does this poem ultimately overcome its status as a purely *descriptive* text. Always reflecting the looming possibility of *narrative* or ‘plot’ at its horizon, a thorough analysis of this poem would have to touch on an arsenal of narratological categories,¹⁹⁰ adding (missing) *actors*, (future) *change*, *duration*, *objects* and *events* to a list that culminates in central questions that address the context of the *mediacy* of these not particularly eventful texts.¹⁹¹

2.2 The Hidden Human in the Wings

Many of Kirsch’s poem from the mid-1970s are structures that hover at the border between *description* and *narration* – and thus challenge both categories’ sharp distinction drawn by scholars of narratology and photography.¹⁹² The setting of “In Summer” reads like a blueprint for a plentitude of nature settings that are published in collections such as *Tailwind* [*Rückenwind*, 1976], *Kite Flying* [*Drachensteigen*, 1979], and *Realms of the Earth* [*Erdreich*, 1982]. Within the larger context of Kirsch’s oeuvre, these volumes mark a transition period for the author, reflected in Kirsch’s slow but steady turn to prose in the 1980s. Following the publication of *A Cat’s Life* [*Katzenleben*, 1984], Kirsch’s poetry morphs into almost haiku-like 4- or 5-liners. Her writing in

¹⁹⁰ Bal, *Narratology*, 5f.

¹⁹¹ Stanzel defines the “mediacy of presentation” with regard to a work’s *narrative situation* – “a fixed type of mediative process throughout the work.” However, for Stanzel, the “authentic presentation” of events “through the mediation of a personal narrator, where the narrator mediates a “potential fictional world,” is only one of many variations of the mediative process in a literary work. Franz K. Stanzel, *Narrative Situations in the Novel: Tom Jones, Moby Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 6.

¹⁹² See Wolf Schmid, *Narratology* 1f, a. Bal, *Narratology*, 5.

general turned to longer diary-like prose texts – both poetry and prose, however, maintained Kirsch’s earlier focus on nature settings.¹⁹³

Scholarship agrees that Kirsch’s distinct take on tropes and images from nature and wildlife resembles the single most characteristic feature of the author’s writing. In its strong focus on her poetry, scholarship in the past twenty years has developed several useful, yet, I argue, oversimplified approaches that subsume the author’s works under various taglines – be it “nature writing,” the idyllic, the withdrawal into the realms of privacy, ecologism, the (a)political, the country escape.¹⁹⁴ Some contributions even attest a neo-romantic juncture of landscape and subjectivity in her texts. These approaches fit well and neatly with the subsumption of the author’s writing under the umbrella of the 1970s *New Subjectivity* movement. Their inward-turned subjective and altogether apolitical aesthetics are often read as restorative escapist or even reactionary turns to the apolitical and everyday milieus and subjects.¹⁹⁵

However, most of these scholarly contributions are autobiographically informed, connecting Kirsch’s turn to nature and peripheral setting to her status as a dropout in the German literary scene. In 1977, Kirsch famously relocated from East Berlin to West Germany and in 1983 moved again to an old farm-turned schoolhouse at the Northern German periphery near the

¹⁹³ Goedele Proesmans, *Viel Spreu wenig Weizen: Versuch einer Poetologie der Sarah Kirsch anhand von fünf Prosabänden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang/Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2000). Silvia Volckmann, *Zeit der Kirschen?: Das Naturbild in der deutschen Gegenwartslyrik*, Jürgen Becker, Sarah Kirsch, Wolf Biermann, Hans Magnus Enzensberger (Königstein: Forum Academicum in der Verlagsgruppe Athenäum, Hain, Scriptor, Hanstein, 1982).

¹⁹⁴ Christine Cosentino, for instance, in her monograph highlights the autobiographical nature of Kirsch’s poetry, dates back the idea for “In Summer” to one of her frequent sojourns at the Mecklenburg periphery, identifying it as a place of nature-ecological withdrawal for Kirsch during a time of major disillusionment with the East-German political regime. Christine Cosentino, “*Ein Spiegel mit mir darin: Sarah Kirschs Lyrik*” (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 1990), 75f.

¹⁹⁵ *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. 8th edition (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), 643f.

coast. Her prose texts, published from 1986 onwards as “journals,” chronicle her reclusive life between the seacoasts in daily entries, interspersed with occasional shorter poems. Subsuming these works as retroactively edited versions of her diaries and separating them carefully from the author’s ‘actual’ work in poetry, Kirsch scholarship so far has not acknowledged the supreme importance of writing in both. I argue that Kirsch’s focus on writing features at the core of both prose texts and poetry and offers a new perspective on their problematic genre status.

Mediating various settings in her texts, Kirsch’s idea of writing slightly slants or distorts the nature stills characteristic for her texts. Christine Cosentino highlights the ubiquity of mirrors and mirrored surfaces in Kirsch’s poetry and reads them as “media of a reflected subjective or objective reality;”¹⁹⁶ however, in her methodological focus on the concepts of subjectivity and authorship, she does not connect these concepts to the act of writing as the ultimate refracting glass that furnishes Kirsch’s seemingly descriptive settings with an innate breaking point. In her analysis of “In Summer,” Cosentino focusses on emotional intensity and expressive color metaphors but misses the peculiar example of a mirror that features prominently in the poem’s penultimate line.¹⁹⁷ Culminating in a strange (and strangely worded), impersonal image, “the own face” is gleaned from a passing reflection on the surface of several “plum butter pots” – “In Pläumenmuskesseln / Spiegelt sich schön das eigene Gesicht” (14).

¹⁹⁶ “Der Spiegel [...] erscheint in Kirschs Gedichten in verschiedener, oft überlappender Bedeutung: als Medium reflektierter subjektiver oder objektiver Realität, als Metapher, Bild, Motiv oder als Teil eines naturalistisch beschriebenen Wirklichkeitsausschnitts,” Cosentino, “*Ein Spiegel mit mir darin*,” 4. Sylvia Volckman makes the trope of the mirror a cornerstone of her Kirsch analysis. Volckmann in her book sees nature as a “political factor.” In Kirsch’s poems from the 1970s, she sees nature itself appearing in the “cracked mirror of [political] uopia,” Volckmann, *Zeit der Kirschen*, 95.

¹⁹⁷ Cosentino notes the intertextual reference to Georg Trakl’s poetry but makes the connection to the latter’s expressionistic settings via Kirsch expressive use of color metaphors. In her analyses, Cosentino takes the ubiquity of mirrors in Kirsch’s texts as an occasion to invite mostly autobiographic and political aspects into her reading Cosentino, 85.

This plum-butter-pot-mirror reveals the rigid, photographic order of this text to be the visual perception of an individual presence. However, while this mirror sets the stage for the single trace of human presence in the text, it suggests that autobiographic subjectivity is not of concern in this poem. In fact, the poem makes every effort to conceal this human presence in the remainder of its fifteen-lines. We only encounter this presence through a reflection on the surface of a makeshift mirror. This image, however, does not contribute to a more profound understanding of this individual's subjectivity. The same reflection process that creates this (human) observer also strips them of any individual features.

Kirsch's text addresses the problem of subjectivity through two intertextual references. Comparisons to Eduard Mörike's 1828 poem "In Spring" [*Im Frühling*] and Georg Trakl's 1914 text "Sommer" [*Sommer*] suggest that Kirsch's impersonalized observer lies at odds with a traditional idea of poetry with roots in early 19th century Romanticism. In typically romantic poems, highly individualized lyrical subjects often project their own emotions onto the surrounding landscape. Where Trakl's eerie landscape settings already reflect a disintegration of these romantic dynamics, Kirsch's text via the mirror turns away completely from any subjective emotions. Ruminating instead on the tardy dynamics between a triptych that constitutes the poem's scenery – "Oh the clouds / like mountains they wing their way over the forests" (9f.)¹⁹⁸ – Kirsch's observer inverts the romantic tradition at the end of the second stanza. "Here I lie upon the hill in spring / the cloud becomes my wing"¹⁹⁹ – in her take on Mörike's proverbial line, she turns the romantics' relationship of individual and landscape inside out, rendering Mörike's

¹⁹⁸ "Ach die Wolken / Wie Berge fliegen sie über die Wälder," Sarah Kirsch, *Rückenwind*, 59.

¹⁹⁹ "Hier lieg ich auf dem Frühlingshügel: / Die Wolke wird mein Flügel," Eduard Mörike, *Werke und Briefe*. Vol. I/1. Ed. by Hans-Henrik Krümmacher (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2003), 42.

image of the clouds an empty tautologic container. Where Mörike furnishes his yearning romantic observer with a symbolic wing,²⁰⁰ Kirsch distorts this line into an altogether defunct metaphor, translating one flawed image (*flying mountains*) into the absent quality (*movement*) of another generic image (*clouds*). Both parts of this metaphoric equation pervert generic topoi from the romantics' toolkit.

In the grammatical structure of its romantic title, "In Summer" references and echoes an entire tradition of romantic poetry.²⁰¹ Other text in Tailwind also refer to the romantic tradition.²⁰² A comparison with Mörike's "In Spring" contributes to a de-subjectivization of these poems. Where Mörike's gaze, informed by the romantics' extensive "lexis of wanderlust,"²⁰³ roams the distance, Kirsch obfuscates any dynamic relationship between her individual and the surrounding topography by transforming the poet's metaphoric wing in Mörike into an anchor. More importantly, Kirsch transforms what at first seems to be in motion into a relatively static affair, mounting huge ranges of clouds as heavy crags atop the forests. Kirsch showcases how the landscape at hand fails to provide the typical romantic canvas onto which the poetically inclined individual would be able to project their feelings and their distinctive character traits.

²⁰⁰ Inge Wild, Reiner Wild (eds.), *Mörike-Hanbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2004), 59.

²⁰¹ An entire tradition of romantic poetry comes to mind as intertexts here, where the structure 'preposition plus month or season' evokes a fixed set of seasonal imagery that bears symbolic value, serving, as Albrecht Koschorke argues, the purpose of externalizing the romantic poet's inner emotions onto elements of the environment. Albrecht Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts: Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung in literarischen Landschaftsbildern* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), 193.

²⁰² The poems "Datum," "Dem Mai," "Ende Mai," "Im Juni," "Die fuchsroten Felder," "Im Sommer," "Markttag," "November/Dezember," and "Schlehen" all feature either a particular month, day, date, or seasonal indicator in their title. Sarah Kirsch, *Rückenwind*, 35, 38, 41, 43, 48, 51, 55, 66, 70.

²⁰³ Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts*, 216.

This sense of a hollowed-out subjectivity is exacerbated by the prominence of vision and the fact that the poem, in general, lacks any affective dimension at all. The glance in the plum butter pots instead appears as impersonal as it can be. Here, “the own face” seemingly casually “reflects *itself*” [*Spiegelt sich*] in the surface of one of the many artifacts in the poem’s world. This passive, non-intentional process appears to be grammatically predetermined through the third person reflexive pronoun ‘sich.’ The poem’s mirror thus reveals this individual as a mere potential, the reader’s figment of imagination, the product of a literary convention. Rather than an actual human being with an inner life, this hypothetical observer as a function of the poem parallels (grammatically) the hypothetical (and likewise impersonal) reader of the news from a few lines earlier – “If you don’t hold a newspaper around here / The world is in order.”

2.3 Focalizing Order, Refracting Diegeses

Instead of acting as an agent *in* this setting, Kirsch’s observer in the poem serves, I argue, as an agent *towards* it. A mediating instance, this observer possesses a functional relevance for the text rather than taking on an intradiegetic role or mask. Much like everything else in this text, this observer only arises via an encounter with the object world. As an almost invisible instance, this observer appears as if they were an accident – a byproduct of the random reflection in one of the countless objects. Emerging only at the onset of the last stanza, this seemingly detached entity moves programmatically from the unsuspecting margins of this descriptive text to its diegetic spotlight. Although a non-acting and non-intervening presence, Kirsch’s individual in the mirror as well as the potential reader of the news embody identical prisms through which the poem’s

image-like diegesis is refracted. This process imbues the poem from the first to the last clause – “and / Fiercely red blaze the fields.”²⁰⁴ A hypotaxis, this clause at first glance seems to casually continue the glossy imagery of the first part of the poem, adding with the blazing redness of the surrounding farmland yet another figure of description to the plethora of scenic imagery from the previous stanzas.

Considering the poem’s interest in mirrors and refraction, however, this last line and its main verb, to blaze or shine, must be taken with a grain of salt. Acting as an agent towards this setting, the vision of the detached observer creates this image. Reflecting themselves [*sich spiegeln*], this observer’s facial features only emerge through a reading of these images. From a syntactic level, the poem’s last line as an apparent addendum to the preceding lines can also be read in continuation with the strangely slanted image-logic of the previous stanza. In this way, the last line continues the first part of the stanza and structurally expands both the reflection and the reading of the news. If read together, the couplet-like structure of the last stanza suggests one big caveat. This caveat extends the simple if-then structure of the two-line premise about the newspaper to a quasi-mathematic proposition. In a sonnet-like manner, the final stanza puts the preceding two stanzas’ content into perspective. Completing the conditional bracket established by the if-clause four lines earlier, these four closing lines are held together both explicitly through the coordinating conjunction “and” and implicitly, i.e., through their parallel sentence structure. In this way, the last four lines explicate what would happen to (and in) this setting if one forwent reading the news.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ “und / Feuerrot leuchten die Felder,” Sarah Kirsch, *Rückenwind*, 59.

²⁰⁵ A content-paraphrase of the last stanza could read: ‘If you don’t hold a newspaper, not only will the world be in order, but your face will also appear properly on the surface of the objects that help constitute this order, as will the fields, which will be perceived as “fiercely red” on the surface of your retina.’

Connected, however, to an entire sequence of such images that dispute the status of the poem's initial descriptions, the closing statement about the pasture blazing "Fiercely red" in itself retains a sense of semantic ambiguity. "Fiercely red," on second thought, is not at all what one would expect to be an accurate description of the seasonally appropriate color of these fields. If we are to understand "In Summer" as an indicator for the onset of the harvest season in the poem's title, the color of these fields would rather be yellow or brown (either the colors of the crops or the plowed earth underneath them). And indeed, the German verb "leuchten" (to glow, blaze, or shine) reveals the accurate choice of color in this image as a crucial question for a reading of the entire poem. Resembling yet another product of mediation, the last line etymologically refers the act of sensory perception through the color of the fields back to the noun *Licht* [light]. The line thus evokes the reflection of electromagnetic radiation responsible for sight. Just like the mirror image of "the own face" appears "beauteously" only through the prism of optical refraction of light, the "vast fields" from the first line now "glow" or "blaze" in the evening sun. Likewise, the clouds from a few lines earlier appeared to the observer as if they were "mountains," *seen* to be slowly flying or moving "over the forests." This points to another visual operation that condenses two separate observations into one semantic image via the comparative particle "wie" [like].

Through the observer's face, this poem illustrates through the process of *vision* that this observer establishes the only point of departure for a whole chain of refraction processes. Both etymologically and physiologically, the "Gesicht" [face] is that part of the body in which "Sicht" [sight] or "sehen" [seeing/vision] as sensory processes are accomplished. Instead of an individualized gaze into the landscape, vision becomes the central *modus operandi* of this poem.

I propose to use Mike Bal's concept of *focalization* to render this productive for my reading of the poem's narrative status. *Focalization*, in Bal's definition of the term, describes "the relationship between the 'vision,' the agent that sees" (or *focalizer*), "and that which is seen" (*focalized objects*).²⁰⁶ With regard to a mediacy-based reading, I suggest that this relationship between the seeing agent and that which is seen in the last two stanzas resolves the poem's initial tension between *narrativity* and *descriptiveness*. This idea of a *vision* or *perspective* reconciles this text's strangely de-subjectivized individual with both its descriptive character and its hypothetical take on the narrative.

The observer of this poem's world in "order" and the order of this world appear as two sides of the same coin. A narrative emerges here through vision. Narrative as an act of mediation is brought into the equation only once the self-directed refraction in the poem's penultimate line is established. Through *vision*, this poem via the observer's face, hints at physical movement as the sole indicator of any passage of time. The "vast fields" surrounding the sleepy villages from the first line "glow" or "blaze" fiercely red in the evening sun at the end of the poem. This is a rare indicator that there may be some passage of time between the beginning and the end of the text. This progression between different sights in the poem ultimately establishes the time of day in particular and, on a more general note, time in itself.

Considering the lexical field of "sehen," I argue that both *narrative* and *vision* establish this text's programmatic pillars. Between "das Gesicht" (i.e., that which "is being seen," "has been seen" or which "does the seeing") and "die Geschichte" (another cognate-homonym, translating as "history" as well as "story") the text's temporal order in time emerges. This order is the progression from what has been seen at the beginning of the poem to what can be seen at

²⁰⁶ Bal, *Narratology*, 149.

the end. Kirsch's individual as the poem's *focalizer* creates this order both through acts of mirroring and refraction. Regarding the poem as the written order that is resembled and established by the "order" of its diegesis, *focalization* ultimately characterizes the text's take on writing. Pointing at writing as a cultural technique similar to the preserving of plums, the poem itself is by no means a 'natural,' pristine, or unadulterated, unmediated substance. Both plum butter and poem appear as similarly processed, concentrated, thickened, and compacted versions of a world (or parts thereof) that the next day (or in fall or winter, to contrast with the poem's title) might just as well present themselves in a different (written) order.

2.4 The *Journal Gaze* – A “Tender Squinting” at the World

In a programmatic entry from *Floating Bog* [*Schwingrasen*, 1991],²⁰⁷ a collection of “prose miniatures,” Kirsch elaborates on the role of writing in her work in a tone characteristic for her late associative style. Emerging from what at first glance seems to be a casual attempt to answer the question of “How Does Literature Come About?” (“Wie kommt Literatur zustande?”), Kirsch states:

I practice the flow, the ease and effortlessness in a structure [*Gebilde*], however one with terrene expansions [*mit irdischen Weiten*], describing, even though it's mine, the earth instead of constantly examining my innermost, even though this also guides the quill, but I don't want to photographically reproduce my interior [*mein Innerstes abfotografieren*] because I don't want to

²⁰⁷ Sarah Kirsch, *Schwingrasen, Gesammelte Prosa* (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2006).

reveal myself [*mich nicht preisgeben will*] or find myself extraordinary at most the angle of view, if anything, a certain tender squinting but this is merely the laughter between the lines.²⁰⁸

While Kirsch here addresses the character of her writing, her programmatic conjectures can be made productive in relation to her earlier poems too. Kirsch evokes both *description* (“beschreiben”) and *contemplation* (“betrachten”) or *photography* (“abfotografieren”) to identify the two opposite poles of her writing that she characterizes as a “flow” or exercise [*einüben*].

More importantly, however, this writing does not “reveal” or “photographically reproduce my interior.” Kirsch offers the image of a mode of writing that can be located both in proximity and in distinct opposition to photography and the notion of poetic subjectivity commonly attributed to her work. In contrast to objective photographic representation, a multifaceted, complex mode of writing in its breathless, verbose, bountiful tone approximates what Barthes in 1953 characterized as a “tone,” the “ethos” or “rhythm” of a text.²⁰⁹ In Kirsch’s texts, I argue, this “ethos” as a particular stand, attitude, angle, or *focalization* towards the world is categorically different from Barthes’ definition of photography. Not a “weightless, transparent envelope” which “is never distinguished from its referent (what it represents)” (5), Kirsch’s texts are characterized by the “flow, the ease and effortlessness” of a writing that approximates the idea of a “tender squinting” of the eyes.

²⁰⁸ “ich übe das Strömen, die Leichtigkeit ein doch in einem Gebilde mit irdischen Weiten, die Erde, wenn auch meine, beschreibend, nicht mein Inneres fortwährend betrachtend, wenn das die Feder natürlich auch lenkt, aber ich will nicht mein Inneres abfotografieren weil ich mich nicht preisgeben will oder mich außerordentlich finde höchstens den Blickwinkel noch ein gewisses zärtliches Schielen aber das ist bloß das Lachen zwischen den Zeilen,” Sarah Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 342.

²⁰⁹ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*. Pref. by Susan Sontag. Transl. from the French by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 1, 13-16.

Continuing the above quote, Kirsch herself evokes transparency, angle, or stance as categories that characterize her writing. At once delineating her *journal* writing from both the idea of a personal dream journal as well as a daily diary, Kirsch continues:

when I [...] copy [*abschreibe*] these sentences from one notebook to another and in doing so alter them, or add to them, or discard them, getting into the realm of the wastepaper baskets – which is a blessing for everyone, as I notice. Period. When I write this way and [...] get lost in the details – digressions – retracing the beautiful figures arches and swings like in a landscape park, measuring, on limited space, everything! In fact really everything! By terrene proportions [*alles über tellurische Verhältnisse setzen*], that is very much how it goes with a piece of prose, and like an uncanny waterfall whooshing in the fog the automatic writing also goes this way it flows how it flows I have been practicing it daily.²¹⁰

The horticultural metaphor evokes the landscape setting of “In Summer.” Comparing the “figures arches and swings” traced by or in her writing to the carefully trimmed geometric forms found in “landscape park[s],” Kirsch underscores the programmatic tension that also characterizes the seemingly intact settings of her 1970s poems. In both her poetry poem and the short entries of Kirsch’s journals, the conflict between a supposed authenticity of the setting and a sense of artificiality or fragility often complicates this setting and corresponds to an idea of writing that mediates the latter through vision and narration. Referencing the “figures,” “arches,” and “swings” retraced in contrast to the natural bounty and wildness of nature, Kirsch, in her effort to describe her writing, evokes the image of a carefully curated 18th-century French

²¹⁰ “wenn ich [...] von einem ins andere Heft diese Sätze abschreibe und wieder verändere, hinzufüge verwerfe, ins Gebiet des Papierkorbs gerate, was stets ein Segen für alle ist wie ich bemerke. Punkt. Wenn ich so schreibe und [...] vom Hundertsten ins Tausendste – Abschweifungen – die schönen Figuren Bögen und Schwünge bereite wie in einem Landschaftspark, auf kleinem Raum alles! aber auch alles! über tellurische Verhältnisse setzen [sic], sehr ähnlich verhält es sich mit einem Stück Prosa, und wie ein unheimlicher Wasserfall rauschend im Nebel so verläuft auch das automatische Schreiben es strömt wie es strömt ich habe es täglich trainiert.” Sarah Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 342.

garden, referring to writing as an act of taming and curtailing nature rather than of copying it onto paper.

As a “daily” practice, Kirsch’s preoccupation with these “terrene proportions” of her local setting emerges as the kind of process-oriented writing mode that recalls the writing typically found in a diary. However, these “terrene proportions” result in writing that tackles the opposite of what is typically the content of a personal diary. The poem’s “terrene proportions” in their macro- and microscopic relation feature the same menial, not “extraordinary” position of the individual that engages with them. As a “not extraordinary” entity, the self corresponds to the only remotely individualized idea of writing that features in the 1975 poem. This individual is merely depicting a landscape which only at second glance is a creation of the writing, seeing, focalizing individual (as is indicated by the conditional “even though”). The resulting text is a “structure with terrene expansions,” created by an individual that “describes [...] the earth instead of constantly examining my innermost.” Both the “angle of view” as a “tender squinting” of the eye and the quoted “laughter” are part of the same impersonal, “not extraordinary” entity that is also responsible for “In Summer’s” peculiar setting.

Identifying “the ‘view’ of the events” in a given story as “an interjacent layer” of narrative,²¹¹ Bal argues that the image a *focalizer* presents of an object (or of multiple objects) also “says something about this focalizer itself.”²¹² In the context of Kirsch’s writing, this idea of a *focalizer* renders the elusive observers at the center of her texts entities, which, as individual characters, would not become more palpable or concrete in an analysis of the single descriptions that constitute this setting. Instead, these entities merge with these descriptions and the “order”

²¹¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 149.

²¹² Bal, *Narratology*, 153.

that they postulate to maintain. Ultimately vanishing behind these descriptions, these observer-entities thus say something about the order of these texts. In a reversal of Bal's definition, the *focalizers*' position in Kirsch's texts and their relationship to the world say something about the "terrene proportions" of the world in which they are placed since they all but disappear behind the objects of her texts. This degree of *focalization* ultimately makes Kirsch's seemingly descriptive and seemingly photographic sceneries of the time non-photographic.²¹³

2.5 A Faceless *Focalizer*?

Kirsch-scholarship thus far has overlooked the complex role that writing assumes in her works. Part of the reason for this oversight is, I suggest, scholarship's disregard of the author's so-called "prose-works." The later journals are mostly seen as either pre-stages to her poetry, as simple notebooks or as diaristic miniatures that do not merit thorough analysis themselves.²¹⁴ I propose to read these texts not in separation from, but in continuation with Kirsch's earlier poetry. The interconnection of focalization and narrative potential is present in both and reveals a shared mode of writing that is characterized by an attention to thresholds, borders, fringes, and perspectives.

²¹³ In their "passivity," Kirsch's mediating entities here and elsewhere by no means correspond to Sontag's non-political notion of photography as a non-narrative act that opposes acts of (political or ethical) intervention. Unlike Sontag's idea of photography, Kirsch's writing is far from being an act of "mirroring reality." Instead, as her focus on processes of mediation and refraction shows, the order of these texts is established through writing, and not reproduced and captured. This opposes photography as a process which through mimesis establishes an "innocent and, therefore, [...] accurate relation to the visible reality" limited only by "the camera's rendering of reality" as an ultimately "narrowly selective transparency" close to objectivity. Sontag, *On Photography*, 6f.

²¹⁴ In her 2000 dissertation, Goedele Proesmans characterizes the 1980 volume *La Pagerie* "als Einstieg in das 'neue,' autobiographische Prosaprojekt." Goedele Proesmans, *Viel Spreu wenig Weizen*, 21.

Kirsch's *journal* texts share the ambiguous role of subjectivity with her early poetry. Unlike typically diaristic texts, Kirsch's *journal* prose lacks any notion of private or intimate information. The various actors in her page-long dailies lose almost any sense of individuality through Kirsch's efforts to obscure autobiographical traces. Usually kept like a calendar almost every day for one or two years,²¹⁵ journals like *Crowchatter* [*Krähengeschwätz*, 2010], *Marchviolets* [*Märzveilchen*, 2012], and *Junenovember* [*Juninovember*, 2014] and work with playful code-names for Kirsch's son Moritz (e.g., Maurice, Mauritzius, Der blaue Mauritzius), her partner Wolfgang von Schweinitz (der Tonsetzer, der Compositeur), or the many cats around the house. In these texts, Kirsch appears as a reader, walker, and observer of the daily weather and the weather reports on the radio. A thin, at times disappearing presence, the appearance of the writer is both reflected by and refracted through her writing as a mirror, gaining individual features only through the single elements of their setting and Kirsch's relation to them.

Mere instances of description at first, her *journal* texts feature images and sights that focalize and "say [...] something" about the person describing them – like in the 1975 poem "In Summer." Writing in the poem works like the refractions of light cast through a prism, an analysis of which allows for conclusions about the physical makeup of the prism and an optical object. In the poem, the observer's impalpable "face" emerges as the single defining characteristic of this texts' *focalization*. Rather than serving the purpose of a physiognomical extrapolation that would refer us to a supposedly deeper persona, the poem's altogether featureless, but by no means *face-less*, *focalizer* ultimately serves as a stand-in for this text and its writing, rendering the face a layer or a lens that seems to be just as thin as the paper of the

²¹⁵ The volumes *Märzveilchen* and *Juninovember* chronicle the years between 2001 and 2003. With only occasionally missing a day or two, these texts offer an almost complete coverage of this three-year period.

page on which the poem is printed, or the pages of the omnipresent newspaper that constantly threatens to disrupt its bucolic setting.

As representations of this thin layer of focalization, the observer's face or the pages of the (news)paper do not, however, correspond to either the "transparency" or "invisibility" often attributed to the photographic image.²¹⁶ In contrast to the photograph, Kirsch's idea of writing is process-oriented, a multi-step act of writing that is one "effortless flow." While this at first seems to be a contradiction, Kirsch suggests that her writing ultimately resembles "ein Gebilde," something that, in a literal sense, is "built" or "constructed." Unlike the *surrealist* idea of *écriture automatique*, however, this structure is oriented *towards* the "terrene realities" from which it departs.

The conflict between the setting of "In Summer," its supposed authenticity, and the sense of artificiality or fragility at its diegetic core corresponds to this apparent contradiction between the writerly measures listed by Kirsch. Any sense of authenticity or dream-like writing done subconsciously (expressed in the "whooshing" of "fog" and "flow" in connection to an *écriture automatique* that closes the passage) also contrasts with the "training" mentioned both at the beginning and the end of this entry. This lengthy entry in itself reads like a breathless sequence or stream of thoughts, often not even separated by punctuation. At the end of this entry, Kirsch details the "daily" practice of capturing the earthly matters at the center of her writing as a process-oriented task which at once stands in stark opposition to the idea of a diaristic practice.²¹⁷ Although one might expect this "practice" to be in proximity to the keeping of a

²¹⁶ Sontag, *On Photography*, 6f.

²¹⁷ Kirsch alludes to Robert Walser's journal *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet*. Robert Walser, *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985-2000).

conventional diary, the steps of “copy[ing]” and rewriting put this idea of writing closer to the vicinity of a *journal*. Taking up a term famous with the surrealists’ experimental writing, Kirsch furnishes the concept of an “automatic writing” with concrete writerly measures, creating an idea of writing that resonates with Barthes’ definition of an *écriture*. She showcases how the measures of “copy[ing],” “alter[ing],” “add[ing],” and “discard[ing]” are not just steps in an effort to “rework” a written text, but that they resemble the different components of a writing process that encompasses all these writerly measures in the first place.

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Evoking the concept of an *écriture* and equipping it with the processual-oriented adjective “automated,” Kirsch ultimately outlines her idea of daily writing in contrast to the modernists’ surreal subject matters and at the same time shifts the focus away from the ins and outs of the concrete process.²¹⁸ Stressing the very “terrene” subjects with which her writing is concerned in the programmatic passage from *Floating Bog*, Kirsch continues by expressing doubts about the actual outcome of this practice. She states “I don’t always know if I really want it [i.e. the automatic writing] that way” and highlights that she would actually “appreciate such short and object-oriented [*gegenständlich*] pieces like ‘Irrstern’ in its time.”²¹⁹ With *Irrstern* [*Wandering Star*], Kirsch references the 1986 collection that for her heralded the long list of ‘journal’ prose

²¹⁸ Note Kirsch’s reference to Walser and to Robert Musil’s essay “Das hilflose Europa oder Reise vom Hundertsten ins Tausendste.”

²¹⁹ “aber ich weiß nit immer ob ich es [das automatische Schreiben] wirklich so will, eigentlich schätze ich solche knappen gegenständlicheren Stücke wie seinerzeit ‘Irrstern,’” Sarah Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 342.

works published from the 1980s to the 2000s.²²⁰ These texts feature the same kind of seemingly effortless, casual, and nonchalant tone that also characterizes the writing in her poems from the late 1970s, where flow and effortlessness arise from a set of concrete writerly measures.

However, I argue that this “effortlessness” is a product of her writing, and is not to be confused with the complicated and many-layered processes that her writing represents. The processual complexity and programmatic hybridity of Kirsch’s approach to writing are oftentimes ignored in scholarship or subsumed under the idea of a supposedly diaristic method.²²¹ “In Summer” shows how both are of one kind and reveals concretely what this writing entails. Scholarship distinguishes Kirsch’s poetry volumes from her later journals. If one takes a closer look at Kirsch’s conception of her *journal* texts, however, these texts seem to work on very different terms than the writing of a conventional diary and its retroactive “poeticization.” Her journals are not merely a gradual “reworking” [*Überarbeitung*] of casual autobiographic notes, and they are not merely legitimized as literary works through the retroactive act of publishing.

Kirsch’s *journals*, however, were edited to be literary works from the start. Kirsch turned her focus away from poetry in the late 1980s. From this time on, her journals became the primary vehicle for the author’s literary production. Considering the commonalities between the writing found in her earlier poetry and later journals, Kirsch’s idea of a journal is a mode of writing concerned with outer matters rather than the 19th-century idea of a *journal intime*. In this way, I argue, Kirsch’s practice of *journal* writing can be seen as a continuation of her lyrical works,

²²⁰ Sarah Kirsch, *Irrstern, Gesammelte Prosa*, 147-210.

²²¹ Hans Wagener characterizes Kirsch’s *journals* as “poetische Überarbeitung von Tagebuchaufzeichnungen,” Hans Wagener, *Sarah Kirsch* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1989), 47.

since both feature a mode of writing with a shared sense of angle – or *focalization*. On the one hand, this approach marks a departure from her earlier writings (i.e., her “love and nature poems”)²²² where a prevailing interest in subjectivity and self-expression can still be observed. On the other hand, this approach is consistent with the “angle of view” [*Blickwinkel*] present in these texts via the remarkably individualized focalization of “In Summer.” The “object-oriented” focus on “terrene realities” can be captured there as the “tender squinting” that also renders the single entries of *Floating Bog* a text or *Gebilde*. Like “In Summer,” these entries are constructs that resemble “structures with terrene” or “mundane dimensions.” Nonetheless, the structures still account for the presence of an individual being, as the parenthesis “even if mine” [*wenn auch meine*] indicates.

II.

The uneventful description of another, nearly plotless set of summer months features at the center of Kirsch’s 1980 volume *La Pagerie*,²²³ a collection of 54 prose miniatures ranging from one sentence or paragraph to little more than a page at most. Like the diegesis of “In Summer,” the setting of this volume is located on top of several borderlines, the first of which is a spatiotemporal one. Reading “in the dust-papers of the carts trundling by” or locating the different wind streams blowing into the plains of Southern France,²²⁴ the personnel of this

²²² Volckmann, *Zeit der Kirschen*, 112.

²²³ Sarah Kirsch, *La Pagerie, Gesammelte Prosa*, 89-145.

²²⁴ “Liest in den Zeitungen des Staubs vorüberrollender Wagen,” Kirsch, *La Pagerie*, 105, 98.

summer in Provence oscillate in their focus on the surrounding land on the one hand, and a sense of distance that transports them time and again beyond the latter's limits on the other. While the world surrounding their spatiotemporal enclave is always at the horizon, this enclave is firmly grounded in the sense of uneventfulness that surrounds the titular manor house or *Pagerie*. In terms of mobility, like the individual in "In Summer," the handful of inhabitants of this account ultimately all appear to be caught between stasis and movement. The eventfulness and the faraway in the text remain constant narrative possibilities. When the narrator and the other temporary inhabitants of this house "talk about the world" in the evenings,²²⁵ or are described to be conjuring up "ornamental telegram greetings" [*Schmucktelegramme*]²²⁶ for their friends at home, these operations are anchored in the house as the fixed center or hub that grounds all these explorations into the distant: "I like to be in strange houses," as one of the entries from the start of the volume locates this setting, "if over many years they have taken on a character of their own [*ein Wesen*], trees lining up if in front of the windows, crickets, and cicadas chirping."²²⁷

Secondly, the status of *La Pagerie* as a text in the larger context of Kirsch's oeuvre resembles an in-between as well. In its interest in temporal and spatial confines, the volume serves as a connecting joint between Kirsch's poetry from the 1970s on the one hand, and what scholarship characterizes as her later "prose project"²²⁸ on the other, which Kirsch began around the time of her relocation from East Berlin to a permanent address in the Northern German

²²⁵ "Abends reden wir über die Welt," Kirsch, *La Pagerie*, 102.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ "Ich bin gern in fremden Häusern[, ...] wenn sie nur in langer Zeit ein Wesen angenommen haben [und v]or den Zimmern Bäume sich aufreihn, Grillen und Zikaden schrein." Kirsch, *La Pagerie*, 97.

²²⁸ Goedele Proesman, *Viel Spreu wenig Weizen*, 21.

periphery. Both chronologically and regarding form, within Kirsch's oeuvre, the volume can be located somewhere between both phases, concretely between the poetry collection *Tailwind* and the prose text *Wandering Star*, the author's first volume of "journal"²²⁹ prose published in 1986. A collection of short prose miniatures, *La Pagerie* shows continuities with both volumes despite the various formal differences. Most of them start with "in the evening," "after the storm," or a particular date, and the 54 entries read like the sheets of a calendar that documents the length of this stay. While these single entries do not yet resemble the dated autobiographical prose entries from almost every day of a given year that make up the majority of Kirsch's late work,²³⁰ they share the latter's temporal embeddedness as well as the interest in seasons and dates characteristic of the poems of the 1976 volume, such as "In Summer."

While the laconic two-word-title of "In Summer" echoes several texts from *Tailwind* that feature either a particular month, day, or date in their title, the dates of the calendar in *La Pagerie* seem to be a source of obscurity and ambivalence rather than a means of anchoring the setting in a clear seasonal framework. This ambiguous relation to the calendar resembles a third borderline dissecting the volume. At the very end of the text, the description of a single calendar sheet spotted in the old mansion's kitchen showcases the spatiotemporal ambivalence at the core of this setting, reading in French: "Vendredi / 13 / juillet," followed by a single line: "After that

²²⁹ For Kirsch, the sole publication of poetry (volumes) in the early 1980s gradually gave way to what strikes as entire collections of largely autobiographical prose texts. In particular, the idea of 'journal' gained an important role in this oeuvre, as a designation in subtitles as well as an intratextual term for the author to refer to such works commonly perceived under the practice of daily writing.

²³⁰ Starting in 1994 with *Das simple Leben* and continuing with Kirsch's uninterrupted 'coverage' of the early 2000s, published in the volumes *Krähengeschwätz* (2010), *Märzveilchen* (2012), and *Juninovember* (2014). Sarah Kirsch, *Das simple Leben: Prosaminiaturen und Gedichte, Werke in fünf Bänden*. Ed. Franz-Heinrich Hackel. Vol 5. (=Prosa 2) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1999), 217-302. Sarah Kirsch, *Krähengeschwätz* (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2010). Sarah Kirsch, *Märzveilchen* (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2012). Sarah Kirsch, *Juninovember* (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2014).

nobody had bothered to tear away any more sheets.”²³¹ This last entry vaguely situates the narrated time of the volume somewhere after July 13, 1979. More importantly, however, the calendar sheets that have not been torn off after this date also indicate this narrated time as a realm beyond the datable, since the loosely narrated sequence of days at the center of this volume chronologically must be located somewhere after this date, as if the diligent attention to the calendar around the time the text sets in has given way to the writing of the pages that resulted in these miniatures as a different form of calendar sheets.

Lastly, the text’s strangely deindividualized personnel resembles a fourth way *La Pagerie* can be read as a text that virtually hovers at the border. Like the featureless *focalizers* in Kirsch’s earlier poetry, the narrator and her companions in the 1980 volume lack any individual character traits or names that would allow us to distinguish between them as the single protagonists of this account. Instead, they provide the backdrop for repeated descriptions of the strangely ephemeral setting and its boundaries that feature the volume’s primary focus. However, like the spatio-temporal coordinates of this stay, the manor house and the surrounding plains, like their temporary inhabitants, remain vague and somewhere at the semi-fictional fringe. As the spatial and temporal coordinates of this summer account cannot be precisely located, it is impossible to identify this text either in a purely autobiographical or in a strictly fictional realm, adding to the volume’s hybrid status in terms of form, time, and space.

While Kirsch’s earlier poetry is similarly engrossed with dates and semi-fictional settings, starting with volumes like *La Pagerie*, this focus on thresholds or divides becomes the very content of her writing. In its specific focus on writing the scene, in particular Kirsch’s engagement of calendar dates and locations from the 1980s on, works across genre borders and,

²³¹ Kirsch, *La Pagerie*, 142.

in fact, deliberately and quite productively obfuscates them.²³² While this tendency is visible as early as in the poetry volume *Kite Flying*, this 1979 follow-up collection to *Tailwind* leaves the distinction between prose and poetry still intact. Closing off the arc of one year, the poem “End of the Year” [“*Jahresende*”] as the penultimate text of Kirsch’s 1996 collection *Bottomless* [*Bodenlos*] is a first indicator of a visible disintegration of genres in the author’s work. Instead, what emerges is writing that focalizes liminal setting and fuses calendar and poetry into a calendrical writing mode. In *Swans’ Love* [*Schwanenliebe*], Kirsch’s final collection of poetry published in 2001, this calendar and poetry merger is completed. The volume features a total of 240 poems that rarely exceed a six-line structure. Mostly untitled, these texts describe what appears to be one year in the poet’s life, starting with “On March 20 around noon.”²³³ In turn, the 2007 volume of journal prose *Cat in the Rain* [*Regenkatze*, 2007] resembles what the subtitle designates to be a “lyrical diary” [*lyrisches Tagebuch*] and by inverting the relation between poetry and prose finalizes this transition from calendric (lyrical) poetry to lyrical calendar entries.

With her poems gradually transitioning to longer block-texts and, from the early 2000s on, giving way to the sole publication of *journal* prose,²³⁴ I suggest that Kirsch’s poetry volumes since the late 1970s in their focus on dates effectively morphed into *journals* themselves.²³⁵ This

²³² A formal analysis of work’s published by Kirsch since the 1980s proves this point: the poems over the course of time morphed into longer block-texts, giving way to entire collections of journal-like prose texts, and thus more and more approximated her journals themselves.

²³³ “Am 20. März gegen Mittag,” Kirsch, *Schwanenliebe: Zeilen und Wunder* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 5

²³⁴ Sarah Kirsch, *Regenkatze* (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2007).

²³⁵ “Jahresende,” the penultimate poem of the 1996 collection *Bodenlos* is titled, starting off with a very mundane weather-related observation “Föhn dreht den / See um.” The follow-up volume, *Schwanenliebe*, Kirsch’s final

can be linked directly to these texts' focus on borders and thresholds and their turn to Kirsch's daily life as their setting. Merely a fantasy, or at best a temporary reality in the earlier poems and prose texts, from 1983 on the idea of a permanent abode at the periphery became Kirsch's daily reality, establishing as a writing scene major parts of the "terrene realit[ies]" that her *journal* writing focalizes. I suggest that the disintegration of genres in Kirsch's writing in favor of *journal* as a distinctly liminal mode of writing corresponds to these developments in the author's life at the time. Kirsch's writing of the 1970s, as I have argued in part one of this chapter, can be characterized by a certain degree of focalization or angle, a particular vision on the scene that emphasizes the writer's relation to the things described rather than moving the writing individual themselves into the spotlight of the text. In her late work, Kirsch's various autobiographically shaped individuals similarly emerge as *focalizers*, mirrors, or reflectors of a scene that is increasingly characterized by an assortment of borders. In the second part of this chapter, I will show how, in an inversion of typical diaristic writing,²³⁶ this scene does not resemble the backdrop for an exploration of Kirsch as a writer of seemingly diaristic prose, but rather that this scene emerges as the main focus of writing that is not only located between different calendrical and geographical fault lines but is itself distinctly liminal.

collection of poetry published in 2001, features a total of 240 poems that rarely exceed a six-line structure, remain mostly untitled and describe what appears to be the course of one year in the poet's life.

²³⁶ In Albert Gräser's definition of the "literary diary as a form of art," the world resembles a "backdrop [for the] main concern of a self-referred, subjective performance." Albert Gräser, *Das literarische Tagebuch: Studien über Elemente des Tagebuchs als Kunstform* (Saarbrücken: West-Ost Verlag, 1955), 122.

2.6 Putting a Pen on the Pulse of Time

“From here it is 50 km to the one and 50 km to the other sea,” one of *Wandering Star’s* first entries, Kirsch’s second prose journal begins. Exploring her Northern land strip’s proglacial and present-day sediments and its embeddedness in the nearby cartography, the short 66-page text resembles Kirsch’s first attempt to localize in writing the new surroundings at the Holstein periphery. Zeroing in on the wetlands of the river Eider as the center point and scene of this new writing universe, this setting is bordered by the Baltic seacoast on the one, and the North Sea shoreline on the other side of the map, as well as battered by the various storms, weather fronts, and floods that originated in these waters: “When the storm stays away between two beats miscellaneous seagulls overfly the land and later bring what their name connotes.”²³⁷

Floating Bog, the 1991 follow-up collection, takes up this principle but puts less emphasis on poetically transforming and abstracting the author’s daily observations from their autobiographical points of departure. The liminality of the setting is a ubiquitous topic in both texts, reflected, for instance, in a multitude of borders, fringes, and partitions that “crisscross” the land in “ditches like a patchwork quilt” [*Flickendecke*] or “dissect the light grey air”²³⁸ above it. The setting’s sense of in-betweenness is further reflected in both volumes’ temporal structures. While the short one-to-three-page entries each span more or less one day, they do not yet feature indications of a specific date or place as will become characteristic of almost all of Kirsch’s subsequent volumes. Subsuming the daily one-to-two-page prose under a title that thematically furnishes each entry’s topic with a motto, throughout both volumes, an almost calendar-like

²³⁷ “Von hier aus sind es 50 km zum einen und 50 km zum anderen Meer.” Kirsch, *Irrstern*, 151.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

structure emerges that orbits both the high days of the gardening year as well as those of the year in the news, all anchored in the author's life in an old schoolhouse at the Northern German periphery that Kirsch had turned into a farm.

In contrast to *La Pagerie*, however, the writing in *Wandering Star* and *Floating Bog* is datable, in the sense that their respective narrative courses are mainly measured by several global events that figure prominently in the entries from the respective dates. Read as a whole, the entries in both volumes form one long log that chronologically spans a more or less specified period. Chronicling a two-year period, Kirsch in *Floating Bog* informs us about the mass flight of GDR citizens via the Austria-Hungarian border in August 1989, the earthquake in Spitak, Armenia, in 1988, and what in the text is referred to as the “third summer” after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. These events indicate that the span of this *journal* starts somewhere in early 1988 and ends in January 1990. While *Wandering Star*'s chronology also spans about a two-year arc, this period remains vague and only rarely datable. *Floating Bog*, in contrast, marks concrete events such as the Iranian airstrikes on Israel in January 1990 and the start of the Latvian independence movement prominently in its timeline. With the year 1989 constituting the most significant portion of the text, the onset of the first Gulf War in January 1990, anticipated in the volume's very last sentence, “it's getting dark – time for war,”²³⁹ thus marks a very natural bookend to two years of global crises and shocks. This regimen of the media's “news” calendar in the volume is supplemented by an array of calendrical thresholds that order the year, such as New Year's Eve 1988 and 1989.

What at first glance seems like a very straightforward case of autopoietic life writing in both volumes emerges first and foremost as a distinctly temporal problem, as the 1991 volume's

²³⁹ Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 393.

chronological arc suggests. Starting in later December with the trimming of the last roses, the narrator, relates how she and her unnamed companion right at the start of the book “slowly learn to read the crows’ writing [*die Krähenschrift lesen*]” in the solid blankets of January snow.²⁴⁰ This idea to read or decipher a supposedly already existing writing in nature is a leitmotif in both volumes. Both news cycle and calendar as temporal skeletons are constantly contrasted or put in conversation with an array of markers that embed these timelines in the much more palpable indicators of the course of a year that often emerges unnoticed through seasons in the garden. The cutting down of the last roses (316), for instance, the start of the rain-and-mud season (“Wir leben in Matschedonien,” 325), and the observation of a series of local tornadoes in late 1989 (381, 386) all point towards the existence of a potentially different timeline or regimen that runs underneath the news cycle and, through thorough attention in writing, time and again can be made visible.

A series of particularly striking entries from *The Simple Life* [*Das simple Leben*, 1994],²⁴¹ the 1994 follow-up to *Floating Bog*, showcases this interplay between dominant structure and underlying timelines, where over long periods the different temporal regimens coexist in parallel and now and again interfere and collapse. Chronicling the years of 1990 and 1991, *The Simple Life* is even closer to the ever-present news calendar than its two predecessors, replacing their poetic and at times ambiguous abstractions of the day-to-day events around the house with more and more concrete reports of the actual everyday occurrences and things seen on TV. Longer stretches of this book are concerned with the First Gulf War’s unfolding events, which Kirsch followed excessively for two weeks in 1990 via radio and TV. While in *Floating Bog*, the

²⁴⁰ Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 316.

²⁴¹ Sarah Kirsch, *Das simple Leben: Prosaminiaturen und Gedichte* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1994).

parallel existence of gardening or agricultural year and the year in the news leads to occasional interferences but never collapses, starting with *The Simple Life*, this construct of parallel regimens at several points culminates, for instance when Kirsch's meticulous reports of the daily developments in the hijacking of Flight TWA 847 in June 1985 are wrapped up all of a sudden with phrases that indicate a seemingly effortless switching between both global and local realities: "Wir aber machen Heu" – "But we are making hay."²⁴²

The sense of in-betweenness at the core of the setting even extends to the very character of Kirsch's writing at this time, often oscillating in a single sentence between loose and casual daily prose on the one hand and dense, intense poetic turns and puns on the other. Placing the dawning war's political protagonists, like "Bush," side by side with the ones of her daily home life, such as her cat with the equally monosyllabic name "Schott," Kirsch's writing suggests that the various actors from different spheres in her *journal* texts ultimately all inhabit one and the same cosmos. The direct and seamless juxtaposition in writing of cat and commander-in-chief suggests that the breaking news of the start of the Gulf War is as important as the report from Kirsch's garden in Northern Germany, where the hay season has begun. Adding to the regular calendar structure, Kirsch, time and again, resorts to such different, non-calendrical thresholds that over the year expand and interact with the current date.

This idea of time – or the telling of its elapsing in different forms in everyday life – emerges as the main topic between all three volumes' writing. In its attention to the decidedly "terrene" realities that resemble its content, writing in these volumes emerges as a way to make palpable the passing of time between different calendrical regimens. The very first entry of

²⁴² Kirsch, *Krähengeschwätz*, 35.

Floating Bog problematizes this process as well as the role Kirsch's seemingly autobiographic presence in these texts might play in it:

Already received a lot of time, used or squandered sometimes more quickly, sometimes less hurriedly. [...] My valiant heart beats like a clock and comes onwards and backwards asunder [*geht vorwärts und rückwärts kapores*].²⁴³

Titled "Time Eater" [*Zeitfresserin*], the entry refers both to the "clock" or "die Uhr" as a (feminine) noun back to the (female) first-person narrator as the chronometer's human embodiment in this volume. The idea of a temporal 'bank account' that through living one's life can be spent, saved, or "devoured" translates directly into Kirsch's approach to writing. Like the author's heartbeat, this writing is both in line with the beat of the news and the 'beat' of the garden and the agricultural year. What emerges ultimately is the beat of time itself as the supposedly strong yet inaudible heartbeat that underlies all the beats. By providing a rhythm in itself, *journal* as the beat of this writing ultimately serves as a means to make this invisible pulse of time both visible and audible. Like a clock, the temporal extent of writing for Kirsch thus translates, verbalizes, or helps to conceptualize time into a steady rhythm which, in its "figures and arches and swings," attaches written ornaments to the otherwise invisible passage of time, drawing attention to a process of 'synthesis' which sociologist Norbert Elias suggested was characteristic of the human perception of time. Arguing against Newton's idea of an absolute time, Elias linked the existence of time to the realm of experience, arguing that time as a

²⁴³ "Habe viel Zeit schon erhalten, mal schneller mal geruhsamer genützt oder vergeudet. [...] Mein tapferes Herz schlägt wie eine Uhr und geht vorwärts und rückwärts kapores Kirsch," *Schwingrasen*, 315.

symbolic category only comes into existence by establishing connections between repeated sequences of events that eventually lead to metaphors of time.²⁴⁴

2.7. In Between Times, Between Poetry and Prose

In his 1984 study *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricœur reframed the century-old question of the existence of an “intelligible order in the universe” as a distinctly temporal problem. Going back to Aristotle and Augustine of Hippo, Ricœur historically contrasts ideas of a blind material universe indifferent to humankind with ideas of a human consciousness that in itself creates time. By sketching out the paradoxical coexistence of a temporality the movement of the heavenly bodies can measure, for instance, and an understanding of temporality that is internal to human consciousnesses, Ricœur in his book describes the paradox of a cosmological time or “time of the world” on the one hand, and a phenomenological time or “time of the soul” on the other hand. In a third step, however, Ricœur reconciles both seemingly opposing perceptions of time by introducing his original invention of *narrative* as a “third time” that allows for the reflection of the interdependence of both layers of temporal perceptions and also for the exploration of alternative times through the narrative’s temporal complexity.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Norbert Elias, *Über die Zeit. Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie II* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), 9, 35.

²⁴⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Vol. 3*. Transl. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 12-59 a. 104-109.

Understanding narrative as the act of imitating an action, Ricœur, in his theory, turns to mimesis and, in particular, to life writing.²⁴⁶ Kirsch's volumes, at first glance, appear like very straightforward cases of life writing. The chronological arc of *Floating Bog* and the different timelines and calendars that intersect in it suggest that the author's writing of the peripheral scene is a temporal and phenomenological problem first. Kirsch's writing itself is an act of mediating between different coexisting and competing spatiotemporal orders. Throughout this volume, the idea of writing as consumption or "devouring" of time is firmly embedded in a daily routine that provides plenty of opportunities to verbalize this intersection. Kirsch's writing in this way ultimately emerges as a third or "narrative" space that not only captures the setting's in-betweenness. As an effort to write nature, this writing in itself is in-between and, I argue, creates in-betweenness. One of the first entries from the volume *Floating Bog* suggests this process by way of depicting a moment of variation in the author's everyday morning routine:

How curious this is: I got up and since it was still almost full moon I could see everything! outside! in its entirety. The lowlands the dark green dike and the donkey on it, just as the lights were switched on inside the house he looked at me. Now at an already more godly hour eight o'clock in the morning everything is lying there in blackness and it is simply just gloomy like in the often quoted back of beyond [*am Arsche des Bären*]. What four hours ago still appeared like poesy [*sich wie Poesie ausnahm*] it gave way to foul prose [*stinkender Prosa*]. Oh dear! Me however I am faithfully keeping my journal here. Preferably very early in the morning hours, in the no-longer and not-yet.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 3, 127-132.

²⁴⁷ "Wie merkwürdig das ist: ich stand auf und da fast Vollmond noch herrschte konnte ich alles! draußen! vollständig sehen. Das Tiefland den dunkelgrünen Deich und den Esel darauf, gleich als im Haus das Licht angemacht wurde sah er mich an. Jetzt zu einer schon christlichen Zeit acht Uhr morgens liegt alles schwarz da und es ist einfach finster wie im zitierten Arsche des Bären. Was vor vier Stunden wie Poesie doch sich ausnahm es ist stinkender Prosa gewichen. Eu Gott! Ich aber führe mein Journal hier getreulich. Am liebsten sehr früh in der Frühe, im Nichtmehr und Nochnicht," Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 317.

Titled “One and the Other” [*Das eine und das andere*], the passage set in the blue hour showcases the volume’s sense of in-betweenness on several levels. Writing here is characterized as a visual process, describing the slow unfolding of a morning via what presents itself to the writer from her window. All of this Kirsch can see on a stage that is framed by the dike in the distance as a proscenium and lit up by the full moon first and by her house’s electric light later. In all of this, the writer is an almost passive entity. The relationship between gaze and observer at one point is even inverted. At the moments the transition from lunar to electric light happens, the moon is described to be “looking” at the writer.

While reading like a blueprint for most entries in this volume that stage this liminality, the passage also casually also addresses the volume’s liminal status in terms of genre. Written from the “8 o’clock” retrospect of the later morning hours, the slow unfolding of the start of this day in and around the house marks writing as a temporal progression that in its unfolding touches on, and at the same time departs from, poetry and prose as the two genre cornerstones of these texts. This transitory process reminds one of the stages of Kirsch’s multilevel writing process, where, as it is suggested, the retroactive writing down of that which was perceived is staged as a process of deterioration, where original perception (“poetry”) in writing it down gives way to “foul prose.” In a third, later step, Kirsch’s process is even expanded by the steps of editing, selecting, and putting together the final volumes as they appear in print, some of which appear years or even decades after the years they span.²⁴⁸ This last step is often thematized in the volumes themselves when Kirsch, for instance, weaves in her reflections on putting the final touches on a *journal* from earlier years over several weeks into her daily accounts.

²⁴⁸ Where texts like *Schwingrasen* or *Sommehütchen* are published within two to four years after the period they chronicle, a decade elapsed between the writing and (posthumous) publication of volumes like *Krähengeschwätz* (1985-1987 and 2010), *Märzveilchen* (2001/2002 and 2012), and *Juninovember* (2002/2003 and 2014), respectively.

In its seemingly unfiltered, outwardly effortless but direct parlendo, this transitory writing process as the “whooshing” [*Rauschen*] of a figurative semantic “waterfall” also resembles what Kirsch in the programmatic entry from *Floating Bog* quoted above put in metaphoric proximity to the “flowing” or “streaming” of a river’s current.²⁴⁹ This streaming, fluctuating quality of her writing, I argue, can be directly applied to these texts’ conception of genres, which emerges as a fluid and ever-changing back and forth between poetry, prose, and seemingly diaristic techniques, all contained in the *journal* as a hybrid, fluctuating third form. *Journal* thus emerges as something that ultimately departs from questions of genre altogether and instead must be defined with regards to a mode of writing. Located through two substantivized adverbs, the “Not-Anymore” and the “Not-Yet” spaces of “the early morning hours,” the *journal* is that which originates in the transition from “poesy” to “prose,” both of which are contained by the bracket of a retrospectively recording observer who, “however,” hovers in between both states by “faithfully keeping [this] journal.”

Hovering between prose and poetry, this genre in-betweenness connects to the experience of different diegetic orders that serve as indicators of time. This is a central and constant concern in Kirsch’s work from as early as the mid-1970s. “In Summer,” for instance, stages its diegetic in-betweenness as a conflict of two competing and conflicting orders as an interplay between descriptiveness and narrative. In the poem’s third stanza, the newspaper poses a threat to what in stanzas one and two appeared as an exclusively *descriptive* chain of descriptions, anticipating the serene and bucolic setting’s potential termination – “If you don’t hold a newspaper around here / The world is in order.”

²⁴⁹ Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 342.

In the poem, this narrative tension between a prosaic, busy outside world in motion and a poetic, static state of affairs in the individual's surroundings is ultimately presupposed by the temporary absence of narrative, symbolized diegetically by the hustle and bustle in the newspaper. This duality of orders indicates the existence of different temporalities in the poem's diegesis. The poem's subjectively experienced time ultimately only emerges through an exercise in phenomenology, reflected by and indicated via the object world. The second sense of supra-individual temporality is present in the cyclic nature of the recurrent fixtures that embed this phenomenology, such as the larger framework of agricultural and cosmic calendars, as well as in the absent newspaper that stands in for a plethora of potential events and dates that exist as if they were part of a blind material universe that exists independently from this observer.

This dichotomy of orders is reflected in the poem's conception of space too. Only through the local denominator "here," the two-line caveat via the news deictically refers to the poem's setting as the flip side of a nomic binary that also encompasses a potential "there," again represented by the absent newspaper. This understanding of space is visible even in the poem's structural organization. Thwarting an array of stabilizing efforts made by the first and second mostly paratactic stanzas, the caveat in the hypotactic third stanza by highlighting narrative potential supports and upholds the poem's sense of description and order and at the same time undermines it.

In Kirsch's *journal* volumes from the 1980s on, time, too, is experienced by way of things, events, or thresholds that indicate the passage of time over the year. Time for the writing individual in these volumes is perceived only through nearby objects and circumstance, either paired with, threatened, or set in opposition with the cosmological, objective, impersonal ways of telling time: either the cosmos or the agricultural realm and their respective calendars, or in the

newspaper or the media in general and their particular “news” calendar. The title of Kirsch’s first collection, *Wandering Star*, an old German word for comet or planet,²⁵⁰ evokes the planetary cycles of “In Summer” and references an array of historical sightings of comets. The comet of 1811, for instance, features prominently in early 19th-century literature,²⁵¹ such as in Johann Peter Hebel’s calendar stories.²⁵² In these stories, Hebel’s alter ego, the Rheinische Hausfreund, informs the local village community about blazing comets in the sky and earthquakes that rock the known world, using the example of the local church tower to explain that the earth is round and not flat. In their calendrical structure, Hebel calendars as *journal* texts fuse chronicle and newspaper in a way characteristic of diaristic writing at the time.²⁵³

The world-encompassing events perceived in the news, I argue, in Kirsch’s texts have a function similar to the 1811 comet sighting and other natural phenomena in Hebel’s *journal* texts. Even in “In Summer,” the stars falling in August, the horns in September announce the hunt, and the stories in the absent newspaper fuse into one sense of a time of the world from the observer’s perspective. The same happens in the later *journal* volumes. Starting with *Wandering Star*, these volumes themselves turned into one steady report on time or “a chronicle,” as the subtitle of the 1988 successor *Allerlei-Rauh* suggests. Considering the several layers of time

²⁵⁰ Johann Christoph Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart* (Vienna: Bauer, 1811), 1397f.

²⁵¹ The comet of 1811, for instance, makes a cameo appearance in the writings of Jules Verne, Leo Tolstoy, and Jean Paul.

²⁵² “Ohne Zweifel wird der geneigte Leser manchmal auch noch an den schönen Kometstern denken, der im Spätjahr 1811 den Himmel geziert hat, und es gern sehen, daß ihn der Hausfreund noch einmal will aufgehen lassen im Kalender.“ Johann Peter Hebel, “Der Komet von 1811,” *Schatzkästlein des Rheinischen Hausfreunds* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006), 184.

²⁵³ Rüdiger Görner, *Das Tagebuch* (München/Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1986), 19.

throughout one year, indicated by the medial regimen, the agricultural calendar, or the gardening year, I argue that writing in volumes like *Floating Bog* and *The Simple Life* can be read like *journal* between senses of the term, which Rüdiger Görner, concerning texts like Hebel's calendars, points out to be both the diary and the newspaper. Both terms, Görner argues, share an orientation at the calendrical structure. As such, Kirsch's *journal* writing in itself can be read as temporal patchwork calendar, drawing from different sources as a way of ordering and structuring time in writing.

Görner points out that, using the designation 'journal' instead of 'diary,' references not only both the diary and the newspaper as the original meanings of the term but also evokes an idea of 'diary' that hovers in "close connection" to the newspaper as a daily, calendric chronicle of events.²⁵⁴ In the first part of this chapter, I have qualified the strange and deindividualized identity of the central observer in Kirsch's 1975 poem as a form of focalization, solely a reflector, mirror, or thin lens solely regarding the object being reflected. This focalization, I argued, ultimately opposes the idea of subjective diaristic writing and puts this instead on writing itself. Relating from a particular "angle" or focalization the essential news of the year, Kirsch's *journal* volumes of the 1980s and 1990s present themselves as alternative newspapers or *journals*, i.e., as collections of texts which, in their nature as chronicles and with regards to what status they assign which kinds of events, grapple with the news-cycle as the emerging dominant structure of everyday life in the latter half of the 20th century.²⁵⁵ As a daily recorder or the clock of a year, writing in these volumes, whether it features indications of dates or months or not,

²⁵⁴ Görner highlights the journal's position between "Diarium und Journalismus." Görner, *Das Tagebuch*, 19.

²⁵⁵ As stated, for instance, by Helga Nowotny and others in contemporary time sociology in the 1980s. Helga Nowotny, *Eigenzeit: Entstehung und Strukturierung eines Zeitgefühls* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989). Niklas Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995).

verbalizes in writing what Kirsch in *Floating Bog* characterized as the “consumption” of time via various calendars and their respective imprints on the *journal* pages, often oscillating between here and there, now and then, plot and stasis, and ultimately between poetry and prose even within the course of a single entry or day.

2.8 The Weather at the Other Shore

Throughout *The Simple Life*, writing between spatial and temporal orders is connected to media ubiquity that serve as a gateway into these orders. In much detail, the 98-page volume follows the course of the first Persian Gulf War as seen live on TV and heard on the radio. This report goes on over several pages, with the various newscasts in the afternoons and evenings taking up larger and larger portions of the text. “In the mornings I am afraid to turn on the radio,” Kirsch expresses her reservations to tune in about halfway through this episode, having witnessed several days’ worth of political escalation. Kirsch closes the very same passage with a take on the view outside her living room window that seemingly contrasts the upsetting developments unfolding in the news: “A gigantic twin set of rainbows above the Eyder. [...] Air-theater, the superior television.”²⁵⁶ In the paragraphs following this one, this window continues to take on an important role, serving as a different kind of gateway for the writer and connecting her to the various reservoirs of information beyond the news available around the countryside abode. The orders of information, however, ultimately blend into one when Kirsch at the end of the episode

²⁵⁶ “Ich fürchte mich morgens das Radio einzuschalten [...]. Ein gigantischer doppelter Regenbogen über der Eyder. [...] Luft-Theater, das bessere Fensehn,” Kirsch, *Das simple Leben*, 452.

counts the “dark beachless island” of Britain among “these rainbows” outside her house, where “no matter out of which window you look and we have one of them in all eight cardinal directions [*Himmelsrichtungen*] one sees the island’s deep dark clouds [...]. The British Sea.”²⁵⁷

The different radios and TVs in Kirsch’s home here are juxtaposed with the ‘actual’ windows leading out to the landscape surrounding the writer. A total of eight, the four cardinal directions of the compass are supplemented by another set of four that, as the passage implies, can be looked at only through the figurative windows resembled by the media. However, the “British Sea” and the corresponding island from the ‘actual’ windows in Kirsch’s Northern German home cannot be seen, especially not when clouded by “deep dark clouds” as is implied in this particular entry. This suggests that this island’s “deep dark clouds” are the dark metaphorical clouds surrounding the British government’s decision to join the Western coalition’s war efforts in Iraq and Kuwait. The views from the actual window and the information received from the metaphorical window of the media here fuse into one image. The existing airspace over the writer’s house is the “air theater” where both views meet, expanded by tv screens and radios as equal means of access, however, to different, more distant airborne or seaborne “theaters” that emerge as the views from other, metaphorical windows.

Situated between these different views, Kirsch’s writing focuses on different and sometimes conflicting temporalities, which she puts in conversation with each other. In a passage titled “Marine Weather Forecast” [“*Seewetterbericht*”], Kirsch in *Floating Bog* reverses the above metaphor. She suggests that the window is a “sort of TV screen,” describing how her

²⁵⁷ “Die düstere strandlose Insel ist auch eine der Regenbögen um diese Jahreszeit jetzt. Aus welchem Fenster man blickt und wir haben solche in alles acht Himmelsrichtungen sieht man des Eilands tiefdunkle Wolken [...]. Die Britannische See,” Kirsch, *Das simple Leben*, 452.

sense of time is structured by the ability to see or hear through the many metaphorical and actual windows that extend her writing scene into faraway land- or mediascapes:

Most days I get up early enough for my favorite radio station to still be silent. Outside in winter, I often catch sight of staggered light in the cowsheds and always at the same time a speck of light in the lower right quadrant of the righthand window, which slowly and in a searching-motion moves to the middle left quadrant of the left window before it suddenly disappears. In summer, I overlook cows and sheep in different paddocks and on the dike, that is unless they are concealed by a fog. Later, when the coffee machine has already done its work, I listen to the marine weather forecast with half an ear. A rewarding activity for a coast dweller. [...] Almost at the end of the wind, temperature, and air pressure data, my movie theater of the mind reels into strong motion: Mariehamn I hear, West four, fog, one degree Celsius, one thousand and nine hectopascal.²⁵⁸

Detailing her daily morning routine, Kirsch's gaze as a kind of *tele*-vision is initiated by the events in her immediate vicinity. The views at the dike and the weather data from the Swedish island supplement one another over one morning and ultimately blend into one. Highlighted by the passage's focus on iterative actions, making coffee and tuning in to the marine weather forecast serve as quasi-ritualistic activities that trigger Kirsch's creative process, morphing into segues to different, alternative temporalities.

Mere sets of data at first, the daily indications of temperature, air pressure and wind intensity ultimately trigger a "movie theater of the mind" [*Kopf*kino] in the writer's head that transports her out of her local environment and into a different part of her scene of writing,

²⁵⁸ "Meistens stehe ich so früh auf, daß der von mir bevorzugte Radiosender noch schweigt. Draußen erblicke ich winters gestaffelte Kuhstalllichter und immer zur gleichen Zeit einen Lichtpunkt im unteren rechten Quadrat des rechten Fensters, der sich langsam und suchend wie auf einem Bildschirm in das mittlere linke Quadrat des linken Fensters bewegt bevor er dann plötzlich verloren geht. Im Sommer habe ich Kühe und Schafe auf verschiedenen Koppeln im Blick und auf dem Deich, sofern sie nicht ein Nebel verbirgt. Später, wenn die Kaffeemaschine schon gearbeitet hat, hör ich mit halbem Ohr einen Seewetterbericht. Für den Küstenbewohner ne lohnende Tätigkeit [...] Fast am Ende der Wind-, Temperatur- und Luftdruckangaben gerät mein Kino im Kopf unweigerlich in starke Bewegung: Mariehamn höre ich, West vier, Nebel, ein Grad, eintausendneun Hektopascal," Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 345.

which here extends to the capital of the Åland Islands. As a kind of ‘radiohead,’ the writer is reliably carried away by this weather data into an alternative life of an old lady who lives in the island town of Mariehamn. As an alter ego of the writer, this lady begins her existence in the writer’s “notebook” as space where Kirsch tunes in and out of this parallel existence while getting the latest weather updates:

Mornings came and went, the marine weather forecast placed her [the old lady] right under my nose. At her home, there was always something similar going on like at my place behind the dike. In February, I jotted down in my notebook with flying pen: my people except for the cats are still asleep. The marine weather forecast. Let’s see what’s going on in Mariehamn.²⁵⁹

Detailing how this preoccupation over time results in a fully-fledged second life, the entry suggests that this old lady, as a figment of Kirsch’s regular radio reception, eventually assumes the status of a companion for the writer, inhabiting the same world as the writer’s real-life companions – both “humans” as well as “cats.” By far the longest entry in the volume, the 5-page account thus indicates the writer to be a “coast dweller” on several levels. Applied to her writing, the coast becomes a symbol for the many borders that establish the circumference of her writing scene, both visible and invisible at the dike in the distance.

In his analysis of hybridity and creole post-colonial literature, cultural theorist Homi Bhabha develops the concept of liminality as a “third space,” as a “center of creativity where opposites and where new bends take place.”²⁶⁰ Bhabha’s reconfiguration of the idea of mere “in-between space” into a fluid liminal space where the single elements from each dimension interact

²⁵⁹ “Morgen kamen und gingen, der Seewetterbericht setzte sie mir vor die Nase. Immer war bei ihr etwas Ähnliches los wie hier hinterm Deich. Im Februar notierte ich mit fliegender Feder: meine Menschen schlafen noch bis auf die Katzen. Der Seewetterbericht. Wollen wir sehen, was in Mariehamn so vorgeht,” Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 347.

²⁶⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

shares with Ricœur the idea of a narrative's temporality as a "third time," the notion of the liminal space as one that creates something new rather than just puts the seeming opposites in juxtaposition. In their exploration of the "transformative power of in-between zones," Hein Viljoen and Chris van der Merve look at South African Literature, taking up Bhabha's concept and developing it into a poetics of hybridity, liminality, and boundaries that relays this question to the realms of identity.²⁶¹

Between the different and at times diverging temporalities that constitute a year, in Kirsch writing itself as a container for several different temporalities and narratives becomes what Bhabha defines as a liminal space, where the single, opposing elements from different orders interact and create something new rather than just being put in juxtaposition. The passage above outlines the potential Kirsch assigns to this act of writing in a "notebook." As a liminal activity, this writing results in a proper time different to the temporalities and orders framing it on either side. Describing the old lady "[wie] ich sie real und leibhaftig gesehen habe," the abstract weather data via the airwaves from Sweden morph into actual waves in the writer's imagination. What emerges in different forms throughout all volumes is an almost daily parallel existence from the weather reports connected to an imaginative potential that the political updates about the earthquakes, wars, and revolutions in the news reports lack and even hamper. Over several months, Kirsch in later volumes such as *The Simple Life*, follows up on her creation of the Swedish island existence.²⁶² She keeps up with the daily weather forecast for her various

²⁶¹ Hein Viljoen, Chris van der Merve: "A Poetics of Liminality and Hybridity," *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 1-26.

²⁶² "Jetzt wimmelt es von Tiefs und es bläst der Nordwest [...]. Höre den Seewetterbericht und bleibe in Mariehamn wiederum hängen. Sie haben stets etwas weniger Wind. Der Bobtail geht ohne Leine mit seiner Alten die Nørre Esplanadgatan entlang," Kirsch, *Das simple Leben*, 443.

summer domiciles in the past, such as Mariehamn in Sweden or different towns in England. Time and again, she compares them to the weather outside of her window and to the forecasts for her local area, as if she physically inhabited all of these spaces at the same time.

The opening lines of the poem “Window,” included in the same collection as “In Summer,” embeds this approach in a multilayered, scaffolded image that connects this liminality to Kirsch’s abundant use of nature metaphors: “Those many skies over / Very flat land!,” the first lines of this poem read, inducing a fully fleshed taxonomy of different types of information between local, meteorological, global, and cosmological actors: “In the first / The magpies fly, in the second // Overbearing clouds. / [...] In the fourth / I saw an aeroplane stand / From the fifth the star twinkled.” Panning from a micro- to a macroscopic level of perception, the single actors and kind of information they signify are attributed to single layers of the ether. However, as the “[d]ead butterflies on the floorboards”²⁶³ in the penultimate line indicate, this abundance of available information is ultimately dismissed, referring to the skyward expansion of the poetic reach – the magpies fly, but the “aeroplane” stands – back to the earthly position of the observer in her run-down house on the flat land.

This skyward taxonomy reflects an inversion of the typical romantic and poetic topoi that furnish the unknown distance with the idea of potential. A stark contrast to Mörike’s ode to the unknown distance – the “skies” [*die Lüfte*] that “do not have a house” – for Kirsch, the faraway is well known and explored daily. For Mörike and contemporaries, categories like ‘distance’ or ‘horizon’ were still connoted as vague and interchangeable with terms from the

²⁶³ Kirsch, *Rückenwind*, 53. Translation: 57. Sarah Kirsch, *Winter Music: Selected Poems*. Transl. by Margitt Leibert (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1994), 87.

romantics' extensive "lexis of wanderlust"²⁶⁴ – such as promise, dreams, transgression. For Kirsch, television, radio, or the newspapers actually (and pervasively) carried all the information that Mörike desires and projects on the clouds as a canvas.²⁶⁵ Heard on a daily basis, the media for Kirsch render the faraway nearby. Instead of expansion and wanderlust, information from afar interacts and fuses with her everyday life's local data to forge something new. Clouds and skies, typically romantic ambassadors of the unknown territories, still feature in her writing but appear as reversed, tautologic, and dysfunctional images, as in the 1975 poem.

2.9 Mediating Between Mouth and Hand

The liminal character of Kirsch's writing is reflected in the multitude of labels and genre indications she attaches to it, either in titles or subtitles. Labeled as poems, journals, chronicle, prose miniatures, "Image Diary" [*Bilder-Tagebuch*]²⁶⁶ or "Daily Fragments" [*Tagebruchstücke*],²⁶⁷ her volumes since the early 1980s ultimately defy traditional genre categories or attributes like prose. Neither "poetry" or "poesy" nor "foul prose," Kirsch in the entry above distances herself as a writer of *journal* texts from the "any old, invented figure of a commercial prose writer" [*x-beliebige ausgedachte Gestalt eines gewerbsmäßigen*

²⁶⁴ Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts*, 216.

²⁶⁵ Mörike writes roughly two decades before technologies like the railroad, or the first telegraphic messages resulted in an "annulment of the distance. Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts*, 259.

²⁶⁶ Sarah Kirsch, *Spreu. Bilder-Tagebuch, Werke in fünf Bänden*. Vol 5. (=Prosa 2), 181-216.

²⁶⁷ Sarah Kirsch, *Islandhoch: Tagebruchstücke* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2002).

Prosaschreibern].²⁶⁸ Instead, Kirsch's decade-long preoccupation with writing emerges as something in between these categories.

Often highlighted through adverbial phrases of contrast ("Ich aber," "Wir aber"), the writer as a "keeper of journals" ultimately appears like a mere afterthought to the setting. Semantically injected as a first-person pronoun following a comma and rejected by the following four-letter adverbial qualifier "aber," these injections suggest that the writing entity is but a hollow container that solely administers this writing. Clamped between "poetry" and "prose," their function is that of a mere keeper or caretaker of their *journal* like they appear as a daily caretaker of their scene. Between the liminal "Not-Anymore" and the "Not-Yet" spaces of "the early morning hours" emerges the *journal's* delicate balance between "poetry" and "foul prose," contained solely in writing, which in its semi-orality doubles down on this liminality. Instead of an individual writer, an indistinct writing individual functions as the container that holds together all these disparities and liminalities.

Reflected in her abundant use of nature metaphors, I argue that writing itself becomes the place of this liminality in Kirsch. In the passage about her cat Schott and the American commander-in-chief, Bush, Kirsch's semantic juxtaposition of both renders actors from arguably different worlds equal parts of the same space. As the scene of Kirsch's writing, this space in equal parts is ultimately constituted by the linguistic representation of the landscapes, house-scapes, and media-scapes that surround the writer.²⁶⁹ Oscillating between loose and casual daily

²⁶⁸ Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 349.

²⁶⁹ Arjun Appadurai in his 1990 essay *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*²⁶⁹ suggested to subsume the entirety of "images of the world created by [the] media" under the concept of "mediascapes." Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 35.

prose on the one hand and dense, intense poetic turns and puns on the other, writing thus emerges as a process of linguistic worldbuilding. Forming a space of linguistic interaction, Kirsch's distinctive use of spoken, dated, quaint, dialectal, and private language, as well as her penchant for extinct grammatical forms, words, and spelling variants in writing, uses language as raw material from different sources and origins and at times results in surprising combinations.

Through writing the scene, Kirsch assembles a daily reality or world in writing that is constituted by elements of language. The center of both that world and its linguistic derivate is the river Eider, phonetically echoing the idea of an "ether" from the passage above. Connecting both seacoasts between which the writer is located, this river's current parallels the air space over Kirsch's home and, with the birdlike actors that congregate above and around it, in itself becomes a "theater." Between Kirsch's volumes, this liminal space is not only resembled in this river but most of all in its semantic representation. Rendered the "Eyder," this river features as the fluctuating constant of Kirsch's liminal everyday writing scene.

An entry from the 2014 posthumous collection *Junenovember* suggests that ultimately this writing originates in nature itself. Dating from January 11, 2003, Kirsch on a "frosty day" continues her readings of Yasushi Inoue from the previous week. Her immersion in Japan's snowy mountain peaks in his texts is paralleled by the weather outside Kirsch's own front door. Jumping from the weather and a bird-filled sky in the morning in her surroundings to the goings-on at the bird feeder to the peculiarities of the Japanese society and back, the entry details Kirsch's day as a back-and-forth between several stations with which the reader is already familiar from the entries preceding this one:

I go to feed the poultry. Then at my laptop and later to the Japanese mountains. Oh how the hungry birds came! Today I found the lil' tree sparrows especially pretty and cozy and memorable for the mind/soul [*für die Säåle*]. [...] At the feeding station the pheasant

[*Fagiano*] with a great crow next to it. That's a marvelous image on the white sheet of paper the white snow.²⁷⁰

Over the winter months, the writer's daily visit to the bird feeder is a staple of most of these entries. Like Kirsch's various cats, the different birds that show up daily at this feeder in this volume almost take on the protagonists' status.

By way of detailing an everyday setting typical for Kirsch's *journal* volumes, the passage also addresses the question of what writing is. The "fagiano," Italian for pheasant, and the massive crow in this passage resemble an image printed on the "grand white sheet" that is the snow, a metaphor that identifies the fresh layer on the hoarfrost-covered ground as a blank piece of paper on which the birds as traces or imprints represent a (photographic or written) image. As a symbol of debauchery, grandeur, and luxuriousness, the pheasant reminds of the "arches figures swings" as which Kirsch described the abundant and opulent image quality of her writing. In the passage at the birdfeeder, however, this sense of writerly grandeur, expressed in the beautiful bird with the Italian name, is metaphorically contrasted with the simultaneous presence of the colossal crow whose chatter Kirsch suggested to be another origin of writing in her volume *Crow Chatter*.

The observation at the birdfeeder is expanded by a four-line poem that serves as a preface to this entry. In its almost Haiku-like brevity, the short text plays with the references to Japanese culture and literature in this entry and expands on the figure of 'snow' as the episode's central motive:

²⁷⁰ "Ich geh das Federvieh füttern. Dann an mein Laptop und später in die japanischen Berge. Ach wie die Fressvögel kamen! Die kleenen Feldsperlinge fand ich heute besonders hübsch und gemütlich und einprägsam für die Sääle. [...] An der Futterstelle der Fagiano mit einer großen Krähe neben sich. Das ist ein herrliches Bild auf dem weißen Bogen dem Schnee," Kirsch, *Juninovember*, 123.

Jaguary 11, 2003, Saturday

In the Morning

I see

Yesterday's

Snow.²⁷¹

Directly preceding the writing from this day and likely written in the days after, the poem reads like a condensed abstraction of the entry's themes. Departing from the autobiographical setting, the poem condenses the constant snowfall and Kirsch's intense editing work over this period into a poem that works independently from this context. Kirsch's takes up the metaphorical context in which snow represents a piece of paper. However, in the poem, both the snow and the metaphorical paper seem to be trodden or written on. A proverbial phrase for which the English equivalent is "water under the bridge," Kirsch's reference to "yesterday's snow" puts the snow metaphor in proximity to her process of writing and re-writing. This process, as quoted above, encompasses the steps of "copying" [*abschreiben*] texts "from one notebook to another" and "altering them," adding to them," or "discarding them" retroactively. In the volume, this process is depicted in great detail when Kirsch recounts her daily efforts to edit the galley proof of the previous book about to be put in print.

In the poem's metaphorical context, the line about "yesterday's snow" proverbially refers to Kirsch's rewriting of a text on a particular piece of paper, maybe the preceding entry, from the previous day. On the morning after, Kirsch rereads her last day's production, which now does not seem as fresh anymore. Understood metaphorically and not proverbially, however, snow here emerges as an equivalent for writing itself. Read together with the entry following the poem, the

²⁷¹ "11. Jaguar 2003, Samstag // Am Morgen / Seh ich / Schnee von / Gestern," Kirsch, *Juninovember*, 122.

writing in the hoarfrost covered garden is done by the birds who leave traces, a “splendid image on the grand sheet of paper the snow.” As the passage implies, the writing that results in this text is informed by nature.

Over the entries from the next snow-covered days, the metaphorical connection between snow, writing, and text emerges as a leitmotif. In an entry from five days later, we find another brief poem at the start of this date that seems to be another result from the thematic writing that happened during that week and the metaphoric complex of snow and the writing process:

Jaguary 16, 2003, Thunder

Snow a letter

In magical ink

A long time

Ago written.²⁷²

While the snow image in the entry from January 11 emerges as a (blank) sheet of paper to be written upon or to be filled with an image (namely one of the birds), here, the snow itself is rendered a container for writing. The snow figures as “a letter,” featuring writing in “magic ink” and “written a long / time ago.”

Kirsch suggests that the snow encapsulates a message that can be read and recorded, like a message in a bottle. This opposes the sense of daily news from the radio that is time-critical and made for immediate consumption. At times, the daily data and updates upset the writer, contrasting with nature’s writing in “magic ink.” The traces in the snow, such as the crows’ feet

²⁷² “16. Jaguar 2003, Donner // Schnee ein Brief / Mit Zaubertinte / Und vor langer / Zeit geschrieben,” Kirsch, *Juninovember*, 128.

or the cat's paws, appear as writing in this letter. Nature is writing itself on the paper surface that is provided by nature and can also be erased by nature (e.g., by fresh snow). Written a long time ago, but like news updates, they are also "time" that is "written," as the enjambement in the last line suggests. Read on its own, the participle passive construction – "Zeit geschrieben," time written (or written-down time) – implies that the snow as a letter and the traces as writing in it ultimately contain time itself, made visible, verbalized and materialized by nature, and only observed, recorded, and "copied down" by the attentive writer/administrator.

Kirsch's volumes feature many such metaphors or neologisms that relate writing to a direct expression or imprint of nature that only has to be recorded by the writer. In the first entry of the volume *Snowstorm Approaching* [*Kommt der Schnee in Sturm geflogen*, 2005], Kirsch expands the metaphorical context of snow and writing to a fully-fledged poetics of winter. In this entry, the traces of a lark that flies away from the storm semi-fantastically morph into a whole choreography of printed characters, where the words themselves are trees and landscapes and the bygone day itself appears as the creator of the resulting poem: "I am writing myself away from the paper and into the landscape."²⁷³ The title of this 2005 volume suggests that the weather and the airborne approach of masses of texts simply emerge from an act of surrendering oneself and one's writing to the surrounding nature. Over several volumes, neologisms like "Moorgeschrey," "Lärchengedröhn," "Windgeschnatter," "Lachschleifen," or "Krähenschrift" reflect this idea of nature speaking, while "Krähengechwätz" even features the title of a whole volume. The "hue" emerging from the bogs, a *geschrey* even rendered with the Middle High German ending 'y' that brings this oral metaphor, *cry*, closer to dated writing conventions and orthography; the noise

²⁷³ "Ich schreibe mich vom Papier weg in die Landschaft," Sarah Kirsch, *Kommt der Schnee im Sturm geflogen: Prosa* (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 5f.

understood as *parlando* or chatter originating from the crows, the droning of the larks, the laughing turns, and loops of the wind are all sources from which Kirsch's writing draws.

This idea of writing informed by a talking nature is alluded to in the attributions of a "Sarah Sound," which scholarship and critics attribute to Kirsch's writing, and which is commonly understood as a specific tone or style or mannerism of Kirsch's that supposedly speaks to the negligible status of these *journal* texts. I argue that this quality in Kirsch's writing is more than a mere sound or style. Barthes, in his conception of *écriture*, demarcated the latter from a mere question of individual style. Kirsch's writing is very orally connotated. It is not a style; it is a mode of writing that hovers between orality and writing. As the passage above shows, this writing is first and foremost characterized by what strikes as an overt orality, as if it were directly recorded from her thoughts. This contrasts with the idea of a mere *écriture automatique* that would resemble a direct translation of thought onto paper. Kirsch's style is precisely not just sound, as her rendering of "Moorgeschrei" into "Moorgeschrey" shows, or her renaming the river "Eider" into "Eyder." In fact, this juxtaposition of idiosyncrasies of both oral and quaint and dated written language as the raw material of her texts is highly artificial and stylized. As if nature herself would be speaking here through the poet's mouth, visible for instance in her highly innovative treatment of the date and month names. Kirsch breathes life and agency into the latter, for instance when "Januar" over several days becomes "Jaguar," or when "Mittwoch," "Donnerstag" and "Freitag" in a stormy week on vacation turn into "Mist," "Donner," and "Frei."

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Through Kirsch's extended interest in (nature) metaphors for distance and gateways, *journal* as a writing mode emerges. In both poems and prose *journals*, the air(space), sky, or horizon images appear as symbols for the distance that is present as potential. The different layers of these metaphorical "many skies," horizons, rivers, or seas in Kirsch capture a space that resonates with the liminality with which Kirsch allegorically describes her position between the North and Baltic Sea coasts in a short and programmatic entry in *Floating Bog*:

In order to be able to grasp or even convey something of the storms, you have to be based at the border between water and land, where they hit the world, fresh and unbowed, directly from the ether.²⁷⁴

The passage independently features prominently in two of Kirsch's journals from 1991²⁷⁵ and 1994,²⁷⁶ respectively right at the beginning and at the end (and, even more prominently, on the dust jacket of her collected prose edition). Kirsch in it stages liminality as a core feature in her *journal* writing, packaged, however, in a seemingly unimportant, everyday negligible average description of a natural setting, seamlessly fitting in with the ubiquitous daily updates and (sea) weather reports as well as the reports of the goings-on about in her garden.

²⁷⁴ "Um vom Sturm etwas zu begreifen oder gar vermitteln zu können, muß man an der Grenze zwischen Wasser und Land angestammt sein, dort wo er sich auf die Welt wirft, frisch und ungebrochen direkt aus dem Äther," Kirsch, *Das simple Leben*, 219.

²⁷⁵ Kirsch, *Schwingrasen*, 388.

²⁷⁶ Kirsch, *Das simple Leben*, 435.

As an “air theater,” nature in this writing is put in comparison and ultimately is characterized as a stage superior to the arena of television, which in the volume resembles another form of daily theater. Both tv and nature together resemble the writing scene that results in the text as both theaters’ merger and the ultimate form of theater. What emerges is a dichotomy between “here” and “there” which, similar to the liminal “Not-Anymore” and the “Not-Yet” spaces of “the early morning hours” and the *journal’s* delicate balance between “poetry” and “fouled prose” forms an ether, contained solely in writing which in its semi-orality doubles down on this liminality. This ether resembles the river Eider and its semantic representation in Kirsch’s writing. Rendered there the Eyder, this river features as the fluctuating constant of Kirsch’s liminal everyday writing scene.

Spelled in its semi-mythological, semi-oral variant Eyder, this river phonologically interacts with the idea of an ether or its German equivalent “Äther” that serves as a similarly shaped connecting or liminal in-between space in fluxus. The Eider serves as a historic border river between tribes and countries, but as a “door to the sea,”²⁷⁷ also like the two figurative “coasts” with their surf and breakers where they “hit the world.” The flow of this river, like the information flow in mass media, becomes this writing’s place, surrounded by its scene where the writer lives. This writing’s place is between two coasts, literally in the artificial, channel-turned river that connects both seas. As a construct solely made up of language, of phonetic elements and lexical variants, of semantic connotations and lexicographic layers of meaning, like the

²⁷⁷ In *Juninovember*, Kirsch quotes a review of her volume *Islandhoch* by critic Frank Trende. In his review, Trende zeros in on the river Eider as a semantic and geographic threshold. Trende points out that “seit Jacob Grimms *Deutscher Mythologie* wissen wir nicht nur, dass sie Eider vor Sarah Kirschs Haus der Fluss ist, ‘welcher die Sachsen von den Normannen scheidet,’ sondern auch, dass sein Name eigentlich *Aegirdora* heißt, zu deutsch: Meerestür,” Quoted from: Kirsch, *Juninovember*, 93.

sediments of the landscape, this river as sediment of a lingscape itself becomes a signifier of a liminal space here.

Instead of nature writing, I argue, in Kirsch, the idea to capture time by way of nature emerges as an approach to writing nature, rendering Kirsch's writing what Norbert Elias defines as an effort of 'synthesis.' Considering the calendric borderline quality of her *journal* writing, Kirsch's position between the seacoasts becomes a symbol for liminal position and character of her writing between orders, facilitated by the 'ether' of tele-media the reception of which structures her *journal* writing daily. The ether is mediating here between both times and conveying from one storm and the other. The perspective of Kirsch's observer, I argue, as a particular focalization ("höchstens den Blickwinkel noch ein gewisses zärtliches Schielen") emerges as a way to negotiate, mediate, convey a subjective experience of time with the context of an ever more cosmic daily calendar that the media establish, as the new daily regimen that in the 20th century replaces the daily telling of time. The writer as a deindividualized entity emerges as a conveyor, a mediator, a lens, an administrator, or recorder of writing.

Like the snow as message or letter, Kirsch's *journal* writing can be defined as work between "News from the life of the caterpillars" and other "news," as one of Kirsch's most famous poems, "Erdreich," shows, which has often been read programmatically:

News from the life of caterpillars
The cuckoo stutters and the baked beds
Tear apart when I haul my watering cans
[...] when I went
Into my father's garden years ago
[...] the soil
Still did its bit, this one here
Is a dropout
[...] how must people have

Insulted the realm of the earth²⁷⁸

The text is often used to showcase these aesthetics from above and label Kirsch as something like a literary dropout. The poem was written a few years after her settling down in Northern Germany. While the spatio-temporal idiosyncrasies in Kirsch's work have widely been attributed to either nature poetry, the criticism of "ecological devastation" and "damage," the Holocaust and, though not openly agitational, but implicit, indirect criticism of the socio-political implications that her position in between the two German states brought with it, I argue that these characterizations in their focus on topics miss the point.

Instead of "news" from the media, her writing as a message or letter encapsulates other news messages, as the German term *Nachricht* also translates. Kirsch's writing establishes the binary between *Nachrichten* and *News*. As a form of reporting, her writing with regard to the messages from faraway places sometimes works like an element of teichoscopy in a theatre text. Packaged in a seemingly unimportant, everyday negligible average description of a natural setting, seamlessly fitting in with the ubiquitous daily updates and (sea) weather reports as well as the reports of the goings-on about in her garden that, again seamlessly, blend into extensive descriptions of the reports seen on tv, Kirsch's writing contains all of this as ether or interspace or liminal space in-between. Kirsch's writing mediates or conveys all of this. It grasps or records all of this as well as it can, taking in and up whatever it can of the storms as they hit the world from both sides, "fresh and unbowed" like fresh snow This activity requires the writer "to be based at the border between water and land," at the Eider or Eyder, the door to the sea, and ether that is her texts and writing as a home. The distance, the airspace, in contrast to Mörike's ode to

²⁷⁸ Sarah Kirsch, *Werke in fünf Bänden*. Vol II, *Gedichte II*, 99. Translation from: Sarah Kirsch, *Winter Music: Selected Poems*. Transl. by Margitt Leibert (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1994), 87.

the unknown distant – the “skies” [*die Lüfte*] that “do not have a house” – here becomes the very house, they do not only restlessly bring distance to the writer.

Conveying, mediating, [*vermitteln*] is the central term here what writing does. Writing thus emerges as a report similar to the weather report or the news reports, conveying data from all different corners of the scene. This writing is writing time through nature, a “Krähenschrift.” “Krähengeschwätz,” i.e., nature speaking or parlaying, through Kirsch’s conveying or mediating efforts turns into “Krähenschrift,” nature’s and thus time’s imprint on the pages. Geschwätz or chatter here in fact is the ideal of *Schrift*, of writing that resembles a *Nachricht*, a message, and thus an effort to mediate between orality and writing.

CHAPTER THREE Writing Time: Synchronicity and Image in Peter Handke's

Journal Texts

I am sure that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper.

H. D. Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)

I.

In July 1977 the writer Peter Handke embarked on a 11-day trip to Alaska to research scenes and places for what would later become his story *The Long Way Around*²⁷⁹ [*Langsame Heimkehr*, 1979]. The text, still under development at this time, was intended to stage a solitary protagonist's slow return from Alaska, a scientist traveling eastwards across the North American continent to his native Austria. Valentin Sorger, as this protagonist would eventually come to be called, has, in his (re)search quest, more in common with Handke than just the framework of their respective biographies. Just as Sorger's manic "search for forms, the desire to differentiate and describe them, and not only out of doors ('in the field')"²⁸⁰ is resolved into a slow homeward bound progression across the breadth of North America, Handke's own investigations in this story [*Erzählung*] into strategies beyond linear narration also draw heavily on the experience of

²⁷⁹ Peter Handke, *Langsame Heimkehr: Erzählung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979).

²⁸⁰ Handke, *Langsame Heimkehr*, 9. All quotes from: Peter Handke, *The Long Way Around, Slow Homecoming*. Transl. by Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1985), 3.

landscape, as well as the question of how one can narrate the experience of space.²⁸¹ For Handke, geological formations, the “meandering stream” of the Yukon River and the change of seasons in Alaska all become blueprints for alternative, non-linear ideas of a narration that follows the cyclical, repetitive and at times stagnating movement represented both by the protagonist’s as well as the author’s own traveling motion.²⁸² Though it is still one of Handke’s more conventional prose texts, scholarship considers *Slow Homecoming* “a turn in Handke’s narrative art,”²⁸³ namely one towards the more unconventional texts that make up the author’s later oeuvre.

Many of Handke’s works of this period seem to share this interest in non-linearity and repetition. “Form,” as the motto of *The Long Way Around* suggests, arises “suddenly” in these texts, if at all, from a “headlong” stumbling “down the path,” randomly, by accident or as a byproduct rather than by design. This undirected movement is also reflected in the working title of a set of notebooks that Handke kept at the time of his trip to Alaska – *Into the Depths of Austria [Ins tiefe Österreich]* – indicating the same vector-like motion that characterizes the narrative trajectory of the later story.²⁸⁴ In the preface to the volume *The Weight of the World*

²⁸¹ Helmut Böttiger, Charlotte Brombach, Ulrich Rüdener, “Sanfte Bewegungen von außen nach innen: Zum Briefwechsel von Peter Handke und Hermann Lenz,” Peter Handke, Hermann Lenz, *Berichterstatter des Tages: Briefwechsel*. Ed. by Helmut Böttiger, Charlotte Brombach, Ulrich Rüdener (Frankfurt a.M., Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 2006), 439.

²⁸² Ingrid Haag, “Unterwegs in die Kindheit in Peter Handkes *Kurzer Brief zum langen Abschied*,” *Partir, revenir. En route avec Peter Handke* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1993), 44.

²⁸³ “eine Kehre in Handkes Erzählen.” Böttiger, Brombach, Rüdener, “Sanfte Bewegungen von außen nach innen,” 439.

²⁸⁴ Originally planned as a novel, *Ins tiefe Österreich* was what Handke had intended to be title of *Langsame Heimkehr*. <https://handkeonline.onb.ac.at/node/2446>

[*Das Gewicht der Welt*, 1977],²⁸⁵ an edited, shortened and polished “journal” version of parts of these notebooks, Handke refers to writing and in particular the writing that led to these notes as the origin of this meandering motion. Handke states that this was the “spontaneous recording of purposeless perceptions [*Wahrnehmung*],” which for him at the time meant “the liberation from given literary forms” and “at once the freedom of a literary possibility which until then was unknown to me.”

Resorting to writing, Handke here replaces form with possibility, definitiveness with uncertainty, narrowness with openness. In its overlap between the stations of Sorger’s journey and Handke’s own vistas during his trip through the vastness of the Alaskan landscape, the autobiographic dimension of these *journal* texts and the ensuing story *The Long Way Around* document both Handke’s process of coming to this new idea of narration as well as its eventual execution. However, only through a focus on writing as it appears in the 1977 *journal*-turned notebook, this idea of anti-linearity opens up as a poetic possibility for Handke on a level that goes beyond narration. As an exercise of “writing in images” [*Bilderschrift*], Handke’s *journal* texts enact and explore this meandering on a day-to-day basis. Handke develops this idea of a decipherable *Bilderschrift* in *The Lesson of Mont Sainte-Victoire* [*Die Lehre der Sainte Victoire*, 1980], a follow-up to *The Long Way Around* that identifies Sorger as a projection of the author.

While scholarly literature often considers Handke’s *journals* to be “printed versions of private notebooks or of preliminary studies”²⁸⁶ for other works, it appears that these formless

²⁸⁵ Peter Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt: Ein Journal (November 1975 - März 1977)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979). All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

²⁸⁶ Ulrich von Bülow, “Die Tage, die Bücher, die Stifte: Peter Handkes Journale,” Klaus Kastberger (ed.), *Peter Handke: Freiheit des Schreibens – Ordnung der Schrift* (Wien: Zsolnay, 2009), 238f.

texts explore the very extent of this new “literary possibility.” In their focus on a distinct and similarly meandering mode of writing they foreshadow the sinuous and circuitous idea of narrative later developed in stories like *Slow Homecoming*. Handke’s more than four-decade-long preoccupation with published *journal* texts, as well as his consistent use of the term and its variations in (sub)titles of works, suggest a distinct mode of writing. An analysis of this *journal* mode of writing, which emerges across all different kind of genres in the author’s oeuvre, will be at the center of this chapter.

3.1 A Diary or the Chronicle of a Crisis?

In a 1977 review for *Die Zeit*, the critic Peter Wapniewski observes an apparent lack of form that, as he saw it, first manifested in the early 1970s in poetry, and in particular in the amorphous *long poem*.²⁸⁷ Wapniewski identified this lack of form in what he labeled as a “stammer[ing]” tone that he connected to the question of genre. “What nowadays is put forward and prospers as poetry,” is neither “drama, nor poetry,” the critic concluded, but “in fact is prose that is stuck, [...] it’s a diary in a stammering-look.”²⁸⁸ Perhaps taking aim at the abundance of published

²⁸⁷ The *long poem*, in Walter Höllerer’s seminal definition, is defined by “its interaction with reality.” Writing a long poem, for Höllerer, transfers the idea of a formal liberation to the level of content by creating the potential to see the world in a “more generous, less restricted” manner. Walter Höllerer, “Thesen zum langen Gedicht,” Walter Höllerer, Hans Bender (eds.), *Akzente: Zeitschrift für Dichtung*. 1965, Vol. 2 (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1965), 128-130.

²⁸⁸ “was heute als Lyrik angeboten wird und prosperiert, ist steckengebliebene Prosa, [...] ist Tagebuch im Stammel-Look.” Peter Wapniewski, “Gedichte sind genaue Form.” Article in *die Zeit* from 04/02/77, Accessed online at: <https://www.zeit.de/1977/06/gedichte-sind-genaue-formen/komplettansicht>

diaries and notebooks of the time, Wapniewski suggests that the lack of form in works like Handke's poem *Life Without Poesy*²⁸⁹ corresponds with the explicitly diaristic aspect of the text.

It is striking, however, that writing as described in this 1972 long-poem of Handke's resembles nothing less than the exact opposite of what Wapniewski sees as diaristic stammering or formlessness. Rather, this text chronicles its central individual's failed attempt to begin a new diary as a process that leads to the discovery of a new form or "literary possibility" that stands in agreement with the environment in which this writing is taking place. In fact, over the course of an entire season, the endless sequence of hours and the copresence of writing seem to be fundamentally out of joint in this text. The poem sets off as follows:

This autumn time has passed by almost without me
and my life stood as still as it did back in the days
when out of moroseness I was wanting to learn how to write with the typewriter
and waited in the evenings in the windowless vestibule for
the course to begin
The neon lamps droned
and at the end of each session the
plastic covers were tugged back over the typewriters
I came and went and would
have been able to say nothing about myself.²⁹⁰

Described here at the beginning of this eleven-page text is an individual's utter inability to write, embedded in a particular scene of writing that stands in stark contrast to the open and

²⁸⁹ Peter Handke, "Leben ohne Poesie," *Leben ohne Poesie: Gedichte*. Ed. Ulla Berkéwicz (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2007), 224-234.

²⁹⁰ "In diesem Herbst ist die Zeit fast ohne mich vergangen / und mein Leben stand so still wie damals / als ich aus Mißmut Schreibmaschine lernen wollte / und abends in dem fensterlosen Vorraum auf / den Beginn des Kurses wartete / Die Neonröhren haben gedöhnt / und am Ende der Stunde wurden die / Plastikhüllen wieder über die Schreibmaschinen gezogen / Ich bin gekommen und gegangen und hätte / nichts über mich sagen können," Handke, "Leben ohne Poesie," 224.

wide Alaskan landscape. Here, an absent-minded individual here is described to be “waiting” for the advent of writing, comparing their current biographical situation with their past attendance at a typewriting class. The absence of this writing, however, is not only framed by the circumstances of this particular biographical situation. It is also anchored within the wider temporal context of “this autumn” as a concrete seasonal marker. “For four weeks now the sun has been shining,” the individual closes their initial flashback towards the end of the first stanza,

and I have been sitting on the patio
and to everything that went through my mind
and everything that I saw
I just said ‘yeah sure’

The days really just came and went.²⁹¹

No movement, no motion, no meandering, just standstill and paralyzing agreement – “The days really just came and went.” Passing by “without” each another, biographical phase and season together here establish what at the beginning of the poem marks as a seemingly barren scene of writing. In their incongruity, both life and season not only fail to match or even overlap, but to actually prove to be an obstacle to a simultaneous writing.

In its suffocating futility, the “writing-scene”²⁹² described at the beginning of the 1972 poem details the central individual’s failure to begin a new diary – except that self-expression,

²⁹¹ “Vier Wochen lang hat jetzt die Sonne geschienen / und ich bin auf der Terrasse gesessen / und zu allem was mir durch den Kopf ging / und zu allem was ich sah / habe ich nur ‘ja, ja’ gesagt,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 224.

²⁹² Rüdiger Campe defines the “writing-scene” as the “fluctuating constellation of writing which happens within the framework that is established by language (semantics of writing), instrumentality (technology of writing) and gesture (physical aspect of writing).” Rüdiger Campe, “Die Schreibszene: Schreiben,” Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Ludwig K. Pfeiffer (eds.), *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche: Situationen offener Epistemologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 760.

commonly considered one of the key aspects of diaristic writing, is described here as impossible: “I would / have been able to say nothing about myself.” Instead, writing appears as a contentless, unmotivated, “moroseness”-driven practice, exercised in a windowless room and out of sync with this would-be writer’s temporal and local environments. At the beginning of the poem, writing resembles a mechanical process that is described as being as detached as possible from the sights and hours of life, separating, through “plastic covers,” what Campe defines as the *technology of writing*²⁹³ from its spatio-temporal environment. Serving indeed a metaphorical cause, this initial reflection in the poem on the hourly “sessions” of a past typewriter-course here does not merely serve to specify the length of these individual lessons. Rather, when the “plastic covers” are said to be “tugged back over the typewriters” at the end of each “session,” the “hours” in general are at stake here in their relation to writing. This is implied by the semantic ambiguity in the German noun *Stunde*, which translates as both *hour* and *session*. Not informed by the light of the day, but instead by the “droning” noises from artificial neon lights, writing as it appears here is the sterile inversion of the ‘time-embedded’ practice, a term scholar Arno Dusini uses to characterize the keeping of a diary. Diary-keeping, then, is writing on a daily basis about the events of a single day – writing that is based on the diary’s supposed congruence between ‘method and ‘content.’²⁹⁴ Both of which, as it were, make up the repeatable unit of one day.

²⁹³ Campe, “Die Schreibszene,” 760.

²⁹⁴ Arno Dusini, *Tagebuch: Möglichkeiten einer Gattung* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005), 94ff.

3.2 In-Sync with the Scene, the Beat of the World

And yet, what ultimately hovers at the very bottom of Handke's long poem is the possibility of keeping a diary as an image of deep personal crisis. The text stages the tenure of one long autumn as the writing individual's slow attempt to overcome this existential discrepancy between *writing* and *scene*. But what kind of diary is meant here, if not the navel-gazing, self-involved sort which Wapniewski and others have in mind when characterizing poetry of the time? The poem's slack, unrhymed free verse creates a tone that is only "stammering" as long as the keeping of a diary is still a distant, unrealized possibility. "Life Without Poesy" chronicles the utterly prosaic biographic condition of the struggling individual at its center, just as if time or life itself were lacking not only in "poetry," but in "poesy" itself – by which something as essential as a poetic spell or spirit that would enable an apt translation of "these days" into text is meant.

The intervening weeks between the low point of this poetic impasse – where the poem begins – and the individual's ultimate emergence from it towards the poem's end are shown as a process. The end point of this crisis is marked by nothing less than the advent of writing – but not just of any writing. Within the process of overcoming the "poetic" deficiency referenced in the title, the possibility of an *écriture quotidienne* not only marks the dawn of "poesy," but is also flagged as the springboard into the practice of keeping what appears here as a diary. Only this understanding of writing as a *practice* or *mode*, soundly embedded in the rhythms of everyday life, as the poem suggests, puts perception, expression, and mediation for the individual all at once back together and in-sync with reality. By the end of the poem, this results in a free verse that stands out through sharp, paratactic sentences. This state, as the poem implies, possesses an almost harmonic quality, realigning biographical time and season. "In the last days / nature has

become musical,”²⁹⁵ the poem’s final stanza sets off, thereby contrasting “[t]his autumn,” which was the void temporal marker of its opening lines.

In the poem’s last stanza, this dawn of a new musicality triggers a burst of paratactic descriptions of everyday observations. These descriptions take up the patterns of the events in the individual’s environment, transposing them into rhythmic text. Ultimately, this process culminates in an outcry that identifies the individual turning to *writing* as a process of programmatic importance for this poem: “I was properly writing IN-SYNC” – “Ich schrieb richtig MIT.”²⁹⁶ But what exactly is the nature of this “mitschreiben” – a writing *in-sync* or *in accordance with*, as the all-caps German prefix “MIT” suggests, furnishing the verb *schreiben* with a distinct procedural dimension?²⁹⁷ According to the poem, it is “nature” itself, in the sense of a re-awakened everyday environment. Through the paratactic descriptions in the long last stanza, this environment seems to take on an almost lifelike quality in the perceptions of the observer-individual:

Farther away smoke moved past the houses and the
television aerials in front of it have become monuments
Each day the deciduous trees revealed
more of their branch-works
and the few blades of green grass which had grown
back after their last cutting
glistened so intimately

²⁹⁵ “In den letzten Tagen / ist die Natur musikalisch geworden,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 233.

²⁹⁶ “Ich schrieb richtig MIT,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 234.

²⁹⁷ The verb *mitschreiben*, in Duden’s definition, means “to keep the minutes” and “to listen to something while at the same time writing it down.” <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/mitschreiben>

that I feared for the end of the world²⁹⁸

The moving scene of a reawakening suburb, and the individual's attempt at "Mitschrift" as the simultaneous act of putting the rhythm of this scene into writing, correspond in the last stanza to the onset of the poem's "poesy" and its characteristic musicality. In this writing, the (mostly paratactic) descriptions from the end of the 1972 poem do not at all unfold as static scenery or a still image. Instead, these descriptions reveal movement and dynamics within their very structure. In fact, the attention to processes and movement refers to precisely the kinds of observations which the would-be typewriter from the beginning of the poem could not (yet) have made. Through the "windowless" walls of a "vestibule," this typewriter is still separated from this moving scenery. As the German original of *Vor-raum* implies, this "vestibule" stands as a spatio-temporal or textual pre-stage to an *actual* chamber or room of one's own, which, as part of the poem's metaphoric writing scene, is located at the end of the text. The larger context of the reawakening suburb is part of a writing scene that extends the situational framework of this practice far beyond the narrow confines of the writer's room. At the end of the poem, reality itself and its spatio-temporal coordinates precondition writing as a time-critical practice that takes up the rhythmic flow of the writer's surroundings.

At the end of the poem, a multitude of dynamic outside observations suggests that, for the individual, this outer movement comes with an inner transformation as well. This transformation in the writer ultimately results in a new musical or poetic state of mind that enables this writer to write, contrasting the individual's inability to "say" anything at all "about myself" at the

²⁹⁸ "Weiter weg zog hinter den Häusern Rauch vorbei und die / Fernsehantennen sind davor Monumente geworden / Mit jedem Tag sah man in den Laubbäumen / mehr von dem Astwerk / die wenigen Grashalme die nach dem letzten / Mähen noch nachgewachsen waren / glänzten so innig / daß ich Angst vor dem Weltuntergang kriegte / in meinem menschlichen Widerschein lächelte / sogar der Verputz an den Häusern," Handke, "Leben ohne Poesie," 233.

beginning of the poem: “I said things long unspoken of / and then thought literally / ‘Well now life can resume’ / [...] / How proud I was of this kind of writing!”²⁹⁹ Only this “kind of writing” – “dieses Schreiben” – in the writerly logic of the poem is considered to be congruous with a life in “poesy.” In German, this term denotes “poetry” as well as literature in general and, in an idiomatic sense, also captures the idea of a poetic enchantment³⁰⁰ as a state of almost romantic inspiration or melodiousness. *Mitschreiben* or *Mitschrift* thus both refer to a mode of writing that in the poem is portrayed to be in general ‘accordance’ or ‘agreement’ with both time and space as two of the core dimensions of the *scene* that frame this writing. The prefix of the central verb connected to this mode of writing expresses this too. Whereas the beginning of the text is characterized by a lack or deficit of something (of presence, of time – “ohne mich” – or of writing and musicality – “ohne Poesie” –), the basic semantic operation has transitioned by the end of the poem to the concordance or harmony expressed in the preposition “mit.” This state of agreement transforms writing (“Schreiben”) into “*Mitschreiben*,” a practice that is “in accordance” or “in-sync” with the events of the day during which it occurs.

²⁹⁹ “Ich [...] / sagte lang Verschwiegenes / und dachte dann wörtlich / ‘So jetzt kann das Leben wieder weitergehen’ / [...] / Wie stolz bin ich auf dieses Schreiben gewesen!,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 234.

³⁰⁰ In opposition to an “everyday, sober and prosaic” state of affairs. “poesie,” Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm, *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. Erstbearbeitung (1854–1960). Digitized version accessed at: <https://www.dwds.de/wb/dwb/poesie>.

3.3 (Un)covering the Days

Through the seemingly diary-like descriptions in its last stanza, “Life Without Poesy” stages the individual’s arrival at *Mitschrift* as the precondition of this text’s existence. In the stanzas that precede the onset of “musicality,” the poem also hints at what prevented this writing. Presented as an impaired version of *Mitschrift*, the idea of a “shorthand” [*Kurzschrift*] that takes place in the narrow confines of the windowless vestibule is identified as that which hinders the writer from a simultaneous writing in *accordance* with the *scene*. This *Kurzschrift* in the poem is explicitly connected to the individual’s initial desire to keep a diary. In its brevity, *Kurzschrift*, in contrast to *Mitschrift*, does not hold up to the extensiveness of the *scene* by which it is framed, but instead “hid[es] away” or conceals a ‘wrong’ kind of first-person utterance that the individual is not able to make in the first place. With this wrong way of writing comes a wrong focus of writing too. Instead of being the surrounding scene, the subject matter of this *Kurzschrift* is the writing subject themselves, reflected in the melodramatic first-person utterance that this writing attempts to hide: ‘I want to throw myself into an umbrella.’”

At the very apex of this impasse, the poem introduces a second mode of writing that impairs the individual’s ability to write. When their all-encompassing crisis culminates in the poem’s eighth stanza, the absence of *Mitschrift* is linked to the presence of another kind of writing, one that is done by others. For the individual, this writing resembles a form of disruption with regard to their own ability to write. Further elaborating on the autumnal time that has passed by “without [them]selves,” the individual in the poem states that in this period,

The novels were supposed to be ‘violent’ and the
poems ‘campaigns’
Mercenary soldiers had gotten lost into language

kept occupied every word
blackmailed one another
by using terms as slogans
and me I grew more and more speechless³⁰¹

The writing of *others* here causes the individual's temporary silence, adding to the discrepancy between scene and writing that, for this individual, is debilitating. The reception of these others' writing – “[m]ercenary soldiers” of language, as the passage implies – contributes to this barren scene of writing. Occupying “every word,” the individual perceives the reading of poems and novels in this time as an activity competing with a “proper,” non-“violent” use of language. In the poem, the abundance of politically “engaged” literature, of conventional literature or of the media as a whole (“In the evenings I kept postponing / turning on my television set”³⁰²) assigns to ‘conventional’ novelists, to politically engaged poets, and to journalists in the media the role of administrating a fixed lingo or jargon. This jargon, from the perspective of this individual, “occupie[s]” the “phenomena” rather than giving room to them. This, in return, causes the diarist *manqué* to become utterly “speechless” themselves. On the semantic level, the poem stages this opposition in the various descriptions of the individual's failed attempts to resume living and writing. The cause for this inability is a decidedly journalistic lingo. The impact of this lingo is reflected in poem's broken, “stammering” syntax and the brevity of its free verse. This free verse likewise ‘scatters’ single sentences via enjambement over several lines, either breaking them unrhythmically at syntactically unnatural points (e.g., lines 4, 7 and 9, p. 224) or stressing their

³⁰¹ “Die Romane sollten ‘gewalttätig’ sein und die / Gedichte ‘Aktionen’ / Söldner hatten sich in die Sprache verirrt und / hielten jedes Wort besetzt / erpreßten sich untereinander / indem sie die Begriffe als Losungsworte gebrauchten / und ich wurde immer sprachloser,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 226f.

³⁰² “Das Einschalten des Fernsehers am Abend habe / ich jeweils hinausgezögert,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 229.

hypotactical turns and loops (lines 11-17, p. 225, 30-33/1-4, p. 225f.). These constructions all fail to correspond with the “musical” idea of language from the end of the poem.

The poem connects the duality in this play of language to the duality of writing. “In the newspapers,” the individual states,

everything was written down in black and white already
and every appearance appeared right from the beginning
as a term
Only in the arts and culture sections they demanded
to still push the terms
but the culture critics’ effort with terms
were merely veil-dances in front of other
dancing veils³⁰³

From the perspective of the (daily) writer and their writing, the linguistic keystones of their daily reality stand in direct opposition to the desired poetic register of language, finally deployed in the last stanza. These linguistic idiosyncrasies appear as the “terms” and “slogans” found in the newspapers and the newspaper writers’ “effort in terms.” To the extent to which the diary resembles one possible conceptual background reality in Handke’s poem, I argue, journalism establishes another. The duality of these realities ultimately results in a dualism of consciousness – poetic and journalistic – that results in two different conceptions of writing altogether.

In this opposition between the writing of the self and the writing of others, the poem engages a binary that was, at the time of its writing, looming in the aftermath of Jean Paul Sartre’s theoretical debate about what literature “is” or can and should do. The subject matter of

³⁰³ “In den Zeitungen stand alles schon schwarz auf weiß / und jede Erscheinung erschien von vornherein / als ein Begriff / Nur in den Feuilletons wurde noch aufgefordert / die Begriffe doch anzustrengen / aber die Begriffsanstrengungen der Feuilletonisten / waren nur ein Schleiertanz vor anderen / tanzenden Schleiern,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 226.

this question in 1953 significantly shifted thanks to Barthes' idea of an *écriture*. In an effort to counter Sartre's concept of a politically engaged literature, Barthes inquires not into literature, but into what writing is.³⁰⁴ In "Life Without Poesy," *Mitschreiben* resembles an *écriture* with a temporal spin. The poem references literature and in particular examples of a *littérature engage*. However, for Handke's individual, the writing of journalists plays a particularly decisive role in terms of their own attempts at *Mitschrift* as a 'coverage' of their scene.

Within the course of the poem, this dualism of writing and of a journalistic jargon or mind-state that opposes a poetic consciousness plays out in a variety of ways. This also affects the linguistic make-up of the text. The idea of a defective or even "damaged" life – in the sense of Theodor W. Adorno's reflections on the interdependence of living and writing in capitalistic societies – does not just account for the altogether scattered attention of the crisis-ridden individual up to the beginning of the last stanza. This disjuncture between living and writing on a semantic level also becomes apparent in the poem's own linguistic make-up, as I have analyzed above. The various descriptions of the individual's failed attempts to write the scene surrounding them correspond to the broken, "stammering" syntax of the poem's free verse. These descriptions display precisely the lack of form which the poem's last stanza resolves. Form at the end of the poem is achieved through writing. This writing, as *Mitschrift*, is dictated by the flow of events rather than designed to align with editorial constraints and journalistic conventions, e.g., economic efficiency, a standardized build or the particular length of a column.³⁰⁵ Historians

³⁰⁴ See the title of the first section of Barthes' 1953 *Writing Degree Zero*, the title of which, "What is Writing?," is a direct response to Sartre's 1947 take on *What is Literature?* Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*. Prefaced by Susan Sontag. Translated from the French by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

³⁰⁵ "Placing facts in a particular order of importance, with the most important facts at the top of the story summarised in the 'lead sentence,' the 'inverted pyramid' made it easier and more cost efficient to edit 'all the news that's fit to print' into the limited column inches available. The opening paragraph is supposed to identify the '5W questions' (who? when? where? what? and sometimes why?) and the rest of the story provides facts into a

of journalism have subsumed such restraint under a class of routines as well as globally standardized, discursive, philological and editorial practices through which journalists turn their notes into easily readable reports.³⁰⁶ Both journalistic writing and the individual's failed attempts to write a diary, in the poem are alluded to in the term *Kurzschrift. Mitschrift*, in contrast, is not dictated by any formal or editorial constraints, but only by the rhythm of the events in the writer's environs.

3.4 Departing from the Diary

Corresponding to the byproduct-like conception of form outlined in the motto to *Slow Homecoming*, which results casually from stumbling headlong down the path, Handke's writing aspires to an accidental, casual meandering. Rather than conceiving of form as something prior to writing, *Mitschrift* identifies intelligible temporal patterns and dynamics and follows their lead. This is not just explored in the 1972 poem but is likewise the writing of Handke's *journal* prose. In its idea of a form that is connected to diaristic writing, the *Mitschrift* from the end of the poem corresponds to the spontaneous noting down of purposeless and aimless perceptions

descending order of importance. [...] These changes in news gathering and processing were brought together by the 'overarching' commitment to objectivity," Kevin Williams, "Anglo-American Journalism: The Historical Development of Practice, Style and Form," Marcel Broersma (ed.), *Form and Style in Journalism: European Newspapers and the Representation of News 1880-2005* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 10.

³⁰⁶ Sociologist Jean K. Chalaby identifies as a set of "distinctive philological characteristics" which in the course of the 20th century set apart "the journalistic mode of writing" as a proper "journalistic discursive practice." These characteristics, Chalaby argues, resulted in "a distinctive class of texts" that encompasses, among others, the interview and the (news) report. Jean K. Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism* (London: MacMillan, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 303f. Mitchell Stephens characterizes the "development of reporting" as a discursive practice and the prime method of journalists, represented in the brief stenography undertaken by the reporter while "stand[ing], notebook open, before an event." Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News*. Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217.

which Handke references in the preface to his first published *journal*. Handke included this idea of purposelessness in the original title to this volume, which was *Phantasy through Aimlessness*. As a principle for the writing across the entire volume, this purposelessness anticipates the meandering, circuitous idea of narration developed in later texts.

In the poem, this spontaneous understanding of form originates in the purposelessness of writing. A writing in-sync, *Mitschrift* spontaneously takes up the flow of events and follows the unpredictable happenings in the scene of writing. This spontaneous “noting down of perceptions” contrasts with the efficient, stringent, linear and audience-specific journalistic report that strictly follows very rigid formal requirements. In the poem, the natural sequence of days provides structure and rhythm to the writing in the individual’s descriptions. This temporal progression is palpable for the individual, for instance, through the gradual defoliation of trees, the moving swaths of smoke or the growing blades of grass. As in other Handke-texts of the time, these processes serve as indicators of the passage of time.³⁰⁷ They reveal the advance of the autumn as a period of time that all of a sudden seems to coincide with the individual’s biographical stage, indicating a period of time which now no longer “passes by without” them, but is in agreement with their writing. Thirteen of the poem’s 23 stanzas feature such temporal markers – e.g., “back then in the summer,” “in the evenings” or “this fall.” Such temporal qualifiers are characteristic of the *writing* typically found in *journals*, especially when this journal writing is in proximity to the calendar or the chronicle as formal influences.

³⁰⁷ Heike Polster, *The Aesthetics of Passage: The Imag(in)ed Experience of Time in Thomas Lehr, W.G. Sebald, and Peter Handke* (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2009).

In “Life Without Poesy,” the last of these temporal markers, “these days,” indicates that calendar and life are finally in agreement again for the individual. Both calendar and life are part of the scene of writing, as Campe argues. In his discussion of the ramifications of the *writing-scene*, Campe identifies the inscription of dates into writing as one of the core parameters of writing as *écriture*.³⁰⁸ This corresponds with the diary’s characteristic focus on the scene of the writer and their writing, as highlighted by theories that establish connections between autobiography and diaristic writing. To the extent to which “antifiction,” as Philippe Lejeune suggests, is the “fundamental constraint” for every diarist,³⁰⁹ the content of Handke’s poem as well as his 1977 journal, too, seems to be informed by autobiographical context. Both correspond to the author’s life at the Frankfurt periphery at the time of their writing.³¹⁰ Departing from autobiography, Maurice Blanchot’s definition of the diary suggests that the calendar, with its repetitious sequence of the ever-same unit of one day, constitutes on a formal level “the demon of the diary.”³¹¹ In Handke’s texts of the time, I argue, the diary itself and its genuine practice of (temporal) *Mitschrift* emerge as the demons of writing. The end of the poem is the very “diary” that is aspired to at the beginning of the text. However, in contrast to the individual’s failed attempt to write a diary, this diary at the end of the text is solely focused on time.

³⁰⁸ Campe, “Die Schreibszene,” 762.

³⁰⁹ Philippe Lejeune, “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” *On Diary*. Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin, Julie Rak (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 203.

³¹⁰ In its inherent focus on the minutiae of everyday life and their inscription into writing, “Life Without Poesy,” offers several autobiographical clues regarding its author’s life at the time. Read autobiographically, this poem can be traced back to this Handke’s own experience of crisis at this point of his life while living in the Frankfurt hinterland, as well as his growing interest in what Handke-scholarship later identified as the “secret poesy of everyday life.” Böttiger, Brombach, Rüdener, “Sanfte Bewegungen von außen nach innen,” 432.

³¹¹ Maurice Blanchot, “Diary and Story,” *The Book to Come*. Transl. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 183.

In their overview of diaristic writing since 1900, Sabine Kalff and Ulrike Vedder highlight the historically “hybrid character” of the diary. Kalff and Vedder regard the diary not as a form or a genre, but as a “field for literary experimentation.”³¹² This take departs from traditional characterizations of the diary, where it is either understood as a “literary genre,” or where its status as proper literature is disputed altogether.³¹³ Temporally embedded in a life *with* poesy, the role of diaristic writing in Handke’s text lies at odds with a scholarly understanding in recent decades of diaries as either literary by-products or as documents of mere biographical interest. Unlike Gräser’s definition as the diary as a medium of crisis, in a distinctly undiaristic turn Handke’s *Mitschreiben* is the writing of intactness, resembled by the individual’s being in in-sync with time. In contrast to Gräser’s definition, the ability to write daily in Handke’s poem is portrayed as impossible as long as life and season are still out of sync or in crisis. “A diary which I wanted to write,” the individual states towards the beginning of the text, “consisted of a single sentence only / ‘I want to throw myself into an umbrella’ / and even this I hid away in shorthand [*Kurzschrift*].”³¹⁴ Only once they overcome their crisis, the individual is able to embrace a daily *Mitschrift*. This suggests that the aspired-to daily writing in the poem is different from the subjective text of crisis which Gräser has in mind. Handke’s individual avoids precisely the kind of self-centered navel-gazing which Gräser puts at the center of his understanding of the diary as the medium of both “solitude” and “crisis.” Rather, the text highlights crisis as

³¹² Ulrike Vedder, Sabine Kalff, “Tagebuch und Diaristik seit 1900: Einleitung,” *Zeitschrift für Germanistik. Neue Folge*. XXVI. 2/2016 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 235.

³¹³ Albert Gräser, for instance, regarded the diary as a “literary genre” with an aesthetic of its own. Albert Gräser, *Das literarische Tagebuch: Studien über Elemente des Tagebuchs als Kunstform* (Saarbrücken: West-Ost Verlag, 1955). On the diary’s disputed status, see footnote 45 on page 16 of my introduction.

³¹⁴ “Ein Tagebuch das ich schreiben wollte / bestand aus einem einzigen Satz / ‘Ich möchte mich in einen Regenschirm stürzen’ / und das noch versteckte ich in Kurzschrift,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 224.

something that is connected instead to the very absence of (daily) writing. In contrast, *Mitschrift*, in its focus on the scene, is opposed to the almost melodramatic first-person statement uttered earlier in the poem (“I wanted to throw myself in an umbrella”). Just like Handke’s successive *journals*, the poem does not engage in a notoriously diaristic act of self-reflection and introspection. Rather, Handke’s diarist-observer in the poem eventually vanishes behind the descriptions of the world they provide, which enables them to overcome the crisis at the beginning of the poem that arises from too high a degree of self-involvement and introspection.

The poem’s disjuncture with typically diaristic writing is further corroborated by the eventual advent of “poesy.” “Nowadays,” the penultimate stanza closes, “it is only with writing that / a poetic lust for the world arises in me.”³¹⁵ This line at first turns the writer’s gaze outwards, only to continue with an utterance that seems to provisionally put the typical diaristic focus on introspection back on the table: “I have regained a sense of myself [*Selbstgefühl*] again.”³¹⁶ This notion of *Selbstgefühl*, however, is ultimately refuted by the poem. By adding a pun-like Freudian slip to the line about “Selbstgefühl” – “Thinking this I misspoke in thoughts and / thought of a ‘melee of myself’ [*Selbstgewühl*]” –, the poem uses the minimal phonetic difference between *Gefühl* and *Gewühl* in order to install a semantic pretense. The individual’s newly-gained “sense of myself” here reads not as typical diaristic clarity and insight, but rather as the opposite, as an inner “chaos” that has to be complemented by the outside world and the “melee” of movements found there. Inner life and outside world both need to be tamed and ordered by the writing of these descriptions; writing must find and transpose the patterns and

³¹⁵ “jetzt stellt sich meist erst mit dem Schreiben / eine poetische Lust für die Welt ein.” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 233.

³¹⁶ “Ich habe wieder ein Selbstgefühl.” Ibid.

rhythms of the outside world to corresponding structures in language. Writing, not self-expression or a sense of oneself, ultimately becomes the focus of this text.

Both in the poem and the later *journal* volume *The Weight of the World*, the gaze of the writer is turned towards a world which resembles more than a “backdrop [for the] main concern of a self-referred, subjective performance,” as Gräser ventures in his definition of the “literary diary as a form of art” in the 1950s.³¹⁷ What in the poem seems to be the impulse to start with a diary arises from an instance of *extrospection* first. This outward-bound gaze is established by the paratactic descriptions that feature at the end of the poem. The “leaves” on the ground, the “bushes” that “have moved,” the trees in front of the window, the freshly cut blades of grass or, ultimately, anonymous passersby in their everyday activities catch the attention of the newly ‘inspired’ individual and their writing. These displayed dynamics result in a “poetic mood” and “lust for the world,” which in turn result in *Mitschrift* as a mode of writing that regards the scene of writing itself as its main concern. In the poem, the diary as a means of writing comes into play only once the discrepancy between *writing* and *scene* as a moment of crisis is resolved, which occurs (only) once the individual’s solitude is overcome and replaced by the concordance in the moving outside world. Instead of the diary itself as a (literary) genre or form, the temporal dimension of writing a diary is central to the writing aspired in “Life Without Poesy.”

³¹⁷ Gräser, *Das literarische Tagebuch*, 122.

3.5 Everyday Matters – The “Writing of Day-to-Dayness”

In one of the aphoristic entries of his journal *Mornings at the Cliff Window* [*Am Felsfenster morgens*, 1998],³¹⁸ Handke describes his concept of a *journal* mode of writing as a “writing of day-to-dayness” [*Schrift der Tagtäglichkeit*]” that originates “at the margins” of perception. Written between 1982 and 1987, the notes in this fourth “journal volume” of Handke’s can be read as the attempt of one long temporal *Mitschrift* over an entire year or even several years. Like the entries from the 1977 volume, *The Weight of the World*, Handke’s notes in this *journal* appear polished, retroactively prepared and edited for publication. Although not a continuous protocol in the mold of the last stanza of “Life Without Poesy,” these notes capture the coming and going of writing as a daily possibility. Sometimes this possibility is attained several times in one day, and other times not once in the period of an entire week.

Many of the entries reflect on how a state of consciousness or awareness necessary for such a writing comes about. Over a longer stretch of entries, Handke develops in this volume the idea of the onset of *Mitschrift* as a “day-break within the day” [*Tagwerden im Tag*]. An awakening or moment of epiphany, this “daybreak” jerks the writer somewhat out of the given regimen of a day, just like the individual in the poem is ultimately jerked out of their life and writing crisis. This superficial daily regimen is often connected with the scatter-brained and fragmented attention span that is associated with the reading of the newspaper. Escaping this regimen, the entries time and again transport the writer into another, more wholesome day underneath or beyond the regular day. Following this “daybreak,” Handke offers observation of “real” or “actual” events that contrast with the seemingly important news read in the newspapers.

³¹⁸ Peter Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens. (und andere Ortszeiten 1982–1987)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000).

Reminding of the role the media assume in the 1972 poem, this understanding of news and was outlined by Handke in his first *journal* volume *The Weight of The World*: “Only after I have put away the newspaper with all its real events, I am free again for ‘what really happened,’ breathing freely and letting my gaze wander around me.”³¹⁹

In his *journals* since this volume, the (daily, local) newspaper is frequently portrayed as a “dangerous enemy,” a term Handke borrows from Goethe. Set phrases like “I will not read the newspapers today!”³²⁰ appear in infinite variations throughout these texts. Handke uses the newspaper to differentiate only seemingly “real” news from the actual ‘news’ perceptible in the details of his scene of writing. Differentiating between the synonymous verbs ‘sich ereignen’ and ‘geschehen,’ the sudden emergence of these different, alternative news throughout a given day is often connected to this idea of a “daybreak” as a moment of revelation or gateway into a new state of mind.

In Handke’s more recent *journals*, such as *In Front of the Tree-Shadow-Wall at Night* [*Vor der Baumschattenwand nachts*, 2016], these gateways into daily writing provide the daily “catastrophes of world history”³²¹ with a phenomenological counterpoint. Within the course of the 500-page volume, written and composed between the years of 1982 and 1987, this *Schrift* springs from omnipresent everyday observations that almost exclusively indicate the passage of time by way of the description of temporal sequence as perceived through the lens of seemingly mundane and unrelated events or objects. Assembled therein are reading notes, reflections,

³¹⁹ “Erst nachdem ich die Zeitungen, mit all den wirklichen Ereignissen, weggelegt habe, bin ich wieder, indem ich um mich schaue und aufatme, frei für das, ‘was wirklich geschah,’” Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, 104.

³²⁰ “Sonne, die Zeitwiese – und ich werde heute keine Zeitung lesen!,” Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 37.

³²¹ “die täglichen Katastrophen der Weltgeschichte.” Peter Handke, *Vor der Baumschattenwand nachts: Zeichen und Anflüge von der Peripherie 2007–2015* (Salzburg, Wien: Jung und Jung, 2016), 261.

quotes, conjectures, many observations and abstractions of phenomena, occasionally furnished with a bracketed date. Many of these entries connect the author's spontaneous, aimless "daily cross-country walks [*das tägliche Querfeldein*]"³²² to an ideal of writing that starts with no fixed form, purpose or aim in the writer's mind. Handke's focus on arriving at a mode of *journal* writing diametrically opposes the idea of a conventional writer's diary that serves as a "workshop for sentences."³²³

Across the whole volume, certain patterns emerge and then fade out, giving room to others. Handke's concept of *Mitschrift* within the course of the volume emerges as

The writing of day-to-dayness: a powerful quiet writing in images [*Bilder-Schrift*]: the bus chauffeur, the schoolchild, the cobbler, the little man in the 'walk'-signal; the river leading to the slim shape of the crescent moon, the sickle leading to the old lady who is just making advances to me, and that old lady, in turn, leads me to the parked train wagon.³²⁴

The central characteristic of this writing is movement. Just as at the end of the 1972 poem, the moving images themselves move or "lead" the writing individual, out of lethargy and crisis, or to the old train wagon parked at the end of a meandering cascade of images. Where *Slow Homecoming* captures and describes the protagonist's non-linear, homeward movement through Alaska, Handke through his idea of a *Bilderschrift* in his *journals* develops a mode of writing

³²² Handke, *Vor der Baumschattenwand nachts*, 400.

³²³ As Barthes conceives of the diary. In Barthes conception, the diary resembles an altogether "non-essential," "unnecessary," and "inauthentic" example of a private text that is not meant for publication but which the writer uses as a mere "workshop for sentences," quoted from Lejeune's reading notes: Philippe Lejeune, "The Diary on Trial," *On Diary*, 162.

³²⁴ "Die Schrift der Tagtäglichkeit: es ist eine gewaltige Bilder-Schrift: der Buschauffeur, das Schulkind, der Schuster, das Männchen in der Ampel; der Fluß, der zum schmalen zunehmenden Mond führt, die Sichel, die zur alten Frau führt, die mir gerade entgegenkommt, die Alte wiederum führt mich zum abgestellten Zugwagon (zu sehen ist diese Bilderschrift am Rand der Schwermut, an den Rändern)," Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 246.

that is based on the idea of time “leading” the writer’s hand. This writing is extensive, and interrelates (various) individual images perceived over a certain period of time.

The associative flow of events captured in this “writing of day-to-dayness” seems to effortlessly tie together the single elements gleaned within the course of the day under which each entry appears. Only at second glance do the results comprise an actual ‘story.’ Linking the “river leading to the slim shape of the crescent moon” to “the parked train wagon” via “the old lady” on the street as the claimed endpoint of a chain of images that seem not particularly related, the writer himself ultimately appears at the end of the passage as the connecting link between all of these images. In the penultimate image, the old lady “leads me,” as the writer states, to the last image of “the parked train wagon” in which this entry culminates. What thus appears on the page is an order of events or images visible by this writing. As a practice of writing “in accordance” with these events, this *Bilderschrift* is informed by the contingency of the scene that surrounds it. Furnishing writing with the ability to endow order to events, Handke challenges narrative conventions, suggesting through writing an idea of both form and narration that is established by that which is being narrated.

Letting the scene take the “lead,” this writing in its abundance and extensiveness ultimately opposes what the individual in the 1972 poem referred to as “shorthand” [*Kurzschrift*]. Rather than spreading out the subject of their writing and exploring it, in *Kurzschrift* the individual hides away or concealed this subject. In a preceding entry on the same page, Handke describes the crescent moon, now waning, as it was in the window the night before. In combination with this entry, Handke’s later reflection on *Bilderschrift* and the seemingly arbitrary flow of events in this passage appear as a retrospective take on a number of observations that stem from the preceding day. One day later, Handke in his reflections addresses

the possible interrelatedness of these events in time. Like countless others in this book, this passage points towards a process of writing that through description endows that which is being observed with a non-chronologic and non-linear order in writing. The order in which these observations relate logically is being replaced by an order endowed or imposed by the temporal logic of a writing. Rather than with the conventions of storytelling, this practice of writing is performed in accordance with perception

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By referring to the writing found both in diaries and in newspapers, I argue, Handke's *journals* conceptualize the idea of *Mitschrift* as a distinct mode of writing that hovers between both diary and the newspaper. In particular, Handke's conception of writing as a form of daily coverage takes these poles as points of departure. While in the poem, *Mitschrift* is portrayed to be a mode of writing in relation to diaristic techniques, this writing ultimately refutes most typical diaristic features, in particular the diarist's self-involvement. Instead, it derives from an almost journalistic outward gaze. Journalistic writing at first seems to stand in direct opposition to this writing, e.g., to the present-minded musicality that is staged as the precondition for this *Mitschrift*. However, like the diary's "mystical alliance with Time"³²⁵ the time-embedded writing characteristic for journalistic reports ultimately grounds the writing at the end of the poem. As a 'poetic' or *journal* mode of writing, the poem's *Mitschrift* in the end is achieved through a twofold process that cuts across a simple opposition to both journalistic discourse and diaristic writing. Drawing on the tension that is contained in the French noun *journal* – a

³²⁵ Lejeune, "The Diary as 'Antifiction,'" 204.

homonym that translates both as diary and newspaper³²⁶ –, Handke’s poems develops the idea of a *journal* mode of writing or *Mitschrift* from a technique closely related to the typically journalistic shorthand. This “note-taking” is as a technique commonly associated with journalism, undertaken by the reporter while “stand[ing], notebook open, before an event.”³²⁷ In a second step, however, Handke combines this journalistic technique with genuinely diaristic features. Through an attention to the supposedly negligible detail³²⁸ rather than to breaking news, and through a focus on the immediate environment rather than the wider (global or national) context, Handke conceives of *Mitschrift* as a mode of writing that is ‘journal’ in both senses of the word, i.e., in both a diaristic and a journalistic sense.

In “Life Without Poesy,” taking to a distinctly *journal* mode of writing only at the beginning of the text for Handke’s individual is characterized by a lack of structure, order or ‘form,’ as Wapnewski suggests. Once *journal* as a mode of writing is achieved, the search for order becomes the poem’s exclusive concern. The process of recovering this order alongside the scaffolding of time and dates result in image-like perceptions and their precise descriptions. This “spontaneous noting-down of purposeless perceptions/observations,” as Handke noted in 1977 in the preface to his first prose-journal *The Weight of the World*, for him at that time meant “the liberation from given literary forms” in the first place and, “at once, the freedom of a literary possibility which, until then, was unknown to me.”³²⁹

³²⁶ For an historic overview of terminology in French and German contexts: Günter Bentele, “Journalismus,” Harald Fricke et al. (eds.), *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*. Vol. II, H-O (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2007), 203-206.

³²⁷ Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News*. Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217.

³²⁸ In contrast, earlier in the poem and before the dawn of *Mitschrift*, the individual stated: “in den täglich gleichen Gesamteindrücken / rührte mich keine Einzelheit,” Handke, “Leben ohne Poesie,” 228.

³²⁹ Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, preface.

By applying Barthes' much more flexible concept of an *écriture*, I argue that the subsequent 'diarization' of oeuvres by writers like Handke can be read as the opposite of what Wapnewski identifies as a reduction or lack of interest in form. Through *Mitschrift*, Handke imports a time-based way of ordering writing into a variety of different genres. This 'diarization' of prose works or poetry for Handke in fact is the manifestation of the author's new interest in writing at the time. This writing allows for a liberation from existing genre conventions, forms, and prevalent ways of narration in the same manner that Valentin Sorger, Handke's protagonist from the 1979 text *The Long Way Around*, finds himself liberated. Once released from his obsessive scientific quest for forms in every landscape, Sorger is drawn towards the idea of form as a "stumbling downhill" that results as a byproduct. In "Life Without Poesy," the individual understands an alignment of living and writing as an entirely new potential for "form." As a mode of writing, *journal* here can be seen as synonymous with an idea of temporal order in texts that is not imposed upon them but informed by the matters of the days, seasons and scenes that make up the content of this writing. This definition of *journal* as a mode of writing conceived in terms of a methodological approach will guide my further analysis in this chapter, where I will turn to works of Handke's that in one way or another subscribe to an *écriture quotidienne*.

The idea of a text in which writing itself sponsors form emerges in Handke's poetry from the early 1970s. Ending with a bracketed "26. Nov." as a rare indication of a new date in this volume, a conclusory statement to the entry following the one about "the writing of day-to-dayness" locates the preceding descriptions within the larger bracket of a single day as the basic unit of this *journal*. Read together, all of the entries of this episode relate writing back to the procedural, calendric nature of everyday perception. This principle is formative not just for Handke's *journal* volumes. Since the 1991 publication of his *Attempt on The Successful Day*, this

understanding of writing also applies to many of Handke's other texts. Reflecting on this affirmative relation of writing to order, scholar Arno Dusini proposes a definition of diaristic writing that relates *journal* writing back to the calendar as its technological predecessor: "Keeping a diary," Dusini suggests, "represents the kind of human activity in relation to time [that is] signified by the time unit 'day'."³³⁰ In their almost exclusive focus on the day as well its numerous temporal subdivisions and increments as their subject matter, Handke's texts show the kind of "mystical alliance with Time" that Lejeune put at the center of his definition of the diary.

Considering the calendar and other forms of log-keeping as precursors to the diary, the syllable 'jour' in the French word *journal* here provides the definition of the "literary possibility" that Handke in the preface to his first *journal* described as the "spontaneous noting-down of purposeless perceptions/observations." The unit of the 'day' as these texts intrinsic ordering principle replaces the conventions of "given literary forms" and frees the writer from them. This focus on the day ultimately allows for a distinctly temporal conception of *journal* as a mode of writing in Handke that permeates other forms too. I argue that this temporal conception of writing as a "Schrift der Tagtaglichkeit" in Handke's texts since the 1970s emerges as the "demon" of writing.

³³⁰ Arno Dusini, "... im Leben Blattern. Das Tagebuch als materialisierte Zeit," Helmut Gold et. al. (eds.), *Absolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), 97.

II.

The meandering progress of Handke's 11-day research trip through Alaska leading up to the eventual work on *The Long Way Around* is not only documented in the author's personal notebooks of the time, but also in a series of 48 casual polaroid photographs.³³¹ Both photos and notebooks together form the raw material for the sights and scenes that end up in the story. The 48 images capture the progress of Handke's trip and the solemn landscape as it presented itself to the author along the way. We see buildings and shops of the cities visited, the snow-covered peaks and tree-covered flanks of the Alaska Range mountains, train tracks, abandoned trains and more train tracks. We see a snapshot taken through the window glass of a small airplane, as well as clouds and even a few cameo appearances of the author-photographer himself, captured as a reflection through the rear-view mirror of a car or as a long thin shadow, strangely elongated by the setting of the eerie northern evening light. The entries in the notebooks supplant these vistas with observations on movement, such as the change of light during the day and the changing scenery as seen from the car window.

The 48 polaroids in their progression could be read as a visual *journal* supplementing the later *journal* volume put together from the notebooks. The image quality of the writing in these volumes motivates my comparison. Like in *The Weight of the World*, the intuitive congruence of form and content characterizes Handke's eerie polaroid pictures. Very much informed by the light of the day, these images in their sequence can be read as a photographic attempt of capturing space and time of the surrounding landscape in the way writing at the end of Handke's

³³¹ Available online via <https://handkeonline.onb.ac.at/node/2446>.

1972 poem captures the suburban scene. In their focus on the wide-open landscape, the polaroids contrast with the stifled, dark and muted experience at the beginning of “Life Without Poesy.” In the case of polaroids, immediate exposure to daylight causes the instant pictures to develop over a short period of time. This process, I argue, can be made productive in an understanding of Handke’s conception of *Mitschrift* as a similarly photo-sensitive or light-sensitive process with regards to a writerly “reaction in language.”

In their passing, sometimes blurred, sometimes disproportionate focus, the Alaskan polaroids reenact the temporal conception of diaristic writing that is absent at the onset of the “Life Without Poesy.” Characterized by an interest in spatial and territorial freedom, the aimlessness or purposelessness of the photographer’s gaze is the sponsor of a perception that is not bound to or confined by the limits of the surrounding space. Instead, the photographer sets out to explore the topographic limits in a form of writerly topography. *A journal extime*,³³² Handke’s writing follows the sequence of days in an attempt to explore both time and space. Handke’s use of polaroid photography during the Alaska trip – like his *journal* writing – appears as the sterile inversion of the protagonist’s futile attempt to type or perceive anything at all worth typing in the windowless vestibule from the beginning of the poem. What Handke-scholarship sees as a focus on “details and observations,”³³³ both in writing and photography emerges as a distinct focus on the spatiotemporal scene of writing and photography. In their focus on motion, Handke’s written *journals* ultimately only supplement the sights of his photographic stills with movement. However, even the polaroids themselves capture moments in motion, resulting in the blurry, slightly unfocused quality of many of the images.

³³² On the *journal extime*, see footnote 28 on p. 11 of my introduction.

³³³ Böttiger, Bromhach, Rüdener, “Sanfte Bewegung von außen nach innen,” 431f.

In his comprehensive overview of the Marbach archive's Handke holdings, Ulrich von Bülow connects the start of the author's *journal* project to his engagement with images. Von Bülow names in particular Handke's and Wim Wender's film *Wrong Movement* [*Falsche Bewegung*, 1975] as the start of this interest in diaristic writing. In one frame of this film, the protagonist can be seen holding a notebook, a scene that the scholar considers as the "kickoff for a decade long engagement of Handke's with the *journal*."³³⁴ As a chronicle in images, the film depicts two young protagonists' search for experiences in the city. Handke, through the medium of film, develops an interest in images that he explores further in the writing of his *journals*. Both his *journal* volumes and this film embed this quest for experience in space and time.³³⁵ In Handke's volume *Mornings at the Cliff Window*, writing itself leads the writer in this exploration, a "writing of day-to-dayness" that grounds this exploration in the use of images.

As *Bildschrift*, the importance of images in this writing emerges as one of the central aspects the texts, alongside their focus on the unit of a day. Over a series of several decades, the writing of time interconnects images. Handke famously explored this interconnection in his novel-epic *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* [*Der Bildverlust oder Durch die Sierra de Gredos*, 2002], where his female protagonist, during an extensive journey through Spain's La Mancha region, overcomes a year of crisis in search of the author Miguel de Cervantes, who she hopes can write her biography. Like *Don Quixote*, Handke's *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* is a merger of novelistic and epic traditions. In Handke's novel, the epic element shows in an almost

³³⁴ von Bülow, "Die Tage, die Bücher, die Stifte," 238.

³³⁵ The Nobel committee in 2019 picked up on this dimension in Handke's works when naming in particular the author's "extraordinary attention to landscapes and the material presence of the world" in these texts. The Committee's announcement can be found here: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2019/bio-bibliography/>

chivalric sense of adventure that is connected to this quest for images.³³⁶ The protagonist's journey to regain her ability to "take in" images emerge as a quest similar to Sorger's quest for form or to individual's quest for writing in "Life Without Poesy." As a search for adventures "where there were none to undergo, at least no external, visible ones," the search for images expresses a desire to regain a visual access to the world.

Handke's larger epic novels from his later work³³⁷ all reflect this circuitous quest where the author once again "attempts to become a narrator," as critic Lothar Müller observes in his review of Handke's most recent epic, *The Fruit Thief* [*Die Obstdiebin*, 2017].³³⁸ Müller in this review connects what he perceives as Handke's two personas: as a narrator on the one hand, and as an author of "notebooks" on the other. The ability (or inability) to see and perceive, i.e., to both write and read images, is the central point in both strands of Handke's work, merging into one, I argue, in Handke's idea of the epic. Like Cervantes' hero, who famously fights invisible windmills, the desired images for Handke's epic heroine belong "primarily to an interior world, and were for that very reason universal." "The loss of images," the narrator states in a conversation with the protagonist at the novel's climax, "is the most painful of losses. – It means the loss of the world." Like in the journals, the writing of and in images in the epic is connected to the realm of the everyday: "In and through the image I was being redeemed and opened on a

³³⁶ Handke's motto in this novel draws this connections between images and adventure: "Vielleicht haben die Ritterschaft und die Verzauberungen heutzutage andere Wege zu nehmen als bei den Alten." Peter Handke, *Der Bildverlust oder Durch die Sierra de Gredos* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 5. Quoted from: Peter Handke, *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*. Transl. by Krishna Winston (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 5.

³³⁷ Such as *My Year in the No-Man's Bay* [*Mein Jahr in der Niemandsbucht*] (1994) or *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* (2002). In both epics, Handke develops the comprehensive project of new "Zeitformen, Zeitgrammatiken," tied to his approach to writing in relation to the day. Handke, *Der Bildverlust*, 638f.

³³⁸ "[Handke] arbeitet [...] in immer neuen Anläufen daran, ein Erzähler zu werden. Lothar Müller, "Meister der Prosa des Augenblicks," review in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from November 16, 2017. Accessed online via: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/literatur-meister-der-prosa-des-augenblicks-1.3746197>

daily basis. In the daily image I become another.”³³⁹ The *journal*-typic fusion of inward and outward, of diaristic and journalistic modes of writing, is connected to the ability to perceive images: “In the image, internal and external seemed to be fused into a third element, greater and more lasting.”³⁴⁰

The epic in Handke’s late work emerges as the final genre where *journal* as a mode of writing is manifested.³⁴¹ In the idea of an epic narration Handke continues his interest in writing as a sponsor of form the 1970s and 1980s.³⁴² In a distinctly epic mode of writing, Handke reconfigures narration beyond the linear. This writing first originates in his *journal* volumes, as an entry from his journal *In Front of the Tree-Shadow-Wall at Night* shows. In this *journal*, Handke’s sense of time and day is expressed in the idea of a “narrative step” or “pace” that is genuinely “epic:” “Epic step: the counting of steps [*Schrittzählen*] morphs into the pace of recounting [*Erzählschritt*], the narrative pace [*Erzählschritte*].”³⁴³ As a pace or rhythm, the ability to narrate here is connected to the ability to walk, (re)count and write. Handke’s quest for the retrieval of images in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* connects his epic project to his journals

³³⁹ Handke, *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*, 464. “Der Verlust der Bilder ist der schmerzlichste der Verluste. – Es bedeutet den Weltverlust. [...] Im Bild wurde ich täglich erlöst und geöffnet. Im täglichen Bild wurde ich ein anderer.” Handke, *Der Bildverlust*, 746.

³⁴⁰ Handke, *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*, 463. “Im Bild erschienen Außen und Innen fusioniert zu etwas Drittem, etwas Größerem und Beständigem.” Handke, *Der Bildverlust*, 745.

³⁴¹ Stefan Kaszyński reads *Am Felsfenster morgens* as Handke’s hitherto latest installment of a “aphoristische Journalepik” or “Mitschgattung.” Stefan H. Kaszyński, “Aphorismus als Lebenshaltung: Zu Peter Handkes Journalbuch *Am Felsfenster morgens*,” Alo Allkemper, Norbert Otto Eke (eds.), *Literatur und Demokratie: Festschrift für Hartmut Steinecke zum 60. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2000), 273, 277. On the relationship between chronicle and epic in Handke, see Leopold Federmair, “Formen der Konjunktion: Zum Verhältnis von Chronik und Epos bei Peter Handke,” Kastberger (ed.), *Peter Handke: Freiheit des Schreibens*, 306-323.

³⁴² Böttiger, Brombach, Rüdener, “Sanfte Bewegungen von außen nach innen,” 439.

³⁴³ “Epischer Schritt: Das Schrittzählen verwandelt sich in den Erzählschritt, die Erzählschritte.” Handke, *Vor der Baumschattenwand nachts*, 345.

through a common focus on a meandering, step-by-step exploration as a writerly adventure into unknown territories. His epics, I argue, are a result of a *journal* mode of writing that works across genre borders. With a focus both on individual details and an overarching whole, and on anti-linearity and the long-haul passing of time,³⁴⁴ Handke's *journal* volumes are epics of the everyday, recounting in hundreds of small, daily image-steps how time passed by under the attention of the writer. In its daily seriality, *journal* writing is a (re)counting of these days.

3.6 *Journal as a State of Mind*

In the preface to *The Weight of the World*, Handke elaborates on the idea of a consciousness that establishes a precondition for writing. Handke connects this idea of a consciousness to the writing of his *journal* volumes, which he defines as a practice of linguistic reaction that invigorates language. Like in his 1972 poem, Handke places this writing in proximity to a seemingly corrupted, occupied, and non-poetic language:

I trained myself to react instantly with language to everything that happened to me and realized how, at the moment of the experience [...], language also became alive [*wie die Sprache sich belebte*] and communicable for me; and then, in the very next moment, it would again be the 'you-know-what-I-mean'-lingo of the communication age, heard on a daily basis, helpless and void of any meaning through its familiarity.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ See Handke's idea of a "narration of states of inertia" [*Erzählen der Stillstände*], outlined in *The Lesson of Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Peter Handke, *Die Lehre der Sainte Victoire* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 441. Translation mine.

³⁴⁵ Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, preface.

The passage's reference to the "lingo" of the "communication age" echoes the function journalism assumes in his poem. As the passage implies, it is not non-communication, but a different idea of communication that characterizes Handke's notion of writing. This writing does not rely on the basic "you-know-what-I-mean" assumption of a journalistic communication of information that posed a problem for the would-be writer in the 1972 poem. "Alive" and "communicable," Handke's use of language does not rely on the recognizing of "familiarity" in linguistic or textual patterns. Instead, through writing a form of "meaning" arises in the singularity of a non-preconceived, non-"occupied" or otherwise mediated "experience."

Writing *journal* for Handke establishes the opposite of the journalistic ideal of a detached and committedly "objective" observer-relation to events as they unfold.³⁴⁶ In its uniqueness and unconformity of unconventional phrases or words, a poetic, "poesy"-endowed use of language as proposed in Handke's "Life Without Poesy" fosters anything but easy communication. Rather than emerging from occupied words and predetermined meaning, experience or adventure arises from a different state of mind or consciousness that precedes writing. Only with the onset of a "poetic lust for the world," does the world begin to resonate for the individual of the poem with the kind of sound that is in opposition to their previously alienated relation to the outside world.

This "lust for the world" is a state of mind which builds on *music* as the historical ideal of poetry and, in the poem, it functions as the aesthetic antagonist to journalism. This sound is then reflected in the poem's stylistic make-up: in the last stanza, enjambments are likewise placed "musically," which is: poetically. This musicality corresponds to the use of enjambment in

³⁴⁶ On the idea of an "'overarching' commitment to objectivity" in journalistic reporting see Williams, "Anglo-American Journalism," 10.

poetry, i.e., rhythmically sound and grammatically as well as syllabically sensible, in a way that provides a different kind of “flow” or order to what here are mostly paratactical structures that oppose the style and syntax from the poem’s main part. At the end of the text, the steady flow of everyday events and their likewise paratactical descriptions of “facts” and “details”³⁴⁷ are also mounted to a temporal scaffolding, now properly inscribing the diary-like iterative adverbial qualifiers into the events they reflect. However, in the context of a language that is meant to aide easy understanding and communication, these vague and unprecise qualifiers are instead obstructive. Temporal indicators like “In the last days,” “With every day,” “Toward the evenings” are rarely found in a newspaper.

A whole cascade of rhythmically (and grammatically) intact descriptions is triggered at the moment at the start of the final stanza when “nature” is said to be turning “musical” again. This stanza in its musicality resembles the very kind of descriptions that the individual, at the beginning of the text, had “hid away in shorthand.” Journalism historians connect this *shorthand* to the development of reporting – one of the prime methods of journalistic writing”³⁴⁸ In the poem, however, (journalistic) note-taking – in conjunction with the methods of the (failed) inwardly-turned diarist – represents the opposite of the ideal of a consciousness or musicality that results in *Mitschrift*. In their iterative character, the adverbial qualifiers discussed above oppose the precise indications of time and locale of singular events which Broersma singles out as characteristic elements in the scaffolding of a newspaper story.³⁴⁹ *Mitschrift*, in contrast,

³⁴⁷ Peter Handke, *Leben ohne Poesie*, 228.

³⁴⁸ Connected to the brief stenography undertaken by the reporter while “stand[ing], notebook open, before an event. Stephens, *A History of News*, 217.

³⁴⁹ Marcel Broersma, “Form, Style and Journalistic Strategies,” Broersma (ed.): *Form and Style in Journalism*, xiiiif.

emerges as a different, more extensive and more integrated way of writing in sync with time, an *écriture* that – “richtig,” “rightly,” as the adverbial qualifier implies – pays ‘proper,’ i.e., a different kind of respect to reality than the writing of reporters in the newspapers.

Considering the emergence of *Mitschrift* from these two different forms of *shorthand*, the poem’s attention to “facts” and “details” that come with this impaired mode of writing stands in contrast to the attention to reality of journalists and diarists alike. The images with which this *Mitschrift* is concerned are distinct from journalism’s use of images, e.g., the photographic documentation of a (crime) scene or the headshot of a famous person. The question of writing, therefore, is one of a state of mind or of an ontological difference that builds on images, showing in the particular access to reality via images desired by this writer. In this manner, the very existence of the last stanza and its focus on the flow of images as they present themselves to the writer indicates the possibility of an utterly different, non-scattered, present-minded and outward-turned state of mind. This attention allows for the flow of a writing process that is dictated entirely by events in the writer’s environment and that remains unaffected by any sense of formal obligations.

In the preface to *The Weight of the World*, Handke elaborates on the idea of a ‘journal(istic)’ consciousness. He defines this consciousness in stark opposition to the realms of communication media and (“heard on a daily basis”) with special recourse to hearing and writing and the ‘you-know-what-I-mean lingo of the communication age. In Handke’s writing of the time, the latter seems to take on a function that James Carey, in his 1974 outline of “The Problem of Journalism History,”³⁵⁰ conceives of as a “state of consciousness.” Carey suggests that

³⁵⁰ James W. Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” Eve S. Munson, Catherine A. Warren (eds.): *James Carey: A Critical Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 86-94.

journalism is a “way of apprehending, of experiencing the world,” an understanding that journalism historians in the following decades have identified as formative in the 20th century. Handke’s writing in its spontaneous conception of form as well as in its focus on experiencing the world in an unburdened way presupposes a different kind of consciousness.³⁵¹

Journalism, in Handke’s writing and in this poem in particular, must be understood in conjunction with the “philological characteristics”³⁵² of the new media landscape emerging in the late 20th century. This resonates, I argue, with the turn-of-the-century scenario of a crisis of consciousness and of language caused by new and more exact media like the phonograph or photography. Historically, crises of language and consciousness can be related to the possibilities of new communication technology that compete with the role and function of literary language.³⁵³ Through unprecedented advancements in satellite communication, information in the latter half of the 20th century was spread more widely and more rapidly than ever before and impacted the perception of the world. This poses a problem for literary texts such as Handke’s, where perception is a central concern. In his texts, the literary topos of *Sprachkrise* is connected to the co-presence of competing modes of writing.³⁵⁴ “Life Without Poesy” implies that the accelerated transmission of journalistic writing through mass media in particular affects the

³⁵¹ Or attitude, as expressed in the idea of *ethos* connected to the emergence of *écriture* in Barthes. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 1, 13-16.

³⁵² Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism*, 303f.

³⁵³ On the historic connection of mediated experiences and crises of writing and narration in modernity, Walter Benjamin, “Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1977), 438-465.

³⁵⁴ On Handke’s journals and their relation to *Sprachkrise*, see Carsten Zelle, “Parteinahme für die Dinge: Peter Handkes Poetik einer literarischen Phänomenologie (am Beispiel seiner *Journale*, 1975-1982,” *Euphorion. Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*. Ed. by. Wolfgang Adam. Vol. 97, Issue 1 2003 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), 99-117.

mediation of reality. For the individual, this is connected to the prevalence of a particular jargon and awareness that arise from the daily reception of topical media.

The multifaceted lack or deficiency experienced by the individual in the poem permeates all dimensions of life, and is represented in a crisis of time, of language, of perception, of the self. At the peak of the individual's impasse, the altogether fivefold experience of crises in the poem's eighth stanza, culminates in the idea of a *Kurzschrift* that is linked to both to a distinctly diaristic and a distinctly journalistic mode of writing. On the content level of the poem, the abundance of the media ("In the evenings I kept postponing / turning on my television set"³⁵⁵) designates the role of journalists in the media as the administrators of a fixed lingo or jargon which, in its attempt to provide a daily coverage, "occupies" the "phenomena" and, in return, causes the *journal* writer manqué to become "speechless."

Handke connects the advent of a new "literary possibility" to this *Mitschrift* as a *journal* mode of writing that resembles a different coverage of the world. Both the absence and eventual advent of "poesy" in the 1972 poem connect the arrival at this new possibility to a multifaceted experience of crisis and connect the individual's eventual emergence from this difficult time as the dramaturgical arc of the text. In the poem, the different degrees of the individual's embeddedness in the temporal context of writing are just one aspect of this "poesy." The idea of an ontological difference in the respective mind states or consciousnesses connected to both the absence and the presence of *Mitschrift* is evident on several levels. Considering the autumnal state of a time crisis, the coming to *Mitschrift* in here not only stands in for a newfound "freedom" to something (e.g., writing) that *journal* as a "literary possibility" opens up. I argue

³⁵⁵ "Das Einschalten des Fernsehers am Abend habe / ich jeweils hinausgezögert." Handke, "Leben ohne Poesie," 229.

that a journal mode of writing for the *individual* to the same degree also presupposes a much larger sense of freedom *from* something. This results in writing as an act of liberation from an ontological standpoint, where the transition from one (failed) mode of writing or no writing at all to another, *Mitschrift*, doubles as the transition from one (barren) *scene* of writing to another one that is intact. In the poem, the physical and metaphorical act of moving (on) from one room to another, from one scene to another, a mental space and a real one, and from one season or time to another, enables the individual to attain the kind of consciousness or perception that enables them to write.

3.7 The Image in the Age of Universal Pictures

Chronicling the utterly depleting, all-encompassing condition of a *loss of images* [*Bildverlust*], the epic *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* expands the idea of a multifold crisis of consciousness and language into the realm of a *Bildkrise*. A crisis of images, the quasi-medical condition of a *Bildverlust* connects an inability to perceive images to a problem of language and writing. The titular image crisis, where the loss of images leads Handke's protagonist to her restless search through the Sierra de Gredos, is connected to an inability to take in images, grounding *Bildverlust* in a more general crisis of perception that results in a further crisis of the writing consciousness. In a dialogue between the author and his protagonist at the end of the novel, the cause of this crisis is connected to the same problem that prevented the individual in the 1972 poem from freeing the right words from the terms and slogans with which the media kept them "occupied."

In a way typical for Handke, the protagonist, who is stranded in the middle of the Sierra, has a “nocturnal discussion” with “her” extradiegetic author. This author figure appears intradiegetically as a *deus ex machina* voice-over that equivocates the sentiments of the “adventurer” with those of “her author” as a form of synthesized, complete soliloquy in two voices. The images that had accompanied both protagonist and narrator over a whole lifetime are no longer affecting them now:

What affects me instead is the ready-made and prefabricated ones, images controlled from the outside and directed at will. And their effect is the opposite of the old ones. These new images have destroyed those other images, the image per se, the source. Particularly in the century just past, the original sources and deposits of images were ruthlessly raided, in the end disastrously. The natural vein has been stripped, and people now cling to the synthetic, mass-produced, artificial images that have replaced the reality that was lost along with the original images that pretend to be them, and even heighten the false impression, like drugs, as a drug³⁵⁶

Like the poem, the epic connects the media to a failure to live in sync with images. The media in the later epic prevent the protagonist from further distinguishing between the right kind of images from the ones that form part of media’s daily image flood. Noting that the intradiegetic author “had experienced the loss of images long before her, the heroine,” and that this loss of images did not mean that these images did not exist anymore at all, the great finale of the epic emerges as an act of working through a moment of crisis that, at least via the intradiegetic persona named “the author,” is charged with a programmatic dimension that can be read in

³⁵⁶ Handke, *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*, 462. “Was stattdessen auf mich einwirkt, das sind die gemachten und gelenkten, die von außen gelenkten und nach Belieben lenkbaren Bilder, und deren Wirkung ist eine konträre. – Diese Bilder haben jene Bilder, haben das Bild, haben die Quelle zerstört. Vor allem im noch nicht so lang vergangenen Jahrhundert wurde ein Raubbau an den Bildergründen und –schichten betrieben, welcher zuletzt mörderisch war. Der Naturschatz ist aufgebraucht, und man zappelt als Anhängsel an den gemachten, serienmäßig fabrizierten, künstlichen Bildern, welche die mit dem Bildverlust verlorenen Wirklichkeiten ersetzen, sie vortäuschen und den falschen Eindruck sogar noch steigern wie Drogen.” Handke, *Der Bildverlust*, 743.

conjunction with the very writing of this text itself. In its focus on the image in the age of its technological reproduction, this central passage in *Bildverlust* establishes an opposition between original and copy, between “prefabricated images” and ones that are unique to the beholder. This almost auratic understanding of image can be read as Benjaminian media critique that draws a parallel to writing as an intervention into a ubiquitous, controlled and synthetic class of journalistic texts.

The critical relationship to images and journalism is a constant yet ambiguous topic for Handke, and, over the course of his oeuvre, has changed significantly. Handke subsequently expanded his media and image critique, culminating in his at times derisive and polemical position towards the media in the late 1990s, where in texts such as *The Journey in the Dugout Canoe* [*Die Fahrt im Einbaum*, 1999], Handke’s attempt at a political intervention into the emerging narrative about the Yugoslavia war turned into a media scandal itself. In contrast, in the story *Short Letter, Long Farewell* [*Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied*, 1972], the images provided in the news lack the problematic aspect for Handke’s protagonist that they will assume later on. In this text, the distinction between reproduced and unique, auratic images is still absent. Images in general for Handke’s protagonist are able to expand his world beyond the momentary, pushing him out of a moment of crisis that is accompanied by a feeling of stasis and of being lost.

As in many of Handke’s texts of this time, the conflicting experiences of liberation in the distance and of being lost while traveling on the American continent assume prominent roles in *Short Letter, Long Farewell*. In a Manhattan self-service cafeteria, the protagonist of this story finds himself drawn to a newspaper on the table next to him. In strange environment, this newspaper provides him with a momentary escape from his feeling of loneliness. Through the

image-like descriptions in this paper, the media in this story provide the protagonist with sense of space and time that contrasts with the spatio-temporal disconnect of his current situation.

Reading “what happened and what was yet to happen, one page after another, with an ever-increasing sense of comfort [*Behaglichkeit*],”³⁵⁷ descriptions of different places engender this sense of comfort. The narrator relates a series of incidents in the local surroundings – a child born on the LIRR, a man walking on his hands from Alabama to Georgia, the cactuses blossoming in the Nevada desert. Through these incidents, Handke’s protagonist develops through the newspaper reading “an obsessive sympathy for everything, only through the fact that I found it described; I felt attracted to every region [*Gegend*].”³⁵⁸

This attraction in combination with the feeling of comfort ultimately draws Handke’s disoriented, lost protagonists towards distant, as-yet unexplored corners of the country. Like in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*, the stasis of crisis is resolved into movement, both mentally and physically. And like in “Life Without Poesy,” the emergence from this crisis ultimately results in a state of mind that is in agreement or in accordance with a scene that goes beyond the writer’s immediate local surroundings:

Every person, and most importantly every place, that I had not known, grew so friendly [*sympathisch*] to me in reading, that I developed a sort of wanderlust [*Fernweh*] for it. I read of a telegraph office in Montana and of a street in a military camp in Virginia, and immediately I wanted to be there and live there for a period of time; if not, I would miss out on something that I would never be able to make up for again. [...] The fact that for the first

³⁵⁷ “was passiert war und was noch passieren sollte, eine Seite nach der andern, und mit immer größerer Behaglichkeit.” Peter Handke, *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 40f. Translation mine.

³⁵⁸ “Eine zwang hafte Sympathie stellte sich bei mir ein mit allem, nur dadurch, daß ich es beschrieben fand; zu jeder Gegend fühlte ich mich hingezogen.” Handke, *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied*, 41

time in a long time, and especially here in New York and while reading a newspaper, I was attracted to everything in an almost uncanny way, terrified me.³⁵⁹

Oriented towards the unknown, unexplored territory, this process strives for a perception that is yet unoccupied or predetermined. Media play a key role in this process, not only when the images are found in a newspaper, but when these images in the newspaper transport the protagonist to a telegraph office in Montana as if there were a direct link or wire that the media establish between the readers location in downtown Manhattan and the open landscape of Montana. Through images like these, the protagonist develops a “sympathy” for the distance that recalls the musicality achieved at the end of the poem.

Modern technology as a force that here reduces or obliterates physical distance enables the protagonist to feel proximity even to geographically faraway places, even as he feels distanced from geographically nearby places.³⁶⁰ The idea of *Fernweh* or wanderlust relates the reading of a newspaper as a positive, image-enabling experience to the distance that differs from the disabling experience to which the media’s images will later be connected in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*. This suggests that two different understandings of image are at play here. The mass-reproduced, “synthetic” images of the media in Handke’s later work do not possess this sense of openness and possibility. The function that is ascribed to the newspaper image in *Short*

³⁵⁹ “Jeder Mensch, und vor allem jeder Ort, den ich noch nicht kannte, wurden mir beim Lesen so sympathisch, daß ich eine Art Fernweh danach bekam. Ich las von einem Telegrafembüro in Montana und von einer Straße in einem Militärcamp in Virginia, und sofort wollte ich dort sein und eine Zeitlang dort leben; wenn nicht, würde ich etwas versäumen, was ich nie mehr nachholen könnte. [...] Daß ich mich seit langem wieder, hier in New York, und beim Lesen einer Zeitung, auf diese unheimliche Weise zu allem hingezogen fand, erschreckte mich.” Handke, *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied*, 41f.

³⁶⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Das Ding,” *Gesamtausgabe*. Vol. 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 165-187

Letter, Long Farewell resembles the character of the non-synthetic, unique and auratic images which in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* oppose the image world of the media.

The changing notion of image and the role of media in this process is striking and, I argue, can be connected to the changing role of media and news over this 30-year period in combination with Handke's idea of *journal*. From the 1980s onward, 24/7 news networks like CNN flooded screens around the world with a ubiquity of images that make experiences like those with the single and isolated images described in the paper in *Short Letter, Long Farewell* impossible. This development is foreshadowed in the role that mass media assume in "Life Without Poesy." Where isolated local news stories about banalities in the 1972 story stand in for freedom, a possibility of space and images, the opposite is the case in the 1972 long poem. While the individual is out of sync with their local scene, the presence of writing about distant events in the papers increases their sense of crisis. The media and their terms and slogans occupy the phenomena rather than provide a sense of openness and possibility. Where in *Short Letter, Long Farewell* story the image in the paper encourages the protagonist, in "Life Without Poesy" the writing of the papers is found to be an off-putting aspect.

In the poem's last stanza, the effortless accordance contained in the synchronous flow of events and writing ("mit-schreiben") as well as the intimate "glisten[ing]" of the green blades of grass establish, in writing, a metaphoric relationship to reality that the poem portrays as much more nuanced and colorful than the "black and white" of the newspaper's ink. The individual's writing in the last stanza stands in for a correlation between language and reality that is displayed as fresh and spontaneous, coming into existence every time anew in the very idea of a perception that, as an act of cognition, merges with the practice of writing. The words referring to events and objects in the newspapers, in contrast, appear as "occupied," with "every appearance" a

priori – or “right from the beginning” [*von vornherein*] as the poem has it – appearing as a term, a relationship between words and reality that is pre-established by certain linguistic patterns or structures and hence resembles the matrix of the “literary possibility” Handke sets out to explore in his idea of writing *journal* as a *Bildschrift*, a writing in and of images that “lead” the writer from one sight or vista to another.

Elaborating on the reasons for his protagonist’s incapacity for “taking the [images] in and letting them affect her,”³⁶¹ Handke points in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredios* to mass media as the main factor of this image crisis. Referencing the latter half of the 20th century and in particular the era of mass media as a time of iconoclasm, Handke states that a “new” class of “readymade,” “controlled,” “prefabricated” and “directed” images have replaced the “old” ones. Handke hints at a process of transformation in which “deposits of images were ruthlessly raided” and where “artificial images” have ultimately “replaced the reality that was lost along with the original images,” thus outlining an ontological problem similar to the crisis of perception connected to the (in)ability to write *journal*. At the very end of the 20th century, the ubiquity of images, as well as the ubiquity of writing that is connected to the news, establishes a problem for the writer. Images, in their ability to either open up space and connect the writer to the world, or to close off associations and predetermine meaning, work for the writer in the same way as words. They either foster or hamper the programmatic spontaneity which Handke in the preface to *The Weight of the World* connects to the literary possibility of writing *journal*.

This ontological dimension connected to images is outlined in an entry of Handke’s first *journal* volume. When reminiscing in an entry from March 6, 1976 about what instances of

³⁶¹ Handke, *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*, 462. “*ich bin nicht mehr fähig, sie aufzunehmen und einwirken zu lassen,*” Handke, *Der Bildverlust*, 743.

intimidation burdened him 10 years ago, Handke in *The Weight of the World* takes up the idea of a *journal* writing that includes a transition from one consciousness to another. Naming concrete poesy, Andy Warhol, Marx, Freud, and Structuralism as examples, Handke refers to an act of liberation from these names. He connects this process to the image world of the media and film industry when he describes how these names as “Universal-Pictures evaporated, and nothing should burden *anyone* than the weight of the world.”³⁶² In this entry, Handke furnishes the idea of a *journal* consciousness with an allusion to the volume’s title and its reference of a worldly burden that endows the writer with the kind of gravitas necessary to write. Opposing the idea of universal pictures, Handke contrasts the scary universality of these pictures with the new-found happiness felt at the ability of looking at a bottle of mineral water (“the wonderful feeling: there *is* something else!”) in a follow-up entry on March 28th. Handke’s idea of *Mitschrift* as *Bildschrift* relies on the temporal interconnection of images like the sparkling bottle of mineral water waiting in the sun.³⁶³

As a writing of day-to-dayness, this *journal* writing explores the scene in search of such images that ultimately for the writer indicate the existence of time and temporal progression. The search for images emerges as an almost daily constant in Handke’s *journal* volumes and thus thematically predates its exploration as a topos in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* by decades. Writing *journal* and the ability to perceive images are directly connected in Handke. From the perspective of an image crisis, the ability to perceive images for the *journal* writer is the ability

³⁶² “Was es, für mich, vor zehn Jahren noch für Einschüchterungen gab: ‘Die konkrete Poesie,’ ‘Andy Warhol’ und dann Marx und Freud und der Strukturalismus, und jetzt sind all diese Universal-Pictures verflogen, und nichts soll *igredeneinen* mehr bedrücken als das Gewicht der Welt,” Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, 32.

³⁶³ “Glücksgefühl, eine Flasche Mineralwasser anschauen zu können. (Das große Lebensgefühl: es gibt was anderes!),” Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, 76.

to perceive the world, and by extension time. “The loss of the images,” as Handke writes in *Bildverlust*, “is the loss of the world.”

With the changing notion of images in Handke’s work, the role of media in the *journals* has changed. The ability to perceive images is first aided, and then consistently hampered by the media as providers of images. In the *journals*, newspapers and the TV provide the writer with “synthetic” images. The duality of images, prefabricated ones and unique, momentary ones that indicate time, directly corresponds to the duality of consciousness that ontologically grounds *journal* as a mode of writing. Contrasting with the expanding and roaming, sweeping spirit in New York a decade earlier, Handke’s spirit is described in an entry in his first journal from the Salzburg periphery as a “shrunken heart [*Schrumpfherz*] from reading the newspaper,”³⁶⁴ degrading the consummation of the news on the television in a Platonic way as the “contemporary shadowy existence [*zeitgenössisches Schattendasein*]”³⁶⁵ that refers the images to be only the negative shadows of the things in a cave, as opposed to Handke’s idea of an image as the real and only important thing, as “the world” itself.

3.8 (Un)burdening Information

The volume *In Front of the Tree-Shadow-Wall at Night* chronicles the years between 2007 and 2015 and, as a formal successor to *Mornings at the Cliff Window*, continues Handke’s *journal* project into the new millennium. In both books, we find an assemblage of reading notes,

³⁶⁴ “Schrumpfherz vom Zeitunglesen; welker, schwerer, blutleere Beutel,” Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 47.

³⁶⁵ “Zeitgenössisches Schattendasein: vor dem Fernseher,” Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 14.

reflections, quotes, conjectures, daily observations and abstractions of phenomena, occasionally furnished with a bracketed date. Across these entries, patterns emerge over a certain number of pages and then fade out only to give room to others. A leitmotif in both volumes is what the author terms “time-thresholds” [*Zeitschwellen*], as well as the parallelly structured “and“-sentences and the identifying of alternative time words [*Zeitwörter*]. The latter resemble Handke’s attempt to find verbs that express in one way or another the literal meaning of the German word for verb (“Zeitwort”), i.e., verbs which indicate the passage of time in their very etymology or semantic makeup.

Alongside this focus on how to differently convey or perceive things in the writer’s environs, both volumes are also particularly interested in what kind of information is being conveyed through daily writing in the first place, reflecting on this in particular through the use of images. The relationship between unspoiled original and mass-reproduced image copy in these notes is linked to the writer’s daily reception of the media as well as the idea of spatial extension or contraction resulting from an exposure to the latter. In one of the many entries where the media are connected to the writer’s inability to adequately use language, Handke reflects: “Engaging with that which has been named (newspaper), I miss that which is still nameable; after having read the newspaper, I am no longer able to name anymore,” adding the example of a sight or image seen on a train as something that is ““*meaning* the world [*welt-bedeutend*]’ – while the newspaper sentences made the world shrink down to a dot.”³⁶⁶

In the 420-page volume, the titular rock window is, as one of the three windows in Handke’s study, ultimately placed in opposition to the idea of spatial contraction connected to

³⁶⁶ “Durch die Beschäftigung mit dem Benannten (Zeitung) versäume ich das Benennbare; ich kann, im und nach dem Zeitungslernen, nicht mehr benennen. [...] ‘welt-bedeutend’ – während die Zeitungssätze die Welt zum Punkt schrumpfen ließen.“ Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 117.

the media. Looking out onto the Rainberg mountain, to Handke's garden and the surrounding trees, this window and its potential for spatial openness becomes a symbol for the gaze over the local surroundings that time and again contrasts the gaze directed by the newspapers and Handke's television set as different kind of windows looking out on a different kind of world. Like a correspondent or news anchor at their desk, Handke reports frequently from in front of these three windows, where he perceives

in one the deciduous trees; in the other the dark spruces and the neighboring crag (Rainberg) with its flashing light for the airplanes; in the third, within reach of hand, the shrubs, the woodbine, the liana ropes – never seen until now (and yet I have almost been sitting here for half a decade on site [*and Ort und Stelle*]).³⁶⁷

As a quasi-reporter “on sight,” Handke's descriptions in this and other passages contrasts with the snapshots and the rapid image flow from the news by means of the long durée of a long exposure shot that is possible in writing. This long take, the condensation of which we read in the resulting passage, encompasses no less than “half a decade;” this is the time Handke has spent living in his peripheral abode. In the volume, countless such *Bilder* juxtapose different sights, vistas or moments and, in writing, they are fused into a synesthetic image that gains its complexity from this process.

The frequent stylistic trope of “and”-connections, for example, connects different perceptions over a day into one new image that is not limited to sight, translating images into

³⁶⁷ “Drei Fenster im Arbeitszimmer: in einem die Laubbäume; im anderen die dunklen fichten und der Nachbarfelsenberg (Rainberg) mit seinem Flugzeugblinklicht; im dritten, handnah, die Büsche, der wilde Wein, die Lianenseile – noch nie habe ich das gesehen (und sitze dich fast schon ein halbes Jahrzehnt an Ort und Stelle),“ Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 122.

idiosyncratic semantic structures.³⁶⁸ In this way, entire series of parallel structures present the sketch-like micronarrative of a single day, often bracketed together only by a conclusory, bracketed date:

And: Smoke from the blown-out candle and rose

And: Break of dawn and mouse (in front of the window)

And: Threshold and lowering of the eyes

[...]

And: Birch tree trunk and snow-spotted field (Jan. 28)³⁶⁹

Connected by the prefatory coordinating conjunction “and,” the two single sights captured in each case form unique, unexpected and mostly surprising visual combinations. In their unconventional synthesis, these image-amalgams contrast with the idea of artificially synthesized images as they appear in the media throughout the volume. In their plentitude across the whole volume, they hint towards the “reservoir of original images” which for Handke’s protagonist and narrator in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* is lost. Handke’s *journals* stage the daily attempt of a semantic retrieval of such images. Images in these volumes often capture motion, temporal change and transience. This is always connected to a focus on sights that “mean the world” on a small scale. In their juxtaposition across several pages, entire series of captured mental images

³⁶⁸ “Der Eisregen fiel auf das Bodeneis: unerhörtes, noch nie so gehörtes Geräusch (12. Jan.)” Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 141. On Handke’s use of “und-”constructions, see Federmair, “Formen der Konjunktion,” 306.

³⁶⁹ “Und: Rauch der ausgeblasenen Kerzen und Rose // Und: Morgendämmerung und Maus (vor dem Fenster) // Und: Schwelle und Augensenken // [...] // Und: Birkenstamm und schneefleckiges Feld (28. Jan.)” Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 144.

render the contemplative finding and beholding of mundane, trivial, quiet vistas such as the stirring of a leaf on a tree as an almost liturgical, ritualistic, and mythical process through writing

This relates to the material quality of Handke's journal volumes.³⁷⁰ The more recent ones of Handke's printed journals, as Jacob Haubenreich points out, capture the original notebooks' material complexity through facsimile reproductions.³⁷¹ Supplementing their contemplative access to everyday temporal phenomena, *In Front of the Tree-Shadow-Wall at Night* and *Mornings at the Cliff Window* complement the written notes by occasional drawings and color sketches. These either take up scenes and motifs from the sentences on the same double page (such as a hedgehog, a coffee stain on the page, or a leaf) or stand unrelated to the written content. This idea of visual rumination is expressed particularly strikingly in a pair of images from February 2011, where a dense and almost entirely black ink drawing of the "raindrop spheres on the Concord River in Massachusetts" is preceded by a written reflection on this vista a couple of pages earlier. Both sketch and note point toward a particular kind of information that is captured in this sight. The passage asks:

Doesn't the sight of a river's black winter water provide us with more information than the reading of a newspaper from letter A to Z? Discriminate between information that burdens you and such that unburdens you.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ On the materiality of Handke's journals, see Jacob Haubenreich, "Poetry, Painting, Patchwork: Peter Handke's Intermedial Writing of *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victorie*," *The German Quarterly*, 92/2 (Philadelphia: American Association of Teachers of German, 2019), 187-209.

³⁷¹ Jacob Haubenreich, "The Trail, the Archive, the Museum, and the Book: Confronting Materiality in Literary Studies," *New German Critique*. November 2020 (Milwaukee: New German Critique, 2020), 151.

³⁷² "Gibt nicht ein Blick ins schwarze Winterwasser eines Flusses mehr Information als ein Durchlesen, von A bis Z, einer Zeitung? – Unterscheide zwischen Informationen die belasten, und Informationen, die entlasten." Handke, *Vor der Baumschattenwand nachts*, 133.

Like the corresponding sketch from a couple of entries later, this passage captures motion and temporal change as visible in the flowing vista of a river's black "winter water." The dichotomy between "burdening" and "unburdening" information here identifies a sense of greatness in the subliminal by juxtaposing it to the supposedly greater events of global scale in the media. Handke not only sorts the quality of information into the categories of essential and non-essential ("belastend und entlastend"), but also hints through prefixes used with both gerunds at temporality as a factor in a different form of phenomenological awareness, relating them semantically to the concepts of acceleration and deceleration ("Be-schleunigung" and "Ent-schleunigung"). In their juxtaposition, the juncture of real, drawn images and captured mental vistas here emerges as the pictorial watershed of this volume, dividing vistas, sight and information into burdensome and unburdening. This echoes the idea of weight expressed in Handke's first *journal* volume from 1977, where the title stages semantically the dichotomy between "burdensome" and "relieving" or "unburdening" information. Understood as *gravitas*, and not as a burden, "The Weight of the World" is what for the writer can be found at the periphery, and not between the letters A and Z of a newspaper.

In an entry from July 1984, Handke relates this dichotomy of information in his writing in a contrast between two distinctly different classes of information. Distinguishing the concept of a message [*Nachricht*] from the idea of tidings or news [*City-News*], the passage implies that the writer's act of walking cross-country in its aimless and purposeless direction severs as some form of escape. Walking in the quote resembles a process of ontological unburdening:

Walking uphill in the sun, from the sea to the inland [...]; of course I, just like you, have read the morning paper, know, like you, that France has a new government, know the first results of the opinion polls [...], but leave me alone with that, journalist, stay with your 'city news' [*city news*']. – In contrast: the message/news [*Nachricht*] of the cicada choir: one 'wing' at times slowing the concert down, and the choir's other 'wings' follow. And, of course (?) the French

fight-bombers are soaring up in the background, time and again. And me? eating, in contrast, a stalk of aniseed.³⁷³

The physical movement of walking uphill towards the inland resembles for the writer a transition from one state of mind into another, and constitutes an act that enables him to perceive a class of unburdening information that stands in marked contrast to the news reported at the beginning of the page-long entry. The passage takes up “Nachricht” as a term that features frequently in the volume and contrasts it with the English term “news.” Handke thus gives the concept of a “message” both an explicitly journalistic and a distinctly non-journalistic spin. By using the English “News,” Handke connects different classes of information available either on the countryside or via the paper in the city to different kinds of reports. He distinguishes between a simple message (as in the original meaning of the German word “Nachricht”) and the new connotations the term obtained through its use in a journalistic context, where “Nachrichten” refers to the topical ‘messages’ included in newscasts or newspapers. By adding the prefix “city,” the passage contrasts the countryside experience at the periphery with the topical hustle and bustle of the urban environment. However, Handke’s distinction goes beyond a simple center-periphery opposition. The slight nuance in the difference of Nachricht(en) and news here is highlighted by the idea of a swarm of cicadas literally transmitting this message that develops into a fully-fledged “concerto.” The real *Nachricht* or news, this passage implies, is the call-and-response between one wing of the cicada choir and the other. This results in a kind of musicality reminiscent of the end of the 1972 poem where the dead “you-know-what-I-mean lingo” of the communication age

³⁷³ “Bergaufgehend in der Sonne, vom Meer ins Landesinnere [...]; natürlich habe auch ich die Morgenzeitung gelesen, weiß, wie du, daß Frankreich eine neue Regierung hat, kenne die ersten Ergebnisse der Meinungsumfragen [...] aber laß mich damit in Ruhe, Journalist, bleib bei deinen 'City-News'. – Dagegen die Nachricht des Zikadenchors: ein 'Flügel' verlangsamt zuweilen das Konzert, und die anderen 'Flügel' des Chors folgen. Und natürlich (?) steigen immer wieder im Hintergrund die französischen Jagdbomber auf. Und ich? esse dagegen einen Anis-Stengel.” Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 196.

opposes a poetic use of language, triggering a writing in agreement with the scene as a different form of coverage or message.

3.9 Writing Dates, Discerning Data

“Keeping a diary,” scholar Arno Dusini states, “represents the kind of human activity in relation to time [that is] signified by the time unit ‘day.’”³⁷⁴ In writing the date on a daily basis, Philippe Lejeune suggests, the diarist forms a kind of “mystical alliance with Time”³⁷⁵ in their focus on *jour* and its numerous temporal subdivisions and increments. Rather than the autobiographic pact,³⁷⁶ the writing of time in these definitions becomes the main subject matter of diaristic writing. In their almost exclusive focus on time, *journal* texts of Handke’s have their proximity to the diary in this temporal aspect. In this context, the almost complete absence of dates in Handke’s *journals* is striking. This becomes even more obvious in the course of Handke’s decade-long engagement with *journal* writing. While in *The Weight of the World*, indicators of months still subdivide the three-year period chronicled by this text, the subsequent *journal* volumes are merely subdivided by years and only occasionally feature a bracketed date at the end of a note or transcribed quotation. For most of the entries in the more recent volumes, the

³⁷⁴ Arno Dusini, “... im Leben Blättern. Das Tagebuch als materialisierte Zeit,” Helmut Gold et. al. (eds.), *Absolut? Privat! Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008), 97.

³⁷⁵ Lejeune, “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” 204.

³⁷⁶ Lejeune, “The Diary as ‘Antifiction,’” 204.

respective date is only identifiable by way of context, such as the blossoming of certain flowers, the first bees, or the observations about the idiosyncrasies of the February snow air.

In Blanchot's definition, the calendar, with its repetitious sequence of the ever-same unit of one day, constitutes on a formal level "the demon of the diary."³⁷⁷ In Handke's texts, a second, non-calendric regimen provides a temporal structure. Handke characterizes "the indication of time [*Zeitangaben*]" as "random and artificial" in an entry from 1984: referring in particular to "the specifications of historical and counted time – 'in the year of 1984' – [...]" unless they are a matter of indicators of time such as 'towards the evening.'³⁷⁸ Identifying, for instance, the countless "time-thresholds" within in the course of one year, 'incidents' such as the first daisies in spring or the first bee sting in summer allow for a sudden "daybreak within the day" [*Ein Tagwerden im Tag*]. Departing from the temporalities of the media and their news calendar, for instance, the "mystical alliance with Time" in Handke's journal *texts* emerges as an interest beyond the writing of the numeric date. Focusing on the daily available data or information, *jour* – the common denominator of both diary and newspaper emerges as the predominant temporal unit.

In his essay *Attempt to Describe a Successful Day* [*Versuch über den geglückten Tag*, 1991] Handke proposes the idea that any given day is an attempt or trial to access this different kind of daily reality. Lifting the writer out of the ordinary regimen of a day, a second, secret, hidden and more meaningful subterranean temporal structure underneath or beyond this day emerges to provide different data or insights into the passage of time. Already in *The Weight of*

³⁷⁷ Blanchot, "Diary and Story," 183.

³⁷⁸ "wie beliebig als auch künstlich [...] die Zeitangaben, die Angaben der historischen und gezählten Zeit – 'Im Jahr 1984' – [...] es sei denn, es handle sich um Zeitangaben wie 'Gegen Abend,'" Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 195.

the World, Handke had envisioned this ideal of the *journal* writer as someone who during the course of the day often pauses and peers around, as if during his usual daily course a completely different daily course evades him.”³⁷⁹ Over the years, this dawning of an alternate “course of day” [*Tagesablauf*] within the twilight of the usual events develops into a *journal* writing that records dawn-like moments of a “different daybreak within the day” [*Ein anderes Tagen im Tag*].³⁸⁰ An almost daily process, this dawn is connected to repeated epiphanies and changes of mood, indicating an alternate everyday reality that can be accessed through a thorough, semi-meditative, writerly attention to the minute events and reflection on the nature of time itself.

Writing the date for Handke thus transcends the idea of a simple time specification. Unlike in a diary, writing the date is not a mere convention in these *journals*. Rather, the date becomes a site of writerly reflection itself. The date, not as a calendric indication or number, is written and experienced differently, through data available at any given day.³⁸¹ The calendric date serves as a springboard into identifying and writing different data. Handke’s *journal* volumes in themselves appear as calendars that are subdivided by indicators of this different temporal regimen. Campe, in his discussion of the writing scene, argues that this “nexus of the date of writing and of writing the date” is “not just a matter of making writing the topic of writing.” Rather, the date, Campe argues, “strikes as an irreplaceable, logically relevant case of writing, of *écriture*, since it establishes and puts into writing that which is being written

³⁷⁹ “jemand, der im Lauf des Tages oft stehenbleibt und um sich schaut, als ob ihm während seines üblichen Tageslaufs ein ganz anderer Tageslauf entgehe.” Handke, *Gewicht der Welt*, 154.

³⁸⁰ Handke, *Vor der Baumschattenwand nachts*, 158.

³⁸¹ On time experience in Handke’s journals, see Tim Lörke, “Dauernde Augenblicke: Sinnstiftende Zeiterfahrung bei Peter Handke,” Anna Kinder (ed.), *Peter Handke: Stationen, Orte, Positionen* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 59-72.

down.”³⁸² The temporal aspect of writing, Campe points out, is ultimately one of writing’s concrete material, situational and contextual prerequisites that belong to its *scene*.

Writing the scene, the data perceptible here in Handke contrasts with news stories’ scaffolding of information (where-when-what-who-why)³⁸³ and instead resembles as a daily attempt to render visible on the page the invisible, hidden temporal thresholds as indicators of an impalpable time. In writing the date, Handke inscribes the date of writing through the data of that which is written down. Making time the very data of writing, Handke’s writing explores the temporal substructure of a *scene* by way of exploring its concrete, material manifestation as indicators of the passage of time as an otherwise invisible, impalpable process. The impressions or traces of bottle caps in the soft warm asphalt as indicators for “summer,”³⁸⁴ for instance, resulting in a world-building or temporal mapping, is in itself a construction moment through perception, with the asphalt – similar to the retina or the blank polaroid sheet before exposure to light – being the literal wax on which time in an imprint leaves a trace: “I look up from long newspaper reading, during which my mind is neither on what I am reading nor elsewhere and see the blue sky outside and the crowns of the plane trees swinging and swaying – the world opens before my eyes.”³⁸⁵

³⁸² “Bei [d]er Verkettung des Datums des Schreibens mit dem Schreiben des Datums [...] handelt es sich nicht nur um ein Beispiel der Thematisierung des Schreibens; und man ist nicht länger einfach auf dem Gebiet der Poetologie. Das Datum ist vielmehr ein unersetzbarer, logisch relevanter Fall des Schreibens, der Schrift, in dem sich festschreibt, was aufgeschrieben wird.” Campe, “Die Schreibszene,” 761.

³⁸³ The ‘5W questions’ of journalistic reports: who? when? where? what? and sometimes why? Broersma, *Form and Style in Journalism*, 10.

³⁸⁴ “Vor den Cafés die Abdrücke der Flaschenkapseln im Asphalt: damals war Sommer, und de Asphalt war weich,” Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, 54.

³⁸⁵ Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, 42. Translated from: Peter Handke, *The Weight of the World*. Transl. by Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984), 32.

In its dichotomy between message and news, this writing opposes the time-critical transmission of reports in the news. Instead of displaying urgency, topicality, timeliness and intelligence, Handke's writing is literally not up to date, topical or relevant. Different, non-calendric dates serve as its cornerstones and oppose journalistic reports and their sense of purpose, timeliness, topicality and communicative motivation. This ultimately suggests a different conception of what an event is. At second glance, the events unfolded in passage of the "writing of day-to-dayness" do not resemble important, relevant or report-worthy information, taking into account the general absence of plot or any events in the conventional sense in this passage. This is something that plays out on the big scale of Handke's *journal* volumes. They rarely feature continuous streams of events or plots that go beyond a single page, and we do not learn of any people or identifiable events that hint towards what is going on in the author's life. Rather, the single events over periods of time are interconnected by linguistic patterns, phenomenological principles, or sight and vistas that feature frequently. If at all, single occurrences are stretched or interconnected across several passages, but they lack any form of progression. Instead, the lack of progression between single events serves as the point of interest in the writer's semi-meditative contemplation.

Handke's idea of message ultimately is a news item that lacks the breathless, continuous succession of events. Instead of the "newsflash," Handke sits in front of his window and notes the "flashing light" of a radio mast as a different kind of rhythm structuring his everyday perception over a whole decade. As messages, Handke's entries in opposition to the mass media's news cycle are not connotated through timeliness, urgency, singularity, but a steady news-cycle corresponding to the idea of the succession of moments that dissolve into one "continual event" as a form of reportage, as Handke outlined the literary possibility of writing *journal* in the preface to *The Weight*

of the World. Both diaristic writing and journalistic writing share this temporal dimension as in their intrinsic relation to the date. Both secure data, in the ambiguous sense in that all writing secures data, gathering, in the plural, both dates and pieces of information for the purpose of communication and representation. This ambiguity, in the case of the newspaper and the diary, becomes the main focus of writing, to the extent in which the date of writing here is rendered writing's central information.

Reflecting the importance of “data” in journalistic writing, Stephens identifies the *report* as a “product of the same spirit that spawned the techniques of historical research and intelligence gathering,” connecting it to “the same spirit that gave birth to the scientific method.”³⁸⁶ Referencing the (scientific) practice of “gathering of information” as a data-driven activity comparable or even parental to the transmission of news, Stephens’ definition of the report highlights the idea of a transfer of data as the key interest of a (news) story. This definition of the report as a quasi-scientific, data-driven form of research and subsequent transmission can be made productive for a reading of Handke’s *journal* texts. In writing down temporal data instead of dates, the relation of writing to its scene becomes a matter of *écriture*. Opposing the idea of a quasi-scientific research-process, however, Handke’s *journal* writing as a form of report in itself in its meandering and explorative motion establishes a different kind of research into temporal matter(s). This is where Handke’s journal writing becomes distinctly epic, as in the epic “narrative steps” this writing takes over the course longer periods of time. In this regard, the most recent metamorphosis of *journal* in Handke’s oeuvre into epic is the logical last step. Both, in their seriality, allow for the kind of long-term time experience which, in episodes dispersed over numerous steps, allow for time to take the lead in writing. Writing *journal*, I argue, for

³⁸⁶ Stephens, *A History of News*, 216f.

Handke can be made productive as an everyday epic adventure on the small scale. Oriented towards the empirical experience of time, this temporal research opposes the scientific method in another point. As a “spontaneous writing down,” *journal* writing in Handke represents a means to liberate the writer from predetermined or expected outcomes.

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In *Mornings at the Cliff Window*, slowness and deceleration emerge as two main trajectories in the idea of an explorative spatio-temporal perception. Over many entries in this volume, Handke develops this thematic complex, culminating in the idea of a whole “continent of images” [*Der Bilderkontinent*] where “being/life on earth on earth stretches and becomes ready to be beheld [*betrachtbar*] as an image, and ready to be stepped upon as one continent.” This continental image-landmass has resonances with the idea of an escape from a reservoir of “synthetic” images obtained from the media and TV in *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*. *Mornings at the Cliff Window* chronicles a phase of sedentariness in Handke’s life, *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos* as a novel about an image crisis is grounded in a period of extensive travel and the search for “vastness” or “expanse” [*Weite*] where these images can be retrieved there.

Tectonically, the periodical shift between those two landmasses and the writer’s temporary stays on both inform his *journal* writing over more than four decades and can be connected to Handke’s autobiographical oscillation between sedentariness and travels. His extensive travels in Spain were followed by a permanent abode in Chaville, a suburb of Paris. which Handke in his writing famously terms his “No-Man’s Bay” [*Niemandsbucht*]. This permanent, remote setting subsequently turns into a literary topos in his works. His most recent

journal, *In Front of the Tree-Shadow-Wall at Night*, chronicles his daily life at the Paris periphery. A code phrase, this “No-Man’s Bay” not only designates the place where he lives but corresponds to a mode of being and writing embedded in the space and proper time at the coast of a metaphorical island.³⁸⁷

Sedentariness, like writing *journal*, emerges for Handke from an exercise in living and perception, which, as Handke confesses in a letter to Lenz on August 3, 1990, had to be relearned after his nomadic years traveling the world: “For three weeks now, I have been in the process of beginning, in a stuttering manner, a kind of sedentariness again.”³⁸⁸ Stammering, the establishing of a scene for his writing, emerges as a step that is almost as important as writing itself. This phenomenological approach is embodied in Valentin Sorger, Handke’s alter ego-protagonist from *The Long Way Around* and *The Lesson of Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Sorger’s striving for a meditative clarity of perception is based on the same sense of slowness that establishes a topos in his *journal* volumes. In Handke’s journals, the spatio-temporal extent of this image world ultimately results in the idea of “fantasy” referenced in the preface to *The Weight of the World*, capturing the volume’s meandering, anti-linear approach to writing and narration through spatial extension and time.

In *Mornings at the Cliff Window*, Handke elaborates on this fairly vague idea of “fantasy.” He states that “Phanasie” is what ultimately emerges from an access to the “image continent of slowness,” a process whereby fantasy emerges as “an unequivocal word” for “Bilderkontinent.” Handke here effectively rephrases what in the prefatory notes his first journal he suggests was the original alternative title of this volume – *Phantasy through Aimlessness*.

³⁸⁷ Handke still lives in Chaville today and has a second home in the Picardie region.

³⁸⁸ “Seit drei Wochen beginne ich, stotternd, wieder mit einer Art Seßhaftigkeit.” Handke, Lenz, *Berichterstatter des Tages*, 246.

Reading together these two entries separated by over thirty years, Handke implies the existence of an “image continent” that emerges “through aimlessness.” This is an important step with regard to a definition of what *journal* writing in Handke is. Aimlessness as the ideal of perception for Handke ultimately stems from images and result in images. A “continent of slowness” time,³⁸⁹ writing *journal* thus emerges as a temporal problem that connects fantasy or aimlessness or spontaneity in writing to a different take not only on time, but more importantly, on its first order derivative acceleration. *Journal* as new literary possibility builds on deceleration, slowness, and leisure, thus emerging both as a freedom from something and a freedom to something, which is fantasy, images, slowness.

When Handke, in a 1980 letter to his fellow writer Lenz, sets out to sketch the particularly picturesque and pictorial scene of his current writing, he ventures an almost *journalistic* coverage of the day in order to provide his fellow writer with the image of what appears to be a “boring,” or in any case uneventful, slow, and altogether passive life at the periphery of Salzburg. Just like the mundane contents of his journals, the information in this letter serves to build or conjure up a world for the fellow writer. Handke starts his letter: “It’s a marvelous day here, and until now I have more or less just been sitting outside and tried to be its rapporteur [*sein Berichterstatter*].”

Providing his colleague with this vivid written report on the goings-on around his “quiet spot” on the map of the world on this day, Handke in his letter pictures himself and the proposed

³⁸⁹ “Der Bilderkontinent: wo das Dasein/das Erdenleben sich weitert und betrachtbar wird als ein Bild, und betretbar als ein Kontinent. ‘Bildkontinent’: dieses ist das unmißverständliche Wort für Phantasie (ein mißverständliches Wort). Es handelt sich bei dem Bildkontinent um den Kontinent der Langsamkeit.” Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens*, 156.

setting as far away from any war or turmoil as possible, transmitting to Lenz instead the seemingly picturesque image of an idyllic and “beautiful” existence:

The cats are lying around on their backs a lot, which supposedly is a sign that they feel safe, and the peasants cry, as if they gagged something out each time. The “papyrus” over there at the well shows many new sprouts [...] It’s a boring life altogether, but I suppose there isn’t anything more beautiful than that (if one knows how to be grateful for this). After all, this little spot gradually grows dear to me (and what’s more, there’s no wars going on right now).³⁹⁰

Being the reporter of the day, I argue, and engaging in its coverage, Handke transcends the notion of a diary or letter writer. The passage suggests that Handke’s writing ultimately not only works in close connection to journalistic techniques but is a form of ‘journalism’ itself. Writing in its temporal extensiveness in this letter emerges as a form of coverage. This is evident in his use of term *Berichterstatter*, which translates literally as “rapporteur,” and especially in a journalistic context is generally used to refer either to a “reporter” or a “correspondent,”³⁹¹ Handke, within the concrete form of a “report” [*Bericht*], conceives of himself as a reporter, mediator or correspondent towards his peripheral setting or scene and places himself as a reporter at the margins of attention instead of at its epicenters.

Just like in news-reporting from far-away places, the “little spot” of Handke’s garden and the writer’s own remote position of reporting emerge as a writing scene that is ultimately rendered the main topic of this (letter) writing. For the writer, the absence of war in this scene

³⁹⁰ “Hier ist ein wunderbarer Tag, und ich saß bis jetzt fast nur draußen und versuchte, sein Berichterstatter zu sein. Die Katzen liegen viel auf dem Rücken, was ein Zeichen dafür [sein] soll, dass sie sich sicher fühlen, und die Fasane schreien, als würgten sie kurz etwas heraus. Der ‘Papyrus’ steht am Brunnen und hat viele neue Triebe [...] Ein langweiliges Leben, aber es gibt wohl nichts Schöneres [...]. Allmählich wächst einem der kleine Fleck doch ans Herz (und Krieg ist auch gerade keiner).” Handke, Lenz, *Berichterstatter des Tages*, 161.

³⁹¹ According to *Duden* “someone who, for a newspaper or the like, reports on current events; correspondent.” Accessed online via: <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Berichterstatter>

accounts for an overall sense of “safety” that facilitates the coming about of text, referred to metonymically in the sprouting paper reed “over there at the well.” Only in this environment, despite or perhaps because of this boringness, the “papyrus grows” – a growth the scale of which is measured by the unit of one day as the temporal framework of this coverage. This idea of writing as a form of coverage [*Berichterstattung*] resonates with the conception of *journal* writing as a “message” which Handke outlines in *Mornings at the Cliff Window* as an opposition to the “city-news”. The term *Berichterstatter* itself in its etymological development highlights the transition from ‘message’ to ‘news.’ Originally reporting from (the medieval) courts, the *Berichterstatter* is an envoy who ‘sets things right’ [*berichtigen*], i.e., someone who brings a multitude of events in their ‘right’ order.³⁹² Linking this practice of making a report, of giving an account of the events of a day to himself in the role of a “reporter,” Handke as the “*Berichterstatter des Tages*” renders the writer a personal envoy or messenger of the day as a kind of royal persona.

Handke first outlines the possibility that his own writing might be a report in the preface to his 1977 volume *The Weight of the World*. Here, writing is not only as a process programmatically wedged *between* messages and news, but an attempt to form such a message in and of itself. In the context of a reinvigorating of language through the “spontaneous noting-down of purposeless perceptions/observations [*Wahrnehmung*]” Handke resorts to the term “reportage.”³⁹³ Rather than the “narration of a consciousness,” Handke states, his *journal* writing resembles “the immediate [*unmittelbare*], simultaneously recorded reportage of the latter.” A

³⁹² Pfeiffer’s *Etymological Dictionary of the German Language* characterizes the report as something as essential as an order or structure to reality in writing. Wolfgang Pfeiffer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, accessed via: <https://www.dwds.de/wb/etymwb/Berichterstatter>

³⁹³ Handke, *Das Gewicht der Welt*, 7f.

process of unburdening the consciousness, of escaping the other, journalistic consciousness of the newspaper alphabet, printed down in black and white from letter “A to Z,” Handke’s idea of a “report” or *Bericht* can be understood in proximity to what Carey characterizes as a “way of apprehending, of experiencing the world.”³⁹⁴

Handke’s idea of *journal* “reportage” works in close connection to the journalistic understanding of a report, which Carey in his 1974 essay places at the center of his notion of a journalistic “consciousness.” Expanding Blanchot’s statement about the interconnection of the calendar and the diary – where the former is the demon of the latter – I argue that in Handke, ever since his early *journal* poem from 1972, writing journals not only emerges as the demon of poetry (or, quite generally, of “poesy” as a kind of literature in its own right). Journalism in a broad sense, and reporting as its “proper [...] discursive practice,”³⁹⁵ from the early 1970s on, as demons haunt the very idea of what this *journal* mode of writing is.³⁹⁶

Instead of the purposefulness of “the dead you-know-what-I-mean lingo of the communication age,” this writing of an invigorated language comes along with the absence of communicative intent in the first place.³⁹⁷ In is this context of communicative intent and purpose

³⁹⁴ Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” 86.

³⁹⁵ Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism*, 303f.

³⁹⁶ Handke establishes the idea of a *journal* coverage or “reportage” opposed to a journalistic report or coverage. While on a metaphorical level, Handke’s notion of reporting shares with the conventional *reporter* the idea of (temporal) embeddedness, the transmission of both dates and data, as well as a certain spatial relation between locality and globality that allows for a particular position or angle towards the world, this position of the *journal* writer is not presupposed by the presence of seemingly important events happening in this scene, but rather by an absence of action or urgency that allows for the perception of commonly unimportant information.

³⁹⁷ On comprehensibility as the ideal and purpose of mass media communication see Niklas Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995), 17f, 20.

I suggest reading Handke's idea of purposelessness and aimlessness in writing *journal*.³⁹⁸ The moment of a language that through perception reinvigorates itself [*Wie die Sprache sich belebte*] both draws from and opposes this dead, synthetic, reproduceable language that arises from a desire to facilitate understanding by resorting back to terms that are known, "occupied" and connotated rather than free. Instead, in Handke writing's sole purpose is to uncover meaning, to mediate accurately, and to lead or guide the writer. In its best moments, like in the letter to Lenz, Handke's *journal* writing is a report, utilizing images to verbalize elapsing time through an awareness to the writing scene. Writing here as a message-like report(age) is ultimately able to provide the desired coverage of the day, or *jour-nal*, as an alternative calendric unit, which both the traditional diary with its focus on dates and self, as well as the media, as the social calendar, lack. As a *Mitschrift* or *Bilderschrift* that explores the plethora of effigies of this *image continent*, this writing is a distinctly *journal* writing, or *journal* awareness and perception. Ultimately, this writing captures, visualizes, and materializes the passage of time as an otherwise invisible process, with the latter, time, endowing the former, writing, its formal manifestation.

³⁹⁸ The meandering character of his *Mitschrift* as a temporal process is guided by images that in its extensiveness opposes the brevity, efficiency, linearity and stringency of the journalistic report, and that we need to understand Handke's desire to explore new forms by avoiding given forms that opposes the utter form-dependence of communication age and journalistic conventions.

CONCLUSION: Collapsing *Journal*? The Daily Text(s) of Rainald Goetz

The most beautiful series that exists at all is the seriality of lived days [...]. The media's objective seriality, which is almost as beautiful, runs in interference with this subject-seriality. This is the seriality of newspapers and journals, of the 'products of the press' [...], of the dailies and weeklies. In French, both phenomena converge [...] in the single word 'journal:' diary and newspaper.³⁹⁹

(Rainald Goetz)

I.

In a 2012 lecture held at Humboldt University in Berlin, the writer Rainald Goetz revisited diary and newspaper in a conversation with his colleague Diedrich Diederichsen and declared them to be two of his work's founding pillars. After the subsequent publication of two weblogs and other diaristic texts in the late 1990s and early 2000s,⁴⁰⁰ Goetz's oeuvre had turned into what the author himself proclaims to be a radical "aesthetics of the present moment."⁴⁰¹ Contemplating

³⁹⁹ "Die schönste Serie, die es überhaupt gibt, ist die Serialität der gelebten Tage [...]. In Interferenz mit dieser Subjektserialität läuft die fast genauso schöne objektive Serialität der Medien: der Zeitungen und Zeitschriften, der 'Presseerzeugnisse' [...], der Dailies und Weeklies. In Französisch laufen die beiden Phänomene [...] in dem einen Wort 'Journal' zusammen: Tagebuch und Zeitung," Rainald Goetz, "mehr," Mosse-Lecture held on 05/03/2012 at Humboldt-University in Berlin, 4:35-5:40. A video of the lecture can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1cAk_RoAeQ

⁴⁰⁰ Goetz's work-cycle *Heute morgen* (1998-2000), the 'reports' contained in *Kronos* (2003), as well as the publication of both the 2007 blog *Klage* (2014) and its 2000 predecessor *Abfall für alle* document this turn to diaristic writing.

⁴⁰¹ "eine Geschichte der Gegenwart, die zur Zeit erscheint," see the author's note on the first edition dust jacket of *Abfall für alle*. Rainald Goetz, *Abfall für alle: Roman eines Jahres* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1999).

the terminological ambiguity contained in the French noun *journal*, Goetz reflected in the lecture on his two decades-long interest in daily writing. Suggesting that diary and newspaper do not merely represent the founding layers of his attempted “history of the present” [*Geschichte der Gegenwart*], Goetz suggested that they are, in fact, the two pillars of this present moment itself. Hovering incessantly between the binary of “self-exploration” [*Ich-Erforschung*] and “self-extinction” [*Ich-Auslöschung*], Goetz’s conception of the *journal* between diary and newspaper reflects a twofold understanding of reality. The subjective seriality of a writer’s everyday perception, Goetz implies, is only one layer of reality, embedded deeply within a supposedly “objective” second layer. At the beginning of the 21st century, the latter is constituted by the much broader daily seriality of global (news) media.⁴⁰²

Goetz concluded his project of a “history of the present” with the weblog *Garbage for All* [*Abfall für alle*, 1998], which was published the following year in hardcopy as the “novel of a year” and formed this history’s fifth and final installment. Sounding out the possibilities of the “narrative of a day” [*Tageserzählung*] towards the end of this year-long project, Goetz characterizes the daily writing of his blog as an almost reflex-like matter of course, a seriality not unlike the act of breathing, with “no frills, simple, casual, day by day, just as one’s got to breathe.”⁴⁰³ The author challenges diaristic writing as a mere reproduction of experienced weather data and observations from the social sphere and attempts to transcend such writing himself. Goetz’s focus in this blog, therefore, turns time and again to the other *journals* of mass

⁴⁰² On the problematic aspect of this subjective/objective dichotomy between diary and newspaper, see my argument in chapters 1 and 2.

⁴⁰³ “[g]anz einfach, simpel, nebenhin, Tag für Tag, geatmet wird ja auch,” Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 620.

media, stating that “for me television is something like nature is for other people.”⁴⁰⁴ The blog constantly connects the personal, subjective seriality of Goetz’s reclusive life between his daily walk to the newspaper kiosk and his note-taking of the late-night fixtures on television to the supposedly objective seriality of these mass media. The writing in this blog ultimately fuses both layers of reality into the one overarching seriality that emerges as “the most beautiful series that exists at all, [...] the seriality of lived days.”⁴⁰⁵

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As I have shown in the three chapters of this dissertation, the decades in the run-up to the new millennium in the German-speaking world saw several approaches to *journal* writing between the poles of diary and news(paper), negotiating supposedly subjective individual realities with (seemingly) objective societal frameworks. Integrating global networks into the peculiarities of local time zones or the topographies of these writers’ scenes, three *journal* modes of writing simultaneously surfaced in the early 1970s in the works of Jürgen Becker, Sarah Kirsch, and Peter Handke. None of these writing modes are grounded, however, in the particular aesthetics or characteristics of these authors’ respective works and all three are fundamentally different in their approach to literature. Becker is first and foremost an experimental writer whose avantgarde approach continues through his engagement with *journal* writing. Kirsch’s descriptive nature texts and their innate breaking points feature a playfulness and humor that Handke’s meditative, and at times mystic, inquiries into the deeper secrets of time lack.

⁴⁰⁴ “Für mich ist Fernsehen so was, wie für andere Natur,” Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 119.

⁴⁰⁵ “Die schönste Serie, die es überhaupt gibt, ist die Serialität der gelebten Tage,” Goetz, “mehr,” 4:35-4:42.

Further chapters could have identified similar modes of writing in other texts – for example, in works by Christa Wolf, Hermann Lenz, Uwe Johnson, Walter Kappacher, or indeed Rainald Goetz. However, I argue that analyses of their works would not yield any fundamentally new insights. Instead, these analyses would highlight different aspects of writing *journals* that I have touched upon already in my readings. Rather than in individual aesthetics, this dissertation’s interest lies in the emergence of *journal* modes of writing that are grounded in a problem of the socio-historical context of the time in which these modes emerged. When they started writing journals, all of the authors in this dissertation were at pivotal points in their careers, writing in the wake of what was then considered a turn to distinctly apolitical writing.⁴⁰⁶ Often (dis)regarded as the endeavors of literary dropouts (due to their supposed disinterest in present time), critics linked these modes of *journal* writing, and the resulting published prose *journals* or *journal* poetry in particular, to a supposedly diaristic interest in introspection and self-expression.⁴⁰⁷

This dissertation argues that the opposite is the case. Handke’s, Becker’s, and Kirsch’s focus on writing time and scene stems from a distinct interest in their surrounding time and location. *Journal* modes of writing, I have argued, emerged from these writers’ interaction with the developments in journalism and mass media. Positioning their writing in constant debate with the impacts of the new communication technology,⁴⁰⁸ all three writers, in their explicit focus on

⁴⁰⁶ Peter Handke, Sarah Kirsch, and Jürgen Becker all turned away from the urban centers and abandoned earlier experimental or political poetics around the same time. See my chapters.

⁴⁰⁷ Hans Christoph Buch, “Der vollkommene Schauspieler,” Review in *Der Spiegel* (37/1977). Accessed online via: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-40831478.html>

⁴⁰⁸ E.g., through the world-wide distribution of satellite television. CNN launched its 24/7 news coverage in 1980. See my introduction, 1ff.

time, image, scene, form, and narrative across genres critically engaged with the literary consequences brought about by what sociologist Niklas Luhmann conceives of as the new “reality of mass media” in the latter half of the 20th century.⁴⁰⁹ A shared interest in the literary representation of elapsed time in writing is characteristic for the three very different literary projects at the center of this dissertation. Handke, Becker, and Kirsch respectively articulate the passing of time, through a focus either on written simultaneity and writing in sync with the scene (Handke), or on writing as an act of mediating plot (Becker), or on writing as an attempt of focalizing settings of spatio-temporal liminality (Kirsch). Their approaches to writing resulted in confusion and the collapse of genres in favor of distinctly liminal modes of writing. I propose to read these modes as manifestations of a new genre of temporally oriented writing. Entirely deplete of actors or plot, *journal* writing by authors discussed in this dissertation and beyond becomes an act of critically rethinking traditional definitions of plot or narrative. To fathom both the possibilities and the limits of (literary) reporting, these writers’ preoccupation with their surrounding scene of writing as an indicator for time emerged as the main focus of their writing.

In my conclusion, I will revisit these modes of writing against the backdrop of Goetz’s energetic rethinking of journals around the turn of the millennium. In doing so, I will expose both the blind spots and fallacies of these approaches that emerged as common threads in the chapters. This first and foremost concerns the predominant position of this writing between diary and newspaper. These texts’ very rigid repudiation of mass media often lies at odds with the extraordinary phenomenological influence these media have on the writing contained in them. Whereas the oeuvres discussed in this dissertation carefully (and critically) hover between diary and the news(papers), neither appropriating nor entirely rejecting “seriality,” Goetz vigorously

⁴⁰⁹ Niklas Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995).

embraces this friction in his writing, engaging both extremes of (diaristic) “self-exploration” and “self-extinction” to the fullest extent possible. His emerging interest in a distinctly *journal* mode of writing surfaced precisely when many authors embraced the new flood of information made available through the internet by starting to write blogs.⁴¹⁰ Instead of looking at Goetz’s emphatic focus on the present time as a compelling kick-off moment to a poetics of *Pop*,⁴¹¹ I suggest looking at his work as the culmination point and potential collapse of the much more critical interest in time, space, and the media that began in the 1970s.

In this vein, the resurgence of *journal* writing around the turn of the millennium echoes, and at the same time strongly contrasts, its first emergence in the 1980s. Writers of the second wave such as Goetz radically indulged in the problems that had occupied Becker, Kirsch, and Handke over the previous three decades in relation to their writing. Regarding Goetz’s focus on synchronicity and “now,” Eckhard Schuhmacher observes that “time, writing, and *écriture*” [*Zeit, Schrift und Schreiben*] result in a programmatic umbrella that turns writing literally into a form of *Zeit-schrift* (i.e., a journal). Goetz first outlined this approach in the manifesto-like end to his text “Subito” – a piece he famously performed at the 1983 Klagenfurt Festival and with which he jump-started his career as a representative of the so-called *Popliteratur*:

⁴¹⁰ In 1999, Goetz launched his web blog *Abfall für alle*. Simultaneously, Thomas Hettche and Jana Hensel started their project *Null: Literatur im Netz*. Blogs and/or (digital) diaries by Wolfgang Herrndorf (*Arbeit und Struktur*, 2010-2013), Joachim Bessing (*waahr.de*, ongoing) or Stefan Mesch (ongoing) initiated a new attention to temporal matters around the turn of the new millennium. On this transition, see Helmut Gold et. al. (eds.), *Absolut? Privat!: Vom Tagebuch zum Weblog* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2008). Beyond the German-speaking context, Philippe Lejeune explores “online journals” as a phenomenon which in 1999 and 2000 “was just appearing in the French-speaking world,” followed by an “explosion of blogs” in the years to follow. Philippe Lejeune, “Diaries on the Internet: A Year of Reading,” *On Diary*. Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin, Julie Rak (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 299.

⁴¹¹ A powerful interest in Goetz’s work which has since dwindled. See Georg M. Oswald, “Wann ist Literatur Pop? Eine empirische Antwort,” *Der deutsche Roman der Gegenwart*. Ed. by Wieland Freund and Winfried Freund (Munich: Fink, 2001), 29-43, a. Eckhard Schuhmacher, *Gerade Eben Jetzt: Schreibweisen der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003).

bold totalitarian rough militant and funny, that's how things should be written, just as the fiercely thinking human lives. I don't need peace because I have war within me. Least of all I need nature. I live in the city after all, there where it's much more pretty anyway. Look at your tv instead. We need even more stimuli, even a lot more ads speed cars fashion hedonisms pop and again pop.⁴¹²

Highlighting stimuli and pop, Goetz's urban environment is the polar opposite of the depopulated peripheral stills that are the writing scenes in Handke's, Becker's, or Kirsch's *journal* texts. As a "writing of" or "in time" [*Zeit-schrift*], Goetz's writing recalls Handke's ideal of *Mitschrift*, Kirsch's merging of temporal orders in writing, and Becker's recurrent leitmotif question regarding yesterday's plot. However, in contrast to all three writers' desire to order, tame, or even structure temporal experience, Goetz's obsession with time links the production of text to an aspired ideal of temporal excess [*mehr*] that collapses any sense of structure to a degree where his weblog completely defies any traditional genre attributions.

Goetz's approach contrasts, furthermore, with Kirsch's, Handke's, and Becker's sense of writing as a quasi-meditative exercise in reduction, minimalism, and spatio-temporal awareness. Instead, his belligerent claim for total surrender to "even more stimuli" in its emphatic embrace of martial imagery resonates with Ernst Jünger's formative conjectures in the preface to his 1948 war-diaries *Strahlungen*. Predicting there that "the character of the diary" would become *the* defining feature of a literature to come, Jünger conceived of the diary's unique relation to everyday time as a way to cope with what he identified as a new degree of "bullet speed" in

⁴¹² "kühn totalitär roh kämpferisch und lustig, so muß geschrieben werden, so wie der heftig denkende Mensch lebt. Ich brauche keinen Frieden, weil ich habe den Krieg in mir. Am wenigsten brauche ich die Natur. Ich wohne doch in der Stadt, die wo eh viel schöner ist. Schaut euch lieber das Fernsehen an. Wir brauchen noch mehr Reize, noch viel mehr Werbung Tempo Autos Modehedonismen Pop und nochmal Pop," Rainald Goetz, "Subito," *Hirn* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 20.

modern life [*Geschossgeschwindigkeit*].⁴¹³ Situated between weblog and mass media, Goetz endows his conception of the *journal* writer half a century later with exactly this ability to keep up with a new degree of speed in modern life. Only now, the main drivers of renewed waves of acceleration are no longer warfare and military technology but the effects of mass media as the latter's civil offspring.

II.

In the further course of his 2012 lecture, Goetz connected his understanding of authorship to managing constant temporal excess. Goetz sees this excess represented in the ideal of “more newspaper,” referring *pars pro toto* to the daily seriality of continual global narratives in the media. More generally, however, Goetz also anchors this excess in the ideal of “more time.” As “the anchor that scrapes against the bottom of day-to-day,”⁴¹⁴ the keeping track of individual narratives in a diary approximates this ideal of “more time” daily. In reference to his programmatic discussion of *Pop-Literatur*, Goetz subsequently suggested that this standoff with the constant feeling of excess would instead lead the *journal* writer to an exploration of the opposite of *more*. Hinting at the semantic proximity between the German homonyms *mehr*

⁴¹³ Highlighting the journal's ambivalent relation to its surrounding temporalities, Jünger outlined one of the most influential definitions of the genre for the 20th century. Keeping up with the new pace of modern life and, at the same time, providing a defensive mechanism that could prevent formal collapse, Jünger placed his ideal *journal* writer in a position remote from the world [*die Absetzung [...] des Autors von der Welt*], furnishing them with virtues that allow for such a resistance, e.g., a more thorough attention to detail or a higher degree of awareness. Ernst Jünger, *Strahlungen I, Sämtliche Werke. Erste Abteilung, Tagebücher, Band II, Tagebücher II* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), 12f.

⁴¹⁴ Maurice Blanchot, “Diary and Story,” *The Book to Come*. Transl. by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 185.

[*more*] and *Meer* [sea or ocean], Goetz observed that the *journal* writer is embedded in a “sense of being inundated, of foundering in the ocean of everything that interests you” [*ein Gefühl des Überflutetwerdens, des Untergehens im Mehr dessen, was einen interessiert*]. Where Kirsch’s writing between coasts is safely located in the ether between two seas, Goetz’s play with the maritime metaphor suggests submersion, drowning, and perishing in the waves as both the means to and the inevitable end of a full immersion in the mediascape.⁴¹⁵ Through this excess, writing *journal* for Goetz ultimately approximates “non-time, death, [and] longing for non-time” [*Nicht-Zeit, Tod, Sehnsucht nach Nicht-Zeit*] which necessarily curtail the *journal* writer’s project.⁴¹⁶

Echoing his lecture title, Goetz anchored this ambiguous quest for “more” in his plowing through the daily plethora of information. In elaboration of the two-edged role of time in his work, Goetz referenced and at several points during the lecture held up a battered copy of Handke’s 1977 journal *The Weight of the World*.⁴¹⁷ Looking at the prominent role the Austrian assumes in Goetz’s writing, it is fair to say that Handke’s project and its particular focus on time have had a significant influence on Goetz’s conception of a *journal* mode of writing. Throughout *Garbage for All*, Handke serves as a frequent point of departure for Goetz’s reflections on his own writing, featuring no less than 22 times over the 900 pages. The blog chronicles the year in

⁴¹⁵ The end of the diary (as one seriality) for Goetz is necessarily predetermined by the end of life as another seriality and, therefore, inextricably linked to the end of an author’s works as the overarching seriality that subsumes both life and writing. On death writing the end of a diary, see Philippe Lejeune, “How do Diaries End?,” *On Diary*, 199.

⁴¹⁶ In the 2012 Humboldt lecture, Goetz and Diederichsen theatrically reenacted this problem with a clock, which they had placed on the lectern, that cut off each speaker’s contributions after seven minutes. Where Diederichsen at the end of each section was left in the middle of a sentence, Goetz talked as quickly as he could, sweating and out of breath from his attempts to squeeze as much information as possible into the time he had.

⁴¹⁷ Goetz, Diederichsen, “mehr,” 12:00.

which Handke's *Mornings at the Cliff Window* was published. In Goetz's daily press review, this volume features prominently when Goetz reads and compares all the reviews he can find in the available arts and culture sections. Handke's journal, thus, becomes an important intertext for Goetz's text, however, more often than not informing the blog's coming to form *ex negativo*.

The distinct juncture of writing, scene, and time in Handke's *journal* texts can be read as an ambivalent blueprint for Goetz's own writing. Goetz's relationship to the Austrian oscillates between reluctant admiration and emulation on the one hand, and sometimes outright mocking and rejection on the other, captured for instance in a parodic entry from September 14, 1998:

1237. Then the sun came out here, and the first thought was not again right away: sky, horror. Light, day, progress [*Fortgang*], time. Fear. Stop. But rather: oh, bright, beautiful. From my collected imperfect-notes in honor of Peter Handke.⁴¹⁸

Despite Goetz's sometimes comical efforts to distance his own project from Handke's approach, the two oeuvres in their central project of writing time and scene are ultimately very similar. Both lack almost any sense of private information and they significantly depart from the traditional understanding of a diary as the medium for intimate self-reflection and introspection. And both authors, in their day-to-day writing, wear their finding to form on their sleeves. Where von Bülow characterizes Handke's journals as "the means of an experimental lifestyle that is geared towards writing,"⁴¹⁹ Goetz's describes his weblog in the printed version's blurb as "diary /

⁴¹⁸ "1237. Dann kam hier die Sonne raus, und der erste Gedanke war nicht wieder sofort: Himmel, Horror. Licht, Tag, Fortgang, Zeit. Angst. Stop. Sondern: ah, hell, schön. Aus meinen gesammelten Imperfekt-Notizen zu Ehren von Peter Handke." Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 587.

⁴¹⁹ "das Hilfsmittel einer auf das Schreiben ausgerichteten, experimentierenden Lebensführung." Ulrich von Bülow, "Die Tage, die Bücher, die Stifte: Peter Handkes Journale," Klaus Kastberger (ed.), *Peter Handke: Freiheit des Schreibens – Ordnung der Schrift* (Wien: Zsolnay, 2009), 251.

ongoing site of reflection / existential experiment” and “history of the moment / of time.”⁴²⁰ For Goetz, taking to the internet in its 1990s infancy resulted in an entirely new scenario for the writing of text, where formatting and questions of readability feature as matters of constant intratextual negotiation.⁴²¹

Despite Goetz’s and Handke’s commonalities with regard to writing the scene, both the concrete manifestation of that scene and their idea of writing differ. Both *Garbage for All* and *The Weight of the World* appear as depersonalized lenses that reflect on everyday life in more general terms, resembling either a container for any form of “purposeless observations” (Handke) or the “novel / of one year” (Goetz).⁴²² The authorship of the latter, as the dust jacket indicates, is even attributed to “time” itself in a proto Handkean-manner. However, instead of *Mitschreiben* as a mode of writing that is guided by time and images, writing for Goetz aspires to the mimetic ideal of copying, reflecting Goetz’s demand from his 1983 manifesto for “the simple, true act of copying down the world” [*das einfach wahre Abschreiben der Welt*].⁴²³ Where Handke’s world at the end of his 1972 poem becomes poetic again, Goetz’s world relinquishes poetic musicality and appears as categorically different from the nature-bound gaze of Handke’s *Bilderschrift*. Handke’s writing transforms the journalistic idea of notetaking or stenography into the extensiveness of writing in sync with time. Instead of *Mitschreiben*, Goetz, however, transitions to the mimetic act of *Abschreiben*, adopting a term commonly associated with the

⁴²⁰ “Tagebuch / Reflexions-Baustelle / Existenz-Experiment [und] Geschichte des Augenblicks / der Zeit,” Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, blurb.

⁴²¹ Scholars agree on the year 1989 and Tim Berners-Lee's invention of the world wide web as historic benchmarks for the digital revolution. See Hartmut Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (Malmö: NSU Press, 2010) 72.

⁴²² Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 620.

⁴²³ Goetz, “Subito,” 18.

tasks of copyists.

The subtle difference between the two prefixes reflects a fundamental ontological difference in both works. Goetz's idea of a "simple, true act of copying down the world" presupposes that the world itself is text already. In his use of the term, Goetz references both the act of copying text from one piece of paper to another and the act of "copying" time as the task of the chronicler. This works with the assumption that texts and not calendric dates are the data of *journal* writing. Included in *Garbage for All* are the installments of Goetz's "Frankfurt Lectures in Poetics," which he held during his year of blog writing. In one of these lectures, Goetz expands on the notion of *Abschreiben* by pointing to written news and news writing as the texts that constitute a *journal* writer's scene of writing at the end of the 20th century. Reflecting on the observation that every sentence "loses its original validity" when repeated more than seven times, Goetz syllogizes:

This is one of the reasons why the writer inevitably is a type of world-text-receiver and explorer [*Welt-Text-Empfänger und -Forscher*], because he needs to know which sentences are at which iteration of repetition [*Wiederholungsstelle*] at the moment in order to know whether they still convey that which was originally intended or have in the meantime taken to express its opposite.⁴²⁴

For Handke, Kirsch, and Becker, *journal* texts are the eventual result of a writing that is in sync with or angled towards the world. For Goetz, the world itself is text. *Journal* writing, like starting

⁴²⁴ "Jeder Satz, der mehr als sieben Mal gesagt wird, wird unwahr, weil seine ursprüngliche Wahrheit in der Wiederholung aufgeht, sich verliert, und stattdessen sein Gegenteil, das in ihm immer und von Anfang an mitgesagte Gegenteil, in den Vordergrund tritt. Auch deshalb ist der Schreiber unweigerlich so ein Welt-Text-Empfänger und -Forscher, weil er wissen muß, welche Sätze im Augenblick an welcher Wiederholungsstelle sich befinden, um zu wissen, ob sie noch das ursprünglich Gemeinte, oder inzwischen eher das Gegenteil mitteilen," Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 333.

a new blog, is the act of “entering” the Foucauldian “institution of everything that thus far has been said” for Goetz, where the entirety of texts *is* the world.

In Goetz’s weblogs, the mass media discourse becomes the calendar that provides the basic structure for his diaristic project. The landscape of “press publications” reflects in its daily changes Goetz’s obsession with the ‘5Ws’ of journalistic reports: “who said what when where and why?”⁴²⁵ Goetz morphs Handke’s, Kirsch’s, and Becker’s focus on the importance of menial and peripheral perceptions into an unrelenting emphasis on red-hot news and “now” instead. In its supposed suspense [-*spannend*], a “solar or lunar eclipse that encompasses the entire globe” [*den Erdkreis umspannende Sonnen- oder Mondfinsternis*] resembles the opposite of crucial information for Handke when juxtaposed with the only supposedly boring, negligible recording of the first snow “in my surroundings.”⁴²⁶ Where for Kirsch, the ether as a liminal space fuses information from the writer’s immediate environs with global events, for Goetz this distinction dissolves. Over the year, events such as the release of a new Madonna music video on MTV or the death of Ernst Jünger serve as globe-spanning events from the author’s perspective that double as significant fixtures in the writer’s subjective daily seriality.

Goetz ultimately grants television the place nature has in romantic writing as something “inexhaustible, hardly ever truly narrated [or] satisfyingly captured.”⁴²⁷ As his writing scene,

⁴²⁵ “The ‘5W questions’ of journalistic reports: who? when? where? what? and sometimes why?” Broersma, *Form and Style in Journalism*), 10.

⁴²⁶ “Eher möchte ich eine den Erdkreis umspannende Sonnen- oder Mondfinsternis versäumen als in meinem Umkreis den ersten Schnee (es ist schon Ende Januar, und immer noch nichts als Schneeluft,“ Peter Handke, *Vor der Baumschattenwand nachts: Zeichen und Anflüge von der Peripherie 2007–2015* (Salzburg, Wien: Jung und Jung, 2016), 329.

⁴²⁷ “daß ich doch nicht immerzu nur übers Fernsehen schreiben kann. Dann: wieso den nicht. Für mich ist Fernsehen so was, wie für andere die Natur. Was [...] Uerschöpfliches, längst noch nicht wirklich Erzähltes, befriedigend Erfafßtes.” Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 119.

Goetz's mass media not only reflect or visualize elapsing time but, in Luhmann's terms, "create time." The reality of mass media, and in particular newspapers and television, becomes a scene for Goetz that propels *journal* writing into the reality of the 21st century. Even when in doubt "that in the end I can't just always write about television," Goetz pushes the balance between diary and newspaper critically to the latter. *Journal* writing for Goetz emerges as a mode that is essentially the writing of chronicles and thus closer to a newspaper than to the diary.⁴²⁸

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With his emphasis on authorship and oeuvre, Goetz conceives *journal* writing with regard to the writer rather than the writing itself. Outlining his conception of the *journal* writer as a "world-text-receiver," the surrounding mediascape replaces the attention to landscapes, which were at the center of *journal* writers' works from the previous three decades. Through his definition of the *journal* writer as a "world-text-receiver," Goetz's orients his writing toward the tv program as a form of calendar. Like the daily regimen of his newspaper reading, this attention results in a state of excess, which ultimately is unmanageable and unsustainable regarding the writer's sanity. Goetz captures this *conditio humana* of his year-long writerly experiment in an entry that summarizes any number of days in this book: "Then food, newspaper, tv. To want to live like this. And at the same time finding it infinitely sad and wrong."⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ On the medieval chronicle as a precursor of the diary see Peter Boerner, *Tagebuch* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1969), 37ff. On the origins of book-keeping in accounting and finance: Jane Gleeson-White, *Double-Entry: How the Merchants of Venice Created Modern Finance* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2012).

⁴²⁹ "Dann Essen, Zeitungen, Fernsehen. So leben wollen. Und das zugleich unendlich traurig und falsch finden," Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 78.

The unsustainability of this daily excess is one of the breaking points of Goetz's project. His writing affords a complete and total, war-like immersion in both scene and time. This interrelation of life and writing is ultimately problematic for the writer due to the idea of a world that consists of text only. For, text not only has implications for the author's social life but also slowly upends his living arrangement:

The system of my bags that always accumulate somewhere, become undiscoverable, then new ones are set up, similar ones, the same ones. Then the order works again for a short time, then masses of new newspapers sprawl immediately over everything, jungle-like [...]. It's absurd, something unadministrable comes from it, though agitation and unrest are released through it, strangely transformed into sorrow.⁴³⁰

The waxing and waning of this newspaper topography is the paper manifestation of a mediascape-turned-lifestyle for Goetz that takes over his life and makes it "unadministrable." Elapsing time, manifested in writing and verbalized through observations of this scene, emerges in Goetz in the mere act of identifying the "iterations of repetitions" [*Wiederholungsstelle*] of sentences in the mass media discourse. Goetz's writing scene is a world that consists of little more than texts and the daily walks necessary for him to acquire more of them. Elaborating on this problematic excessiveness of his writing, Goetz resorts in his blog to the supposedly diaristic idea of landscape and weather descriptions. By way of his focus on weather descriptions, however, Goetz inadvertently outlines the breaking point of works like his:

Attention to the weather. This alone is already DEPRESSION, in its purest form. Sick [...] this kind of precision towards the utmost transient and at the same time the most hyper present thing. [...] the fact that only such a strangely poetic-sentimentalist, very traditionally

⁴³⁰ "Das System meiner Tüten, die immer irgendwo anwachsen, unauffindbar werden, dann werden neue angelegt, ähnliche, gleiche. Dann funktioniert die Ordnung wieder kurz, dann wuchern sofort die neuen Zeitungsmassen drüber hinweg, urwaldmäßig. [...] Es ist absurd, es kommt etwas Unverwaltbares dabei raus, aber es wird Erregung und Unruhe abgebaut, komischerweise transformiert in Kummer," Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 77.

coded WORD GARBAGE of the most beautiful words remains from the most intense weather impressions of all things and from the attempt to really accurately reproduce this sensory overwhelming data. [...] You read a description of the weather and think: He experienced the weather. It impressed him. He made an effort to depict it. The poor guy. What the hell is his problem?
SICK⁴³¹

The “problem” Goetz sees in an excessive, descriptive focus on nature in texts such as Handke’s, I argue, is ultimately a historical problem of the 1970s. Goetz’s critique of weather descriptions as something “hyper present and transient” recalls his own attempts to document entire tv shows or feuilleton debates in their entirety.

Goetz’s scorn for the prototypical nature writer could easily be applied to his own attempts to document, for instance, the daily escalations of an unfolding feuilleton debate and the resulting “garbage” that features in the title of his blog. The autobiographic subject matters in Handke’s, Becker’s, and Kirsch’s texts and their sometimes fairly uniform and tedious accounts of their peripheral lifestyles are ultimately comparable to Goetz’s endless lists of things seen on television.⁴³² His unconditional juncture of life and writing can be read as a 21st century variation of the nature-writer’s problem. His daily life between overwhelming amounts of unwatched episodes of Harald Schmidt’s late-night and their description in writing is not much different from the accurate description of “weather impressions.” Goetz’s disturbing regimen of watching

⁴³¹ “Aufmerksamkeit fürs Wetter. Das ist schon DEPRESSION an sich, in Reinform. Krank. [...] diese Art Präzision dem Allervergänglichsten und zugleich Hyperpräzistenten gegenüber. [...] daß gerade von den intensivsten Wettereindrücken, vom Versuch wirklich präziser Wiedergaben der sinnlich überwältigenden Daten nur so ein komisch poetisch-sentimentalischer, sehr traditionell kodierter WORTMÜLL schönster Worte übrigbleibt. [...] Man liest ein beschriebenes Wetter und denkt sich: Er hat ein Wetter erlebt. Es hat ihn beeindruckt. Er hat sich Mühe gegeben, das darzustellen. Die arme Sau. Was hat der denn für ein Problem? KRANK,” Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 56.

⁴³² This tedium reminds of the *journal*’s historic proximity to the chronicle and the duty-aspect as part of the chronicler’s task.

these tapes drunk at night, and then again in the morning (as his version of sunrise and sunset) results in episodes where he cannot even remember if he has seen a particular episode or not. Pages-long descriptions of this kind beg the same question which Goetz asks with regards to the description of weather data. Other than a cascade of words, what remains of a tv show once it is described in a weblog?

Regarding Goetz, I highlight the problem of transience as an important friction and eventual breaking point of *journal* writing in general. The attempt to keep up with the flow of time necessarily resembles the ultimate hubris of the diarist, as Goetz underlined the constant “sense of being flooded” by time that naturally curtails the task of the *journal* writer. This transience is also reflected in the relationship between scene and writing in other modes of writing *journal* discussed in this dissertation. When expressing “infinite [...] sad[ness]” over his own compulsive mode of living connected to his writing, Goetz characterizes the situation in which *journal* writing emerges not only as a choice, but also as a created scene. Goetz argues that the exposure of the writer to constant media input makes this writing possible in the first place.⁴³³ This poses the important question about the relationship between writing and scene in *journal* texts. Does *journal* writing create the scene that is its main concern, or does the scene ultimately yield *journal* writing? In the long run, writing *journal* in an almost autopoietic, self-sustaining process, generates the scene of writing that it originally set out to chronicle. This is suggested by Goetz’s being overwhelmed by the structure of everything that can be “copied down.”

⁴³³ Goetz’s weblog, I suppose, would look differently if the writer had made it his task to go on daily walks through different Berlin neighborhoods. The same applies to earlier journal texts. Handke’s journal writing results in markedly different texts when written during one of his frequent periods of traveling the world, rather than from the remote and fixed position in the suburbs of Paris or at the Salzburg or Frankfurt periphery.

At the turn of the millennium, I therefore argue, a new, accelerated mass media landscape brings friction already inherent in *journal* texts since the 1970s to the surface. Goetz's collapse of the *journal* scene's delicate balance between global and local suggests that *journal* writing in the end might only be able to cope with a certain level of discrepancy between heterogeneous levels of daily temporal experience. Once this balance tips, writing time through writing the scene becomes a task of overwhelming scale as it indeed resembles for Goetz. For him, the diary is past the point of being able to cope with what Jünger had characterized as "the bullet speed" of modern life. By "engaging the new medium of the internet," as Elke Siegel suggests, Goetz's explicitly temporal focus in his web blog ultimately "encounters and transforms the form of the diary,"⁴³⁴ thereby advancing the spatial and temporal aesthetics of earlier *journal* texts towards a poetics of radical synchronicity. Goetz's work leads this writing between the poles of diary and newspaper to a logical endpoint at a time where the traditional newspaper is about to be replaced by paywalls, previewed content on search engines, shares on social media, news-tickers, and push-notifications.

In this vein, I read Goetz's interest in the journal as both the culmination and collapse of earlier temporal modes of writing that first emerged in the 1970s under the impact of a temporal globalization. This is reflected in Goetz's sudden, and to this day final, departure from diaristic writing. This interest had reached a peak around 2000 but dwindled at the end of the same decade when social media and the Web 2.0. as a total mediascape exacerbated the temporal excess with which Goetz's writing grapples. Still in its infancy, the new possibilities of the world wide web in 2000 provided Goetz with the means to write his blog while his daily sifting and

⁴³⁴ Elke Siegel, "Remains of the Day: Rainald Goetz's Internet Diary *Abfall für alle*," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*. Vol. 81, No. 3, 2006 (Washington: Heldref Publications, 2006), 236.

sorting through the landscape of news media still resulted in analog stacks of newspapers.⁴³⁵

When online news and search engines replace printed, haptic newspaper as the writer's preferred medium and the last straw to a material world beyond text,⁴³⁶ Goetz's *journal* writing reaches its endpoint. With the internet not only establishing the medium of this writing but also taking over its scene, *journal* as a mode of writing that is based on a balance and friction between diary and the news collapses.

⁴³⁵ Goetz's preference for print shows in his decision to later publish his weblog as a printed book.

⁴³⁶ After browsing the internet for one and a half hours on the quest for either a Luhmann or Jünger quote, Goetz in *Abfall für alle* reflects on the implications this new access to texts has for his writing: "Der resultierende Geisteszustand: totale WIRRNIS. Da ist lapprigstes Zeitungslesen und Zeitschriftenblättern ganz strenge Sammlung dagegen," Goetz, *Abfall für alle*, 70.

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