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Doublings and Couplings

The Feeling Thing in Valéry and Kleist

Katrin Pahl

A large part of the vitality of open objects stems from their emotionality. The »open object« affects others with this emotionality. Socrates, the protagonist of Paul Valéry's dialogue *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*, gets very agitated when – at the intersection of land, sea, and sky – he finds something ambiguous, something that resists his habit to close the process of classification. Socrates' spirit is moved, it is »mis en mouvement par cet objet trouvé sur le bord de la mer«. ¹ His interlocutor Phaedrus calls him an »adolescent spirit« – no doubt evoking puberty's well-known bent for emotional agitation (EA, p. 125). Adolescent Socrates finds himself unable to determine whether the thing is man-made, a product of chance, or the result of its own inherent *Bildungstrieb*. This undecidability affects him physically; it makes him stop in his tracks and then walk in a different direction. It also affects him mentally; the thing throws him into confusion and embarrassment – and he admits that therein lays its significance: »son importance est inséparable de l'embarras qu'il me causa« (EA, p. 115). The trouble he has defining the thing generates important thoughts and life-changing ideas. The open thing thus moves both his body and his spirit. ² The entanglement of these two movements belies Socrates' own strict separation of body and thought.

But not only human subjects get agitated. With this paper, I want to explore how things become emotional and – as a slightly different line of thought – whether it makes sense to conceive of emotionality as an »open object«. With his network account of human and nonhuman actants, Latour helps level the opposition between subject and object. Can we also draw upon his theory for an account of »the feeling thing«? Building on Latour, Jane Bennett is concerned with what

¹ Paul Valéry: *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* [EA] (1921), in: *Œuvres de Paul Valéry II*, Paris 1960, p. 79–147, here p. 125.

² See EA, p. 121: »SOCRATE: Cherchant, trouvant, perdant et retrouvant le moyen de discerner ce qui est produit par la nature, de ce qui est fait par les hommes, je restai quelque temps à la même place [...]; puis, je me mis à marcher très rapidement vers l'intérieur des terres, comme quelqu'un en qui les pensées, après une longue agitation dans tous les sens, semblent enfin s'orienter; et se composer dans une seule idée, engendrant du même coup pour son corps, une décision de mouvement bien déterminé et une allure résolue.«

she calls »impersonal affect« or »material vibrancy« – an »affect not specific to human bodies«. ³ Drawing on a Spinozist notion of affect, which »refers broadly to the capacity of any body for activity and responsiveness«, she argues that »organic and inorganic bodies, natural and cultural objects [...] all are affective« (ibid.). Indeed, we have already seen that Valéry's found object has the vibrancy or vitality to move Socrates – it is affective in Bennett's sense.

I want to go one step further and – beyond this affectivity of things – explore the emotionality of things. I find emotionality more interesting than affectivity because it truly unsettles the binary of materialism and idealism, which Deleuzians (who are responsible for most of the discourse on »affect«) inadvertently maintain in favor of preconscious forces and bodily intensities. Emotionality opens bodies to thoughts and affects spirits with matter. For me, emotionality is the faculty of responding to self-incongruence. It thus requires a form of subjectivity. But my understanding of subjectivity differs from a Deleuzian one in that I don't use »subjective« as a synonym for »personal«. For Deleuze, »affect« is impersonal, preconscious, and before representation. He reserves the term »feeling« for personal experiences that are conscious and can be identified and labeled by checking them against one's biography of feelings. And he uses »emotion« as referring to the social – not necessarily self-reflective – display of »affect«. ⁴ My term »emotionality« cannot exactly be mapped onto this Deleuzian terminology. If »affectivity« is a body's openness to being affected by other bodies and its capacity to affect other bodies, then such affectivity includes self-incongruence: the transport from one (version of the) self to another (version of the) self (or the dynamic intersection of land, sea, and sky in our example of *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*). »Emotionality«, as I understand it, registers and responds to this »affectivity«. Something is emotional when it responds to its incongruence (that response can take the form of augmenting or reducing self-incongruence). ⁵ A basic form of reflection (in the sense of mirroring, folding back, reinforcing, or diluting) and a minimal form of subjectivity are thus

³ Jane Bennett: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke 2010, p. xii.

⁴ See Brian Massumi: *Notes on the Translation*, in: Gilles Deleuze: *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987, p. xvi; and Eric Shouse: *Feeling, Emotion, Affect*, in: *M/C Journal* 8.6 (2005), under: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php> (03. 27. 2010).

⁵ Bennett describes »incongruence with itself« as affectivity: as a body's openness to being affected by other bodies and its capacity to affect other bodies. The emotional response can be augmenting or attenuating said affectivity or self-incongruence. Drawing on Spinoza's notion of *conatus*, Bennett shows that it serves a body's interest in power to increase its encounters with other bodies and thus its incongruence with itself. But we can certainly also observe the opposite tendency. Traditional rationality, for example, has developed effective technologies for reducing complexity and incongruence – and yet, as a way of registering and responding to self-difference, it is no less emotional for it.

necessary for emotion. Without reflection no emotionality, and without self no reflection. But this self need not be human for it to become emotional.

For my purpose of thinking an impersonal mode of reflection, I draw on Leo Bersani's and Ulysse Dutoit's work.⁶ Through discussions of visual art works as historically apart as Caravaggio's paintings and late-twentieth-century films, Bersani and Dutoit describe the aesthetic dispersal of personal identity. They develop an ontology of doublings and inaccurate replications that has important ethical implications for them. In the remainder of this essay, I will discuss the theater of Heinrich von Kleist and explore the doublings and couplings that produce emotional things and a thinglike emotionality there. Kleist uses a similar aesthetic as the one Bersani and Dutoit describe, only that he extends the doublings and replications across the line that separates the visual from the textual components of theater. His theater serves as an exploration into emotional reflection that elaborates an emotional logic, if you will, of confusion and jumbled identities.

Kleist develops unusual and rather queer strategies to render visible on stage what the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility has relegated to interiority, namely feeling and reflection. He does not favor the expressive capacities of theater – theatrical gestures, for example – to make emotion visible. Nor does he use the four walls of the theater to create an allegory for the interior space of the soul – a technique developed by Weimar Classicism. Instead, Kleist doubles the embodied action on stage with narrative (p)re-presentations. His theater can be described as an assemblage of textuality and theatricality, of giving to read and giving to see.

But let me quickly bring back Valéry's *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*. Initially, Phaedrus asks Socrates for a detailed and vivid description of the *objet ambigu*: »Fais-moi voir cet objet, comme le grand Homère nous fait admirer le bouclier du fils de Pélée!« he demands of Socrates (EA, p. 115). Phaedrus asks for hypotyposis: Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* epitomizes the art of creating the illusion of reality through lively description.⁷ Valéry's Socrates refuses such ekphrastic hypotyposis of the found object – »Tu penses bien qu'il est indescriptible«, he counters – and indeed we learn very little about what it looks like (ibid.). Instead of reifying the thing by bringing it before our eyes, Socrates explores its shifting orientation to human modes of thought, specifically the fact that he can-

⁶ Leo Bersani/Ulysse Dutoit: *Forms of Being. Cinema, Aesthetics, and Subjectivity*, London 2004; and id.: *Caravaggio's Secrets*, Cambridge, MA 1998.

⁷ More specifically, the *Iliad*'s description of Achilles' shield is an example of ekphrasis, that is, of the literary description of a work of art. In Valéry's dialogue, Socrates refuses such ekphrasis since it cannot be determined whether the *objet ambigu* is a work of art or of nature. He refuses any kind of hypotypotic description of the thing, perhaps because of the teleological force of narrative, which would close the object rather than preserve it as an open object.

not classify the found object and cannot determine its origin.⁸ Socrates vividly describes how his own physical, emotional, and spiritual movements permit (perhaps seek) the encounter with the ambiguous object and then respond to it. Valéry's text uses hypotyposis not to reify and stabilize, but to paint a dynamic assemblage of things that affect one another: land, sea, and sky, stuff that is washed on the shore, Socrates' moving body, and his moving thoughts.

It seems that the open object has drawn all these bodies together. And yet, despite the fact that it creates a moving assemblage of human and nonhuman components, the *objet ambigu* is not quite an emotional thing in my sense. The »merveilleux objet« (as Phaidrus calls it) does affect another body (the body of Socrates); it also troubles the distinction between matter and thought in that it affects Socrates' thoughts about himself (EA, p. 115). In Deleuzian terms – where »feelings are *personal* and *biographical*« – Socrates' encounter with the open object produces an *arche*-feeling: a feeling that creates a biographical crisis and even (re-)constitutes biography.⁹ The story that Socrates tells about his life is that in response to his encounter with the *objet ambigu*, he became a philosopher and not an architect. But the *objet ambigu* doesn't respond to its own incongruence; its affectivity is not self-reflective. Socrates' vivid description of emotion cannot serve me as an example for impersonal emotionality. After all, for Valéry, only the man is emotional – not the thing.

Let's turn to Kleist then, who also uses hypotyposis. But he uses it in his plays in such an excessive way that the narrative element of hypotyposis threatens to destroy the unity of place, time, and action required in classical theater.¹⁰ What is more, hypotyposis does not serve Kleist to describe a feeling (as it does Valéry's Socrates), but to perform – i.e., to generate and enact, emotionality.

Kleist's theater relies heavily on hypotyposis and other narrative elements, such as messengers' reports and teichoscopies. This holds especially for *Penthesilea* – the

⁸ Cf. Sara Ahmed: *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, New York 2004; in particular, her use of »orientation«, pp. 7–8.

⁹ Shouse: *Feeling, Emotion, Affect* (as note 4).

¹⁰ My analysis of re-layed emotionality in Kleist owes much to the contributions of Gabriele Brandstetter and Rüdiger Campe on the repeated hypotyposes in *Penthesilea*. See Gabriele Brandstetter: *Insenzierte Katharsis in Kleists Penthesilea*, in: Christine Lubkoll and Günter Oesterle (eds.): *Gewagte Experimente und kühne Konstellationen. Kleists Werk zwischen Klassizismus und Romantik*, Würzburg 2001, p. 231: »In der Wiederholung des vor- und zurückgreifenden Erzählens und in der Staffelung des Berichts aus mehreren Perspektiven lädt sich das Szenario der vorgestellten Bilder mit einer ungeheuren Energie auf.« Cf. Rüdiger Campe: *Zweierlei Gesetz in Kleists Penthesilea*. *Naturrecht und Biopolitik*, in: id.: *Penthesileas Versprechen. Exemplarische Studien über die literarische Referenz*, Freiburg 2008, pp. 313–41.

play that features the shield of Achilles (even though it barely makes it visible).¹¹ What these narrative elements typically describe are again not static works of art, but assemblages in motion: amazons – themselves affective assemblages of the kind woman-on-horse-with-bow-instead-of-breast – run into Greeks and the turmoil of the battle creates tangles of carriages, animal and human and differently gendered bodies, weapons, armor, and dust – all mixing constantly into novel indecipherable and agitating configurations. One can certainly say that the reports and teichoscopies of *Penthesilea* present us with »open objects« and that these »open objects« have a strong affective charge – perhaps even an emotional quality. These narrative elements describe emotional bodies or assemblages, but I find even more interesting how – forming an assemblage with the action on stage – they become emotional things themselves. In the following, I will focus on one of Penthesilea's monologues to analyze the emotional thing that Kleist's theater is, and the impersonal emotionality that it presents.

At the end of *Penthesilea*, we find a most unusual teichoscopy. Teichoscopy can be literally translated as »viewing from a wall«, and means the synchronous description by a character on a lookout of events that take place outside the field of vision of all others. Here, the Amazon queen stands at the figural edge of the scene and describes in real time what her sisters cannot see, that is, how she manages to revive a dead and buried feeling by forging it with words into a thing. Her teichoscopic speech relays what is conventionally relegated to the realm of interiority as if it happened in exterior reality, and her feeling actually does take shape as a dagger.

Denn jetzt steig' ich in meinen Busen nieder,
Gleich einem Schacht, und grabe, kalt wie Erz,
Mir ein vernichtendes Gefühl hervor.
Dies Erz, dies läutr' ich in der Glut des Jammers
Hart mir zu Stahl; tränk es mit Gift sodann,
Heißätzendem, der Reue, durch und durch;
Trag es der Hoffnung ew'gem Amboß zu,
Und schärf' und spitz es mir zu einem Dolch;
Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich' ich meine Brust;
So! So! So! So! Und wieder! – Nun ist's gut.¹²

¹¹ Achilles' shield appears only as something that is discarded. See *Penthesilea*, lines 1156–58: »Er ruft: verweilet, meine Freundinnen! / Achilles grüßt mit ew'gem Frieden euch! / Und wirft das Schwerdt hinweg, das Schild hinweg.« Heinrich von Kleist: *Penthesilea*, vol. I/5 of: Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle (eds.): *Sämtliche Werke*, Brandenburger Ausgabe, Basel 1988.

¹² *Ibid.*, lines 3025 ff.

Having protagonists like Penthesilea relate, as Bersani and Dutoit would say, »invisible non-event[s] which, however, we can, with some effort, see«, Kleist's theater trains the spectators to acknowledge a »different mode of being [emotional]«. ¹³ Kleist doubles the embodied action on stage with narrative and thereby produces a palpable textuality that is at odds with the performance art of theater. ¹⁴ His scenes oscillate between these two modes of (re)presentation, layering slightly different accounts of a feeling into what can best be described as a multiple impression or mackle. Such layering blurs the contours of emotion. While emotions, in Kleist, can be seen, they are not, therefore, clear and distinct. They never quite come into focus, as it were. I don't view this as a deficiency or an epistemological problem. ¹⁵ Instead, Kleist's aesthetics of re-layed emotionality models an emotional ontology that has ethical and political benefits because it brings into view that emotions, as Sara Ahmed has argued, »open bodies to others«. ¹⁶

Penthesilea's final monologue intertwines or mackles embodied performance, descriptive narrative, and performative speech. When she eventually offers her breast to the dagger, this is not an original act committed by an individual but one response in a series of de-individualizing repetitions. The last two verses of her monologue – »Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich ich meine Brust; / So! So! So! So! Und wieder!« – describe actions that physically repeat – five times – what the teichoscopy has already carried out. Beginning with »Denn jetzt steig' ich in meinen Busen nieder«, the teichoscopy already pierces the border between interiority and exteriority. Yet, even the mimetic re-enactment of this piercing (the jabs with the dagger) does not bring the series of repetitions to a definite end. To be sure, the stage directions, »*Sie fällt und stirbt*«, retroactively confirm the descriptive character of the preceding verses and seem to bring closure to the scene. But Kleist's peculiar word choice earlier creates an extravagant imagery in excess of literal description. The phrase »und diesem Dolch jetzt reich ich meine Brust« does not exactly produce the image of a suicide by stabbing. When Penthesilea says that she »gives her breast«, one rather imagines a scene of breastfeeding, that is to say, of a nurturing and life-giving practice. Alongside every »so!« Penthesilea might mimetically act out the effect her words have on herself – but whether this be a repeated stabbing or a repeated breastfeeding remains open for the actress's interpretation. In any event, these mimeses of an act already mackled by narration are doubled once

¹³ Bersani/Dutoit: *Forms of Being* (as note 6), p. 8.

¹⁴ The V-effect of Kleist's theater does not rely on parabases (a technique preferred by Romanticism) but is produced by this subliminal yet palpable textuality of the performance.

¹⁵ As Christian Moser does, for example. See Christian Moser: *Verfehlte Gefühle: Wissen, Begehren, Darstellen bei Kleist und Rousseau*, Würzburg 1993, pp. 6–36.

¹⁶ Ahmed: *Politics of Emotion* (as note 8), p. 15.

more by further speech acts. Prothoe repeats the stage directions with her verdict »Sie stirbt!«. And Penthesilea, in addition to her physical gestures and her literal and figural descriptions, performs a speech act that realizes – forges, to be precise – in the very utterance of words what the conventions of the teichoscopic mode cast as the unrepresentable beyond: a feeling. Penthesilea thus doubles and couples the concrete reality of the presentation on stage with the imagined realities both off-stage and inside her bosom. Who would here not confuse one mode of being and representation with another?

In *Eupalinos ou L'Architecte*, Valéry uses metalepsis – the conflating of two distinct levels of a narrative. At the very moment when the hypotyposis of his walk along the beach proves successful, that is to say, when Phaidrus sighs, »Tu me fais revivre«, Socrates almost imperceptibly slips into metalepsis: »L'objet gît sur le bord où je marchais, où je me suis arrêté, où je t'ai parlé longuement« (EA, p. 117). He speaks of his ambling along the beach and his ambling in speech (»Je me suis laissé parler«) as if they didn't belong to different levels of the narrative (ibid.). Of course, plainly speaking, the place where Socrates speaks at length to Phaidrus is not the ocean beach, where he chances upon the queer object. Similarly, the protagonists of the two narrative levels are not the same: one is the adolescent Socrates, the other is the mature Socrates. The adolescent Socrates of the narrated scene is brought back to life by the mature Socrates' narration. Hypotyposis, it appears, has a metaleptic effect. By vividly presencing, if you will, an absent scene, it has the tendency to confuse not only narrative levels but also the representation with its referent. This becomes evident when Phaidrus at the moment of successful hypotyposis exclaims: »O langage chargé de sel, et paroles véritablement marines!« (ibid.). He notes how the message (the effects of an encounter at the seashore) affects the medium (language becoming marine). In hypotypotic speech, language affects itself: it confuses, troubles, and confounds itself. Because it does so in excess of the speaker's intention, language presents itself as a thing or an actant here (not simply as a tool or a medium). And, because of the self-reflective quality of its affection, we can now say that this thing is emotional.

Socrates' hypotypotic speech is an example of an emotional thing. Kleist's theatrical texts are similar emotional things, only that Kleist's metalepsis (if the term still applies) jumbles two genres: the dramatic and the narrative genre. Kleist's plays are assemblages of textuality and theatricality that are emotional because, through doublings and couplings, they affect themselves and respond to their self-incongruence by increasing or reducing difference. Penthesilea's teichoscopy »presences« what is supposed to take place off-scene, namely the production of a feeling – a feeling thing, to be precise. Again, medium and message slip and stick, technique and effect reflect and confuse one another. Penthesilea's teichoscopy – itself an emotional thing – describes the production of an emotional thing: the

forging of a feeling (*Gefühl*) into a thing (*Dolch*) that is affective in the sense that it affects another body (*meine Brust*) and enters into an assemblage with it, and that is also emotional in the sense that it responds to its own incongruence by effecting another self's incongruence. The self-incongruence of the dagger consists in the slippage and stickiness between itself as thing and itself as word.¹⁷ While the word »chest« has an empirical referent on stage, the »dagger« does not exist physically. The obvious distinction between the empirical chest and its signifier affords each a solid and self-identical being. The dagger, on the other hand, oscillates between word and thing, and it responds to its own self-incongruence with a demand for nourishment (whether this is a call for appeasement or for growth remains again ambiguous): Penthesilea needs to breast-feed the dagger (*Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich' ich meine Brust*). At the same time, the emotional dagger turns Penthesilea into an »open object«. Penthesilea's speech has a physical effect on her: the emotional thing that is her teichoscopy opens the closed interiority of the person Penthesilea to a positive end (*Nun ist's gut*). The emotional dagger turns Penthesilea into a self-incongruous thing: we are not sure whether she is dead or alive, reified or vibrant at the end of the play.

At this point, where the contours of personal identity have become quite unreliable, we can conclude that it makes more sense to conceive of emotionality as an open object or ambiguous assemblage than to see it as a personal characteristic or human capacity. The thing that is emotionality lives at the border – »L'objet gît sur le bord« (EA, p. 117). Which border this might be is of little importance to the opening of the object and to the emergence of the ambiguous emotional thing: the transient boundary between land and sea, the boundary between interiority and exteriority that iron ore can fortify (forged into armor) or pierce (forged into a dagger), or the sticky boundary between distinct levels and genres of representation. If rationality has developed technologies to straighten things out, emotionality strikes me as a queer thing that jumbles identities. It lives in the *Beieinander* of bodies, words, feelings and ideas, all of which it constantly doubles, couples, and jumbles with one another – just as the repeated *ei* of the signifier *Beieinander* suggests.

¹⁷ Cf. Ahmed: *Politics of Emotion* (as note 8), p. 15: »Words for feeling and objects of feeling [...] move, stick, and slide«, as well is *ibid.* p. 202: »The objects of emotions slide and stick.«