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# Trickster, Owlglass Pranks, and Dysfunctional Things: Non-Knowledge and Critique in Digital Cultures

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**Non-knowledge and incomprehensibility are, for now, the norm in digital cultures. These states, produced part technologically, part discursively, need particular attention because they form a "politics of non-knowledge." Against this back-drop, critique is necessary but is at the same time difficult to execute because the possibility of gaining knowledge is fundamentally put into question. A performing "practice of critique," which tests the contemporary theorization on digital cultures by reflecting it with exaggerated affirmation and identification, is recommended as a method of critique in digital cultures. Its aim is to enable a self-awareness of digital cultures concerning the politics of non-knowledge.**

## Introduction

Digital cultures are characterized, it could be argued, by a variety of forms and levels of non-knowledge[1] and incomprehensibility.[2,3] They arise from the technological conditions of digital cultures, about which no one is fully informed, as e.g., unrepresentable algorithms (Galloway 2011) or untestable simulations (Vehlken 2016). Against this background, Timon Beyes and Claus Pias (2014) have proclaimed a culture of non-knowledge and incomprehensibility in digital cultures. That is, they are the norm and demand different forms of participation and policy than e.g., transparency, which is claimed in the dispute over data surveillance. In digital cultures, incomprehensibility and non-knowledge are, it could be said, no longer a shortcoming or an exceptional situation that must be rectified. Rather, they are becoming the status quo, and as such are extremely productive

1  Knowledge refers to Michael Foucault's order of knowledge (episteme) in a historical phase and is inseparable from power (Foucault 1994). Non-knowledge is thereby productive in the sense that through interplay with power, new forms of knowledge can be initiated. An example would be disciplinary actions with which new knowledge for classifying and treating individuals can be created (Foucault 1994). In digital cultures, non-knowledge becomes a new episteme, thus building new knowledge forms.

2  It is possible to know something without understanding it. Understanding then refers first to an operationalization of knowledge regulated by communication and action. Secondly, of interest here, "understanding" refers to the tradition of hermeneutics, organizing the capabilities of cognition and giving sense. This brings to the fore either subjects and deep psychological explanation models, or a machinic understanding that processes data beyond subjects and intentions. Niklas Luhmann's (2001) hermeneutic model, too, requires no subject as it creates understanding as a function of systems over couplings. For Derrida, understanding and hermeneutics are ultimately a problem because they fix definitions and thereby exclude "other" (Derrida and Gadamer 2004). (For the history of hermeneutics in consideration of digital cultures, see Pias 2015.)

3  Knowledge and understanding, or their impossibility, can be brought together under the concept of "knowledge systems," which includes epistemes, epistemology and hermeneutics.

since they produce governmentality, generate subjects, and correspond to the epistemological constitution of digital cultures.

This culture of non-knowledge and incomprehensibility requires new forms of critique. Critique, tasked with analysis and reflection, is central to the scientific examination of digital cultures. Hitherto, to do so was enabled by a presupposed critical distance, an external position, and an exposure of knowledge that lay hidden in the background. But where on the one hand comprehension is supposed to be absent, and when, on the other hand, human actors are assumed to be already always entangled *in* the technological environment (Engemann and Sprenger 2015b), forms and methods of reflection and critique other than the traditional ones based on distance to the socio-cultural surroundings must be devised and tested. A contradictory situation emerges in which notions and practices of critique are changed under technological conditions and, at the same time, have the status of discursive assumptions.[4] The aim of this text is not to find the correct notion of critique but to understand the discursively generated state of the art of critique under the conditions of digital cultures and how to deal with it.

As a method of dealing with this situation a "practice of critique" is proposed and explored here with a practical project. In it, technological conditions and discourses on digital cultures are embodied and performed. This gives rise to critique and reflection produced in an "outside in inside" as a proposal for a model of critique in digital cultures. That this practice could be successful is due to a specific situation in digital cultures—a situation constituted of an inescapable ambivalence in which affirmative new descriptions of digital cultures, technological

4    In this text it is presumed that critique does not exist a priori. On the contrary, there are different concepts and practices of critique in different techno-historical situations, which should enable reflection and distanciation. This involves the idea that critique is possible from an outer, distant position as well as e.g., the concept of a second-order observation, which denies any outer position of critique.

procedures, and a politics and economy of affect (Angerer 2007) and relations as a discourse of the new solely valid mode of existence (see Barad 2003) co-exist. Out of this co-existence a "dispositif of technospheres" arises that targets, above all, the ensnarement of human actors in technological environments; a process for which non-knowledge and incomprehensibility are the lifeblood, so to speak. There are, nevertheless, gaps, ruptures, and contradictions in the coexistence in which the practice of critique can take root. Against this background, the performative tests of theories, discourses, and technological conditions for digital cultures should enable the exploration of governmental and subject-forming consequences of the dispositif of the technospheres, which serve at the same time as the basis for other theoretical formations than those of, e.g., non-knowledge and incomprehensibility. Finally, methods of "in/forming culture" are proposed to open temporary gaps for knowledge and for the power to act for human agents.[5]

## What's going on? Discourse-on-Things, Techno-Ecology, Digital Mysterium, Dispositif of Technospheres

The current situation of digital discourses on digital cultures can be described as a complex farrago. The interplay of technological procedures and conditions with the discursive generation of digital cultures and economic and political interests form what is called here a "dispositif of technospheres." This dispositif and its constitution in, as well as its benefits from, non-knowledge and incomprehensibility, are outlined below. A crux is the crucial element: non-knowledge and incomprehensibility are

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5    As the notion "actor" still implies the concept of an autonomous and intentional subject, which is put into question in digital cultures and their "agencies" of different parts, the notion of "human agents" is used to indicate a new status of the older anthropocentric view.

events. Technological environments are seen as a power of acting via affecting that can no longer cognitively be grasped or controlled by humans.

What is now crucial is that these discourses affirm the states of impaired comprehension and precarious knowledge, and dignify them. Addressing relationships, understood as operators for an existential involvement of human agents in technological environments, the theories outlined can be seen as a solution for dealing with current challenges. This includes, for example, the (climate) catastrophes and capitalist crises (Hörl 2014; Latour 2010 and 2013), proclaimed with the Anthropocene. Considering that the discourses on relations correspond to the liquidation of an anthropology of autonomous and self-conscious beings, these discourses may well be seen as attempts to solve these crises by installing an environmental modesty. In addition, in the discourse-on-things and in the techno-ecology, a life with the non-comprehensible as the norm is recognized and celebrated, as stated by Bruno Latour: "Once again, our age has become the age of wonder at the *disorders* of nature" (Latour 2010, 481). The being in agencies, because the co-existence of non-human and human actants is no longer predictable or controllable, should moreover correspond to a deliverance from, according to Latour (2008), a "false" history of the human-thing relationship that had been in force since the eighteenth century. It was based on the fact that people saw themselves as independent of their environment and capable of knowledge. Finally, the dissolving of knowledge in sensing and pre-consciousness, thus in non-knowledge as a mode of existence, is ennobled. This process is put forward with, to be specific, an undertone of affirmation (Hansen 2011), as if a more appropriate picture of human agents would now be produced. Non-knowledge and incomprehensibility are produced as conditions for the possibility of "better and more accurate" descriptions of "human" and "existence," as well as the savior of humanity and the earth. This supercharging is what makes it so

difficult to build a critical distance from the techno-ecological field of discourse.

### Digital Mysterium

From the tradition of media-historically and media-epis-temologically oriented media studies comes another proposal for the new description, which is presented in the example of a short essay by Beyes and Pias (2014).[7] It deals with an arcana of digital cultures constituted of secrets that cannot be revealed (un-betrayable secrets).

Pias has proposed the development of a theory of digital cultures whose constitution draws from incomprehensibility and secrets (2016). The big challenge of digital cultures is, specifically, their immanence, since there would no longer be any outside and we would be in technology. This constitution would be attended by an epistemological rupture. In place of hermeneutics would be constitutive incomprehensibility, which could no longer be ignored or escaped (Pias 2015). So it is that, for example, due to the unfathomable amounts of data being processed, no under-standing is possible. The programs that process these data are no longer completely comprehensible in their functions and regularities to programmers or scientists. Networks for data transfers in infrastructures (Engemann and Sprenger 2015a) cannot be controlled and could never be if they are going to function at all. Finally, technical things can work in a self-organized way without any human intervention. With this comes to an end a critical hermeneutics in media studies, which while not believing in an understanding in the sense of intrapsychic systems and processes in individuals, probably did believe in the possibility of seeing media effects and works (McLuhan 1964; Kittler 1986). The prerequisite for this "insight" were the codes or the moments of technological upheaval being looked at (Pias

7    See the essay by Beyes and Pias in this volume.

2015). This retrospective interpretability is profoundly questioned (Beyes and Pias 2014).

Therefore, Beyes and Pias (2014) argue for a theory of the mystery of digital cultures. Unlike betrayable secrets (*secreta*) the mystery denotes its own constitutional ineluctability. Because it has its history in the concept of a sovereign ruler or cosmology of pre-modern times, which were not meant to be understood, the reasons for the conditions or the decisions are not laid bare and also could not be made transparent.

As an example of a mystery in digital cultures, Beyes and Pias cite climate research (2014), in which the calculations cannot be understood but are, nevertheless, determined to be non-experimentally testable predictions of reality. Instead of a mystery in the form of a ruler or a cosmology of pre-modern times, there is now the secret of data processing.

### Interplay: In the Dispositif of Technospheres

The thesis is that the two discursive formations can be bundled into a "dispositif of technospheres." In it, non-knowing and incomprehensibility are affirmed and made productive, or exploited in their productivity. Where the theory of techno-ecology brings in agencies and technological environments, and a new, weak sense of deep-sensory techno-participation (Hörl 2014 and 2016), the cultures of secrets deal with the end of participation and come up with the subordination of human agents under technological regimes. At first glance, the discursive formations therefore exclude themselves. A closer inspection, though, reveals that both are in agreement on a deprivation of "human" power and an inauguration of potent technology. The generator of this change is, in both cases, the secret. Techno-ecology deals with the secret that comes out of the not recognizing and non-knowing of technological spheres. The theory of the digital mysterium has to do with the secret of power and the fascination of non-knowing.

It is about the sphere of non-visible processes and events, which could only be divined.

These new, so-called weak ontologies could be seen as a response to the self-induced crises of digital cultures resulting from technological conditions and their theoretical descriptions. They bring with them to the technospheres the promise of giving humans a position, and a form of action-possibility beyond knowledge, thinking, and awareness, which come out of the extensive "sensing" and the mysterious fanning of the hidden power of technology as the new sovereign. In the techno-ecological, almost animistic, resonance, human agents could operate directly in this dispositif, even when no longer controllable. In contrast to this participative sensing, the culture of secrets lures human agents with the fascination and glory of secrecy.

The two discursive fields are linked where "sensing" and secrecy compensate for the inaccessibility concerning knowledge and comprehension, and hallucinate new forms of participation. The secret cultures describe thereby, though only in part, the state of data politics, in which negotiations and usages of data are done in secret. However, in taking descriptions of symptoms as a starting point, in a similar way to the techno-ecologies, appointing these to the status quo, they run the risk of coagulating into a mode of governmentality. Because the digital arcana legitimizes not only secret policies—which can only be obeyed and followed, but no longer understood, or be actively created by human agents—but also the sealing off of technology with the theoretical model of non-knowing. If non-knowing is the status quo, then all efforts to uncover the secrets within would be in vain.

The dispositif of technospheres that arises from the different discourses thus aims for human agents that are swinging with the technological environment and celebrating self-optimization in sensing. In doing so, they forget the politics of the technospheres. The obedience of this technological being in spheres thereby

arises as the new ritual of the political public in digital cultures of mystery.

### Ambivalence: Balancing Act between New Descriptions and Politics

The thesis is that on the one hand, in the developing discourse landscape and the dispositif of technospheres, a necessary new description of culture in the time of technological self-organization is being dealt with. On the other hand, it is essential to explore the possibilities of theory formation in the context of the no longer completely understandable and increasingly closed-off technological environments. The problem with this dispositif is that the new ontologies simultaneously, as described, carry politics within themselves that are necessary to be recognized and reflected. The interest in affects and sensitive materiality comes, e.g., out of the fact that with focusing these aspects, more and more dimensions of human agents could be captured and formalized. The captured results of these processes are then firstly transferred to the data economy, as for profiling, and secondly used for the regulation of algorithmically controlled processes. The more users do things, even mistakenly, the more algorithms could "learn." What is celebrated as, for example, new knowledge in the preconscious, world-connectedness of the body, is always usable for economic advantages, too. It is essential, therefore, to examine the current discourse landscape according to its reference to a "regime of affects" (Angerer 2007), co-opting human agents unquestioningly, extensively, and pervasively. They are so enchanted with this (Sprenger 2016) that the concealed modes of data collection and analysis, as well as the interests of major players (Amazon, Google, Facebook), are happily supported. A continuous data supply, consumed in ignorance of its politics, would thus be the meaning and purpose of participation in technological environments.

In this light, non-knowledge and incomprehensibility are important elements in a history of fascination, which the

dispositif of technospheres must be read as. In it, non-knowledge and incomprehensibility serve to blind and distract human agents. In such a way, the epistemology after the hermeneutic mutates to a politics and a regime of non-knowledge and incomprehensibility.

The great challenge is now to develop new descriptions, what is absolutely required by the constitution of digital cultures, without overlooking their politics and governmental aspects. In digital cultures now, according to the hypotheses, the starting point is a non-resolvable simultaneity of these two processes, so that an unceasing balancing act between ontological description and reflection will be necessary.

With that in mind, the task is therefore to consult and make the new descriptions readable as discourse and still reveal their potential for an understanding of, and a way of dealing with, digital cultures. So how could the technological affecting of smart things on people be described? How could the technological environments be seen, without overlooking the demand for totality (Engemann and Sprenger 2015b, 58) that they and the discourses of the weak ontologies carry with them? These undertakings must—and this is the great challenge—occur under the premise that comprehension and knowledge are hampered, perhaps forever lost, because of technical blackboxing, the entanglement in digital cultures, and the interlinking between method and discovery (Pias 2015). At issue, therefore, is critique in digital cultures that is concerned with technologically induced, yet discursively produced, non-knowing and incomprehensibility.

## How to Do Critique? Performing Discourses and Technology in Exhibiting Dysfunctional Things

To carry out analysis and reflection, a form of examination is required that allows, under the discursively generated

situation for knowledge and critique, a reflective distance and at the same time takes into account that there is neither a stable "beyond digital cultures," nor the possibility of under-standing in the traditional hermeneutic sense. What critique under these conditions could look like is to be elucidated in the exhibition-performance "Dysfunctional Things" (*Versehrte Dinge*), which originated at Leuphana University in Lüneburg with students from different programs of study under the banner "complementary studies" in the winter semester 2015/16. The departure point for the project was the following consideration: our technological situation is, it is said, determined by the fact that we and our smart technical things (e.g., smartphones, tablets, fridges, blenders, fitness trackers, and GPS watches), which often know more about us than we do ourselves, live in a symmetric agency. If things and technological environments (such as traffic systems, smart cities, shopping centers) now have their own rights and capacity to act, can we then, for example, simply dispose of those that are malfunctioning? If that is now inappropriate, what would it mean for humans to be surrounded by dysfunctional technical things? These issues were carried by concerns about illuminating the current discourse landscape of digital cultures with the help of exaggerated affirmation of their theoretical description. By doing so the constitution and the effects of non-knowledge and incomprehensibility should also be experienced.

### The Exhibition[8]

To explore these questions, an "Owlglass (Till Eulenspiegel) prank," or the art, according to Bazon Brock, of the affirmative word-taken-literally (Brock 1986, 288), was conducted. At the center stood the exaggerated affirmation of and identification with the equality of things and human agents, and the

8    For the complete project documentation, including images, video, and fur-ther analysis, see: Leeker 2016.

subsequent dethronement of the latter. The hypothesis was that it is easy to develop theories, but how seriously these theories can be taken can be seen only when they are embodied— because in this process, relevance, consequences, and govern- mentality of theoretical constructs become recognizable when obtained through experience. So the strategy of dealing with and testing the analyzed ambivalent situation of knowledge and critique was to generate theory by acting out discourses as well as technological conditions. Embodying and performing should generate knowledge. This kind of practical forming of theory and knowledge seems also to be adequate in the decen- tralized situation of human agents, as the practices of *acting out* and *embodiment* are always implemented in surroundings and dependent on the indeterminacy of performing, so that there shouldn't be any danger of falling back into ideas of autonomous subjects. The questions for these experiments were: What would cultures look like if the theories mentioned were put into practice? How far will we go in the acceptance of things and our own disempowerment?

To perform this Owlglass prank, the students built or brought malfunctioning things. The things were to have defects, but still be functional. With their dysfunctions, so the thinking goes, they would impose specific behaviors on the human users, which would make visible and palpable how dys/functional things shape humans.

The exhibition and performances with the dysfunctional things raised a veritable parallel world of agency of things and humans. It was like a contemporary science fiction in which what is said has already become everyday culture. A look at the projects is illustrative of this.

[Fig. 1] Exhibition: Dysfunctional Things. Photography: Martina Leeker & Laila Walter, Lüneburg 2016.

Interfaces, through which human agents gain access to technological environments, are important in digital cultures. Interfaces enable not just control of technological operations; they shape, through their design, the behavior of users. They are therefore a sensitive gateway to the technological worlds and models and regimes of human-machine interaction. The exhibition asks what would happen when, assuming a radical equality of things, interfaces are disrupted and cannot be thrown away? In this context, a workstation was created that had a defective computer mouse, which performed self-willed movements enabling the production of strange drawings.
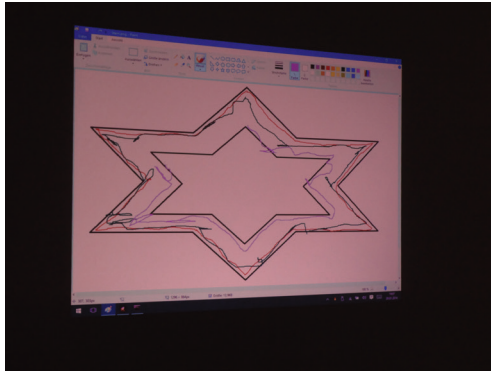
[Fig. 2] Exhibition: Dysfunctional Things. Project: Train your Brain (Jan-Erik Förster). Photography: Martina Leeker & Laila Walter, Lüneburg 2016.

There is a big difference between criticizing an interface for poor user-friendliness, and thoughtfully taking it into account and being glad of disruptions.



[Fig. 3] Exhibition: Dysfunctional Things. Project: Betreuungszentrum für grenzüberschreitende Geräte / Care Center for Cross-Border Devices (Julie Heitmann, Nadine Teichmann, Franziska Debey). Photography: Martina Leeker & Laila Walter, Lüneburg 2016.

The "Betreuungszentrum für grenzüberschreitende Geräte" (BGG) (Care Center for Cross-Border Devices) was another work. Here, dysfunctional things could be put into care so that they wouldn't cause damage left unattended. At the BGG, a completely unique educational and behavioral culture ensued, which ranged from psychological training with device co-operators for appropriate contact with technical things, to new courses in electropedagogy, for example.

In the artificial world of dysfunctional things, the "Market for Dysfunctional Smartphones" marked the station that congenially spelled out the economic side of the new world of things and data. When people can no longer get rid of their smartphones, a peculiar business could be created with their purchase. This business idea was implemented by an ingenious start-up. Owners of dysfunctional smartphones could offer them for purchase to the new company via the Internet. The enterprising business could then accept payment from the former owner to appropriately store the device on their behalf.



[Fig. 4] Exhibition: Dysfunctional Things. Project: Markt für versehrte Smartphones / Market for Dysfunctional Smartphones (Laila Walter). Photography: Martina Leeker, Lüneburg 2016.

As an example of the storage, a dysfunctional smartphone was presented on an altar decked out with lavish offerings like exquisite fruits and flowers.

Data rights have become a very important topic in the world of Owlglass prank in the exhibition, because smart things are technical devices controlled by algorithms collecting and processing data.



[Fig. 5] Exhibition: Dysfunctional Things. Project: Magna Carta der Datenrechte / Magna Charta of Data Rights (Martina Keup). Photography: Martina Leeker & Laila Walter, Lüneburg 2016.

In data rights now, as based on human rights, the right to the protection of life, to freedom of movement, and to assembly (compatibility) have been conceded to data. One consequence of these rights is, for example, that because of freedom of movement human agents should no longer be allowed to use methods of data protection.

### The Owlglass Prank as a Method of Critique and Resistance

The exhibition-performance concerns itself with both sides of the current discourse landscape outlined here, namely (1) the discourse of the techno-ecology and (2) the digital mysterium.

One focus was on the forms of non-knowledge and incomprehensibility produced by them, which were affirmed and thereby criticized.

(1) The discourse-on-things and on techno-ecology were taken on seriously and experienced in an exaggerated manner. Non-knowledge and incomprehensibility generated by these discourses, which emerged from the complex agencies and the technological environments, became new possibilities of (non-) knowledge. This knowledge from non-knowledge, and its effects, were clear and concise in the "Kleiderflüsterin" (clothes whisperer). New levels and forms of sensibility were reached by listening to damaged clothes and hearing of their desire for repairs.



[Fig. 6] Exhibition: Dysfunctional Things. Project: Kleiderflüsternde Nähwerkstatt / Clothes Whispering Sewing Room (Nadine Teichmann). Photography: Martina Leeker & Laila Walter, Lüneburg 2016.

It had the effect of, among other things, stitching together the arms of her sweater and so "dysfunctionalising" the wearer's hands. In the exhibition it was, however, immediately clear that

these new forms of knowledge arise from imaginings and—
as with the *Kleiderflüsterin*—could be loaded with animistic reminiscences.

The Owlglass prank was also an attempt to explore (2) the pro-claimed digital mysterium. What was remarkable was that in the exhibition, the mysterium had already become an integral part of the dysfunctionally functioning everyday world. A particularly striking expression of this was the "Declaration of Data Rights of Things." Because with it, the digital mysterium became, in the shape of the inviolability of data, the law, and human agents its co-operative partners.

In the examination of both discourses, exaggerated affirmation was the trigger for critical reflection. Through the performers and the visitors entering the discursive landscapes, affirming them and living them, their critical, political, or governmental aspects could light up—so the performing of exaggeration produced its own theoretical input.

### Knowledge of Tricksters

The exhibition had the task of enabling, through exaggerated affirmation and performance, a discourse analysis of digital cultures in periods of impeded or thwarted hermeneutics. It was crucial to produce embodiment and performance as an epis-temological device that could generate and train the ambivalent thinking described here, which correlates with a balancing act between description and analysis. To do this, the performers acted as "tricksters." This hybrid figure was of interest because tricksters, according to Erhard Schüttpelz (2010), not only disrupt the consensus but above all provoke conflicting interpretations and ensnare those affected in an unresolvable contrariness. A thing is not simply either good or bad, but always both and, fur-thermore, a third thing in which contradictions are conveyed as not mediative.

This status of the trickster thus corresponds to the previously mentioned constitution of digital cultures. New descriptions of the "situation" are in fact necessary and yet they have to be checked constantly according to their discursive, political and governmental effects, and potential. In this situation, the trickster and the thinking that he provokes can be considered an appropriate epistemological stance and exercise for digital cultures—because they set up permanent, cognitive-affective multi-stable figures with which various kinds of re-thinking can be activated and supported.

In this way, digital cultures get into a state of liminality (Schüttpelz 2010) via tricksters, a transience that never ends and will not culminate in any new order. The trickstery becomes thus a form of action and thinking that could influence digital cultures by intervening in ontologization with exaggerated affirmation and contradictions.

## How to go on? Practice of Critique in Digital Cultures

The reflective level and the standpoint of critique presented in the "Dysfunctional Things" project thus appeared to both performers and visitors as an embodiment and experience of theoretic visions and discourses as well as technological conditions. That is to say, theory and conditions should become reflectable in action, so that the positions of critique in the "artificial worlds" arose from those worlds and their behavior within them. A "critique from aesthetic experience" and secondly an "aesthetic experience of critique" were enabled through the embodiment of theories in the exhibition in this way.

This "practice of critique" responds to the constitution of the discursively and technologically generated state of knowledge, research, and critique in digital cultures, which, as mentioned, are being confronted with the dictum of non-knowledge,

incomprehensibility, pre-conscious sensing, and with continuous self/reflection and the simultaneity of new ontological description and critical analysis. Furthermore, digital cultures are constituted of ubiquitous infrastructures that form technological environments impossible to escape. The upshot of this is that critique lies in the discourses surrounding it and in the situation that is generated by the former, no longer positioned "outside," which was, to date, considered essential. Instead of stepping outside of techno-cultural conditions, in the project a stepping into them was experimented with, which should make it possible to find a position of critique in the interior. This interior does not refer to the position of a subject. The exaggerated identification that makes things and human agents unfamiliar gives rise instead to an "inner as outer" and an "outer as inner." In this configuration, it is about critique in and out of the entanglement with the surrounding environment. And it is to deal in a productive way with non-knowledge.

### After Criticism: Smuggling, Looking Away (Irit Rogoff), and Performing

The "practice of critique" can be further defined as a method of reflection for digital cultures because it goes far beyond traditional forms of criticism, which became inefficient with the crisis of hermeneutics, and opposes vehemently any form of "criticism" (Rogoff 2003). Criticism, according to Irit Rogoff, was based on recognition and understanding, as it intended to make the invisible visible, condemn in- and exclusion, and denounce injustices.[9] In place of this concept and practice of criticism, Rogoff puts "criticality" (2003). The point of departure for this concept is that one cannot stand outside of the situation that one

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9    For the "embodiment of critique" it is therefore necessary to move away from the criticism of judging and valuating, just as Michel Foucault has called for with suspending judgment (Sprenger 2014). Judging criticism must in fact be seen as its own discourse and separate regime because it makes claims to a sovereignty of interpretation (Rogoff 2003).

is criticizing. In digital cultures, a similar situation results from the interwovenness of methods, technologies, and discourses (on digital cultures as well as on critique) in which little exists beyond the digital. According to Rogoff, it is an "inhabitation of a condition in which we are deeply embedded as well as being critically conscious" (2006, 5). Even if it is presupposed in the text that the concepts of critique are also generated discursively, as, for example, the present-day loss of distance, and become real in this constitution, the ideas of Rogoff are of interest to follow-up methods of dealing with the emerged contemporary situation of the loss of distance. Rogoff proposes two methods with which this "inhabitation" could be realized. They could be tested for their value and also for the reflection and formation of theory in the technological and discursive conditions of digital cultures.

Rogoff sees "smuggling" (2006) as a method to fulfill infiltration in established and legitimate order. Smuggling moves along borders and breaks through spots that are permeable. The goal of smuggling is not resistance or destruction, but existing in a different order in an established situation. In this constitution, smuggling is a quasi-part of the existing law and order and at the same time a method of their reflection.

To smuggling belongs "looking away" (Rogoff 2005). Looking away turns from an anti-hermeneutic impulse against "thorough inspection" that is bound up with the idea that preexisting meanings lying under the surface could be seen. Looking away, in contrast, would bring strange and unexpected events into existence and meaning would be vacant and fluid. Looking away is a way of participating in cultures, because with this method and attitude the power of discourse is questioned and other voices are heard. With regard to the proclaimed digital arcana, the voices of the excluded could be kept present before its gates with aesthetic displacements.

The method of "performances of the Owlglass prank" could be added to the two other previously mentioned methods, as it had

been tested in the exhibition. Rather than the sensing and being shrouded in secrecy of the digital mysterium, the pranks employ the in/security and unpredictability of performance, with which an entirely different analysis of the power discourse could be formed. These allow the hermetic facades of the cultures of non-knowing and incomprehensibility to be permeable, and produce insights into their discursive constitution and "politics."

### In/Forming Cultures: Inventing Alien Worlds

What was tested in the project "Dysfunctional Things" as a method of intervening in the current discourses of the constitution of digital cultures and critique shall be considered further in conclusion. The question is how a concrete displacement in the discourse field of digital cultures and in the dispositif of technospheres could come about. It is above all a matter of allowing a different world view, and to imagine and realize different orders via these displacements.

Fundamentally, "unlearning" (Sternfeld 2014) is essential for the formation of different cultures. But what has been learned cannot simply be forgotten, because it is embedded deeply in body and behavior. That is, the production of non-knowledge and incomprehensibility is at stake. This does not happen, however, in the context of a regime of secrecy or techno-ecology, but in the sense of experimentation with the thresholds of knowledge and non-knowledge. At stake here is the enabling of the re-appropriation and displacement of what is sayable, visible, and interpretable.

These forms and methods of productive critique can be integrated within the concept of "in/forming cultures." This is proposed as a contribution to critique in the specific, technological, epistemological, and discursive conditions of digital cultures outlined here. What is meant by this is that (a) a separate, artificial, e.g., excessive, strange, and unfamiliar, culture is created, performed, and made accessible. This culture formation

(b) "in/forms" existing cultures in terms of their education by reflecting them. From this double formation arises (c) in small scope, meaning local, temporary, case-specific displacements in the see- and say-able. From these, in turn, other stories and collective action spaces of self-empowerment may arise. This refers to the production of artificial and parallel worlds in which unfamiliar ways of living or unknown technological structures operate. They follow their own logic, with which they continuously infiltrate the dominant cultures. These parallel worlds would, therefore, on one hand expose the contra-factuality of existing cultures with the owlglassy exaggerated affirmation. On the other hand, they would survey and test as artificial worlds, for example, technological possibilities or other forms of life for their potential. It is entirely a matter of repeated questioning, reconsidering, and rethinking of the non-knowledge and incomprehensibility in digital cultures, in order to open and colonize a space of reflection and knowledge between technology and discursively produced non-knowledge. Much could, in fact, be quite different because—as set forth here—digital cultures are in large part created discursively and as such are politically useful.

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