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## ARTICLE

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# Unspeakable references – On infective states of words and images in the “SHUT DOWN 2020” project

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## Abstract

The authors discuss a collective art project, initiated by them during the time of the first COVID-19 shutdown in Europe in late spring 2020. With 58 participants contributing short texts in combination with an image, the collection reflects the specific responses to the new situation. This article investigates the state of the project after its publication by a German online cultural magazine (CulturMag). A fusion of the authors' expertise, ranging from psychoanalytic theory to literary and performative experimentation, undertakes a tentative deciphering of what lies unrecognised and virulent amidst and in between verbal and visual elements. Reflections on the uncanny, “das Unheimliche” (Sigmund Freud) – as well as “l'extimité” (Jacques Lacan) – connect paradoxical psychic (non-, mis-, over- etc.) representation of the COVID-19 danger with all too well un/known experiences of ongoing states of emergency – touching on their ecological, economical, ideological aspects, tiptoeing perhaps on the windblown tracks of childhood fears?

In this way the authors asked the participants, most of them artists and writers, to submit to us something of their lives in the NOW – “no analysis, no commentaries. We’ve got enough of those. We want to know what is going on inside your rabbit holes” (Helbling/Reiche, 2020) – in order to find ‘unspeakable references’ with precision and in abundance.

### Keywords

Networking, CulturMAG, online curatorial practice

### *Referencias indescriptibles: Sobre estados infecciosos de palabras e imágenes en el proyecto «SHUT DOWN 2020»*

#### Resumen

Las autoras analizan un proyecto de arte colectivo que iniciaron durante el primer confinamiento por la COVID-19 en Europa, a finales de la primavera de 2020. 58 participantes aportaron textos breves que se combinaron con una imagen, y en esta colección se reflejan las respuestas concretas a la nueva situación. En este artículo se investiga el estado del proyecto después de su publicación en CulturMag, una revista cultural alemana en línea. La fusión de la experiencia de las autoras, que va desde la teoría psicoanalítica hasta la literatura y la experimentación performativa, inicia una interpretación incierta de lo que permanece no valorado y virulento entre elementos verbales y visuales. Las reflexiones sobre «lo siniestro» (das Unheimliche), de Sigmund Freud, así como sobre la «extimidad», de Jacques Lacan, conectan la representación psíquica paradójica (no, mal-, sobre-, etc.) de la peligrosidad de la COVID-19 con experiencias muy conocidas y desconocidas de los actuales estados de emergencia, y se tocan aspectos ecológicos, económicos e ideológicos, ¿pasando de puntillas quizás por los senderos de los miedos infantiles que el viento borró?

De este modo, las autoras pidieron a los participantes, la mayoría son artistas y escritores, que nos mostraran algo de sus vidas en el AHORA –sin análisis ni comentarios. «Ya tenemos bastantes. Queremos saber qué está pasando dentro de las madrigueras» (Helbling/Reiche, 2020)– para encontrar «referencias indescriptibles» con precisión y en abundancia.

#### Palabras clave

Networking, CulturMAG, práctica curatorial en línea

#### 0.0.

Some decades ago: “You can see the end of communism [...] as the dismantling and refutation of the last social ideals. [...] Nature takes her revenge. [...] Maybe no solution is possible without decimating the human race. But how? By epidemics and disease? Better than war.”<sup>1</sup>

A musician’s nightmarish impromptu on some preconditions for the survival of human society confronted by a strangely vindictive idea of “Nature”, gives a reference - a demonstration, really – of the art of saying too much as a way of saying ‘it’. These words from an interview (Luyken, 2006, 60) with Yehudi Menuhin may sound like an old man’s lament in the face of decaying social orders and natural environments, uttered in a moment of low-

1. “Man kann das Ende des Kommunismus [...] als die Preisgabe und die Entartung der letzten sozialen Ideale sehen. [...] Die Natur nimmt ihre Rache. [...] Eine Lösung mag ohne die Dezimierung der Menschheit nicht möglich sein. Aber wie? Durch Seuchen und Krankheit? Lieber so als durch Krieg.” (all translation of originally German quotes by the authors).

red self-censorship, not quite aware of the true impossibility: of speaking the truth.

Another old man, Slavoj Žižek, more recently, has been trying to say even more of too much: “The most probable outcome of the epidemic is that a new barbarian capitalism will prevail: [...]”<sup>2</sup> (Žižek, 2020; Horton, 2020).

But wait, let’s brace ourselves for the upcoming (text, too) with one more transgressive quote, transgressing expectations: “Anything scares me, anything scares anyone but really after all considering how dangerous everything is nothing is really very frightening.” This from “Everybody’s Auto-biography” by the more than rational Gertrude Stein. (Stein, 1973, 62)

With our project SHUT DOWN 2020, we’ve tried to encourage ourselves and others to risk similar moments of revealing more of too much... with regard to what cannot be fully revealed, and fully conveyed only through failure. We are referring to that which lies between words and images. (Hovering on the finiteness of SENSE<sup>3</sup> and life.)

## 1.0.

It was an experiment. An experiment in finding out what people would have to say, show, write if we asked them to describe their personal experience of what was happening to us all.

“No opinions, no analysis, no commentaries. We’ve got enough of those. We want to know what is going on inside your rabbit holes.” (Helbling/Reiche, 2020)

This was during the most intense phase of the lockdown. SHUT DOWN. We’re talking about Germany, Switzerland, Austria... Restricted lives in German-speaking countries, the differences between us arising from the regions and social contexts we live in, from our medical, social, personal, job and financial conditions and options, from the politics of our countries – the politicians of our countries! – and their ways of coping with a global threat that cannot be fought with bombs, soldiers, men and women and children fighting and dying, fighting and dying and suffering... though the fighting and dying and suffering was of course happening, mostly not where we were, which does not mean that we were not affected.

We were collaterals. We are collaterals. How could we not be collaterals, riding as we are all together on this sinking boat of wary, unwary humanity?

“People are having bizarre dreams...<sup>4</sup>” (Helbling 2020a)

## 1.1.

Or was it the other way around? “Dreams are having bizarre people...” with frightened dreamers proving to be inhabited by structures stronger and older than their fragile ‘selves’. Traditional reactions to ‘uncanny’ (Dolar, 1991) threats like the current COVID-19 pandemic include time-honoured conspiracy theories, those ‘halluzinatorische Wunschpsychose[n]’ (Freud, 2000, 187) as produced in states of dreams – stereotypical wish fulfillment in finding out who is guilty, who is malevolent, who is evil as a way of coping with perceived losses of control, the perception of being invaded alive – by a virus, par exemple, thusly becoming the virus’ body...

Is it not one of the most valiant achievements of the arts, to risk an awakening? to dream with eyes wide? (Reiche, 2020), paving different ways out of unbearable terrors?

Also: It was quiet then. An eerie calm. Familiar noise tracks simply not happening anymore. Planes, trains, partygoers on the street, sounds from cafés nearby, the traffic outside our city apartments, our abodes next to the rural Autobahn. We didn’t hear what we didn’t hear anymore. Except of course we did, something in us did, something registering the eerily unusual, pointing in the direction of the UNKNOWN. And yes: birds triumphantly loud, screaming through the sky. Homes deranged. Not quite homely anymore. UNHEIMLICH. “Tell us what is happening...”<sup>5</sup> Maybe, in German, a bodiless gaze from nowhere: “Augenblicke des Unheimlichen sind solche, die sich nicht zeigen, wenn sie sich zeigen?”<sup>6</sup>

“The dimension of the uncanny, introduced by Freud [...], is located at the very core of psychoanalysis. [...]. Put simply, one could say that traditional thought consisted in the constant effort to draw a clear line between the interior and the exterior. All the great philosophical conceptual pairs — essence/appearance, mind/body, subject/object, spirit/matter, etc. — can be seen as just so many transcriptions of the division between interiority and exteriority. The dimension of [the uncanny] blurs this line. It points neither to the

- 
2. “[...] many old and weak will be sacrificed and left to die, workers will have to accept much lower standards of living, digital control of our lives will remain a permanent feature, class distinctions will become much more than now a matter of life and death....” Ibid.
  3. Compare the German feminine noun “Sense”, meaning “scythe”, Middle German *s nse*, *segens(e)*, Old German *segensa*: “die Schneidende” (a female about to cut.), cf. Slavoj Žižek: “The really difficult thing to accept is the fact that the ongoing epidemics is a result of natural contingency at its purest, that it just happened and hides no deeper meaning. In the larger order of things, we are a species which doesn’t matter.” Slavoj Žižek, We’re all in the same Boat now – and it’s the Diamond Princess... in: *Welt+*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.welt.de/205828983>.
  4. BBC-anchor talking with a psychiatrist in April 2020, author’s (B.H.) archive.
  5. Like asking (for) a “[b]ody, marrow cord, buckled around a void, embryo, bent over nothing, wrapped up, developing.” (“Körper, Markstrang, um eine Leere gekrümmt, Embryo, über nichts gebeugt, eingewickelt, sich entwickelnd”) (Nancy, 2020)
  6. “Moments/glimpses of the uncanny are those that do not show, when they occur.” (Tholen, 1995)

interior nor to the exterior, but is located where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes a threat, provoking horror and anxiety.” (Dolar, 1991, 5)

## 1.2.

Painters, writers, musicians. All kinds of art projects. Large theatres and 1001 middling to tiny venues. Even artists who were not dependent on a live audience found themselves locked in a standstill, quite often literally forced to stand still? Or walking in circles, endless circles, questioning themselves, their work, their very existence in a society that seemed to manage perfectly well without them in this our state of emergency. “What can we do? What do you want us to do?” “Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Keep on keeping still. Practice your vanishing act.<sup>7</sup> Disappear to wherever you disappear to when you are no longer an object of attention in kindergarten, on stage, in the street, on walls? Cease and desist meaning: CEASE TO EXIST?” (“And still, but still? Still life, still alive??” [Gardner, 2020])

“What will remain? In such a way  
that the birds won’t  
drop from the skies  
any more?”<sup>8</sup> (Beinstein, 2020)

## 1.3.

An emergency brings out the hidden, the unwelcome, censored, negated, all the frightful things everybody didn’t know they’d always known. Head over heels the unconscious emerges, like an incubating organism already virally infected. “The human creature is alone in his carapace,” Stevie Smith once noted. “Poetry is a strong way out. The passage that [poetry] blasts is often in splinters, covered with blood; but she can come out softly.”<sup>9</sup> (Kimball, 2006)<sup>10</sup>

## 1.4.

Anyway. We asked our friends, not all of them artists, almost all of them associated with the arts, what it was that they were experiencing.

Very politely requested them to describe what was happening, with one picture, a short text (100 to 250 words). No money in it for them (or us). (Helbling/Reiche, 2020)

This was for the online magazine *Culturmag*, as a “special” on the pandemic. We were five or six weeks into the shutdown in Germany. We weren’t counting on many reactions. Meaning: contributions. Sleepwalkers all around us. It felt like the thing to be. Also, we thought the worst might already be over. We thought we might be “too late”.

We were wrong.

“No opinions, no analysis, no commentaries. We’ve got enough of those. We want to know what is going on inside your rabbit holes.” (Helbling/Reiche, 2020)

What trick did we have in mind? A bet not against but with the unspeakable reference to that, as knowledge, which “does not know itself”?<sup>11</sup>

(In other words – other-wordly: “What happens when our usual equations suddenly lead to completely unexpected results?” Feucht, 2020)

## 1.5.

“Like most people around us, we had been sleeping a lot.” (Helbling 2020a)

“No. Wait. Hadn’t we rather been nervously trying to get more sleep? Between sudden half-awakenings, occasioned by the involuntary intrusion of what used to be our usual schedules or in reaction to another one of those ‘bizarre’ dreams? Some of us, the hard-boiled pros, would of course immediately have started drowsily dictating bits and pieces of dreams into their apploaded smartphones, misusing (if not the machine itself) eavesdropping intelligence apps as ersatzshrinks. Tell me what you’ve deleted, and I’ll tell you who you are! Clear your throat once too often and you’ll be diagnosed.” (Reiche, 2020a)

(How sweet and subtly comical it would be to be able to write: “Like most people around us, we had been sleeping *around* a lot.”

But, no. (Helbling, 2020a)

So there we were then, and here we are now, in a state of the new *Unheimlich*, uncanny, a new “extimate”, or “extimité”, as Jacques Lacan put it, with so many *Imitations of Life* (Hoolboom, 2003),<sup>12</sup> that a virus had to explain ‘it’ once more to us, spiralling its way through time and thought – in a new turn of history’s screw without a grip and

7. The one Lou Reed wished for: “It must be nice to disappear, to have a vanishing act, to always be looking forward and never looking over your back...”

8. “Was wird übrig bleiben? So, dass die Vögeln nicht mehr vom Himmel fallen...” (Beinstein, 2020)

9. Caitlin Kimball quoting Stevie Smith here.

10. And yes, Stevie Smith knew a thing or two about the uncanny, being quite spooky herself, although, and at the same time, pretty entertaining. Just ask “Freddy”. Or don’t.

11. Cf. “Un savoir qui se sait” and a “savoir qui ne se sait pas”, as Jacques Lacan put it in “L’envers de la Psychanalyse”.

12. “At the same time, Hoolboom tells us as the narrator that the moving image has disrupted the awareness of death. It is as if it accepted the role of death: if death was a protest against life and against the dream of eternity, then the film, by capturing the disappearing images, by fixating all that had to die first, makes death eternal. Film not as a preservation of life, but film as eternal death. We have to learn to die once more, to free ourselves from our own image.” Anonymous, on the film “Imitations of Life”, (Hoolboom, 2003)

within the ‘real’: “There was an eruption of the uncanny occurring in a parallel line to the rise of bourgeois (and industrial) revolutions and scientific rationality – also, one might add, to the establishment of transcendental subjectivity by that man, Kant, of which the uncanny presents the surprising counterpart. Ghosts, vampires, monsters, the undead dead, etc., flourishing in an era in which one might have thought they would remain dead and buried, placeless, abandoned. Instead, they arrive like something the cat brought in with the arrival of modernity itself.” (Dolar, 1991, 6)

(The very first contribution that fluttered into our Mail-In-Boxes mentioned the uncanniness of it all. [Kuhlmeyer 2020] But then the contributor was a psychiatrist. Also, she didn’t play by the rules, our rules at least, though we didn’t care. 25 words were less than 100 words but more than no words at all. Speak, special contributors. Start leaving your traces!)

A new estimate of today repeats this development in structure, but with a new twist on rationality and the prevailing take on ghosts and monsters, with blatant irrationalities exploding into political, scientific and philosophical discourse. Strange inconsistencies, slight losses of memory, logic and reliability are flooding every day’s news. Take the lowering of the scientific standards applied to articles on the COVID-19 virus and its pandemic. Ostensibly, this retraction is a reaction to the urgency brought about by the emergency, though it does bring to mind the fundamental psychoanalytic rule for the client, of telling it all, not censoring anything –

(So, what happens when the place of the analyst remains empty?)

The result is a flood of scientific papers on the current COVID-19 virus: Which means that even if any of them contain viable theses and suggestions, and surely some do, the sheer quantity of reading matter can all but guarantee that anything useful or world-saving will be missed.

So, will the place of the evenly suspended listener remain empty?<sup>13</sup> Yes and no. Let the bots read! Statistics (we are)! Let personal assistant systems tell us their findings, make suggestion according to our preferences – since do they or don’t they understand us better than we understand ourselves? And it may very well be that some inconsistencies in today’s popular, political and scientific cultures derive uncannily from a childishly blind trust in the higher power of machine’s intelligence, as well as from a misunderstanding of rationality in the psychoanalytic SENSE.

Deciphering all this as a dream may very well support rigorous scientific rationality. (Eyes wide – signals a way out of contemporary screaming matches related to “fake news” in dire need of their counterparts, the so called ‘facts’,<sup>14</sup> – while all the while any reference to knowledge is being uncannily replaced with the reference to that other, ‘unspeakable’ trust in an ominous ‘omniscience’, that shifting-shimmering machine-shadow of ‘us’...)<sup>15</sup>

## 1.6.

Ah, the trust we place in intelligent solutions concealed in machines to help us with the ‘facts’! Nothing more than black boxes, since who even knows what goes on in there anymore. YouTube (somebody, or something there) recently allowed its algorithms to delete an unprecedented number of videos, even before human inspection entered the scene, claiming (who or - or - WHAT did the claiming?) that they did not meet “community standards”<sup>16</sup> (yeah, but: which “community”, and is this a club we want to join?)<sup>17</sup> We are in a spectral communion with AI, involuntarily, busily shaping our data shadows, our digital double, according to patterns identified within our data tracks. And, yikes, our Special will add to the mountains of evidence against us, though possibly useless, considering all those “hungry black holes” in between the pics and the wording...

(Hey, and don’t forget centralised or non-centralised Corona apps, tracing our movements as potential virus/viral spreaders!)

“The shadow and the mirror image survive the body due to their immateriality – so it is that reflections constitute our essential selves.’ [Otto Rank] The image is more fundamental than its owner: it institutes his substance, his essential being, his ‘soul’; it is his most valuable part; it makes him a human being. It is his immortal part, his protection against death.” (Dolar, 1991, 12)

(This a sentence only a living person could cling to. And we weren’t sure how alive we were anymore, what with all the sleepiness.)

Rabbit hole moments. Listening for death’s siren call in the In-between between images and words? Recording your SHUTDOWN REAL (impossible, of course). “Fibra Pneumonia, nice to meet you!” (Cohen, 2020)

13. More on this later in another footnote below.

14. “it is not psychoanalysis that Lacan compares to a delusion. but science itself; he describes science as ‘a fully realized paranoia’ (Lacan. 1965: 874). This is because scientific constructions resemble the architecture of a delusion in their rigor and explanatory power, and because both science and paranoia are based on the operation of foreclosure.” (Evans, 2016)

15. It is only a recent twist, as modern science always evaded truth: “Does something qualify as truth only when it can be validated by the discourse of institutionalized science? Or does modern science, as Lacan argues, derive its power precisely from the fact that it wishes to know nothing of truth as cause?” (Evans, 2016)

16. Youtube stellt Löschrekord auf, Im zweiten Quartal 2020 hat Youtube über 2 Millionen mehr Videos gelöscht als im Vorjahreszeitraum, August 26, 2020, <https://www.golem.de/news/google-youtube-stellt-loeschrekord-auf-2008-150484.html>

17. “I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member.”

**1.7.**

We were doing no more than we had to. Some of us were getting prolific with ZOOM. Some of us were overwhelmed with kids at home, or with organizing relief for neighbors, or with their poorly paid, systemically relevant jobs, or with creating outlets for their shops that were closed. Some of us were accepting every work offer that came our way, the better to finance themselves / the mortgage / their suddenly destitute family members. Some of us were reading lots of books. Some of us were watching lots of Netflix. Some of us were feeling awfully lonely, some of us were very happy to be alone, some of us were wandering around the city, listening to Victor Hugo, layers upon layers of possible realities? (Helbling N, 2020)

Some of us dressed up of an evening in their grandmother's lime-coloured summer coat, smoking cigarettes and dancing all alone on a marble-clad floor.

“You look lovely tonight. Too bad nobody is there to see it.” (Sleev, 2020)

**1.8.**

Some of us were getting really good with words.<sup>18</sup>

Actually, some of us had been really good with words before<sup>19</sup> though it seemed to matter more now. Or not. Even words were getting shifty. Shifting reality. Especially words. “Now is the time to talk about what we are actually talking about” was the title of a “New Yorker” article by Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi right after the presidential election in 2016. (Ngozi, 2016)

Long ago, long ago.

Which puts in mind the Freudian joke: The United Symptoms of America... (Miller, 2009), not limited to borders as the unconscious never will have been...

Ah, Freud.<sup>20</sup>

Here they come.

Contributions from the Outer Space of Lockdown were fuelled by irritation (Weiss, 2020), rage (Helbling Nora, 2020), grief (Irod, 2020), longing (Junker, 2020); but most often: strangeness, wonder (Falaki, 2020; Reiche, 2020; 3 Geschwister, 2020). In this we sensed the artist's curse and privilege: All senses activated, all the time?

Beware! Don't let them turn against you, or they will eat you alive from the inside out.

(The artist's way out, if there is a way out:) Creating art.

**1.9.**

“The estimate is simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body; in a word, it is *unheimlich*. Freud calls the uncanny that class of the frightening which leads back to what was known of old and long since familiar. And it is this very dimension beyond the division into ‘psychic’ and ‘real’ that deserves to be called the Real in the Lacanian sense.” (Dolar, 1991)

We are, by the by, talking about creativity during the pandemic from the inside out. From out of the belly of the “arts”, as it were. Don't ask us where the next holy shit will be coming from, Madonna, we don't know. We don't even really care, to tell the truth. Survival mechanisms are not about being the next big IT. More about just doing stuff. Most of them, mechanisms, we mean, don't really work, but some do. Like most things. So anyway, here we are.

“Not waving but drowning.” (Smith, 1972)

Or are we?

**1.10.**

“The word is the standard German negation of *heimlich* and is thus supposed to be its opposite. But it turns out that it is actually directly implied by *heimlich*, or rather, *heimelig*, which means familiar, homely, cozy, intimate, ‘arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house’.<sup>21</sup> By extension, what is familiar and securely tucked away is also hidden, concealed from the outside, secret, ‘kept from sight... withheld from others’; and by a further extension, what is hidden and secret is also threatening, fearful, occult, ‘uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal... ghastly’ - that is, *unheimlich*, uncanny.’

There is a point where the two meanings coincide and become undistinguishable, where the negation does not count - as indeed it does not count in the unconscious.” (Dolar, 1991)

Sometimes the arts can keep you safe. (And / or sane.) Other times it might be safer to be insane. Take that instance when the

18. Like Vera Hofmann, writing about “leergehamsterte Wortspielplätze...”. (“word's playgrounds, empty after panic-buys”)

19. Vera Hofmann again, probably was.

20. meaning JOY! and missing an “e”. Freude, of course.

A different crisis, a slip between the Real of viral DNA sequences and our nightmares on the brink of imaginary horrors transgressing borders that we were un/aware of, intimate closeness to external unbearable states - hello, hello, here we are now (again). “Auf Messers Schneide.” (Helbling, 2020b; Reiche, 2011) FINALLY SENSE. New words. Other wordings. Strange and inspired (Auer, 2020) ways of expressing this status quo (Brandmayr, 2020) that was and is and always will be spreading throughout the world.

21. Even if they don't quite align, are weather-beaten, lopsided... IMAGE: LINUS in (Helbling, 2020)

Real of the uncanny, of algorithms, of impotent emergency laws against the new unknown virus started to really, really get under your skin. The fear of not being able to handle these novel floods of pain and fear and rage. And who's to say what strange creatures are about to emerge in a time of change and wonder and crisis?

### 1.11.

Listen. Listen. Listen to what people are saying. Listen again. The luxury of our being Shut Down. Open your ears.

And, and. And open your eyes. Transformations, exhaustion, maybe a revolution. Entropy? All our senses awake and sharpened. Or deadened, dead. Same thing? Watch the impact (join the action): FLOYD GEORGE, Black Lives Matter, CLIMATE CHANGE. NATURE. HUMANS AS AGENTS. VIRUS AS AGENT.

Anthropo(obs)cene. "Ab scaena" as etymology of obscene, means literally, what (usually) happens off scene, or beyond scene. Behind curtains, facial masks or layers of infected human tissues, inner or outer skins? Something to stare at or something we'd rather not inspect too closely. It depends on your appetite for knowledge, or let's say: on your evenly suspended curiosity.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.12.

Still. STILLE.<sup>23</sup> Let's keep some of it. The eerie quiet. The tender melancholy. The rooms and spaces for thinking dangerous thoughts.

(Like, wait a minute: what will happen if everybody decides to live the simple, poor, risky, beautiful life?<sup>24</sup> Comparable to a cat gone wild – maybe in a sanctuary for the very last birds – or children

on welfare vacation, furnished with the latest in industrial food and surveillance technology. Wildly swinging from surplus enjoyment to nausea and back again...) (Reiche, 2009)

Here they come. Here they come. Here they come, come, come.

Questioning unequal prosperity.

UNGLEICHHEIT. (Krausneker, 2020)

Questioning what was there before (finding the time to ask questions).

IN DIESER ZEIT. (Beinstein, 2020)

Questioning what is missing.<sup>25</sup>

Mein Leben ist ein einziges Bedeutungstheater. (Brandmayr, 2020)

What is missing.

(FRAG DIE CROWD) (Limberg, 2020)

What are you truly missing?

"Hold on to what is happening." (Helbling/Reiche, 2020)

– in 58 different ways.

"We never really thought about it. But now we know. We truly are relevant to the system, as artists, curators, musicians, writers." (Mathis, 2020)

Take the plunge - and keep an eye out for 'unspeakable references' between the image and the words, black holes or something/nothing, their very eerie hapless closeness to the extimate.

And to the conveyance of the too much of it.

Who knew what would happen, anyhow.

Not them.

Not us.

And who can help saying too much

in the messy

midst

of images contaminating words

and words invading the

visual?

22. Let's at least encourage the Freudian practice of 'gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit' ('evenly suspended attention') as a productive mode of reception and interaction, not restricted to sessions besides/behind a couch. Generalise this: "The fundamental rule, as set forth in Freud's Psycho-Analytic Procedure [...], urges that patients say 'whatever comes into their heads, even if they think it unimportant or irrelevant or nonsensical ... or embarrassing or distressing' [...]. Implicitly, the rule urges analysts to adopt a corresponding listening technique ('evenly suspended attention'), for which they are prepared by virtue of what Ferenczi [...] called the second fundamental rule, namely the requirement that future analysts be analyzed themselves." (Evans, 1996)

23. The German word for "quiet".

24. See Footnote 2, Suggestion: "The most probable outcome of the epidemic is that a new barbarian capitalism will prevail."

25. Missing in: "Quarantäne // Basisreproduktionszahl // Allgemeinverfügung // Pandemiepotenzial // R-Wert // CORONA-Ferien // Exponentielles Wachstum // Sterberate // Abstand // falsch negativ // Filtering Facepiece // Corona-Krise // Kontaktpersonen // Schweden // Selbstisolierung // WHO // Systemrelevanz // Triage // Aerosol // Verdopplungszahl // Infektionszahlen // Pandemie // Latenzzeit // Mortalität // Letalität // Dunkelziffer // Epidemie // Pandemie // Herdenimmunität // Killerzellen // New York // Infektionsschutzgesetz // Einschleppung // Inkubationszeit // Vorräte // Kontaktinfektion // Reproduktionsrate // Risikogruppe // 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome'-Coronavirus-2 // Wuhan // Tröpfcheninfektion // Übersterblichkeit // Gesamtmortalität // Mutation // Statistik // Hochrechnung // Öffnungspläne // Virulenz // asymptomatisch // Spanien // Manifestations-Index // Patient Zero // Händewaschen // Amplifikation // Immunitätspass // symptomatisch // Analoga // Immunsystem // Desinfektionsmittel // Anti-body-Dependent-Enhancement // Autophagie // Lombardei // Avidität // BZellen // Bluetooth // Cluster // Compassionate Use // Contact Tracing // Schmierinfektion // ELISATest // Evidenz // Genexpression // Fallsterblichkeit // falsch positiv // Grundimmunität // Hintergrundinfektion // Social Distancing // humorale Abwehr // Infektionskette // Kohorte // Kontraindikation // Lockdown // Prädisposition // Verschleppung // Zoonose // Maskenpflicht // Antikörper // Vorerkrankung // Bias // Lockerung // Reiseverbot // 800qm // Besuchsverbot // Spanische Grippe // Infektion-swege // Beatmungsgerät // Schutzanzug // Hamsterkauf // Attack-Rate // Durchseuchung // Corona-App"? (Oldenburg, 2020)

## 2.0.

SHUT DOWN 2020, in the mildly modest end, may be nothing more (nor less) than a systematic attempt at retaining the uncanny dimension of that moment in early spring 2020, not in order to dismantle it (stuck on a needle, labelled, boxed and tucked into a trunk in the attic), oh no – let’s not, let’s keep it on hold, – eyes wide – let’s<sup>26</sup> –, closing in on a joke about a failed encounter, opening onto the Real: ‘They met in Paris, at the Opera ball. When they removed their masks, sheer terror! It wasn’t him, her neither by the way.’<sup>27</sup> Challenging words and images as symptoms, crowning these reflections of Corona, spikes upon spikes upon spikes: We may have an appointment with death (Žižek, 2020), – “Nobody heard him, the dead man, / But still he lay moaning: [...]” (cf. also: Smith 2020) –, but sheer terror, it wasn’t ‘him’ or ‘her’. Neither ‘you’, by the way.<sup>28</sup>

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26. “[...] recognize a double loss and a double lack. [...] The duality also corresponds to the double level of desire and jouissance [...] it will be expressed by means of the two disjunctions (impossibility and impotence) governing each discourse.” (Verhaeghe, 1998, p. 167)

27. Ils se rencontrèrent à Paris, au Bal de l’Opéra:...” is referring to Gaston Leroux, *Le fantôme de l’opéra*, 1910.

28. ... as ‘you’ had been infected by sexuality and mortality even before birth. <http://culturmag.de/allgemein/shut-down-ueberblick/126744>

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Brigitte Helbling is a writer based in Hamburg and has a PhD in literature. Mostly, she works for theatre, writing plays and lyrics for independent theatre collectives and state theatre in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. She has written some novels, has won several prizes, and is an editor at Culturmag. She met Claudia during graduate studies in Hamburg. Since then, they have collaborated on various artistic and research-oriented projects.