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Kay, or a Case for Intensity

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content

Reflexive documentation of the artistic research *Kay, or a Case for Intensity* leading to the novel *Sehr*, including lecture performances that informed its development and the video chapter *Intensity in Language*.

Für die,
die schnell mutig sind,
die ganz liebhaben.

Malik, 4 Jahre

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Foreword

Kay, or a Case for Intensity is artistic research that explores the concept of intensity as a reciprocity of body and language. It focuses on emotional states such as "fucking", "loving", and "grieving". It attempts to answer questions such as: What is intensity? Where does intensity take place in the body, in language? How can I write or speak about intensity? How do emotion and language influence each other? To what extent can words capture, trigger, emphasize, or mitigate emotions? What kind of cultural codes are implied in feeling words? Can I invent new feelings, new subjectivities in and through writing? Is there such a thing as an intensity of meaning? How can meaning be modulated through different language and performance practices? *How abstract must this text be to be called "abstract"?*

Clearly, concepts such as intensity, pleasure, or pain are subjective experiences, and resist measurement. This work takes a ficto-critical approach: I, Cordula Daus, propose a female literary character – the eponymous Kay, "a middle aged, white woman from the European middle classes", and speak from and about her as a protagonist and a research fictosubject. Intensity will thus not be approached as a problem of representing a real feeling, but as a metric, the eponymous *Intensity of Kay,* practiced through literary writing, lecture performances, and other artistic forms. I investigate this subject as a female writer-artist.

My dissertation is situated at the intersection of artistic research, literature, and a general study of feelings. It consists of an ensemble of artistic works including the novel *Sehr* and this reflexive documentation. As in previous works, I appropriate and translocate vocabulary and methods from other sciences and disciplines such as seismology, sociology, phenomenology, and linguistics.

The voices and materials gathered here enter the research in different ways – as arguments, companions, provocations and material for writing – and often move between these roles. Broadly speaking, my artistic practices fall under five categories: theory as material; semifictionality; writing as research; questionology; and lecture performance. Those practices include intertwined methodologies and mutating micropractices that include in depth reading, excerpting, re-sensing, online dating, interviewing, autoethnography, phenomenology, confabulation, roleplay, performative writing, situated writing, live writing, free writing, fictocriticism, vocalization, mixing, and sound experiments.

Kay, or a Case for Intensity develops artistic research practices that critically investigate feelings and their symbolic forms. It offers different degrees of proximity for observing heterosexual relations. By subjecting not only words but cultural codifications to a scale, Kay fabricates new feelings such as *meaning lesser sex* or *Higher Love*. Kay's raging-grieving challenges the "woman" as general format. As an unresolved form, the novel *Sehr* opens up a space for another work, another woman to come.

In this text I'm speaking to you as a writer-artist that has found her place in artistic research. I am also speaking to you as a lover, as a queer mother, as a female

fucking-loving-grieving person. I try to stay on good terms with all my different selves. Not to lose ground. To take you, the reader, into consideration. To be patient. If I go into theories that are not mine, I will lay out why and for what purpose. I will combat high levels of abstraction with examples.

For example: "For example" – it makes a difference to write these two words, or to speak them to you. It makes a difference to write them in English, to "do the English", a language that is not really mine. Or to write this thesis in Hessian, the dialect of my grandfather ("*Kellena, des wär was, gell?*"). Each language comes with its own tone, humor, and imaginary audience. In order to find an appropriate tone for this reflection, I started to write in German, then translated myself. For a long time, I could not begin as the format was unclear to me. Initially, I had planned a journal of theory fiction to accompany my novel and ended up with this book. It is not without a certain sense of horror and surprise that I look at it now: A thesis, after all! My research was partly rooted in the fact that I was aware of the looming dangers that came with the task of reflection, of a certain tendency in artistic research to confound an analysis of forms with self eulogy or interpretation of one's work. Also, at first it seemed problematic to me to reflect on a language-based artistic work in writing, in language again. The role of writing in relation to artistic research has been debated in recent years.[1] In this documentation I have tried to reference, even circumscribe artistic works but not *explain* them.[2] As suggested by Salomé Voegelin, I resonate with the idea of the literary "as a modest collaborator to the artistic investigation: aiding its articulation without erasing its processes and speechlessness." The subject of my inquiry is contained in the novel *Sehr*. It will demand from time to time that I speak about myself as a medium. At some points I will need to move out of this text (see video on *Intensity in Language*).

1 Borgdorff: p. 58.
2 Voegelin: p. 99.

Disclaimer: Qualia and the Mind-Body Problem

To consider intensity from a philosophical perspective is nothing new, and it inherently relates to the questions of qualia, the Cartesian mind/body distinction, or more generally, monism/dualism. This discourse that has a long history in Western thought. My work does not attempt to address or solve the mind-body problem. Firstly, I do not believe in dualism; secondly, I try to stay away from abstract abstraction. I approach intensity as a *topos*: a (search) place in the body and in language, as something individuated and embodied that can't be thought of independently of the instruments and languages that try to grasp and measure it, the experimental systems that define it as a set of ordered differences.
The novel *Sehr* is the central materialisation of this research. Through my choices of language, voice and narrative form, I explore intensity as it takes shape in the fucking, loving and grieving of a particular body and subject: Kay. Writing is itself one of the practices through which this intensity is produced and modulated. The writing systems and formats through which human bodily sensations are articulated – whether in poetry, a novel, a doctor's report, letters, or diary entries – must themselves be taken into consideration as media and means of affect regulation. Intensity is thus not only a passive category; it can be modulated in sexual, culinary, meditative, narrative practices, and so on. I sympathize with Deleuze and Guattari's approach to intensity in terms of becoming and qualitative change. Intensity is to be found in verbs or gerunds rather than in nouns. In this reflexive documentation I mostly use the word *feeling* instead of *emotion*. This is less motivated by a categorical distinction than by an aesthetic choice and elective affinity to authors who developed a poetology and theory of feeling of their own, such as: Ann Boyer, Ann Cotten, Albert Heim, and Susanne K. Langer.



Figurine, ca. 3100–2500 BC, Skara Brae

Why Intensity?

If I had to reconstruct the beginning of this research, I would date it back to a particular moment in a car, three months after the death of my mother. I have described this in *Toponymisches Heft N° 3*:[3]

> We drove south for eight hours, three months after Mother's death. The Panamericana stretched out ahead of us. Animitas, araucarias, ñandús, pudús. My eyes fell shut. Keep your eyes open, said María. We're very close now. We stopped, María took a piss. I was awake for a whole 45 minutes. The Panamericana stretched out ahead of us. My eyes fell shut. You slept through the volcano, María said.

In January 2008 a volcano erupted while I was traveling through Chile in a car with a friend, but I was too tired, too sad, to see it. Witnessing my mother die, accompanying her through the process of dying, had left me with a kind of grief unknown to me until that moment. I lost my ground. In hindsight it seems no coincidence that I felt drawn to a field that studies shifting continental plates, tremors, and earthquakes – phenomena that go beyond what can be grasped by humans. Geology, and in particular seismology, spoke to me. It provided an approach to perceiving events that transcend language. This led to a book, a new kind of writing, but also to my transformation as a literary writer.

"We Need a Dead(wo)man to Begin," says Hélène Cixous in *The Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. This was certainly true in my case: "To begin (writing, living) we must have death. (...) Writing is learning to die. It's learning not to be afraid, in other words to live at the extremity of life, which is what the dead, death, give us. (...) So it gives us everything, it gives us the end of the world. We need to lose the world; to be human we need to experience the end of the world. (...) and to discover that there is more than one world and that the world isn't what we think it is. Without that, we know nothing about the mortality and immortality we carry. We don't know we're alive as long as we haven't encountered death: these are banalities that have been erased. And it is an act of grace."[4]

In 2015 I traveled back to Chile. I studied the histories of seismology. How to assess the strength of a shaking in words and numbers. How to use one's own body as a sensor. How to use writing as a form to contain and transform intensity. In *Toponymisches Heft Nr. 3*, I assembled historical seismic documents, letters, interviews with scientists as well as literary texts. In the short story *Trying To, Dying Too* I interweave the accounts of three events – the crash of an airplane, the death of a seismologist and the death of my mother:[5]

> Three years before the crash, Bock writes about the greatest challenge for seismology in the third millennium: making predictions in the short term, "i.e., within the space of hours or days." To be successful, it must be able

3 Daus: *Toponymisches Heft N° 3*, p. 3.
4 Cixous: pp. 9-10.
5 Daus: *Toponymisches Heft N° 3*, p. 96.

> to reliably pin down the place, time and strength of a future quake. Which it is not currently possible to do "with sufficient precision." Writes Bock and I calculate the difference between his crash and today, the moment when Bock wrote that phrase. How much precision has been achieved since then. Today, on this Wednesday as it leans into the third millennium.
>
> Four nights before her death Mother suddenly recovered the ability to speak and said: "Now I'll sleep for another three nights, and on the fourth it'll carry me off." With this statement she both achieved and exceeded precision, but it still didn't stretch to making us understand. The day before that night my father asked the doctor at her bedside. Because I, her daughter, needed to leave, whether it was possible or not to predict. And the doctor said it wasn't. So I went almost too late. Came just in time, at the moment when precision and her end said goodnight. No, she didn't fall asleep, it wasn't peaceful. Death murdered her, cut off her breath supply. And when I see a picture of Mother today, I think, were you blind. Isn't it enough of a prediction to have a face like that.

Toponymisches Heft Nr. 3 was published at the end of October 2016. On the same day I learned that I was pregnant again. (Only a few weeks before I had accompanied a friend through the process of an unhappy abortion.) Unexpectedly, I entered into a quandary myself and decided to abort. "Each of us, individually and freely, must do the work that consists of rethinking what is your death and my death, which are inseparable. Writing originates in this relationship," states Hélène Cixous.[6] Feminist writing, my own female condition, had not been of any relevance to my work before. I was doing the Hannah Arendt[7] (and give me a break from the "Frauenfrage", "women's issues", period problems, mothers that feel not good enough, "family planning", *that kind of shit*). This changed drastically. The experience of death, of giving birth, not giving birth confronted me with illusions regarding my autonomous self. With my privileges and superiority complexes. After all, I realized that I did belong to a "biological class". That I had a body that was not always my own. That my womb contained histories, intensities, that transcended me. Something larger than my own pain, my own knowing and choosing. I had entered a new fight and flight zone. A necessity for new alliances, new art forms arose.

In 2016, I published a love story,[8] structured along a fictional scale from I-X. The protagonist becomes a case for emotional extremes, a state that she embodies and struggles to contain, to overcome with words:

> Various forms of relief offered themselves up. Report, essay, novel. Dora wished for a fever, a good old mercurial fever, the red 37 pushing its way up past all other numbers. A temperature that didn't stop, that grew with her heat. Her personal, immeasurable state of exception. Dr. Sonntag held her upside down, above the development. Look, she's lost it! As a child she had

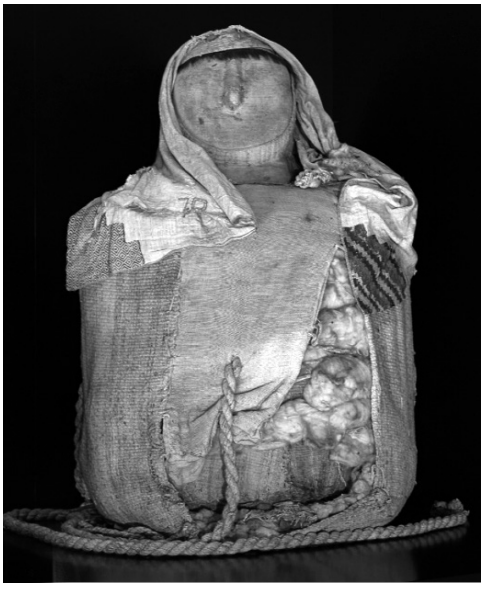
6 Cixous: pp. 12-13.

7 For a feminist reflection on Hannah Arendt's take on the "Frauenfrage", see also: http://www.antjeschrupp.de/hannah-arendt-vortrag, accessed 16 January 2022.

8 Daus: "Dora, or a Case for Intensity", pp. 111-120. The original German title of the text is "Dora – oder eine Form der Heraussteigerung". Here I was merging the term for superlative (Steigerung) with the gerund "sich hineinsteigern" (to get worked up about something), creating a new fictional antonym or exlative, "die Heraussteigerung".

> once smashed a thermometer because she wanted to know what fever was made of. Leaden pearls rolled out from it, nothing like water, retaining their form. She had cut her brother's hand with a razor blade because she wanted to know what brother was made of.

The initial motivation for my dissertation was to take up Dora's story as a blueprint for going further into writing as research. For the first time, I did not depart from a geographical place but from a woman, Kay. I approach the states of "fucking", "loving", and "grieving" as states in the body and in language. All in all, my own meandering experience has taught me to understand these states as a precondition for literary writing that not only questions the "I" but proposes ways of being.



Mummy bundle, ca. 650–1000 AD, Peru

Research Questions

Fucking

What is sex? How do sex and meaning relate to each other? Where does fucking start and end? What kinds of cultural meanings are attributed to "fucking"? And how do they influence our non-relations? Why can sex be qualified as "meaningless" but not "love"? How does the degree of knowing another person relate to sexual intensity? How is sex initiated in and through language? How do "fucking" and "talking" relate to each other? How can we increase or decrease the intensity of fucking through talking? Is there such a thing as an intensity of meaning? If so, how can it be triggered, dosed, augmented, or suspended? Can meaning be suspended in and through sex? How does that feel? How does meaningless sex feel? How does *meaning lesser sex* feel? Do humans with wombs need more meaning? Could sex be a practice during which we can experience a suspension of meaning? Of purpose? If so, how can this state be reached and cultivated?

Loving

How does "loving" feel? (Euripides) Where does "liking" start and where does it end? What kinds of cultural meanings are attributed to love? How do they influence our non-relations? How does this phenomenon of love operate? Do we want to get rid of love? (Shulamith Firestone) How high must a loving be to be called "love"? Is there a *Higher Love*? (Whitney Houston) What does "I love you" mean? Why can't I say "I love you"? What does "I love you" produce? How can we imagine forms of loving beyond the I/You formula? How do narrative forms - literature, poetry, lyrics – inform our loving? How can I narrate a state called postlove? Is it possible to step out of the biologically determined cycle of "fucking, loving, grieving"? What do we need in order to do that in fiction and in reality? How to invent new feelings in and through writing? How strong must a novel be to be called "*The Novel that Coined a Feeling Called Kay*"?

Grieving

How much meaning resides in a name? How much can a name contain? Does your name contain you? Does the container name you? How much grief can a person contain? How much grief can Kay contain? How to write grieving? How to write the intensity of fucking, loving, grieving? How to rewrite it? How to break through this cycle? Does Kay have the choice? What kind of choice would she have if she had the choice? Why procreate at all? How do grieving and the need to create relate to each other? How are desires being produced? What does Kay desire? What do we desire when we desire someone?

Method

How does it feel to question something/someone? How does it feel to be questioned? What does a question do? How can asking a question help bring forth an idea? How can we ask each other? How many questions does it take to dilute the idea? How does

the very form of questioning inform that idea? (For example: How high must an elevation be to be called “hill”?) How frequent must a practice be to be called “method”? How practical must a method be to called “knowledge”? How to call a knowing into being? How musty is your being? Must a method be called? How does knowing feel? Can I call you when it comes to “my method”? *Can you please focus on one research question only?*

→ See Practices: Theory as material

In this research I appropriate theory as material. Existing models to measure intensity — scales in medicine, psychology and sociology — inspired me to fabricate my own intensity model, the literary character Kay. What follows tries to kill three birds with one stone: I will present scales that have been relevant to my inquiry, how they have informed its subject, and how I speak (about) it.

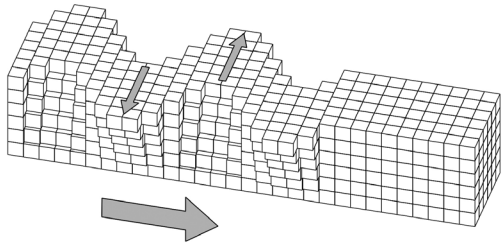


Bottle, ca. 1-800 AD, Peru

Scales

Imagine a *love wave.* It could look like this:

Or like this:



In 1911 Augustus Edward Hough Love mathematically predicted a wave that was later observed in reality. Love waves are what most people feel during an earthquake. Love waves can travel around the globe several times, before they dissipate (for a long time, people believed that some animals, like dogs or snakes, could see into the future and predict earthquakes. Most probably, animals can indeed presense what is going to happen. They can feel the subtle body waves that precede Love waves). They have a highly destructive effect. Of course, Love waves were felt long before Augustus Edward Hough Love was born. Only they existed as tremors without names.

Love wave: Some words are able to give birth to phenomena. Some words create a perceptibility that allows us to sense something that supposedly wasn't there before. And by doing so, words in/form our perception of the world. Think of *Fahrvergnügen*. *Fremdscham*. *Meaningless sex*. *Migrationshintergrund*. Each word is able to convey something that might not have existed before, or rather, had not yet been formulated, something that was "in the noösphere", or collectively sensed to be coming. La Rochefoucauld claims this was the case with the feeling of being in love: "There are people who would never have been in love if they had never heard love mentioned." ("*Il y a des gens qui n'auraient jamais été amoureux s'ils n'avaient jamais entendu parler de l'amour*").[9]

9 La Rochefoucauld: pp. 38-39, maxim 136.

Seismic Intensity Scales

Why would an author, when it comes to writing about love, turn to an earthquake scale? With Nietzsche I share the disgust for German inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*).[10] I'm drawn to objectivist approaches. To write for me also means to make myself available for systems that surround me. I like to approach difficult things uncreatively. To appropriate what already exists and render it new by combining it differently.

Consider the earthquake.

Peter Nikolaus Caspar Egen was one of the first geologists to use intensity in the assessment of an earthquake that occurred in Belgium in 1828. He created a map.

Imagine a map that looks like this:
The localities of a quake underlined with specific colors. Each color corresponds to a grade from 1–2 (yellow), 3–4 (blue) and 5–6 (red) for a strong impact.[11] Place and intensity. Colors, numbers, and words.

Quantitative attempts to record earthquakes date back to the 18th century, yet the systematic use of scales and of the term intensity only became widespread after 1883 with the first internationally used Rossi-Forel Scale. "Historically," Roger W. Musson writes, "the use of intensity scales is important because no instrumentation is necessary, and useful measurements of an earthquake can be made by an unequipped observer."[12] Two different pathways emerged within seismology. One was the geological or descriptive direction, concerned with "quake effects that are visible and tangible for human beings", as August Sieberg writes. This approach became known as macroseismology. The other was a physical direction that was interested in the "mechanics of earthquakes" and captured seismic waves in the form of images using sensitive measuring instruments.[13]

Seismic intensity hinges upon the figure of the unequipped observer who notes the felt impact of an earthquake without instruments. In that way it fundamentally differs from the definition of magnitude.[14] Seismic intensity can be captured anywhere and by anyone without further technical help. All we need is a body. And some know-how. In 1879, the geologist Albert Heim wrote a text commissioned by the Earthquake Commission of the Swiss *Naturforschende Gesellschaft* that can be regarded as a didactic text in this regard:

10 Among other things, Nietzsche criticizes "den merkwürdigen Gegensatz eines Inneren, dem kein Äußeres, eines Äußeren, dem kein Inneres entspricht, ein Gegensatz, den die alten Völker nicht kennen. Das Wissen (…) wirkt jetzt nicht mehr als umgestaltendes, nach außen treibendes Motiv und bleibt in einer gewissen chaotischen Innenwelt verborgen, die jener moderne Mensch mit seltsamem Stolze als die ihm eigenthümliche 'Innerlichkeit' bezeichnet." Nietzsche: p. 45.

11 https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Egen-1828-macroseismic-map-of-the-23-February-1828-earthquake-First-map-worldwide-with_fig2_348924971

12 Musson and Cecić: p. 1.

13 Sieberg: p. 3.

14 Unlike intensity, which describes the effects of an earthquake at a particular location based on human perception and observed damage, magnitude measures the energy released by an earthquake instrumentally. The best-known magnitude scale is associated with Charles F. Richter, who introduced it with Beno Gutenberg in 1935. For more, see: http://media.gfz-potsdam.de/gfz/wv/doc/infothek/MagnitudeIntensitaetErdbeben.pdf

> Earthquake observation is not easy, due to the slightly disturbing agitation this mysterious phenomenon can cause, which usually takes possession of the observer's clarity of view. A certain tensity of the sensual organs should be maintained, not giving way in to excitation, which exaggerates the perception. If the informant is not quite certain of his observation, he shouldn't withhold his observation from us, but declare idem in his report as uncertain. If the amount of incoming reports is substantial, then it is usually not difficult for he who studies them to recognize the local deceptions through the correlations with neighboring areas and eliminate them from the reliable, which would not be possible for the individual observer. Therefore: observe conscientiously, and have no timidity towards us on the communication of the observed. All that has actually been observed is welcome, even the uncertainly perceived, as long as it is referred to as such.[15]

Albert Heim became a secret idol of my research. He was a hyphenated being: not only a geologist but also a kynologist-abolitionist-draughtsman and an advocate for true citizen science. Most of Heim's publications and lectures aim at a general re-education of the senses towards a form of impersonal scientific feeling. According to him, humans have to learn how to see and observe again. His text *Seeing and Drawing* contains the term *Holding Capacity* (*Fassungsvermögen*), which has kept coming back to me ever since: How much can a specific body hold or contain? Think of alcohol, pain, or imagination. How much can a word contain? During my research in the archives of the seismological service in Chile, I came across hundreds of handwritten letters and documents from all over the world. The collective euphoria about a science-in-the-making infected me: In the 19th century, geologists and lay(wo)men all over the world began to note seismic intensities. Up to the year 1880, twenty-seven scales circulated internationally. Later attempts at standardization produced the Mercalli-Cancani-Sieberg Scale, one of the predecessors of the Modified Mercalli Scale.[16]

The protagonist of my novel does not only write about states of fucking, loving, or grieving; she attempts to develop a new scale of what can be felt at all. A writing system of intensity. Kay is not entirely successful. One of the many reasons might be that she belongs to a culture in which feelings already come with meanings attached to them. Unfortunately, feeling is not yet taught in schools.[17] Seismic models inspired me to think of a general study of feeling.[18] Would it be possible to note and write about feelings from an outward perspective? What if *feeling something* didn't mean anything? If we'd be able to observe feelings as impersonal states, just like the earthquake observers? Seismic intensity scales give us an idea how this could work.

15 Heim: 31 pp.

16 Who could have memorized an even longer name? A multiply hyphenated, history-in-a-nutshell name that, like in the game "Mother went shopping", forces us to take all those researchers on board, including the unpaid assistants who were involved but never mentioned? It would be a monstrous name, for sure, but a fair one.

17 In "Formulary for a New Feeling", the poet Anne Boyer proposes a research community consisting of "girls, poets, sensitive publics" and whose central task is to "test-feel, engender new feelings through just feeling". In a lecture given at HKW in Berlin, the writer Ann Cotten comes to the conclusion that Western nations would be better off founding a "school of feeling" in order to train the practice of global emotional relativity: "Jedenfalls ähnlich wie die Psychologen der Adlerschule, die krankhafte Ich-Bezogenheit der Affekte und Leiden mit einem allgemeineren Denken heilen wollten, in dem das Selbst als ein Teil der interdependenten Menschheit gesehen und gefühlt wird, bräuchte es hier eine Art Schule oder Allgemeinbildung der Empfindung in Bezug auf die Welt." Transcribed from audio documentation, Ann Cotten, *Now Is the Time of Monsters*, *What Comes after Nations*, HKW, Berlin, 23–25 March 2017.

18 See also my proposal for an Erschütterungskunde ("tremor studies") in *Toponymisches Heft N° 3*, p. 8.

— EMS-98

This is how the European Macroseismic Scale looks like:

EMS intensity	**Definition**	**Description of typical observed effects (abstracted)**
I	Not felt	Not felt
II	Scarcely felt	Felt only by very few individual people at rest in houses.
III	Weak	Felt indoors by a few people. People at rest feel a swaying or light trembling.
IV	Largely observed	Felt indoors by many people, outdoors by very few. A few people are awakened. Windows, doors and dishes rattle.
V	Strong	Felt indoors by most, outdoors by few. Many sleeping people awake. A few are frightened. Buildings tremble throughout. Hanging objects swing considerably. Small objects are shifted. Doors and windows swing open or shut.
VI	Slightly damaging	Many people are frightened and run outdoors. Some objects fall. Many houses suffer slight non-structural damage like hair-line cracks and fall of small pieces of plaster.
VII	Damaging	Most people are frightened and run outdoors. Furniture is shifted and objects fall from shelves in large numbers. Many well built ordinary buildings suffer moderate damage: small cracks in walls, fall of plaster, parts of chimneys fall down; older buildings may show large cracks in walls and failure of fill-in walls
VIII	Heavily damaging	Many people find it difficult to stand. Many houses have large cracks in walls. A few well built ordinary buildings show serious failure of walls, while weak older structures may collapse.
IX	Destructive	General panic. Many weak constructions collapse. Even well built ordinary buildings show very heavy damage: serious failure of walls and partial structural failure.
X	Very destructive	Many ordinary well built buildings collapse.
XI	Devastating	Most ordinary well built buildings collapse, even some with good earthquake resistant design are destroyed.
XII	Completely devastating	Almost all buildings are destroyed.

The GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences warns us "not to use this scale for actual intensity assignments".[19] The ground is stable at the moment. I'll look at it as a writer: The description column strikes me at first. The adjectives and adverbs slide between different categories: the realm of senses, feeling, and sight; the realm of quantity, numbers of observers and observed events; and the realm of strength, referring both to the intensity of the quake and to the observing subject's capacity to perceive or withstand it.

I addresses something yet unfelt. Something that does not yet reach the resolution of the human sensory apparatus (who is able to sense it then? Some kind of extrasensory being, an animal? Immanuel Kant? Does this degree refer to the anticipation of a perception?)

II corresponds to something that is scarcely felt. Maybe not by everyone, maybe just by some very sensitive beings, some snakes and dogs.

III relates to something that the observer denotes with adjectives such as "weak" or "strong".

VI addresses a tipping point; the language changes: the quake is addressed as an afflicting force, a force that does something *to* people and objects, that ranges from slightly damaging, to damaging to "very destructive". People are mentioned but the adjectives refer rather to objects. (Can a person be "damaged"? From when on is a person "destroyed"? There is panic but no mention of physical injury).

X Sentient beings are left out of the description. The unnamed ones that have scarcely noticed, who were frightened, who started to run and feel panic, "that can't stand it anymore" are out of consideration. There are only "things" left. "Almost all buildings are destroyed." The scale ends in describing a degree at which those who are needed to assign intensities cannot report anything anymore. But people do not figure here anymore. Death is irrelevant for the discipline we're in.[20]

The seismic scale offers a formalization of sentience that abstracts from individual feeling. The earthquake observers dedicate their feelings to science (imagine a group of lovesick people reporting worldwide to the Institute of General Feeling Studies!).

19 Abstracted from the Core Part of the EMS Scale, it provides a simplified and generalized view that can be used for educational purposes.

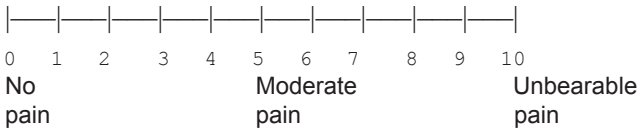
20 Heim was also a recognized figure in the early study of near-death experiences. In his article "Notizen über den Tod durch Absturz" (*Jahrbuch des Schweizer Alpenclubs*, 1882), he analyzes his own mountaineering accident and draws on numerous reports he collected from other mountaineers.

Medical Intensity Scales

In *Kay or a Case* I appropriate numerical and verbal rating scales from the medical field to conceptualize the space of a novel. In the following I'll show some of the material that has proven useful to me (see also *Semifictional Scales*).

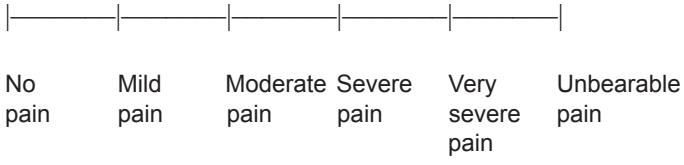
Scientific scales typically mathematize what can only be captured through experience. They are a symbolic reduction of the world. A sensation gets ordered, sorted, named. The transformation from a sensation into data allows sensations to be compared. Curiously, and I only realized this while writing this reflexive documentation, I had not investigated what might seem most obvious: scales of emotional intensity.[21] Why? My reasons were purely stylistic and functional: I felt drawn to simple ordering systems. To the aesthetics of graphic scales.

— Numerical Rating Scale



In medicine and psychology, "intensity" is used as an attributive metaphor for a physical or psychic force. Rating scales are used to capture the "frequency" or "magnitude" of a depressive disposition, pain, or joy. The same terms as in seismology, but in an entirely different context. These scales can be numerical, verbal, or visual (see *Appendix B*).

— Verbal Rating Scale



Both scales from: Wang, L., Xiao, Y., Urman, R.D. et al.

21 Research on emotional intensity gained empirical and theoretical attention during the 1990s. One example is the Emotional Intensity Scale (EIS), which comes in the form of a questionnaire; see: Bachorowski and Braaten: pp. 191–199.

Another type of scale that has proven interesting to me is used in psychology. It comes as a multiple-choice inventory or questionnaire to assess the intensity of depression:[22]

(0) I do not feel sad.
(1) I feel sad.
(2) I am sad all the time and I can't snap out of it.
(3) I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.

The highest state of depression is expressed through a physical metaphor: Not being able to "stand it" (or, as Samuel Beckett put it in *The Unnamable*: "You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on"). The physical and the psychological can't be taken apart. As a writer I look at the medical scales as a professional idiot. For me they exemplify the low resolution of language, or in the words of Deleuze and Guattari: "the problem of writing: in order to designate something exactly, anexact expressions are utterly unavoidable."[23] Intensity drives empirical procedures to their limits. Pain can cause a meltdown of language, of all senses. It even exceeds the holding capacity (*Fassungsvermögen*) of a person. This is why we need seismologists. And poets. Kathy Acker, Elaine Scarry, and many other writers have investigated how physical or mental pain challenges the category of the person as such.[24] "To experience intensity is to not know how things will end", writes Chris Kraus in *I Love Dick*.

22 The Beck Depression Inventory, see: https://www.ismanet.org/doctoryourspirit/pdfs/Beck-Depression-Inventory-BDI.pdf, accessed 12 April 2022.

23 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 20.

24 Johanna Hedva writes: "I want to make a defence of de-persons. According to the American Psychiatric Association, I am one. That is, I have been diagnosed with depersonalization/derealization disorder (DP/DR for short), which means that I have 'significant, persistent, or recurrent depersonalization (i.e., experiences of unreality or detachment from one's mind, self, or body).' What that means is that, at various times, my body, self, environment, and the world itself do not feel real." Hedva: "In Defence of De-persons", http://gutsmagazine.ca/in/, accessed 3 September 2021

The **ModifiedMercalli**IntensityScale
The **Facebook**Intensity Scale
The **Grief**Intensity Scale
The **Dream**Intensity Scale
The **Supports**Intensity Scale
The **WaterEvent**Intensity Scale
The **Pain**Intensity Scale
The **Labor**Intensity Scale
The **Symptom**Intensity Scale
The **PureTaste**Intensity Scale
The **Depression**Intensity Scale
The **NewTsunami**Intensity Scale
K a y

Research Envelope #2, 2018. Typography in collaboration with Vasilis Marmatakis.

Conceptual Scales

I'm drawn to names. To find out how names relate to places and how meaning comes into being through the act of naming. Consider *Las Indias*, the *Indians*. I read etymologies or histories of concepts to retrace the morphology of words back in time. To understand where and when chance or a misunderstanding crystallized. But naming something and forming a concept of it are not the same thing. What interests me is how words move beyond naming and begin to organize what can be thought and perceived at all. At the beginning of this research, I wanted to understand what concepts actually do: how they relate to what is absent, and how they make something available to perception. Hans Blumenberg was one of the first theorists that I read for this research. I will call him by his first name – a simple trick so we can get into a closer dialogue with him. Other authors will follow who have helped me to conceptualize and contextualize how we have learned to feel and to think about feeling.

— Hans

"The concept is not capable of doing all that reason demands", Hans writes.[25] Or in other words: Beware of concepts! Concepts do not come empty-handed. They drag their pretensions along with them ("Begriffe schleppen Anmaßungen mit sich herum"). Consider love: a concept loaded with romantic expectations, capitalist histories, cinematographic promises. And yet: a concept. Hans' writings contain some fine anthropological arguments for this hypothesis. In his *Theory of Nonconceptuality* he develops an evolutionary history of the concept that is related to the development of the human sense organs. According to Hans, concepts emerged at a specific moment of the life of human hunters and gatherers.[26] He compares the concept with the trap, a device that aims to catch something that is not immediately present. Traps are laid out because of a need, hunger for example. The trapper knows that his need cannot be fulfilled immediately. The trap as well as the concept emerge at the end of a long evolution of the human senses: [27]

> The concept stands in relation to the absence of its object. This may also mean it relates to the lack of a developed imagination of the object. This relation has been compared with different sense organs: seeing represents the possibility of touch, of feeling and therefore that of owing. Optical presence anticipates a tactile presence, even if it can do without the latter. Sight (*Sichtbarkeit*) – because of the distance to the object – correlates to

25 "Der Begriff vermag nicht alles, was die Vernunft verlangt." Blumenberg: p. 9. My translation.

26 "Der Mensch, das Wesen, das sich aufrichtet und den Nahbereich der Wahrnehmung verlässt, den Horizont seiner Sinne überschreitet, ist das Wesen der actio per distans. Er handelt an Gegenständen, die er nicht wahrnimmt, in den Höhlen, die seine erste Unterkunft sind, zeichnet er die Gegenstände seines Begehrens und seines Kampfes ums Dasein an die Wände. Der Begriff entsteht im Leben von Wesen, die Jäger und Nomaden sind." Blumenberg: p. 10.

27 "Der Begriff hat etwas zu tun mit der Abwesenheit seines Gegenstandes. Das kann auch heißen mit dem Fehlen der abgeschlossenen Vorstellung des Gegenstandes. Dieses Verhältnis ist verglichen worden mit dem zwischen verschiedenen Sinnesorganen: das Sehen vertritt nur die Möglichkeit einer Berührung, des Fühlens, damit des Besitzens. Die optische Präsenz nimmt die taktile vorweg, auch wenn sie sich ohne diese begnügt. Die Sichtbarkeit ist der Mangel der Fühlbarkeit wegen der Distanz zum Gegenstand. Stellt man sich vor, die Distanz würde weiter vergrößert – räumlich und zeitlich –, so bleibt nur noch der Begriff, der seinerseits die ganze Skala der sinnlichen Erreichbarkeit vertritt." Blumenberg: p. 9.

a lack of touch (*Fühlbarkeit*). If one imagines that the distance increases – both spatially and temporally – only the concept remains, which in itself represents the whole scale of sensual reachability (*Erreichbarkeit*).

A rough sketch:

to feel	0–100 cm	here/now
to see	> 100 m	there/a while ago
to conceptualize	> somewhere/in an imaginary time (*vor- oder nachgestellt*)	

Like the trap, the concept is oriented towards or aims at what it hopes to catch. For all those engaged in the creation of words, this is a highly interesting insight: How do our concepts relate to what we imagine them doing? We cannot catch tigers with eagle creels, birds with large-meshed fishing nets, or poor white men with tennis rackets. Or maybe we can? Still, if we don't have a clear idea of the "being" we seek to catch, we cannot conceive of an appropriate trap. Here imagination bites its own tail. The form of the trap will determine the body of the animal and vice versa. Whatever word we fabricate, its letters, its sound, its very Gestalt will attract different meanings. The concept allows us to perceive what is not there, to map out gaps in our experiential context. It allows us to relate to absence.[28]

— Niklas

I L
II O
III V
IV E

How strong must a feeling be to be called "love"? The scale above is very abstract. The reader may bear with me. For now, I'd like to keep it as a placeholder to speak about the relation between concepts and feelings. I enjoy reading scientific texts just for their terminology and special vocabulary. In *Kay or a Case*, I most specifically enjoyed reading Niklas Luhmann's German. So much wit. Freeze-dried emotions. Biting social criticism.

Love, according to Niklas, is not a feeling but a cultural code: a set of rules that allows one to express, simulate, or presume feelings in another person. What a person recognizes as feeling has already been culturally instructed. Concepts, systems of signs, and institutions fundamentally mediate this feeling and the ritualized signs of feeling. Niklas describes a specific love code that evolved in the West in the 17th century: love as passion. Literature played a central role in the development and circulation of this code. Novels spread and instituted a specific narrative, through which the idea of romantic love could unfold. "*J'avais lu quelques romans, et je me crus amoureux*", says the protagonist in *Les Confessions du comte* de ***, written in 1741 by Charles Duclos.[29] Reading about love – imagining it – recognizing it in oneself –

28 Blumenberg: p. 79.
29 Duclos: p. 9.

looking for it in others. Niklas made me wonder how novels have shaped the ways we feel and relate to one another. Or to put it in other words, to think about the genres that have contributed to the making of "love".

Alongside traditional criteria that conditioned marriage markets, such as personal status, class, economic status, or ethnic background, a new category increasingly entered the stage: emotional intensity. Or to put it into another equation: True love is what is being personally perceived as intensive (i.e., "strong"). A classic expression of that feeling can be found in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*:[30]

> This sweetness of sensation pierced through her old desires, and these, like grains of sand under a gust of wind, eddied to and fro in the subtle breath of the perfume which suffused her soul.

Around 1700 a new imperative crept into the concept of love. Almost as if someone had implemented a scale into the word (see my clunky attempt at the beginning of this chapter). In order to love, feelings had to be maximized. The modern subject more and more came into a position to choose their love object. Or at least to desire this. The criteria of choice had multiplied. And with them a paradox arose: The allegedly free power of decision to choose a love object seemed to be an obstacle to surrendering to it and thus feeling emotional intensity. To put it bluntly: Comparison deadens passion. For instance:

> *Kay loves Wolf very much.*
> *Kay loves Ran more than Wolf.*
> *Kay loves Sal less than Ran but more than Wolf.*

The modern individual tries to navigate between two needs that are hard to reconcile: the need for safety and the need for passion and adventure. You cannot have it all. Over the course of Western history, these diverging needs put increasing pressure on marriage as a union traditionally sanctioned by the family and the wider social network. Love and marriage not only acquired new meanings but also came to require intense emotions. This "semantics of excess", Niklas argues, "opens up new freedoms that must be given substance and re-specified through the history of a love – but no longer through society itself".[31]

Niklas explains that greater scope for personal relationships cannot simply translate into an increase in the number and variety of successful communicative exchanges. Such an expansion would soon overwhelm the individual: "The personal element in social relations cannot be extensified, only intensified."[32] Niklas also identifies the difficulties arising from a "heightened degree of individualization". He explains how this endangers marriage and other intimate relationships by placing demands on them that are difficult to fulfil.[33] In a capitalist society built upon the concept of "freedom" those demands and expectations apply both to the self and the other. "I" wants it all. As in Kay's case: [34]

30 Flaubert: Part II, ch. 8. German edition consulted: Insel Verlag, 1981. English quotation from Eleanor Marx-Aveling's translation, available through Project Gutenberg.
31 Luhmann: Liebe als Passion, p. 85. My translation.
32 Luhmann: Liebe als Passion, p. 14. My translation.
33 Luhmann: Liebe als Passion, p. 46. My translation.
34 Daus: *Sehr*, *Song of Praise*.

> [Kay] is high. Her legs shake. She stands by the window. Under these circumstances she can imagine anything.
>
> —ALLES
>
> Anything or everything? Jens wants to know what she means by that: a) triple penetration, b) family and kids. c) an artwork.
>
> None of that. Kay takes a breath. She is the author of this show. It might be trivial, but seen from a historical perspective, it is a sensation! This woman, there, standing by the window.

Niklas' theory of love as passion leads to a model of subjectivity – a self that comes into being through its own feelings. I feel, therefore I am. Feelings are locked inside the self but can hardly be contained by it anymore.

Degrees of Self

In his book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*[35], Julian Jaynes argues that the self and consciousness of the self, as we know them, are relatively young developments in the history of the human mind. According to him, some 3,000 years ago, near the end of the Mediterranean Bronze age, there was a time in which the "I" as we know it did not exist. Drawing on the "original *Iliad*", Jaynes speculates about how extensive and intensive sensations first made themselves noticeable in literature. During that time, the "bicameral epoch", mental processes that we would now locate within an introspective self were not necessarily experienced as internal: voices, impulses, and commands could instead be experienced as coming from outside. According to Jaynes, a general change in mentality occurred only slowly. The first psychological expressions of a self-awareness appear, so-called "preconscious hypostases", which later would become metaphors for consciousness. Drawing on the *Iliad*, Jaynes gives the following interesting examples of these metaphors: *thymos*, which moves from an outwardly observable activity to the surging of inner sensations in response to a critical environmental state, and later becomes a kind of container; *phrenes*, originally associated with the lungs and breathing, which gradually become a space for recognition and remembrance; *kradie*, originally the heart and its trembling or beating, which eventually becomes a "chamber" where the "deepest convictions, thoughts and feelings are kept". These ancient word relics, might be possible evidence of how language can carve out inner places in the being, in the body. Places where self-awareness could accumulate, be felt but also be expressed. Degrees of individualization. Degrees of self. A solitary "I" at the end. Jaynes's theory of the bicameral mind remains controversial. What interests here is the possibility of thinking the inward-looking "I" historically – and of images and language as agents in its formation. If feelings have moved inward once, perhaps they can move again.

35 Jaynes: pp. 316–324.

— Eva

F — E — E — L — I — N — G

I first read Eva Illouz' book *Love Hurts* during a phase of lovesickness and it proved useful to me as a source of comfort. Later, when I decided to research the heterosexual field, I realized that many of my experiences correlated with her sociological analysis.

We have arrived in the more or less now. The language changes with it. This is the age of smartphones and platforms such as Tinder, OkCupid, and Parship. "Long-term" is over. Long-term job contracts are over. Long-term relationships are over. Connection is everything.[36] *What are you into?* Just have a look at the drop-down menu of a dating site and choose a prefix or adjective: demi-; sapio; pan-; casual; cis; bi-; tri-; poly-. Never, it seems, have people of different classes, gender, colors, or kinds be able to connect with each other instantly.

My research in the field of online dating has made me think specifically about emotions under digital conditions. One of my first striking observations was how the use of online dating apps leads to the production of what Eva Illouz calls "fictional feelings".

The first "match" on Tinder had an instant effect on me. I "fell in love" with a person that I had never seen and that I would never see. It was only after a few days of obsessive messaging that I was able to feel intense physical symptoms of stomach ache, longing, arousal, shaking, and heat waves. After a week I had the impression of knowing the person. I had no other desire than to instantly sleep with that person. People have been sending each other letters for centuries – but instantaneous digital messaging produces unparalleled intensity.

Despite three months of texting, voice messaging, sending each other images, and scripting our encounter in excessive detail – we still had not seen each other. Illness and traveling led to a constant postponement. We had come to project so much onto each other that the tension had risen to an unbearable height. When we were finally able to meet – the person that I had "fallen in love with" chickened out. I had learned my first lesson.

One imagines feelings and anticipates feelings that have been triggered by media contents, Eva says. Distance is key here:[37]

> Precisely because feelings will more easily emerge if they can interact with clearly contoured ("aesthetic") forms, distance enables more intense sensations – sensations that are more intense because they are structured through clearly definable patterns and contours.

36 I borrow from Hannah Black: "This is the age of intensity and not of duration. (…) Monogamy is over, long-term job contracts are over, mortgages are over, cinema is over (kind of), novels are over (pretty much), content is compressed into a single fleeting moment: the meme. Everything you need to understand you need to understand immediately. One date, one kiss, one glimpse is enough." Black: "You Are Too Much".

37 llouz: *Warum Liebe weh tut*, p. 503. My translation.

→ See Practices: Online dating

From 2018 to 2021 I conducted a self-experiment in the field of online dating, gathering data of different kinds. I literally started a new life on the Internet by creating profiles on the dating apps OkCupid and Tinder. I observed actors and behaviors – including my own. I studied dating codes, sexual scripts and how those can be interrupted or simply put into play in and through writing and fictioning.

Imagined feelings feel very real. Fiction becomes real as soon as it enters the body. As a being who is sensitive to language, the very text-based technology of online dating made me susceptible to all kinds of imaginaries. Eva describes this techno-imaginary as follows:[38]

> One of the most interesting transformations in the institutionalization of the mass cultural imaginary is based on its in-formation: Technologies and cultural genres inform desire and lust, they generate anticipatory feelings (feelings prompted in the anticipation of future feelings) as well as cognitive scripts on how those feelings will feel like, how they should look like and will be represented.

A clash is preprogrammed when the imaginary and real feelings need to come to terms with each other. In this research I have strategically subjected myself to those clashes and to the tensions produced in and through cognitive scripting and sexting. Mobile online dating apps served as tools to jump into realities that would otherwise have been out of my reach. I met people that I would never have had the chance to meet under analogue conditions and within my limited time. Messaging apps enabled me to establish instant contact with strangers, and to test different forms of confabulation or what I call *ficktioning*. Here is an example from *Sehr*:

Kay: This is a preparatory session.
Rek: We need a strong connection.
Kay: Understanding.
Rek: Trust.
Kay: 3G.
Kay: We will only script the very first five minutes of our meeting.
Rek: I'll wait outside.
Rek: Walk up to me and stare at my face.
Rek: I need your eyes.
Rek: I want to see your eyes lock on mine.
Rek: Look at me and say something.
Kay: I will be looking at your eyes.
Kay: I look at you and say something.

38 Illouz: *Warum Liebe weh tut*, p. 465. My translation.

Kay: Something.
Kay: Olympiastadium. Spielfeld für Rekorde und Emotionen.[39]

The act of chatting, of "live writing", produces something between the two characters that their actual bodies cannot live up to. The imagined encounter becomes a playing field for record emotions. As the meeting approaches, Rek grows increasingly anxious.

During my field research I read countless online profiles of other people, self-summaries, best-of lists, anecdotes, and stories. The dating software I encountered from 2016 onwards usually comes with questionnaires to fill in, menus that offer adjectives how to self-define. In the field I met mostly "heterosexual", "bisexual", or "gender fluid" men. But I also met sociologists, sexologists and Tinder experts who where on a mission like me. I read about sexual script theory, about gay dating rituals, party and play, and online hookup devices.[40] Slowly but surely, I zoomed in on the realities of a particular subject – the contemporary Western heterosexual woman of the middle class.

For this particular social actor, Eva comes to a disastrous conclusion:[41]

> The heterosexual women of the middle class find themselves in […] the peculiar position, to confidently dispose over their own bodies as never before in history and to be - at the same time – dominated by men in a novel and unprecedented way.

Browsing through *Love Hurts* I gathered a chain of arguments that ground Eva's central argument – the "emotional hegemony" of men over women in "emotional capitalism". For the woman who wants to have children, time matters. Assisted reproductive technologies aside, she can only get pregnant within a certain time window, and as long as mating and reproduction go together, she experiences more pressure to find the *right* partner. According to Eva, her situation is further complicated by prevailing patterns of homogamy and hypergamy – the tendency to seek a partner of similar or higher social or educational status. As women's educational attainment has increased faster than men's, highly educated women are confronted with a smaller pool of equally or more highly educated men on the marriage market.[42] Eva further argues that while men can derive a sense of self-worth from their public status or professional success, romantic love remains "a social foundation for the self" for women. For women in particular, modern narratives of romantic love have increasingly linked intimate relationships to self-realization.[43]

According to Eva, promiscuous women can't accumulate social prestige or sexual

39 Daus: *Sehr*, *Fourth Service*.
40 A basic premise of sexual script theory is that sexuality is learned from culturally available messages that establish norms for sexual behavior and activities. Sexual scripts are embedded in a cultural context in which norms provide guidelines for behaviors, emotions, and cognitions considered appropriate for men and women in sexual experiences. See Simon and Gagnon: pp. 97–120; Frith and Kitzinger: pp. 209–232.
41 Illouz: p. 537
42 Quick fact check: In 2019 this gender gap was -10.5 percentage points (p.p.) in the EU-27, meaning that the proportion of women aged 30-34 that had attained tertiary education exceeded that for men by 10.5 p.p. See: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_statistics#Education
43 Illouz: p. 247.

capital to the same degree as promiscuous men can. She describes female sexual seriality as the adoption of "a masculine strategy".[44] At this point I begin to resist her analysis. Why understand promiscuity primarily in terms of accumulation or strategy? Sex can also be about curiosity, adventure, pleasure, experimentation, or simply wanting more sex. This does not mean that sexual freedom operates under equal conditions. For women, fucking around may still come with different physical and social risks: pregnancy, sexual violence, slut-shaming.[45] But these asymmetries do not make female promiscuity an imitation of male behavior. I became heated up with and against Eva. Her sad sociological summary is: marriage markets reveal an oversupply of highly educated, highly demanding women who want to mate and reproduce, but tend to be love-maimed and frustrated. Current capitalist conditions, according to Eva, disguise a "new form of emotional hegemony of men over women" that expresses itself in the availability of women and the hesitation of men to commit themselves.[46] The heteronormative concept of modern love seemed to have turned into a trap.[47]

> As long as the conditions of economy and biological reproduction institutionalize gender inequity within the heterosexual family, sexual freedom will be a burden for women.

If we wanted to mathematize Eva's equations – time would be a crucial parameter. There is no intensity without biological time![48] This correlates with my own experience: Compared with male friends of the same age (50 +/- 5) my female friends going through perimenopause seem to experience time more intensively. This has nothing to do with the actual wish to reproduce, but rather with the many things female fertility and pregnability is entangled with. Ultimately, it is a priviledge and a curse. The biological temporality of womb-based reproduction and the cultural temporality of romantic love do not necessarily align. This conflict is at the core of Kay's intensity in *Sehr*.

> Must heterosexual love by definition lead to babies and/or grief? What if we do not want to buy this definition? What kind of superpowers would we need?

If things are so miserable "love" and "sex" must be reworked. In the following, you see some conceptual scales that I came up with during the first year of my research. Scales have helped me to map the space of the novel, to order my thoughts, and to equip my lecture performances with "facts".

44 Illouz: p. 248.

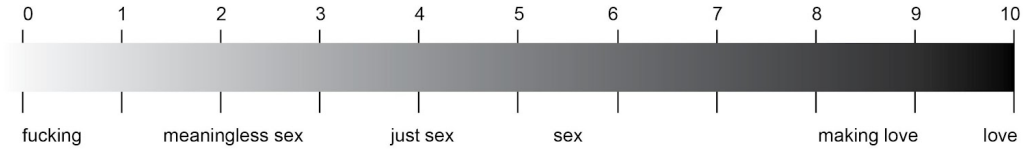
45 For a radically different perspective on female promiscuity, see Virginie Despentes: "I am a girl; the world of sex outside the couple doesn't belong to me. Occasional prostitution with free choice of client and scenario is also a way to dip into sex without sentiment, to try things out, without having to pretend you're doing it out of pure pleasure, and without expecting the societal collateral advantages. When you are a whore you know why and for how much you are doing this, and when you enjoy doing it on top of that and when you satisfy your curiosity, even the better. When you are a girl that has the choice it is all much more complicated and serious." Despentes: p. 60.

46 Illouz: p. 247.

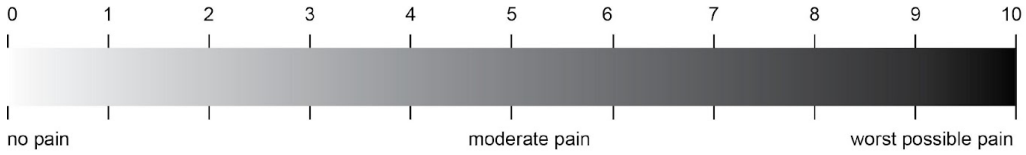
47 Illouz: p. 555.

48 Clearly, this relates to a long history of gendered reproductive expectations. Most women are used to being confronted with the question of "wanting children" from an early age. They are pressured to respond to a "desire" (German: Kinderwunsch) that is being projected onto them by default. Ideally, you produce two children with the same partner. If you have "only" one child, you're being asked why. If you have more than two children, you will be asked why, too.

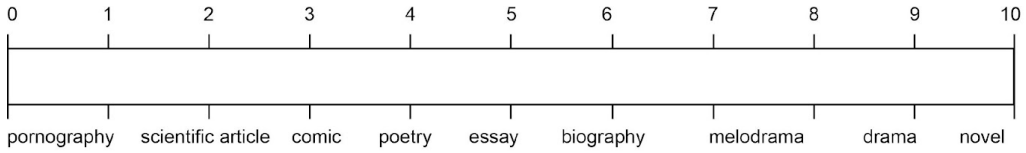
Semifictional Scales



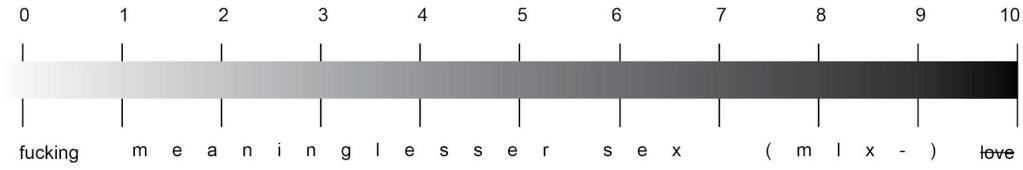
Words ordered by the intensity of meaning attributed to them in conventional language use. The most meaning (10) is being attributed to the signifier "love", whereas "fucking" can be found at the opposite side (0).



Intensity of pain related to the scale above. "Fucking" (0) usually does not hurt that much – "love" is supposed to hurt a lot (10).



Genres ordered by cultural value (with 0 being unimportant to 10 very important). In combination with the two previous scales, "love" can be seen as related to the genres through which it is conveyed.[49]



Towards a new love order: meaning lesser sex (mlx–) helps not to feel too little, but also not to feel too much. Mlx– functions like a scale within a scale, a metric and a relation between feeling something and its meaning.

49 A more up-to-date scale would have to include media such as TikTok, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, WhatsApp, email, etc.

Kay

> *Kay has been dead for almost two years now. And it was not until very recently that I could approach her material again and look at this phenomenon of a woman with the dispassion and detachment which are supposed to be proper to impartial criticism; the intense experience of knowing her is still too immediate and overwhelming. Perhaps it would thus be appropriate to continue with a few observations on her character.*
>
> *Kay was headstrong, impulsive and overdetermined in will. There was a certain inexpressibly spiritual and bewitching magic about her face. Her asymmetrical and raw-chiseled features registered only very few expressions, but each in an expanded range. She was blessed with a rare beauty which did not diminish with the erosion of time or distortion of media. Even dead, she will will be okay. Throughout her lifetime she refused to have a last name.*[50]

The three letters *Kay* stand for a fictional author and character, as well as for a semi-fictional method: to write from and about Kay as "a heterosexual, white, middle-aged woman from the middle class living in the center of Europe, sometimes close to now". Here's a blurb of the novel:[51]

> In her 45th year of life Kay decides to put herself at the service of free love. In exercises with Ran, Wolf, Sef, etc. she searches for new feelings. Whatever positions Kay and her body partners take, they work hard on a new erotic style: meaning lesser sex! Unfortunately things are not that easy. Among other obstacles, female nature (the womb) proves to be an intractable factor. In the rest of the world reproduction goes on as usual. Children are born out of women. But not in Kay any more! There must be Higher Love!

Kay cultivates a serial sexuality. She strives to feel as much as necessary but not to feel too much. As Luhmann has analyzed, any move in the erotic field, "requires cold blood and a strategic course of action. The threshold towards love can be passed anytime, and then the tragedy takes its course".[52] Kay meets the painter Ran for sporadic only sex. They work hard on keeping their practice casual.

50 Daus: *The Heft*, foreword, never published, Berlin 2040 (citing from the wastebin).

51 One of the many blurbs that I have written for the novel *Sehr*. The concept of Higher Love came to me in a euraka moment while I was driving a rental car and listening to Whitney Houston singing; to be precise the 2019 DJ Kygo remix of the Steve Winwood song "Higher Love" from the 1986 album *Back in the High Life*.

52 Luhmann: *Liebe als Passion*, p. 113. My translation.

KAY
What are we doing here?
RAN
I'd like to keep it as concrete as possible.
KAY
I'm trying hard to keep myself out of you.
RAN
It's like with the colors, I can't tie them down either. When I'm painting, I'm constantly trying to equilibrate. I call this "Gewühl" (meeling).
KAY
Yes, exactly, taking the other person as a climatic influence. The only problem is that if I'm too far out, I do not sense anything anymore. Is there about me that you can refer to? Like my knees, for example. I know that you've been drawing my knees! You could say you like my knees, for example. You know, just so I feel minimally meant.

Meaning and Sex

What would we see if we looked at human relationships from another planet? A satellite image of Earth at night can give us an idea of the magnitude of human activity on our planet through visible light pollution. Sexual reproduction is more than a billion years old.[53] Humans have attempted to separate sex and reproduction for millennia, but the introduction of the contraceptive pill around 1960 radically increased the ability to control this separation. And yet biological reproduction continues to structure sexual and romantic relations. Romantic love, meanwhile, remains remarkably persistent across cultures. *Meaning lesser sex* as introduced by the stylist Kay offers a new outlook. Anatomy luckily is not destiny. And *Homo sapiens sapiens* is not the last word in evolution.

Sehr is an episodic novel structured by a series of duets. The protagonist Kay has meaning lesser sex: She goes to a place that does not need to lead to love, not to babies, not even to joy. The narration focusses on her encounters, her relations with men or man-like creatures: Ran, Rek, Wolf, Sef, Sal, Nyam, Umut, et al. Sex is depicted as a prepositional activity: As something she does for, on, in, because of, despite, instead of, without someone. Here is a preliminary definition of this fictional practice that I came up with in one, two, three steps:

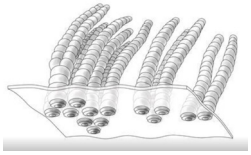
53 

Illustration of *Funisia dorothea*, a tubular organism that paleontologist Mary L. Droser and her colleagues identified as showing evidence of sexual reproduction some 540 million years ago. *Funisia dorothea* lived in dense clusters anchored to the shallow, sandy seabed of what is now the Australian outback. The name *Funisia* comes from the Latin word for "rope"; *dorothea* was named after Dorothy, Droser's mother. Droser commented, "She's come with me on digs and done all the cooking and taken care of the kids. It seemed the right thing to do." Fox: "Early Life on Earth – No Predators, Plenty of Sex".

Meaningless sex
also called “casual”, “occasional” or “random sex”, “sex without emotional attachment”.

> Expression that implies a moral scale of human emotions in which “fucking” is at the bottom and “love” at the top. Whoever uses this word combination, is suggesting that sex should mean something, lead to something, e.g., reproduction, love, orgasm, marriage, God, good, health, etc. Let’s have a break! Let’s mean less!

Meaning lesser sex (mlx–)
a fictional comparative of the second degree.

> Derailed from “meaningless sex” (see above), mlx– takes the word at its word and makes a move towards sensual justness. Mlx– has no other assigned function than to mean less. Save sex from love! Just fuck, no more! Separation between state and church, sex, sense, woman, and womb! When we have mlx– we go somewhere we don’t know yet.
>
> Meanwhile:
> 1. Fuck, whatever that means.
> 2. Stay strangers to each other.
> 3. Invent new feeling games.
> 4. Extend the liking scale.
> 5. Forget and forgive.

Meaning least sex
a fictional comparative of the third degree.

> The prospect of uniform advancement towards the state of “meaning least sex” seems possible for those who have already practiced “meaning lesser sex”, yet the theoretical problems relating to the transition from one state to the other acquire major importance. The scientific problem of scalable feeling will only be resolved in practice, in the creative activity of tens and hundreds of millions of fucking people. In this higher degree, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of sex, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of producing life but life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly, a paradoxical state, a suspension of sense is achieved in which nothing seems to have changed but everything is put into question, waiting to become possible.[54]

54 Incerpt from Marx: *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

→ See Practices: Writing as Research

The above definitions are one example of how I use writing as research. Inspired by existing terms, I create new terms and write dictionary-type definitions. What comes into being in letter form demands further definition and drives the research. I can hardly think without writing, rewriting, reformulating. Language thinks, searches, stumbles.

Conversation with a Reader

Sebastian: In the novel *Sehr* we learn that Kay tries to stay away from "conventional love" (*land-läufige Liebe*). But what does that mean?

Cordula: Love as leading to a family, for example. The adjective *land-läufig* introduces a word game: It means both "common" but also to be "in heat".

Sebastian: It seems comprehensible that a woman like Kay is interested in physical intensity as a surrogate for an emotional intensity that has long been connoted with femininity. Still, the simple inversion of moral preferences for deep emotional bonds (and dependency) and superficial physical lust does not take us anywhere. It simply maintains the dichotomy. I mean, we are not in the 1980s or in a Bret Easton Ellis novel – *SEHR* is set in the 2020s!

Cordula: True. Nowadays, random fucking with random people, casual or meaningless sex is pretty much standard style. At least in the Western hemisphere. For heterosexual people like her, the problem of pregnancy is more or less medically managed. Sex can be separated from its reproductive function. Sex can be separated from its reproductive function. Psychosexually, though – to use a Freudian expression – reproduction continues to haunt heterosexual sex.

Sebastian: I see that Kay has real trouble stepping out of the heterosexual scripts. We have to beware of the fact that *meaning* – if we do not watch out – *is* in the last heterosexual instance, the BABY: personified dependence and manipulation.

Cordula: So true! No wonder Kay wishes to be gay.

Sebastian: Gay sex for heterosexual women seems a way to disarm on a semantic and hermeneutic level. Which does not necessarily mean to mobilize pornographically.

This is the trap that most homos step into! (On the other hand, porn of course opens a lot of spaces). Where is the heterosexual place then, the metaphor or the practice between porn and baby?

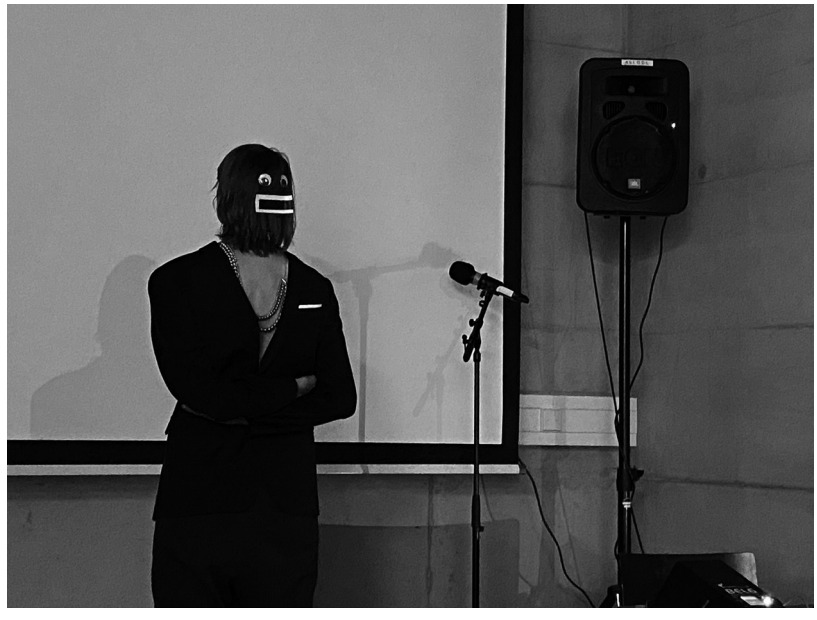
Daus/Bark, Email from 14. November 2021

→ See Practices: Lecture Performance

The lecture performance is not an end, or a product in itself, but a way of performing not-yet-texts or to activate texts from existing books. I like to begin with the dry register of an academic lecture. To assume the role of the lecturer. Then to add little disturbances. Glitches in believability. This may happen by shifting from reading to saying to singing; from telling to showing.



Cordula Daus, *Kay*,
Let's Fabulate, University of Applied Arts Vienna,
15.1.2020.



Performing Kay

During a lecture performance given in January 2020, I spoke about feminist speculative writers such as Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy and Joanna Russ. Kay appeared almost like a comic in a pop-up scene. A big hyphen constitutes her mouth. Her eyes are stickers glued to my hair. Throughout the lecture, I used a bilateral strategy: speaking as Cordula Daus (frontal), speaking as the character Kay (dorsal). Here's an excerpt from the script:

> I'd like to introduce Kay to you:
>
> At the airport, for example, just before the body check.
>
> [*Cordula steps forward, puts lights on.*]
>
> It's her turn now. She stands on the marked spot. The laser scans her body. The backscattering reconstructs an image. This is how she looks like:
>
> [*Turns around. Crosses her arms.*]

Towards the end of the lecture, Kay has a solo. She turns to the microphone and gives a speech in a low-pitched voice. It ends with the sentence: "Ich sag dem Alter. Alter, *ich* bin die Zeit. (I tell age. Alter, I *am* time)."

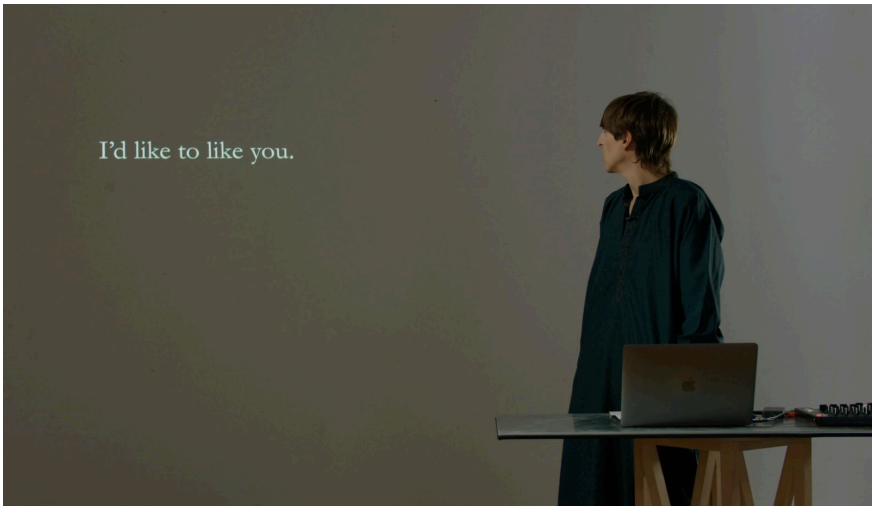
The voice gives a fuck about time. What is great about a mixing board is that it allows the perfomer to live modulate voice in pitch, reverb and volume. These sonic effects became a means of testing singular sentences, of testing how affect might change through effect. In the video *Intensity in Language* I take this further, treating the technical device as a miraculous object that can solve emotional problems.

Intensity in Language

In this video chapter Cordula Daus presents four categories of intensity in language: meaning, form, voice, context. Specific sentences are analyzed, and different tools are tested to increase or decrease their force. As the lecture continues, the boundaries between the four categories become blurry. The lecturer's own limitations come to the foreground ("I can't say this sentence"). Yet a solution is found in a technical device. Daus introduces an apparatus that can be used by anyone to adjust and extend their relational and emotional capacities.







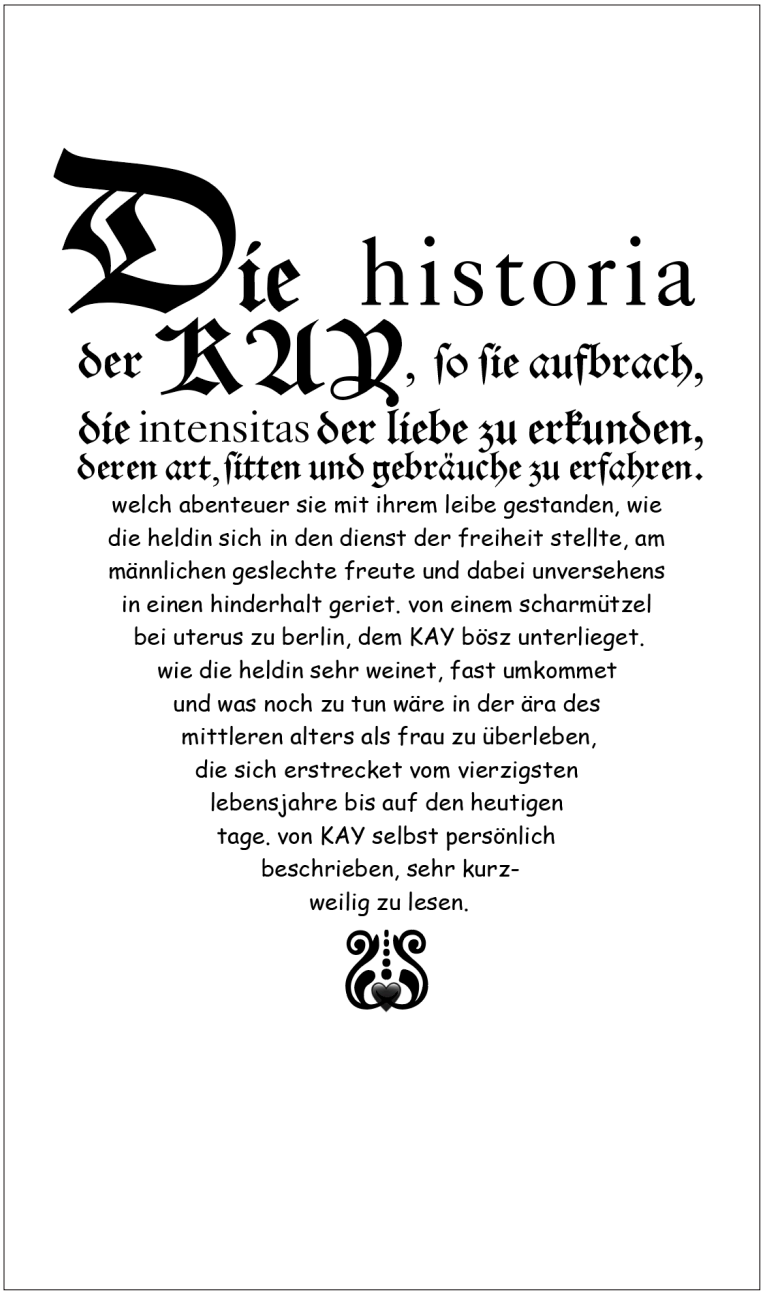


Intensity in Language, video, 18:56 min, 2022

Sehr



Preliminary cover, typography: Till Gathmann



Sehr, prologue

Prologue, or Finding a Voice

Long before the novel existed, I wrote blurbs (*Klappentexte*) or announcements similar to those found on a book's dust jacket. These summaries helped me to get a sense of the novel's possible form (see *Appendix D*). The blurbs were fun to write and served as *exercices de style,* in Raymond Queneau's terms, allowing me to test different forms.

At a later stage in the writing, I was looking for a narrative frame. Back then, a historic book came to my mind, Nikolaus Federmann's *Indianische Historia*[55] from 1557 – and all of a sudden, things fell into place. I appropriated Federmann's voice, adapting it into a pseudo-medieval idiom. I wanted the prologues to stand apart from the rest of the narrative, creating a voice speaking from outside of my own time to observe today's rituals of courtship. In my imagination, this voice could be the *Minne* herself, the personification of love.[56]

In its final form, *Sehr* begins with a prologue in this neo-medieval language. The "historia", is introduced as an adventurous quest for love, during which "the heroine puts herself at the service of freedom". The language summons a strange space and temporality: anatomy is turned into geography, while the "era of the middle age" stretches from the fortieth year of life until the present day.

Reading further into medieval literature, I came across Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst* (1255), which led me to introduce "services" into the table of contents. These came to structure the novel. In Ulrich's *Frauendienst*, the narrator-knight recounts his service to two ladies in succession. *Sehr* reworks this model of courtly service by reversing the gender roles and complicating the object of devotion: the heroine Kay serves men, but also the idea of freedom. Each service is introduced in a quirky pseudo-historical German; the episodes themselves are written in contemporary German. Together with Till Gathmann, I looked for a typographical embodiment of a narration shifting between times, scripts and voices. Minne speaks in Alte Schwabacher, an blackletter typeface; in the epigraph, it meets Comic Sans. Luther meets Microsoft. Typesetting is crucial. Only when I see a text *in form* do I begin to understand the body of the work. At this stage, I sometimes discover that a passage does not belong to a particular voice. I cut it or rewrite it.

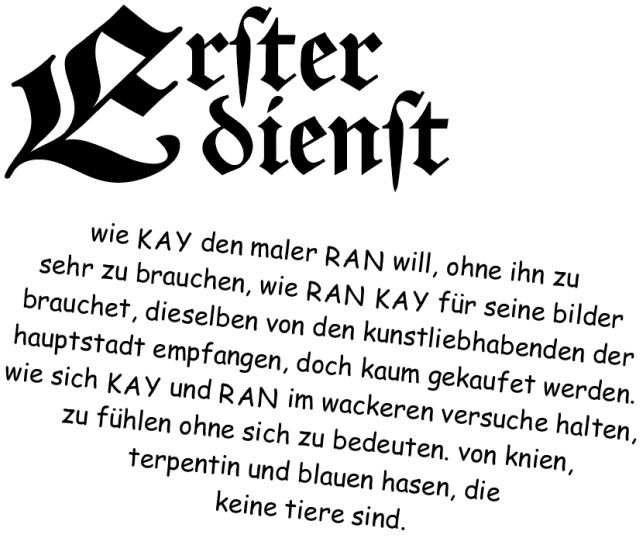
Text images

Different media find their way into the writing of *Sehr*. In the First Service, Kay's encounter with the painter Ran gradually changes the way the text behaves. Painterly vocabulary enters the relationship, while passages of prose break into spatial

55 Nikolaus Federmann (1505, Ulm–1542, Valladolid) was a German adventurer and conquistador whose account *Indianische Historia. Ein schöne kurtzweilige Historia Niclaus Federmanns des Jüngern von Ulm erster raise* was published posthumously in 1557. I first encountered the book during my research on the Spanish/German colonization of the Americas.

56 *Minne* is a Middle High German word for "loving remembrance". The *Minnesang* ("love song") also relates to a tradition of lyric writing and songwriting; in Germany and Austria that flourished between the 12th and the 14th centuries.

arrangements of words, colour fields and image-like compositions. Towards the end of the episode, a painting posted by Ran on Instagram is rendered as a sparse verbal image of foreground, background, colour and figure. In the chapter *Preislied*, Kay adopts the procedures of portraiture to describe Jens in (live) writing. Observation gradually shifts from his body to individual features, words and finally letters. Meeting Sef, on the other hand, means dealing with the medium of silence. Here hyphens count minutes, hours, days. Some examples:



Sehr, *First Service*

ERSTER DIENST 17

Es
klingelt

weder bei ihm
noch bei ihr

Rans Hose öffnet sich

Ein Feld aus
Kadmiumrot und Kremserweiß

Sie hängen sich aus

Girlande

Sehr, *First Service*

—Hey Sef, das grüne Licht ist an.
Ich sehe, Sie sind online!

—

—Wie fein Sie mich beschweigen!

— — —

—Es zieht mich zu dem
Abstand hin, den Sie zwischen uns
eingerichtet haben.

Sef schreibt, dass er total busy ist.

Sehr, Third Service

REK: I might burst.
KAY: Explode.
REK: I have a meeting in forty minutes.
REK: I beg you.
KAY: No. This is not about release.
REK: I beg you.
KAY: Hold this and use it for the script.
REK: I have a meeting in twenty minutes.
REK: I am going somewhere private or
it'll be a disaster.
REK: Talk to me please please please.
KAY: I'm on the tram. It's full.
REK: I am a bit, um, full on. I'm gonna call you.
KAY: I can't take your call now.
REK: Damn.
REK: Gimme some script.
REK: I'm close.
REK: You're so cruel.

REK
KAY: 000007PHOTO-211062342-04-13-
23-53-44.jpg.
KAY: Is this you?
REK: Believe it or not, this was me only
three years ago.
KAY: What happened to that boy?
REK: Been a tough ride.
KAY: What kind of drugs.
REK: Why do you ask? You use?
KAY: No.
REK: Good.
KAY: I mean your face, then and now.

Sehr, Fourth Service

Framing: Fucking, Loving, Grieving

In the English language, *fucking* can function as a gerund, as an intensifier, as an interjection, and as a grammatical ejaculation at the same time. These possibilities can resonate at the same time. *Fucking* is able to cast doubt on *loving* and to imbue the *grieving* with its negatively refreshing effect. How the words act upon each other depends on how we speak them, how much space we leave between them, how we pronounce a comma.[57]

In the *Fifth Service* of the novel, Kay falls in love. Hormones kick in. Kay becomes pregnant by choice. There it is, the supposed ultimate meaning of heterosexuality: procreation. (To baby or not to be.) Unfortunately, her partner disappears and Kay decides to have an abortion. She is in great emotional pain. The doctor says all blood tests are okay, the thyroid is functioning well; the pain must be related to grief. Kay says no: her pain is not personal. The doctor refers her to a sociologist. This passage implicitely relates to an earlier unpublished text in which I enter into a dialogue with the sociologist Luc Boltanski, or, to be precise, with his *book*. I'd like to include this paratext here. (See *Grieving the Unborn.*)

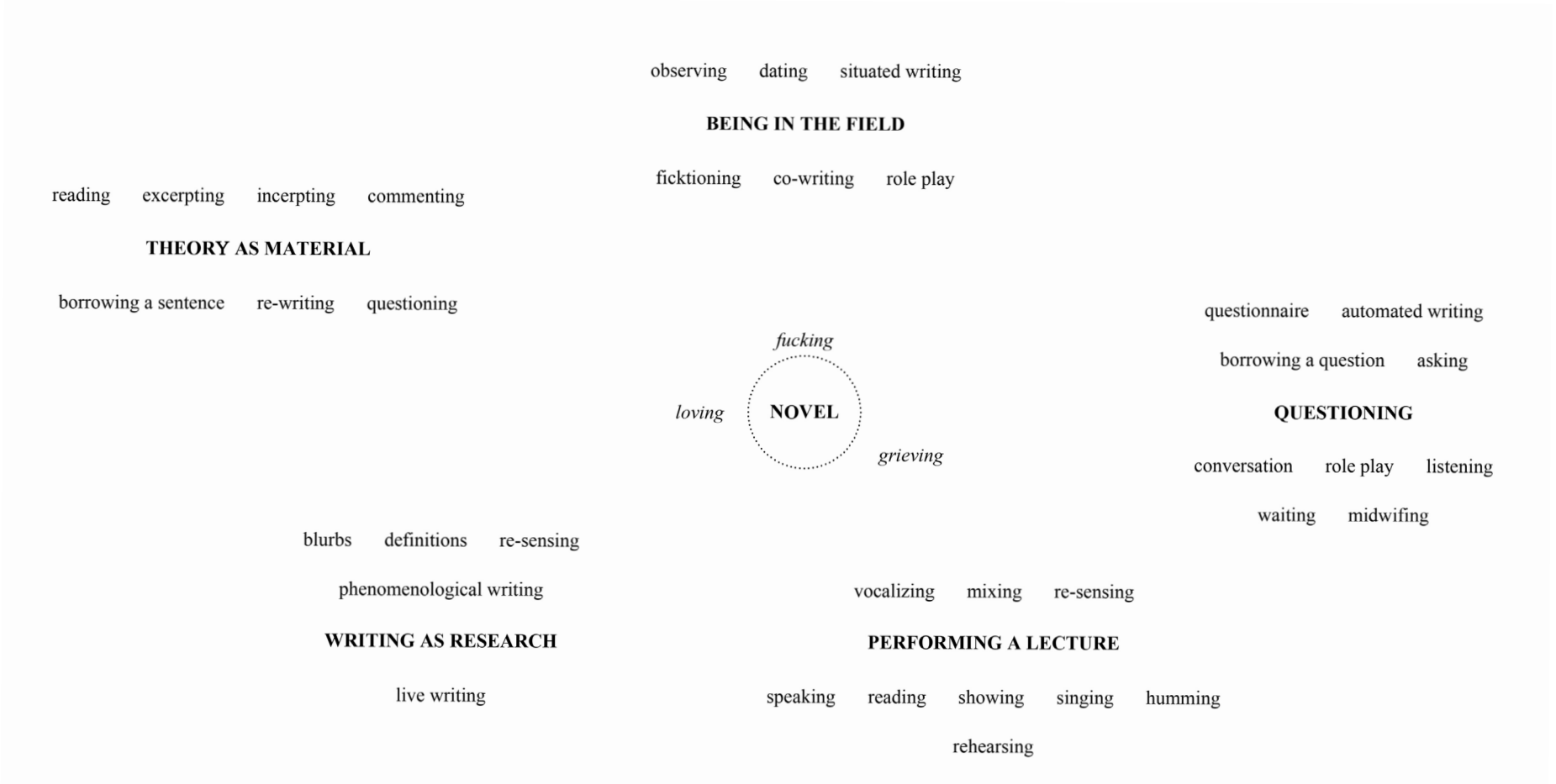


When trying to describe her pain, Kay begins to count how many times her lover used the intensifier "sehr" in his text messages, then turns to its etymology. "Sehr" derives from older forms associated with pain and woundedness, related to the English "sore", but over the centuries this meaning faded. The "pain" faded out. The *Fifth Service* takes the reader to the epicenter of the book and the limits of language. It is here that the event took place. Or, to be more precise, where the non-event took place, as there is no trace, no crater, no body to mourn over. Sometimes a very old story can be rendered new by telling it again. Sometimes a feeling felt by someone who died thousands of years ago can become alive again. During my research I discovered *Grief Lessons. Four Plays by Euripides* translated by the classicist and poet Anne Carson. In her book, Carson not only translates Euripides, but also provides the most compelling prefaces to four of his plays. Framing is everything, or, as Carson says herself: "Grief and rage — you need to contain that, to put a frame around it, where it can play itself out without you or your kin having to die. There is a theory that watching unbearable stories about other people lost in grief and rage is good for you-–may cleanse you of your darkness. Do you want to go down to the pits of yourself all alone? Not much. What if an actor could do it for you? Isn't that why they are called actors?"[58] Kay acts for us. By adding a preface around her, we can look at her fucking, loving, grieving from an ancient future.

57 In a voice-to-text program, one can observe a similar re-framing or re-sensing effect. Sometimes a word that has already been written changes retroactively as the speaker moves on – the algorithm replaces it with another, more adequate word as it grasps the context of the language system as a whole.

58 Carson: preface to *Grief Lesson's. Euripides*, p. 9.

Practices



Sketch of interrelated practices

The sketch on the page before is an attempt to name practices that have emerged through doing and mutated over time. In *Kay or a Case* I employ a series of interrelated methods. *Methodos* comes from meta and hodos, "way" or "journey". To research perhaps means to look again for something without yet having the means to find it. To be on a path. Still, if you had nothing to go on, you would not have started to look for it. The search is dialectical: it is a process without a predetermined way. There may be no direct or pure route, but a path emerges – a dirt track, a paved street, a hollow lane. I have experienced that a method can also be in the way. I have a tendency to find titles and names and then stick to them. I can become attached to a title for aesthetic reasons only while having already moved on to doing something entirely different. To research also means to constantly reconnect with what first caused one to wonder. To find new ways to go there. To ditch "the method". What follows examines a series of practices relevant to this dissertation. These practices are intrinsically bound to the subject of intensity.

Theory as material

Many of my works depart from an appropriation of theory. The chapter *Scales* gives an impression of this approach. I use theories and models not only to further theoretical reflection but as artistic material. I like to work with the *form of theory*. With the aesthetics and sound of *Fachsprache* (specialist language).[59] For example: consider the footnote of a footnote of a footnote. The credibility of an academic text can be reinforced by a footnote and undermined by it at the same time. How specific, how precise can a scientific article be? There is something I have called the involuntary poetics of scientific texts that emerges when an uninitiated reader is confronted with specialist language. Often, I am fascinated by terms that I do not understand. This non-understanding leads to a vague idea, a context. To the making of a place in language. I like to take language too seriously or not seriously at all. My literary texts often emerge in dialogue with another voice that scrutinizes them. Within the format of my publication *Toponymisches Heft* I have played with the dialogic modality of play and replay: e.g. an author narrates a story which will be interpreted by another (invented) author, maybe the publisher or translator of the very same publication. There is the artefact and the interpretation of that artefact through a discourse, a theory. An erratic image and a lengthy caption. The distinctions between theory and literature, original and commentary become blurred. Interpretation may turn into poetry. The dialogue *On Higher Love* with [M] Dudeck is an example of how I lured another artist and thinker into the interpretation of my text, relinquishing authorship and authority over meaning and reclaiming them again. In such a semifictional dialogue, snippets from the novel are being hijacked into a theoretical context and play back into the novel. In other cases, bits of "theory" have directly entered into my lecture performances or into *Sehr* as I will show below.

59 The poet Ulf Stolterfoht has explored this potential in his eponymous series *fachsprachen*.

— Physiognomy of Language

While reading Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, I discovered a source that allowed me to explore the intensity of single words further: Heinz Werner's *Grundfragen der Sprachphysiognomik* (*Basic Questions of Language Physiognomy)* from 1932. Werner was an Austrian-Jewish psychologist who conducted a series of experiments. Participants were asked to describe their experiences with words presented to them on paper cards, in projected form or acoustically. Werner instructed them to focus on the physiognomic and bodily sensations evoked by individual letters, words and sentences. The participants then protocolled their experiences themselves. Werner writes:

> If we show specific words to an appropriate test person (printed on little cards) or acoustically, we will find, that these words have a more optical for some and for others a more acoustical face, that they carry the meaning of the word in eye-obvious or ear-obvious form in them.

What attracted me to Werner's physiognomic approach was that he conceived the linguistic entity as a sensory object and that he developed a scientific practice of sensing words. According to Werner, the experience of the word (*Worterlebnis*) has to be understood within a synesthetic semantics that grasps the materiality and corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*) of a sign. For the psychologist, language was both an object of scientific research and an affective object that allowed for an unprejudiced perception and poetic experience. This resonates with my own approach and re-sensings. At the end of his book, Werner comes to the conclusion that the experiments "have shown that something like a word-feeling exists […] It is part of the poly-and synthetic character of language that the linguistic meaning is almost always incarnated and that a word only reaches its full and deepest physiognomy through its specification in the motorical, acoustic and optical circle of the image."

Meaning for Werner had to be understood within a "process of word formation" that occurs when the subjective experience and objective concreteness, word image and corporeal state, converge. Heinz Werner did not discuss or analyze further where the word associations of his participants actually originated: in the material itself or its meaning. This has been criticized from a scientific point of view. It was precisely this ambiguity that attracted me.

In 2019 I wrote a first script for a lecture performance called "Jens". (Later in the novel, it became the chapter *Song of Praise*.) In this script the proper name and the person "Jens" are deliberately being confused. There is a seminal passage that I borrowed directly from Werner's protocols.[60] His physiognomic method became part of the protocol of a date.

60 "'Rot [red]', says a test person, 'has its centre in the *o*. The whole word has a rotating dynamic; its centre is the *o*. The o, in a way, is the funnel of a crater, which sucks in the rotating movement and therefore tends to deepen spatially. The suction power of the environment is concentrated here.'" Werner: p. 87.

60 PREISLIED

—Fühl Dich wohl geleckt.

Er soll sofort aufhören.
Das ist ihre Beschreibung.

Später wird sie zugeben, dass ihr Jens
einen Tick zu hot geraten ist.

BESCHREIBUNG 2

—Sag mal Rot.

—Rot.

—Nein, kleingeschrieben.

—rot.

rot hat sein Zentrum im o, eine rotierende Dynamik, deren Mittelpunkt das o ist. o ist gewissermaßen der Trichter eines Kraters, der die kreisende Bewegung in sich saugt und drum dahin tendiert, sich räumlich zu vertiefen. In ihm ist die Saugkraft für die Umgebung konzentriert.

o schert sich nicht weiter darum, ob Jens noch da ist. Es rotiert, kreist, saugt in unvermeidlichen Spiralen auf sein Zentrum zu, es liegt auf der Zunge und in der Hand, wie es sich weitet, steht oder fällt, entgegenkommt, o bäumt sich auf, und fliebt dann über, mitten heraus, o, yours truly, O.

Über eine Stunde ist vergangen. Jens ist eingeschlafen.

Sehr, Song of Praise

— Excerpting

The act of ex-cerpting, from Latin *excerpere*, denotes "cobbing", "picking out", "to abstract something", and goes back to the Latin verb *carpere*: "picking, pinching, selecting". I like to "pinch" sentences as such from theoretical texts, abstract them or turn them into something very concrete. Excerpting is a metabolic activity, a physical form of writing-reading that is usually practiced to fully understand another text and reproduce its essence. As the language material has gone through different states of matter, from a printed text to a handwritten text to a digital text, it has literally passed through the writer, moved neurons and other parts of their body. Excerpting, the simple copying of a text, can in this sense be understood as a re-enactment of another writer's move. A way of making a thought liquid again, of thinking it from scratch by rewriting and recomposing it. Yet the gleaner of language may pick the cherries just for the sake of their color. For *Kay, or a Case* I have experimented with different forms of excerpts and excerpting. Most of them started from a basic procedure consisting of the following micro-activities:

– Reading: Usually with a pencil in my hand.
– Underlining, marking according to a notation system of my own: circles for proper names, squares for concepts, wavy lines for passages that I do not understand, straight lines for relevant passages, C° for notes to myself, usually at the bottom of the page.
– Re-titling: I add my own titles at the top of the page.
– Transcription of the underlined parts by hand into a notebook or into a digital file, either by typing or using speech recognition software.
– Addition of commentaries: Underneath in italics.
– Incerpting or borrowing a sentence: Selecting sentences or passages of the text to become a structural environment for my own thought. The incerpt must not be confused with plagiarism; rather, it can be compared to midwifing. To borrow someone's sentence as a structure to support an as yet unborn idea. In the participatory performance *Questionology* (with Charlotta Ruth) I have used this strategy to invite others to think and write with one another.

Semifictionality

I adopted the term "semifictional" a decade ago to describe my practice of inventing institutions and characters. I have experimented with presenting and performing those entities in public space as well as in academic contexts and artist books. Fictional scientists such as J.C. Duenkel allowed me, among other things, to speculate on alternative histories and methods in linguistics, archaeology or seismology. Discussing Hélène Cixous's "semi-fictions" Mairéad Hanrahan writes in her introduction:

> Only in a writing that is, in a practice of language that dares to venture outside pre-existent categories, that doesn't feel the need to enclose what it names in the confines of the already-known, to translate what it names into terms it already recognizes – can the 'semi-' find its place, find a place.[61]

61 Hanrahan: p. 3.

This resonates with my understanding of semifictionality as a practice rather than a classification. The "semi-" does not designate a fixed proportion of fact and invention. It allows me to work with positions that do not fully coincide: the person undergoing an experience, the character taking shape through it, and the writer observing and composing. These positions can overlap without becoming interchangeable.

In *Kay, or a Case*, fiction enters the experience before it becomes material for a literary text. I write and act in ways that invite encounters and allow me to try out different versions of myself. Within a situation, I attempt to remain involved while also considering it as fiction: something that could be perceived, enacted or written otherwise. This partial distance is neither constant nor secure. I can shape the conditions of an encounter without determining what will happen or how it will affect me.

In lecture performance, this movement between positions becomes available to an audience. I am physically present, read as a woman, an author or a researcher. I work with what people can see, what they know about me and what I claim. Changes in voice, bodily orientation and modes of address allow me to shift between speaking as a character and speaking about her. The tension between these positions becomes a material of the performance.[62] This practice has affinities with what Carrie Lambert-Beatty calls "parafiction": fabrications that enter lived situations and are, for a time, experienced as fact.[63] My emphasis also falls on what happens when I know that something is invented and nevertheless become involved in it. How can a fiction that I have helped to create affect me? How does it alter what I can say, feel or do? Semifictionality allows me to work with this tension between making something up and undergoing its effects.

The following sections trace these movements through dating and fictocritical writing: from composing a position within an encounter to changing the position from which a text can be written, performed and interpreted.

62 The work of The Atlas Group, The Yes Men and other artists who have strategically operated at the borders of what could be true influenced my development of the fictional corporate identity BCNova!. See also http://bcnova.org/

63 Lambert-Beatty: pp. 51-84.

— Dating

> *Over the course of four years I have dated 55 men between 21 and 55 years of age. I have fallen in love with 33, I have almost loved 23, I was walking hand-in-hand with two men. I had sex in 45 different positions with 54 men, I have been pregnant 9 times and had to abort 8 times.*[64]

In *Kay, or a Case* I practice dating as semifiction. In the introduction to her book *Feeling and Form* Susanne K. Langer writes: "The affliction of literature is its relation to fact, propositional truth; (…) I have battled against all these bogeys as best I could; (…)." It would be futile to try to identify where Kay begins and where Cordula Daus ends. The much more interesting question is: What differentiates the practice of a writer doing field research from the practice of an artistic researcher? In both cases, life is being used for the sake of art. For me, the difference lies in explicitly reflecting on one's method and approach, as I do in this reflexive documentation. My practice has affinities with autotheory in its interplay of lived experience and theoretical reflection.[65] Here, I use "semifiction" to describe how invention enters the encounters themselves and shapes the positions from which I experience and write. In the following I will briefly map out some aspects of the semifictional that I have encountered in the context of online/offline dating:

Pseudonyms

In the field I used different names, never my own name. I did not use the name Kay. The disclosure of one's real, proper name is a crucial moment when meeting someone through a dating platform. Mostly this happens soon after a "match", in the first chat or later. It is interesting to consider this moment (of revelation) in relation to the degree of trust or to the type of relationship desired. Usually, when both people reconfirm their interest, this is accompanied by the exchange of the real names, telephone numbers, etc. Sometimes this might only happen after meeting in person. Disclosing one's identity, making oneself more real, comes at a price: You become googleable, traceable, attached to a biography that is available online, a profession, and so on. In a few cases I chose to stick to my pseudonym even after several meetings. The pseudonym became so natural to me, that after a while it did not even feel like lying when the other person referred to me by that name.

Chatting, texting, sexting

Online dating already involves forms of self-invention and shared imagining. Facts (age/height/weight) are tweaked here and there. Sexting does not care for facts as it is driven by desire. Chatting while being horny is a form of writing with-out someone. Dating mainly served as a source of energy for me to write *Sehr*. Rather than following a specific script, I moved from one process into another, in and out of situations, working and living with texts. Often, I did not know where those texts would lead or what to do with them. I created hundreds of documents, emails to myself, notes distilled from chats, dialogues, theoretical texts and pure spinning.

64 Daus: Statistical note, unpublished.

65 Maggie Nelson explicitly relates her use of "autotheory" for *The Argonauts* to Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie*. Lauren Fournier's *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (2021) discusses both Nelson's *The Argonauts* and Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* within a broader account of feminist artistic practice.

When I started to go into the "heterosexual field" in 2017, I had already been initiated – I knew how to play the game. I knew the basic rules or lack of rules online, and I had come to invent my own online etiquette. I knew about the drastic divide between self-presentation and encounters in person (online portraits might be ten years old or more); about the timing of a first contact, the degrees of interest and of allowing access (messaging, exchanging photos, disclosing the real name); I knew exactly how ghosting, gaslighting, fading out, not showing-up, and all other forms of "exiting" can make me feel. I had learned the vocabulary and acronyms for different sexual preferences, identities, and so on. In dating one fabricates versions of oneself. Those selves enter into a game with others. For *Kay or a Case* I practiced online dating as an adventure. I used it to quickly get into contact with people I had chosen or who had chosen me. I experienced dating as an actual heterosexual role-playing game. There are a variety of cultural and gendered scripts at play: introductions, choice of meeting place, conversational patterns, patterns of behavior. And there is a more or less gendered script for what a person should feel, or how these feelings should be expressed.

This is why dating becomes an interesting site for artistic intervention. For *Kay, or a Case* I set out to observe the digital codes d'amour, to disrupt and intervene in them. I moved out of my own comfort zone and tried out different positionalities. I met people with special profiles and not so special profiles. I performed against the stereotype of the love-seeking heterosexual woman to explore whether I was merely copying "male strategies" or could come up with something else. For example, I used this sentence in my Tinder account:

Only one-night stands, please. Thank you.

The early Kay still had supernatural powers similar to those of Wonder Woman. Over time, I realized that I could not really write her. If we role-play gendered conventions, it makes sense to re-engineer those scripts. It becomes futile to determine what came first: the literary writing, the imagination, or the sexting. What mattered to me was to follow and experiment with what can only be done in text. See *On Higher Love.*

— Fictocriticism

Attributing the novel *Sehr* to Kay allowed me to withdraw from the position of the author and to look at Kay from a different angle. As the title of my thesis suggests, Kay is approached as a case, a vessel for intensity ("woman", "womb") and as a specific case, a story of intensity. Kay's intensity is characterized by a specific relation to time and mortality. Here again the double move of speaking as a character and about her allows me to grasp intensity as a specific historical product: an intensity that is still bound to biological reproduction.

Initially I had planned to publish a whole journal to look at Kay and her oeuvre *Sehr* from the future. he journal is a medium that I have used for over a decade. In hindsight, I have come to understand my work with fictional characters and my appropriation

of genres in relation to "fictocriticism" or "ficto/critical writing". The writers Chris Kraus and Mark von Schlegell have used the term to describe something they share in their works: "Our novels are very informed, in different ways, by research and concerns beyond the scope of 'character' and 'plot'."[66] Fictocritical writing brings other discourses into play within a text. One example of this strategy is the use of paratexts that recursively relate to other texts, as the conversation *On Higher Love* to the eighth' episode in *Sehr*. According to Gerrit Haas, fictocriticisim can be defined as a "peculiar textual conduct which inextricably intersects fictional with critical discourses as well as aesthetics with poetics and ethics."[67]

Writing as Research

Form and content, intent and intensity cannot be separated. The researcher is often not conscious of the direction of their writing. The writer gets tempted by the material. They cannot help but write with and through specific forms (pronouns, prepositions, and so on). They become a medium of what wants to be written and vice versa. Writing as research and writing in the field of artistic research take this reciprocity into account. In his essay *Phantom als Methode und vice versa* (*Phantom as a method and vice versa*), Ferdinand Schmatz states:

> While writing I imagine a form" [or: "I have a form in my head"] "which corresponds to the respective content or that has emerged during the writing. Although I'm convinced that I write according to rules or norms, it also writes in me: The method is a phantom and the phantom is the method. The transfer from contents into the material form of language is a reciprocal process. In language we do not have atoms like in physics or molecules like in chemistry, but we have letters. When I see letters, I see content that also can be totally surprising. I read the letters LEBEN (life) in the sense of an everyday and banal term, but all of a sudden, I see a palindrome or an anagram and I read NEBEL (fog).

The text is never finished and it can always be read differently. Wherever the text leads, it "must not forget its nature as language, and it is this which ultimately makes an encounter with writing inevitable."[68]

— Meaning

Generally, my works explore how meaning is made – literally, where and how meaning takes place (in a name, or in a body, for instance). Further, I set out to explore how to shake the mechanism and structures of meaning making through re-writing, vocalising, and other language practices. My take on "meaning" is strategically confusing. My writings have been influenced by phenomenological practices and a "literary primitivism" (see Heinz Werner) that emphasizes the unity between the signifier

66 Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* and Monika Rinck's *Ah, das Love Ding!* have been major literary influences for my work. https://obieg.pl/en/125-beyond-fictocriticism

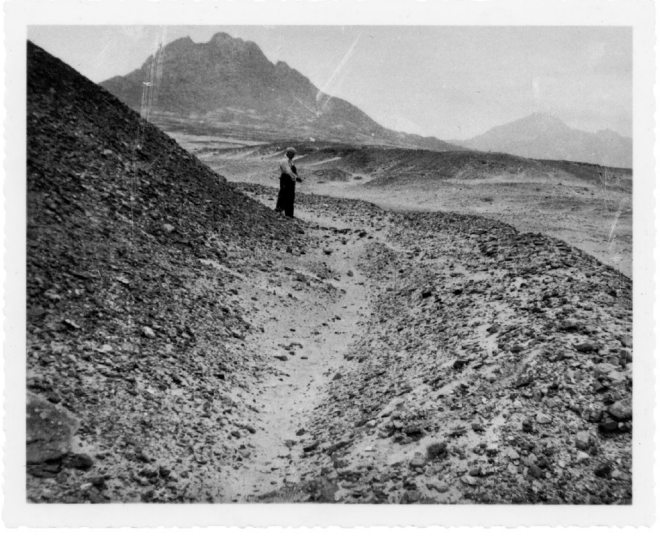
67 Haas: back cover.

68 Barthes (1986, p. 316), quoted in van Manen: p. 364.

and the signified. I align myself with a semantic holism that considers the meaning of a sentence to be understandable only when the context of a whole language and the performative context of a speech act are taken into consideration. Sense is not produced through the relation to an object outside of language but emerges through the relations among linguistic elements and their expressionist charge. The philosopher of art Susanne K. Langer has analyzed the relation between feeling and form in music, literature, film, and other arts. According to her definition: "Art is the creation of symbolic forms of human feeling."[69] In order to grasp this feeling, to elicit some knowledge from it, we must look at the symbolic forms, the specific structure of art. I search for moments of intensity in the context of a discursive game with terms, rather than primarily through their representational function. And it is in this sense that I seek to trigger tensions that occur in the making of meaning, to render visible how and where meaning surfaces.

— Re-sensing

The concept of re-sensing (EntSinnung) first came to me during my research for the publication series *Toponymisches Heft*. The fictional linguist J.C. Duenkel practices re-sensing as a decolonial cure. He speaks in and to the landscape to get rid of unwanted memories attached to specific place names. Feeling his way into ("sich einfühlen") a specific place or object allows him to access a state of openness where new meanings can surface.



"P – abysses of a consonant." J.C. Duenkel in Peru. Toponymisches Heft Nr. 2, p. 72.

In German *sich entsinnen* means "to remember". The prefix *ent-* of this reflexive verb cannot be directly translated into English but shares some qualities of the prefixes *de-*, *re-*, or *dis-*.[70] In my use of *Entsinnung, ent-* removes sense (*Sinn*) and gives new sense at the same time. I have for a long time felt attracted to the dialectics of ent-. My master's thesis plays with the double sense of the term "Ent-fernung" (dis-tance).

69 Langer: p. 40.

70 I'm tempted to think of prefixes like antechambers. They generate a 'Stimmung', a word atmosphere, generating an anticipation of what might happen: Delusion. Decreation. Recreation. Disentanglement. Entartung, Entfernung, Entgleisung. Entsinnung.

In daily life, re-sensing might just happen by chance. Suddenly a word or term appears different; one hears a nuance that one has not perceived before, and this may bring a completely new understanding. Curiously, I had such an epiphany with the word "understanding" itself.[71] An unheard or unseen aspect surfaced in the word-Gestalt, inducing an epistemological shift. [72]

Re-sensing allows one simultaneously to recall and let go of meaning within language. The concept has mutated and shapeshifted in my work. It has developed from the character J.C. Duenkel's decolonial ritual of forgetting turned into a performative vocal practice. Since 2019 I have practiced *re-sensings* of single words ("gap", "understanding", "Jens", "womb", "lieben") during my lecture performances. The procedure is simple: One starts off by saying a word out loud and then repeats it over and over again. The word morphs into something else; the boundaries between the before and after get blurry. The repetition of this speech act or word-action allows one to explore the word's form and to forget even, if it is only for a while, its assigned meaning. What is gained then is an "open feeling", to borrow Gertrude Stein's phrase.[73] As Filippo Romanello puts it, "one can achieve difference precisely by remaining receptive to the possible effects emerging throughout the repetitive act."[74] Re-sensing can be used as a critical spatial practice, at a particular site, or in daily life whenever one feels annoyed or threatened by a word/concept. I very much recommend it as a personal ritual as well as a means of inventing new words.[75]

Lecture Performance

I usually use the sober term "lecture" or "Vortrag" to announce my lecture performances. This choice is related to how I have myself became an artist-performer as well as to my practice of over/understating what is expected to come. For over two decades I have been fascinated by speech as a genre: I have studied political speeches, mundane speeches during family festivities and historical speeches such as those given during the Spanish colonization of the Americas. The academic lecture as "expert speech" has long served as a conceptual framework for my work and performative attitude. As exemplified in the video *Intensity in Language,* the setup is minimal and non-theatrical – there is neither an overt costume nor a stage. I often assume the somewhat aloof attitude of an academic researcher who is on top of her material, then seamlessly introduce moments of doubt, glitches in positionality. People have often told me that they wondered *who* was speaking. I seek this ambiguity, this inconsistency of identity, and I have made use of it as a tension, an intensity of its own.
My lecture performances draw on my initial training in cultural theory (Kulturwissenschaft). They often foreground the capsules and forms knowledge comes in by

71 See also re-sensing in Cocker, Daus, and Séraphin: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/618624/621036/588/136

72 This touches upon what Wittgenstein has called "aspect change" and "aspect seeing"; on how meaning is experienced. In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein also elaborates on the relation between tone and meaning in reading. The artist and researcher Tine Melzer has published on this topic and initiated a Symposium on Aspect Change. See Melzer: pp. 145-158.

73 Stein: *The Making of Americans*, https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks16/1600671h.html.

74 Romanello: p.1.

75 Cordula Daus on re-sensing in https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/618624/621036/588/136

appropriating academic gestures and the inbred flavor of my invented institutions.[76]

During a research trip in the summer of 2008, I witnessed a linguist giving a lecture at the University of Seville. While showing a map of the Iberian Peninsula, he spoke on morphological changes in Spanish toponyms of Arabic origin. I could barely understand what he was talking about, yet it was precisely the (semantic) non-understanding that I enjoyed the most. This non-understanding, at least in my ears, converted his specialist knowledge into poetry. I have tried to emulate this spirit in my own lectures – to exhaust the serious work of meaning-making, to over- or underdo the work of interpretation. Footnotes, images of artefacts and other references to invented authors and quotations appear as seminal elements within my presentations/readings. The modes of speaking, saying, reading and quoting seamlessly merge into singing, showing, into semi-fictional characters and worlds.[77]

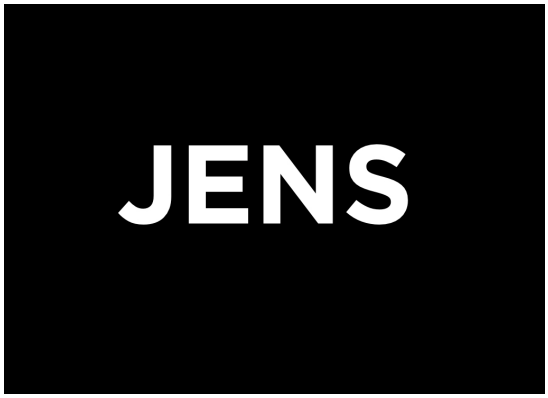
In *Kay, or a Case*, for the first time, I did not start with a finished book. Instead, the lecture performance became a translational research practice for me, a way of finding and embodying different voices. I started to write with/for an audience. While writing, I probed sentences with a microphone. Using live voice filters helped me to hear myself as someone else and thus to hear my own texts "from outside". The voice effects began to feed back into and affect the written text.

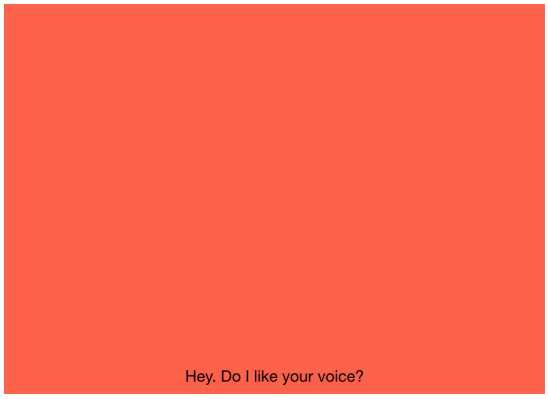
Over the last years I have learned to develop lectures through rehearsal. Charlotta Ruth and I have been each other's "outside eyes" and supported each other in this process. The challenge is to rehearse while remaining open to what happens in the moment. To allow things to go wrong.

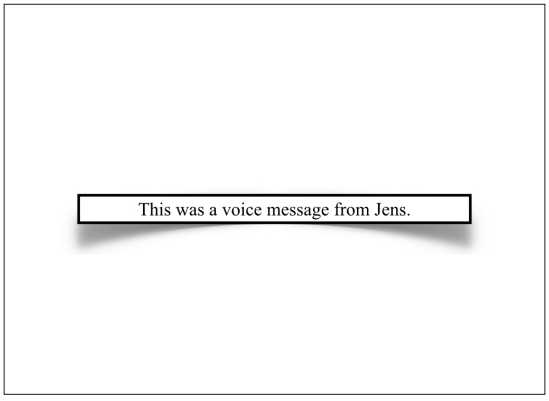
In *Kay, or a Case*, the script for a lecture becomes part of the novel and vice versa. The lecture *Jens* (2019) offers an example of this movement between text, voice and image. A character takes shape through his name, a voice message and the description of his body. The following stills show how these elements were arranged across a sequence of slides.

76 An invitation by Ellen Blumenstein and Tanja Schomaker was seminal here. I gave my first live lecture performance within the series *Performing Books* at Salon Populaire/Berlin in November 2010. See also: https://www.salonpopulaire.de/

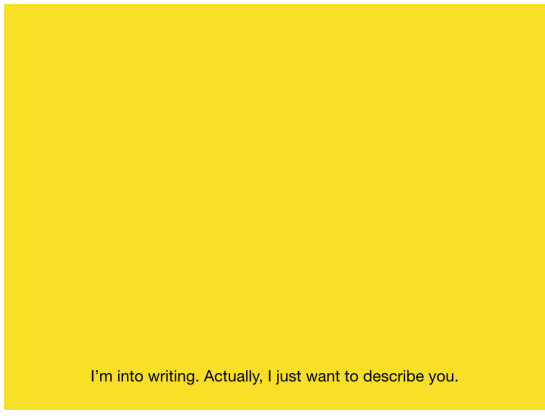
77 Over the last decades, I have followed the work of my friends in the Berlin-based performance collectives She She Pop and Gob Squad, as well as that of Christine Meisner, Jérôme Bel, Tim Etchells, Robert Ashley, Mark Leckey, Alessandro Bosetti, Simone Aughterlony, Erik Bünger, Erick Beltrán and Dan Graham, just to name a few of my favorites. On the history of the art form, see also Frank: "When Form Starts Talking: On Lecture-Performances", https://www.konstfack.se/PageFiles/17986/Afterall_When%20Form%20Starts%20Talking_%20On%20Lecture-Performances.pdf (accessed 15 November 2026).


JENS


Hey. Do I like your voice?

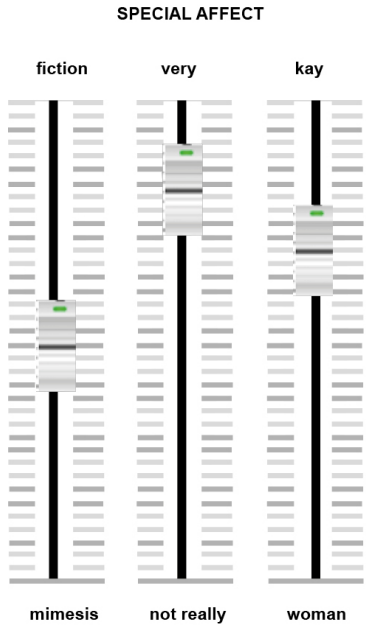

This was a voice message from Jens.

Jens lies on Kay's canapé playing a video
game. He wears a dark-blue hoody,
no trousers. Kay starts with his ankles,
his calves, the inside of his thighs.
She moves on to his forehead.
Continues to describe the bridge
of his nose.

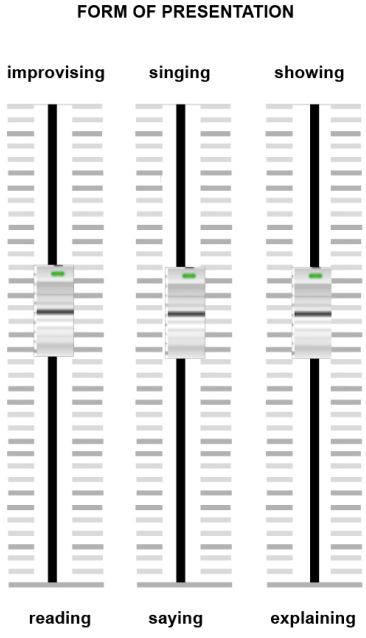


Stills from *Jens*, lecture, Angewandte, 28.5. 2019

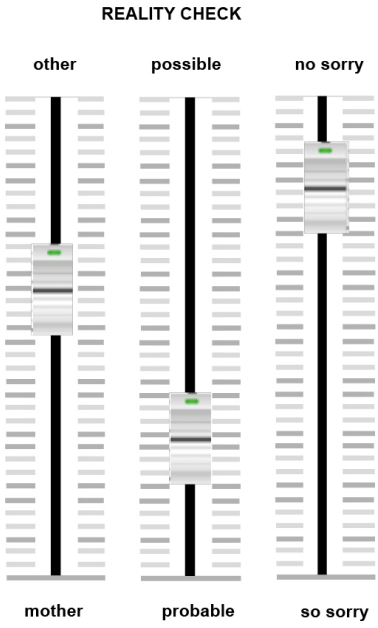
— Mixing



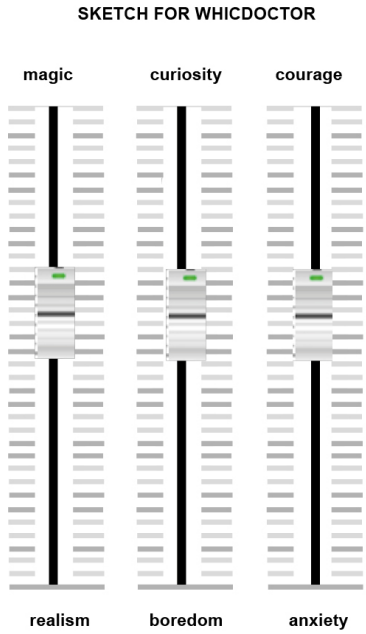
Some time ago, Charlotta Ruth recommended that I look at The Mixing Desk of LARP, which became an important inspiration (see *Appendix E*). I started to move from two-dimensional horizontal scales to three-dimensional vertical scales pertaining to the field of sound. Images and sketches of a mixing board turned into epistemic objects; the use of a real mixing board informed my vocal practice. In *Kay or a Case* I approach intensity as a fadable quality. Sentences and single words are being modulated, changed and mixed. The mixing desk and its faders are explored as a means of regaining control over intensity. Affects are treated like effects and vice versa.



I made many sketches of faders and used them in different contexts and situations. They helped me to think of feelings or specific states as variable parameters (e.g., Kay's fucking, loving, grieving) or to think of possible attitudes in relation to lecture performances.



The images became like mind maps. In parallel, I started to use an actual mixing board in lecture performances or in collaborative works. In the participatory performance *Questionology*, this experiment with adjustable intensities became something a visitor could try out.



Shortly after arrival, the visitor was asked to see "whichdoctor", a role that Charlotta Ruth and I developed in collaboration with the performer [M] Dudeck. They entered a tent-like structure protruding from the building, where whichdoctor appeared on a screen. In a casual conversation, whichdoctor asked the visitor to locate their current mood (e.g., "How are you on a curiosity level?"). This could be done by moving specific faders on the mixer. A sound was emitted that changed in pitch, melody, frequency (and other modalities that could be interpreted as intensity in sound) according to the position of the slider. As a next step, the visitor was encouraged to

self-manipulate this state/mood. Unlike in the sketch above, there were no words attached. The visitor was only guided through three questions from whichdoctor and the attribution between sound and meaning happened on a rather intuitive level. Together with our collaborator, Simon Repp, who was responsible for the programming and sound design, we worked with site-specific sounds. The visit to whichdoctor's resembled that a rite de passage that helped the visitor to enter the magical realism of the performance. Whichdoctor's basic function was to facilitate this transition, to check on the visitor's personal resistances and desires. In a final session, their journey was discussed, and whichdoctor issued a dream prescription to support the fabrication of a memory/story.

Questioning

Within *Questionology* (2019-ongoing),[78] an art project developed with Charlotta Ruth in parallel with my PhD, the act of questioning and the question as a grammatical form became material to play with, explore and perform.[79] In the following I will give different examples from our collaborative practice and my literary work that show how the question as a linguistic form and questioning as a gesture and situation relate to my inquiries into intensity.

— Borrowing a Question

A couple of years ago I found a sentence on a German Wikipedia page.[80] It immediately spoke to me, and ever since I have used it for my own writing and language-based artistic research. Working with the same sentence over a hundred times has provided deep insights into the functioning of language: What does a sentence do? What is the language system? What happens when meaning is transported from one word, image, or body to another? What happens when we delegate the process of making meaning?

How high must an elevation be to be called "hill"?

During the participatory performance *Questionology*, we invite the visitors to borrow this particular sentence to enter into a co-writing and co-thinking exercise. The goal is to fathom "a question of matter", a question that matters to oneself. The material that enters this question might have emerged earlier that day, or it could come from something that one has pondered for a some time.

78 The practice of naming would have deserved a chapter of its own. The sound of names, here, science and quiz show…

79 Dialogues, interviews and semifictional conversations had been an integral part of my art for a long time. Charlotta Ruth herself had worked with dialogical situations within the realm of instruction-based art, participatory performance and game art. In 2019 at the Research Pavilion #3 in Venice we initiated Questionology in the format of a live installation.

80 "Wie hoch muss eine Erhebung sein, um 'Berg' genannt zu werden?" Unfortunately, the article has been re-written meanwhile and I can't locate the original sentence anymore. See: Wikipedia, Berg, last visited on 28.2.2022

LEVEL 1
How high must a feeling be to be called "love"?
How wide must a feeling be to be called "love"?
How deep must a feeling be to be called "love"?
How often must a feeling be to be called "love"?
How long must a feeling be to be called "love"?

LEVEL 2
How long must a feeling be to be called "love"?
How must a loving be to call "feeling"?
How feels "longing" to call a love?

How called must love feel to "a"?
How feels musting a love call?
How must calling feel to "loving"?
How long must feeling "be" to call?
How must a "longing" be to love?
[...]
How "feel" be?
How be?

Example of how material is being incerpted into a sentence structure, then varied.

The procedure works as follows: Small groups of three or four are formed. The raw question material is written down. Whatever comes to mind is welcome. The next step consists in borrowing the ready-made question as a support structure for further thinking.

How _ _ _ _ _ _ _ must a/n_ _ _ _ _ _ _ be, to be called "_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _"?

The task now consists of fitting ("incerpting") the previously gathered raw material into the structure of this sample question. The first gap asks for an adjective, the second for a noun. The two gaps are interdependent. They ask for the intensity of a "howness". The last gap asks for another thing in quotation marks. The quotation marks are seminal here as they give each writer a kind of carte blanche in naming, "whateveryouwanttosay". Usually this is where a humorous element comes in. A new question is formed and written down. It is passed on to the co-writer on the right. The question makes three rounds in total before returning to the first writer. During each round the sentence is re-written and changes form. Each writer shapes the question in a way that seems most appropriate to them. New ideas are okay, but not needed. The co-writers may appropriate the given material, re-shuffle the order of verbs, turn verbs into nouns and vice versa. In the last step the question arrives to its original author. The participants are encouraged to respond to what others have made of their question and shape it once more according to their needs.

"Questions that matter" are often personal and private. While guiding this exercise as a performer I witnessed the most astonishing discussions between complete strangers. The moment when a question "came back" to its first authors after having circulated through two or three other minds, was usually experienced as rewarding. Some participants experienced it "like a gift". A large part of the exercise consisted of learning how to overcome one's perfectionism, how to unlearn the habit of outsmarting each other, how to co-think in a small collective thinking unit.

By delegating decisions to a system – here the structure of a readymade sentence – the participant no longer has sole control over the meaning that has been generated through this "automated" writing process. This can relieve the pressure to produce a perfect answer or solution and allow something unforeseen to emerge.

— Asking

The question's capacity to set something in motion also became apparent in my literary work. I explored how asking produces intensity between characters: how it sets the pace of an exchange, directs attention and desire, or sustains a relation in the absence of a response. Here is an excerpt from *Fourth Service*:

Rek: Where are you?
Kay: BERLIN. Walking.
Rek: I can't think of anything else in this moment.
Rek: Come back.
Kay: Wait. I need to focus.
Rek: Seriously. Let's sit down for ten minutes and focus.
Rek: Ten minutes, yes.
Rek: I'll make sure, I'm in private.
Kay: Are you at work?
Rek: I am.
Kay: Where are you?
Kay: What's your profession?
Rek: Music business. Like a consultant.
Kay: Consulting whom.
Kay: Record companies.
Rek: No, artist side.
Rek: What are you?
Kay: Not now.
Rek: I'm going to go down in the lockup.
Kay: What?
Rek: A storage unit that's part of our building.
Rek: I feel the blood.
Kay: No touching.

Rek and Kay check each other out. Add the sounds or effects of a mobile app: Each message linked to a tone, a vibration, or a flash. Depending on the writers' commitment and ability a duel like the one above might last a minute only. Text here works as a pacemaker. There is the intensity of frequency, of speed, and the intensity of

content. Questions can be direct, too direct or beat around the bush. They immediately set a tone. The software of the app might have fabricated the match – still, the actors need to come to a kind of deal with each other. Asking here negotiates the conditions of the encounter: where the characters are, whether they can give each other their attention, and what they will allow. Asking in the medium of a chat – as a message popping up on a screen, a sound, a vibration – involves a physical interaction with the device. It also means "to do time", to use one another.[81] To withstand or not to withstand the compulsion to answer right now can alter the pace of a whole day. The intensities of attention are being modulated across online and offline encounters. In the episode *Song of Praise*, asking becomes part of a face-to-face encounter in which Kay and Jens negotiate their roles against the backdrop of the traditional relationship between an artist and their model:

> —What are you into?
> —At the moment I'm totally into writing, Kay says.
> —I want to describe you. Nothing else.
> —Do I have to be present for that?
> —Yes.

Kay exercises the art of description in a manner comparable to nude drawing. Questions are used to prompt qualitative data from her object of desire:

> —What kind of eye color is this?
> —Greybrown.
> —Can you say that again?
> —Greybrown.

The repeated question does more than solicit information: Kay asks to hear the answer again. Kay gets hooked on Jens, the person in flesh, his voice. The act of asking-Jens, of writing-Jens generates an in-tension, a state of contemplation. Questioning here resembles a form of auto-affect. It is practiced as a form of fathoming and re-sensing the other.

Most interrogative sentences establish a relation even if there is none. Questions are directed. There is a call, a want. Someone, something is being convoked to respond. *What's the time?* (See also *Intensity in Language*). What if there is no response? Asking exposes the questioner to the possibility of being left unanswered. Once expressed, a question can be left alone, hovering in the air.

In the *Third Service*, Kay engages in a strange monologue with herself, speaking with-out the light technician Sef. She avoids asking him anything directly. Yet her address still invites a response:

> —Hey Sef, I see the green light. You're online again!
>
> —

81 See Vistrup Madsen: Doing Time: Essays on Using People.

—How beautiful is your silence!

— — —

—I'm attracted by the gap you have arranged between us.

The absence of a reply becomes part of the encounter. Kay continues to address Sef and, through this address, sustains a relation whose reciprocity remains uncertain.

Elsewhere in *Sehr*, asking brings the responding subject's own intention and consent into question. The gesture of questioning here acquires a more existential dimension — a state that touches upon what the philosopher Klaus Heinrich called *Ver-antwortung* (response-ability).[82]

> Dr Samstag appeared, Samstag, that was really his name. She asked if it was normal, she was so very. Dr Samstag asked if she consented. And Kay nodded, shook her head. What should he say. Kay walked across the floor in her socks, you can leave them on, and lay down. Kay wished she wasn't there. The anesthetist had a name, Maria or something. She stroked her arm. A "Schnapps" for the nausea, don't you worry. Dora thought of. A last scrap of intention contorted her face, then she/it was gone, quite gone, just as desired.

Kay's response to the question of consent splits between nodding and shaking her head. The passage offers no single, settled intention behind these gestures; it ends with the disappearance of the "last scrap of intention" and the shift from "she" to "she/it". Being called upon to respond does not guarantee a coherent self from which an answer can come. Questions allow one to speak with-out the other, with-out oneself, with language (to borrow a preposition from Alenka Zupančič). In and through questioning one establishes a connection with a voice, with oneself – at the same time one is fabricating this connection, this self.

82 "Expressions like 'to put something' or 'someone' into question actually hold the whole existence of the person concerned in suspension. […] After all, it will not be a coincidence that answering, which is so closely related to questions, refers to one or perhaps the central concept of ethics—'response-ability' [Ver-antwortung]. Although we cannot yet draw any explicit conclusions from these signs, they nevertheless indicate that questioning and the question have a certain ontological significance." Heinrich: p. 99. My translation.

On Higher Love (L)

Cordula Daus in Conversation with [M] Dudeck

Cordula Daus: I'm very happy that you accepted my invitation to engage in a close reading of a book which sparked controversy when it came out in the early 2020s: Kay's *Sehr*. I'd like to talk about a specific chapter with you, the "8th service". It has sparked my interest as it describes a very peculiar idea of love.

For all those who haven't read the book, I'll give a short summary. The *Eighth Service* tells the lightning love story between the protagonist Kay and a man-like creature called Nyam. Kay and Nyam meet at a public swimming pool in Berlin. A few days later, they marry. The ceremony is conducted by La Mago, a character that, as far as we know, has been inspired by you. You're an artist and witch doctor and knew the author personally, didn't you?

[M] Dudeck: Yes, Kay was a close friend of my husband and me.

C I was wondering about the groom. In the introduction we learn that Nyam's face is made of foam. How should we picture this "man"? Is he a mere puppet or a human at all?

[M] To be precise, the German text says: "Fresse aus Schaumstoff, Augen so schwarz wie keine Kohle". So foamed material meets coal, metaphor meets matter. I personally do not think Nyam is a puppet, nor a cyborg. He is a being made of flesh, material and letters.

C In the courting scene on the lawn, Nyam reveals a sudden athleticism which makes him attractive to Kay: He does a capoeira-style handstand and spontaneously carries her child on his back. Kay decides to marry him almost instantly. The crucial passage reads: "Kay is determined that Nyam will take her to the next level without passing the falling-in-love- field: higher love!" What is meant by higher love?

[M] That's a complex question and we need to look at the novel as a whole to approach it. Kay developed a linguistic metric and erotic style of her own. The term higher love stands in relation to meaning lesser sex. Our protagonist has literally fucked herself to a heightened state of consciousness. She realizes that things do not work out with heterosexual men – and that, in a Lacanian sense, there is no relation – not even a so-called casual relation. The solution Kay comes up with is to marry someone outside of the human species. But to get there, she needs the help of La Mago, the witch doctor.

C Grammatically speaking, we're dealing with a progression towards the superlative: love – higher love – highest love. Still, it is unclear to me what is being compared to what.

[M] This has been a problem for me before and remains one to this day. It aligns with my distaste for New Age plastic notions of a "higher self" which descend from Freud's notion of the Superego (which itself descends from Jewish principles of abstract monotheism).The notion of "higher" in certain spiritual traditions evokes a subtle plane imagined as free of sediment and unpolluted by base desire, the bodily, or the abject (Kristeva). This Higher Plane within the Abrahamic religions is typically performed by the androgynous angels – who lack bodies of flesh and are instead made of light, merging male and female in heavenly ether. I don't think Kay was after this kind of dematerialization. She had no desire to ascend to Mount High and disintegrate. Rather, I felt that she longed for a liaison – part flesh, part fiction – a liaison, or an interdimensional consort.

C Why does Kay immediately upgrade the courting ritual to permanence? Why do you think she wants to marry at all?

[M] The story confronts us with a strange inversion of the culturally prescribed chronology of feelings. The love confession, expected to occur in an intimate setting before the marriage, is performed publicly at the center of the wedding ritual. As readers, we witness the production of love through its vocalization. We argue that Kay's realization that Nyam is fabricated aligns with the earlier signals that what she has been seeking all of this time is the hybrid – a being that is only partially sentient – and she wants not only to merge, but to build and grow and form an institution.

C If we look at the first edition of the book, "I love you" is written in superscript. How must we imagine the sound of this sentence?

[M] To grasp the full meaning, I suggest we read the scene out loud together.

LA MAGO
love
a small word unable to hold
while we stretch at its meaning
after all, l o v i n g means
to do this stretching together.
Please repeat: I love you.

KAY/ NYAM
I love you.

Kay sagt es gleich nochmal, um es sich einzuprägen.

KAY
I love you.
Sie kann das aussprechen! Und zwar genauso. Es ist ihr erstes Mal.

LA MAGO
Beautiful. Don't forget to work out every day.

[M] As you just heard, "I love you" is being repeated, and sung – not only spoken. The musicality can be understood as a form of artifice seeping into the ritual. From another point of view, it is a simple mimicry of the way I used to say and still say "I love you" to my husband. The question is still why Kay has to learn to say "I love you".

C To be honest, I can totally identify with her. Only very seldom have I said "Ich liebe Dich" to a lover or partner. There is no way I can own this sentence. But putting my own psychological disablement aside – I think there is also a cultural dimension to that constraint. It seems to me as if the German language imposed a higher pressure of truth on the native Ich-liebe-Dich-Sayer. Deutsch seems to suggest: "Say it like you mean it, or shut the fuck up!"(O) But how does it sound when we really mean something? And – more importantly – could we get into loving just by saying "it"? Loving and the will to believe seem to be very much connected.

[M] Can we believe in something that we have invented, fabricated ourselves? This is one of my fundamental questions. A short answer is: of course. Do you believe in Justice? Do you believe in Morality? Do you believe in Love? Most of the things humans believe in are fabrications or constructions. But going deeper – the question of whether a person can believe in an overt fabrication, a fiction that is glaringly obvious, is far more interesting and theological. Belief is a matter of projection. When one goes to see a healer who does a ritual of transformation, it is not the healer

who heals you; it is your belief projected onto that healer that enables you to heal yourself. The placebo effect is the essence of Religion. Higher love, in Kay's sense, might be about restoring the belief in one's capacity to create one's own reality.

C 32 years ago you began to create your own religion. That was at the same time you came out as a witch doctor, right?

[M] Yes, exactly. I have always preferred the notion of making Magick over Prayer. Prayer is passive whereas Magick is assertion. In prayer, one humbly asks for things to happen as one wishes them to; in Magick one decides that what one seeks is already happening. "Abracadabra" is often interpreted as "I create as I speak", although its origins are uncertain. For me, it expresses precisely this: I say it and therefore it is.

C If I wanted to marry tomorrow – how would we go about it?

[M] In my Religion as Art, literally everything in one's life must be created by oneself, or collaboratively in terms of collective living. This means that the holiest person is one who has created their own home and clothing, has grown, spiced and cooked their own meals, designed their own languages, created their own religious frameworks, their own rituals, their own codes and constructs. Therefore, if we wanted to get married tomorrow, we would have to build our house, build the temple for our marriage, draw the invitations(V), design robes for all the guests, choreograph the ritual, make blueprints for our love-temple and design our intentions together.

C There is so much left to talk about(E), yet I'm afraid we've already hit the bottom of this page.

M Abarakadabara.

(L) This text has been generated through a series of recorded and live conversations with the artist [M] Dudeck. I asked [M] to comment on an episode of my novel that I translated for him into English. We exchanged several audio messages after that which I used as material to script a semifictional conversation. Our dialogue is set in the year 2040, two years after Kay's death. [M] acts as an expert on the text (and former friend of the fictional author) whilst I, the actual author, embody the role of an interviewer and editor. This role play enabled me to step out of my role as the author of *Sehr*, to re-contextualize and interpret the novel. Other language-based artistic researchers have worked similarly – just to mention a few colleagues and their respective approaches: Emma Cocker ("conversation-as-material"); Goda Palekaité ("co-writing with the historical other"), Rosie Heinrich ("writing through other people's voices"), Nirav Christoph ("polyphonic creative writing").

(O) Erik Bünger: It seems to you that in German there is a tighter relationship between the words and the feeling. Almost as if there existed an injunction against saying this unless you feel it first. The English phrase “I love you” appears to work precisely the other way around in your text. First comes the phrase, then comes the feeling. For Kay to be able to feel love she is advised to repeat the phrase “I love you” again and again. A little bit like Luther telling people to kneel and pray and belief will come. (...) So a possible answer to the question “Can we believe in something that we have fabricated ourselves?” might be: “Yes, we are doing this all the time. As soon as we stop doing it, we are screwed.”

(V) View: For the Public Colloquium of the PhD program, I recorded a video documentation in which [M] and I rehearse this interview, trying out statements, fabulating together. I then continued to work on the script. A first version of the text has been published originally in Research Envelope #4 by Zentrum Fokus Forschung. I have only made a few adaptations to it.

(E) About strawberries and entheogens, for example.

Research Diary

At the beginning of my PhD I started a private blog which also included a research diary. My idea was to use it to collect excerpts from books and films, as well as to document my research experience. Basically, I wanted to establish a place to which I could come back whenever I lost the thread. Also, the blog provided a first "audience" for my texts. I shared it only with my "dramaturgical advisor", Daniela Plügge (in the following abbreviated as dp) and with my supervisor, Ferdinand Schmatz (fs). The following fragments are taken from the research diary section of this blog. Disclaimer: To make this section more readable to future researchers, I have added titles, key words and some retroactive comments in italics. Editing a diary is a tricky endeavor. The researcher is tempted to autocorrect herself, to make herself appear smarter than she was at a given moment. I tried to resist that temptation.

2017

8.9.17 **Missing place**

The subject is so wide! The fear that this is leading where I don't want to go: into myself. I need a *place* from which I can write from. *beginnings*

My previous works had a clear framework; a geographical place; a discipline (toponymy, linguistics, archeology, seismology). And now? *positionality*

11.9.17 **A novel in body form**

I wish to write a 'novel.' A novel that evades the tyranny of the plot, the melodrama.

Addendum, 17:35

dp asks me how the body of the author relates to the character. I say the author places herself at disposal. My aim is to rehabilitate the body as measure of intensity, to develop a differentiated language. *theory fiction*

Right now the novel seems to grow into the science, the science into the novel.

Could body parts be connected to specific knowledges?

The tongue – Freudian analysis

The skin – Literature

The heart – Seismology

The womb – Feminism

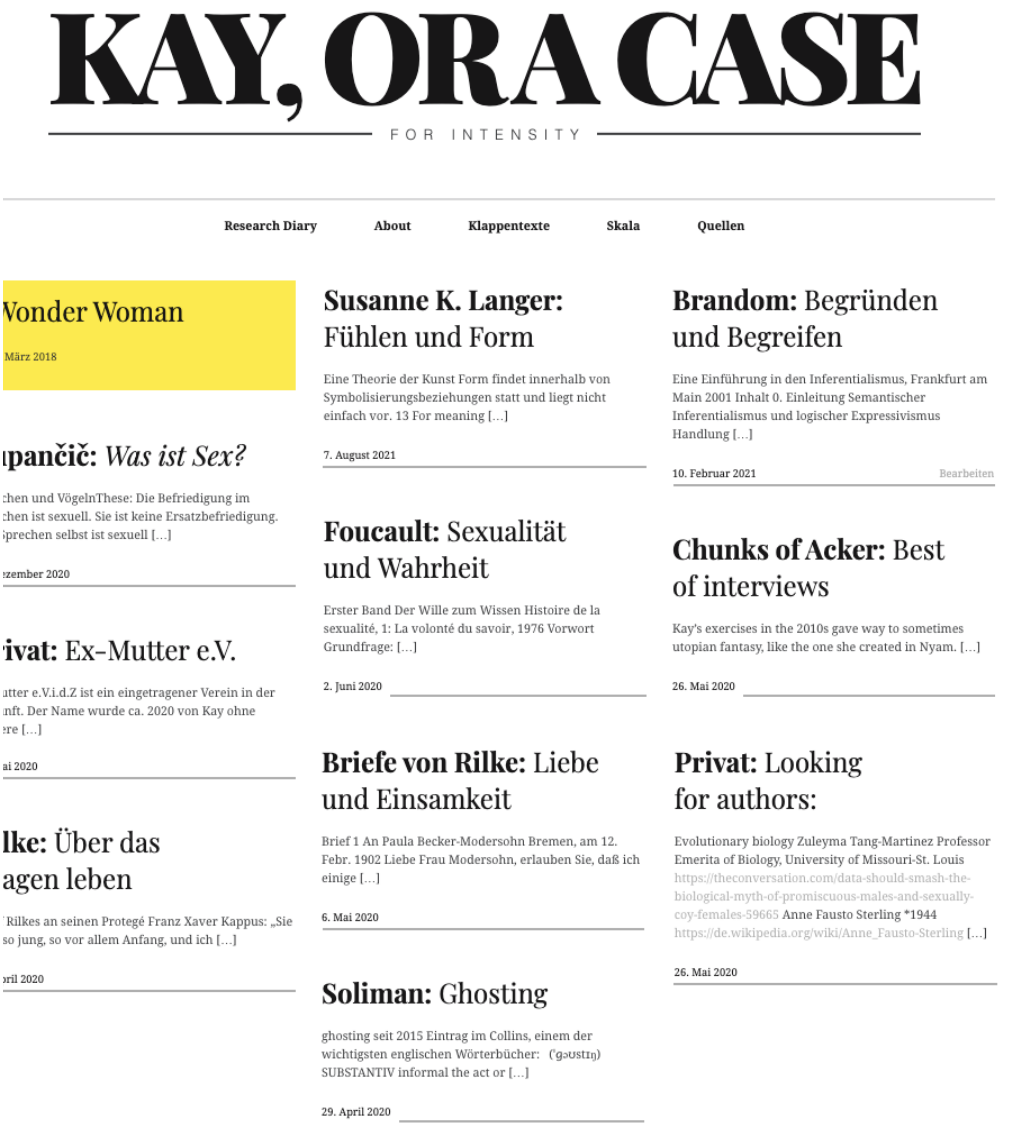
The knee – Movement

2.10.17 **A general feeling studies**

I'm writing towards a general feeling studies. Like a seismologist or meteorologist. Each feeling is based on an event. There is no evaluation, no judgment. *grammar of feeling*

It rains.

What rains? "Was this where the name of a God used to be?" (Blumenberg) Using the impersonal. Re-engineering the existing scales of feeling. Den Lust- und Leidfaden der Figur erschreiben.



Screenshot of private blog, including the research diary

3.10.17 **Exercises in relaxation**

I started an experiment that I call ‘writing without focus’ which I carry out for one hour per day. Reduce the production pressure. Reduce the intensity of intention. *writing*

Academic and research-based projects are often overdetermined. It takes time to free oneself from a project description, an initial intention as expressed in an application or the like.

This experiment runs parallel to the research and self-experiment in the field of online dating. *parallelity*

17.10.17 **Expanded History**

The conceptual history of intensity can be found in dictionaries. Coup: cd develops a new history of the concept departing from her own sources, conducts a search for new sources. She loves to excerpt and takes off in between. *excerpting*

A conversation under the influence of Luce Irigaray’s book *Sexual difference* and her quest for a female form of speech and sexuality. cd speaks about giving birth. And about not giving birth. Also an experience that tips death. dp has never shared her body but reckons that this experience has not yet been radically enough explored. Women can be two, can restart with every new cycle. Terms are missing, or the images. *reproduction vs. creation*

What if the female body was taken (more) serious(ly) as a basis of experience. *You can’t have it all.* What do we mean by all and how far is this all an important, feminist demand *and* at the same time connected to a liberal logic? How would this “all” look like in terms of Kay? *all*

Maggie Nelson in *The Argonauts* has a and+and+and-approach. Example: The sodomitical mother! dp asks: Could the bodily be separated from the biographical (in view of the larger intersection?)

A new woman

In a BBC podcast I listen to an interview with Joye Murchison Kelly (later Joye Hummel), the first woman to write for *Wonder Woman*. Joye recalls why she was hired by William Moulton Marston, the psychologist who created the character in 1941:

wonder woman
semifictionality

"Actually… one of the reasons that I was hired is in my youth. I may have had an appearance and definitely the attitude of Wonder Woman. I'm a brunette, weighed about 103 pounds, very athletic, a good student and now I feel I'm bragging."

prosody

A guttural laughter follows. The laughter of the old woman describing the young woman she had been. Joye was not only writing for a fiction created by a man, but also serving as one of its living models.

12.11.17 **Title ideas**

Eine Erschöpfungsgeschichte
A ficktion in 11 body parts
Kay, a bodybiopic

blurbing
preambling
forwording

I'm writing blurbs.

Confessions of a preamblist: Who knows where this excessive writing of forewords and introductory introductions comes from. It's almost as if she did NOT want to come to the point.

5.11.17 **Inframince**

The term intensity is usually used in the sense of "strong" or "severe". I'm interested in its spectrality. In what is almost imperceptible. Its gliding quality. Conceptually: When and how does something become noticeable at all? How can it be named? And how far does the name, the act of naming, become part of that something? Personally: How can one de-escalate, make anti-dramatic moves.

"What do you call the affect of an occurrence that is less than an event? That functions less than a cause nor as an effect. And yet remains formative as a force." (Paul Ricco)

Apropos Immediacy

fs recounts how he came to his first poetry book: he isolated himself under a cover and produced neologisms that he then hung on the wall to generate sentences. The words were direct distillates from his inner states, at the verge of a private language. *shoulder*

Inspired by Kafka, fs wrote a diary and left it lying around. His cousin, a long-distance lorry driver, discovered it, read it and started to admire him. At this moment fs realized that it was garbage. Henceforth, he integrated the perspective of the other which has proven to be very useful. fs wants to know who looks over Kay's shoulder.

Usually the editor is the first reader. Here, dp and fs, occupy that position.

30.11.17 **Colloquium in Vienna – Questions from colleagues**

Verena Faisst: How do you become a medium? Can you trigger experiences? One can program sex but not love. *peer review*

So true: I can set up as many dates as I like but I can't say: Now I'm going to love 18 people; or grieve for 7.

Katarina Šoškić: Do you think of the reader, about the effects of your writing? Imagine a triangle: Writer, reader, intensity. What about research on the effects of intensity in literature?

To be honest, up to that point I had not taken the reader into account.

2018

11.1.18 **False Feelings**

According to Eva Illouz, intensity has become a value, a currency of truth in the age of emotional capitalism. (I feel, therefore I am. What I feel must be real.) dp asks: When the character searches for intensity, how does she know that it is "her intensity" and not one of the many scripts (societal disgraces, hormones, etc.)? cd: Kay knows that her feelings do not belong to her.

identification

13.1.18 **Wish and Intensity**

Kinderwunsch (childwish). There is no equivalent noun in English. Sounds like a disease. The same goes for *kinderlos*. The childless woman is a common topos. I have never read or heard of a childless man.

I found great passages on desire in Monika Rinck's book *Ah, das Love-Ding*:

"Dass es Wünsche gibt, dass es einen Antrieb gibt, ist offenbar. Dass man Wünsche verfolgt, wenn man sie einmal hat, ist verständlich und liegt in gewisser Weise in der Natur des Wunsches. Das Ausmaß der Verfolgung hat mit Mut und Ermutigung, mit Vernunft und Unvernunft zu tun. Am Anfang steht das interesselose Wohlgefallen, am Ende die idée fixe." Rinck: p. 65

essay
poetry

"Veronika sagt, Fassbinder habe gesagt, er hätte gerne einen schnellen Wagen. Und er hätte keine Lust, den Wunsch zu haben und keinen schnellen Wagen, und genauso sei das jetzt auch." Rinck: p. 97

In psychoanalytical, Marxist, but also very banal terms: Why do we want what we want? And what produces this want?

Excerpt from a dating profile
Bisexual, Man, Single, 180cm

Speaks German, English, and some Polish, Attended Post grad — *self-summary*

Has kid(s), Pisces — *Okcupid*
Looking for
single women, within 81 km, ages 27-47, short & long term dating, hookup, and new friends.

17.1.18 **Kay and me**

I define Kay. What she wants/can do.
I take on some properties of Kay.
I am partly Kay, partly the intensity researcher who turns Kay into a case. — *notes to self*
I work with a chance-based approach.
And this shall be my armor as I go into the field. Trying to overcome the usual preferences of the white, hypergamous middle aged woman looking for love. Testing different 'pitches' in the profiles.

Kay did NOT work as 'armor'. I went on these dates without a specific method. To elaborate in the future: How to access an experience as someone else? Is this even possible at all?

21.1.18 **Bin ich die neue Günter Wallraff?**

The journalist Wallraff constructed a fictional identity as a Turkish "Gastarbeiter" for his undercover investigations into the working conditions of migrant labourers in Germany, published in his reportage *Ganz unten*.
The writer Daus constructed a semi-fictional identity as a woman wanting to mate for her undercover investigations into the sexual scripts and habits of the German urban middle class published in her novel *Sehr*. — *dum analogy*

Dating profiles best-off

Heterosexual men seem to feel obliged to emphasize that they "also want love." (No one-night stands!) Heterosexual women feel obliged to emphasize that they "also want sex".

cultural scripts

I started to collect the best dating profiles. They vary between a medical self-report, an advertisement for a technical object, utterly generic writing and great stuff for a novel.

OkCupid excerpts

"I'm boring, I'm lazy, not all that friendly and I'm all yours, ladies. I know how do make reading and do writes good.

Despite my years of training I'm a very, very bad fencer.

I'm a professor at a less than prestigious university. Like this: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeSdC7lbAlA

I've never had tuberculosis.

I can graft fruit trees.

I make candy.

(...)
It really bothers me when people smell bad, myself included.

I'm really good at spotting four leaf clovers from a distance. Like autism, good.

I'm a perfectly off-putting mix of debilitatingly shy and unnervingly vulgar.

I'm starting to realize that I put the word "that" into sentences far more than one should."

3.2.18 **Intensity and Meaning**

The implicit moral of the term *meaningless sex* makes me furious. I suggest taking it literally, ridding it of all the (love) pressure. To offer a word exempt from the ill-formulated debate about sex/love that, in most cases, tries to downscale the fleshy experience. A novel that is an ode to anonymous sex. To a tenderness that does not seek to penetrate the twoness, the pact of loneliness, the fleetingness of being together. *re-sensing*

Kay tries to cultivate a loving fucking as well as a fucking grieving. The semantic indeterminacy of the word love, and the predominantly pejorative connotations of fucking, lead me to invent a new hybrid that may one day lead to a practice or even to an object. A modality that does not have to exhaust itself within the binary opposition between sensuality and intellect.

dp asks: What does meaning lesser mean on the level of the plot? Is this all about advanced sex-and-the-city knowledge? Are you the gym leader for post-love? *gym leader*

I like the idea of the gym. Recently I was reading Plato's Symposium again. Conceptually it relates to a scale that ranges from the singular boy through art to the Platonic idea. From the sensual, the senses, towards pure meaning. Love appears as a means of optimization, as an increasing capacity for sublimation that must forget the body. Plato propagates a striving for knowledge that is driven by the intensity of Eros. The wise old teacher instructs his beautiful young lover.

I imagine Kay on a stepper in the gym. There is a continuous movement that leads neither up nor down. She can even walk blindly, thinking of her lovers' bodies. Of balls, thighs, knees. It's hard work and she is sweating. But maybe this is the only way to get rid of the idea of love. At the end there is no end, she'll just fall asleep. It relaxes her deeply to know that she is finite and replaceable. *the stepper of love*

5.2.18 **Dramaturgy**

End of love = core melt down
meaning lesser sex = cooling down
new beginning = Kay in a post-romantic landscape *conceptual scales*

cd: How could the specifically feminine heroic look like? (beyond what we know from Superman/ Superwoman) *superwoman*

dp: Once a guy said to me: I would never go to bed with someone who is stronger than me. Women do this all the time.

cd: In the film *Casanovagen* there is a tragic scene with a trans man who only realizes after his operation that he misses his womb.

10.2.18 **Looking for a body double**

cd: Today I met my 16-year-old body double in the subway. She seemed so perfectly Kay. I talked to her and she gave me her number. Now I don't know what to do with her.

How to inhabit another body? How to experience from a body that does not yet exist? How can artistic research provide tools to invite other people into a fiction? — *future method*

dp: She's your medium. She helps you reconnect with your 16-year-old self.

cd: Eros is a middle being. So it seems good to cover the range 20 years below *and* above my age.

dp: A friend comes to my mind. Marion, author of an unpublished novel. I can ask her.

cd: Viv Albertine's *A typical girl* is a great example how someone can write being on a par with one's younger self. The short chapters, especially the one on the blow job work very well. I also find Dora Russell and Margarete Sanger very attractive.

dp: You could jump between times and reappear as Sanger's revenant.

cd: Yes! The fictional autobiography seems to be it. A sentence from the documentary *Man for a Day* comes to my mind: I've always wanted to be more. To take bits and pieces from those women for Kay's biography, a transhistorical intensity-heroine. (Reread Woolf's *Orlando*.) — *autofiction*

dp: Each chapter in a different discipline!

cd: Okay, in a nutshell, we have the young, middle aged and old Kay and their relation to sexuality. Furthermore starring: the reckless editor, the superego, foot-stomach and headnotes etc.

16.3.18 **Interview with a post-love-professional**

A profile on OkCupid catches my attention: "looking for encounters, middle to long-term, respectfully binding, without love, pleasant hours (and possibly very) good sex". This reembles Kay's mission. I meet the guy for an interview in a shisha bar.

field research

18.3.18 **Conversation with a Tinder researcher**

On Tinder I come across the sociologist Thorsten Peetz, who himself conducts research on Tinder. We speak about how it feels to go into the field with one's own body, what kind of (protective) tools sociologist and other researchers have when they use dating as a method. He recommends Loïc Wacquants *Body & Soul* as well as to read Adam Isaiah Green who has researched gay sexual fields.

sexual scripts
tinder studies

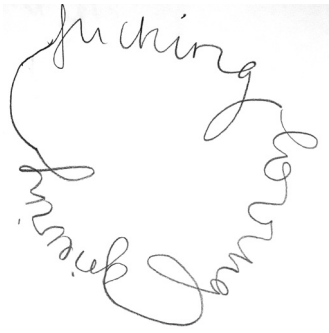
Why have I not interviewed Thorsten on precisely this question?

A few weeks later, Thorsten travels to New York for research. He sends me a screenshot from his Tinder account. He had just matched with a woman. Her first message was: "Hi, wonna fuck?"

7.5.18 **Feedback from the colleagues**

Charlotta Ruth: I still ask myself, what is it that you're writing? Is it really a novel? I think it could be a live-action-role play. If this is the case, you could consider different forms to develop your character, as it happens in the world of gaming, for example, where you learn how to talk to your character, design a setting etc.
Hannes Böck: Your scale should have a circular form.
cd: Like a Möbius-strip?

peer review



lecture
public colloquium

14.6.18 **Theweleit on Pasolini – the lust structure of violence**

Watched Pasolini's *Saló – 120 days of Sodom* (1975), and then – to calm myself down – Theweleit's lecture *Der andalusische Hund von Saló* (2014). Relevant excerpt: "Buñuel was one of the first to recognize de Sade as a theoretician of sexual violence. Instead of sadism it should be called 'sexualized feudalism' and 'sexualized clericalism'. Pasolini is interested in showing the physical structure of sexualized violence. One can only approach this violence, if one recognizes its specific lust structure. One has to watch carefully. The crying of the victim versus the laughing and scorning of the torturer. When the victim is all pain, the torturing man is on a high. The stronger the pain, the stronger the lust. This blows up any academic theoretical repertoire – that's where art is needed. Pasolini's art does not care about the limits of good taste. He wanted to show this category of gentlemen exactly like that. Gentlemen who philosophize about Baudelaire, Nietzsche and Paul or Dada, who torture, make others eat shit, who scalp them and jerk off onto them. One does not want to see this muck (Drecksmixtur)."

transgression

29.6.18 **Futur II**

Which grammatical form would be appropriate for an "emotional science fiction"? In German, we have Futur II, the future perfect, which expresses the assumption that an action will have been completed by a particular point in the future. "She will have been hungry."

Kay IS the future. 2030. 2040, yes, to be fixed! Make a decision. fs is a little bit afraid of her. Does Kay have a secret? Is there any other character that determines her desire? Someone who looks over her shoulder? See also René Girard's theory of mimetic desire. *undecided* *decision*

6.7.18 **Date with sexologist**

I meet T., a polyamorous sexologist from Switzerland. He introduces me to Sexocorporel, an approach developed by Jean-Yves Desjardins that understands sexual arousal as something that can be modulated through bodily parameters such as breathing, muscular tension, posture and movement. One of its techniques is the "double swing" (doppelte Schaukel): a rhythmic movement of the pelvis and upper body along the body axis. *sexology*

We kept in touch. I call him Dr. Shauklbaum.

10.7.18 **Sisters in Crime**

I keep running up against the limits of the woman as a format. dp recommends Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970). I take the book with me on summer holiday with my son. *reading*

31.10.18 **Two books**

I'm planning two publications: the novel *Sehr* (2020) and an accompanying journal, *The Heft* (2040). The aim of the latter would be to situate Kay as a figure between two eras – the era of biological birth and the era of assisted birth (ectogenesis) – within a history of feelings and their formatting. "Our feelings are works." (Émile-August Chartier) *framing* *fictocriticism*

20.11. **Recognition (*Anerkennung*)**
18 Conversation with fs about the first chapter of the novel. Kay and Ran meet for meaning lesser sex. Kay has set herself a rule not to feel too much. She realizes that if she is not meant to a certain extent, she does not feel anything ("Could you refer to my knees, at least?). Ran pretends that nothing has ever happened. *knee-shoulder*
fs: Isn't it all about recognition?
"I is a group and each sees differently at its own time, has its habitus. All together, from subject to group, makes up the field again, the context that sets, creates the rules for use – as long someone else is been looked at, as he/she or it is being deemed necessary." (Schmatz in aufSätze, p. 17) *I-group*

22.- **Get rid of meaning**
24.11. Kathy Acker Symposium
18 Badischer Kunstverein
Waldstraße 3
76133 Karlsruhe

A windowless room in the basement of the Kunstverein gathers a crowd of former friends and lovers of Acker, disciples, fans, literary scholars, artists and an interested audience. Cult-like vibes. The curators managed to bring Kathy's personal library and install it. (Traces of Acker in the books, underlinings, passages that she appropriated in her books.) And then, of course, the accounts of those who knew her: McKenzie Wark, Matias Viegener and others. Special moments: Leslie Dick's dialogue with her own daughter Audrey Wollen, two generations of women. (Trivia: The chlamydia Dick shared with Acker through her partner Peter Wollen, Audrey's father-to-be.) Dodie Bellamy gave a great poetic-pragmatic talk on Acker's funeral ceremony. I can't even say I'm a fan of Acker. Nor that I enjoy reading her texts that much. Yet her persona and work have been coming back to me since I first read her in 1998. That Merve book that has now fallen apart. Flashes of connection, her radical approach to sexuality and writing, her obsession with unmaking sense, her intense living with and in texts of all kinds. *aura* *living text*

The blue tape (1974)

There is a separate small projection room in the basement. Among other works, Acker's video Blue Tape is projected, a live-writing-talking-and-licking experiment she undertook with one of her lovers. To look at Kathy's "real" cunt is hardly bearable. In the video, she gives her lover instructions ("this is good, no, not there"). One cannot avoid thinking that she is in control. (What does it mean to be the author of one's sexual experience? Sex as a practice of power, as a practice of not being in power.) It makes me think of her deployment of language as surface. When looking at this experiment, I'm tempted to think that it was hard for her to give in to pleasure. That the only way she could feel was to abject herself.

video licking

live writing

Writing Affect

In his lecture, Hanjo Berressem, speaks about writing as a practice of affective resistance, dealing with rewriting affect. And about how literary texts have real-life consequences. "The Pornological instead of the pornographic"; "Syndromalogy instead of symptomalogy"; "the logic of abject jouissance."

Throughout the entire symposium, cd was busy chatting with a dom. She got hooked on the fact that there was someone who told her what to do, giving her all kinds of absurd bodily tasks. But then she had a hard time immersing herself in the BDSM codes. The vocabulary and the stereotypical images were a total turn-off and caused a disruption in the game, as she began to see herself from the outside. She had to laugh all the time. Her initiation into the world of BDSM while attending the symposium created a strange new connection with Acker.

shoulder

role play

Acker's tattoo

I have never wanted a tattoo. Yet this one totally makes sense: restriction and expansion, sense and sensation coming together on the skin. (Sense is always open, sensation territorializes. Someone at this symposium said: "She tried to take the cultural poison out of the body.") The materiality of the body that can't be overcome.



Against Ordinary Language

In *Against Ordinary Language. The Language of the Body,* Kathy Acker sets out to write about bodybuilding but realizes that she forgets to write after every workout. And not only that: the part of herself that does the training resists language, resists finding a vocabulary for the workout. Kathy writes on, searches where these resistances lie. She realizes that muscle fibers must break before muscles can be built up. I need a similar ritual.

body building

writing

What needs to break before I can build up a text, a texture?

2019

8.2.19

Pronouns

The first-person narrative tends to have more impact on the reader, as the lyrical I tends to be conflated with the author. I prefer the third person, the third person of the fictional author.

auto-autofiction

As much distance from I as possible.

10.2.19 **Notes Towards a Politics of Location**
Rereading Adrienne Rich. How far shall I address my own (writing) conditions?

Being a half-time mother, navigating between two distinct states: being on my own – being with my son (an emotionally and motorically VERY lively, lovely child). *mother* *ADHD*

15.2.19 **Reading, University Helsinki**
I'm invited to participate in the research cell *Through phenomena themselves* led by Alex Arteaga in the framework of the research Pavilion #3 in Venice. I practice how to pronounce Pheno-meno-logy. *phenomenology*

21.3.19 **On Gapping**
Lecture Performance
Society for Artistic Research (SAR) *re-sensing*
Zurich
I ask a volunteer from the audience to read the word GAP aloud from a piece of paper. Again and again, faster, slower, smaller. As we listen, the word begins to change its shape and size, turning into something we can almost feel in our mouths.

12.4.19 **Shulamith oder das Ende der Gebärmutterschaft**
I began teaching a writing seminar at the Literaturinstitut Hildesheim, taking Firestone's book as a point of departure.

6.-12.5.19 **Questionology** *live writing*
Cordula Daus and Charlotta Ruth *installation*
Live installation
Research Pavilion #3
Venice
"You bring a phenomenon of your choice. We apply questionology: a playful interview series in progress that investigates the nature of the question and questioning."



8.-
10.5.19 **Reading on Reading**
Emma Cocker, Cordula Daus and Lena Séraphin
Research Pavilion #3
Venice

"Different ways of reading can generate different registers of sense making and affect; there is scope for testing experimental tactics. (...). Certain language must be rolled in the mouth before it can be digested, new meanings revealed in the pauses and durations breathed between the words. Over three days, Emma Cocker, Cordula Daus and Lena Séraphin test different practices of reading on reading at various locations within the Sala del Camino."

collaborative practice

28.5.19 **Jens**
Lecture
Public Colloquium
University for Applied Arts
Vienna

17.6. **Jens**
Lecture
Research Pavilion #3
Venice

DESCRI
PTION
3

"Cordula Daus studies how emotional intensities can be written. She is currently working on a speculative fiction about a character called Kay. Kay tries to free herself from heterosexual expectations and ideas of romantic love. Instead, she pursues a radical form of relation: *meaning lesser sex*. Jens is one of her objects of desire. But Jens is also a name that becomes material for exploring language and its forms. Jens appears through different voices, typographies and audiographic plays."

2020



15.1. **Kay**
Lecture
Let's fabulate
University for Applied Arts
Vienna

3.6.20 **Public Colloquium – pandemic online version**
University for Applied Arts
Vienna

Still struggling to find a form for this PhD. My idea: the novel, set in the year 2020, will be accompanied by a journal, set in the year 2040. I want to invite authors to write about the "feminist classic *Sehr*" from an imagined future.

fictocriticism



a novel by Kay
2020



a journal based on SEHR
2040

During the colloquium I presented how I developed one episode of the novel. [M] Dudeck, a performer and artist friend, inspired a character and helps me to think about *Higher Love*.

fabulation rehearsal
video conversation

15.6.20 **Revision. Conversation with dp**

Where does Kay's grieving come from? Result: Love and sex must be revolutionized. Thesis: Grieving is the motor, motivation, drive for something new. But grief remains. (Gap) The dialectic of the new: bound to a resistance. Outlook: Abolition of Wombmanhood. *outer woman*

Note: My tendency to conceptually overdetermine a work. Better to have small intermediate outputs, self-contained forms. Leave the rest for the next project.

28.6.20 **Prologue**

"In German, a Heft refers to a booklet, journal or exercise book. The English language takes us somewhere completely different. In Northern England, a heft is a piece of upland pasture to which a farm animal, like a sheep, has become hefted. 'Despite their considerable heft, buffalo are agile creatures,' says the Cambridge Dictionary. The verb to heft means to lift up something heavy. 'Sich das Heft nicht aus der Hand nehmen lassen,' says a German proverb – to remain at the wheel. *The Heft* you hold in your hands has been deliberately conceived as an ambidexterous being. With its left hand, it holds on to another book. The right hand wants to be on its own. *The Heft* publishes critical essays, documents, notes and reviews concerning the period of the outer woman. Its first edition is dedicated to the concept of intensity. It is hefted to the character Kay, as depicted in the novel *Sehr* by the German author of the same name (1970-2038)." Excerpt from the prologue *preambling*

I wrote 23 versions of a prologue. The index of the publication has changed innumerable times.I had become too hefted to the idea of the journal. *self-critique*

2.7.20 **Crisis & infinite regress**

Stagnation in the editorial office! The authors I invited to contribute to *The Heft* have not responded or have declined. I asked a psychologist, a philologist and a musician to respond to a specific episode in the novel. Premise: to write from the future, in which the artificial uterus is a reality. This is all too demanding, both for me and for them. I need to take the future out of this project. *failing method*

How can I invite a scientist into a fiction without scaring them off?

18.12.20 **Turning point**

Phone conversation with my supervisor. The idea of speaking about the novel from the future and from different perspectives in the format of a journal was just too ambitious. *The Heft* is dead. I will write a reflexive documentation that does not pretend to be an artistic form. End of doubts. *revision*

Appendices

Appendix A: Conceptual History of Intensity

Intensity is an interdisciplinary concept, a technical term, a figure of thought, and a philosophical problem. It also, for the purpose of this project, refers to a subjective spectrum of emotions expressed in language. Conceptual histories per se are jumpy and brutal as they rip text passages out of larger bodies of work. So I hope the reader will bear with me.

Some antecedents of intensity *avant la lettre* can be found in ancient thought. Aristotle, as usual, provides the contours of a problem that relates to thinking about the concepts of sameness and difference, and about a processual change in the property of a being. According to him, "some qualities, as accidental beings, admit of the more and the less."[83] In *Categoriae 8* I find a seminal passage:[84]

> Qualifications admit of a more and a less; for one thing is called more pale or less pale than another, and more just than another. Moreover, it itself sustains increase (for what is pale can still become paler)—not in all cases though, but in most. It might be questioned whether one justice is called more a justice than another, and similarly for the other conditions. For some people dispute about such cases. They utterly deny that one justice is called more or less a justice than another, or one health more or less a health, though they say that one person has health less than another, justice less than another, and similarly with grammar and the other conditions. At any rate things spoken of in virtue of these unquestionably admit of a more and a less: one man is called more grammatical than another, juster, healthier, and so on.

Interestingly, Aristotle, as well as medieval European thinkers who follow his path, do not approach the problem of qualitative change as a problem of comparison between two qualities in two different beings or subjects, but seeks to draw an "ontology of qualitative change within a single being or subject."[85]

If we read over the passage above from a purely formal perspective, we can discern elements that convey a gradual change. Most languages contain elements that allow us to express an increase or decrease in a quality: adverbs ("many", "more", "very"); adjectives ("pale", "healthy", "big", "weak") or comparatives and superlatives ("the body that is pale is called more pale now than before") – what was missing and what would be introduced in modern empirical thinking was an overarching figure of thought. A figure that allows us to "inscribe the abundance of discontinuous representations into a taxonomic unitarian continuity (such as force, light, sentience)."[86]

What follows is a sketchy word history. Intensity can be imagined as an actor that appears on different stages, in different costumes and with different speeches leading us

83 Solère: p. 582
84 Aristotle: Categories 8, 10b26-11a4.
85 Mader: p. 7.
86 Kleinschmidt: p. 24

through time.[87] According to the philologist Erich Kleinschmidt this history starts in the age of enlightenment:

> [i]ntensity only becomes […] thinkable, from the moment that a theory of the extremes exists. The latter emerges in the 17th-18th century in a discourse on physical forces and energies (…) Yet the theorem of intensity functions also without its scientific and mathematical fundament, as it disengages soon from its fundamental premises, to be torn into a linguistic process of intensification, fluctuating as an independent and territorializing figure of thought. The thinking in intensity unfolded its own dynamic and emancipated itself from its exact potential of initiation.

Intensity emerged in the natural sciences, where it was applied to describe phenomena such as light, temperature or speed. Differential calculus and the principles of Newtonian optics open up a thinking in degrees, scales and continuous variation. What is interesting for my purpose is how the term moves between concretion and abstraction, serving different functions in different discourses.

In 1665, Robert Boyle observes the weather, trying to estimate the degrees of cold:[88]

> For though (to give an instance) water be thought the Liquor, that is most susceptible of such an Intensity of Cold, as will destroy or suspend its Fluidity, yet not here to repeat, what we formerly deliver'd of the easie congealableness of Oyl of Aniseeds, we have (as we elsewhere note to another purpose) distill'd a substance from Benzoin, which becomes of a fluid, a consistent Body, and may be reduc'd to the state of fluidity again by very much lesser alterations of the Ambient Air, as to Heat and Cold, then would have produc'd Ice or Thaw'd it.

Intensity becomes a fluid concept soon to be adopted by rationalist philosophers. In 1704, Leibniz, in his *Nouveaux Essais* develops the fundamental concept of "intension ou degrés" based on infinitesimal calculus.

His student, the philosopher Christian Wolff, is the first one to coin the neologism *intensitas.* His ontology *Philosophia prima* written in Latin, defines *intensitas* as "a multiplicity of degrees, as it were, just as magnitude is a multiplicity of parts."

Wolff realizes that, if we want to speak about the ontological situation of a multiple state of infinite degrees (*graduum multitudo*), we need a new word. This state can't be conceived as a unit in itself but as a spectrum for which he provides the term intensity (*intensio*). By coining this word Wolff opens a place in language.

Following a word over time means observing alchemical processes between languages. Wolff most probably derives the noun *intensitas* from the adjective *intense,*

87 I will do this in a more or less chronological order, drawing on two major secondary sources, the article "Intensität" in *Bloch-Wörterbuch: Leitbegriffe der Philosophie Ernst Blochs*, Berlin/Boston 2021, and on Erich Kleinschmidt's *Die Entdeckung der Intensität: Geschichte einer Denkfigur im 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2004. Most references to primary sources and comments that follow can be found in these works. For the sake of accessibility, I will nevertheless provide bibliographical references to the primary sources and sometimes quote them at greater length.

88 Boyle: p. 67-68.

already known in French or English and rooted in the Latin verb *intendere* ("to tense", "to strain something"). The corresponding verbal adjective intentus ("strong", "severe", "tense", and later "attentive") already existed in ancient Latin. Around 1740, *intensité* appeared in the French language.[89]

Notions of the intense begin to inspire the vocabulary of writers and philosophers. Novalis, Diderot, Lessing, and Fichte develop a vocabulary for degrees of passion and emotion. In 1767, the foreign adjective *intensiv* appeared in a German text by Lessing, who refers to the acting style of an actress: "The total lack of intensive accents produces monotony".[90] In 1745, Diderot freely translates an essay by Shaftesbury, speaking of the degree of motherly tenderness as *intensité*[91] (imagine a thermometer in a woman's armpit seeking to detect her degree of motherness). Shaftesbury himself had reflected upon the "immoderate Degree of Passion" in the context of a theory of "natural Proportion" and "right balance".[92] Johann Gottlieb Fichte describes the atmosphere of a forest, the luminosity of trees in relation to the sensory capacity and intensity of reception of the observer.[93] In 1798, Novalis added a new connotation. He speaks about the density (*Dichtigkeit*) of colors, figures and volumes of space.[94]

To draw an interim conclusion: Intensity/intense/the intense promises an unheard-of alliance of scientific precision and subjective perceptual judgment, a relation between the measurable and the perceptible. In general terms, intensity becomes a placeholder for the "quantity of a quality". This will be of relevance for the psychophysical terrain that I'm going to move into next.

Charles Bonnet uses the term intensité in his psychological text *Essai de Psychologie* (1754). Trying to solve the old dualism between body and mind, Bonnet deploys a new term: Intensity is to serve to correlate physical movements of the nerves with the vivacity of the psyche. Referring to the genesis of a new being just after conception, he writes: "The reaction of the soul on the nervous fibers or the animal spirits, always proportional to the quantity of their movement, consequently increases in intensity." He continues: "The sensations acquire enough liveliness (vivacité) to be accompanied by a certain degree of pleasure or pain".[95] More than a century later, Freud will describe the birth of the system of consciousness (Bw., short for Bewusstsein) in a similar setting.[96]

89 Kleinschmidt, p. 19.
90 Lessing: p. 223.
91 Diderot in: Kleinschmidt, p. 20.
92 Cooper Third Earl of Shaftesbury in: Kleinschmidt, p. 20.
93 Fichte in: Kleinschmidt, p. 26.
94 Novalis: p. 514.
95 Bonnet in: Ratcliff, p. 424.
96 "Let us imagine the living organism in the simplest possible form as an undifferentiated vesicle of sensitive substance: then its surface, exposed as it is to the outer world, is by its very position differentiated and serves as an organ for receiving stimuli. […] We have more to say about the living vesicle with its receptive outer layer. This morsel of living substance floats about in an outer world which is charged with the most potent energies, and it would be destroyed by the operation of the stimuli proceeding from this world if it were not furnished with a protection against stimulation (Reizschutz). It acquires this through its outermost layer—which gives [up] the structure that belongs to living matter—becoming in a measure inorganic, and this now operates as a special integument or membrane that keeps off the stimuli, i.e. makes it impossible for the energies of the outer world to act with more than a fragment of their intensity on the layers immediately below which have preserved their vitality." Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: pp. 29–31. "[Up]" supplied in accordance with the German original.

Taking up a line of thought from Descartes and others, Bonnet tries to find a "secret rule of unity" – a substance that would explain the physical order in the spiritual. Yet Bonnet's essay lacks a comprehensive definition of intensity, a unit of measure to quantify sensations of the psychic order. In his later works this quantification, even if imaginary, becomes more thinkable to have an afterlife as a notion of an energy that can't be quantified. More and more, the figure of intensity seems to cultivate a terrain for obscure, fictional quantities, or, in the words of the philosopher of science Marc James Ratcliff: "The concept of intensity appeared as dependent on an imaginary construction of measure, closely connected to an experimental fiction that picks up a methodological order its experimental and discursive rhetorics."[97]

We have arrived at a crucial degree of enlightenment. Immanuel Kant, who himself has worked hard to tell ghosts from real imaginations, comes to establish the duality *extensiv*/*intensiv*. In the first principle of his *Critique of Pure Reason* titled *Axioms of Intuition*, Kant speaks about the a priori mathematics of "extensive magnitudes," where wholes are measured by their discrete parts. This applies to empirical objects given in space and time, which are themselves "extensive magnitudes". In the second principle, titled *Anticipations of Perception*, Kant tries to prove the principle of "intensive magnitudes". According to this principle, every sensation will display some "degree" (Grad) of "continuous" or "intensive magnitude" of "reality" (*Realität*). The seminal passage reads: "In all appearances, the real that is an object of sensation has intensive magnitude, that is, a degree."[98] This applies to properties such as color or heat, or material forces such as weight or impenetrability. Kant establishes a correlation between sensation and reality according to a scale of changes. What is crucial here is the philosopher's emphasis on the degree of attention, on the subject's perception towards an object. According to Kant the sensation of intensity can't be derived from the property of things alone but from perceptual changes in the subject. Subject and object enter into a crucial interdependency that has remained a subject of discussion ever since.

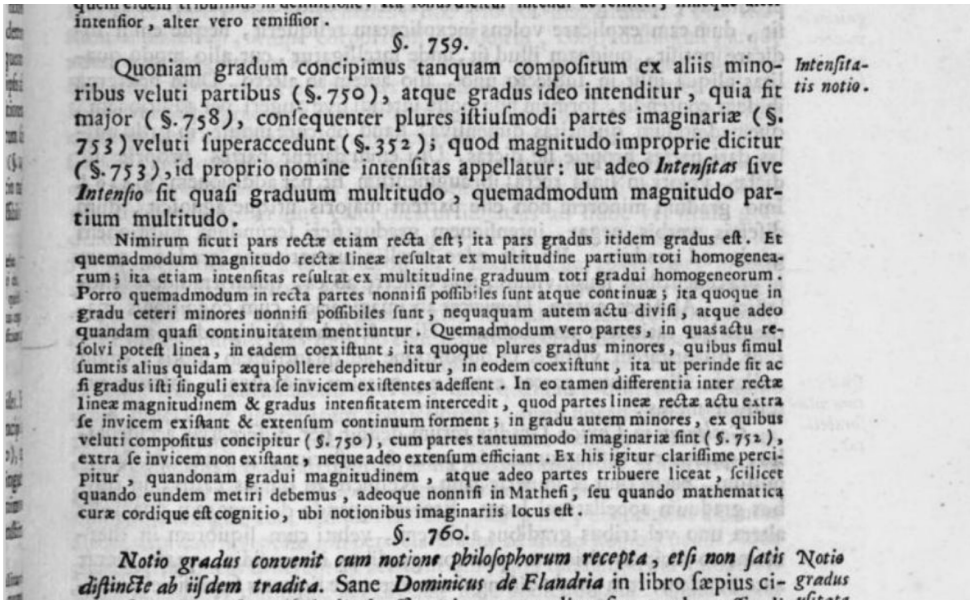
Henceforth, "intensity" defines the degree of strength of a perception or sensation. As a figure for a dynamic experience of perception, it opens up new poetic possibilities. Philologists feel the impulse to invent new words, as the German "language contains an infinite number of actions (*Handlungen*) and sensations that are still *nameless,* which is why adequate foreign words and derived loanwords must be taken on."[99] Rationalist thinkers like the mathematician and philosopher Johann Heinrich Lambert try to match words with numbers, concepts with degrees. In his 1771 *Architectonic* Lambert assigned the intensity degree 1 to "absolute consciousness" in order to consider its scalability, which is subjectively bound depending on "person, times and matter". As an absolute unit, he continues, consciousness can't increase but can decrease through tiredness, confusion or distraction. Lambert seeks material proof, fibres of thought: "that we, while imagining an object, take a sample, if the fibres (nerves) can give us a consciousness of the changed extension and intension of a magnitude or not."[100]

Our word-protagonist takes one side or another in the good old body-mind debate.

97 Ratcliff: p. 445.
98 Kant: B 207.
99 Lenz in Kleinschmidt: p. 34.
100 Lambert in Kleinschmidt: p. 37.

Philosophia prima

A simple copy and paste of the above title, and I'm thrown into the middle of a 300-year-old book in a few seconds. And here it is, the first scene in our history of the word *intensity*.



intenſior, alter vero remiſſior.

§. 759.

Quoniam gradum concipimus tanquam compoſitum ex aliis minoribus veluti partibus (§. 750), atque gradus ideo intenditur, quia fit major (§. 758), conſequenter plures iſtiuſmodi partes imaginariæ (§. 753) veluti ſuperaccedunt (§. 352); quod magnitudo improprie dicitur (§. 753), id proprio nomine intenſitas appellatur: ut adeo *Intenſitas* ſive *Intenſio* ſit quaſi graduum multitudo, quemadmodum magnitudo partium multitudo. *Intenſitatis notio.*

Nimirum ſicuti pars rectæ etiam recta eſt; ita pars gradus itidem gradus eſt. Et quemadmodum magnitudo rectæ lineæ reſultat ex multitudine partium toti homogenearum; ita etiam intenſitas reſultat ex multitudine graduum toti gradui homogeneorum. Porro quemadmodum in recta partes nonniſi poſſibiles ſunt atque continuæ; ita quoque in gradu ceteri minores nonniſi poſſibiles ſunt, nequaquam autem actu diviſi, atque adeo quandam quaſi continuitatem mentiuntur. Quemadmodum vero partes, in quas actu reſolvi poteſt linea, in eadem coexiſtunt; ita quoque plures gradus minores, quibus ſimul ſumtis alius quidam æquipollere deprehenditur, in eodem coexiſtunt, ita ut perinde ſit ac ſi gradus iſti ſinguli extra ſe invicem exiſtentes adeſſent. In eo tamen differentia inter rectæ lineæ magnitudinem & gradus intenſitatem intercedit, quod partes lineæ rectæ actu extra ſe invicem exiſtant & extenſum continuum forment; in gradu autem minores, ex quibus veluti compoſitus concipitur (§. 750), cum partes tantummodo imaginariæ ſint (§. 752), extra ſe invicem non exiſtant, neque adeo extenſum efficiant. Ex his igitur clariſſime percipitur, quandonam gradui magnitudinem, atque adeo partes tribuere liceat, ſcilicet quando eundem metiri debemus, adeoque nonniſi in Matheſi, ſeu quando mathematica curæ cordique eſt cognitio, ubi notionibus imaginariis locus eſt.

§. 760.

Notio gradus convenit cum notione philoſophorum recepta, etſi non ſatis diſtincte ab iiſdem tradita. Sane ***Dominicus de Flandria*** in libro ſæpius ci- *Notio gradus*

Christian Wolff, *Philosophia prima, sive Ontologia, methodo scientifica pertractata, qua omnis cognitionis humanae principia continentur* (1730), p. 562, § 759: "Intensitatis notio" ("The concept of intensity").

I'm reminded of how it once felt to look at a microfiche through the old reading devices at the Humbold University around the year 1994. All the actions that had to be undertaken to reach a book, a specific passage in a book.

Prof. Andreas Fritsch, a Latinist from the Free University in Berlin, helped me to translate § 759 into German. In his email of 25 August 2021, which accompanied his draft translation, he cautioned: "Attached, I'm sending you a still very preliminary (!), incomplete (!) response, which would, however, absolutely need to be discussed and revised with the help of someone more knowledgeable about the history of philosophy before it could be incorporated into an academic work.

Weil wir eine Stufe (einen Grad) annehmen, die (der) gleichsam zusammengesetzt ist aus anderen sozusagen kleineren Teilen, und es wird daher eine Stufe (ein Grad) angestrebt (intendiert), weil er (sie) größer wird, folglich treten mehrere gedachte (imaginariae?) Teile dieser Art sozusagen hinzu; weil es unpassend Größe genannt wird, wird dies mit dem geeigneten Namen intensitas (Intensität?) genannt; wie ja derart Intensitas oder Intensio entsteht sozusagen als Vielzahl der Stufen (Grade), wie Größe (in der) Vielzahl der Teile (besteht)."

I don't dare to give you my clunky English translation of the preliminary German translation.

We have reached a point where even orgasms, once ought to be indescribable and undefinable, are being defined with the help of intensity. The German doctor and philosopher Carl August Eschenmayer writes about the "intensity of lust", that accompanies the act of procreation "as unmistakable phenomenon". For Eschenmayer it is here where "beauty and love meet sexual excitement", where the highest intensity converges with the starting point of new life.[101]

Some Definitions of Orgasm
Ordered according to their length and effect on the writer.

"[From the Greek meaning] to swell with moisture, be excited or eager."
(Oxford English Dictionary, Simpson & Weiner, 2002a)

"The expulsive discharge of neuromuscular tensions at the peak of sexual response." (Kinsey et. al., 1953)

"A peak intensity of excitation generated by: (a) afferent and re-afferent stimulation from visceral and/or somatic sensory receptors activated exogenously and/or endogenously, and/or (b) higher-order cognitive processes, followed by a release and resolution (decrease) of excitation. By this definition, orgasm is characteristic of, but not restricted to, the genital system." (Komisaruk & Whipple, 1991)

"The zenith of sexuoerotic experience that men and women characterize subjectively as voluptuous rapture or ecstasy. It occurs simultaneously in the brain/mind and the pelvic genitalia. Irrespective of its locus of onset, the occurrence of orgasm is contingent upon reciprocal intercommunication between neural networks of the brain, above and the pelvic genitalia, below, and it does not survive their deconnection by the severance of the spinal cord. However, it is able to survive even extensive trauma at either end." (Money, Wainwright & Hingsburger, 1991)

"A variable, transient, peak sensation of intense pleasure, creating an altered state of consciousness, usually with an initiation accompanied by involuntary rhythmic contractions of the pelvic striated circumvaginal musculature, often with concomitant uterine and anal contractions, and myotonia that resolves the sexually induced vasocongestion and myotonia, generally with an induction of well-being and contentment." (Meston, Levin, et. al., 2004)

All quotes taken from: Barry R. Komisaruk, Carlos Beyer-Flores, and Beverly Whipple, *The science of orgasm*, chapter I.

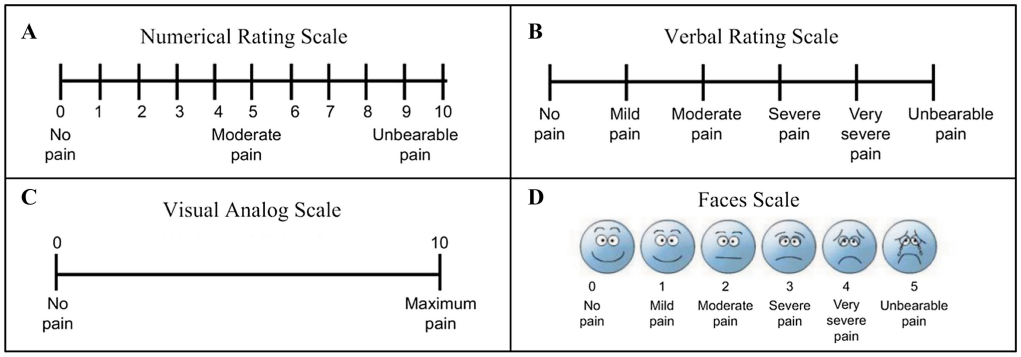
101 Eschenmayer in Kleinschmidt: p. 47.

A century later, Gustav Theodor Fechner takes up intensity in his famous 1860 law, proposing that sensation increases logarithmically with stimulus intensity. The principle of measurement appears in psychology and psychophysics as applied to the human senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Fechner's law mathematically expresses the relation between physical stimulus intensity and the magnitude of sensation. Following Leibniz' concept of minimal perceptions ("petites perceptions" in the sense of differential units of experience), Fechner develops a formula of measurement that describes a non-linear relation between stimulus intensity and sensation. This relation is mediated by bodily processes, which he calls "psychophysical activities." While external psychophysics investigates the relation between stimulus and sensation, internal psychophysics concerns the bodily processes immediately underlying mental activity. In German, the formula is called *Maßformel*, a measurement formula. The name perfectly describes the general promise of "intensity" – to bring order to uncontrollable and messy things such as sensations or feelings.

My sketchy conceptual history ends here. (It could have infinitely more entries. I have not mentioned Schelling, nor Goethe, nor Humboldt. Novalis is missing. Not to mention the 20th century, Deleuze, Lyotard.) Words and numbers entered into a peculiar tension in the 18th century: Intensity promised an exactitude, a structural order unknown in the centuries before, that would also affect language. Mathematical formulas, electricity and electrostatic attractions would charge and recharge words and vice versa. New phenomena demanded new words – new words inspired new possibilities of perception, and ways of structuring the world intellectually.

No entry for "intensity" can be found in the *German Dictionary* of the Brothers Grimm. Around 1835, when the philologists started their mission to assemble all words of the German language to study their origin and use, that particular noun was not among them. It belonged and still belongs to a rather elitist sphere, the discourse of specialists.

Appendix B: Medical Intensity Scales



Examples of common pain rating scales used in most hospitals. A numerical rating scale (NRS), B verbal rating scale (VRS), C visual analog scale (VAS), D faces scale[102]

The scheme above shows four common scales used in human medicine to capture the intensity of pain. A patient is asked to express their perception and to locate it on the scale.

The scale can be compared to a city map. It serves as an orientation tool to assign a position within the wide field of pain, so another person can identify "where" the patient finds themselves. Composed of two elements, a graphic structure and verbal descriptors, it bridges the inner subjective experience to the outside world. The subject alone is able to assign a degree and point to a position on the graph. I am *here*. Intensity is happening *here.* The results can then be quantified and mapped over time.[103]

What is the difference between "severe" and "very severe pain"? I'm tempted to add more intensifiers ("verys") to achieve a numerical progression but this is not how medical language works. How is quantity expressed in the verbal rating scale? Again, I'll have a look at the extremes:[104] The lowest degree is defined by a negation, *no pain,* —something that is not there or that can't be felt yet. The highest degree is indicated by *unbearable pain.* The prefix includes a negation (un-), indicating a quality that is there but too strong to *bear*. In Old English, *beran* meant "to carry, bring; bring forth, give birth to, produce; to endure without resistance; to support, hold up, sustain; to wear", the Middle Dutch *beren* means "to carry a child", as do the Old High German *beran* and the German *gebären*. Many senses are contained in this notion of "moving onward by pressure." This might take us a little too far, but it seems no coincidence that the word to *bear* takes us back to the beginning of life, the source of all pain.[105]

102 Wang/Urman, R.D. et al. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42452-020-03822-8

103 In comparison with the visual analogue scale (showing faces with different expressions) and the numerical rating scale (showing only numbers) the VRS scale has proven to be least prone to flaws in capturing pain. See: https://www.pschyrembel.de/Verbale%20Ratingskala/K0101

104 Extreme (noun) derives from extrēmus the Latin word for "utmost point of a thing," or "outermost, utmost, farthest, last; the last part; extremity, boundary; highest or greatest degree," the superlative of *exterus* (see exterior). In English as in Latin, extreme is not always felt as a superlative, hence grammar allows for *more extreme, most extreme,* a kind of doubling-up of the superlative. The Latin phrase *in extremis* refers to the "last stages of life" and reminds us of the limits on our scale, the limits of a body, of existence. Source: https://www.etymonline.com/

105 From c. 1300 as "possess as an attribute or characteristic." Meaning "sustain without sinking" is from 1520s; to bear (something) in mind is from 1530s; meaning "tend, be directed (in a certain way)" is from c. 1600.

Other medical scales draw on different notions of imagination or, in Kant's terms, *Einbildungskraft,* to express the upper limit: *non-imaginable, maximally imaginable intensity, or most intense imaginable pain.*

Clearly, for the medical scientist, each expression on the graph represents a clear reference to a state that can be quantified, transformed into data and thus compared with other states. Different rating systems, e.g., Stanine (STAndard NINE) try to operationalize language, define the levels of measurement, etc. This one-to-one reference (*Eineindeutigkeit*) between a descriptor and a number stands in contrast to the polysemic use of language in a literary text. Scientists have long attempted to make intensity objectively measurable. In the area of sensory physiology, it is currently being investigated whether taste intensity can be determined via an electronic measuring procedure, a "sensorial tongue", in order to circumvent subjective judgements. In medicine and psychiatry, the hope is to better evaluate illnesses such as depression via blood tests, EEG or neuroimaging. In recent years, a series of discoveries in psychosomatics, neurobiology and biochemistry have given cause for excitement, having reintroduced a direct, measurable correlation between language and the body. Experimental studies in the realm of psychoneuroimmunology have shown how specific linguistic images can trigger somatic reactions in patients' bodies.

To bear down "proceed forcefully toward" (especially in nautical use) is from 1716. To bear up is from 1650s as "be firm, have fortitude." Source: https://www.etymonline.com/

Appendix C: Obituary

KENNETH D. KEELE, MD, FRCP (1909-1987)

With the death on 3 May 1987 of the distinguished physician and medical historian, Kenneth David Keele, the world of scholarship has sustained an irreplaceable loss, especially in the field of Leonardo da Vinci studies.

(…)

In 1941 tragedy befell him when his first wife (née Doris Berther) died suddenly in late pregnancy from the rare complication of spontaneous hemorrhagic infarction of the suprarenal glands, which Kenneth described in a classic paper based on personal observation of his wife's illness.[106]

I pause at Keele's obituary. The account of his wife's death reminds me of the story of a friend and his wife: in both stories, medical knowledge and personal loss become painfully entangled. I never knew my friend's wife. I'll call her T.

T. was a neuropathologist and neurologist conducting research on a specific disease. Some decades ago, the disease was still believed to be hereditary. At the time, T. proceeded from the hypothesis that it might be a viral disease and that particles found in the brains of patients could be remnants of viruses. One day she was able to obtain fresh material and started to grow cell cultures. Her research looked very promising. Then she became pregnant. During childbirth, she asked for spinal anaesthesia. Only a few days later, she started to work again in the lab. Maybe this was the moment, my friend said. We will never know. Two days later, paralysis began to affect her lower extremities and then spread to the upper part of her body. This is how the catastrophe began. *Descensus ad Inferos*. For a while, the child was breast fed by a wet nurse. The father would give the child a piece of his wife's clothing that still carried her smell. My friend reflects on the limits of putting this experience into words:

"Nicht das Biografische der Geschichte ist das Besondere, sondern das schicksalhafte Ereignis, in dem das Leben sich fiktional scheinend, einem unfassbar um den Hals dreht. Manche werden darüber verrückt, eben durch die Intensität, da immer etwas Unausdrückbares zurückbleibt." For him, narrative can't hold it. It will always sound sensational or sentimental. He suggests that when one pauses in times of need and listens to the poetic, something emerges that may touch others, yet remains beyond the grasp of the person affected. After the burial of his wife, my friend wrote a poem. It was published in a newspaper on the following Sunday and many read it. Yet when he was walking along the street, alone or with his two children, most people who knew

106 Kenneth Keele was a pioneer in pain measurement. In 1948, he introduced a pain chart for recording patients' assessments of pain intensity over time. A particular sentence in his obituary catches my attention: a hidden tragedy mentioned but not told that is connected to the destiny of many other women. Women who have died in or as a result of childbirth. No one can tell how much Keele, the inventor of the pain scale, suffered himself back then. Certainly, grief clearly belongs to a different category than physical pain, but in pain, categories and sensations often collapse. Numbers are promises to contain pain. Phrases too. Some are contagious. See Keele: "The Pain Chart," *The Lancet 252*, no. 6514 (1948), pp. 6–8.

him crossed to the other side. Later they told him that the density, the fatefulness of the event, had been too much for them, and that a sense of helplessness overcame them that rendered an encounter impossible.

Back then, my friend had a friend, a literary scholar who had lost his younger wife to leukemia. The woman had a special genius and was of peculiar beauty; redheaded, tall, much taller than her husband. She died at 29. My friend mourned with his friend. Once he, the literary scholar, came and told him something that my friend regarded as especially tough: "You will never find her again, every search in memory is in vain." Later he realized that his friend was right. The experience of loss would create a special bond between the two. They wrote many articles and a book together. But while the literary scholar did not dare to touch his wife's work, our friend felt an inner urge to publish the medical research of his deceased partner. He started to complete some of her texts and to publish them. But unfortunately, the publication of her articles would never leave a living trace of her. He tried to write about how the experience of writing, the engagement with his wife's literary and scientific remains, had brought him to the firm resolve never ever to publish a conventional scientific text again, only essays. In the hope of approaching the secret of expression ("Ausdruck") with full respect for the inexpressible ("Unausdrückbares"). Maybe this was the ominous something that he would never understand. Later in life, my friend became a full-time hermeneut and therapist. This is how I got to know him. He wrote to me: "Da ist immer ein Überrest. Er kommt sicherlich aus einem Weltmangel, als Seinsgeschenk, eine Gnade, aber der Preis ist sehr hoch. Aber das wissen Sie ja selbst." (But you know that yourself.)

Appendix D: Blurbs for a novel

Wissenschaftsroman

Kay ist Leiterin des Instituts für Fühlkunde. Wir verfolgen ihre Forschung auf dem Gebiet der Intensität der Liebe. In Exkursen rekapituliert die Autorin ihr Interesse an der Entwicklung neuer Feelings und Fähigkeiten. Was bedeutet Ficken, wenn keine Ehe, keine Kinder und kein Spaß mehr dabei herauskommen müssen? Kay und ihre Mitarbeiterinnen propagieren ein anderes Liebesmodell: Lüben. Praktische Beispiele zeigen, wie jede diese Ability täglich trainieren kann: Lüben, lüben, lüben. Ein Sachbuch, aus dem das Leben strotzt.

Ornamentale Biografie

Die Stylistin Kay lebt in einem modernistischen Baumhaus am Gleisdreieck Berlin. Nach einer desaströsen Affaire mit einem georgischen Schriftsteller zieht sich Kay in ein Zenkloster zurück und arbeitet an ihrem Ausstieg aus der Fashion-Welt. Kays Mode verkauft sich schlecht. Mit ihrer Partnerin Susette gründet sie das Label "Inventory". Das Buch ähnelt einem aus den Fugen geratenen Lookbook.

Heroisch, Sci-fi

Kay ist eine Heroin, die (die) I. beherrscht. Sie verfügt über Superpowers: Body doubling, Ausencia, Anaestesia (Gegen-Verwirklichung) und Eruptio. Bei Bedarf kann Kay zum Impersonalen wechseln. Ihr dementer Vater wird von einer inzestuösen Bande polnischer Pfleger*innen betreut. Als er den dringlichen Wunsch äußert, von einer japanischen Roboterin versorgt zu werden, eskaliert die Situation.

Harte Sahne

"A tantalizing, tough, wildly associative work that leaps effortlessly between music album and book, sex criticism and fiction."

Memoir

Kay zählt zu den Pionierinnen der deutschen Postlovebewegung. 1979-1984 war sie Gitarristin der legendären Noise-Band *Ficktionality*. Heute ist sie auch Mutter. Wie die Intimsphäre aus weiblicher Sicht erlebt und entliebt wurde, hat noch niemand so plastisch und zugleich so reflektiert, so ausgebufft und zugleich so fundiert geschildert wie die Protagonistin selbst in ihrem umwerfenden Memoir.

Spinsterland

Berlin in den Wechseljahren 2028/29. Die Europäische Union hat sich aufgelöst. Die Stylistin Kay (52) ist müde. Gemeinsam mit ihrer Freundin, der Soziologin Dee (67) plant sie ein neues Business: Spinsterland, das weltweit erste Zentrum für Lust & Alter. Sie erwerben einen verlassenen Olivenhain im griechischen Aspiria und suchen Unterstützung bei lokalen PolitikerInnen, Erotomanen und Farmer*innen. Die Realität übertrifft ihre Erwartungen.

Toponymisches Heft Nr. 11: Kay, 2040

Das Toponymische Heft Nr. 11 nimmt die Herausforderung an, das schier unmögliche Verhältnis zwischen Frau-Mann als einen Ort zu beschreiben, der im Sexuellen entsteht. Ficken ereignet sich nicht als solches, sondern immer anders. Kay

und ihre Verhältnisse stehen im Zentrum des Hefts. Damit wäre auch unsere toponymische Mission definiert: Frau kommt nicht vor. Die Protagonistin ist ein Verhältniskörper, den es zu benennen gilt. Extra: Mit Bauchnoten renommierter Sozialwissenschafter*innen.

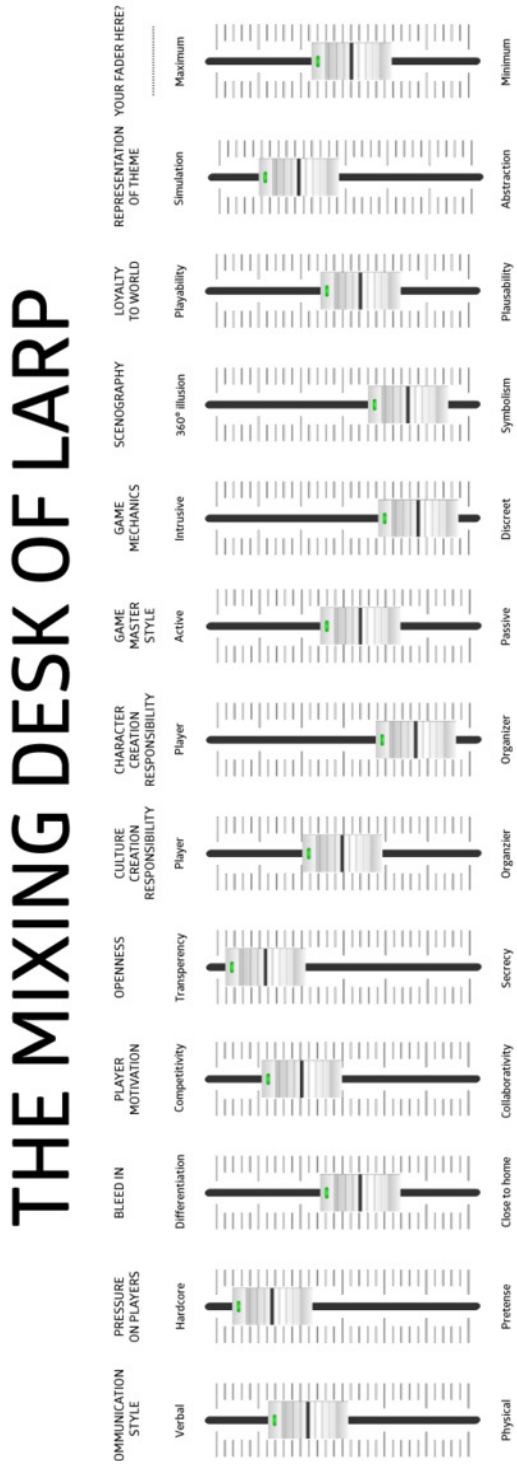
Eine Geschichte der Sexualität

Kay befindet sich im 5. Jahr ohne Love. Ihren Geschlechtsgenossinnen kündigt sich ein vielversprechender Paradigmenwechsel an: Das sexuelle Begehren, ein über Jahrtausende altes Programm ist mutiert und scheint sich loszulösen von seiner evolutionären Funktion. Und nicht nur dass – auch die romantische Norm des Liebens bzw. die Art, wie es sich anfühlen sollte, beginnt sich zu lockern. Kay u. Co. sind confused!

Sehr

In ihrem 45. Lebensjahr beschließt die Stylistin Kay, sich in den Dienst der neo-neosexuellen Revolution zu stellen. Sie arbeitet an einer radikalen Trennung von Sex und Sinn. In ihren Übungen mit Ran, Rek, Sef, Wolf, Jens usw. sucht sie nach neuen feelings. Meaning lesser sex! Doch immer wieder stößt sie an Grenzen. Die weibliche Natur (“Gebärmutter“) bleibt ein renitenter Faktor im Challenge um Gleichberechtigung und Würde. Draußen läuft die Reproduktion weiter. Kinder kommen immer noch aus Frauen raus. Aber nicht mehr aus Kay! There must be a Higher Love.

Appendix E: Mixing Desk of LARP



The image shows a conceptual mixing desk used in the world of live-action-role-playing (LARP). The basic idea is that the designers of a game (or the players themselves) can, like DJs, adjust their attitudes and other parameters. They can increase or decrease "openness", "pressure on other players", their "motivation", and so on. See: https://nordiclarp.org/wiki/The_Mixing_Desk_of_Larp

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List of Related Works

Lecture Performances and Performances

"Kay, or a Case." Public Colloquium, Angewandte Innovation Laboratory, Vienna, May 8, 2018.
"Exercises in New Meaning." 10th SAR International Conference on Artistic Research, Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Zurich, March 22, 2019.
"Questionology." With Charlotta Ruth. Research Pavilion #3, Venice, May 6–12, 2019.
"Kay, or a Case." Public Colloquium, Zentrum Fokus Forschung, Vienna, May 28, 2019.
"Jens." Convocation, Research Pavilion #3, Venice, June 17, 2019.
Lecture performance at Continental Drift, Atelierhaus Salzamt, Linz, October 24, 2019.
"Kay." Let's Fabulate, University of Applied Arts Vienna, January 15, 2020.
"Exercise in Fabulation" Online Public Colloquium, Zentrum Fokus Forschung, Vienna, June 3, 2020.
"Questionnaire." With Charlotta Ruth; programming by Simon Repp. Temporarily available online from May 2020.
"Questionology." With Charlotta Ruth. Co-produced by brut Wien and Zentrum Fokus Forschung, Vienna, June 2021.
"Sehr" Performative Reading, Readers: Cordula Daus with Barbis Ruder, Verena Faisst, Micha Payer, Barbara Graf, Charlotta Ruth, Zentrum Fokus Forschung, Vienna, June 19, 2022.

Workshops

"Questionology – The Research Question." With Charlotta Ruth. Alliances & Commonalities, Stockholm/online, October 22–24, 2020.
"Questionology." With Charlotta Ruth. PRACTICE(!)WEEK, Angewandte Performance Laboratory (APL), Vienna, September 21–24, 2021.

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