

## DATA, UNDEAD: THE CULTURAL PROSOPOPOIETICS OF THE ARCHIVE

[Relating to talk "Data, undead: The cultural prosopopoetics of techno-memory, or: This is not an archive", given at conference *Packrats and Bureaucrats: Study in the Archive*, University of California, Santa Barbara (Interdisciplinary Center), 5./6. February 2001<sup>1</sup>]

Archivology of Media

Undead

The virtual reactivation of a lost sound storage medium:

Hornbostel's *Phonogramm-Archiv*

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The silence of the archive

Very titanically: So what happens to the archive?

### **Archivology of Media**

Ephemeral articulations like speech and sound, movement and the instant moment have, as it were, become immortally archivable by technical media of recording like photography, phonograph, and film. But just as it were; is the relationship established between the classical archive (as an institution of processing records for memory) and such media of recording a proper or a metaphorical one? Such machines are for engineers what rhetoric is for the humanities. What returns in a culture of non-discursive apparatuses is, on a discursive level, an epistemological aesthetics based on the figure of prosopopoetics, the desire to address the dead as something alive. Media-archaeology, though, teaches to unmask this archival phantasm.

Let me first reflect on the term "archivology of media". The theoretical unease with the predominance of narrative as the dominant medium of processing our knowledge of the past by actually *undoing the archive* has led to works like Michel Foucault's *Archéologie du Savoir* (1969) and Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973). It took a new infrastructure of communication though, the impact of digital media, to put this critique of historical discourse into media-archaeological terms and practice. Francis Bacon once longed for exorcizing „all kinds of phantasma" (as declared in his *Novum Organon*) - this is what

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<sup>1</sup> For a version in German, see W. E., *Halluzinationen von Leben = Prosopopöie des Archivs. Maskenspiele*, in: Sven Spieker (ed.), *Bürokratische Leidenschaften. Kultur- und Mediengeschichte im Archiv*, Berlin (Kulturverlag Kadmos) 2004, 243-262

today might be called the media-archaeological gaze. I want to apply media archivology - both subject and object of my argument - in two steps: by first uncovering, or to say it in archival terms: de-classifying the hidden rhetorical trope which still governs our cultural discourse on archives, that is: the archival phantasm of hallucinating speech and life in what is actually mute and mechanically dead; after that exorcism, I try to argue that what we still call archives are no archives at all any more.

Archaeology of knowledge, we have learned from Foucault, deals with discontinuities, with gaps and absences, with silence and ruptures, as opposed to the historical discourse which privileges the notion of continuity in order to re-affirm the possibility of subjectivity. We are separated from our own archives to the extent that they allow us to speak at all - which implies that we cannot exhaustively describe the archive of a given epistemology or culture. "Archives are less concerned with memory than with the necessity to discard, erase, eliminate."<sup>2</sup> Where historiography is founded on teleology and narrative closure, the archive is discontinuous, ruptured. Like all kinds of data banks "it forms relationships not on the basis of causes and effects, but through networks"; instead of being a medium of cathartic memory, "the archive is traumatic, testimony not to a successful encounter with the past but to what Jacques Lacan has referred to as the 'missed encounter with the real'" (Sven Spieker) - that is, an allegory of the impossible bridging of a gap.

This silence of the archive has seemingly been replaced by an aesthetics of the undead.

## Undead

Is there something like an anthropological foundation for the desire to address the past and the dead in a would-be dialogical form, as if they were still alive?<sup>3</sup> The rhetorical figure (thus means: a cultural technique, even a mechanical one) involved here is what in classical Greek has been termed *prosopopeia*, the rendering of a „speaking“ mask to something non-alive.<sup>4</sup> The undead undoes the binary logic of life and death (which has been illuminated by René Descartes in his metaphorical comparison of

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<sup>2</sup> Sven Spieker, proposal for a research project: "Archive fever": Storage, Memory, Media (draft 2000)

<sup>3</sup> On this trope in Aby Warburg's phylogenetic model of cultural imagery see Edgar Wind, Warburgs Begriff der Kulturwissenschaft und seine Bedeutung für die Ästhetik, in: Aby M. Warburg, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, Baden-Baden 1992, 401-417, esp. 408f

<sup>4</sup> In the Microsoft *Encarta* Enzyklopedia, the word "prosopopy" is unknown; as alternative search word is being proposed "photocopy".

the human body with a clock-work).<sup>5</sup> There is no linear narrative; archival spaces don't have a beginning, nor an end, as opposed to the book-based, historiographic timing of history. Storage time is empty time.<sup>6</sup> Siegfried Kracauer has been very pessimistic about the possibilities to translate the narrative continuity of a novel into camera-life<sup>7</sup> - since living processes cannot be told, but simply registered by technical media. What looks *live* to the beholder in visual media, might as well be recorded from tape (since the introduction of magnetic tv recording in 1958/59) - an uncanny, undeadly state of the moving image.

"One can no longer distinguish, visually or aurally, between that which is reproduced and its reproduction [...] not even discern *that* or *when* reproduction or repetition, in the manifest sense of recording or replaying, is taking place. We must be informed whether or not what we are seeing is "live". [...] we cannot distinguish through our senses alone between what we take to be simply "alive" and what as reproduction, separated from its origin, is structurally posthumous [...]." <Weber 1996: 121>

The art historian Aby Warburg tried hard to conceptualize the categories of the dead and the living, the things provided with a soul and the lifeless things into a theory of the image. Already the emergence of the phonograph puzzled these clear-cut notions.<sup>8</sup> "Speech", as it were, has become immortal", reads the comment of the *Scientific American* from 1877 on Thomas Alva Edison's recent invention. *Nota bene*: "as it were". Since such machines are for engineers, what figures of speech are for writers. What returns here, epistemologically, is the figure of prosopopey, the rhetoric of presenting the dead as alive - just like the first advertising images of the Edison phonograph presented the apparatus as growing out of an allegorical human figure. The 19th century is full with phantasies of making the dead sent decipherable messages to the living, such as the experiments with magnetic writing tables to see such messages appear.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> René Descartes, *Über die Leidenschaften der Seele*, in: *Philosophische Werke*, trans. and commented by Artur Buchenau, Leipzig (Meiner) 1911, chapter 6 "Über den Unterschied eines lebendigen und eines toten Körpers",

<sup>6</sup> „Das Konstrukt „geschichtlicher Zeit“, eines geschichtlichen Kontinuums ist untrennbar verknüpft mit dem Medium des Buches <...> Demgegenüber ist Speicherzeit *leere oder tote Zeit*“: Götz Großklaus, *Medien-Zeit, Medien-Raum: zum Wandel der raumzeitlichen Wahrnehmung in der Moderne*, Frankfurt/M. (Suhrkamp) 1995, 47

<sup>7</sup> Quoted after: Gabriele Seitz, *Film als Rezeptionsform von Literatur*, 2nd. ed. Munich (tuduv) 1981, 413

<sup>8</sup> See David Kaufmann, *Der Phonograph und die Blinden*, 1899

<sup>9</sup> One of these tables has been recently detected by a researcher of the journal *Natural History* in (of course) the archive of the Society for Psychic Research at Cambridge University, with still readable ghost-writing. See Richard Milner, Charles Darwin and Associates, *Ghostbusters*, in: *Scientific American*, Oktober 1996

What had been a rhetorical figure so far, became positive evidence in the electro-physiological experiments of Duchenne de Boulogne in his 1862 publikation *Mécanisme de la physiognomie humaine*, where he describes the phantasm of self-registering life, when the moment electric current, sent through human flesh, is being coupled with photographic registration.<sup>10</sup> Subject of Duchenne's experiments has been a patient suffering from the Moebius disease, whose mimetic facial muscles (the *nervus facialis*) had been lame from the time of his birth. Such a face, devoid of expression and motion - as if he had put on "a lifeless mask of himself"<sup>11</sup> - is the reversal of archival prosopopy indeed, re-poled like the "+" and "-" in electric circuits itself. The *v-* or *compufrog* has transferred this scenario into the pure space of digital calculation.<sup>12</sup> The artificial life of electro-informaticized machines become a function of their post-archival memory, such as robots can react only by comparing incoming „sensual“ data with a stored set of information (which might be called library, archive or catalogue).<sup>13</sup>

It is the option of feedback-operations, given with integrated circuits, which sets the classical storage medium archive - a „trivial machine“ in the terms of Heinz von Foerster's cybernetics<sup>14</sup> - literally in motion; the result is operating "Data, undead" (re-figured in a notorious protagonist of *Star Trek*), when the awareness of a past state of a machine influences the probability of its future actions (Markov chains).

### **The virtual reactivation of a lost sound storage medium: Hornbostel's *Phonogramm-Archiv***

Occidental phonocentrism has always been striving for finding means to store the human voice in the memory apparatus - a desire resulting from the „dialogical“ hallucinations of *speaking with*

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<sup>10</sup> See Hans-Christian von Herrmann / Bernhard Siegert, *Beseelte Statuen - zuckende Leichen. Medien der Verlebendigung vor und nach Guillaume Benjamin Duchenne*, in: *Kaleidoskopien. Jahrbuch des Instituts für Theaterwissenschaften der Universität Leipzig*, Jg. 3: *Körperinformationen*, Institut für Buchkunst Leipzig 2000, 65-99 (92)

<sup>11</sup> Jan Schweizer, *Mienen in Fesseln*, in: *Die Zeit* no. 2 from 4th January 2001, 25f

<sup>12</sup> See Burkhard, Strassmann, *Frösche mit der Maus retten*, in: *Die Zeit* Nr. 1 v. 28. Dezember 2000: 58, referring to: [www.george.lbl.gov/vfrog](http://www.george.lbl.gov/vfrog) (Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, University of California), and the morphological program *Compufrog* ([www.kmr.net/bluecross](http://www.kmr.net/bluecross))

<sup>13</sup> Dirk Baecker, *Was wollen die Roboter?*, in: Carl Hegemann (ed.), *Freude ohne Ende. Kapitalismus und Depression II*. Berlin (Alexander) 2000, 134-152 (139)

<sup>14</sup> See Heinz von Foerster, *Prinzipien der Selbstorganisation im sozialen und betriebswirtschaftlichen Bereich*, in: ders., *Wissen und Gewissen. Versuch einer Brücke*, Frankfurt/M. (Suhrkamp) 1993, 233-268

the dead in historical imagination, and the recent dissimulation of the silence of data by linguistic (ro)bots in cyberspace - algorithms making websites literally speak to the user.<sup>15</sup> Even if the ancient Christian Gnosis acknowledged that in the beginning there was silence, it seems to be part of cultural rhetoric to produce consolation in the permanent anthropologic struggle against the experience of death. This is transparent in religious discourses in Medieval times like Philip of Harvengt's *De silentio*: "when canonical authors set out to treat silence, the discussion frequently evolves into a discussion of useful speech."<sup>16</sup> New technical means since late nineteenth century made it possible to inscribe traces of the human voice both literally in the already established archival institutions of cultural memory and in the epistemological „archive“ (Foucault) as dispositive of cultural (re)cognition.

As an example, let us take Keith Hopkins' study in the emergence of Christianity in antiquity *A World full of Gods*, a true exercise in experimental history which is governed by one of the oldest phantasms of historical imagination in the occident: to be able to travel in time and to speak with the dead. Hopkins actually performs these scenarios literally, by letting two students of ancient religion travel back to Pompeii and by letting a modern TV crew enter ancient imperial Rome. One day in 85 CE Isaac, an old Jew on the point of death and survivor of the religious Qumran community close to the Dead Sea destroyed by the Romans, is troubled by worries how to transfer his precious scrolls, saved from his commune, to his nephew Hilary in order to save this secret knowledge for posterity. Perhaps God will send a miracle, he muses; at this moment, enter a TV crew: "Now all they have to do is to get old Isaac to answer some questions about life in the commune for the program, *Judaism, Then and Now*, reminiscences of an insider. <...> "Dialogues with the Dead, that's what we'll call it."<sup>17</sup>

A *nota bene* remark clarifies that the dialogue now moves on two interconnected levels, the ancient and the modern. It is a play, but also a replay of the Qumran charter myth, in which the main characters have their mythical doubles - an allegorical scenario indeed, reminiscent of the multiple levels of reading, the hermeneutics of the Holy Bible itself. "But perhaps the most important character is the TV camera itself, which symbolizes that common and underrated, but nonetheless invaluable,

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<sup>15</sup> See Katja Schmid, Die unermüdlichen Agenten, in: Die Zeit no. 13, 22 March 2001, 49; furthermore xxx Svenbro, Phrasikleia, xxx

<sup>16</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London (Univ. of California Press) 1984 [\*1982], 45

<sup>17</sup> Keith Hopkins, A world full of gods: The strange triumph of Christianity, New York (The Free Press) 2000, 58

instrument of history writing, namely simplificatory misunderstanding" <Hopkins 2000: 59>, indicating the *visual turn* in historiographical recording implied by the audiovisual media of the XXth century - the historian's desire for immediate eye-witnessing apparently come true. Hopkins' fictitious scenario is to capture the atmosphere and passion of Qumran, thus supplying the archaeological evidence (the scattered Dead Sea Scrolls, dry and contextually "cold" as they are as an archive) with warm historical counter-imagination. What has been elaborated in lofty theoretical studies by Paul de Man for literary criticism (*Blindness and Insight*) and by Hayden White for historiography (*Metahistory*) is being applied in the writing of *A World full of Gods*. Hopkins' rhetorical trope thus is irony, the awareness of the historiographer of the unbridgable gap which separates the time of his writing from the time described. What seems true here for the case discussed, is a true allegory of (mis)reading history in general.

Even if we still cannot interview the dead interactively with a microphone, if for example we want Bernhard of Clairvaux' opinion on the medieval popular belief in a female Christ (that which written texts distinctively exclude), there is a read-only-memory with their recorded voice now. The notion of the archive is in transition - towards the audio-visual. As long as there have been archives, the phantasma of recording the acoustically real, i. e. the non-writable, has generated rhetorical, symbolic and scriptural forms of memorizing sound in supplementary ways. With the emergence of the phonograph, this new type of records has still been subjected to forms of inventorization and administration which were developed in the long-time context of paper-based archives. (Multi-)Media archaeology searches to reconstruct phantasms of memorizing sound in a pre-technical age and point out the discontinuities which arose with the invasion of audiovisual records in traditional archives, libraries and museums in the twentieth century, resulting in a plea for rethinking the options of retrieval under new media conditions - transcending the notion of the archive itself.

In Germany, the invasion of the Edison phonograph into the Gutenberg-galaxy of cultural memory inaugurated a century which, for the first time, was also gifted with an audiovisual memory. In the same year as Sigmund Freud fixed his psycho-analytic interpretation of dreams (*Traumdeutung*, 1900), the psychologist of acoustiv phenomena, Carl Stumpf, and in his sequence the music ethnologist Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, founded, at the Berlin university, a phonographic archive with world-wide recordings on wax-cylinder of the voices of people threatened to be

extinguished.<sup>18</sup> At the end of the 20th century the archival character of von Hornbostel's phonogram archive has been reversed: Not only that the collection had been disseminated around the world (as a result of dislocations in and after World War II), but what is more important, the frozen voices on the analogue, vulnerable storage medium of wax cylinders are currently being de-frozen by digital means.<sup>19</sup> The Berlin Society for the Enhancement of Applied Informatics has developed a method to gain acoustic signals from negative traces of galvano-copies from Edison-cylinders by opto-endoscopic „reading“ - scanning visual information into sound.<sup>20</sup> Thus the making of stored acoustic frequencies actually speak does not ask for rhetoric operations, but on the contrary a hermeneutically distant gaze, an exteriority of interpretation which the aesthetics of the opto-technical scanner only can provide.<sup>21</sup> Technical media provide a different option of reading: reading without (premature) understanding. The archaeological gaze tries to mimick this ascetic confrontation of data, resisting the temptations of figuration, that is, narrative.

All of the sudden, we can listen again to the recordings taken by the ethnologist M. Selenka who went to the tribe of the Wedda in India in 1907. She made the natives speak or sing into a phonograph which she instantaneously played back to the speakers - to their joyfully recognition.<sup>22</sup> With the media mystery of the recordability of the physically real of sound and images, humans get a multi-media mirror effect (in Lacan's sense), sublating the clear-cut difference between presence and absence, present and past. Strange enough, we are able, today, to listen to this play-

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<sup>18</sup> See W. E., Hornbostels Klangarchiv: Gedächtnis als Funktion von Dokumentationstechnik, in: Sebastian Klotz (ed.), „Vom tönenden Wirbel menschlichen Tuns“: Erich M. von Hornbostel als Gestaltpsychologe, Archivar und Musikwissenschaftler, Berlin / Milow (Schibri) 1998, 116-131; furthermore the catalogue no. VI (*Wissen*) of the exhibition *7 Hügel. Bilder und Zeichen des 21. Jahrhunderts* in the Berlin Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin 2000 (esp. the hypermedia installation "MusikWeltKarte"); see as well Artur Simon (ed.), *Das Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv 1900-2000. Sammlungen der traditionellen Musik der Welt*, Berlin (VWB) 2000. See as well the proceedings of the Annual Conference of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives - IASA -, Vienna, 18-23 September, 1999: *A Century of Sound Archiving*

<sup>19</sup> On pre-phonographic metaphors of writing in medieval times see Horst Wenzel, Die "fließende" Rede und der „gefrorene“ Text. Metaphern der Medialität, in: Gerhard Neumann (ed.), *Poststrukturalismus: Herausforderung an die Literaturwissenschaft*, xxx

<sup>20</sup> See Gerd Stanke / Thomas Kessler, in: Simon (ed.) 2000: 209-215

<sup>21</sup> Siehe Jeffrey Sconce, The voice from the void. Wireless, modernity and the distant dead, in: *International journal of Cultural studies* Vol. 1, no. 2 (1998), 211-232

<sup>22</sup> Quoted after: Max Wertheimer, Musik der Wedda, in: *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* Jg. XI, Heft 2 = Januar-März 1910, 300-309 (300)

back in exactly the same quality as the Indian natives could in 1907, since an example of the above mentioned opto-electronic archaeology of sound can be appropriately experienced right in the World Wide Web.<sup>23</sup> Message or noise? Only the media-archaeological operation of opto-digitally reading the inscribed traces make the otherwise inaccessible sound recording audible again. Synesthetically, we can see a spectrographic image of sound memory - a straight look into the archive.<sup>24</sup> The opto-digital *close reading* of sound as image, though, dissolves any semantically meaningful unit into discrete blocks of signals. Instead of musicological hermeneutics, the media-archaeological gaze is required here.

At the end of Second World War, the reels of a secret Nazi medical film project from between 1941 and 1945 at the Berlin hospital Charité were thrown by the SS into lake Stössensee near Berlin when the Red Army approached the capital. It was a literally media-archaeological moment when divers detected these films in 1993 and rescued them; just three of several hundred film rolls could be deciphered at all, one of them showing on the basis of heavily damaged film material the shape of a naked man who performs several movements, apparently directed by orders from outside. "More cannot be seen, comments the media artist who has re-presented this material to the public<sup>25</sup> - a ghostly media-prosopopy.

Dealing with gaps and confronting absences is the lot of media-archaeology. Of course, every film is, always already, itself an archive of time-as-movements, of life as process in time which cannot be reproduced, only measured in moving-image form.<sup>26</sup> The pioneer of cinematographic *montage* in Russia, Wsewolod Illarionowitsch Pudowkin, produced a film together with the Leningrad researcher of behavioural patterns Pawlow in 1928 under the title of *Functions of the Brain* and comments on the artificiality of mechanic reproduction of life: Any movement shown by filmic projection is dead already, even if its original has once moved in front of the camera. Only the setting-in-relation of filmic moments by cutting them together into a visual synthesis provides them with „filmic life“.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.gfai.de/projekte/spubito/index.htm>

<sup>24</sup> See the spectrogram of a reconstructed recording of Wedda chants in Ceylon 1907 on the SpuBiTo web page

<sup>25</sup> Christoph Keller, *Lost / Unfound: Archives As Objects As Monuments*, in: catalogue *ars viva 00/01 - Kunst und Wissenschaft* for the exhibition by prizewinning artists of Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e. V., Berlin (Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg / Halle, January - March 2000); transl. Jeanne Haunschild, Berlin 2000

<sup>26</sup> W. Wicker, 1964, as quoted in: Keller 2000

## ***Prosopopeia***

„What is it that transforms archival revelation into an event?“<sup>27</sup>  
An archive (according to Foucault) comes into being only at the moment at its functioning. But how does it function, practically? Archival memory is still frequently being addressed by names, such as in the case (or skandal) of the archival discovery of Paul de Man's wartime writings: „as if the impossibility of distinguishing Paul de Man from the name `Paul de Man' conferred a power of resurrection on naming itself“.<sup>28</sup> De Man himself had described, in his essay "Autobiography as de-facement" (in *Allegories of Reading*), the figure of prosopopeia as the trope of the autobiographical discourse, referring to Wordsworth's *Essays upon Epitaphs*; Derrida applied this idea on de Man's epitaph himself,

"[...] the prosopopeia that he addresses to us from an incineration all the more sublime for having no tomb - <...> beyond the tomb and its sepulchral inscriptions. Here is the figure, the visage, the face and the *de-facement*, the effacement of the visible figure in prosopopeia: the sovereign, secret, discrete, and ideal signature - and the most giving, the one which *knows how to efface itself*." <sup>29</sup>

As has been literally performed by Chateaubriand's *Memoirs de l'outre-tombe* as well: Prosopopeia is the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave - a kind of *arché-au-logie* - and this fiction of voice, according to Derrida, takes the form of an *address* - an anthropomorphic reversal of addressing the archive by the reader. "Prosopopeia is hallucinatory"<sup>30</sup>; is it desirable to think of and to pass beyond this hallucination, „beyond a prosopopeia of prosopopeia" <Derrida 1986: 28>, this projection of a face upon archival files?<sup>31</sup> What we call identity, according to Foucault (who himself once was longing for effacing his

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<sup>27</sup> Johnson 1989: xi

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires: trois lectures pour Paul de Man*, as quoted in: Hamacher et al. 1988: 115. See Bettine Menke, *Rhetorik und Referentialität bei de Man und Benjamin*, in: Sigrid Weigel (ed.), *Flaschenpost und Postkarte: Korrespondenzen zwischen Kritischer Theorie und Poststrukturalismus*, Köln / Weimar / Wien (Böhlau) 1995, 49-70; furthermore W. E., *Texten ein Gesicht geben: Die Prosopopöie des Archivs im Namen Ernst Kantorowicz*, in: *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* vol. 25, no. 94/95, december 1996, 175-182

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires: for Paul de Man*, New York / Guildford (Columbia UP) 1986, 26

<sup>30</sup> Paul de Man, *Hypogram and Inscription*. Michael Riffaterre's *Poetics of Reading*, in: *Diacritics*, Winter 1981, 34

identity as an other in writing), is nothing but a choice between different masks - whether these masks be called archival papers of registration or computer programs (when Alan Turing reflected the principle of the computer, he re-named man into a *paper machine*<sup>32</sup>). Instead of giving a voice to archival documents (a prosopopy resonant in the Etruscan-Latin term *persona*, designating the actor's mask with open mouth), they might simply be silently grouped into serial entities. They cannot be made speaking, but just be analyzed, recombined, without ever identifying the portrait of the author again.

The archive as uncanny space between *real bones* and *symbolic letters* is already described in the biblical prophet Ezechiel's vision (Ez. 37, 7f and 11f) - the vision of dead signifiers which long for eschatological re-animation: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." Re-animation is *re-reading* - which is a historians' syndrom as well.<sup>33</sup> Stephen Greenblatt once openly declared his *new historicist* impulse: his explicit wish „to speak with the dead" like Shakespeare's Hamlet and Horatio on the grave-yard.<sup>34</sup> This prosopopoeitic desire takes place even against the better knowledge that every dialogue with the past only mirrors one's own voice.<sup>35</sup> The textual *grammophone*? Written letters, though, inevitably belong to the realm of the symbolic which is the order of the archive, as different from physically indexial traces - the immediacy - of the real (like rays of light on photography or tracks of sound on recordings). These new kind of technical memories are archives or libraries no more; the *a priori* of discourse turns into dynamic, in a way post-*postal* systems of information transfer<sup>36</sup> (Internet or otherwise, where „archive" is just a name for data banks in reserve).

The American painter of allegories Elihu Vedder (1836-1923) once drew the subject of *Questioning the Sphinx* (1863).<sup>37</sup> On the depicted archaeological site, remnants of skeletons can be

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<sup>31</sup> As has been performed by a permanent media installation of Christian Boltanski at the Art Room at the University of Lüneburg literally, called *The archives of my grand-parents*; see a notice in the journal: art 11/1996, 8

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Kittler, Protected Mode, in: same author, Draculas Vermächtnis. Technische Schriften, Leipzig (Reclam) 199xxx, 83

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the metaphor of the historian's task in Karl Lamprecht, Paralipomena der deutschen Geschichte, Vienna 1910, 4

<sup>34</sup> Introduction to Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespearean Negotiations, xxx

<sup>35</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act V, 1st scene. See as well the final passage in Jacques Derrida's *La voix et le phénomène*.

<sup>36</sup> See Friedrich A. Kittler / Manfred Schneider / Samuel Weber (eds.), Diskursanalysen 1: Medien, Opladen (Westdeutscher Verlag) 1987, Editorial

<sup>37</sup> See the exhibition catalogue: Ägyptomanie. Ägypten in der europäischen Kunst 1730-1930, Electa <year xxx>, entry no. 180, 262f

detected - people who had once tried to speak to the Sphinx in vain. Instead, any present enquiry is confronted with an archivally or archaeologically frozen *read only memory* - which is the nature of any inscription, any monument. The gap separating a given presence and the absence of the past is unbridgable - a kind of insight which is allegorical (different from symbolic modes which privilege continuity). The archive is always traumatic, „testimony not to a successful encounter with the past but to what Jacques Lacan has referred to as the `missed encounter with the real`" (Spieker) - that is, an allegory of the impossible bridging of a gap.

The postmodern painter Marx Tansey has given Vedder's image a literally media-archaeological turn, by providing the interrogator of the Sphinx with a microphone - with the option not only to listen to the dead, but as well to record this evidence. Electronic recording is the techno-fiction of reversing death; with the invention of the gramophone voice has lost its logocentric privilege of authorizing true presence. In Walter Rathenau's novel *Resurrection Co.* the administration of a cemetery in the city Necropolis, Dakota/USA, after some scandalous cases of mistaken people buried still alive established a company called „Dakota and Central Resurrection Telephone and Bell Co.“ with the aim of connecting the buried with the public telephone network - just in case.<sup>38</sup>

A coupling between the rhetoric of prosopopy and technics already takes place in Sigmund Freud's comparison of psychical latency „with a photographic shot <...>, which might, after a given temporal delay, might be developed into a positive image“<sup>39</sup> - *Voice Terminal Echo* (Jonathan Goldberg), textual specters, in alliance with early nineteenth century efforts to get spiritistic evidence by means of photography. In Ken McMullen's film from the 80s, *Ghost Dance*, a student of ethnology, enacted by Paqual Ogier, asks Jacques Derrida in Paris whether he believes in ghost. Without hesitation, the philosopher answers: Yes, they have returned in the guise of technical media (radio voices, televisional images - *revenance des revenants*).

### **The silence of the archive**

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<sup>38</sup> As reported in Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophon - Film - Typewriter*, Berlin (Brinkmann & Bose) 1987, 23

<sup>39</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion III*, paragraph „Latenz und Tradition“, in: same author, *Studienausgabe*, vol. IX, Frankfurt/M. (S. Fischer) 1989, 455-584 (571)

The trope of a dialogue with the past is an effect of reading techniques. In his letter to Francesco Vettori from 10th december 1513 Niccolò Machiavelli describes his practice of reading classical texts: He puts on festive dress and starts to talk to the ancient authors who, in human friendliness, answer. This is the well-known anthropomorphising trope of consolation beyond death, beyond silence. The condition for this though is total self-negation („tutto mi trasferisco in loro") - the total *metaphorein*, literally.<sup>40</sup> Actually, a distant relationship between reader and text, beholder and image has been brought about by the invention of printing, creating a kind of "silence of the archive" (the silent reading situation, corresponding with the media-archaeological insistence on confronting absences and silences, as opposed to the multi-media phantasy of a "talking" archive which today „bridges the gap between manuscript and print" again.<sup>41</sup> An inscription above the entrance to the Vatican Library in Rome demands it without ambivalence: *Silentium*. "We associate libraries, collections of knowledge, and systems for memory retrieval with silence and hence with permanence" (Leah Marcus); it is exactly this kind of silence which the archaeologist of knowledge has to regain again, resisting the temptations of turning the silence of symbolic memory apotropaeically into historical discourse, that is: dialogue. Milton as well thought of reading not as a purely visual activity but as a form of displaced orality - a conversation with kindred spirits who were long dead or at great distance (Leah Marcus). Both readers and historians long for making a textual body resound again- what has been theatrically been called *re-enactment* by Collingwood. Jules Michelet, historian of the French Revolution, hallucinated the murmurs of the dead in the archives, as if archival records had always been the logocentric variance of a phonogram (*avant la lettre*). Not yet being equipped with according technical media of recording and projecting, Michelet made use of the psychic medium of imagination: "Dans les galeries solitaires des Archives où j'errai vingt années, dans ce profond silence, des murmures cependant venaient à mon oreille."<sup>42</sup> The present multi-mediatic interface aesthetics of computers makes use of this tradition; "in recent years, the computer is no longer silent". Has the computer itself become a "talking archive" which allows „to begin to reenter a mind set that was endemic to the early modern era, even though it has long been lost to us in the era of silent libraries" <Marcus 2000>? The media-archaeological resistance to this techno-ideology of dialogue with data though rather looks at the signal-to-noise-

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<sup>40</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Opere 3: Lettere*, ed. F. Gaeta, Turino 1984, 426

<sup>41</sup> Leah S. Marcus, *The Silence of the Archive and the Noise of Cyberspace*, in: Neil Rhodes / Jonathan Sawday (eds.), *The Renaissance computer: knowledge technology in the first age of print*, London / New York (Routledge) 2000, xxx <first page>

<sup>42</sup> Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, preface of 1869, 24, in: *Oeuvres Complètes IV*, edited by Paul Vialaneix, Paris (Flammarion) 1974

ratio of electronic data transfer, from the point of view of communication theory which even Foucault alluded at in his 1966 essay „Message ou bruit?“, reminding us that „Freud a fait des énoncés verbaux des malades, considérés jusque´là comme bruit, quelque chose qui devait être traité comme un message.“<sup>43</sup> Today, Foucault´s own recorded voice can be listened at on a CD-ROM. But here, human ears only, not the technical apparatus, make sense out of noise. We are dealing with what was once called tradition - in the sense which is technical transmission of signals today. Let us take, for example, the necessity of compressing digital video streams in order to make them storable and transmittable at all. While in the transmission of archived text in the occidental tradition every letter counts - which is the lot of a whole discipline called philology -, by compressing and decompressing digital images subtle amounts of data are being lost. This might be almost undetectable for the weak human eye - an organ which has been deceived in its perception since the origin of time-based media like film -, but in the world of military target calculation this one bit of absence or difference might lead to fatal errors. The aesthetic illusion of the multi-media archive, then, is for human eyes only.

### **Very titanically: So what happens to the archive?**

The recent (re)search for the wreck of the ocean liner *Titanic* has been a true act of submarine archaeology. While the gaze of the camera is able to look at this archaeologically (that is, purely evidentially in the sense of remotely sensing data), the human eye though immediately confounds evidence with magic when it comes to re-presentation of the absence of the past. "Out of the darkness, like a ghostly apparition, the bow of a ship appears <...> just as it landed eighty-four years ago." When the submarine exploration device *Mir 1* set out for the search of the wreck in 1995 late-summer, limited visibility and strong currents were a constant threat to the expedition. Film director James Cameron recollects:

"Initially, I had totally superimposed my vision on to the ship and made the mistake of not letting *Titanic* talk to me. I was like the astronauts who experienced the moon as a series of checklists and mission protocols <the true archaeological gaze>. So, at a certain point I abandoned "the plan" and allowed the

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<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, *Message ou bruit?*, in: *Concours médical*, 88<sup>e</sup> année, 22 octobre 1966, pp. 6285f (Colloque sur la nature de la pensée médicale) = M. F., *Dits et Écrits I*, Paris (Gallimard) 1994, 557-560 (559)

emotional part of my mind to engage with the ship. It made all the difference in the world."<sup>44</sup>

Hermeneutic empathy (a rhetorical figure) of instead of data navigating distance - a world of difference between an *archaeology of knowledge* and historical imagination. In James Cameron's words, we find exactly the aesthetics of the New Historicism at work which seeks to replace rational desire for positive evidence by an act of reanimation. What is sonar echoing in submarine archaeology is rhetorically renamed *empathetic resonance* by Stephen Greenblatt.<sup>45</sup>

When rotten objects from the bottom sediment of the Atlantic *look back at you* (in Jacques Lacan's sense), suddenly namens re-appear, engraved in pieces of jewel ("Amy"), or preserved love letters in a piece of rescued luggage. There is an anthropological rhetoric operative in *turning* (that is, troping) the presence of death (which is the confrontation of absence) into a world full of humans. How to commemorate the drowned passengers of the Titanic? Are they being remembered best by telling their story? Suddenly, archaeology turns into history; the submarine archive is transformed into narrative: Cameron's box office-hit *Titanic*.<sup>46</sup> When what for the longest time had been just an archive of records (textual, visual) re-turned archaeologically, as "the tangible past": relics from the ground of the sea. The real archival piece, though, is the non-figurative board-register, containing the record of all orders, like the black box in an airo-plane as the most non-narrative evidence of human and technical enunciations.

The prosopopoeitic, „dialogic“ rhetoric of the archive is currently being replaced by operational archival interaction, as illustrated by *Pockets Full of Memories*, an online and museum installation by the media artist George Legrady in which the audience *creates* an archive by contributing a digitized image of an objekt in their possession at the time of the exhibition visit. Interaction is an aspect Bertolt Brecht pointed at already in the 20s for the emerging medium radio, insisting that it can technically - on the (feed-)back channel - be used in a bi-directional way as well by the receivers to communicate instead of being unilaterally being distributed as broadcast.<sup>47</sup> The unidirectional communication of books still dominated the user experience. With different *hierarchies*, a network is not a text

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<sup>44</sup> Joel Avirom / Jason Snyder, James Cameron's *Titanic*, foreword by James Cameron, New York (Harper Perennial) o. J., xii

<sup>45</sup> See Stephen Greenblatt *Resonance and Wonder*, xxx

<sup>46</sup> USA, Twentieth Century Fox, 1997

<sup>47</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, Frankfurt/M. 1967, 117-134

any more, rather an archi(ve)-tecture. As long as the key-board of computers is alphabet-based like a type-writer for printing just letters, the paradigm of printing remains dominant; progressively though the mouse-click replaces the key-board for directing the monitor, and orientation shifts to visually perceived information landscapes; in multi-media space, however, the act of re-activating the archive can be dynamically coupled with feedback. This does not lead to a return of rhetorically prosopopoeitic intercourse with the digital archive, but rather is this figuration in space being dynamically replaced by figures in time. The visionary of digital architectures, David Gelernter, points at the data flow called *lifestream* as a future alternative to the current desktop-metaphor of computer interfaces which still carry, with file-like icons, an anachronistic archivism dating from old-European times of secretaries and offices, instead of rethinking digital storage space in its own terms (in computing language, we still speak of *stacks*, *files* and *registers*).<sup>48</sup> If emphatic memory (data permanently stored on hard-disks) is being replaced by a future of the computer as a place of intermediary, *passing storage*, the digital medium becomes „a mere temporary holding tank for data, not as a permanent file cabinet“. <sup>49</sup> Future, present and past then are but segments, functions of marking differences within the transitive data stream. This leads to a performative consequence as well. Is it possible to avoid simply writing *about* the archive, thus missing the archival mode of representation itself, by writing the archive transitively? The option thus is to represent the archive as loosely coupled medium, not as historiographically closed form.<sup>50</sup> And this non-narrative mode means to count (with) what is given, alluding to a phrase by Gottfried Benn - counting data.

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<sup>48</sup> A media archaeology of the file has recently been written by Cornelia Vismann, *Akten*.

*Medientechnik und Recht*, Frankfurt/M. (Fischer) 2000

<sup>49</sup> David Gelernter, *Machine Beauty. Elegance and the Heart of Technology*, New York (Basic Books) 1997, 106

<sup>50</sup> Compare Niklas Luhmann, xxx