

KATHARINA PHILIPOWSKI

### Presence as an Effect of Mediation

Immediacy and the lack of mediation have been treated as the central features of literary presence (German *literarische Präsenz*) in discussion of the concept. In medieval German studies, presence has been discussed primarily on two different heuristic levels. The first is the level of cultural history and the theory of signs. Presence is understood here as the absence of reference, as the quality of being purely here and now – as an immediacy that transcends any kind of referentiality. The example of the Eucharist is used repeatedly in the literature to illustrate this kind of presence: the consecrated Host does not refer to the body of Christ, does not symbolize it, but *is* Christ himself. According to the much-quoted words of Aleida Assmann, when things are present there are no signs. It has been asserted from various perspectives that medieval culture was one in which the representation of presence in cultural products and the experience of presence was particularly intense (in images representing several points in time, for example, or metonymic legal formulas). Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht has introduced the term ›culture of presence‹ (*Präsenzkultur*) to reflect this situation.

The second level involves the discussion of presence as an effect of intensity and presentation – as suddenness that constitutes an event. In medieval studies, this concept of presence is discussed under the rubrics of visual culture, symbolic communication, and the reading of bodies. Gerd Althoff in particular, for example, has pointed out that acts of rulership had to take place in a public space so that, visible to all, they could lay claim to authority and influence. The relationship between the two concepts of presence is a precarious one, for it has yet to be considered whether the ability to produce, present, and manipulate presence reinforces the status of a culture of presence or questions it.

What the two categories of presence do have in common, though, this article suggests, is the fact that they cannot be applied to the description of literary presence. Strictly speaking, the very term ›literary presence‹ is a contradiction in itself. Although narratives can tell about the experiences of their characters in which pres-

ence is involved, these experiences are always confined to the level of the *histoire* and are therefore present only for the characters and the narrator. For the recipient, on the other hand, they are precisely not unmediated, not present and immediate; instead, they can be experienced only as mediated by the *discours*. Literary presence is therefore always mediated presence. But how are we meant to conceive of a mediated absence of mediation?

The problem of mediation and the lack of mediation can be paradigmatically illustrated using the twofold time of narrative as an example. By necessity, the time of the *histoire* is different from that of the *discours*. On the one hand, the time of what is narrated must have passed in order for it to become the subject of the narrative; on the other hand, it becomes present by virtue of the very fact that it is the subject of the narrative. Although the story is created only by the fictional narrative itself as it progresses, the story also adopts the status of a given quantity that preceded the beginning of the narrative about it. Every narrative narrates something that has already been completed and entered the past at the time of the narrative itself. So, while the time of the *histoire* is always that of the past, that of the *discours* always has to be the present. As both together are required to make up a narrative, the narrative partakes of past and present in equal measure with every word. In order to unfold over time as narrating time, the narrative has to narrate something: it needs a topic, a story. However, this story, the *histoire*, can produce its own time span (the time of the characters who are part of the action) only in the time of the narrative. Although they mutually exclude each other, each time is dependent on the other for its existence. Conversely, although they depend on each other for their existence, the success of the narrative is dependent on the time of the narrative not being the time of what is narrated. The article suggests that the literary presence created in this way can be described only as a negative presence.

Ricœur's theory of narrated time is used to support this argument. His monumental *Time and Narrative* is a theory of the experience of time as configured or reconfigured by narration, and thus a theory that covers human experience and its manifestation in literature. The concept of configuration is crucial for Ricœur. He believes that time becomes human time in proportion to the extent to which is given narrative form. Conversely, the meaningfulness of a narrative is proportional to the extent to which the narrative is marked by features of the experience of time. The experience of time can be freely shaped only by fictional narrative, not by historical narrative (the two terms are those of Ricœur), since only the former links two times that are always separate, in this case narrating time and fictional narrated time. Unlike non-fictional narration in all its forms, the fictional narrative creates through fiction a ›new‹ time that does not establish a reference to a ›real‹ past that has been made comprehensible, but represents an alternative to it. As a result, the narrative has free reign over what is narrated, and it is only because of this that time can be experienced anew by means of configuration – experienced as time that passes or as time that stands still.

Thus, literary presence obtains its quality of presence only by being mediated by the *discours*. Only as mediated is it present, ›now‹. Only while the succession of the *discours* remains intact can time stand still and presence arise on the level of the *histoire*. This is because the *discours* lends presence to what is narrated, not as an event or occurrence (as that as which it is narrated) but only by virtue of the fact that it is narrated (as a narrative). It is therefore the act of mediation alone that gives presence to what is narrated, and this is why it is wrong to describe literary presence in terms of the categories of immediacy or the absence of mediation. True, a narrative cannot but serve to generate presence, but it does this only through mediation. Because of this, it would only be possible to retain the concept of literary presence if presence were treated not, as previously, as immediacy and the absence of mediation, but as a literary effect that depends on the interplay of the two levels that can never fall together but can generate presence only by means of their disjunctiveness.

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