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**Kleist's Teichoskopie auf die Moderne. Über Kollektive, Meuten,  
Subjekte und das Tier-Werden im Trauerspiel *Penthesilea*  
(Abstract)**

- Full-length article in: JLT 9/2 (2015), 161–185.

In Kleist's so called »Trauerspiel« *Penthesilea*, published in 1808, the ontological status of the eponymous famous Amazonian Queen is for a brief moment undecided between animal and human.

Assuming this perspective on the text it is now possible to negotiate subjectivity and individuality as ideological constructions. This allows for approaching its deconstruction as well as other modes of being such as group-formation, hybrid and the pack. By associating *Penthesilea* to her dogs Kleist's text aims at the fragile status of human beings in the Modernity. *Penthesilea* is thus turned into an animal. As a murderous pack the female protagonist stands amongst being a *Subject*, *Becoming-Animal* and hybrid *Group-Formations*.

To understand Kleist's »ethnological view« on the constitutive self-descriptions of Modernity, it is expedient to read *Penthesilea* as an ontological experiment. With the help of the concept of the *Becoming-Animal*, coined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it becomes possible to understand this ontological experiment on the basis of the means of eighteenth century drama. Thereby it appears that the *pack mode* of *Penthesilea* and her dogs undermines her status as a subject and human. Understanding the pack in this way the association with animals is a challenge for the force of law of the Amazons and Greeks as they are representing the female and male modes of power.

To meet the significance of *Penthesilea*'s tragedy it is indeed necessary not to stop at the point of understanding the *Becoming-Animal* as a subversive and critical act. With Bruno Latour's ethnological view on Modernity it is possible to re-construct Kleist's strategy of talking about *Becoming-Animal* as shift to reconsider the way of assembling human and non-human actors. The pack will be understood as a specific group-formation and the *Becoming-Animal* as a mode of existence. In his latest work *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* as well as in *We Have Never Been Modern* Latour claims a perspective on the Modernists as living in a plurality of modes of existence by denying it at the same time. This tension, which *Becoming-Animal* sets off, leads to understanding Kleist's play as a revelation of what Latour calls practices of separation and purification of the Modernists on those group-formations and hybrids.

Modernity, Latour argues, has always constituted Nature as an objective external place, whereas Society has always been constituted as the place of subjects. Around 1800 the practices of separation and purification of hybrids and group-formations are expressed through a dispositive of humanism that emerges amidst the tension of the discourses of romanticism, classicism, medicine, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy of the subject. The aim of the present article is to show that the entanglement of those mentioned theories by Latour and Deleuze/Guattari is important for the understanding of Kleist's critical view on the fragile constructedness of the subject as a human being.

Therefore the play makes use of a narrative strategy which is highly apt to show those compounds: the »teichoscopy«. With this seemingly detached way of observation Kleist is able to report not only on the practices of separation and purification, but also on the hybrids and group-formations.

The article adopts this strategy to observe both sites of Kleist's understanding of the Modernity. Hence, section 2 of the analysis starts with a first teichoscopy on hybrids and group-formations in the (self-)descriptions of Amazons and Greeks.

On the basis of the state of war the protagonists in the play are always associated with animals, things and other humans. With the focus on Achilles and Penthesilea it is significant how language is involved in constructing, out of these hybrids, the dichotomy between subject and object and therefore unambiguous ontological statuses. However, with the term of Becoming-Animal that dichotomy is suddenly uncertain. On this account the aim is to understand animals and things not as *intermediaries* to a metaphorical interpretation, but rather as *mediators* involved in the action and ontology of the non-human and human actors. It is crucial that non-human actors therefore have agency. In Kleist's play animals are neither a projection of social attribution, nor metaphors or objects. They are involved precisely in constituting the modes of existence and the ontological status that has to be negotiated.

That leads to the second teichoscopy in section 3. The focus shifts now to Penthesilea's process of Becoming-Animal. This allows to show the power of Modernity as well as their concepts of »human« and »animal«. Therefore Penthesilea's association with her dogs and the slaughter of her lover Achilles – as a dog, like a dog and with her dogs – is not displayed in the play, but it is reported by the Amazons. This uncertain form of report points to the crux of Kleist's tragedy: Penthesilea and her dogs undermine the established regulatory power and the dispositive of humanism around 1800. Still, Kleist does not persist in an elaborated ideal. For that he demonstrates the counter-mechanisms of Modernity on Penthesilea: this includes turning Penthesilea literally into an animal, or in other words, transforming the Becoming-Animal into a solid state of being by means of performative speech.

Under those circumstances the perspective changes in section 4: the play abandons the strategy of teichoscopy in favour of the monologue to execute on Penthesilea a radical re-subjectivation. The asymmetry of Modernity results in a desperate suicide: the pack yields the subject, instead of the group-formation a single human being comes to existence. Penthesilea has to remove all other non-human actors like her bow and her dogs from herself to understand herself as a human being in the way of Modernity.

Consequently Becoming-Animal – as implied – is a mode of existence outside of established institutions. This mode breaks with the old institutions of Modernity established by the *humanism-dispositive* as well as with the new institutions proposed by the negotiation by group-formations. Just as the dogs reveal the process of demarcation, they indicate the crossing over, too. Becoming-Animal is thus a mode of existence that undermines institutional power either way. Trying this is a deadly endeavour which Kleist allows not himself but for Penthesilea to display the crisis of Modernity. In the end the human being is irrevocably divided from gods and animals. Its ontological status remains fragile and endangered. Penthesilea dies lonely and forlorn, without the stir of animals and things, as a human being.

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2015-09-28

JLTONline ISSN 1862-8990

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**How to cite this item:**

Abstract of: Martin Bartelmus, Kleists Teichoskopie auf die Moderne. Über Kollektive, Meuten, Subjekte und das Tier-Werden im Trauerspiel *Penthesilea*.

In: JLTONline (28.09.2015)

Persistent Identifier: urn:nbn:de:0222-003130

Link: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0222-003130>