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**The Authenticity of Digital Media**

It's a curious thing that when I finish writing an article for a newspaper, the last thing I do is take a look at the online edition. I only believe in the publication when I can see and hold the printed copy in my hand, and this is despite my progress with the Internet since 1997. It all started when I had to be 'networked' for ZDF's "Aspekte" news programme for their "Novel in Progress" project. The training was an existential shock - my fountain pen never recovered. Elsewhere, I have written in detail about what happened as a result, whether I wanted this or not. Here, I briefly wish to mention that my website, domain name and homepage were gifts from my wife for Christmas 2003. The experience of receiving her gift was a cathartic shock. In the days that followed, I fell into a lengthy process of contemplating what owning my own website might set in motion. Surely, the rest of my life would only bring the burden of maintaining, updating and achieving total digitalization? I reflected on how this could be reconciled with my idea of a writer's life. When I was at school, I could never have dreamt of the notion of an author as eyewitness to present-day events. Yet, nor was the thought of having my own website - as a digital gravestone - exactly what I wanted to become involved in as "work in progress" for the rest of my life.

Meanwhile, to keep up with the self-perpetuating need to update the website, I have gradually purchased more web space. Each new book publication came with the requirement for something new - from flash animations, music and film clips for the novel "Herr der Hörner" to interactive maps for "In 180 Tagen um die Welt" to a short film, which adopts all the conventions of a Hollywood trailer, and is now the latest addition for the "Jenseitsnovelle". I live on tenterhooks to see where this will all end; and indeed, if it will ever end? Of course, these developments mean that I have lost touch with some old, die-hard habits - the powerful and special aura of the handwritten, original text, which is surrounded by numerous rituals.

At least in Germany, the general idea of an author's lifestyle is that an author is a genius because his or her world is not just about pen and ink, but also involves considerable profoundness. But I have no regrets. Ultimately, I have gained something in place of this old lifestyle, which means more to me - that is, the Mac computer screen and its motivational design. The many supporting software functions facilitate highly complex works that we could not produce merely using our memory and countless reminder notes as tools. Authors lead a ubiquitous life. Thanks to their worldwide online presence, they seem only a mouse click away. Yet the virtual screens conceal a real person, whose name corresponds to the author's. The perpetual offline presence, which remains intangible, is more perfect than any ivory tower.

The natural resistance of a sheet of paper - and today, the nostalgists still rave about this when they discuss literary authenticity - will be far exceeded by the computer. At least, that's my experience. I see no problems even with the digitalization of our entire library stocks, as long as the licensing issues are properly clarified. One exception perhaps is that our literature may in any case vanish if we digitalize the wrong books. I also have another small personal matter in mind. For example, when I am going to be the next in line? When this happens, it will be hard to stop the digital version of my first novel, "Aus Fälle / Zerlegung des Regenbogens". The pages of this book are one-sided; and in certain places the plot springs from the front to the reverse side of the page. Sometimes, the sequence is also reversed and then it swings back and forth. The process is not arbitrary. Rather, it is in strict adherence to word and line intervals so that, when held up to the light, the new typeface makes it appear as if an entire page has been filled. That's experimental literature for you. It nearly drove the producer mad! The standard online databases such as Google or any others do not show the unpredictable leaps in a novel's plot, or at least this will

no longer be so clear and meaningful. With all its simplicity, paper remains the exception and is far superior to the highly complex digital format. Maybe it is a blessing that these sorts of innovations will no longer be permitted in future by the new media. An author, who no longer has a book publication in mind as the end goal, but instead must consider the type of reading device, can no longer afford the aforementioned or any similar artistic innovation. Indeed, the very idea of digital formats changes the appearance of literature.

However, this does not mean that web designers, as successors to production specialists, might not also be driven mad by a genuine author recognizing the specific quality of the new medium for the first time, and deliberately playing on this in his or her text. I am not referring to the hyperlinks, interactive modules or similar scenarios which are always considered from the user's perspective. I have the feeling that things should be much simpler like interrupting a page's front or reverse side, and therefore also being far too obvious for people to dream up first time. So-called highbrow literature will not truly arrive in its new medium until those digital narrative forms are developed which only function in these same formats. Until then, literature will only be a guest in a futuristic designer guesthouse. Despite the attention, which it will obviously receive here, it will always be notoriously alien.

For the time being, I don't want to shed any crocodile tears about whether literature would still be literature, or at least go by that name, or whether it will be absorbed into a brand-new, independent art form. Here, I wish to be quite clear: I am glad that I have held onto my old-fashioned longings about the good old book; we Germans have little else to call our own other than our sense of yearning. But at the same time, I am also glad that I have not been swept up by the compulsory wave of modernization. Thus, I do not belong to the chorus of those who react according to the same pattern concerning every new design or communicative opportunity: "Does literature really need this then?" Is this question really helpful? The only retort to this reflex-like criticism is to adopt the same stubborn approach: 'x' literature perhaps has no need to be released as a CD or e-Book

or for a film trailer to be used to advertise the work on the Internet. Rather, it can afford to do so!

The key point - and please be warned, here is my theory - is to use digital media and all its potential in such a way that literature is treated with appropriate dignity. That means not succumbing to the hysteria of the moment, when any new technique is acceptable as long as it produces the right effect. Another paragraph seems worthwhile to comment on what dignity means in literature, and also the dignity of literature's media. I was recently hit by a bolt from the blue amidst the buzz of the Apple Store in Munich. All the fuss was about the brand-new iPad, which had attracted dozens of people who wanted to try it out. The kids were vying each other to be the next in line. Next to the professional and business-like design of MacBooks, the iPads looked like animated tablets of slate, or hi-tech boys' and men's toys, at least for those men who are still boys at heart. But in my case reading a novel on one of the devices would still feel like the toil of first year school lessons using a high-tech slate tablet. The potential image boost, which is all-important for Mac fans, the practicality and any other bonuses attributable to the iPad's ingenious touch pad such as easy transport of entire libraries, is in my view a poor substitute for everything that I believe is lost by dispensing with the dignity of the traditional medium.

As long as books are produced in high quality and with excellent design, they still have something eminently grown-up about them. Thus, the key question must be: in future, how is the e-Book to achieve the same degree of dignity; and ideally, how is this to be done in the discreet and natural way as currently applies for the book? Of course, this question naturally not only applies for the hardware - be it the iPad, Kindle or any other reading device - but also to the kind of future literature that should fit these devices better than beforehand, and this means without the need to reformat literary texts. The path leads from literature on the Internet to a genuine form of Internet literature (or whatever name this new art form would go by). In this format, literature would also only be available via this pathway. Hence, a symbiosis with the reading devices would emerge that, in turn, would be quite dignified and natural.

To understand my cause, namely the question of the dignified format of the digital medium, it seems worthwhile digressing briefly to consider the essential difference between an author and a writer. Apart from the convention whereby everyone is an author, as long as he or she produces books, this arguably arbitrary distinction at least enables a tentative demonstration of what sets the writer apart from everyone else producing books. The key point is his or her driven nature, which keeps a writer engaged in his activity for a lifetime, and as a genuine obligation. The matter concerns the rigorous necessity of narration as well as the fact that every writer also turns his or her aesthetic attempts into a moral situation. Ultimately, this individual mission can only be achieved in the face of considerable resistance. Thus, a writer's sense of obstinacy is deeply connected to an attitude reflected on manifold occasions in his or her texts. As I have described this process elsewhere, I merely suggest a few comments here.

Precisely the involuntary aspect of his or her writing gives a writer credibility that may shape him or her into a personality or even an authority during the course of a lifetime. This also has nothing to do with whether the writer was a failure in his personal life - unreliable, macho, a loudmouth and so on. Every new sentence lights up a writer's ethos, insofar as he or she embellishes the words not only with the essentials of narrative plot, but also with autobiographical elements. Each new book attains something unique that an author cannot accomplish with the same degree of complexity. An author is restricted to the production of texts, albeit he or she may be more successful, attaining greater crafted perfection and being more pleasurable to read than a writer. An author crafts books that are in demand and his work involves a calculated approach as opposed to obstinacy. Moreover, an author recedes once more as a public person from the moment that his or her books disappear. By contrast, a writer remains a writer even without a recent book being released onto the book market. Ultimately, his credibility is not derived from his works, but primarily thanks to the personality creating these works.

Indeed, the quest for beauty, even in the literary sector, is also a moral undertaking, even as a quest for a perfect sentence. To phrase this provocatively: style is nothing less than morality. Aesthetic rigour, in my view, also has profound consequences for content. Moreover, this belies an attitude to the world and continually intensifies what may be described as the need for idealism.

If a writer is concerned with every minute detail in the text - (thus, being part of the basic concern for life in general) - and then adopts a sense of responsibility for the form of his or her text, this leads far beyond mere presentation or marketing strategies. Yet the question remains as to who is under a sense of obligation? When I transferred ten years ago from Luchterhand to Hoffmann und Campe publishing house, I realized that the new production director had a particular love of paper that was as white and as thick as possible. The books on the shelf reflected this preference. It took several discussions before I was given the go-ahead for my first publication with my new publisher using paper with a yellow tint. The head of production laughed at me - his comment was 'writers'! The implication here was that writers are difficult people. Now, however, the publisher's programme has been visually updated across the board. Slim books are good sellers. Pure white paper is, as far as I know, no longer in use. On the other hand, my latest book - the "Jenseitsnovelle" - has been produced for the first time in a haptically softer card binding. Now, a 'HoCa' book is no longer just more "literary" than beforehand, it also feels more authentic.

These factors are far from being merely exaggerated and banal. On the contrary, they play a subtle and key role when the potential reader first comes into contact with the book. Ideally, one should be able to tell the target audience from a book's appearance. Book cover design is the art of appropriate, authentic packing and, at its core, is also essentially ethical. The diverse codification options ensure that the right readers find the right book; and indeed, they sense a spontaneous desire to acquire the book. In principle, this unity of text and

haptic or visual design still applies today. If I revert back to the writer and claim that merely the appearance of his work, or its content is of little use in the fight for survival on the book market, then you will understand how my conclusions about the book of the future can only be very one-sided:

I am addressing the question as to whether the iPad, Kindle and other devices are ushering in something new - especially for the writer. I have already mentioned how on the periphery of their material form, where experimental technology is expected, a certain amount of course correction is expected. It is also obvious that all manner of authors will use the new media with great success. But does this also apply to writers with their notorious obstinacy and lack of flexibility? Interactive narration seems a contradiction in itself to them. After all, narrative texts have long since been handed down in a "valid" version and not in a way that is best aligned to the listener. They have one creator, one narrator and others have to listen with keen interest. In the end, writers make their living this way.

What does the new medium offer them? The dignity of their professional status in no sense depends on how many animation possibilities associated with the core product are to be dispensed with. A writer's PR consultant or media specialist should be a job with a great future, since this person decides what is marketed on which additional platforms. For instance, the important factor is not to discredit the main product such as a novel.

In all other respects, however, the new medium changes nothing about the writer's daily work. The net effect of a text in digital form is not one iota less authentic than a printed text. In any case, we have long since acclimatized to the digital text. The new aspect is less production than distribution and review procedures. Here again, no writer can afford to be indifferent, as taking into account the projections, numerous benefits accrue to authors as writers of books. A digital version of an existing printed book will not alter anything about the quality of the text, but

it will more or less change the literary parameters. These previously fulfilled key communicative roles in the cultural sector, and in future, this kind of book design will be dispensed with. There will be no replacement. Moreover, the reader is left with the monotonous reading device as an aid for a wide variety of texts. Digitalization is the great equalizer among texts - and for authors and writers, too. And that's not mentioning the readers who at best can still recognize themselves as such. All the specified codes, which the book constantly transmits via its readers to all those who are interested, will now be lost in one go. Instead, the reading device or its brand will be the sole identifying symbol that counts. Content is of secondary importance.

The worse thing here is that regardless of the text types to be uploaded to our reading devices in future, they will always look authentic, simply because meanwhile we are accustomed to their visual appearance. In reality, however, all texts have been released from their authentic and traditional book cover. They are exposed to the danger of being treated as banal objects. There is no protection. As regards the quality of a text, who decides beforehand in the form of a reader's tip or star rating or similar, if ultimately this is not the Internet portal where we first found our text? All e-Books have equal status on this portal, although some are rated as more equal and they are generally not the texts by writers. Of course, the marketplace will embellish all of this with digital peripheral parameters and bonus tracks. This promises a respectable number of sales, for instance, for a fantasy novel which after beginning with the necessary opening sequence offers repeated hyperlinks leading directly to the respective player level of the corresponding fantasy world. Such texts will be used after a certain point on entirely different levels, and the user will decide this individually. In this case, the act of reading will only be one of the modules on offer to convey the material more widely.

Incidentally, the printed book will scarcely play a relevant role in this usage chain.

Perhaps books will be sold as a kind of luxury collectors' edition for successful eBooks. It's exciting - there's no question about it! I am not in the least looking forward to the novelty of such eBooks. Their authentic experience for the reader or user is at least as strong as the traditional book. But in the fight for market shares, where does the comparatively old-fashioned idea of authenticity come into what a writer tries to instil in his texts, and how am I to recognize his or her works in future? And where will I even find them? The comprehensive digitalization of printed matter will be a great equalizer purely optically, yet in terms of content, it will be the great unequalizer. Writers' new publications will probably be accessed as comparatively pathetic net downloads. Will it be possible to codify this obvious lack as a new form of wealth in comparison to the opulent and scheduled bestsellers? And will the dignity of the literary product be preserved in the new digital format or only be produced with the least possible financial means? There is no need to worry. In any case, the printed book has lost its old aura thanks to Amazon Marketplace and eBay.

Literature will survive. This will possibly be as a parallel world, off Broadway, where the personal reader tip becomes a key selection criterion, albeit noted by only a handful of readers amidst the hustle and bustle of the booming eBook launch. And why not? With a short interruption during the century of the educated middle classes (from about 1870 to 1990), the peripheral quality of literature has a long-standing tradition. The split of our existing cultural society into multiple parallel cultural societies also has its thrilling aspects.

However, if my conclusion still only offers restrained euphoria about the development, I also wish to let you know the real reason for this. In my lifetime, I have little experience of those unique moments of good fortune - they never happened in a café, on the beach or in my doctor's waiting room, but instead in open carriages of an Inter City Express train. This was where I experienced the sudden shock of seeing one of my books and someone actually reading it! What better feeling of good fortune can a writer have?

And the biggest misfortune is never to experience this again in the future, because in these open train carriages, all you see will be iPads. It will scarcely be possible in passing to glimpse what is being read and by which author. Even if, by some outside chance, we were to come across someone who had uploaded one of our books onto his reading device, we would not be able to enjoy this as much as if the book were in front of our eyes with all its magnificent and wonderfully familiar signals. Since you can a digital front page can no longer be held in your hands, whatever we think we may have glimpsed in passing would probably be unbelievable again after only a few short steps.