

# Chimeras

*“To give some idea of such a monster, to describe his appearance and his habits, to sketch out at least a Hippogryph, a Chimera of the mind’s mythology, this requires – and therefore excuses – the use if not the creation of a forced language, at times vigorously abstract.”* Paul Valéry<sup>1</sup>

This is what Paul Valéry writes in his preface to *Monsieur Teste*; and this forced and sometimes rather abstracting language can manifest itself as science or as art. Accordingly, Valéry’s introductory epigraph could be taken further, but we will come back later to this inference and its implications for aesthetics. What will concern us first in the epigraph is solely the “chimera”, which is what Valéry terms his invention, this “Monsieur Teste”.

In his cinematographic panorama installation *Alias Yederbeck*, Frank Geßner

1 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, in: *Collected Works*, vol. 6, ed. and trans. by Jackson Mathews, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1989, p. 7. A French edition is available online under the title: “Paul Valéry / de l’Académie Française / MONSIEUR TESTE / 1919 et 1949”: <http://ugo.bratelli.free.fr/ValeryPaul/Valery-MonsieurTeste.pdf> (last viewed on Nov. 12, 2012, cf. p. 6). Of course, authoritative in the French is still the two-volume Pléiade edition of *Œuvres*. Édition établie et annotée par Jean Hytier, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris: Gallimard, 1957 and 1960; new ed. 1980 and 1984, here vol. 2, p. 9–75. The authors worked mainly with the German and the French editions. Therefore, we chose to alter the English standard translation by Jackson Mathews, published by Princeton University Press, in some points to ensure a closer reference to the argument, sometimes just for reasons of style. Valéry himself might have accepted these reasons, however idiosyncratic they may seem. Used German edition: Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, in: idem, *Werke*, Frankfurter Ausgabe in 7 Bänden, ed. Jürgen Schmidt-Radefeldt, Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992, vol. 1, p. 301–372.

interlocks *art history*, as a conceptual and greatly condensed construction, with *media history*, especially in regard to the moving and animated media of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Expanded cinema, video installation, 1-channel video works, film, montage, digital compositing, performance, Internet and media art, but also painting, sculpture, relief, drawing, photography, computer animation, panoramas, panel painting, projection media, documentation, architecture, music, sound, language, and concept art – all these genres, forms, components, and levels are compiled, mixed and differentiated from each other again, re-mediatized, juxtaposed, and set in relation to each other. Here, art history and media history are interwoven; this many-layered interlocking and condensation gives birth to the most diverse range of mixed creatures and aesthetic media chimeras, transmedia copies, multiplications and re-mediatizations, aliases and fictionalizations, which in turn are personified on the conceptual level in Geßner's work as doubled figures of the genius: once in the role of the invented painter Paul Yederbeck and then in the role of Paul Valéry's figure cited above, Monsieur Teste – whom the introductory epigraph itself terms a chimera. These two chimeras, Yederbeck and Teste, seem to be the double source that nourishes the idea of the work and the array of pictures in Geßner's expanded cinema panorama. But perhaps they only form a double or false bottom, a kind of masquerade and field of forces that permits the self-multiplication and creation of aliases and avatars, of representatives and legends. Under the protection of these masks, myths, and multiple role-playing, one can operate artistically in a many-layered manner, if not entirely undisturbed.

“Chímaira” is Old Greek for “goat”, and it originally stood for a fabled, mixed creature in mythology that, according to Homer, possessed three heads: in the front, that of a lion; at its neck, that of a goat; and finally, at its tail, that of a serpent. It was also able to breathe fire. All kinds of legendary hybrid beings can thereafter be convened under the name of the chimera. Finally, it also stands for illusions and deceit of the most manifold kinds.

Without wanting to make too much of the figure of the chimera, it can still

be asserted that the audiovisual media themselves, their rapid development since the 19th century, and their overall plasticity have something chimera-like about them. Again and again, these media, especially photography but also cinema, have had to struggle to find any recognition at all in the realm of the academically ennobled arts. “Too technical, not truly artistic, solely mimetic mechanics, cold, lifeless, uninspired, too commercial, etc.,” were the objections. This is how the arts, like Bellerophon riding Pegasus, attempted to defeat and slay the technical media chimeras. The deceptions of poetry and the fine arts in general have always seemed to be superior to the chimera-like illusions and nightmarish images of these mixed creatures and media constructs. But in reality, art too must make use of specific media to be able to generate its works: paint, canvas, stone, language, paper, sound, etc. Nonetheless, into the late 20th century, the arts have known how to make these media disappear and become invisible in their works, as if naturalizing them as work or as art genre. This situation is changing only with media art and on a broad level with Post-Structuralism, the media and image sciences (as the Germanophile “Bildwissenschaften” wish to distinguish themselves from Visual Studies), and finally the *Iconic Turn*;<sup>2</sup> and we may

2 See for example: Gottfried Boehm (ed.), *Was ist ein Bild?*, 3rd ed., Munich: Fink, 2001. Hubert Burda and Christa Maar (eds.), *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*, 2nd ed., Cologne: DuMont, 2004 (on this, see also the website: <http://www.iconicturn.de/> last viewed on Nov. 29, 2012). Klaus Sachs-Hombach (ed.), *Bildwissenschaft: Disziplinen, Themen, Methoden*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Bildtheorie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008 (this volume collects and translates Mitchell’s most influential essays from about the last 20 years, from his *Iconology*, 1986 to *What do Pictures Want?*, 2005). See also the yearbook *Bildwelten des Wissens. Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik*, published by the Hermann Helmholtz-Zentrum für Kulturtechnik of the Humboldt-Universität Berlin. And, finally, see under the title *eikones* the Nationalen Forschungsschwerpunkt Bildkritik at the Universität Basel with numerous publications, for example Gottfried Boehm, Birgit Mersmann and Christian Spies (eds.), *Movens Bild. Zwischen Evidenz und Affekt*, Munich: Fink, 2008; or Ludger Schwarte (ed.), *Bild-Performanz*, Munich: Fink, 2011. On this, see also the website: <http://www.eikones.ch/> and its magazine for Iconic Criticism *Rheinsprung 11*: <http://rheinsprung11.unibas.ch/> (last viewed on Nov. 29, 2012). – In a

acknowledge the simple truth that the traditional fine arts, too, employ media, and sometimes even technical media. Pegasus, too, was always a mixed creature and thus a kind of chimera. Even in genetics, organisms with genetic information from different species are called chimeras. So we can wait in vain for Pegasus' gene test – and the chimera itself need not fear the result of its gene test, if one were possible. The re-Latinized “hippogryph” in the epigram, with the head and front legs of an eagle and the abdomen and rear body of a horse, is sometimes employed as a synonym for Pegasus and is clearly a chimera, but one that, it seems, the artist himself rides.

### The Masks of Fiction – The Fiction of Masks

“Everything deep loves the mask,” says Nietzsche, and he writes elsewhere, “Every deep mind needs a mask: even more, around every deep mind a mask constantly grows [...]” But he adds, “Every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hiding place, every word also a mask.”<sup>3</sup> Behind Nietzsche's masks there are always new masquerades that dissolve all substances and persons – assuming that “person” ever meant more than merely “mask” and one wants to cling to the substances apart from metaphysics, as we could add with Nietzsche.

different perspective on art and medium see: Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

- 3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, in: idem, *Kritische Studienausgabe* in 15 vol., eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Munich, Berlin, New York: dtv and de Gruyter, 1967–1977, 2nd revised ed. 1988, vol. 5, here p. 57 f. (BGE 40) and p. 234 (BGE 289). See also the outstanding *Digital Critical Edition* (ed. Paolo D'lorio) of the works, letters, and all Posthumous Fragments (the so-called “Nachlass”, also in facsimile): <http://www.nietzschesource.org/> (last viewed on Nov. 12, 2012). The best English translation of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE) might be Judith Norman's, which appeared with Cambridge University Press in 2002, but for the aforementioned reasons, we took the freedom to alter it here slightly.

Frank Geßner accordingly extends his work *Alias Yederbeck* between two masks, two kinds of seeming figures of genius; no better ones could have been found to fan out the large-scale installation with this title. On the one hand, we encounter the aforementioned Monsieur Teste, the *literary* figure created by Valéry, an idealization of mental vigor with unlimited capacities for thought and perception that seems to do without any bodily foundation. Onomastically, here *nomen est omen* seems valid. In this sense, the various meanings of his name already carry a whole program: “head”, “witness”, “attempt”, “test”, “experiment”. Valéry admits that in his imaginings this figure began living a life of its own, which is clearly evidenced by the supplementations and continuations of this theme over many years. Valéry also claims to be – and with the aid of a footnote counterfeits himself as – a mere publisher of material not his own, as is seemingly attested by the “letter from a friend”,<sup>4</sup> who of course is not specified but is generally suspected to be a writer.

Monsieur Teste is a figure of permeability, of tension, of hyper-reflection, but also of exchange, of discourse, of witty impromptu and self-questioning, of uncertainty, of free-spiritedness, and of course also of the experimental, but one who “never spoke vaguely”.<sup>5</sup> He is conceived more as the modern anti-hero and explicitly contradicts the usual cliché of the genius. He is a figure of neutrality, of self-effacement, of objectifying reduction, of weakness

4 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, German ed., vol. 1, p. 319–29, see the footnote on p. 319. The same is true accordingly for the “letter from Madame Émilie Teste”, loc. cit., vol. 1, p. 330 ff. On the theme of metafiction, which does not seem unimportant in this context, see for example: Mark Currie (ed.), *Metafiction*, London and New York: Longman, 1995. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, London and New York: Routledge, 5th ed. 1996. On Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, probably the most important modern metafiction, see: Brian Boyd, *Nabokov’s Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999. Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* is already a metafiction. The most recent case with major media interest must have been Laura Albert alias T. J. LeRoy. Fernando Pessoa’s various heteronyms and their specific voices seem however closer to Geßner’s play with metafiction.

5 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, trans. Matthews, p. 13.

in the sense of cautious “weak thinking”, of *pensiero debole*.<sup>6</sup> – And yet Monsieur Teste couldn’t be more resolved, more courageous. Chimeras have simply never shied from contradictions:

“If this man had changed the object of his inner meditations, if he had turned upon the world the controlled power of his mind, nothing could have resisted him. I am sorry to speak of him as we speak of those of whom statues are made. I am sure that between “genius” and him there is a quantity of weakness. He, so real! So new! So free of all deception, of all wonders! So hard! My own enthusiasm spoils him for me ...”.<sup>7</sup>

Geßner’s second figure is the legendary and wholly fictitious Berlin painter Paul Yederbeck, who unfortunately died in a tragic plane crash much too young; he is so obviously modeled after notorious ideas of the genius<sup>8</sup> that

- 6 Pier Aldo Rovatti and Gianni Vattimo (eds.), *Il pensiero debole*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983. Cf. René Scheu, *Das schwache Subjekt. Zum Denken von Pier Aldo Rovatti*, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008, first as dissertation, Univ. Zurich, 2007. Translated as: idem, *Il soggetto debole. Sul pensiero di Pier Aldo Rovatti. Con una lettera di Gianni Vattimo*, Traduzione di Antonello Sciacchitano, Milan: Mimesis, 2010.
- 7 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 13.
- 8 See: <http://www.kunstraumpotsdam.de/rahmen.php?do=show&id=1177> (last viewed on Nov. 12, 2012). A press text on this website summarizes what we want to quote here at full length, since the legend is part of the context, if not metafictionally of the work itself: “Paul Yederbeck (1965–2001) appeared out of nowhere, in a manner of speaking, in Berlin at the beginning of the 1990s and polarized the art world like no one else. While some venerate him as the interface figure to the 21st century and the founder of a ‘Nouvelle Vague’ in contemporary painting, for others he is a charlatan. Yederbeck, who lived and worked in Berlin and Potsdam-Babelsberg during his most productive period, died in 2001 in a plane crash in Venice. In only a few years he created a hybrid artistic oeuvre of extraordinary complexity and cohesion that – though unfinished – never remains fragmentary. The intermedia experimental setups that he developed from 1997 to 2001 find their completion in the cinematographic installation *Alias Yederbeck*. The media spaces of action testify to an unconditional desire for artistic autonomy and playfully confront his own existence with the societal body. After his early death, in his studio was found a plethora of pictures, plans, sketches, and

the figure begins tipping over into irony. The posthumous work from the estate of this highly promising, early-matured artist, who crashed like Icarus storming the sun, now serves Geßner as material and metafiction for his partly reconstructed, partly expanding large-scale panorama installation *Alias Yederbeck*. This legacy, together with the estate, is in the care of and administered by a Berlin-Brandenburg foundation, the “Teste Foundation”.<sup>9</sup> We encounter Paul Valéry’s literary invention again already in the name of the Teste Foundation. The website of the Teste Foundation and the entire Yederbeck legend also belong to the work complex, as already stated in the footnote. Allegedly, Yederbeck’s legacy was released only after an endless

film/video footage, along with notes and context material – including precise instructions for playing, setting up, and carrying out the cinematographic installation *Alias Yederbeck*.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the death of the artist Paul Yederbeck, the Berlin-Brandenburg *Teste Foundation* presents his legacy for the first time: the hybrid Gesamtkunstwerk *Alias Yederbeck*. In the cinematographic 360° installation – a mixture of panorama and cinema – the many-layered oeuvre of the intermedia picture-maker celebrates its world premiere in Potsdam. After litigation and a legal dispute lasting years, the *Teste Foundation* has succeeded in realizing this previously unpublished project by the exceptional artist. When the doors of the Schinkelhalle and the neighboring art room on Potsdam’s Schiffbauergasse open on December 4, 2011, a ‘fiction of art’ will be brought to life by means of elaborate technology: for the first time, the cinematographic installation *Alias Yederbeck*, consisting of a large projection panorama (12-channel video, wave field synthesis), an artist’s video, and an archive and lecture hall, will be presented. The artist worked until shortly before his death on the 24-hour *expanded animation* in 252 sequences, of which it was initially possible to realize twelve circa 5-minute 360° scenarios: Entertainer, Flaneur, Zuschauer, Schauspieler, Auflösung, Projektion, Anima Techne, Transzendente Animation, Happy End, Doppelgänger, Reminder, The End. For the first time, Paul Yederbeck’s 30-minute artist’s video will be shown: *Qu’cest-ce que Monsieur Teste?*

The cinematographic installation *Alias Yederbeck* is curated by Frank Geßner, who, with a team, has staged Yederbeck’s final, as yet unknown phase of media production in a manner that does justice to the work. The *Teste Foundation* is realizing *Alias Yederbeck* together with the Atelier Berlin Production, the University of Film and Television (HFF) ‘Konrad Wolf’ Potsdam-Babelsberg, the Erich Pommer Institut, the project office ‘Potsdam 2011 – Stadt des Films’ and Potsdam, the capital of the federal state of Brandenburg.”

9 See: <http://www.testefoundation.org/>

legal battle. That Valéry and Yederbeck share the same first name is absolutely no coincidence. Yederbeck is a “Jedermann”, an everyman of artists’ fantasy and of the star cult; he is just as invented as Monsieur Teste, but that does no disservice to the whole thing, since the stereotyping and the frame tales are actually integrated in the whole project, which definitely adds true knowledge value to the fiction.

By framing his cinematographic panorama installation using the two key figures Monsieur Teste and Paul Yederbeck, Geßner generates a field of aesthetic discourse that oscillates between the cult of the genius and fiction, memorial function and masking, cinema and art, literature, painting, and film, and intellectual or art history and media art. By creating the widest range of media composites, Geßner expresses this in a complex way. His individual projection sequences are in turn also built up in a structure and an order of naming and themes that take up and further differentiate this field of discourse. By having the media, the pictorial qualities, and the picture generation converge, overlay each other, and reflect each other Geßner sets a sequence of metamorphoses in motion behind which he himself, as author, artist, or curator, withdraws, like Valéry behind his creation Edmond Teste, and like the secret, anonymous author of the Yederbeck legend behind this meta-fiction. A theatrical aspect is the core of this polyphony. Out of *all* of his figures, it is always just the *one* artist speaking to us, but he is never just *one* and can never remain just one – just as these figures can also never express their creator directly – because the artist irrevocably fans himself out in his creatures and their levels of interpretation. “All the world’s a stage,” we are taught, not only by Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and the Baroque *Theatrum mundi*. Today’s stages of life, the current theater of the world and theater of the self, are performed and overdramatized in the media. Reality and fiction are no opposites here: As you, as anybody likes it ... The adaptation, the plasticity of the media is their inner, their primal power. Only the separation between audience and performer is fictitious and negotiable. The media theater is real, but that is long since no cause for worry, as it still was for Valéry:



“I greatly fear, old friend, that we are made of many things that know nothing about us. And this is how we fail to know ourselves. If there is an infinite number of such things, all meditation is useless ...”<sup>10</sup>

### The “Plasticity” of the Metamorphosis

*“This man had known quite early the importance of what might be called human ‘plasticity’. He had investigated its mechanics and its limits. How deeply he must have reflected on his own malleability!”* Paul Valéry<sup>11</sup>

This “*plasticity*” – “la *plasticité* humaine”, as it is called in the original – remains ungraspable in the core of its mutability. No substance, no essence is hidden in it, quite in contrast to the customary assumption and entirely as in Nietzsche’s play of masks. We find metamorphosis, the transition of forms and stages into each other, played out in broad variation in Geßner’s twelve sequences, their mutual references, and their spatial orders of staging. Without a fixed beginning and lasting end, the various shapings of masklike embodiments, instances, and concepts alternate: “Entertainer, Flaneur, Zuschauer, Schauspieler, Auflösung, Projektion, Anima Techné, Transzendente Animation, Happy End, Doppelgänger, Reminder, The End.” Constant transformation – metamorphosis – is the base of plasticity, as Catherine Malabou remarks in her *Ontology of the Accident*:

10 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 49f. And shortly thereafter, Valéry concludes: “What is more tiring than to conceive the chaos of a multitude of minds? Every thought in that tumult finds its like, its opposite, its antecedent and its successor. It is discouraged by so much sameness and so much of the unexpected.” Loc. cit., p. 50.

11 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 11f.; the French online version shows this passage on p. 12; see: <http://ugo.bratelli.free.fr/ValeryPaul/Valery-MonsieurTeste.pdf> (last viewed on Nov. 12, 2012).

"[...] sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation. A form born of the accident, born by accident, a kind of accident. A funny breed. A monster whose apparition cannot be explained as any genetic anomaly. A new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a biography."<sup>12</sup>

Catherine Malabou finishes this thought with the unsurprising conclusion that no one would think of understanding plasticity also as decay and destruction, which require a plastic, visually creative force and power, as well. Plasticity always seems associated with positive artistic power and less with anything corrosive, although a precise glance shows that the latter is definitely the case:

"In science, medicine, art, and education, the connotations of the term 'plasticity' are always positive. Plasticity refers to an equilibrium between the receiving and giving of form. It is understood as a sort of natural sculpting that forms our identity, an identity modeled by experience and that makes us subjects of a history, a singular, recognizable, identifiable history, with all its events, gaps, and future."<sup>13</sup>

12 Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, translated by Carolyn Shread, Cambridge: Polity, 2012, p. 1 f.; first as: idem, *Ontologie de l'accident: Essai sur la plasticité destructrice*, Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2009. See also: idem, *L'Avenir de Hegel: Plasticité, Temporalité, Dialectique*, Paris: Vrin, 1996. Idem, *Plasticité*, Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 1999. Idem, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; first as idem, *La Plasticité au soir de l'écriture*, Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2004.

13 Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, loc. cit., p. 3.

We will deal in the following with a creative plasticity that displays itself on the stage of the media panorama in the processes of media installation, translation, and re-mediating, and in the entire staging and spatial framing; and it is significant that Geßner's artistic plasticity always includes the dimension of dissolution and pictorial destruction in the aforementioned sense.

Geßner has a delicate sensitivity to the fact that Monsieur Teste embodies a modern concept of the artist that is able to take up currents, appropriate them, and then again and again convey them to the flow of the temporary. Everything in this figure is in flux, and it is never able to step into the same stream twice. Repetition and self-reference, fanning out and multiplication are programmatic; they operate in Nietzsche's world of constant becoming, to which Deleuze and Guattari also pay reverence. The veil of the artist serves here as a figure for projection – an ill-tempered, melancholy media star who hates every form of melancholy,<sup>14</sup> a dandy and boundary-crosser, an extreme athlete of the intellect and of artistic forms who not only recalls the fantasies of the 19th century, but also makes his way like a comet in post-Wall Berlin. The painter Yederbeck, who died young, and Valéry's Monsieur Teste call up the spectrum of media and character chimeras that glides with them across the projection screen of the panorama. Roles, postures toward the reception and production of art history and media history, and various instances of depiction and performance alternate like metamorphoses and blend into each other:

We'll begin, rather arbitrarily but not without intention, with the "Entertainer", who unmistakably claims his own way of doing things, as in Frank Sinatra's "My Way"; he is a famous person, a self-presenter, a star, whom the classical visual genre of painting attends and, more contemporarily, the

14 "Monsieur Teste had no opinions. I believe he stirred his passions when he willed, and to attain a definite end. What had he done with his personality? What was his view of himself? ... He never laughed. There was never a look of distress on his face. He hated sadness." Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 12.

depths of whose soul the camera tries to glimpse, unnoticed or by staging. The chimera of the portrait is the paparazzi's snapshots. The exhibitionism of public display increasingly dissolves the space of privacy. In fame, the portrait, the mask, and the personality converge irretrievably.

The mediatised, intellectual, urbane "Flaneur" follows, strolling nomadically through the capitals of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, pushing the disembodiment of the self in the pure flow of perception: Claude Monet's oval panorama of water lilies, the *Nymphéas* from Paris' Musée de l'Orangerie, abstracts the all-around impression in a rondo of absorption made of light, water, the fluid plays of reflections, and a blaze of vegetative color – a panorama of wide-format painting.<sup>15</sup> That water, like light itself of course, often presents a metaphor for media qualities gives a note of its own to the wishes for and events of abstraction in the Impressionist space of color.

Then comes the spectrum of viewer perspectives: melancholy self-reference and witnessing, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*, but also William Kentridge's animated drawings that bear ethical and political witness to our and his time, are all hinted at in Geßner's sequence of the omnipresent "Zuschauer" (viewer).

The "Schauspieler" (actor) adopts and sheds roles and transforms himself among them. He recalls the institution of the theater, but also the sculpture of Western Antiquity, the relief of the Pergamon Altar, in front of which the viewers become a chorus in the darkened projection panorama. The audience finds itself as a staged group. They themselves all become actors. Presentation and reception interlock. Representation and fictionalization refer to each other.

The transformation of all these roles and figures, their metamorphosis, appears as an instance of "Auflösung" (dissolution) in this sequence. Each new formation entails the dissolution of the previous one: polyfocality of the figures and transformations. Just as Sigmund Freud was a knowledgeable collec-

15 See also: Bernhard Kerber, "Bild und Raum. Zur Auflösung einer Gattung", in: *Städte-Jahrbuch*, Neue Folge, vol. 8, Munich: Prestel, 1981, p. 324–345.

tor of objects from Classical Antiquity,<sup>16</sup> here psychoanalysis, which is the psychological exploration of the self, becomes a foil of the reconstruction of one's own history. The interview conducted with himself in media masking stages a self-dissolution that has nothing to do with a statement about content. Oscar Wilde's proviso could not be more apt: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth."

"Projektion" (projection) in both the technical and the psychoanalytical sense is what first makes possible the dynamic change, its finely modulated transformations and adaptations. Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotography recalls the early contexts of cinematic spectacle and fun fair situations. The protagonist wanders around, shadowlike, in the cinematic flickering of the big cities, whose melodies and ballads an eavesdropping Hanns Eisler seems to capture. The individual image is lost in the motion. The protagonist seems to dance to the music accompanying the silent movie. The somnambulant animations and surreal masks now come forward in its place.

Eadweard Muybridge, with his photographic motion studies and motion picture projection, opened up the level of self-questioning to which Monsieur Teste, too, is eternally affixed. The spirit of these apparatuses, the innermost soul of this picture machinery is an "Anima Techne", itself a technical, media field of forces: the soul of the machine, a genie in a bottle, or merely the unconscious of our media practices and desirousnesses, a kaleidoscope, the sheet of pictures feeding our desires, in accordance with desire, the desire for pictures.

Then the "Transzendente Animation" (transcendental animation), Geßner's ingenious idea expressed in this bon mot, designates in a certain way the self-referential rapture and movement of sublimation that arises between

16 Claudia Benthien, Hartmut Böhme, and Inge Stephan (eds.), *Freud und die Antike*, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011. In it, see also: Thomas Macho, "Freuds Mischwesen: Überlegungen zu einem Bild von Ursula Hübner", loc. cit., p. 296–312. See also: Lena Kugler, *Freuds Chirmären: Vom Narrativ des Tieres in der Psychoanalyse*, Zurich and Berlin: diaphanes, 2011 (first as dissertation, Univ. Konstanz, 2008).

the respective media with their specific animations and mediatization in general, and finally in the interaction and communication found in computer-generated worlds. From New Age to the aesthetics of video games, use is made of the complex game between interior and exterior, their seeming dualism, but also their mutual determination. The difference between interior and exterior was one of the leitmotifs of video art. We enter artificial worlds, panoramas, in order to flee ourselves. The self is glad to be another for once, and the alias, the avatar, makes it possible. The game with the mask is not least a relief for the self.<sup>17</sup>

The “Happy End” – precisely like the great disaster – corresponds to the leading ideology of Hollywood’s cinematic language. The kiss on the silver screen is the icon of the “Happy End” and we know quite well that this ideology, along with its gender-specific ideal images, cannot do justice to reality, any more than Madame Bovary’s economy of wishes can meliorate her self-inflicted, tragic disaster. But here, too, Flaubert confesses with enchanting openness: “Madame Bovary – that’s me!” “Madame Bovary, c’est moi!”, which already foreshadows Rimbaud’s “Je est un autre”, “I is another”. The artists, and indeed all of us, are all already others, something entirely other; we are cast upon the incessant forces of plasticity.

The “Doppelgänger” (doppelganger), who is always also an image, is a representative who turns us into a picture and who steps forth out of the mirror stage of our own economies of wishes and projections. As a romantic background figure and *alter ego*, he is a multiple alias. He populates our world to the degree that we wish for him. But actually what wishes is the “id”. As a combined product and operational mask, the doppelganger simultaneously follows the principles of doubling and of the collage. The pipedream of unity, of seamless integration, remains a fiction, just as the archive, the manuscript, the plan, the wall newspaper, and the *quodlibet* as still life remind us. Unity

17 See also: Ursula Frohne, “Maske oder Authentizität? Überlegungen zur heutigen Relevanz des Porträts”, in *Fotoheft*, March 2011, p. 15–18.

remains a wish, a chimera; the self is a multiplicity – just as the chimera, as a heterogeneous form, is put together from several components.

Then follows the “Reminder”, the thing that is able to make us remember something – the string around a finger has long since turned into a smart-phone app. But a “Reminder” is also something that warns us, the admonishing finger. Perhaps strange memories force themselves upon us of Bruce Nauman’s video works, in which he stages an interplay between constant self-exposition and withdrawal. In Nauman’s work, the result was empty places, a pure blank. “Reminder” also sounds a lot like “remainder”, what is left over. Something is always left over, like a remnant that cannot be squared away, and not just *found footage*. What is left of the genius in our era? “I is another ... Je est un autre,” Rimbaud not only *remarks*. He also *acts* accordingly in self-destructive manner, fleeing his own biography into impossible adventures, finally to Africa, to Ethiopia and Somalia, which Westerners had still hardly explored in his time. Rimbaud, like Madame Bovary opens the powers of plasticity as far as the realm of the impossible, the negative, and destruction – to the “end of the line”, to the “bitter end” and thereby into the innermost dark heart of the art of modernity.

“The End”, the “shipwreck with an amused audience”,<sup>18</sup> the shipwreck in a rowboat in front of a pastoral landscape backdrop with a newspaper, this ironic demise as slapstick in its Chaplinesque comedy recalls the ever-present theatricality. The applause afterward and the red curtain transform the round of the media panorama back into a stage. This end doesn’t so much conclude something as it directs the gaze back to the media stage, on which the show always goes on when it doesn’t seem to go on. This shouldn’t be misunderstood as a critique of the media, but the media live from constant disaster, in a manner quite unlike art, which nevertheless cannot do without it, either. On the big screen as well as historically, the “Titanic” is not only an existen-

18 Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, translated by Steven Rendall, Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1996.

tial metaphor between fiction and reality. It is the object of the fascination of the grand idea, the promise of progress between the icebergs of contingency.

### **Metaphors, Metamorphoses, Monsters**

In this sense, Paul Valéry's *Monsieur Teste* is a thoroughly *geniuslike*, but equally *impossible* chimera. This situation will concern us in the following consideration of the history of the aesthetic of the genius. But first let us turn to Valéry:

“Who knows whether most of those prodigious thoughts over which so many great men and an infinity of lesser ones have grown pale for centuries, are not, after all, psychological monsters – *Monster Ideas* – born of the naïve exercise of our questioning faculties, which we apply to anything at all, never realizing that we may reasonably question only what can actually give us an answer?”<sup>19</sup>

Questions that don't have any real answers, i.e., a certain class of philosophical questions, especially the metaphysical ones, give birth to chimeras – that much should have been clear at least since Kant and Wittgenstein. In the same passage, Valéry laments that the “fleshly psychological and idea monsters “quickly perish. Yet they have had a certain existence. Nothing is more instructive than to meditate on their destiny.”<sup>20</sup> Here Valéry recommends a kind of phenomenological questioning of these composite creatures, a kind of investigation and analysis that, not coincidentally, resembles aesthetics – until he finally begins asking about the actual *impossibility* of the chimeras. This question finally touches the core of his object:

19 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 6. Emphasis by Valéry.

20 Ibid.



“Why is Monsieur Teste impossible? That question is the *soul* of him. *It changes you into Monsieur Teste*. For he is none other than the very demon of possibility. His concern for the whole range of what he can do rules him.”<sup>21</sup>

The chimera of Monsieur Teste is the demon of possibility and – we can add – consequently equally the *demon of impossibility*, perhaps even the chimera of art. In this turn of phrase, which tries to analyze the conditions of possibility simultaneously as the conditions of impossibility, and which by no coincidence recalls deconstruction, we can pinpoint, with Christoph Menke,<sup>22</sup> Valéry’s significance for current aesthetics; for Valéry plays an important role in the argumentational context of the aesthetic debates of modernism and the present. As Menke elucidates, the Western tradition’s standard explanation of the constitution of things is quite generally to reveal the way these things are produced. This necessarily results in the ability to reproduce the things in question. But as Socrates already noted, this doesn’t really seem to be the case with works of art. To know how works of art were made and know and master how they can be reproduced is not yet the same as understanding them. It is important to understand this Socratic critique properly, because the life-world and the role of art since Plato and Socrates’ times cannot be equated with our own. And it is not only historical distance that is important here.

21 Ibid. Emphasis by Valéry.

22 See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBIMyTg8wJ0> (last viewed on Nov. 7, 2012)  
See also: Christoph Menke, *Die Kraft der Kunst*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013, here esp. “Das Kunstwerk: zwischen Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit”, p. 17–40 and p. 12 ff., p. 172 f.; idem, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, translated by Neil Solomon, Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1998. Michael Lüthy and Christoph Menke (eds.), *Subjekt und Medium in der Kunst der Moderne*, Zurich and Berlin: diaphanes, 2006. Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, translated by Gerrit Jackson, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. In Paul Valéry, along with various passages in the *Cahiers*, see esp. his inaugural lecture at the Chair of Poetics at the College de France on Dec. 10, 1937: idem, *Leçon inaugurale du cours de poésie de Collège de France*, in: *Variété V*, Nrf., Paris: Gallimard, 1944, pp. 295–322.

Superficially considered, Valéry seems to assert and do the opposite of Socrates. With phenomenological attention, Valéry precisely considers poetic ability and aesthetic procedures and investigates them perseveringly and with a love of detail, in order thereby to precisely recognize and understand what a work of art is. But at precisely this point a gap opens up, because the production and the reception of a work do not necessarily correspond with each other. If they did, namely, there could not be such a thing as a history of reception and, quite generally, a history of the arts and their varying interpretation. In a certain way – and this distinguishes art history precisely from the analytic procedure applied to the mass media – insight into the production process doesn't help us understand the deep dimensions of a work of art. And this leads to the paradox that a work of art is, on the one hand, something made by a human being but, on the other, that it cannot be grasped and understood simply as a consequence and product of its production process, because there can be no definitive production method for a work of art.

Works of art are made without any recipe; and precisely what is art about them seems to come from a kind of *surplus*, from another power or force. Precisely this distinguishes art again and again from what is merely well-meant and properly made. Of course, artists have to learn, know, and be able to do all manner of things. But all of that must be joined by something more, a *je ne sais quoi*. This tension, the *surplus*, which as we have already seen resembles an impossibility more than an ability that can be mastered, can now be turned to the positive with Nietzsche's term of the "Dionysian". In this transition from Valéry to Nietzsche, we are still following Menke's argument. Menke explicates this paradox that art is something made by people that cannot be understood solely as the product of this making, based on the difference between "force" and "capability", which is taken back in Kant's aesthetics of genius that will be considered in juxtaposition below; but we'll get to that soon.

Nietzsche's "Dionysian" can be understood only if we do *not* misconceive it as successful execution of a procedure. It is rather an inability, a collapse, and

the aforementioned possibility of its own *impossibility*. Artistic production requires the resources of a dimension going beyond our everyday practices, the insight into and recognition of the fragility, the frailness, and the uncontrollability of all chimeras and dark forces. Yet, according to Nietzsche, it is not a *higher* form of practice, but rather a *different* one, one that is no longer oriented toward the plain success of everyday accomplishments, that is decisive for this Dionysian dimension. This *different* dimension is not so much genius – which, as a figure of higher giftedness, embodies precisely the metaphysical, pre-modern dimension of art – as it is collapse and endurance of failure: if our everyday accomplishments are suspended and do not simply succeed, and if we reach not only our own limits, but the limits per se.

Valéry captures this aesthetic limit, which is able to criticize and cast doubt not only on theoretical reason and philosophy's view from nowhere, its assumed bird's-eye overview, but also on the practical world and its everyday accomplishments, in the following metaphoric imagery: "The stranger's way of looking at things, the eye of a man who *does not recognize*, who is beyond this world, the eye as frontier between being and nonbeing – belongs to the *thinker*." And of course to the artist, we could add, since Monsieur Teste stands for both the thinker and the artist in his purest and most advanced form. Further in the text we read: "It is also the eye of a dying man, a man losing recognition. In this, the thinker is a dying man, or a Lazarus, as he chooses. Not much choice."<sup>23</sup> Valéry's insight into this boundary is that the

23 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 79. Let us add here a second, somewhat longer quotation on the conditions of possibility and impossibility, which in turn has a "strong" reference to the "weak thinking", the *pensiero debole* mentioned in FN. 6: "It is what I contain of the unknown to me that makes me myself. / It is my clumsiness, my uncertainty that is really myself. / My weakness, my frailty ... / Gaps are my starting point. My impotence is my origin. / My strength comes from you. My impulse goes from my weakness to my strength. / My real poverty generates an imaginary wealth; and I am that symmetry; I am the act that annuls my desires. / [...] / What compels me is not myself." Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 38f. See also: Nicoletta Grillo, *Der Engel und der Spiegel. Zur Philosophie Paul Valérys*, Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2012 (first as dissertation, Humboldt-Univ. Berlin, 2010).

artist and the thinker must enter into the liminal realm of the undead, into the space between life and death, or perhaps into the rigging loft of the world stage where Lazarus is also found and from where the monsters and chimeras come and must go like *dei ex machina*. This area is also one of the media and images, of the theatrical stage and of panoramas, a heterogeneous region in which pictorial spaces mix with real spaces and where the two interpenetrate.<sup>24</sup>

### Chimeras of the Genius

In Section 46 of his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant has genius and nature emerge from and merge into each other; he consequently explicitly defines the fine arts as the arts of genius:

*“Genius is the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to Art. Since the talent, as an inborn productive faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art. / Whatever the case may be with this definition, and whether it is merely arbitrary or is adequate to the concept which is usually associated with the word genius ([...]), it can nevertheless already be proved at the outset that, according to the significance of the word assumed here, beautiful arts must necessarily*

Of course thinking, too, is a bringing forth and a making, but one that is in part differently structured and that orients itself toward paradigms different from those of poetic and aesthetically creative making. See: Olav Krämer, *Denken erzählen. Repräsentationen des Intellekts bei Robert Musil und Paul Valéry* (spectrum Literaturwissenschaft / Komparatistische Studien, 20), Berlin et al.: de Gruyter, 2009, esp. p. 431–503. See also: Paul Gifford and Brian Stimpson (eds.), *Reading Paul Valéry: Universe in Mind* (Cambridge Studies in French, 58), Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

24 Cf. Ursula Frohne and Lilian Haberer (eds.), *Kinematographische Räume: Installationsästhetik in Film und Kunst*, Munich: Fink, 2012.

be considered as arts of *genius*. / For every art presupposes rules which first lay the foundation by means of which a product that is to be called artistic is first represented as possible. The concept of beautiful art, however, does not allow the judgment concerning the beauty of its product to be derived from any sort of rule that has a *concept* for its determining ground, and thus has as its ground a concept of how it is possible. Thus beautiful art cannot itself think up the rule in accordance with which it is to bring its product into being. Yet since without a preceding rule a product can never be called art, nature in the subject (and by means of the disposition of its faculties) must give the rule to art, i.e., beautiful art is only possible as a product of genius.<sup>25</sup>

To make use, not entirely without irony, of a famous formulation of Adorno's and Horkheimer's, one might say that art would be the (admittedly) "non-conceptual" remembrance of Nature within the subject; the latter, however, inspired by his genius. Christoph Menke's train of thought, presented above, that there can be no recipe, no secured procedure for the production of art – is contained in Kant's argumentation, explicitly and thoroughly formulated, but turned to fit another context. Thus, Kant assesses the consequences in the opposite direction. In Kant, the genius does not appear as a problem, but as the solution that reconciles the subject with nature, as *telos* and great, imagined goal and objective. As is well known, Kant's project leads to a teleology. Classical Modernism, Nietzsche as well as Valéry, will no

25 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge et al., Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 186, all emphases are Kant's. For the original see: idem, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 241 f., (B 180 ff., A 178 ff.). In another context see: Robert Kudielka, "Die Lust der Reflexion und das Fest der Malerei: Über das Verhältnis von Kants Ästhetik zur Bildkunst von Matisse", in: Birgit Recki and Lambert Wiesing (eds.), *Bild und Reflexion: Paradigmen und Perspektiven gegenwärtiger Ästhetik*, Munich: Fink, 1997, p. 241–269; Robert Kudielka, "Die Befreiung der Kunst von der Kunst: Arthur C. Danto und das Happy End des philosophischen Bildungsromans", in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 45, no. 5, (1997), p. 765–771.

longer permit themselves to be persuaded by this solution of Kant's and will clearly distance themselves from it. Despite and precisely because of his affinity with the media, Frank Geßner nevertheless remains beholden to this Classical Modernism – along with its so-called “postmodern overtones” and their “dialectical dynamic” – from Max Beckmann to Orson Welles, from Marcel Duchamp to Bruce Nauman, from Samuel Beckett to Buster Keaton, from Paul Valéry to Roland Barthes, and from Proust and Joyce to Foucault and Derrida. The numerous references, quotations, and figures in the project *Alias Yederbeck* give rise to a kind of historical echo chamber around it, by means of which the viewer goes for a stroll, so to speak, and wanders about into the image and into the stream of images – just as the recipient in the round of the panorama also finds himself set in constant motion.

Historically, the “genius” was nonetheless a creator figure connected at the deepest level with the Western idea of art; after Shaftesbury and the cult of the genius that unfolded fully in the 18th century, he is a “second creator” and “true Prometheus after Jupiter”,<sup>26</sup> even after we today have lost our belief in that. The perfect artist, thereby, has always been the epitome of the genius, as Giorgio Vasari, the precursor of the modern concept of the genius, indicates in his *Vite's* characterization of Michelangelo.<sup>27</sup> Since the 17th century, the concept of the genius then took on the synonymous meaning of “esprit, caractère, nature, don, talent”,<sup>28</sup> and in modern times was finally freed of the metaphysical overtones attached to this tradition; since the 1960s, it has increasingly survived solely ironically as a fictionalizing construct. Robert

26 Cf. R. Warning, B. Fabian and J. Ritter, “Genie” article, in: Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, Gottfried Gabriel (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1971–2007, vol. 3, col. 279–309, here col. 292. The source named here is: A. A. C. Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks ...* 1–3 (1714, reprint Farnborough 1968) vol. 1, p. 207 f.; vol. 2, p. 393 f., and p. 407 f.

27 Cf. Gerd Blum, *Giorgio Vasari: Der Erfinder der Renaissance*, Munich: C. H. Beck, 2011, p. 15, p. 261 ff., “Vom Ingenium zum Genie”.

28 Cf. R. Warning, B. Fabian and J. Ritter, Article “Genie”, loc. cit., col. 279.

Musil's episode of the "racehorse of genius" anticipates this. The idea of the genius has become problematic, which can be traced through all of Western culture. Not entirely coincidentally, the genius is thus usually male, white, and found primarily in the capitals and museums of the colonial powers. The ideas of the genius and the pipedreams of the cult of the genius become the alias of the figure of the artist per se. But the Western figure of the artist itself becomes brittle, problematic, and accompanied by new possibilities that are oriented more toward the type of the anti-hero. Already earlier and as if *avant la lettre*, Valéry has his *alter ego* Monsieur Teste say disparagingly, "[...] I hate extraordinary things. Only weak minds need them. Believe me literally: genius is *easy*, *divinity is easy* ... I mean simply ... that I know how it is to be conceived."<sup>29</sup> Valéry follows the genealogical demystification of the so-called higher world that Nietzsche already developed as an intellectual toolbox of his cultural critique and as methodological dissecting instruments, after initially still paying homage to a "metaphysics of the artist" that clearly stood in the gravitational field of Richard Wagner. Nietzsche's turn away from Wagner and his genealogical clarification of the former art-metaphysical "background worlds" are clear signs of his radical self-criticism. But in Nietzsche's involuntary heroism and his thematic complex of the "free spirit", the "Overman", "grand politics", etc. there remains enough space to let even the shadow of genius grow all the longer behind his back.

In contrast, in Geßner's expanded cinema panorama there is a cross-fading of every possible artist typology that bursts every genealogy: the one who attains perfection young, the monk, the actor, the melancholic, the painter aristocrat, the comedian, the impresario, the tragedian, the artistic director, the lone wolf, the analyst, the virtuoso, the self-ironic one, the Romantic, the encyclopedist, the Post-Romantic, the commentator, the archivist, the destroyer and creative genius – all these types oscillate here and form mythi-

29 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 17.

cal mixed creatures and chimeric hybrids. The diverse mixture of all these incommensurable types already provides an inkling that *the* artist doesn't exist and that the artist – in the historical and genealogical sense of the genius – is always a chimera. The artist is a construct, composed of exposure and hiding. The act of grappling with the *role* of the artist has long since entered into art itself, even before Duchamp, Warhol, and Beuys, not to mention *Appropriation Art* and *Institutional Critique*. In Bruce Nauman's early videos, an interplay of constant self-exposure and withdrawal creates empty spaces and pure blanks in a metaphorical sense. The way these voids absorb the recipient differs from how he might wish, which Nauman's corridors and rooms make physically experientiable. The recipient is exposed to a situation, a space. Exposed in this way, he experiences his physical and social limits. The play between possibility and impossibility, which is also mirrored in the psychological realm, performatively structures these psychosocial spaces of experience.

Nauman's two relatively early works, *The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain* (1966) and *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* (1967), are a central reference point for the still continuing grappling with the artist's role and the institutions that this change of role involves, whereby the recipient's spectrum of possibilities to participate and the performative openings toward him are also changing fundamentally. With Nauman, the video was mediation between the body and space, between the self and the world. But the world of the media and that of art have meanwhile opened interactively. The paradigm of communication, media, and event have overbid and undermined the paradigm of representation. In his artistic works, Nauman has not only dealt with his own body and his role, but, since his early videos, has also addressed the studio.<sup>30</sup> The studio, the site where art

30 See: Beatrice von Bismarck, "Hinter dem Studio: Bruce Naumans Auseinandersetzung mit dem Atelierraum", in: *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 49, March 2003 (thematic issue: the studio), p. 38–43. See also: Beatrice von Bismarck, *Bruce Nauman: Der wahre Künstler / The True Artist*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1998. Finally, see: Ursula Frohne, "Maßlose Langeweile:



develops, once again abets a supposed self-exposure. Not only do the masks fall here, they are also tried and tested. The studio is also always a site of staging and self-staging. Mask and studio form a chimeric unity.<sup>31</sup> Yederbeck's studio, with all its studies, fragments, and approaches, is the as-if-mythical site conjured up by Gefßner's cinematographic media panorama.

### The Arts of the Chimera

The spatially mediatised format-templates Gefßner chose for the panorama, have a certain totalitarianizing bent. Every point of the classic panorama is re-

Zur Produktivität von Passivität und Leere in Bruce Naumans Videoinstallation Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)", in: Doris Schuhmacher-Chilla and Julia Wirxel (eds.), *Maß oder Maßlosigkeit: Kunst und Kultur der Gegenwart*, Oberhausen: Athena, 2007; and: Ursula Frohne, "Creativity on Display? Visibility Conflicts or the Claim for Opacity as Ethical Resource", in: Hille Koskela and Greg Wise (eds.), *New Visualities, New Technologies. The New Ecstasy of Communication*, London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, p. 119–152.

- 31 See: Werner Hofmann, *Das Irdische Paradies. Kunst im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1960; Hermann U. Asemissen and Gunter Schweighart, *Malerei als Thema der Malerei*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994; Hans Belting, *The Invisible Masterpiece*, translated by Helen Atkins, Chicago et al.: The University of Chicago Press, 2001; Pia Müller and Katharina Sykora (eds.), *Puppen, Körper, Automaten. Phantasmen der Moderne*, Cologne: Oktagon, 1999 (exh. cat. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen July 24, 1999–Oct. 17, 1999); Helmut Friedel (ed.), Georg-W. Költzsch, *Der Maler und sein Model: Geschichte und Deutung eines Bildthemas*, Cologne: DuMont, 2000; Rolf Aurich, Wolfgang Jacobsen and Gabriele Jatho (eds.), *Künstliche Menschen: Manische Maschinen: Kontrollierte Körper*, [on the occasion of the exhibition in the Filmmuseum Berlin, Sony Center am Potsdamer Platz], Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2000; *Pygmalions Werkstatt: Die Erschaffung des Menschen im Atelier von der Renaissance bis zum Surrealismus*, ed. by Helmut Friedel, Cologne: Wienand, 2001, (exh. cat. Kunstbau, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Sept. 08, 2001–Nov. 25, 2001); Jan Gerchow (ed.), *Ebenbilder. Kopien von Körpern – Modelle des Menschen*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002, (exh. cat. Ruhrlandmuseum Essen March 26, 2002–June 30, 2002); *Mythos Atelier: Von Spitzweg bis Picasso, von Giacometti bis Nauman*, ed. by Ina Conzen and the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2012, (exh. cat. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart Oct. 27, 2012–March 03, 2013).

lated to and aimed at the subjective viewer in the conventional sense. The panorama was one of Modernism's first mass media, and in this context it clearly obeys the staging order of the spectacle. Because of the viewer's more or less forced motion in and through the panorama, it opens itself to the world of moving images and early cinema. Since the viewer can never take in at one glance the entirety of the all-around picture – that classically depicts battle scenes and landscape or city vedute – the panorama literally and necessarily sets the spectator in motion. The viewer is expected to put what he has seen together, successively, as an overall picture, but one that is possible only in imagination. This is the situation of the visitors to Geßner's expanded cinema panorama, which is now actually set in motion and animated, but which intentionally does without the all-around impression of the panorama. But the sensory overload, which is experienced not only visually but also acoustically and displays a downright physical dimension, merges the simultaneous space of the panorama painting with the successive space of film and the visitor perceives sequentially via the montage as well as along a temporal axis. Geßner does not strive for the realistic simulating and spatial effect of the medium of the panorama. Nor is his intention the deceptively authentic staging of a virtual reality, the illusion of virtual spaces. Geßner's panorama serves him as a stage for testing conceptual intentions and media ideas. Accordingly, he sees many more totalitarian forces at work in the recipient's psychological and physical fixation and immobilization in conventional cinema; the gestures of strolling, spatial movement, and gathering together in his panorama counteract these forces. Instead of the old traditional role of the doubled genius, now the multiple alias of the artist figure and the variety of reception perspectives in the cinematographic space of the panorama become a social event. Historically viewed, the genius was already a social construct, and perhaps even an event; and, in the metaphorical context, this is also true of the pawn in a game, the playing piece, and the alias. But now the cinematographic projection space populated by the recipients and aliases opens up; it resembles the artist's or even a film studio. In several ways, it

transforms from a space of motion to one of encounter. This site, the space of the fictitious studio,<sup>32</sup> is the quarry from which Yederbeck's legacy would have to be reconstructed. Thus, with the site of encounter, the intellectual dimension of an encounter is also implied. The mask of the metafiction is mirrored in and on the theme of the studio. Studio and mask are merely two sides of one and the same fictionalization. If the artist appears in various masks, then the studio is the stage on which he rehearses and develops these roles and masquerades.

What the term "alias", avatar, in the realm of video and computer games has to tell us is the necessary instance of the placeholder in play, of the playing piece, of self-representation in accordance with the rules of and in the world of play that is shared by the various players. Whether this mask and role that the player takes on in play, in order to actually play, are owed solely to conventions, or whether they are a product of free imagination, becomes incidental here. The player, unlike the recipient, tries to remain in the game and to win. He is as far removed from the genius as the creature is removed from its creator, as far as everyday life is from art. Thus the desire for celebrities, the cult of the star, and fame. But the genius was himself only an alias, an avatar, a chimera, as we already remarked at the beginning; he has meanwhile become historical and, in *Alias Yederbeck's* many-faceted cinematographic space, he becomes the artist's material for play and reflection, the artist's idea of the work in the metafictional media panorama.

32 See: Jens Hoffmann (ed.), *The Studio* (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art), Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2012; Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner (eds.), *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists* (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010; John Edwards and Perry Ogden, *7 Reece Mews, Francis Bacon's Studio*, London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2001; *L'atelier d'Alberto Giacometti: Collection de la Fondation Alberto et Annette Giacometti*, Paris: Centre Pompidou, [exh. cat. Centre Pompidou, Oct. 17, 2007–Feb. 11, 2008], as well as Friedrich Teja Bach's chapter: "Das Atelier als Kunstwerk", in: idem, *Constantin Brancusi: Metamorphosen plastischer Form*, Cologne: DuMont, 1987, p. 109–115.

It is the genre of the portrait that has prepared the ground for the logic of these personifications, these veilings and unveilings. This was already foreshadowed in the sequence of the “Entertainer”, as in many other passages of this work complex, which is constructed around a systematically ordered plethora of specific portraits. The portrait and, even more so, the self-portrait stand in a tense and conceptual, definitely more than merely artificial relationship with the instance of the alias. Both represent and stand for, and sometimes replace, a specific person. The artist, too, unavoidably depicts himself in his work. This self-depiction *need* not be done in the sense of a likeness, but it *can*. In art history, self-portrait inserted in the ensemble of happenings in a picture has been termed a “painted signature” – Michelangelo in the skin of Bartholomew on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Raphael in the *School of Athens*, and Velásquez in *Las Meninas*, to mention just three extremely prominent examples. But the creator portrays himself not only *within* his work; the work as such depicts him in his entire character – and yet remains a mask, an alias. Max Beckmann’s self-portraits and the many meanings of the mask in his pictorial stories, for example, are worth mentioning here. The consistent elaboration of this double nature, held in a dialectical and perhaps also deconstructive relationship, was Valéry’s ambition in his literary creation, *Monsieur Teste*. One might speak, with Georg Simmel, of an imaginary portrait, a portrait beyond external similarities. As Malraux spoke of a *musée imaginaire*, we would be dealing with an elective affinity of the projective kind, or perhaps with a media-performative family resemblance. In a section titled “Sketches for a Portrait of Monsieur Teste”, Valéry straightaway robs us of the hope of clear, outward recognizability based on likeness: “There is no known likeness of Monsieur Teste. / All the portraits differ. / The man with no reflection: / This phantom which is our self (which it *feels itself to be*) and which is closed in *our* weight.”<sup>33</sup> Of course, even before Valéry

33 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, loc. cit., p. 67. On the “dissimilar portrait”, see: Georg Simmel, “Ästhetik des Porträts”, in: idem, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908*, vol. 1, Frank-

and Nietzsche, the genre of portraiture was already bound up with the question of the metaphysically inflated subjectivity that has been in a process of dissolution since Modernism. The plethora of supposed “self-portraits” of Yederbeck do as little to solve this problem as does the absence of any usable portrait in Edmond Teste’s case. For a moment, it may also have appeared as if in art the media had taken the place of abdicated genius and as if the category of the work were performatively dissolved. In a variety of metaphorical role and mask plays, Geßner questions whether this appearance, too, is a media and performative chimera and submits it to discussion. In a commentary on a text on the “Politics of the Face” by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Nicola Suthor writes: “There is nothing beyond the mask, no authentic core to be discovered. Rather, turning the mask against itself, playing with it, opening up spaces for play to escape the bunker, going outside of oneself, stepping outside – turning ‘schizo’ – means to grant the face a future.”<sup>34</sup>

Just as Catherine Malabou encompasses decay, negativity, and destruction in her concept of plasticity, quoted above – which also requires a plastic force, a forming power – so too in Geßner’s various chapters it is important that all pictorial worlds that are highly medially constructed be destroyed and dis-

furt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995 (Gesamtausgabe vol. 7, ed. by Rüdiger Kramme, Angela Rammstedt and Otthein Rammstedt), p. 321–332 or “The Aesthetic Significance of the Face”, translated by Lore Ferguson, in: Georg Simmel, 1858–1918, edited by Kurt H. Wolf, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1959, pp. 276–281; idem, “Die ästhetische Bedeutung des Gesichts”, in: loc. cit., p. 36–42 or “Aesthetics of the Portrait” in: ABBILD, recent portraiture and depiction, edited by Peter Pakesch, Wien: Springer, 2002, pp. 192–200); idem, “Das Problem des Porträts”, in: idem, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1909–1918*, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000 (Gesamtausgabe vol. 13, ed. by Klaus Latzel), p. 370–381.

- 34 Nicola Suthor, “Kommentar”, in: Rudolf Preimesberger, Hannah Baader, and Nicola Suthor (eds.), *Porträt* (Geschichte der klassischen Bildgattungen, vol. 2), Berlin: Reimer, 1999, p. 466–477, p. 476. Suthor is referring of course to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, chapter 7: “Year Zero – Faciality”, in: idem, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 167–191.

solved in the picture. This double movement of bringing forth and destroying indicates the overall “made” character of the pictorial worlds brought together in the rondo. This constant reference to made-ness, however, is not the final truth in and about Geßner’s oeuvre. It is merely a necessary precondition that we all too easily lose sight of in the face of the general plasticity of the media and pictorial worlds. The individual sequences of *Alias Yederbeck* exhibit and depict their made-ness and the media transpositions to the point of excess. In this excess, all the pictorial worlds are thoroughly destroyed again and the forces that constitute them appear, recognizably.

The chimera of Monsieur Teste, Yederbeck’s posthumous “self-stagings”, and Geßner’s “auto-(author-)constructions” [*Auto(r)konstruktionen*], media constructs, and metafiction are wrested from the *demon of possibility* and – and as emerged just as clearly – no less from the *demon of impossibility*. In their *media plasticity*, they are all, not least, also chimeras of art. The artist sketched and portrayed himself self-ironically in the pose of the genius, to which something melancholic often adheres. This construct, which actually corresponds to a mask of greater capability and recognition as much as to the taking of distance from the quotidian, demonstrates how the status and social role of the artist was naturalized and at the same time transposed as if into something higher and supernatural. The veil of the historical ideas of the genius and of the artist’s self-depiction and public staging serves here as the general surface for reflection and projection in the cinematographic media panorama of an *Expanded Cinema*. That Frank Geßner himself appears in various embodiments and poses of this role-play underscores the ironic double character of a literally “serious game” in which the studio moves into the foreground, face to face with the panorama and behind the mask of the alias, as a site of the aesthetic event. Unlike with Bruce Nauman, who took his studio as a theme continuously from his numerous early video works to *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)* (2001), what is decisive for Geßner’s free “Valéry adaption” is that the figure ultimately “comes out of

life and likewise goes into life”, as he himself sums up.<sup>35</sup> The studio is here an “interstice” and at the same time a passageway and projection space, similar to the panorama.

In the 1-channel video *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?*, the protagonist – Geßner/Valéry/Yederbeck – manages, if only with great effort, to leave the studio in the end, after it lands like something colossal and extraterrestrial in its place. But the flow of time and events is thereby reversed. Backward and forward are exchanged. *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* forms a kind of nutrient medium and nucleus of the whole project. In retrospect, this visual testing ground may feel like something left over that, nonetheless, must not be lacking if the project is to be complete. A dramaturgical climax, a “key motif”,<sup>36</sup> in this video is the studio building’s precision landing like a spaceship in a rear courtyard in Berlin.<sup>37</sup> The reassembly, like magic, of even the smallest pieces of wall, stones, and debris makes it clear that this is a special effect, a sequence of film spliced in backward, which of course for this reason seems anything but realistic. If the studio in this trick montage rose like a spaceship

35 Frank Geßner in conversation with the authors.

36 On this, cf. Robert Kudielka’s revealing section “Der Zufall, die Ausweglosigkeit und das heilsame Mißgeschick” in: idem, “Die Gier, der Zufall und das Rote: Zur Malerei Francis Bacons”, in: Konrad Paul Liessmann (ed.), *Im Rausch der Sinne: Kunst zwischen Animation und Askese*, (Philosophicum Lech, 2), Vienna: Zsolnay, 1999, p. 91–121, here p. 114–115: “To understand Bacon’s motif of the key, the subsequent verses are crucial: ‘We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.’ [T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922, V. 413–414]. The idea of the key, i.e., of the wish to get out, is what first makes the interior space of the world into a prison, because it spoils being in it. [...] There is no escape from the space of existence, especially not through the back door of the unconscious.” The text concludes in the culmination: “Being able to suffer disappearance marks the cusp of the little revolution that Bacon hopes his art will produce: ‘to turn the viewer more violently back to life.’” Loc. cit., p. 120.

37 See: Rolf Giesen and Claudio Meglin, *Künstliche Welten: Tricks, Special Effects und Computeranimation im Film von den Anfängen bis Heute*, (on the occasion of the exhibition in the Filmmuseum Berlin, Sony Center am Potsdamer Platz), Hamburg and Vienna: Europa Verlag, 2000.

into the vastness of the universe, then the dramaturgy of motion would be chronological. But the view of the work, like that of the self, is always retrospective in a certain sense – just as the *Alias Yederbeck* panorama sequences and *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* always begin with the “end”, so to speak.<sup>38</sup> After the landing, the protagonist – as if in the role of Valéry’s and Geßner’s test pilot – first leaves the studio and, with a grand gesture, imaginarily signs the complete oeuvre with his alias with a script of light: “Yederbeck!”. Beginning in 1949, in film or in photos with a long exposure, Picasso practiced this kind of light script as a self-staging of the artist. The ironically exaggerated quotation, however, is counteracted by the figure’s specific departure at the real end of the video: for immediately after the last title on screen, “Fin d’un début”, this protagonist walks like one of Kleist’s marionettes, with visible uncertainty and effort, out of the picture, over which the final credits roll. Every step costs him effort, as if his body mechanics did not yet function properly. The jerky figure, embodied by Frank Geßner himself, was filmed walking backward. Mounted in reverse in the film, the sequence seems as if it showed him moving forward. This provides a simple explanation of the awkward movements, which is not so simple to perceive at first sight in the visual material. As in the explosive studio landing, the temporal dimensions

38 A general reflection on remembrance and the museum in juxtaposition with the studio and the portrait by way of Adorno’s essay “Valéry Proust Museum” might be right in place here. Adorno’s dense and “prismatic” essay opens an allusive and most inspiring exchange between Valéry’s and Proust’s different concepts of art. These differences oscillate between the museum and the railway station, the studio and the art chamber, architecture and editing, the spectacle and aesthetic purity. See: Theodor W. Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum”, in: idem, *Prisms*, transl. by Samuel and Shierry Weber, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981, p. 173–185. From a Film Studies viewpoint, we may finally point out Erika Balsom’s recent book *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*. Unfortunately she operates with far too narrow a concept of art here. See: Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. The Film Museum applies different rules and dispositives than the art museum. Accordingly, film becomes something different in the art museum, perhaps something chimerical.



are reversed. Forward becomes backward, backward becomes forward. In this doubly reversed way, the figure that we have described as the chimera of Monsieur Teste comes out of life, and this is how it goes back into life – and it can do so only extremely awkwardly and not without great effort. In the protagonist’s clumsiness, Joseph Beuys’ often-misunderstood dictum that “every man, every human being is an artist” moves ineluctably toward Martin Kippenberger’s ironic inversion that “every artist is just a human being”. The hippogryph, Pegasus, the chimera that carried the artist and on which he was able to ride through the air gave him some of the forces and powers for his staging and fantasy. Identifying with these powers in a tragic way created the various forms of the Western aesthetic of the genius. *Not* confusing oneself with these borrowed forms and forces remains a constant challenge even *after* the aesthetic of the genius and in the art-historical epoch *after* the portrait,<sup>39</sup> because the subject was always the point of intersection of various forces. Thus, this difference itself remains a kind of chimera, but one that, like the treasures that in Geßner’s metafictional reconstruction seem to originate in Yederbeck’s studio, is not necessarily more graspable than that under the masks of Teste, Valéry, or Yederbeck.

39 Petra Gördüren, *Das Porträt nach dem Porträt. Positionen der Bildkunst im späten 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verl., 2013 (first as dissertation, Freie Univ. Berlin, 2008). The mask minutely reproduced from the face in the work of the British artist Gillian Wearing has an odd, uncanny character, because similarity and difference, biographical phases between once and now overlay each other in a ghostly role play. See: *Gillian Wearing* (exh. cat. Whitechapel Gallery, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Pinakothek der Moderne), Cologne: Verl. der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2012. – With Emmanuel Lévinas, in contrast, the “*épiphanie du visage*” and his concept of the “*visage*” – entirely beholden to difference and inaccessibility, beyond substance and perceptual appearance as well as beyond the mere face or any mask – becomes indebted to an ethical dimension that even constitutes a “*first philosophy*”. All of this, unfortunately, cannot be discussed any further here. Yet we, the authors, are in turn deeply indebted to Frank Geßner, whom we thank in many ways for valuable advice and suggestions as well as intense discussions that acquainted us with the project, with its aliases and chimeras; last, but not least, we thank him for his patience and amicable trust. U. F. and C. K.

To exhibit the *made-ness* of the masks and chimeras themselves, to make them visible, is the aim and purpose of their incessant plasticity and metamorphoses. The studio is the first site of these chimeras and transformations. The arena of the media panorama is their testing ground, on which the recipients, too, may explore the degree to which this “test” suits them. And it is no coincidence that here, in manifold guises, Monsieur Teste, alias Yederbeck greets us: à bientôt!

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