

Gabriele Genge, Ludger Schwarte, Angela Stercken (eds.)
Aesthetic Temporalities Today. Present, Presentness, Re-Presentation

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[transcript]

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Visible/Unvisible Present

When we take it for granted that there is a 'present' in which we are living and about which we speak, which we can compare with the 'past' and observe with respect to possible developments of the 'future,' then we owe this to a linguistic positing that first took place in the final third of the 18th century: the noun 'present' ['Gegenwart'] shifts from serving as a spatial to a dominant temporal concept.¹ Directly tied to this is the concurrent rise of the abstract nouns: 'the past' and 'the future.'² Previously one could have spoken about the 'current century,' the 'current course of time,' or indeed even 'the time now' and the 'present time,' but not about 'the present' in the sense of a permanently changing, synchronic, overarching social nexus, whether this be that of a territory, a nation, or the world. The hallmark of this present as a synchronic nexus of all the "signs of our time"³ is its conflictive transitoriness. In his text *Ueber den Geist des Zeitalters in Teutschland* (1790) the philosopher Karl Leonhard Reinhold formulated this as the diagnosis of the present:

1 | Ingrid Oesterle, "'Es ist an der Zeit!' Zur kulturellen Konstruktionsveränderung von Zeit gegen 1800," in *Goethe und das Zeitalter der Romantik*, ed. Walter Hinderer, Alexander von Bormann and Gerhart von Graevenitz (Wuerzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), 91-121, 101. Johannes F. Lehmann, "Editorial: 'Gegenwart' im 17. Jahrhundert? Zur Frage literarischer Gegenwartsbezüge vor der 'Sattelzeit,'" *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL)* 42, no. 1 (2017): 110-121.

2 | Lucien Hölscher, "Von leeren und gefüllten Zeiten: Zum Wandel historischer Zeitkonzepte seit dem 18. Jahrhundert," in *Obsession der Gegenwart: Zeit im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Alexander C.T. Geppert and Till Kössler (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 37-70. Cf. id., *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft*, 2. ed. (Goettingen: Wallstein, 2016).

3 | Karl Leonhard Reinhold, "Ueber den Geist des Zeitalters in Teutschland," *Der neue teutsche Merkur* 1 (1790), 3rd piece, 225-255; 4th piece, 337-378, 228.

“The most striking and peculiar feature of the spirit of our age is an unsettling of all hitherto known systems, theories, and ideas, the breadth and depth of which is unprecedented in human history. The most diverse, indeed the most flagrantly contradictory signs of our time lead back to this feature, which announce to all and sundry an endeavor, more animated than ever before, to establish new forms everywhere on the one hand, on the other to support the old. Whether the old will finally be supplanted by the new, or the latter by the former; then would humanity be permitted to win, and if so what exactly?”⁴

This, according to Reinhold, is something the “unbiased independent thinker” dare not decide. The present is contoured as a transitional time, the contradictory unity of which resides in how ‘the old’ wrestles with ‘the new’ to gain future legitimacy, and it is precisely this that makes talk of the ‘past,’ ‘present,’ and ‘future’ as metonymic designations for distinctive times plausible since the final third of the 18th century.

More recently however, historians of the early modern period interested in the rise of the press and journalism have sought to date the “birth of the present” back to the 17th century, foremost amongst them Achim Landwehr and Daniel Fulda.⁵ This perspective has failed to precisely determine the type of historical change mentioned in each respective case and to adequately take into consideration the reflexive capacity of the concept of ‘the present.’ It is undeniable that the burgeoning journalism (and other media, for example, as Landwehr has impressively shown, the calendar) contributed to increasing awareness about the events taking place at the time and initiating discussion. It is also irrefutable that knowledge of the political events of the present was increasingly taken to be a norm for scholars. But when, at the end of the 17th century, Kaspar Stieler, a theorist of the newspaper, states in his book *Zeitungs Nutz und Lust* that those involved in running the affairs of the state need to be informed about their own time and have to know “who is the Nuntius Apostolicus in Vienna: and / whether the Pope is / called Alexander / Innocentius / Paulus or Coelestinus,”⁶ then this may show that the present is thought of in

4 | Reinhold, “Ueber den Geist,” 3rd piece, 225–255; 4th piece, 337–378, 228.

5 | Achim Landwehr, *Geburt der Gegenwart: Eine Geschichte der Zeit im 17. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt o.M.: S. Fischer, 2014); Daniel Fulda, “Wann begann die ‘offene’ Zukunft? Ein Versuch, die Koselleck’sche Fixierung auf die ‘Sattelzeit’ zu lösen,” in *Geschichtsbewusstsein und Zukunftserwartung in Pietismus und Erweckungsbewegung*, ed. Wolfgang Breul and Jan Carsten Schnurr (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 141–172; *ibid.*, “Um 1700 begann die ‘offene’ Zukunft. Zum Ausgang der Aufklärung von einer allgemeinen Unsicherheitserfahrung,” in *Um 1700: Die Formierung der europäischen Aufklärung. Zwischen Öffnung und neuerlicher Schließung*, ed. *ibid.*, Jörn Steigerwald (Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 23–45. See also: Stefanie Stockhorst, “Zeitkonzepte: Zur Pluralisierung des Zeitdiskurses im langen 18. Jahrhundert,” *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 30, no. 2 (2006): 157–164.

6 | Kaspar Stieler, *Zeitungs Lust und Nutz*, ed. Gert Hagelweide, complete reprint of the original edition from 1695 (Bremen: Schönemann, 1969), 4. Changes like these were then given their own publication, for:

terms of its difference to the past, but it certainly does not prove the idea of a synchronic social, cultural, political, and economic overarching nexus that is 'the present' and is constantly changing, as formulated at the end of the 18th century by Mercier for example: "The art of printing, gunpowder, the discovery of the new world, the post, the promissory note, and the ostensible balance of Europe have thrown the entire old system into disarray." And a page further on: "The man who is modified by government forms, laws, habits, becomes a completely different species as he once was."⁷ For Stieler in contrast, the "variety of the present"⁸ resides merely in how one name takes the place of another; a socio-cultural transformation, as is reflected since the middle of the 18th century and which thus makes plausible the necessity of an abstracting category 'the present,' is not given. As important as Landwehr's evidence is for proving the enhanced status of the present in the 17th century, a distinction still needs to be drawn between this enhancement and the temporalizing of the present.⁹ A temporalized present presupposes reflection on an internal and correlative complexity that is variable in its temporal dynamic and social structure, one that is simultaneously coupled to methods capable of rendering it both visible and observable.

I will develop this problematic of the visible/invisible present in three steps. In the first, conceptual and practical, I look to think of the 'present' in its interdependencies as an overarching nexus, to gather pertinent observations and turn it into a (discursive) object of intervention. This concerns the discourse of world history and the reflection on the practices of 'policing.' Secondly, I show how, parallel and simultaneously in the discourse on the genius, privileged viewing positions were discussed from where invisible simultaneities (of the present) could be rendered visible. In the third step, I shall explicate an example of this rendering visible of the present, drawing on the fragment *Der tugendhafte Taugenichts* by J.M.R. Lenz.

"The heads in Europe have changed so much in just a few years / that there are very few serene Houses to be found / wherein no significant deaths have occurred. This has been remarked on in writings now and then/ but because the gallant youth and many other curious minds prefer to see such remarks together in a compendium / these brief notes have been put up on demand." So [Johann Gottfried Gregorius], *Das jetzt lebende Europa Oder Genealogische Beschreibung aller jetzt lebenden Durchlauchtigsten Häupter. Von Melissantes* (Frankfurt/ Leipzig: Niedtens, 1715), Preface, pl. 2 (recto and verso).

7 | Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Neuer Versuch über die Schauspielkunst*, aus dem Französischen von Heinrich Leopold Wagner, mit einem Anhang aus Goethes Brieftasche, facsimile print after the edition of 1776, with an epilogue by Peter Pfaff (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1967), 198/199. In a list of the changes in the present Mercier follows a passage from a Voltaire text: *Anmerkungen über die Geschichte überhaupt (Remarques sur l'histoire, 1742)*, in *ibid, Erzählungen, Dialoge, Streitschriften*, ed. Martin Fontius (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1981), vol. 3, 217–222, esp. 220/221.

8 | Landwehr, *Geburt der Gegenwart*, 201.

9 | For more on this see the detailed discussion of the contributors to the IASL thematic issue: "'Gegenwart' im 17. Jahrhundert? Versuch einer Antwort," ed. Stefan Geyer and Johannes F. Lehmann, *IASL* 42, no.1 (2017): 110–278, 257–278.

I. Present as Nexus (Universal History, Police)

To make a substantive time concept of ‘the present’ plausible, the prevailing relations of the time, in particular social-economic relations, need to be grasped as an interconnected nexus, and indeed as one that is observable and discussable in terms of its changes, although it is invisible or unseeable in its wholeness. The Göttingen historian August Ludwig Schlözer formulates in *Vorstellung der Universal-Historie* (1772) a distinction between the “relationships of the real nexus,” which describes the diachronic and “visible”¹⁰ relations of cause and effect, and the “the nexus of the time,” which means the mere simultaneity of countries, peoples, or events which do not possess any “visible connections.”¹¹

“The mere *temporal connection* has incidents and events which are not based in one another, but are simultaneous; that is under facts which occur in very different countries, or in different parts of the world, but at the same time. [...] Here it is the claim of universal history to combine all the simultaneous facts, to imagine at once the situation of the world in this given age, and in such a way think every single incident *synchronistically*.”¹²

Schlözer’s “ideal of a universal history,” so the subtitle prefixed to the table of contents, aims to furnish an abstracting and synthesizing perspective, one in which a “general view that encompasses the whole”¹³ is to consider the whole of history under “one single aspect.” Only so can it create “a system through which diversity can be grasped at once.”¹⁴ Elsewhere, Schlözer writes: “this sweeping gaze recasts the aggregate into a system, returns all states of the globe into a unity, the human species, and evaluates the peoples of this globe solely in terms of their relations to the large revolutions of the world.”¹⁵ A system of synchronic relationships is to be distilled from the real causal relations. The diversely employed optical metaphors (view, gaze, painting, mosaic painting, stage, etc.) aimed to provide an abstracting representation of invisible simultaneities in a nexus that itself is unimaginal. In the form of its representation as an interconnected system, world history

10 | Ludwig August Schlözer, *Vorstellung der Universal-Historie* (Göttingen / Gotha: Dieterich, 1772), reprint, in *ibid.*, *Vorstellung der Universal-Historie (1772/73)*, with appendixes, edited, introduced and commented by Horst Walter Blanke (Hagen: Rottmann, 1990), 46.

11 | Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 22.

12 | Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 48f.

13 | Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 18. There is also mention of a “gaze that apprehends everything at once” (34).

The opposition between aggregate and system, which Schlözer ties to a specific way of looking at connections and their nexuses, was later taken up repeatedly in the philosophy of history; for the example of Schiller, see: Thomas Prüfer, *Die Bildung der Geschichte: Friedrich Schiller und die Anfänge der modernen Geschichtswissenschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002), 289–297.

14 | Both quotes Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 22.

15 | Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 18f.

is to ultimately simulate a vantage point that can “see through the concatenation of all things on our earth,”¹⁶ or in other words: the vantage point of God.

Schlözer's position in the history of world historiography and in the heated controversy that ensued from his *Vorstellung* is less conclusive than the quotes above initially seem to indicate.¹⁷ A few of the visual metaphors like the mosaic and the use of synchronistic tables in his text follow the principle of the older universal history, which one could characterize as a kind of additive or tableau-like synchrony, the “classical form of representing history”¹⁸ in the Middle Ages. In his polemical review of Schlözer's *Vorstellung*, Herder accordingly criticized that it would have been better to “craft more of a *picture*, a whole continuum, from history.”¹⁹ On the other hand, with his formulations Schlözer is aspiring to precisely this idea of a lively and organic connective nexus of cultural history, finding a powerful formula for this with the opposition between aggregate and system.²⁰

Fundamental to Schlözer's innovative idea of a world or universal history is not only the inclusion of all nations and peoples, which was already standard in the older examples of universal history and their chronological tables²¹ (which he also still used and modified),²² but the integration of as many facets and aspects as possible which constitute the respective social-structural, economic, and cultural

16| Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 49 (emphasis J.L.).

17| Hölscher tends towards simplifying tensions and ambiguities: “*Von leeren Zeiten*,” 48f. He places Schlözer's synchronistic thinking in an analogy to the concurrently emerging concept of the ‘Zeitgeist’ and Herder's idea of the ‘Volk spirit.’ While this is by no means wrong, it does however play down the proximity to the older synchrony and the distance to Herder.

18| Martin Gierl, *Geschichte als präzisierte Wissenschaft. Johann Christoph Gatterer und die Historiographie des 18. Jahrhunderts im ganzen Umfang* (Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2012), 35.

19| Johann Gottfried Herder, “Schlözers Vorstellung seiner Universal-Geschichte,” *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen*, no. LX (28.7.1772): 473–478, 477. In the controversy between Schlözer and his Göttingen colleague Johann Friedrich Gatterer Herder defended the latter with this review.

20| Schlözer expressly claims this formulation to be his own discovery: “From amongst the new authors not one is known to me who makes this general view that encompasses the whole into the character of world history, and in such a way distinguishes system from aggregate.” Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 23. For more on this formulation, see: Manfred Riedel, “System, Struktur,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 6 (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1990), 285–322.

21| Universal history lectures using chronological tables were held in Göttingen since the founding of the university and themselves in turn based on older traditions. See André de Melo Araújo, *Weltgeschichte in Göttingen. Eine Studie über das spätaufklärerische universalhistorische Denken, 1756–1815* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012). The chronological tables of Johann David Köhler (1684–1755) are still the foundations for his successor Johann Christoph Gatterer. On the dispute between Schlözer and Gatterer about the priority of a world history as a system and the role Herder played, see: Gierl, *Geschichte als präzisierte Wissenschaft*, 365–386.

22| Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 88–94 and 109–112.

'presents.' The aim is to furnish an overview of and "insight into the connection"²³ between the political, social, economic, technological, and other relevant factors of a time; to identify the "course of culture, of industry, or in a word, the course of humanity in a nation."²⁴ Accordingly, Schlözer is interested in the history of tobacco, of the strangest inventions, of the postal service, and the French colonies in America.²⁵ The focus is to be shifted from the history of rulers to socio-economic conditions and the connective nexus.

"A history of tobacco"—this would always be as an interesting subject for world history as 'the history of the great Tamerlane,' or 'the history of the ancient Assyrian empire.' Assuming namely, that the connection a historical subject has with important changes in the world, as a cause with effects, is the sole criterion determining its worth for universal history."²⁶

The relevance of such a socio-economic nexus was formulated in similar terms by Schlözer's archenemy Gatterer; despite aggregative listings into tables for grouping special histories, he too was interested in identifying the simultaneous nexus:

"The *highest degree of the pragmatic* in history would be the idea of a general nexus of things in the world (*Nexus rerum universalis*). For no incident in the world is, as it were, *insular*. All depends on one another, occasions one another, begets one another, is occasioned, is begotten, and occasions and begets again. The incidents of the noble and the lowliest, individual people and all together, of private life and the greater world, indeed even the brutish and lifeless creatures and people, all are entwined and connected in one another."²⁷

That everything is interconnected, the estates of society amongst themselves and humans with animals and things—this leads to an observational attitude that aims to 'see' intersections between cultures. And precisely the explicit inclusion of animals and, in particular, things will be of significance in what follows. These 'images' are not to represent a tabular chronometric parallel, but an interdependent intertwining. Against the background of the move towards a secular universal history, formulated for the first time by Turgot in the middle of the 18th century,

23 | Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 45.

24 | Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 44.

25 | Cf. Horst Walter Blanke, "Einleitung," in Schlözer, *Vorstellung*, 9–26, 21.

26 | August Ludwig Schlözer, "Erste Bekanntwerdung des Tobaks in Europa, besonders in Deutschland," in id., *August Ludwig Schlözers Briefwechsel meist historischen und politischen Inhalts, Dritter Theil, Heft XIII–XVIII* (1778), 3rd ed. (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck, 1780), book 15, 153–165, 153f.

27 | Johann Christoph Gatterer, "Vom historischen Plan, und der darauf sich gründenden Zusammenfügung der Erzählungen (1767)," in *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Horst Walter Blanke and Dirk Fleischer, vol. 2: *Elemente der Aufklärungshistorik* (Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1990), 621–662, 659.

history is to be the history of culture and humanity.²⁸ A representation of the historical sequence of nexuses of the present is—as Turgot explicitly states—concerned with the respective “*coupe* of history.”²⁹ History consists of a “succession of time levels structured in such a way.”³⁰ Accordingly, Turgot also needs the nouns ‘past’ and ‘present’ to describe this nexus sequence and the respective “tableau of the present.”³¹

“Mais la géographie, par là même qu'elle est *le tableau du présent*, varie sans cesse; et puisque tout de qui est passé a été présent, l'histoire, qui est le récit du passé, doit être une suite de ces tableaux de l'histoire du monde pris dans chaque moment. Je parle de *l'histoire universelle*.”³²

Without having a noun ‘the present’ at his disposal, in Schlözer’s thought this idea is formulated somewhat differently: the whole “situation of the world at the one given time”³³ is to be represented. Such a formulation indicates *ex negativo* the necessity or the need for a noun ‘present.’ A little later in a historico-philosophical reflection, Adam Weishaupt arrived at a similar formulation in a passage on the progress and development of mankind:

“Along with the development of the same [power of the mind and needs] so the way of life changes along with them, the moral and political state, the notions of happiness, the conduct of people towards one another, their relations to one another, *the whole situation of the concurrent world at the one given time*.”³⁴

28 | Cf. Johannes Rohbeck, “Erklärende Historiographie und Teleologie der Geschichte,” in *Zwischen Empirisierung und Konstruktionsleistung: Anthropologie im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jörn Garber and Heinz Thoma (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 2004), 77–99. Cf. *ibid.*, “Turgot als Geschichtsphilosoph,” in *Turgot: Über die Fortschritte des menschlichen Geistes*, ed. *ibid.* and Lieselotte Steinbrügge (Frankfurt o.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), 7–87.

29 | Turgot, “*Entwurf zu einem Werk über die politische Geographie*” [1751], in *id.*, *Über die Fortschritte des menschlichen Geistes*, ed. Rohbeck and Steinbrügge 168–220, 166. In original: “La géographie politique est, si j’ose ainsi parler, la coupe de l’histoire.” Turgot, “Plan d’un ouvrage sur la géographie politique,” in *id.*, *Oeuvres et Documents le concernant, avec Biographie et Notes*, par Gustave Schelle, Tome 1 (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1913), 255–274, 258 (emphasis J.L.).

30 | This is the formulation given by Rohbeck, “Turgot,” 45.

31 | Rohbeck, “Turgot,” 166.

32 | Turgot, “*Plan d’un ouvrage*,” 257. “Aber die Geographie verändert sich unaufhörlich, weil sie eben ein Bild der Gegenwart ist, und da alles, was vergangen ist, einmal Gegenwart war, muß die Geschichte, die eine Erzählung der Vergangenheit ist, aus einer Abfolge dieser Bilder der Weltgeschichte bestehen, genommen in jedem Augenblick. Ich spreche von der Universalgeschichte.” Turgot, *Entwurf*, 166 (trans. modified by J.L.).

33 | Turgot, *Entwurf*, 259.

34 | [Adam Weishaupt], “Anrede an die neu aufzunehmenden Illuminatos dirigentes,” in *Nachtrag von weitem Originalschriften, welche die Illuminatensekte überhaupt, sonderbar aber den Stifter derselben Adam Weishaupt, gewesen Professor zu Ingolstadt betreffen, und bey der auf dem Baron Bassusischen Schloß zu Sandersdorf, einem bekannten Illuminaten-Neste, vorgenommenen Visitation entdeckt, sofort*

The “whole situation of the concurrent world at the one given time”—this is the complex expression for precisely the complex situation of a simultaneity of elements and conditions of a ‘world’ interconnected at one time, which change with one another in and through time and whose synchronic nexus is to be thought of as a succession of simultaneities at each time, i.e. also as different from one another, but itself is not directly observable. In other words: as synchronic cuts through a nexus of relations, whereby to enable a temporal reflection, the spatial concepts of ‘situation’ and ‘relation’ and that of presence are transformed into time concepts.

As a concept of time, the noun ‘present’ functions in rhetorical terms like an ellipsis or a metonym—the expression characterizes the time of the present by refraining from concretely marking what in itself in particular and in relation is present, i.e. is *there*. By omitting the concrete, the ‘present’ signifies all that which appears simultaneously in a time respectively and the new substantive concept is explicitly marked: while the noun “the present” in the dictionaries of the 17th and early 18th centuries is not even entered, an entry in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* since 1755 reads: “The Present. An elliptical expression for the present time.”³⁵ A potent testament of the usage of this nominalization was the formulation of the title given to the encyclopedic universal history published in London since 1736, its inclusion and translation history reaching to the Gottingen universal historians: *An Universal History, From the Earliest Account of Time to the Present*.³⁶

While the elliptical concept of the present refers to something that, on the one hand, appears in time and, on the other, that consists precisely in how that which appears concurrently forms and develops relations and conditions that permanently change and elude accompanying perception, the ‘present’ alternates between visibility and invisibility from the outset. As such an object of observation, discourse, and governance, the present constituted itself first in the second half of the 18th century, and precisely—so my thesis—as a correlate to the power techniques of policing and the burgeoning modern public sphere.³⁷

auf Churfürstlich höchsten Befehl gedruckt, und zum geheimen Archiv genommen worden sind, um solche jedermann auf Verlangen zur Einsicht vorlegen zu lassen: Zwo Abtheilungen (Munich: Lentner, 1787), II, 44-121, 53f.

35 | *Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. Samuel Johnson (London: Consortium, 1755), 382.

36 | Cf.: Helmut Zedelmaier, *Der Anfang der Geschichte. Studien zur Ursprungsdebatte im 18. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), 143-163. The translation of *Universal History* provided by Baumgarten since 1744 dispenses with the subtitle, i.e. the term ‘Gegenwart’ is missing: Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten, *Uebersetzung der Allgemeinen Welthistorie, die in England durch eine Gesellschaft von Gelehrten angefertigt worden, Erster Theil* (Halle: Gebauer, 1744).

37 | Cf. Johannes F. Lehmann, “Literatur der Gegenwart als politisches Drama der Öffentlichkeit. Der Fall Robert Prutz und seine Voraussetzungen im 18. Jahrhundert,” in: *Dramatische Eigenzeiten des Politischen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Michael Gamper and Peter Schnyder (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2017), 191-214.

It is not only the more recent universal historian who, looking back, seeks to identify cuts through historical presents; the contemporary gaze of power and governments attempts to observe the connections not immediately visible and turn them into the object of a recursive observing tool of governance and control. In 1760 Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, the self-proclaimed scientist of police and policing, writes:

The most noble characteristic of a good police is, consequently, an unwavering, tireless attention for the current state of the country or the city it administers and regulates: and that for all the noticeable changes which bring forth a different direction and relationship in the objects and final ends of the policing, it also changes its institutions and arrangements.³⁸

As described by scholars since the middle of the 18th century, the police is the medium of an observant constitution of the present and—through policing laws—also an agent of its change. Indeed, the changes in time are the object to which the policing legislation has to react to with measures limited to a fixed time. One can see this as the introduction of a reflective temporality into governmental action: “It is therefore certain that the police laws cannot always remain the same, but are subjected to change more than others laws.”³⁹ Despite the problematic that frequently changing laws is possibly damaging to a government’s authority, von Justi advocates a “public revocation” of police laws which “no longer suit the current state of the community.”⁴⁰ Because circumstances “change from time to time”⁴¹ and the police press for unstinting improvement (“the police is never beyond improvement”)⁴² in its efforts to keep actualizing, it is an agent of enmity to tradition. With the battle cry of “plus ultra” and “on and on” it takes the fight to all those who “believe to dishonor the ashes of their fathers whenever they deviate even just an inch from their habits and customs, and, complying with the saying as

38| Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Die Natur und das Wesen der Staaten* (Berlin/ Stettin/ Leipzig: Rüdiger, 1760), 476.

39| Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Grundsätze der Policy-Wissenschaft*, 2nd strongly enlarged ed. (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck, 1759), 296. See also Joachim Georg Darjes, *Erste Gründe der Cameral-Wissenschaften drinnen die Haupt-Theile so wohl der Oeconomie als auch der Policy und besondern Cameral-Wissenschaft in ihrer natürlichen Verknüpfung zum Gebrauch seiner academischen Fürlesung entworfen* (Jena: Johann Adam Melchior Wittwe, 1756), 3rd part, § 25, 407: “Police arrangements can be of a long duration.”

40| Justi, *Grundsätze*, 307. See Joseph Vogl, “Staatsbegehren. Zur Epoche der Policy,” *DVjs* 74 (2000): 600–626. Focusing on welfare and insurance, Vogl thus identifies and elaborates on police references to the future. I would like to add however that this presupposes observing the present.

41| Georg Heinrich Zincke, “Von der Policy-Wissenschaft,” in id., *Cameralisten-Bibliothek*, 2nd part (Leipzig: Jacobi, 1751), 337.

42| Zincke, “Policy-Wissenschaft,” 337.

damaging as it is common, leave everything as it is.”⁴³ The police mobilizes energy against the inertia towards improvement, but also against the obsession with reform. In order to avoid doing too much or too little, the police “has to make sure that it never loses sight of the connection of the whole,” and it must permanently keep under observation “the connections of the body politic” and the “current state of the community.” These observations of the changing present connections have to also be made the topic of continuous communication.⁴⁴ Von Justi again:

“The law-giving cleverness must therefore constantly strive to investigate the current condition of the state thoroughly and reliably; on the one hand, make thorough knowledge available to the attentive administration of the affairs; and on the other, through the reports of the authorities and servants, if they are in agreement with one another from different sides, do the same with other reviewed information, so that the condition of the body politic is sufficiently inspected in all its parts.”⁴⁵

Through specific practices of observing and communicating, which have to be thought of synchronically, it is nevertheless possible to make the respective current interconnecting relationships visible at certain points as a nexus.

The new in the cameralistic understanding of the police since the middle of the 18th century lies in this focusing on empiricism as an authority and foundation of governmental action.⁴⁶ In the foundational texts of cameralism, police science appears as a sub-discipline: “Almost all of the matters of regulation covered by the older police doctrines are also presented here, albeit now ordered into a coherently interconnected economic purpose.”⁴⁷ It is the rationality of the economy and its “planning-prognostic element” that makes it plausible to attain the necessary knowledge of the actual state of not only persons but also objects and things in the

43 | Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Zincke (the son of the publisher Georg Heinrich Zincke) in a speech for the birthday of the Duke of Brunswick “Von dem in Oeconomischen Policy-Cammer- und Finanz-Sachen höchstnötigen: Plus ultra,” in *Leipziger Sammlungen von Wirtschaftlichen, Policy-Cammer- und Finanz-Sachen*, IX (1753): 478–508, 486. Zincke justifies the economically necessary “Plus ultra” and “on and on” (“Oeconomische Policy-Cammer,” 487) anthropologically with man’s drive to find happiness.

44 | Justi, *Grundsätze*, 295 f. Cf.: Friedrich Wilhelm Tafinger, *Von der Lehre der Policywissenschaft auf deutschen Universitäten* (Tübingen: Fues, 1767), 8f.: “Precisely for this reason the police must make every effort to keep an eye on the relationship between all these different goods and donations at all times [...].”

45 | Justi, *Grundsätze*, 296. In his book: *Die Grundfeste zu der Macht und Glückseligkeit der Staaten; oder ausführliche Vorstellung der gesamten Policy-Wissenschaft, zweyter Band* (Koenigsberg / Leipzig: Gebhard Ludewig Woltersdorfs Wittwe, 1761), 472, Justi adds a detailed note to this sentence in which he makes it clear that this is not to be done by spying (“scouts”).

46 | As part of the economy, policing now refers in essence to the “food supply” and its organization and improvement. See Zincke, “Von der Policy-Wissenschaft,” 323.

47 | Thomas Simon, *“Gute Policy.” Ordnungsleitbilder und Zielvorstellungen politischen Handelns in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt o.M.: Klostermann, 2004), 452.

framework of the *political* economies arising in the 18th century.⁴⁸ If early modern politics and police (*politia*) were limited to maintaining order with respect to associations of persons, the *oikonomia*, at first strictly separated, requires through the inclusion of factual goods and possessions and their connections, a stronger intensity in its controlling and other virtues: “The primary virtue of the economist is not justice, wisdom, or bravery, but diligence and ‘omnipresence.’”⁴⁹ To the degree that the economy—in the sense of an “administering”⁵⁰ economy—becomes the foundation of politics and surpasses its limitation to persons due to the economic consideration of goods and possessions, then the empiricism of the present and its methods for observing the present become the centerpiece of police practice.⁵¹ Within the framework of its setting of economic purpose, to continuously improve the ‘machinery of the state’ with all its component parts,⁵² there emerges the idea of the permanent observation of all its parts⁵³ and an awareness of the connection of all parts among themselves: “The prosperity of the subjects has extensive limits, and can be considered from various standpoints, and all of them, even the most minute circumstances belong to the chain of incidents which lead to such an ulti-

48| Simon, *Gute Policey*. Simon shows how the individual voices formulating ideas on an economic and empirical foundation of politics were already marginalized in the 17th century (namely Johann Joachim Becher, Wilhelm von Schröder, and Philipp Wilhelm von Hörnigk) and their projects primarily failed “to acquire a reasonably reliable picture of the commercial structures and circumstances of the country.” Simon, *Gute Policey*, 381–416, 415.

49| Simon, *Gute Policey*, 428. For the increasing need of governance due to the setting of economic goals, see: 533–542.

50| In his text *Oeconomia in Form einer Wissenschaft* (1717), Amthor distinguishes between natural, acquisitive, and administrative political economy. See Simon, *Gute Policey*, 441.

51| It is repeatedly emphasized that with its observing willingness to change, the police focus on not just people but goods and property: “If the science of policing and the police is to teach how to come up with and apply prudent laws and arrangements, and through this enable a thriving food situation in the country and for the subjects, and the comfort of life is promoted, through all this however the ready fortune of the prince is to be established, increased, and maintained: then both the goods and properties as well as the persons with which this science is concerned inevitably demand increased knowledge and curative improvement at all times.” Zincke, “Oeconomische Policey-Cammer,” 492.

52| For this metaphor, see: Barbara Stolberg-Rilinger, *Der Staat als Maschine: Zur politischen Metaphorik des Fürstenstaats* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1986).

53| The “alert and divining eye” of the ruler “must constantly have an overview of this machine in all its parts.” Johann Heinrich Gottlieb von Justi, “Auf was Art die Regierung den Zusammenhang und das Aufnehmen des Nahrungsstandes durch die Abgaben leiten kann,” in *Johann Heinrich Gottlieb von Justi. Gesammelte Politische und Finanzschriften über wichtige Gegenstände* (Copenhagen/Leipzig: Johann Heinrich Rüdiger, 1761), 614–632, 616. Justi argues for the consideration of the consequences and side-effects of taxes and levies with respect to the overall economic nexus and warns against focusing solely on increasing the revenues of the state.

mate purpose.”⁵⁴ To take a look at the “most minute circumstances” and be guided by an idea of a “chain of events” also touch on—as we shall see—aesthetic and poetological questions of looking at the present.

II. Seeing the ‘Present’ (Genius)

Besides, and in a sense parallel to, the police in the 18th century, an aesthetic regime for rendering the invisible present visible developed in analogy and rivalry, namely in the form of an aesthetics and poetology of the genius. Contrary to the usual reconstruction of the aesthetics of the genius as the breakthrough of a male, autonomously free creative force of a God-subject, it needs to be stressed that the function of the concept of the genius in the second half of the 18th century actually lies in the attempt to conceptualize authors in terms of their relationship to the present and to obligate them to *subordinate* themselves to the world and the present.

Considering the descriptions of the genius in the eighteenth century, the first thing that is noticeable is how visual metaphors are employed to constitute a viewing position. As the concept of the ‘situation,’ whether this be the political or the military or indeed the world at large, presupposes a position from where this situation should be able to be surveyed in its synchronic and changeable complexity,⁵⁵ the figuration of the genius sets the task that what is simultaneously there, and as the simultaneous is invisible, is to be seen and made visible nevertheless. The emphasis on the visibility in the description of the specific achievement of the genius implies that the specific creative force is not autonomous, but one that subordinates itself to that which is present, both visible and invisible.

The *locus classicus*—and frequently either incompletely quoted or read—is Shaftesbury’s essay *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* (1711), wherein he characterizes the true author as a “second Maker,” albeit—and this addition is decisive—as “a second Maker: a just Prometheus under Jove.”⁵⁶ This author “under Jove” is the antithesis to an author who is “injudicious” in their use of “wit and fancy.” Rather, the true author ‘creates’ under Jupiter by giving a precise rendering of the latter’s world and creatures: “but for the man who truly and in a just sense deserves the

54 | Johann Friedrich von Pfeiffer, *Lehrbegriff sämtlicher oeconomischer und Cameralwissenschaften*, vol. 2 (Mannheim: Schwan, 1770), 13.

55 | Vgl. Günter Oesterle, “‘Coup d’œil’ und ‘point de vue.’ Korrespondenz und Kontrast des Feldherrn- und Soldatenblicks im stehenden Heer des Absolutismus,” in *Es trübt mein Auge sich in Glück und Licht. Über den Blick in der Literatur*, Festschrift für Helmut J. Schneider on his 65th birthday, ed. Kenneth S. Calhoun et al (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), *Philologische Studien und Quellen* 221, 146–158.

56 | Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, “Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author [1711],” in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein, Karl Ameriks, and Desmond M. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70–161, 93.

name of poet, and who is a real master or architect in the kind can describe both men and manners and give to an action its just body and proportions,"⁵⁷ it this poet alone who, thanks to self-knowledge and virtue, is intimately versed in "the inward form and structure of his fellow creatures,"⁵⁸ and is an authorial genius because he is capable of describing the proportions of the world's structure as complexly and "accurately" as he perceives them. This is clearly not the "autonomy of the creative human,"⁵⁹ or if so, the autonomy here is one whose foundation is an intensive relationship to the world, an autonomy that, setting and obeying its own laws, subordinates itself⁶⁰ to the proportions and laws of the world. Shaftesbury thus conceives of writing as practiced by the genius as "mirror writing,"⁶¹ as working with a "pocket mirror" or a "looking glass,"⁶² taking on the task to "draw the several figures of his piece in their proper and real proportions." In his novel *Tom Jones*, Henry Fielding also explicitly refutes what he considers to be the false assumption that the inventiveness of the genius is a "creative Faculty," stating instead that "by Invention is really meant no more (and so the Word signifies) than Discovery, or finding out; or, to explain it at large, a quick and sagacious Penetration into the true Essence of all the Objects of our Contemplation."⁶³

Optical metaphors of this kind emerge in Germany in the age of the genius, including in Lenz when he refers to the "specific grind of the lens"⁶⁴ the genius has at his disposal, and in Goethe, who speaks of the "sharp eye for proportion."⁶⁵ The object of seeing is now no longer the object itself and its given structure however, which, as it were, visually unfolded, but the relations and proportions of a world that is thought of as itself being changeable.

The central function of the concept of the genius and the generation of the position of the corresponding viewpoint—this seems plausible enough to conclude—is to decouple the author from the system of the literary arts and mark the self-adopted coupling with the 'world' and thus with the present, namely with that

57| Shaftesbury, "Soliloquy," 93.

58| Shaftesbury, "Soliloquy," 93.

59| Jochen Schmidt, *Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur. Philosophie und Politik 1750–1945*, vol. I: *Von der Aufklärung bis zum Idealismus* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004), 258.

60| It would be a separate task to trace how the transmission and criticism of the genius aesthetics as a figuration of 'male' creative autonomy was involved in rendering the 'female' aspects of the genius (in the sense of a heteronomous relationship to the world and the present) invisible and thus forgotten.

61| Shaftesbury, "Soliloquy," 86f.

62| Shaftesbury, "Soliloquy," 86f.

63| Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* [1749] (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 430.

64| Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, "Remarks on the Theatre," in *Selected Works by J. M. R. Lenz*, trans. Martin Wagner and Ellwood Wiggins (New York: Camden House, 2019), 263.

65| Johann Wolfgang Goethe, "On German Architecture," in *German Essays in Art History*, ed. Gert Schiff, trans. John Gage (New York: Continuum, 2004), 33–40, 39.

which precisely now appears as the vital world surrounding the genius—in stark contrast to the timeless treasures of the written tradition. The old argument, already used in antiquity, that it is not possible to produce a genius through learning alone, is now radicalized to the point that learning is identified as a hindrance to the genius in as far as the learned medium of writing *disguises* direct access to the world and the present. As Wieland claimed, precisely the *lack* of a “classical education”⁶⁶ is the reason why Shakespeare became a genius, for instead of undergoing a school education through texts, he learnt directly from life, from experience untainted by learning: “his *own* observations; keen senses as the tools; a precise attention to the *immediate impressions* objects have on him—this is what develops the genius.”⁶⁷

The present states and conditions to be observed are thus not only correlates to the observational and power techniques employed by the police; rather, the ‘present’ emerges as the other of writing and learning—the present arises as the invisible visible that surrounds the poet, and that he then can see and render as a coherent connection when he stays away from learned traditions and immersed in life.

Or however, he understands writings and books to be something that appear in his present and are an expression of this present—a possible option for understanding the ubiquitous referencing of texts from the Sturm und Drang to texts of the immediate present. In its intensity this is certainly a new phenomenon in the history of literature around 1770, that current literature is frequently quoted in the texts of the time—and thus the present is also reflected in the mirror of newly published texts.⁶⁸ Not only does Goethe have Werther delve into *Emilia Galotti*, published just two years before, the students in Lenz’s *Hofmeister* attend a performance of *Minna von Barnhelm*. Lenz is a master of this technique of rendering visible the complexity of the present by referring to contemporary texts. He not only practices the visual poetics of taking a standpoint, as he had described them in *Remarks on the Theater* as a specifically Christian technique for mirroring the immediate present—here I recall only the note that the poet “takes a standpoint—and then he must combine in that way”⁶⁹—but he also presents literally in his theatre the synchronic connection between what is happening simultaneously in his present—and indeed as a connection that reflects the theater as a medium of appearance, as a stage of the present, and a visualized reflection of and on it.

66| Christoph Martin Wieland, “Einige Nachrichten von den Lebens-Umständen des Herrn Willhelm Shakespear” [1766], in *ibid.*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2. Abteilung: *Übersetzungen II (3): Shakespeares theatralische Werke. Sechster bis achter Teil*, ed. Ernst Stadler, reprint 1st ed., Berlin 1911 (Hildesheim: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1987), 558–569, 560.

67| Wieland, “Einige Nachrichten,” 561.

68| See Stefan Geyer, “Aktualität im Vollzug-Formen der Intertextualität bei Lessing und Goethe,” in *Aktualität. Zur Geschichte literarischer Gegenwartsbezüge vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Stefan Geyer and Johannes F. Lehmann (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2018), 219–240.

69| Lenz, “Remarks on the Theatre,” 264.

III. Showing the Present (Lenz)

To conclude I would like to briefly show this with reference to the drama fragment *Der tugendhafte Taugenichts*. Although clearly recognizable in the tradition of Diderot's tableau theater, the play also goes far beyond this reference point: while Diderot justifies his theater reform and the presentation of tableaux on the stage as a depiction of connections and relations, which in turn are to documentarily represent a permanently changing social world ("new estates are emerging every day"), but at the same time limiting them to family roles, Lenz expands the scope of the tableaux to depict well-nigh global synchronicities of his present.

A brief mention of the play's subject: Drawing on Schubart's *Zur Geschichte des menschlichen Herzens*, which Schiller will also use as the basis for his first drama *The Robbers*, the story revolves around two unequal aristocrat brothers and their relationship to their father. The play opens with the father giving his sons mathematics lessons, which the younger, Just, quickly understands, and the older, David, doesn't. His honor offended by the inability of his son, the father threatens to banish him from home and forbid him from using the family name in the future. Although David clearly fails to grasp mathematics, in secret he is working on plans for fortifications, so that it is not quite clear just how dull he really is; but he conceals this work on military fortifications from his father, who disapproves of the military and has threatened to punish his sons with disinheritance should they merely think of becoming soldiers. The father does like fancy dancers and singers however, keeping them in his own serail, sleeping with all of them—an aspect more pointedly depicted in the second draft—and is very tolerant of the sexual adventures of his sons as long as they do not poach in his serail, constantly imagining them in the arms of some village beauty at night. David though has fallen seriously in love with one of the singers, and because there is no prospect of his love being requited and getting married, then he swaps clothes with the servant Johann and signs up as a simple soldier when Prussian recruiters come around—to either die or prove himself worthy to his father through military achievements.

The text is singular in the history of theater and literature in two respects. Firstly, because in the next scene war, namely the Battle of Kolín from 1757, is brought to the stage as a physical presence, with shots being fired, men falling, getting up again and falling again, there's screaming, wheezing and gasping as death swiftly approaches, men flee in desertion⁷⁰—and when the battle is over, the dead are plundered and robbed. The stage here shows—including beyond the war scenes—a physically real tableau of parasitic relationships, the recruiters live para-

70 | See Johannes F. Lehmann, "Den Krieg im Rücken. Deserteure im Theater des 18. Jahrhunderts," in *Kriegstheater. Darstellungen von Krieg, Kampf und Schlacht in Drama und Theater seit der Antike*, ed. Michael Auer and Claude Haas (Stuttgart: Springer, 2018), 173–188.

sitically from the recruited soldiers, the deserters from those who die here, and the peasants from the dead who they plunder.

That social relations in their interconnection, to be thought of synchronically, are parasitical relations, and as such also form a global present, is shown by the next and final scene of the fragment. The father, mourning his runaway son, no longer even has the stomach to drink his chocolate, for the “sweat of the savages is all over it.” To his servant he says:

“Leypold: [...] Look at this copperplate, it is from the *Voyage à l'Isle-de-France*—you're like scoundrels when you complain about our whims, look at this nigger, could have our Lord Christ suffered more than them, and all that so that we can tickle our palates—make no more chocolate for as long as I live, and no more spices on my meals, tell the cook [...]. Who am I that other people have to sweat blood because of me. They should be allowed to hit me on the head, then my money would be theirs—[...].”⁷¹

The book quoted here in the text, *Voyage à l'Isle de France* by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, is for Lenz contemporary literature, first published in 1773, i.e. only two, at the most three years before he wrote the play. A German translation was published in 1774. The copperplate (fig. 1) is based on a sketch by Jean-Michel Moreau, while the figure the father mentions has the following caption: “Ce qui sert à vos plaisirs est mouillé de nos larmes.”⁷²

By quoting the book Lenz brings to the stage a tableau that creates a relationship of visible simultaneity between events in Bohemia/Prussia and the drinking of chocolate with the colonial situation on Mauritius. The medium that renders visible these relationships between wars in Europe and colonial exploitation in Africa and elsewhere appears on the stage as book and tableau, as plausible knowledge of the present. Bernardin's text is positioned as the narratively unfolded *subscriptio* to the emblematic tableau, with the scene on the right in the middle distance described as the element of a story:

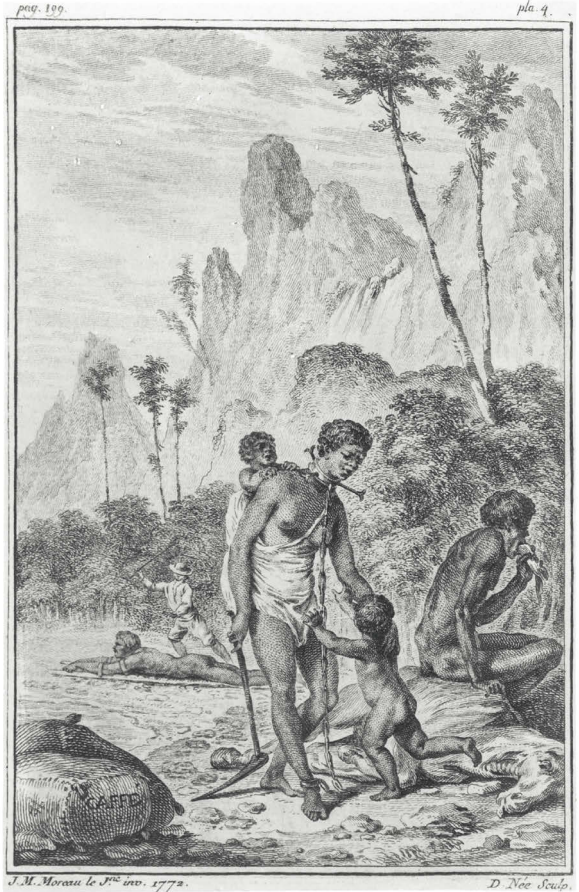
“Sometimes, when grown too old to labour, they are turned out to get their bread where they can. One day I saw a poor creature, who was nothing but skin and bone, cutting off the flesh of a dead horse to eat—it was one skeleton devouring another!”⁷³

71 | Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, “Der tugendhafte Taugenichts,” in *Werke*, vol. 1, 499–526, 518f.

72 | Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Voyage à l'isle de France, à l'isle de Bourbon, au cap de bonne-espérance, et avec des Observations nouvelles sur la nature et sur les Hommes, par un officier du Roi*, vol. 1 (Paris: Chez Merlin, 1773), 277. Apart from the title copperplate, it is the only engraving in the first volume. There is another engraving in the second volume, but this cannot be the one referred to, for here slavery is in fact presented as idyllic under bearable conditions. For this context, see Robin Howell, “Bernardin de Saint-Pierres Founding Work: *The Voyage à l'île de France*,” *Modern Language Review* 107 (2012): 756–771.

73 | [Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre], *A Voyage to the Isle of France, the Isle of Bourbon and the Cape of Good Hope; with observations and reflections upon nature and mankind* [1773], 1st engl. trans. 1800 (London: Cundee, 1800), 114.

While the father in his subjective and self-righteous perspective has an emotional fit of bad conscience, induced by this (narrated) picture, that in the very next moment makes way for other emotions, the picture of slavery and the connection between chocolate, delighted taste-buds, and gold in Prussia with sweating blood in the colonies are brought into visible existence in a manner recalling Büchner's *The Hessian Land Courier*. With the book brought to the stage, Lenz is implicitly evoking the context of the other two global voyages of the time, those of Bougainville and Cook, while choosing however with Bernardin's *Voyage* the account that best fits to his own subjective, Christian poetology of the present: where Lenz's standpoint aims to subordinate itself to the viewpoints of the lowliest,⁷⁴ in the form of letters written in the respective



present moment Bernardin focuses on the living realities and perspectives of the exploited, the Breton fishermen, the sailors, but above all the black slaves. He openly criticizes that all who turn away from this fact, "as if the disgraceful deed does not belong to our age, in which half of Europe is taking part." Lenz is taking up exactly this when he brings Bernardin's book and its detailed description of the reality of the slaves, which is simultaneously a precise explication of the copperplate prin-

74 | "Alas, to see the great secret in many different aspects and each and every man to be able see it with his own eyes!" Lenz in July 1775 to Sophie von Laroche, in *Werke*, vol. 3: *Gedichte und Briefe*, 325. That this view and this standpoint, to be able to immerse oneself in the minutest detail, is the standpoint of Christ, is then noted by Lenz in his moral-theological treatise "Über die Natur unseres Geistes:" Christ had "concentrated the miseries of a whole world on himself to see through them. What only a God can do -." Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, "Über die Natur unseres Geistes," in *Werke und Briefe in drei Bänden*, ed. Sigrid Damm, vol. 2 (Frankfurt o.M./ Leipzig: Insel, 1992), 619-624, 622.

ted in the book, to the stage. This simultaneously raises the question as to which side theater itself takes as the medium of the visualization of the present, a point addressed in Bernadin's text:

“Those beautiful rose and flame-colours, in which our ladies are dressed, cotton, of so general use, coffee and chocolate, now the only breakfast admitted to polite tables; the rouge with which the pallid beauty gives new bloom to her complexion—all these are prepared by the industrious hand of the enslaved and oppressed negro ! Ye women of sensibility and sentiment, who weep at the affecting story of a novel, or the representation of a tragedy, know, that what constitutes your chiefest delight, is moistened with the tears and died with the blood of men !”⁷⁵

What can one do with the theater when it causes tears to be shed for enjoyment, while the clothes upon which the tears of enjoyment fall are soaked in tears of a very different kind (“mouillé”)? With this quoting of the copperplate, the bringing-to-stage of this text, and the reflection on the tragedy, Lenz is radically calling theater itself into question. In his theater text he transforms it into a medium for rendering visible the complex synchronicity of the present. That Lenz enters into a conflict (still ongoing today) about the public visibility of images and knowledge about this invisible present is indicated by how Bernardin's book was generally neglected by the public, occupying a marginal position. Due to its radically critical perspective on slavery in France it could only be published without the royal printing patent, while Lenz's text remained unpublished altogether. As a medium of rendering visible the present of the time it remained invisible in this very present. |

Figures

Fig. 1 Ce qui sert à vos plaisirs est mouillé de nos larmes, 1773, copper plate, Jean-Michel Moreau (inv. 1772), D. Née (sculp.); qtd. from: Jacques-Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, *Voyage à l'isle de France, à l'isle de Bourbon, au cap de bonne-espérance, ... Avec des Observations nouvelles sur la nature et sur les Hommes, par un officier du Roi*, vol. 1 (Paris: Chez Merlin, 1773), pl. 4, 199.

75| Bernardin, *Voyage*, 123.