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Of eyes and men: Diffracted violence, embodied vision, and dis/continuous objectivity

De ojos y hombres: violencia difractada, visión encarnada y objetividad dis/continua

D'ulls i homes: violència difractada, visió encarnada i objectivitat discontinua

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Abstract

According to Donna Haraway, a certain disembodied scientific method relies on parables about objectivity (Haraway, 1988, p. 575f.). The latter is framed as the mandatory principle that can visualize a representative knowledge that is accessed by tools of empiricism – most prominently, the phallic eye. This article (re-)turns to a famous parable about objectivity – The Sandman by E.T.A. Hoffmann – entangling it with Donna Haraway's situated knowledges and Karen Barad's conception of a dis/continuity. It focuses on the violence that is always displayed in knowledge production and offers an alternative: another kind of objectivity that neither neglects nor unconditionally affirms this violence, but rather transforms it by sensing the fact that a violent act always hits back.

Keywords

Situated knowledges; objectivity; matterphorics; E.T.A. Hoffmann; dis/continuity.

Resumen

Según Donna Haraway, el método científico incorpóreo se basa en parábolas sobre la objetividad (Haraway, 1988, p. 575f.). Esta se enmarca como el principio obligatorio que puede visualizar un conocimiento representativo al que se accede mediante herramientas del empirismo, principalmente, el ojo fálico. Este artículo (vuelve) a una famosa parábola sobre la objetividad: The Sandman de E.T.A. Hoffmann, entrelazándolo con los conocimientos situados de Donna Haraway y la concepción de dis/continuidad de Karen Barad. Se enfoca en la violencia que siempre se despliega en la producción de conocimiento y ofrece una alternativa: otro tipo de objetividad que ni desatiende ni afirma incondicionalmente esta violencia, sino que la transforma al sentir que un acto violento siempre devuelve el golpe.

Palabras clave

Conocimientos situados; objetividad; materiafora; E.T.A. Hoffmann; dis/continuidad.

Resum

Segons Donna Haraway, el mètode científic incorpori es basa en paràboles sobre l'objectivitat (Haraway, 1988, p. 575f.). Aquesta s'emmarca com el principi obligatori per a visualitzar un coneixement representatiu el qual s'accedeix mitjançant eines de l'empirisme, principalment l'ull fàlic. Aquest article (torna) a una famosa paràbola sobre l'objectivitat: The Sandman d'E.T.A. Hoffmann, entrelaçant-ho amb els coneixements situats de Donna Haraway i la concepció de dis/continuitat de Karen Barad. S'enfoca en la violència que es desplega en la producció de coneixement i ofereix una alternativa: un altre tipus d'objectivitat que ni desatén ni afirma incondicionalment aquesta violència, sinó que la transforma en sentir que un acte violent sempre torna el cop.

Paraules clau

Coneixaments situats; objectivitat; matèriafora; E.T.A. Hoffmann; dis/continuitat.

Introduction

Who or what has ever encountered — that is, sensed and made sense of — a concept, or even a word, that was not an entanglement of matter, history, forces, political and legal structures, [...] and physical intra-actions? (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, p. 3)

The following article will further explore the entanglement between concepts and words with matter, history, forces, political and legal structures, and physical intra-actions. Donna Haraway tells us that “the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). This article turns toward a novel which could be considered in Haraway’s sense as “parable[s] about objectivity and scientific method” (Haraway, 1988, p. 576). That novel is E.T.A. Hoffman’s *The Sandman* (2022), chosen, not least, because Haraway alludes to it in her famous text *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988), stating that “they [the scientists] and their patrons have stakes in throwing sand in our eyes” (Haraway, 1988, p. 576). I want to consider *The Sandman* as a fiction about science, a science fiction, and a parable about objectivity and the scientific method — specifically, a parable about “ideological doctrines of disembodied scientific objectivity” (Haraway, 1988, p. 576). I will show why *The Sandman* is specifically a story about disembodied scientific knowledge.

As stated above, science fiction and social reality are not strictly separated. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the novel *The Sandman* “matterphorically”, its true meaning neither “rhetorical” nor “metaphorical” (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, p. 4). This means, that the “inextricability of thought and matter for a matterphorical ethics of thinking” (p. 4) has to be taken into consideration. With this approach, I hope to be able to answer the above stated question about the entanglement between words, concepts – here displayed as a parable or science fiction about disembodied objectivity by throwing sand in our eyes – and politics,

history, and intra-actions. Such an approach, I believe, will eventually offer a way to ethically respond to “the violence(s) already inherent in representational modes of thought and sense making” (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, p. 2). Therefore, the following analysis will always be informed by this approach, considering science fiction and social reality as fundamentally intertwined. It is thus possible and necessary to have a closer look at the narratives and novels that serve as (fictional) parables about scientific methods of objectivity.

Furthermore, the novel to which my attention will now turn is also a story about an optical illusion itself, since the main theme is the eye, the male gaze, the penetration and appropriation of the other, and therefore a catachresis of the positivist and empiricist scientific method itself, as Haraway tells us:

This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word “objectivity” to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies [...]. (Haraway, 1988, p. 581)

Throughout this article, when referring to science, the scientific method, and objectivity, I mean hegemonic, masculinist, militarized, and positivist concepts of scientific knowledge-making — concepts that Haraway strives to transform through her approach of situated knowledges. Although Haraway does not explicitly mention *The Sandman* in her text, I identify it in a matterphorical sense as a parable that not only semiotically contains a narrative about the eye, disembodiment, and therefore scientific objectivity, but also materializes it, therefore making it material-semiotic (Haraway, 1988, p. 588).

My chosen method will be neither hermeneutic, nor will it aim to produce representative knowledge. Rather, borrowing from Karen Barad (Barad, 2014, p. 168), I want to re-turn to this parable without reproducing it. Here too, I want to add the insight of Minna Salami, who states: “A revolution means to turn something on its head. There are many ways to turn something on its head, but the method that

prevents a 're-turn' is to change what is actually inside the head" (Salami, 2020, p. 74). Although Karen Barad and Minna Salami use the same word to express a different meaning (re-turn), I read Minna Salami's formulation as equal to that of Karen Barad when they (Barad) spell 'return' without a hyphen.¹ The method I want to use therefore is a re-turning without a returning – neither regression nor recidivism. This method is revolving knowledge production, not only by turning it on its head, but also by transforming what is inside the head and, in doing so, transforming the sensory system of perception – addressed in greater depth later.

This approach also takes into consideration Haraway's warning that "[i]t is, of course, hard to climb when you are holding on to both ends of a pole, simultaneously or alternatively. It is, therefore, time to switch metaphors" (Haraway, 1988, p. 580). The two ends of a pole spoken of here are social constructionism, with its focus on narratology and semiology, and feminist empiricism, which centers around the ongoing reflection of so called practices of domination (pp. 576-579). With her insistence on the necessity to change metaphors, Haraway wants to stress that, for a feminist concept of knowledge and objectivity, it is impertinent to try to simultaneously climb up to another level while continuing to hold onto and maintain the implications of the starting point. However, this is *not* a plea for dialectics. She does not mean to dialectically synthesize the 'old' with the 'new' approaches. However, by alluding to the need to 'switch metaphors', she means to transform them.

What I therefore intend with (re-)turning towards *The Sandman* is to transform it, neither clinging to an approach of perceiving it via a semiological perspective, nor by merely considering it as an empirical document that is proof of a specific historical-material concept of objectivity. I do not only want to switch metaphors, but also want to transform the metaphor of *The Sandman* (2022) into a

matterphor (see Helmreich et al., 2021, p. 158) that constantly carries meaning. By following Haraway's track into 'vision', I want to "reclaim the sensory system" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581) of the eye. Therefore, I now give a short summary of *The Sandman*, which enables me to then follow up with my feminist transformation thereof.

The Sandman's main protagonist, Nathaniel, is a student. He regularly converses with his fiancée Clara by means of letters. One day, he makes a disturbing acquaintance in the form of Coppola, a barometer dealer, who strangely resembles the advocate Coppelius – Nathaniel's nemesis, who haunts him in his dreams both by night and by day. Coppelius is the source of Nathaniel's childhood trauma and once a close paternal friend who visited Nathaniel's father by night, shortly after Nathaniel had gone to bed. Nathaniel's nurse told him stories about the sandman visiting his father, aiming to steal the boy's eyes. A passage in the novel, which cannot be verified either as 'real' or as a 'dream', describes a horrible scene in which the nurse's tale comes true and Coppelius pushes Nathaniel onto a stove to burn his eyes. As a student, Nathaniel now lives close to his professor, Spalanzani, whose daughter Olympia is of the utmost interest to him. He falls in love with her and abandons his fiancée, Clara. One day, on his way to Olympia's and Spalanzani's house to propose to Olympia, Nathaniel finds Spalanzani and Coppola fighting over Olympia, who then reveals herself as a perfect anthropomorphic automaton. She lies broken on the floor. Her wrecked body is stolen by Coppola, who escapes. Spalanzani throws the remaining eyes towards Nathaniel's chest by telling him that those are his – Nathaniel's - eyes. Nathaniel is pushed to the point of insanity about that. The story continues with Nathaniel's mind and reasoning becoming increasingly clouded. Feeling haunted by Coppelius,

revel in while helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it." (Barad, 2014, p. 168).

¹ "As such, I want to begin by re-turning – not by *returning* [emphasis added] as in reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, rediffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffraction patterns. We might imagine re-turning as a multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms

Nathaniel eventually commits suicide, jumping to his death from a tower (Hoffmann, 2022).

The story has many intertwined layers of possible meanings or interpretations. Most famously, Sigmund Freud scrutinized this story in terms of the uncanny – a part and function of the unconscious that is constantly haunting and returning (Freud, 1976). In this article, I would like to focus on the scene in which Nathaniel's professor, Spalanzani, throws Olympia's eyes at him, leading to his mental collapse. Pivotal here is the fact that the eyes only assumingly belonged to Olympia, Spalanzani's handcrafted automaton, with whom Nathaniel fell in love. Their origin remains unclear, however. The concept of vision is crucial here — something to which I return later. Although Nathaniel fanatically and narcissistically adored Olympia, he did so without ever actually seeing her. Rather, she was merely a vessel for his own reflection — the perfect avatar for a patriarchal and masculinist erotic dream of the ideal woman. She seemed to unconditionally love him back, since she was only able to nod her head, never contradicting that which she was programmed to do (Hoffmann, 2022).

A Continuous Transition of Standpoints?

As a result, Nathaniel was able to parasitically take over Olympia's body, disembodiment himself in order that he might, on the one hand, be able to totally melt into her, and on the other hand, totally erase and extinguish her, performing a "leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). However, this 'nowhere' is actually just an illusion, a "god trick" (Haraway, 1988, p. 582). "Relativism and totalization are both 'god tricks' promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). By leaping away from it into a nowhere that is called Olympia, Nathaniel simultaneously relativises and totalizes his own standpoint. In doing so, he claims an unmarked, bodiless, and all-encompassing vision that remains uncontaminated by 'bodily constraints', possessing and appropriating Olympia's vision

for that end. However, this appropriation can – and that is the very trick, to coin it in a cynical way – be obfuscated by claiming to be just "flies on the wall" that innocently and without any own position or interest "see[...] through other people's [...] eyes" (Jackson Jr., 2013, p. 13). It is part of a scientific method that anthropologists describe as "thick description" (Jackson Jr., 2013, p. 13), which claims to be able to fully know by deviating from a mere superficial view by the "naked eye" (Jackson Jr., 2013, p. 13) and by gaining emancipation from any sensory or raw empiricism. Yet, this so-called emancipation is merely an act of disembodiment, a jump out of the marked body into an unmarked transcendence that is able to arbitrarily take over other bodies and other sensory systems to 'fully' see.

Paradoxically, this disembodiment still relies on a continuity of the Self to be able to 'conquer' and to 'know'. This can be shown by approaching the work of M. Jamie Ferreira (2006), who describes and interprets Søren Kierkegaard's main philosophical concepts, such as 'the leap' (to which I will turn later). Here, I want to have a look at what M. Jamie Ferreira – referring to Kierkegaard – has to say about continuity. Ferreira suggests that Kierkegaard – by disguising himself as one of his many alter egos, 'Climacus' – states that a qualitative transition of standpoints is actually discontinuous (Ferreira, 2006, p. 210). Ferreira further explains:

What becomes clear is that the direct and immediate transition [...] is precisely not the qualitative transition at issue. Rather, 'direct and immediate' refers to the cumulative, automatic, Hegelian type of transition in which something passively "flops over" by "immanent necessity" (Kierkegaard, 1967-78, p. 21); the immediacy that is rejected is that involved in the Hegelian view that "the one standpoint on its own necessarily determine[s] its transition over to another" (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 295, as cited in Ferreira, 2006, p. 210).

Thus, the Self needs to rely on a stable and secure standpoint which determines the necessity of its transition from one to another. The two standpoints have to communicate with

each other if they are to guarantee that when they leave the starting point, they arrive at the finish. This is ensured by the immanence, directness, and immediacy, which is described in the quote above. This is the way rationality and reasoning (from a Hegelian perspective) work:

But he includes under demonstration inductive as well as deductive reasoning, teleological as well as ontological arguments, calling attention to the way in which the premises we accept in order to begin (as Socrates knew) must already be infused with the ideas with which we conclude (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 44, as cited in Ferreira, 2006, p. 209).

Thus, the premise from which we begin – the one standpoint – must already contain an idea of where we conclude – the other standpoint. This is the necessary continuity mentioned above: All known scientific methods, such as inductive and deductive reasoning or teleological and ontological arguments, are based on this absolute necessity – of a passive immediacy of standpoints that flop over to another. If these circumstances are corrupted, the whole scientific method will collapse.

I want to infuse these Kierkegaardian prolegomena with Barad's work on quantum entanglements. She tells us that the former planetary model of the atom, developed by Ernst Rutherford, had been flawed: It conceptualized "electrons orbiting the nucleus like planets orbiting the sun" (Barad, 2010, p. 245). This resembles the phallogocentric model of the Self I am investigating here by matterphorically reading *The Sandman* as a parable about the megalomaniac god trick and scientific methods. However, Barad further states that, if the above were true, "an orbiting electron would continuously radiate away its energy, giving off a continuous spectrum of light while it quickly spirals into the nucleus. Atoms wouldn't be stable" (Barad, 2010, pp. 245-246). If we entangle this further with the continuity of standpoints of the Self, which follows this Rutherfordian atomist model of matter, it becomes obvious why Kierkegaard (to whom we are partly indebted for the more responsible model of matter, developed by Niels Bohr,

to which I also turn later) is so skeptical about continuity. It apparently leads to an instability of matter, initiating a suicidal tendency of spiraling into its own nucleus. The problematic scientific method therefore is an ongoing attempt to maintain stability by the wrong means: continuity and an immanent 'flopping over' of standpoints. This attempt is always in danger of collapsing and therefore needs to possess and appropriate another Self to which it can cling – in the case of Nathaniel, this other Self is Olympia – to prevent the suicidal spiraling into the own nucleus. This is the god trick par excellence: It is necessary to pretend to speak from a neutral, objective, and bodiless position or a transcendence in order to obfuscate this violent possession of the other that is the actual means to maintain this stable but fragile position in the first place. If the exploitation of the other's corporeality, the other's body and matter would be revealed as the very means that facilitate neutrality and objectivity, both would implode immediately because their own premises (the claim that matter is irrelevant for objectivity and neutrality) are undermined. Therefore, this violent constellation of the god trick is not only a necessity but at the same time an effect. It is a self-contained loop that constantly substitutes its effect by its cause and its cause by its effect. The god trick is also a choice, because one decides to rely on continuity as the defining principle for matter's stability, which then leads to the problems described above. At the same time, this choice results in divorcing matter from mind and idealism therefore neglecting matter as such. This is because the exploitation of the other needs an alibi if it is to maintain continuity (as the means of the stability of the Self). The closed nature of this vicious circle is thus sealed. The orbital logic of a planetary and hermetically closed solipsistic system is reproduced over and over.

To further scrutinize this, I want now to look again at my chosen parable *The Sandman* to find out if it tells us something about this continuity of standpoints and about what happens when this concept is jeopardized. As the eyes are thrown at Nathaniel, we read:

'After him – after him – why do you pause? Coppelius, Coppelius, has

robbed me of my best automaton – a work of twenty years – body and soul set upon it – the clock-work – the speech – the walk, mine; *the eyes stolen from you* [emphasis added]. The infernal rascal – after him; fetch Olympia – there you have the eyes! And now Nathaniel saw how a pair of eyes, which lay upon the ground, were staring at him; these Spalanzani caught up, with the unwounded hand, and flung against his heart. (Hoffmann, 2022, p. 38)

As we can see in the above, the continuity of standpoints totally collapses: Coppelius has stolen Olympia after an argument with Spalanzani. All that is left are some eyes on the floor. By relying on a continuity of the scientific method of reasoning, these eyes clearly belong to Olympia. The starting point was that her being there was the very reason for the turmoil between Coppelius and Spalanzani and hence, she was harmed and partly destroyed during the fight. The conclusion must therefore be that now Olympia is gone, but her eyes remain on the floor, which is an immediate, continuous, and therefore reasonable inference. However, Spalanzani cries “the eyes stolen from you” (Hoffmann, 2022, p. 38) and throws them at Nathaniel. This immediacy now faces a hiatus, is hindered and corrupted: Spalanzani throws the eyes towards Nathaniel stating that those have been stolen from him. I follow Sigmund Freud’s interpretation here, who states “This short summary [of the plot of *The Sandman*] leaves no doubt, I think, that the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes [...]” (Freud, 1976, p. 3683) It is Nathaniel’s trauma that is revoked here. As we know, he had been traumatized by an experience of losing a means of perception and by a dispossession: Coppelius had stolen (or tried to steal; it remains unknown if he was successful as Nathaniel’s memory is clouded) his eyes. Thus, if those are indeed Nathaniel’s eyes flung against his chest, it does not make sense that they should have belonged to Olympia before and are the leftovers of her wrecked body. Therefore, the premise (the eyes belong to Olympia) must be wrong. The alternative is, that those are not Nathaniel’s

eyes and that this is therefore a wrong conclusion because it does not include parts of the premise (Olympia’s eyes lie on the floor). To the best of Nathaniel’s knowledge, his eyes have not been stolen, indeed they have remained intact and working – how else could he perceive and sense this situation? It is at this point that “madness seized him with its burning claws, and clutched into his soul, tearing to pieces all his thoughts and senses” (Hoffmann, 2022, pp. 38-39). Clearly, any sense of continuity as a proper method of reasoning becomes useless now as a means to grasp this situation of contradictory inferences. That is why Nathaniel’s mind – until then relying on continuity, immaterialness and reasonable inferences – changes perceptive terrains from ‘reason’ to ‘madness’. It is a collapse of the scientific method that is dependent on neutrality and objectivity.

A Sensory Particularity

To grasp the above described contradiction and uncertainty of inferences in a way, that does not rely on objectivity, it might be pertinent to approach matterphorics again. This would imply “to slide between language and materiality” (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, 4). That means stopping to try to decide whether the premise (Olympia’s eyes lie on the floor) or the conclusion (Nathaniel’s eyes are flung at him) is wrong, but rather trying to slide between all the different possibilities and therefore trying to sense what is materialized by this uncertainty. To explore this, I re-turn to Haraway’s *Situated Knowledges*:

I would like to suggest how our insisting metaphorically on the particularity and embodiment of all vision (although not necessarily organic embodiment and including technological mediation), [...] allows us to construct a usable, but not an innocent, doctrine of objectivity. (Haraway, 1988, p. 582)

I want to further have a look on the word ‘particularity’. My attention is turning to this, because etymologically stemming from Latin, ‘particular’ can mean ‘small part’. I want to associate Haraway’s joint concepts of the particularity and embodiment of vision with the

very means of vision itself: the eyes. Sliding between language and materiality, therefore grasping the eyes matterpherically, one could float between particularity semantically being a 'small-part-ness' and the eyes as small parts of a body. This entangles particularity's etymology and language with the eyes' materiality and leads to a material and embodied particularity. The eyes therefore serve here as medium or mediation of another doctrine of objectivity (see Haraway's quote above).

Nathaniel's mind and thoughts are torn apart. He simultaneously loses his mind and perceives his body as vulnerable and incomplete – the ultimate catastrophe for reason and the scientific method. The catastrophe here is not only to perceive one's own vulnerability, but rather to realize that mind and reason are entangled, both with materiality and their own embodiedness. Haraway encourages us to affirm this very fact – this shredding to bits and pieces – as a mattering particularity. Paradoxically, at the same time Nathaniel realizes that his body is flawed, harmed, and vulnerable, it is also this recognition that allows him to actually *have* a body. Whereas he did not sense his body at all before, he now embodies his vulnerability. Nathaniel used to play the god trick which constitutes as follows (as already discussed above): As first step, mind is detached from body, as second step it is pretended to speak from a transcendental nowhere and as third step – to be able to stabilize a bodiless Self – another body is appropriated while at the same time this violent act is obfuscated by attributing the virtue of objectivity to this appropriation. This third step is performed by Nathaniel when he fanatically and in a patronizing manner preaches first to Clara, his fiancée, and then to Olympia, his new love interest. This admiration is actually an appropriation as Nathaniel carelessly throws aside Clara's love letters (Hoffmann, 2022, p. 36) or when he praises Olympia's passivity and scarcity of words as an expression of love (Hoffmann, 2022, p. 36). Both female characters are mere projections for his own self-centeredness and therefore mere means which have to be possessed to be able to use them to a full extend. The purpose of this use is to maintain the stability of Nathaniel's Self. Thus, Nathaniel performs exactly that to

which Haraway alludes when she indicates the scientific method with a leap out of the marked body (see Haraway quoted above) into the possession of another body (Clara and Olympia). Nathaniel was permanently switching standpoints by transcending his body and disembodying himself at the same time.

So here we see how Nathaniel's madness, the shredding of his mind and thoughts, is transformed into a particularity that can be affirmed for producing another kind of knowledge – one that deviates from the label 'objective'. I have also shown that the scientific method, which claims to produce objective knowledge, relies on a certain conception of continuous and immanent switches of standpoints while simultaneously transcending the mortal and vulnerable body. *The Sandman* speaks of the consequences when the scientific method of continuously and reasonably inferring conclusions from set premises fails to make sense of the world. As a replacement for a universal mode of reason, Nathaniel's insanity has been presented as a simultaneous collapse of the structure of reason and also as a remedy or remediation for another mode of knowledge production that reworks and rethinks the continuity of standpoints as a shredded particularity. What has been described thus far, therefore, was a kind of "double relationship" (Aarø, 2010, p. 336) – one that occurs as the eyes are thrown.

Ane Faugstad Aarø, referring to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of phenomenology and his concept of the flesh, states that "the double relationship that he mentions is the two aspects through which the body functions as 'sensing-sensible' in a reversible flux" (Aarø, 2010, p. 336). She further says that, according to Merleau-Ponty, "reversibility moves beyond the visible and constitutes a fundamental relationship that is consequential to the understanding of the self, language, thought and intersubjectivity" (Aarø, 2010, p. 336). Continuing, Aarø also adds that Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes or grasps the Self as always unavailable for consciousness (Aarø, 2010, p. 337).

I have to add another layer about perception before I can re-turn to *The Sandman* and see how it materializes this reversibility in the

perception of the Self. As Aarø points out, Merleau-Ponty, in turn, refers to a Hegelian continuity:

It is precisely in the chiasm of identity and difference to the perceived, in this phenomenon of structuring perception, that the break occurs creating a distance to nature, because perception is to leave oneself and to return to oneself in a continuous movement. It is in this movement that the mystery of perception lies hidden, according to Merleau-Ponty, who alludes to Hegel. (Aarø, 2010, p. 343)

What I perceive as a feasible and viable concept for further conceptualizing our alternative method of particularity is the fact that the body is apparently always in a state of reversible flux: a sensing-sensibility. This is materialized in a visceral sense when Nathaniel is hit by the eyes, representing a catachresis that visualizes the reciprocity between Olympia and Nathaniel. As in the above quote, perception leaves oneself and then returns to the Self – the eyes once stolen and now returned to their (presumed) owner². The chiasm of identity and difference is also well displayed in that scene. Nathaniel possessed Olympia and perceived her body as part of himself. For him, trapped in a solipsistic loop, no break occurred, his perception neither left nor returned. What happens then is that, by throwing the eyes, both the chiasm between identity and difference and this break (or hiatus, as I referred to it earlier) are reinstated. Yet another paradox becomes apparent here. Nathaniel felt assured that his perception of the world was stable and reliable, but must now abruptly recognize that perception (in Merleau-Ponty's sense) was not possible at all because the reversibility of the body as a sensing-sensibility was impaired by his narcissistic acquisition of Olympia. Furthermore, there is another transformation taking place, as Aarø further argues:

[The] *Flesh* is introduced in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy by the discovery of the affinity of the visible and the tactile aspects of perception: between the visible and the seeing. The experience of the visible and the touchable, and the enfolding of the visible on the seer and the look of the visible — all aspects point to a mutual element that can include and uphold these phenomena, but maintain their qualities within the structure. (Aarø, 2010, p. 341)

The flesh is a mutual element in the experience of the visible and the touchable and maintains their qualities. However, striking Nathaniel's chest with the eyes, the ownership of which remains unknown, not only materializes a chiasm between the visible and the invisible – since seeing with eyes disconnected from a body and brain is impossible, yet still Nathaniel was able to somehow see – it also renders the difference between touching and seeing undecidable. Thus, seeing becomes touching becomes seeing – Nathaniel is touched by his seeing, questioning the difference between those two sensory systems.

Re-turning to Haraway's concept of particularity, already brought into conversation with *The Sandman* by transforming Nathaniel's madness and shredding of thoughts into an embodied concept of vision, I want to further suggest that vision and touch build a new chiasm that fails to maintain their qualities, but rather entangles them, becoming a touching/tangible vision or a visualizing/seeing touch. Thus, I deviate here from Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh which maintains the qualities of the visible and the touchable within the structure (see quote above). Rather, not only are their qualities transformed and entangled but also the structure (of the Self) is getting shredded. Re-turning to Daniela Gandorfer and Zulaikha Ayub, "*matterphorics*" is an "ethics of both sense-making and sensing in the making" (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, p. 2). The eye, therefore, becomes matterphoric,

² I still want to stick to the uncertainty of the eyes' 'true' owner. The whole article tries to embrace and preserve this uncertainty. However, for the sake of analysis and for the sake of supporting my argument that constellates Merleau-

Ponty's reversibility with the throwing of the eyes, I speak here of a restitution or restoration to visualise the reciprocity of this movement.

matter a shredded particularity – a particularity that considers sensing (both touching and seeing) as always in the making. By this ongoing making, touching and seeing become intermingled and entangled as a more ethical way of producing knowledge.

Diffraction Violence

This particularity opens the way for a “heightened attentiveness to the violence(s) already inherent in representational modes of thought and sense-making” (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, p. 2). Obviously, the parable of *The Sandman* is also a story about violence: the violence that causes Nathaniel’s trauma; the violence he imposes upon his fiancée Clara, to whom he constantly devotes his love only to abruptly lose interest as soon as his attention turns to Olympia; the violence that Nathaniel enacts upon Olympia, since his adoration is merely narcissistic abuse; the violence that Spalanzani and Coppelius enact upon Olympia, since they fight about her and destroy her; the violence that Spalanzani enacts upon Nathaniel, throwing the eyes at him; and, eventually, the violence that Nathaniel does to himself when he commits suicide by jumping from a tower. I want to attend to the web of violence that knits all these different actors together.

In a strange and cynical way, one could say that violence seems to be the glue that sticks together the plot of this parable and also stratifies the relationships between the actors in the story. However, this violence, “if attended to *matterphorically* [is] not rhetorical, [its] meaning[s] not metaphorical” (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, p. 4). The violence matters, something *is* materialized here. Therefore, I do not just want to reject the violence or perceive it merely as a metaphor. By inscribing violence into every relationship in the story and especially into the performance of the thrown eyes, which offers another form of particularity, a transformation might be possible. The particularity I want to develop here, therefore, is not non-violent, but rather sees and senses

violence, touches it, and at the same time is reciprocally touched and seen by it. This transforms the violence into a break, a hiatus, that disrupts the continuity of both the Self and the continuity of its standpoints. It is still an ongoing violence, but it is no longer a form of representationalism. “*Thought is relational, non-representational, and collaborative*. To deny this [...] is a proprietary act – one of capture, appropriation, and seizure” (Gandorfer & Ayub, 2021, p. 2). The violence to which I allude here, rather than appropriating, should be seen as a dispossession. Nathaniel has to affirm and perceive that he has been dispossessed all along, that his eyes had been stolen. Only now is he able to relate, is he able to affirm the reversibility between him and the world. What was necessary was this break of the solipsistic loop by an act of violence that now reversibly becomes an act of *vio-lens*, as I want to call it. His eyes become a lens, an objective, that transform and diffract the representational violence of the Self to a partial way of knowing and thinking. This partial way of knowing is itself a diffracted violence, which I want to conceptualize in reference to Jacques Derrida’s reading of Walter Benjamin’s *Critique of Violence*:³ I choose this text because Jacques Derrida construes Benjamin’s critique of violence based on the insight that violence emerges in a circular and tautological manner. For me, this resembles the way in which I described the god trick (see above). Derrida states about Benjamin’s conception of violence:

Performative tautology or a *priori* synthesis, which structures any foundation of the law upon which one performatively produces the conventions that guarantee the validity of the performative, thanks to which one gives oneself the means to decide between legal and illegal violence. (Derrida, 1992, p. 33)

Something is performed – for the god trick, this is the appropriation of another body to enact a scientific method which pretends to speak from a transcendental nowhere; for violence it is the

³ The original version “Zur Kritik der Gewalt” was written in German and originally published in 1921.

moral configuration of justice – and then, in a recursive movement, this performance is validated and justified – for the god trick by emphasizing the ends of this performance: scientific objectivity; for violence by stressing the fact that morality and justice need means to decide between legal and illegal. What strikes my attention further is that Benjamin, according to Derrida, while analyzing the workers’ right to strike, does not perceive this right as non-violent, as it is conventionally seen (Derrida, 1992, p. 34). I appreciate this position, because it facilitates a conception of violence *itself*, while many analyses merely scratch the surface and rather focus on the means or the ends of violence and not at violence *as such*, which also confers to Benjamin’s critique (Derrida, 1992, p. 31). This is because Benjamin does not hesitate to assess the general strike as a variation of violence. He does not wonder if something is violent in relation to its means (and legitimizes some of those as morally or juridically non-violent, such as the general strike) or ends (and legitimizes some as morally or juridically non-violent such as less exploiting work). He rather tries to scrutinize violence as *such* without distracting himself by looking at means or ends. Therefore, he can conclude (according to Derrida) about the general strike:

And so there is violence against violence. In carrying the right to strike to its limit, the concept or watchword of general strike thus manifests its essence. The state can hardly stand this passage to the limit. It deems it abusive and claims that there was a misunderstanding, a misinterpretation of the original intention, and that *das Streikrecht ‘so’ nicht gemeint gewesen sei*, “the right to strike was not ‘so intended’” (Benjamin, 1921, p. 282; cited in Derrida, 1992, p. 34). It can then condemn the general strike as illegal and, if the strike persists, we have a revolutionary situation. (Derrida, 1992, p. 34)

The diffraction of a violence by the vio-lens – the thrown eyes – is a *violence against a violence*. By framing the general strike as violence, it is now possible to identify its revolutionary potential: The state’s monopoly of

violence becomes threatened by another violence. Furthermore, revolution is a violence against a violence and therefore not morally preferable to the order of the state. Morality is rather rendered useless for a conception of violence as it is only able to assess its means or ends and not violence itself. The diffraction of violence is mediated by re-turning and revolving it: a violence against violence – or a violence – is set beyond moral categories of good or evil and materializes a revolutionary potential. As stated above, referring to Minna Salami: “A revolution means to turn something on its head. There are many ways to turn something on its head, but the method that prevents a ‘re-turn’ is to change what is actually inside the head” (Salami, 2020, p. 74). So what is inside the head? In this case, it is the eyes. They pop out of Olympia’s head and they had been taken from Nathaniel’s head long ago; stolen by Coppelius. What is inside the head needs a change. The violence that Coppelius enacted to possess Nathaniel’s eyes could therefore be framed as a revolutionary violence, because only this performance made it possible to change what was in his head. It was this that made it possible to change the eyes – before simply means of a violent production and capturing of representationalist knowledge – into a lens that diffracts this violence.

An Ongoing Rotation

This lens becomes a means of turning objective knowledge production, transforming it into a particularity. This revolution matters; it is materialized not only as a concept, but in this very performance of throwing the eyes, since ‘to revolve’ literally means ‘to turn’ or ‘to rotate’. The eyes are rotated – between Coppelius, Spalanzani, and Nathaniel – every one of them possesses them at a certain point. In a way, they are therefore exploiting the eyes for their own ends, letting them work for the purpose of a supposedly objective vision. Only Olympia seems to never possess the eyes in a sovereign way, since she is being exploited herself. However, this rotation yields also a violence against a violence. The exploitative violence hits back in analogy to the general strike. It is a strike that strikes with madness, shreds the participating subjectivities’ thoughts,

and re-assembles them to an assemblage of particularities. This rotation of the eye is, however, anything but dialectic. Here I re-turn to a previously mentioned quote:

The experience of the visible and the touchable, and the enfolding of the visible on the seer and the look of the visible — all aspects point to a mutual element that can include and uphold these phenomena, but maintain their qualities within the structure. (Aarø, 2010, p. 341)

The eye has now been identified as the mutual element in this rotation between the different participants. However, as already discussed above, the qualities of the phenomena – in this case, the different standpoints and subjectivities of the actors in the story – are not maintained, but constantly transformed. Since *The Sandman* is also a story about possession and propriety (the possession of the eyes), it is pertinent to turn to one of the most famous stories about propriety: Karl Marx' (1906) *The Capital*. In Karl Marx' formula for the exchange of commodities, the mutual element is value, which represents the commodities (exchange value) (Marx, 1906, p. 44). Following Marx, one could assume that – in contrast to Ane Faugstad Aarø's reference to Merleau-Ponty – the quality of the phenomena (for 'phenomena' in Merleau-Ponty's approach I want to set the commodities in Marx' approach) is not maintained, but rather is constantly transformed by trading them. Each trade changes the commodity's quality (its use value) because it is specifically entangled with the buyer's needs and desires. A crucial part of Marx' theory, which is based on the idea of propriety, is the transformation of money (which represents the exchange value) from a mere means to an end (the trading of commodities) to an end in itself (the accumulation of financial capital) (Marx, 1906, pp. 164).

A similar phenomenon can be observed in *The Sandman*: The eyes as a mere means of knowledge production become an end in themselves. By starting to rotate them, the eyes become the object of desire; it is necessary to possess them. However, while Marx keeps the dialectical structure of his formula intact and merely interchanges its elements from C-M-C

to M-C-M (commodity-money-commodity to money-commodity-money) (Marx, 1906, pp. 164), I want to think of this rotation, not as a dialectical movement that flips between different standpoints, but rather as an ongoingness, a performativity, an iteration or repetition that neither arrives nor leaves. Therefore, just as Marx criticizes the accumulation of financial capital as exploitation of labor-power (Marx, 1906, pp. 235-244), so do I want to stress that this rotation of the eyes, which I rendered as a way in which particularity is materialized, is not only violent in a diffracted way, but also bears in itself traces of exploitation.

The changing between appropriation and dispossession (of the eyes) during this rotation and ongoing performativity eventually leads to Olympia's destruction. Yet nowhere in the story is her death grieved. Instead, all the other students try to fathom if their girlfriends too might be non-human (Hoffmann, 2022, p. 39). The story therefore privileges an anthropocentric and androcentric perspective. However, the story also shows how this anthropocentrism and androcentrism is violently thrown back onto the perpetrator (Nathaniel), preventing him from escaping this ongoing iteration of violently shredding standpoints and thoughts, revolving, re-assembling, and transforming them.

The Dis/continuous Leap of the Eye

To further distinguish my concept of rotation from a dialectic circulation of standpoints between different actors and their positionalities, I now have to turn back to the Hegelian concept of continuity, discussed above in M. Jamie Ferreira's reading of Kierkegaard. According to this Hegelian view, there is an immediacy at work and a necessity that determines the transition from one standpoint to another (Ferreira, 2006, p. 210).

For that, I now want to introduce "the concept of a leap", which "is appropriately associated with the name of Kierkegaard, since the leap is a structural element that winds its way throughout his whole authorship: it informs his various accounts of the peculiar character of transitions between radically different ways of life"

(Ferreira, 2006, p. 207). These “different ways of life” in my formulation translate to different positionalities or standpoints: In the story or parable of objectivity that I scrutinize here – *The Sandman* – different ways of life are materialized by the different actors. However, I now want to figure out what happens when the rotation or throwing of the eyes is conceptualized as a ‘leap’. Such a conceptualization might transform the otherwise smooth transition of different standpoints to a discontinuous one. Ferreira further tells us that Kierkegaard speaks of an “attempt to disguise the discontinuity of a qualitative transition” (Ferreira, 2006, p. 210). This implies that the leap diffracts continuity by materializing a discontinuity while transitioning from one way of life to the other. Søren Kierkegaard’s leap provided the inspiration for the Danish physicist Niels Bohr’s quantum jump or quantum leap (Heilbron, 2016, p. 72). By following this trace, I want to have a closer look at the kind of discontinuity that is performed by the leap.

For that end, I turn to Kierkegaard and his conceptualization of the leap and consider why Niels Bohr considered it suitable for theorizing quantum physics. Ferreira tells us: “Aligning the leap [...] with letting go already hints at the leap as something curiously active yet passive” (Ferreira, 2006, p. 210). The leap seems to be kind of a strange, undecidable, and indeterminate motion that oscillates between activity and passivity. In her work about quantum entanglements Karen Barad (2010) refers to Niels Bohr, who co-founded the so-called ‘Copenhagen interpretation’ of quantum physics. Barad asks: “what precisely is the nature of this ‘leap’?”, concluding:

It is a measure of *the discreteness of nature*. Unlike any ordinary experience of jumping or leaping, when an electron makes a quantum leap it does so in a discontinuous fashion [...]. In particular, the electron is initially at one energy level and then it is at another *without having been anywhere in between*. Talk about ghostly matters! A quantum leap is a dis/continuous movement, and not just any discontinuous movement, but a particularly queer kind that

troubles the very dichotomy between discontinuity and continuity. Indeed, *quantum dis/continuity* troubles the very notion of *dicho-tomy* – the cutting into two – itself (including the notion of ‘itself!’). (Barad, 2010, p. 246)

As can be seen in the quote above, Barad indeed answers the question about how the leap, dis/continuity, and Bohrian quantum physics are entangled. This has several implications for the rotation of the eye and therefore for a particular and other form of knowledge production. I want to conceptualize the violence against a violence that breaks the otherwise smooth circle of rotation as a hiatus that configures the throwing of the eyes – rather than a smooth and continuous movement – as a dis/continuous leap. The eyes become a quantum of embodied vision. As I discussed earlier, the ‘real’ owner of the eyes is indeterminate. However, this indeterminacy is irreducible to a primordial determinacy or continuity. In other words, it is neither necessary nor possible to offer a conclusive answer to the question: ‘Whose eyes are these?’ This indeterminacy or undecidability is rather a matter or a mattering of the dis/continuous jump between standpoints. The fact that Nathaniel is driven mad when he perceives this dis/continuous jump is an expression of the trouble that he has with the impairing of the notion of ‘itself’ and therefore the ‘Self’, as Barad (2010) might say.

The leap of the eye, with its implications of dis/continuity, makes it impossible to keep concepts such as ‘subject’ and ‘object’ intact. Indeed, ‘origin’ and ‘aim’ seem to be equally in need of reconsideration. Returning to Karen Barad’s quote that electrons perform this jump from one discrete level of energy to another, one can say that this strange event that defies the idea of continuity and of transcendence – two candidates that guarantee the stability of matter and identity in a Hegelian context – is paradoxically the very reason matter is able to matter. Dis/continuity and not transcendence are necessary to heal, to be able to have a body, and to be stable.

Embodied Op-jectivity

Nathaniel is a Hegelian disciple of continuity, of the transcendence of the I, and of the planetary model of identity. He orbits around himself, a narcissistic solipsistic solar system. He constantly emits his energy and eventually falls into his own sun, into himself. He collapses when all the energy is spent, in the very moment when his last chance to endure is gone, when Olympia is broken and he realizes his terrible mistake. This emitting of energy is the “*automatic* [emphasis added], Hegelian type of transition in which something passively ‘flops over’ by ‘immanent necessity’” (Kierkegaard, 1967-78, p. 21, cited in Ferreira 2006, p. 2010). However, here, again, the eye becomes the (vio-)lens that diffracts this suicidal violence: This very movement – of an immediate transition of standpoints that is necessary to keep the transcendental ‘I’ intact - is kind of an automation. Cynically, one could say that, by striving to recuperate a human and sane body by taking over Olympia, Nathaniel becomes something else – he becomes an automaton himself. For Olympia being an automaton can be considered a metaphor (or indeed, matterphorically) for the kind of disembodied Hegelian aesthetic that Nathaniel is performing. So to summarize, not only is this performance parasitic, narcissistic, and violent, it is also auto-aggressive, self-deceiving, solipsistic, and tautological. The apotropaic attempt to prevent harm to himself by colonizing the other returns as an atavism – as the question of vision in the form of the eyes and the question of violence to which they allude. This is diffraction in action: Nathaniel’s human Self is diffracted with violence, with a non-human automaton, with a shredding of his thoughts, and with a radically different way of life.

Nathaniel has to affirm the dis/continuity of these discrete body parts. At the same time, those eyes belong and do not belong, they are, and are not, Olympia’s. The affirmation of this discreteness is necessary for his stability. It would have prevented him wanting to take over Olympia in the first place. His trauma, his expropriation matters and the jump of the eyes, the jump of the ‘I’, could be affirmed as another way of mattering stability that does not need disembodied vision, but rather embodied *op-jectivity*, as I call it. I derive this matterphor from

the Greek ‘*ops*’ (‘eye’) and the Latin ‘*iacere*’ (‘throw’). An embodied *op-jectivity* therefore figures and matters matterphorically the throwing/leaping of the eye(s).

This *op-jectivity* is therefore another kind of knowledge production that is an ongoing dis/continuous performance -- a leap between different ways of life that diffracts the violence of representational thought to a *vio-lens* that breaks the continuity of the flopping over of standpoints. It is an embodied and sensory vision where seeing and touching are chiasmatically entangled. It is a non-dialectic rotational movement that matters a revolutionary violence that strikes with madness and therefore not only (re-)turns Hegelian reasoning on its head, but also changes what is inside the head: the eye or the transcendental ‘I’. A dichotomy between subject and object becomes undecidable, indeterminate. What remains is an ongoing becoming – an ongoing performance of throwing and leaping, being hit and shredded, and being partial – welcoming a particularity and vulnerability. Concluding, I turn to Donna Haraway:

All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (Haraway, 1988, p. 583)

The dislocated eyes and the limited, untraceable, unlocatable body of Nathaniel allow this feminist *op-jectivity* to become possible. Yet this is not an immanent or continuous transition of standpoints, but rather always, over and over again, a search for answers for the eyes on the floor that hit us, that embody our vision and therefore welcome our ability to respond – our response-ability.

What is crucial here and what I perceive as an extension of Haraway’s concept of situated knowledges and of an embodied objectivity, is the embodied *op-jectivity* as a way of re-turning

violence and exploitation. Haraway states that we are not innocent (Haraway, 1991, p. 175). I would add that we are also far from non-violent. Indeed, by referring to Derrida's reading of Walter Benjamin, I have shown that violence is a founding principle of law. A revolution – which is a kind of re-turning, the very methodology in this article – is a violent act, a divine violence that seeks to destroy the law (Derrida 1992, p. 52). If violence is neglected and rejected, it will re-turn, and the revolution will recede. When Minna Salami (2020) advocates a change of what is *inside* the head, the change must also include the concept of violence. The parable of *The Sandman* as a parable of objectivity is in itself indeterminate and undecidable. It is not a rejection of violence, but rather it is an offer to dive into it, re-turning to it by transforming it. Therefore, I conceptualized 'op-jectivity' as a matterphor and a homophony that still bears and contains the violent concept of 'objectivity'. Both do not absolutely differ from each other, but are rather connected by a *différance* (Derrida, 1982). It is a play between differing and deferring:

Thus one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same (the intelligible as differing-deferring the sensible, as the sensible

different and deferred; the concept as different and deferred, differing-deferring intuition; culture as nature different and deferred, differing-deferring; all the others of *physis*—*tekhne*, *nomos*, *thesis*, society, freedom, history, mind, etc.—as *physis* different and deferred, or as *physis* differing and deferring. (p.17)

Opposition is not erased, but a total difference that differs two concepts, discourses, entities, meanings etc. from another is always deferred, never totally manifests into the realm of the 'real'. Therefore, I want to add the following concepts to the series of philosophical pairs Derrida is alluding to: violence as differing-deferring non-violence, as non-violence different and deferred; objectivity as differing-deferring op-jectivity, as op-jectivity different and deferred. This *différance* is mediated by a rotation of matter and meaning, a throwing and leaping of quanta of vision that makes it possible to respond to this violence and ongoingly transform it, hold on to it, and re-turn it.

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