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What is Critique?

Suspension and Recomposition in Textual and Social Machines

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> "Critique does not have the premises of a thinking that conclusively explains: and this is what is to be done now. It must be an instrument for those who fight, resist, and who no longer want what is. It must be used in processes of conflict, confrontation and resistance attempts. It must not be the law of the law. It is not a stage in a program. It is a challenge to the status quo." (Michel Foucault, "Table ronde du 20 mai 1978", *Dits et Écrits II, 1976-1988*)

In the manifold assemblages of concepts of resistance, an impression of confusion is not unusual, but also arbitrariness in terms of a meaningful differentiation of these concepts. When Michel Foucault presents an entire battery of concepts of resistance in his governmentality lecture and weighs them – refusal, revolt, disobedience, resistiveness, desertion, dissidence, dissent, finally counter-conduct – then the following question arises in relation to critique: Is there a specific place of critique in this assemblage of concepts, and if there is, then where? This is the question, the

problem that I want to address in the course of this essay, beginning with Foucault and tying my own idea of this specific place of critique into his.

First of all, I would like to avoid a misunderstanding that might possibly arise about the title of the conference[1] that was the reason for this text: *The Art of Critique* was not in any way a reference to art in the narrower sense, nor to art criticism, even though the efforts undertaken by our institute do move in the neighboring zones of art production and art theory. The conference title was, first of all, a set piece of a quotation from "What is Critique?", the lecture that Michel Foucault held in late May 1971, which is also the leitmotiv of my lecture. The term *art* here is closely related to the Greek word *techne*, which is why Foucault calls critique in his lecture not only an "art" and a "virtue", but also a "technique". This is not simply an idiosyncrasy of Foucault's, but rather a tradition that reaches back to the first uses of the term critique. The term first appears with Plato, in *Politicos* (*The Statesman*), in the combination *kritiké techne*[2], in other words the art, the craft of distinguishing, which is then translated in Latin as *ars iudicandi*. Calling critique both "technique" and "art" is found throughout the centuries and in various European languages.

Yet which praxis makes up this technique of critique? Contrary to the commonplace use of the term, in Judith Butler's essay, inspired by Foucault's lecture and also entitled "What is Critique?", she refers to critique as "a practice that suspends judgment". So instead of judging or condemning, critique specifically suspends judgment. Contrary to the notion of a purely critical position, a privileged place, upon which – and from which – the overview and authority of judgment arise, it is initially a matter of suspending judgment. In fact, this was already noted by the eternal head of the court of critique, Immanuel Kant, who wrote: "critical method suspends

judgment." Nevertheless, he also continued with the explanation that this suspension of judgment has only one aim: "critical method suspends judgment, in order to reach [judgment]."[3] Butler, on the other hand, concurs with Foucault that critique goes beyond suspending judgment, that critique specifically does not return to judgment in this suspension of judgment, but instead opens up a new practice.[4] This double figure of suspension and re-invention corresponds to the development of the two components of my own text.

1. Critique suspends judgment.
2. At the same time, critique also means re-composition, invention.

Foucault's "What is Critique?". The Necessity of New Reversals of the Movement from the Critical Attitude to the Project of Critique

In my lecture for the opening of the transform project in Linz in fall 2005, I focused primarily on the famous starting point of Foucault's lecture, which names critique as the attitude, the art, the will not to be governed like that, not in this way, not at this price, not by them.[5] Judith Butler calls Foucault's starting point here the "signature of a critical attitude", and it is in fact inscribed in most practices of critique as a figure that derives its resistiveness primarily from the will to shift the relationship of power and resistance.

Foucault develops the figure of critique as an art of not being governed like that, consistently parallel to the expansion of the pastoral "economy of the souls"[6], into an art of governing people: the critical attitude is simultaneously "partner and adversary of the

arts of governing", which expanded explosively in the late Middle Ages. And while Foucault posits this unexpectedly early start of the genealogy of critique, in his lecture he picks up virtually all of the important threads of critique in European Modernism: he starts with the emergence of the *critica sacra*, the new bible criticism during the transition from the late Middle Ages to Modernity as the most important component of the modern foundation of critique. He ascribes to Kant's endeavor of critique the main moment of questioning knowledge about its own limits and dead ends, and he calls this the "Kantian channel".[7] With the term "critical attitude" Foucault ties into the revolutionary, leftist Hegelian texts of the 19th century, and finally even takes a position of "fellowship with the Frankfurt School"[8] – especially in relation to their "critique of positivism, objectivism, rationalization, of *techne* and technicalization"[9] – whose critical theory embodied the last major boom of the concept of critique.

As my starting point for *transform* was the thesis at the beginning of Foucault's lecture, that of critique as the art of not being governed like that, now at the close of our project I would like to start from the end of Foucault's lecture. This is specifically his not easily understandable question, in which – following the familiar opening passage and longer epistemological passages in the middle section – he states his sympathy for certain aspects of the *Enlightenment* contrary to a form of critique that he increasingly begins to doubt in the course of his text. His question is specifically, is it not necessary to *reverse* the path from the critical attitude to the question of critique, from the endeavor of the Enlightenment to the project of critique. The movement of the reversal is first of all to be examined in its heterogenesis, as a historical dissemination of Enlightenment on the one hand and the Kantian "project of critique" on the other. It must be noted,

however, that the reversal of the process cannot simply lead *back* to the pathos of Enlightenment, it also includes the leftist critique of the Enlightenment from the 19th and 20th centuries, but understands the critical attitude as Enlightenment-critical "enlightenment" in a different genealogy as the "project of critique".

Whereas critique and Enlightenment seem to be inextricably interwoven in a more general understanding, Foucault gradually unfolds both terms in the course of his lecture, finally polarizing them with a reserved polemic reference to Kant and his concept of critique: he writes that "this question of the *Aufklärung,* since Kant, because of Kant and presumably because of this separation he introduced between *Aufklärung* and *critique,* was essentially raised in terms of knowledge (*connaissance*)".[10] In other words, a separation of Enlightenment and critique first took place with Kant, *then* the "movement responsible for reassessing the *Aufklärung* endeavor within the critical project." In this "critical project"[11] now comprising both Enlightenment and critique, Foucault sees a procedure develop that focuses exclusively on testing the legitimacy of historical modes of knowledge.[12] Foucault, on the other hand, takes up and assails the question of how power and knowledge are interwoven.[13]

The problem of the Kantian position is that "Kant set forth critique's primordial responsibility, to know knowledge."[14] Here a radical critique of knowledge is separated from every critical political activity. Instead of this form of critique understood as being necessarily limited, Foucault is interested in a practical critique that continuously transgresses the limit of knowledge that is not to be grasped as a "law of laws".[15] Whereas Kant is concerned with critique as knowing knowledge, therefore also and above all knowing the *limits* of knowledge, Foucault wants the

critical attitude to be understood as a transgression of precisely these limits.

I read the direction of Foucault's demand for a reversal primarily as an attack on fixations and confinements of the concept of critique as a critique of knowledge, as an attack on the extreme academicizing and narrowing of the Kantian concept of critique, which made it impossible in the early 19th century, at least in the German-speaking region, to use the concept of critique in political contexts. And what is perhaps even more important: I also read Foucault's suggestion that it is a matter of reversing the path from the critical attitude to the project of critique as a productive repetition of leftist Hegelian discourses, which attempted a reversal of this kind around the mid-19th century. The highpoint of this development counter to Kant's concept of critique, which is also posited, not least of all, dichotomously against revolutionary violence, is Marx' famous dictum from his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: "The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses."[16] Or less oratorically: what Marx and Engels called "practical critical action" is already quite close to the Foucaultian concept of the "critical attitude" in this emphasis on turning away from Kant's purely epistemological critical project. And since Marx, it is already possible (again) to understand critique as "practical" *alongside* revolutionary violence, not as exclusive, but rather as complementary components of social battles.

And this was also possible *before* Kant. The intention of my essay is to insist on this complementarity. Critique and Revolution, critical discursivity and social battles, the machines of textual criticism and the machines of social resistance do not have to be understood as mutually exclusive. When the relationship to text suspends the law

of the law, then new social machines emerge. If a new social composition emerges in resistance, then a recomposition of the texts also results; the social organization form of an assemblage joins together with a new concatenation of conceptual and textual components. In fact, in my examples this social recomposition overlaps to a certain degree with reconstructive textual critique. To support this thesis, in the following I would like to investigate both components of machinic complementarity, the text machine and the social machine.[17] Instead of constructing and fixing the distance between two identitary poles with terms such as "scholarly text production" and "people's revolt", I want to focus on the zones of proximity between these two machines, especially on the modes in which they impel the suspension of judgment *and* the praxis of recomposition.

Critique as Discursive and Textual Machine

In the beginning of the modern history of the concept of critique, there is textual criticism, and it consists primarily of the suspension of judgment as it was practiced by the clergy as a Medieval monopoly on interpreting the bible. The growing objections to the Christian principle of tradition and its privileging of the Fathers of the Church and the clergy as monopolists of exegesis took the scriptures away from the clergy as sole mediators.[18] In the high and late Middle Ages, when the art of governing was largely a spiritual practice closely linked to the doctrine of the scriptures, this was exactly the point where governing, guiding people was attacked, resistance ran, not least of all, through the search for a different relationship to scripture: "Not wanting to be governed was a certain way of refusing, challenging, limiting (say it as you like) ecclesiastical rule."[19]

Foucault speaks here of a dimorphism, in which the clergy is on the one side and the laity on the other, an extreme development that represents "one of the starting points of pastoral counter-conduct".[20] The monopoly on performing the sacraments, the practice of obligatory confession as a permanent tribunal, the inversion of asceticism into obedience, and not least of all the jurisdiction over the interpretation of the sacred scriptures, these are the central components of the pastorate. Counter to all of these components, however, there was also a pastoral counter-conduct in the form of short-circuiting, subverting and over-affirming the respective clerical coercion or monopoly. In the case of the scriptural monopoly this meant the repulsion of the pastor in the field of scriptures.[21] Critique as suspension of judgment meant here the suspension of the "pastoral relay", suspension of the mediation of the scriptures through the clergy, suspension of teaching, and thus the self-empowerment of the readers.[22]

Following the late Medieval practice of resistance against the clerical scriptures monopoly, the concept of critique from antiquity was reanimated in the late 15th century.[23] Roughly a hundred years later, the term entered into English and French from Latin. A hundred years after that, the word "Kritik" appeared for the first time in German, specifically in Gottlieb Stolle's *Kurtze Anleitung zur Historie der Gelahrtheit*. Here the early scientific systems theorist and historian Stolle (1673-1744) wrote a condensed definition of critique, summarizing its conceptual development in the last centuries and definitively closing, in a sense, the conceptual development from late Medieval resistance against the clerical scriptures monopoly. In this genealogy, Stolle's definition emphasizes the specific significance of text critique and provides a concise representation of the object of this critique:

“Critique commonly means an art of understanding the old authors, or making them understandable, of distinguishing what they wrote from what has been imputed to them or falsified, and improving or replacing what is spoiled.”[24]

I would like to use this probably first appearance of critique in German to take a closer look at the dense definition proposed here. The source is a “Historia Literaria”, which essentially collects bibliographical references to certain specialized questions; the definition of critique is the sentence that introduces the 18-page chapter “Von der Critica”. Gottlieb Stolle initially calls “Critica” or “Critic” an “art”. He does so in the tradition of the philological line of the *ars critica*, as it dominated the concept of critique since the end of the 16th century, in other words, critique essentially as text critique. In keeping with the sense of *techne*, of *ars* from antiquity, we may presume that a technique, a technical procedure of the philological discipline is to be designated here, which is subsequently made concrete. The “old authors” are defined as the object of critique, thus also seeking and establishing the familiar reference to antiquity and its theory protagonists, which takes up the line intended to suspend, skip and explode the Medieval *authority* of the clergy. Yet “authors” – or as Stolle writes, “auctores” – also indicates the central concept of authorship, subjectifying and specifying the origin, which – as we will see – is not to be interpreted as an essentialist figure, so much as a simple root: the Latin noun *auctor* stems from the verb *augeo*, for multiplying. Auctor is hence a person who multiplies something or brings together several components that do not necessarily belong together.[25]

What *Critic* first involves is *to understand* the old auctores. The next step, which was relatively surprising for the context of that time, expands this “understanding” with “*making understandable*”.

The crucial difference between “understand” and “make understandable” is the relation between a passive continuation of the tradition of interpretation in the old tracks of knowledge and “making understandable” as a definitive productivity of critique. Critique is thus based not only on the appropriation of linguistic competence to be able to understand the texts, it also actively intervenes in the text production. It goes beyond obediently following the rules just as it goes beyond slavish reconstruction of the original text.

Critic should nevertheless “distinguish”, it remains an *ars iudicandi*, a technique of distinguishing. But what does distinguish mean, what is to be distinguished here? That which the “old authors” “have written” from that which “has been imputed to them or falsified”. It is not only the sense of an unambiguous writing that has been clearly passed on that is to be interpreted here; before that, critique seeks to distinguish what was written from what was falsified. For this, we must imagine the often fragmentary quality of the handwritten manuscripts as well as the manifold revisions, the complex interlocking of generations of manuscripts and the various degrees to which the texts have been “spoiled” through various circumstances ranging from fire to less talented scribes. Knowledge of the processuality of text production and text critique is evident here. Aspects of imputing and falsifying reveal a process, which multiplies authorship, shifting the focus to the interests of the respective historical contexts and their subjects in understanding, interpreting, shifting or even obfuscating the origin in their own interest. All of these revisions of the existing original material are to be understood as a productive process of recomposition. Instead of introducing the distinction as an essentialist excavation of an origin, it is instead a matter of reinstituting a heterogenetic process: not a pure tree schema, at the

head of which there is an original text and an *auctor*, but rather a much more winding practice of continual recombination.

And what results over the course of time is a gigantic and complexly interlocking apparatus of philological method and auxiliary sciences, the visual representation of which in the positive or negative apparatus, which sometimes takes up a large portion of the page of a book, illustrates its apparatic nature. Yet the history, linguistics, conjectures, translations, and the biographical and political contexts of the authors form not only a gigantic apparatus, but also a productive, abstract machine. The copyists not only copied and improved/deteriorated the texts, they also filled gaps with much imagination, sometimes refined the texts, corrected them ideologically, sometimes even continued them. Text critique involves more than distinguishing between the source and its multiple shifts, it also involves "improving or replacing what is spoiled". With the words "improve" and "replace", Stolle positions critique in the terrain of reconstruction and recomposition. And the re- in both these terms does not necessarily indicate a return to an origin that must be re-produced, but rather a new, more suitable place. The result is a scope for recomposition, reinvention. [26]

Critique is thus to be understood as an interplay between the suspended *iudicium* and *inventio*, between the capacity for judgment, which in "making understandable" clearly goes beyond the practice of empirically distinguishing in the sense of separation and exclusion, and the talent for invention that newly concatenates the (significant) components.

Critique as Social Machine

Even before the reinvention of critique as text critique, Foucault discovered a resistive practice against the pastorate: in the religious battles of the second half of the Middle Ages, in the revolts of mysticism, in the nests of resistance against the authority of clerical exegesis, not only was the Reformation prepared, but for Foucault they were also "the kind of historical limit upon which this critical attitude developed"[27]. Both before and as scholarly resistance arose, the self-empowerment of philology against the clerical exegesis monopoly and the application of philological critique to the biblical scriptures, social machines against mediation by the pastor also arise. What especially interested me was the historical basis of what Foucault took as the starting point for his explanations, what he also mentions as questions that were still open for him in the discussion of his lecture from 1978. Here he asks: "If we were to explore this dimension of critique, would we not then find that it is supported by something akin to the historical practice of revolt, the non-acceptance of a real government, on one hand, or, on the other, the individual experience of the refusal of governmentality?"[28]

Foucault himself left this question open in his lecture. In his lectures on the history of governmentality held in the same year, there are ideas that continue on from this. Especially in the eighth lecture from 1 March 1978, Foucault brings up numerous indications of the various resistances against the pastorate in the late Middle Ages.[29] Yet Foucault did not really close the gap here either. His method remained eclectic and purposely on the surface. He listed the most important movements on the constantly shifting border between internal and external criticism of the church, referred occasionally to single specific features of these movements that tested a different conduct, a counter-conduct.[30] Not only witchcraft and the familiar heresies, but also

a multitude of smaller and larger anormalities at the margins of ecclesiastical immanence are mentioned here. Waldensians, Utraquists, Calixtines, Taborites, Amalricans, Flagellanti, the mysticism of the Rhine nuns, the Society of the Poor and Jeanne Dabenton, Beguines and Beghards, the Brethren of the Free Spirit and Marguerite Porete populate the space and time of this marginal cartography of counter-conduct especially in the 12th to the 15th century.[31]

However, Foucault does not go into detail about any of these examples of counter-conduct. The reason for his limitation to a movement along the surface certainly has something to do with the precarious source material, which is marked by the fact that sources from the perspective of the actors hardly exist, because the Inquisition so thoroughly destroyed them. This forced fragmentarity, however, also has an implicit quality. This made it possible for Foucault to collect single aspects from every possible area, which constitute individual and collective counter-conduct in (not only) the late Middle Ages: the election and the option of deposing the pastor among the Taborites, the new forms of "counter-society" among the Society of the Poor, the emphasis on communal property and the rejection of personal ownership of goods. All of these are components of an abstract machine that assails the dimorphism of priests and laity, in which the suspension of the Christian pastorate goes hand in hand with the recomposition and re-invention of social organization.[32] These forms of counter-conduct have their specific features, but this remains a "non-autonomous specificity"[33]. That means they develop in the connection with political revolts against power as sovereignty, with economic revolts against power as exploitation. Most of all, though, "these revolts of conduct, these resistances of

conduct are equally linked with a very different, but decisive problem, namely the status of women".[34]

When I look more closely in the following at one of the movements central to this question, then I am exploring somewhat below Foucault's eclectic probing maneuver on the surface of counter-conduct in the high and late Middle Ages. I mainly limit myself to the 13th and early 14th century and to a single movement, but one that left traces throughout broad sections of Europe: the Beguines.[35] At the turn of the 12th to the 13th century, a new type of religious or semi-religious form of living crystallized primarily in Belgium and the Netherlands, in the Rhineland and in northern Italy.[36] The *mulieres religiosae*, the pious, honorable women who were soon called by the collective name Beguines[37], lived unmarried and in poverty, or more strongly formulated: in the rejection of the marital dominance of men and in the rejection of wealth, which was also understood at the time in the sense of a rejection of power and higher position. However, they lived without a fixed ecclesiastical rule, such as that which defines life in a religious order.[38] Not least of all, due to this lack of a rule, they could also leave the community at any time, because they had not taken a vow of eternal obedience. This means that the Beguines were border-crossers, who were always and from the start in danger of being thrown into the outside of ecclesiastical immanence.[39] Depending on the interpretation of the authorities, geographical and historical context and the conclusions of various practices of divine judgment, they were persecuted or revered, landed on the lists of heretics or later in the calendar of saints.

The rise of the Beguine movement was not at all primarily as a revolt against worldly rule, but rather out of the desire for a suspension of the clerical-patriarchal order and the everyday

misogyny that permeated all classes in the 12th and 13th century. As Foucault described it[40], alongside the failed conduct of the clergy, it was primarily the growing dissatisfaction with the sacramental power of the priests that gradually incited a threatening perforation of the dimorphism between clergy and the laity. In the case of women there was an additional reason not to accept the alternative or early marriage or entry a cloister. The suspension of this alternative led them directly into the risky experiment of trying out a non-institutionalized, non-secured, non-protected way of living.

The desire for alternative forms of living generated essentially three practices of the Beguines, the withdrawal into the hermitage as an anchoress, the collective practice of living together without the rule of an order, and finally the nomadic practice of the mendicant wandering preacher.

1. First the mystical practice of the anchoresses: this is essentially a technique of radical self-isolation, but does not only consist solely of a hermit existence, of the complete withdrawal of a hermit into solitude. The anchoress' hermitage was sometimes also attached to a church and furnished so that the anchoress could also take part in the mass. Ecstasy, trances, visions, and finally the *unio mystica* (mystic union as the bride of Christ) marked the anchoress' specific way of living; direct experience of God, the rapture or the *enthousiasmos* of God were the highest aim, and guidance from the confessor was the transformed remainder of ecclesiastical order. Here one should think about Foucault's distinction between asceticism and obedience that would even shift the ascetic practice of the anchoresses is shifted into a light of disobedience towards church power, or as Foucault says: "a kind of raging and inverted obedience"[41]. However, there is not time to go into this in more detail and especially more critically, and what I am interested in

here is primarily the aspect of recomposition in the context of the Beguines.

2. When the suspension of judgment is found here in the suspension of *divine* judgment (=ordeal) and clerical order, this means not only a movement of defecting from the extreme ecclesiastical order, but also a dangerous attempt to live without rule, beyond the discipline of the institutional order. The Beguines founded unofficial religious communities living in one or more houses, later entire city districts. A collective alternative form of living emerged in self-organization as fleeing from the practice of confession as a permanent trial, from penance and reconciliation imposed from outside, from the double domination by men and priests. Whereas entering a cloister was a final decision, leaving the community at any time remained open to the Beguines and with that also leaving the voluntary abstinence from sex.

3. Finally, however, along with these radically individual and collective practices of being settled in one place, there was also a Beguine form of living in movement: vagabond, nomadic Beguines who regarded themselves as homeless mendicants.[42] Initially the nomadic existence of the Beguines was an analogy to their notion of a spiritual path leading through detours and wandering without plan or destination through a difficult terrain. Like their male counterparts, the Beghards, however, these Beguines concretely led a purposely poor life of wandering based on the pillars of begging and preaching.

More or less public preaching, sometimes in more out-of-the-way places, sometimes in central squares, was probably imagined as an act of provocation. Women like Hildegard von Bingen or Marguerite Porete who appeared in public, tested a rare form of female presence, but probably provoked the authorities all the more

for it. The Beguines were easily attacked, since they belonged to no order, but the forms of living they practiced and propagated were also subject to persecution: *recompositio* and *inventio*, recomposition and reinvention, take on a dangerous tone here, because the new, "new fashions" and "unheard of innovations" were terms associated with the *novi doctores*, the heretics[43]. In this respect, the bishops attacked both the anchoresses' way of living, as the ecstasy of the brides of Christ was especially condemned as immoderate, and that of the nomadic Beguines, whose wandering way of life was also read as excessive.[44] What was left – although increasingly regulated – was only the middle form of communal living under the control of worldly and ecclesiastical authorities. Towards the end of the 13th century, the attacks became increasingly massive, the border between inside and outside the church was clearly drawn again[45]: some were integrated into Catholic order, were accommodated in manageable city districts, were compelled to withdraw into communities with orderly ecclesiastical surveillance, regulation and institutionalization; others were increasingly exposed to persecution, condemnation and burning[46], or they made the transition into the clandestine. It may be supposed that under this pressure there was a development similar to the one asserted by Norman Cohn for the Beghards: the wandering Beguines also withdrew from the public practice of preaching and begging in "conspirational understanding which they were able to develop with certain of the Beguine communities".[47] This results in a new recomposition, or at least a re-ordering of the functions of settled and nomadic Beguines. Whereas the nomadic Beguines were able to continue their practice of preaching in the community houses, through this clandestine combination of moving and static elements, even communication with far distant Beguine centers was maintained.[48]

When I talk about a suspension of (divine) judgment in the context of the Beguine movement, I am not at all imputing a turning away from Christian practices, but rather the attempt to intensify, reinterpret and rewrite them, the excessive application and outdoing of the rule, the over-affirmation and exaggeration of the regulations: to the extent that Beguines exercised ecstatic practices, they were able to draw on non-biblical messages, the direct access to Jesus Christ in their mystical experiences. The knowledge of God grounded in experience (*cognito Dei experimentalis*) entered into competition with the mediating role of the church. The revelation experiences were thus not only supernatural, but also unmediated (self-) authorization, which went beyond the original authority of scripture, as well as beyond the mediating authority of the clergy.

Along with this privileged access to God, which was primarily reserved to the anchoresses, there was also a direct attack on the scripture monopoly of the clergy. The Beguines used their knowledge of the bible to develop their own form of living and to become autonomous from the monopoly of the clergy.[49] The type of relationship the Beguines had to exegesis is evident not only in this emancipation process, but also in the fact that they already attempted to translate the bible into French in the 12th century, that they presumably interpreted its mysteries and discussed it in secular assemblies and even in the street.[50] Not only the bible was interpreted and translated autonomously, but the Beguines also wrote texts. Even in the interweaving of experiential mysticism and theoretical mysticism, however, they did not use Latin as the language of scholars, but rather Middle Low German, other German dialects or French.[51] And these self-assured texts are, not least of all, also invectives against the

established theology[52], implicit and explicit criticism of the clergy.

In this context, critique must also be seen as a search for alternative forms of living, different from the marital dominance, clerical and patriarchal order, *and* as a battle for education, as a battle over language, as a battle for broader knowledge production. The social machine of the Beguines is not to be decoupled from the text machine that gradually and increasingly arose against the monopoly of the pastor. The concatenation of the two machines is the crucial indication of the quality of critique.

And this brings me back to the opening question of the specific place of critique in the conceptual assemblage of expressions for resistiveness. Of course, there should not be an overly hasty link made here between the historical and the current; space must be left for querying historical shifts both in terms of the text function and in terms of the social recompositions. The late Medieval concatenation of text critique and social machine undoubtedly follows a different mode than the opposition of an economic power as difficult to grasp as capitalism, which was central to the Marxian concept of critique in the 19th century. And if today we negotiate the position of the General Intellect, a collective and militant intellectuality in post-fordist cognitive capitalism, this in turn means a new challenge for the various forms of critique as suspension and recomposition. Nevertheless, the place of critique is there, where the social machines of resistance are concatenated with text machines. What has made the concept of critique so relevant and so controversial in various phases of modernism, is the battle against decoupling text machines and social machines, their concatenations, overlaps and superimpositions.

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[1] This essay is a revised version of the introductory lecture for the eipcp conference "The Art of Critique", which took place on 19 and 20 April 2008 in Vienna at the Kunsthalle Exnergasse in the framework of the project transform (cf. http://transform.eipcp.net/Actions/discursive/artofcritique).

[2] Polit. 260b

[3] Refl. 2665 = Adad.-A 16, 459.

[4] Judith Butler, "What is Critique", http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/butler/en.

[5] Michel Foucault, *What is Critique?*, in: Sylvére Lotringer and Lysa Hochroch (Eds.), The Politics of Truth: Michel Foucault,. New York: Semiotext(e) 1997, 23-82, cf. also Michel Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2004 [*Security, Territory, Population*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2007], and Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices", http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en.

[6] Cf. Michel Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, 279f.

[7] Michel Foucault, *What is Critique?*, 63.

[8] Ibid., 44.

[9] Ibid., 38.

[10] Ibid., 48.

[11] “whose intent was to allow knowledge to acquire an adequate idea of itself”, ibid., 61.

[12] Foucault contrasts this test of legitimacy with the strange concept of the “eventualization”, ibid., 49.

[13] His question describes the movement of deserting from this specific connection to the figure of not being governed like that: “In what way can the effects of coercion [...] not be dissapated by a return to the legitimate destination of knowledge and by a reflection on the transcendental or semi-transcendental that fixes knowledge, but how can they instead be reversed or released from within a concrete strategic field, this concrete strategic field that induced them, starting with this decision not to be governed?”, ibid., 60.

[14] Ibid., 36.

[15] Foucault, “Was ist Aufklärung?”, in: *Dits et Ecrits: Schriften in vier Bänden*, 702: “The point in brief is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.” [http://www.foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html] This also illuminates the somewhat confusing conceptual shift from the critical attitude to the critical project: What Kant originally describes as *Aufklärung*, clearly separates from critique, and finally dissapates into a notion of critique that is solely a critique of knowledge, is for Foucault “very much what I was trying before to describe as critique, this critical attitude which appears as a specific attitude in the Western world starting with what was historically, I believe, the great

process of society's governmentalization." (Foucault, "What is Critique?", 34)

[16] Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, MEW 1, 385 [Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm

[17] These are also two main strands that Foucault indicates with his reference to pre-Reformation "religious struggles" on the one hand and the "spiritual attitudes prevalent during the second half of the Middle Ages" on the other, when discussing the genealogy of the critical attitude. Cf. Foucault "What is Critique?", 64)

[18] On the emergence of *critica sacra* cf. Reinhart Kosseleck, Kritik und Krise, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1976, 87-89, and Hakan Gürses, "On the Topography of Critique", http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/guerses/en.

[19] Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?", 29f.

[20] Foucault, *Sicherheit, Terrritorium, Bevölkerung*, 294.

[21] Ibid., 309

[22] "The pastor can comment, he can explain what is unclear, he can name what is important, but this occurs in every case so that the reader can read the Holy Scriptures himself." Ibid., 309f.

[23] The Italian humanist Angelo Poliziano, in his lecture about Aristotle's "Analytica priora" in 1492, ties into the terminology from antiquity, ascribing to the *critici* the sole right to judge and improve writings.

[24] Gottlieb Stolle, *Anleitung zur Historie der Gelahrtheit, denen zum besten, so den Freyen Künsten und der Philosophie obliegen*, Jena: Meyer 1736, 117.

[25] Giorgio Agamben points this out in *State of Exception* (University of Chicago Press, 2005). Agamben sees the specific function of the *auctoritas* in contrast to *potestas* precisely where it is a matter of suspending right: "It is a force that suspends and reactivates right, but gives it no formal validity."

[26] There is something involved here that Cicero and Quintilian already addressed in conjunction with critique, but still clearly *distinguished* from critique in the narrower sense, from *ars iudicandi*. The *recompositio*, the recomposition of the text, is also accompanied by a component of *inventio* or of *ars inveniendi*. Quintilian emphasizes, for instance, in the *institutio oratoria*, describing the meticulous and scrupulous character of the dialectical discussion of scholars, "that they claim for themselves both the part of invention and that of judgment, the first of which they call topic, the second critique." Quintilian, Inst. orat. V, 14,28: *ut qui sibi et inveniendi et iudicandi vindicent partis, quarum alteram topikén, alteram kritikén vocant*.

[27] Foucault, "What is Critique?", 64, and he continues: "[...] these experiences, these spiritual movements have very often been used as attire, vocabulary, but even more so as ways of being, and ways of supporting the hopes expressed by the struggle ...", ibid., 74.

[28] Ibid., 73.

[29] Foucault, Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung, 278ff.

[30] Ibid., 282: “By that I mean that these are movements that have a different conduct as their goal, which means wanting to be conducted differently, by other conductors [conducteur] and by other pastors, to different goals and to different forms of salvation, by means of other procedures and other methods.” Cf. also 288: “an aspect of the search for a different conduct, for a being-conducted-differently, by other people, to goals other than that which is provided for by the official, visible and recognizable governmentality of society.”

[31] Ibid., especially 285 and 306f.

[32] At this point Foucault repeats the familiar figure that resistance should not be understood as a subsequent reaction: rather than a linear sequence of action (by power) and resistance, there is “an immediate and fundamental correlation between conduct and counter-conduct”: ibid., 284.

[33] Ibid., 286.

[34] Ibid., 285. In the early 13th century policies for women were more prohibitive in recognized orders such as the Premonstratensians, and at the same time there was a strong increase in the number of women joining the Waldensians, who initially instituted religious equality. Here women were permitted to preach, baptize, grant absolution, celebrate the Eucharist.

[35] Cf. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Oxford University Press 1970, especially 148-186; Louise Gnädinger, “Margareta Porete, eine Begine”, in: Margareta Porete, *Der Spiegel der einfachen Seelen*. Translated from old French and with an afterword and notes by Louise Gnädinger, Zürich: Artemis 1987, 215-239; Raoul Vaneigem, *La résistance au christianisme : les hérésie*

des origines au XVIIIe siècle, Paris: Fayard 1993, especially Chapter 31 and 32; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Mittelalterliche Frauenmystik*, Paderborn: Schöningh 1993; Peter Dinzelbacher, "Die christliche Mystik und die Frauen: Zur Einführung", in: Wolfgang Beutin, Thomas Bütow (Ed.): *Europäische Mystik vom Hochmittelalter zum Barock. Eine Schlüsselepoche in der europäischen Mentalitäts-, Spiritualitäts- und Individuationsentwicklung*, Frankfurt/Berlin 1998, 13-30; Irene Leicht, *Marguerite Porete – eine fromme Intellektuelle und die Inquisition*, Freiburg: Herder 1999; Grace M. Jantzen, "Disrupting the Sacred. Religion And Gender In The City", in: Janet K. Ruffing (Ed.), *Mysticism & Social Transformation*, Syracuse University Press 2001, 29-44.

[36] For an overview, cf. Dinzelbacher, *Frauenmystik*, 21-23.

[37] On the emergence and possible etymologies of the term, cf. Leicht, 99, also footnote 149.

[38] Initially this development was based on intercessions from bishops and permission from the Pope: At the intercession of Bishop Jakob von Virty, Pope Honorius III allowed pious women in France and Germany "to live together without assuming an approved order in common houses and to hold sermons for their mutual edification" (Dinzelbacher, Frauenmystik, 36).

[39] The Beguines moved at the margins of the pastorate and brought a certain change to its limits at the same time. This relationship between limit and immanence corresponds with a figure that I call immanent transgression: transgressing a limit that does not presume the existence of a radical outside, into which the transgression of the limit is supposed to lead, but rather which changes the limit *and* the immanence (cf. the essay "Immanente Transgression" in Stefan Nowotny / Gerald Raunig, *Instituierende*

Praxen, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008, in preparation). In his "Preface to Transgression" from 1963, Foucault writes about Bataille and transgression as a "gesture that applies to the limit": "Is not the game of limit and transgression that adheres to the moment today the essential test of a [...] thinking that is absolutely and in one and the same movement a critique and an ontology, a thinking that thinks finiteness and being?" And many years later, in 1978, this concept of transgression returns in "What is Enlightenment?": "This philosophical ethos may be characterized as a limit-attitude. We are not talking about a gesture of rejection. We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers. Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits."

[40] Foucault, Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung, 302-307.

[41] Ibid., 301.

[42] Cohn, 163f.; Heimerl, 150.

[43] Dinzelbacher, *Frauenmystik*, 31, also footnote 18.

[44] Dinzelbacher, *Frauenmystik*, 37f. It is doubtful, however, that the promiscuity, negation of sinfulness, complete absence of moral ideals, such as Cohn (179ff.) presumes for the Brethren of the Free Spirit as "mystical anarchism", also applied to the Beguines.

[45] Official stages of this development are 1274, the Council of Lyon, the Provincial Synodes in Cologne, 1307, and in Mainz and Trier in 1310, and finally the general ban of Begine forms of living by the Council of Vienne, 1311/12, cf. Leicht, 98. In 1317 the Bishop of Straßburg "organized the first regular episcopal

inquisition on German soil" (Cohn, 165). Cf. also Dinzelbacher, Frauenmystik, 55-58.

[46] Cohn, 165.

[47] Cohn, 162.

[48] Cohn, 166.

[49] Gnädinger, 223.

[50] Cohn, 161; Gnädinger, 223 and 229; Heimerl, 101.

[51] Hadewijch, Beatrijs von Nazareth, Mechthild von Magdeburg wrote in German, Marguerite Porete in French. Cf. Gnädinger, 225; Dinzelbacher, Frauenmystik, 20.

[52] Leicht, 108.