Marshall McLuhan's Ambivalent Prophecies of Digital Age and Kathrin Röggla's Pessimistic Diagnoses

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Marshall McLuhan's works can be applied to the interpretation of our digital media situations and postmodernist, post-democratic media constellations in the 21st century. Although his views have to be corrected in some of their details, many of his explanations of media issues can be consulted to shed light on contemporary media and political problems. Media theorists who use McLuhan's observations have made his ideas topical in the contemporary context, with modifications and additions of current considerations. Whereas McLuhan's works show his ambivalence, Kathrin Röggla seems to be an unequivocal pessimistic, Cassandra-type media theorist and writer, which comes to light explicitly in her radio play as well prose text die alarmbereiten. The comparison between McLuhan's and Röggla's explanations has shown that there is a considerable degree of agreement on the subjects of consumerism, commercial interests of rulers, role playing, simulacra, post-democracy, and resignation—despite the fact that Röggla never overtly uses McLuhan's works. The dystopian half of McLuhan's predictions seems to be realized in Röggla's weltanschauung, as she unknowingly moves within the field of McLuhan's explanations.

Keywords: digital media / postmodernism / post-democracy / simulacrum / McLuhan, Marshall / Röggla, Kathrin

Despite the fact that the German style of theorizing media topics does not favor McLuhan's playful lecturing and writing performances,[1] and

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[1] Cf. e. g. Heilmann (91–98). However, not only Germans had problems with his way of thinking. In the introduction to McLuhan's interview in *Playboy* of March 1969 his "difficult style – at once enigmatic, epigrammatic and overgrown with arcane literary and historic allusions" is mentioned. Galabert (65) stresses his "methods" of

despite the fact that Röggla never explicitly mentions McLuhan, her opinions about the German and international potentially dystopian media and social landscapes correspond with opinions of McLuhan and his critics. McLuhan was well aware of both the optimistic and pessimistic potential developments stemming from the electrification and digitization of media contents and media vehicles. However, Kathrin Röggla[2] seems to diagnose the predominantly negative consequences of these processes around her. In this paper, I aim to discuss McLuhan's explanations and conclusions of McLuhan's critics regarding our contemporary digital media situation in order to form a backdrop containing significant parallels with statements in Röggla's texts. Röggla deals with problematic, noisy digital environments of contemporary social conflicts. On the other hand, Carlos A. Scolari finds that McLuhan's analysis of television could be understood as an "excellent description of the digitalization process and its consequences that would take place thirty years later" (Gascue Quiñones 109). Similarly, Angela Krewani (177) claims that McLuhan's "remarks on cybernation offer an understanding of the computer as medium of communication long before the communicative and interactive aspects of the computer had been explored and developed." Could not the internet and personal computers be understood as a form of an interactive, participative, on-demand television in which M. Shamberg's "symbioses of media" takes place thanks to transmission of all kinds of digital files "as the same type of binary pulse" (Krewani 184)? Finally, we must

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intuition, perception and analogy, his "negative dialectic method" and "gestalt approach" (62). McLuhan was no Marxist. Therefore, possible traces of dialectic thinking could come from Wyndham Lewis' "combative dialectics" (Chrystall 181). Possibly, McLuhan could be considered as a complex product of an unorthodox university career, private meditations in churches (cf. Galabert 65), numerous, heterogeneous intellectual influences – and, not to be forgotten, a "marketing experiment carried out by Howard Gossage and Gerald Feigen and supported by Gossage's San Francisco advertising firm" (Marchessault xv).

[2] Kathrin Röggla was born in Salzburg in 1971, but since 1996 she has been living in Berlin. She studied German studies and journalism, and started her literary activity in 1995 (text titled *niemand lacht rückwärts*). Since 1998 she has been writing and producing radio plays, acoustic installations, and internet radio programs. Since 2002 she has been writing theater plays, too. Her literary procedures include intermedial plays, documentary and essayistic style, language experiments, and ironical reflections on the noisy communication orality of digital mass media (cf. e.g. Perenič 7 on the "secondary orality"). She is a member of the Berlin *Akademie der Künste* and of the Darmstadt *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*. She has been invited to give lecture series at the universities of Saarland, Duisburg-Essen (2014), and Zurich (2016). Cf. also her website www.kathrin-roeggla.de.

also agree with Paul Levinson's impression of McLuhan's importance for our own time:

> McLuhan was taken seriously at the time of his writings by some people, because they recognized that one or more aspects of one or more of his metaphors hit home, struck a chord of equivalence on some level. What makes McLuhan even more important as we embark on a new millennium is that the evolution of media since his death in 1980 has sharply increased the match of his metaphors to the reality of our communication. (29)

Before focusing on an exclusive comparison between McLuhan and Röggla, let us briefly outline the changes in notions of space and time in the electric and digital ages, then point out the importance of the postmodern media turn, and finally draw attention to possible typologies of media theorists in the context of our contemporariness.

A new contemporary time-space complex

Christian Fuchs (56) claims that, at least in 2007, we can notice the rise of the "network society," which is just his synonym for terms of other scientists like "cybersociety," "Internet society," "virtual society," "post-industrial society," "postmodern society" or "Post-Fordism" (Kathrin Röggla chooses this term in her lectures!). Fuchs adds further labels like "soft fascism" (by Steven Shaviro) and "Empire" (by Toni Negri and Michael Hardt) and develops the idea of the transnational "global network capitalism" (60). The network can be a rhizome, but also it can have hubs, centers, hierarchies, exclusions from first-class distribution zone, underprivileged zones, master-slave relations, monopoly-obedience structures with obligatory keep-smiling poses etc. It includes ethnic, technological, financial, medial and ideological elements, too. However, Fuchs' claim that McLuhan was exclusively an "optimist" in the matter of "early cyberspace theory" (65) cannot be supported. McLuhan shared the ambivalence of Vilém Flusser whom Fuchs quotes as saying, "new media have various potentials that can result in democratic telematic society or an undemocratic technopoly." (ibid.) At the same time, McLuhan was not an exclusive pessimist like Neil Postman, about whom Fuchs concludes that he saw that "new media will result in a totalitarian technopoly." Fuchs himself offers a not so contended vision of the situation: "Cyberspace reflects the unequal and asymmetrical geography of the social spaces of global network capitalism; it is characterised by digital apartheid and exclusion." (66) The most prob-

lematic part seems to be "monitoring" and "manipulation" of digital processes in the Internet as a "multi-medium" (67). Fuchs underlines his belief that "cyberspace has both the potential to strengthen participation and surveillance; these are two tendencies that are at work at the same time and that contradict each other." (71) However, Elizondo and Guertin (627) claim unequivocally that we "now live within surveillance cultures where everything is mapped, observed, monitored, recorded, policed and controlled." Is it an open-air, digital Big Brother? On the other hand, Sigrid Merx tries to find some advantages of the surveillance technology for "mapping performances" which

> encourage emancipation and individual and collaborative agency. … Here, cartography became performative, in that the map was not a mere digital representation, but something that was produced in a co-creative relationship between the map and its different users. Through producing different modes of encounter and interaction between documented and undocumented that would normally not meet each other in public space, the project opened up an understanding of performative cartography as enabling, or perhaps provoking, a space for civic engagement. (165–166)

Stephen Graham agrees with Fuchs' description of the cyberspace: "Thus there is not one single, unified cyberspace, rather, there are multiple, heterogeneous networks … 'Cyberspace' therefore needs to be considered as a fragmented, divided and contested multiplicity of heterogeneous infrastructures and actor-networks." (178) This would mean that not everybody in this cyberspace community "hears" (and sees) equally well in the "acoustic space" of the transnational electronic communication field. There is simultaneity of privileged and underprivileged accesses to global (financial and other) communications (cf. Graham 182). This contradicts McLuhan's vision of "center everywhere and margins nowhere" (Findlay-White and Logan 168) in his interpretation of the post-literate, electric "acoustic space." The cyberspace seems to retain centers and margins and to be a chessboard for big players in potential cyber wars. In that respect, McLuhan was too optimistic. Although cells of the mystical field of Christ's body might be theologically all equal, the earthly cyberspace as digital meeting place for humans is constructed hierarchically – and no 'Pentecostal' "universal understanding" will ever be reached. Martin Speer (55) claims that McLuhan's notion of "electric or acoustic space" could be put into relationship with the notion of a "hologram" and Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of a "rhizome." Truly, the rhizome can be described as interconnectedness of all points within an assemblage, thus

conceiving the points also as dimensions or directions in motion, all non-hierarchical, flappable and fluid (Speer 49). Only theoretically, the Internet space is a free rhizome. Practically, internet pathways are "controllable by links provided by search engines, web browsers, web productions and local software applications on end devices that are interconnected with the web." (Speer 52) In the next step, Speer shares the conclusions of previously mentioned researchers: "In addition, political or economic interests can take control of these pathways by occupying, banning and leading link structures – or by deleting and changing archived material" (ibid.). Thus, the rhizome can become a hierarchical tree structure and chessboard for cyber manipulations – in places suffering from lower quality and disconnections for customers on the margins.[3] For example, McCutcheon (66) calls the cyberspace a "vast electric ocean" in which the digital communication between participants of web-conferencing can "encounter audio difficulty" (62). The ocean full of trillions of digital binary codes pulsations is based on "HTML, HTTP, TCP / IP and URL" as the "new movable type of the digital galaxy" (Arnau 425) – and, of course, on an impressive network of fiber-optic cables around the planet.

The final product of the digital externalization of the collective computer "consciousness" of mankind could be what McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* called "technological brain of the world" (32) – comparable with de Chardin's "noosphere." Both authors were pessimistic about such a development (cf. Galabert 67–68). Kathrin Röggla seems to be impelled to diagnose global "panic terrors" in her texts, too. Further, Galabert (68) calls this negative globalization a "globaloma" due to factors "parasiting and preying on the development of a positive global social structure that would otherwise be caring for the welfare and education of the individual." By contrast, Avi Rosen, who argues that McLuhan "actually predicted the Internet meme" (599), tries to see some positive artistic (and SF) characteristics of the cyberspace which is gradually becoming a digital recording container of global activities with eternal memory. Rosen (591) believes that the cyberspace can "compress the Earth and it's [sic!] content to a black hole like shape with an event horizon of approximately 2 cm, located at a near-zero

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[3] But that is not the last problem. Kathrin Röggla is aware in *Die falsche Frage* of autistically modeled user-personalized points in the internet and of the involvement of commercial interests. Chameleon-like adjustments of local internet connection can produce prison-like, self-mirrored worlds. Röggla expresses the finding in the following way: "Die PR-Abteilungen dieser Welt halten uns in Feedbackschleifen gefangen, im Spiegelkabinett des *personalized* Internet." (77)

distance from the surfers (artist) connected to it." He sees the positive impacts of the cyberspace and expresses his optimism as follows:

> Cyberspace has compressed time and space into a short circuit hyper-reality. Cyberspace is more real than everyday life; computer games, social networks and digital 3D simulations are more fascinating and alluring than the daily social activities of school, work, sports or politics, and hyper-real theme parks like Disney World and VR environments are more attractive than actual geographical sites. The hyper-real symbolizes the death of the real, and the rebirth of a holistic reality resurrected within a system of digital data. (596)

Unlike Rosen, Gerald C. Cupchik (322) clearly spots the passage from *Understanding Media* dealing with audio-visual manipulation, exploitation, and surveillance exercised by private commercial monopoly. Cupchik applies this realization on his reflections about Facebook:

> In other words, the perceptual salience and vividness of media products makes them appear real for a receiving audience and reality then becomes confused with truth. It is in this context that agents who control the media can surreptitiously manipulate the beliefs, ideas and values of recipients. This problem becomes especially significant in the multiimage and multimessage context of interactive websites such as *Facebook* where advertisements are tailored to the recipient. Our interactive footprints can be easily monitored and used against us, so to speak. (322)

The interactive media of the twenty-first century turn out to be in the service of advertising industry. Cupchik arrives further at the thesis of the "digitized Self" (325), which is "compartmentalized and mechanistic," "concerned more with outcome than meaning," and needs "external validation."

Dangerous consequences of the postmodern media turn

Carlo Peroni (96) claims that reality "becomes a blurred concept controlled by communication devices." However, it seems that the majority of citizens/consumers adapts to the rules of the new digital game – at least in using digitally manipulated images in online communication. Trotta and Danielson (399) arrive at the conclusion that

> digital photography and software such as *Photoshop* allow practically anyone to combine, modify and recycle images in previously unimaginable ways. Additionally, factors such as the greater processing and storing capacity of comput-

ers, easy access to a virtually infinite archive of images, and today's ever grow-ing bandwidth, have coalesced to make (manipulated) photographic images a viable and increasingly important component of online communication; a means of expression which extends language beyond its normal bounds.

In other words, cropping, editing, manipulating, remixing etc. have become acceptable procedures and ways of digital life of the majority of common people in online communication. No wonder that opera-tors of surveillance cameras (and their superiors) could feel the same temptation to play with original images.

O'Dea (409) agrees partly with Jean Baudrillard's estimations that the traditionalist and modernist image quality of representations, re-flections and signs of the reality changed to a postmodernist quality of images creating a "bigger reality." Further, O'Dea finds in her paper on the connection between media and violence significant correspon-dences between McLuhan's opinions, the opinions of other relevant researchers and "background stories and personal declarations of sub-urban school shooters" (415). Contemporary youth seems to be ex-posed to media advertizing pressure to "buy" exchangeable identities in a supermarket of popular simulations and to play with ever new "identities." However, these identities are dangerously vacuous – caus-ing outbursts of violence, sometimes in a desperate attempt to start building one's identity, sometimes unfortunately picking up the "cul-tural scripts of violence promulgated in events like Columbine" (ibid). True identity should be coupled with "moral responsibility" (416), respect for others and "socially agreed-upon principles of conduct." (417) In O'Dea's conclusion to the paper one can trace a convergence of McLuhan's ideas about the acoustic space of a violent, noisy global media theater and Kathrin Röggla's diagnoses of the German medial and political situation. O'Dea detects "full sensory involvement." She believes that the "omnipresent, sensually engaging structural biases of postmodern technologies encourage people once again to be passion-ately volatile and spontaneous, bringing their emotions rather than their cognitive capacities close to the surface." (418) The problem with the postmodern media is also that they can encourage "fantasy-driven wishful thinking" and "instant self-gratification" (418) – sometimes turning computer geeks into witless nerds.

Cassandras, culturalists, and cybernetics

John Durham Peters tries to outline a classification of media theorists according to their publications in 1964: pessimistic Cassandra-types (Lewis Mumford, Herbert Marcuse, Jacques Ellul – and here I must add Kathrin Röggla, who admits her position explicitly[4]), culturalists (Stuart Hall and Leo Marx) and cybernetics-types (André Leroi-Gourhan, Stanisław Lem, and Norbert Wiener). The problem with McLuhan is that, according to Peters, he could belong to all three categories of media theorists at the same time! Edward Comor (7, 9) proves in his paper on "digital engagement" that politicians are primarily inclined to use McLuhan's metaphors on the "global village" only optimistically. The question is whether the omnipresent electronic equipment and various electromagnetic radiation "galaxies" are here just to enable the "freedom to connect" in cyberspace as social environment 2.0 where both the producers and consumers of communication gadgets suffer partly from a technological narcissism but are, nevertheless, irrevocably on the way of rational Enlightenment – or the society 2.0 must expect to be confronted with a wild "theater" full of atavisms, irrationality and reactionary phenomena due to a strange dialectics of the technological "Enlightenment." Can computer nerds become witless in human matters? Comor draws our attention to McLuhan's "dark vision" (15–18) containing the prospects of a programmed, machine-like behavior, lack of reflection about consequences, disengagement from human interactions, chauvinism and extremism. Comor even quotes his *Playboy* interview from March 1969 where McLuhan dared to compare the dystopian alternative of developments with the realization of the "Anti-Christ" (17). Finally, for Mark A. McCutcheon there is no doubt that McLuhan "had not suggested the 'global village' to project a Utopian future … but to describe his dystopian present, the violently turbulent geopolitical world of the 1960s." (66) Therefore, his equivocal, potential optimism about future developments could be understood possibly only as a polite irony, resulting eventually in the position of equivocal neutrality. If somebody is bored by media programs, (s)he can "turn off the button," mute the speaker with remote control –

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[4] The name of Greek truth-telling prophetess Cassandra, whom nobody believes, appears in 2009 in Kathrin Röggla' radio play *die alarmbereiten* (ca. 55 min.), in the chapter "die ansprechbare" of collection of prose texts *die alarmbereiten* (pp. 29–53, mentioned on pp. 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46), and in the comment to the radio play in her Essen lectures (Röggla, *Essenpoetik* 53). Cf. Kupczynska for a detailed interpretation of the Cassandra character.

McLuhan used "a very long wire to the speaker of his television set" (Andreas 401) to mute the program during commercials –, unplug the media device – or turn on the plane mode on smartphones and tablets.

Kathrin Röggla – unknowingly in the shadow of McLuhan's theories and predictions

Like in McLuhan's case, Kathrin Röggla has enjoyed the privilege of accessing some important factors of the corporate industrial and media 'ruling classes'. Both of them can be described as intellectuals and media theorists with a bird's-eye view, sitting occasionally, only temporary, as guest birds in the nests of financial and political 'power'. McLuhan – a pre-Internet Explorer in the acoustic space of the electrical phenomena? – had his methods of research, as described above. Kathrin Röggla has her specific methods of research, too. First, she would record oral interviews with all relevant protagonists and, second, she would create docu-style, fragmented, essayistic,[5] montage, cinematic postmodernist novels which could then be converted to theater and/or radio plays.[6] Both McLuhan and Röggla show interest in analyzing the Machiavellian manipulation of advertisement strategies of neoliberal capitalism for the purposes of a ubiquitous consumerism. In the preface to *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan makes a very important statement: "Today the tyrant rules not by club or fist, but, disguised as a market researcher, he shepherds his flocks in the ways of utility and comfort." We might add: also in the ways of credit debt. McLuhan and Röggla are both critics of the dehumanizing, disturbing, enslaving infiltration of all areas of life by corporate industrial and financial way of thinking – and a 'magic' media manipulation, i.e. production of fiction, better to say: of fake worlds, or at least of doubles.[7] Nevertheless, Röggla admits her contacts with important investment

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[5] Cf. Wojno-Owczarska (361–363) for more information on Röggla's essayistic style and connections to Harun Farocki and Alexander Kluge.

[6] Cf. Clarke (153) who describes Röggla's prose texts as "*Rollenprosa*, or a fiction of voices, in which the reader is confronted with the discourses of various characters, sometimes as a kind of interior monologue, sometimes entering into a dialogue with each other. This choice of form lends Röggla's prose fiction to adaptation for the stage and for radio."

[7] In *Die falsche Frage*, Röggla comments on the double Saddam Huseins as follows: "Die Welt der Doppelgänger und Doubles hat sich uns eröffnet, wie sie auf den höchsten Ebenen der Macht stattfindet und Tennis spielt. Die Autokraten müssen schließlich überall gleichzeitig sein, haben wir uns gesagt." (32)

bankers (*Gespensterarbeit* 21–23) and defines her focus on the language of decision maker, the world of the powerful and the rich (*Essenpoetik* 22–23) – although she criticizes this milieu. Erkki Huhtamo defined McLuhan as a "Menippean Satirist." The Canadian called the rebellious youth in his 1969 *Playboy* interview "television conditioned" and added: "From Tokyo to Paris to Columbia, youth mindlessly acts out its identity quest in the theater of the streets, searching not for goals but for roles, striving for an identity that eludes them." By contrast, Röggla seems to be socially engaged in actions of public protest (cf. photo materials in *Die falsche Frage*) – although she shares McLuhan's opinion on role playing, indirectly, through Hubert Fichte's reflections on "Inszenierungscharakter" (*Essenpoetik* 43), and despite accepting Ingolfur Blühdorn's conclusions on post-democratic state of affairs and lack of subjects with traditional identities: "In liquiden spätkapitalistischen Demokratien sind es flexible Subjekte, dynamisierte und fragmentierte, die unsere *role models* darstellen." (*Frage* 61)

Unlike McLuhan, Röggla proves to be a virtuoso of keyboard adjustments in intermedial adaptations of her own works – and her characters in prose, theater and radio texts seem to be open to both live recordings and commercial medial products. She seems to suggest that literature is primarily a medium (not so much a fixed, stable, elitist *Wortkunst* as we were used to believe) in contact with other media, which tend to tirelessly play with one another. However, Kathrin Röggla believes that her texts in different media have different appearances and impacts: "In meiner Arbeit weiß ich, dass ein Stoff sein Aussehen radikal verändert je nach medialer Situation." (Röggla, *Frage* 26) Since it would be outside the scope and space limits of this paper to elaborate on concrete case studies, it should be noted that some of the tasks of future Kathrin Röggla research would be to compare her prose and theater texts with their adaptations as radio plays and to find out intermedial adaptation changes in contents, style and media format.[8]

Radio plays can be starting points in Röggla's intermedial adaptation plays, too. At least judging from chronological data, the radio play *die alarmbereiten* (2009, BR, dir. Leopold von Verschuer) came

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[8] At a quick glance, she varied the title of her prose text *really ground zero. 11. september und folgendes* (2001) to *really ground zero – anweisungen zum 11. september* (Bayerischer Rundfunk, dir. Ulrich Lampen, 2002) for some reason. The title of the theater play *junk space* (2004) became capitalized as radio play *Junk Space* (Bayerischer Rundfunk, dir. Ulrich Lampen, 2006). The title of the theater play *Der Lärmkrieg* (2013) lost its definitive article as radio play *Lärmkrieg* (Bayerischer Rundfunk, dir. Leopold von Verschuer, 2014).

first, and the prose text collection *die alarmbereiten* (2010, S. Fischer Verlag) came next. The case is the same with the 12-minute radio play *kinderkriegen (Deutschland 2089)* and its theater adaptation in Residenztheater München in 2012 titled as *Kinderkriegen* – longer than the original radio play, with the printed text entitled *Kinderkriegen. Ein Musikstück*, containing more than 70 pages. There is also a chronologically unexplainable case: in 2006 there are both the radio play *ein anmaßungskatalog für herrn fichte* (BR, dir. Barbara Schäfer) and the essay of the same title in the journal *Kultur & Gespenster*. Kathrin Röggla thus proves that essays are also adaptable to the medium of radio play, or insinuates – vice versa – that her radio plays could be understood as intellectually demanding essays on the (un)human conditions in the contemporary (medial and other) circumstances. The list of Röggla's radio plays reveals that radio play is her favorite medium of literary expression.

On the other hand, she believes that the borders between different media seem to vanish: "Wenn alles sich verflüssigen läßt, was für eine Rolle spielt die mediale Grenze oder gar die Gattungsfrage noch?" (ibid.) Genres and media are available for free intermedial adaptation plays and playfulness.[9] Röggla's final words in her *Essenpoetik* read as follows: "Gamification / Century of play / Entgrenzung des Spiels / Not even a game anymore." (59)

In other words, rulers play real games on their subjects, and poets among their subjects play fictitious games, including games about

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[9] Some literary scholars seem to share this confusion, too. Eva Kormann could make us believe that the theater play *wir schlafen nicht* is the original work (through the title of her paper and the treatment order of the texts) and the novel of the same name could be an adaptation of the theater text. However, in the middle of her paper we read as follows: "Aus dem auf den ersten Blick einem Lesedrama ähnelnden Roman *wir schlafen nicht* wird ein Theaterstück, das sich schnell 'anhört' wie ein narrativer Text." (201) So, the title *wir schlafen nicht* refers to four performances of one and the same "matrix text" in the mind of the author: a novel, a theater play (premiered on 7 April 2004), a radio play (2004, now not available any more from the BR Hörspiel Pool), and an audio book (read by Kathrin Röggla and Hanns Zischler, Parlando Edition, September 2004). Eva Kormann has a very interesting conclusion: "Das Hörbuch ist epischer als der Roman, der Roman nähert sich einem Drama, und das Theaterstück verzichtet weder auf den persönlichen Auftritt der Figuren noch auf narrative Vermittlung. Die Gattungsnormen dekonstuieren sich auf diese Weise wechselseitig." (205) *wir schlafen nicht* turns out to be an intermedial text system (206) consisting of something like an undeterminable first text and its adaptations/variations/expansions. In my opinion, we deal with the 'binary impulses' of the matrix text *wir schalfen nicht* in the mind of the author Röggla and its four convertible/converted different/similar media 'files,' i.e. genres.

games, for the sake of gaming. It is both about fluid hybrid states and about suggesting some improvement/changes in her more critically intonated works.

Not one title of her works invites a pleasant reading. Her literary opus is overshadowed by sharp criticism and dystopia-like nightmares. Even her last prose text *Nachtsendung. Unheimliche Geschichten* (2016) sounds this way as well as her last radio play *Normalverdiener* (2016, BR, dir. Leopold von Verschuer), about which there is also a downloadable interview (from the BR Hörspiel Pool) titled as *Über/wider das postdemokratische Schreiben* (2016, BR, interviewer Julian Doepp).

The intermediality 'Queen' of the contemporary German literature – and member of the *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* – shows clear symptoms of pessimism and possibly paranoid (artistically justified!) fear of media abuse on a massive scale in a dystopian world beset by financial crises. Accordingly, McLuhan's "global village" is less a utopia, possibly more a dystopia, where very brutal, retribalized people live. Kathrin Röggla refers in *Essenpoetik* (p. 50) to Slavoj Žižek's book *Was ist ein Ereignis?* and shows concern about a potential brutalization, barbarism, acceptance of 'normality' of torture and manslaughter like in films *Zero Dark Thirty* and *The Act of Killing* in the context of "Narcissist shows" and other kinds of 'normal' media consumption.

McLuhan and Röggla both share the impression of the dominance of an acoustic culture which has come after the world of visual, phonetic-alphabet based civilization – as a "secondary orality." Röggla says about the radio play version of *wir schlafen nicht* that she was attracted by the "acoustic world" (*Essenpoetik* 33) – because the uncanny is located in the "Hör-raum." The new post-literate orality is a multimedia flow orality of role players instead of spontaneous people. Additionally, the noise of airports (in the radio play *Lärmkrieg*), noise of media productions, and noise of speakers in the lift in the radio play *der tsunamiempfänger* present a toxic, lethal acoustic aura of everyday life. Resistance is without effect: "Kann man Amok laufen. Ist auch nur eine leere Geste, verpufft im Medienwirbel." (*Essenpoetik* 48) However, Röggla goes much deeper in her criticism, especially in her Vienna lecture *Gespensterarbeit, Krisenmanagement und Weltmarktfiktion* (2009). Here, she cites Guy Debord (*The Society of the Spectacle*), speaks of postfordism, nerds of the digital era, anti-social policies of Social-Democrats, and of other policies which seem to copy/paste structures of dystopian literary works and films.

On post-democracy in McLuhan's and Röggla's texts

McLuhan did not quote any previous scholar on the issue of a post-democratic development. He just spontaneously revealed his impressions about what could happen in a tribal megalopolis where everybody is linked to a "world computer" via an electric "global telepathy" in his 1969 Playboy interview. Democracy with free elections would not survive:

> McLUHAN: … The TV networks' computers, by "projecting" a victor in a Presidential race while the polls are still open, have already rendered the traditional electoral process obsolescent. … In a tribal all-at-once culture, the idea of the "public" … is supplanted by a mass society in which personal diversity is encouraged while at the same time everybody reacts and interacts simultaneously to every stimulus. The election as we know it today will be meaningless in such a society.
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> …
>
> McLUHAN: … [We] enter an age where the collective tribal image and the iconic image of the tribal chieftain is the overriding political reality. … We must understand that a totally new society is coming into being, one that rejects all our old values, conditioned responses, attitudes and institutions. …

In *Die falsche Frage*, Röggla meditates about similar ideas: "Die Welt mit ihren Ausbeutungs- und Infantilisierungswirklichkeiten scheint sich mit Computerlichtgeschwindigkeit von den Theatertauglichkeiten zu verabschieden." (28) Computer simulation technology could indeed open new possibilities of exploitation and reduction of individual wisdom and intelligence. In the same passage Röggla laments the disintegration of the traditional party system through bureaucrats and experts who seem to undermine normal argumentation. It is about the death of theater and the death of traditional politics. Who/what does win the game? The screen. Röggla is explicit about it: "Ich weiß nur: Bildschirm schlägt Bühne, schlägt Text, und zwar immer in dieser Reihenfolge, so aufmerksamkeitstechnisch." (88) Of course, she has read publications by Jacques Rancière, Colin Crouch, and Ingolfur Blühdorn (cf. 54–55), too. And she quotes Blühdorn's explanations in her (essayist-dialogue) radio play *Lärmkieg* (2014) repeatedly, almost as echoes. But in her newest radio play *Normalverdiener* (2016), Röggla is totally committed to the topic of post-democracy.

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McLuhanove ambivalentne prerokbe o digitalni dobi in pesimistične diagnoze Kathrin Röggla

Ključne besede: digitalni mediji / postmodernizem / postdemokracija / simulaker / McLuhan, Marshall / Röggla, Kathrin

Dela Marshalla McLuhana je vsekakor mogoče uporabiti za interpretacijo so-dobnih razmer, ki jih znatno določajo digitalni mediji, in sploh za čas 21. stoletja, ki ga pogostoma označujemo s pridevnikoma postmodernistični in postdemokratični. Čeprav je njegove poglede v nekaterih podrobnostih treba prilagoditi, je mogoče mnoge izmed njegovih razlag medijev uporabiti tako za osvetlitev sodobnih medijskih in tudi političnih problemov. McLuhanove hipoteze, ugotovitve in opazke so najbolj aktualizirali mlajši teoretiki, saj so jih postavili v sodobnejše medijske kontekste, jih modificirali in nadgradili. Toda medtem ko se dela McLuhana kažejo kot izrazito ambivalentna in zato odprta za najrazličnejše interpretacije, razlage in razumevanja, je pogled me-

dijske teoretičarke in pisateljice Kathrin Röggla nedvoumno pesimističen, kar postane še posebej očitno v njeni radijski igri in tudi v proznem besedilu *die alarmbereiten*. Primerjava McLuhanovih razlag in pogledov Kathrin Röggla je pokazala, da obstaja med njimi precejšnja stopnja strinjanja glede subjekta potrošništva, komercialnega interesa vladajočih, igre vlog, simulakra, postdemokracije in resignacije – in to kljub dejstvu, da se Röggla nikoli ne sklicuje na McLuhanova dela neposredno. Antiutopični del McLuhanovih napovedi je tudi dobro realiziran v avtoričinem nazoru (*Weltanschauung*), ki se nevede nahaja znotraj polja McLuhanovih razlag.

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