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*Introduction, Chapter IV.6 and Chapter III.1*

Most theories of empathy assume that the primary scene of empathy involves two people: One who has empathy with another. My hypothesis, however, is that human empathy derives from a scene of three individuals: One individual who observes a conflict between two others. If the observer is drawn to mentally choose a side, then it is possible for the observer to also develop empathy as an emotional legitimization for choosing that side and not the other. The book discusses central cognitive theories of empathy (key words include: mirror neurons, Theory of Mind, and Stockholm Syndrome), presents an argument for the necessary connection of narrative and empathy, and offers readings of some canonical works of literature.

## CULTURES OF EMPATHY

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### **Acknowledgements**

### **Bibliography**

[The book will be adjusted to an English audience and involve English literature, as indicated]

## Introduction

### *The Story of the Mouse*

A few years ago some colleagues and I were sitting around after a meeting of our reading group. Now that we were done with official business, we could let our thoughts wander freely. By and by we came to the topic of empathy, which they knew I wanted to teach a course on. A simple question posed itself: do most people feel empathy in similar circumstances, for similar reasons? Do we share an “ur-scene” of empathy? We decided to try an experiment: each of us should tell the clearest memory we had of slipping into someone else’s skin. The very first story told was the following:

In my first apartment as a student there was a mouse. I could hear it from time to time at night and find its traces in the morning, but I never succeeded in catching it. One morning when I came into the kitchen I heard an odd scratching sound from the sink. I stepped closer and saw that the mouse had fallen into the sink. It could not find any holds on the smooth walls and was trapped. I stared at the mouse, and it stared back. After a moment I turned on the faucet so that the mouse was swept into the garbage disposal with the water. Then I flipped the switch...<sup>1</sup>

This story is curious in many respects. Instead of the positive sympathy with a similar person in need that we usually associate with empathy, it is, in this case, immediately connected to a feeling of guilt. Also, the similarity between the empathizing person and the mouse seems relatively slight. Rather, there is a pre-history that sets up an antagonistic relationship between the mouse and the person. Nevertheless, this story, at

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<sup>1</sup> If Andreas Gelhard, one of the readers of this book, had been part of the conversation back then, he would have pointed me then to Samuel Beckett’s “Dante and the Lobster.” There a lobster has to die, even though and because the protagonist recognizes him as an empathetically accessible being.

least for the narrator, is a representation of the experience of empathy, which built a bridge between him and the mouse. Whether this story of the poor mouse actually has the traits of an “ur-scene” of empathy will be put aside for the moment (in the fourth chapter of this book, I will propose what such an “ur-scene” might look like). What I would like to emphasize here is that pity and fellow-feeling with the mouse seemed far-fetched to the narrator before the episode with the garbage disposal. Apparently there was something in this situation that moved him to give up his neutral or negative stance. Empathy can, perhaps, be turned on and off, and the key to this triggering is not so much characterological, as we might like to think, as it is situational. This conjecture, however simple it sounds, gave this book its initial impetus.

### *Thesis*

In recent years empathy has become one of the central themes of cognitive science. Empathy should here be understood in the broadest sense as *Einfühlung* or “slipping into another’s skin.” This includes the calculation of reading someone else’s thoughts (mind reading), the involuntary or willed “experiencing with” somebody, and assuming another person’s perspective (as in Theory of Mind). What needs to be stressed is that empathy is by no means only a matter of well-wishing and the positive acceptance of another. Empathy also allows competitors to better understand and hence disable each other. Schadenfreude is *not* a marginal phenomenon of empathy.

The discovery of so-called mirror neurons, the discussions about “Theory of Mind,” and the evolutionary biologists’ meditations on the social intelligence of people have brought a slew of mechanisms to light for how we slip into the skin of others. The

cognitive sciences give us not only amazing insights into the mechanisms of empathy, but also demonstrate that people cannot do other than empathize with others. As we now know, the capability for intellectual and emotional understanding of others is based on innate capacities of mimicry and basal neuronal possibilities, which let us experience the observed behavior of others as though we ourselves were acting. Social beings like humans live in a world full of empathic noise, so that they almost constantly and involuntarily take over others' perspectives. When we observe a conversation in a group of people, our empathetic attention jumps from one person to the next, often with remarkable speed.

My colleagues' (almost all humanities and cultural studies professors) question aimed at whether and how individual control actually plays a role in the process of empathy, because the insights of cognitive science into the mechanisms of empathy leave little room for individual decisions. Humans and some primates apparently interpret the actions, emotions, and intentions of others quasi-automatically, pre-reflexively, and pre-rationally, and in fact display similar brain activity as those whose actions they observe. Nevertheless, there is a function here for individual control. If empathy occurs quasi-automatically, it does not suffice to ask how empathy comes to pass; one must also investigate how empathy and the loss of self connected with it are prevented. How is empathy diverted, channeled, pulled away, filtered, in a word: blocked?

What constitutes such blockade mechanisms of empathy and by whom or what are they steered? By consciousness?<sup>2</sup> By cultural techniques? If yes, which ones? And

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<sup>2</sup> One thinks of the "veto function" that Benjamin Libet ascribes to consciousness: Benjamin Libet, *Mind time: The temporal factor in consciousness, Perspectives in Cognitive Neuroscience*, Cambridge, Mass. 2004.

under what circumstances is empathy nevertheless admitted? Presumably the activity of mirror neurons is not subordinated through blockade mechanisms (although even here there remain open questions – see Chapter 1). Even so, not every activity of the mirror neurons is translated into pity and understanding. How are the emotions that are recognized in others and simulated by the activity of the mirror neurons interpreted, filtered, and focused? Why can a mouse cause empathy in my friend, while some people would fail to do so? And why do we have empathy with a mouse only once it is too late?

These and related questions mark the starting point of the following investigation. The topic of this book is the space between neuronal activity and the development of understanding and pity, that is to say, the space of cultures of empathy.<sup>3</sup>

The answer that this book will unfold to these questions is that we understand other people (and ourselves) insofar as we entangle them in small “thought stories.” We understand once we narrate. Even the fast jumping of empathic attention from one person to the next in a larger group, it can be speculated, activates fragmentary stories, insofar as here too there is usually a time dimension that plays a role, namely that of the intended but not yet executed actions of the people involved. (This may also be how pictures tell

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<sup>3</sup> Culture is here understood in its minimal definition as a collection of acquirable behavior routines that can be practiced and divided among a number of individuals, but are not universally valid. Culture exists only in the plural. An agreement of individuals who belong to a culture about their culture is not necessary. To this degree other animals, in addition to humans, can possess culture. It should also be emphasized here that this definition of culture does not consist of a pure counterpart to biological processes (“nature”) or to neuronal processes in the brain, because many of the individually and differently learned (cultural) routines fall into quasi-automatically subsiding neuronal routines. It can at least be debated to what degree the acquisition of mirror neurons programmed for specific tasks varies by culture (see Chapter 1).

stories.) Whenever we spin out the chronological succession of actions and situations of another person, whether consciously or not, we are connected to him or her.<sup>4</sup>

What is remarkable about chronological processes? Chronological processes remove themselves from visibility in a moment. Thus, in any given moment, something is missing. Precisely this missing component forces or empowers the observer to speculatively add the missing moments and thereby go beyond mere description. Through such a narrative addition, which people with autism, for instance, find very difficult, the observer is implicated. He himself crosses the chronological gap to the other events and thereby begins to take on the perspective of the actor. Narration is defined in this sense as the crossing of a bridge between two events that are not necessarily connected with each other (see Chapter 4, Sections 1-5). Thus the observer does not slip directly into the other's skin, but rather calculates or dreams up the other's possibilities to act. This has the effect that he seems to see out of the other's eyes. This narrative calculation causes the observer to outsmart himself and develop pity for the character or characters in question.

Consequently, the chronological processes that are most appropriate for empathy are those in which the observer himself actively constructs the chronological sequence and must guess or intuit the goals and intentions of the actors. In order to make the observer active, neither the prognosis nor the reconstruction should be given beforehand or made too obvious. There must remain a remnant of work for the observer, a space of play in which the observer is needed. In many literary/narrative media, this leads to a

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<sup>4</sup> At this point, a gender-neutral description suits our purposes, but we will take a look at the possible gender implications in the interpretation of Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* in Chapter 4, Section 9.



preference for tendentially counter-intuitive and surprising connections. In the medium of film or in computer games, exactly as in many everyday situations, or in sports, the activity of the observer can also constitute itself in paying attention to the great speed of events and making predictions and decisions with only very short reaction time.

This thesis of a narrative type of empathy becomes more clearly defined if we ask ourselves under what circumstances empathy does not occur. Narrative models provide a blockade apparatus that reduces empathy to a few exceptional cases. Empathy is only allowed in where chronological processes of before and after are decisive. When there is nothing to predict or, working backwards, to reconstruct, that is, in stagnant situations, our empathy fails, glides off like the mouse from the edge of the sink. If someone simply suffers, and we do not know or intuit “what has happened,” our empathy is usually markedly less than when we perceive or add (in thought) an event which explains the other’s pain. Narratively amplified empathy that comes to consciousness is the exception. Perhaps we do not register or believe that someone suffers if we do not know or intuit the reasons why, or when these reasons do not proceed directly out of the actions we know of. Starving people in Africa do not have a good chance, given this tendency.

The entanglement of the observer in narration circumvents the blockade mechanisms. The effect of this is that the observer “forgets” himself. Nevertheless, or perhaps therefore, narration strains toward the moments that leave the observer free again, that is, released from his position of narratively amplified empathy. These moments consist of the dramatic climaxes in which the intentions (as recognized and constructed by the observer) of the protagonists are realized or dashed. The sequence must run its course or be interrupted by a short circuit so that the observer can be thrown

back on himself. We will see what structures of events and narrative forms best meet this challenge.

Narration, runs the thesis of this book, is the exceptional form in which empathy is admitted.<sup>5</sup> Even more pointedly, one could say: empathy, the understanding of others, only comes to pass because our emotional attention towards others is jammed, blocked, and filtered. Without such a (partial) blockade we would live in a world of constant loss of perspective, in which we involuntarily would have to take over the perspectives not only of all the people with whom we came in contact, but also those of animals, mythical creatures, and things. The filtering of empathic ecstasy, the canalization and blocking first allows us the illusion of an insight into the other.

What occasions us, though, to “tell” someone else’s story in our thoughts and in this way develop empathy? I do not believe that the cause of narration is to be sought primarily in curiosity. We begin to narrate, rather, because we have already *decided for someone* we are observing, thus because we have taken his side and feel ourselves connected with him. Perhaps in order to deepen this (often) entirely spontaneous taking of sides, to explain and to justify our choice, we begin, or so I presume, to narrativize the other’s story. We then feel empathy as a result of this process and congratulate ourselves for having chosen the correct side, i.e., the other’s suffering is a certificate of his (and our) superior humanity.

Among the most surprising consequences of this model of empathy is that narrative empathy involves not two but three individuals. While most classical theories of

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<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that other (non-blockaded) forms of empathy should be excluded (see Chapter 1). Even here, though, it is remarkable how wide possible narrativizations reach. Even in the mother-child relationship there are (on the mother’s side) narrative approaches to the child, about whom she knows that it grew in her for nine months, etc.

empathy start from a simple scene of observation with an observer and an observed, narrative empathy implies a scene with three people. The observer observes the conflict, or at least a difference of opinion, between two others, and speculates about the possible causes, motivations, intentions, and consequences. If he thereby takes a position (mentally or explicitly) and comes down on the side of one of the disputants, this can lead to the aforementioned empathy effects. The taking of sides in a three-person scene will be introduced in this book as the basic type of narrative empathy. This admittance of a third party may appear counter-intuitive at first glance. Many self-perceptions of empathy follow the simple schema of observation: “I see that B is in pain, and can feel B’s pain.” However, even such apparently simple scenarios hide a row of complex conditions, such as the prediction of what, chronologically, will happen next. Also, they could reveal themselves to be primitive versions of a more complex scene involving a third. “I see how A hurts B.” From such a scene it would proceed just the same, that we react empathically, even when B experiences pain and no A exists. Even in the story of the mouse one could speak of an abbreviated three-person scene. The person inhabits two positions here. First, he is the aggressor against the mouse. Second, he operates as an observer who observes the conflict between mouse and man and takes the side of the mouse.

The narrative empathy proposed here is in its structure closely tied to complex social situations and is probably a possibility for only some animals. It is my belief that human empathy cannot be explained exclusively as a bottom-up theory. A bottom-up theory starts from simple cases and basic structures and then expands from them to more complex cases. Certainly, evolution operates, as a general rule, through continuous

accommodation to the environment. We normally think of this as a constant increase in complexity, although it should not be forgotten that simplifications can also be part of a new accommodation.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, there also exists in evolution a particular type of jump. Namely, when a number of capabilities develop independently of each other, it can happen that their combination suddenly opens up a new possibility for action, for which no direct evolutionary pressure was given. So it could have happened with the development of empathy from apes to hairless apes. The new empathy could thus be described as an unintended byproduct of the development of bigger brains. It is imaginable that these combined capabilities could suddenly supersede and effectively block earlier forms of empathy. The gradual (bottom-up) evolution of each of these capabilities does not stand in opposition, then, to a sudden leap to a top-down model. Once developed, narrative empathy would constitute the majority of forms of mind reading and pity.

The book finds evidence for this hypothesis in the fact that people possess the ability to create elaborate fictional worlds. In fact, this book engages at various points with so-called works of fiction. This does not mean, however, that only literary artworks are treated here. Rather, it is the hope of this investigation that the human fondness for fiction can also provide keys to the cognitive capabilities of human beings in general. Apparently there can only be fictions because they correspond to the human capacity for imagination. It is also by means of imagination that we construct stories of others in our minds. If this is correct, the form of narrative contains a key to the astounding human capacity for empathy.

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<sup>6</sup> On questions of evolution, see Armin P. Moczek, “On the origins of novelty in development and evolution”, in: *BioEssays* 30.5 (2008), S. 432-447.

At the same time, however, narrative literature plays an essential part in exposing people to examples of empathy and thereby trains their responses to specific narrative scenarios. This training of empathy via narrative literature opens a space in which variant forms of empathy could also emerge. These, then, can have feedback effects on the sensitivity for empathy. Fiction provides a history of empathy and demonstrates the necessary plurality of cultures of empathy.

### *Organization of the Book*

The book approaches the structure of narrative empathy by discussing the three most prominent paradigms for the explanation of empathy, with increasing complexity in each paradigm.

To begin with, there is the paradigm of similarity (Chapter 1). Similarity between the empathizing observer and the person observed, or so it is often argued, is the basis of empathy and, further, the condition of its possibility. Even if this is true (one can hardly argue against it), similarity is a rather lacking medium for the explanation of human empathy because similarity is routinely overestimated. Whenever someone simulates the corporeal feeling or particular emotions of another because he imagines it/them to be similar to his own, he always abstracts at the same time from the situation and experiences of the other. Hence, the chapter suggests that it is not so much similarity itself as the *overestimation* of similarity that is a central medium of empathy.

Overestimation tends always towards the boundless and demands mechanisms of regulation. Even apparently simple mechanisms like the parallelization of the observer and the observed made possible by the mirror neurons simultaneously employ similarity

but also mechanisms for limiting it. The limiting happens, as will be shown, by means of anticipation and temporalization.

The second chapter discusses construction models of empathy. The basic assumption of these construction models is that we are capable of building another person's perspective, even if this perspective is quite different from our own. Similarity with the other is therefore perhaps helpful, but not unconditionally necessary anymore. The hope of construction models is that we can also intellectually or emotionally understand someone who has another view of things than we do. In the discussion of these models the importance of the concrete, empathy-inducing situation is emphasized. Only particular situations allow these kinds of constructions, above all those that can be construed as events in time, that is as narratives. Even the difference from the other must let itself be "narrated" as a preceding story (which shapes the other or exemplifies his ignorance, etc.). In order to construe the other, all intentions, preconditions, and possibilities must be put into a straightforward scenario.

The third chapter proposes a further basic form of empathy, namely an empathy that is compelled through violence. In extreme situations like that of hostage-taking, an emotional connection from the victim to the aggressor (i.e., the hostage-taker) has often been observed (keyword: Stockholm Syndrome). This emotional tie will be described here as a form of empathy. The hostage, so it stands to reason, hopes to effect a positive reaction in the hostage-taker with the help of empathy. This form of empathy, I believe, is *not* simply to be cast aside as a limit case or exception. Rather, such cases demonstrate a basic form of human communication and a central trait of empathy, insofar as empathy operates as a medium of communication. We will expand this notion of communication

in the chapter by referring to the treatment of gossip in evolutionary theory. As the medium of communication, empathy could prepare the structure for mutual exchange and response to attraction. In this chapter we also hit upon the role of a third person for the first time. In the situation of hostage-taking, such a third person finds himself in the central position, namely in the form of the authorities, whom the hostage-taker fears. This fear of the third person, it can be assumed, is noted by the hostage and may prove central for empathizing with the hostage-taker.

The elements of empathy described in the first three chapters – temporalizing, empathy-inducing situations, and three-person constellations – will be combined in the fourth chapter to build a model of narrative empathy. This occurs from two directions – on the one hand, from narrative theory, on the other, from an anthropological speculation on “taking sides in a three-person scene.” There it will be proposed that the “ur-scene” of empathy is to be found in an act of taking sides. Because the observer decides for one person and against the other in a conflict, he must rationalize and legitimize his decision. Empathy and pity prove themselves, as it will be developed, to be the best strategies to justify and cement one’s decision.

As should have become clear by now, this book proceeds in a speculative manner. The stress of the argument does not lie on a catalogue of forms of empathy, even if different conceptions of empathy and “feeling with” are introduced, but rather on the condensation of all forms and conceptions to one model. (Evan Thompson provides a good overview of cognitive models of empathy.<sup>7</sup> Hans Robert Jauss offers a helpful

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<sup>7</sup> Evan Thompson, “Empathy and consciousness”, in: *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, 5-7 (2001), S. 1-32.

cataloguing of the forms of literary identification.<sup>8</sup>) This method has the advantage of clarity. Other theses and ideas concerning questions of human empathy will find it easy to position themselves for or against these proposals.

### *Instructions for Use*

Readers who want to immediately get a picture of the model proposed in this book can skip directly to Chapter 4, Section 6.

Readers who want to use this book as an introduction into cognitive science approaches to empathy can read Chapter 1, Sections 5-6 (mirror neurons), Chapter 2, Sections 1-2 (Theory of Mind), and Chapter 4, Sections 1-2 (Narrative Mind).

Whoever wants to read the book as a contribution to literary studies should concentrate directly on the literature discussions: Chapter 1, Section 8 on Lessing; Chapter 2, Section 5 on E. T. A. Hoffmann; Chapter 4, Section 9 on Fontane's *Effi Briest*; in addition, Chapter 4, Sections 1-5 contain a discussion of narrative theory with a nod to Aristotle.

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, "Negativität und Identifikation. Versuch zur Theorie der ästhetischen Erfahrung", in: Harald Weinrich (Hg.), *Positionen der Negativität* (Poetik und Hermeneutik VI), München 1975, S. 263-339.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Narrative Empathy**

#### **6. Empathy as Taking Sides in a Three-Person Scene**

Most of the theories of empathy that we have discussed in the first three chapters of this book take as their starting-point a scene involving two people: an observer and an observed, the former of whom registers the behavior and emotions of the latter “as though he himself were the agent.” This is certainly true for the activity of mirror neurons (Chapter 1) and the Theory of Mind (Chapter 2). Only in the third chapter, when it came to observing another in situations of power differentials did our meditation lead us to consider the possible participation of a third person. In all of these theories empathy becomes almost completely synonymous with observation. Empathy is portrayed as a particularly close observation that also takes into account the intentions and emotions of the other person. Depending on the respective theories, the observations are either copied in one’s own neural experience, and mentally performed in sync with the action (mirror neurons), or pieced together into a functional, calculable whole of the other person (Theory of Mind), or interpreted as the search for traces of weakness in the other (Stockholm Syndrome, see Chapter 3). In short, the dominant opinion is that empathy represents a peculiarly exact form of observation in a two-person scene.

Empathy is certainly based on observation, but I do not believe that empathy is adequately defined as a special form of observation. Certainly, two-person scenes are, evolutionarily speaking, ubiquitous, and the infant-mother relationship is decisive for all

mammals. What sets the primates apart, however, is the increased possibility for social scenes with three or more individuals, and it is precisely the primates who seem to be most capable of empathy. It is possible, then, that the origin of a more fully developed empathy lies in social scenes, or perhaps vice versa – social structures are only possible at all as the result of empathy.

In what follows I would like to propose that empathy results from taking sides in a three-person scene.<sup>9</sup> Empathy originates, I believe, when a third person observes the discord between two other individuals and mentally sides with one of the two parties, without necessarily interfering in the action. “Discord” here simply means that the two individuals observed encounter each other with different interests. This can occur in direct conflicts like fights or arguments or in ritualized conflicts like sport competitions or judicial processes. This can also be the case in indirect conflicts such as disagreements of opinion about how a group should behave itself, or in popularity contests, in gossip, political advertisements, or erotic behavior. In general, all groups and constellations should be included in which the individuals inhabit different roles. In the family, for instance, the individuals inhabit different relationship niches as father, mother, first, second, or third child, etc., and these unavoidably produce conflicts of interest. Even when no open struggle breaks out, one can always assume a discordant situation as a starting-point (in this respect, even happy families, which I heartily wish to all, are, contra Tolstoy, alike in being much like unhappy families).

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<sup>9</sup> Rüdiger Campe arrives via an alternate route at a tri-partite model of advocacy (*Fürsprache*, literally “speaking for”) in his critique of empathy in the writings of Theodor Lipps. See Rüdiger Campe, “An outline for a critical history of *Fürsprache*. *Synegoria* and advocacy”, in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift* (2008), S. 355-381.

Narrative fiction as a whole is certainly marked by such discordant interactions, which are then registered and observed by a third party (the reader, the viewer).<sup>10</sup> In this sense, William Flesch has recently proposed that our interest in fiction is at heart an interest in observing fictional characters being praised or punished. People as social beings can cooperate, according to Flesch's evolution-oriented argument, because those who do not cooperate are punished – and with them also the second-order rebels, namely those who fail to punish those who do not cooperate. Careful observation, not naive identification, is therefore the more general basis of fiction.<sup>11</sup> Against Flesch's argument, however, one must remember Robin Dunbar's studies, which allot negative gossip only a small place in everyday conversation.<sup>12</sup> I would therefore propose a slight correction to Flesch's hypothesis and claim that the impetus for the observer lies in making a positive

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<sup>10</sup> It might also be considered whether the basic situation of pornography belongs here. Pornography and voyeurism are certainly central phenomena of empathy. In them one (usually) observes two (or more) people acting in their sexually differentiated roles. Thus the question to ask is whether the observer takes the side of one of the parties and as such "participates" in his/her actions. "Taking sides" for one certainly does not exclude the possibility of empathetic attention jumping alternately from one to the other. Precisely this variation could strengthen the stimulus of observation.

<sup>11</sup> The argumentation of Flesch's brilliant study goes a step further than mine insofar as he claims that the altruism of giving both gifts and punishments is the basis of community. When I speak of "taking sides," the notion of the partisan's self-interest is always lurking in the shadows. Flesch seems to me to dismiss the theorems of "identification" and "mimesis" (and with them empathy) somewhat over-hastily. I certainly share his misgiving that "identification" adequately explains our interest in fiction. Nevertheless he underestimates, from my perspective, how our identifications and choices of sides undermine our moral judgment and our attempts to assign praise and blame. To put it differently, Flesch underestimates the rhetorical or empathic dimension of the literary in his otherwise groundbreaking study. William Flesch, *Comeuppance: Costly Signaling, Altruistic Punishment, and Other Biological Components of Fiction*, Cambridge and London 2007.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 3, Section 2.

judgment, that is, in taking sides for (and not against) somebody.<sup>13</sup> The observer of conflicts tends to make the decision for one side or the other, and only after achieving this position does the other side secondarily become an object of dislike.

Narrative fiction seems to be shaped by this demand to take a side. This may explain a fundamentally puzzling aspect of literature and film, namely that they typically include characters obviously coded as good and bad, despite our awareness that this distinction does not hold in real life. Even the people we dislike we only seldom claim are evil. This category is reserved for a few tyrants and even then seems questionable. Fiction, though, features this distinction because, so I conjecture, it accommodates the reader's task of taking sides. As long as the reader makes the correct decision, his faculty of judgment will be rewarded.<sup>14</sup> (It is also certainly not the case that only modern works deliberately set up difficulties for the readers.) I do not only wish to make an argument about fiction, however, but also about a human capability.

Taking sides assumes first and foremost that the fight or conflict is registered as such, i.e. that the different tendencies of the combatants are recognized by the observer. I prefer the word "tendency" to the more common "intention," since "intention" is often related to circumstances of belief that are not perceptible from an external perspective, while a "tendency" is built into the action itself. In order to take sides in any given

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to Flesch's work, there are two new studies that focus on the relationship of judgment and narration: James Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction: Judgements, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative*, Columbus 2007 and Michael Richter, *Das narrative Urteil*. While Richter ultimately thinks that judgment takes place from a position beyond empathy, Phelan's cautious investigation considers the ways in which observation, empathy, and judgment mutually influence each other.

<sup>14</sup> As a result, fiction does have something to do with what Carl Schmitt calls the Political; Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin 1932.

conflict, a position must be obtained from which one tendency and one side takes priority over the other.

An assumption of this model is that the decision to take sides is open to many influences, whether from rationality, rhetoric, consciousness, the unconscious, etc..<sup>15</sup> Before one asks what criteria the observer uses to position himself, it must be emphasized *that* it is possible for social beings to so position themselves – an ability that is decisive for social beings. This is not to say, however, that the criteria to be used to decide which side to take are given. At the very least there appear to be many situations in which taking sides is not simply pre-determined. Primates do not automatically take the side of the dominant individual. And why I side with one of my children in one situation and another in another, when they are both situations where the children are getting in each other's hair, is not particularly clear to me. Precisely this room for decision-making seems to be of essential importance for empathy. *Could the ur-scene of empathy not lie here, in the possibility and necessity of deciding for someone? Empathy would then be a derived act, a consequence of taking sides. I feel with the other because I have decided for him.*

At first (and maybe even second) glance, this seems abstruse: I have “feeling with” somebody, because I have decided for him and taken his side. One would expect: I decide for somebody, because I have empathy with him. A familiar example may help make the thesis more plausible: sports competitions, in this case soccer. Whoever observes a game without anything riding on it can certainly appreciate the performances.

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<sup>15</sup> As far as the numerous complications of decisions and judgments are concerned, I point you to Leslie Paul Thiele's study, Leslie Paul Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment: Practical Wisdom, Neuroscience, and Narrative*, Cambridge, New York, 2006. That decisions and judgments in situations of empathy do not stem from immediate introspection is what Peter Carruthers argues: Peter Carruthers, “How we know our own minds”.

It only becomes exciting, however, when he or she has decided for a team and from then on lives or dies with its players. Only then can the events of the game become experienceable, only then can the attempted shot become a second of horror or a moment of hope. Every foul also becomes an emotional event, because one either feels pain with the player and curses the fouling opponent or dismisses the player rolling around on the ground as a great melodramatic actor but no football player. (See Italy's team, for instance.)

In the 2008 elections the political campaigns were also personalized in this manner, so that one can see similar structures. Whether it was "Barack vs. Hilary" or Obama vs. McCain – the telegenic speeches and debates were made to be empathy events, *because* most Americans had already picked a side. Correspondingly, every verbal attack could be felt as an insult or lie, or celebrated as the voice of truth. Choosing sides *made empathy possible*. As a result, it is seldom arguments that move someone to switch parties but rather the moments that muddy the clarity of a person's position, because one seldom takes the side of someone who has little outline as a person. Political opponents are therefore always stressing moments of contradiction, inconsistency, and characterlessness in their opponents. Presumably the so-called "flip-flop" attacks against the Democrat John Kerry in 2004 did more damage than all of the direct critiques of his platform combined.

Let us turn, then, to the structure of taking sides. Since every taking of sides is based on a free decision, it remains vacillating, uncertain, and in need of legitimization. Given this uncertainty, the question becomes how one can feel good about one's decision. My suggestion is that empathy allows emotions to be released, and these

emotions confirm the initial decision. In short, empathy can be regarded as a mechanism for strengthening the decision. The more clearly I feel the pain of the one for whom I decided, the stronger will be my rage against his adversaries, and I will side even more strongly with the one for whom I already decided. Vice versa, the suffering of the opponent, against whom I decided, can release negative empathy such as *Schadenfreude*. *Schadenfreude* and negative empathy are also means to the legitimization of my own taking of sides and thus prevents desertion (of the side I have chosen). The function of empathy is to strengthen the taking of sides and to confirm created alliances. Empathy is the medium through which the quick act of taking sides becomes more durable. In this respect empathy certainly helps consolidate family bonds (although empathy does not seem suited to the strengthening of impersonal institutions, as will be proposed in the Epilogue).

At the same time, it is certainly true that I decide for someone because I *can* feel with him. Empathy is the act that comes later, but already plays a role in the decision about taking sides and is thus objectively connected with taking sides.

How does one choose in taking sides, as long as one is not already or quasi-automatically connected with one party (as in the case of belonging to a family, etc.)?

For this decision, a number of forms are available. In the following, only the most interesting for our purposes will be discussed.

a) A strategic decision can be made according to criteria of self-interest. This can (but does not have to) lead to deciding for the probable winner of a conflict, who one assures of one's loyalty through signs of sympathy. If the conflict ends as expected, this can have immediate positive consequences for the partisan. It should be noted that a

strategic decision can also be consciously made for the weaker of the two opponents. This can have two positive consequences for the partisan. First, as one of few partisans, he can perhaps expect a correspondingly large amount of gratitude, if “his” candidate wins. Second, the avowal of sympathy (because perceived empathy for another is most often taken as sympathy) with the weaker can subtract from the joy of victory for the dominant winner and lead to less excessive punishment for the defeated. In this way the stratifications within a group can slowly be ameliorated and yield a “flatter” societal order.

The strategic decision to take the side of the stronger can follow simply through force of habit. However, this strategic decision can border on narrative forms as well. Above all, The more the consequences of the “when-then” and the “if-then” constitute part of the partisan’s strategic considerations, the more narratively informed will be his decision.

b) A judicative decision can be made when it is calculated which of the two opponents is right.<sup>16</sup> As part of this process, events will be pulled in that lie outside of the immediately observed conflict and typically will take on narrative forms. *Because* one of the opponents has done certain things, it follows that he can only be in the right (or in the wrong). We can attach this train of thought back to the considerations that narrative forms regularly imply accusation and excuse (Sections 1 and 2). Whoever evaluates the behavior of others (and himself) must always be able to narrate it in one way or another. Incrimination and acquittal come about by means of narrative calculations that causally

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<sup>16</sup> One is not necessarily legitimized before a universal right. One can also be legitimized because one has acted in accordance with one’s psyche, given in to one’s obsessions, or pragmatically seemed to do the right thing.



connect events and intentions. This is true just as much for the pre-modern law of an “eye for an eye” as for modern justice.<sup>17</sup> In the first case of an “eye for an eye” it is narratively reckoned what the one has done to the other. In the second case of abstracted justice, narrative processes are also involved, insofar as the individual possibilities for action need to be played out.

c) There is also a form of decision we could call *self-reflexive*. This requires further explanation and demands agreement concerning what actually constitutes “observation.” In order to be able to observe, the observer abstains from his own activity, that is, stepping in, participating, speaking, etc.<sup>18</sup> There might be many reasons for abstaining. Perhaps the observer is too helpless to be able to step in and help in the scene he is observing. Or he is not in a position to step in, such as when receiving a report or a fiction, whose events are only shared with him. Or he does not want to step in, because he likes observing what he is observing. In each case, though, this voluntary or involuntary “active inactivity” shapes what we call observation. The renunciation or the impossibility of action relegates the observer to a position of passivity, which in turn is what first makes (active) observation possible. This position of passivity, so it can be speculated, *predisposes* the observer to taking sides with the tendentially more passive of the observed persons, the victims, the sufferers (*Leidenden*), the weaker, or simply those to whom the action happens. (One remembers here that in older linguistic usage “*Leiden*” meant the passive reception of an action.) Because he himself is practicing the “act of inactivity,” the observer can register his structural similarity to the more passive actors

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<sup>17</sup> For more on this distinction, see René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore 1977.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson, Brunet, Meltzoff and Decety, “Empathy examined through the neural mechanisms involved in imagining how I feel versus how you feel pain”.

whom he observes. At least we can assume that the observer is defined through his own (in)activity of observation in such a way that he observes similar restrained, passive, inferior actors favorably and takes their side. This self-reflexive form of taking sides has narrative traits throughout, insofar as the victim role of the weaker and the underdog, is recognized and valorized.

Of course, we must also remember that the privileging of the weak and the passivity of observation as a form of sympathy is culturally coded. In the Christian tradition of the West there is certainly a double tendency that corresponds to what we have said above: Christian art demands contemplation, i.e. active inactivity before the work, and the Christian religion privileges both pity and passivity (“and unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek also offer the other”). Accordingly, central figures of identification in the Christian art-religion complex are the suffering Christ, the tortured martyrs, and the enduring Mary. Other traditions, however, such as the Pre-Hellenic cults, did not know this culture of observation and contemplation. Whoever attends a cult is a participant and not just an observer. The works of art produced by such cults are obviously not based on the primacy of the suffering figure, as in later Christian art, but instead are hero-worshipping. The weak and inferior are cut out of the picture. Starting with Hellenism it comes to pass that both triumphal and suffering figures can be the main objects of art. In other words, it is only in the cultural form of contemplative observation that this form of passivity and pity becomes central.

Up to now, we have assumed that the act of choosing sides has primacy over empathy. Whoever decides for someone in taking sides acquires empathy as a result, *because* he has decided for this other. As we have seen, however, the choosing of sides is

labile, susceptible to diverse influences. Hence it can also be assumed that one will more probably choose the side of the party with whom one *can* have empathy. To be sure, the choosing of a side has primacy over empathy. However, this choosing of a side and the sympathy connected with it are already influenced by one's understanding of whom one could have empathy with.<sup>19</sup> How is such feedback, which allows the influence of empathy on the antecedent taking of sides possible? As we will see, narrative elements come into play here, not the least of which is the attempt by disputants to win observers over to their side by making their stories sympathetic.<sup>20</sup>

To begin with, it can be declared that it is advantageous for the parties in a conflict to win potential observers over to their side. There always remains the chance that observers might step in, elevate themselves to judges, or be asked later about what happened. The actors in a conflict thus, as a rule, behave themselves such that their attitude could win an observer over to their side. They "fight fair" and work to appear convincing, heroic, honest, trustworthy, etc. In general, the idea that empathy is only an act of the observer appears naive from the perspective of narrative empathy. The disputants are not blind to the possibility of observation by a third. With increasing narrative consciousness they observe themselves with renewed sharpness. In this respect they are not so very different from characters in fiction, who only exist as characters in the view of the third (the reader/the viewer). Narrative strategies thus enter into the

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas Chismar distinguishes empathy and sympathy as follows. "In the case of empathy, familiarity with the recipient and his situation is the chief parameter, whereas for sympathy, agreement with the recipient, liking him and what he stands for, the presence of shared ventures etc. appear to be the important variables"; Douglas Chismar, "Empathy and sympathy. The important difference", in: *Journal of Value Inquiry* 22 (1988), p. 257-266, here pp. 260-61

<sup>20</sup> For these theses and the connection of judgment (as in the decision of taking sides) and narration in general, see Leslie Paul Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment*.

behavior of individuals in a conflict, which makes it easier for the observers to narrativize the fates of the actors and thereby to develop empathy with them and to take a side.

Correspondingly, one can expect that the influence of empathy on choosing sides has evolutionary relevance. When a certain behavior of an individual induces (positive) empathy in others, then this behavior is encouraged because it (frequently if not necessarily) increases the likelihood of one's side being taken in a dispute. Evolutionarily speaking, it can also be advantageous to present oneself as legible (especially in situations that are pity- or sympathy-relevant). Whether this is a driving factor in evolution or only a beneficial side effect cannot be decided here. Invitations to empathy are attempts to manipulate the choosing of sides, because empathy bends the decision process in its direction.

Conducive to the arousal of empathy is comprehensibility (Chapter 1), calculability (Chapter 2), and the fascination of power (Chapter 3). A calculable person or character, especially when emotions attach easily to him, can awaken empathy. This is even the case if the character is morally dubious, simply because the character is so portrayed that empathy with him is possible.

[...]

While the evolutionary advantage to the individual is difficult to calculate--since every attempt to win over an observer will cause one's opponent in something like an "empathy arms race" to do the same--it can nonetheless be surmised that the evolutionary advantage for the group is considerable. Groups which possess the cultural technology of choosing sides in a three-person scene also possess the potential to decide conflicts less violently, insofar as it is the duty of the group as a whole to de-fang conflicts. Events that

might split a group, such as a fight between two family heads, could become a moment that consolidates the group identity, since everyone becomes a judge. And in disputes “fairer,” “more honest,” or “more just” forms of fighting are advocated, i.e., those forms of fighting that appear narratively in the most beneficial light. One can assume that these forms of behavior serve the consolidation of the group. The evolutionary advantage to the group might lie here: it can grow in size without falling apart, and thereby compete better against other groups (for more detail, see Chapter 3 with the discussion of Robin Dunbar’s studies). At the same time, it must be emphasized that latent feelings of hate and competition in the big group are not thereby excluded but in fact even enhanced. Empathy strengthens the group in spite of and by means of the negative feelings that exist in it.

It is not hard to imagine that the origin of the concept of judgment derives from these patterns of narrativizing conflicts. An idea of “justice” can become necessary when observers retrospectively attempt to legitimize their choice of sides in a conflict. The more this “justice” can be distanced from the individual taste of the observer, the more persuasive it will be, and it will be more stabilizing for the group.

Evidence for this model of empathy as taking sides in a three-person scene can be found not only in the aforementioned sports competitions, the meditations on the evolution of social intelligence, and the sociology of groups, but also in the fact that people like to create fictions. The existence of fictions (created by people) is certainly one of the most instructive indices for the understanding of activities in the brain when it comes to phenomena like empathy, mind-reading, and pity. Fictions prefer situations that correspond most closely to the empathetic faculty. The strange thing is that characters of

fiction come alive for us, even when they are only drawn “with a few lines” and only characterized by a few actions. Apparently these few lines and characterizations are enough for our imaginative faculty to dream up a complete character with intentions of his own. This works, so I propose, not because we imagine the character but predict his actions in certain situations. And it is precisely for this kind of prediction that our cognitive powers are programmed (see Chapter 1).

The basic situation of fiction corresponds to the already mentioned three-person situation, insofar as the reader/viewer takes on the reserved role of the third (the observer) and sides with one of the characters. One can also come down on the side of the “villain,” and this decision too can be legitimized through narrative empathy. The legitimization can lie in the tension of whether or not he will be found out and thus produce a form of pity. Even the villain becomes a human being when he reaches the scaffold, Adam Smith warned us long ago. Legitimization for choosing the villain’s side can also take place, against moral feeling, because the villain is the more interesting character, who does or says what no one else in the fictional world dares to.

Now it is time to refine our discussion of narrative in light of these arguments concerning the choosing of sides...

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Invisible Third:**

#### **Stockholm, Power, Reciprocity**

##### **1. 1973**

In August 1973 a man on prison-release entered a bank with a gun and took four hostages. He demanded that a friend of his be brought into the bank, and together they barricaded themselves in the bank with the hostages (one man and three women) for more than five days before the police could overwhelm them without bloodshed. What has made this episode famous, however, were the events that followed. The first perpetrator was contacted in prison by several female admirers, who came to know and love him through the (for the time) astoundingly intimate TV reporting. He later married one of them. The second perpetrator, who was acquitted of all criminal charges by the court on the grounds that he had only appeared to help in the hostage taking with the real goal of preventing any harm to the hostages, entered into a long friendship with one of the female hostages. The place was Stockholm and the resulting relationships coined the term Stockholm Syndrome.

What is especially conspicuous about Stockholm Syndrome (also known as Survival Identification Syndrome) is that the empathic or identificatory relationship of the hostage to the hostage taker can outlast the hostage situation. (In the following I will use “he” to signify the hostage taker and “she” for the hostage, simply following the original case of Stockholm Syndrome.) The hostage takes on the perspective of the

hostage-taker in such a committed way that she fears and fights the police, that she continues to support the hostage taker after his defeat, and that she testifies for him in the court proceedings (all of this was the case in 1973). The hostage sees the world through the eyes of the hostage-taker – a classic scenario of empathy.

The question driving this chapter is whether violence belongs to the structure of empathy in general or whether Stockholm Syndrome is only a marginal case of empathy. As far as I know, it has nowhere – as it will be attempted here – been argued that Stockholm Syndrome can offer insights into empathy as a whole. The objections lie at hand. The mixing of violence and human empathy seems to present a paradoxical exception and as such is hardly suited to explain peaceful mind-reading and pitying. Nevertheless, how does one know that the mixing of empathy with questions of power is the exception? Is empathy in its structure perhaps less a form of neutral observation than an emergency strategy that is called upon precisely because the other party exercises such dominance that he must be understood, both rationally and emotionally? Perhaps extreme situations such as hostage taking first induce such a peculiar behavior as empathy: only someone who has given himself up for lost gives up his own perspective.

Starting out from Stockholm Syndrome and a number of related cases and models, a possible structure of empathy will be distilled in what follows. While this structure will build on the Theory of Mind (Chapter 2), it will bring another group of presuppositions into play than those that were discussed in the first and second chapters. In the relevant cases for this chapter we are concerned with a communicative situation between two dialogue partners, who are differentiated by a power gap: someone has empathy towards another who is perceived as more powerful. The weaker observes the



stronger, guesses his intentions and emotions and in the process takes over his evaluations of the world. What is unclear is whether in this form of empathy (if it is empathy, which remains an open question at this point) there are still two positions or whether instead a “melting” or “fusion” takes place (I completely adapt the position of the other, insofar as I do everything that I think he wants, and thus lose myself in him).

Even among the experts there are considerable differences of opinion concerning how to evaluate Stockholm Syndrome. Two basic appraisals can be distinguished. The first takes as a starting point the destruction of the psychic system and self-function of the hostage.<sup>21</sup> The remainders of the self-function are then attached to the one who has power and control, i.e. the hostage taker, who seems to manifest a healthy self-confidence.

Empathy, if this is even still the right word, would be an effect of the demolition of one’s own self. Psychoanalysts describe Stockholm Syndrome in this sense as a regress to an infantile model, typically as parental identification. In accordance with this appraisal, Stockholm Syndrome moves into the neighborhood of the psychoses.

The second appraisal views Stockholm Syndrome as a rational strategy. The hostage submits, according to this theory, in order to communicate positive feelings to the hostage taker and thus to come away with her life. In the self-sacrifice of the hostage

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<sup>21</sup> Here and in what follows the concept of the “self” will be used as a marker for what is threatened in Stockholm Syndrome. This has less to do with an image of identity (as an “I”) – this can remain intact – than with the function of self-interest. The hostage appears to lose the center of self-interest. The concept of “self” is therefore used here in order to maintain the conceptual difference from “I” used in the first chapter. In the first chapter we emphasized that the imagination of a (singular) “I” operates less as an identity of the individual than as the dividing element that accentuates the inequality of all. In this sense one could say that in this chapter we are also concerned with an “I,” just not the “I” of the hostage, but rather, from the vantage point of the hostage, the “I” of the hostage taker. In the situation of a power differential, only the other, the hostage taker, is entitled to an essential “I,” a constitutive particularity.

hides the hope of a friendly end to the hostage situation through communication and reciprocity. While this goal of self-preservation motivates Stockholm Syndrome and thus the giving up of one's own perspective, the "return" to the self is then quasi-forgotten and the hostage becomes stuck in the perspective of the hostage taker.

It is possible, I believe, that both opposed appraisals are necessary in order to explain the phenomenon of Stockholm Syndrome. Is the self abandoned (as in the first appraisal) *in order to* open positive communication (as in the second appraisal)? Empathy could show itself precisely here: only someone who gives up his own perspective can take in the other's.

Certainly the experience of being taken hostage is so existentially traumatic that it can in fact shake the contours of one's self. Nevertheless, a small but important detail indicates that Stockholm Syndrome does not, or not exclusively, represent a total capitulation and demolition of the self, but *simultaneously*, that is, *even in the destruction of the self*, should be understood as a survival strategy. There is a much greater probability that Stockholm Syndrome will develop when the hostage taker gives a sign of friendliness and thereby permits hope. This sign can consist of a small gesture, nothing more than the handing over of some food or a laugh, or something else along these lines. Such gestures allow the hostage to interpret them as signs that the hostage taker is "not so bad" as it appears. Psychologists call this the "small kindness perception."<sup>22</sup>

Thus Stockholm Syndrome is not solely the result of radical power-asymmetry, abuse, or threats of death. Rather, it includes an element of hope, as long as the hostage taker allows this. The handing over of some food, the friendly remark, the permission to

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<sup>22</sup> See Joseph M. Carver, "Love and Stockholm Syndrome. The mystery of loving an abuser", 2007, see <http://counsellingresource.com/quizzes/stockholm/part-2.html>

use the toilet, all such “small kindnesses” are presumably understood by the hostage as acts of communication. Where there is communication, there is dialogue, answer, acceptance. The hostage probably *wants* to understand these gestures optimistically as the introduction to a friendly communication, because this would allow the hostage to see her own situation in a better light. Such a perception through rose-colored glasses follows from the tendency towards a *self-serving bias*. Correspondingly one could conclude that the hostage in fact reacts through a positive emotional valorization of the relationship between herself and the hostage taker. Precisely because this communication obviously stands in the shadow of a great doubt (the threat of death and the confinement remain in effect), it is even more important for the hostage to hold fast to this form of communication.

As a result, the hostage might think that the hostage taker must under no circumstances be irritated so that his “good” side can remain dominant.<sup>23</sup> In order not to irritate the other, he first must be understood. It would therefore make sense for the hostage to attempt to take in the other’s perspective in order to understand the wishes and fears of the hostage taker and make these feelings her own. Empathy does not originate here as an end in itself, but rather as a concrete medium that keeps channels of communication open. The hostage would then calculate (not necessarily consciously) how the hostage taker would react to different situations: “If I say x, or the police do y, then the hostage taker will do z.” Everything up to this point is a totally normal part of dialogical communication. What is new in Stockholm Syndrome is that the hostage

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<sup>23</sup> Frans de Waal notices that the chimpanzees of higher rank register which of the lower members of the group show them the most respect. At the very least, they punish the less respectful group members more frequently. See Frans de Waal...

probably believes that she cannot afford to make one mistake and therefore cannot jump back to her own, presumably contrary, perspective from that of the hostage taker. Even though the *unio mystica* attempted by the hostage is meant to ultimately restore her own separate identity, it tends to remain stuck in the perspective of the other (the hostage taker).

The hostage's behavior would thus be rational and at the same time paradoxical: the hostage strategically denies her own wishes and position and adapts the other's position, in order, through this repudiation of her own self, to strengthen her own self in the end. This occurs in two contradictory ways. First, insofar as the self of the hostage "melts" into that of the hostage taker, every strengthening of the hostage taker assists the "self" of the hostage in a psychotic way, because the other is understood as the placeholder of one's own self. Second, insofar as the hostage helps the hostage taker, she hopes that the hostage taker for his part will also help her (such help could consist of the protection that a self-proclaimed guru promises to the members of his sect, but it could also be the final releasing of the hostage).

The situation is paradoxical because the hostage wants, on the one hand, the hostage taker to overlook her, but, on the other, wants him to be thankful to her. The hostage might calculate that it is only with the establishment of an identity between herself and the hostage taker that the good will of the latter can be achieved. The hostage taker, himself under considerable pressure, can be thankful to the hostage, so long as she does not make a claim to his critical attention. In short, the communication tends to fall back into a mere monologue, the self-confidence of one person (the hostage taker) dominates the relationship to such a degree that the other's perspective vanishes.

A comparison with torture can support these thoughts. In torture, tortured people only very rarely view the torturer positively.<sup>24</sup> One of the main differences between Stockholm Syndrome and torture consists of the fact that the hostage understands that her suffering is the means to another end for the hostage taker, while the victim of political torture, on the contrary, must see the violence done to her as the whole point of the operation. In hostage taking the hostage taker wants something for himself: money, freedom, community, attention, or sexual pleasure. In order to achieve this end, he needs the hostage as a means. The suffering of the hostage can thus be a step towards success. It is not, however, the end goal of hostage taking. In torture, on the contrary, the suffering of the victim is precisely the goal, whether it is the end goal (punishment, retribution), part of the goal (deterrence), or the first step of judgment (forcing confessions). Also when torture is used in order to force the victim to reveal a secret, the goal of the torturer's activity is pain (and not the torturer's enjoyment in his abuse). Because the hostage can see herself and her suffering even in cases of abuse<sup>25</sup> as the means to advance the personal goals of the hostage taker, it seems possible to build up a positive human relationship to the him (even if this, statistically speaking, is not the rule). A further difference lies in the fact that the hostage taker, in relation to the hostage, is the sole authority that decides everything, while the torturer usually acts as a representative of an organization. The good will of the torturer thus does not help the prisoner.

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<sup>24</sup> See Freihart Regner: "Unbewußte Liebesbeziehung zum Folterer? Kritik und Alternativen zu einer 'Psychodynamik der traumatischen Reaktion'," in: *Zeitschrift für Politische Psychologie* 8 (2000), S. 429-452. Regner criticizes the psychoanalytic notion that torture leads to a regression to a childhood model with the torturer as parental figure.

<sup>25</sup> It would be worth considering whether the suffering in sexual abuse can be understood as the *means* of the other's arousal and not directly as a goal in itself. Or does the distinction between torture and hostage taking break down in this case?

To summarize thus far: it is provisionally proposed that empathy with the hostage taker creates an unstable situation between one and two positions. As soon as the hostage starts to mimetically incorporate the presumed wishes and fears of the hostage taker into herself, her independent position vanishes and leads to a fusion with the hostage taker. Instead of a dialogical I-you-relationship, it becomes a “you with me” relationship. The dual, dialogical structure slips into mono-perspectivism.

There seems to be a double motivation for the hostage’s behavior: first, the hostage hopes, as a communicative partner of the hostage taker, for positive communication. The goal is to increase the number of “small kindnesses.” Second, the hostage wants to make herself quasi-invisible. The more the hostage becomes one with the hostage taker, the hope goes, the more she vanishes from the sight of the hostage taker, is ignored, and thus avoids his anger. Communication is thus reduced to total agreement. As Stockholm Syndrome demonstrates, leaving one’s own perspective runs the risk of getting stuck in someone else’s perspective. The return to one’s own perspective, the cleaving of mono-perspectivism into two positions, remains the distant goal on the horizon.

[The chapter will proceed to make claims about the “invisible third” in Stockholm Syndrome, namely the police, that the hostage taker fears. It will be suggested that the hostage can empathize with the hostage taker since she perceives this fear.]