

## Border Crosser between Science and Visual Arts

A self-interview by [Peter Tepe](#) | Section: [Interviews](#)

*Summary: In an interview with himself, Peter Tepe clarifies how he got interested in the intersections of philosophy/literary studies and the visual arts, and describes the ways his scientific and artistic activities interact. According to Tepe, artistic development consists of five phases generating what he calls the programme of informal construction.*

### Foreword by the publisher

The following article retraces my career in the crossover between science and visual arts in the form of a self-interview: I myself formulate several questions that could have been asked in an interview conducted by another person, and answer them. Doing so, I will introduce the reader to some of my artistic works created since 2013. For this purpose, I will select some representative examples from several series and explain their prevailing peculiarities.

### Becoming a border crosser

**A border crosser between science and art is what the online journal calls an individual working both scientifically and artistically in the field of fine arts.**

I belong to this group, too.

**Speaking about the personal career of such an individual, we discern three different types, which help us to decide whether he or she, for a certain period of time, gives preference to either the scientific or the artistic activity or if there is a general balance between them. A scientist/artist works mainly in the scientific field, whereas an artist/scientist gives preference to artistic aspects. The fifty-fifty type works as much in science as in the arts. Where would you situate yourself?**

Even if it took me a longer time of personal development to become one, I would define myself as a scientist/artist.

**Can you describe the stages of your personal and professional development a little bit closer?**

After my Abitur in Osnabrück, I started to study painting with Karl Otto Götz at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in the winter term 1968/69. After three or four semesters, I switched to the Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (which was not yet called like this at that time). Enrolled in philosophy and German philology, I did both my PhD and my habilitation in philosophy. Yet, I eventually ended up at the department for recent German philology, where I was employed from the late 1970s to the end of my academic service on December 31st 2013.

**Someone doing research in philosophy as well as in literary science can be called a border crosser, too. So, before working in the crossover between science and visual arts, you had already worked in the crossover between philosophy and literary science.**

This is true. I wanted to render this quite unusual constellation, which included a continuous teaching and examination activity in two academic disciplines, productive for research and teaching. Philosophical and literary interests were to be brought into fruitful interaction. This led to the

foundation of the interdisciplinary focus of study and research *Mythos / Ideologie* (*Myth / Ideology*) in 1987. Later, in the year 2000 the focus was enlarged to *Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden* (*Myth, Ideology and Methods*) because I wanted to take account of the growing importance of literary theory and methods of analysis.<sup>[1]</sup> I spent most of my 35 year professional career at Düsseldorf University working as both a literary scientist and a philosopher, at times additionally as a media scholar.

The study focus, which continues to exist for the PhD courses, is an institution based on the principle of multidisciplinary. In fact, the 30 interdisciplinary classes with lecturers from philosophy, history, history of the arts and educational sciences reveal a general crossover tendency.<sup>[2]</sup>

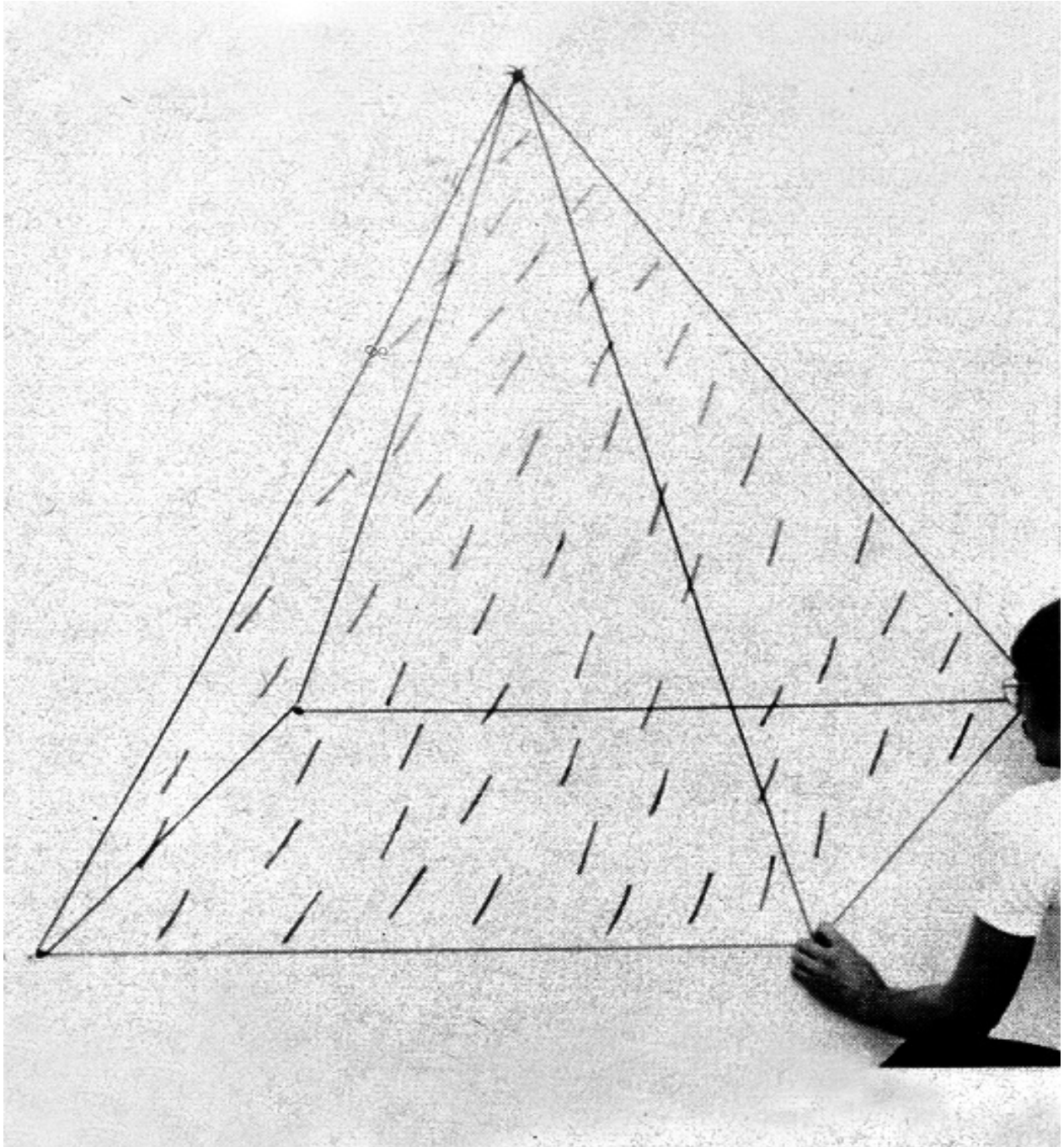
### **Phases of the artistic career**

**The striving to transcend the limits of the various disciplines can thus be considered an essential feature of your personality. What about the artistic part of your character? Which phases of your artistic work can one distinguish?**

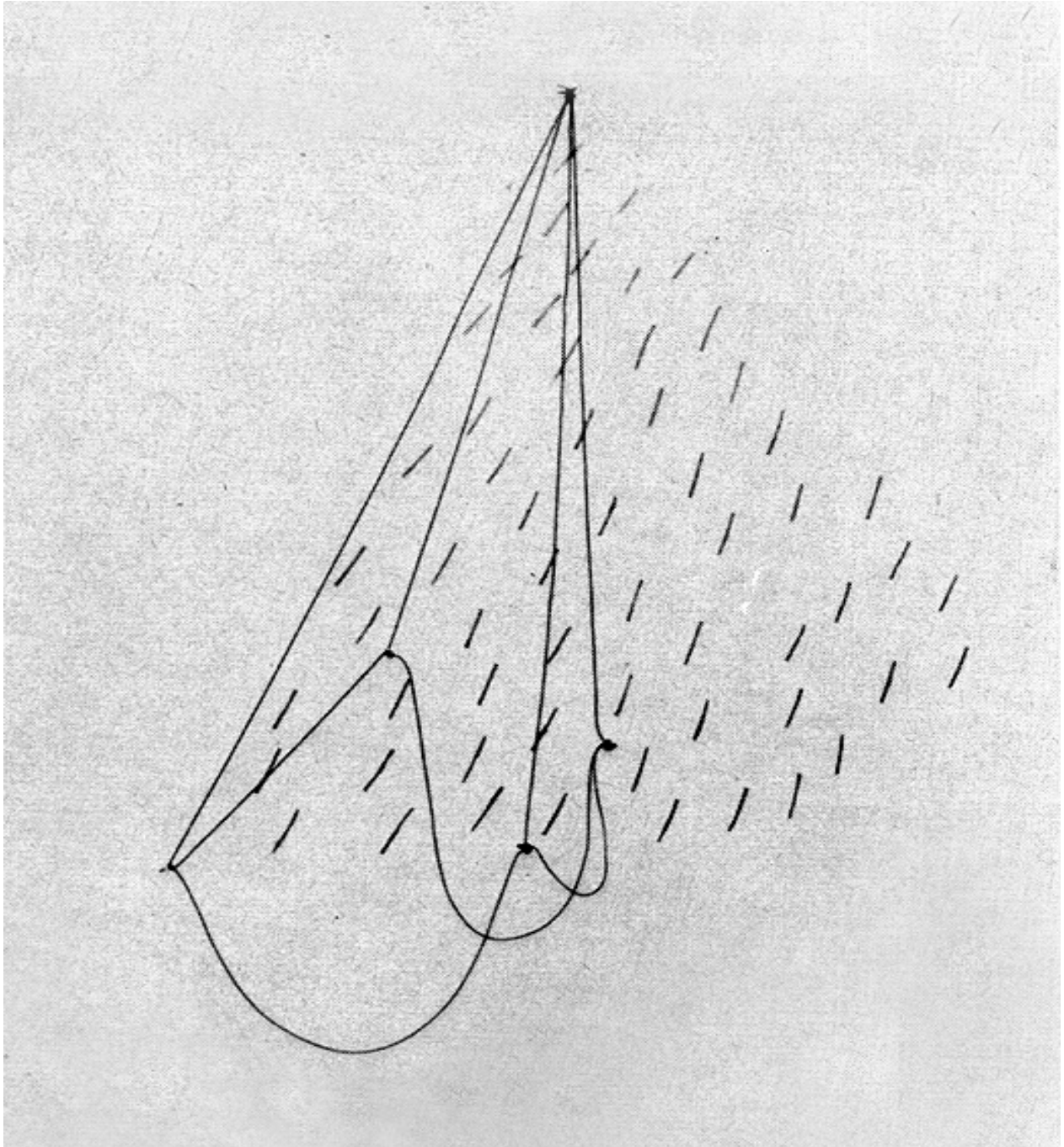
I can count five:

**Phase 1** (1965–1968): My activities at secondary school, which were decisively encouraged by my art teacher Veit Lindenmeyer.

**Phase 2** (1968–1970): My studies in Karl Otto Götz's class at the Düsseldorf Art Academy.



Peter Tepe: Vorher (1969). Photo: Tanja Semlow.



Peter Tepe: Nachher (1969). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

Holding the knots of the pending strings so that they enclose the underlying structure, one will obtain the illusion of a pyramid.

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Phase 3 (1970–1975): My artistic activities during my studies at university as well as during and after my PhD.

Phase 4 (1989–1995): My artistic activities during the development phase of the focus *Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden*.

Phase 5 (from 2013 onwards): The resumption of my artistic work during and after my last year of service.

**In which phases can we consider you as a scientist/artist?**

In phases 4 and 5: At that time, my work was predominantly scientific – including my activities as an editor of several academic periodicals<sup>[3]</sup> – but still I kept on working as an artist, even though on a smaller scale. From 1976 to 1988 and from 1996 to 2012, I was working only as a scientist (who continued to be interested in arts and thus was longing to give the own artistic activities some more space).

**Please describe the stages of development of your individual constellation in closer detail.**

During phase 1, I was not only working artistically, but also highly interested in issues of art theory and aesthetics, which I then used, directly or indirectly, for my work as a painter. In addition to this, I read and studied several philosophers on my own, Nietzsche above all. At my secondary school, philosophy had not been taught at all.

During phase 2, at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, I used to participate in the classes of philosopher Walter Warnach. So you can say that my artistic studies included scientific aspects, too (philosophy in general, philosophy of art and aesthetics in particular, history of art).

However, in 1969/70, my inner quest for knowledge took on a life on its own, so that I increasingly started dealing with issues that are somehow preliminary to philosophy of art and aesthetics and that could thus not be integrated into my artistic practice easily. I was particularly fascinated by the history of thought from Kant to Fichte, Schelling and Hegel as well as by present-day philosophy, such as for instance the controversies between the Frankfurt School and Critical Rationalism.

**Moving to university**

The reading of philosophical texts became more and more important and the dealing with philosophical issues gained preponderance over artistic practice. This led me to attend, as a guest auditor, lectures and seminars at the faculty of philosophy which was still being established at Düsseldorf University in those days. My fascination with philosophy grew so strong that I eventually switched to university.

**Was this change intended to be a definite goodbye to the fine arts?**

No, it was meant to be a longer transition period: I wanted to pursue my philosophical and later also the increasing literary interests in a more intensive way, at least for a certain period of time, in order to then go back to visual arts with some kind of a broadened horizon. I had neither planned nor wished this phase to become steady.

**Why did you choose German philology as a second subject?**

I made this decision because during my art studies, I had read many literary texts from different national literatures with great interest and benefit.

**Was your reorientation encouraged by certain people?**

I think that German philologist Herbert Anton, who had himself a strong philosophical orientation, eventually enabled me to pursue a decade-long university activity – a stroke of luck I will never forget. It has determined my life. He actually accepted to take a former art student with a PhD in philosophy under his wing and supported me in a way that later allowed me to become adjunct professor at the department for German philology.

**How would you describe and classify *phase 3* of your artistic career?**

During my first semesters at university, I concentrated on philosophy and German philology, but my artistic activity continued to simmer on a low flame.



Peter Tepe: *Gestörte Ordnungen 3* (1973).

Photo: Tanja Semlow.

Perhaps we should call this the elementary form of a scientist/artist (the artistic activity was somehow accompanying the scientific one). This did not change so much during the doctoral phase. Though, keep in mind that unlike normal graduate students, postgraduates actively contribute to scientific research.

Thus, I would suggest to call this the second stage of development of a scientist/artist (an artistic activity that accompanies a PhD project).

From 1976 to 1988, I was totally committed to teaching and research in German philology and philosophy so that there was hardly any time or energy to continue the artistic work. I created just some drawings and a few sketches for projects.

**Throughout your longstanding teaching activity at the German department and at the philosophical institute, have you ever offered seminars and classes that dealt with issues from aesthetics and philosophy of art?**

Yes, but other topics were predominant. Over time, my earlier interest in art theory and aesthetics turned into an interest in literary theory and methods of text analysis. As I was not – apart from some minor experiments<sup>[4]</sup> – in earlier times – pursuing any literary activity myself, there was no direct link between my new theoretical interests and my artistic work. My dealing with literature had scientific and cognitive objectives and I got familiarized with innovative theory-building.

**Phases 4 and 5**

**What about Phase 4?**

After my habilitation in philosophy and the foundation of the study and research focus, my artistic activity flared up again: first, I created many works, most of which can be categorized as object art. Secondly, in collaboration with visual artist and musician Chris Scholl, I undertook an experiment in installation art which we are going to speak about later. Thirdly, I integrated artistic elements into my scientific teachings and publications.<sup>[5]</sup> Thus, it is actually only in phase 4 that I started working as a border crosser between science and fine arts.

**How do you explain the flare-up of your artistic activity during that phase?**

If your center of life once used to be an artistic activity, you are very likely to develop – provided that the general conditions change in your favor, for example by establishing a stable professional life – the desire to reactivate your former passion. Resuming your artistic activity then helps you to restore a state of equilibrium between the different parts of your personality: What once used to be very important but had then been set aside, is now being revived under different circumstances. The reintegration of what had been split off was and still is of great importance for my life, and I guess that other border crossers and scientists know this experience. By the way, what I am doing here in order to give you an insight into my career is basically retracing correlations, I do not want to evaluate anything. Whether a scientist/artist has been scientifically or artistically innovative is another kettle of fish.

**And how do you define phase 5?**

This phase in a way finally resumes phase 4 after a seventeen year long dry spell. However, it is limited to paintings / pictorial objects and works on paper. Already in the preceding years I had stopped using artistic elements in my university classes. On the other hand, phase 5 is the moment when I started my publishing and organizational activity for w/k. Working on this project, it has always been important for me to guarantee scientists/artists like me a space in it.

## **Some more about the different phases of artistic development**

**I think we should have a closer look at the different phases of your artistic activity. Please describe what exactly you did in the different phases.**

In phase 1, my works are influenced by different artistic movements, such as for example Art Informel, Abstract Expressionism and Art Brut<sup>[6]</sup>; besides I dealt with the works of Willi Baumeister, Antoni Tapies and several other artists. I suppose that Karl Otto Götz accepted me in his class just because of these stylistic influences, which had shaped my portfolio.

In Götz's class, though, I did not continue on this line, but entered phase 2, which stood under the influence of contemporary movements such as Land Art and Minimalism – a new path that simply forbade everything picturesque. From the very first semesters I developed quite an autonomous artistic program. One of my aims was to play with the relation between spatial-perspectival and flat visual perception – especially with the moment in which the one turns into the other. Doing this, I stuck to a principle that can in a certain sense be called minimalist: "Choose as simple means as possible to do what you want to do and drop every kind of accessory and decoration."<sup>[7]</sup>

During phase 2, I created several series that are more or less linked with the mentioned artistic agenda. One example would be the pictorial objects with wire constructions, which are fixed on chipboard panels.<sup>[8]</sup> In phase 3 I referred back to these works with some works on canvas that deal with the construction and destruction of spatial illusion and order in general in a different way. Still sticking to minimalist principles, I worked with simple tinting paints and avoided all kind of accessories and decoration.<sup>[9]</sup>





Peter Tepe: *Länder Afrikas* (1975). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

#### **Did this change in phase 4?**

Yes, it did. In phase 4, I created a bigger number of pictures / pictorial objects. On the one hand, I continued to use elements that had already proven to be effective in phase 2 (simple chipboard panels as a basis, wire and clothesline as covering strings, ordinary screws for the fixation and so on). On the other hand, I added new components, which were biographically connected to my years of study. In those years, I had read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Fichte's *Theory of knowledge*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and many other texts of the so-called German Idealism as well as contemporary texts discussed at that time, such as texts of the Frankfurt School, Critical Rationalism and Analytical Philosophy or last but not least Ludwig Wittgenstein and his successors. After reading I excerpted them, first by hand and later on a typewriter. These as extensive as intensive readings were pushed forward by the need to find my own philosophical standpoint, which I would be able to defend in good conscience. As I have already said, I was particularly interested in the development of thought from Kant to Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, whose writings I then experienced again during my "metaphysical phase", copying, mentally analyzing and rewriting them.

**This means that you incorporated parts of your several-hundred-page-long collection of excerpts into your pictorial objects. Did this have any consequences?**

The works became much more complex compared to the ones from phase 2 and 3. I abolished the

minimalist limitations maintaining all the same the element of minimalist construction. In 1992, I described the style of these layer pictures as follows: “Every picture is composed of a great number of layers, usually about five to ten different ones. The uppermost layer is made by strings, wire and plastic cord. Many pictures contain a layer of text, which is composed of earlier manuscripts or typewritten excerpts. For the other layers, I might use cardboard, plastic foil and other materials of this kind. In some pictures, I work with the glass from simple interchangeable picture frames, which I then paint over with varnish. I make the different layers permeable by ripping and cutting them open. Generally, I prefer to work in smaller series of three or four pictures. In terms of content, the common reference of such a series is often a photo the enlarged black-and-white photocopy of which will appear in every work as a kind of key theme entailing variations.”<sup>[10]</sup>

**By using excerpts that you wrote as a student or during your doctoral phase, you established a connection with your scientific activity.**

That’s true, but these links do not refer to the content of Kant’s, Hegel’s or Fichte’s arguments and theses, I definitely do not refer my work to the theories these philosophers have developed – the excerpts rather represent playful components of an intuitive and improvisational artistic strategy.

**An important highlight of phase 4, undoubtedly, was the “action event” Setzen - Zusammen - Setzen. Dreieck Kunst - Philosophie - Musik (Triangle Art - Philosophy - Music), which you organized together with Chris Scholl at Werstener Kulturbunker in Düsseldorf and for which there is even a small catalogue. What exactly was your contribution to this event?**

Firstly, I showed some pictorial objects in the staircase, secondly, I put up an installation that Chris Scholl and I had developed together. It was composed of several triangular and pyramid shapes. Additionally I painted – live and on site – parts of a big plastic foil that belonged to the installation. Last but not least, I presented my new book *Postmoderne/Poststrukturalismus*<sup>[11]</sup> during the theoretical and philosophical part of the evening. The musical part contained a performance by the drumming group *Drums off Chaos*, which included well-known musicians such as Frank Köllges (founder of *Härte 10* and *Intermission*, who should pass away long before his time) and Jaki Liebezeit (who many might know as the percussionist of the famous band *Can*).

A passage from the presented book was projected onto the plastic foil and during the painting action, I modified and manipulated the text in a way that in the end nothing apart from some single letters and the two words “spürbar” (tangible, perceivable) and “sagen” (say) was left. Later, I would integrate this part of the foil into a pictorial object, which was then, in 2001, used for the cover of my book *Mythos & Literatur*, published in 2001.<sup>[12]</sup>



Peter Tepe: *spürbar sagen* (1993). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

### **Connections between the scientific and the artistic activity**

#### **Is there a link between the chosen words and your scientific work?**

There is a connection between these words and my scientific activity indeed, a connection that concerns this time the meaning of these words, whereas, as you probably remember, the link to my scientific activity established by the excerpts was merely formal. I had chosen the projected text passage while randomly leafing through the book that I should present during the event. The words “spürbar” and “sagen”, which were used in different lines of the text, immediately caught my eye and I found it a good combination of words to express one of my ambitions in scientific work: I always wanted the things I said in a class or wrote in scientific text to become “spürbar” (tangible, perceivable). I wanted them to touch the audience or the readers and encourage them to change certain aspects of their way of thinking and acting.

**Another highlight of phase 4 is your performative lecture *Mythisches, Allzumythisches* (Mythical, all too mythical), which you held in winter term 1993/94 and which has been published in book form. It was probably the first academic lecture in form of a stage-play.<sup>[13]</sup>**

I think that only a person with a strong artistic character trait will have the courage for a term long scientific and artistic experiment of this kind. Furthermore, it must be a phase when the artistic part of this person's soul is somehow "volcanically active".

**Why did you not continue your activities as a scientist/artist after 1995?**

At that time, the workload at university became bigger and bigger – partly because of what I had imposed to myself by creating the focus, that is teaching, examination, research and publication, and by committing myself to the reform of the German philology courses in Düsseldorf<sup>[14]</sup>, which turned out to be very time-consuming, partly because of the objective general conditions under which academic work took place at that time and especially after 2004, when the two-cycle system was set up. The artistic part of my personality was pushed into the background for more than 17 years. Similarly to what had happened after the end of phase 3, I just created a few drawings and sketches during the little spare time I had.

**Have you also tried to find suitable names for the artistic strategies you worked with during phases 1-4?**

Yes, and this is the preliminary result:

Phase 1 (1965–1968): Informal material pictures – "informal" in the specific sense I have already explained.

Phase 2 (1968–1970): Minimalist constructions (objects and pictorial objects with materials such as wire, string and clothesline). If I use color here, this does not happen in an 'artistic' but in a rough way.

Phase 3 (1970–1975): Constructions on canvas, painted in a minimalist style.

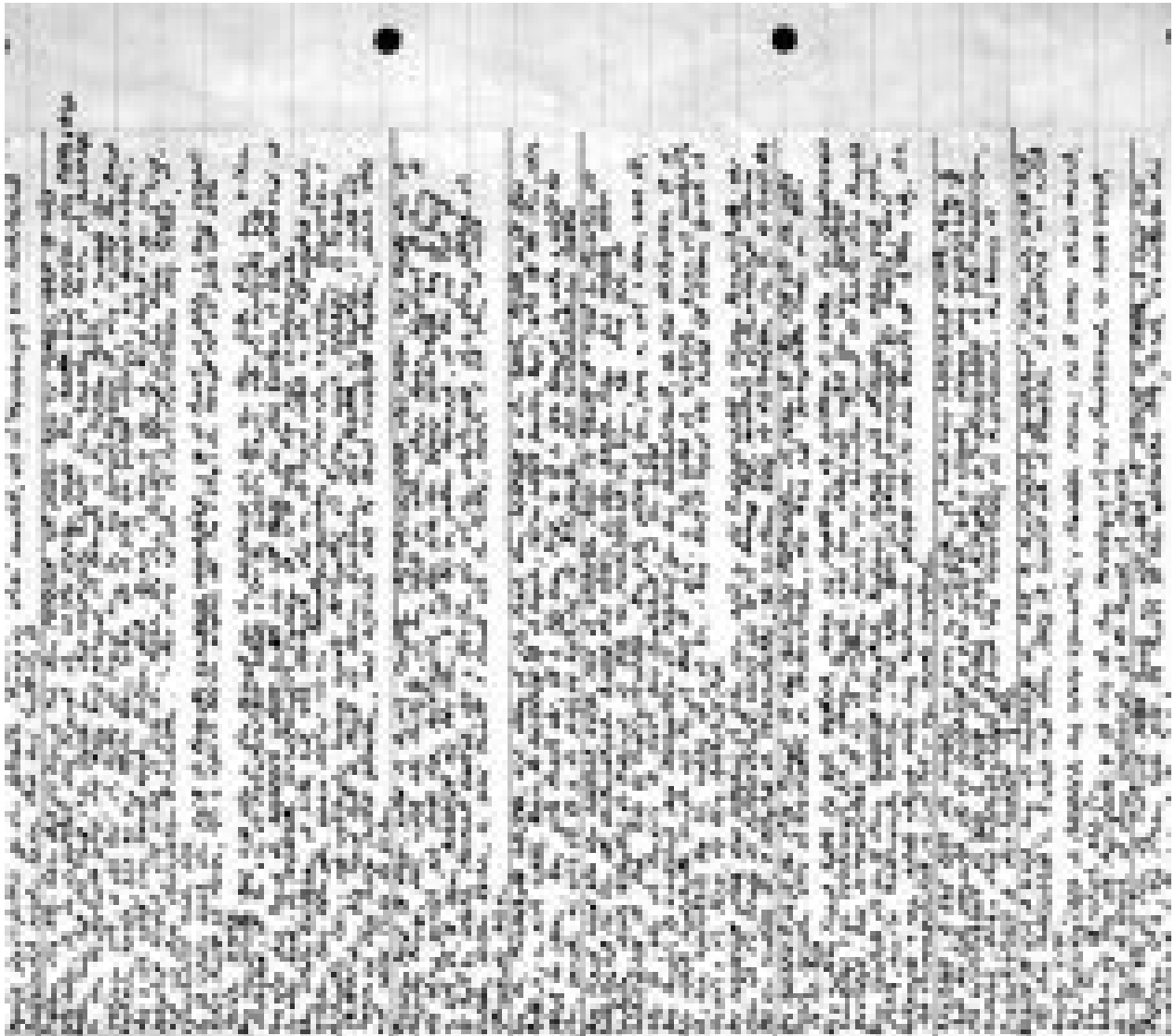
Phase 4 (1989–1995): Fusion of Informalism and Minimalist constructions (Informal Construction). During this period, I developed several ways to conceive a series.

**Phase 5**

**Let's now deal with the series that have been created since 2013, giving some representative examples.**

At the beginning of phase 5 in 2013, I first tied up with phase 4. I took up again the principle of the layer pictures which to my mind still worked quite well. Though, there were variations that slightly modified the accents and focuses of this strategy. Equally, I continued to work with hand- or typewritten excerpts that I had made as a student.

The following example was created in spring 2013, as the second piece of that year. It consists of two components: first, there is a DIN A0 photocopy of a handwritten excerpt that refers to Hegel's aesthetics. Glued onto chipboard, another photocopy of this sheet serves as a basis for the following artistic manipulation – component number 2.



The student's handwritten excerpt.



Peter Tepe: Großer Brief mit Streifen (2013). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

### The “Reading pictures”

#### **What about the series that are connected to your scientific activity at university?**

I usually divide them into two groups of works: Talking about series 1, I use the term “reading pictures” because it contains scientific texts that were part of my lectures. Series 2, which is entitled *Coping with the past*, refers to my experiences in the focus *Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden*.

### **How do you proceed in series 1?**

My lectures used to follow a specific scheme, whatever the topic was: To start with, I gave a speech about 20 to 30 minutes, which I then summed up in a two page outline of the most essential points. I gave my students some minutes to ask questions before moving on to a second speech part. I always brought a prepared and formulated conclusion with me that I used to project on the wall. Some pictorial objects use one of these summarizing texts as a basis. Similarly to phase 4, my artworks of that time do not deal with the content of my teaching and research – the summaries are rather some kind of raw material for my intuitive and improvisational way of working.

### **The first pictorial object from phase 4, which was created in spring 2013, is a good example for this strategy.**

Yes. Similar to the last example, this object is composed of two components. The first component is a summary text from my lecture on myth research. Glued onto chipboard, a photocopy of this sheet serves as a basis for the following artistic manipulation which forms the second component. Again, both copies are printed on DIN A0 format.



14. Vorlesung: Zweite Modellinterpretation zu Werner Herzog: *Wo die grünen Ameisen träumen*

Es handelt sich um einen mythoshaltigen Text vom Typ b, denn das Denken der Aborigines trägt Züge des mythischen Denkens.

In Herzogs Filmerzählung wird die Konfrontation einer mythischen Lebenswelt mit der modernen Zivilisation aus der Perspektive der modernen Zivilisation dargestellt. Das Mythische erscheint hier als das Andere, welches die eigene Denkart in Frage stellt.

Das Überzeugungssystem des Autors ist offenbar durch ein starkes Unbehagen an der eigenen Zivilisation gekennzeichnet, das sich in erster Linie auf die Wirtschaftsform und die damit verbundene Denkweise bezieht.

Die Ausbeutung und Zerstörung der Umwelt durch rücksichtslosen Rohstoffabbau wird auf eine kapitalistische Mentalität der rücksichtslosen Naturausbeutung um der Profitmaximierung willen zurückgeführt.

Hackett muss erkennen, dass die Ureinwohner *anders denken* und dass ihre Ablehnung der finanziell lukrativen Firmenangebote mit diesem anderen Denken zusammenhängt.

Für Gläubige ist es grundsätzlich nicht akzeptabel, dass an einem heiligen Ort z.B. ein Bergwerk errichtet wird. Menschen, die glauben, dass die aus ihren Träumen geweckten grünen Ameisen die Welt zerstören werden, müssen versuchen, ihr Aufwecken auf jeden Fall zu verhindern.

Es ist in Herzogs Augen zu kritisieren, dass die Landrechte der Weißen auf ihren eigenen Rechtsvorstellungen beruhen, die sie einfach auf Australien übertragen haben, ohne dabei zu berücksichtigen, dass es auf diesem Kontinent bereits eine viel ältere Rechtsvorstellung gibt, die damit nicht vereinbar ist.

Die Störung des Lebenszusammenhangs der Aborigines durch Eingriff von außen kann unter bestimmten Bedingungen zu *Kompromissbildungen* führen, die einigermaßen funktionieren. Beispiel: das Kinder-Träumen der Väter im „Supermarkt von Coober Pedy“.

Herzogs Überzeugungssystem ist gekennzeichnet durch das in den 80er-Jahren in Deutschland zunehmende Umweltbewusstsein, wozu nicht zuletzt die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema Atomkraft gehört.

Dazu passt die Einführung grüner Ameisen und die Texttatsache, dass Ayers Mining Uran abbaut.

Wenn wir ein grünes Überzeugungssystem als textprägend ansetzen, so lässt sich auch die positive Einstellung zu den Aborigines erklären. Denn ein wesentlicher Teil der meisten grünen Weltauffassungen ist ja die Forderung der Toleranz gegenüber fremden Kulturen und ihrem anderen Denken.

Innerhalb der Ökologiebewegung gibt es Strömungen, die das Denken und Verhalten bestimmter fremder Völker, z.B. der Indianer, als vorbildlich ansehen. Diese Tendenz findet sich auch in Herzogs Text.

Das textprägende Überzeugungssystem Herzogs besitzt eine gewisse Nähe zum Katastrophendenken Arnolds.

Anders als die Textfigur Arnold scheint Herzog selbst jedoch nur eine mögliche, aber keineswegs eine völlig unausweichliche Katastrophe anzunehmen. Herzogs Problem wäre demnach: Wie kann eine Zivilisation, die dazu tendiert, die Natur und am Ende auch sich selbst zu zerstören, zu einer Wende gebracht werden?

Aus dem Text lassen sich Möglichkeiten der Gegensteuerung ablesen, die vielleicht zur Verhinderung der Katastrophe beitragen könnten.

Dem durch die westliche Zivilisation erreichten Standard werden immer wieder die Würde und Ruhe der Stammesangehörigen gegenübergestellt. Die Aborigines kennen ihren Platz im Universum und werden nicht von den Fragen nach dem Woher und Wohin und dem Sinn des Lebens umhergetrieben.

Summary text from a lecture.



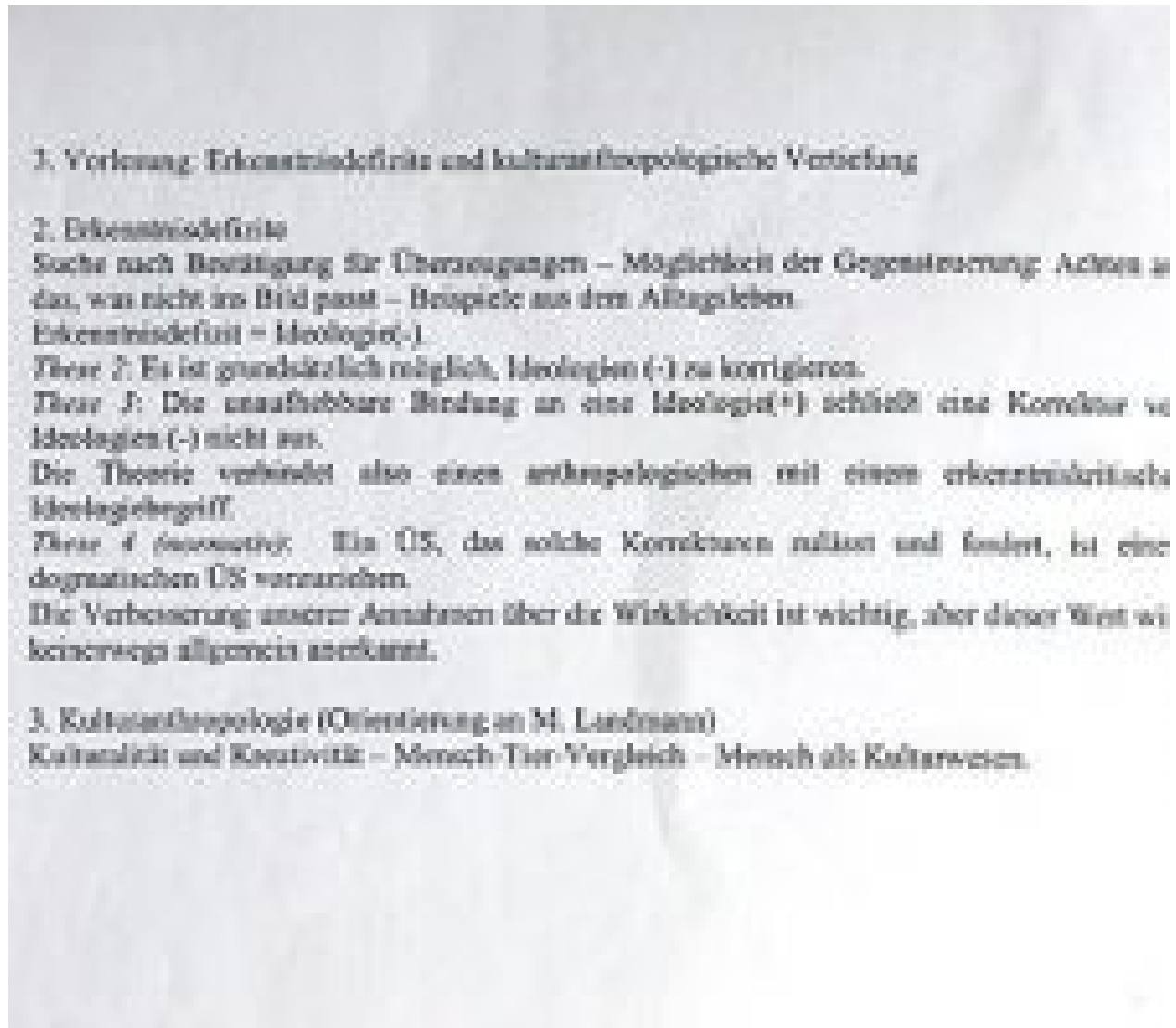


Peter Tepe: Grüne Ameisen (2013). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

Some words and constituents have been extracted from the text by painting over the rest of it, either completely or in parts. If the summary text eventually gets reduced to “The thinking of ... green ants ... exemplary”, this is a way for me to play upon the text poetically and with a certain ironic twist, thus stimulating the imagination of the viewer, whose gaze wanders from the initial text to the picture and back (just as it does, even though differently, in some objects from phase 2)<sup>[15]</sup>.

**Pictorial objects of this kind seem to establish a link to your scientific activity in a freer, purely artistic manner.**

Exactly. I will give two more examples from this series:



Summary text from a lecture.



Peter Tepe: Was nicht ins Bild passt (2013). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

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Nathanael erfüllt die Bedingungen, um den Künstlerfiguren Hoffmanns zugeordnet zu werden. „Ohne den Glauben [an das Wunderbare] existiert die phantastische Sphäre nicht, oder sie bleibt machtlos“. *Kritik:* Welt B, die „phantastische Sphäre“ *existiert*, und zwar unabhängig davon, ob diejenigen Textfiguren, die in Welt A leben, an sie glauben oder nicht. Der „Glaube“ an Welt B ist nur die Voraussetzung dafür, dass eine Textfigur mit Welt B *in Kontakt treten kann*. Zur Grundhaltung, die fordert, *in* der alltäglichen Welt offen für die ‘höhere’ Welt zu sein, gehört auch eine Auffassung von der ‘Bestimmung’ des Menschen. Diese besteht darin, sich *primär* an der höheren Welt zu orientieren und den sich aus ihr ergebenden Forderungen zu genügen. „Klara ist nicht so unromantisch, daß sie die Existenz von verhängnisvollen Kräften bestreitet“. *Kritik:* Klara bestreitet die Existenz von *über-natürlichen* „verhängnisvollen Kräften“. Nehring behauptet, Nathanael sei als ein solcher „romantischer Mensch“ angelegt, der

Aus dem Fazit einer Vorlesung [From the Conclusion of a Lecture] (nach 2000). Photo: Tanja Semlow.





Peter Tepe: ...die phantastische Sphäre ist nicht so unromantisch [...The Fantastic Sphere is not that Unromantic] (2014). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

**In what does your working strategy differ from the one of a scientist/artist pursuing a science-related artistic agenda - such as for example BioArt?**

Such an artist would try to represent certain contents of the chosen lecture visually or interpret them with the means of visual art. By contrast, I do not explicitly react to the given research findings nor to the respective theories and methods. My reading pictures are based on the poetical play with certain words and syntactical components from the summary text, which engenders new alienated constellations of sense.<sup>[16]</sup> However, the source text constitutes an essential part of the work, for in an exhibition it would be shown in an equal size just next to the actual pictorial object. This makes sure

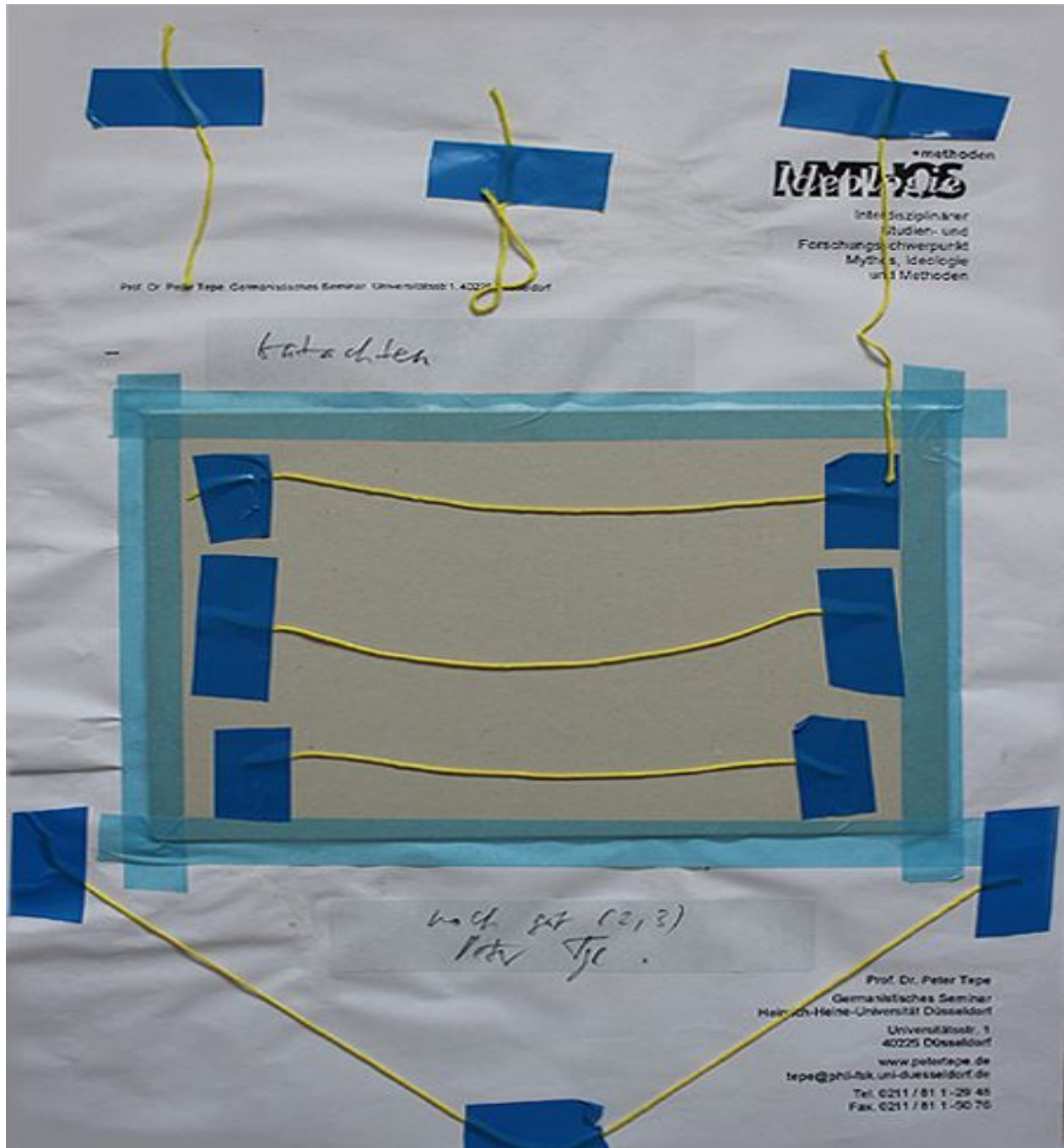
that the recipient can recognize certain contents of the chosen lecture and see, by comparing the original and its artistic adaptation, what has become of them. Sometimes I choose the remaining words and components before starting the creative processing, sometimes the selection is part of the latter.

### **Coping with the past**

#### **Ok for *series 1*. How did the series *Coping with the past* come into being?**

At the end of an academic service, you have to – among other things – move out of your office. During the cleaning I found a bigger amount of writing paper with the logo of the focus as well as templates for lecture announcements, which I had used above all in the 1990s.<sup>[17]</sup> Now I used these materials as patterns for my 2014 series *Coping with the past*, which helped me to reflect – again in an intuitive and improvising way – upon the 25 year history of the study focus *Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden*. Series 2 consists of 39 artworks on the whole, mostly manipulations of the letter paper in DIN A4 format, but there are also four bigger works. For this series I frequently used – as in some pictorial objects – materials that had been part of my daily life as a scientist, which obviously included a lot of paperwork: stickers, post-it notes, Tipp-Ex and so on.

I will give you these examples:



Peter Tepe: Gutachten (2014). Photo: Tanja Semlow.





Peter Tepe: Mit freundlichen Grüßen (2014). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

## Recycling Leftovers

**In order to round off our interview, could you please tell us something about a series which does not have any direct link to your scientific activity?**

In the years 2015 and 2016 I created the extensive series 3, which comprises several smaller series. It is called *Recycling Leftovers* and it has quite a funny background. During an open studio day in spring 2015, I met w/k editor and artist Meral Alma, who has, like me, an atelier at Werstener Kulturbunker. When I casually mentioned some works from the 1990s in which I had used fragments of the old floor covering from the storeroom of my parents' house, she remembered that after renovating her atelier, she had had some leftovers, too. She asked me whether I wanted to have them and I thought: "Let's



give it a try". During the following period, I created quite a few pictorial objects and works on paper in which I used parts of the different floor coverings.

I show you four works: three on chipboard, one on paper.



Peter Tepe: Pyramide auf Rädern (2015). Photo: Tanja Semlow.



Peter Tepe: Vulkanisch (2015). Photo: Tanja Semlow.





Peter Tepe: Schwarz-Weiß-Malerei 1 (2015). Photo: Tanja Semlow.



Peter Tepe: Schwarz-Weiß-Malerei 2 (2015). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

**Having already talked about how you name the specific working strategies of the different phases, I would like to know how you call what you do in phase 5.**

Speaking about phase 4, I told you about the connection between informalism and minimal construction, that is about informal construction. This has turned out to be some kind of general artistic program which I remain true to even in phase 5. Yet, I obviously try to invent new concepts of seriality. As a consequence, some of the series created during phase 5 are very different from what I did in phase 4.

**We will present some more younger series as well as current works in the second part of our interview.**

Exactly, this interview is to be continued in 2017.

Translation: Laura Strack.

Picture above article: Peter Tepe: *Großer Brief mit Streifen* (2013). Photo: Tanja Semlow.

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[1] The history of this institution is exhaustively described in P. Tepe: *25 Jahre Schwerpunkt Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden ... und kein Ende*. In: *Mythos-Magazin* (2013), see [http://www.mythos-magazin.de/geschichtedesschwerpunkts/pt\\_25Jahre.pdf](http://www.mythos-magazin.de/geschichtedesschwerpunkts/pt_25Jahre.pdf). Additional information is

provided by the documentary, such as my farewell lecture: *25 Jahre Schwerpunkt Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden ...und kein Ende – Dokumentation 1*. In: *Mythos-Magazin* (2014), see [www.mythos-magazin.de/geschichtedesschwerpunkts/pt\\_25Jahre-Dokumentation1.pdf](http://www.mythos-magazin.de/geschichtedesschwerpunkts/pt_25Jahre-Dokumentation1.pdf), S. 7–17.

[2] Cf. P. Tepe: *25 Jahre Schwerpunkt Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden ... und kein Ende*. In: *Mythos-Magazin* (2013).

[3] *Mythologica. Düsseldorfer Jahrbuch für interdisziplinäre Mythosforschung* (8 volumes 1993-2002 ed. Die blaue Eule, Essen). *Mythos. Fächerübergreifendes Forum für Mythosforschung* (4 volumes 2004-2016 ed. Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg). *Mythos-Magazin. Online-Journal für die Bereich Erklärende Hermeneutik, Ideologieforschung und Mythosforschung* (numerous issues since 2005, available online: [www.mythos-magazin.de](http://www.mythos-magazin.de)).

[4] Some of them have been published in the school newspaper *neue realität* of the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Gymnasium.

[5] Cf. P. Tepe: *25 Jahre Schwerpunkt Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden ... und kein Ende*. In: *Mythos-Magazin* (2013), chapter 15: “Erprobung neuer Veranstaltungsformen”.

[6] For reasons of simplification, I will use the term “informal” as a generic term for the quoted artistic currents.

[7] The second speech of my farewell lecture contains visual examples and further explanation. Cf. P. Tepe: *Die andere Seite*. In: P. Tepe: *25 Jahre Schwerpunkt Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden ... und kein Ende – Dokumentation 1*, S. 19–24 and P. Tepe: *Bildpräsentation zum Vortrag Die andere Seite*. In: *Mythos-Magazin* (2014), see [www.mythos-magazin.de/geschichtedesschwerpunkts/pt\\_bildpraesentation.pdf](http://www.mythos-magazin.de/geschichtedesschwerpunkts/pt_bildpraesentation.pdf).

[8] These artworks that used to be stored in the hallway in front of Mr. Götz’s class will have been removed by the janitor, but some photos still exist.

[9] The speech *Die andere Seite* contains visual examples for the artworks dealt with in this interview.

[10] P. Tepe: *Künstlerische Konzeption*. In: C. Scholl / P. Tepe: *Multimedialer Aktionsabend. Dreieck Kunst – Philosophie– Musik. Setzen – Zusammen – Setzen*. Düsseldorf 1992.

[11] P. Tepe: *Postmoderne/Poststrukturalismus*. Wien, 1992.

[12] P. Tepe: *Mythos & Literatur. Aufbau einer literaturwissenschaftlichen Mythosforschung*. Würzburg, 2001.

[13] P. Tepe / May H.: *Mythisches, Allzumythisches. Theater um alte und neue Mythen 1*. Ratingen, 1995. Cf. P. Tepe: *25 Jahre Schwerpunkt Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden ... und kein Ende*. In: *Mythos-Magazin* (2013), chapters 15.2: “Theatralische Vorlesung: Vorlesung in Theaterform” and 15.3: “Dialogische Vorlesung”.

[14] Cf.: Welbers, U. / Preuss, M. (Ed.): *Die reformierte Germanistik. Dokumentation zur Düsseldorfer Studienreform*. Düsseldorf, 2000.

[15] See the visual examples in P. Tepe: *Die andere Seite*. In: P. Tepe: *25 Jahre Schwerpunkt Mythos, Ideologie und Methoden ... und kein Ende – Dokumentation 1*, S. 19–24.

[16] The pictorial object *spürbar sagen* from *phase 4*, shown above, can be considered a forerunner.

[17] Among other things, the letter paper indicates who was working for me in those days as a research assistant. Professor Herbert Anton had allocated me not only this job position but also, for many years, several positions for undergraduate assistants.

## Tags

1. Border Crosser
2. interview

3. literary criticism
4. Peter Tepe
5. philosophy
6. science-related art