FOR A PRAXIS OF

Cavaliere Gianbattista della Porta (1535-1615), denounced as a magican and charlatan by some and revered as a universal genius by others, had connections with two academies during his lifetime. There was the famous Academy of the Eagle-eyed Ones, the "Accademia degli Oci," which della Porta helped to build up and which numbered Galileo Galilei among its members for a time. The other he accommodated at his house in Naples: the "Accademia de' Segreti." This academy had but one condition of membership: della Porta only gave houseroom to those who had discovered something new in the natural world and brought it with them to the academic community. The Accademia de' Segreti was banned by the Pope. It was far too devoted to the study of life. For example, they experimented on natural methods of contraception and on possibilities of pre-natal gender determination, conducted research on magnetism, on the distortion of images and on optical artefacts of all kinds.

The idea of the impossibility of such an academy becoming reality at the end of the twentieth century is one of the things that gives me the elan to shape day-to-day life at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, Germany. To make the impossible more possible: ever in contact and in confrontation with the machines and programmes of what is calculable, the task is to discover the boundaries at which subjectivity can still develop.

The visual and audiovisual apparatuses that we work with are all time machines. Their origins lie in the first founding era of the New Media in the nineteenth century - they are prostheses for dealing satisfactorily with the impossible. The following seven items should be understood as a minimal plea for poetry under the influence of Kairós as one possible strategy against an encroaching Psychopathia medialis.

1. Karl Marx wrote for posterity. Thanks to his mania for scrupulously citing his sources, the remark of an anonymous contemporary was recorded in Volume 26.3 of Marx' and Engels' collected works (German edition), who by succinctly summing up his own notion of economy, formulated what later became the touchstone of Marx's critique of established bourgeois economy: "A nation is only truly wealthy, if no interest is paid on capital; if the working day is six hours long instead of twelve. Wealth means to have time at one's disposal; nothing more, nothing less." At a historical juncture where time has now been declared the most important resource for the economy, technology, and art, we should not pay so much attention to how much or how little time we have. Rather, we should take heed of who or what has the power of disposal over our time and the time of others. The only efficacious remedy for melancholy as the all-pervasive attitude to the world is to assume, or re-assume, the power of disposal over our own life's time. Only then is the future conceivable at all - as a permanent thing of impos-sibility.

2. Chronos -chronology's time is that kind of time which dispenses of life by using it up. History, Chronology fits us into the order of things. Illness can be chronic, but never passion. Chronology cripples us because we are only mortal and we shall pass. Machines live longer. The computer scientist and engineer Danny Hillis, who has played a decisive role in constructing the massively parallel architecture of today's supercomputers, amongst other things, is currently working on the prototypes of a clock which will begin operation in the year 2001 and run for exactly 10,000 years. The ancient Greeks understood only too well the dilemma we would get ourselves into with Chronocracy (the term was coined by Peter Weibel) as the dominant time mode and they introduced two further concepts of time: Aeon and Kairós. They were the antipodes of powerful Kronos who, ultimately, devour his own children. We find the transcendental dimension of Aeon suspect - time that stretches far, far beyond our and the Earth's life-time, that is supposedly "pure." The fastest way from zero to infinity, as the theatre avant-gardist Alfred Jarry once defined God. On the other hand, we value Aeon as a possibility of uniting time and life as a virtual power from which the vitality of life springs. By contrast, Kairós stands for the art of doing the right thing at the right moment; he is the god of the auspicious moment. Yet only the interplay of all three conceptions of time can preserve us from alienation: to give the auspicious moment a charge from an Aeolian battery and/or challenge chronic time's power of disposal over life by applying both Aeon and Kairós tactics - to me, this appears to be a possibility whereby we may survive in dignity with and within the time machines.

3. In one of his early works, Françoise Lyotard wrote: "Our culture singles out for special favour that which it places in the limelight; the only scene which it considers to be an event: the moment of exchange, the immediate, the sensational, the 'real' time, which for our culture is the only time that is alive. This moment, in which accumulated 'dead' time is realised, one can call obscene." Recently, an American electronics firm presented a system which in the future, will allow information to be invoiced per bit; it will be a matter of complete indifference whether the information is text, images, or sounds. The bit, as the smallest techno-unit, will become the new abstract currency, the basic coinage for an economy of text, image, and sound production, which will also include those art forms that are expressed and realised with and through the media.

We should not tolerate either one of these kinds of expropriation of the so very valuable moment; neither that of the culture industry with its obscene concentration of life's time in the staged and celebrated sensation, nor the installation of a universal meas-
KAIROS POETRY

4.

In 1934, Max Horkheimer published his "Notes on Germany" under the pseudonym Heinrich Regius; he calls it "Twilight" in the title. In a small section with the heading "Time is Money" he remarks: "...if one shrinks from falling into the generalisations of common platitudes, then time is not money, but money is time, as well as health, happiness, love, intelligence, honour, peace. For it is a lie that if you have time, you also have money; with mere time you won't get any money but vice versa is certainly true."

5.

"We wander around in circles in the night and are consumed by fire" - this is how Guy Debord described his situation as a professional Situationist: the movement of roaming about, which was the title of the last film he made before his last will and testament. The first known timepieces, from ancient China, were rectangular metal reliefs structured like labyrinths. In the depressions, a slowly igniting powder was strewn and the burning of the powder showed the passage of time. Guy Debord offered his body and his imagination for measuring the time in which he lived. Yet what would be a viable alternative of action to the Situationist one, which consumes its own identity? Naturally, and theoretically: to be fire, instead of burning powder. However, to take up this position is not an option for us for we are (amongst other things) of the very stuff that time uses up (unless we want to play God). What we can do is to intervene in the rhythm and velocity of the burning, put in stops, and organise the intervals in between.

A superior time policy means to fight for the upper hand in time consumption and time use. It appears that one must be ready to face certain loss, both in the sense of self-consuming (Guy Debord) and of self-squandering (Georges Bataille). However, then loss is not a category of a fatal economy, if we succeed in making it an enrichment of others in a grand way. Otherwise, the act of consuming would be religious and the act of squandering, ideological. Both have had devastating effects in the recent past, for which Germany stands as an example.

6.

If it is so, that under the aegis of expanded interactivity at the interface of media people and media machines 'creativity' has become a fundamental social competency and, although the traditional model of the artist in art is now a discontinued line, it appears to be becoming a general, central model for social action, then it is appropriate to work on at least complementary identities. The competencies in life that will be required increasingly of intellectuals and artists in the future are already tangible but as yet not translatable into concrete strategies and tactics: chaos pilots and Kairos poets; people who are not only capable of dealing with confusing arrangements but are also able to organise them, and those who catch the auspicious moment (for example, in the cinema or on the Web) and charge it with energy. Without a relationship to complexity, and without a relationship to time - both are inextricably bound up with each other - I cannot imagine that advanced praxis in art and thought are possible.

7.

"In general we always seek (in a potlatch) or in actions or in contemplation that shadow - which per definitionem we are unable to grasp hold of - that we helplessly call poetry, profundity, or intensity of passion. That we will be decreed is inevitable, should we attempt to grasp this shadow." Under the New Economy, the task will also be to not relinquish the attempt to express the inexplicable. With regard to how we handle the visual and audiovisual time machines, these can constitute a powerful unity: work on the living heterogeneity of the arts of image and sound (but without master- and slave-media, without accepting a new universal machine) and the sensitivity for the right moment, the auspicious moment for life, imagination, and the media. Moreover, this should also constitute the lowest common denominator for any contemporary or future academy - at least for those among them which rise to the challenge of intervening with art and artistic means in the current processes that are transforming society.