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After the End of the World

On Music in Hans Jürgen Syberberg's *Café Zilm*

“Because I desire to reveal myself,
to stop being too easy a riddle for you to solve.”
(Gombrowicz 2012: 44)

Entering the square from the southern side, I immediately found what I was looking for: a scaffold construction made of metal planks partially covered by plastic sheeting. Since I approached it laterally, I could see something like a marquee inside, like those which can be found on city squares during Christmas time. The front of the marquee was not visible. At the plastic sheeting there was a printed photograph of an old building, possibly from the nineteenth century, which had the inscription “Café Zilm” on the facade. The front door in the photograph had been replaced with a real wooden front door in front of which stood a chalkboard with the following inscription:

“Today, on Friday October 13
from 4 PM on coffee and cake
- homemade! -
At 7 PM: Live!
For and with Marlies Hamann (94)
Songs for singing along.
The Café Zilm is heated.”

Inside the marquee there were some round tables with tableclothes made of white damask and small flower arrangements. The carpet, the chandelier and the elegant chairs gave an impression of a certain age. Next to the entrance there was a table with the different sorts of cakes, a coffee machine and the accessories. I introduced myself to the hosts and we sat at one of the tables. That evening the music which formed part of the programme was announced, and the programme itself was dedicated to Marlies Hamann, whose name I was until that moment unfamiliar with. Before her appearance a young female singer, accompanied by two female musicians playing violin and accordion, performed some songs. I recognized just *Der Mond ist aufgegangen* [The Moon has risen], a song which belongs to the repertory familiar to children in Germany, or it at least did in the past. Even in her nineties Marlies Hamann was a lady full of verve. In accordance with the programme, which included songs for singing along, she raised her hands and the visitors started to sing. A more informal social gathering followed. When she decided to leave, she received a standing ovation.

The inscription on the chalkboard was an invitation directed to anyone. And yet the visitors were mostly the citizens of Demmin, a town in the German federal state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, which was once part of the German Democratic Republic. It seemed that they came to the marquee at the main square in order to meet the old café again, even if they just heard of it from the older members of their families. The Café Zilm is in fact part of the personal histories of the citizens of Demmin. Named after the family who owned it, the Café Zilm was situated at the corner of the main square and was a favourite meeting place. It also shared the destiny of the town, which was terribly devastated on 1 May 1945, when the

retreating Wehrmacht forces had blown up the bridges over the rivers, thus blocking the Red Army's advance. Soviet forces looted and burned down the town, and committed rape and executions. Numerous inhabitants, especially women and refugees, then killed themselves, with many families doing so together. After the war the new socialist authorities built a block of residential buildings on the northern side of the main square, intended to be used by the new inhabitants. Yet, the place on the corner, the place of Café Zilm, remained empty, even after the end of the GDR. It remained covered with grass until today. The scaffold construction was erected on that place from 29 September until 15 October 2017.

After the end of the Second World War the events which took place in 1945 in Demmin were covered with a veil of silence. They were an undesirable subject because their public discussion could be dangerous for the relations between the GDR and the USSR, relations officially called a *friendship*. But the children's songs, were they unwanted as well? It is unlikely that the music sung that evening in the marquee had also once sounded in the Café Zilm. If there was any music in the old café, the children's songs were hardly a favourite repertory. Why did they find their place in the marquee at the main square? The evening was announced not just "with" but also "for" Marlies Hamann. The songs were sung in her honour, and she conducted them with an elegance that suggested she had always done so. And that was the case indeed: that evening Marlies Hamann took her former role of the music teacher in the primary school once again. The citizens of Demmin made her a tribute as their former teacher, a person who introduced them to the world of music.

But the scaffold construction and the marquee attracted not just the visitors from Demmin. Because of them also the author of these lines came to the town, if for another reason. While the citizens of Demmin considered the marquee to be the place, where one could give wings to one's own memories or at least one could learn something about the subjects long kept secret, for me it was a work of art named by its author, Hans Jürgen Syberberg, as an "installation" (Syberberg 2000–: <http://www.syberberg.de/CafeZilm/>). In order to prepare myself for the visit I had to familiarise myself with the artist's former work, reading his writings and watching his films. Thus, when I came to Demmin, I already knew that he was born in the nearby village Nossendorf, that he had attended school in Demmin, that in the school he had had to write essays on "our beloved leader" Stalin, that in 1953 he fled first to West Berlin and from there to Munich, that the allusions to his homeland appeared in his works since the late sixties, that he could visit Nossendorf again only after the fall of the inner German border, that in 2001 he finally succeeded in buying back his native house in Nossendorf, and that the renovated house stands since that time at the centre of his large-scale work *The Nossendorf Project*, of which the "installation" *Café Zilm* was just a part.

I came to Demmin with some kind of knowledge of Syberberg's artistic path. To have a knowledge of it meant to know the reasons why his work was the way it was. For example, I knew that in some of his former works the children's songs had already appeared. Some of the songs performed in the *Café Zilm* thus could be heard in his film titled *Die Nacht* [The Night], coauthored with the actress Edith Clever, the only person who appeared before the camera in that film. *Die Nacht* is a four-part film consisting of two quite long black-and-white parts, each preceded by a shorter one in colour. At one moment of the last, fourth part we see the actress in a close-up singing a song *Der Mond ist aufgegangen*. Her eyes are closed and her face lies on her right hand, while her uplifted left hand descends gradually. As the song progresses, her face releases itself from the supporting hand in order to move to the other side. With the gradual movement of the camera her whole body becomes visible. She bows down, makes a circle, and returns to the original posture, with her head now resting on her left hand. At the end of the song she opens her eyes. After that she takes the scattered items from the floor one after the other, the teddy bear, chain clock and the ring, in order to lay them down at the floor again singing a number of songs, as if she were in trance. Thus we hear, one after the other, *Guten*

Abend, gut' Nacht [Good evening, good night], *Nun ruhen alle Wälder* [Now all the woods are sleeping], *Weißt du wieviel Sternlein stehen* [Do you know how many stars there are], *Schlaf', Kindchen, schlaf* [Sleep my child, sleep], but also *Dona nobis pacem*, *Abendstille überall* [Evening silence everywhere], *Alles schweiget* [All is silent], *Nun danket alle Gott* [Now thank we all our God], *Wer hat die schönsten Schäfchen* [Who has the most beautiful little sheep], *Kindlein mein, schlaf jetzt ein* [Sleep now, my dear child] and finally *Schlafe, schlafe, holder süßer Knabe* [Sleep, sleep, fine, sweet boy]. As a kind of echo, the actress repeats just the beginnings of the songs *Dona nobis pacem* and *Alles schweiget* reciting alternately some verses we heard in the former scenes of the film. Finally, we hear some tones of *Dona nobis pacem* again until the face of the actress disappears behind the raised mat.

Yet, that scene was not the only one in Syberberg's film *Die Nacht* in which children's songs could be heard. With one such song the fourth, final part of the film begins. At that moment the actress is shown in a close-up, with her eyes closed and her head resting on her right hand. She sings a song *Schlafe, mein Prinzchen, schlaf ein* [Sleep, my little prince, fall asleep], but she pronounces clearly only some of the words, substituting the others with the syllables "la la" or "ta ra ra", or just mumbling the respective part of the melody. But the word "Dünensand", dune sand, was clearly recognisable. That lullaby, addressed to a "little prince", creates a nocturnal atmosphere, suitable for the evocation of memories. When the song ends the actress opens her eyes and begins to recite. We are told a story about a boy and his daily journey to school, a school in which the map of Pomerania, "a province in the North of Germany in form of a butterfly with the open wings" (Syberberg s.a.: 117), hangs on the wall. We are told that his "young teacher" came "from far away" and that she "taught him, who was unmusical, the canons of Bach and Mozart". (Ibid) We are told that he "went into the world" after their family house was lost because for him that was "the end of the world". (Ibid) Since that time the music and the words that he learned in the school became his "artificial homeland" and he "swore to himself to bring everything back to the altar of childhood". (Ibid)

From that moment it becomes clear that the film we are seeing is exactly such an endeavour and that the story about the boy, recounted in the third person singular, actually gathers the author's own memories. What follows in the film are his memories concerning the night time. We are told that after supper he would go to bed, while his parents would stay awake. Since the night was usually silent, he could hear the fragments of his parent's conversation, the mooing of cows or the noises made by mice. Finally, his memories of the particular night arise:

"In the night before the Russians came, in 1945, on the 1st of May, the forest was suddenly caught in flames, exploding on the horizon of childhood. The forest dark and silent, as in the fairy tales. It was the forest which he often went through, fast, during the night and in the early morning, in darkness, in the sled or carriage, to the distant railway station, towards the trains, which would take him in summer to the Ore Mountains, or to the relatives in Schwerin, or once to Hamburg, when the bombs were falling, or to Berlin. But he noticed that the forest was a storage place for ammunition or a military production plant, with the captive Russians, a place caught in the dark red flames, rumbling all night. As long as it was possible to see. The horizon on fire, the childhood, the trees and the animals and the whole land, and the nearby town of his early days, all of this burned and the thousands of corpses floated in the bloody red river, in the river, in which he always bathed. The familiar walls and doors and the windows exploded, the gardens and parks in flames, the familiar smell of the house disappeared, the haylage was flooded, the horse stalls were empty, the storks left the stall roofs, and the paths and the stones in the courtyard, the wooden carriage and the homemade harness,

nothing was like it was before. The village was not a village and the world was not a world anymore. In one night.” (Ibid: 119)

Coming to the *Café Zilm*, I had in mind that already *Die Nacht* was a kind of autobiography and that the children's songs, which could be heard in that film, but also the “canons” of Bach and Mozart, were the music of Syberberg's childhood. The music, which he brought with himself after the “end of the world” and which became since that time his “artificial homeland”. However, I didn't know who Marlies Hamann was, whom I saw that evening for the first time.¹ For more than two weeks the *Café Zilm* opened its door each afternoon, offering the visitors coffee and homemade cakes and a special programme each evening. Since I visited it for the last three days, the evening dedicated to Marlies Hamann was the first one I attended. The next day the visitors could see the premiere of Syberberg's film *Für Café Zilm* [For Café Zilm] and on the last evening another of his films, titled *Café Zilm 2017 Best of*, was screened. Both films shared the character of a revue. While in the second film some memorable moments of the previous days were collected, in *Für Café Zilm* some sequences taken from other films were put together, beginning with a fragment of Syberberg's own film *Karl May* from 1974. What followed was a sequence from Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* and a short silent film made in 1940 by Syberberg's father. The last two sequences were focused on music. The first of them contained the movements *Dies irae* and *Rex tremendae* from Syberberg's film *Requiem mit dem Finger gelesen* [Requiem read with the finger], originally made for his installation *Cave of Memory* which was presented in 1997 at the exhibition Documenta X. The second sequence was the recording of Bach's *Ciaccona* in d minor, performed at the concert titled *Praying for Palmyra*, given by the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra from St. Petersburg under Valery Gergiev in May 2016 in the Roman amphitheatre of the ancient city, a few months after the Palmyra offensive. But what could the film biography of Karl May, a German writer best known for his adventure novels, the scene from *Viridiana*, in which the group of paupers breaks into the house of the protagonist's uncle Jorge, the film which shows some scenes from the streets of Demmin before the Second World War, and the performances of Mozart's and Bach's pieces all have in common? The viewer familiar with Syberberg's previous work would immediately understand that the selected film sequences were not put together just by chance. He would recognise that every sequence relates somehow to the “end of the world”, to that horrible night evoked in the film *Die Nacht*. Thus the short film made by Syberberg's father could be a testimony that the world before the end existed at all, preceded by the words spoken by the figure of Karl May in the selected scene as a “vision of the catastrophe” (Syberberg 2000–: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/15_Oktober.html). The music of Mozart and Bach, to which Syberberg was initiated by his school teacher Marlies Hamann, was the artist's “artificial homeland”, another remnant of the world before its end. The scene from Palmyra, in which the Russian musician performed Bach (as in the film *Die Nacht* before),² referred to the connection between “Bach”, “war” and the “Russians”. Finally, music also plays a decisive role in the sequence from *Viridiana*, giving it the character of a carnivalesque reversal. Handel's *Hallelujah*, a soundtrack of this twisted Last Supper, appeared here as diegetic music, since at the beginning of the scene we see one of the paupers taking the record from its cover and putting it to the gramophone.

But the references to the “end of the world” were not restricted to the film Syberberg showed on the penultimate evening. It was evoked at the very beginning of the *Café Zilm* programme through the screening of Martin Farkas' film *Über Leben in Demmin* [Living in Demmin] from 2017. The memories of today's citizens of Demmin on that fateful night in 1945, recorded in

¹ Unfortunately, also for the last time, since Marlies Hamann passed away during the writing of this study.

² In the black-and-white parts of *Die Nacht* the complete recording of Sviatoslav Richter's performance of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* can be heard.

Farkas' film, found their echo a few days after in the memoir of the writer Karl Schlösser on his own childhood in Demmin, read by the author himself (cf. [ibid: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/4_Oktober.html](http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/4_Oktober.html)). The town Demmin and the surrounding area was thus in the past and today the subject of another semantic line. Thus in the opening credits of Fritz Lang's film *Frau im Mond* [Woman in the Moon], screened on one of the evenings, Hermann Oberth as a "scientific advisor" ([Ibid: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/2_Oktober.html](http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/2_Oktober.html)) was mentioned, once an enthusiastic reader of Jules Verne's novel *De la terre à la lune* [From the Earth to the Moon], a physician who participated during the Second World War in the German space programme in Peenemünde Army Research Centre, not far away from Demmin, and whose pupil Wernher von Braun after the war played a decisive role in the Moon landing of the US spacecraft Apollo. The Trebel, along with the Peene a river which flows through Demmin, was the subject of Martin Succow's film *Floßfahrt auf der Trebel* [Rafting at the Trebel] from 2016. The reminiscences of the "Russians" were presented through the interpretations by the Russian artists of the classical "German" works to which Syberberg was initiated in the school, like Goethe's *Faust*, which could be seen in the film version made by Alexander Sokurov, and Bach's *Ciaccona* from the concert held in Palmyra. A part of this semantic line was also the screening of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*, a portrayal of the artist experiencing the "inferno" which occurred when the "Tatars invaded the town [...], burned it down and violated women" ([Ibid: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/3_Oktober.html](http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/3_Oktober.html)). Not by chance were two other films screened in the *Café Zilm*, Willy Birgel's *Reitet für Deutschland* [Riding for Germany], made in the time of war, and the film *The Salt of the Earth* by Wim Wenders and Juliano Ribeiro Salgado, a portrait of the photographer Sebastião Salgado, whose work documents decades of conflicts, wars and suffering and who "at the end of his life as a famous old man [...] returned to his father's house, in order to plant millions of trees in the jungle" ([Ibid: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/6_Oktober.html](http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/6_Oktober.html)) - a fate which resembles the lifepath of Syberberg himself.

But the *Café Zilm* was not a place where the visitors could come just to attend the prepared programme. It also provoked discussions, to which the pupils of the Demmin school were invited, while the screening of the concert from Palmyra was attended by some refugees from war-devastated Syria and who had found asylum in Demmin (cf. [ibid: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/12_Oktober.html](http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/12_Oktober.html)). What were the subjects of the discussions? What was addressed, according to the artist himself, were "many whys" ([Ibid: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/1_Oktober.html](http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2017/1_Oktober.html)). Why were there so many dead that night? Why did they have to die? Why did the victims include mothers and children? Why was the town burned down? Was the violence that night just the answer to another violence, the National Socialist one, which preceded the bloody events? Did one violence justify the other? Why was there a total silence about those events for such a long time? How would reconciliation be possible? In the *Café Zilm* the memories of the citizens of Demmin could be expressed, the memories which during the times of the GDR could be transmitted just as a whisper in the family circle and after the end of the socialist state were used by the far-right political parties for their own purposes. Addressed by the programme, the visitors of the *Café Zilm* came together in conversation. They participated in the *Café Zilm* in search of the answers to many whys. The process was somehow curative, since the verbal expression of the once repressed content gave that content a form, a limitation. It became something that could be faced as an object and thus did not present a danger any more. In that sense, to participate in the *Café Zilm* meant to acquire some kind of knowledge of the fateful events. Even if the participation was just a search for such a knowledge, it implied that some kind of knowledge should be its goal.

But I also came to Demmin with some kind of knowledge. Since I was familiar with many of Syberberg's previous works, I could recognise in the *Café Zilm* some of their elements, like the tendency to leave the author of the work unmentioned, to leave some of its dimensions to chance, or to move from the format of the film to the format of site-specific art. Furthermore, I could recognise the references to the motive mentioned in his film *Die Nacht* as the “end of the world”. I understood finally why the pieces of Bach and Mozart, or the children’s songs, found their place in the *Café Zilm* again, after their appearance in many of Syberberg’s works beginning with his film *San Domingo* from 1970, in which we hear the protagonist Michi singing the verses “Maybug, fly! / Your father is at war, / Your mother is in Pomerania, / Pomerania is burned down“. Since the fragments of Mozart's *Requiem* returned in some of Syberberg's works after his move from the format of the film, it was no surprise to hear again a portion of this piece in the *Café Zilm*. After all, the programme of the *Café Zilm* was structured as a kind of fugue, with the distinct semantic lines built up of the memories of the fateful night in 1945 (Farkas, Schlösser), of the references to the town Demmin and its region as it existed in the past and today (Lang, Succow), of the reminiscences of the “Russians” (Tarkovsky, Sokurov, concert in Palmyra) etc. The programme of the *Café Zilm* even ended with a kind of *stretto*, in which the fragments of the previous evenings followed each other, beginning with the song performed on the first evening by the young singer Jennifer Hartwig, which was followed by the fragment of the reading of Karl Schlösser's memoir and the scene of Marlies Hamann's conducting the performance of the children's song. Also the last sequence of that *stretto* was dedicated to the music teacher. We saw her in front of the café saying goodbye. The camera followed her as she walked slowly away until her figure disappeared.

In contrast to the other visitors who came to the *Café Zilm* with the idea of acquiring some kind of knowledge, for me the visit to the *Café Zilm* was a chance to have my knowledge confirmed. For the others it seemed to be of less importance *how* they acquired their knowledge than the question of *what* they learned of, whereas for me it was more important to find out which traces the experiences of that fateful night left on Syberberg's works than to know every detail of the historical events themselves. But it was not so important that they wanted to find out something about the events from the past, while my interest was related to Syberberg's works themselves. More important was the fact that we both expected of the *Café Zilm* some sort of knowledge, something defined and final. But was such a reduction of art to the source of knowledge not actually the central problem of Syberberg's work in general? When Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, trying to define the essential trait of Syberberg's work, mentioned the artist's preoccupation with the “possibility of art as such” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1997: 484), his argument should be understood as having two different meanings. Syberberg preoccupied himself with the possibility of art as such because he experienced that art could have fatal consequences. The continuous confrontation with the subject of National Socialism in his works of art as well as in his writings followed that insight. While in his works of art issues of this sort were noticeable from the beginning, but rather indirectly, for example in his interest in the artists whose lives and careers were damaged by National Socialism, like the Austrian Jewish actor Fritz Kortner, the protagonist of two of Syberberg's very first films, the subject of National Socialism appeared in his writings gradually, and perhaps most intensively in his contribution to the catalogue of the exhibition of the “realist tendencies” between the World Wars (cf. Syberberg 1980). In contrast to the other texts in the catalogue, which consisted of erudite essays on artistic phenomena in different countries over the period considered, Syberberg's contribution was astonishing because for him art was not reducible to some kind of object, and whereas the task of the scholar would be just to describe or to classify such objects according to their subject, form, style or to the context of their production, Syberberg considered art to be a shaping of everything that exists. That definition of art found its expression in National Socialism. “The distinctive art of the Third Reich was not to be found in the traditional disciplines like literature,

sculpture, painting, architecture [...]. The will to artistic expression identified itself with the interest of the State and with the will to power as well as to its representation. The State itself was understood as a total work of art including the propaganda, extermination machinery and the war.” (Ibid: 378)

But to shape everything that exists as art was not possible before art was considered to be its essence. If art is namely considered to be the essence of everything that exists, then everything that exists is considered to aspire to the state of art. To treat everything that exists as art means to confirm it in its essence, to harmonize it with its innermost nature. Yet, it doesn't mean that everything that exists equals art. When the essence of everything that exists is defined as art, this definition has a certain consequence: it namely divides everything that exists into one sphere, which is considered to be in accordance with its essence, and into another one, in which this is supposedly not the case. The striving of everything that exists to the state of art, that is to say to its innermost nature, means at the same time to dismiss everything that is considered not to be in accordance with it. Hence the monstrosity of National Socialism, if under National Socialism one understands an attempt to realize the State itself as a total work of art. The violence towards the sphere considered not to be in accordance with the essence of everything that exists was prepared in the very definition of art as the essence of everything that exists. Even if National Socialism was something limited, a historical phenomenon, the possibility to take art as the essence of everything that exists remains. This is the reason, according to Syberberg's argument, why one has to remain vigilant and to mistrust the definition of art as the essence of everything that exists. Moreover, one has to mistrust the definition of art itself, because the definition of art as an essence of everything that exists implies that art is essentially defined through something “higher” than art itself. In striving to be in accordance with its innermost nature, art has to dismiss everything that is considered not to be in accordance with it. But since the essence of art is considered to be something “higher” than art itself, this striving has some kind of finality. In order to fulfil its own essence, art has to retreat and to let that “higher” instance show itself, that “higher” instance which can be covered by the sight and about which some kind of knowledge can be obtained. Thus art, defined as something “higher” than art itself, finds its fulfilment in the obtaining of some kind of knowledge.

At the same time, that definition of art brings the very existence of art into danger since it presupposes that art finds its fulfilment in something beyond art. Taught by the example of National Socialism, in which art was expected to be something “higher” than art itself, for example an instruction for some kind of action or an indication of belonging (an indication that divided art into “genuine” and “degenerate”), Syberberg considered art to be deeply problematic, something that cannot be continued as before. And not just by the example of National Socialism. The lexicon of the invectives used by the West German film critics at the time referring to his works (cf. Syberberg 1976: 143 et seqq.) showed that essentially the same definition of art could be continued in other terms, but always with fatal consequences for art itself. It was as if the West German film critics at the time, for whom only “politicised” art had the right to exist, reminded the refugee from the East of his own childhood in the GDR and the obligatory school essays on “our great and beloved Leader”.

But art, defined as something “higher” given through something “lower”, is never just a connection between the two. The “higher” and the “lower” appear as such thanks to the circumstance *that* they appear at all. Just because it is not sure whether there will be art at all can art appear. It is preceded by that undecidability that remains unthought in the definition of art as something “higher” given through something “lower”, but was always already implied. That undecidability cannot be noticed as such, because it is not something noticeable at all, neither a presence nor an absence or emptiness, which also could be taken into account, just like any other being. But if there is always already at work something more than just striving towards something “higher” than art itself, art can never reach its own definition, it can never

be at one with itself. Even when art occurs as an instruction for some kind of action, an indication of belonging, or simply as a propaganda, it remains marked by something that makes it impossible to be just that.

In searching for the “possibility of art as such”, Syberberg's work is thus paradoxical. On the one hand, the concept of art is for Syberberg essentially problematic, since it can always open the possibility of a catastrophe anew. Therefore it is important to keep art at a distance, to put art into question, to prevent anyone becoming enchanted by its siren song. On the other hand, since art can never be at one with itself, it can also open the possibility of avoiding the very catastrophe it would provoke. From his beginnings Syberberg moved between this double meaning of the “possibility of art as such”. The double meaning, which makes it impossible to know what art actually is. It is as if art were something indeterminate, in-between, neither the striving towards something “higher” than art itself, nor it's the actual impossibility of art obtaining its goal. The paradoxical nature of Syberberg's art was the result of his obligation to both meanings implied in the “possibility of art as such” at the same time, even in the cases in which it seemed that one side outweighed the other, for example in his film *Die Nacht*, in which the frontal projections and the dolls, the very means used in his previous works in order to prevent art from turning into knowledge or instruction for some kind of action, were explicitly removed. Like his previous films, *Die Nacht* dealt with the catastrophe, with the “end of the world”, but it renounced the procedures and the means which would suspend the striving towards the final meaning. After using them for some time, in the film *Die Nacht* Syberberg rejected them in order to prevent them from becoming something instantly recognisable, predictable and calculable, about which some kind of knowledge would be possible. He could decide to move since he considered art to be always already immune to its own transformation into something else and hence there was no need for the particular procedures. But in the film *Die Nacht* the recital on the “end of the world” proceeded together with the recording of the Bach's preludes and fugues. Instead of fragmenting the cycle and adapting its parts to the spoken text, Syberberg seemed to put his work completely into the hands of music, as if this would prevent his art from being turned into something else.

Yet, the film format was still something preconditioned, about which some kind of knowledge could be won. Having this in mind, Syberberg tried to neutralise this danger by moving his art from the setting of the movie theatre. Although his Documenta work *Cave of Memory* consisted of a certain number of film projections arranged in space, it took place outside of the movie theatre, leaving the visitors to find their own ways through the arrangement. The striving towards something final seemed to be suspended through the opening of the work to the dimension of space, not to mention the multitude of film projections at the same time. But the gallery setting in which *Cave of Memory* was exhibited still implied something predictable, since the very entry into the gallery suggested that the matters which occurred there were art. The danger of reducing art to some kind of knowledge appeared again.

What would remain of art if it also relinquished the idea of its determination through the context in which it occurs? In order to prevent his own art from being reduced to something else, Syberberg also left the art institutions like galleries and theatres and took a path into the unknown. On the one hand, he moved his art to some locations in physical space, but such locations that would not suggest that the matters occurring there were necessarily art. On the other hand, he let his art enter the vast land of the internet, welcomed it enthusiastically as a place beyond control (cf. Syberberg 1995: 22), including the control of whether the matters occurring there were considered art or not. Thus the *Café Zilm* took place at the town square. Another part of *The Nossendorf Project* happened or is happening permanently since the early 2000s at locations in Nossendorf or Demmin, sometimes with video links to other locations, for example to the Pompidou Centre in Paris (cf. Syberberg 2003). Once again Syberberg followed his obligation to both meanings implied in the “possibility of art as such” at the same

time. But he took another direction this time and let his art come to meet its other, following the insight that the only way to prevent his art from being turned into something else would be to become as similar as possible to it, to let nothing stand out as its particular trait, since every particularity would make his art recognisable and would open the possibility of reducing it to some kind of knowledge. In doing so, Syberberg's art seemed to achieve a point at which it could not be distinguished from non-art any more. It tried to eliminate the danger of becoming something else, calling into question its own existence. The strange thing about the *Café Zilm* was exactly that we could not know what it actually was. It could be an improvised café in which homemade cakes could be tasted. Or it could be a place in which the long suppressed subject could be publicly discussed. Or a place in which the songs from one's own childhood could be sung. For some visitors, including the author of these lines, the *Café Zilm* was the place at which some kind of knowledge could be obtained. Happening at the town square, at a place which didn't suggest that the matters which occurred there were necessarily art, the *Café Zilm* seemed to propose the impossibility of knowing whether the actual happening was art or not as its very subject. This impossibility could not be eliminated through the knowledge obtained in the marquee, even less through the reading of learned studies on Syberberg's art, or the abundant writings of Syberberg himself, since his own writings also move between two poles, the view of his own art as something "higher" than art itself (mostly as some sort of a collective psychotherapy), on the one hand, and confidence in the forces of art to resist any attempt to reduce it to something else, on the other.

When art, trying to prevent its own turning into something else, becomes unrecognisable as art, when one doesn't know whether one attends an art work or not, everything can appear as art, even the renovation of one's own childhood home. Since Syberberg's childhood home was nationalised immediately after the war and remained inaccessible for the former refugee from the East, he could for years only dream about it, trying to make it present for a few moments if only as a vision, as for example in his film *Die Nacht*. At the end of the GDR's existence the house was devastated, since it had been used for years as a warehouse and the courtyard around it was covered with concrete. Art could thus also appear in Syberberg's care of the places of his childhood, Nossendorf and Demmin, as well as his preoccupation with the collection of everything that could bear witness to his own life and the life of his associates before the "end of the world". In that period, in which every one of his actions were (and are) just parts of *The Nossendorf Project*, his art became increasingly personal. It was as if his art were nothing more than the collection of the traces of the past and the recording of his everyday activities, whether they were meetings, short trips, readings, music heard on the radio or news found on the internet.

But that obsessive collecting of fragments of his own life and the recording of everyday life, that continuous revealing of himself, was at the same time what Witold Gombrowicz, also an author of a comprehensive diary, talked about when he said that he wanted to write about himself in order to stop being too easy a riddle for somebody to solve. Just because of the idea of art as something that can never be at one with itself, just because of the undecidability which precluded the appearance of something *as* art, could for him the writing about himself be both revelatory and its opposite at the same time. Similarly, where Syberberg, especially in his recent actions, seems to be the most personal, where his actions look like the bare recording of everyday banalities or the nostalgic attempts to bring back lost happiness, his works are at the same time the most enigmatic. Even if he was from the beginning driven by the memories of the world before its "end", he betrayed them converting them into something, about which one could not have final knowledge. It was as if there was at work an "oblivion which appears under the mask of anamnesis" (Marquard 2003: 105). And not just his own memories. Allowing the memories of others of the fateful night in 1945 to be expressed publicly, Syberberg's *Café Zilm* not only exposed them to the risk of being reduced to an instruction for some kind of action,

especially a political one, but at the same time also prevented them from being reduced in that way.

From the beginning Syberberg also searched in music for an instance which could protect film, or art in general, from its reduction to something else, even though he was aware that music itself could be reduced to something else pretty well, an idea which manifested itself in his long-time confrontation with Richard Wagner (cf. Olsen 2005). Even in *The Nossendorf Project* Syberberg tried to bring his own art under the protection of music. Thus in the *Café Zilm* the music of Syberberg's childhood – Bach, Mozart, and children's songs – found its place once again, but also the work itself followed the structure that could be considered musical, that is to say the structure of the fugue, since the programme of the “installation” was composed of many interconnected semantic lines for a determined period of time. Another of Syberberg's actions from the same period consisted of the acquisition of the organ for the church in Nossendorf, which had to be renovated beforehand (cf. Syberberg 2000–: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2019/Orgel190818.html). In an unnamed action which took place on 5 May 2018 in St Bartholomew's church in Demmin (cf. *ibid*: http://www.syberberg.de/Syberberg4_2018/6_Mai.html), the recording of which was titled *Demminer Requiem* [The Demmin Requiem], Syberberg's art appeared as a memorial service held on the anniversary of the fateful events in 1945. Or as a concert, since the service included two Mozart's pieces, *Ave verum corpus* and the *Requiem* performed by the church choir from Demmin and the Prussian Chamber Orchestra. It seemed that Syberberg finally reached the point at which the difference between his own art and Mozart's *Requiem*, to which he referred so many times before, disappeared.

But did Syberberg in these recent works really succeed in trying to eliminate every predictability from his art? Did he really neutralise the danger of reducing his art to some kind of knowledge? In his search for that, his art left the art institutions and became indistinguishable from non-art. Whether it would appear as art or not depended on a fundamental undecidability. But in that case it seemed to be taken for granted that the danger of reducing art to some sort of knowledge could be neutralised through the making of a particular artwork which would be resistant to such temptations. In order to place the undecidability of the appearance of art as the very subject of the artwork, the undecidability had to be turned into *something*, namely into an absence or a possibility. Even the event like the *Café Zilm*, which one doesn't know whether it was a work of art or not, had to be *something*. And that means that some kind of knowledge of it remained possible, be it the most elusive kind. But the turn of the undecidability into something allowed the rupture between the two to show itself at the same time, preserving thus, if only inadvertently, the idea of art as such.

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