

From Information to Experience

Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Quiz 3000*

TARA FORREST

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

The curiosity which transforms the world into objects is not objective: it is not concerned with what is known but with the fact of knowing it, with having, with knowledge as a possession. This is precisely how the objects of information are organized today ... As facts they are arranged in such a way that they can be grasped as quickly and easily as possible. Wrenched from all context, detached from thought, they are made instantly accessible to an infantile grasp.

Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Culture'¹

It is about the desire to feel something in a world that kills *Erlebnis*.

Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Chance 2000: Wähle Dich selbst*²

German artist Christoph Schlingensiefel played an important role in mobilising public debate about contemporary politics in the German-speaking countries. Diverse in both form and content, his work spans film, theatre, writing, art, radio, television

and opera, and addresses issues pertaining to (among other topics) racism, immigration, terrorism, war, and the legacy of the Nazi past in contemporary Germany. Schlingensief's capacity to cross boundaries—not only between different topics and media, but between art and politics, performance and reality, the private and public spheres—is reflected in the fact that he was an experimental artist who became a household name in Germany.³ Although he gained a certain notoriety for his film, theatre and activist productions, it was through his work as the host of a series of television talk shows that his public profile in Germany was cemented.

In a pilot episode of his third talk show *Die Piloten* (The Pilots) that was shot at the Akademie der Künste in 2007,⁴ Schlingensief participates in a heated debate with two of his guests about the mode of engagement facilitated by the exhibits at the former concentration camp in Dachau.⁵ Reflecting on his visit there as a sixteen-year-old school student, Schlingensief describes the displays that prompt one to 'look at this' and 'look at that' as 'reconstructions' that 'mount something that I should feel [*empfinden*] but which I can't really feel at all'. Responding to his guest's defence of the camp as an 'information centre', Schlingensief's frustrated retort provides us with an insight into what he thinks the site should be: 'Not an information centre, but an experience centre [*Erfahrungszentrum*]'!⁶

The distinction that Schlingensief draws in this statement—between information and experience—is central to Walter Benjamin's analysis of the decline in the capacity for experience (*Erfahrung*) that he associates with the rise of an information-driven news culture. Taking newspapers as his prime example, Benjamin argues, if 'it were the intention of the press to have the reader assimilate the information it supplies as part of his experience, it would not achieve its purpose'. 'But its intention,' he claims, 'is just the opposite and it is achieved: to isolate events from the realm in which they could affect the experience of the reader.' This segregation process is accomplished by the fragmented format of newspapers and by the emphasis on 'brevity', 'newness', and immediate comprehension characteristic of individual news bites; qualities that impact negatively on the reader's capacity to reflect on—and participate in the meaning-making process about—the issues, ideas and events in question.⁷

Benjamin's comments on this nexus—between the proliferation of information as a mode of communication and the decline in the capacity for experience,

reflection and autonomous thought—form part of a larger argument about the diminution in the quality of life that he associates with the replacement of *Erfahrung* by *Erlebnis*. As will become clear, these terms not only form the two poles of Benjamin's theory of experience, they are also central to Schlingensief's conception of the significant role that the mass media plays in stunting, rather than enhancing, the audience's capacity to engage with issues and ideas in an autonomous, affective and meaningful way.

In what follows, I will summarise Benjamin's bipartite theory of experience and draw out the connections between his concept of *Erlebnis* and Theodor Adorno's delineation of what he describes as the passive, consumer-oriented mode of experience fostered by the information-driven format of the culture industry. The focus of this article is not, however, these ideas *per se* but, rather, the important role that Schlingensief's television programs have played in undermining the indifferent, perfunctory mode of experience that Adorno associates with the mass media. Through an analysis of the pilot episode of Schlingensief's 2002 reality program *Quiz 3000: Du bist die Katastrophe!* (Quiz 3000: You are the Catastrophe!), this article will explore how—and with what effects—Schlingensief has sought to transform the information-driven focus of television quiz shows into a source of experience for viewers and contestants alike. Drawing on Alexander Kluge's delineation of the task of a realistic method, I will argue that *Quiz 3000* encourages the contestant and audience to reflect on German politics (both past and present) in a manner that is thoughtful, self-determined and engaged, and, in doing so, asks them to interrogate—rather than passively consume—the limited, hegemonic image of reality propagated by the mainstream news media.

—ERFAHRUNG AND ERLEBNIS

In keeping with his delineation of the isolated, perfunctory mode of experience cultivated by information, Benjamin describes *Erlebnis* as a form of experience that one registers consciously, the content of which makes a superficial impression that is superseded by the following moment. This type of experience is lacking in substance because consciousness 'assigns an incident a precise point in time in consciousness, at the cost of the integrity of the incident's contents' and thus transforms it 'into an isolated experience [*Erlebnis*]'.⁸ In a letter to Adorno, both the

superficial nature and the temporal deferral characteristic of this mode of experience are described by Benjamin in concrete terms. 'There is', he writes:

no reason to make a secret of the fact that I trace the roots of 'my theory of experience [*Erfahrung*]' to a childhood memory. My parents naturally took walks with us wherever we spent our summers. There were either two or three of us children. The one I have in mind is my brother. After we had visited one of the obligatory tourist attractions around Freudenstadt, Wengen, or Schreiberhau, my brother used to say, 'Now we can say that we've been there.' This statement made an unforgettable impression on me.⁹

Benjamin's brother's statement is a very apt description of the detached, impassive mode of experience that Benjamin describes as *Erlebnis*. The sites in question do not, presumably, leave a lasting impression on the young tourist. Rather, experience, in this context, is transformed into something reminiscent of a snapshot or souvenir; a possession or object that does little more than attest to the fact that he has 'been there'.¹⁰

This conception of experience as something that one *has* or *consumes* shares a number of similarities with Adorno's delineation of the consumer-oriented mode of engagement fostered by the information-driven focus of the mass media. As his comments in the epigraph make clear, for Adorno, information refers to 'facts' and ideas that are easily consumed because they are 'pre-digested'.¹¹ In keeping with Benjamin's analysis of information as that which can be immediately understood, the 'pre-digested' facts described by Adorno support, rather than challenge, the status quo. 'Information,' he writes, 'refers constantly to what has been preformed, to what others already know. To be informed about something implies an enforced solidarity with what has already been judged.'¹²

Adorno's criticism of information forms part of a larger argument about the decline in productivity and experience fostered by the standardised products of the culture industry. Underpinning his argument is an acknowledgement of the damage wrought by alienated labour conditions that leave people feeling exhausted, bored and unfulfilled. He argues that while standardised forms of mass entertainment provide consumers with an escape from the burdens associated with non-skilled work, they replicate the passive mode of engagement cultivated by alienated labour.

The workers, he writes, 'seek novelty, but the strain and boredom associated with actual work leads to avoidance of effort in that leisure time which offers the only chance for new experience'.¹³

Benjamin too points to production-line labour to illustrate the decline in the capacity to draw on one's experience that is symptomatic of *Erlebnis*. In contrast to the emphasis on practice which is central to the art of craftsmanship, in which the capacity to draw on one's experience is vital to the development of one's practice, Benjamin argues that the 'drilling of the workers' in production-line labour makes 'a speciality out of the absence of all development'. 'The unskilled worker,' he writes, 'is the one most deeply degraded by the drill of the machines. His work has been sealed off from experience [*Erfahrung*].'¹⁴ This description—of the temporal isolation and experience of fragmentation characteristic of production-line labour—is also echoed in Adorno's analysis of the superficial, distracted mode of perception fostered by the mainstream media. '[N]o one,' he writes, 'is trusted to remember anything that has already happened or to concentrate upon anything other than what is presented to him in the given moment. The consumer is thus reduced to the abstract present'; someone who is 'incapable of ... exercising thought'.¹⁵

Erfahrung, on the other hand, overcomes the temporal fragmentation characteristic of *Erlebnis* because, for Benjamin, it designates a form of experience that amalgamates the past and the present. As Benjamin makes clear, this is because *Erfahrung* is informed by the past experiences of the subject in question. In contrast to *Erlebnis*, it is not characterised by easy comprehension, but by a form of reflection that is guided, in part, by the senses and that doesn't, as a result, always find itself on solid ground. "I have experience [*Erfahrung*]", Benjamin (quoting Franz Kafka) states, "and I am not joking when I say that it is a seasickness on dry land".¹⁶

What is crucial here is that the experiential vertigo characteristic of *Erfahrung* initiates a feeling and thinking process in which the responsibility for generating meaning is relegated to the subject in question. In contrast to *Erlebnis* which is given 'a classificatory number behind which it disappears', "So now we've been there" ("I've had an experience"),¹⁷ *Erfahrung* oscillates between the past and the present and is mediated by a subject who forges his or her own autonomous connections between the two. If, as Adorno states, it is 'productivity—the ability to bring forth something that was not already there' which has been 'eradicated' by information,

then *Erfahrung* is marked by a productive engagement with the material and ideas in question.¹⁸ In contrast to the emphasis on easy comprehension that Benjamin associates with *Erlebnis*, *Erfahrung* designates a form of production that Alexander Kluge describes as ‘experience in the production of experience’ [*Erfahrung in der Produktion von Erfahrung*].¹⁹

Returning to Schlingensiefel’s comments about the former concentration camp in Dachau, and his criticism of the information-oriented displays that direct one to ‘look at this’ and ‘look at that’, we can begin to get a sense of what he means when he states that the exhibits display material that he ‘should feel but which [he] can’t really feel at all’. Clearly, what is at issue here is not an inability, on Schlingensiefel’s behalf, to recognise the atrocities that occurred there. He acknowledges, after all, that the material in question is something he ‘should feel’. Rather, what drives his criticism is a concern about the degree of desensitisation that occurs when the history of the camp—and the horrors that took place there—are packaged as information for public consumption. When Schlingensiefel advocates an ‘experience’ rather than an ‘information’ centre, he is calling for a site that encourages visitors to participate in the meaning-making process themselves; to draw productively on their own experience, and the experience of others; and to invest time, feeling, and energy in grappling with (rather than simply registering or consuming) the images, spaces, materials and ideas with which they are presented.

—A REALISTIC METHOD

Schlingensiefel’s criticism of information as a mode of communication is not specific to debates about the memorialisation of the Holocaust, but forms part of a larger argument about the shift from production to consumption precipitated by a media dominated, consumer-oriented culture that he describes as ‘System 1’. In a similar vein to Adorno’s analysis of the passive mode of engagement fostered by the culture industry, what troubles Schlingensiefel about this system is the degree to which it stifles independent thought and promotes an acceptance of the status quo. ‘System 2’—the title he employs to describe the *modus operandi* of his work—seeks to undermine the emphasis on easy consumption promoted by System 1 and to foster, in the process, reflection, debate and autonomous thought. As Schlingensiefel’s comment in the epigraph makes clear, System 2 (and, by extension, his work more

generally) is motivated by 'the desire to feel something in a world that kills *Erlebnis*'.²⁰

As the reality productions he produced prior to *Quiz 3000* make clear, Schlingensiefel has experimented with different formats in an attempt to frustrate the emphasis on easy comprehension that Benjamin associates with *Erlebnis*.²¹ For Benjamin, it is precisely by cultivating this superficial, perfunctory mode of engagement that the mainstream media functions to stymie debate about how—and with what effects—the so-called 'reality' in which we live could be transformed into something very different. For both Schlingensiefel and Kluge, the image of reality generated by the media (and by politicians and the culture industry more generally) is a 'simulation of reality'²² that not only excludes the needs and interests of large sectors of the population, but which stunts the capacity to conceive of the degree to which things could, in fact, be very different. As Kluge has maintained throughout the course of his career, the so-called 'real' state of affairs 'is not necessarily or certainly real'. Alternative possibilities 'also belong to reality. The realistic result, the actual result is only an abstraction that has murdered all other possibilities for the moment.'²³ Within this schema, a 'realistic' approach that is true to its name is neither limited nor governed by the current state of affairs. On the contrary, to be 'realistic' is to be mindful that the so-called 'reality' in which we live is neither given nor set in stone, but rather open to change; a reality that can be transformed according to the will and desire of people who 'actually ... want something completely different'.²⁴

Extrapolating on these ideas in relation to Schlingensiefel's television experiments, it is clear that if 'reality' television is to live up to the promise inherent in its name, then its task is not to reflect or confirm the status quo, but to encourage viewers to think critically and imaginatively about the possibilities and limitations of the world in which they live. 'The uncompromising production of realistic products is itself,' Kluge writes, 'the means of changing the horizon of experience.'²⁵ 'The motive for realism is never the confirmation of reality but protest.'²⁶ Within this schema, the success of a realistic text is judged according to the degree to which it engages the viewer at the level of his or her own experience. Building on Benjamin's delineation of *Erfahrung*, Kluge argues that the kind of experience in question is

characterised by an imaginative, autonomous, and sensorially engaged mode of reflection that, above all, questions—rather than accepts—the status quo.

While the realistic method employed by Kluge in his experimental film, television and literary work is distinguished by an emphasis on fragmentation and an extensive use of mixed materials, Schlingensief's approach is very different in the sense that his reality programs operate within—rather than outside—the standardised television formats he critiques. As I will argue in the following section via an analysis of *Quiz 3000*, it is by corrupting these formats that Schlingensief undermines the automated mode of engagement facilitated by the audience's familiarity with the programs in question, rendering it near impossible for viewers to consume the programs in a passive, unreflective way.

—QUIZ 3000: YOU ARE THE CATASTROPHE

However useful it might be from a practical point of view to have as much information as possible at one's disposal, there still prevails the iron law that the information in question shall never touch the essential, shall never degenerate into thought.

Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Culture'²⁷

The pilot episode of *Quiz 3000* was shot in 2002 at the Volksbühne in Berlin and subsequently toured as a stage production to theatres in Germany and Switzerland.²⁸ Modelled closely on the popular reality program *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (the German version of which, hosted by Günther Jauch, has screened on RTL since 1999) *Quiz 3000* is, as I will explore in more detail, remarkable in the way it seeks to transform the information-driven focus of television quiz shows into a source of experience for viewers and contestants alike.

The pilot program opens with images of Schlingensief as host (wearing a lustrous grey suit and a spotty tie) striking a series of poses to music as a montage of footage from a range of different news, talk and current affairs programs flashes behind him on screen. Although the opening sequence is followed by a title reading 'The prototype for a new quiz show', when Schlingensief enters and the set is revealed (featuring a round table, a pair of stools and two back-to-back computer

monitors on a podium) it is immediately apparent that *Quiz 3000* is a re-enactment of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*

Millionaire, like other programs in the genre, is organised around a question and answer format. Both the contestant and the host are seated at a table with a computer monitor on which to focus. The contestant, who is presented with multiple-choice questions, is asked to 'lock in' one of four possible answers that appear before them on screen. With each question that is answered correctly, the contestant moves up a ten-point scale that starts at 100 Euros and ends with 1,000,000 Euros. If the contestant becomes stuck, they are provided with a series of 'lifelines' or, in the case of *Quiz 3000*, 'jokers'. These jokers allow contestants to seek advice from the studio audience, a friend/family member, and/or one of several on-site 'VIPs'. The question and answer process is also accompanied by discussions initiated by the host, who asks the contestant about his or her life and interests and speculates (without giving too much away) on which of the four possible answers is correct. As I will discuss in more detail, in *Quiz 3000* Schlingensiefel also endeavours to situate the question in a broader political and/or historical context in an attempt to stimulate reflection, discussion and debate about the issues and ideas at hand. If the contestant is able to answer all ten questions correctly, they are awarded the 1,000,000 Euro prize.²⁹ If, however, the contestant 'locks in' an incorrect answer, they are replaced by another contestant who begins the process again by starting at the bottom of the scale.

The questions that appear on *Millionaire* largely conform to the 'predigested' data that Adorno associates with information because they revolve around facts pertaining to fields such as geography, biology, history, sport, music and popular culture that are generally agreed to be true. Questions such as 'Who won seven gold medals at the 1972 Olympic Games?', 'A popular form of American folk music is called Country & ...?', and 'Where in the human body does one find the cruciate ligament?'³⁰ are very straightforward and provide little cause, following Adorno's sarcastic formulation, for *Erlebnis* to 'degenerate into thought'. In a similar vein to the detached, impersonal mode of experience that Benjamin associates with his sightseeing brother, knowledge—in this context—functions as a commodity that one has or consumes. 'We agree,' Adorno states, 'with the majority about it, yet simultaneously we wish to deprive them of it and take possession of it ourselves.'³¹

For Adorno, the information-driven focus of quiz shows thus has two important functions. First, it ‘socialises’ the ‘curiosity’ of those hungry for knowledge by providing them with ‘predigested’ information bites that stunt—rather than promote—independent thought.³² Second, it provides a sense of solace to those for whom their own ‘experience proves inadequate’. ‘[T]he apparatus,’ he writes, ‘trains [them] to appear well-informed on pain of losing prestige among other people and to renounce the more arduous process of real experience [*umständlichen Erfahrung*].’ ‘[T]his,’ he adds ‘is where information leaps in: ... sparing each individual from the disgrace of appearing as stupid as everyone else.’³³

This mode of knowledge acquisition is, for Adorno, not specific to the quiz show format, but is a defining characteristic of the kind of communication fostered by the culture industry more generally. Schlingensief, too, argues in a similar vein that television, in particular, plays an important role in inculcating spectators into accepting the status quo. Playing on the connotations of the German word for watching television (*fernsehen* = far or distant seeing), Schlingensief concludes that ‘the person who does little more than watch television is also little more than a *Fernseher*’³⁴: that is, someone who views the world from afar, who is a passive consumer, rather than an active participant in, or producer of the ‘reality’ on screen.

Returning to *Quiz 3000* and to Kluge’s conception of the task of a realistic method, it is clear that Schlingensief’s realistic re-enactment of the quiz show format is not driven by a desire to produce an exact copy of *Millionaire*. Rather, as Schlingensief has made clear in an interview with Kluge, what fascinates him about re-enactment as a critical strategy are the inconsistencies generated in the reproduction process that serve as catalysts for reflection and debate.³⁵ As I will explore in the following section, in *Quiz 3000* it is the nature of the questions posed to the contestants—and their thematic difference from the kind of topics that ordinarily feature on such programs—that generates the inconsistency in question.

—THE QUESTIONS

The first task (which appears, as do all subsequent questions, on screens that closely mimic the design format of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*) reads: ‘Order the following concentration camps from north to south! A: Auschwitz, B: Bergen-Belsen, C: Dachau, D: Ravensbrück.’³⁶ The contestants (all of whom applied to appear on the

program following a call for applications on the *Quiz 3000* website) scribble their answers furiously, hand them to Schlingensief's glamorously clad, high-heeled assistants who race across the stage to form a line in anticipation of jury president Dietrich Kühlbrodt, who inspects the answers to determine who will be the first to join Schlingensief at the spot lit table on stage. Kühlbrodt, who has appeared in many of Schlingensief's productions, also served as a senior public prosecutor for Nazi crimes and is thus able to provide further context for the contestants and audience on topics pertaining to the Holocaust. For example, in response to the question 'What were the measurements of the standing cells at Auschwitz concentration camp in which four internees at a time had to spend the night?', Kühlbrodt is able to confirm that '90 cm x 90cm' is, indeed, the correct answer and that internees were held in such cells for up to a week or even ten days at a time.

What is immediately apparent about these and other questions pertaining to the Holocaust is the degree to which they short-circuit the experience of pleasure associated with the contestant or audience member's capacity to answer the question. If, for example, in response to the query 'For what purpose was the hair that was shaved off the detainees in Auschwitz used for?' the contestant is able to lock in the correct answer ('carpet and socks'), the sense of discomfort generated by the question, and by the memory of the camps and the inhumanity of the atrocities that occurred there, both outweighs the pleasure gained from providing the host with the correct answer and makes it very difficult for the contestant or audience member to proceed in an enthusiastic manner to the next question.

Only some of the questions focus directly on the Holocaust, but throughout the program the contestants and viewers are confronted with questions in a similarly disturbing, albeit contemporary vein (a number of which, as I will explore in more detail, are connected in direct and/or tangential ways to the crimes committed by the Nazis):

Question: How many conscientious objectors from Kurdistan have, since 2001, been tortured to death in Turkey after being deported by Germany?

A. 3 B. 5 C. 7 D. 9

Answer: C

Question: The rape of members of which minority group is, according to the German criminal code, less heavily penalised?

A. Men B. Animals C. Children D. People with disabilities

Answer: D

Question: By what percentage did the number of anti-Semitic motivated criminal offences rise in 2000 in contrast to the previous year?

A. 12 % B. 31% C. 55% D. 69%

Answer: D

What distinguishes these and other questions from those that feature on *Millionaire* is the degree to which their disturbing content disrupts the emphasis on immediate comprehension associated with information-oriented forms of communication that stunt the viewer's capacity to engage—in a reflective and autonomous manner—with the issues and ideas in question. As Benjamin makes clear, the 'prime requirement' of information 'is that it appear understandable in itself'.³⁷ But what is 'understandable' about forcing four people to stand overnight in a cell with a floor space of 90cm x 90cm? Why is the rape of disabled people less heavily penalised in Germany than the rape of other 'minority groups'? And how is one to comprehend the German government's decision to deport Kurdish asylum seekers to Turkey given they knew, from past experience, there was a good chance they would be tortured and killed?

Instead of providing the contestants and viewers with a series of questions and answers that explain and/or pin meaning down, the answers provided by Schlingensief transform information into a catalyst for the kind of experience (*Erfahrung*) that Kluge associates with a realistic method because—in short-circuiting the passive mode of acceptance ordinarily associated with the presentation of facts as immutable—they compel the audience to challenge the realities with which they are presented and, in doing so, to continue the questioning process for themselves.

As mentioned previously, this questioning process is also set in motion by Schlingensief himself through discussions he instigates with the contestants about the issues and ideas at hand; conversations that, although very brief, provide a broader context within which the facts in question can be processed. For example, one of the questions posed to the contestant who went on to win the grand prize revolves around the average cost of fitting a prosthetic leg to victims of land mines.

The contestant, who immigrated to Germany from the former Yugoslavia some thirty-three years before, undertakes humanitarian work raising money for victims of the Bosnian war. He has also campaigned against the use of land mines and thus knows from experience that the cost of fitting someone with a prosthetic leg is somewhere in the vicinity of 800 Euros. However, before the contestant's answer is revealed to be correct, Schlingensiefel initiates a discussion about the cost of land mines. 'One land mine,' he states, 'costs on average, I believe, around 1.80 Euro'. The contestant, however, responds by noting that the land mines deployed in Bosnia were made in China and that they cost, back then, around 1.50 Deutschmarks. Schlingensiefel notes that with the 10,000 Euros that the contestant has been nominally awarded, one could purchase a large number of land mines and then adds, before locking in the correct answer, that 'the main producers of land mines are located in Germany and the USA'. Later in the program, Germany's status as a major exporter of arms is again the topic of discussion; a conversation initiated by a question pertaining to the number of people killed in 2001 as a direct result of German-made weapons.

In contrast to the lighthearted banter initiated by the hosts of *Millionaire*, these discussions, although far from comprehensive, are highly effective in encouraging the audience to become active participants in the meaning-making process because they function (in contrast to the mainstream news media) to ignite reflection rather than pin meaning down. "You can learn nothing from the papers," Benjamin notes by way of a story about his discussion with a sea captain:

'They always want to explain everything to you'. And in fact isn't it half the art of journalism to keep the news free from explanations? And didn't the ancients set an example for us by presenting events, as it were, dry, draining them of psychological explanations and opinions of every sort?³⁸

For Schlingensiefel, as for Benjamin, it is clear that the information-driven focus of news reports functions to delimit, rather than stimulate understanding; a point emphasised by one of the *Quiz 3000* contestants who, when asked by Schlingensiefel whether she is certain that she has locked in the correct answer, states: 'I can't be sure because ... we don't experience [*erfahren*] anything from our media.' This statement is immediately corroborated by one of several image montages that are projected, at different points in the program, on the back wall of the *Quiz 3000* stage.

The montage in question, which functions to both draw attention to and *enact* the degree of desensitisation that occurs when images of war, terror, violence and destruction are packaged as information for public consumption, consists of a rapidly edited collection of television news footage. We see (among other images) snippets of George W. Bush and Gerhard Schröder pointing in unison at the camera, we watch footage of the World Trade Center towers collapsing and we see a coffin draped in the German flag. Images of corpses scattered on the ground flit by as do faces of people imprisoned behind barbed wire; images of Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden flash up and disappear just as rapidly, as does footage of television news anchors, military hardware and soldiers with guns.

The second montage (which appears some ten minutes later) consists of footage pertaining to Adolf Hitler, National Socialism and the Holocaust. This sequence (which is edited at a much slower pace) opens with the image of a giant swastika, marching soldiers, and crowds saluting Hitler. It is followed by black and white footage of planes dropping bombs, people being executed, barbed wire, piles of corpses, and human beings reduced to walking skeletons. In contrast to the previous montage (the rapid pace of which enacts the anaesthetising effects that Benjamin associates with an information-driven news culture), the second montage encourages viewers to reflect on, and to *feel*, the reality of the atrocities that constitute the information-driven statistics in question.

It is clear that by juxtaposing contemporary news footage with footage of the Holocaust and World War II, Schlingensief is also asking viewers to reflect on whether the barbarism characteristic of the Third Reich does, in fact, belong solely to the past, or whether its traces can be found in certain sectors of the media and political culture of the twenty-first century in Germany, the United States of America and elsewhere. As Schlingensief himself has made clear in a discussion about his film *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* (100 years of Adolf Hitler)³⁹ that is true of his work on history and politics more generally: 'It wasn't about some historical psychic profile, not about unmasking. Rather it was about delusion here and now, about the ghosts of the *Führer*, the muck in ourselves.'⁴⁰

In *Quiz 3000*, this 'delusion' and 'muck' emerges (through a suggestive rather than didactic process) as a result of questions that prompt the contestant or viewer to reflect on the actuality of the Nazi legacy. For example, while the question

concerning the rise in anti-Semitic violence is explicit in drawing attention to the connections between Germany's past and present, other questions pertaining to the deportation of Kurdish asylum seekers and the legal consequences of the rape of disabled people ask the contestant or viewer to consider why the lives of some human beings are judged to be more valuable than others and, furthermore, to what degree a relationship of continuity exists between Nazi policies on disability, for example, and decisions that are made in contemporary political and legal spheres.

It is this questioning process, and the active, autonomous mode of reflection with which it is associated, that aligns the spectatorial relationship cultivated by *Quiz 3000* with the mode of experience that Benjamin describes as *Erfahrung* in which thought is provoked, in part, by the amalgamation of the past and the present. In fact, one could extrapolate on Schlingensiefel's criticism of the information-driven displays at Dachau and argue that what is problematic, for Schlingensiefel, about such exhibits is the degree to which (to quote Benjamin) they provide 'the object [or incident] with a classificatory number behind which it disappears'.⁴¹ As a result, the viewer is left with the impression that these horrific acts of violence and destruction are the product of a bygone, barbaric past and, therefore, bear little if any relationship to the now of the 'civilised' present.

In contrast, *Quiz 3000* encourages viewers to adopt a perspective that reflects on and questions the twenty-first century continuation of a certain Fascistic logic according to which the destruction of lives is represented as an 'unfortunate' byproduct of the march of progress enacted by powerful nations seeking to shore up their power, accumulate wealth, fortify 'freedom' and secure their national borders. This is not to suggest that Schlingensiefel's work is driven by a desire to relativise the Holocaust. Rather, what *Quiz 3000* does is encourage contestants and viewers to ask, among other questions, why Germany—which is responsible for the piles of corpses depicted in the montage described above—is one of the largest international producers and exporters of military arms; to reflect on why a country which had a policy of 'euthanising' disabled people continues to discriminate against people with disabilities; and to question why anti-Semitic violence is on the rise in a country that has sought to atone for, and move on from, the crimes of the past.

In contrast, however, to quiz shows such as *Millionaire*, it is clearly not Schlingensiefel's intention to provide the audience with clear-cut answers on these

and other matters. Rather, as the questions cited above make clear, the answers that Schlingensief *does* provide function to open up, rather than close meaning down; to frustrate the emphasis on easy comprehension that Benjamin associates with *Erlebnis*; and to encourage the viewer to draw on their own experience—and on the experience garnered from the mistakes of the past—in an attempt to grapple with a status quo that is marked, in part, by inequality, unhappiness and oppression.

In stark contrast to the ‘matter-of-fact’ approach of the news media described by Benjamin, Kluge argues the ‘root of a realistic attitude, its motivation’ is not the confirmation of a certain reality or truth, but rather ‘*opposition* to the misery present in real circumstances’. It is, he writes, ‘therefore, an anti-Realism of motivation, a denial of the pure reality-principle, an *anti-realistic attitude* which alone enables one to look realistically and attentively’.⁴² By re-enacting *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, Schlingensief not only undermined the ‘reality-principle’ governing the information-driven focus of both quiz shows and the mainstream news media. He also demonstrated—in a most compelling way—the significant role that a realistic re-enactment of reality television can play as a catalyst for experience, reflection and political debate.

—

Tara Forrest is senior lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. She is the author of *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge* (2007), co-editor (with Anna Teresa Scheer) of *Christoph Schlingensief: Art Without Borders* (2010) and editor of *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials For the Imagination* (2012).

—NOTES

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘The Schema of Mass Culture’, in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, p. 75.

² Christoph Schlingensief, ‘Betroffenheitstypen’, in Christoph Schlingensief and Carl Hegemann, *Chance 2000: Wähle Dich selbst*, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln, 1998, p. 17.

³ Schlingensief died from lung cancer in 2010 at the age of forty-nine. For an overview of his career, see Tara Forrest and Anna Teresa Scheer (eds), *Christoph Schlingensief: Art Without Borders*, Intellect,

Bristol and Chicago, 2010, and Pia Janke and Teresa Kovacs (eds), *Der Gesamtkünstler: Christoph Schlingensiefel*, Wien, Praesens Verlag, 2011.

⁴ The other programs include *Talk 2000* (an eight-part series that was shot in 1997 at the Volksbühne in Berlin and that screened on SAT 1, RTL, Kanal 4 and ORF) and *U3000* (an eight-part talk show that aired on MTV in 2000 that was shot in a train as it raced through Berlin's underground railway network).

⁵ The guests include Lea Rosh (a journalist and a key figure behind the establishment of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin) and German Greens politician Claudia Roth.

⁶ Cordula Kablitz-Post (director), *Christoph Schlingensiefel: Die Piloten*, 2009.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, eds Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2003, p. 315.

⁸ Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 319.

⁹ Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (eds), *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910–1940*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1994, p. 629. Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel: 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1994, p. 424.

¹⁰ In 'Central Park', Benjamin describes the souvenir as 'the complement to isolated experience [*das Kompliment des 'Erlebnisses'*]. In it is precipitated the increasing self-estrangement of human beings whose past is inventoried with dead effects', *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 183, and 'Zentralpark' in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. I.2, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, p. 681.

¹¹ See Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Culture', p. 67. He writes: 'The pre-digested quality of the product prevails, justifies itself and establishes itself all the more firmly in so far as it constantly refers to those who cannot digest anything not already pre-digested. It is baby food ...'

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Popular Music' in Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et al., University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002, p. 459.

¹⁴ Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 133, and 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. I.2, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, p. 632.

¹⁵ Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Culture', p. 69.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, eds Michael W. Jennings et al., trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999, p. 809.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, [H5, 1], p. 211.

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Free Time' in Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p. 193.

¹⁹ Alexander Kluge, 'The Sharpest Ideology: That Reality Appeals to its Realistic Character' in *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials For the Imagination*, ed. Tara Forrest, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2012, p. 194, and 'Die schärfste Ideologie: daß die Realität sich auf ihren realistischen Charakter beruft', in Alexander Kluge, *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin. Zur realistischen Methode*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1975, p. 219.

²⁰ Schlingensiefel, 'Betroffenheitstypen', p. 17.

²¹ These include the 2000 production *Bitte Liebt Österreich/Please Love Austria* (a re-enactment of the *Big Brother* television program that sought to mobilise debate about the anti-immigration policies of Jörg Haider and the Freedom Party of Austria) and *Freakstars 3000* (a 2002 television series modelled on the casting show format that was transformed into a singing contest for people with disabilities). Both productions are discussed in detail in Forrest and Scheer. See chapters six and seven respectively.

²² See Kluge's television program 'Die Kirche der Angst/Erste atavistische Nachrichten von Christoph Schlingensiefel', *News & Stories*, SAT 1, 24 August 2003.

²³ "'But Why are the Questions so Abstract?": An Interview with Alexander Kluge', in Jan Dawson, *Alexander Kluge and the Occasional Work of a Female Slave*, Zoetrope, New York, 1977, p. 34.

²⁴ Kluge, 'The Sharpest Ideology', p. 191.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁷ Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Culture'.

²⁸ My analysis of the performance/program is based on the production that took place at the Volksbühne in Berlin on 15 and 16 March 2002. The production that toured to other theatres in Germany and Switzerland throughout 2002 changed over time and differed in a number of key regards from the original production. I am grateful to Frieder Schlaich for providing me with a copy of the production.

²⁹ In *Quiz 3000*, this jackpot was downscaled to a briefcase of cash and a second-hand car.

³⁰ These questions all featured on the German version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

³¹ Adorno, 'The Schema of Mass Culture', p. 84.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 81–2 and 'Das Schema der Massenkultur', in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1997, p. 320.

³⁴ Schlingensiefel and Hegemann, pp. 14–15.

³⁵ See Alexander Kluge, 'Das Halten von Totenschädeln liegt mir nicht/Christoph Schlingensiefel inszeniert Hamlet', *News & Stories*, SAT 1, 16 December 2001. This discussion has been reproduced in Thekla Heineke and Sandra Umathum (eds), *Christoph Schlingensiefels Nazis Rein*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2002, p. 128. For an interesting analysis of the strategy of 'performative recitation' employed by Schlingensiefel in the context of his 1998/1999 production *Chance 2000*, see Solveig Gade, 'Playing the Media Keyboard: The Political Potential of Performativity in Christoph Schlingensiefel's Electioneering

Circus' in *Performative Realism: Interdisciplinary Studies in Art and Media*, eds Rune Gade and Anne Jerslev, Museum Tusulanum Press, Copenhagen, 2005, pp. 19–49.

³⁶ This, and a selection of other questions from the pilot version of the program can be accessed via the official *Quiz 3000* website, <<http://www.quiz3000.de/fragen16.3.pdf>>.

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Fontana Press, London, 1992, p. 88.

³⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'The Handkerchief', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 659–60.

³⁹ The full title is *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler—Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker, 1998/9*.

⁴⁰ Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Ich weiß, ich war's*, ed. Aino Laberenz, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln, 2012, p. 229.

⁴¹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [H5, 1], p. 211.

⁴² Alexander Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feeling', in Forrester, p. 284.