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In conversation with Harald Katzmaier *Instigate Un-Balance*

Ruth Anderwald and Leonhard Grond in Conversation with Harald Katzmaier, Vienna, 2 December 2014.

Leonhard Grond – In our project Dizziness—A Resource we are exploring the notion of dizziness as an experience that can trigger both constructive transformation and destructive change. We view dizziness as a system that one can succumb to either as an individual, as a member of a group, or in a much larger mass of people. And it seems to us that a period of dizziness may unleash potential for innovation and for the new, or become a resource for art in its capacity as a creative process.

Ruth Anderwald – The question that interests us is how that newness arises and how it may be described. How much transformation is necessary for us to arrive at something new?

Harald Katzmaier – My first association with dizziness and visual art is Paul Klee. In his philosophy and in his paintings Klee engaged intensively with the notion of equilibrium and dizziness. In his paintings there are numerous artistes balancing on things and there are even several works that refer to equilibrium [*Gleichgewicht*] and related notions in their titles.¹ And anyone with children will have a deep-seated awareness of equilibrium or balance – an



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awareness of gravity and related constraints. Ultimately it is about a tension that concerns us as long as we live. I mean that tension between constraints and the attempt to become stratospheric, as Klee called it. Dizziness only occurs when we lose our balance, which we take for granted as a form of gravity. Klee's *Wandbild aus dem Tempel der Sehnsucht* *↗dorthin↖* ("Mural from the Temple of Longing *↖Thither↗*," 1922),² for instance, depicts route markers pointing in all different directions. In the lectures Klee gave at the Bauhaus³ there are studies on the arrow, on the exhausted arrow, and the arrow that is waiting, which will by definition lose its tension at some point, because it, too, is ultimately unable to completely resist the force of gravity.

So dizziness is always connected with the matter of the relationship to gravity. Experience shows us that the horizontal is a state in which dizziness is impossible, because one has already fallen down. In the work of both Klee and Kandinsky there are deliberations on the role of horizontality, verticality, and diagonality. For instance, there is the question why falling diagonals and verticals, that may in fact already be at an angle, are prey to dizziness.

Verticality connects above and below, gravity connects with the stratosphere. That happens at the end of the day – when we die, when we succumb to dizziness. The end will always be a form of dizziness. Dizziness in conjunction with an ending always also heralds a kind of new beginning. And in that respect, too, in Klee's work there is an incredibly filigree, detailed engagement with the notion of the cycle. He is interested in the circulation of water, in the cycles of the moon, and – as the epitome of the cycle – the circulation of blood, the heartbeat.⁴ In all these different circumstance his interest is in something arising, coming into its own, disintegrating, and potentially transforming. Saturation – desaturation, saturation – desaturation, construction – destructuring, construction – destructuring.

RA – How would you define that destructuring? What does it bring with it that is new?

HK – No cycle of innovation can exist without a cycle of destructuring. Destructuring or deconstruction, creative destruction and dizziness arise when things become unbalanced, when the vertical dominates and we find ourselves out of true. That marks the phase during which orders self-destructure. And it seems to me that the important thing here is that it is at this point that the order of the ego self-destructures.

During this phase the connections that support identification are dissolved, so there is an end to identification with roles, with scripts, with narratives that can be categorised with the past, with existing experiences. That whole bundle of narratives that makes up our identity remains narrative, because it is rooted in the past. Destructuring and dissolution are necessary to create space in which (long before innovation, long before creativity) there is room for what Jacob Levy Moreno calls “spontaneity.”⁵

I believe that is the crucial factor: it is only through dizziness that we gain access to the energy of that spontaneity. Spontaneity ensues where we encounter one another, where we encounter our ideas, our convictions in a similar manner, as though there were no script. Spontaneity is close to the notion of improvisation, because it is only through improvisation that we come up with a script that has never previously existed in that form. But this process does adhere to certain rules, improvisation doesn't happen in a vacuum . . .

RA – In attitudes, maybe?

HK – Yes, in pre-scripts. Basically the point is that dizziness is necessary – that loss of orientation, detours, disintegration. Gilles Deleuze describes it in terms of a triadic sequence: departure – breakdown – breakthrough. A very pleasing cycle: you set out, you break down, and your breakthrough ensues from the breakdown. In his essay “The Exhausted” (“L'épuisé,” 1992)⁶ on Samuel Beckett's plays for television, Deleuze writes about exhaustion and about the fact that real creativity only begins when we have exhausted all the possibilities available to us. All the indications are that this condition, when a state of spontaneousness arises from dizziness, always goes hand in hand with the deletion and destructuring of the ego. The crucial point is that as long as the ego is in play, all we can expect are struggles for status and wars – one narrative pitted against another. Nothing new comes about. The world only has a choice when the ego recedes into the background.

War – Polemos – is the father of all things, but who is the mother of all things? That is the philosophically relevant question here. War corrodes, Polemos corrodes and divides. But what has to happen for something new to occur? Birth, for instance, does not happen in war. And in that sense war contributes to dizziness. An example of that could be seen in the dying soldier, the soldier who falls in battle.

LG – We’ve talked to the physician Michael Marker about stumbling and about the human reflexes to stumbling. If I’m walking in the woods and stumble, my body knows exactly how it stumbled – we’re all aware of that. That’s to say, one knee gives way and the other follows suit. A process that is registered deep in the spinal cord. This information doesn’t even reach the brain. The time needed for the reflex is far too short. Medical experts have tried to find a reason for this, and the tendency is to suggest that the torso and limbs do everything in their power to protect the skull. However, this would mean that this immensely important reflex that instantly kicks in does not involve the brain at all. The torso and limbs are able to protect the skull without recourse to the brain in the skull. The reflexes of the arms are much closer to the skull, that’s to say, the brain.

RA – Could one apply that to what we were talking about before? Is “stumbling” a recognised topic in innovation research?

HK – Always.

LG – Dizziness involves both security and insecurity. So now the question is, if I’m thinking in terms of war, whether any insecurity still attaches to destruction?

HK – I’d put it more radically: the present war is our last war, this is our last bout of dizziness, for the eternal restitution of the vertical. War is so-to-speak an attempt to prevent dizziness by going to war. It is an attempt to use violence to eradicate every form of alterity or ambiguity, every form of heterogeneity, so that we never need succumb to dizziness again. We stumble and fall because of the Other, because of uncertainty. We go to war because we want to avoid dizziness. But the real solution would be to rehabilitate the value of dizziness.

By way of a related aside: in *Batman Begins*⁷ we learn how Bruce Wayne became Batman. In an archetypal farmyard scene the young Bruce, playing outside, falls into a dry well full of bats. He remains undiscovered for a long time in the well and has to contend with the bats on his own. This traumatic experience is the reason why he developed his singular fixations and anxieties. The little boy is eventually found and the family’s butler, Alfred Pennyworth comments, “Why do we fall, Sir? So that we can learn to pick ourselves up.”



Batman Begins,
director:
Christopher
Nolan, USA
2005

LG – To come back to new ideas and to innovation. What circumstances are necessary for innovation to come about? Above all in connection with the individual subject and small groups, or is it possible for there to be innovation where there is a large mass of people?

HK – It's always the same: the point is that on the one hand we are in danger of burning up, of evaporating, of going too fast, of dissolving, and on the other hand we are in danger of freezing, rigidifying, of becoming mummified and unable to move. Dizziness contains within it both extremes. My experience of dizziness can lead me to decide never to be overcome by dizziness again. In that case I will do everything in my power to prevent the onset of dizziness, and thus to mortify myself and my surroundings, that is to say, to destroy life so that I can avoid dizziness. But it could also be that I don't properly find my feet again after a bout of dizziness, that I am continually stumbling and ultimately go to pieces, in the way that happens to so many people as they live their lives.

“Successful” dizziness is a phased cycle: dizziness from which a process ensues, namely stabilisation and destabilisation. This of course raises the question as to which culture needs this productive cycle. There's a wonderful little book by Henri Bergson – it's called *Laughter (Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique, 1900)*. He shows that humor can be used to make people flexible again who have become rigidified or twisted. Humor always makes us flexible, and the same thing happens in our dreams. According to evolution research the function of dreams is to increase our emotional plasticity or elasticity, that's to say, we become embroiled in all kinds of dramas and peculiar situations, like different combinations of screenplays where we are constantly finding ourselves in states of un-balance.

As for innovation, the main point is that there can only be innovation when there is an un-balance in our situation. And the complexity of a system only increases in that type of situation and is dependent on the extent to which a complex system departs from a state of equilibrium, because it is only then that gradients come into play. In modern natural sciences, especially in complexity research, there are many points of contact with the topic of un-balance. Life consists of interconnected states of un-balance, for instance when we are walking or running. Walking is nothing less than interconnected falling. A kind of falling that is interconnected in the sense that it involves two processes of falling (or of dizziness). Interconnected dizziness amounts to a true encounter, and perhaps also a form of success in the widest sense, if my dizziness and your dizziness combine in a single process.

All our work at [FASresearch](#),⁸ all the analysis of networks that we undertake, is in effect a hymn in praise of un-balance, since it is only through intransitivity, as we call it, it is only in intransitive movement that change is possible.

LG – And we have to instigate this state of un-balance, of dizziness, otherwise nothing happens.

HK – The problem is that my ego resists this state. It only ever wants to create clarity. The reason for that is our endless fear of being destructured or deconstructed and the narratives, the whole pile of stories that we have amassed within us: who we are, our idea of who the Other is, or how the Other sees us, how we see ourselves . . . in fact this discursive machinery prevents encounters between us as individuals. We are always entrenched in our own roles and our stories are already finished.

Drinking can perhaps loosen us up – simply because this rigidification, this “role conserve” as Jacob Moreno called it, becomes more fluid. But the new arises wherever we encounter each

other as non-egos. It requires humor, but also that personal experience of Batman's butler, namely that we have already learnt that we can find our feet again after a bout of dizziness. It is all about self-awareness and yielding to dizziness. We know that there will be a phase when the dizziness is over. It is a learning process and the more often I have entered that state of un-balance, the more I have passed through a bout of dizziness, the more dizziness or shared dizziness has opened up a realm where we can encounter each other, where spontaneity connects us and gives us access to creative energy, the sooner I will be able to consciously accept a state of un-balance. Everyone who is creative knows that in the moment when there is an absence of thought, an absence of all concepts and notions of successful narratives, without a hint of recollection, a form of extreme presentness ensues. Regardless of whether you call this flow experience or improvisation, the new always enters the world through the door marked "not-manifest." Only how do we gain access to that door? That's the question.

RA – That, and whether you then trust what you find. Because any idea is initially very fragile.

HK – This trust, this sensitivity and openness to an idea, the notion that it does not have to succeed, is the same way we would treat a small child, whom I would also not burden with the whole weight of the world. It's okay to let the idea grow, in all its fragility, and if it proves not to be vigorous enough, to give it the chance to disappear again and not to cling onto it. But above all I believe that the main function of dizziness and deconstructing is the deconstructing of the ego. As long as we cling to what we are clinging to we will only ever reproduce the status quo.

RA – That also involves a loss of control. As long as I refuse to relinquish control and don't dare to venture out into the open, I'm stuck "at the railings."

HK – Yes! We're controlled, by our egos. You have to imagine wanting to control losing control! That's madness. But we think we can do that.

LG – Presumably there's a point when the ego little by little reclaims its ground. And presuming an idea has arisen, who is to assess whether it is new? Is judging whether something is new even relevant?

HK – New. The new. What do we mean by the new? In fact we first have to develop a philosophy of the new, because, as we know, there is no such thing as "the new," only transformations, re-combinations, or mutations. But any such assessment is more of a scale question. What is the discount period for that assessment? If I produce something, what is the discount period for assessing whether something is new or not. After all, sometimes we discover something that is new yet old.

RA – For the person or people in that process, there's the aha experience of discovering something . . .

HK – Which brings us to the beautiful, to impartial delight, and to the moment in which this is exclusively the exchange value of the new. But if there is a scale of evaluation and if this value is formulated in terms of making money, then of course the funnels and filters of that evaluation become narrow. Everything is destroyed if it is only thought backwards from the end.

RA – *That’s interesting! We thought that innovation research was all about thinking backwards from the end.*

HK – No – that would destroy everything.

LG – *If you look at the new from the artistic path, you can’t think backwards.*

HK – You two are on the right side, artists are on the right side. The thing is that something has to be made manifest because it has to be made manifest. End of! And whether that’s of interest to anyone or not is a completely different question, or if it’s new or not. In that connection I’d recommend Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*⁹ and what he says there about insanity and health. Strauss suggests that in order to remain healthy there have to be others who implement certain recombinations. An insane person fulfils the task of recombining symbols because they have to be recombined, so that others don’t have to recombine them any more. Looking at this whole story from the perspective of usefulness and innovation – and not from that of spontaneity – presumes that it would be possible to instigate something new without involving insanity.

As for scientific innovation research, that reminds me of the work of Stuart Kauffman, an important researcher into complexity who talked of a Cambrian explosion.^[10] During the Cambrian period there was an explosion of animal phyla. Kauffmann showed in his models that during a “Cambrian period” everything is in production, from the useful to the useless. You can’t be selective and say, I’ll just get the go for things.



Alpha, 2006 © Anderwald + Grond

That is also important when we look at the history of Vienna. We know that in Vienna the most beautiful and the ugliest things, the most magnificent and the meanest things all came about at the same time, and it may be that it’s only ever possible to have both at once. We always want the most beautiful things, but it’s not possible to *only* have beautiful things. We don’t want the Nazis but we do want Gustav Mahler. The notion that there is a creative process that is aimed in a particular direction – *a priori* to all things beautiful, to the good and the true, without the garbage, the dross, the manic, the beauty in mad-houses, without having to deal with the asinificant, with breathing, with hearing and that whole presubjective and

prediscursive arena – is just a reductive, neoliberal illusion, which only wants to recognise a single scale. We swipe everything else away with the same gesture we'd use on a tablet. We think we can escape that dross and all that other stuff by swiping it away. In that sense classical modernism was already much further ahead than we are now. We've gone back to thinking we can swipe everything away that we don't need!

LG – Modernism is extremely important, but people like to mystify it, because it's the time when everything broke away.

HK – That's exactly what I mean. That was the period from 1880 to 1930, the time when there was an explosion of signs and of madness. The whole system was topsy-turvy and simultaneously produced the ugliest things and the most beautiful things. Again, if you try to consider creativity from behind, who is it that evaluates all that which is creative? In our world it's evaluated by the stockbrokers. But, in my view, if you define it from the outset in teleological, utilitarian terms, you'll never understand the meaning and the nature of creativity. That's a functionalist illusion, a confusion that is typical of our world and that also happens to be one of the reasons why we are so captive in our own world, why we find no way out, why we move in this frantic gridlock through technological evolutionary dizziness and yet don't feel better or different for even one day, but just feel the way we feel: hemmed in, incarcerated in a world of necessities yet not at home in this world.

There's a late text by Deleuze on the topic of creativity,¹¹ in which he describes how and why creativity always has to pass through narrow conduits. It's about finding the gap. Initially it's about making something manifest. But as soon as you consider or view that which is to be manifested in light of an economic evaluation, you're lost. There has to be a plentiful surplus for something to emerge at the end of the process.

If I consider how many people had to get stoned and take LSD, and how many Buddhists who had fled Tibet had to teach on the West Coast until a Steve Jobs was possible; how much culture, spirituality, philosophy was necessary for that illegitimate child who was always an outsider; how infinitely many codes had to be produced for technology to emerge somewhere in the end; and above all how many healing processes were necessary for those cycles of traumatization. And then all of that is forced through a bottle neck, that's to say, a bottle neck of monetary evaluation.

Nevertheless there is the strand of life philosophers in the history of philosophy, which shows that the process of creation is not over yet. Deleuze is one of them, Spinoza, all the antipsychiatry people in the 1960s and 1970s, who were constantly exploring the new and creativity, *natura naturans*, the old topic of scholastic philosophy. Ultimately all of modern quantum physics is nothing other than a continuation of the creation story.

Those are vast fields, but when dizziness triggers something, it is the disruption of the ego with its longing for verticality and, only in the unconscious, with its longing for horizontality, because you can't fall any more when you're lying down.

(Laughter)

RA – Which you could sum up as – the longing for stasis is a longing for death.

HK – It really is a death wish that's manifested here, the same as when people talk of the last war: one more war and then *eternal rest*. That's *eternal peace*, the *thousand-year Reich*, and

so on. Now we have to kill everyone and then everything will go quiet. We're just not keen to do that. (*Laughs*)

Translation: Fiona Elliott

photo © The Getty Research Institute

1

For instance *Todessprung* (<http://archive.org/stream/paulk00klee#page/10/mode/2up>), 1915, *Zerstörung und Hoffnung* (http://www.moma.org/collection/provenance/provenance_object.php?object_id=59763), 1916, *Abstürzender Vogel* (<http://metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/483046>), 1919, *Schwankendes Gleichgewicht*, 1922, *Ein Gleichgewicht-Capriccio* (http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=33845), 1923, *Kleiner Narr in Trance 2* (<http://pintura.aut.org/SearchProducto?Produum=70.508>), 1927, *Kleiner Narr in Trance* (<http://alfredflechtheim.com/werke/narr-in-trance/>), 1929, *Schwebendes*, 1930 (<http://www.zpk.org/de/sammlung-forschung/sammlung-archiv/highlights-aus-der-sammlung/schwebendes-341.html>), *Sturz* (<http://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/index.php/paul-klee.html>), 1933, *Im Rausch* (http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=34149), 1939.

2

http://www.picturebook-illust.com/artist/003_klee/054.htm

3

During his time teaching at the Bauhaus Klee published numerous texts and lectures on art education and on the theory of art: on studying the natural world, thinking in images, and artistic form. It was while Klee was at the Bauhaus that he delivered a series of lectures, between November 1921 and late 1922, which he titled *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre* and which included his studies on the arrow. See “Bildnerische Form- und Gestaltungslehre”: at <http://www.kleegestaltungslehre.zpk.org/ee/ZPK/Archiv/2011/01/25/00001/>

4

Paul Klee, *Das pädagogische Skizzenbuch* (1925)
<http://andrewharlow.co/post/9733365796/illustrations-for-das-padagogische-skizzenbuch>.

5

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rollenkonserve>.

6

Gilles Deleuze, “The Exhausted,” trans. Anthony Uhlmann, *SubStance*, vol. 24, no. 3, issue 78 (1995): 3–28. Available at
http://pages.akbild.ac.at/kdm/_media/_pdf/Gilles%20Deleuze%20-%20The%20Exhausted.pdf

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Batman Begins, director: Christopher Nolan, USA 2005, www.batmanbegins.com.

Bruce Wayne: *What have I done, Alfred? Everything my family... my father built...*

Alfred Pennyworth: *The Wayne legacy is more than bricks and mortar, Sir.*

Bruce Wayne: *I wanted to save Gotham. I failed.*

Alfred Pennyworth: *Why do we fall, Sir? So that we can learn to pick ourselves up.*

Bruce Wayne: *You still haven't given up on me?*

Alfred Pennyworth: *Never.*

8

The philosopher and social scientist Harald Katzmaier is founder and director of the Social Network Analytics & Strategies firm FASresearch, <http://www.fas-research.com>.

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http://monoskop.org/images/6/65/Levi-Strauss_Claude_Introduction_to_the_Work_of_Marcel_Mauss.pdf

10

“Antichaos and Adaptation” (1991) <http://www.santafe.edu/media/workingpapers/91-09-037.pdf>

11

Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. Logique de sensation*, 1984), London and New York: Continuum 2003,

http://monoskop.org/images/1/1f/Deleuze_Gilles_Francis_Bacon_The_Logic_of_Sensation.

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