

EDITORIAL: AMBIGUITY: CONDITIONS, POTENTIALS, LIMITS

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Editorial: Ambiguity: Conditions, Potentials, Limits

1_Ambiguously Lured

Although the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic can be described, inspired by Pauline Boss, as trigger for an “ambiguous loss,”¹ a collectively experienced loss that remains unclear and undefined and thus lingers indefinitely, especially in times of crisis simple answers to complex questions seem to be growing in popularity. Instead, in this issue we as the Editorial Team plead for a “near-sighted, case-study oriented analysis with ambiguity-pragmatic intention,”² thereby focusing on the following questions: Are there different stages, degrees, levels³ or variations of ambiguity, and can they be differentiated terminologically and analytically? Is there a connection between ambiguity and (socio-)political engagement?⁴ How can we include ambiguity’s historicity in our conceptual reflections and theoretical discussions? To what extent are the production, perception, transformation, and functions⁵ of ambiguity shaped by the occidental Western tradition of thought, and what are the challenging phenomena?

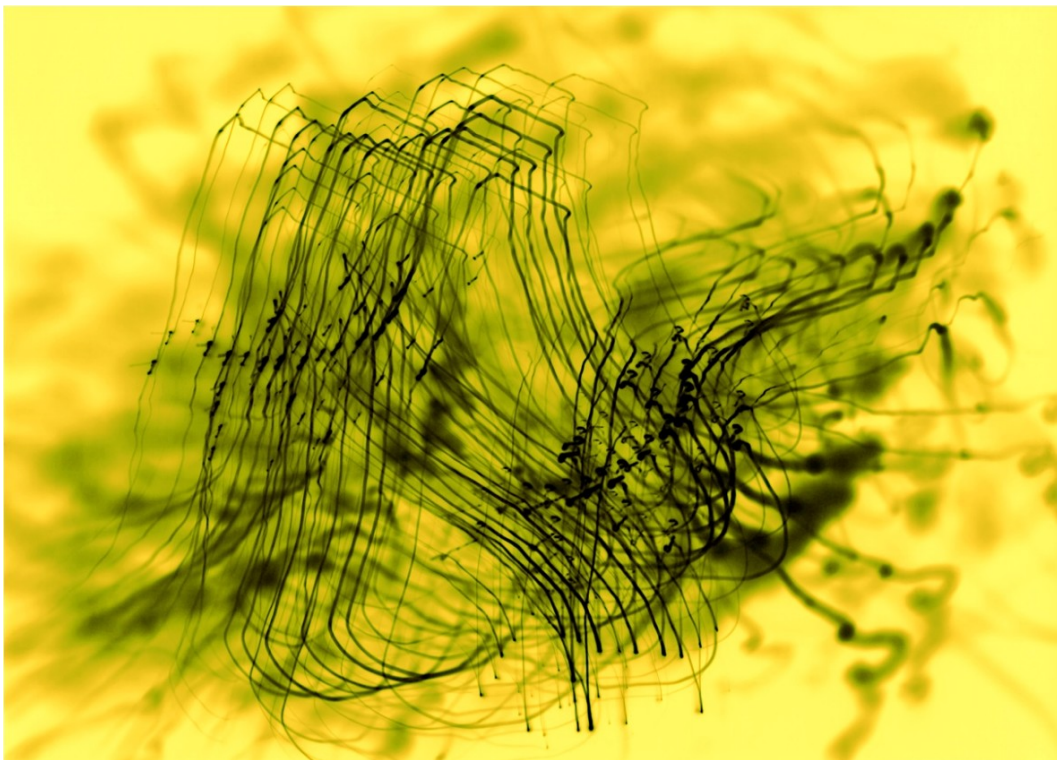


Fig. 1: Tim Lorenz, *NordWest 2.03*, 2019. © Courtesy of the artist

To make it a bit more concrete: The teaser image (Fig. 1) to this issue persists in an associative mode of aesthetic ambiguity⁶ with a corresponding mode of reception that Verena Krieger identifies as a “continuous cycle of searching for meaning, but this search remains, in the end, unresolved.”⁷ Because *NordWest 2.03* (2019) by Tim Lorenz is characterized by a striking ambiguity on a formal-aesthetic level (due to its abstract design vocabulary together with its focus-and-blur relations), it triggers a variety of associations in our Editorial Team:

I see a nice warm summer day with green spots as grass. (Çiçek Tanlı)

My first association was energy and power, I specifically had to think of energy and glowing wires inside a light bulb; my second association was movement, flying particles, sudden moves and turns of flying animals defying expectation and prediction. (Jens Kugele)

The yellow reminds me of a flower in the sun. It gives rise to a feeling of comfort, which is then disrupted by the green-black scratches. (Eva Zimmermann)

My immediate impression was that of power, energy or electricity (due to the vibrant colors, but perhaps also because the green lines vaguely remind me of wires), chaotic potential, movement, or even rage which has the power to transform the status quo and trigger chaos which results in new possibilities. Relatedly, I’m also thinking of the process of emitting light — which kind of resonates with the notions of hope, creativity, and potential for transformation.

Another association is that of vibration. Now I’m thinking of the green lines as strings of a musical instrument and interpret the shapes as though the strings were vibrating, hence emitting sounds, making music. This makes me think of ‘in-betweenness,’ oscillation between precision/imprecision and the potential for new creations resulting from this state. (Lucia Toman)

First, I associate what is depicted with movement — and thus with something that, strictly speaking, defies fixation. Second, as a non-binary person, I am particularly drawn to the dominant gender-neutral color yellow. Finally, I like the anti-identitarian politics that this photograph conveys for me. By not depicting human bodies, for example, it sidesteps the danger of stigmatization, victimization, and stereotyping, which is why I find it quite liberating, and why I inevitably find myself thinking about the subversive potential of relative invisibility. (Oliver Klaassen)

The photograph reminds me of a flying seagull. (Isabella Kalte)

When I look at the photo, my eyes catch the invisibility/obscurity of the boundaries between what is considered to be explicit/precise/lucid versus blurred/vague/unclear in the background. That contrast reminds me how challenging it could be for the scholars of social sciences and humanities to find a proper language to define, describe and explain the (structural) ambiguities embedded in social imagination and reality. (Margarita Pavlova)

Although the image might elicit a lot of different associations, it is in strictly technical terms nothing more than a luminogram, a camera-less generated light-space. The depicted structures on the surfaces of the photographs are a result of gestural and chemical operations in the darkroom. With the help of sources of light, the manual manipulation of light-intensive photo paper creates a random accumulation and scattering of color particles in and on the fibers of a chemically reactive paper. Abstractly gesturing with flashlights and lasers creates sweeping washes of soft color — as if someone were drawing with light. After creating the originals in the darkroom Lorenz scanned and colored the camera-less photograph.

Oliver Klaassen analyzes in their short comment in the multi-voiced *Perspective* the fact that such camera-less photographs can also to some extent leave such an associative mode and be made productive for queer(ing)-political — i.e. normativity-critical and binary opposition undermining — engagement, using the example of an exhibition poster by Wolfgang Tillmans (Fig. 2) on the occasion of his* 2013 exhibition at the Museo de Artes Visuales (MAVI) in Santiago de Chile. In this mini-collage, in fact, two details of photographs are combined to form an overall view: on the one hand, the camera-less photograph *Ostgut Freischwimmer (right)* (2004), which shows similarities to Lorenz's teaser image on a formal-aesthetic and technical (production) level, and on the other hand, the analog photograph *The Cock (Kiss)* (2002) of two persons readable as male* kissing.



Fig. 2: Wolfgang Tillmans' photograph of a placarded wall in a street in Santiago on the occasion of his* exhibition *Wolfgang Tillmans* (07/18/13–10/20/13) at the Museo de Artes Visuales (MAVI). Each poster consists of a section of the analog photograph *The Cock (Kiss)* (2002) (top) and the camera-less photograph *Ostgut Freischwimmer (right)* (2004) (bottom).
© Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

2_A Working Definition of Ambiguity

In line with Bernhard Groß, Verena Krieger, Michael Lüthy, and Andrea Meyer-Fraatz, this issue starts from the premise that ambiguity's peculiarity can be determined "only by looking closely at the contexts in which ambiguity occurs and the intentions with which it is generated."⁸ But what do we mean by ambiguity? As an editorial team, we argue for a more open terminology that is no longer oriented only to the etymological sense of equivocation, but uses ambiguity as a meta-terminus that includes "double meaning, multiple meaning, or *Vieldeutigkeit* [O.K.] of a phenomenon."⁹ In addition, following Sabine Dengel, Julia Hagenberg, Linda Kelch, and Ansgar Schnurr, we propose the terminological specification that "the term [ambiguity; O.K.] captures not only the competition of two binary perspectives, but above all the complex simultaneity of multiple interpretations and claims."¹⁰ Therefore, Frauke Berndt and Stephan Kammer also define ambiguity in a narrower sense as "antagonistic-simultaneous bivalence."¹¹ Above all, we sympathize with the concept of cultural ambiguity coined by Thomas Bauer as an umbrella term that encompasses not only language but also non-linguistic acts and is defined by him*¹² as follows:

We may talk of the phenomenon of cultural ambiguity if, over a period of time, two contrary, or at least competing, clearly differing meanings are associated with one and the same term, act, or object; or if a social group draws on contrary or strongly differing discourses for attributions of meaning to various realms of human life; or if one group simultaneously accepts different interpretations of a phenomenon, all of them entitled to equal validity.¹³

The fact that “ambiguity [...] does not exist without someone [who] perceives [and experiences; O.K.] it”¹⁴ also leads us to the distinction, central to this issue, between ambiguity as the object side and ambivalence¹⁵ as the subject side, with both levels often interlocking.¹⁶ In terms of ambiguous phenomena in culture, politics and everyday life, this means that while they may be *experienced* as ambiguous, they might not necessarily be ambiguous *per se*.

3_Ambiguity and Interdisciplinary Dialogue

Ambiguity is a circulating and ‘traveling concept’¹⁷ that is in motion as part of ever-changing orders of knowledge within and between disciplines and is variously linked in different contexts. For this reason, this issue advocates an approach that Mieke Bal describes as continuously “working with concepts.”¹⁸ That the concept of ambiguity stimulates research from a wide variety of humanities and/or cultural studies is evidenced by findings from, for example, art history and theory,¹⁹ art education,²⁰ gender and queer studies,²¹ social sciences,²² psychology,²³ cultural studies and history,²⁴ literary studies and linguistics,²⁵ philosophy,²⁶ and political science/studies.²⁷ Above all, we as the Editorial Team would like to build on the increasing number of interdisciplinary research projects already completed²⁸ and still underway²⁹ in recent years and further differentiate and systematize the field of cultural ambiguity studies. To do this, this issue brings together a variety of the following disciplines in an interdisciplinary dialogue: graphic narrative/contemporary fiction studies (Barlow), feminist social theory (Gekle) and social science (Schorstein), comparative literature studies (Schöfberger), anthropology (Spyropoulou), (queer-)political philosophy (Engel), creative writing (Biswas), art history (Aranke, Cooper, Getsy, Klaassen, Rand, Sexon, Simmons, Töpfer), art education (Kargin), and media studies (Beckmann, Claus). What unites all these authors is an attitude of ambiguity tolerance³⁰ and/or affinity for ambiguity, in that they understand ambiguity as an intellectual challenge. As the brief summary of all the contributions below will make clear, noticing ambiguous phenomena in culture, politics and everyday life is thus not

the end, but rather the starting point of the interpretive discussion and engagement with a research object.

Starting from the double function of ambiguity in queer theory, namely its livability and political potential, Antke A. Engel delineates a concept of a *a_sociality* as ‘queerness a lived ambiguity’ in their *Essay*. In doing so, Engel argues that a *a_sociality* depicts a relationality that simultaneously involves sociality, anti-sociality and a *a_sociality* and as such could draw attention to new ways of cohabitating in a socially and globally heterogeneous world. Interpreting ambiguity through Primo Levi’s concept of the ‘gray zone,’ Amy Barlow’s *Article* sheds light on the intricacies of victim- and perpetratorhood, often more interlaced than dichotomous. Through the analysis of two contemporary graphic novels about war and genocide, Barlow delineates the unique portrayal of trauma afforded by the form of the graphic narrative and makes a case for a more nuanced critical approach, motivated by empathy and a consideration of the circumstances complicated by the precariousness of war. In her* *Article*, Lea Gekle makes an important and long overdue argument about a blind spot in Theodor Adorno’s diagnosis of social-psychological intolerance of ambiguity and in his* critique of positivist epistemology and methodology in the social sciences by pointing to strategic sources in feminist epistemology. Riccardo Schöfberger explores in his* *Article* the representations of masculinity in the works of Bolognese subcultural and avant-garde writers in late 1970s Italy. Taking a transatlantic literary motif of masculine ambiguity as a point of departure, the author reveals three remarkably different literary reactions to the second-wave feminism shedding light on the transformation of gender narrative since the sociopolitical turmoil of 1968. Despoina Spyropoulou’s *Article* is a theoretical exploration of the status of human remains within processes of repatriation. By making use of the concept of ambiguity as an analytical tool, Spyropoulou argues that repatriation claims activate an ambiguous potential within the reclaimed human remains that defies classification and results in a multiplication of meanings and temporalities which results in endowing these items with social agency. Biswas’ trilogy of poems presents a trans-positive perspective on the characters of Shiva, Vishnu and Shikhandi, through which the *Perspective* analyzes the divine as non-binary in Hinduism, combining queer theory and applied transpoetics in a critical and creative practice. And last but not least: In a multi-voiced *Perspective*, twelve contributors

(Oliver Klaassen with the collaboration of Sampada Aranke, Marie Sophie Beckmann, Ashton Cooper, Jakob Claus, David J. Getsy, Fatma Kargin, Erica Rand, Tillmann Schorstein, Sophie Sexon, William J. Simmons, Siim Sorokin, and Lukas Mathis Töpfer) from various disciplinary backgrounds respond to Getsy's critique of the concept of ambiguity with a short comment, thereby exploring not only to the potentials (added value) but also to the limits (valuelessness) of ambiguity as an analytical tool.

4_Ambiguity and Epistemology: Some Food for Thought at the End

Ambiguity is often understood as a “counterworld to the logical stringency of scientific thinking.”³¹ In this issue, the Editorial Team and all authors are therefore confronted with the dilemma that the transfer of ambiguity into the written language is inevitably accompanied by disambiguation tendencies at one point or another:

[...] scientific texts [...] strive to offer a clear argumentation and a sharpened presentation — this is good scientific convention and unquestionably serves the insightful communication of science. But this desirable and helpful clarification of things in describing and communicating inevitably leads to a fundamental paradox, namely to counter the thematically ambiguous, open-ended, and indeterminate with scientific clarity and selectivity.³²

Being aware of the constitutive impossibility of a final fixation of meaning with a simultaneous necessity of partial fixations, a classic poststructuralist premise, we as an editorial team think that it is desirable within cultural ambiguity studies to produce academic texts “which function [...] less according to controllability (mastery) and according to a binary either-or principle, but rather according to an open approach of thinking, which is characterized by an as-well-as and/or a neither-nor principle.”³³ But how, in the course of researching (cultural) ambiguity, is it possible not to smooth it out hermeneutically in the form of reductionist interpretations, but to leave it in abeyance? Does this require disputing epistemological paths that are precisely not aimed at directing the production of meaning along a prescribed path? Or, to put it differently: What does an active and formative way of dealing with ambiguity look like? What does it mean to adopt a research approach that is characterized by a “pleasure in and a desire for contradictoriness, discordances, ambiguities?”³⁴ And what are the characteristics of scientific texts that effortlessly settle into ambiguity without a conscious effort? With this selection of open questions, we would like to

demonstrate that the potential of ambiguity is still unexploited in many respects and therefore encourage further research.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the people who have played a big part in this issue with valuable contributions and support. First and foremost, we would like to thank all the authors whose *Articles*, *Essay*, and *Perspectives* have contributed to the polyphony of the issue. Second, we would like to thank the external reviewers for their active support in reviewing the articles and the artist Tim Lorenz for the camera-less photograph *NordWest 2.03* (2019), which serves as a teaser image. Thirdly, we would like to thank Constance Schölch and Miriam von Kutzleben for giving all contributions a formal check (adaptation to our style guidelines). Fourth, we would like to thank Anne Wheeler, Lucia Toman, Marija Spirkovska and Shawna Vesco for their proofreading services. Fifth, we would like to thank two former editorial board members: Max Bergmann for his* support in the conceptualization phase; Marie Christine Boucher for her* support also in large parts of the implementation phase and her* idea for a multi-voiced *Perspective* after we, unfortunately, had to discard another idea for this section. Last but not least, we would like to take this opportunity to thank each other in the Editorial Team for bearing responsibility in several directions (careful consideration of submitted contributions, organization of fair review process, preparation of the texts for publication the best possible way through editing, proofreading, layout, etc.).

So as not to let individual credit, effort and authorship sink into ambiguity, we the Editorial Team have taken the liberty to add these final lines to include one more acknowledgment — a great thanks goes to Oliver Klaassen for bringing their expertise on the topic to this issue, for taking the lead in writing its framing texts (Editorial and Call for Abstracts), as well as for compiling the multi-voiced *Perspective*. Thank you for your work, Oliver.

Endnotes

- ¹ Pauline Boss, *The Myth of Closure: Ambiguous Loss in a Time of Pandemic* (New York: Norton Professional Books, 2021); Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss. Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1999).
- ² Bernhard Groß et al., “Für eine Pragmatik der Ambiguität — Zur Einleitung,” in *Ambige Verhältnisse: Uneindeutigkeit in Kunst, Politik und Alltag*, eds. Bernhard Groß et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 9–12, here: 12; translated by O.K. We thereby follow Krieger’s motto “[a]lso *Vieldeutigkeit* [O.K.], also refusal of meaning, also openness of meaning can be the object of interpretation!” Verena Krieger, “‘At war with the obvious’ — Kulturen der Ambiguität: Historische, psychologische und ästhetische Dimensionen des Mehrdeutigen,” in *Ambiguität in der Kunst: Typen und Funktionen eines ästhetischen Paradigmas*, eds. Verena Krieger and Rachel Mader (Köln: Böhlau, 2010), 13–49, here: 45; translated by O.K.
- ³ Krieger, for example, distinguishes between five levels of ambiguity of (or in) art, namely the medial level, the artistic level, the intentional level, the historical level, and the receptive level. See Verena Krieger, “Modes of Aesthetic Ambiguity in Contemporary Art: Conceptualizing Ambiguity in Art History,” in *Ambiguity in Contemporary Art and Theory*, eds. Frauke Berndt and Lutz Koepnick (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2018), 59–103, here: 83–85.
- ⁴ On the interplay between aesthetic ambiguity and (socio-)political engagement, see especially Nina Bandi, “Zur Un/Eindeutigkeit politisch engagierter Kunst,” in *What Can Art Do?*, eds. Siri Peyer et al. (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2020), 85–93; Verena Krieger, “Strategische Uneindeutigkeit: Ambiguierungstendenzen ‘engagierter’ Kunst im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert,” in *Radikal ambivalent: Engagement und Verantwortung in den Künsten heute*, ed. Rachel Mader (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2014a), 29–56; and Verena Krieger, “Ambiguität und Engagement: Zum Problem politischer Kunst in der Moderne,” in *Blindheit und Hellsichtigkeit: Künstlerkritik an Politik und Gesellschaft der Gegenwart*, ed. Cornelia Klinger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014b), 159–88. Krieger distinguishes between four variants in this context, namely evocation of contradictions, subversive affirmation, indifferent mimesis, and reconciliation.
- ⁵ With regard to linguistic ambiguity, Donald Levine differentiates between two cultural functions, namely the “illuminative function” and the “expressive function,” and two social functions, namely the “protective function” and the “function of social bonding.” See Donald N. N. Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). With regard to the intentional level of aesthetic ambiguity, Krieger differentiates between four modi operandi, namely the conjunctive mode, the disjunctive mode, the associative mode, and the indifferent mode. See Verena Krieger, “Modi ästhetischer Ambiguität in der zeitgenössischen Kunst: Zur Konzeptualisierung des Ambiguitätsbegriffs für die Kunstwissenschaft,” in *Ambige Verhältnisse: Uneindeutigkeit in Kunst, Politik und Alltag*, eds. Bernhard Groß et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021b), 15–71; Krieger, “Modes of Aesthetic Ambiguity.”
- ⁶ In distinction to pictorial ambiguity, we refer to the term aesthetic ambiguity as the generic term for “equivocation, vagueness, and all forms of *Uneindeutigkeit* [O.K.] in art.” Verena Krieger, “Steigert Kunst die Ambiguitätskompetenz? Potenziale ästhetischer Ambiguität von Picasso bis zum Zentrum für Politische Schönheit,” in *Mehrdeutigkeit gestalten: Ambiguität und die Bildung demokratischer Haltungen in Kunst und Pädagogik*, eds. Ansgar Schnurr et al. (Bielefeld:

- transcript Verlag, 2021a), 103–127, here: 103; Krieger, “Modi ästhetischer Ambiguität,” 30.
- ⁷ Krieger, “Modes of Aesthetic Ambiguity,” 99. Krieger distinguishes four modes of intentional aesthetic ambiguity: the conjunctive mode, the disjunctive mode, the associative mode and the disjunctive mode. See Krieger, “Modes of Aesthetic Ambiguity,” 85–102.
- ⁸ Bernhard Groß et al., “Für eine Pragmatik der Ambiguität,” 10; translated by O.K.
- ⁹ Groß et al., “Für eine Pragmatik der Ambiguität,” 12; translated by O.K. See also Krieger, “‘At war with the obvious,’” 15.
- ¹⁰ Sabine Dengel et al., “Einleitung: Zur Ambiguität in Kunst, Gesellschaft und Pädagogik sowie die Suche nach dem Transfer,” in *Mehrdeutigkeit gestalten: Ambiguität und die Bildung demokratischer Haltungen in Kunst und Pädagogik*, eds. Ansgar Schnurr et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 9–22, here: 15; translated by O.K.
- ¹¹ Frauke Berndt and Stephan Kammer, “Amphibolie — Ambiguität — Ambivalenz. Die Struktur antagonistisch-gleichzeitiger Zweiwertigkeit,” in *Amphibolie — Ambiguität — Ambivalenz*, eds. Frauke Berndt and Stephan Kammer, (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 7–32, here: 10; translated by O.K.
- ¹² In the sense of a queer-feminist motivated (written) language we use the asterisk (*) to signal the denaturalization and cultural constructedness of categories such as man* and woman* and the related pronouns he*/his* and she*/her*.
- ¹³ Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 10.
- ¹⁴ Andrea Sabisch, “Vom Zeigen und Zähmen der Ambiguität zwischen Kunst und Pädagogik,” in *Ambige Verhältnisse: Uneindeutigkeit in Kunst, Politik und Alltag*, eds. Bernhard Groß et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021b), 329–348, here: 329; translated and added by O.K.
- ¹⁵ The term ambivalence, coined in 1910 by the Zurich psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler (1857–1939), describes “a double valuation, which by its nature is usually an opposite one. The valuation may be an affective or an intellectual one, i.e., an idea may be stressed with positive or with negative feelings, or it may be thought of positively or negatively.” Eugen Bleuler, “Die Ambivalenz,” in *Festgabe zur Einweihung der Neubauten der Universität Zürich* 18. IV. 1914 (Festgabe der medizinischen Fakultät) (Zürich: Schulhess & Co., 1917), 95–106, here: 105; translated by O.K. For a more in-depth discussion of the concept of ambivalence from an interdisciplinary perspective, see, among others, the issue 27, no. 4 of *Forum für Psychoanalyse. Zeitschrift für psychodynamische Theorie und Praxis* from 2011 (ed. Kurt Lüscher).
- ¹⁶ See Dengel et al., “Einleitung,” 15; Groß et al., “Für eine Pragmatik der Ambiguität,” 11; Miriam Haller, “Dekonstruktion der ‘Ambivalenz:’ Poststrukturalistische Neueinschreibungen des Konzepts der Ambivalenz aus bildungstheoretischer Perspektive,” *Forum der Psychoanalyse: Zeitschrift für psychodynamische Theorie und Praxis* 27, no. 4 (2011): 359–71, here: 363–64; Krieger, “Modi ästhetischer Ambiguität,” 41; Krieger, “Modes of Aesthetic Ambiguity,” 68–69; Michael Lüthy, “Ambiguität in der bildenden Kunst: Eine differenzierende Bestimmung,” in *Ambige Verhältnisse: Uneindeutigkeit in Kunst, Politik und Alltag*, eds. Bernhard Groß et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 73–109, here: 84. On the distinction between ambiguity and ambivalence, see not least the *Essay* by Antke Engel in this issue.
- ¹⁷ Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). In addition, see Mieke Bal, “Working with Concepts,” in *Conceptual Odysseys. Passages to Cultural Analysis*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 1–9.

- ¹⁸ Bal, “Working with Concepts,” 1, 6.
- ¹⁹ For an introduction to the research field of ambiguity art history and theory, see especially Frauke Berndt and Lutz Koepnick, eds., *Ambiguity in Contemporary Art and Theory* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2018); Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1989 [1962]); Stuart Franklin, *Ambiguity Revisited: Communicating with Pictures* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2020); Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); Krieger, “Steigert Kunst die Ambiguitätskompetenz?”; Krieger, “Modi ästhetischer Ambiguität”; Krieger, “Modes of Aesthetic Ambiguity”; Krieger, “At war with the obvious”; Verena Krieger and Rachel Mader, eds., *Ambiguität in der Kunst: Typen und Funktionen eines ästhetischen Paradigmas* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010); Rachel Mader, ed., *Radikal ambivalent: Engagement und Verantwortung in den Künsten heute* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2014).
- ²⁰ For an introduction to the research field of ambiguity art education, see especially Susan Orr and Alison Shreeve Alison, *Art and Design Pedagogy in Higher Education: Knowledge, Values and Ambiguity in the Creative Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Ansgar Schnurr, “Die bildende Seite der Ambiguität: Zum ästhetischen und demokratischen Bildungspotenzial mehrdeutiger Kunsterfahrung,” in *Mehrdeutigkeit gestalten: Ambiguität und die Bildung demokratischer Haltungen in Kunst und Pädagogik*, eds. Ansgar Schnurr et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 27–53; Ansgar Schnurr, “Vom Bauchgefühl zur Sprache kommen. Qualitative Ansätze zur Darstellung ästhetischer Prozesse in Auseinandersetzung mit Offenheit und Mehrdeutigkeit,” in *Ist Kunst ein Sonderfall? Qualitative Forschungsansätze in den künstlerisch-pädagogischen Fächern*, eds. Erik Esterbauer und Andreas Bernhofer (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2020), 50–66; Sabisch, “Vom Zeigen und Zähmen der Ambiguität.”
- ²¹ For an introduction to the research field of ambiguity gender and queer studies, see especially Antke Engel, *Wider die Eindeutigkeit: Sexualität und Geschlecht im Fokus queerer Politik der Repräsentation* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2002); William S. Wilkerson, *Ambiguity and Sexuality: A Theory of Sexual Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- ²² For an introduction to the research field of ambiguity social sciences, see especially Theodor W. Adorno et al., eds., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950); Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993); Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity*.
- ²³ For an introduction to the research field of psychological studies on ambiguity, see especially Else Frenkel-Brunswik, “Tolerance of Ambiguity as an Emotional and Perceptual Personality Variable,” in *Journal of Personality* 18 (1949): 108–143; Boss, *The Myth of Closure*; Boss, *Ambiguous Loss*; Jack Reis, *Ambiguitätstoleranz. Beiträge zur Entwicklung eines Persönlichkeitskonstrukts* (Heidelberg: Sanger, 1997).
- ²⁴ For an introduction to the research field of cultural ambiguity studies and history, see especially Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*; Thomas Bauer, *Die Vereindeutigung der Welt: Über den Verlust an Mehrdeutigkeit und Vielfalt* (Ditzingen: Reclam Verlag, 2018); Ulrich Berges, “Ambiguität in kulturwissenschaftlicher Hinsicht. in *Die dunklen Seiten des guten Gottes. Zu Ambiguitäten im Gottesbild JHWHs aus religions- und theologiegeschichtlicher Perspektive*,” ed. Ulrich Berges (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013), 33–55.
- ²⁵ For an introduction to the research field of ambiguity literary studies and linguistics, see especially Frauke Berndt and Stephan Kammer, *Amphibolie — Ambiguität — Ambivalenz* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009); William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: NEW DIRECTIONS, 1996 [1930]); Anthony Ossa-Richardson, *A History of Ambiguity*

- (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Wiltrud Wagner, *Idioms and Ambiguity in Context: Phrasal and Compositional Readings of Idiomatic Expressions* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).
- ²⁶ For an introduction to the research field of philosophical studies on ambiguity, see especially Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2015 [1947]); Craig J. N. de Paulo, Patrick Messina, and Marc Stier, *Ambiguity in the Western Mind* (New York et al.: Peter Lang, 2005).
- ²⁷ For an introduction to the research field of ambiguity political science/studies, see especially Werner Friedrichs, “Politisch-ästhetische Bildung(E)n im Demokratisch-Imaginären. Demokratie und Ambiguität,” in *Mehrdeutigkeit gestalten: Ambiguität und die Bildung demokratischer Haltungen in Kunst und Pädagogik*, eds. Ansgar Schnurr et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 159–173; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemonie und radikale Demokratie. Zur Rekonstruktion des Marxismus*, edited and trans. Michael Hintz and Gerd Vorwallner (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1991 [1985]), 233–234; Silke van Dyk, “Ambiguität der Gerechtigkeit. Mehrdeutigkeit, Hegemonie und die soziale Frage des Gegenwartskapitalismus,” in *Ambige Verhältnisse: Uneindeutigkeit in Kunst, Politik und Alltag*, eds. Bernhard Groß et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021b), 185–202.
- ²⁸ Completed interdisciplinary research projects on ambiguity in recent years include Bernhard Groß et al., eds., *Ambige Verhältnisse: Uneindeutigkeit in Kunst, Politik und Alltag* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021); Barbara Braid, Ewa Glapka, and Malwina Siemiątkowska, eds., *Ambiguous Selves: Contesting Gender Binaries in Literature, Film and the Media* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019); Ansgar Schnurr et al., eds., *Mehrdeutigkeit gestalten: Ambiguität und die Bildung demokratischer Haltungen in Kunst und Pädagogik* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021); Susane Winkler, *Ambiguity: Language and Communication* (Berlin et al.: de Gruyter, 2014); Peter Koslowski and Richard Schenk, eds., *Ambivalenz — Ambiguität — Postmodernität. Begrenzt eindeutiges Denken* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 2004); Sita Popat and Sarah Whatley, *Error, Ambiguity, and Creativity. A Multidisciplinary Reader* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
- ²⁹ Ongoing interdisciplinary research projects on ambiguity include the research training group 1808 “Ambiguity — Production and Perception” at Eberhard Karl University Tübingen, funded by DFG (German Research Foundation) since October 2013; the DFG-research group 2600 “Ambiguität und Unterscheidung: Historisch-kulturelle Dynamiken” at University Duisburg-Essen (since 2019); “FORM. Generic Ambiguity in Narrative Fiction (1800–1930)” (November 2021–October 2025) by Frauke Berndt at University of Zurich or the interdisciplinary working group “Die Produktivität ästhetischer Ambiguität” at Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena (since 2012).
- ³⁰ The term ambiguity (in)tolerance was introduced in 1949 by Elke Frenkel-Brunswik to refer to how individuals perceive and process ambiguous situations and/or stimuli. See Frenkel-Brunswik, “Tolerance of Ambiguity.”
- ³¹ Verena Krieger, “Ambiguität,” *Kritische Berichte* 35, no. 3 (2007): 85–89, here: 88; translated by O.K.
- ³² Dengel et al., “Einleitung,” 17.
- ³³ See Oliver Klaassen in their short comment in this issue’s *Perspective* “(Re-)Negotiating Ambiguity’s (Added) Value(lessness).
- ³⁴ Barbara Paul and Johanna Schaffer, “Introduction: Queer as a Visual Political Practice,” in *Mehr(wert) queer — Queer Added (Value). Visuelle Kultur, Kunst und Gender-Politiken —*

Visual Culture, Art, and Gender Politics, eds. Barbara Paul and Johanna Schaffer (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009), 20–33, here: 20.