

Invectivity – Perspectives for a New Research Program in Cultural Studies and the Social Sciences

Konzeptgruppe „Invektivität“ (Dagmar Ellerbrock, Lars Koch, Sabine Müller-Mall, Marina Münkler, Joachim Scharloth, Dominik Schrage und Gerd Schwerhoff)

Phenomena of vilification and denigration, of naming and shaming, can be understood as trans-epochal and cross-cultural forms of communication. As disruptive, stabilising and dynamising elements, they influence social systems and have the potential to form, change and destroy communities.

In order to investigate the political and cultural relevance of phenomena such as disparagement and shaming, the new term "invectivity" is introduced in the pages that follow. Invectivity is meant to bring into focus those aspects of communication (verbal or non-verbal, oral, written, gestural or pictorial) that are apt to disparage, harm or exclude. However, the manifestations and functions of invective discourse - understood as a mode of performing invectivity - do not conform to a rigid pattern, but rather appear in complex, historically variable constellations in the media, politics, in social situations and the aesthetic sphere. They can therefore only be adequately understood as a performative phenomenon, as a relational nexus of attributions, resonances and follow-on communications, in the context of their social, discursive and medial conditions of possibility.

We want to use the concept of invectivity to develop a new perspective in cultural studies research in order to comprehensively investigate the central role played by invective-driven communication in processes of socialisation, which is the first time this has been done. For this purpose, the pre-conditions and effects of disparaging, destructive communication need to be rendered describable across different contexts: the task is to ascertain the different forms and degrees of invectivity, ranging from the fleeting constitution of groups, to (de-)formations of social systems, to epochal figurations and ruptures; to render visible, to describe and compare the social functions as well as cultural forms of invectivity and the changes they undergo. Conceptualised as a potent mode of processes of interaction and communication, invectivity enables us to gain a more precise understanding of the conflictual nature of the social sphere.

1. Disparagement as a Cultural Model. An Introduction

Verbal and symbolic aggression against persons or groups of people are fundamental manifestations of the social. Denigration or exclusion are linked to attributions related to ethnic, national or religious affiliations, social positioning, gender, sexual orientation or other characteristics relevant to the construction of identity. Such acts of invective are more than marginal or deviant forms of social interaction. They are aimed at the very core of the social sphere by destroying or producing, stabilising or dynamising social relations as a whole.

Even a cursory glimpse at history attests to the ubiquity and the virulence of invective phenomena. Already in the Iliad, one of Europe's oldest epics in written form, a key impetus of the plot consists in King Agamemnon offending Apollo (or at least the latter's priest, Chryses) as well as the hero, Achilles. As a form of political, religious or intellectual confrontation, vilification was omnipresent, for instance in late republican Rome, in early Christianity, in the medieval conflicts between emperors and popes, in the agonistic altercations between the Renaissance humanists, in the struggles of the Reformation as well as in the debates of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. On the one hand, the play of

disparagement, challenging an opponent and defending one's honour is often regarded as a central characteristic of pre-modern society, based as it was on face-to-face interaction (Schlögl 2014); on the other hand, the Reformation was a boom period for the reciprocal denigration of religious-political opponents, which was made possible by the new media of the Gutenberg era (Schwerhoff 2017).

But invective is also obviously present in many different forms today: in election campaigns, parliamentary debates or television panel discussions, in youth cliques or among football fans, in schools, in the 'social media' or – particularly in Dresden or during election campaign appearances by Chancellor Merkel – out on the street. Invective can assume playful forms, which nevertheless always harbour a potential to offend, or it can be articulated aggressively, in the mode of unmistakable hostility. Under the banner of increasingly informal Western societies (Wouters 1999), old and new forms of harsh, offensive language have established themselves in new contexts and have congealed into widespread cultural patterns (cf. Koch 2017). Discussions about verbal aggression in the electronic media, such as the documentary-soap formats on television, but especially in the Internet (shit-storms and trolling), are indications of the immense amount of attention that invective is currently (re-)experiencing. Standing in a largely unresolved, tense relationship with the oft-lamented inflation of verbal denigration is the allegedly increasing sensibility to insults and denigration in relation to gender or people with a migration background. This sensibility finds an outlet in heated journalistic and academic debates as well as in literary and aesthetic reflections on verbal discrimination and hate speech, on the accusation of supposedly ideology-driven political correctness and the limits of freedom of expression (cf. Erdl 2015).

Vilification and denigration play a role in public debates from the local to the global sphere.

Invective is used to defame political opponents and mobilise one's own supporters. Donald Trump presents himself as the very embodiment of a politics of vilification (cf.

Kanzler/Scharlaj 2017). Historical crises and current crises were and are significantly shaped by public invective: the European debt crisis, the nuclear dispute with North Korea, the Brexit debate, and the clashes between the EU and Erdogan's authoritarian government.¹ In the debates about fleeing and expulsion, derogatory stereotypes regarding the exclusionary construction of ethnic identity are omnipresent. The Pegida demonstrations in Dresden (Rehberg/Kunze/Schlinzig 2016), which set the trend for racist escalation of the discourse on identity in Germany, have meanwhile lost the status of a regional special case and are regarded as an indicator of an increasingly brutal culture of debate. Intercultural conflicts are often crystallised, as in the case of the 2005 Mohammed caricatures (Lindekilde et al., 2009), in the accusation that one's religion is being vilified. And academia is also heavily affected by controversy over verbal and symbolic denigration, the danger of potentially offensive micro-aggressions (Sue 2010), and the freedom-endangering effects of a linguistic sensitivity denounced by its critics as political correctness. Likewise, emotion-laden campaigns against a supposed 'gender ideology' point to the role of invective in the structuring of academic debates (Hark/Villa 2015).

These contemporary and historical constellations of invective are as diverse as they are virulent. The current state of academic research is such that it provides an inadequate account of the social impact of invective and the plurality of its forms. Sociological research on conflict has dealt with verbal-symbolic denigration only in passing rather than as a central concern (Simmel 1992; Dahrendorf 1956; Coser 1964). It is true that there are numerous studies on individual aspects of the topic, originating from the most diverse disciplines, including studies focused on the current situation (cf. inter alia Matsuda et al. 1993; Neu

¹ Numerous historical and current examples can be found in Frevert (2017), who, however, chooses a conceptual approach to public shaming or humiliation that differs from ours.

2008, Moïse et al. 2008; Conley 2010; Gauger 2012) as well as historical analyses (Beard 2014; Lobenstein-Reichmann 2013; Eming/Jarzebowski 2008; Czech 2010; Speitkamp 2010). More recently, there have been contributions to the discussion whose ambitions and significance go far beyond their own discipline, such as social-psychological reflections on linguistic discrimination (Graumann 1998) and especially the contributions from the philosophy of language on hate speech and offensive language (Butler 2006; Herrmann/Krämer/Kuch 2007). However, so far there has been no overarching, systematic, interdisciplinary attempt to study the wide range of manifestations of verbal or symbolic aggression and disparagement as a phenomenon *sui generis*, across historical periods. Due to the extremely variable linguistic, pictorial and symbolic form of the phenomena and due to their occurrence in different social milieus, in interactions, in political controversies and religious conflicts, a more extensive, interdisciplinary approach to studying them appears essential.

2. The Concept of Invectivity

The concept of invectivity opens up access to a fundamental social phenomenon that links together emotions, strategic calculations and symbolic claims to validity in a specific way. For the most part it is considered as a transgression of the norms that regulate interpersonal relations, but at the same time invective (sometimes) establishes its own normative and emotional claims and notions of normality. The social effects produced by an invective event depend on the manifold possibilities of interpretation and the corresponding communicative resonance that it itself initially generates. In each case, invective serves as a production mechanism and “transmission belt” of processes of social inclusion and exclusion, thereby producing social hierarchies and societal orders. The notion of invectivity thus not only reveals the conflictual-polemogenic² character of social systems, but also makes it possible to explain how invective acts bring forth emotionally and performatively the conflictual nature of the social. Our assumption is that invectivity contributes significantly to the production, implementation and transformation of specific *dispositifs* and orders of discourse. Thus, the concept of invectivity enables a systematic analysis of the social dynamics of the derogatory identification of individuals, groups and larger collectives. In particular, the social constellations, social functions and cultural forms of invectivity can be better understood in this way. In addition, we want to profile invective as a specific mode of processes of interaction and communication, and assume that only in this way can one adequately understand the conflictual nature and the reproduction of societal systems, their ability to reach consensus, as well as their polemogenic nature.

On the one hand, our attention is focused on the processes that are characteristic of invective - how do the dynamics of invective develop and accelerate to escalation point? How can they be contained (for example, by means of ritualised forms of behaviour)? On the other hand, we focus on the effects of invective on social, political and cultural change: for invective can have a dynamic effect but it can also have an obstructive, or even a stabilising effect on societal orders. This raises the fundamental question of the relationship between invectivity and transformation (Böhme et al., 2012): empirically, it has to be clarified whether and, if so, in what way forms of invective are linked to paradigm shifts, system transformations, and epochal upheavals. From a conceptual point of view, one has to examine the extent to which the concept of invectivity - specifically in light of the productivity of invective -, offers greater potential for explaining social change than system-theoretical or discourse-theoretical approaches, or whether via the concept of invectivity society has to be understood and

² “polemogenic”: giving rise to conflict (trans.)

described in a new way. In particular, however, it is apparent that the concept obliges one to view social dynamics and cultural forms as reciprocal, since invective is always culturally shaped and cannot be discerned independently of the social dynamics in which it is inscribed. Therefore, the analytic elaboration of the concept of "invectivity" allows cultural and social phenomena to be placed in a common analytical context, phenomena which so far have remained scattered, fragmented and covered by a heterogeneous spectrum of concepts. The phenomena to be described using the notion of invectivity range from disparaging rudeness to vilification, from blasphemy and insults to hate speech and verbal or symbolic violence, from intentional and personalised variants of deprecation, to social *dispositifs* and constellations whose socially pejorative force is the effect of structural power. We use the term 'invective' to designate the common feature of these everyday phenomena: in all cases, individuals and groups are judged by means of verbal or non-verbal acts of communication, which are apt to change the victims' social position, to single them out and/or discriminate against them and, in certain instances, exclude them. A single communicative event in which a person or group is assigned a pejorative characteristic is conceptualised as 'an occurrence of invective'.

On a pragmatic level, the different manifestations of invective share a common modality of social interaction and communication. In a given context, invective can take the form of cursing and offensive expressions, of pejorative expressions, generalisations, hyperbola, superlatives, of reproachful intonation, and so forth (cf. Kallmeyer 1979, Spiegel 1995). In summary, the concept of invectivity is thus a theoretical construct, the cognitive power of which consists in defining observable phenomena as invective, identifying common invective modalities by means of comparison, and establishing invective as a characteristic property of the most diverse cultural phenomena. Our terminology deliberately goes beyond the classical meaning of *invectiva oratio* as a deliberate and artificial diatribe: like other rhetorical genres – such as polemic, satire or caricature -, forms such as these certainly constitute an important frame of reference central to the historical reconstruction and interpretation of invectivity. However, the concept presented here aims to include and analyse phenomena that elude clear formal ascription – only through subtle contextualisation, follow-on communications or through interpretation by a third party does their invective character become apparent (cf. Edlinger 2015).

3. References and Perspectives

Aspects of invectivity are to be found in diverse theoretical contexts. In order to be able to build on this diversity in as differentiated a fashion as possible, we approach the concept of invectivity on the methodological basis of a problem-oriented, theoretical pluralism. Representative examples of these connections and perspectives are outlined in the following sections on a) the fundamentally conflictual nature of social orders, b) on the performative character of acts of invective communication, c) on their affective/emotional foundation, and lastly d) on the aspect of violence.

3.1. Polemogenity and the Conflictual Nature of Social Orders.

The concept of invectivity has the potential to make human co-existence the object of reflection from a specific perspective, and therefore offers an epistemic opportunity: it allows one to dig down to the foundations, so to speak, to uncover the historically varying causes and different manifestations of social orders. In this way, it becomes possible to observe the power-based inclusions and exclusions, the asymmetries and demarcations of the visible and the sayable characteristic of the social order in question. While existing research

concepts foreground the mechanisms that mask social conflicts of interpretation and competing claims to validity, or that endow a social order with the appearance of static stability (cf. Melville/Rehberg 2012; Rehberg 2014), focusing on invectivity offers the possibility of systematically analysing competition, conflicts and struggles in the light of their structural ambivalences. However, precisely because invectivity does not confine itself to identifying transgressions of the social order, but is rather to be understood as a constitutive aspect of the formation of social order, it acquires a central significance in view of the fundamentally conflictual and polemogenic character of political and social orders. This characterization clearly goes beyond the dimension of agonality in the sense of a regulated social and political confrontation, conceivably 'civilised' or civilising, commonly found in theories of democracy (cf. Mouffe 2013, Nullmeier 2000, 148ff; Hirschi 2005; Laureys/Simon 2010). With the concept "polemogenicity", Klaus Eder emphasizes the necessarily divisive and therefore potentially disintegrative side of "culture", which runs counter to the traditional dominance of consensus theories (Eder 1994; Eder 1998); in the framework of still another theoretical approach, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe use the concept of "antagonism" to argue in a similar direction (cf. Mouffe 2014). These reflections are just as groundbreaking as recent sociological theories of conflict, which overcome the fixation on causes, solutions and structural-functionalist constrictions, in order to take seriously the significance of social forms, thereby following the example of Georg Simmel (cf. Bonacker 2008). This is consistent with the insight formulated from very different perspectives in recent decades, namely that the social is generated through communication. Consequently, invective is to be understood as a communicative mode in which the conflictual moment of social order is produced, rendered more dynamic or transformed, performatively. Because invectivity links all dimensions of social conflict, the dynamics of change and the stabilisation of order, the proposed new perspective therefore makes a comprehensive investigation of the foregoing possible. Invective always renders communication more emotional and thereby provokes conflicts (for example, through spontaneous, defamatory utterances), escalates existing conflicts (as in the dispute over the Mohammed caricatures), brings latent conflicts to the fore (as in the case of Pegida), or serves to contain manifest conflicts (for instance, by transforming the level of conflict into an agonal exchange of invective, as in verbal sparring matches). This preliminary differentiation of the communicative modalities of invective into provocation, escalation, explicitation and containment is not intended to constitute a rigid categorial grid analogous to well-established conflict typologies, but rather to outline an expandable heuristic matrix that guides our interdisciplinary work.

3.2. Communication, Performativity and Media Arrangements

Invectivity can only be observed when it is condensed in communicative practices, regardless of whether it is a verbal or non-verbal insult addressed to an adversary, a defamatory speech delivered in front of an audience, a satirical caricature, or antagonism conveyed via the media, addressed to a wide audience. We describe as invective those communicative acts that are perceived as such by participants or viewers - that is, when relational follow-on communications by addressees or third parties thematise the fact that an invective event is occurring or has occurred, and how it has occurred. In accordance with the theory-pluralistic system, the concept of communication we are employing uses the strengths of diverse theories of language to identify and analyse invective phenomena. In order to be able to adequately describe acts of invective, taking into account their conditions of presence and their technological mediation with respect to their respective operationalities and the conditions of their utterance and perception, a heuristic distinction has to be made

between physical presence and absence in communication. This distinction makes it possible to use the concept of interaction developed in interactionist sociology (cf. Goffman 2009) for modes of communication involving physical presence, and at the same time overcome this limitation. In the analysis of situations charged with invective, this distinction also makes it possible to observe all gradations of proximity and distance between the poles of presence and absence (Dürscheid 2003). Only then can meaningful comparative questions be asked about thematic recourses and adoptions of form - for example, fictitious (invective) orality in texts (cf. Goetsch 1985), audiovisual fictions of interaction in media communications (cf. Tuschling 2009), but also the structuring of invective communication in the mass media, where physical presence is involved.

Furthermore, because they involve an action, invective utterances must always be understood as performative: to express oneself in the form of invective means doing something (Austin 1962). In contrast to classic forms of illocutionary speech acts (baptisms and marriages, requests and expressions of thanks, etc.), insults and verbal aggression remain implicit in Austin's verdictive forms, then become central in the work of John Searle, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. However, only in recent years has invective been given more extensive attention by researchers. In a way, insults and verbal aggression appear to constitute the ideal-typical contrast to Jürgen Habermas' principle of communicative rationality, on the basis of which rational agreement is supposed to be possible (cf. Butler's critique, 2006; and Habermas' reading of Austin, 1981).

The research program on invectivity goes well beyond a traditional reading of the speech-act model of verbal abuse. Invective occurs under conditions that involve a complex interweaving of utterances and the attribution of meaning to such utterances in the reactions of addressees and observers. Thus, it is not just the intention of the offending person, which is realised in the speech act and which produces denigration as a perlocutionary effect of a linguistic pattern of action (cf. Austin 1962). Rather, intentionality is a possible, but by no means a necessary pre-condition of invectivity. This viewpoint can be aligned with recent interpretations of Austin's speech act theory, which do not view the sovereign subject as the "intentional origin and centre of his actions" (Kramer/Stahlhut 2001, 38f.), but instead interpret the performing of speech acts as an interpersonally coordinated activity and thus open to interpretation. This results in abandoning the postulate of sovereignty, since the success of invective utterances is dependent on follow-on practices that confirm invective as an effect. That the speaking subject is divested of control is also documented in and by the fact that utterances that were not intended as invective can be interpreted as such by reactive attributions, thus creating a situation where the original utterer is thrust into the role of the insulter. An action model is thus superseded by a negotiation model sensitive to conflict and contingency, which relativises the intentional act of invective address.

The term "performativity" (cf. Wirth 2002; Martschukat/Patzold 2003; Fischer-Lichte 2012; Müller-Mall 2012) is an important point of reference to the extent that it not only follows on from speech act theory, but also underscores the corporeally habitualised, at times also the ritualised character of invective communication: terms of abuse and gestures are often highly stereotyped, as are the corresponding rejoinders and efforts to outdo the initial utterance or gesture. As they interact with each other, speakers endeavour to save face (cf. Goffman 2005), to avert threats to face, or to regain face after being insulted. This generally happens on the basis of conventionalised interaction and communication rituals, meaning that by means of a collaborative social act, norms and intentions in the form of ritual are adopted by those engaged in the interaction (cf. Krämer/Stahlhut 2001).

The success of the efforts to preserve face is highly variable and situation-specific. It depends as much on the concrete form of the communication as on the position of the speakers, the approval of the audience, the social contexts and so on. Consequently, no

utterance is offensive in and of itself; the decisive factors are the particular circumstances in which an utterance takes effect as an occurrence. It can be assumed that invective always manifests itself within a network of cultural knowledge, social norms, storage in various media, and situational facilitation. It is embedded in the multidimensional relationship of staging, performance, corporality and perception (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2005), which situatively constitutes the triad of the producer of the invective, the target of the invective and the audience. The power effects of invective communication are therefore not predetermined, plannable or predictable, on the contrary: being produced performatively, they are characterised by a high degree of contingency, resulting from the unpredictable situational interaction between actors and spectators or listeners (cf. Köpping/Rao 2000).

For this broadened perspective, taking up the post-structuralist conception of the subject found in praxeology is a productive move (Schmidt 2012; Freist 2015; Reckwitz 2015). A corresponding concept of praxis, which, in addition to the materiality of social acts, also takes into account the implicit logics and schemata of knowledge involved in practical actions and reactions (cf. Reckwitz 2003, 293ff.) appears to be helpful in the study of invectivity because by emphasizing the context-dependent character of invective acts and their corporeal dimension, it avoids overly-hasty theoretical constraints and enables flexibility in dealing with different constellations of invective.

These reflections already make it clear that the concept of invectivity points beyond direct invective address to the complex (inter-)medial configurations that pre-figure and frame invective. For example, in many respects, the human body can become the medium of invective communication: as a tool of vilification in the form of 'giving someone the finger' (cf. Krüger 2016) or *fica*, as a referential object of invective with its numerous scatological or sexual facets, as a target in the case of physical deviations from the norms and, above all, as an organ of resonance that, even before any classification in the registers of politics, morality or the law, indicates that invective has occurred (cf. Gehring 2007). Thus, even the body refers beyond the face-to-face situation to the manifold possible levels of invective communication. In each case, an analysis of the semiotic materials is required, of the technical tools of production and distribution, as well as the cultural scripts sedimented in media offerings, in order to reconstruct forms of invective in line with their respective genealogies. The aim is to analyse the different modes and forms in which invectivity is realised, its spatiality and temporality, its visuality, its materiality, the forms in which it is enacted and the possibilities of its reception (cf. Schüttpelz 2006).

3.3. Emotions and Feelings

The intensity, relevance, and obtrusiveness of invective utterances draws heavily on how emotionally laden they are. The relation between invective and emotions or feelings is, however, extremely diverse. Posing a major challenge to all attempts at terminological, categorical and generic classification are the dynamics, the fuzziness and the ambivalent openness of invectivity, which are an indication of the feelings that are always at work, because, as explained above, it is follow-up communications that are essential to invectivity. These follow-up communications are substantially determined by emotional resonance and responses. Above all, the addressees of invective are confronted with a strong negative affective force that often makes it impossible to make a sovereign decision about whether to feel ashamed, humiliated or to meet with hostility. In addition, it can synchronise emotions and thus force group cohesion (cf. Durkheim 1998). The range of emotions and feelings circulating in an invective-event ranges from joy, fun and cheerfulness to desperation, fear (cf. Koch 2013), mistrust, shame and anger (cf. Lehmann 2012). The emotional-affective dimension can be deliberately addressed and exploited, aroused to the point of becoming uncontrollable, and/or experienced spontaneously. Central to the analysis of invectivity is

thus the categorial inclusion of emotions/feelings. In order to sharpen up the concept of invectivity with regard to the dynamics of escalation and the range of variations in follow-on communications, one can draw on approaches from research into the emotions (cf. Adloff / Jörke 2013; Senge / Schützeichel 2013), which lend themselves to a more precise understanding of – in particular - aspects of dynamisation, the inclusion of witnesses to invective, and group formation (cf. Salmela 2014).

Emotions arise in the interplay of corporeality, cognition, sociality and culture. This deliberately problem-oriented concept of emotion makes it possible to open up points of connection with various recent theories of emotion. Depending on the question, it is thus possible draw on the explanations offered by socio-constructivist theories of emotion (cf. Rosenwein 2010) as well as cognitive or philosophical concepts of emotion (cf. Nussbaum 2013), or reflections from the field of *affect studies* (cf. Massumi 2007; Gregg /Seigworth 2010). The empirical analysis of invective uses the terminology of these different approaches to more precisely understand and describe the experiences and modes of operation of shaming and denigration.

Invectivity and emotionality are not just correlated: invective communication without an affective foundation is simply inconceivable. Fundamental to the understanding of invectivity is thus a precise analysis of its manifestations, taking into account its constellations, functions and forms, its social resonance and the ways invective is conveyed by the media into society. Conversely, invectivity could prove to be a key category in opening up access to the historically and socially variable manifestations of passionate feelings and thus make an important contribution to interdisciplinary research on emotions (cf. Schnell 2015). For a special quality of invective is that it makes latent orders of emotion analytically evident and thus reveals their potential for social dynamisation as well as their potential to generate resonance in the media. The emotional intensity that invective is capable of generating lends itself particularly well to understanding the formation of emotional communities (cf. Rosenwein 2006) and emotional regimes (cf. Reddy 2001), or the composition of specifically normative systems of feeling (cf. Stearns 1985, Ellerbrock/Kesper-Biermann 2015; Köhler et al. 2017).

One of the immediate effects of invective utterances is that they can cause shame, a sense of powerlessness, anxiety or anger on the part of those on the receiving end. Depending on the constellation, invective utterances are apt to lead those who are affected either to form a group out of solidarity, to isolate the victims in their shame, or to interrupt the flow of interactions and thus open up space for creativity, reflection, deviation or protest. Shame and shaming have recently been given special analytical attention, on which the conceptualisation of invectivity can build (cf. Frevert 2015). Thus, for example, practices of public shaming highlight the political effectiveness/relevance of invective practice (Ronson 2015; Jaquet 2015). Witnesses to shaming and their relationship to normativity and power are of particular interest (cf. Landweer 1999). Also on the part of those dispensing invective, various emotional effects can be observed, depending on their concrete historical composition: annoyance, rage and hatred can be expressed in invective practices, as well as pleasure, a sense of superiority and pride. Even though these emotions are obvious in connection with invectivity, it remains to be clarified which feelings in which constellations are linked to which invective practices.

3.4. Debasement and Violence

There is certainly a close relationship between the two "resources available to everyone" (to use von Trotha's expression), namely invective and violence, but it is complex and in many respects unclear. Research into this relationship is promising in two respects: both as a

theoretical contribution to the much-discussed and still unresolved relation between language and violence, and as an enhancement of empirical knowledge about the dynamics of discourses and practices of violence. At present, sociological and historical debates appear to focus rather restrictively on physical violence (cf- Gudehus/Christ 2013). However, so far it has been overlooked that invective can have not just a dynamic effect in the sense of initiating violence, but in some constellations - for example, where normative models in the form of genre conventions or communicative genre rules are on hand - also the opposite, de-escalating or retarding effect. Thus, when dealing with invective rap music, for instance, it is not enough to scrutinise the offensive language and the potential for violence that is being articulated. In an opposing perspective, it should also be emphasized that battle rap constitutes a cultural practice in which the defamation of an opponent with forms of recognition and elaborate language games is bound up with a subcultural mode of expression that contributes to the group-stabilising containment of violence rather than promoting it.

Other approaches (cf. Butler 2006; Krämer/Koch 2010) point in a different direction, where any attribution of characteristics at all is understood as an act of violence: because every time an individual is named, every time an individual is subsumed under a conceptual category, only certain features are foregrounded, meaning that the production of order in the medium of language and the realisation of violence go hand in hand. This violence is of course a condition of the possibility of speaking and thus, in principle, pre-ethical; from an analytical perspective, it is in the first instance not subject to any moral judgment. However, social-philosophical and cultural-theoretical analyses generally go beyond the inevitable violence of linguistic utterances in this sense: they are mindful of relations of power and inequality that are based on violence and often embed their analyses in a moral-normative discourse. From this perspective, linguistic violence is the attribution of a disparaging or marginal subject position to a person or members of a social group. Essential for the understanding of invectivity is the diagnosis of a fundamental vulnerability of the socially constructed symbolic body, which issues from a person's dependence on recognition by others, from the observation "that the subjectivity of the individual is produced by language in the first instance and consequently can be harmed, negated and destroyed by language" (Krämer/Koch 2010, 41). In light of language's power to offend, a strict separation of linguistic-symbolic and material-physical violence is hardly possible: one need only recall the thesis of the physical power of language (cf. Gehring 2007), which is situated at the borderline between symbolic denigration and physical injury.

However, debasement and injuries cannot be limited to individual interactions, to the singularity of the concrete situation, but are rather always the result of the social positions and structures that lend the utterances their performative power. For example, language-analytical approaches following on from Butler situate the possibility of discriminatory speech in a dispositive of interdependent power relations that produces structural discrimination (Hornscheidt 2011). In this framework, power is understood as the possibility of generating conceptions of normality and asserting their validity. Viewed this way, discrimination is thus not just an act based on individual intentions, but above all a constitutive feature of social structures. Our understanding of invectivity can build on this, but it should be noted that we are not aiming to eliminate the distinction between linguistic-symbolic and physical violence. Rather, we intend to develop a comparative heuristic, which strives for greater differentiation or takes into account the ambiguity of practices in order to make possible an appropriate conceptualisation of invective violence in the first place.

4. Outlines of an Analytics of Constellation

The concept of constellation lends itself to the reconstruction of the different historical circumstances of invectivity and the multi-layered situational, spatio-temporal and discursive positioning of invective. The term refers to the relationality and the mutual resonance of various factors in occurrences of invective. A constellation analysis of invectivity can build on heuristically fruitful bridging concepts from various academic disciplines and traditions, including a) relational sociology from Georg Simmel to Karl Mannheim and Norbert Elias to Erving Goffman; b) research into philosophical constellations carried out by Dieter Henrich, or c) the analysis of discursive “dispositifs”, following on from Michel Foucault (cf. Bührmann/Schneider 2008). Of particular importance for the study of invective constellations are the already mentioned outlines of a praxeology that goes further than the classical sociological theories of action. As far as the markers of social difference are concerned, which are the starting point and the goal of invective communication processes, a constellation analysis can also use the bridging concept of intersectionality. This focuses on the overlaps and interactions between different forms of discrimination, such as gender, class, ethnicity and age (Winker/Degeler 2010; Walgenbach 2012). This makes it possible to observe reciprocal effects of amplification as well as masking effects (Eribon 2009), which mainly come into play performatively, in acts of social positioning, when invective involves several of these dimensions.

Analyses of invectivity in this sense encompass, at the very least, a) the complex constellation of actors, including their spatio-temporal arenas, their role-specific entitlements, as well as aspects involving the media and material aspects, b) the determinations of the functions of invectivity, c) their wide-ranging languages of form and lastly d) the epoch-spanning, specific features of invective phenomena.

4.1. Constellations of Actors, Arenas, Entitlements and Media

Any act intended or perceived as derogatory owes its invective character first of all to the concrete conditions of the situation that enables and produces it. Constellation analysis thus begins with a differentiation of the respective concrete constellations of the actors and their sequential dynamics. From the point of view of interaction theory, the ideal-typical starting point is the *invective triad*, encompassing the positions of the one dispensing the invective, the target of the invective and the audience (cf. Stenzel 1986) and their respective contexts of action and meaning. From a poststructuralist perspective, it can also be understood as a discursive moment of articulation of subject positions and conflict relations. An important guiding principle in gaining a more precise understanding of the respective manifestations, functions and forms of invective is thus first of all the differentiation of the different roles and features relevant to the invective in question, taking into consideration political, socio-economic, gender-specific, ethnic and generational aspects. Since the invective relevance of these features stems not least of all from denigration on the basis of prevailing societal notions of normality, and the concomitant, implicit assertion of the validity of the normative, the reconstruction of the interaction dynamics of the invective triad also allows conclusions to be drawn regarding culturally sedimented conceptions of order and boundaries of the normative.

The ideal-typical model of the invective triad is not intended reductively to evoke the idea of a homogeneity and linearity of invective occurrences, but on the contrary to serve as a starting point for the analysis of their complexity, their dynamics and the forms they take in practice. Thus, the motivational situations for invective result from a network of individual, cultural and social influences, which in certain situational contexts condense into articulations of invective. The communicative success of invective depends on the extent to which it is perceived by the addressee and/or the audience as offensive (cf. Deppermann

2005; 2008). In principle, this also leaves room for a new coding and transcoding of what has been said. Processuality and interactivity are thus essential dimensions of invective communication. Correspondingly, it can be assumed that discrete, single instances of invective are much less frequent than communicative cascades of reciprocal invective, of follow-on communications which recursively seize on, amplify or even generate the invective character of an utterance in the first place. Characteristic for invective triads are changes in position and direction as well as discursive transcoding - vituperative groups such as Pegida often derive their legitimacy from claiming to have been themselves the victims of invective. In addition, all positions of the triad can be differentiated according to the degree of abstraction of the analytic observation itself, in particular with regard to the political inclinations and the (implicit) addressees of invective expression: the dispensers of invective act in the name of the "the people as a whole"; groups of people feel they are the targets of invective as part of "the entire nation" or as part of a religious community; third parties intervene on behalf of perceived violations of the integrity of minorities and marginalised groups, and so on. Constellation analysis thus ultimately endeavours to reconstruct the dynamics of invective networks and of the relational positioning between self and other that are possible within these networks.

Closely related to the analysis of roles and positions is the question of spatio-temporal localisation of invective constellations. For they are clearly not determined solely by (typed) actors, but display references to the historico-social contexts that determine the orders of the expressible and performatively representable within which invective confrontations occur. This raises a central question for researchers: what does invective contribute to the performative perpetuation and stabilisation of orders of knowledge and conceptions of normality? To what extent does invective add dynamic impetus to the latter as discursive events?

Of particular interest are the temporality and the spatiality of invective constellations. Carnival, uprisings and revolutions deserve mention as particularly marked constellations in temporal terms; prominent spaces of invective include parliament, the football stadium, cabaret and casting shows. In addition, there are also forms that are difficult to situate in spatio-temporal terms, such as the shitstorm and stigmatisation in everyday life. The historically diversified study of such different arenas of invective as spaces with their own logic of action, conventions, structures of opportunity and patterns of attention promises interesting results. Accordingly, with regard to the historical and cultural differentiation of constellations of invective, different degrees of formality or informality must be taken into account. Highly formalised situations in particular can become attractive for taboo-breaking symbolic acts, from the iconoclasm of the Reformation to the disruption of Christmas church services by the 1968 movement, to the interventions of the performance group Pussy Riot (cf. Scharloth 2011; Koch/Nanz 2014). The analysis of the temporal structures of invective within this spatio-temporal situation leads to a trail of emotionally-laden (often escalating) chains of vilification and insults, and can only be analytically grasped in their immediate discursive scope if one assumes that invective has a potentially unlimited capacity to proliferate.

The spatiotemporal situatedness of concrete invective acts is bound up with question of the legitimacy of invective acts, meaning: how are they sanctioned and what speaker positions do they entail? In a specific constellation who is entitled to give voice to invective, from whom might it even be expected? On what resources of legitimisation do such entitlements draw? Are they derived from existing social norms or institutional positions, or is the validity of the latter fundamentally disputed? Who is not permitted to engage in invective communication, perhaps even denied the chance to react to denigration? Which invective acts draw their explosiveness precisely from violating the limits of such entitlements? In certain historical-cultural situations who is taboo as an addressee of invective (e.g., God,

Muhammad, the Pope)? Are there circumstances in which it can actually be more disparaging *not* to be considered a possible target of insult? What does one learn about the fabric of social norms when one looks at those who are situated outside the spectrum of invective, as is clearly the case in many historical and cultural contexts when it comes to the entitlements of women, older people or dignitaries?

Whether invective takes an affirmative or critical stance towards existing power relations depends substantially on the political and discursive fields in which it occurs. We can assume the existence of a paradoxical tension between the horizon of the normative in a society and its level of invectivity. At first sight at least, the effectiveness of invective is the result of transgressing a norm, which can involve rules that are legally fixed (regarding insults, for example) as well as informal codes of conduct (such as slurs that remain below the threshold of offensiveness). Of course, invective can also consist in the observance of a norm, when a role or an arena bestows on a social actor an entitlement to engage in invective, where the incentive for verbal or symbolic aggression can stem from the fact that in other areas of life such immoderate behaviour is taboo. Invective can also be the expression of prevailing norms to the extent that it is directed against minorities who are viewed as meriting discrimination: the Jewish joke under National Socialism or the vilification of homosexuals in present-day Russia do not constitute transgressions of norms, but rather affirm the existing norms of exclusion. Even if they can be legally interpreted as overstepping the mark, the classic terms of abuse and reprimand usually convey a confirmation of the norm in that a positive reference point is also more or less clearly invoked: in the early modern period, whoever insulted a woman as a “whore” was at the same time affirming the norm of sexual abstinence for unmarried women; the blanket use of “gay” as an insult amongst adolescents supports a heteronormative conception of order. Invective thus serves as a kind of test probe in analysing the complex horizons of the normative in a society or an epoch (cf. Popitz 2006). The meaning of these norms does not have to be unambiguously established, however, as the example of those Roman aristocrats with originally negatively connoted cognomina shows (Brutus = the stupid one, Crassus = the fat one, Strabo = the cross-eyed one): by taking on and accepting these nicknames, they apparently demonstrate their ‘competence in invective’ and increase their prestige (cf. Corbeill 1996).

A further increase in the complexity of the research perspective presented here comes from the insight that various spheres of mediatisation and overlapping phenomena have to be taken into account when studying invective constellations. All positions of the invective triad can occur on the level of physical or virtual presence, each of which can have different effects on the intensity and dynamics of invective communication. In addition we have the already-mentioned social categorisations of actors (age, social status, gender, group affiliation) and cultural scripts (role patterns, semantics, interdiscourse, plausibility narratives, media formats). Depending on the extent to which the source of the invective, the target of the invective and the audience are physically or virtually co-present, they contribute to the situating and contextualisation of an invective event, moderate its internal dynamics and generate stabilising or transformative effects. For the question of how epoch-specific invective constellations are, it could well be of central importance to clarify the extent to which the presence or absence of the participants has an influence on the effectiveness of the invective. The question needs to be examined concerning whether, as Luhmann assumed, interaction-based, stratified societies are more prone to conflict than functionally differentiated societies - or whether the opposite assumption is more plausible, namely that the changing media landscape leads to an increase in the level of invectivity in a society. However, these seemingly contrary perspectives may also converge in that the most recent structural changes in the mass media (which are not discussed in Luhmann's media theory)

are characterised by the adaptation of interaction-like patterns of communication.

4.2. Functional Determinations of Invectivity

Within the framework of the constellation analysis outlined above, invectivity can also be described in functional terms. One needs to bear in mind, however, that the effects of invective must be regarded as contingent; they elude predictability, thus ruling out simple functional determinations. By communicatively linking the source and the target of invective, as well as (initially) uninvolved observers, invective creates a condensed form of publicness, emotionally-charged and accordingly susceptible to discharge. In this form of publicness, the claim to universality of social roles and social functional relationships can tend to be undermined, and abstract contests for power and validity can be intensified and condensed in personalised attributions of a total identity (cf. Garfinkel 1967). Thus, due to the performative character of these acts, invectivity represents the constitutive ambivalence of social order. On the one hand, in the invective act of simultaneously talking *to* and *about* someone, implicitly or explicitly normative conceptions of society and belonging are articulated, along with demands concerning behaviour, which, by means of an offensive intervention, confirm, restore and stabilise the existing social order. On the other hand - and this is the aspect of invectivity that seems dysfunctional from a structural-functionalist point of view - confusing situations can also arise in which the roles of those involved and the communicative processes cannot be fully gauged in advance. In such cases, alternative conceptions of order can thus disturb the self-evidence of the 'normal' and thus contribute to the inversion of order. Often, the invective act oversteps the limits of regulated speech and thus also makes room for conceptions that stand opposed to the status quo - whether these conceptions are pursuing their own strategic interests, seeking to implement a different order, or have as their goal the moral condemnation or criticism of the status quo. Thus, it is a matter of determining when, in what constellations, contexts and under which conditions, invectivity contributes to the destabilisation, erosion and inversion of social and cultural order, and when and under what conditions it contributes to the stabilisation, rigidification and naturalisation of socio-cultural order. The term 'dynamics of denigration' thus refers to both the productive and destructive potential of invectivity. In concrete historical situations, the connection between or occurrence in swift succession of both dimensions can be encountered: the same, initially subversive invective, can have a stabilising function once a new order has been established. For example, invective fueled the Reformation movement in the sixteenth century, and the same is true of the rise of National Socialism - but at the same time invective became a central feature of both established Protestantism and National Socialism. The causes of invective and the circumstances in which it occurs, its social embeddedness and the larger conflict scenarios can therefore not be fully comprehended using categories of analysis that attribute such highly situated events to the mere fulfilment of a function. That said, as long as the constitutive performativity of invectivity is acknowledged, the question of its functions is fundamental to the study of invectivity; it makes it possible to bring micro-analytical perspectives on the dynamics of interaction and the cultural forms of invective into relation with overarching social structures and historical processes that often remain latent in the acts and utterances themselves. Accordingly, the question of functions is not to be understood in the sense of a functionalism that completely reduces occurrences of invective to external structural contexts presupposed in the analysis, but rather in the sense of a functional analysis of the immanent modes of operation, the historical-social contexts to which reference is made and the structuring effects of invectivity. An obvious starting point is to describe invective communications in terms of their socially

exclusionary or inclusive effects. For example, in the context of the hate speech debate, their function is centred on denigrating, humiliating, marginalising and excluding individuals, but also entire groups, social milieus, ethnic groups or nations. Their integrative reverse side is more rarely considered: the invective exclusion of others brings about an inclusion of those producing the invective, who boost their self-worth communicatively both as individuals and as a reference group. These socially inclusive aspects have been extensively studied especially in the research on peer groups, i.e., on the level of concrete interactions and group processes (cf. Wolf 2008). In smaller and larger groups, defamation and vilification can also serve individuals in the struggle for social positions, as well as create a sense of cohesion for the group as a whole. At the same time, acts of invective do not just lead to the constitution and to the sealing-off of a we-group, they also create - in an almost cultivated, but always precarious form - binding effects within the we-group: the communitive functions of vilification are displayed in the ritualised diatribes of humanism, as well as in contemporary battle rap. The sense of inclusion of the we-group can involve invective communication inside the group in order to demonstrate that each member possesses sufficient honour or status to be a worthy opponent. Thus, in extreme cases, invective can even constitute a form of recognition. On the other hand, verbal aggression remains latently present even in this integrative function of vilification; indeed, it is even presupposed to the extent that dispensing with the normal violent reflexes is a way of marking out the 'pacified' inner space of the group. It can therefore also lead to abrupt changes in mood. The constitutive ambivalence of aggressiveness is indicative of the unpredictability of invective.

At the intersection of societal practices and discourses, invective may also serve the purpose of community-building on the level of larger groups not involved in face to face communication, such as social milieus, nations, social movements, or networks that, in the medium of invective beyond abstract affiliations, can cultivate the feeling of communal togetherness. This applies, for example, to the - actual or imagined - majority of a population that, as a community antagonistic towards strangers, foreigners, refugees or Islam, 'finds itself' (cf. Hogan / Haltinner 2015). This also applies to people who, as victims of vilification, feel collectively degraded and impelled to engage in joint action. Pegida, however, shows that victim-communities constituted in this way and the abusive communities described above are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but that they can reinforce each other. There are, of course, groups that, although they become the target of invective, cannot be constituted as communities because, for example, the group is over-generalised (references to 'women' as such), or it can only be relationally determined (references to 'foreigners' as such).

Beyond the social functions of invectivity, one can also discern references to the social-functional systems from which invective draws its affective energy. In the political sphere, for example, invective is deployed in struggles for hegemony, in particular struggles for visibility and audibility, as well as for legitimate speaker positions. The question of the political functions of invectivity thus has the potential to render visible patterns of behaviour and dynamics of interaction that run contrary to the established external descriptions and self-descriptions of political actors to be found in the scholarship, which commonly emphasize the rational balancing of interests and institutionalised procedural rules.

In the field of economics, invective acts and utterances can be employed in conflicts over resources, markets and allocation formulas. Here, too, the potential of constellation analysis lies in rendering visible modes of conflict such as these, which run counter to - or at least have to be constitutively screened out by - conceptions that foreground the rational actor and the pursuit of interests moderated by market-based calculations.

In the field of religion - or more generally the field of ideological world-views - invective acts can be used to assert absolute truth claims. A key means of stabilising a community of believers consists in the denigration of “infidels” or “heretics”, “deviants” or “class enemies” (cf. Piltz/Schwerhoff 2015).

In the field of law, invective can fulfil certain functions - for example, if it is used in the context of attempts to normalise what is legitimately expressible, that is, if it is employed in advance of regulated procedures of norm setting or interpretation in order to set limits to what can be thematised. These limits have legal consequences, but do not possess their own legal form.

In addition to the functions that invectivity can fulfil in processes of inclusion and exclusion and in social-functional systems, it has the potential to make the conflictual character of social order itself self-reflexive. This is the case when invective itself becomes the topic of invectively charged communication and is thus itself embroiled in conflict and/or becomes the object of regulation. Here, too, one can speak in terms of the functions of invective: on the one hand, it represents one of the prerequisites for the knowledge of invective that has been handed down in a culture and is thus at the disposal of social actors (for example, in formal handbooks of rhetoric). On the other hand (and building upon this feature), it has the potential to identify the normative character of roles and patterns of behaviour that are commonly taken for granted, in order to then undermine them. Thematising invective in invective communication can occur, for example, when the claim that one is being denigrated is employed as a strategic resource; or when position-taking in identity politics refers to the possible effects of invective acts; or when, in the framework of language criticism, invective meanings are ascribed to linguistic expressions. We propose the concept of ‘meta-invective’ to describe the thematisation of invective in its various forms.

Meta-invective communication can be regarded as a separate, distinct kind of communication, with its own functionality. When invective itself is explicitly thematised, it can become the occasion for reflection and debate, and thus become the object of situational, institutionalised or socially codified regulations. However, meta-invective utterances themselves also have invective potential: for instance, the strategic claim of being insulted forces one’s counterpart into the role of the offender; identity positioning implies privilege at the expense of others due to a physical trait (e.g., “whiteness”); the ascription of invective has the potential, for example, to make all those seem sexist who use the word “miss” (*Fräulein*), which is impregnated with invective presuppositions. The phenomena theorised by the concept of the meta-invective are thus not mere reflections on invectivity, but also belong to the sphere of invective phenomena proper. Their invective potential derives from the declarative nature of the utterances. Of course, this does not mean that academic or linguistic-philosophical works are somehow excluded from the domain of meta-invective phenomena, to the extent that they are predominantly received as declarative, as is partly the case with the works of Lann Hornscheidt. The insights offered by the concept of meta-invective are thus derived from studying the historical effects and functions brought about by an explicit thematisation of invective in processes of invective communication.

4.3. Form and the Languages of Invectivity

Complementing the research perspective concerned with functions, historically and culturally varying forms of invective language must also be included and examined as ways of realising and modernising invectivity (cf. Desmons/Paveau 2008). Even seemingly random invective practices unfold against the backdrop of formal conventions of denigration, ridicule, and shaming, such as those found in established forms of rhetoric and in literary, theatrical or artistic genres. They have a lasting and determining influence on invective practice, its

semantic content and its emotional charge.

Rhetorical, literary and theatrical genres can serve as an archive of forms of invectivity because their models include specific modalities of deprecation or vilification. In addition, the classical genres also serve to regulate invective, since they prescribe certain forms that act as self-evident limits to a possible proliferation or escalation of invective communication. In each case, invective is always realised against the background of a memory comprised of forms and images, which are sometimes cited directly, but sometimes only indirectly and thus largely unreflectively exert influence on an invective event.

In the recourse to literary and rhetorical genres specific forms have thus developed that are especially suited to invective and which can be marked out as special types of text or performance. These genres include forms of speech such as *philippic* or *invectiva oratio* (cf. Helmroth 2010), which employ disparaging attributions such as lack of self-control or miserliness. Also relevant for invective is satire, a genre that can stand alone (Menippean satire) in historically and culturally diverse forms, but can also appear in spoken or written form within other genres (such as dialogue, comedy, poetry and the novel), and which ridicules a given undesirable state of affairs by contrasting it with a presumed ideal (cf. Meyer-Sickendiek 2007).

Especially since the Reformation an important role has been played by visual satire, predominantly distributed in the form of pamphlets and leaflets, in which people who took part in the religious confrontations or were the focus of criticism are depicted as donkeys, cats, dragons, monsters, anti-Christes, devilish figures and instruments of Satan, etc., where visual satire and caricatures can often seamlessly merge. Pamphlets and leaflets such as these led to the emergence of satirical periodicals in the 18th century, which in the 20th century then produced periodicals devoted entirely to satire ("Simplicissimus", "Die Fackel", "Kladderadatsch", "pardon", "Titanic").

In addition, invective speech acts can assume even the most minor forms, such as sayings and expletives, but also in word games and malapropisms, which oscillate between everyday language and aesthetic forms. The latter, in particular, appear to be of considerable importance in the context of changes in the media and the expanded possibilities provided by new media (leaflets and pamphlets, blogs and social networks), inasmuch as they enable a particular communicative approachability due to their mixture of wit and their formally undemanding character.

All in all, it can be surmised that certain media give rise to specific formats of which invective is a hallmark, such as television shows featuring competitions, where the dramaturgical concept is not primarily based on selecting a winner ("talent" shows and beauty pageants such as "American Idol"), but on exposing the participants to the voyeuristic gaze of the public who take pleasure in the degradation and shaming (e.g., "Jungle Camp" or "Celebrity Big Brother"). The different media *dispositifs* of fine art, theatre or television, for instance, facilitate different forms of invective communication, which, however, repeatedly undergo trans-medial hybridisation. The decisive parameters, which need to be analytically established, are the result of the different medial arrangements of textuality, visuality, auditivity, corporality and their associated spatio-temporal registers. Thus, the potential for shaming and feedback loops between the positions of the invective triad in the theatre is possibly of a different quality than with the publication of a scandalous book. An important factor in the communicational dynamics is therefore which of the elements of the invective triad are co-present in a space and which are not, which can not only have direct consequences on the perceptual and behavioural modes of the audience, but also determines the repercussive capacity of an invective event in the medium term. Through the respective media, which determine the varying scales of proximity and distance, a shifting

differential is generated between the being-on-display of the observed and the presence or hiddenness of the observers.

In view of the numerous forms and genres of invective, it needs to be asked how they differ in their directedness and the persons or objects they refer to, their aggressiveness and the chosen aspects of the denigration in question (comic, ridiculing, humiliating or socially destructive acts) and how they are mediated by the respective culture of conflict and dispute (cf. Schöne 1986). Going well beyond the familiar “structured literary forms” (Koster 1980, 39), it is therefore necessary to examine the pictorial, linguistic or rhetorical-performative conventions that invective draws on, as well as the various socio-cultural and medial contexts in which it occurs, whether and how historically mobile these conventions are, to what extent they circulate across medial and cultural boundaries and how they influence invective practice and the latter’s potential impact on society.

Situated at the border between formal and functional analyses, the aesthetic dimension of invective merits special attention. Beyond the self-referential dimension of art, works of art and theatrical events can also be the subject of intense de- and re-normalisation communications (for example, the dispute over the Mohammed caricatures). Conversely, in order to increase their effectiveness, symbolic-linguistic practices of deprecation can use aesthetic mechanisms that produce effects of graphic vividness and involve the staged activation of emotions (for example, “The Apprentice”). The aesthetic generates its own practical and explicatory knowledge about the modes of operation as well as the formal and medial registers of pictorial-semantic evidentness. The aesthetic is actually doubly relevant for research into invective: on the one hand, on the level of the subject matter, one can explore the extent to which the dynamics of aesthetic change are almost inevitably realised in an invective mode – whether it’s a case of dominant art forms seeking to gain renewed force by belittling new art forms, or of aesthetic innovations deriving at least part of their power of persuasion from discrediting the old. On the other hand, on a meta-level, the aesthetic itself can be understood as a second-order observational and creative practice that supports hetero-referential invective by pursuing a naturalisation of value judgments (e.g., anti-semitic art) and/or a practice that subverts social and political constellations saturated with invective by rendering perceptible the contingency of normative claims to validity, of narratives of justification and semantics (for example, in ethno-comedy, cf. Koch 2015).

Invectivity is by no means limited to conventional genres, but in this domain it possesses a symbolically institutionalised reservoir of image and text types that diffuse into everyday communication. In order to take account of these processes of diffusion and interdependence, recourse to the concept of communicative genres is fruitful. It lends itself to describing aesthetic schemata and the different forms they take, the mixtures in which they occur and their appropriations of everyday language. Here we are referring to communicative processes that are the hallmark of typically recurrent models, which on the one hand provide orientation for the protagonists and which, on the other hand, exert an influence on these same protagonists (Luckmann 1986; Knoblauch/Schnettler 2010). For certain protagonists, situations and functions, communicative genres provide a model of invective communication, on the basis of which recurring action can be taken. Similar to aesthetic genres, genres of communication shape horizons of expectation, which constitute an important aspect of invective practices and constellations.

Genres of communication differ from aesthetic genres inasmuch as the latter encompass types of text and theatrical staging that are literary, rhetorical, pictorial and medial, while the notion of communication genre encompasses specific models of communication meant to ensure and simplify communicative compatibility. A membrane between both generic forms enables processes of mutual exchange. It can be assumed that the modes of invective are transformable in fluid communicative situations and adaptable to different communicative

situations, and cannot be confined to a list of genres. This raises the question as to whether the relevance of aesthetic genres for invectivity in relation to the communicative genres as a whole is in decline in modernity, or whether, conversely, communicative genres increasingly influence aesthetic forms.

4.4. Adopting an Historical Perspective on Invectivity

A central task of constellation analysis is situating invective phenomena historically. This includes determining characteristics specific to an epoch as well as the identification of similarities that extend across epochs: Which arenas of invective exist at a given time, who are the holders of public office who are entitled to legitimately and publicly vilify and malign? Courtroom orators, court jesters and fools in pre-modern times as well as cabaret artists and comedians in our own time are entitled to engage in invective, with obviously very different kinds of autonomy and assigned quite different functions. But those playing other roles were and are also granted the right to vilify and polemicize, preachers as well as political actors, for whom the ritualised verbal exchange of blows is part and parcel of their accustomed activities. How extensive is the repertoire of invective practices and which forms of expression can potentially be demarcated as invective? What are the medial pre-conditions constituting the specific arenas of invective typical of an epoch, what are the distinct modes of invective communication to be found in these arenas and which of these modes extend across epochs? In a given period, what are the marks of social differentiation that are foregrounded in invective communication?

The analysis of the features typical of an epoch and of similarities or differences that extend across epochs makes it possible to determine to what extent certain epochs are characterised by the respective forms of invectivity. Specificities of this kind have been repeatedly thematised by historians. Jacob Burckhardt, for example, highlighted the agonistic principle of the Greeks as a distinctive feature of antiquity. A central focal point of such debates in social and historical research is the problem of honour, which was dealt with by the classics of sociology and has also been the object of historical research for more than twenty years. Increasingly seen as problematic is the idea of a transformation process in the course of which the corporative collective honour of the pre-modern period has supposedly been replaced by the concept of inner dignity in the modern period, and that honour has thus been rendered functionless (cf. Burckhardt 2006). What needs to be examined is whether the virulence of invectivity in the modern period may indicate that honour is by no means a pre-modern phenomenon limited to corporative society (cf. Frevert 1991; Ludwig 2016). Thus, the formalised duel in Germany constitutes a comparatively modern practice in the transition to bourgeois society. In a diachronic framework, practices of deference, of stripping a person of honour and dealing with honour-related conflicts could open up a differentiated perspective on the forms of social honour and recognition typical of an epoch and lead the way beyond stereotypical perceptions of honour as “archaic potency” or an “anthropological constant”. The surprising return of discourses of blasphemy in the globalised modern era points in the same direction, while the assessment of blasphemy in the pre-modern Christian ‘West’ proves to be much more ambivalent than is often assumed. (Grenda et al 2014; Schwerhoff 2008).

These examples show that the concept of invectivity lends itself to the reassessment of historical grand narratives. It prompts one to employ an open-ended heuristic to investigate whether and how Western cultures have been specifically marked by invective in the past and continue to be marked by it in the present. Have Western societies developed special mechanisms since antiquity to deal with the stress to which they were subjected through vilification and defamation? To what extent was there tolerance for verbal aggression when

it prevented escalation? Or – conversely - did and does invectivity actually play an important role in social integration? Is it even a necessary catalytic factor in a dynamic society? Thus, as a robust counter-thesis to the conventional grand narrative, one has look into the question whether the roots of a modern European culture of dispute lie specifically in the pre-modern culture of defamation and blasphemy or whether Western modernity has developed different ways of dealing with invectivity and, further, to what extent either or both, when informed by a theory of invective, are able to offer a new perspective on the comparison with non-western cultural spaces, in the past and in the present.

5. Conclusion

The research program presented here forms the basis for a comparative heuristic which at the same time is intended to encourage and bring together empirical research from a wide variety of academic disciplines. With the aid of a grid of distinctive concepts and definitions, interrogative perspectives and modes of thought, we intend to establish an analytical network that makes it possible to examine social constellations and dynamics comparatively. A constitutive element of this research perspective is the intersection between “digging” deep into history and a systematic study of the present situation. The particular attraction of research into invectivity consists in discovering new aspects of a topic as well as the possibility of revisiting well-researched topics from a new viewpoint. Knowledge of invectivity contributes to a better understanding of our current situation, which, in the context of intensifying globalisation, appears to be characterised by a massive brutalisation of discourse and by increasingly heated confrontations regarding standpoints and interpretations. By reflecting on the complex interweaving of tendencies that resist or advocate transformation and the related social and political asymmetries, our research cluster can provide a starting point for a reflection on and critique of our situation in the 21st century. However, the contours of contemporary invective phenomena only become clear when comparing them with phenomena from the past. At the same time, even more systematic attention will have to be devoted to the culture-specific aspects of invective. Broadening the scope of thinking about invectivity could contribute to better intercultural practice. On the basis of inter-epochal and intercultural comparative research, it would then be possible to achieve the actual goal of our research cluster, namely to produce a comprehensive theory of invectivity.

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