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Beyond the Borders of the Baltic Sea. Outlining a Narratology of Regions[1]

1. Turning the spatial turn

At the latest since Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014, the stories we tell about the Baltic Sea region have changed considerably; the narrative of increasing contact and a peaceful integration has lost its persuasive power. The fall of the Iron Curtain almost 35 years ago signalled an apparent end of an era of ideologies and, along with the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union, a process of transformation ensued in the Baltic Sea region and its states. This was greeted optimistically as presenting its own kind of opportunity: various political players explicitly conveyed the objective of developing a Baltic Sea region with its own strong identity, a Baltic Sea region which would promise economic prosperity, appeal to its people socially, as well as achieve cultural integration across state borders. The chances of turning this vision into reality appeared realistic, considering a) the common geographic conditions of the region, b) the reconstruction of a supposed historically-grounded and therefore common Baltic identity that dates back before the Cold War, and c) the mutual challenges of the future, such as the supply of fossil fuels (e.g., the Nord-Stream-Pipeline or NEGP), the threat of an ecological crisis in the Baltic Sea, or the structural dynamics between rural and urban areas in the context of global competition. While political actors did not deny that the region had been politically and culturally divided for long periods of the 20th century, they chose to emphasise a

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putative shared past so as to renew and revive the Baltic Sea region as a contact zone. In this regard, the Baltic Sea region has been and is a unique field of experimentation: in an area previously divided into two blocs, might a common region be established that transcends state boundaries?

In recent years however, this narrative of peaceful integration has lost its cogency. The constellations of power and the socio-political conditions that engendered hopes for a unified Baltic Sea region have changed. Consequently, the plausibility of such a vision has been undermined. Global and European crises like the economic and financial crises of 2008, the perceived refugee crisis in 2015/16, the fears evoked by the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea in former Eastern bloc states, and finally the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 with its consequences for the security architecture in the Baltic Sea region, such as the decision of Finland and Sweden to join NATO or the increased vigilance of the Baltic states, have called into question the idea of an integrated Baltic Sea region as a shared cultural space that is steadily homogenising in an atmosphere of peace. Instead, positions, which emphasise nationalism and do not see positive value in cultural exchange, have regained a power they have not possessed since the end of the Cold War. The stories of a shared past and a promising future of the Baltic Sea region are under constant re-evaluation. Stories of success compete with stories of looming conflicts and nationalistic self-assertion.

In both phases, that of hope and that of disillusionment, the Baltic Sea region has attracted a considerable amount of research in the field of humanities and social sciences. It is no coincidence that it was precisely at the end of the 1980s that space gained acceptance as an innovative analytical paradigm in the humanities and social sciences, i.e. at a moment when international interplay and geopolitical space were being reordered. Under the label of the spatial turn (Döring / Thielmann 2008), space began to be imagined no longer as a pure volume, as a container that forms a stable background against which diverse agents are acting, but as a relational entity that is only constituted by the imagination and practices of its agents – space was conceptualised as the result of processes of spatialisation. Accordingly, the question arose about how the (mental, social, political, economic …) conditions of the production of space must be described. Research on the Baltic Sea region has greatly benefited from this new orientation in cultural studies, and at the same time has played an important role in its differentiation, since the Baltic Sea region was a geographically compact yet politically, historically and culturally very complex object of research in which, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, spatialisation processes could be observed in real time and at an accelerated pace (on the differing definitions of the region's compositions: North 2012; 2015).

As this contribution is entitled "Beyond the Border of the Baltic Sea," one might think that it was meant to distance itself from the hitherto dominant spatial

paradigm in Baltic Sea research and herald a new turn, i. e. that it wants to extend the series of interpretative, performative, reflexive, postcolonial, translational and spatial turns by a further turn (Bachmann-Medick 2006). But that is not the case. For one thing, I think that the metaphor of the turn falsely describes developments in the humanities and social sciences as a succession of episte-mological revolutions, each of which overturns everything that came before. Rather, it is more appropriate to speak of a constant diversification according to clusters, which overlap at numerous points (e.g. Moebius 2012). For another, however, this essay (and this volume as a whole) would like to make a contri-bution to precisely this diversification of spatial studies by making the discourse about the turn itself as the object of investigation. A turning point always implies a before and an after and is therefore embedded in a history. Accordingly, a narratological approach promises a new perspective both on the Baltic Sea region and on the changing perception of the Baltic Sea region. And finally, it allows a second-order perception when it perceives the turns of the academic paradigms that form the changing perception of the Baltic Sea region. In other words, a narratological approach could prove fruitful for a more nuanced reconstruction of spatialisation processes. As this is an interdisciplinary endeavour, it seems sensible to me to introduce a term for the key concept of the 'turning point' that cannot yet be assigned to a specific academic field. The Aristotelian term 'peripety' with its broad semantic openness seems to me to be suitable for this purpose, as I will argue below.

2. Demarcated or narrated identities

A major achievement of spatial studies is that they provide a consistent model of widely differing identity constructions. In this way, different aggregate condi-tions of cultural identity (individuals, families, companies, institutions, social strata, national states, regions, religions) can be compared and related to each other. In spatial models, cultural identity is understood as a set of qualities or a list of characteristic features that are attributed through bordering and othering: one's own identity is necessarily determined by the border to a cultural other; A is A because it is not B. Thus, the thinking of the border becomes a key field of investigation for spatial studies; demarcation and de- and rebordering are essential strategies of identity formation and identity maintenance.

One of the shortcomings of this inherently convincing model is that its design of social and cultural change remains under-complex. Even though the in-scription of borders is conceived of as a process, the result of the bordering process is conceptualised as a number of characteristics that define the respective identity. Corresponding to these models of bordered identity, a shift of borders is

an act that directly affects the identities of both sides of the border; accordingly, a shift can either be interpreted as subversive and threatening or welcomed as liberating, depending on the attitude of those concerned. Nevertheless, the fundamental limitation of spatial models with regard to explaining change is that they merely project change as a drastic break of identity and not as a gradual process that smoothly negotiates shifts of antagonistic elements within the same identity. Narratological approaches could make the spatial model more flexible, as spatiality is grounded in narratives:

The cultural anthropology of narratology (Hermann / Jahn / Ryan 2005; Phelan / Rabinowitz 2005; Hühn et al. 2009) directs attention towards the fact that one's basic orientation in the world is processed through the production of, and participation in, narratives. The 'homo narrans' (Niles 1999) uses different media to produce these narratives which operate in different societal fields such as jurisdiction, medicine, historiography, religious services, politics, and advertising (Klein / Martinez 2009; Fludernik / Falkenhayner / Steiner 2015); recent research in economic sociology has exemplarily elaborated the importance of narration for the formation of profit expectations (Beckert 2016). However, beyond all these specialised discourses, the basic form of world shaping takes place in everyday storytelling (Ochs / Capps 2001).

In contrast to the previously described spatial model, processability is a key feature of narratives. Therefore, in the narratological paradigm, the identity of individuals and groups (from local families to global businesses), is not constructed by unambiguous attribution of qualities and features, the loss of which subsequently equals the loss of the whole identity, but rather the construction of social units (and also their borders) is achieved by tentative establishment, gradual distribution and the continual and repeated participation in and passing on of narratives (Nünning / Nünning / Neumann 2010, Schaff 2011).

As a model of identity formation, narratives are much more flexible than lists of characteristics. In contrast to the binary criterion on the one side or on the other side of the border, the subjects of narratives necessarily exist in an ambiguous relation to each other and to their interpretation. Narratives develop much more elastically (Abel / Blödorn / Scheffel 2009) and therefore have social bindings that are more robust than those based on clearly defined border lines because:

a) they allow 'narrators' as well as various 'audiences' individual liberties regarding the semantic connotation of every single element of the story. Narration demands an interpretation of what is narrated, which can differ to varying degrees without risking that the group members gathered around the narrative experience this plurality as dangerous. To give an example: this attitude towards narration is one of the explanations for the persistence of religions. It is not their dogmas, tenets or moral codes that guarantee their unity; rather, they manage to

gather their members around founding narratives that each generation interprets individually, thereby maintaining a flexible identity over centuries.

b) their elements are embedded in a narrative course, i. e. into the logic of a narrative that develops, and therefore are subjected to constant re-contextualisation at any point in the narrative. Narration gains coherence because its separate elements are connected temporally; however, the temporality and change in connections also mean a constant semantic shift of these elements. In contrast to the model of a list of features, which define affiliation via unambiguous attribution of qualities and features, uncertainties are not a hindrance for narration, which is why narratives as a medium of socialisation have greater integrating force (Koschorke 2012).

and c) another advantage of mainstreaming narratological approaches to regional studies lies in its potential for self-reflection. For the Baltic Sea region studies, for example, re-orienting the research logic from space to narration has the potential to make the previously mentioned political crises both in the Baltic Sea region and in the field of Baltic Sea region studies itself objects of research. Both have a temporal aspect and are therefore open for narratological investigation.

3.   On Methodology: Event as a Category of Interpretation

As the challenge is to integrate temporality in the analyses of a region, the requirement towards the methodological tool would be to conceptualise the central element in a story that brings about change. This requirement is met by the narratological concept of the 'event.'

As a category for building meaning through narratives, the concept of the 'event' was first used in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Aristotle 1452b). There it was called 'peripety.' This denotes the turning point in a tragedy, the moment at which it becomes obvious that what was expected in the fictional world depicted on stage will not happen. Through the turnaround, the life of the protagonist appears in a new light; the peripety redefines every single element of the story. It unites them to an overarching plot that assigns meaning to all the occurrences that the audience has seen on stage so far. Thus, the beginning and end of a plot can be defined as answers to the questions 'What leads to the peripety?' and 'What consequences does the peripety have?' Correspondingly, Aristotle advises the dramatist that "a well-constructed plot […] must neither begin nor end at haphazard" (Aristotle 1450b, p. 30f.); rather, beginning and end should refer entirely to the peripety. In narratology, which consolidates in the 1960s, the term 'event' is used to identify the same concept – the constitutive element that makes a text a narrative: Systematically, the distinction between descriptive and nar-

rative text stands at the beginning of narratology. In contrast to descriptive texts, a change of state is essential for narrative texts. A plot needs at least two states, a and b, that are temporally or temporal-causally connected (Hühn 2009, Martínez 2011). To be precise, the event is the connection, and it initiates the change from a to b. In the field of narratology, therefore, Aristotle's category of 'peripety' becomes the 'event,' the central, irrevocable moment of all narratives.

Although Hayden White does not refer explicitly to Aristotle or narratology in his famous study *Metahistory*, he does reflect in a similar manner on the central function of the event. When he deals with different styles of historical thinking, he initially distinguishes 'chronicle' from 'story.' Chronicle is a chronologically organised line of occurrences, whereas story is a structured connection of occurrences that gains its structure through the regulating force of an event. In the following quote it should be understood that White uses the term 'event' differently than it was previously introduced here; he uses 'event' to denote an occurrence which has yet to be brought into a context of meaning, i.e. into a story:

> First the elements in the historical field are organized into a chronicle by the arrangement of the events to be dealt with in the temporal order of their occurrence; then the chronicle is organized into a story by the further arrangement of the events into the components of a 'spectacle' or process of happening, which is thought to possess a discernible beginning, middle, and end (White [1973] 2014, p. 5).

Put differently, according to White, a chronological series of occurrences fulfils the criterion of connecting individual states to a temporal line. But a 'story,' a meaningful narrative, is not just an excerpt of a theoretically infinite chronicle – it requires, additionally, that the excerpt be identified as a 'well-constructed plot' (echoing Aristotle) with a beginning, a middle, and an end. This identifying function is precisely ascribed to the 'event' in the previously described narratological sense (s. resp. Baudrillard's definition of the non-event; Baudrillard 2007). Because White's focus is the study of history, the above quote indicates that the criteria of construction formulated by Aristotle apply not only to fictional but also to factual narrative texts. More importantly, segregating a narrative out of the potentially infinite stream of the chronicle implies the implementation of meaning, i.e. an interpretation in which the event is distinguished from other occurrences by its relevance to the story. The identification of an occurrence as event, the formation of a narrative and the establishment of meaning are, at their core, the same process (White 2008).

A third aspect of the quote from *Metahistory* deserves particular emphasis: the implicit hint that, depending on which occurrence in a chronicle is given the status of an event, the interpretation of a historical narrative will change as well. The act of re-evaluating an occurrence as an event is the invention of a plot. An

example makes this connection plausible. The category of the catastrophe is a special form of an event: in Aristotle's classical drama theory, it is understood as a 'downward turn.' Calling an earthquake a catastrophe, a peripety downwards, means that one not only reports seismologically describable movements of the earth, but also simultaneously implies there is at least one story in which the earthquake takes on the meaning of a turning point: for example, in the biography of an individual, the story of a community or the unstable condition of an ecosystem. The status as an event is not inherent to the earthquake per se, but is the result of the interpretation of the earthquake as the turning point of a story (a critique of objectivist approaches can be found in Sternberg 2010).

Additionally, to consider an occurrence an event means to understand this occurrence as a deviation from the expected, which also de facto defines the normal course of occurrences. This norm, for its part, defines the normativity of the event, that is, has norm-giving (or norm-destroying) force (Žižek 2014, p. 9–30). The narrative, which is established by the event, possesses a certain potential for agency which can be used by the players in social interaction (on events as political instruments: Nanz / Pause 2015). Even if the past is the object of narration, narrating a past event allows the group gathered around the respective narrative to experience the norm of the narrative and to update it. Narrating is therefore always an investment in the future (or to use Niklas Luhmann's term 'present future,' Luhmann 2000, p. 14–16): the identification of an occurrence as an event opens up present futures or makes a selection of possible present futures plausible (Opitz / Tellmann 2010).

The work of Yuri Lotman shows that narrative approaches can follow the results of the spatial turn in a meaningful way. Lotman was responsible for establishing the 'event' as a key concept in literary narratology in the 1970s (Hauschild 2009); here, the 'event' is referred to as the 'sujet.' Further, he gave the spatial turn considerable impetus in the 1980s. In his modelling of the event, Lotman links temporal aspects of narration with a spatially semiotic model when he defines the event as "the shifting of a persona across the borders of a semantic field" (Lotman 1977, p. 233). As crossing the border in a narrated world is at first seen as inconceivable, the event is always the violation of a ban, a fact that happened although it should not have happened (Lotman 1977, p. 238).

In his later essay *On the Semiosphere* (Lotman 2005), Lotman concentrates on the spatial structure of systems of meaning. All cultural systems are structured spatially (Nöth 2006), divided into areas of centre and periphery and defined via inner and outer borders. Lotman's focus during his culture-semiotic phase is on reconstructing the stability of semiotic spaces. Here, the crossing of borders is not conceptualised as the violation of an order; rather, the disruption caused by the entry of new semiotic elements is tempered by conceptualising the process as one of translation. The new element is re-coded at the border areas of the pe-

riphery and incorporated into the structure of the semiosphere on its way to the centre.

The third and last phase of Lotman's work sees yet again a re-orientation (Lotman 2009). He now differentiates between the evolutionary re-organisation of semiotic fields via continual translation processes and the explosion, the sudden onset of the new in the semiotic order which reorganises this order all at once. The culture-semiotic concept of the explosion is similar to the narratological concept of the event. For Alain Badiou, whose entire philosophy examines the concept of the event (Badiou 1988), only the discrete event – Lotman's explosion – can be termed an event. In this emphatic meaning, the 'event' possesses the quality of opening up cultural structure:

> For me, an event is something that brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable. An event is not by itself the creation of a reality; it is the creation of a possibility, it opens up a possibility. It indicates to us that a possibility exists that has been ignored. The event is, in a certain way, merely a proposition. It proposes something to us. Everything will depend on the way in which the possibility proposed is grasped, elaborated, incorporated and set out in the world. (Badiou / Tarby 2013, p. 9–10)

In all of his three phases, however, Lotman applies the temporality of the event dialectically to the spatial structuring of the cultural order. The event needs the boundary of the semiosphere to be perceived as an event and to develop its norm-changing character. The event, regardless of whether it is best described as the accumulated result of a series of micro-events or as an explosion-like macro-event, changes how a culture is structured spatially.

Lotman (also Koselleck 1973; Suter / Hettling 2001) touches on an important methodological problem: the retrospective hermeneutic view of the academic is systematically blind to the multitude of possibilities that are opened up when order is disrupted. The potentiality of the event is, in retrospect, reduced to the one peripety that was realised: "A retrospective transformation occurs. That which has occurred is declared to be uniquely possible […]. The fact that it did not occur is interpreted as being impossible. The weighting of that which is regular and inevitable is attributed to the random act" (Lotman 2009, p. 16; Baudrillard 2003, p. 11, 31, 74 argues the same way). The academic analysis of an event therefore needs to maintain the complexity of the field under investigation, by attentiveness towards competing narratives and by reconstructing the openness that was closed by the act of deciding on a particular event. Or, narratologically speaking, the analysis needs to consider alternative, uncanonised narratives.

Aristotle, White and Lotman stand respectively as examples for an aesthetic, historiographical and culture-theoretical approach to the 'event.' In an essay

from 2009, Peter Hühn states that the concept "has played no more than a peripheral role in narrative studies to date" (Hühn 2009, p. 162). In the meantime some studies have been published that explicitly examine eventfulness as a means of interpretation: Hühn (2010) outlines a framework for a narratological definition of eventfulness and tellability; Nünning and Sicks (2012) show how literature and film work on destabilising culturally canonised turning points by displaying their 'made' nature; Nanz and Pause (2015) examine the nexus of media, event and politics; Schmid (2017) investigates historical changes in the construction of (mental) events and their sustainability. However, such studies remain few in number and work predominantly with fictional texts and films. If a region is to be the subject of study, this would require an approach of a truly interdisciplinary nature that takes into account both fictional and factual texts/ films/images as well as historical and contemporary grand narratives of the region in focus.

4.   Peripety and its neighbouring concepts

It should have become clear that what narratology has elaborated under the terminus technicus 'event' implies an act of meaning-making; the narratological event must therefore not be confused with an occurrence (historical or imagined in a fictional text); rather, it is an occurrence that is promoted to the rank of a meaning-giving event.

But since the aim of this article is to sketch the outline of a narratology of regions, which by nature must be interdisciplinary, the danger does not seem insignificant that the narratological term 'event' could too easily be equated with its everyday use, as is typical for the use of the term in the 'Ereignisgeschichte' or 'histoire événementielle' (Rathmann 2003, p. 3–11; Rüth 2005; Tamm 2015). There, in a completely under-complex manner, the event simply means what has just happened, without taking into account the interpretative quality of the event. Therefore, I suggest that in an interdisciplinary context, the ambiguous term 'event' should at least be supplemented by 'peripety,' since 'peripety' – outside the specific context of Aristotelian drama theory – is not yet fixed terminologically. Paradoxically, despite its relative semantic emptiness, the term 'peripetia' allows for greater terminological precision in its use because it has not yet been semantically filled elsewhere.

This openness is an advantage for an interdisciplinary endeavour, as 'peripety' can be used as an umbrella term for neighbouring concepts such as turning points (Nünning / Sicks 2012), catastrophes (Horn 2014), tipping points (Gladwell 2000), paradigm shifts (Kuhn 1962), crisis (Jordheim 2017), reformations (Rublack 2003), and revolutions (Hobsbawm 1962; Goldstone 1991; 2014). The

term 'peripety' has the capacity to bind together the narratological concept of event with these neighbouring concepts and to test their mutual compatibility. Or to put it differently, 'peripety' guarantees both conceptual freedom and a link to its neighbouring concepts.

Some of the concepts have already been subjected to extensive research. This is especially true for the term 'crisis' (Freeden 2017). The literature on crises can be grouped in two approaches; one addresses historically canonised crises without discussing the concept (e.g. the monumental Parker 2013), the other has a distinctly conceptual attitude (starting with Koselleck 1959; 1982). Choosing the narratological term 'peripety' as the central instrument implies a significant change in perspective: Koselleck sets the agenda by proposing the idea that crisis is a defining feature of Western modernity. By focusing on peripety as an omnipresent basic element of every narration, the question of whether crisis is a decisive characteristic of modernity poses itself quite differently: which peripety do Koselleck and others use when they tell the story that modernity should be understood as a state of permanent crisis? Our deliberate choice of the term peripety, i.e. the choice of a term that derives from drama theory, ensures that the constructive character of crises, upheavals, reformations, and revolutions remains in focus at all times; someone upgrades an occurrence to the central turning point in a story in order to cause a particular effect in the group that gathers around that story. This also applies to Koselleck's story that models the concept of modernity.

What is true for the term 'crisis' is also true for the other neighbouring concepts. Coming from drama theory, the term 'peripety' is a continual reminder that 'events' are not incisive historical moments, catastrophes, or disasters per se; these moments need to be embedded in a story first, they need to be interpreted, respectively, as a seed from which a story can grow. Therefore, one must be attentive to their narrative construction as well as to the societally-shared criteria of relevance that regulate their construction. 'Peripety' has the terminological openness to integrate both the different objects of investigation (as shipwrecks, lottery win, climate change, fortune in war) and the narratological methodology of their analytical reconstruction. In this way, the term 'peripety' could help to open up canonised peripeties of the Baltic Sea region by focusing on the narrative strategies, which sustain the canon, and to reconstructing the conflictual processes of canonising specific peripeties at the expense of alternative narrative choices.

5.   Outlining a narratology of regions

In this section, a number of important aspects will be listed that must be taken into account if the sketched complex concept of peripetia is to be applied when analysing the constitutive conditions of a region in an interdisciplinary context. The examples given are all from the Baltic Sea region.

a) A systematic starting point for analyses is the observation that certain per-ipeties have successfully been canonised in present public and academic discourse. Thus, they have gained agency influencing how today's general perception of the Baltic Sea region is formed. Examples of such prolific peripeties are the Reformation or the fall of the Eastern Bloc in the past, as well as ecological collapse in future scenarios.

b) These peripeties do not necessarily have to occur in the Baltic Sea region (such as the ecological collapse of the Baltic Sea), but they do have to develop a specific agency within narratives about the Baltic Sea region. The Second Coming of Christ (Parousia) is one example of a peripety of universal extent; Parousia would be relevant when this peripety becomes an event in narratives of local and regional importance in the Baltic Sea region. The occupation of the Crimea by Russia in 2014 is a similar case: it is an event which happened on the Black Sea, but it has become a peripety in a narrative which has motivated troop movements in several states bordering the Baltic Sea. Fin-land's and Sweden's accession to NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively, can also serve as peripeties both in narratives of the two countries and in nar-ratives of the military alliance as a whole. A taxonomy of outreach would distinguish between the range or scales of the effects of peripeties: 1) stories with peripeties in the Baltic Sea region (e.g. the murder of Olof Palme), 2) stories with peripeties of the Baltic Sea region (e.g. the Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster), and 3) the Baltic Sea region in stories with overarching peripeties (e.g. the Reformation or the fall of the Iron Curtain).

c) As already mentioned above, for the narratological reconstruction of a re-gion, not only those peripeties that have gained agency are of importance. The reading of established history is complemented by a contrapuntal reading in the sense of Edward Said (1993), meaning that one must be aware that the acceptance of certain occurrences as events creates exactly the history books from which these events were deduced, in a circular conclusion. Correspondingly, the task of a narratological approach to regions is to re-construct the cultural, social, political and religious logics and strategies that lead to the canonisation of a given event, as well as to reconstruct alternative peripeties that have either lost their interpretive force or were unable to develop the same agency in competition with canonised events. This does not mean that canonised peripeties should be criticised in order to unveil the

'real' peripeties that ruled history. Instead, the comparison of established stories with those of alternative peripeties brings to light questions about the persistence of peripeties as well as the criteria for their persistence. How semantically flexible are certain peripeties? When and how do they lose their effectiveness? This line of questioning, therefore, is not the same as a retelling of the 'histoire événementielle' which ascribes an unshakeable authenticity to the event and sees it as a precondition of history.

d) Which media are involved in establishing the canonisation or deconstruction of peripeties (Dayan / Katz 1992; Nanz / Pause 2015) in the Baltic Sea region? Is it possible to say that certain media facilitate certain peripeties? Is media history therefore peripetic history and vice versa? Can, for instance, McLuhan's media revolutions be seen as consequences of canonising certain peripeties? (McLuhan 1962; 1964) Do, for example, late medieval pamphlets allow for different peripeties compared to classical history paintings or the tableau vivant with its aesthetics of the pregnant moment? Such questions inevitably link classical images and text media with contemporary concepts like the political, economic and military scenario technique or the fragmentation of the public by social media.

e) The socialising function of peripeties lies primarily in segmenting time in the narrative. Narratives can consequently be sorted into types depending on a) whether they narrate the peripety or whether the peripety has to be reconstructed from the narrative; or b) whether they situate the peripety in the past or the future (seen from the moment of narrating). The classical history painting, for instance, understands the present as resulting from the depicted peripety. Images of Parousia, ecological disaster scenarios or some systematic and comprehensive philosophical doctrines, like Marxism, on the other hand, move the peripety into the future; they count on a change in the depicted future and therefore ultimately aim to create alternative futures (e. g., a future without the ecological disaster). A similar difference in relation to the future colours the distinction between monuments (representing the past) and memorials (warning about similar events). Correspondingly, the temporal reference becomes relevant for reconstructing the agency of peripeties.

f) Closely connected with specific temporality is the systematic distinction between two levels of narration: the narrative and the act of narrating. When considering concrete peripeties in the Baltic Sea region, the corresponding question arises of whether the respective peripety depicts a turn in the narrative or whether it refers to the present of the narrator. Do both peripeties coincide or do they diverge? The Reformation, for example, functions as a peripety very differently in contemporary (Protestant or Catholic) narratives,

compared with the context of the Luther renaissance in the 1920s or in the context of the recently celebrated Reformation decade.

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The focus on peripety opens a level of academic self-reflection that is especially important in times when politics and NGOs alike have discovered 'Zeitenwende' as a justification strategy: Until not too long ago, the concept of turning points could be used as a criterion for distinguishing between past and present. In his 2004 entry 'Wende' (turn) in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Konersmann, 2004: 534–538), the author records a change from a pre-modern, religious concept of turns in which the change arrives from the outside and is directed towards the future (the birth of Christ and the Second Coming), to a contemporary way of thinking which constructs turns only in retrospect. This argumentation shows two things: on the one hand, that the reconstruction of turns is itself dependent on a narrative with a turn. On the other hand, however, that thinking about turns has since undergone a new turn. Just as a premodern theological mindset expected the decisive turning point of humanity in the future of the Second Coming or the Last Judgement, prominent discourses of the present also demand that one should orient one's life towards coming peripeties, whether these are the dystopias of climate activists, the technical utopias of transhumanism or threats of war by power-mad politicians. Ecological disasters, digitalisation and impending conflicts make thinking about peripeties more relevant than ever before – for the Baltic Sea region and beyond its borders.

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