

In diesem Heft



The Rehearsal (TV Show)



British Future War
and Invasion Stories



Julian Barnes



„Mein Rostock“ (Song)



Paul Celan



Franz Kafka

In diesem Heft: *The Rehearsal* (TV Show)

British Future War
and Invasion Stories

Julian Barnes

„Mein Rostock“ (Song)

Paul Celan

Franz Kafka

literatur in wissenschaft und unterricht | neue folge

ISSN 0024-4643

ISBN 978-3-8260-9006-6

eISBN 978-3-8260-9007-3

www.anglistik.uni-kiel.de/LWU

Herausgeber:innen/Editorial Board: Matthias Bauer, Nicola Glaubitz, Martin Klepper, Lena Wetenkamp & Jutta Zimmermann

Redaktion/Managing Editor: André Schwarck, Tel.: (0431) 880-2671 – e-mail: schwarck@anglistik.uni-kiel.de
Redaktionsassistentz/Assistant to the Managing Editor: Charlotte Webert – e-mail: lwu@anglistik.uni-kiel.de

Englisches Seminar der Universität Kiel, Olshausenstr. 40, D-24098 Kiel

Verlag/Publisher: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, Postfach 60 07, D-97010 Würzburg – Leistenstraße 7, D-97082 Würzburg, Tel.: (0931) 32 98 70-0, Telefax (0931) 83 62 0, E-Mail: info@koenigshausen-neumann.de – Internet: www.koenigshausen-neumann.de

Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht | neue folge (LWU) erscheint mit zwei Heften im Jahr. Verlagsort ist Würzburg. Preis des Einzelheftes: 35,00 € – Jahresabonnement 50,00 € (D), Ausland 60,00 € (Abonnements versandkostenfrei). Alle Bestellungen sind an den Verlag zu richten. Das Abonnement ist nur zum Ende des Jahres zu kündigen, spätestens jedoch bis zum 15. November.

LWU | neue folge wird im Englischen Seminar der Universität Kiel redaktionell betreut. Das Augenmerk gilt in besonderem Maße der Zusammenarbeit von universitärer Forschung und Lehre in Schule und Universität. Regelmäßig erscheinende Themenhefte widmen sich einem spezifischen literatur- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschungsbereich, der für Lehrende von besonderem Interesse ist. Diese Themenhefte werden von einschlägig spezialisierten guest editors betreut. Vorschläge für Themenhefte sind immer willkommen.

Die regulären Hefte bieten Aufsätze zu Literatur, Kultur und Medien aus dem anglophonen (Großbritannien, Nordamerika, New English Literatures) und deutschsprachigen (Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz) Bereich, die den Stand der wissenschaftlichen Forschung für den Unterricht in Schule und Universität erschließen und signifikant erweitern. Die Beiträge behandeln allgemeine Aspekte literarischer Kulturen und literarischer Forschungsfelder oder sie setzen sich in textnahen Lektüren mit forschungsrelevanten Einzelfragen und neuen Ansätzen in Forschung, Methodologie und Theorie auseinander. Buchbesprechungen stellen relevante Neuerscheinungen vor.

Die Autor:innen erhalten zwei Hefte als Belegexemplare ihrer Beiträge. Den Rezensent:innen wird ein Exemplar des jeweiligen Heftes zur Verfügung gestellt. Eine Verpflichtung zur Besprechung unverlangt eingesandter Rezensionsexemplare besteht nicht.

LWU | neue folge (*Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht/Literature in Research and Teaching*) is a literary journal published by the English Department at Kiel University (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel), Germany. Its objective is to provide a platform for the cooperation of academic research and teaching at school and university. Periodically, specific theme issues are devoted to particular topics in literary and cultural studies that are of special relevance for university lecturers and school teachers. These special issues are editorially supervised by guest editors who are experts of the respective field of research. Suggestions for future theme issues and offers or suggestions of guest editorships are very welcome to the editorial board.

The regular issues offer essays about literatures, cultures and media in anglophone (UK, USA, Canada) and German-speaking (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) countries and about New English Literatures. They expand and make accessible current research for teachers of literature at schools and universities. The essays address general aspects of literary cultures, traditions, and research fields related to literature, or they present and explore relevant problems and new approaches, methodologies, and theories in close readings of individual texts. Our book reviews critically survey recent publications.

Contributors will receive two copies of the respective issue, book reviewers will receive one copy. The journal is under no obligation to review books not expressly ordered for review purposes. Overseas subscription rate for individuals and institutions (2 issues per year): 60,00 € per year (postage included), single copy: 35,00 € (plus postage). Payment in Euro by international money order/postgiro or cheque made out to the publisher: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, P.O. Box 6007, D-97010 Würzburg, Germany.

Alle Rechte liegen beim Verlag und den Herausgebern.
Satz: Redaktion der LWU. Druck: Königshausen & Neumann

Inhalt/Contents

Mia Goyette:

“Is There Something You’ve Been Avoiding?”

Social Optimization and Surveillance in *The Rehearsal* _____ 5

Claus-Ulrich Viol:

Invasion, Spy, and Future-War Stories in Britain before

the Great War: From the Manufacturing of Consent to Psychoanalysis ____ 21

André Schwarck:

‘Martha’s Loss’-Teaching Narrative and Reflected

Diegetic Reading with Julian Barnes’ *England, England* _____ 37

Ole Petras:

Operationen am offenen Lied.

Grundzüge der Popmusikanalyse

am Beispiel von Marterias „Mein Rostock“ _____ 63

Stefan Schenk-Haupt:

Die Entwicklung des Liebesverhältnisses zwischen Mann

und Frau in den Gedichten Paul Celans: „Corona“, „Sprachgitter“,

Gedichte aus Fadensonnen, „Largo“ _____ 79

Michael Braun:

Arbeit am Mythos: Kafkas Prometheus _____ 107

Buchbesprechungen/Book Reviews _____ 115

“Is There Something You’ve Been Avoiding?” Social Optimization and Surveillance in *The Rehearsal*

The Rehearsal (2022–) is a six-episode reality television series on the HBO network in which its creator and host, Nathan Fielder presents participants the opportunity to rehearse potentially difficult or stressful situations before they must confront them in their lives. On a narrative level, Fielder proposes to optimize potential human interaction through rudimentary data collection, highlighting the ways that surveillance equipment and other tracking technologies have entered the lives of ordinary people. Although the surveillance technologies that the series uses are still emergent, in *The Rehearsal*, they are used to heighten and satirize long-standing television conventions, and thus it is instructive to read their use in the context of analytic texts attempting to codify the narrative, social, and technical modes of television production when it was itself an emergent technology. Stuart Hall’s 1975 essay “Television as a Medium and Its Relation to Culture” identifies the newly forming norms in broadcast television as constrained by the technologically determined aspects of production, as well as the “set of social practices” (227) that govern what can be communicated by the medium. In *Within the Context of No Context* (1980), George W.S. Trow writes about the development of television’s more affective qualities, and its tendency to flatten, infantilize, and flatter both subject and audience in corrosive ways. First published as an essay in the *New Yorker*, Trow’s essay describes television’s production as tending to strip historical and situational context in favor of demographic categories. Both texts are concerned with the particular relationship between television and the depiction of “reality”, which it so often purports to broadcast.

The Rehearsal is the second reality television project from Fielder, whose first series, *Nathan For You*, aired for four seasons on the Comedy Central network before ending in 2018. *Nathan For You* follows the model of popular American reality shows such as *Bar Rescue* (2011–), in which an outside “expert” diagnoses the problems of a failing business and attempts to whip it into shape, reliant on the charismatic host who delivers tough-love critique. Fielder seeks out potential participants through classifieds sites such as Craigslist, and those who respond are ordinary small businesses: the first season of *Nathan For You* (2013) features a frozen yogurt shop, an independent gas station, and a seasonal Santa Clause mall performer, among others. Where the series departs from conventional reality television at first appears to be Fielder’s outlandish and increasingly unhinged prescriptions to the businesses and individuals who are featured, but coheres into an incisive case study of the compulsive credulousness of the American entrepreneur. Fielder sells his unconventional prescriptions with a gesture toward vaguely credentialed business acumen, (“I graduated from one of the top business schools in Canada with decent grades,” says Fielder in *Nathan*

For You's opening credits), but the punchlines of the show often stem from how far business owners are willing to go for the promise of a potential profit, and his schemes' utter, and utterly predictable, failure to deliver.

If *Nathan For You* focuses on appeasing the unpredictable hand of the market, *The Rehearsal* applies a similar approach to solving problems that at first glance seem more relational than economic. Fielder again places a classified advertisement in the personals section of Craigslist with an open-ended question: "Is there something you've been avoiding?" He asks applicants to identify something in their lives that they feel is holding them back, and offers an opportunity to overcome it. Fielder proposes a method to rehearse potentially difficult or stressful situations, and thus conquering the avoided subjects at hand, which at first seems like an invitation to a life-coaching course, or perhaps a group therapy session, but he suggests that the more detailed and true-to-life the rehearsal, the more effective it will be, leading to the elaborate, theatrical strategy of the program. Using information gathered, often surreptitiously, from the subject's life, Fielder builds a meticulously personalized physical and operational staging ground where they can "rehearse": the participant will repeat the scenario in question over and over again until they feel prepared to confront it in real life. While *Nathan For You* is concerned with the relatively discrete goal of business success, the approach of *The Rehearsal* is self-consciously sprawling, attempting to optimize interaction through a ballooning web of meta-reality, reproduction, and repetition. The indiscriminate hoarding of detail mirrors the technological methods of tracking technologies, in which broad nets for gathering information are cast with the assumption that useful patterns or data points will inevitably emerge. Each rehearsal expands well beyond Fielder's initial plans as new contingencies are encountered, mirroring the mission creep that is often observed in more official data-gathering schemes. The constructed "rehearsals" are repeated many times over in order to anticipate contingent events and avoid their potential to lead to failure, and employ the use of detailed observation as a main strategy, both in terms of human behavior and physical space. Fielder establishes a logic of accruing detail which pervades the entire series, where increasingly elaborate sets are constructed and supporting casts are hired to service the participants' concerns and the details of the conflict at hand, such as a full-scale replica of a Brooklyn bar, complete with actors to stand in for staff and other bar-goers, where one participant can rehearse a confession untethered from the uncertainty of real life. The rehearsals not only copy real spaces, they also try to incorporate real experiences of time, for example, when fake snow is imported daily and applied to the perimeter of a suburban home to convincingly simulate the unseasonable passage of time, and vegetables are purchased and buried in a garden plot to mimic the experience of a self-sufficient homestead lifestyle. To mark remaining time before the actors who work in shifts in Angela's 24/7 rehearsal are swapped out, an oversized countdown clock is installed at ceiling height; the type of production detail that would ordinarily be made to



Fig. 1: An oversized countdown clock remains in-frame.

allow the tracking device to remain highly visible to crew members and easily avoided by the camera's aperture. But within the production and editing of the series, these manipulations are openly acknowledged both to the audience and the participants, producing an unspoken assumption that such gestures towards fidelity serve a strategic function that serves the success of the rehearsal. The effect is often visually emphasized in framing, where high- or wide-angle shots that include elements of the production apparatus, such as the countdown clock, marginalize and de-center the participants themselves (see Fig. 1).¹ The construction of the experiments that Fielder facilitates are bound in a basis of therapeutic language and a belief in the ability to accurately diagnose, name, and solve one's own obstacles if provided with the right toolkit. But as the series goes on, what this toolkit appears to be missing is the context of the participant's lives, which they have gone to great lengths to remove for the sake of isolating the problem in question.

Hall explicates the broad nature of television as a "technically and socially thoroughly manipulated medium" (223) that always exploits its particular relationship to "reality." Hall locates this relationship as a particular characteristic of broadcast television, which allowed for the transmission of live and direct visuals to a mass audience, but his analysis also offers useful insight into the development of reality television as a genre. He writes, "The illusion that television transmits 'reality' in the raw leads us to pose the question—is life like that?" (225) Although the now well-developed genre of reality television had not yet been born, Hall's question remains relevant. The sets and scenarios constructed by Fielder in service of rehearsals for each participant are self-evidently unnatural, but they purport to replicate or mimic real life in substantial ways. If these constructions account for what Hall describes as the "social practice" (213) on behalf of

¹ All stills are taken from *The Rehearsal*, directed by Nathan Fielder, produced by Nathan Fielder and Dan McManus. HBO. Cinematography by Marco Codero.

television professionals and producers, then the “social uses” (213) implied for the audience are also embedded within. *The Rehearsal* proposes a social utility in approaching one’s problems as they do within the program, with a level of mediated distance nearly impossible to apply outside of the television context.

In his polemic about the flattening effects of television on American culture, *Within the Context of No Context*, Trow identifies a shift to an increasingly common impulse to frame the world in terms of group dynamics, a turn towards an ever more generalized audience:

The middle distance fell away, so the grids (from small to large) that had supported the middle distance fell into disuse and ceased to be understandable. Two grids remained. The grid of 200 million and the grid of intimacy. Everything else fell into disuse. (47)

The matter of context returns frequently in the series, beginning with the selection of the participants themselves. The main figures featured in *The Rehearsal*, Kor, who has lied to his friends about having a master’s degree, Patrick, whose brother is withholding a portion of their shared inheritance from a deceased grandfather, and Angela, who is deciding whether or not to have children, do not have any explicit relationship to one another, and the issues they bring to the series are similarly disparate. “A problem is a disease in the demography,” Trow continues, “[a] difficulty is something overcome by a man – or not. A *problem* is something enjoyed by a piece of the demography” (49). Under Trow’s dichotomy, the issues at hand in *The Rehearsal* are difficulties, not problems as such. Despite this, the narrative container of reality television operates as a sort of mold in which their “difficulties” are raised to the level of societal ills, and treated with a disproportionate gravity commensurate with the elaborate construction of stage sets and an entire production apparatus to support them. But within the logic of the series, although they come to represent some version of the American polis, it is their disjunction with the medium of reality television that accounts for the curiously stilted tone of the series, and where its comedy originates. As the season develops, its cast of characters balloon in all directions, eventually being recruited from dating apps, or hired actors who operate both in “on duty” and “off duty” capacities, including Fielder himself, whose transition from producer to participant constitutes what is arguably the primary arc of the season.

Over the course of *The Rehearsal*’s six episodes, we encounter people who are struggling with the mundane problems of living: the contingency of social acceptance, family hierarchies, and deciding whether, and under what circumstances, one might want to have children. In the first episode, an adult man worries that coming clean about a lie will result in social ostracization. A second storyline involves a disagreement between two brothers regarding an inheritance from a recently deceased relative. In a third, a woman is uncertain if she wants to have children. When described in the abstract, these conflicts have a distinctly timeless,

almost literary quality. But the framing of *The Rehearsal* produces a strange and vertiginous effect, on the one hand reifying their alleged gravity through the maximal problem-solving scaffolding in which no expense, financial or personal, is spared, while simultaneously obscuring the universality of such conflicts by turning up the focus on the protagonists' personal idiosyncrasies. Trow notes that in the flattening medium of television, "[t]he trivial is raised up to power in it. The powerful is lowered toward the trivial" (45). Over forced small talk, Fielder's voice-over tells us that he is "about to ask this man to trust me with his life," a comic overstatement that exemplifies the flattening effect of television, relying on the dramatic inflation of ordinary lives.

This strategic framing by Fielder calls attention to several aspects of typical narrative conventions in reality television, which Laurie Ouelette describes as "hybrid [...] programs that combined the factual conventions of journalism, observational documentary, and video diaries with the plot elements and entertainment appeals of soap operas, sitcoms, dramas, and game shows" (1). With the exception of programs that focus specifically on extreme deviations from normative behavior or physicality, like *The Biggest Loser* (2004–16, 2020), *Hoarders* (2009–), or *My Strange Addiction* (2010–2015), reality television that operates with an ensemble cast of strangers typically requires participants to be cast in "a process that converts the real person into an objectified type," (Mayer 61) and who can be relied on to react and behave in ways that can be easily understood, both by audience and by one another. Within these bounds, the industry of reality television defines the limits of standard interaction between "different" people in highly superficial ways. The main participants in *The Rehearsal* are adults of indeterminate middle age, and like many other American cultural products, the series avoids explicit reference to class. But as Hall argues, the smoothing effects of conventional television production operate in order to "translat[e] the social into the symbolic," accreting into a deliberate and learned "set of social practices" (227). Although the program goes to sometimes great lengths to frame them otherwise, the concerns of the participants in *The Rehearsal* ultimately do share a common thread: the material conditions and class anxieties that run beneath their issues as stated, which perhaps amount to an actual answer to Fielder's initial casting question (Is there something you've been avoiding?). Kor is a teacher in New York City, work that is notoriously underfunded and underpaid, and it is in his search for a new job where his lie is threatened to be exposed, when his friend repeatedly encourages him to apply for positions requiring a master's degree. An inheritance is withheld from Patrick by his older brother, the executor of his late grandfather's will, because he feels that Patrick's girlfriend will take advantage of his newfound wealth. Angela, a 44-year-old single woman who lives in a studio apartment, would like to start a family, but only under the ideal conditions of a traditional marriage and on a self-sufficient homestead. *The Rehearsal's* deft framing of these concerns draws on both the conventions of reality television, where the issues at hand seem



Fig. 2: A conversational flow-chart on Fielder's laptop.

both too amorphous to solve and not acute enough to warrant our attention, as well as the audience's sympathetic biases, which are not inclined towards the main subjects, who are not particularly likeable. Their lack of self-awareness renders them unfit to be the vessels for a cathartic narrative arc, at the same time that it seems self-evident that their very understandable problems are unlikely to be solved through *The Rehearsal's* methods, or aided by, for example, the meticulous reconstruction of a fast-food chicken restaurant.

In many episodes, *The Rehearsal* engages with the reality and wide-spread acceptance of extensive surveillance in our daily lives. In order for Nathan to stay involved with his “around the clock simulation of parenthood” with Angela, he installs an elaborate surveillance apparatus so that he can observe both her and the rotating cast of actors hired to play their son at various ages. During Fielder's first on-camera meeting with Kor, who has lied about having a master's degree, he reveals a confession: in advance of their meeting to plan the details of Kor's rehearsal, Fielder himself has repeatedly rehearsed the meeting currently taking place. Fielder describes how he sent a team of workers disguised as HVAC workers, hired by Kor's apartment building, to “secretly make a digital map of your entire home” (Ep. 1, 04:13). The 3D scan is used to construct a one-to-one replica of Kor's home, and an actor is hired to stand in for Kor. After studying his demeanor and speech patterns based on Kor's video application to participate in *The Rehearsal*, the actor and Fielder rehearse the upcoming conversation several dozen times, finally creating a situational flow-chart that includes jokes, gestures, body language, and general affect. “And with the help of a fake you,” Fielder says, “I could practice every single permutation of this interaction and have a plan for it.” In this way, Shoshana Zuboff writes in *Surveillance Capitalism*, “the connectedness that we once sought for personal sustenance and effectiveness is recast as the medium for a new species of power and the social confluence that translates



Fig. 3: Fielder and hired actors watch the 24/7 surveillance feed of Angela's rehearsal.

into guaranteed outcomes” (386). These guaranteed outcomes can only be a function of predictable social behavior, which is the underlying basis for the methodology that Fielder both instrumentalizes and satirizes in *The Rehearsal*.

The gathering of extensive data in our daily lives has become increasingly commonplace and is often accompanied by utopian promise of its use. The privacy we sacrifice is offset by the potential to leverage both the aggregate of such data collection in the form of large-scale societal information, as well as individual level information that can be used to improve one's life based on increasingly minute metrics. Such tech-utopianism often employs a degree of magical thinking between the gathering and the implementation of the data of individuals, but as Zuboff continues, “[t]hey aim to fashion a society that emulates machine learning in much the same way that industrial society was patterned on the disciplines and methods of factory production” (375). Fielder's situational flow-charts are constructed to resemble a functioning social algorithm by producing the conditions where he is able to aggregate multiple events to analyze, but their granular specificity renders them absurd parodies of scientific rigor, and the limitations of his strategy are immediately clear (see Fig. 3). In the same way that analysis of big-data trends seeks to convey predictability where it may not really exist, Fielder's tools of optimization suggest a degree of certainty for the participants in *The Rehearsal* through repetition and practice, erecting a kind of social training ground that would guarantee success. In these highly constructed spaces, isolated from real-world variables, participants experiment with a form of purportedly optimized decision making, and have the opportunity to run through their social flow-chart repeatedly to test for machine failure. It is proposed that this will allow them to deftly select for a positive outcome when they reach the planned-for encounter in real life, but somewhat predictably can only produce stilted, unnatural interaction, thwarted by the most minor deviation from



Fig. 4: Fielder wears a laptop in a chest harness as he directs participant Patrick.

the plan, or frustration when the participant themselves is unable to stick to the script, where failure is most easily ascribed to the actor or participant for their inability to bend themselves around an inhuman system.

In the early days of reality projects, like the television show *Big Brother* (1999–) or the streaming webcam project *JenniCam* (1996–2003), the pervasive presence of cameras in the lives of ordinary people was still, at that point, a relative novelty. This became part of the programs' appeal—how would people behave differently if they knew they were being recorded? But as home surveillance and self-observation have become increasingly more common through technologies like nanny-cams and Ring doorbells, so too has comfort with the notion of being monitored.

Throughout the series, *The Rehearsal's* engagement with surveillance technology as a medium for producing reality is reinforced in its visual rhetoric. The apparatus of production is often explicitly shown on camera in various ways, and emphasized with panning or zooming camera shots which move outwards from a scene to include its edges, revealing the production team and the extended apparatus of television: cameras, microphones, monitors. The opening scene of the second episode begins with the camera on a screen of gridded surveillance feeds of a suburban home, where we see Angela tending to a baby from multiple angles. The camera pulls back to reveal a command center of producers watching intently as she lays the baby into a crib and exits the room (see Fig. 3). The scene continues, anticipation heightened with tense music as the shot and counter-shot continue to alternate between the grid of surveillance feeds and the intent producers, producing an empty drama in contrast with the utilitarian movements of assistants moving production equipment on screen, action normally relegated to behind the scenes. Fielder's repeated emphasis on the program's production pushes against what Hall refers to as “good’ professional television,” where

the technical nature of the medium is thoroughly suppressed: any reminders that there are cameras, cameramen, sound booms [...] location or studio-managers, producers, directors, telecine recordists and so on, invisibly intervening as a collective production unit between ‘reality’ and the viewer, destroys the illusion of immediacy and transparency. (228)

Similarly, the repetitive nature of Fielder’s rehearsals interrupts the sense of a seamless narrative expected in a well-produced television show, emphasizing the disruptive nature of real-time optimization.

Although *The Rehearsal* engages specifically with the genre of reality television, the series draws references from other television conventions as well. Throughout the series, Fielder’s voice-over acts as what Hall terms “the mediation of the explainer/guide/moderator, who ‘stands in’ for the absent audience and makes the complicated plain, simple, and straight” (228). Fielder frames the diegetic dialogue, narrative turns, and production decisions for the viewer in methodical terms that render their comic outlandishness as perfectly logical. His flat, authoritative tone is reminiscent of the “slice of life” segments that might punctuate the nightly news, reporting on the lives of ordinary people in observational terms and minimally punctuated with their own words. Similarly, the use of voice-over narration in *The Rehearsal* calls attention to Fielder’s directorial authority, despite his dual position as both producer and participant. In his role as producer, Fielder is sometimes distinguished from others on set with the presence of a laptop worn in a chest harness, where he is shown to be actively amending rehearsal flowcharts, taking notes, and observing the actors (see Fig. 4). As with the role of voice-over narration, Fielder calls attention to the nature of television as a produced environment, even when it purports to be transmitting “reality.” Hall states,

[t]elevision *always* manipulates its raw material – it is, by nature, a ‘dirty medium.’ Though nature and actuality constantly appear before us on the screen as if transparently capture by the telecine, the images we see are constructions of or representations of ‘the actual,’ not reality itself (218).

Though it is well understood that much of what falls under the reality television umbrella is scripted and produced, Hall instructs us that even before the emergence of reality television as a discrete genre, the relationship of television to the “real” is fundamentally fraught and cannot be taken for granted. Nevertheless, *The Rehearsal* is particularly focused on the figure of the actor as one who fundamentally distorts the world in their attempt to mirror reality. In *The Rehearsal*, the figures who seem most aware of the presence of a camera are professional actors, whose emotionally dense performances sometimes seem histrionic or calculated in comparison to the subdued and idiosyncratic primary participants in Kor, Patrick, and