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SHAKESPEARE IN SPACE: A *STAR TREK* TOWARDS PLURALITY

BY

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Defamiliarizing reality

“All the galaxy’s a stage!” (Bole, *Hide and Q*). This quotation sounds both familiar and unfamiliar. It is, of course, a slightly altered quotation from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. “World” has been changed to “galaxy” because of the spatial-temporal location of the speaker, a character called Q, who features in the US television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Q is one of the main recurring antagonists acting against Jean-Luc Picard, the Captain of the USS Enterprise, who, as we are told in the opening credits, has followed in the footsteps of James T. Kirk in order to “seek out new life and new civilisation, and to boldly go where no one has gone before” (Allen, *Encounter at Farpoint*). From time to time, Q appears on the star ship to try, test, and annoy humans, in particular Captain Picard. The usual weapons of the twenty-fourth century star ship (phasers and photon torpedoes) are ineffectual when used against Q, because he is not only well versed in Shakespeare, but also omnipotent. Who could be better than a godlike creature to introduce us to Shakespeare and *Star Trek* – the two fictional universes which converge in this article?

The quotation from the episode *Hide and Q* combines two elements: on the one hand, we have the stage, which signifies the notion of drama, theatre, and the idea that our reality might as well be a play. In this respect, Shakespeare seems to be in line with poststructuralist ideas. If all the world were a stage, a world outside the stage would consequently not exist. What is the stage but a place where we perform texts? Consequently, the stage could be seen as a space for a plurality of texts, and in this sense, there would be no outside of the text. On the other hand, we have the galaxy that transports us into a fictional future, opening up the perspective to manifold fictional possibilities and thereby increasing the plurality of possible texts. Both signifiers, stage and galaxy, imply a certain plurality of texts and possibilities that I intend to explore through the way in which Shakespeare’s plays are integrated into the text of *Star Trek*. Plurality is certainly a characteristic of our time that could be characterized as postmodern and postcolonial. Everyday we encounter both ethnic and medial plurality, and perhaps even plural realities, and postmodernism tries to establish difference and plurality as principles in our world. In his study on modernism and postmodernism, Peter Zima argues that taken to their extreme, these principles can turn into indifference (see 112). While there is a dangerous tendency towards apathy in postmodernism, we still live in a political world in which postcolonial issues counter the effects of this. Such a confrontation is, of course, reflected in the texts discussed here.

Science fiction informs us about our world by defamiliarizing our reality (Dionne 174). *Star Trek* succeeds in doing this by transforming our wishes, desires, conflicts, our anxieties, and even our character traits into an alien world. The heroes of this world (mostly star ship captains) can face any intergalactic challenge because they can rely on the merits of their technological and cultural achievements. While there is a huge fan community that has devoted itself to the question whether or not beaming people or travelling above light speed is really possible, my concern is with the way that culture of the twenty-fourth century is conceptualized in the television series.

Multiple alien races create a colourful mixture of different fictional ethnicities with ostensibly different cultural backgrounds that can easily be deciphered as racial stereotypes or generalized human characteristics. For example, Russians and Japanese are presented as a proud warrior race with ridges on their foreheads. On the one hand, Klingon culture can be traced back the Japanese warrior rituals; the Klingon accent, on the other hand, is sometimes blatantly Russian. Furthermore, there are the logical Vulcans, the greedy Ferengi, the deceitful Romulans, the power hungry Shapeshifters, the militant Cardassians, the religious Bajorans, and many more that represent different aspects of human nature.

The ethnic variety on board hints at the possibility that *Star Trek* also mirrors the plurality and complexity of our world. Shakespeare will be our guide through the plurality of the *Star Trek* universe. I would like to show how Shakespeare functions at the same time as a constraint and an enforcer of plurality. In order to pinpoint this twofold and somewhat contradictory function of Shakespeare in the *Star Trek* universe, I shall explore three different aspects of his appropriation. I will first describe the intertextual use of Shakespeare in terms of plural meanings before turning to the question of whether or not Shakespeare is used to depict one or plural realities. Both of these points are implied in the opening quotation that hints at the intertextuality as well as at the problem of multiple realities. Third, I will analyse Shakespeare's function with regard to ethnic plurality. The third aspect is a consequence of the general function of *Star Trek* as a show that explicitly portrays itself as concerned with ethnic integration. This tension between integration and plurality is yet another topic relating to our postmodern and postcolonial time that can hardly be ignored when talking about *Star Trek*.

Intertextuality

There is no doubt that Shakespeare comprises an important aspect of human culture in the *Star Trek* universe. Shakespeare's plays and his sonnets have not been forgotten – there is still need for Shakespeare in the twenty-fourth century. In fact, from the beginning of *Star Trek*, Shakespeare has been an integral part of the show. The intertextual reference to Shakespeare is already evident in the titles of the various episodes: in the first series, *Daggers of the Mind* and *All Our Yesterdays* echo *Macbeth* and the origin of the movie title *The Undiscovered Country* is quite clear as well; in the sequel *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the title *Sins of the Fathers* alludes to the *Merchant of Venice*, while *Remember Me* refers to *Hamlet*; the title of the *Star Trek*:

Deep Space Nine episode *Once more Unto the Breach* is, of course, from *Henry V*; and the *Star Trek: Voyager* episode also makes use of *Hamlet* for its title *Mortal Coil*.

Shakespeare's plays are not only present in the paratext, however. There are other dialogical encounters of greater intertextuality: plots allude to the plays, which are quoted, and even staged. The episode *Catspaw* from the original series, for example, opens with the chants of three witches: "Winds shall rise / and fog descend / So leave here all / or meet your end" (Dutta 38). Spock comments on that "Very bad poetry, Captain", and he is quite correct; the original three witches in *Macbeth* do not chant in the common iambic meter but rather in the more obscure dactylic rhythm. *Macbeth* remains a subtext in the episode that revolves around the inversion of gender roles: a masculine (or unsexed) woman and her weak partner (Dutta 39-41). The movie, *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* was given its title, which alludes to Hamlet's famous soliloquy in which death is the undiscovered country, for a reason: it is full of quotations from *Hamlet* and other plays.

The Next Generation introduces Shakespeare in the very first episode when Captain Picard quotes from *Henry VI*: "Kill all the lawyers" (Allen). This quotation is used in an argument with the omnipotent being Q – whom I consider to be a key to understanding the relationship between Shakespeare and *Star Trek*. In addition to the quotation from various sonnets in two episodes, and a couple of quotations from *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare is present through the medium of his texts. Captain Picard displays a leather bound copy of the collected plays in his office. The non-electronic book serves as a source of inspiration in a time dominated by technological gadgets. Picard and Data are also the ones who actually stage Shakespeare plays: they perform, or at least rehearse, parts of *Henry V*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*. After *The Next Generation*, the frequency of Shakespearean intertexts decreases in the other spin-offs. He is mentioned once or twice in *Star Trek Deep Space Nine*, *Star Trek Voyager* and *Enterprise*. The disappearance of Shakespeare in these spin-offs might imply the end of Shakespeare as a cultural icon in the future.

In the earlier spin-offs, however, Shakespeare has to share his space in the continuum of the text with various other intertexts by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Herman Melville, Cicero, Freud, Lewis Carroll as well as with the Bible, which all add to the cultural construction of human civilization. The use of Shakespearean intertexts, however, "is so extensive as to constitute a motif" (Hegarty 55). On the one hand, he is one voice among many, one text in a plurality of texts; on the other, Shakespeare seems to be a particularly strong voice. The first aspect supports the notion that Shakespeare enforces plurality, while the second restrains this plurality.

Let us take a closer look at the intertextual Shakespeare in order to determine the nature of his employment. Intertextuality as a theoretical concept was born from postmodernist thinking. At its basis lies the notion that any text is always already constituted by other texts. This ontological concept may be valid, but it is not applicable to the study of concrete examples of intertextuality. If one applies a narrow concept of intertextuality that is descriptive rather than ontological, then it is possible to measure the strength of intertextuality within specific texts (Pfister, "Konzepte der Intertextualität" 26-29). I will use Manfred Pfister's model in a simplified version to

describe Shakespearean intertextuality in *Star Trek*. Are we dealing with low or high intertextuality? Could it be described as modern or postmodern? Postmodernist intertextuality is, according to Pfister, highly reflexive, thematized, and theorized as a construction principle (Pfister, “How Postmodern is Intertextuality?” 214-218). If we follow this train of thought, postmodernist intertextuality should again enforce plurality because of its meta-reflexive capacities. If a text points to its own textual nature, it also refers to its status among a plurality of other texts.

In most of the cases discussed here, it is clear that we are dealing with examples of high intertextuality. In *Star Trek VI*, *Hamlet* is not just mentioned, but directly quoted. In fact, he is even quoted in Klingon as “taH pagh taHbe” (Meyer, *Star Trek VI*) (“To be or not to be”) and discussed at the dinner table. In *The Defector*, Data is performing a part of *Henry V*, Act IV, Scene 1 (Scheerer). The stage is the holodeck – a room that can simulate matter in a realistic way. In fact, the scene looks as if it really took place in the forest at night. A camp is visible in the background and a fire warms the soldiers. *Henry V* is not performed on stage by a group of actors (there are such performances in other episodes, but not of Shakespeare), but in a naturalistic environment. Thus, one could argue that this is no longer an intertextual reference to the play but rather to a film version of the play.

Data plays the role of the king and Captain Picard observes his performance. The play is discussed and interpreted in context after the performance of the scene. Data even mentions that he bases his interpretation on the performances of Olivier and Branagh. The scene has a certain humour to it, particularly as Patrick Stewart (Captain Picard) and Jonathan Frakes (usually playing the first officer on the Enterprise) speak the parts of the other two characters. Aside from this meta-textual pun, however, the play within the show proves to be crucial to the plot. The play does not serve as a model for the entire episode, which would be an indicator of high intertextuality, but the scene nevertheless introduces the main theme of the episode: that of posing as someone else. The king mingles with his troops on the night before the battle, disguised as a common soldier. The Romulan defector, which the Enterprise later takes on board, is also an admiral (i. e. king) in disguise, posing as an ordinary soldier. In addition, the situation before the battle of Agincourt is transformed into circumstances appropriate to the genre of science fiction. The Enterprise crew also faces a battle: an impending war with the Romulans. Picard has to ask Data how the crew feels about his decision to face the Romulans. He shares the dilemma of a military leader’s distance to his troops with King Henry, yet Data is surprised that the Captain does not feel the crew’s sentiment. The Captain replies: “Data, unlike King Henry, it is not easy for me to disguise myself and walk among my troops” (Scheerer). After Data’s exit he speaks to himself, quoting the following lines: “Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king who led them to it” (Scheerer). Since Picard not only mentions and quotes from the play that was performed earlier but also reflects on his allusion, we are again dealing with a case of high intertextuality.

Another example of an episode’s theme being based on the rehearsal of a Shakespeare play is *Emergence*. Data is playing Prospero on the holodeck when his simulation breaks down and the Orient Express suddenly rushes through his magic island. This fault in the system makes the juxtaposition of different texts clearly visible

and it can be understood as a comment on the uncontrollable or uncanny sides of magic and fantasy. The theme of Shakespeare's scene, the new world, is expanded upon when a new life form comes into being that is born from the holodeck fantasies of the crew.

In *The Defector* and in *Emergence* Shakespeare is not used in a self-reflexive way. Instead, Shakespeare as text is used to interpret and explain reality. In these two episodes, Shakespeare has a strong intertextual voice that counters a hypothetical plurality of other possible realities by reducing the number of possible interpretations. Knowing the Shakespearean intertext entails understanding the episode. One could even say that Shakespeare serves as a kernel of meaning.

Finally, *The Die Is Cast*, Garak, a Cardassian tailor and spy, alludes to *Julius Caesar* when he explains to his father how they ended up in a hopeless situation: "The fault, dear Tain, is not in our stars but in ourselves. Something I learned from Doctor Bashir" (Livingston, *The Die is Cast*). Again, Shakespeare is used to explain what is perceived as reality. Furthermore, the quotation cannot be identified without knowledge of the pretext, which means that this seems to be a case of low intertextuality. In fact, the quotation does not have to be traced back to Shakespeare to understand its meaning. In connection with the title, however, it serves to flesh out Garak's character. The air of treason evinced by *Julius Caesar* functions as a theme for the mysterious spy who betrayed his own father while at the same time his distinguished interest in the fine arts is stressed.

We have seen that quotations from and allusions to Shakespeare's plays are often used explicitly, are frequently identified and commented on, and sometimes even serve as pattern for an entire episode. The intertextual nature of the episodes, however, is seldom reflected upon. Shakespeare is often quoted unnoticed. Furthermore, the intertextuality of the show is not thematized as a construction principle. Consequently, we are dealing with an essentially classical or modernist kind of intertextuality.

A playful element is located on the metatextual level. Patrick Stewart, who plays Captain Picard, is also an actor of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Many of the supporting actors and actresses are also Shakespeare actors, while Captain Kirk, whose favourite author happens to be Shakespeare, is actually killed by an actor who is a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company (Hines). Reality (i.e. the actor's other roles) enters the fictional text and thereby destroys the text's ability to create the illusion of reality. The show is revealed to be just a simulacrum. In the very moment real reality destroys fictional reality, the audience steps out of the text into the context. Thus, one could say that the allusions to the actors' lives playfully mark the series as fictional or textual.

Cultural Supremacy and Ethnic Plurality

A playful element is introduced by the distortion of the original meaning and its appropriation to other contexts: if Shakespeare actors quote Shakespeare in a science fiction TV series, this TV series is clearly playing with its own fictional or textual nature. This section will explore the question of whether Shakespeare is used to depict one or many realities. The next question is, of course, what these realities look like.

There are three possible ways of understanding Shakespeare's function with regard to reality: first, Shakespeare is used to question reality. Second, he can also have the exact opposite function: Shakespeare is used as a cultural authority that affirms the progress of human civilization and represents humanity itself. These perceptive possibilities are based on David Reinheimer's distinction between ontological and ethical allusion. Shakespeare is human cultural (ontological allusion) and represents the values of human culture (ethical allusion). This means that Shakespeare serves as a symbol of human nature and as a model of action (see "Ontological and Ethical Allusion"). Third, Shakespeare as a random agglomerate of fragmentary quotes and allusions is used as a means of verifying and demonstrating white, male, Anglo-Saxon middle-class supremacy. While the first option would mark the intertextual Shakespeare as an enforcer of plurality, the plurality decreases in the second option. The third option hints at one way in which intertextuality can support a colonial world that does not tolerate any kind of multiplicity.

Let us start with the first assumption: Shakespeare is used to question reality or mark the world as fictional. When Q, as quoted above, in the *Next Generation* episode *Hide and Q* declares, "All the galaxy's a stage", Captain Picard corrects him instantly: "World, not galaxy, all the world's a stage" (Bole). Q is not discouraged and continues: "How about this: Life is but a walking shadow..." (Bole) and so on. With his godlike powers, Q indeed considers the galaxy to be a stage, and himself the director. In *Hide and Q*, he provides a setting (alien planet), a plot (enemy soldiers attacking), and even costumes (uniforms from the Napoleonic Wars). Captain Picard realizes this: "I see, how we respond to the game tells you more about us than our real life, this tale told by an idiot" (Bole). In *Q Who?* the play is a lot darker: When Q forces the Enterprise's first encounter with a powerful merciless race, the Borg, Q comments: "The hall is rented, the orchestra engaged; it is now time to see if you can dance" (Bowman, *Q Who?*). When several people are killed, Picard asks Q if this is just one of his games. Q's answer is: "No, this is as real as your so-called life gets" (Bowman).

For Q, there is not just one reality, but rather a *theatrum mundi* with many stages. Humans are not able to see the plurality of realities, since they are limited to a three-dimensional thinking that only allows for one reality and one meaning of life and death. Q considers it his duty to teach the postmodern concept of multiple realities. His metaphorical device, however, is not taken from postmodernism but from the early modern era. For him, Shakespeare is useful as a means of theatricalizing human existence (Reinheimer 48-49), deconstructing reality, and critiquing humanity. Consequently, the high correlation between quotations from Shakespeare and Q's appearances is not surprising. In this case, the series shows traces of postmodern ideas brought forward through the use of Shakespeare quotes. Q renders a world fictional that is of course a fictional TV series, and thereby reflects on *Star Trek* as a text.

Captain Picard challenges Q's reasoning and tries to affirm human existence by appropriating Hamlet for his purpose: "What Hamlet might say with irony, I say with conviction: what a piece of work is man..." (Bole). Q becomes annoyed and throws Picard's leather bound copy of the plays back at him. This is just one of the cases where Shakespeare is used to defend or construct humanity.

Another example is found in the episode *The Defector*. While we have to remember that the scene is performed on the holodeck, which questions reality, it also affirms a certain version of reality. The holodeck itself is a simulation of reality, a simulacrum, which leads us to question the nature of reality. Quite a few episodes play with this notion by confusing holodeck-reality and real-reality. Characters find themselves in the holodeck only to discover that past events were not at all authentic, they fall in love with simulated persons, and use the holodeck to act out fantasies unfit for true life. The way Shakespeare is used in this scene, however, is not to question reality, but to generate meaning and construct reality.

After Data's performance, Picard explains that there is no better way to understand the human condition than to learn about it through Shakespeare. This is why not only Q and Picard, but also Data are linked to Shakespeare. Data is an artificial life form, an android, who strives to become more human. In order to do so, he makes repeated use of Shakespeare: he possesses a copy of the plays, quotes him frequently and rehearses his plays. Shakespeare is not only depicted as part of the progress of civilization, as a cultural authority that has survived while other writers passed into oblivion, but also as the epitome of humanity. He is used to constructing a reality that is based on a limited view of what is considered high culture in the twentieth century – a view that excludes many equally important works which are not part of the educational canon and thus reduces it to a superficial knowledge of a few classics.

This interpretation leads to a postmodern concept, since one does not have to go far from here to reach the idea that the original texts are no longer important. The use of particular fragments in the series implies that it is possible to appropriate Shakespeare in any way one wishes. This point has been made regarding the way Shakespeare is used in *The Undiscovered Country*. The movie from the *Original Series* is understood as a “thinly veiled allegory of Cold-War politics” (Dionne 183). The extensive use of quotations, mostly from *Hamlet*, is irrelevant to the plot, and shows rather the ideological employment, the political appropriation and the way Shakespeare is used as cultural capital. The Federation as the empire of white, male, Anglo-Saxon protestants claims Shakespeare as their cultural capital that designates them as the better-educated, more highly cultured, supreme power. The Klingons (or Russians), on the other hand, appear to have no right to use Shakespeare, as they are dark, barbaric, and inferior (Dionne 185).

This is an example of a monistic reality that is constructed by the intertextual use of Shakespeare. While the random quotations from Shakespeare out of context support the postmodern notion of indifference towards meaning and point to the way high culture is (mis)used in popular culture, quoting Shakespeare, however randomly, can by no means be described as an act of promoting ethnic or cultural plurality. *Star Trek VI* is clearly a case of the racially-prejudiced appropriation of Shakespeare. The other two examples, Q's contention that “All the galaxy's a stage” and Picard's notion that Shakespeare is the epitome of humanity, however, have shown that there are more positive ways of constructing and deconstructing reality via Shakespeare. These two interpretative strands are not mutually exclusive. Shakespeare can deconstruct and generate meaning while also being appropriated for political purposes. Evidently, the

concepts of reality and textuality remain complicated issues – even in a television show.

Colonial Shakespeare and Beyond

The appropriation of Shakespeare in *The Undiscovered Country* certainly represents an example of a colonial attitude that can be recognised in many of the *Star Trek* spin-offs (see various essays in Harrison, *Enterprise Zones*). Interestingly, the Federation is supposed to have rid itself of ethnic conflicts. The original series featured an Asian and a Russian pilot and also contained the first kiss between a white man and an African American woman to be shown on television. But the fear of the Other prevails, veiled in alien allegories. While a supposedly real Russian can be an officer on a star ship, the actual Russian threat is masked as a Klingon threat. The exploration of space as a sphere of diversity and plurality often ends in a racist dead-end. The Federation and its values are considered superior. If other races want to join it in order to share resources or enjoy trade relations and protection, they have to rid themselves of unwanted internal conflicts, achieve a certain technological standard, and abolish barbaric rituals.

Nevertheless, there is hope. It seems as if colonial attitudes are slowly being replaced by the common denominator of postmodernism and postcolonialism: plurality. In order to explore this, I will now consider the line of development from the original show, to *The Next Generation*, to *Deep Space Nine*. In the *Undiscovered Country (Original Series)*, knowledge of Shakespearean texts is the privilege of the civilized races. The barbaric Klingons attempt to appropriate Shakespeare because they would like to participate in the discourse of the colonizer by using the correct cultural code. It is shown to be an unquestionable fact that Klingons accept Shakespeare as a universal cultural authority. Their extensive quotation from *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and other plays is not explicitly marked as unusual. The Klingon warrior who is most fond of Shakespeare even dies with his words on his lips. Whether he has succeeded in claiming Shakespeare as a representative of humanity, whose plays are supposed to be better when performed in Klingon, for himself, or whether this means that he dies an assimilated colonized subject, is debatable (Dionne 188).

The *Next Generation* episode *The Defector* demonstrates how Shakespearean discourse is the key to becoming a member of the superior race of human beings. Picard comments on Data's performance as the disguised King Henry: "Data. You are here to learn about the human condition. And there is no better way of doing that than by embracing Shakespeare" (Scheerer). Data's, or the colonized subject's, road to full membership of the human club is paved with Shakespeare. He has to 'quote himself in' (see Reinheimer 52). There are other examples of Data using Shakespeare to construct himself as human, but the discourse-universe is slightly more diverse in *The Next Generation*. Data does not only rely on Shakespeare in his search to become more life-like; he draws on other cultures, too. In the episode *In Theory*, he creates a sub-routine for romantic interaction with a crew member that also includes alien references. In *The Offspring*, Data lists Klingon child-rearing methods alongside guidelines applied by human parents. Data constructs himself not only through human

texts, but also through appropriated texts from other cultures which are implicitly discriminated against by the Federation. Evidently, as the number of intertexts increases, plurality increases.

This development continues in *Deep Space Nine*. In *The Die is Cast*, the Cardassian Garak quotes from *Julius Caesar* and assigns a human origin to this quotation. It is only a very small textual fragment in a wide multiplicity of alien texts. Cultural discourses become hybrids when Garak is taught Shakespeare by his friend Bashir, who in turn reads the Cardassian masterpiece *The Never-ending Sacrifice*. Shakespeare and other classics like Klingon opera and ancient Bajoran texts are juxtaposed with popular culture (for example Swing, Baseball, alien games of chance, crime novels). Shakespeare becomes more postmodernist, more postcolonialist, and more pluralist in the nineteen-nineties.

In the two later spin-offs *Star Trek: Voyager* and *Enterprise* Shakespeare has almost vanished – but not because of plurality. On the contrary, *Enterprise* represents a strong backlash against postmodern and postcolonial attitudes. Written and produced in the times of the Iraq War, it portrays a different kind of humanity: one that has shipped out to help the universe become a better place, but one which receives only hostile responses to its gracious offer. Finally, the only way out of the hostilities is open war, and so there is hardly time for culture on the decks of the ship. Old Westerns are shown at the weekly movie night, but no one thinks of rehearsing a play. Only a few episodes allow for peaceful exchange with other races. On one of these occasions *Macbeth* is mentioned. An alien captain claims to have enjoyed Shakespeare and Sophocles, and now asks for film recommendations (Burton, *Cogenitor*). Human technology dominates over both human culture and alien culture. The absence of Shakespeare or other texts creates a hostile galaxy that is no longer a stage but a vacuum where questions of plurality trail off.

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Zusammenfassung

In Form von Zitaten aus verschiedenen Stücken, Anspielungen und Aufführungen ist Shakespeare in den jeweiligen *spin-offs* der amerikanischen Science-Fiction-Fernsehserie *Star Trek* präsent. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Funktion der Shakespeare-Intertexte unter dem Aspekt der Pluralität. Shakespeare wird sowohl im Sinne einer Pluralität der Bedeutung, der Realität und der Ethnizität als auch in Form einer Beschränkung derselben instrumentalisiert. Die Entwicklung dieser oszillierenden Bewegung wird an den einzelnen Serien von *Star Trek* nachvollzogen.