Tipp-Ex
Small Corrections

No text is created without corrections. What is presented as a coherent whole after completion is, in fact, shot through with mistakes and rejections. Whoever makes an attempt at writing will experience disturbances. These interferences in no way only apply to great thoughts but also, primarily, occur in the small things that are involved in the writing process. It is the notorious mistakes and malfunctions and—even more—the techniques of their deletion that are of particular interest to me in the following essay. In addressing these, I start with a small, everyday object that was developed to delete typographical mistakes: Tipp-Ex. As an object of observation, it offers the possibility of looking past the completeness of a text and turning to the structural and material conditions of its development. What makes Tipp-Ex interesting, then, are the corrections *in* the small and the corrections *of* the small, i.e., those corrections that are observable as media practices and procedures and become effective in the interplay of technological and epistemological factors.

This is connected to a certain correction of the view, an altered line of vision that does not start from a finished text but considers the processes of its production. What happens when one looks past the big and focuses on the small? A new perspective emerges. It "requires and enables a different optics, a specific vision, and a different epistemology: it is interested in the smallest thing, in the supposedly marginal or insignificant, it focuses on microstructures and penetrates into the smallest particles of things, which become for it the signum of knowledge."[1] Such a change in perspective presents the pos-

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1   Wolfgang Schäffner, Sigrid Weigel, and Thomas Macho, "Das Detail, das Teil, das Kleine. Zur Geschichte und Theorie eines kleinen Wissens," in *"Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail". Mikrostrukturen des Wissens*, ed. Wolfgang Schäffner, Sigrid Weigel, and Thomas Macho (München: Fink, 2003), 7. On the insight possibilities of details and microstruc-

sibility of new insights, which this text examines along the lines of typing errors, deleting agents, and methods of correcting.

Every small form is part of a history of forms to which it is reacting, which it adapts, interpolates, and transforms. And every culture of the small is part of a history of cultural techniques to which it relates. For the cultural technique of writing and the related cultural forms of text production and reception, the introduction of the typewriter initiated a profound transformation.[2] The typewriter mechanizes writing, organizes it in terms of processes, and optimizes it by machine. The idea of individual handwriting is thus contrasted with the production of writing as a media technology. This media technology is in turn, unlike letterpress printing, closely tied to the hand as the organ that performs it. It does not require a single movement of the hand but multiple taps of the fingers, insofar as typing is a sequence of single keyed operations. These changes entail, on the one hand, the potential to increase efficiency and, on the other hand, effective problems. The typewriter is capable of not only increasing the speed of word processing but also, simultaneously, of calling into question the seamless flow of writing with the common occurrence of errors that comes along with its use. These deviations and irritations bring to light what lies beyond the grand form of the regulated order of knowledge.[3] The moment of a small interference in one's writing is also always a moment of doubt: it throws the medium back on its foundations and thus expands the boundaries of what can be surveyed and expected.

Siegfried Kracauer describes a telling example of this in his 1927 text "The Little Typewriter." It involves an author and his typewriter, whose initially balanced relationship is suddenly greatly disrupted: "One day, an unexpected event occurred: the little typewriter became *sick*. Well, not the machine really, and to call it sick is exaggerated. Only one minor key failed, a keylet really, off to one side."[4] Only minor, only off to one side—and still, everything changes all at once. The defect of the small, the failure of a single key, affects the big

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tures, see further: *Was aus dem Bild fällt. Figuren des Details in Kunst und Literatur*, ed. Edith Futscher, Stefan Neuner, Wolfram Pichler, and Ralph Ubl (München: Fink, 2007).

2   Cf. Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1986), 271–380.

3   On the productivity of errors in media history, see *Goofy History. Fehler machen Geschichte*, ed. Butis Butis (Köln: Böhlau, 2009).

4   Siegfried Kracauer, *The Little Typewriter*, trans. Johannes von Moltke, ed. Meghan Forbes and Hannah McMurray (Ann Arbor: Harlequin Creature, 2017), no pp.

whole: not only does his writing come to a halt, but the writer is also suddenly deeply affected by it. While at first, he admired the machine "[g]iven its perfection,"[5] now, at the abrupt moment of the malfunction, a blockade takes place. What the machine initially allowed for, is now prevented by the "key's paralysis."[6] The machine seems to possess its own dynamics, even a life of its own, and seems like a vulnerable organism in Kracauer's image of its sickness. What threatens it also afflicts the user. Suddenly, something becomes visible that at first seemed hidden: the white spot on the paper and, thus, the gap in the text.

Kracauer's miniature reveals a particular attention to small elements and short irritations, even more so: it indicates a change in perspective. "When looking back at such occurrences in the material cultures [...] of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a conception of knowledge [arises] that more greatly emphasizes the coincidences, contingencies, and arbitrariness than the planned and expected."[7] The incident [*Zwischenfall*, between-occurrence] is also simultaneously an interval [*Zwischenraum*, between-space]. It enables "a rejection of overarching orientations"[8] and a shift in focus onto those empty spaces out of which something new can arise.

Interferences are not only irritating but also catalyzing. They are innovative, in the sense that they raise questions about new ways of dealing with errors. From the small errors of writing with a typewriter, medium-driven techniques and material arrangements develop that seek to conceal and correct the irritations. In doing so, the increase in malfunctions that appear with the expansion of machines plays a crucial role. The more the typewriter made its way into public and private spaces, the more obvious its use for organizational procedures became, the more often small mistakes began to appear. Not only can keys get stuck, but fingers can also mistype. Every now and then, they miss the correct key and thereby produce typographical irritations. Here, too, the regulated process is disturbed, with the difference being that the human typist has now become the actual machine defect.

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5   Ibid.

6   Ibid.

7   Bernhard J. Dotzler and Henning Schmidgen, "Einleitung: Zu einer Epistemologie der Zwischenräume," in *Parasiten und Sirenen. Zwischenräume als Orte der materiellen Wissensproduktion*, ed. Bernhard J. Dotzler and Henning Schmidgen (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 7.

8   Ibid.

With the introduction of the electric typewriter, keyboard switches became smoother, increasing the probability of typos. It was a professional typist who not only noticed the proliferation of these small disturbances but also developed a novel solution for how to correct them. In the early 1950s, the American secretary Bette Nesmith Graham created a white paint coating with which one could paint over incorrectly typed letters in the text and then write over them. She initially named her invention, a well-coating and fast-drying white paint in handy little bottles, "Mistake Out" but changed the name a few years later and ultimately marketed the product as "Liquid Paper". Almost simultaneously in Germany, Wolfgang Dabisch was dealing with the question of how to proceed with the correction of typing errors. Like Nesmith Graham, he also assumed a change of perspective: not the removal, in the sense of a subtraction, but rather the overcoat, in the sense of an addition, should eliminate the errors. And, like the secretary Nesmith Graham, the engineer Dabisch also had the materiality of the medium in mind. Dabisch developed little pieces of paper coated on one side with white, fine powder paint. His idea involved correcting typos with a duplication. If one positioned the little piece of paper where the incorrect character is and typed it again, the white paint would then come off in a way that covered up the error, and the newly formed blank space could be typed over. As a small-format correcting tool, Dabisch's invention was patented in the late 1950s and produced by Tipp-Ex, the company he founded. Along with correction paper, a short time later, correcting fluid was also sold under the name Tipp-Ex. Additionally, the company also produced correction ribbon and correction pens.

What is notable about these innovations and productions is the development of a cultural technique of deletion that does not assume the destruction of the whole system but, rather, focuses on making small corrections. It then becomes clear that "tools used to erase something, in their various forms, not only consider the nature of the writing utensils whose traces they are meant to delete but also, in equivalent fashion, consider the medium bearing the script."[9] Suddenly, the white page comes to view—and with it, the question of what material basis there is for the act of writing to be completed and transformed in the first place. At the same time, a shifting process occurs that is less interested in the cultural production of meaning by completed texts and

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9   Nele Heinevetter and Nadine Sanchez, "Fragmente einer Geschichte des Löschens," in
     Was mit Medien… Theorie in 15 Sachgeschichten, ed. Nele Heinevetter and Nadine Sanchez
     (Paderborn: Fink, 2008), 154.

instead focuses more on the microstructural elements making up textual production. In the process, the whole is disassembled into its small and smallest elements, of which a few remain visible, while others can be covered up. In actuality, the application of white layers onto white surfaces provides for an increase of empty units, spreading whiteness as the condition of possibility for further operations of writing.

These forms of correction, nevertheless, are not themselves erasable but remain materially noticeable. It is striking that Tipp-Ex, above all, shows *where* something written was deleted or covered up. Here, the "Ex" of typing comes to light in a particular way: as the trace of a correction, as an indication of the process of revision itself. Decisive for this, then, are the material forms of the media participating in this process: paper, ink, correction fluid. Only through them, only with them and in them, does the operation of deletion then become observable—all independent of the question of what a text means.

When one puts aside the meaningful big and instead focuses on the concealed small, when one considers not the intentionally used characters but looks for the unintended traces, one then departs from the message and arrives at the medium. Sybille Krämer points out this connection and underlines: "The imprinting power of a medium [...] unfolds in the dimension of a meaningfulness beyond the structures of conventional semantics. And it is the materiality of the medium that provides the basis for this 'excess' of meaning, for this 'surplus value' of significance, which is not at all intended by the users of signs and is not subject to their control."[10] Media can thus be inferred by the traces they leave—without one having to or being able to trace them back to a specific intention. Krämer emphasizes: "The medium relates to the message in the way that the unintentional trace relates to the intentionally used sign. [...] The medium is not simply the message, rather, the trace of the medium is preserved on the message."[11]

Krämer's observations on the relation of signs and traces can be connected to the operation of deleting, for deleting is itself intimately tied to the trace—whenever we try to erase something, we simultaneously also enter something. We leave traces behind and thus also the rest that escapes deletion as ultimate destruction. This is precisely what the small form of Tipp-Ex

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10   Sybille Krämer, "Das Medium als Spur und Apparat," in *Medien, Computer, Realität. Wirklichkeitsvorstellung und neue Medien*, ed. Sybille Krämer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 78–79.

11   Ibid., 81.

reminds us of: in removing traces of script, deleting agents themselves leave traces behind. It is no longer the presence of particular characters that come into play here, but their absence and superimposition by new traces.

This phenomenon of self-superimposing and mutually overwriting traces had already been described by Sigmund Freud in his "Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad'". In it, Freud develops a view of psychic and technical conditions that interconnect the functionality of the perceptual apparatus with medium-technical relevant operations. Crucial for their functioning is not solely the process of notation but also, and primarily, the bases of the notes it makes, or their material makeup. Freud explains this relation of its recording techniques on the basis of two processes:

> On the one hand, I can choose a writing-surface which will preserve intact any note made upon it for an indefinite length of time—for instance, a sheet of paper which I can write upon in ink. I am then in possession of a 'permanent memory-trace.' The disadvantage of this procedure is that the receptive capacity of the writing-surface is soon exhausted. [...] Moreover, the advantage of this procedure, the fact that it provides a 'permanent trace,' may lose its value for me if after a time the note ceases to interest me [...]. The alternative procedure avoids both of these disadvantages. If, for instance, I write with a piece of chalk on a slate, I have a receptive surface which retains its receptive capacity for an unlimited time and the notes upon which can be destroyed as soon as they cease to interest me, without any need for throwing away the writing-surface itself. Here the disadvantage is that I cannot preserve a permanent trace.[12]

Both recording techniques have advantages and disadvantages. Freud then describes the merging of both processes into a specific arrangement, which he bases on a child's toy—the Mystic Pad:

> The surface of the Mystic Pad is clear of writing and once more capable of receiving impressions. But it is easy to discover that the permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights. Thus the Pad provides not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been

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12   Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIX (1923–1925). The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961), 227.

written, like an ordinary paper pad: it solves the problem of combining the two functions *by dividing them between two separate but interrelated component parts or systems*.[13]

This systematization is where the essential achievement of the medium can be found: the Mystic Pad can not only take on signs and then remove them, it can also save them, it can layer the traces and thus retain them.

What concerns Freud here is the relation of provisionality and return, of disappearing and appearing, of absence and permanence—grand themes and techniques that become observable in the small example. Freud's interest in small things, the seemingly insignificant everyday objects, makes his approach adaptable to media theory and cultural analysis. For here, the essential question is that of textual meaning but that of the conditions and possibilities of its origin and subsistence. Similarly, the observation of writing also implies its own unique direction. It shifts the attention from the notes to the act of recording itself—and, with this, opens up the possibility of its own dynamics of knowledge:

> To understand recording as an act, as a process, as a procedure, means, first of all, to refrain from what is recorded and rather to pay closer attention to the gestures and practices, the materials and obstacles associated with recording. That the act of recording produces the recorded in the first place is not a trivial observation: for the techniques and procedures condition what can be recorded at all; and so, conversely, the recorded always bears witness to the procedures of recording.[14]

The processes of recording are closely tied with the practices of deletion, which, in turn, make their constitutive participation in that process seem rather small. The microscopic view, however, will not miss their central position in the cultural-technical framework of writing and saving. Deleting agents like Tipp-Ex ultimately leave their mark "on the carrier media by referring to the work of deletion they have done just as much as on the 'destroyed' script, of which remnants now and then, here and there, noticeably remain. Instead of erasing traces of writing, deleting agents save these, paradoxically, to the same degree that they delete them—as traces of traces, so to speak."[15]

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13   Ibid., 230.

14   Petra Löffler and Kathrin Peters, "Aufzeichnen. Einleitung in den Schwerpunkt," *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft 3: Aufzeichnen* 2 (2010): 11.

15   Heinevetter and Sanchez, "Fragmente einer Geschichte des Löschens," 158.

Deletion procedures thus set in motion more than marginal corrections; they enable an accumulation of small references.

While those references are still visible and tangible in analog carrier media, their perceptibility seems to disperse in the digital age. Thomas Macho notes:

> In fact, it looks as if an era in the history of script carriers has come to its logical end with the advent of computers and electronic networks. This is why computers [...] are the true "Mystic Pads" that Freud interpreted merely as metaphors for the structures of the unconscious mind, without considering the possibility that the history of cultural techniques and the script carriers, for its part, constitutes and differentiates between [...] the functions of consciousness. Computers are possibly not at all instruments of knowledge presentation but, plain and simple, the instrument-based forms in which knowledge itself evolves and circulates without requiring instances of authorship any further.[16]

If this is true, what function and meaning should the analog deleting agent Tipp-Ex still have? Should it not have already disappeared a long time ago?

It may well be that Tipp-Ex must grapple with its own deletion in the digital age as a tool for making corrections for analog script media. It is likely that these circumstances are the very reason why it is now, in a phase of uncertainty and upheaval, extensively dealing with its own characteristics. And it is likely that the preferred form for this is the small format. At any rate, this is what an interactive video campaign suggests that has recently brought Tipp-Ex back onto our screens. As a type of aesthetic reflection, this advertisement shows what it means to not only understand Tipp-Ex as a medium of deletion but also as a source of knowledge for digital transformation processes.

The advertisement in question was released and circulated in 2012, the year that the world was meant to end, the supposed erasure of the universe. On a website that looks like a conventional YouTube video, a hunter and a bear can be seen with a birthday cake.[17] Suddenly, a meteorite approaches that threatens to destroy Earth. While the protagonists start to panic and run to and fro hectically, two buttons appear on the screen: "End the Party" and

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16   Thomas Macho, "Shining oder: Die weiße Seite," in *Weiß*, ed. Wolfgang Ullrich and Juliane Vogel (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003), 26–27.

17   See TippExperience2, "Hunter and bear's 2012 birthday party," YouTube video, 0:35, April 11, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQtai7HMbuQ.

"Don't End the Party." Users can decide how the rest of the video plays out. When selecting the option "Don't End the Party", a new window opens. Now, the bear appears on the left side of the screen, equipped with the product he is meant to be advertising: the Tipp-Ex "Mini Pocket Mouse," a small-format correction ribbon dispenser. The bear hands the Tipp-Ex to the hunter, who uses it to erase the year in the title of the video and then places it in an adjacent display window. He then declares to the viewer: "Quick! Enter any year you want with your keyboard, and let's replay the party." The user can now enter any year he or she wants and send the hunter and the bear on a journey through time.

The point of this short video is not so much explained by the hints in the dialogue but rather clarified by the written display in the advertisement window on the right: "Tipp-Ex: White and Rewrite." As a small form of advertisement, its slogan features a remarkable type of concentration. "White and Rewrite"—this is not only a particularly catchy and rhythmic rhyme form, it is also, in fact, a media-reflexive theorem. The notion of the white page may still exist. However, if it is transferred from the materiality of paper to the type field of the computer, writing and, therefore, text production, are radically changed.[18] Vilém Flusser emphasizes this transformation and points to the increased variability of the text, the exponentiated possibility of intervention, and the extension and expansion of previously stable distinctions linked to it. Flusser notes:

> Writing on paper limits one's creativity. [...] When writing into an electromagnetic field, however, the creative text will also form lines, but these lines will no longer run clearly. They have become 'soft,' plastic, manipulable. One can break them up, for example, open windows in them, or make them recursive. The end points inscribed in them can just as well be seen as starting points. [...] The text is no longer, like on paper, the result of a creative process, but it is itself this process, it is itself a processing of information into new information.[19]

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18   Cf. Martin Stingelin, "Understanding New Media Through An Old One: Die Geschichte des (literarischen) Schreibens im Licht seiner digitalen Revolutionierung," in *Das Gesicht der Welt. Medien in der digitalen Kultur*, ed. Lorenz Engell and Britta Neitzel, 31–49 (München: Fink, 2004).

19   Vilém Flusser, "Hinweg vom Papier. Die Zukunft des Schreibens," in *Medienkultur*, ed. Stefan Bollmann (Frankfurt am Main : Fischer, 2008), 63.

One of the most important characteristics of this new type of writing is the fact that it makes text movable. Changes and corrections are no longer exceptions but the rule. Digital text editing no longer assumes a fixed final state: what is written can also always be rewritten. Furthermore, the fact that the text can be forwarded and processed effortlessly makes it available to other writers and thus expandable: it moves into the realm of the collective and collaborative. Pierre Lévy stresses:

> In order for collectives to share meaning, it is not enough that each of its members receives the same message. The role of collaborative software is precisely to share not only texts but also the networks of associations, annotations, and comments within which they are understood by everyone involved. As a result, the constitution of a common meaning is made visible and quasi-materialized: the collective elaboration of a hypertext.[20]

It is not only the grand theories that are able to formulate such observations. Rather, the possibility of reflecting on changed conditions of meaning production and circulation is also manifested in the small, in the supposedly banal and quotidian. The advertisement for Tipp-Ex even seems to be particularly of interest and suited for determining this relationship—and not least, therefore, because, typical of consumer culture, it does not hide its message in its depths but resolutely forces it up to its surface. As an example, one can see in the advertisement the transformations to which the small form of corrections in the age of the digital is subject and which transformations this form itself creates.

Here, the form of advertisement, or to be more exact, the advertisement *clip* is relevant to us. Advertisement clips are a central component of popular culture and mass consumption. Their line of development reaches back to cinematographic trailers and television commercials, where their compressed organizational form unfolded within specific media environments: in cinema as a sequence, in television as a segment. In both cases, the consumer's active intervention is excluded. This principle is fundamentally transformed in the realm of the digital. The decisive foundations for this change are processes of networking and interaction.

Already the basic structure of the Tipp-Ex ad suggests that interaction is essential for it to work: when clicking on the YouTube video, the user is in-

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20   Pierre Lévy, "L'hypertexte, instrument et métaphore de la communication," *Réseaux. Communication – Technologie – Société* 46–47 (1991): 64.

stantly asked to participate in it. The controlling intervention here initially consists of the possibility of influencing the course of the narration by providing certain information. In a window overlaid with virtual Tipp-Ex, any random year can be typed in—and, already, one can see another clip. One can thus not see a single clip, but instead experiences a variety of forms of self-operated entry and transfer.

In the process, it is notable that the invitation to break up the coherent plot is initiated by means of a movement that reaches beyond the frame of the individual image. This becomes clear the moment the hunter breaks through the boundary of the fictional diegesis and reaches out of his window into another. In doing so, the frame of the YouTube clip window on the left side of the screen is mediated to the frame of the product advertisement on the right side of the screen: the hunter grabs the Tipp-Ex Mouse and transfers it from its static presentation frame to the interactive input field. There, the application of the correction agent forms the basis for a white inscription surface, which then makes it possible to type in the numbers of a year via the computer keyboard.

Another example of the interactive intervention of the user is the aesthetic modulation of functional control elements within the individual clips. In this way, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 can be brought about by the viewer the moment he or she moves the timeline's cursor at the bottom of the clip window to the right ("drag to break the wall"). Again, the frame is transgressed, again supposedly stable boundaries are dissolved—on the one hand, those of the image format as a closed fictional universe, and on the other hand, those of the user interface as a purely functional display element. A further example can be found in the clip from the year 1233. Here it is the volume control whose purpose for regulating the auditory output is reshaped. As an aesthetically redesigned element, it appears as an intervention option for the user to move a sword ("drag to pull the sword").

Both examples show how the frame, which defines the events onscreen as a self-contained entity, is repurposed and thus redefined. Through the interaction of the user, the separation of the viewer and the viewed, for which the frame actually stands, is suspended. Instead of viewing the fictional universe from a distance, the users themselves intervene and thus refer to the specific quality of digital audiovisuality: it is not only capable of deforming individual image elements; it also allows for breaking up the boundary between passive consumption and active production.

Along with the aforementioned interactive processes, the Tipp-Ex ad also features types of networking through media. The stories of the hunter and the bear are not to be found solely on YouTube but can also be shared from there. Directly under the ad window with the product presentation, there is a set of options to share clips. After clicking on an option, the ad leads to Facebook or Twitter, where users can access and share them again. Obviously, the digital advertisement clip is able to create knowledge about the routines of its reception. This includes the processing of a self-knowledge of access, but, moreover, also the reference to the intermedia reach of the phenomenon beyond the limitations of the individual medium.

Due to its extremely compressed form, the digital clip seems to have developed an increased awareness of its own switchability. It is not only capable of displaying this knowledge but also of making it productive. The digital user's limited resources of time and attention are expanded by means of viral processes, in other words, transmitted from the small to the big. Instead of confirming the limited duration of the YouTube clip by making it self-contained, the Tipp-Ex ad shifts to the multiplicity of versions—both within its own limits and beyond them. Put another way: the process of proliferation affects interaction on multiple levels, it extends across the immanent and transverse figuration of multiplication.

This becomes clear, on the one hand, by the enhancement of the one story (a birthday party in the year 2012) with a variety of versions (alternate birthday parties from the middle ages to the future). These versions now appear not as discarded possibilities but remain present and retrievable as elements of a fictional universe. On the other hand—and this is another way of going beyond the stability of the limited—what has been multiplied is then transferred from one presentation platform to the next: from YouTube to Twitter and Facebook, where further forms of reception such as comments, links, or video responses spread out.

In this context, it is helpful to tie the spread of the small form to transmission by a small unit: the virus. The advertising industry understands viral marketing to be a way of influencing the market that uses social networks and digital platforms to disseminate information like an epidemic. For media theory, not only the implementation, but also the interpretation of this phenomenon, is of interest. "Viruses," note Ruth Mayer and Brigitte Weingart, "recode foreign operating systems for their own purposes and thereby

undermine asymmetrical power relations."[21] In the context of the digital, this applies in particular to the non-linear and, therefore, non-directional form of a transmission only possible with web-based forms of interaction and collaboration.

Crucial to this is the double process of information circulation: in the digital chain of transmission, every link acts simultaneously as a receiver and transmitter of the pathogen. It is therefore unsurprising that the virus concept is taken into account where it concerns the destabilization of established hierarchies and the overcoming of system limitations. Of particular importance here is the self-replicating power of infection, or more precisely: its dynamic adaptability. Mayer and Weingart note on this: "The logic of infection cannot be understood in the terminology of individuality, directionality, and linearity. Rather, it is constantly creating new supra-individual, flexible, and momentary nexuses and complexes."[22] This principle of non-linearity and flexibility is not only driven in the Tipp-Ex ad through marketing techniques but also reflected in its motifs. The relation between *story* and *history* is particularly striking in the clip. The ad not only concerns the network-like dissemination of forms of multiplication, it primarily concerns the suspension of the arrow of time as a temporal paradigm. This applies to both the narrative as well as to the historical distortion of its story. In the universe of the Tipp-Ex advertisement clip, there is no monodirectional continuation of the temporal, there is no linear development of events. The (hi)story is not fixed but constantly changes. It observes, questions, and expands itself; it revises, edits, and reworks itself. This is where the digital comes into its own—in the sense that it is the characteristic principle of digital construction that its results are subject to constant updates. The digital always already bears the possibility of revision within itself, it is aware of its own temporary nature and, in the process, recognizes that it could also always be something else.

It is the creative processing of this realization that constitutes the reflexive potential of the Tipp-Ex advertisement. The digital clip does not only follow the conditions that constitute it but also makes them recognizable as a simultaneity of recourse and anticipation. For, on the one hand, Tipp-Ex (still) refers to the white paper page, which is indispensable as the basis for its deleting

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21   Ruth Mayer and Brigitte Weingart, "Viren zirkulieren. Eine Einleitung," in *Virus! Mutation einer Metapher*, ed. Ruth Mayer and Brigitte Weingart (Bielefeld: transcript, 2004), 9.

22   Ibid., 25.

operations. And, on the other hand, both the slogan and the shape of the correction tape dispenser reveal a reference to digital deletion processes. The fact that the Tipp-Ex takes the form of a mouse in the digital age, i.e. closely resembles the shape of a computer device, is probably just as little a coincidence as the rhyme that the slogan makes with new writing processes: "White and rewrite." After all, computer programs are less about complete erasure than about multiple overwriting:

> Deleting on the computer, in particular, is a highly complex, almost impossible undertaking. Because the writing, which can only seemingly be made to disappear so easily, must de facto undergo multiple deletion processes in order to no longer exist as a trace and thus no longer be reconstructable. Interestingly, the deletion tools and programs of digital storage do not work by actually deleting data on a hard drive but by overwriting them. Once again, it becomes clear that any attempt to eliminate traces only multiplies them.[23]

The methods of deleting, along with their arrangements and apparatuses as well as their reciprocal interactions and effects, make up a complex process. It is subject to both material conditions and historical changes, each developing specific forms and functions. "Deleting is perhaps the central epistemic figuration of the twentieth century," Jens Schröter surmises in his "Notes on a History of Deleting."[24] And perhaps, one might add, deleting is also (and even more so) a central epistemic figure of the twenty-first century—an epoch that raises the question of what constitutes digital deleting and what should be deleted in the first place with a particular sense of urgency.

Therefore, it is just as helpful as it is insightful to look more closely at the small deleting agent Tipp-Ex and its aesthetic forms of reflection. For if, in the digital age, on the one hand, an infinite amount can be saved and, on the other, hardly anything can be deleted without residue, then this leads to a convergence of the written and the deleted, the drafted and the discarded. In the face of growing masses of data and expanded storage capacities, questions of preserving and discarding, of organizing and selecting text and image elements must be posed anew. One way to approach these questions is through small corrections.

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23   Heinevetter and Sanchez, "Fragmente einer Geschichte des Löschens," 159.

24   Jens Schröter, "Notizen zu einer Geschichte des Löschens. Am Beispiel von Video und Robert Rauschenbergs *Erased de Kooning Drawing*," http://www.theorie-der-medien.de/text_detail.php?nr=51.