

## Opening remarks

---

*Dieter Mersch*

The avatar, as both a simulated and animated ‘character’, is one of the autochthonous algorithmic figurations that digital technology has produced, along with certain types of robots and interactive artificial intelligence programs. As a genuine, on-screen figure that exists exclusively in virtual Euclidean spaces, it is distinct from classical figures such as masks, puppets, hobbyhorses, or props, dolls, as well as the comic book characters of graphic novels and anime. Avatars form something literally new, unprecedented, to which the old, primarily theatrical, ethnographic, and literary categories no longer seem to fit, and to whose particular ‘nature’ we must readjust. However, it is all the more astonishing that there are hardly any comprehensive studies on the avatar and its features, despite a number of individual investigations, mainly in the fields of psychology, media studies or cultural studies. The present work of Rune Klevjer, which moreover represents one of the few phenomenological approaches, is an exception to this, but, as a dissertation paper, it has never been adequately published. Within the framework of the interdisciplinary project on *Actor & Avatar*, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, which, also on the basis of phenomenological considerations explored traits of different forms of encounter between philosophy, theater practice, and neuroscientific research, and for which Klevjer’s work formed an important point of reference, the opportunity arose to present the original dissertation writing in an updated form. We thank the author for having undergone the effort of this revision and thus, at the same time, for having implicitly contributed to the foundations and the success of the project. Thanks are also due not only to the collaborators of the research project, but first and foremost to the Swiss National Science Foundation for its generous support of the research work, without which the present publication would also have been impossible.

June 2021, Dieter Mersch

