Towards the Smoothed Word

Where We Write From

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This editorial is part of our "Behind the Scenes" series, in which our editors and authors describe their creative process in the age of artificial intelligence. How do ideas come to us? How do we sow and water them, and how do we know when they are ripe? And what role does artificial intelligence play in all of this?

İnsan olmaya geldim – I have come to be human. The line goes back to Nimri Dede, a folk poet from a village near Elazığ. If you know it, you probably know it in the voice of Arif Sağ, who turned the poem into one of the best-known spiritual songs of the Alevi-Bektashi tradition.

Each stanza ends on the same rhyme, with only the word before it changing: *Özde*, in the core. *Sözde*, in the word. *Yüzde*, in the face. *İzde*, in the trace. *Közde*, in the embers. Registers of becoming human, listed one after another, none struck out or played off against the others – like a refusal to split being human into a part fit to be shown and a part one merely brings along. And after every stanza, the same refrain: the singer has come to lay his head in the *Meydan*, the space at the centre of the *Cem* where people dance and deliberate, and where you lay down nothing that is not yours.

The academic world I work in often demands the opposite movement. It demands the split: bring the word, leave the core at home. One can try to pin this demand down and call it the postulate of neutrality and objectivity. It rarely comes as a rule, far more often as a tone, like an expectation nobody voices because nobody has to. The text is finished, someone reads it and leaves a comment in the margin that looks like a description and works like an objection: "positioned, engaged, pointed, personally coloured, political." It does not claim that anything is wrong. It is not a counterargument one could respond to. What lies behind it is the message that someone has seen on me, and read in me, where I am writing from – and that this place means the text cannot be objective.

Legal scholarship, too, knows that no one writes from nowhere. As Arthur Kaufmann observed in *Die Geschichtlichkeit des Rechts im Licht der Hermeneutik* in 1969: even with sound method and critical reflection, "the personality can never be entirely eliminated as a co-deciding instance in a legal decision. The knowing subject does not remain outside the process of cognition but takes part in it – with all his prejudices, convictions, interests." In the philosophy of science, positionality has long been a subject in its own right, and there are colleagues for whom scholarly rigour lies precisely in disclosing their own assumptions. So it is not insight that is lacking. Pre-understanding counts as a condition of all understanding. It only counts as bias once you can see it on someone. Miranda Fricker has coined a term for this: *testimonial injustice*, a credibility deficit ascribed to a person not because of their arguments but because of what others see in them. What makes this form of epistemic injustice so insidious is that it needs no rejection. Being rejected would be easier; rejection can be argued with. The text is given a provenance, while other people's texts simply remain texts. And the neutrality postulate is where this injustice receives its academic seal of approval: it claims a standpoint without a location and generously overlooks the fact that this standpoint can only ever be claimed by those whose location no one asks about in the first place.

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So far, so familiar. The point I am after lies one turn further, and it is more uncomfortable, because it shifts from accusation to confession: I have stopped waiting to be marked. These days I do the marking myself, earlier and more efficiently than any reviewer. Nobody ordered me to. I have internalized the verdict, and that is exactly what makes epistemic injustice what it is: at some point, it starts producing itself.

Victor Loxen opened his editorial in this series with Vega and Elena Ferrante, Maximilian Steinbeis with mushrooms in the woods, and it would occur to no one – rightly – to see anything in this but erudition or creativity. I opened with an Alevi song in Turkish, with a bill running in my head that Ferrante and mushrooms never incur: how much argument I would need after an opening like this to win back the credit the first paragraph had gambled away.

Loxen writes that AI engages in a kind of "clever dilettantism." Since it does not itself exist in the world as an embodied subject, it never meets the provocations and pushback of an outside; and linguistic form can never become a cage for it, because nothing it takes is foreign to it. It was his editorial that prompted this piece. If writing lives on failing at something that does not come from one's own text, then everything turns on what is recognized as that kind of failure. Reading is recognized, and so is a contradiction in the sources, a find in the archive, a judgment that doesn't fit one's thesis. The outside that I bring with me, by contrast, is deducted as mere distortion. The neutrality postulate is a gatekeeper. It sorts the world's ideas and resistances according to whose they are.

And for some time now there has been a machine that could make this deduction for me. The prompt would be simple: *"Make this text more objective. Rephrase it so that it comes across as completely impartial and no one can accuse me of taking a position."*

The paragraph would come back with everything still in place: structure, claims, citations, bigger names. What would be missing is the spot where you would have noticed that the person writing has something at stake. Nothing would be missing that a reviewer could object to. And yet the core would be missing. The AI would not hesitate. A colleague who smooths the same sentence for me has to look at me while she does it. She might ask, more carefully, whether I am sure, and she might know that she is taking something away from me. The AI has no empathy that would make it ask carefully, because it has never had a core. It is *Söz* without *Öz*, word without core, without face, without trace, without embers – and that is exactly what makes it the ideal instrument for an operation I already perform on myself.

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Sie wollen an der interdisziplinär ausgerichteten Professur für Öffentliches Recht und Europarecht (Jürgen Bast) der JLU Gießen zu Migration und Menschenrechten promovieren?

Im Teilprojekt ***„Zugehörigkeit, öffentliche Gewalt und Menschenrechte: Rechtebasierte Mitgliedschaft von Migrant:innen im EU-Recht"*** *der DFG-Forschungsgruppe MeDiMi ist eine Stelle (65 %, für vier Jahre) zu besetzen.*

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That is my answer to the question this series asks. In my writing process, AI plays neither the role of idea-giver nor that of rival. It offers itself as an arbiter

of objectivity. To objectify means to make objective – and to turn into an object. A system that books personal involvement as distortion demands a labour of adaptation. Now there is a tool for that: a machine that could edit my text and, in the same stroke, grind away whatever in me does not count in this business. Put bluntly, I could prompt: "Claude, make me objective. Dehumanize me. Erase who I am from my arguments and claims. Delete the unwanted outside I carry within me."

Nimri Dede says he is here to be human, in the core and in the word. AI could help me run in the opposite direction. From the positioned *Öz* to the smoothed *Söz*.

I hope I will not need this machine. That I will no longer be the one who deducts the outside I bring with me as distortion, and will let it count instead as the resistance that writing lives on. That I will reach the core of what I want to say, and acknowledge what I have long known: that no one writes from nowhere. And that I will write texts I can lay down in the *Meydan*, because they are mine, in the core and in the word.

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Editor's Pick

by MAXIMILIAN STEINBEIS



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Did someone say fascism? Yes, someone did, and more and more people do. One of them is the philosopher Eva von Redecker. She coins contemporary fascism as *liquidierende Phantombesitzverteidigung*, a liquidating defence of phantom property, a term inspired by a find she made at a flea market in Havelberg, Saxony-Anhalt: an old tin sign bearing the police notice "Looters will be shot." Fascism, she argues, "imagines itself to be operating under the jurisdiction of such a decree. The hostility it celebrates presents itself as self-defence against looters." Everywhere, there are people and powers supposedly coming after what belongs to you: my country, my women, my rule – all the more fiercely defended when the claim to ownership is every bit as imaginary as the figure said to be threatening it. At the heart of contemporary fascism, her argument goes, is a regime of property that breaks free from the law and from the democratic processes through which that law is made, and instead declares itself absolute and natural, as if it had always been there. It starts with the AfD, but it certainly does not end there. There are plenty of conceptual gems to discover in this book (my favourite: *Verflixung*), but its central analytical contribution is to draw this connection. Reading it may not make you feel any better, but it does leave you seeing things more clearly.

Eva von Redecker: Dieser Drang nach Härte. Über den neuen Faschismus. S. Fischer 2026, (only available in German).

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The Week on Verfassungsblog

summarised by EVA MARIA BREDLER

After months of research, warnings, hope, and despair, the scenarios have now leapt from the drawing board onto the Tagesschau: at the **state election in Saxony-Anhalt**, the AfD won over 43 per cent of the vote. Not an absolute majority, but only a wafer-thin margin short of one. It remains entirely unclear who will govern the state. No one wants to take the AfD's outstretched hand.

On Sunday evening, this sparked a heated debate on Caren Miosga, a political talk show on ARD. One political scientist argued that *völkisch* concepts such as

"ethnopluralism" or the "ethnocultural community" are also part of democratic pluralism. FABIAN MICHL (GER) disagrees emphatically, taking these prime-time claims as an occasion to reflect on the **responsibility of scholarship** in the democratic constitutional state.

How far will academia be able to live up to that responsibility in Saxony-Anhalt? FRIEDRICH ZILLESSEN and LUNA MONO (GER) examine just how much influence an authoritarian-populist **minister of science** could wield.

Who will actually take charge of which ministry remains wide open. The AfD is three seats short of an absolute majority; with five seats, the BSW could become kingmaker (and is flirting with the idea). The remaining parties (CDU, Die Linke, SPD, Greens) hold 39 seats in the state parliament – exactly as many as the AfD. So far, so familiar. What has barely been discussed is that this arithmetic means the AfD could push its agenda through regardless, should six MPs from the other groups be absent or abstain. JANOS RICHTER (GER) explains why that could turn the **Saxony-Anhalt state parliament** into a game of *Full House*.

Should the AfD take over the state interior ministry, it would also control the **State Office for the Protection of the Constitution** – and could restructure it in ways that abuse the law. HEIKO MEIERTÖNS (GER) analyses the limits set by the Federal Act on the Protection of the Constitution – and when the federal government can step in.

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For our Security & Crime Dossier, JANA TRAPP and MARKUS THIEL (GER) discuss what levers a **state executive** actually has at its disposal without a parliamentary majority. You can subscribe to the dossier here (it's worth it, we promise). If the election still won't let you go, we also recommend our spotlight on Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. What Maximilian Steinbeis says above about Eva von Redeker's new book holds true here too: "Reading it won't necessarily make you feel better, but it will make you see more clearly." And that is crucial. Because after a brief *Hydration Break*, the election in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania continues on 20 September.

Explosive material for security law isn't confined to an AfD-led State Office for the Protection of the Constitution – it can also be found in the draft of the nationwide **intelligence services reform**, which the cabinet approved in mid-August. SOFIANE BENAMOR (GER) has taken a closer look at the reform and concludes: "The Federal Constitutional Court would have to perform some fairly dogmatic pirouettes to clear away all the constitutional problems."

Literal explosive material, meanwhile, turned up in Leipzig: after the explosive-drone incident at the airport, Foreign Minister Wadephul announced a package of measures against **Russia** – among other things, he wants to terminate the cultural agreement covering, for instance, the "Russian House" in Berlin. Actually shutting it down, though, will mean cutting through several legal Gordian knots first, as BERNHARD KNOLL-TUDOR (ENG) explains.

While bridges to Russia and the US are collapsing, the EU wants to build new ones. But is the EU really serious about **enlargement**? Not ready, at any rate, argues ANDREW DUFF (ENG): the debate focuses too much on the adaptability of the candidate countries – and too little on the question of what the Union itself needs to do in order to take in new members.

Maduro's lawyers are asking a federal court in New York to drop the narco-terrorism case against him – a sitting head of state, they argue, enjoys absolute immunity. CARLOS MORENO (ENG) shows that the very notion that **abducting foreign leaders** poses no legal problem traces back to the case of a Mexican doctor from the 1990s whom almost no one has heard of.

But what does **terrorism** actually mean? The US recently designated the Brazilian organisations *Primeiro Comando da Capital* and *Comando Vermelho* as terrorist organisations, reigniting the debate over the concept. LUCAS CATIB DE LAURENTIIS and LUIZ GUILHERME ARCARO CONCI (ENG) trace how Brazilian law justifies drastic legal consequences by invoking terrorism, while drifting further and further from the concept itself – a dynamic familiar from other countries.

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So is the problem not the law, but politics? That's a common narrative in **international law** too, used to explain today's crises. In his *long read*, ITAMAR MANN (ENG) pushes back: "If we offload that responsibility and bask in our own legal purity, we do that only at our own expense."

Responsibility can take very different forms, *quite literally*. On 4 September, 164 UN member states adopted the "Correct the Map" resolution, calling for the Mercator projection to be replaced with fairer, equal-area **world maps**. LUIS ESLAVA (ENG) traces how maps help build our world, and how they can help us build another one.

Incidentally, only one country voted against the "Correct the Map" resolution. Guess which one. Bingo! The US delegation dismissed the initiative as an "ideological project" and insisted on remaining at the belly-button of the Mercator map, gorged on resources from a shrunken periphery. A good moment to reflect on our own "ways of seeing". What have we become blind to? Which "mental geographies" are worth re-travelling, re-surveying? Just asking, from (West) Berlin towards (East) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and back.

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That's it for this week. Take care and all the best!

Yours,

the Verfassungsblog Team

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