Klaus Hoffer’s two-part novel Bei den Bieresch (1979/82) can be read as an enactment of the deconstructivist principle of intertextuality, both on the level of content, histoire, and on the level of form, discours. On the one hand, the text is conceived as a ‘novel of quotations’ – with references to about fifty authors and about eighty texts. On the other hand, the novel self-reflexively problematizes its intertextual practices as eclecticist theft, as identity-corroding illness, and as a technique of artistic grafting. These are three extreme positions that meta-narratively sensitize the reader to the structurally hidden intertextuality. But Bei den Bieresch is only partially an exemplification of post-structuralist ideas in the sense of a plea for an inevitable collective creativity. The intertextual repetitions are already creative displacements which give an individual shape to the novel’s text as well as to the processes of production aesthetics and reader response.

1 Klaus Hoffer’s two-part novel Bei den Bieresch (1979/1982) is about a droll ethnic group, the Bieresch, who live in a remote enclave and who in seven extensive conversations subject Hans, a young newcomer from the city, to a process of initiation. I should like to begin with a quote from one of these conversations:

‘Und es ist wahr: Jedes einzelne Wort – und damit freilich auch der Sachverhalt, den es beschreibt!’ rief der Jude aus, sagte Lumiere, ‘jede erdenkliche Kombination von Lauten und Sätzen ist schon tausende Male durch die Filtersysteme fremder Gehirne, durch die Bergwerke fremder Herzen gelaufen – Es ist verrückt! Man selbst kommt sich wie aus dem Zusammenhang gerissen vor!’, […] fuhr Zerdahel fort, sagte Lumiere.¹

(‘And it is true: each single word – and thus of course also the facts it describes!’ the Jew exclaimed, Lumiere said, ‘each conceivable combination of sounds and sentences has already run through the filter systems of other brains and the mines of other hearts – It is crazy! You feel taken out of context!’, […] Zerdahel continued, said Lumiere.)

¹ Klaus Hoffer, Bei den Bieresch. Halbwegs [1979]. Der große Potlatsch [1983] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983), p. 209. In the following, this edition will be quoted in the text using the abbreviation “B” and the appropriate page numbers. I would like to thank my colleague Dr. Thomas Köhler from the Department of English and American Studies, Leibniz-University Hannover, for the translation of this article, including the German quotations.
Lumiere laments the impossibility of speaking individually, typically repeating what Zerdahel said. In view of all that has already been said some time ago or by someone else, the Bieresch are on the brink of madness. As every new formulation must necessarily be put into the context of the already-said, these observations are reminiscent of deconstructivist concepts of intertextuality. The metaphoric image of words seeping through brain matter, an image supported by the association with the ramifications of cold and damp mineshafts, corresponds to intertextual theories which often make use of visual analogies, too.

One may refer for instance to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of ‘dialogism’, according to which words are always already enriched by the intentions and accents of other speakers, as language is foremost a social, not an individual medium.\(^2\) One could also cite Julia Kristeva’s assumption that ‘any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another’.\(^3\) In a similar way Roland Barthes regards the author – who in turn is also a reader – as ‘an echo chamber’ filled with the sound and noise of other texts.\(^4\) According to Michel Foucault, ‘all literary works are confined to the indefinite murmur of writing’, and each text merges as a tiny element into a universal continuum of texts.\(^5\) In the collective ‘murmur of indifference’, individual authorship has been invalidated.\(^6\) Considering these post-structuralist principles, intertextuality is a feature of all texts, and individual and original writing has become impossible per se.

Deconstructivist concepts of intertextuality in the context of the discussion about postmodernism mark a change of paradigm in the 1960s. Ever since the Renaissance, when human beings had been proclaimed as the measure of all things and when individuality had come into focus, artistic creativity has had an intimate connection with the concept of individual authorship. However, with the deconstructivist equation of intertextuality and textuality, individual creativity has become dubious, and collective creativity has emerged as a necessity or is even seen as mandatory. This paradigm shift was accompanied by a critical revision of the concept of the author as an auralistic genius.


\(^6\) Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’, in *Michel Foucault: Language, counter-memory, practice*, pp. 113-138 (p. 138).