

Being Normal / Not Being Normal

Two Types of Unbearably-Attractive in Literature, Film and Television

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Abstract

The unbearable-but-attractive state of being normal and the attractive-but-unbearable state of not being normal are merely two sides of the same coin named 'normality,' which Jürgen Link analyzed and described systematically in his extensive study *Versuch über den Normalismus. Wie Normalität produziert wird*. Following an outline of the main features of Link's theoretical approach, the range of possibilities to refer to flexible notions of normality in literature and media will be considered. This article will illustrate the spectrum of different positions using examples taken from film and literature. But first, I will examine what normality actually means in modern societies, how it works and above all, why in many respects it is always connected to unbearableness.

Résumé

L'état intolérable-mais-attractant de la normalité et l'état attractant-mais-intolérable de l'anormalité sont les deux faces d'une même médaille, celle de la "normalité", que Jürgen Link a étudié et décrit systématiquement dans son étude approfondie *Versuch über den Normalismus. Wie Normalität produziert wird*. À partir d'une présentation des caractéristiques les plus importantes de l'approche théorique de Link, cet article étudie l'étendue des possibilités pour renvoyer aux notions mouvantes de normalité dans la littérature et les médias. L'article illustre l'éventail des différentes positions à partir d'exemples littéraires et cinématographiques. Dans un premier temps, toutefois, nous examinerons la signification de la normalité dans les sociétés modernes, son fonctionnement, ainsi que son lien inextricable avec l'intolérable.

Keywords

(un-)bearable normality, flexible normalism, normalism vs. normativity, normalism in different media, Jürgen Link, *Kill Bill*

1. Introduction: The Two Extremes of Normality

When one looks up the lemma ‘unerträglich’ [‘unbearable’] in German online dictionaries, one will first of all find ‘erträglich’ [‘bearable’], ‘anziehend’ [‘appealing’] and also ‘attraktiv’ [‘attractive’] as its antonyms. It would follow that something can be either ‘unbearable’ or ‘attractive,’ but not both at the same time. So what happens when the qualities of ‘unbearable’ and ‘attractive’ can be equally attributed to something, and when in addition this pair of opposites also applies to its negation? It is likely then that we are faced with questions of normality and non-normality, for nothing is more unbearable than always being normal, while nothing is more bearable than reassuring oneself of one’s own normality. The reverse holds true, too: nothing is more attractive than crossing the boundaries of the mere normal, but also, nothing is more unbearable than not being seen as normal. Good examples of this are casting shows on television, because during the auditions and first rounds the candidates repeatedly state that they want to do something extraordinary once in their life or that they were born to be a star. Their aim is clear: to not be just normal for once. Then, after the first rounds, one frequently sees the same candidates leave the studio crying, often stating that it is their sole wish to go back to their everyday lives, their family and their normality.

The unbearable-but-attractive state of being normal and the attractive-but-unbearable state of not being normal are therefore merely two sides of the same coin named ‘normality,’ which Jürgen Link analyzed and described systematically in his extensive study *Versuch über den Normalismus. Wie Normalität produziert wird* with regard to its historical origins and its actual-historical function. In the next section, following an outline of the main features of Link’s theoretical approach, the range of possibilities to refer to flexible notions of normality in literature and media will be considered. In the course of this article, it will become apparent that the question of ‘bearable or unbearable’ plays an important part. The third step will illustrate the spectrum of different positions using examples taken from film and literature. But first, I will examine what normality actually means in modern societies, how it works and above all, why in many respects it is always connected to unbearableness.

2. What Is “Flexible Normalism”? A Small Thought Experiment

The modern society we live in can be characterized as flexibly-normalistic (in contrast to normative), which scholars of philosophy, sociology, psychology, political science, and especially of cultural and literary studies have regularly asserted in the last ten years from various theoretical backgrounds. But what exactly does ‘normality’ mean? An initial response can be given with the help of a small thought experiment with which the necessary terms can be developed in a less abstract manner. Imagine that a cultural festival in, say, Leuven, had just ended and that the participants were discussing the range of the presentations, films, exhibitions, talks, thoughts, statements, questions and answers while traveling home together. At some point, one of them would exclaim, “We drank a lot of beer during the festival”. Upon which another would reply, “Oh no, that was just normal”. This leads a third participant to calculate and estimate, “About 5 beers a day, how about you?” A wild shouting out of numbers ensues, during which the answer 1 is followed by an almost pitiful “oooooh” and the answer 10 by a booming “wow!” (Fig. 1);

however, the numbers 4, 5 and 6 are mentioned most frequently. This goes on until someone ascertains, “4 to 6 beers are a very normal amount of beer consumption at a cultural festival in Leuven.”

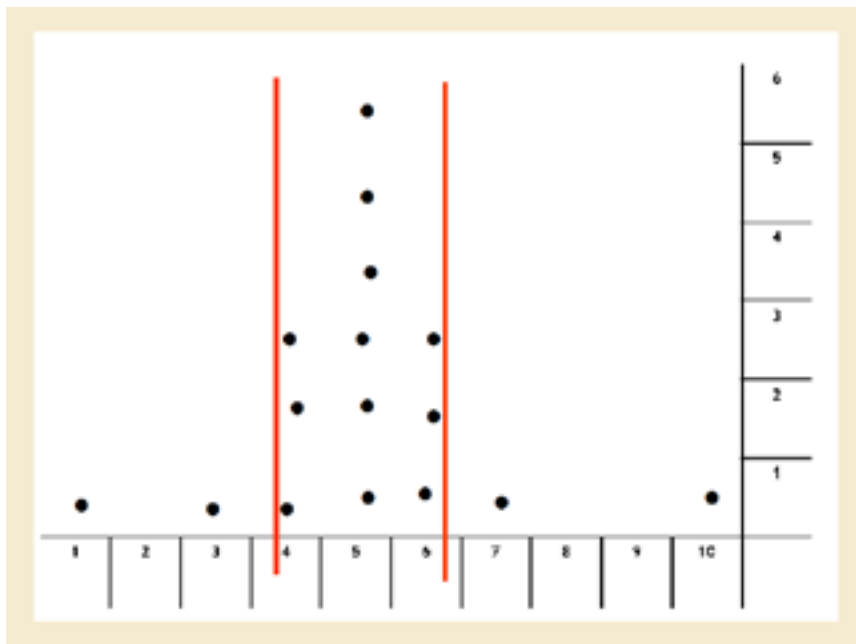


Fig. 1. Normalistic field of ‘beer consumption’ (thought experiment)

With such small talk, the participants in our thought experiment did nothing more than retrospectively create a range of normality with an upper and a lower border as regards their beer consumption, beyond which the zones of abnormality or – expressed in a procedural manner – the zones of denormalization with the obvious outliers start (see examples 1 and 10). This means that our fictitious group of participants first collected a mass of individual data, then compared these and related them to each other, finally finding out whether there were any accumulations, defining a standard zone and thereby developing a “normalistic field”. In general, each of those fields also produces moments of unbearableness; if for example all of a sudden everyone stares at the one person with the 10 pints of beer so that he is forced to perceive himself as abnormal. (This is however not the case when someone sees himself as the top of a league table and therefore is not positioned in a normalistic field.)

The ‘normality’ derived from this small thought experiment thus stands in stark contrast to the notion of normativity: while norms must be understood as prescriptive and pre-existent to concrete action, normalities can only be determined in hindsight for extant events, cases or data as social entities, in the same way the participants in our thought experiment did after the festival. It has also become apparent that modern normalism constitutes a specific “type of character and subjectivity”: the type of the “normal monad” (Link, “Immer nach Süden” 30),¹ the atomized individual, who on the one hand constitutes ‘a case apart’ and is on the other by means of correlation connected to a normalistic field of many individual cases and can be located there.

But let us go a step further: if our group of festival participants knows the bandwidth of beer consumption considered to be ‘normal’ for a cultural festival in Leuven by developing a normalistic field,

1. All quotations from German sources have been translated into English.

one can expect that they will orient themselves toward this spectrum the next time, adjust themselves to these limits, and perhaps say, “Well, I can have another one,” or, when approaching or even exceeding the upper border, put on the brakes themselves and say, “Today, I will only drink 3 pints”. Hence, for the type of the normal monad constituted by modern normalism, each correlation with other cases always means asking oneself whether one is in fact normal and in which direction one can still move with regard to this or that behavior, this or that criterion, this or that measured value. By accumulating many and spreading few individual cases, the normalistic field highlights what, in relation to a specific criterion, can be considered ‘normal’ or ‘deviant,’ which then causes a certain pressure to normalize. This typically results in a normal range scenario (Fig. 2) with a calming zone of normality in the (broad) ‘middle’ as well as zones with ‘upward’ deviation (toward overachievement) and ‘downward’ deviation (toward underachievement).

This type of normalism in which the individuals adjust their behavior time and again so that it resembles a staggering chart between two boundaries and sometimes shows outliers, will be called *flexible normalism* after Jürgen Link, in contrast to all types of *normativity* operating on the basis of fixed borders, for example laws or religious commandments with their “Thou shalt ...,” “Thou shalt not ...,” “It is required” “Normality in this sense,” one can summarize, “in modern Western cultures possesses a relative autonomy from normativity. The category of ‘acceptance’ is symptomatic for this: nothing creates acceptance as quickly as normality” (Link, “(Nicht) normale Lebensläufe” 25). Normality is virtually an acceptance joker which can always be played, something which politicians like to make use of. Conversely, a position of abnormality and therefore non-acceptance creates social pressure, which can sometimes be unbearable. Let me introduce the first of three normalist mnemonics at this point: “Hidden pressure is unbearable” [“Heimlicher Druck ist unerträglich”] (German proverb).

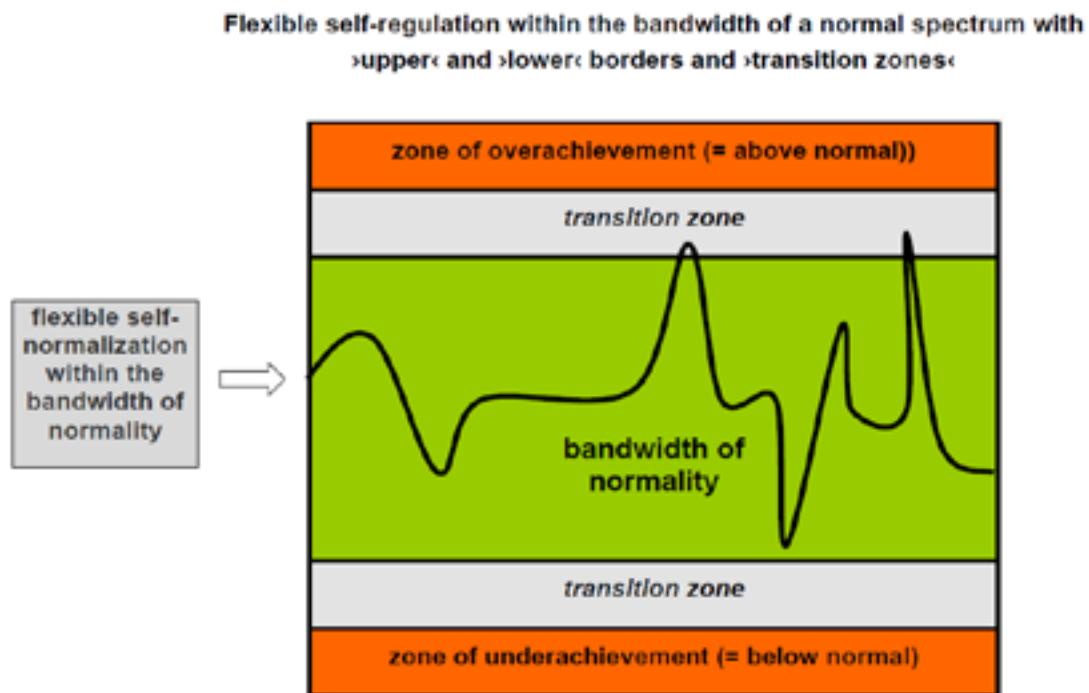


Fig. 2. Normal range scenario

3. *The Staging of Normality in Different Media*

If one therefore defines normalism as “the whole of all [...] processes, ‘dispositives’, authorities and institutions with which in modern societies ‘normalities’ and their corresponding subjectivities ‘are [...] produced’ which constantly observe their own behavior on something like inner screens, thus ‘rendering themselves transparent’” (Link, “(Nicht) normale Lebensläufe” 25), the data required for normalist self-evaluation can, next to print and audio-visual media, also (and perhaps not lastly) be derived from literature. If we are constantly faced with the question of normality in the most various aspects of life and socio-political contexts, and also receive constant suggestions to evaluate and perhaps even normalize ourselves, then it is surely the vast media sector (including literature) which plays an important part: from print media, meaning newspapers and magazines, to television commercials and even weather forecasts, to game shows and feature films we watch at the cinema or on television. Particularly in the case of television and cinema, it is not just about the comforting kind of self-normalization which reassures us that we are entirely normal for having this or that opinion, possessing this or that level of fitness, having this or that habit, but also about a gleeful crossing of the boundaries of normality that is temporary and – as we are merely dealing with literature, television and films – entirely safe. Thus, from the perspective of normalism, media such as the cinema, television and literature are characterized by the constant ambivalence between a gleeful crossing of boundaries and comforting self-normalization, between being tolerable and being unbearable.

Television talk shows in particular connect both, as it is their principle to first develop a problem, then collect data on this problem in the studio audience to finally present a case of a studio guest which stands out exorbitantly in comparison to the bandwidth of the collected data from the audience, and is therefore everything but normal. For the audience, this voyeuristic desire for abnormality in others goes hand in hand with the reassurance of their own normality. Their outcry, “Oh my God! Look at this!” does not only result from the unbearableness of the outlier, but also from its attractiveness, since it breaks out of normality. At the same time, the viewer can say, “Thank God that we’re normal!” One might almost think that the formula of success for talk shows is to give their viewers the possibility to see abnormality and normality, unbearableness and attractiveness in a positive way at the same time. Moreover, it is possible that such occasional excursions into abnormality are necessary in order to not be completely at the mercy of the unbearableness of one’s own normality. Hence at this point the second normalist mnemonic fits: “Masquerading as a normal person day after day is exhausting” (anonymous).

Now one might think that flexible normalism in the media and in literature inevitably has to lead to a certain consistency of orientation toward the ‘middle.’ Fortunately, the situation is much more complex, not despite but because of the normalist orientation of modern societies. For literature and the media by no means limit themselves to simply affirming already extant conceptions of normality in a society, but rather, as a kind of test acting, fictional narration has the possibility of breaking through conceptions of normality, that is, of shifting spectra of normality and with them the boundaries between ‘normal’ and ‘not normal’. Literature and film use these scopes to set new ‘thrills’ against the tendency of comfortable normality and boredom, thus to place the unbearableness of the ‘ever-the-same-normal’ next to the attractiveness of the ‘going-beyond-the-normal’ (see Link, “Basso continuo”; Parr, “At last”).

3.1 *The Permanent Need for Normalization: Same Time, Next Year*

A first instructive example (in the consecutive sections I am following in part Parr and Thiele, “Normalize it, Sam!”) for the interplay between the assurance of normality and the search for thrill is Robert Mulligan’s feature film *Same Time, Next Year* from 1978. For 26 years, two people, each married to another partner, meet on the same day each year, in a holiday hotel for ritualized adultery, after once having spent a night together as near strangers. What causes tension for the viewers is the question in which situations a need for normalization evolves from the unbearableness of the abnormal, and what the spectra of normality which the protagonists adapt themselves to look like. The need for normalization can constantly be detected between the two protagonists, and this from the start. Against the background of the night just spent together, the consciousness that they are “decent honest people” sets off veritable waves of seemingly necessary renormalizations, which are to render the latent unbearableness of the situation more bearable. Throughout the film, one of the protagonists will again and again introduce such series of normalization processes by expressions such as “I’m crazy,” “We have to talk about this,” “We are a bit crazy,” “Are we normal?” etc. New scenarios follow suit which themselves again create new, subordinated denormalizations, which then again cause new processes of normalization and so forth. This always happens with the aim of rendering the unbearable bearable, of converting the abnormal into normality after all. For example, it seems to be unproblematic to admit the existence of two children, while committing adultery with three children is beyond the acceptable: “Doris, I have not been totally honest to you. I told you I am a married man with two children. [...] I am a married man with three children. I thought it would make me seem less married”.

On the whole, a structure evolves, the attraction of which is to both contemplate and also experience normality and abnormality, normalistic self-assurance and the sensually experienced crossing of boundaries. The only thing that is unbearable is the thought that this is not also a kind of normality, only one of a slightly different nature. This becomes particularly apparent in a scene in which the two protagonists each have to tell a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ story of the reciprocally unknown spouse, with which the upper and lower border of normality of each family life is defined so that both can position themselves in the middle, as ‘normal’. The twist of the film however is that each of these attempts of renormalization entails new denormalizations. Flexible normalism as situational and contextual self-assessment of subjects along spectra of normality within the normal range thus tends to be an endless process constantly beginning anew, for each normalistic action essentially causes a new necessity of normalization so that one can barely ever reach an end, unless at the cost of the solidification of normality to a prescriptive norm. Normalization therefore seems to be a permanent working process at something which would otherwise be and remain unbearable.

3.2 *(Ab)normal Journeys of Life Experienced as Normality: Forrest Gump*

In *Forrest Gump* (USA 1993), the question concerning normality is at first also brought into play thematically: the young Forrest is to be sent to a special school, because he scored five points below the threshold for ‘normal’ intelligence in an intelligence test, 75 instead of 80; a scene typical for the embedding of an individual in a normalistic field, presented to the viewers in the form of a canvas-sized chart showing the American normal range of intelligence with a clearly marked zone of the ‘above’ and

the 'below'.

One could argue that this is not an example of flexible normalism, because the threshold values are clear in advance and the individuals can hardly normalize themselves, by for example suddenly becoming 'more intelligent' and thereby 'more normal'. And yet the film does act out this normalization, as the states of 'being normal,' even 'being below normal' and 'being extraordinary,' are constantly reciprocally transferred across each other. Forrest Gump's further journey of life, passing by events of political importance and popular culture in American history since the early 1960s, is characterized by an integrated duplication of (sub)normality and abnormality. For what the 'below normal' Forrest considers to be normal, acceptable, not extraordinary (being a top football player, highly decorated Vietnam veteran, table tennis champion and successful entrepreneur in the shrimping business), is, from the viewer's point of view, linked to well-known exceptional situations and/or great moments of American history. 'Below normal,' 'normal' and 'above normal' are merged in a way that they can (barely) be distinguished from one another. This has the effect that hardly anything is disconcerting or unbearable for Forrest Gump.

3.3 Gradual (Self-)Normalization with a Teleological Perspective: Groundhog Day

A particular type of feature film will serve as a third example. Here, the process of normalization is based on the repetition of shorter or longer phases of the characters' lives during which the characters undergo a gradual movement from the extreme to the normal in a series of repetitions. The underlying model here is Francis Galton's bean machine (Fig. 3), in which balls are dropped through a funnel. These then repeatedly pass binomial tests via a regular row of pins. During this process, they arrange themselves between the extremes in accordance with the Gaussian distribution. In cinematic normality narratives, this statistical distribution of many balls thrown into the funnel is turned into a succession of 'many' runs by the means of the particular repeat structures which the medium film offers. The distribution of 'cases' (or better: attempts) occurs from the outside to the inside, from the extremes to the middle, from which finally an upside down Gaussian curve is derived (Fig. 4), where in extreme cases only one single ball will land in the middle and most others are sorted out either to the left or the right (toward underachievement or overachievement). In films working with this pattern, the drive, the incentive for continual repetition is the unbearableness of not being 'normal' (thus the desire to arrive in the symbolic 'middle'), and also the unbearableness of being caught in a time loop and of having to live through an event or a day time and time again.

A textbook example of this is *Groundhog Day* from 1993, not only a cinema but also a television classic, in which a cynical and eccentric television meteorologist experiences the day of his live broadcast on 'Groundhog Day' in a provincial town again and again in the form of a time loop. Passing through the phases of just one day more than thirty times with the continuous consistency of a fixed set of characters, events and details, the cynic, played by Bill Murray, normalizes himself using the full bandwidth of possible positions to the left and the right of the middle to a model American citizen, while the extremes of both sides of the spectrum are eliminated in alternation: the exaggerated normalization

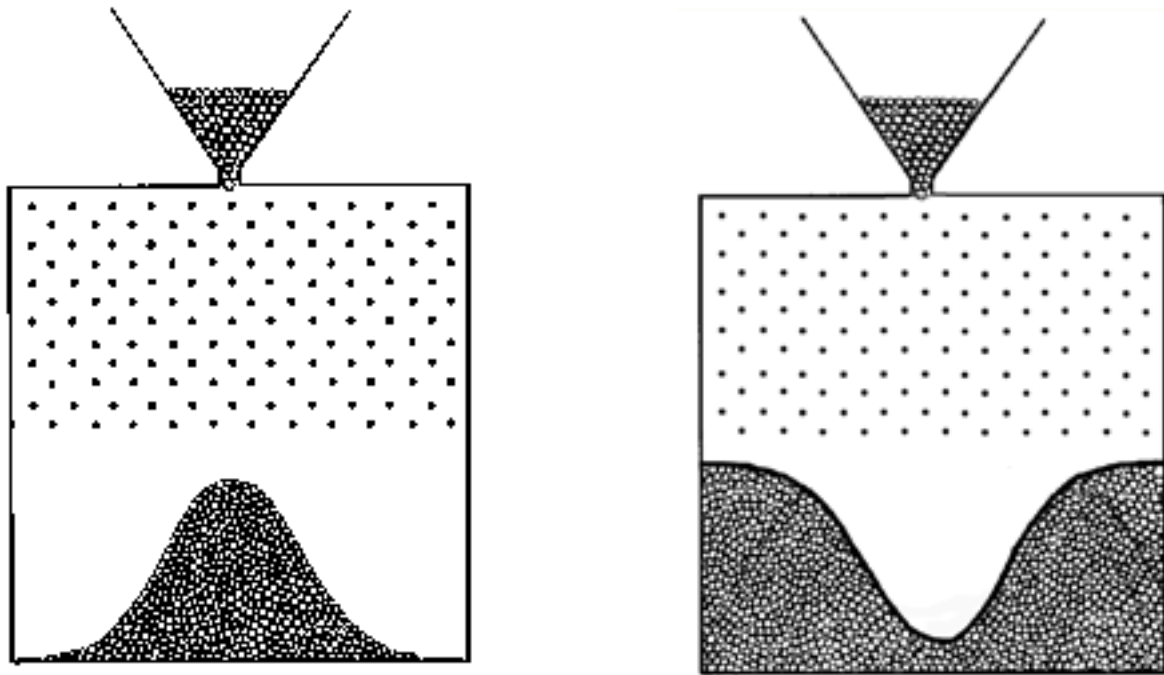


Fig. 3. Bean machine after Francis Galton to achieve a normal distribution (simplified representation)

Fig. 4. Reverse Gaussian curve as narrative model for Groundhog Day

toward the ultimate ideal of familial, politically correct American ‘politeness’ fails as much as extreme denormalization, for example the entire series of suicides with the aim to put an end to the unbearableness of having to live through the same day again and again.

For the viewers, the direction of interest changes approximately in the middle of this film. Whereas at the beginning the appeal lies in the obvious and initially slight increase of denormalization of the protagonist, from the moment a relationship between the cynic Phil and the attractive producer Rita evolves, the film starts to derive its appeal from the question of how the self-normalization of the television host necessary for a happy ending between the two will turn out. It evolves in two series of repetitions of situations in which he continually normalizes himself toward the emotional world of his producer (and with her the majority of the viewers), along with occasional deviations toward ‘overachievement’ and ‘underachievement.’ For example, the fact that the producer studied French poetry before becoming a journalist is initially laughed at in one of this series of repetitions, then put into perspective and finally emphatically accepted.

The quintessentially normal American family with the desire to have children, at the end of the film, staged in front of a romantic, snow-covered Happy Christmas backdrop, is the target outcome of the meteorologist’s normalization process, which the viewer could see coming for a long time. In the final sequence, what was just shown is constantly topped by what one might call normality kitsch in the sense of the average and therefore predictable: Phil and Rita leave the house and dance through the front yard toward an arch placed exactly in the middle of the picture, symbolizing the finally achieved normal ‘middle’ and thereby the happy ending expected in film and television routine.

3.4 The Hypernormalistic Outperformance of the Normality Spectrum: Nip/Tuck

A different type of referring to normalistic scenarios concerns itself with the change of unbearable, uncomfortable mediocrity (this paragraph follows in part Parr, “Monströse Körper”). The normality of the comfortable middle is not the positively marked aim, but rather the reverse, which is clearly negatively connoted. This only works – as Michael Cuntz shows in the television series *Nip/Tuck*, set in a beauty clinic (see Cuntz, “Extrem normal”; Cuntz, “Tell me”) – in a society which is at least in part rather oriented toward hypernormality than toward the soothing, reassuring normality of mediocrity. The individuals following the model of hypernormality can only be sure of themselves and entirely be themselves when they constantly outperform themselves (see Cuntz, “Extrem normal” 147; Cuntz, “Tell me” 69), which means that they are dependent on an accelerated quantitative and/or qualitative outperformance of normality. In this way, a permanent excessive “outperformance of oneself” (Cuntz, “Tell me” 69) turns into an ideal “which demands permanent investment in one’s own physical capital” (Celikates and Rothhöler 327). A sequence from the first season of *Nip/Tuck* which has meanwhile virtually gained cult status can illustrate this: after a night spent together, plastic surgeon Christian explains to his girlfriend Kimber that on a beauty scale she would be an “8 out of 10”. Her reaction, “I don’t wanna be pretty. I wanna be better. I want to be perfect. I haven’t booked anything in two months.² Tell me”. The not yet ‘optimized’ individual with hypernormalistic subjectivity is bound to see herself as an untreated monster and therefore bound to find herself unbearable. From a position of flexible normalism however, the opposite can occur, too: one can also see the result of the ‘optimizing’ process as an unbearable monstrosity. Hence the third and last normalistic mnemonic: “The quest for perfection makes some people perfectly unbearable” (Pearl S. Buck).³

3.5 Once Again: The Double Pleasure from Normality and Abnormality: Kill Bill

An important component of Quentin Tarantino’s feature film *Kill Bill* is the normality of the abnormal in the form of a double normalistic pleasure, on the one hand of the comforting reassurance of the normality of one’s own life and actions, on the other the exact opposite, the pleasure of breaking away from the boundaries of everyday normality. Both can be experienced on trial, so to speak, at the cinema without seriously affecting one’s own life (this paragraph follows in part Parr, “At last”).

Accordingly, the film features an element one could almost call a defining rhythm; a rhythm of tension and relaxation, of denormalization and renormalization, which becomes clear predominately in the dueling scenes with ‘showdown’ quality, such as the one between Beatrix Kiddo and Vernita Green. On the one hand, this leads us to expect thrill, suspense and also scenes of denormalization; on the other, this scene is linked to a contrastive scenario of normality, namely the arrival of Vernita’s little daughter coming home from school early. For a large part of the audience, she is an orientation marker for normality, which the film shares for a short moment, that is, that children in European-American culture are more important than anything else. Once they come into play, all other conflicts have to step back. Above everything, one has to conceal violence and especially any kind of killing as carefully as possible. This is a consensus which both opponents initially respond to in entirely parallel movements

2. Meaning in this context: “I haven’t been booked for a modeling job for the last two months”.

3. Translated from German: „Das Streben nach Vollkommenheit macht manchen Menschen vollkommen unerträglich“ (see <http://zitate.net/pearl%20s.%20buck.html>).

(glances, showing concern, hiding the weapons behind their backs, change into a different, more insecure intonation and smiling) as soon as Nikki arrives (Fig. 5a, b, c, d). This ‘children consensus’ is implicitly ratified via the opponents’ adaptation to the new situation and then verbalized explicitly: first, Vernita Green asks Black Mamba (the ‘bride’ Beatrix Kiddo) not to fight in front of her daughter, whereupon she assures her, “I’m not gonna murder you in front of your child”. Thus, murder in front of a child constitutes something like a non-negotiable and absolute normality boundary of the unbearable.

However, the maxim “not in front of the kids” is not adhered to for long. The question “You want some coffee?” (Fig. 5e) indicating a certain tension release, and the use of towels as an apparent confirmation of this normalization offer (as if the fight was over and as if one could cleanse oneself from its marks afterward), is immediately interrupted by Vernita Green shooting at Beatrix Kiddo with a hidden gun. Such a transition from familiarity to escalation, from a latently present but deceptive tendency toward normalizing the situation to the final escalation, can cinematically be realized as an abrupt one. Tarantino however opts for a gradual transition. Thus the viewer only realizes in hindsight that the ‘direction’ of the film again changed from normalization to denormalization. Vernita Green, for example, starts preparing lunch for her daughter with a smile on her face (Fig. 5f), which gives Beatrix Kiddo such a sense of security that she can chat away with her about the knife being her favorite weapon, while Vernita opens the cutlery drawer, ‘merely’ to take out a spoon. The actual weapon, however, is a gun hidden in the cereal box (Fig. 5g). The lunch intended for her daughter becomes a weapon, with which the scenario of escalation and de-escalation, familiarity and fight merge seamlessly. At the end of the sequence, after killing Vernita, Beatrix Kiddo assures Nikki that it was not her intention that she should witness this, for which she wants to apologize, thereby once again normalizing the situation.



Fig. 5 a, b, c, d, e, f, g The alternation of normalization and abnormality in Kill Bill (screenshots) (fair use)

3.6 Is It Possible to Escape the Unbearableness of Normalization Transmitted by the Media?

Jakob Hein's novel *Herr Jensen steigt aus* [*Mr. Jensen Drops Out*] from 2006 allows us to follow up the question of whether it is possible to escape from the unbearableness of normalization transmitted by the media altogether. Herr Jensen is an objector to normalization, someone looking for a place beyond the normalistic functioning of our modern society, when he loses his job at the post office after 15 years. Thereupon he decides to spend his entire energy on the one thing he does best, namely watching television. For days and nights on end, he studies the television program, records broadcasts on video and writes logs, and establishes cross-references between them. All of this with the aim of finding something like an underlying sense in the apparent meaninglessness of television. When he is close to despair after searching in vain for the meaning of television for a couple of weeks, he realizes that television is "about moral norms" conveyed however by characters showing "how *not* to lead your life anymore" and serving "as bad examples in human form". "The seemingly most absurd discussions with sodomites and pederasts showed where the boundary was, marked how far you could go. Anyone not crossing these boundaries could assume they were behaving in accordance with the norm." Herr Jensen jots down his realization in the form of a list derived from negative examples, ranging from "You should go to work" to "You should have a wife or at least have sex very often" to "You should be beautiful". Looking at this list, Herr Jensen had to "realize that he stood on the margins of society. He asked himself why these norms he had discovered via his research had not simply been taught to him in school" (Hein 82-84).

By now we could explain to Herr Jensen why the normalistic orientations produce unbearableness in him, because he sees them as *norms* and not as flexibly-*normalistic* orientations. The latter can be unbearable, but they do not have to be so. In contrast, the former are unbearable on a regular basis. Why? Because ultimately the 'unbearable' is always a phenomenon of crossing boundaries, and this process is regulated normalistically in modern societies.

4. Conclusion: The Spectrum of Normalistic Scenarios

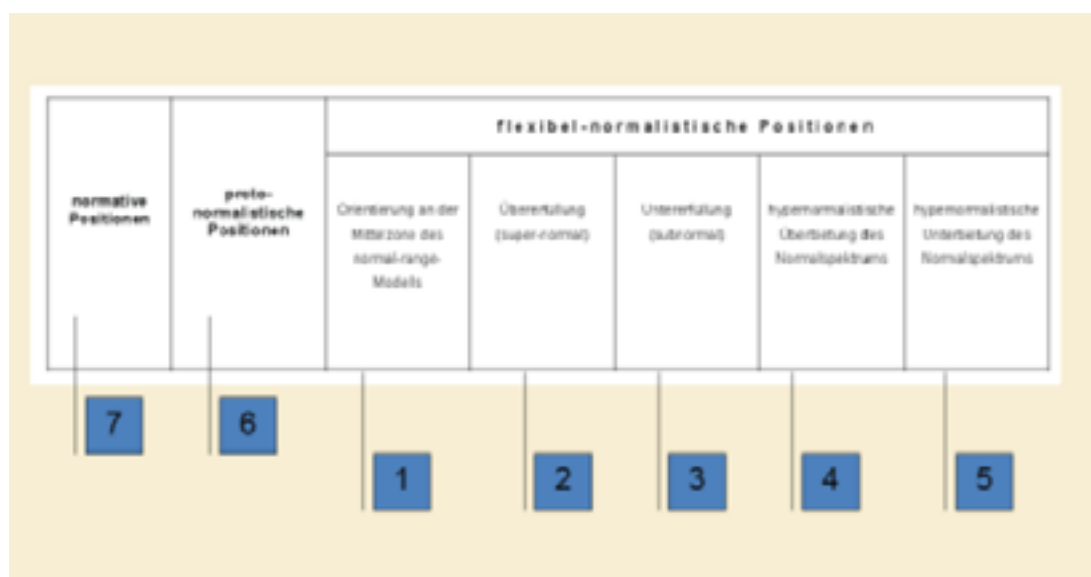


Fig. 6. Normative, protonormalistic und flexible normalistic positions

If one tries to systematize the spectrum of the types of narrated normality, as it has become manifest in the examples discussed, then, in literature and the media, one can find next to – *firstly* – the orientation toward the achievement of normality, meaning the ‘normality of the middle,’ at least six other possibilities of dealing with or reacting toward flexibly-normalistic scenarios, namely *secondly* the expansion and even selective breaking away from normality ‘upward’ in the form of overachievement; complementary to this and *thirdly* the ‘downward’ break-out in the form of underachievement; *fourthly* the constant programmatic expansion of existing boundaries through outperformance, that is, ‘hypernormality’; *fifthly*, again complementary to this, the programmatic underperformance, thus a type of ‘negative hypernormality.’ If, *sixthly*, one adds the orientation toward proto-normalistic, meaning very narrow, bandwidths, and *seventhly* the orientation toward normative positions, all in all a graded matrix ensues (see Fig. 6). It defines the broad range of possibilities of orientation *toward* as well as the productive processing of normalistic scenarios between normativity and hypernormality in literature and the media.

Translated by d’onderkast, Harelbeke

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