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Doing Trust and Crisis Communication

Narratives of the 2021 Explosion in the Chempark Leverkusen

According to governmental recommendations and scholarship concerning crisis communication, which have emerged from the 1980s onwards, an important characteristic of successful disaster-related crisis communication is its capacity for developing or restoring trust. This article demonstrates how, in the aftermath of a tank farm explosion on 27 July 2021 in the waste incineration plant Chempark in Leverkusen, the managing company, Currenta, engaged in crisis communication in a way that can indeed be interpreted as a form of ‘doing trust.’ By offering a discourse analysis of the statements published by Currenta on a newly created info page and its Twitter account, the paper explores the emergence of a specific crisis narrative connected to that aim. Our study shows how Currenta’s crisis narrative depicted the company as trustworthy by referring to its attempts at reflecting the values of integrity, transparency and (willingness to) dialogue. We situate these attempts in the context of competing narratives which, disseminated by other actors such as journalists, environmental activists and individual social media users, ‘revealed’ an alleged deceptiveness of the company and presented it as untrustworthy.

1. Introduction

On the morning of 27 July 2021, an explosion occurred in the tank farm of the chemical waste incineration plant in Leverkusen-Bürriq, Germany. The explosion killed 7 people and 31 were injured. According to the latest reports of the District Council of Cologne (Bezirksregierung Köln 2021), the explosion was caused by a storage of liquid waste above the autoignition temperature.

The waste management facility in Leverkusen was commissioned in 1966 as part of the Bayer Group and it has been managed by Currenta since 2002. Currenta Chemparks¹ provide customers with various services, including the recycling and disposal of hazardous chemically-contaminated waste at the disposal plant in Leverkusen (Currenta n.d.). This facility consists of a waste incineration plant, a wastewater treatment plant and the hazardous waste landfill. It is located in Leverkusen-Wiesdorf North and surrounded by a densely populated area. The clouds of smoke that arose during the explosion on the morning of July 27 could therefore be observed by many residents and freeway users.

The fire department received the emergency call at 9:37 a.m. (Currenta 2022a, n.p.). 12 minutes later, the siren alarm was activated in Leverkusen to warn the residents. 73 minutes later, an information hotline for citizens was established. At 12:15 p.m., the fire department reported that the fire had been extinguished.

The company held press conferences on the day of the explosion and the following day. By the second conference, the death of 2 employees and the disappearance of 5 others were confirmed. It was not until 17 days after the event that the last missing person was found dead, bringing the total number of fatalities to 7 employees.

This article will show that, as days, weeks and months went by, a wide range of actors – from individual social media users to environmental activist groups and, most importantly, journalists – claimed that not only the disaster itself but also the way in which Currenta had dealt with it severely damaged or eroded trust and public confidence in the reliability of the company.

In a statement published on an info page that was released on 16 August 2021, Currenta declared that they were aware of an erosion of trust “in its work.” In the words of the chief operating officer of the company²:

We know that trust in our work has suffered considerable damage. [...] We want to re-earn trust. We will comprehensively review our safety standards and further improve them [...]. We will provide transparent information about what has happened and what has to change.³ (Currenta 2022a, n.p.)

In this article, we interpret that this statement – with both its regretful answer to the loss of trust and its declaration of their willingness to “re-earn” it – as well as the entire webpage on which it was published were part of a crisis communication seeking to establish or restore trust among the public. More specifically, we ask three main research questions: what was the crisis narrative that Currenta created and mobilized to this aim? What were its central thematic components and channels of dissemination? In what ways can the narrative be interpreted as a form of *doing* trust?

It is important to underline that, in this paper, we do not analyze trust as a deeply-rooted pre-discursive natural disposition, whose proof of presence or absence we set out of reach. Rather, we understand that trust emerges from and consists of sets of socio-material-discursive practices with an emotional component which are experienced and embodied – despite the fact that these components, experiments and embodiments result from and are part of rational(izing) and highly mediated actions and processes.⁴ Moreover, we understand that doing trust has connections and interactions with practices that articulate and perform doubt and mistrust.⁵

We depart from the working assumption that a number of factors turned trust building into a plausible crisis communication goal of Currenta. While they are highly interconnected, these factors can be classified into factors stemming from phenomena and processes situated and unfolding before the explosion, and factors constituted primarily in the period after the explosion. As we will explain in section 2, trust plays a key role in crisis communication according to crisis communication theory and guidelines. Our second working assumption is that Currenta’s crisis communication attempted at being consistent with these guidelines and the scholarship informing them. Moreover, years and even decades before the explosion, the company had met severe criticism, especially from environmental and social movement activists. In their speech, Currenta

was portrayed as a company which did not have the best interest of the general population at heart and lacked integrity – that is, as a deceitful and fundamentally untrustworthy company. We suggest that this past criticism increases the pressure on the company to give, at the moment of crisis, special attention to trust-building communication.

As we will demonstrate in the third section of the paper, Currenta's crisis communication unfolded not only against the background of these historical factors but also in an interplay with narratives emerging after the explosion which, on the grounds of the explosion itself and the management of it, presented the company as lacking integrity and transparency. These narratives were disseminated by two main actors. On the one hand, environmental activists which also engaged in activities depicted as the provision of counter-expertise, such as the collection of samples to measure the impact of the disaster. On the other, investigative journalists covering how the company allegedly (mis)handled the drainage of fire extinguishing water after the explosion.⁶ We explore how these narratives articulated and performed doubt and mistrust in Currenta and how these performances and articulations were grounded on a broad public perception of the media channel as trustworthy in the case of journalists, and how they included the depiction of the used method as trustworthy in the case of environmentalists. We understand that these narratives constitute counter-narratives or complementary narratives⁷ to the crisis narrative that Currenta developed in its crisis communication. A detailed analysis of the latter is featured in the third section of this article.

We will demonstrate that central elements or frames of the company's crisis communication have been statements and performances of (intentions of) integrity, transparency and (willingness to) dialogue. The goal of our article is not only to demonstrate the importance of the ideal of trust in disaster settings but also to excavate some of the discursive and material practices this ideal can translate into. We seek to demonstrate how in the case we analyze the examined (competing) narratives (and counter-narratives) constituted a complex assemblage of such practices with all of them being connected to broader socio-cultural constellations and processes.

2. (Historical) Origins: Crisis Communication Theory, Guidelines, Criticism

The situation in which the company Currenta found itself on 27 July 2021, and in the days, weeks, and months that followed, was in many ways neither unprecedented nor unexpected. Several 'incidents' – accidents of various types involving personal injury, material damage, and environmentally relevant emissions – had occurred previously at Chemparks operated by Currenta.⁸ Those accidents and the activities of Bayer AG, which held shares of Currenta until 2019 had been the object of severe criticism for decades and even of 'Anti-Bayer'

protests organized by various environmental and social movements' activist groups, such as Greenpeace and the "Coalition against BAYER-Dangers." Starting in the early 1980s, members of these groups engaged in sometimes highly spectacular forms of protest which were usually accompanied by narratives of their actions aiming at 'revealing' company activities that had been kept 'hidden' to the general public, such as the dumping of toxic substances into oceans, or the selling of harmful products. A sometimes implicit and very often explicit message of these narratives was that Bayer AG and its contractors could not be trusted to a) engage in actions that benefit its clients, the general population and the environment, nor to b) disclose the (full) truth about its products and actions.⁹

On a global level, from the 1970s onwards, many large and small companies began to face an increasing number of public relations scandals when newly emerging social movements' activists, individuals and mass communication media uncovered dubious activities. These activities were portrayed as having eroded the trust of consumers, shareholders and the public, causing loss of reputation and organizational and sometimes even political crises. Specific disasters, especially environmental disasters occurring from the Italian Seveso to the Indian Bhopal, were in this regard crucial moments. These disasters and crises fueled the development of "crisis communication" scholarship (Frandsen / Johansen 2020), as well as the interest of this scholarship in the topic of trust. The importance of trust for crisis communication is recognized in previous formative literature of this field, such as in Coombs's (2007, 2015) "Situational Crisis Communication Theory." The attributed loss of such trust is often understood as resulting from perceived violations of salient stakeholder expectations. Therefore, and particularly in the context of organization-level failure-induced crises, crisis communication has been framed as serving the goal of "trust repair" (Dietz / Gillespie 2012). As the field "matured from a narrowly mechanistic, strictly functional approach" (Gilpin 2022, 136), the understanding of trust shifted from an element previously given and then lost, to an element developing within the ongoing relationship between an organization and its stakeholders (Pfarrer et al. 2020, 250), emerging from the creation of "shared meaning among and between groups, communities, individuals and agencies" (Sellnow 2021, 17) – a central component of crisis communication. Boin et al. (2017, 79) define such a meaning-making process as "the attempt to reduce public and political uncertainty and inspire confidence in crisis leaders by formulating and imposing a convincing narrative."

The theoretical assumptions regarding the importance of trust in crisis communication also found their way into guidelines for practitioners.¹⁰ In the "Guidelines for Crisis Communication" published by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI), the term "trust," which is not theoretically grounded, appears 21 times on 56 pages (BMI 2014). In the event of a crisis, openness, transparency, dialogue orientation, credibility and consistency are depicted as important pillars for preventing a loss of trust (BMI 2014, 12). To achieve those, the BMI formulates four basic rules regarding communication

– it should be fast (active and early), truthful (based on facts, transparent and true), understandable (short, simple, uncomplicated, pictorial) and consistent (uniform, coordinated and continuous) (15). In order to prevent speculation and demonstrate transparency, lack of knowledge and assumptions made should also be communicated (36, 37). In line with the existing research, guidelines also point out that risk communication should aim to establish long-term relationships of mutual trust (11). For eye-to-eye communication with citizens, as many direct channels as possible should be used, such as loudspeaker announcements, sirens, citizens' telephones, websites (kept ready for emergencies) and social media. The latter are described as particularly important because silence in Web 2.0 can be interpreted as incompetence or a refusal to communicate, both of which lead to a loss of trust. On the other hand, according to the BMI's recommendations, communication based on ground rules can create the impression of authority and transparency (26, 39). These recommendations are largely consistent with other handbook literature, which may even refer to BMI's guidelines (e.g. Bachmann / Ternés 2021, Meißner / Schach 2019).

We would like to argue that, against the backdrop of this (historical and contemporary) context, the following facts are not surprising – they are rather to be understood as being in accordance with and as a reproduction of broader, older discourses and discursive practices.

1. Almost immediately after the explosion, Currenta was criticized and made responsible for the disaster. This criticism included statements about the company not being trustworthy.
2. The company started to communicate rapidly.
3. The way the company was communicating was also criticized and interpreted as untrustworthy. Of central importance was the allegation that the company was willfully withholding information.
4. From mid-August onwards, Currenta's crisis communication narrative was heavily centered on the topics and the performance of integrity, transparency and willingness to dialogue.

In the next section of this article, we will reconstruct and analyze the different stages of Currenta's crisis narrative, situating it within the context of competing narratives.

3. The Narrative

Figure 1 shows an overview of the phasing of crisis communication. As a complementary visualization method, we illustrate the timeline of Currenta's crisis communication on the basis of a frequency analysis of the messages the company published on the microblogging and social network service Twitter. The

cumulative codes plotted here over the observed period already indicate that Currenta reacted to a series of events with its communication.

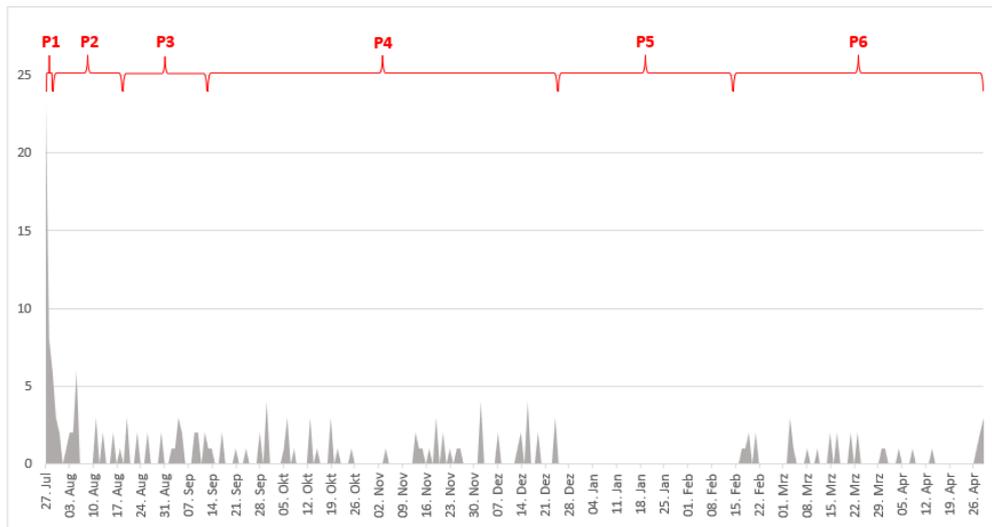


Fig. 1: Phasing of crisis communication

Phase 1 – Immediate Action

The first communication phase took place in the first three days after the events of July 27. This phase was characterized by a high output in accordance with the principle of speed in crisis communication (BMI 2014). Indeed, the first tweet was posted about 40 minutes after the explosion. With an average of 5.75 tweets per day, the output was the highest in this phase, in which presence and sovereignty of interpretation are sought. With few exceptions, only 1 tweet per day was posted in the following phases.

In the first communication phase, Currenta attempted to engage in the rapid and open communication often prescribed in crisis communication guidelines, through which trust, credibility and transparency are to be created (BMI 2014). The very first tweet, dated July 27 at 10:18 a.m., stated that the incident was an explosion “from an unknown cause,” and that the plant fire department and air measurement vehicle were on duty. The tweet also included a safety warning that read: “Residents please seek enclosed spaces and keep doors and windows closed.”¹¹

At this point Currenta was communicating according to the textbook (BMI 2014). The admission of not knowing (“from an unknown cause”) was supposed to signal transparency. By informing the public that the plant fire department and air measurement vehicle were working and by including a safety warning telling residents how they should behave to protect themselves, Currenta sought to establish certainty of action. Many informational tweets were posted later – the number of casualties and missing people, the technical course of the event and emergency response measures account for almost a third of the twitter content. In addition, Currenta showed propriety in view of the fatalities by coloring

the company logo black on all platforms in sign of grief.¹² It expressed consternation and also asked not to share names and pictures of the deceased and missing colleagues to protect the families of the victims.¹³ All press conferences at which Currenta made itself available were announced several times and linked on Twitter. The citizens' hotline and the possibility of submitting damage reports online set up by Currenta were attempts at offering citizens opportunities for interaction. However, the largest share of Twitter communication was reflected in content we call "documentation." These tweets include content which linked press conferences, interviews and other contributions to the incident communicated outside of Twitter for review. The flood of information and the obvious efforts to project an image of transparency were perceived very positively by some Twitter users: "That's how crisis communication should be done!"¹⁴ or "Truly professional how you handle this situation, providing opportunities for dialogue. Above all, a very big praise to the CHEMPARK manager Lars Friedrich!"¹⁵

However, irregularities in the information provided by key players in emergency response were already starting to be observed in the first three days: one day after the explosion, chief operating officer of Currenta, Hans Gennen (the technical manager of the plant), said at a press conference that he obviously knew what was in the tanks. Four hours after this press conference, a press release was issued stating that the tanks contained chlorinated solvents.¹⁶ Surprisingly, Dr. Ulrich Quass, head of the department for the State Office for Nature, Environment and Consumer Protection (German abbreviation: LANUV) special operation, stated in a press conference three days after the explosion:

However, we do not know yet whether there may have been further releases of substances that we have not yet been able to measure in the short time available and when we also did not know yet what to look for, since we have only now received the first pieces of information about which substances were actually stored in the tank farms.¹⁷

Although Chempark head Lars Friedrich spoke of a joint investigation and sample analysis with the authorities in a FAQ-video on the day of the explosion,¹⁸ the head of the LANUV operation said he did not have knowledge of the tank contents until three days later. These statements led to criticism. A comment on YouTube under the uploaded press conference reads: "Wait... at 22:00 it is said, they of course know what is stored in the tanks. However in today's press conference (30.07.2021) they say that they know only NOW what exactly is stored in the tanks!"¹⁹ It was not until five days later that Hans Gennen explained in a Q&A format on Radio Leverkusen²⁰ that the legally stipulated reporting obligations were complied with and that, for example, the fire department had complete information at all times during firefighting operations.²¹ However, the extent to which the public felt well-informed – when even an important player in hazard prevention, the LANUV, did not receive full information at the beginning of its measurements – is arguable. After only three days, Currenta's crisis narrative of being a transparent crisis actor focusing on protecting the population and taking all necessary measures to avert danger collides with the

statements of the LANUV and the fact that the tank contents were not precisely named.

Currenta's inconsistencies in the communication of knowledge and lack of knowledge had all the potential for epistemic uncertainty. Together with the fact that the company's crisis communication was in contradiction to other information available, this constituted an important ground on which several actors articulated doubt in and performed mistrust of the company. These actors went on to disseminate a counter-narrative of Currenta not only being non-transparent but also lacking integrity and not having the interest of the inhabitants of the affected zones at heart. One of these actors was the group of journalists who would, as we will explain below, eventually set out to investigate and uncover faulty actions of the company. Another such actor was a group of environmental activists.

During the first three days after the explosion, Greenpeace employees took soot samples from a playground and private gardens in order to measure the concentration of various toxic substances. According to a "preliminary investigation report" the organization published on August 6, inhabitants of Leverkusen had asked the activists to do so (Greenpeace 2021a; 2021b), and their presence in the backyards of private homes suggested a relationship of trust between citizens and the organization. Such citizens also collected samples themselves and handed them over to activists for analysis. The fact that the activists were undertaking their own investigation with the visible support of citizens insinuated that neither of them counted on – nor trusted – neither the governmental authorities nor the company Currenta to communicate or even possess accurate knowledge regarding the true damage and the continuing danger caused by the explosion. Following scholarship from fields such as environmental sociology and disaster science and technology studies, we interpret the activities of Greenpeace in Leverkusen as a production and staging of "counter-expertise" (Arancibia / Motta 2019). Such counter-expertise has been an important tool for social and environmental movements concerned with slow ecological disasters since the 1980s. As Frickel et al. (2010, 444) have demonstrated, in such contexts, activists' efforts to produce and interpret data on issues such as industry-caused pollution have often emerged in response to "undone science," i.e. "research left unfunded, incomplete, or generally ignored." That was the case in Leverkusen as well: Greenpeace presented itself as 'stepping in' to create and disseminate the knowledge that – according to the organization – should have been provided by either the company or the government if they were responsible and trustworthy. In so doing, they presented these governmental actors and the company as lacking transparency, integrity and, thus, trustworthiness.

It is important to point out that while environmentalists developed a competing counter-narrative to Currenta's crisis narrative through their actions and their framing of these actions, mostly by referring to Currenta's (in)action regarding the explosion of July 27 and its immediate after-effects, this counter-narrative was grounded on and resonated in the practices of environmentalist

and social movements (beyond Greenpeace) that had been unfolding both locally and globally in the previous decades. Moreover, as we will see in the following sections, these activities were by no means marginal to Currenta's doing trust with crisis communication. On the contrary, they were closely linked to the tension between knowledge and non-knowledge, and to the topic of epistemic uncertainty that lies at the core of trust-related practices according to classical but also more recent sociological and anthropological theorizations of trust. It is therefore not surprising that data and scientific knowledge remained important in the second communication phase.

Phase 2 – Defense

This second communication phase covers a time frame of about 20 days from early to mid-August. In this phase, the frequency at which Currenta posted tweets decreased to 0,71 per day. Moreover, the company launched the info page “currenta-info-buerrig.de.” While, in the first phase, the company mainly published statements which could be read as reactions to the event itself, the communication of this second phase can be interpreted as a reaction to statements made by other actors such as environmental activists, concerning not only the event but also the company's (mis)management of it. In other words, there was a chain of reactions in which the company reacted to reactions to its reactions to the event. While phase 1 involved a lot of criticism of the (re)actions of Currenta, and, consequently, a performance of doubt and mistrust, we would like to argue that phase 2 consisted largely of the company's defense against this criticism. This defense had two components: on the one hand, a focus on citizen interactions, that we will describe below, and, on the other, an “information offense.”

In an article from August 16, Radio Leverkusen wrote:

Almost three weeks after the explosion in the Chempark disposal center in Bürrig, the Chempark operator is now going on the information offense [...]. In recent weeks, there had been massive criticism from various sides of Currenta's information policy: it has been said that the information was coming too late and too sparsely.²²

The article refers to the info page currenta-info-buerrig.de (Currenta 2022a) that had gone public that same day. Since its launch, the homepage underwent many modifications, seemingly providing an ever-increasing amount of knowledge on a growing number of categories such as “the course of events after the explosion,” “the tanks' content,” “how does activated carbon water purification work?”²³ This knowledge concerned the chemical processes which caused the explosion, as well as data on the emissions it produced. This was presented in written texts, elaborated yet very simple, clear and seemingly accessible, and in graphics. At the same time, videos were produced, in which different company officials recounted and analyzed the events and the situation from their expert point of view. The info page can be understood as a site for countering the

environmentalists' performance of doubt over the company's capability and willingness to produce and share (scientific) knowledge and, hence, their performance of mistrust in the company's transparency and integrity. The company's experts reacted as counter-experts to Greenpeace's counter-experts and their allegations of "undone science" and of the withholding of information. Eventually, the company even included findings from Greenpeace's data analysis on the info page, along with those from LANUV.

The loss of trust and the efforts to regain it are negotiated under the headings "What we do" and "What's next". The word "trust" appeared a total of 8 times in just a few lines. Overall, the website could be read as an admission of a failed information policy and as a vow to improve, not only by communicating facts, but also by explaining complex processes. In this sense, the passage quoted in the introduction of this paper is emblematic. We interpret the company's declaration of wanting to re-earn trust on an info page into whose design and maintenance a lot of resources had visibly been invested as a performative speech act – as a form of doing things with words. By stating that it sought to "re-earn" trust in such an elaborated way, Currenta has indeed been attempting to produce trust. The extremely carefully crafted visual elements of the info page, on which the declarations and other-trust producing actions were made, were an important element of the performative practices of doing trust. At the same time, these declarations have an interpellative character: by declaring / performing that the company was doing so much in order to re-earn public trust, Currenta called the receivers of its crisis communication messages to recognize these performances as a proof of the trustworthiness of the company and to become trusting subjects.²⁴

The "information offense" and the practice of explaining were only one way in which the company defended itself against criticism. It also attempted to engage in more citizen interaction, establishing various communication channels. Throughout August – as can be seen from Currenta's Twitter posts – information letters were sent,²⁵ listener questions were answered on Radio Leverkusen²⁶ by Hans Gennen, the possibilities of reporting damage via the damage form provided or the hotline were promoted again,²⁷ and the possibility to have a personal conversation with Hans Gennen in the Leverkusen neighborhood office was advertised.²⁸ Overall, Currenta presented itself as a close and responsive partner in the crisis.

Hans Gennen's answers to the many specific questions of listeners about damages and safety issues on Radio Leverkusen on August 4 were, however, evasive. He responded by making reference to "individual cases" that had been reported via the hotline, adding that residents would be contacted and that Currenta would work "as fast as they can." The approachable partner in the crisis, who promised unbureaucratic and quick help, apparently hid behind bureaucratic claim forms and did not provide any information on specific time frames. Gennen's inconclusive answers received negative criticism: "Somehow, after the interview, you are none the wiser",²⁹ comments a Facebook user under the post

of Radio Leverkusen. Another user writes “It’s all still very ‘confusing’ ... Let’s wait and see”.³⁰

User reactions like these exemplify that the pressure on Currenta continued to mount as the second phase progressed. Accurate information on tank contents, linked on Twitter on August 11,³¹ was not coming fast enough, drawing demands for a map of soot emission. “Trust lost,”³² “Better late than never,”³³ or “A list of precipitation locations? Does it exist? Or does it take a lawyer to [...] get it published?”³⁴ were the reactions of some users.

Phase 3 – Absolution

Communication phase 3 followed shortly after the launch of Currenta’s information website, starting in mid-August and ending in mid-September. The number of posted tweets dropped even further to an average of 0.2 tweets per day. The recovery and cleanup work at the accident site continued to progress, blood and urine samples were taken from the emergency workers and analyzed for harmful substances. Findings on the cause of the accident were published, a fundraising campaign for the bereaved was launched and a memorial service was held.

There was an evident change in tone from phase 1 to this phase in the company’s tweets with references to odor nuisance resulting from cleaning work. On July 29, it was stated that “during the securing and cleanup work, odor nuisances may occur around the Bürrig waste disposal center.”³⁵ With new consideration and humility, “understanding”³⁶ was requested on August 20, and, on August 23, Currenta apologized for “possible odor nuisance.”³⁷ In full transparency and care, the results of the blood and urine samples of the emergency forces were made available on Currenta’s website. Exceeded limits and offers to affected emergency personnel, as well as a video with the assessment of an independent doctor, were also visible. Currenta showed awareness of its responsibility to all potentially injured groups. The publication of these bio-monitoring data was also in correspondence with the undone science accusation from phase 1 and it can be seen as a delayed submission of documentation.

Over the following days, Currenta continued to seek to project an image of sincerity while also involving its employees in its crisis communication. On September 5, Currenta promoted a fund-raising campaign organized by its work council for the bereaved families and victims of the accident.³⁸ What, if not Currenta’s own employees who supposedly had insight knowledge of the generally invisible features of the company and who despite or rather based on that knowledge chose “loyalty” over “exit” (Hirschman 1970) after the event, could have been a stronger testimony to Currenta’s trustworthiness?

However, the main focus of Twitter communication in this phase was on the memorial service and the emotional processing of the event. The memorial service took place on 12 September 2021, at the Leverkusen Air Sports Club. It was

announced on Twitter³⁹ (04.09.2021), a route map was posted⁴⁰ (09.09.2021), and a livestream was announced and linked⁴¹ (10.09.2021). After the ceremony, Currenta declared being “overwhelmed by the great condolence”⁴² in a tweet from September 12 decorated with a heart symbol. On September 13, Currenta picked up on the closing words of the event stating: “It will be nice again. It may become nice again. We take the closing words of our commemoration as an opportunity to let our colors return, to inform you again about other topics – and still not forget the deceased. #CURRENTA”.⁴³ The end of the tweet featured a black and orange (Currenta’s color) heart symbol, highlighting the change of logo colors, the change of emotions and the return to normalcy. At this point, the fit between Currenta’s communicative handling of the crisis and the guidelines provided by reference material becomes clear once again. In accordance with the motto “after the event” is also “before the upcoming event,” in these guidelines, the course of a crisis is often presented in a cyclical manner (Klings / Glade 2017, 50). The development of crises is frequently divided into four phases, reflecting a rhythm of crises and specifying different (communicative) tasks that should be carried out in each phase. One of these recommendations is the announcement to return to normalcy (BMI 2014, 8, 35). Such an announcement is meant to mark the transition from the acute crisis phase to the normal state, which is also a potential crisis phase, in which trust is to be built with the media and the public (Geenen 2017, 308). This, in turn, can be used in the next acute crisis phase. With its closing words “it may become nice again,” Currenta appeared to grant itself the symbolic absolution that legitimized the announcement of a transition to the state of normalcy.⁴⁴

Phase 4 – Leaving the Crisis Mode

With the self-imposed absolution at the memorial service, Currenta entered a phase of completely new communication content. Phase 4 began in mid-September and ended in late December. This was a phase dominated by messages signaling a return to daily business and attempting to establish a congruence of values with its addressees.

On twitter, such messages included recommendations of podcasts,⁴⁵ announcements of student fairs,⁴⁶ congratulations to an employee on passing his final exams⁴⁷ and the celebration of World Kindness Day.⁴⁸ Only a few posts directly related to the explosion in July appeared. Currenta nevertheless used other content to show that it was aware of its public safety mission, the fulfillment of which had been questioned in previous months. Reference was made to COVID-related regulations in the Chempark,⁴⁹ appointments for booster vaccinations against COVID in the Chempark were offered⁵⁰ and the hashtag #togetheragainstcorona was shared.⁵¹ Even the relatives of eligible employees could register for a vaccination at the Chempark. Currenta was thus making visible its contribution to eliminate a health hazard that affected society as a whole. In a

tweet posted on September 24, a mobile protective wall was set up as a preparation for floods, which contributed to the safety of the plant and the population.⁵²

Currenta's societal mission appeared to go beyond the safety aspect. The company used hashtags such as #womeninleadership,⁵³ #rainbowflag and #diversity⁵⁴ to take a stand on important social issues and take on social responsibility. At this point, congruence of values between Currenta and the population was used as a trust-building mechanism (Brühl et al. 2016, 184).

In this phase, a smaller share of tweets continued to signal transparency. The discussion of Chempark manager Lars Friedrich with the Minister of Environment and a representative of the German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation (BUND) about the safety of the chemical industry after the explosion was announced twice on September 30.⁵⁵ The purified Currenta did not shy away from confrontation with opposing interest groups. Publications on the explosion were then also chronologically presented on the info page, and a newsletter was launched. A video by the Labor Director updated on the investigation being conducted against three Currenta employees at the time (Currenta 2021a). Meanwhile, Currenta protected its employees and emphasized "the unrestricted presumption of innocence until the investigation is concluded".⁵⁶

In any case, in December 2021 all illusions of a return to normalcy in Leverkusen were shattered by the media coverage emitted by the West-German broadcasting channel WDR on the handling of the extinguishing water used for mitigating the fires resulting from the July 27 explosion. We would like to argue that this coverage played a particularly important role in the competing narrative of Currenta not being transparent and, hence, not trustworthy because of its content and its sources. The broadcasting channel WDR was and is a well-established public media channel with great potential for being viewed as trustworthy due to its perceived "independence" and accuracy of information.⁵⁷

On December 17, the WDR (Köhler 2021, n.p.) confronted Currenta with the results of the LANUV analyses of wastewater from Currenta's wastewater treatment plant. In the tested sample "[...] significantly elevated levels of the insecticide clothianidin, which is banned in Germany, and of PFOS, a substance that is extremely harmful to water,"⁵⁸ were found. According to Currenta, any remaining liquid from the exploded tank, which was mixed with the fire extinguishing water, was collected, drained into the wastewater treatment plant and finally discharged into the river Rhine in a "controlled manner" (Currenta 2022c, n.p.). Currenta also claimed knowing that the substances in question could not be degraded in this wastewater treatment plant and that continuous measurements of Currenta had shown that no limit values were exceeded. However, according to water expert Paul Kröfges, cited in a WDR article (Köhler 2021), there is no limit value for clothianidin in Germany. The limit values for a comparable substance would have been exceeded by a factor of 60,000. Currenta provided a complete counter-statement on its website two days after the WDR report, making reference to the emergency situation, in which there were no better alternatives since firefighting and rescuing missing persons were a priority

(Currenta 2021b). Once again, there were concerns about the reasons for not keeping the public informed about this.

This was not to be the end of Currenta's trouble with the wastewater. On December 24, Currenta tweeted about the "leak now detected" with a link to a press release.⁵⁹ The first version of the press release (Currenta 2021c, n.p.) stated that a leak was detected in a tank line the previous day, caused by a defective flap in a pipeline. As a result, "apparently about fourteen percent of the tank contents entered the wastewater treatment plant over a period of five months without additional activated carbon filtration,"⁶⁰ consequently entering the river Rhine unfiltered. Information on the tank capacity (9,200 cubic meters) and the discharged quantity (1,300 cubic meters) was later added to the press release. Currenta announced that it would take additional samples "[...] to ensure that monitoring values are not exceeded." On the one hand, Currenta once again pointed out that the monitoring values had never been exceeded. On the other hand, Currenta put the matter into perspective and tried to give the incident a new frame of reference. In the initial press release, the tank contents were only described with a percentage figure giving only a vague idea of the extent of the environmental damage. A two-digit percentage figure suggests a smaller quantity than the figure of 1,300 cubic meters, or even 1.3 million liters. By referring to monitoring values, Currenta tried to classify the uncontrolled discharge not as "environmental pollution" but as "the undercutting of limits." While the former expression would have been connotated with further damage to public well-being and hence with a further breach of trust, the latter signaled control over the situation and compliance with regulations to protect the environment. The reporting newspapers (Aachener Zeitung, Bild, Rheinische Post, ZEIT ONLINE), however, spoke in unison of a renewed "mishap."⁶¹ It is particularly interesting that Currenta again only reported on the leak after public pressure, i.e. after the inquiry by the BUND and the WDR. Once again, Currenta's transparency and integrity was put in doubt.

Phase 5 – Reset

Following Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (Watzlawick et al. 2007, 53f.), we hold that one cannot not communicate. Currenta did not post any tweets for almost two months from December 25 to February 17. Currenta's silence represented a clear break with the communication behavior up to this point, which had relied on regular and frequent acts of communication. We argue that it can be read as a message signalling a willingness to discontinue not only its communication pattern, but also the company's behavior in a broader sense. The withdrawal from public communication indicated that the company was taking time to reset, for critical self-reflection, and for planning for reform. That the company was indeed aiming for such reform was a message that it communicated explicitly and verbally in the following phase of its crisis communication.

Phase 6 – Pledging Reform

“Understand, change, improve” (German original: “Verstehen, Verändern, Verbessern”) was the motto of a communication campaign which Currenta launched on February 18 by means of a video message from chief executive officer Frank Hyldmar (Currenta 2022b). In German, the triadic alliteration – a stylistic device with the power to influence readers’ evaluations and choices (Davis et al. 2016) – not only had a catchy sound, but also contained a promise to the public. Currenta showed itself willing to do more than simply recover and return to a pre-disaster state. It pledged to take the mistakes of a past as an opportunity to better understand stakeholders’ concerns and to improve, even beyond the pre-disaster state. Hyldmar announced: “I would like to report to you today on what we have changed at Currenta in recent months and how we intend to improve in the future.” (Currenta 2022b)⁶² Moreover, he referred to Currenta’s moral revision: “We #change our attitude. For a new CURRENTA” (Currenta 2022b). Improvements were usually related to specific safety systems such as power lines and fire water containment and addressed the technical implications of the moral change process.

The campaign promised more than the mere communicative handling of the crisis, as was seemingly done in the first phases, and it conveyed through the stylistic device of the triad a multi-stage operational transformation process. Such a process placed the company in a limbo between crisis mode and a return to normalcy.⁶³

In his video message, Hyldmar talked about the intensification of dialogue and about Currenta wanting to “earn” trust, especially regarding areas such as safety, environmental protection and communication. While Currenta showed itself to be insightful, it also rejected the public’s perception of the company: “The way it was perceived in some areas, that’s not how we work, that’s not who we are.”⁶⁴ The wastewater issue was again put into perspective by the reference to limit values and it was classified as a limit value undercut:

The fact that it was not noticed for five months that water leaked into the wastewater treatment plant and then into the Rhine through a defective flap in the pipe system is difficult to comprehend. I understand this, even if the measured concentrations were at all times below the orientation or limit values. We are working also on this point and are continuing to improve our systems.⁶⁵

Communication in phase 6 attempted at balancing insight, on the one hand, and denial and putting in perspective, on the other. The insight was not that Currenta had behaved wrongly, which was also indicated by the semantic twist of Hyldmar’s statement in the use of the passive voice “it was not noticed” instead of a direct and actively formulated admission of guilt in “we did not notice.” Rather, the insight was that not enough had been done and that Currenta did not want to be good, but better – “We have started and will continue to implement a variety of measures to further improve our safety systems.”⁶⁶ The motto of phase 6 was that Currenta had reached a milestone. That is, that a lot had already been done and that Currenta was on a good track and would continue to

follow it. The campaign gave crisis communication a new coat of paint without working on the crumbling foundation of its integrity. “We have made up our minds: there will be no simple business as usual,”⁶⁷ said Frank Hyldmar in his video message and yet there was only talk of continuing and intensifying measures already taken.

On February 19, bookings for an info-exhibition on the explosion were announced via Twitter.⁶⁸ This also ran under the motto “understand, change, improve.” The mayor of Leverkusen supported Currenta’s reformation project by being the first visitor to the info room and reporting on the high quality of the exhibition in a video message linked to Twitter on February 21.⁶⁹ The importance of the plant for the Leverkusen site and for the prosperity of the city and region of Leverkusen was also addressed in the video message.⁷⁰

Phase 6 was similar to phase 4 in terms of the basic communication orientation. Everyday business posts continued to be announced⁷¹ and Easter greetings were sent.⁷² Currenta also continued to make efforts to establish value congruence with hashtags such as *#standwithukraine*⁷³ and *#internationalwomensday*.⁷⁴ Unlike the narrative, our evaluation ends at the end of April, when the exhibition moved into the Leverkusen neighborhood office.

4. Conclusion

The fact that the crisis communication of Currenta has continued beyond the time frame analyzed in this article points to one of its most important features. While crisis communication is still commonly understood – e.g., in crisis communication guidelines – as unfolding in a circular fashion and as allowing a communicator to leave the acute crisis mode relatively soon after a disastrous event, the case studied in this article attests to a different reality. Currenta’s crisis communication after the 2021 explosion in Leverkusen has been unfolding over a prolonged period, and its attempt to return to normalcy has presented itself as failed or at least fragile. In this sense, Currenta’s crisis communication mirrored the messy temporality that critical disaster studies scholarship has in recent years been attributing to disasters themselves, as disasters have been analyzed as sometimes having both a fast onset but also slow-moving elements, particularly in the case of environmental disasters (Usón / Stehrenberger 2021). In the case of the Leverkusen disaster, the activities of both environmental activists and investigative journalists also pointed into this direction, as they called attention to the fact that the consequences of the explosion and the way it was managed might continue to cause harm in an unclearly defined future. However, it was not just the disaster itself but also these activities that posed an extreme challenge to the studied crisis communication, making it continue for a long time and undergo manyfold changes in channels and contents. It was particularly with respect to the topic of trust that these challenges persisted.

In the second part of this article, we have shown against the backdrop of historical and contemporary discussions of the functions of crisis communication in, e.g., guidelines, research literature and the history of narratives circulating locally and globally that depicted (companies such as) Currenta (and the Bayer AG) as untrustworthy, that the production and restoration of trust was a plausible goal of this crisis communication. The practices of doing trust through the creation and dissemination of a specific crisis narrative were relational from the beginning, also in the sense that they interacted with competing narratives. Such narratives have not always explicitly called Currenta untrustworthy. Sometimes they merely constructed it as being deficient with respect to aspects that were featured as central in the company's own crisis narrative. We have identified several such elements – most importantly, integrity, transparency and willingness to enter a dialogue. We have demonstrated how they were performed and how a general longing to be trusted materialized in the form of interpellations in speech acts and in (symbolic) (inter)actions. Such speech acts consisted of texts that were released on social media, and on a newly established, extremely elaborate info page. Relevant (symbolic) (inter)actions were the info page itself, the establishment of a hotline, and a memorial service held for employees killed by the explosion. By means of these practices, Currenta went from engaging in immediate action to defending itself, seeking absolution, attempting to leave the crisis mode, and rearranging and reforming itself. These tactics were central to the different phases in which Currenta attempted to produce trust via the development of its crisis narrative.

Despite reacting in such manifold ways to public pressure to inform citizens better, this pressure has never fully disappeared in our observation period. We would like to argue that this was closely linked to the complexity of the entire social-material crisis communication assemblage in and through which the company sought to re-earn trust: that is, the complexity of both the social environment and the forms in which the company communicated, as well as the complexity of the disaster it communicated about. These complexities were constituted by the specific temporalities of the disaster as well as the high number of different actors sending and receiving messages. In this connection it is important to point out that the recipients of the crisis communication were by no means passive entities, but themselves engaged in communicating on the crisis and on Currenta's crisis communication, especially through social media.

In the context of the social media dimension of the studied crisis communication (and with respect to the limited controllability of this dimension) one episode occurred, which we could not analyze in this article but which shall nevertheless be mentioned here. Two days after the explosion, Currenta released a tweet stating: "The real footage of the #explosion in #Leverkusen is bad enough. Still, #fakes keep making the rounds. We are doing everything we can to inform you as well as possible. Please don't fall for the fake ones."⁷⁵ With this tweet, the company responded to a tweet apparently circulating at that time, which discussed the Leverkusen explosion using images from another explosion that had occurred in Mexico. The authors of such content were identified as the

local branch of the far right populist political party “Alternative for Germany” (AfD Kreisverband Leverkusen), and the tweet with the images from Mexico was swiftly deleted (Echtermann 2021). Future studies of Currenta’s post-disaster crisis communication might explore if and how similar instances developed, in which the company presented itself as the only reliable source of information by distinguishing itself from “fake news” producers. In general, the question of how trust is done in the context of disinformation constitutes an important research object for studying crisis narratives of the post-truth area.⁷⁶

The story of Currenta’s image crisis continues after the end of the period investigated in this article. How Currenta will act in the future, whether Currenta can restore the trust of the citizens in the long term through the campaign launched in phase 6 and which narrative means are and will be used are subject of further investigation.

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¹ Currenta manages Chemparks in Leverkusen, Dormagen and Krefeld-Uerdingen.

² All source material from Currenta, social media and the press was written in German. The translations are provided by the authors.

³ “Wir wissen, dass das Vertrauen in unsere Arbeit erheblichen Schaden genommen hat. [...] Dieses Vertrauen wollen wir uns wieder erarbeiten. Wir werden unsere Sicherheitsstandards umfassend überprüfen und [...] weiter verbessern. Wir werden transparent darüber informieren, was passiert ist und was sich ändern wird.”

⁴ Our understanding of trust is framed by classical sociological trust research such as the work of Luhmann (1979), Simmel (1992) or Barber (1983), in the sense that it views trust (building) as relational and as emerging in contexts of high uncertainty, tensions between knowledge and non-knowledge, and as a form of reducing complexity. At the same time, our approach to trust is decidedly praxeological, informed by practice theories and practice-oriented scholarship from fields such as philosophy of science or gender studies such as Rouse (2007) and Butler (2004).

⁵ On doubt and mistrust see Mühlfried (2019) and Oreskes / Conway (2010).

⁶ It is important to note that the way disasters are presented in mass media coverage has a profound impact on how they are viewed and even experienced (Horowitz / Remes, 2020). The interpretative process to which this media coverage contributes continues long after the event (Dimbath / Heinlein, 2020).

⁷ On competing and complementary narratives in context of crisis communication and disaster see e.g. Morgan et al. (2018).

⁸ For example, in 2019, there was a fire at the Chempark in Dormagen that injured five people (Currenta 2019); and in 2015, an explosion occurred at the Chempark in Krefeld-Uerdingen, injuring 12 employees and causing extensive property damage (Schwerdtfeger 2015).

⁹ The activism of the “Coordination Network against Bayer Hazards” included the presence of activists at the annual general assembly of BAYER as shareholders. As such, they were allowed to submit counter motions and they used this opportunity to inform all shareholders and the public about the activities of the company and to make demands. In 1989, several counter motions were submitted concerning side effects of drugs, accusing BAYER of ignoring scientific findings on these side effects and of deceiving the public with respect to them (Coordination gegen BAYER-Gefahren 1991, 140, 141). In some texts the activists also addressed BAYER’s handling of criticism as deficient (see also Köhler-Schnura 1985). Greenpeace also took action against BAYER in 2008 and won a court case to stop BAYER from making a specific statement about its pesticides that trivialized the dangers (Greenpeace 2008). On the history of the environmental movement in Germany and the emergence of various forms of protest against the chemical industry since the 1980s, see Zelko (2014) or Uekötter (2014).

¹⁰ In Germany, the guidelines are developed by the BBK (Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz und Katastrophenhilfe), which also has an important research unit and publishes material in the publications of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat).

¹¹ „Aus bisher unbekannter Ursache kam es zu einer Explosion im Chempark Leverkusen. Werkfeuerwehr und Luftmesswagen im Einsatz. Anwohner bitte geschlossene Räume aufsuchen

- sowie Türen und Fenster geschlossen zu halten.“ <https://twitter.com/CHEMPARK/status/1419935284599398400> (25.05.2023).
- ¹² <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1420038990971998213> (25.05.2023).
- ¹³ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1420430191319523332> (25.05.2023).
- ¹⁴ “So geht Krisenkommunikation!” <https://twitter.com/ThomasS31227083/status/1420247658980155392> (25.05.2023).
- ¹⁵ “Wirklich sehr professionell wie Sie mit dieser Lage umgehen, und Sie Möglichkeiten für Dialoge bieten. Vor allem aber auch ein ganz großes Lob an den CHEMPARK-Leiter Lars Friedrich!” <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1420323716349763587> (02.03.2023).
- ¹⁶ This term describes a large family of chemical compounds and is thus very unspecific.
- ¹⁷ “Wir wissen aber noch nicht, ob es eventuell weitere Stofffreisetzungen gegeben hat, die wir eben jetzt noch nicht messen konnten in der kurzen Zeit und wo wir auch noch nicht wussten, wonach wir zu suchen hätten, da wir erst jetzt die ersten Informationen bekommen haben, um welche Stoffe es sich bei den Tanklagern eigentlich handelte.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qopls5nxHO4&t=1028s> (02.03.2023).
- ¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/CHEMPARK/status/1420056631908446208> (25.05.2023).
- ¹⁹ “Moment...bei 22:00 wird gesagt, man wisse selbstverständlich was in den Tanks gelagert ist. In der heutigen Pressekonferenz (30.07.2021) wird aber gesagt, dass man erst JETZT genau wisse was in den Tanks gelagert ist!” <https://youtube/qopls5nxHO4> (02.03.2023).
- ²⁰ <https://www.radioleverkusen.de/artikel/sonderfolge-eure-fragen-an-den-chempark-1029321.html> [32:50] (29.05.2023).
- ²¹ We need to emphasize that we do not know at what point in time Currenta actually had that information available nor whether information was withheld. Due to pending legal proceedings, documents concerning internal processes have not been made public so far.
- ²² “Knapp drei Wochen nach der Explosion im Chempark-Entsorgungszentrum in Bürriig geht der Chempark-Betreiber jetzt in die Informationsoffensive. [...] In den letzten Wochen hatte es von verschiedenen Seiten teils massive Kritik an der Informationspolitik von Currenta gegeben: die Infos kämen zu spät und zu spärlich, hatte es geheißen. ” <https://www.radioleverkusen.de/artikel/nach-explosion-info-offensive-von-currenta-1039968.html> (27.05.2023).
- ²³ “Der Ablauf nach dem Explosions Ereignis,” “Das war in den Tanks,” “Wie funktioniert eigentlich die Abwasserreinigung mit Aktivkohle.”
- ²⁴ Our analysis is here loosely informed by Judith Butler’s (2004) theorizations of performativity and interpellation.
- ²⁵ <https://twitter.com/CHEMPARK/status/1422814448545406979> (27.05.2023).
- ²⁶ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1422995672115159048> (27.05.2023).
- ²⁷ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1423267383276449796> (27.05.2023).
- ²⁸ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1428388439188180992> (27.05.2023).
- ²⁹ “Irgendwie ist man nach dem Interview genauso schlau wie vorher...”. <https://www.facebook.com/radioleverkusen/posts/4557719720904724> (27.05.2023).
- ³⁰ “Es ist alles noch sehr ‘Konfus’... Warten wir mal ab”. <https://www.facebook.com/radioleverkusen/posts/4557719720904724> (27.05.2023).
- ³¹ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1425448428574740482> (27.08.2023).
- ³² “Vertrauen verloren.” <https://twitter.com/ARawohl/status/1425461034731589633> (27.05.2023).
- ³³ “Besser spät als nie.” <https://twitter.com/andrelang9/status/1425571584895500288> (27.05.2023).
- ³⁴ “Eine Liste der Niederschlagsorte? Gibt es die? Oder braucht es da auch erst einen Anwalt um über die @BezRegKoeln eine Veröffentlichung zu erreichen?” <https://twitter.com/Levikus66/status/1425682296405962755> (27.05.2023).
- ³⁵ “Bei den Sicherungs- und Aufräumarbeiten kann es zu Geruchsbelästigungen rund um das Entsorgungszentrum Bürriig kommen.” <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1420831668886192130> (27.05.2023).
- ³⁶ “Wir bitten um ihr Verständnis!” <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1428696383146676231> (27.05.2023).
- ³⁷ „Wir entschuldigen uns für etwaige Geruchsbelästigungen.“ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1429823636966461442> (27.05.2023).
- ³⁸ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1434471450493300739> (27.05.2023).
- ³⁹ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1433912766549696512> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴⁰ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1435988925919731726> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴¹ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1436252355461361665> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴² “❤️ Wir sind überwältigt von der großen Anteilnahme.“ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1437105880210845699> (27.05.2023).

- ⁴³ “‘Es wird wieder schön werden. Es darf wieder schön werden.’ Das Schlusswort unserer Gedenkfeier nehmen wir zum Anlass, unsere Farben zurückkehren zu lassen, euch auch wieder über andere Themen zu informieren – und die Verstorbenen dabei trotzdem nicht zu vergessen. #CURRENTA ❤️❤️.” <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1437442207880032259> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that while crisis communication literature does indeed foresee a return to some state of normalcy, critical disaster studies have been arguing for over a decade that very often, particularly when it comes to environmental pollution such a non-disastrous normalcy is not given. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the fact that returning to normalcy is often returning to a constant crisis has been pointed out far beyond these academic contexts (Fredericks et al. 2020).
- ⁴⁵ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1452681599720607748?cxt=HHwWiMC-sfyN-6goAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴⁶ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1445418610072113158?cxt=HHwWjMCy0aqkll8oAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴⁷ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1460560303675088896?cxt=HHwWgIC5mfP2-cQoAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴⁸ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1459491302677037062?cxt=HHwWjICyje3mk8EoAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁴⁹ <https://twitter.com/CHEMPARK/status/1461695823213961222> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵⁰ <https://twitter.com/CHEMPARK/status/1464262714277220353?cxt=HHwWgsC-5cflJdl-oAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵¹ <https://twitter.com/CHEMPARK/status/1468229422432108554> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵² <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1441402327081103362?cxt=HHwWhMC5wflx8YAoAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵³ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1438895657780133890?cxt=HHwWhICy7cT-fcnAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1463175630481248257?cxt=HHwWgsC-rfqen84oAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵⁵ <https://twitter.com/CHEMPARK/status/1443479485253365762> (27.05.2023); <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1443632925375967237> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵⁶ “Bis zum Abschluss des Verfahrens darf es zu keiner Vorverurteilung unserer Kolleg*innen kommen.” <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1450427069712715777> (27.05.2023).
- ⁵⁷ A study on media trust has shown that media channels regulated by public law are trusted the most. 70% of respondents stated that they consider them to be trustworthy (Jakobs et al. 2021, 158).
- ⁵⁸ “Nach der Explosion hatte das Landesamt für Natur, Umwelt und Verbraucherschutz (LANUV) im Abwasser des Klärwerks unter anderem deutlich erhöhte Werte des in Deutschland verbotenen Insektengiftes Clothianidin und des extrem gewässerschädlichen Stoffes PFOS gemessen.”
- ⁵⁹ “Vor dem Hintergrund der jetzt festgestellten Undichtigkeit [...]” <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1474365923746271232?cxt=HHwWgMCyDeUoAAAA> (27.05.2023).
- ⁶⁰ “Es gelangten offenbar rund vierzehn Prozent des Tankinhalts von rund 9.200 Kubikmetern und damit eine Menge von rund 1.300 Kubikmetern über einen Zeitraum von fünf Monaten ohne zusätzliche Aktivkohle-Filterung in die Kläranlage.”
- ⁶¹ “Currenta räumt erneut Panne im Chempark ein.” *dpa / Aachener Zeitung* (25.12.2021). https://www.aachener-zeitung.de/nrw-region/currenta-raeuert-erneut-panne-im-chempark-ein_aid-64843991 (27.05.2023); “Wieder Panne bei Currenta im Chempark!” *Bild* (25.12.2021). <https://www.bild.de/regional/koeln/koeln-aktuell/leverkusen-wieder-panne-bei-currenta-abwasser-in-den-rhein-geflossen-78641204.bild.html> (27.05.2023); “Currenta räumt erneut Panne im Chempark ein.” *chal / dpa / Rheinische Post*: https://rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/leverkusen/leverkusen-currenta-raeuert-erneut-panne-im-chempark-ein_aid-64843841 (27.05.2023); “Currenta räumt Panne ein: Undichte Abwasserklappe.” *dpa / ZEIT ONLINE* (25.12.2021). https://www.zeit.de/news/2021-12/25/currenta-raeuert-panne-ein-undichte-abwasser-klappe?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F (27.05.2023).
- ⁶² “Ich möchte ihnen heute berichten, was wir bei Currenta in den vergangenen Monaten verändert haben und wie wir uns in Zukunft weiter verbessern wollen.”
- ⁶³ It is noteworthy that Currenta’s crisis narrative reproduces here the ‘growing with disaster’ topos that is central to the resilience device and the narratives sustaining it. On this topic see e.g. Usón / Stehrenberger (2021).
- ⁶⁴ “So, wie es stellenweise wahrgenommen wurde, so arbeiten wir nicht, so sind wir nicht.”

⁶⁵ “Dass fünf Monate nicht bemerkt wurde, dass durch eine defekte Klappe im Leitungssystem Wasser in die Kläranlage und dann in den Rhein gelaufen ist, das ist nur schwer zu begreifen. Ich verstehe diesen Punkt, auch wenn die ermittelten Werte zu jedem Zeitpunkt unterhalb von Orientierungs- beziehungsweise Grenzwerten lagen. Wir setzen auch hier an und verbessern unsere Systeme weiter.”

⁶⁶ “Wir haben damit begonnen und werden damit fortfahren, eine Vielzahl an Maßnahmen umzusetzen, um unsere Sicherheitssysteme weiter zu verbessern.”

⁶⁷ “Wir sind entschlossen: ein einfaches ‘Weiter so’ wird es nicht geben.”

⁶⁸ https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1495001173459447813?cxt=HHwWisC9ra_pp78pAAAA (27.05.2023).

⁶⁹ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1495867846764769281?cxt=HHwWgsC91bL4sclpAAAA> (27.05.2023).

⁷⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz7GN27ZfEs> (27.05.2023).

⁷¹ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1510977299528695812?cxt=HHwWiLCyoab2iPg-pAAAA> (27.05.2023).

⁷² https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1514611969055096844?cxt=HHwWmICswfTj_YQqAAAA (27.05.2023).

⁷³ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1499757482217979910?cxt=HHwWjICyjf3emtApAAAA> (27.05.2023).

⁷⁴ <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1501226057898381313?cxt=HHwWgsC-yarJttU-pAAAA> (27.05.2023).

⁷⁵ “Die echten Aufnahmen von der #Explosion in #Leverkusen sind schlimm genug. Trotzdem machen immer wieder #Fakes die Runde. Wir geben alles, um euch so gut wie möglich zu informieren. Bitte fällt nicht auf die Falschen rein.” <https://twitter.com/CURRENTA/status/1420682421192859648> (27.05.2023).

⁷⁶ On narratological perspectives on the analysis of narratives in post-truth context see e.g. Dawson / Mäkelä (2023).