

SIGNS OF LIFE

Form, Life, and the Materiality of Writing around 1800
(Georg Christoph Lichtenberg – Jean Paul – Goethe)

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how concepts of life articulate themselves in the writing practices of German authors around 1800, with particular focus on the works of the Göttingen experimental physicist and writer Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, the humorist and romantic author Jean Paul, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. While much of the research on this topic is limited to theories of the novel or to the relationship between German Romanticism and the emergence of the field of biology around 1800, I contend that new scientific theories of organic development in the early-19th century introduced a crucial and as yet largely overlooked element into literary representation during this period: that of materiality. In the dissertation, I argue that these author's works reflect and inform a specifically material conception of life – as corporeal, finite and heterogeneous – which manifests itself at the level of the surface materiality of the texts themselves: the life of the book as “waste” (Chapter I: Georg Christoph Lichtenberg), scholarly life as the contingent combinatory of letters (Chapter II: Jean Paul), and morphology as the science of serial aggregates (Chapter III: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe). Through a close and sustained engagement with their texts, I conclude that these writers' insistence on a notion of corporeal and linguistic materiality does not cohere with the romantic conception of literature as a subjective epistemology of infinite reflection; my dissertation therefore seeks to reconstruct an alternative epistemology of the literary which examines the specifically material dimension of the contingency of writing and the various “forms-of-life” which it comes to embody.

To support this argument, I draw on recent scholarship within the growing field of “science and literature” which identifies a convergence between the fields of biology, aesthetics, as well as rhetoric and poetics around 1800. As scholarship in the history of science has well-established, the transformation of “life” into an object of scientific and empirical scrutiny during this period was

closely intertwined with the decline of the older natural-historical enterprise of categorizing living beings into primordial types and static taxonomies and subsequent rise of the modern “life sciences,” namely biology. Yet the dissertation departs from previous studies in both the history of science and literary criticism, which focus primarily on the interconnection between German Romanticism and the modern natural sciences. Instead, the dissertation examines works of literature in which the corporeal materiality of both life and letter intersect and intertwine at the level of the “small form.” That is, rather than taking the romantic novel as the object of inquiry, or the related opposition between system and fragment, the dissertation foregrounds the relation of form to life in terms of different graphematic procedures of writing and their relation to marginal literary forms. From this peripheral perspective onto the “discourse network” around 1800, I argue that there is in fact a profoundly close connection between the material conceptions of life in the 18th century, which foregrounded the elements of contingency, disorder, and death, and the emergence of small literary forms – ones which were considered far too heterogeneous and fragmentary to possess “aesthetic unity” – during this period.

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INTRODUCTION: FORMS-OF-LIFE AND THE LIFE OF FORM

Sobald das Leben über das bloß Animalische hinaus zur Stufe des Geistes vorgeschritten ist und der Geist seinerseits zur Stufe der Kultur, wird in ihm ein innerer Gegensatz offenbar [...] [wir] sprechen von Kultur, wenn die schöpferische Bewegung des Lebens gewisse Gebilde hervorgebracht hat, an denen sie ihre Äußerung, die Formen ihrer Verwirklichung findet, und die ihrerseits die Flutungen des nachkommenden Lebens in sich aufnehmen und ihnen Inhalt und Form, Spielraum und Ordnung geben [...]. Aber diese Erzeugnisse von Lebensprozessen haben das Eigentümliche, daß sie im Augenblick ihres Entstehens schon einen eigenen selten Bestand haben, der mit dem ruhelosen Rhythmus des Lebens selbst [...] nichts mehr zu tun hat. Sie sind Gehäuse des schöpferischen Lebens, das sie aber wieder verläßt, und des nachströmenden, das aber schließlich in ihnen nicht mehr unterkommt.¹

—Georg Simmel, “Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur”

In this remarkable opening passage from Georg Simmel’s 1918 essay “Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur,” the concept of life emerges as a new epistemological-philosophical paradigm for understanding modern society, the cultural forms which it gives rise to over time, as well as the inner contradictions that these forms come to embody.² Here Simmel alludes to the peculiar fact that the ontological tension between subject and object – a tension which for him amounts to nothing less than *the* fundamental paradox of modern culture – can just as well be articulated in terms of the conceptual distinction between “life” and “form”; for life can only realize itself as an *individual* life *in* form, which the productive “vital impulse” gradually outgrows and supersedes. With the term “life,” Simmel thereby designates not an abstract idealization, but rather a pre-conceptual, unmediated “lived reality” (*Erlebnis*), which appears as the source of all cultural forms and social phenomena. As soon as this lived reality comes into existence, however, a struggle between life

¹ Georg Simmel, “Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur,” in: idem., *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. O. Rammstedt, vol. 16 (Frankfurt a. M. 1999), 181–207, here: 183ff.

² This text, along with *Lebensanschauung* (1918), may be viewed therefore as representative of Georg Simmel’s late phase of writing insofar as his “philosophy of life” [Lebensphilosophie] finds its clearest and most decisive articulation in them. For more on Simmel’s philosophy of life, and in particular his conception of form, see A. M. Bevers, *Dynamik der Form bei Georg Simmel* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot Verlag, 1985).

and its forms ensues, for while these forms allow life to be grasped conceptually, life in its immediacy always eludes discursive cognition and conceptual mediation (*Erkennen*). For this reason, life is characterized for Simmel by a constitutive surplus – a *Mehr-Leben* as well as a *Mehr-als-Leben*: “Indem es Leben ist, braucht es die Form, und indem es Leben ist, braucht es mehr als die Form. Mit diesem Widerspruch ist das Leben behaftet, daß es nur in Formen unterkommen kann und doch in Formen nicht unterkommen kann [...]”³

Simmel’s understanding of life thus leads to a double complication of the notion of form, oscillating between foundation and product, restriction and enabling of life. How a living process is carried out is, on the one hand, conditioned by the form of life it exemplifies; this very conditioning form, on the other hand, is itself produced and manifested by this living process. Life, in other words, “is conditioned by a form it itself produces; it restricts and orders itself by means of something it brings into reality.”⁴ While Simmel’s solution to this fundamental philosophical problem of the time – that is, the relation of life and form – thereby entails the positing of an insuperable “contradiction” [Widerspruch], the philosopher Ernst Cassirer proposed an alternative answer – what he called the philosophy of symbolic forms – meant to resolve and mediate the antinomy diagnosed by Simmel: “Für die Philosophie [...] kann [...] niemals das Leben selbst, vor und außerhalb aller Geformtheit, das Ziel und die Sehnsucht der Betrachtung bilden: sondern für sie bilden Leben und Form eine untrennbare Einheit.”⁵ Conversely, this also means for Cassirer that no form can be posited as prior or external to all vitality; his philosophy of symbolic forms, which seeks to represent the “Urphänomen des Lebens selbst” in “seinem Bestand und in seiner

³ Simmel, “Lebensanschauung,” in: idem., *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 16, 209–425, here: 230ff.

⁴ Thomas Khurana/Christoph Menke, “Form and Formation of Life,” in: *Constellations* 18.1 (2011), 6–7, here: 7.

⁵ Cf. Ernst Cassirer, “Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften,” in: idem., *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften. (1922-1926)*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 16, ed. Birgit Recki (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2003), 75–104, here: 104.

vollständigen Entfaltung,”⁶ can also be formulated therefore as a phenomenology of living forms.⁷ With this formula, Cassirer, like Simmel, no longer considers form merely statically as a fully formed “figure” [Gebilde], but rather conceives it dynamically as a “werdende Form”⁸ and a “Werden zur Form”⁹ – or what he refers to, with explicit reference to the scholastic tradition, as a “*forma formans*”: “Wie die scholastische Metaphysik den Gegensatz zwischen dem Begriff der ‘*natura naturata*’ und der ‘*natura naturans*’ gebildet hat, so muss die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen zwischen der ‘*forma formans*’ und der ‘*forma formata*’ unterscheiden.”¹⁰

For Simmel and Cassirer, as for other philosophers of life around 1900, the conception of form as a process of emergence from life thus marks a decisive break with the classical Aristotelian framework that rested upon a hylomorphic dualism between substance (*hylē*) and form (*morphē*) – a dualism that deeply influenced idealist aesthetics. Now, in accordance with the conception of form drawn from the natural sciences as the “becoming of life,” form arises as an emergent phenomenon from unformed (physical, social, and aesthetic) forces, energies, and processes, rather than as a principle of enclosure and order that seeks to contain and give shape to unformed matter or material. In this way, a conception of form as “living form” not only advanced to a key concept in the frame of *Lebensphilosophie*, but also – to the extent that such philosophical inquiry intersected with the domains of cultural sociology (Simmel), the philosophy of symbolic forms (Cassirer), logic and ethics (Wittgenstein), philosophical anthropology (Plessner), as well as various

⁶ Cf. Cassirer, *Zur Metaphysik der symbolischen Formen*, in: idem., *Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 1, ed. von J. M. Krois (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995), 263.

⁷ For more on the concept of life in Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy, cf. Christian Möckel, *Das Urphänomen des Lebens. Ernst Cassirers Lebensbegriff* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2005).

⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰ Ibid. For more on Cassirer’s distinction between *forma formans* and *forma formata*, cf. Reto Luzius Fetz, “Forma format – forma formans. Zur historischen Stellung und systematische Bedeutung von Cassirers Metaphysik des Symbolischen,” in: *Lebendige Form. Zur Metaphysik des Symbolischen in Ernst Cassirers “Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texten*,” eds. Reto Luzius Fetz/Sebastian Ullrich (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2008), 15–34.

other newly-emergent discursive fields – became intimately intertwined with the foundations of the nascent *Kulturwissenschaften* of the early-20th century.¹¹

As important as these later epistemological reflections on the relation of life and form were and continue to be for engaging with questions of vitality, processuality, and autopoiesis in the human or cultural sciences, it is nevertheless essential to recognize that their groundwork was in fact already laid as early as the 18th century. In breaking away from an older epistemological paradigm that opposed form and idea to matter and content, “philosophers of life” around 1900 such as Simmel and Cassirer drew on a conception of form, as largely independent of matter, substance, and content, that owed its origins to the aesthetic debates around 1800. During this period, nothing less than an epochal transformation of the notion of form took place, which David Wellbery has described as the shift from “eidetic” to “endogenous” form-concepts, that is, from the scholastic (as well as neo-Platonic) opposition between form and materiality to the notion of form as a process of self-formation and self-production.¹² Kant’s aesthetics marks in this context a decisive turning point insofar it reformulates the old rhetorical-poetic figure of “liveliness” in the sense of *energeia* – the *terminus technicus* for the lively description of an action, event, person or passion – into an aesthetic concept, one which is now charged with endowing the mind with life and providing the means by which it affects and feels itself.¹³ In jettisoning the inherited tradition of this rhetorical figure, Kant places art into a new relation with life: “life” is now conceived as an

¹¹ Cf. Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften* [1942], in: idem., *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 22, 357–90.

¹² Cf. David E. Wellbery, “Form und Idee. Skizze eines Begriffsfeldes um 1800,” in: *Morphologie und Moderne: Goethes ‘anschauliches Denken’ in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800*, ed. Jonas Maatsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 17–42, in particular 19.

¹³ For more on Kant’s reformulation of the traditional rhetorical figure of “hypotyposis,” which is synonymous with “energeia,” cf. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant’s Aesthetics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), in particular 202–46. See also Winfried Menninghaus, “‘Ein Gefühl der Beförderung des Lebens.’ Kants Reformulierung des Topos ‘lebhafter Vorstellung,’” in: *Vita aethetica. Szenarien ästhetischer Lebendigkeit*, eds. Armen Avanesian, Winfried Menninghaus and Jan Völker (Zürich/Berlin: diaphanes, 2009), 77–94.

autopoetic form, and this conception of a self-forming, self-preserving force paves the way for the (re-)foundation of aesthetics.¹⁴

The departure from the classical rhetorical *topos* of “liveliness” and inauguration of a new aesthetic conception of life was not, however, a purely isolated development in the history of knowledge around 1800. Rather, as the second half of Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, which deals with the problems of teleological judgment, already makes clear, it was in fact the parallel – and in many respects interlocking – development of the disciplines of biology and aesthetics that provided the epistemological foundation for this transformation. The well-studied decline of natural history and subsequent rise of the modern life sciences – biology – brought about a radical upheaval in the classical understanding of nature and its forms, which introduced into the scientific discourse of the time a new conception of independent, self-organizing life-forms under the name “organism.”¹⁵ Parallel to this development in the natural sciences was the seemingly unrelated rise of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, which in the wake of Alexander Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* (1750/58) quickly gained traction. Yet whereas Baumgarten’s work still made extensive use of the classical rhetorical *topoi* of “vivid cognition” (*cognitio viva*) and “vivid representation”

¹⁴ Coming at this problem from philosophical aesthetics, Rodolphe Gasché argues that Kant’s efforts in the *Critique of Judgment* to separate the beautiful from anything sensible or moral “breaks with the Aristotelian or scholastic tradition, according to which form is always the form of some matter and hence is understood in its difference from, that is, in relation to, its other” (Gasché, *The Idea of Form*, 8). For Gasché, this break is most clearly elucidated by way of Kant’s notion of “mere form”: “Mere form [...] is anything but an empty contentless arrangement. It is the form that the cognitive powers achieve in the face of wild objects whose representation suggests purposiveness, notwithstanding the absence of determinate concepts. Mere form is thus above all a para-epistemic concept” (ibid.).

¹⁵ Cf. Wolf Lepenies, *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte. Wandel kultureller Selbstverständlichkeit in den Wissenschaften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Hanser Verlag, 1976). For more on the broader philosophical significance of this epistemic break around 1800, see also Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life. Teleology and Mechanics in Nineteenth Century German Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), in particular 156–94, as well as Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life. Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), in particular 407–502.

(*repraesentatio viva*),¹⁶ Kant formulates in the third *Critique* – with explicit reference to the contemporary (proto-)biological theory of the *Bildungstrieb* – an emphatic conception of “life” not only as a key term of aesthetics, but also one which seeks to unify aesthetic as well as natural-philosophical desiderata. His substitution of an older rhetorical-poetic figure for an aesthetic-biological one was not merely a semantic shift; rather, it marked “einen Paradigmenwechsel der Ästhetik selbst. Auch in der Ästhetik rückt mit dem Begriff des Lebens – freilich nun als ‘Leben des Subjekts’ verstanden – die Eigenständigkeit eines sich selbst erhaltenden Modus von Wahrnehmung, Urteil und vor allem ‘Lust’ in den Vordergrund.”¹⁷

Taking this narrowing of the domains of aesthetics, rhetoric and poetics, and biology in the 18th century as its point of departure, this dissertation seeks to explore the theories, practices and literary phenomena of “life” and its forms of knowledge – its concepts, ordering principles, its heterogeneous discursive practices, as well as its systems of notation – around 1800. In order to bring methodological cohesion to this project, the dissertation pursues the relation of life and form during this period across three interrelated domains of inquiry: (1) rhetorical and representation-theoretical; (2) natural-scientific and biological; and (3) literary- and media-historical. While I have attempted to provide a brief historical sketch of how the rhetorical-poetic figure of “liveliness” suddenly became superimposed onto and largely replaced by an emphatically biological conception of life with the rise of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline in the mid- to late-18th century, I would like to turn our attention now to the role of literature and media.

¹⁶ For more on Alexander Baumgarten’s aesthetics and its relation to the older rhetorical tradition, see Rüdiger Campe, Christoph Menke, and Anselm Haverkamp (eds.), *Baumgarten-Studien. Zur Genealogie der Ästhetik* (Berlin: August Verlag, 2014).

¹⁷ Cf. Armen Avanesian, Winfried Menninghaus, and Jan Völker, “Einführung,” in: *Vita aesthetica*, 7–11, here: 10. For more on the importance of biological theories of self-organizing organisms for literature and philosophy in the 18th and 19th centuries, see also Helmut Müller-Sievers, *Self-Generation. Biology, Philosophy, and Literature Around 1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

One of the most significant developments with respect to the relation of form and life around 1800 concerns the form and theory of the novel. At least since the end of the 17th century, theoretical debates on the novel were characterized by its recurring presentation as the ‘form of formlessness.’ The novel, as Rüdiger Campe writes, was considered the genre which “keine Form hatte im Sinne dessen, was man manchmal auch genauer die äußere Form nennt. [...] Der Roman war keine poetologisch bestimmte Gattung. Wenn der Roman Form haben sollte, musste sie Form dessen sein, was er erzählt.”¹⁸ If the novel were to have a form, it would not have been an “external” one, but rather an “inner” form – one which, moreover, conforms to a conception of form above all as a form of formation: it is, as Campe further elaborates in a separate essay on the theory of the novel, “derjenige Formprozess, der einfache Formen in sich aufnimmt und an ihnen die eigene Formlosigkeit kompensiert.”¹⁹ Starting with Friedrich Blanckenburg’s influential treatise *Versuch über den Roman* (1774), which made Christoph Martin Wieland’s *Agathon* into the exemplary model of novelistic narration, and later with Friedrich Schlegel’s *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800), which drew its theory of romantic form, in turn, from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, post-poetological theories of the novel from the romantics to Walter Benjamin and Georg Lukács in the 20th century conceived the “inner” form of the novel as the form and formation of *life*.²⁰

¹⁸ Cf. Rüdiger Campe, “Das Bild und die Folter. Robert Musils *Törleß* und die Form des Romans,” in: *Weiterlesen. Literatur und Wissen*, eds. Ulrike Bergemann and Elisabeth Strowick (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007), 121–147, here: 141f.

¹⁹ Campe, “Form und Leben in der Theorie des Romans,” in: *Vita aesthetica*, 193–211, here: 198.

²⁰ Here it is crucial to note the extent to which the term “life” in these various treatises remains undetermined and fluid. In *Versuch über den Roman*, for instance, Friedrich Blanckenburg oscillates between two ostensibly different meanings of the term “liveliness”: on the one hand, the novel is said to be ‘vivid,’ because what it makes present is the ‘formed life’ of the hero (“The Life of ...,” as per many novelistic titles) in all its richness and detail; on the other hand, it is ‘lively,’ because it makes ‘life’ present in the actuality of specific features and actions (perceptions, sensations, and dispositions). By superimposing “die Qualität des Präsentierens am Präsentierten” (ibid., 201), Blanckenburg collapses the distinction between the rhetorical and representational-theoretical conceptions of “liveliness”; cf. Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg, *Versuch über den Roman* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1965), in particular 260, 264, and 278. Friedrich Schlegel, on the other hand, speaks in his review of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* of “Lebenskunst” as both the object and means of representation of Goethe’s novel; cf. Friedrich Schlegel, “Über Goethes Meister,” in: idem., *Schriften zur Literatur* (Munich: dtv, 1972), 260–78. Furthermore, in Benjamin’s essay “Goethes

“Nur und erst beim modernen Roman ist es unter allen Gattungen so, dass man über Form nur als eine des Lebens sprechen kann. Mit dem modernen Roman wird literarische Form statt zu einer Sache der literarischen zu einer der Lebensform.”²¹ As Campe demonstrates, this superimposing of the “form-of-life” [Lebensform] onto the “life of form” re-activates a much older rhetorical technique of evidentiary intuition: that of *energeia*, or what Aristotle calls “putting before the eye” – *pro-ommaton* –, which by way of metaphoric transfer substitutes “Lebendiges an die Stelle von Nichtlebendigem (Totem, Abstraktem oder Abwesendem).”²²

While the dissertation largely follows Campe’s speculative link between the classical Aristotelian relation of life (metaphysics) and representation (rhetoric-poetics) and modern literary forms, it inquires less into the epistemological and form-theoretical (pre-)conditions for the emergence of the modern novel *as such* than into the heterogeneous *form-processes*²³ which it unleashes and, relatedly, into the plurality of *small* or *simple forms*²⁴ which it enfolds. Central to my argument, therefore, is a methodological shift away from the “major form” of the novel and a privileging, in turn, of the small, fleeting, and “minor” forms of literature as the primary locus of

Wahlverwandtschaften” (1924/25), “life” becomes the decisive value that is realized in the novel, although his use of the concept “Lebensform” remains purely polemic, referring to the renunciation of criticism and idolatry of nature as the “mythischen Lebensformen” in the artist’s existence; cf. Benjamin, “Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften,” in: idem., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 123–201, here: 149. Finally, Lukács, akin to Simmel, recognizes only either life which is already formed, or form which is always-already given, namely as works of art; cf. Georg Lukács, *Theorie des Romans. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik* (Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand, 1965).

²¹ Campe, “Form und Leben in der Theorie des Romans,” 196.

²² Ibid., 203.

²³ For more on the concept of process, cf. Christoph Hoffmann, “Festhalten, bereitstellen. Verfahren der Aufzeichnung,” in: *Daten sichern. Schreiben und Zeichnen als Verfahren der Aufzeichnung* (Zürich/Berlin: diaphenes, 2008), 7–20. There Hoffmann points out that writing can manifest itself in different ways as a process: “Teils setzt es sich in räumlichen Verteilungen, teils in zeitlichen Abläufen um, teils liegt das Gewicht auf der Anordnung, teils auf einer Folge von Schritten und insgesamt variieren diese Verfahrensweise nach der Menge der Konventionen, ihrer expliziten Formulierung und, darin eingeschlossen, nach der Möglichkeit der Rekonstruierbarkeit” (ibid., 13).

²⁴ For more on the concept of “small form,” cf. Ulrich Stadler, “Kleines Kunstwerk, kleines Buch und kleine Form. Kürze bei Lichtenberg, Novalis und Friedrich Schlegel,” in: *Die kleinen Formen in der Moderne* (Innsbruck 2001), 15–36. For the related concept of the “simple form,” see André Jolles, *Einfache Formen. Legende, Sage, Mythe, Rätsel, Spruch, Kasus, Memorabile, Märchen, Witz* (Tübingen 1999); Sonja Hitziger et al., ed., *Kleine literarische Formen in Einzeldarstellungen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002).

“liveliness” and “vitality” – a shift which is grounded, moreover, on the basis of a literary-historical and mediological understanding of the period in question. For just as soon as the genius aesthetics of classicism and *Sturm und Drang* in the 18th century had elevated the unity of the work of art and the individuality of its author into aesthetic as well as social ideals, the manner in which fiction was produced, distributed, and consumed underwent a dramatic transformation: the boom in newspaper, magazine, and book production around 1800 brought about not only an unprecedented abundance of textual material, but it also raised new questions of authorship and readership in an era of too much to read and write. In the introduction to *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise; nebst einer Auswahl verbesserten Werkchen* (1808/22), Jean Paul gave voice to this shift when he wrote: “Mit den Taschenkalendern und Zeitschriften müssen die kleinen vermischten Werkchen so zunehmen [...], daß man am Ende kaum ein Großes mehr schreibt.”²⁵

This brief description provides an insightful, albeit parodic, description of the new conditions under which literature is produced in the nineteenth century.²⁶ In his characteristically humorous manner, Jean Paul not only diagnoses the transformation of fiction into the form of an archive or compendium in the nineteenth century – as well as the corresponding shift from the “great work,” or *opus*, to the “minor work,” or *opusculum* – but also realizes this shift at the level of literary form by coupling his “minor works” from newspapers and anthologies onto his novel, which was itself published in installments.²⁷ As the example of *Dr. Katzenberger* makes clear, the rise of seriality in the nineteenth century thus meant, on the one hand, that the form that literature

²⁵ Jean Paul, *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise; nebst einer Auswahl verbesserten Werkchen*, in: *Jean Pauls Sämtliche Werke* (henceforth as *Werke*), ed. Norbert Miller (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), I/6, 81.

²⁶ Cf. Nicolas Pethes, “Serial Individuality: Eighteenth-Century Case Study Collections and Nineteenth-Century Archival Fiction,” in: *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 115–32. See also: Andrew Piper, *Piper, Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), in particular 19–52.

²⁷ Cf. Pethes, “Serial Individuality,” in particular 115–17.

assumes now had to accord with the commercial exigencies of the book-market and printing press, which not only put into question the autonomy of the artwork, but also its aesthetic unity. On the other hand, nineteenth-century literature was already aware of its new situation and, like Jean Paul's "novel," reflected this change in its structure. Arguably more pertinent than questions related to the discursive conditions of text production around 1800, then, is the way in which the *form of the series* advanced to a privileged form-principle of open-ended composition and narration during this period. The consequences of this shift are difficult to underestimate: they entail nothing less than a thorough-going disarticulation of the novel as a form and the proliferation, in turn, of the microscopic "small forms" or "minor works" which it once took up. From this perspective, seriality should be understood not simply as an external condition of mass market production, but above all as an "inner" form-process in its own right – one which is characterized by the serial techniques of juxtaposition, contiguity, enfolding, and concatenation (*Verkettung*). Hence, one can no longer speak here of literary form in analogy with an organic totality, but rather as a serialization of the parts, which do not relate to each other as parts to a whole.²⁸

But what might "liveliness" and "vitality" mean, then, at the level of the *small form*? As the analogy between the *bio-logic* of life and literary form might already imply, the blurring of the biological and the aesthetic foregrounds the way in which writing itself is subject to the constraints of corporeal existence, namely finitude and death. In the case of the small forms – and by these I mean not simply static (generic) forms of the small, but heterogeneous form-processes such as drafting, collecting, excerpting, list-making, note-taking, and archiving²⁹ – "life" embodies writing

²⁸ For more on the concept of seriality and its transformation of the part-whole relation, above all with respect to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Notes on Morphology*, cf. Eva Geulen, "Serialization in Goethe's Morphology," in: *Compar(a)ison* 2 (2008), 53–70, in particular 65–66.

²⁹ For more on this point, see Hoffmann, "Festhalten, bereitstellen. Verfahren der Aufzeichnung," esp. 7–8.

in its finite corporeality and microscopic materiality. For this reason, it is no longer simply a question of “vivid representation,” but concerns an emphatic conception of life in terms of the “textual body” (*Schriftkörper*) itself, which serves as the privileged locus of inscription as well as of mortification. This focus on the corporeality of the small positions this study firmly within the framework of what David Wellbery refers to as “post-hermeneutic criticism”³⁰: it shifts away from questions dealing purely with meaning to the analysis of discursive practices and their medial (pre-)conditions. The intersection of corporeal *life* and material *form* thus manifests itself, for instance, in the very “gesture of writing” [Geste des Schreibens], which constitutes a heterogeneous ensemble of linguistic material and bodily movement.³¹ Such a conception of “material” as the excess of form’s potential to become form not only jettisons the scholastic distinction between form and matter; it also radically departs with the conception of matter found in German idealism as well as German romanticism. Whereas Fichte, for instance, subordinates letter to spirit, the “body” to the “soul” of text, in his influential treatise on intellectual property and modern copyright law, *Beweis der Unrechtmäßigkeit des Büchernachdrucks* (1793), and Friedrich Schlegel, among other Romantics, programmatically defines “Romantic universal poetry” in transcendental terms as an infinite process of self-reflexive becoming – in other words, the epistemic space of the *mise en abyme*

³⁰ “The reason that the concept of corporeality defines the point of reference for post-hermeneutic criticism is clear. The body is the site upon which the various technologies of our culture inscribe themselves, the connecting link to which and from which our medial means of processing, storage, and transmission run. Indeed, in its nervous system, the body itself is a medial apparatus and an elaborate technology. But it is also radically historical in the sense that it is shaped and reshaped by the networks to which it is conjoined” (David E. Wellbery, “Foreward,” in: Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992], vii–xxxiii, here: xiv).

³¹ “Um schreiben zu können, benötigen wir – unter anderen – die folgenden Faktoren: eine Oberfläche (Blatt Papier), ein Werkzeug (Füllfeder), Zeichen (Buchstaben), eine Konvention (Bedeutung der Buchstaben), Regeln (Orthographie), ein System (Grammatik), ein durch das System der Sprache bezeichnetes System (semantische Kenntnis der Sprache), eine zu schreibende Botschaft (Ideen) und das Schreiben” (Vilém Flusser, “Die Geste des Schreibens,” in: idem., *Gesten. Versuch einer Phänomenologie* [Düsseldorf; Bensheim 1991], 39–49, here: 40; cited in Martin Stingelin, “Schreiben. Einleitung,” in: *Mir ekelt vor diesem tintenklecksenden Säkulum. Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Manuskripte* [= *Zur Genealogie des Schreibens*, vol. 1], ed. Martin Stingelin, Davide Giuriato, Sandro Zanetti [Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004], 7–21, here: 13).

–, the writers which I have selected for this dissertation foreground, by contrast, not only the fleetingness and material ephemerality of the small forms, but also take as both their object and means of representation a seriality towards death.

For this reason, I have chosen as the title for the dissertation the phrase “signs of life,” which emphasizes just as much the vital as the discursive dimensions of my inquiry. While the phrase “signs of life” was first translated into the German *Lebenszeichen* from the Latin *indicium vitae* by the 17th-century poet and linguist Kaspar von Stieler (1632–1707), Grimm’s *Wörterbuch* traces the use of this word to around 1800,³² citing in particular a letter from Goethe to Bettine von Arnim, in which Goethe solicits von Arnim for a “sign of life,” and alludes to the possibility of death.³³ As the use of this term in this context implies, written and received letters can act as proof of one’s own life, especially when death is within reach. Thus a letter and, if possible, one featuring a hand-written signature, serves to dispel rumors of life-threatening illness or unexpected demise. Thus in a letter to Carl Friedrich Zelter written on March 23, 1823 – a period during which Goethe was recovering from a severe illness and his correspondence slowly dwindled – he wrote the shortest letter of their correspondence, a “sign of life” *tout court*: “Erstes Zeugnis / erneuten Lebens und Liebens / Dankbar, anhänglich / J. W. v. Goethe.”³⁴ Put briefly, a “sign of life,” one might

³² Cf. “Lebenszeichen,” in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden, vol. 12, [Leipzig 1971], 459; “Lebenszeichen,” *Grimm-Wörterbuch*, accessed 22 Mar. 2016, <<http://www.woerterbuch-netz.de/DWB?lemma=lebenszeichen>>).

³³ “Von Dir, liebe Bettine, habe ich sehr lange nichts gehört und kann meine Reise ins Karlsbad unmöglich antreten, ohne Dich nochmals zu begrüßen und Dich zu ersuchen, mir dorthin *ein Lebenszeichen* zu geben; möge ein guter Genius Dir diese Bitte ans Herz legen, da ich nicht weiß, wo Du bist, so muß ich schon meine Zuflucht höheren Mächten nehmen. [...]” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Bettine von Arnim on March 10, 1810, *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde*, in: Bettine von Arnim, *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden*, eds. Walter Schmitz and Sibylle von Steinsdorff [Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992], vol. 2, 335; my emphasis).

³⁴ Goethe to Zelter on March 23, 1823, in: Goethe, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1915), vol. 2, 203. In a letter to Marianne von Willemer dated April 14, 1823, Goethe similarly writes: “Nur wenig Worte als Zeichen erneuten Lebens und Liebens” (Goethe, *Goethes Briefwechsel mit Marianne von Willemer*, ed. Philipp Stein [Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1908], 101).

say, designates a small form – in Goethe’s case, a *parergic* supplement (“anhänglich”) to an epistolary correspondence – which constitutes both a performative utterance, insofar as it does not simply “re-present” a given reality, but rather seeks to bring a new condition into being through its illocutionary force, as well as a form of evidentiary intuition, which draws on the classical rhetorical technique of “liveliness” in the sense of *energeia* by superimposing an emphatically *biological* conception of life – namely the physical body of the writer – onto something which is absent, abstract, and – potentially – dead.

The dissertation provides three case studies, whose chapters are organized in a roughly chronological manner according to specific authors and works, which open up different perspectives onto the nexus of form, life, and the materiality of writing – of *signs of life* – around 1800: Georg Lichtenberg’s *Waste Books* (*Sudelbücher*), Jean Paul’s idylls (*Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal*, *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, *Leben Fibels*), and finally Goethe’s writings on morphology and his final prose piece, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden*. While there are arguably many other writers and texts during this period that explore the relation of form and life in a manner that accords with the methodological criteria and theoretical aims which I have laid out for myself just as clearly as – if not perhaps better than – those which I selected, this should not detract from the fact that, in their works, one encounters poetological reflections on the relation of the instruments of material inscription to the concepts of form and life in a manner that foregrounds the contingency of writing at the material level.

By foregrounding the corporeality and materiality of writing with an eye towards the form-life relation around 1800, the dissertation seeks to open up an “interstitial perspective,” in Homi

K. Bhaba's words,³⁵ onto the book as a discursive format in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The book, on this reading, appears not merely as a vessel for narrative form, but rather as a historically-specific communicative medium which undergoes change and transformation in the context of evolving discursive practices and hermeneutic operations. Crucial in this respect is that each of the aforementioned writers cite different scholarly techniques of writing that, as I will argue, contribute in different ways to the dissolution of the book as a unified discursive format. In Chapter I, I focus on Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's *Sudelbücher*. Starting with his citation of the tradition of commonplace books, a scholarly bookkeeping practice, as his method of writing, I approach this ensemble of texts not as a static collection of aphorisms, but as a form-experiment in serial methods of text production, such as list-making, note-taking, and scribbling, which bring into view the different epistemologies of intuitive knowledge around 1800. In Chapter II, I examine Jean Paul's idylls, in which the lives of minor scholarly figures become intertwined with discontinuous procedures of writing and reading. Here I seek to show how any engagement with Jean Paul's writing whatsoever – either in spite of or perhaps on account of the fact that it proliferates into massive, multi-volume compendia – necessarily leads in the direction of the poetics of the small form; for in each of his idylls, he makes the technique of writing in excerpts into both an object and means of representation, with major epistemological consequences, as I will demonstrate, for his own idiosyncratic conception literary form. Finally, in Chapter III, I examine the role of contingency, materiality and seriality in Goethe's *Notebooks on Morphology*, in which his observations of nature's heterogeneous phenomena led him to reject the model of formative development – *Bildung* – as insufficiently dynamic and to rethink in turn his conception of form, and in his final “novel” *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* – a genre-designation which Goethe in fact struck

³⁵ Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 4.

from its second edition –, in which this rejection of *Bildung* gains epistemological significance with respect to the transformation of the *Bildungsroman* into an “archive fiction,” thereby making the *Wanderjahre* one of the first serial novels.

CHAPTER I. GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG

1. INTRODUCTION: WASTE (BOOKS) FOR NO ONE

Aber die Lumpen, den Abfall: die will ich nicht inventarisieren sondern sie auf die einzig mögliche Weise zu ihrem Recht kommen lassen: sie verwenden.³⁶

—Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*

For more than three decades, the Göttingen experimental physicist and writer Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799) meticulously entered his “remarks” into notebooks, which he used as a repository for miscellaneous thoughts, observations and memoranda to himself. Each volume of his notebooks – fifteen in total – was accorded a letter of the alphabet (with “I” omitted) from “A,” begun in 1765 – which in fact consists of five slim notebooks collected together – to “L,” which breaks off at Lichtenberg’s death in 1799.³⁷ He called these notebooks, which consist of approximately 1,085 individual entries, his *Sudelbücher* – a translation of the English “waste books,” a term employed in the English business house of the time to designate the ledgers in which transactions of all kinds were entered as they occurred before being transferred to the more orderly and neatly written account books.

While the name “waste book” [Sudelbuch] first appears at the end of Notebook “D” (1773–75) in an alphabetically-organized list of words and things entitled “Wörter und Redens-Arten,” which among other entries includes the items “in seinem Sudelbuch (common place book)” and

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), vol. V.1, 574.

³⁷ As will be discussed further on, it is in fact only in what we now call Notebook “D” that the letter appears as a classificatory label for the first time. The attribution of letters to Notebooks “A,” “B,” “C,” is an editorial fiction imposed upon the notebooks by the editor Wolfgang Promies. For more on the publication and edition history of Lichtenberg’s *Sudelbücher*, see the editorial remarks by Wolfgang Promies included at the end of volume one of the *Sudelbücher*, in: Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 950–52.

“Sudelei,”³⁸ it was not until Notebook “E” (1775–76) that he developed the “waste book” into a potential form-principle for his own notebooks. There he compares the writing of scholars and his own way of writing in his notebooks with the form of the “Sudelbuch,” that is, with a practice of book-keeping used by merchants:

Die Kaufleute haben ihr Waste book (Sudelbuch, Klitterbuch glaube ich im Deutschen), darin tragen sie von Tag zu Tag alles ein was sie verkaufen und kaufen, alles durch einander ohne Ordnung, aus diesem wird es in das Journal getragen, wo alles mehr systematisch steht, und endlich kommt es in den Leidger at double entrance nach der italiänischen Art buchzuhalten. In diesem wird mit jedem Mann besonders abgerechnet und zwar erst als Debitor und dann als Creditor gegenüber. Dieses verdient von den Gelehrten nachgeahmt zu werden. Erst ein Buch worin ich alles einschreibe, so wie ich es sehe oder wie es mir meine Gedanken eingeben, alsdann kann dieses wieder in ein anderes getragen werden, wo die Materien mehr abgesondert und geordnet sind, und der Leidger könnte dann die Verbindung und die daraus fließende Erläuterung der Sache in einem ordentlichen Ausdruck enthalten. vid.[e] p.[aginum] XXVI.³⁹

Here Lichtenberg outlines a two-step process of writing that proceeds from the “waste book,” in which everything is to be written down, to a “ledger at double entrance,” in which the disordered material in the notebook is to be carried over into a ledger in order to be further ordered and refined. The method of text production which Lichtenberg cites in this remark derives on the one hand from the economic discourse of double-entry bookkeeping – here he speaks explicitly of the transactions between “credit” and “debtor” – and on the other hand – as suggested by the first mention

³⁸ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 341f [from D 668]. The significance of this list of words and phrases at the end of Notebook “D” extends further. In a later entry in Notebook “E,” Lichtenberg speaks without comment of “allen meinen Hudelbüchern,” in which he has gathered remarks in order to write a historiography. *Hudelbuch* is here a variant of *Sudelbuch* and likewise means *common place book*. *Hudeln* already appears, however, in the list in Notebook “D,” in which the word “Sudelbuch” is introduced as a “common place book”: “hinhudeln, Hudler” and also in a list of words that end with the suffix “-ei”: “*Bücherei* statt Bibliothek / *Eselei* / *Faselei* / *Hudelei*, *Humpelei* / *Klügelei* / *Sudelei* / *Witzelei*” (ibid., 342f [from D 668]).

³⁹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 352 [E 46]. It should be noted that the material published by the editor Wolfgang Promies as “Sudelbücher” in the first two volumes of his edition was not originally conceived by Lichtenberg to ever be published under this title. Lichtenberg starts using the term “Sudelbuch” on the title page of his notebooks only in Notebook “F,” and then inserts the term for the first time in Notebook “D.”

of the term “Sudelbuch,” in which the parenthetical explanation “common place book” is added – from the rhetorical discourse of excerpting and collectanea.⁴⁰

As Lichtenberg’s explanation for his use of the term “waste book” might suggest, the contents of these notebooks are extraordinarily heterogeneous: on any given page the reader may encounter aphoristic aperçus, lists of the titles of books to be read or purchased, important dates to be remembered, philosophical reflections, linguistic experiments of witty combinatories, notes for future work, quotations or excerpts from other books or magazines, as well as scientific illustrations and sketches. For this reason, it would be exceedingly difficult to summarize the diverse contents of the *Sudelbücher*. Nonetheless, it can be said with relative certainty what they are not: diaries. Lichtenberg also kept private diaries, albeit on an irregular basis compared to his notebooks, and the descriptions of the day-to-day events of his life which they contain bear little connection to the heterogeneous form of entries found in his notebooks.⁴¹

Admittedly, there is, however, one important way in which Lichtenberg’s diaries, or *Tagebücher*, and his notebooks are similar: although he published much during his lifetime – in addition to countless scientific treatises on subjects ranging from physics, astronomy, geology, physiognomy, and even drone technology,⁴² as well as non-scientific texts, such as his *Briefe aus*

⁴⁰ Cf. Heike Meyer, *Lichtenbergs Rhetorik. Beitrag zu einer Geschichte rhetorischer Kollektaneen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Liliom, 1999), 109.

⁴¹ A selection of the contents of these diaries can be found in the second volume of Lichtenberg’s *Schriften und Briefe*. See in particular Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 595–859. Unlike his *Sudelbücher*, Lichtenberg only irregularly contributed entries to these diaries. Furthermore, the entries found in these diaries concern mostly private, everyday matters, including his encounters and conversations with friends, colleagues or acquaintances, astronomical observations, as well as travelogues, most of which he – again, in contrast to the *Sudelbücher* – consistently dated. More specifically, these diaries contain a travelogue kept from 1770 to 1774, the “Reise-Tagebuch” (ibid., 621–35) from his second trip to England, which accompanies the “Reise-Anmerkungen” (ibid., 639–93) from Sudelbuch “E,” and finally the calendrical entries dated from 1789 to 1799, which bear the title “Königl. Groß-Britannisch- und Churfürstl. Braunschweig-Lüneburgschen Staats-Kalenders” (ibid., 695–859).

⁴² Cf. Lichtenberg, “Vermischte Gedanken über die aërostatischen Maschinen, von G. C. L.,” in: idem., *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 3, 63–75. There Lichtenberg hypothesizes the invention of a self-piloted “ball,” projected into the atmosphere, that could harness the clouds and other weather phenomena for movement and be guided by signals, “also keine Luftschiffe mit Segel und Steuer-Ruder,” as Lichtenberg writes, “sondern bloße Bälle, die an einem Leitseil über die

England (1776 and 1778) and his book on William Hogarth's copperplate embossments, *G. C. Lichtenbergs ausführliche Erklärung der Hogarthischen Kupferstiche* (1794–99) – the notebooks in which he wrote down his “remarks” were kept private, entirely for his own use, with no thought of publication. Hence, just as much as the *Sudelbücher* are not private diaries, they also cannot be easily situated as a precursor to the literary tradition of the autofictional diary, as one finds in the work of twentieth-century writers like André Gide and Ernst Jünger. Only posthumously were fragments from Lichtenberg's *Sudelbücher* released to the reading public, first under the title *Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's Vermischte Schriften* (first edition: 1800–06; second edition: 1844–53), as in the literary tradition of the miscellany or collected edition, and later by Albert Leitzmann, the editor of the first critical edition of Lichtenberg's notebooks, who from 1902 to 1908 published Lichtenberg's private, unclassifiable notebooks based on hand-written manuscripts under the new title *Georg Christoph Lichtenbergs Aphorismen*.⁴³

Since then, Lichtenberg has been credited, if largely by accident, with having introduced the aphorism into German literature, despite the fact that he did so posthumously and without any deliberate intent. To apply the concept of “aphorism,” as Leitzmann did, or of “Gedankenbuch,” as in the case of Franz H. Mautner,⁴⁴ to Lichtenberg's notebooks is therefore highly misleading. Lichtenberg did not compose aphorisms in the sense of *maximes*, as in the tradition of the French

Wolken hinaus mit und ohne Menschen steigen, und auf gegebene Signale hin und her und auch herabgezogen werden können” (ibid., 69). Lichtenberg suggests that such an invention would not only be of great scientific importance, but would also have self-evident military applications, namely for the purposes of reconnaissance (see in particular ibid., 70–71).

⁴³ The publication of Leitzmann's edition of Lichtenberg's notebooks took place between 1902 and 1908 and was broken up into five separate volumes in the *Deutsche Literaturdenkmale*. Cf. *Deutsche Literaturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Bernhard Seuffert and August Seuffert, Nr. 123, 131, 136, 140, 141.

⁴⁴ See Lichtenberg, *Gedankenbücher*, ed. Franz H. Mautner (Heidelberg 1967). The term “Gedankenbuch,” which Friedrich Nicolai applied to his diary entries, appears only once in Lichtenberg's *Sudelbücher*: “Wenn ich zuweilen in einem meiner alten Gedankenbücher einen guten Gedanken vor mir lese, so wundere ich mich, wie er mir und meinem System so fremd hat werden können, und freue ich mich nun so darüber, wie über einen Gedanken eines meiner *Vorfahren*” (Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 404 [K 44]).

moralists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Chamfort), nor do his remarks “anticipate” the romantic fragment, as developed by Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, among others, who drew on Kant’s theory of the sublime to transform the fragment into a transcendental genre, which gained epistemological significance around 1800 as a linguistic critique of systematic philosophy.⁴⁵ While there is an undeniable proximity between Lichtenberg’s remarks and aspects of the contemporaneous concept of the romantic aphorism, particularly with respect to their brevity (*brevitas*) and wit (*ingenium, esprit*),⁴⁶ only once does Lichtenberg in fact use the term “aphorism” to describe the form of his entries found in the *Sudelbücher*. Instead, he most often speaks of “remarks” [Bemerkungen], as well as occasionally of “whims” [Einfälle], “thoughts” [Gedanken] or “ideas” [Ideen]. In contrast to the romantic aphorism, which owes its poetic obscurity and potential for infinite reflection precisely to its unique formal closure as a “selbständiges Gebilde,”⁴⁷ Lichtenberg’s remarks are not thought in isolation

⁴⁵ For more on the genre of the fragment, especially with respect to its pre-Romantic forms, cf. Justus Fetscher, “Fragment,” in: *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Ein Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, vol. 2, eds. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2001), 551–88.

⁴⁶ In addition to the countless passages in the *Sudelbücher* in which Lichtenberg performs witty combinatories, in one remark from Notebook “E” he speaks of a hailstorm of epigrams with reference to his own “witty writings”: “Witzige Schriften wollten sie. Da regnete blitzte und hagelte es Epigramme” (Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 365 [E 111]). Furthermore, in Notebook “J,” he links “wit” to both the rhetorical technique of *inventio* – in the sense of the discovery of arguments and their “realia” – and to the *techné* of observation: “Der Witz ist der *Finder* (Finder) und der Verstand der Beobachter” (ibid., vol. 2, 297 [J_{II} 1620]) and requests “*einen Finder zu erfinden für alle Dinge*” (ibid. [J_{II} 1621]), that is, “[e]in *Tubus Heuristicus*” (ibid. [J_{II} 1622]), a ‘heuristic telescope.’ While more will be said about Lichtenberg’s ‘wit’ in the subsequent chapter, it suffices to note that contemporaneous writers also perceived his writings as ‘witty.’ Thus in a passage from the first edition of the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804), Jean Paul speaks of Lichtenberg’s “witty abundance”: “Lichtenberg stand doch mit seinen humoristischen Kräften höher, als er wußte, und hätte bei seiner astronomischen Ansicht des Welttreibens und bei seiner witzigen Überfülle vielleicht etwas Höheres der Welt zeigen können als zwei Flügel im Äther, welche sich zwar bewegen, aber mit zusammengeklebten Schwungfedern” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 128). Furthermore, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s review of Lichtenberg’s *Vermischte Schriften* from 1801 speaks of “witzigen Wendungen” with respect to Lichtenberg’s “Bemerkungen,” “Selbstbeobachtungen” and “Einfälle” (cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermachers Leben. In Briefen*, 4 vols., 1863, 561–67, cited in Spicker, *Der Aphorismus*, 67).

⁴⁷ W. A. Berendsohn, *Stil und Form der Aphorismen Lichtenberg. Ein Baustein zur Geschichte des deutschen Aphorismus* (Kiel 1912), 17, cited in Heinz Krüger, *Über den Aphorismus als philosophische Form* (Munich 1988), 14. For more on this point, see Rudolf Wildbolz, “Über Lichtenbergs Kurzformen,” in: *Geschichte. Deutung. Kritik*, ed. Maria Bindschedler and Paul Zinsli (Bern 1969), 126; Friedemann Spicker, *Der Aphorismus: Begriff und Gattung von der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts bis 1912* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), esp. 60–67.

from one another as individual apothegms, nor do they anticipate – in their fragmentary, draft-like composition – a future completed work or ‘whole’; rather, in their chaotic disorder and wild proliferation they become entangled within constellations of other remarks. Lichtenberg himself referred to such semantic clusters as a “Wörter-Welt”⁴⁸ – “[e]ine ganze Milchstraße von Einfälle,”⁴⁹ which secretly proliferate and extend into a myriad of “[g]litzernden Wörtchen.”⁵⁰

Recently, studies of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg’s writings in the history of science have shifted focus away from questions of literary genre – particularly the application of the genre designation “aphorism,” as found in much of the literary scholarship on Lichtenberg’s writings⁵¹ – toward the rhetorical tradition of book-keeping and practices of scientific note-taking. This new scholarship situates Lichtenberg’s writing within a broader historical context of scientific note-taking practices in the early modern period. A reference to this tradition can be found in Lichtenberg’s own notebooks, namely at the end of Notebook “D,” where he uses the word “Sudelbuch” as a satirical variant for the “common place book.”⁵² A tradition of excerpt books is thereby alluded to, to which Lichtenberg’s own manner of writing is said to be closely connected. Thus Ann M.

⁴⁸ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 706 [J₁ 357].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 704 [J₁ 344].

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 798 [J₁ 1033].

⁵¹ See, for instance, Franz H. Mautner, *Lichtenberg: Bildnis seines Geistes* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), Friedemann Spicker, *Der Aphorismus*, Gerhard Neumann, *Ideenparadiese*, and Thomas Stötzel, *Rohe und polierte Gedanken. Studien zur Wirkungsweise aphoristischer Texte* (Freiburg i. B. 1998).

⁵² Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 341f [D 668]. While the use of the term “commonplace book,” the *loci communes* of the topical tradition, dates back to the early modern period in Europe, it was not until the 18th century that they became a widespread information-management device in which writers entered quotations, observations and definitions according to pre-established *topoi*. Significant in this historical context is the publication of John Locke’s *A New Method of Making Common-Place-Books* (1706), in which scholarly techniques for common placing were first programmatically formulated and presented as a model for other scholars to imitate. For more on the history of commonplace books and the practice of common-placing in the Renaissance, cf. Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). See also Earle Havens, “‘Of Common Places, Or Memorial Books’: An Anonymous Manuscript on Commonplace Books and the Art of Memory in Seventeenth-Century England,” in: *Yale University Library Gazette* (April 2002), 136–53.

Blair, in her formidable study of information management from antiquity to the early modern period, shows how scholars in the early modern period often referred to the merchant practice of double-entry bookkeeping as a model for their own note-taking practices – a model which was subsequently popularized in the 18th century by William Webster’s influential handbook, *An essay on book-keeping* (1719), whose advocacy for a three-layered note-taking method Blair links in passing to Lichtenberg’s *Sudelbücher*.⁵³ Along these lines, Lorraine Daston similarly situates Lichtenberg’s writing in the context of encyclopedic and scientific excerpting practices, where the excerpting of individual sentences or groups of sentences from their original context can be turned into a counterpart to observation and thereby a means for producing new knowledge.⁵⁴ For Daston, the “miscellaneous, overflowing, and decontextualized quality of Lichtenberg’s waste-book entries, in which excerpts from books often mix with excerpts from nature on the same page”⁵⁵ – a technique of juxtaposition that bears a striking resemblance to the 18th-century practice of collecting heterogeneous objects in natural history cabinets – can in this way become a technique for producing new facts and ideas.

In a recent essay on Lichtenberg’s *Sudelbücher*, Rüdiger Campe argues that while the approaches to the notebooks in recent historical-scientific studies (the excerpting-practice thesis) have successfully refuted the anachronistic readings of the notebooks by literary theorists as romantic aphorisms (the aphorism thesis), both approaches threaten to overlook the process through which and in which the “Sudelbuch” itself emerges. As Campe emphasizes in that essay, if one examines Lichtenberg’s text production more closely, it becomes clear that only a few examples

⁵³ Cf. Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2010), in particular 68–69.

⁵⁴ Cf. Lorraine Daston, “The Disciplines of Attention,” in: *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David Wellbery (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 434–40; idem., “Taking Note(s),” in: *Isis* 95 (2004), 443–48.

⁵⁵ Daston, “The Disciplines of Attention,” 438.

can be found in which Lichtenberg might have developed a “remark” from one of his waste books into a finished text. Campe therefore argues that the characteristic element of Lichtenberg’s waste-book method lies not in the successive development of a thought first in the “waste book” and then in the literary equivalent of the businessman’s ledger, but rather that the *Sudelbücher* show the emergence of a process of “prolepsis and analepsis” [Vorgreifen und Zurückgreifen] that, especially in Notebook “E,” unfolds in the space of the notebook itself.⁵⁶ As *formal practices* – processes which, according to Campe, concern the “emergence of their repeatability” – their interaction allows for the form of the “Sudelbuch” to emerge in that the flipping back and forth between pages furnishes a space of finding and invention [Erfindung].⁵⁷

The following chapter takes up Campe’s thesis insofar as it draws attention to the processes of writing immanent to Lichtenberg’s own notebooks, rather than their relation to later textual production. Yet whereas Campe examines the emergence of the “Sudelbuch” as an inductive form-principle with respect to a system of cross-referencing – that is, of prolepsis and analepsis as “simple forms”⁵⁸ of note-taking – the focus of this chapter will be on the *material contingency* of the remarks in Lichtenberg’s notebooks: in other words, with the form of the *thought-experiment*, which connects imaginary seeing with the possibility and limits of thinking.⁵⁹ As is well known, Lichtenberg experimented in his notebooks with an entire series of forms – two-columned lists, tables, diagrams, litanies of paronomasias, aleatory clusters of words, and other forms of organiz-

⁵⁶ Rüdiger Campe. “Vorgreifen und Zurückgreifen. Zur Emergenz des Sudelbuchs in Georg Christoph Lichtenbergs ‘Heft E,’” in: *Notieren, Skizzieren. Schreiben und Zeichnen als Verfahren des Entwurfs*, eds. Karin Krautcausen and Omar W. Nasim (Zurich: diaphenes, 2010), 61–88, in particular 76 and 78.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵⁸ For more on the concept “simple forms” [einfache Formen], cf. André Jolles, *Einfache Formen: Legende, Sage, Mythe, Rätsel, Spruch, Kasus, Memorabile, Märchen, Witz* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968).

⁵⁹ Cf. Sigrid Weigel, “Das Gedankenexperiment: Nagelprobe auf die *facultas fingendi* in Wissenschaft und Literatur,” in: *Science & Fiction: über Gedankenexperimente in Wissenschaft, Philosophie und Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2004), 183–205.

ing writing. Unlike the aphorism, such configurations of linguistic material – i.e., evidentiary tableaux – do not submit themselves to the subordinating rules of syntax; instead, they follow a paratactical logic of contiguity, seriality, and juxtaposition.

As Campe has meticulously demonstrated, the same could be said for the form of the “notebook” [Heft] itself; for what we today call Lichtenberg’s *Sudelbücher A, B, C* and so forth are, in reality, nothing but a disparate collection of handwritten notebooks – what Hans-Jörg Rheinberger calls the *Zettelwirtschaft* of the laboratory situation.⁶⁰ Only in what we now call Notebook “D” does the letter appear in fact as a classificatory label for the first time, though not at the beginning of the notebook, but rather in the middle.⁶¹ Not coincidentally, it is precisely at that point where the general observations – what the traditional interpretation of the *Sudelbücher* as a collection of aphorisms takes as its point of departure – begin. In the first half of the notebook, one finds instead “Annotationes et collectanea philosophica et physica,” after which point follows the first part of the travelogue of Lichtenberg’s trip to England from September 29, 1774 to April 15, 1775, followed by several entries on the theory of fire. Only then do the entries on physics transition into those general or ‘literary’ entries – prefaced by the inserted letter “D” – which subsequent editions of Lichtenberg’s notebooks call *Sudelbuch D*.⁶² The letter as a label of the notebook appears, however, first in Notebook “E” on the cover and first page. From that point on, all the notebooks are

⁶⁰ Cf. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, “Zettelwirtschaft,” in: *Schreiben als Kulturtechnik*, ed. Sandro Zanetti (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 441–52. In that essay, Rheinberger speaks in particular of “notes” [Zettel] and “drafts” [Entwürfe] as the written material of the experimental system: “Sie liegen zwischen den Materialitäten der Experimentalsysteme einerseits und den begrifflichen und narrativen Gebäuden andererseits, die als sanktionierte Forschungsberichte den unmittelbaren Kontext des Labors verlassen” (ibid., 442).

⁶¹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 227 [D 1]. One must keep in mind that that the entries which the editor Wolfgang Promies printed form the second part of the notebook, whose first part forms the “Annotationes et collectanea philosophica et physica.” Hence D 1 is actually in the middle of the notebook.

⁶² In his edition of the *Sudelbücher*, Promies includes the physical “Annotationes,” yet he relegates them – along with Lichtenberg’s “Reise-Tagebuch” from 1774–75 – to the second volume of the *Sudelbücher*. In doing so, his edition yields a confusing representation which follows neither the original sequence of text nor leads to a more comprehensible reorganization of the material.

marked by letters; notebooks “A,” “B,” and “C,” were in fact never ascribed these labels by Lichtenberg, but added by later editors. One can therefore read Notebook “E” as the decisive turning point in the emergence of the “Sudelbuch”: there Lichtenberg discovers for the first time a new form of simultaneous inscription for the separation of entries. Yet in contrast to Notebook “D,” which carries out a similar operation – namely, the separation of physical and literary notes – in Notebook “E,” it is the travel diary and the remarks, be they scientific or literary, which are simultaneously separated and related to each other.⁶³

Thus when Lichtenberg conceived of the “Sudelbuch” as a form, he did so under the condition that scientific and literary modes of reflection need not be strictly separated. This does not mean, however, that Lichtenberg was a pre-modern – or at the very least, a pre-Kantian – thinker, who did not acknowledge that literature and science entail different modes and conditions of epistemological inquiry. Quite to the contrary, it was precisely on the basis of the scientific method that Lichtenberg, who was himself just as much an experimental physicist as he was a satirist, vehemently criticized Johann Caspar Lavater’s physiognomy for its naive insistence on an immediate legibility of man.⁶⁴ Instead, whereas in Notebook “D” scientific and literary inscriptions are

⁶³ In Notebook “F,” Lichtenberg returns once more to the one-directional and unseparated practice of inscription which he used in the notebooks prior to the turning point in Notebook “E” – those which Promies’s edition calls “A,” “B,” and “C.” Starting with Notebook “J,” however, one sees a return to the practice of two-directional inscription from Notebook “D” with the allocation of remarks into scientific and literary categories.

⁶⁴ Cf. Lichtenberg, “Über Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen. Zu Beförderung der Menschenliebe und Menschenkenntniß,” in: idem., *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 3, 256–95. There Lichtenberg observes that it is in fact not only the scientific method, but also the creative capacities of the imagination and wit that can be directed against physiognomy; for whereas physiognomy obscures its semiotics, imagination and wit can make the mechanics of idea-association – the basis of all physiognomic thought – conceivable: “Wollten wir die Leute, von denen wir nach dem ersten Anblick urteilen, alle durch jahrlangen, genauen Umgang prüfen, ich glaube, es würde der Physiognomik ärger ergehen, als der Astrologie. Einbildungskraft und Witz kommen hierbei gefährlich zu statten, daher sind die tiefsten Denker gemeinlich die schlechtesten Physiognomen. Sie sind mit einer flüchtigen Ähnlichkeit nicht so leicht befriedigt, da der flüchtige Physiognome in jedem Dintenfleck ein Gesicht und in jedem Gesicht eine Bedeutung findet. Alles dieses ist aus Ideen-Assoziation begreiflich” (283f). For more on Lichtenberg’s conflict with Lavater and its broader epistemological significance for the 18th and 19th centuries, cf. Wolfram Groddeck and Ulrich Stadler (eds.), *Physiognomie und Pathognomie. Zur literarischen Darstellung von Individualität* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter,

first separated into two distinct themes – thereby making the basic condition of modern knowledge-production into a process of writing – in Notebook “E” he reflects on what it would mean to conceive of scholarly writing according to a model of double-entry bookkeeping. In doing so, he adopts the division of inverse directions of writing between the natural and the human sciences in the preceding notebook in order to separate travelogue from collectanea, at which point this two-directional writing process is now bound instead to individual themes and single motifs that, despite their separation, can in fact be shown to relate to each other.⁶⁵

Against this background, the following chapter takes Lichtenberg’s use of the word “remark” [Bemerkung] as significant to the extent that it simultaneously connotes techniques of observation and inscription – in other words, the foundational praxes of the modern scientific experiment – which, as Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and others have shown, are of epistemological significance not only to the natural sciences, but also to the human sciences.⁶⁶ How observation and inscription interact and, moreover, what kinds of heterogeneous life-forms manifest themselves at the threshold of writing and observation, will be examined in light of the ‘laboratory conditions’ of Lichtenberg’s form experiment: these include evaluation and implementation with the aid of criteria such as magnification, reduction, contrast, as well as interactions with written material – i.e., the *Zettelwirtschaft* of the *Sudelbücher*. As will be argued, it is principally the form of the thought-experiment that presents itself in Lichtenberg’s notebooks, namely as a process of writing whose contingency manifests itself at the material level. There idea or observation and its written

1994). See also: Helmut Pfotenhauer, “Sich selber schreiben. Lichtenbergs fragmentarisches Ich,” in: *Um 1800. Konfigurationen der Literatur, Kunstliteratur, und Ästhetik*, ed. Helmut Pfotenhauer (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1991), 5–26, in particular 7–12, as well as Albrecht Schöne, *Aufklärung aus dem Geist der Experimentalphysik: Lichtenbergsche Konjunktive* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1993), in particular 1–15.

⁶⁵ For more on this point, see Campe, “Vorgreifen und Zurückgreifen,” in particular 86–87.

⁶⁶ Cf. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Experimentalsysteme und epistemische Dinge. Eine Geschichte der Proteinsynthese im Reagenzglas* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), in particular 1–34.

inscription or linguistic materiality (i.e., its trace-like structure) – the epistemological and the material – are not disaggregated or filtered from one another, as literary scholars have traditionally approached the *Sudelbücher*, but intimately intertwined. Such a perspective onto the experimental procedures of writing in Lichtenberg's notebooks reveals how forms disintegrate into a series of smaller, microscopic forms, which are characterized not by the fixity of genre, but by the restless, vibrant dynamism of writing as processes of formation and deformation.

2. “DIE KLEINEN INFUSIONS-IDEENCHEN.” ON THE MATERIALITY OF THE THOUGHT-EXPERIMENT IN THE SUDELBÜCHER

Der Deutsche holt bei Beschreibung psychologischer Dinge vieles vom *Fallen*, es *fällt* mir *ein*, es ist mir *entfallen*, es ist mir *aufgefallen*. Zufall, casus accidit. Beifall.⁶⁷

—Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Sudelbücher*, Notebook “J”

In his *Sudelbücher*, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg articulates his remarks from the perspective of a modern scientist, namely that of an experimental physicist (in addition to a prolific writer of witty remarks, Lichtenberg was employed as a professor of mathematics and physics at the University of Göttingen), by reflecting on the microscopically small objects and experiences encountered in everyday life and attempting to look at them from awry. For Lichtenberg, the scientific perspective unto the quotidian consists not in reducing the complexity of everyday phenomena to abstract mathematical formulas – an operation of which Lichtenberg himself was highly skeptical – but entails instead a constant reversal of perspective. Although the formal technique of re-perspectivization has a well-established history within the genre tradition of the modern aphorism – particularly the *maximes* of the French moralists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries⁶⁸ – it also belongs to the epistemology of the modern sciences and constitutes in this context a form of experimental thinking that means seeing things in a different way. In Notebook “A” (1765–1770) of his *Sudelbücher*, Lichtenberg explicitly links re-perspectivization to the epistemic space of the microscope: “Dinge die man täglich vor Augen sieht von einer andern Seite zu betrachten, oder vielmehr durch ein Vergrößerungs-Glas anzusehen ist oft ein Mittel die Welt mit Erfolg zu lehren.

⁶⁷ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 679 [J₁ 180].

⁶⁸ “Wie später der Naturforscher Lichtenberg, so sieht auch Pascal [die Problematik des Verhältnisses von Einzelnem und Allgemeinem] unter dem Bild der sich verschiebenden Perspektiven von Nah- und Fernsicht” (Neumann, *Ideenparadiese*, 57).

Ledermüllerische Belustigungen ließen sich auch in der Moral schreiben. Ein solches Mikroskop würde uns unglaubliche Dinge zeigen.”⁶⁹

By putting the objects and experiences of “common life”⁷⁰ [gemeines Leben] under the same epistemic conditions of observation as the physico-scientific phenomena that he studies in his laboratory in Göttingen, Lichtenberg’s writing seeks to open up a microscopic perspective onto reality itself. Its object is no longer the determination of universal propositions, as it arguably was for French moralists like La Rochefoucauld or La Bruyère,⁷¹ but rather the minimal differences or “deviations” [Abweichungen] from perceived or accepted wisdom (*doxa*). In Notebook “A,” Lichtenberg explicitly stages this epistemological problematic as the starting point for his own practice of recording “witty thoughts” [witzige Gedanken] into notebooks. As he writes in the first entry found in that notebook: “Der große Kunstgriff kleine Abweichungen von der Wahrheit für die Wahrheit selbst zu halten, worauf die ganze Differential-Rechnung gebaut ist, ist auch zugleich der Grund unsrer witzigen Gedanken, wo oft das Ganze hinfallen würde, wenn wir die Abweichungen in einer philosophischen Strenge nehmen würden.”⁷²

Although Lichtenberg’s skeptical critique of dogmatic reasoning in the above remark seems to confirm the widespread impression of him as a quintessential figure of the Enlightenment, his reference to differential calculus [Differential-Rechnung] in this passage hints at an idiosyncratic train of thought within his own writing, one which does not in fact seek to oppose reason to

⁶⁹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 27 [A₁ 78]. Here Lichtenberg refers to the Enlightenment jurist and naturalist Martin Frobenius Ledermüller’s well-known scientific treatise of microscopic studies, entitled *Mikroskopische Gemüths- und Augen-Ergötzung* (1761–62).

⁷⁰ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 11 [from A₁ 11].

⁷¹ For a more complex and thorough reading of the *maximes* of the French moralists (Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, and La Bruyère, amongst others) and their broader relation to the cultural poetics of a “transcendental moralistic” in the 18th and 19th centuries, cf. Neumann, *Ideenparadiese*, in particular 56–68.

⁷² Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 9 [A₁ 1].

whimsy but rather to open up the play-space for contingency in thought – and writing – by distinguishing between the “truth” (logic) and its “minimal deviations” (i.e., witty thoughts, *witzige Gedanken*). Although Lichtenberg suggests that “philosophical rigor” [philosophischen Strenge] would eliminate such deviations from the truth, he nonetheless imbues the latter with a certain degree of epistemic productivity, one that is grounded in the art of free association, i.e., the faculty of wit. What interests Lichtenberg in the semblance of truth (*Schein des Wahren*) is not so much the moralist distinction between truth (the whole) and (self-)deception (witty thoughts), therefore, but rather the cultivation of an epistemic space – and an experimental process of writing – which orients itself according to the probabilistic procedures of games of chance, i.e., probability calculations (*Wahrscheinlichkeitsrechnungen*).

2.1. Dr. Lichtenberg, the Gambler

In language strikingly similar to the above-cited remark from Notebook “A,” Lichtenberg chose to discuss at length in his 1770 inaugural address at the University of Göttingen – it was in that year that he was named Professor Extraordinarius of Physics and Mathematics – the limits to eliminating minimal deviations in probability calculations according to purely mathematical means.⁷³ The talk, entitled *Betrachtungen über einige Methoden, eine gewisse Schwierigkeit in der Berechnung der Wahrscheinlichkeit beim Spiel zu heben*, addresses a topic that in Lichtenberg’s life time was already well-known as the “St. Petersburg Paradox” and the subject of much controversy among mathematicians. There he describes the problem as follows:

Die Aufgabe [...] ist folgende: Zwo Personen A und B werfen eine Münze in die Höhe, die z. E. auf der einen Seite mit 1 und auf der andern mit 0 bezeichnet sein soll. A, der die erste Münze wirft, verspricht dem B einen Taler, wenn 1 im ersten Wurf fällt, 2 Taler wenn es erst im zweiten Wurf, 4 Taler wenn es erst im dritten,

⁷³ Cf. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, “Betrachtungen über einige Methoden, eine gewisse Schwierigkeit in der Berechnung der Wahrscheinlichkeit beim Spiel zu heben,” in: idem., *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 3, 9–23.

8 wenn es erst im vierten fällt, kurz, sollte es erst im n^{ten} Wurf fallen, so bezahlt A an B 2^{n-1} Taler, und sollte n auch noch so groß sein, sie wollen so lange werfen bis 1 fällt. Die Frage ist: wieviel Gewinn kann sich B wahrscheinlicher Weise hieraus versprechen, oder wieviel muß der dem A voraus bezahlen, daß sich dieser ohne Schaden in ein solches Spiel einlassen kann.⁷⁴

Lichtenberg's decision to address precisely this topic is far from coincidental – nor, as will soon become apparent, is its synchronicity with the end-composition of Notebook “A.” For in the Age of Reason, at the zenith of the Enlightenment, the rise, transformation, and diffusion of probabilistic and statistical thinking pressed man increasingly into the role of a player – a “gamester,” per the eponymously-titled novel by Daniel Defoe⁷⁵ – who had to assess and conjecture the risks of actions using rational and quantifiable criteria, i.e., he or she now had to learn how to orient his or her subjective decisions according to objective probabilities of occurrence, either of unwanted or hoped for events.⁷⁶ This Enlightenment program, which in Pierre Simon de Laplace's words meant “nothing more at bottom than good sense reduced to a calculus”⁷⁷ [n'est, au fond, que le bon sens réduit au calcul], can be discerned in countless texts throughout the 18th century, yet with revealing shifts and developments nevertheless: at the turn of that century, the particular situation of an individual, decision-making subject did not yet play a role in mathematical discourse. Rather, the prevailing theories of probability at the time, as developed by thinkers such as Laplace and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, proscribed in each case only one compulsory, rational course of action for all men. However, this fixed criterium of rationality all too often stood in clear contradiction to the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10f.

⁷⁵ Daniel Defoe, *The Gamester: A Benefit-Ticket for all that are concern'd in the Lotteries* (London 1719).

⁷⁶ Cf. Lorenz Krüger, Lorraine Daston, Michael Heidelberger, Gerd Gigerenzer, and Mary Morgan (eds.), *The Probabilistic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987). See also: Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁷⁷ Pierre Simon de Laplace, *Essai philosophique sur les Probabilités* [1814], in: *Œuvres complètes de Laplace*, tome VII (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1878-1912), 220.

rational decision-making of concrete individuals. This eventually led to Daniel Bernoulli's successful effort in the 1730s to develop a mathematical formula that made it possible to account for risk aversion based on the individual financial situation of participating players.⁷⁸ Bernoulli thereby demonstrated by mathematical means that a specific game could be played rationally by different players in different ways.

Although this new method, which went on to attain canonical status in the 18th century, far more successfully adapted to particular circumstances of decision-making situations, it also entailed a simplification through abstraction. As Bernoulli himself conceded, there could be certain cases where the mere ascertainment of an individual's financial situation no longer suffices as the criterium for a rational judgment; for the standard of rationality can be modified not only by *external* circumstances, but also by *internal* ones. This makes it conceivable that, at least in some cases, even seemingly irrational decisions – despite all objective anomalies having been taken into account – could nevertheless appear rational. Such a judgment would, however, not be capable of being realized by mathematical means, as Lichtenberg argued in his inaugural address, which deals explicitly with Bernoulli's probability problem. What distinguishes Lichtenberg's 1770 solution to this paradox from those of his predecessors and contemporaries is that he not only discusses it from the perspective of mathematical-theoretical statistics, but now incorporates empirical experiences from experimentation into his own "observations" [Betrachtungen]. In doing so, he introduces in his treatise the newly discovered techniques of knowledge-production not from the field of mathematics, but from the experimental sciences of the eighteenth-century, into a once purely

⁷⁸ Daniel Bernoulli, *Specimen Theoriae novae de Mensura Sortis* [1738], in: *Commentarii Academiae Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitanae*, Tomus V [Papers of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Petersburg, Vol. V], 175–192; "Exposition of a New Theory on the Measurement of Risk," in: *Econometrica*, 22.1 (1954), 23–36.

theoretical controversy. By relating theoretical-mathematical problems to the seemingly improbable contingencies of natural circumstances from the physical world – during his experiments, for instance, the physically unlikely occurrence of a coin landing on its edge is recorded – Lichtenberg makes evident the purpose of his treatise as a “Beispiel zur Erläuterung seiner Ansichten über das Verhältnis zwischen Natur und Mathematik”:

Der Meßkünstler findet nicht selten bei der Anwendung seiner Schlüsse auf die Natur, merkliche Abweichungen von dem, was er nach seiner Rechnung hätte erwarten sollen. [...] Er abstrahiert sich von dieser Welt eine eigne, von welcher er die Gesetzbücher gleichsam selbst in Händen hat; keine Kraft kann in derselben wirken, ehe er sie selbst hinein legt; er weiß was überall geschieht, und aus seinen Formeln liest er Weissagungen ab; ohne ein Wunder hebt er Gesetze auf, verordnet andere, und gibt seiner Welt jede Gestalt die er will [...] und alles ist so gewiß als die ewigen Wahrheiten, worauf sie sich stützt.⁷⁹

The analogy between empirical experiences in the experiment and nature itself opens up the possibility that the mathematician would come to relativize his own “laws” [Gesetze] and worldview as determined by abstract models and formulas. For despite such proficiency in measuring, as soon as the mathematician “den Abstand erwägt von uns bis zu dem, der allein die Gesetzentafeln dieses Ganzen in seiner allmächtigen Hand hält, der wird erkennen, wie unmöglich es ist, sich ein System von Kräften mit allen den unzähligen Beziehungen zu denken, das nicht schon selbst im allgemeinen von diesem wirklichen abweichen sollte.”⁸⁰ By incorporating into his treatise not only experiences with seemingly absurd natural phenomena, but also the “countless relations” [unzählige Beziehungen] that cannot be accounted for within a “system of forces,” Lichtenberg exceeds the boundaries of mathematical thought and makes the case for an experimental form of knowledge, which the actual topic of his treatise seeks to represent.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 3, 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ From this perspective, Lichtenberg’s thought situates itself within the epistemic field of the “probability revolution” around 1700. As Rüdiger Campe has recently argued, theories of probability during this period cannot be divorced

Lichtenberg thus presents in his text not only an “enlightened” inquiry into the limits of Enlightenment thought, but also what can arguably be read as an early poetological program; for it is not only experimental physics which Lichtenberg proposes as the solution for successfully resolving scientific inquiries into mathematical theories of possible worlds (Leibniz), but also an early working-out of his conception of contingency – of *games of chance*. For Lichtenberg, as for other scientific thinkers of the time, the crucial phenomenon to be taken into account in this regard was that of subjectivity, which only first with the solution to the “St. Petersburg Paradox” appeared to have become mathematically accessible. Yet as Lichtenberg decisively demonstrated in his address, subjectivity cannot in fact be made discursively comprehensible by means of purely mathematical attempts at calculating human behavioral decisions. For in the course of these attempts, more and more statistical exceptions to and subjective deviations from the theoretical models became apparent, such that being able to grasp the subject’s behavior through mathematical formulas appeared as an increasingly hopeless effort, gradually leading, in turn, to the exorcism of the “dark continent” of individual subjectivity from the field of mathematics. Because the individual deviations and distortions that become observable in the context of games of chance were not capable of being grasped mathematically, the phenomena of subjectivity – thoughts, sensations, and mental presentations – fell increasingly under an entirely different epistemic purview, namely that of psychology and anthropology.⁸²

from aesthetic questions, in particular those dealing with the representation of reality (*Wirklichkeit*). According to Campe, because the calculable and construable world can never entirely free itself from perceivable reality, the issues of mathematical probability, including the new science of statistics, and problems of representing reality in the novel are fundamentally interrelated. For more on theoretical questions pertaining to probability as a mathematical and narrative issue from Pascal to Kleist, cf. Rüdiger Campe, *Spiel der Wahrscheinlichkeit. Literatur und Berechnung zwischen Pascal und Kleist* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002).

⁸² For more on this point as well as its significance for later developments in the field of probabilistic theory, namely the application of measuring and calculation techniques through frequency distributions at the macroscopic level of society, as opposed to microscopic level of the individual, see Lorraine Daston, “Rational Individuals versus Laws of Society. From Probability to Statistics,” in: *The Probabilistic Revolution*, 295–304.

2.2. *The Blitz of Witz: Lichtenberg's "Experimental Thinking"*

Returning to the *Sudelbücher*, it suffices to say that it is precisely on account of the fact that, for Lichtenberg, the acting subject who makes decisions cannot be reduced to a calculable formula that contingency attains such a central role with regard to the idiosyncratic procedure of writing that unfolds in the space of his notebooks. By opening up the play-space in his note-taking practice for the epistemic legitimacy of logically ungrounded “witty thoughts,” he arrives at an iconoclastic conception of the subject that departs in crucial respects from his Enlightenment contemporaries. Whereas in the context of theoretical mathematics he argued that a single theory of probability could not account for the contingencies of subjective decision-making, in the realm of philosophical anthropology he criticized the anchoring of thoughts onto a substantial, unified subject. In one of the most well-known remarks from the *Sudelbücher*, he expresses in this regard his skepticism of the Cartesian subject, the *cogito*. For Lichtenberg, the phrase “I think” [ich denke] disingenuously posits a subject where there might actually be none. He suggests that it might be better, therefore, to say “it thinks” [es denkt], because the *cogito* may consist in nothing but the accumulation of sensations, presentations, and thoughts that cannot be immediately attributable to any fixed or stable “I.” In writing about this “it” [es], Lichtenberg remarks:

Wir werden uns gewisser Vorstellungen bewußt, die nicht von uns abhängen; andere, glauben, wir wenigstens, hingen von uns ab; wo ist die Grenze? Wir kennen nur allein die Existenz unserer Empfindungen, Vorstellungen und Gedanken. *Es denkt*, sollte man sagen, so wie man sagt: *es blitzt*. Zu sagen *cogito*, ist schon zu viel, so bald man es durch *Ich denke* übersetzt. Das *Ich* anzunehmen, zu postulieren, ist praktisches Bedürfnis.⁸³

⁸³ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 412 [K 76].

Lichtenberg's exegesis of the *cogito* in this passage formulates the problem of its recovery from the "it" as one of lost origins. If the subject is ignorant of the origins of its "own" emotions [Empfindungen], mental presentations [Vorstellungen], and thoughts [Gedanken], then it must be equally uncertain about the status of the "I" that thinks that it thinks about them. For Lichtenberg, the "I" is for this reason not a positive, substantial entity, but rather only a postulate assumed out of "practical necessity" [praktisches Bedürfnis]. Correspondingly, thoughts do not belong to the "I" that thinks them, precisely because the "I" only carries out the process of thinking without ever having any certainty as to the ownership of these thoughts. Lichtenberg's conception of thinking contains within it, therefore, an essential moment of not-knowing, insofar as it disperses thoughts from any stable point of origin in the "I." This puts Lichtenberg radically at odds with the Enlightenment tradition of autonomous thinking which he is often taken to epitomize; for rather than taking the route of Cartesian self-reflexivity to ground ideas in a substantial "I," he conceives of thoughts as impersonal, freely-circulating material that does not originate from a subject, but emerge from a network of pre-established topical matrices which at least nominally orient them.⁸⁴ The activity of the "I" – not only the purely eidetic operations of cogitation, but also the activities of reading and writing – is thus conceived primarily as one of re-appropriation and recombination, which actively manipulates and experiments with thoughts as raw material without ever being able to claim them as its own.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Cf. Stefan Goldmann, "Lesen, Schreiben und das topische Denken bei Georg Christoph Lichtenberg," in: *Lesen und Schreiben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Studien zu ihrer Bewertung in Deutschland, England, Frankreich*, ed. Paul Goetsch (Tübingen 1994), 79–90.

⁸⁵ For more on Lichtenberg's epistemology of the subject, see Kirk Wetters, *The Opinion System: Impasses of the Public Sphere from Hobbes to Habermas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), in particular 188–238.

Lichtenberg's insistence on the unsystematic character of thoughts is given form in fragmentary writing. His own understanding of what it means to write a *Sudelbuch* confirms this interpretation; for in addition to "waste book," he also translates this word into the English "commonplace book,"⁸⁶ an apparent reference to the *loci communes* of the topical tradition. The commonplace book is a collection of topical variations, of thoughts and arguments pertaining to pre-established *topoi*. In that same remark, he further reflects on what it would mean to conceive of scholarly writing according to a model of double-entry bookkeeping. Although this analogy suggests that the purpose of his *Sudelbücher* is to create order, with the "waste book" as the site where the raw material is entered and collected in anticipation of its later working-out and sifting-through, the need for such an elaborate method of recording thoughts attests to a fundamental lack of order. In describing his way of writing, Lichtenberg avoids for these reasons hackneyed expressions like "I record my thoughts." Instead, he gives the notion of inscription a more adequate formulation by characterizing it as follows: "Erst ein Buch worin ich alles einschreibe, so wie ich es sehe oder wie es mir meine Gedanken eingeben."⁸⁷ In this well-known remark from Notebook "E," Lichtenberg lays out his two step-process of writing: first, the literal transcription of the thoughts as they occur to him into the "waste book," where everything appears "durch einander ohne Ordnung"⁸⁸; and second, their subsequent refinement and reformulation in the "ledger at double entrance." Yet these two steps ultimately prove to be impossible to differentiate, since not only did Lichtenberg never employ a ledger in which to further refine his thoughts, but the first thought – the raw, unprocessed data that occurs to him – already comes in the form of a "remark." For this reason, he portrays writing and thinking, seeing and remarking, as inseparable within a potentially endless process of

⁸⁶ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 341f [from D 668].

⁸⁷ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 352 [from E 46].

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

transcription and translation. Through this process, the “I” appears not as the one who thinks the thoughts (or thinks itself thinking these thoughts), but is rather revealed to be their bookkeeper and copyist.

In the absence of self-censorship, the endless production and reformulation of thoughts produces nothing but byproducts, detritus. Thoughts present themselves in the “waste books” as raw material, appearing in an unsystematic fashion as draft-like scribbles, as *Sudelei*, rather than as fully-formed thoughts or ideas – a status which the very idea of “waste” already implies. Despite the occasional semblance of order, individual variants of particular *topoi* are put in a more or less arbitrary juxtaposition, or *Nebeneinander*, that follow a serial chronology, or *Nacheinander*. As Lichtenberg’s analogy to the bookkeeping practice of double-entry accounting further suggests, the “waste book” is a balancing of ledgers and a calculation of debts; yet there is no sign of a final accounting between creditor and debtor, no indication that the process will come to an end in a unified “work.” Rather, he writes down everything without attempting first to sort it out or reflect on it further. The “waste book” is for this reason not a pre-work for a later work-to-come, but a radical form-experiment that has perpetual recourse to the “material” – the “waste” or “precipitate” (*Abfall*) of “witty ideas” (*Einfälle*). These are to be recycled into a kind of collage-work, which makes the writer of waste into the *bricoleur* who carries out the rearrangement and recombination of the material lying at his or her disposal.⁸⁹ In this way, Lichtenberg’s writing foregrounds its

⁸⁹ “In its old sense the verb ‘bricolage’ applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. [...] The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purposes of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand,’ that is to say, with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. The set of the ‘bricoleur’s’ means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project [...]. It is to be defined only by its potential use or [...] because the elements

contingency at the material level. In fact, in a remark from Notebook “E,” he explicitly conceives of writing as a procedure akin to draft-making:

Eins der fruchtbarsten Erfindungs-Mittel, wogegen das *Quis, quid, ubi* pp gar nicht aufkommt, ist, daß man, sobald man etwas hört, zu sich selbst sagt: *das ist nicht wahr?* und alsdann die Gründe sucht, warum man so sagt. Die Regel, daß man nicht eher reden oder schreiben bis man gedacht habe, zeigt von vielem guten Willen des Verfassers, aber von wenigem Nachdenken, und der gute Mann dachte wohl nicht daran, daß man, um mich schöppenstädtisch, aber kräftig, auszudrücken, sein Gesetz nicht halten kann ohne es zu übertreten. Denn nicht zu gedenken, daß viele Leute gar nicht würden sprechen können, so glaube ich überhaupt das Gegenteil. Wie mancher hat endlich aus Desperation etwas Gescheites gesagt, weil er etwas Unüberlegtes verteidigen mußte, und Behaupten ist Philosophieren...⁹⁰

Against the logical-rhetorical schema of knowledge-production, Lichtenberg advocates in this remark for a conception of writing as a draft. Here he makes clear that the discursive practice of writing down everything, unconstrained by the limitations imposed upon thought by the traditional Aristotelian *topoi* of rhetorical invention – the who (*quis*), what (*quid*), where (*ubi*), and so forth –, is intended to open up the epistemic play-space for the “minimal deviations from the truth,” i.e., the contingency of witty thoughts. For if the activity of the “I” is conceived primarily as one of re-appropriation and recombination, which manipulates and experiments with thoughts without being able to claim them as its own, then the question of how the new and the novel arises presents itself as a problem which his *Sudel* way of writing is intended to resolve.

As Rüdiger Campe argues, Lichtenberg’s procedure of writing can thus be understood above all in relation to the ambiguity inherent in the notion of “evidence” (*evidentia*), the rhetorical figure of the detailed accumulation of features and properties that is central to the epistemé of the

are collected or retained on the principle that ‘they may always come in handy’” (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966], 16f).

⁹⁰ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 371 [E 146].

so-called “classical period” stretching approximately from Descartes to Kant.⁹¹ On the one hand, “evidence” is that which is produced through sensual immediacy; on the other hand, it must be manufactured using experimental and representational techniques. However, precisely because much of what is immediately given to intuition is far too fleeting and ephemeral in order to be deemed scientifically meaningful, evidence must be newly fabricated through technical means in order to be able to fascinate and persuade. Hence, despite the prevalence of economic metaphors in the *Sudelbücher*, in no way should they be read as an economization or fixation of knowledge. Just as man, for Lichtenberg, cannot be reduced to *homo oeconomicus* – an entity whose decision-making processes are wholly calculable according to theoretical-mathematical models – so too do his remarks in the *Sudelbücher* resist fixation and determination within a “closed economy” of writing. This manifests itself in Lichtenberg’s repeated emphasis on contingency and experimentation in the *Sudelbücher*. In remark from Notebook “K,” he explicitly affirms the necessity of experimenting with ideas in order to produce new knowledge:

Wie viel Ideen schweben nicht zerstreut in meinem Kopf, wovon manches Paar, wenn sie zusammen kämen, die größte Entdeckung bewirken könnte. Aber sie liegen so getrennt, wie der Goslarische Schwefel vom Ostindischen Salpeter und dem Staube in den Kohlenmeilern auf dem Eichsfelde, welche zusammen Schießpulver machen würden. Wie lange haben nicht die Ingredienzen des Schießpulvers existiert vor dem Schießpulver! Ein natürliches aqua regis gibt es nicht. Wenn wir beim Nachdenken uns den natürlichen Fügungen der Verstandesformen und der Vernunft überlassen, so kleben die Begriffe oft zu sehr an andern, daß sie sich nicht mit denen vereinigen können, denen sie eigentlich zugehören. Wenn es doch da etwas gäbe, wie in der Chemie Auflösung, wo die einzelnen Teile leicht suspendiert schwimmen und daher jedem Zuge folgen können. Da aber dieses nicht angeht, so

⁹¹ Rüdiger Campe, “Epoche der Evidenz. Knoten in einem terminologischen Netzwerk zwischen Descartes und Kant,” in: *Intellektuelle Anschauung. Figurationen von Evidenz zwischen Kunst und Wissen*, eds. Sibylle Peters and Martin Jörg Schäfer (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2006), 25–43. See also idem., “‘Vor Augen stellen.’ Über den Rahmen rhetorischer Bildgebung,” in: *Poststrukturalismus. Herausforderung an die Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Gerhard Neumann (Stuttgart 1997), 208–25; idem., “Unwahrscheinliche Wahrscheinlichkeiten. Evidenz im 18. Jahrhundert,” in: *Diskrete Gebote. Geschichte der Macht um 1800*, eds. R. Borgards, J. F. Lehmann (Würzburg 2002), 15–32; idem., “Evidenz als Verfahren. Skizze eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Konzepts,” in: *Vorträge aus dem Warburghaus* 8 (2004), 105–34.

muß man die Dinge vorsätzlich zusammen bringen. Man muß mit Ideen *experimentieren*. Ein bequemes Mittel mit Gedanken zu experimentieren ist, über einzelne Dinge Fragen aufzusetzen: z.B. Fragen über Trinkgläser, ihre Verbesserung, Nutzung zu andern Dingen etc., und so über die größten Kleinigkeiten.⁹²

With his insistence that one must “*experiment with ideas*” [mit Ideen experimentieren], Lichtenberg establishes his way of writing, and thinking in writing, which presents itself as an open experimental arrangement that aims at the production of the new and the novel. In this respect, his procedure bears a close proximity to what Hans-Jörg Rheinberger calls “experimental thinking” [experimentelles Denken] which – in a further shifting of the balance between thought and experiment – concerns above all a “durch instrumentelle Randbedingungen ausgerichtete Bewegung, in der das Rasonnieren gewissermaßen ins Spiel der materiellen Entitäten gerissen wird.”⁹³ Here the materiality of ideas – as inscribed and (re-)read in the form of “remarks” [Bemerkungen] – affects its permutation within the experiment; in most cases, the *Zettelwirtschaft* – the heterogeneous economy of notes, drafts, scribbles, lists, and diagrams that constitute the material of the laboratory situation – *is* for Lichtenberg the experiment itself.

In a subsequent remark from Notebook “J,” Lichtenberg further likens his experimental ideas to *Infusionstierchen*, a class of protozoa also known as infusoria: “So wie Linné im Tierreiche könnte man im Reiche der Ideen auch eine Klasse machen die man Chaos nannte. Dahin gehören nicht sowohl die großen Gedanken von allgemeiner Schwere, Fixstern-Staub mit sonnenbeduderten Räumen des unermesslichen Ganzen, sondern die kleinen Infusions-Ideecken, die sich mit ihren Schwänzchen an alles anhängen, und oft im Samen der Größten leben, und deren jeder Mensch wenn er still sitzt [eine] Million durch seinen Kopf fahren sieht.”⁹⁴ Here Lichtenberg

⁹² Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 453f [K 308].

⁹³ Cf. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Experiment, Differenz, Schrift. Zur Geschichte epistemischer Dinge* (Marburg/Lahn: Basilisken-Presse, 1992), 22.

⁹⁴ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 770f [J_{II} 850].

opens up once more an epistemic play-space within the realm of ideas that cannot be anchored in traditional, pre-existing *topoi*; rather, experimental ideas are situated within a miscellaneous category that Lichtenberg – in direct analogy with the Swiss naturalist Carl Linnaeus’s classificatory system of animals – calls “chaos.” Yet as Lichtenberg notes, to the realm of “chaotic” ideas belongs not “great thoughts” [großen Gedanken] like that of “universal gravity” [allgemeiner Schwere], but rather – in a further reversal of perspective from telescopic to microscopic observation – the microscopically small ones, the “great trivialities” [große Kleinigkeiten] as he writes in the previous remark, to which he ascribes the neologism “Infusions-Ideechen.” Here imaginary seeing (“deren jeder Mensch [...] sieht”) connects with the possibility and limits of thinking (“[eine] Million durch seinen Kopf fahren”). In other words, it becomes a *thought-experiment* – “so könnte man...,”⁹⁵ as Lichtenberg hypothesizes – which inserts along the way a poetological code (“Infusions-Ideechen”) that links imaginary and scientific productivity. This juxtaposition of form and life – this *formation of a life* – is noteworthy in that it activates an old rhetorical function whereby the *bio*-logic of life in an emphatic sense overlaps with the vivid actualization of evidentiary intuition: the Aristotelian conception of *energeia*, the ability to “bring-before-the-eyes” (*pro-ommaton*), which, by means of metaphoric transfer, “Lebendiges an die Stelle von Nichtlebendigem (Totem, Abstraktem oder Abwesendem) setzt,” such that “das Wirklichwerden (des Potentiellen)” figures as a process of formation of “eines Sichbewegenden.”⁹⁶ What is decisive here is that such metaphoric visualization does not merely signify living things, but rather “durch die

⁹⁵ “Was Lichtenberg einbringt in das Spiel der Konjunktive, ist eine wahrhaft genialische Einfallskraft, die in solchen sprachlichen Formen das ihr angemessene Ausdrucksmittel findet, zugleich aber durch die habitualisierten Suchformeln dieser konjunktivischen Konstruktionen befördert und geleitet wird – auf allen Gebieten, in denen dieser Physiker experimentierte” (Albrecht Schöne, *Aufklärung aus dem Geist der Experimentalphysik: Lichtenbergsche Konjunktive* [Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1993], 79).

⁹⁶ Rüdiger Campe, “Form und Leben in der Theorie des Romans,” 203–04.

Ersetzung des Lebenden für Nichtlebendes vor- oder nachmacht, wie Sichbewegendes auftaucht, wo keines war.”⁹⁷ Lichtenberg’s *Sudelbücher*, which push this principle of *energeia* to its limits, “steigert diese prozessierende Transformation in einen *Exzess* des *Potentiellen* und die darin aufscheinende *Unform*.”⁹⁸

The central question motivating Lichtenberg’s project, then, is how to capture and collect this *excess* of *potential*, this *unform* – the contingent ‘flashes of insight’ (*Gedankenblitze*) or “unexpected combinations”⁹⁹ [unverhoffte Kombinationen] that he calls “witty thoughts” [witzige Gedanken] or “Infusions-Ideecken”? When Lichtenberg juxtaposes the phrases “*es blitzt*” and “*es denkt*” in his remark from Notebook “K,” he hints in fact at the foundations of his own experimental procedure of writing. There he foregrounds not only the impersonal character of the thoughts themselves – the absence of an “I” which could be determinately affixed to them – but by metonymically linking “blitzen” and “denken” he also alludes to the swiftness of thought, which may be said to strike like lightning. Since Shakespeare’s famous maxim in *Hamlet* that “brevity is the soul wit,” the only genre or form that is always recognized as the property of wit (*Witz*) is succinctness, which could be summarized according to the witty formula: wit is a flash of lightning (*Der Witz ist ein Blitz*). In Notebook “E,” Lichtenberg draws much the same witty conclusion when he writes: “Witzige Schriften wollten sie. Da regnete blitzte und hagelte es Epigramme [...]”¹⁰⁰ As Jean-Luc Nancy writes, “[f]lash, lightning, explosion are the forms of the *cogito*’s double insofar as it is instantaneous.”¹⁰¹ Far more than the mere swiftness of the utterance, the effect of wit constitutes the temporality of a productivity that can be emphatically referred to as “lightning”:

⁹⁷ Ibid., 204.

⁹⁸ Andrea Krauß, “Sammeln – Exzerpte – Konstellation. Jean Pauls literarische Kombinatorik,” in: *Monatshefte* 105.2 (2013), 291–314, here: 298.

⁹⁹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 454 [K 309].

¹⁰⁰ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 365 [from E 111].

¹⁰¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Menstruum Universale,” in: *The Birth of Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 248–65, here: 263.

whereas the sun (en)lightens, lightning blinds – its explosion deafens; the light which wit brings forth is thus, to quote Bettine Menke, “die leer resultierende Produktivität statt der metaphorischen und metaphorologischen *Sonne* der Erkenntnis, die sich in ihrem Gegenstand phänomenal erfüllte.”¹⁰²

In Notebook “J” of the *Sudelbücher*, Lichtenberg links wit to both the rhetorical technique of *inventio* – in the sense of the discovery of arguments and their underlying “realia” – and at the same time to a technical apparatus of perception: “Der Witz ist der *Finder* (Finder) und der Verstand der Beobachter,”¹⁰³ he remarks, and goes on to request in the subsequent remark “*einen Finder zu erfinden für alle Dinge*,”¹⁰⁴ i.e., “[e]in *Tubus Heuristicus*,”¹⁰⁵ a so-called “heuristic telescope.” In contrast to the later literary tradition which links wit to a specific genre or narrative form, namely the “joke” as popularized in the 19th century, Lichtenberg understands wit as the rational capacity for invention and discovery for the heuristic purpose of scientific knowledge-production. This epistemological understanding of wit in the sense of *ingenium*, which was emphasized by the rationalist tradition (Christian Wolff, Alexander Baumgarten, Johann Christoph Gottsched), places it in parallel to acumen (*Scharfsinn*); for without the latter, “mere” wit yields a potentially dangerous surplus of idea-associations (i.e., madness), while acumen cannot forgo imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), i.e., evidence in the sense of *energeia*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Bettine Menke, “Jean Pauls Witz. Kraft und Formel,” in: *DVjs* 76 (2002), 201–13, here: 204f.

¹⁰³ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 297 [J_{II} 1620].

¹⁰⁴ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 297 [from J_{II} 1621].

¹⁰⁵ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 297 [from J_{II} 1622].

¹⁰⁶ Along these lines, Christian Wolff defines wit as “die Leichtigkeit die Ähnlichkeiten wahrzunehmen,” and praises it as an inventive faculty (*Erkenntnisvermögen*) by emphasizing that “zum Erfinden,” in addition to “der Kunst zu schließen,” also belongs to wit (cf. Christian Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen (Deutsche Metaphysik)*, §366, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Jean École u.a., I. Abt., Bd. 2 [Hildesheim 1983], 223. The presuppositions of wit are “Scharfsinnigkeit,” presenting something hidden “distinctly” [deutlich], “Einbildungskraft,” and so forth. While Wolff thereby still makes acumen (*Scharfsinn*) into the condition of wit, his student, Alexander Baumgarten, juxtaposes places faculties on equal footing. Accordingly, wit in the stricter sense (“*ingenium strictius dictum*”) is able to detect similarities in differences, whereas acumen detects differences in similarities (cf. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* [Hildesheim 1963]), §§572f., 203f.

Thus when Lichtenberg metaphorically relates acumen and wit respectively to a “Vergrößerungs-Glas” and “Verkleinerungs-Glas,” as he does in Notebook “D” of his *Sudelbücher*,¹⁰⁷ he not only follows a well-established tradition in the 18th century that sought to connect these two capacities, but he also deploys “mathematische und physikalische Termini außerhalb ihrer ursprünglichen Geltungssphäre”¹⁰⁸ in order to link imaginary and scientific techniques of perception. He thereby designates his own heuristic procedure, which counts acumen and wit among the formal techniques of perspectivization, albeit with a decisive revaluation of wit: “Glaubt ihr denn daß sich bloß Entdeckungen mit Vergrößerungs-Gläsern machen ließen? Ich glaube mit Verkleinerungs-Gläsern, oder wenigstens durch ähnliche Instrumente in der Intellektual-Welt sind wohl mehr Entdeckungen gemacht worden.”¹⁰⁹ The ability to discover similarities amongst seemingly disparate objects or ideas becomes for Lichtenberg a determining form-principle of wit, which he explicitly links to scientific knowledge-production: “Ohne Witz wäre eigentlich der Mensch gar nichts, denn Ähnlichkeiten in den Umständen ist ja alles, was uns zur wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis bringt, wir können ja bloß nach Ähnlichkeiten ordnen und behalten.”¹¹⁰ Thus alongside the physical instrument of the microscope, the faculty of wit may be said to belong to the experimental arrangement of the laboratory situation: “Auch ist Mikroskop und Verkleinerungs-Glas, mit analogen Schlüssen verbunden, ein Haupt-Mittel zur Erfindung.”¹¹¹ Here the analogy between wit and “Verkleinerungs-Glas” is revealed, in fact, to go in both directions: for Lichtenberg, the “Verkleinerungs-Glas” is not simply a metaphor for wit; rather, microscopic and “Verkleinerungs-Glas” are themselves conceived by him as witty techniques of *inventio*, as “Haupt-Mittel zur Erfindung.”

¹⁰⁷ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 301f [from D 469].

¹⁰⁸ Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe. Kommentar zu Band I und Band II*, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 301f [from D 469].

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 535 [F₁ 559]

However, in contrast to the traditional meaning of *inventio*, for which nothing truly new can ever appear, Lichtenberg's wit – as Rheinberger writes of experimental thinking – “produziert Wissen, das wir noch nicht haben.”¹¹²

To the extent that wit presents itself in the *Sudelbücher* as both a constitutive form-principle as well as a technique of knowledge-production, it must nevertheless be kept in mind that when Lichtenberg analogizes it to an optical-technical instrument of perspectivization, this does not so much establish as *deform* perception and its forms – or *unforms* – of knowledge. Magnification and minimization do not make visible the “truth”; rather, they distort that which is perceived by the naked eye (*doxa*), and in doing so optically juxtapose the most disparate pairs. It is against this backdrop that the wordplays and paronomasia in the *Sudelbücher* make themselves “readable,” albeit in their *defacement* of the relation between word and meaning. There one finds witty wordplays and seemingly random word-associations such as “Bacchus, Backhaus,”¹¹³ “Vellus, Vlies, Velies, Veleis, Felleisen,”¹¹⁴ “Polizei, Polzei, Plotzei, Platzzei, Platzerei, Plackei, Plackerei,”¹¹⁵ “protokollieren, prodekollieren,”¹¹⁶ and “Apostel, Apostille, Postille.”¹¹⁷ For seemingly incomprehensible series such as these, one might ask whether one ought to read the combinations of letters masquerading as words according to their phoneme or grapheme, or perhaps as an overlapping of sound and image, of word and thing – or what Lichtenberg refers to elsewhere in his *Sudelbücher* as “Bilderschrift für das Ohr.”¹¹⁸ Whether such remarks consist of only three words, or perhaps

¹¹² Rheinberger, *Experiment, Differenz, Schrift*, 22.

¹¹³ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 88 [B₁ 156]

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 102 [B₁ 202].

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 138 [B₁ 357].

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* [B₁ 356].

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* [B₁ 358].

¹¹⁸ “Es donnert, *heult, brüllt, zischt, pfeift, braust, saust, summet, brummet, rumpelt, quäkt, ächzt, singt, rappelt, prasselt, knallt, rasselt, knistert, klappert, knurret, poltert, winselt, wimmert, rauscht, murmelt, kracht, gluckset, röcheln, klingelt, bläset, schnarcht, klatscht, lispeln, keuchen*, es kocht, schreien, weinen, schluchzen, krächzen, stottern, lallen, girren, hauchen, klirren, blöken, wiehern, schnarren, scharren, sprudeln. Diese Wörter und noch andere, welche Töne

one or two more, what is distinctive about them is that they are not embedded in a determinate context or subordinated to the regular rules of grammatical syntax, but hover freely “in der Möglichkeit, sich irgend einem Kontext einzuordnen.”¹¹⁹

Lichtenberg’s preferred literary form is thus not so much narration as it is the list or the series, albeit ones which could go on potentially indefinitely – a narration (*Erzählen*) without a number (*Zahl*).¹²⁰ They form “[c]lusters of ideas Trauben von Ideen. Gruppe. Grape,” as he playfully writes.¹²¹ In addition to witty word-associations, his *Sudelbücher* feature seemingly random inventories of words and things, such as lists of books to be read or purchased,¹²² a list of curse words in the German language,¹²³ and even a list of words that begin with the prefix “ab,” which features neologisms like “*abgedacht*,” “*abdemonstriert*,” and “*abgeärgert*.”¹²⁴ “Lichtenberg’s lists,” writes Markus Wilczek, “show an inventory that is never static; rather, his lists always point beyond or transcend their own contents. They display the emergence of *inventio* from *inventario*: the transformation from inventory to invention.”¹²⁵ As in the case of his list of words that begin with the prefix “ab,” Lichtenberg does not simply list a series of entries from the lexicon, but composes an idiosyncratic series of words that brings them into relations that hitherto did not exist. In order to think them, one must “think awry” – *abdenken*¹²⁶ – in order to transform that which appears as nonsensical trash (*Abfall*) into a potentially fruitful idea (*Einfall*).

ausdrücken, sind nicht bloße Zeichen, sondern eine Art von Bilderschrift für das Ohr” (Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 39 [A_I 134]).

¹¹⁹ Eleonore Frey, “Lichtenbergs Einfälle,” in: *MLN* 110.3 (1995), 508–17, here: 509.

¹²⁰ For more on the poetics of the list, cf. Sabine Mainberger, *Die Kunst des Aufzählens. Elemente einer Poetik des Enumerativen* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2003). See also: Jack Goody, “What’s in a list?,” in: *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 74–111.

¹²¹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 444 [E 475].

¹²² Cf. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 344.

¹²³ Cf. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 338f [D 667].

¹²⁴ Cf. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 340 [D 668].

¹²⁵ Markus Wilczek, “Ab. Lichtenberg’s Waste,” in: *The Germanic Review* 87.4 (2012), 305–24, here: 307.

¹²⁶ For more on “ab” and “abdenken” as a modern figure of thought in the writings of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg and beyond, see Wilczek, “Ab. Lichtenberg’s Waste,” in particular 321–24.

For Lichtenberg, thoughts and the word-particles that constitute them stand in inverse relation as sense to nonsense: “Die Gedanken dicht und die Partikeln dünne,” he writes.¹²⁷ The fleeting and restless character of his remarks present the particles of words, such as the prefix, as the combinatory material which allows for the formation of new ideas. His fascination with linguistic materiality, and with the prefix in particular, presents itself throughout his *Sudelbücher*, as when he remarks in an entry from Notebook “D”: “Entsprechen, entsagen. versprechen, versagen.”¹²⁸ Here Lichtenberg draws attention to the specific way in which certain prefixes, for instance “ent-” and “ver-,” bear no obvious relation to the actual “meaning” of the words themselves or their physiognomic appearance. One might say that for Lichtenberg, speaking and saying, as communicative acts, do not simply “correspond” [entsprechen] or “promise” [versprechen], but – once paired with the signifiers “renouncing” [entsagen] and “withholding” or “malfunctioning” [versagen] – reveal the differential signification inherent to all word-particles, putting into question any notion of linguistic correspondence or coherence.

This interplay between sense and nonsense, thought and (word-)particle, breaks words down into their constitutive elements, i.e., the meaningless letters of the alphabet. No where is this more apparent than in Lichtenberg’s lists of words which begin with the prefix “ab,” whose inclusion of “Aberglaube” shows that his approach is in fact oriented less around the semantic aspect of the words than around the letters themselves. This a-semantic procedure of writing, which takes the alphabet as its point of departure, thus proceeds letter by letter: first “Wörter mit a,” then “Wörter mit b,” followed naturally by “Wörter mit a-b.” The chaos of Lichtenberg’s lists thereby demonstrates how his “thinking awry,” *abdenken*, accords – to speak anachronistically – with the dream-logic of the unconscious, which treats the letters of the alphabet as *Bilderschrift*. As Freud

¹²⁷ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 346 [E 16].

¹²⁸ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 314 [D 552]

would write more than a century later apropos the dyad “a-b”: “So oft [der Traum] zwei Elemente nahe bei einander zeigt, bürgt er für einen besonders innigen Zusammenhang zwischen ihren Entsprechenden in den Traumgedanken. Es ist wie in unserem Schriftsystem: *ab* bedeutet, daß die beiden Buchstaben in einer Silbe ausgesprochen werden sollen, *a* und *b* nach einer freien Lücke, läßt *a* als den letzten Buchstaben des einen Worts und *b* als den ersten eines anderen Worts erkennen.”¹²⁹ In Freud’s simile, as Jan Mieszkowski notes apropos this passage, “*a* and *b* (and by implication the rest of the alphabet) are a mini-field of differential signification. The difference between, for instance, *Thema behandeln* and *abgemacht* becomes emblematic of a graphematic field in which position and spacing are the crucial forms of articulation, and thus of sense in general, and in which there are no positive terms, only differences.”¹³⁰

In Lichtenberg’s remarks, words are thus placed in relation to one another in such a way that they are not confined to this or that meaning, but are rather put in play in the plurality of their possibilities. They are, as he writes, “[g]litzernde Wörtchen.”¹³¹ According to this cosmic metaphor, the “wordlets” [Wörtchen] which make up his remarks are microscopically small, astral-like formations that “twinkle” or “glisten” [glitzern] – “Infusions-Tierchen” that shoot by in a flash of light like a comet. As in the *Blitz* of *Witz*, their swift eruption simultaneously illuminates and obscures, dissolving every form into uniform, every word into a “glistening wordlet” that makes the

¹²⁹ Sigmund Freud, “Jenseits des Lustprinzips,” in: *Gesammelte Werke* (henceforth as GW), ed. Anna Freud et al. (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1967), II/III, 319. In its other instantiations, the second half of the simile is very similar: “[...] genau so wie in der Schrift *a* und *b* nebeneinander gesetzt bedeutet, daß daraus die Silbe *ab* gebildet werden soll”; “[...] ebenso wie ein *a* und ein *b*, die ich neben einander hinschreibe, als eine Silbe: *ab* ausgesprochen werden sollen” (GW V, 198; GW II/III, 253). In his notes to the English translation of the *Traumdeutung*, James Strachey suggests that Freud probably adopted this simile from a Goethe poem: “Schwer, in Waldes Busch und Wuchse / Füchsen auf die Spur gelangen; / Hält’s der Jäger mit dem Fuchse, / Ist’s unmöglich, ihn zu fangen. // Und so wäre manches Wunder / Wie A B, Ab auszusprechen, / Über welches wir jetzunder / Kopf und Hirn im Kopf zerbrechen.” See *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 volumes, ed. by James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1960), 4–5: 330; and for the German version of Goethe’s text: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Berliner Ausgabe, Poetische Werke*, 16 Bände (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1960), 1: 603.

¹³⁰ Jan Mieszkowski, “The Next Word (or something like it),” in: *MLN* 129.3 (2014), 606–20, here: 608.

¹³¹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 798 [J₁ 1033].

meaningless literality of the letters of the alphabet blindingly shine through. They exert their lively energy – their vital force, or *energeia* – in an unconstrained and untethered manner, falling out or even exploding the frame which was attributed to them as a syntactical unity between words within a continuous (con)text. Just like the *Sudelbücher* themselves, the remarks present themselves as a form without a form, as an eruption from the prevailing order of things. In this eruption from the given order, they open up an epistemic play-space which has its own order, or rather *disorder* – one in which words and things criss-cross and intersect according to the logic of wit, which pairs together disparate similarities like aleatory games of chance.

2.3. Lichtenberg's Polyps: Form and Life at the Limits of Knowledge

In Notebook “F” (1776–79) – the first notebook to be accorded the genre designation “Sudel-Buch” – Lichtenberg writes the following enigmatic remark: “Er sah in jeden drei Worten einen Einfall und in jeden drei Punkten ein Gesicht.”¹³² Eleonore Frey suggests that this remark can be read as having been composed in the third person, serving the purpose of self-representation.¹³³ Yet Lichtenberg’s reference here to the (mis-)reading of an ellipsis as a “face” [Gesicht] suggests an alternative reading, namely that his remark – like so many others in the *Sudelbücher*, and especially in Notebook “F” – is implicitly directed against the Swiss writer Johann Caspar Lavater, who is most well known for his work in the field of physiognomy, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775–78). In that same notebook, one finds frequent mention of Lavater by name, as for instance in remarks that begin with phrases such as “(Über Lavaters Physiognomik.)” (F 593), “An Herrn Lavater” (F 1051), “Für Herrn Lavater”

¹³² Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 475 [F₁ 98].

¹³³ Frey, “Lichtenbergs Einfälle,” 508.

(F 1080), and “Gegen Lavater” (F 1114), as well as lengthy critiques of his theory of physiognomy from a variety of different scientific perspectives, including that of probability calculations.¹³⁴ To be sure, Lichtenberg’s disagreements with Lavater’s work precede the entries from Notebook “F” by a number of years; however, the composition of Notebook “F” coincided not only with the publication of Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente*, but also relatedly with the events surrounding the so-called “Physiognomik-Streit”¹³⁵ (Spring 1778), which embroiled Lichtenberg in a public conflict with Lavater that ultimately led to the publication of his essay “Über Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen,” in which he vehemently criticizes Lavater’s naive insistence on the immediate legibility of man.¹³⁶

In simplified terms, Lichtenberg’s fervid criticism of Lavater stems from his broader distrust of the classical concept of the idea, which found its refuge in a deified human nature.¹³⁷ From Lichtenberg’s perspective, this manifested itself above all in Lavater’s idealization of drawing in the *Physiognomische Fragmente*, which favorably adopted the Renaissance concept of *disegno* insofar as Lavater understood sketch, line, outline, and silhouette as guarantors of transcendent

¹³⁴ Cf. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 561 [F 730].

¹³⁵ For more on the importance of these debates for Lichtenberg’s thought and way of writing, see Helmut Pfotenhauer, “Sich selber schreiben. Lichtenbergs fragmentarisches Ich,” in: *Um 1800. Konfigurationen der Literatur, Kunstliteratur, und Ästhetik*, ed. Helmut Pfotenhauer (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1991), 5–26, in particular 7–12, as well as Albrecht Schöne, *Aufklärung aus dem Geist der Experimentalphysik: Lichtenbergsche Konjunktive* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1993), in particular 1–15.

¹³⁶ Cf. Lichtenberg, “Über Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen. Zu Beförderung der Menschenliebe und Menschenkenntniß,” in: idem., *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 3, 256–95.

¹³⁷ See, for instance, Lichtenberg’s lengthy remark in *Sudelbuch E*, in which he refers ironically to the prevailing tastes of his time: “Es ist die Pflicht jedes rechtschaffenen modernen Mannes, die wir hoffentlich alle sind, gegen die alten Bildhauer nichts einzuwenden. Ich bin zuweilen nicht ungeneigt zu glaube, daß Winkelmann entweder Eingebungen von irgend einem guten Geist gehabt, oder daß ihm der Drache seine Bemerkungen gebracht oder der Kobolt diktiert hat. Es ist zwar wahr, wenn man feine Nerven hat und bis zur Wollust gesund und ruhig im Gewissen ist, so fängt man leicht Feuer, und ein eigener Gedanke den man unvermutet bestätigt findet breitet sich aus, berauscht und erhitzt uns, so könnte in Sh[aftes]bury, in dem Manne der in dem Nachmittag seines Lebens noch katholisch werden konnte eine Hochachtung für alten Marmor entstehen, die von Anbetung nicht unterschieden ist. Man kann sich Rom und klassisches Land nicht ohne wollüstige Beklemmung denken, und wenn man dann selbst der heiligen Stelle nahe kommt, wo die Denkmäler stehen, auf die ehemals unser Lob und unsere Schläge hinausliefen, da scheint die Erde zittern, keiner unsrer Kollegen hat das je gesehen. Da zittert, schaudert und ahndet der Geist und betet an, wo urteilen sollte. [...]” (Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 382 [from E 165]).

truth.¹³⁸ Lichtenberg skeptically interpreted this aesthetic preference as an inclination toward religious fanaticism and overhasty judgment and, as is well-known, subsequently turned to a different paradigm of the fine arts, namely the copperplate engravings of William Hogarth. Lichtenberg's lengthy descriptions of Hogarth's copperplate engravings, published between 1794 and 1799 under the title *Ausführliche Erklärung der Hogarthischen Kupferstiche*, reproduces the smallest elements of Hogarth's illustrations, immersing itself in a satirical manner in the most unremarkable, most salacious, and ugliest details. Lichtenberg's disfiguring, dismembering manner of representation, which makes no effort to produce an overall aesthetic impression, points to a characteristic feature of his own way of thinking: the distrust of "große Gedanken" – claims to genius – and the interpolation of the tiniest, most fleeting, and experimental, which resists the synthesis of thought and writing into a whole.

With his emphasis on contingency and experimentation, on the materiality of thoughts as combinatories of letters, as well as his privileging of the small, fragmentary and fleeting at the level of (literary) form, Lichtenberg positioned himself as the great antipode to the classicist and genius literature of his time, of which Lavater and Goethe (amongst other members of the *Sturm und Drang* movement) figured as the most prominent exponents. From the perspective of his trenchant critique of Lavater's theory of physiognomy, his decision to appropriate the form of the "Sudelbuch" no longer appears as a coincidence. In fact, Lichtenberg himself drew an explicit connection between his *Sudel* way of writing and his critique of physiognomy: in remark E 46, in which he first relates the form of the "Sudelbuch" to the practice of double-entry bookkeeping, the

¹³⁸ Cf. Johann Caspar Lavater, *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniß und Menschenliebe*, 4 vols. (Leipzig/Winterthur 1775–1778), vol. 1, in particular 61 and 91. For more on the reception of *disegno*, see Gerhard Wolff and Georg Traska: "Povero Pastore – Die Unerreichbarkeit der Physiognomie Christi," in: *Das Kunstkabinett des Johann Caspar Lavater*, eds. Gerda Mraz and Uwe Schögl (Vienna 1990), 120–37, in particular 120f.

retroactive pagination (“vid.[e] p.[aginam] XXVI”¹³⁹) cross-references another remark in which the word “Sudelbuch” once again appears. There Lichtenberg writes:

ad p. VI In dem Sudel-Buch können die Einfälle die man hat, mit all der Umständlichkeit ausgeführt werden, in die man gewöhnlich verfällt so lang einem die Sache noch neu ist. Nachdem man bekannter mit der Sache wird, so sieht man das Unnötige ein und faßt es kürzer. Es ist mir so gegangen als ich meinen Timorus schrieb. Ich [habe] oft mit dem, was ein Aufsatz im Sudelbuch war, einen Ausdruck schattiert.¹⁴⁰

Here Lichtenberg abbreviates the comparison of scholarly or literary writing into a relation between “waste book” and the further elaboration of thoughts without further distinguishing between notebook and ledger. More importantly, however, he refers in this passage to one of his own texts, namely his essay “Timorus” (1771/73), which in addition to addressing the problems of conversion in general – with particular critical attention devoted to the case of two Jewish converts to Christianity in Göttingen – contains a polemic against Lavater. According to Lichtenberg, it is not the case that he begins to follow his own suggestion and orients his writing towards the model of double-entry bookkeeping, but rather that this technique was in fact already being utilized at the time that he composed his essay. In other words, in the case of his critique of Lavater, as Lichtenberg declares, he was already working with the *Sudelbuch*.

Here it is important to recall that the name “Sudelbuch” figures as a satirical variant of the English word “commonplace book.” Elsewhere in the *Sudelbücher*, Lichtenberg likewise satirizes the scholarly practice of excerpting, which is often said to characterize his way of writing: “Er exzerpierte beständig,” remarks Lichtenberg in the third-person, “und alles, was er las, ging aus einem Buche *neben seinem Kopfe vorbei* in ein anderes.”¹⁴¹ Lichtenberg’s decision to make use of

¹³⁹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 352 [from E 46].

¹⁴⁰ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 373 [from E 150].

¹⁴¹ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 166 [GII 181].

this satirical naming-convention, whose privileged form – the “remark” [Bemerkung] – is identified with wit, is thereby directed above all against the cult of genius aesthetics insofar as it is meant to unveil the secret basis of all physiognomic thinking, which, in its fanatical insistence on a metaphysical form of “evidence” grounded in immediate intuition, it misrecognizes as transcendent truth: “Ideen-Assoziation ist der Grund der Physiognomik.”¹⁴² Vivid imagination and wit, i.e., the ability to (quickly) draw similarities between disparate objects or ideas, are said to bring about the associations of ideas, which emerge when one person observes another and attempts to elicit physiognomic meaning from the configuration of facial features. With his insistence on the invalidity of an immediate relation between body and soul, outer and inner, Lichtenberg has recourse to psychological-anthropological knowledge, from which standpoint he views the false conclusions drawn by Lavater’s physiognomy as readily explainable. What physiognomy fails to account for, Lichtenberg argues, is precisely the deviations and distortions of the phenomenon of subjectivity, which already played a pivotal role in his intervention into the mathematical controversy surrounding the “St. Petersburg Paradox.” Here, however, Lichtenberg makes clear that he does not disavow the possibility of an intuitive knowledge – of an immediate observation (“remark”). Rather, he rejects the positing of a mythical origin that does not exist.

One might say that, in and through his *Sudelbücher*, Lichtenberg carries out a procedure of writing that attempts to critically reflect on the limits of knowledge with an eye towards their transgression, i.e., the naive affirmation of immediate intuition, as embodied in Lavater’s physiognomy. This is particularly the case in Notebook “D,” where Lichtenberg first began to systematically distinguish his (physico-scientific) “annotations” from his (literary) “remarks.” In the first

¹⁴² Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 493 [from F 216]. In his essay “Über Physiognomik,” Lichtenberg similarly remarks: “Ideen-Assoziation erklärt eine Menge von Erscheinungen in der Physiognomik, ohne daß man nötig hätte, zu Schmälerung der Rechte der Vernunft, neue Sinnen anzunehmen, [...]” (Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 3, 272).

part of Notebook “D,” that is, in the section entitled “Annotationes et collectanea philosophica et physica,” one encounters a series of curious remarks which, I want to argue, are crucial for understanding not only his conceptions of form and life, but also his related critique of physiognomic science. These remarks form a narrative account of his own experimental studies of polyps. Based on the studies contained in Abraham Tremblay’s 1744 treatise, *Naturgeschichte des Süßwasserpolyphen*, Lichtenberg occupied himself intensely with this peculiar creature. In several remarks in Notebook “D,” grouped under the heading “Von Polyphen,” he attempts to represent not only the transition from plant to animal, but also from the fleeting to the fixed, while simultaneously demonstrating his familiarity with the extant scientific literature dealing with polyps, as for example texts by Tremblay, Baker, and Leeuwenhoeck.¹⁴³ In the second part of Notebook “D” – precisely at that point, in other words, where the general observations, or what the traditional interpretation of the *Sudelbücher* as a collection of aphorisms takes as its point of departure, begin – he crosses the threshold between scientific experimentation and philosophical observation, between “annotation” and “remark,” by recording the following witty remark based on his study of polyps: “Der Mensch ist vielleicht halb Geist und halb Materie, so wie der Polype halb Pflanze und halb Tier. Auf der Grenze liegen immer die seltsamsten Geschöpfe.”¹⁴⁴

Lichtenberg’s fascination with the polyp concerns its resemblance to man insofar as it is a uniquely threshold creature: whereas man is “perhaps half spirit and half matter,” the polyp is “half plant and half animal.” While he does not further elaborate on this striking analogy between polyps and humans as “strange” [seltsam], “threshold” [auf der Grenze] creatures within the confines of Notebook “D,” he returns to this liminal entity in Notebook “F” – precisely at the point, in other

¹⁴³ Cf. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 93–102.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 254 [D 161].

words, when he was most intensely engaged in his public fight with Lavater and the formulation of his critique of the latter's physiognomic system. In an astonishing remark from Notebook "F," Lichtenberg refers to polyps in order to explicate the functions of the human mind as well as to implicitly furnish his critique of Lavater's physiognomy:

Es gibt auf der Oberfläche dieser Erde eine Menge rundlicher Körper mit einer dicken Wurzel aus der mehrere kleine herausgehen, und verschiedene kleinere Wurzeln, sie leben so im Äther wie die Polypen im Wasser (Gehirn, Nerven, Rückenmark) und hängen ihre Wurzeln aus, wie jene ihre Arme. Sie sitzen in einem besondern Futteral, das ihnen zur Decke dient, das sie fortbewegen können, und so eingerichtet ist, daß sie ihre zarten Wurzeln nicht selbst brauchen auf andre Körper zu setzen, durch dieses Futteral wird die Materie durchgeseigt und gereinigt, die ihren Abgang wieder ersetzt. Diese Körper werden auch so wie alle andere verändert, und sind wie alle andere eine mit natürlichen Zeichen geschriebene Geschichte aller Veränderungen die sie erfahren haben. So gut als ein zinnerner Teller, dessen empfangene Schnitte Stiche und Quetschungen alle die Mahlzeiten erzählen, denen er beigewohnt hat. Die Materie woraus sie bestehen ist von einer besondern Beschaffenheit, von Anfang sehr weich und fast flüssig, doch nicht aller Eindrücke fähig wie das Wasser, sondern mehr zum Behalten, und weil es nicht allein *Simultanea*, sondern auch *Successiva* erzählen soll, so wird jeden Augenblick etwas davon fest, der Körper wird immer zäher, so daß er auf die letzt nur ausspricht aber nicht aufzeichnet. Ich der ich dieses schreibe, habe das Glück ein solcher Körper zu sein. [...]¹⁴⁵

Here he describes a supple entity ("sehr weich und fast flüssig") which is capable of numerous forms of appearance, of which only a few solidify to the point where they make themselves legible: "der Körper wird immer zäher, so daß er auf die letzt nur ausspricht aber nicht aufzeichnet." In the final sentence, Lichtenberg even goes so far as to identify himself, as a writer, with the polyp: "Ich der ich dieses schreibe habe das Glück, ein solcher Körper zu sein." For Lichtenberg, polyps constitute a complex of cells in which the individual is not at all easily discerned. They reveal in turn a netlike complex of living beings as well as a socialization of the body ("Er ist gesellig doch hat

¹⁴⁵ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 464f [from F 34].

jeder seine eigne Zelle”¹⁴⁶) which thereby, on the one hand, are capable of recording various detectable traces and, on the other hand, are occasionally able to solidify into a cohesive, self-legislating “opinion system” (*Meinungssystem*).

In this extended analogy between man – and more broadly, forms of human social organization – and polyp, Lichtenberg arrives at a new figure of thought that is at once immediately intuitable as well as fashioned through (scientific) experimentation. In a further move, the polyp, as a modern figure of thought, is intended to draw a clear and polemical distinction between his own way of thinking, as well as his own way of writing, and that of Lavater’s. Whereas Lavater insists on the rigid anchoring of body to soul, of letter to spirit, Lichtenberg elevates this microorganism into a dynamic, scientifically-grounded symbol of metempsychosis, i.e., the transmigration of souls. Decisive for Lichtenberg is that the polyp cannot be pinned down, for it is in a constant state of morphological transformation, change, and flux. In this sense, it coheres not only with Lichtenberg’s rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* and Lavater’s physiognomy, but also with his own *Sudel* way of writing, which seeks to carry out a discursive practice that, starting with the refusal to affix a determinate “I” to the thought which it thinks, would allow for the emergence of new knowledge in writing. For Lichtenberg, writing in *Sudelbücher* is, from this perspective, not an economization or fixation of knowledge, but an uncoupling of thoughts from any “closed economy” of writing. Thus as he contends at the outset of Notebook “A”:

Die Erfindung der wichtigsten Wahrheiten hängt von einer feinen Abstraktion ab, und unser gemeines Leben ist eine beständige Bestrebung uns zu derselben unfähig zu machen, alle Fertigkeiten, Angewohnheiten, Routine, bei einem mehr, als bei dem andern, und die Beschäftigung der Philosophen ist es, diese kleinen blinden Fertigkeiten, die wir durch Beobachtungen von Kindheit an uns erworben haben, wieder zu verlernen. Ein Philosoph sollte also billig als ein Kind schon besonders erzogen werden.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 2, 95 [D 676].

¹⁴⁷ Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, vol. 1, 11 [A₁ 11].

As a writer, Lichtenberg situates himself within a process of writing which, beginning with “kleinen blinden Fertigkeiten,” subsequently seeks to unlearn these in order to arrive at fixed “Fertigkeiten, Angewohnheit, Routine.” This he never does. Instead, he privileges an experimental form of writing which elevates contingency and materiality to the fore. In attempting to preserve the restless and fleeting character of thoughts, which strike like lightning, zip across the night’s sky like comets, or proliferate under the microscope like infusoria, he not only presents a conception of writing that produces new forms of knowledge, but also presents himself in the form of a polyp – as a formation of life that lies at the threshold of literature and science.

CHAPTER II. JEAN PAUL

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CROOKED LIFE OF HUMOR

Der Mensch ist der große Gedankenstrich im Buch der Natur.¹⁴⁸

—Jean Paul, *Die unsichtbare Loge*

The following chapter takes as its point of departure the extremely heterogeneous text-constellations in which the books of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825) appear. They take the form of appendices, such as *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, “a kind of idyll” [eine Art Idylle] which he inserted into his first novel *Die unsichtbare Loge* (1793); or serve as repositories for desultory short texts, such as a “Mustheil für Mädchen” and “einigen Jus de tablette für Mannspersonen” which frame the novel *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* (1796, 1801); or feature selections of “minor works” [Werkchen] collected from newspapers and paperbacks, which he then grafted onto books like *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise* (1807, 1822). And they consist of the most heterogeneous types of text: prefaces, prefaces to prefaces, prefaces to the history of prefaces, pre-chapters, post-chapters, satirical reviews, errant footnotes, and even “extra scraps of paper” [Extrablättchen]. To use a popular medial metaphor, his books are structured like hypertexts: far from being standalone, unified literary works, they are perpetually caught up in a system of associative chains and intertextual references which continually flow beyond the boundaries of one text and into the production of another.¹⁴⁹ “The frontiers of a book are never clear cut,” writes Foucault. “Beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its

¹⁴⁸ Jean Paul, *Die unsichtbare Loge*, in: *Werke*, I/1.

¹⁴⁹ For further readings of Jean Paul’s books as hypertexts, cf. Armin Schäfer, “Jean Pauls monströses Schreiben,” in *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 37 (2002): 216–234, in particular 220–21 and 233. See also: Annina Klappert, *Die Perspektiven von Link und Lücke: Sichtweisen auf Jean Pauls Texte und Hypertexte* (Aisthesis 2006).

autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.”¹⁵⁰

Jean Paul’s notoriously condensed, associative manner of writing represented a major provocation to the aesthetic norms and reading culture around 1800. Contemporary readers frequently complained of the unreadability of his texts. Amongst his earliest and most prominent critics was the young Goethe, who in a 1795 letter to Friedrich Schiller mocked Jean Paul’s first major publication, *Hesperus oder 45 Hundposttage* (1795), as an exemplary case of a literary monstrosity: “Hierbei ein Tragelaph von der ersten Sorte.”¹⁵¹ Goethe’s negative assessment of *Hesperus* as a “Tragelaph” – a mythological hybrid between a goat and a stag, but which around 1800 also referred to literary compositions of mixed and unbalanced character¹⁵² – was grounded in his impression of the novel as lacking organic unity, and hence as at odds with the formal conventions of Weimar classicism and the discourse of genius aesthetics.¹⁵³ Reading Jean Paul – known for the countless encyclopedic allusions to a dizzying array of disparate facts, authors, and

¹⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 23.

¹⁵¹ In a subsequent letter to Schiller dated June 12, 1795, Goethe writes: “Es ist mir angenehm, daß Ihnen der neue Tragelaph nicht ganz zuwider ist; es ist wirklich schade für den Menschen, er scheint sehr isoliert zu leben und kann deswegen bei manchen guten Partien seiner Individualität nicht zur Reinigung seines Geschmacks kommen. Es scheint leider, daß er selbst die beste Gesellschaft ist, mit der er umgeht” (cited in Emil Staiger, ed., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Schiller* [Frankfurt a. M. 1966], 110).

¹⁵² According to *Duden*, the word “Tragelaph” possesses a double meaning which connotes an “uneinheitliches literarisches Werk, das man mehreren Gattungen zuordnen kann.” Cf. “Tragelaph,” *Duden*, accessed 17 Nov. 2015, <<http://www.duden.de/node/800210/revisions/1091222/view>>.

¹⁵³ Goethe later came to re-evaluate the merits of Jean Paul’s work, as suggested by his positive remarks in the *Noten und Abhandlungen zum besseren Verständnis* which he added to the first edition of the *West-östlichen Divan* (1819). (Cf. Hendrik Birus, *Vergleichung. Goethes Einführung in die Schreibweise Jean Pauls* [Stuttgart 1986].) Jean Paul’s impression of Goethe, however, always remained that of an ardent classicist. As Helmut Pfotenhauer argues, “Jean Paul verstand Goethe als einen Klassizisten, welcher sich als Klassiker inszeniert. Er unterstellte ihm antikisierenden Formenkult; Kunstsachen interessierten ihn mehr als Menschen, als schlagende Herzen. Das überzeitlich Geltende verdränge das gegenwärtige Leben. Als Jean Paul zum ersten Mal in Weimar ist und im Begriff Goethe gegenüberzutreten, erwägt er in einem Brief an den Freund Christian Otto spaßeshalber, ob er sich nicht durch einen Mineralbrunnen petrifizieren und inkrustieren lassen sollte, um sich Goethe „etwas im vorteilhaften Lichte einer Statue“ zeigen zu können” (Helmut Pfotenhauer, “Das Leben schreiben – Das Schreiben leben. Jean Paul als Klassiker der Zeitverfallenheit,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 35/36 [2000/2001], 46–58, here: 46).

scientific disciplines in his writing – allegedly once gave Goethe a severe case of “Gehirnkrämpfe von dem Werfen aus einer Wissenschaft in die andere.”¹⁵⁴

Another prominent critic was Hegel, who likewise complained of the excessive accumulation of scholarly references, analogies, and metaphors in Jean Paul’s texts. In his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Hegel formulated the exemplary critique of Jean Paul’s writing from this perspective as the “barocke Zusammenstellungen von Gegenständen, welche zusammenhangslos auseinanderliegen und deren Beziehungen, zu welchen der Humor sie kombiniert, sich kaum entziffern lassen.”¹⁵⁵ In contrast to Goethe, who rejected the disturbing heterogeneity of Jean Paul’s writing on moral and aesthetic grounds, Hegel dismissed in particular the *indecipherability* of Jean Paul’s texts from the standpoint of reception aesthetics. For Hegel, Jean Paul’s “baroque” combinatory method of writing, which privileged the processing of heterogeneous information over and against the reader’s understanding, was seen as antithetical to the interpretative strategies of the hermeneutic method, which dominated the reading culture of the “discourse network”¹⁵⁶ around 1800. Especially problematic for Hegel in this regard was the so-called “exterior” [äußerlich] character of Jean Paul’s texts:

Jean Paul hat deshalb auch, um immer neues Material zu haben, in alle Bücher der verschiedensten Art, botanische, juristische, Reisebeschreibungen, philosophische, hineingesehen, was ihn frappierte, sogleich notiert, augenblickliche Einfälle dazugeschrieben und wenn es nun darauf ankam, selber ans Erfinden zu gehen, äußerlich das Heterogenste – brasilianische Pflanzen und das alte Reichskammergericht – zueinandergebracht.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Cited in Gerhard Fiegurth, *Jean Paul. Begegnungen mit Zeitgenossen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1964), 37. Jean Paul himself reports Goethe’s remark in a letter to Christian Otto dated January 17, 1798.

¹⁵⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, in: *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, eds. Eva Muldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt a. M. 1970), vol. 13, 382. For a further analysis of this passage with respect to Jean Paul’s writing, cf. Bettine Menke, “Ein-Fälle – aus ‘Exzerpten.’ Die *inventio* des Jean Paul,” in: *Rhetorik als kulturelle Praxis*, eds. Renate Lachmann et al. (München 2008), 291–307, in particular 294–96. See also: Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa, “Lesarten. Autorschaft und Leserschaft bei Jean Paul,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 37 (2002), 35–52, in particular 42.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900* (Munich: W. Fink, 1995).

¹⁵⁷ Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 13, 382.

Jean Paul's texts, as texts which refer in turn to other texts through the principle of witty combination, went against the prevailing conception of aesthetics around 1800; for "[d]ieser Zufolge sollte das Werk in sich selbst [...] begründet sein, nicht aber in einem diesem vorausgehenden Wissen und dessen Formen."¹⁵⁸ The latter – the construction of a work on the basis of (forms of) knowledge that lie beyond the boundaries of a single book – would, instead, constitute a method of contingency, which combines all different forms of knowledge in one place at one time. As one contemporary reviewer noted, Jean Paul's texts would thus appear to readers "wie eine Sammlung aus allen Trümmern Babylons, Persepolis', Roms und Nürnbergs, auf *einem* Platz auf gut Glück untereinander zusammengehäuft."¹⁵⁹

Hence in the eyes of his critics, Jean Paul's texts were largely perceived as being not only radically at odds with classical theories of the beautiful, which emphasized the aesthetic virtues of proportion, precision, and organic unity, but also as grounded in an outmoded, so-called "baroque" production aesthetics, whose ostensible "exteriority" and "incoherent juxtaposition of objects," as Hegel put it, were no longer accessible to contemporary readers steeped in the hermeneutic method; as "obscure" works, they were thus deemed inaccessible and unreadable. In the place of a timeless form of beauty, Jean Paul offers instead works of "immoderate construction, form, and manner,"¹⁶⁰ and in the place of a hermeneutically-reconstructible meaning and subject-centered poetology, he carries out instead an epistemological experiment in contingency. His texts "treib[en] eklektisch Informationen und Lehrmeinungen aus allen Ecken der Welt zusammen, um

¹⁵⁸ Menke, "Die Geburt des Gelehrten aus den Exzerpten. Die Gelehrtenleben und die wissenschaftliche Praxis des Jean Paul," in: *Gelehrtenleben: Wissenschaftspraxis in der Neuzeit*, eds. Alf Lüdtke, Reiner Pass (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 113–30, here: 121.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Peter Sprengel, ed., *Jean Paul im Urteil seiner Kritiker* (Munich: 1980), xxxiv.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Fleming, *The Pleasures of Abandonment: Jean Paul and the Life of Humor* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 18.

sie unter einem neuen Gesichtspunkt oder in einer neuen Färbung zu vereinigen,”¹⁶¹ and they do this through the technique of *excerpting*.

As is well known, over the course of his life Jean Paul amassed a collection of approximately 12,000 pages and over 100,000 individual entries worth of excerpts, which cover practically every field of knowledge around 1800. However, in contrast to the “polyhistoric” excerpting practices of Enlightenment scholars like Daniel Georg Morhof, who sought in their excerpts to discover the underlying “realia” of pre-existing objects of knowledge, which they subsequently sought to systematically organize according to a pre-codified, well-ordered *loci communes*, Jean Paul’s method of excerpting concerns the discovery of the new through the recombination and re-contextualization of information. The keyword for this technique is *play*. Thus in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804/1813), Jean Paul ascribes to his distinct method of text production through excerpting a striking degree of contingency, in which

Ideen aus allen Wissenschaften ohne bestimmtes gerades Ziel – weder künstlerisches noch wissenschaftliches – sich nicht wie Gifte, sondern wie Karten mischten und folglich, ähnlich dem Lessingschen geistigen Würfeln, dem etwas eintrügen, der durch *Spiele* zu *gewinnen* wüßte, was aber die Sammlung anbelangt, so habe ich sie und vermehre sie täglich.¹⁶²

Here he refers to an anecdote from Moses Mendelssohn regarding G. E. Lessing’s habit of “in seiner Laune die allerfremdesten Ideen zusammen zu paaren, um zu sehen, was für Geburten sie erzeugen würden.”¹⁶³ The importance of Lessing’s manner of thought here is that, for Jean Paul, writing in excerpts does not concern the subject’s understanding, but is instead conceived in ludic

¹⁶¹ Götz Müller, “Jean Pauls Privatencyklopädie. Eine Untersuchung der Exzerpte und Register aus Jean Pauls unveröffentlichtem Nachlaß,” in: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Wolfgang Frühwald et al., 11 (1986), 73–114, here: 75.

¹⁶² Jean Paul, *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, in: *Werke*, I/5, 202f, note 1.

¹⁶³ Letter from Moses Mendelssohn dated August 1, 1784, in: F. H. Jacobi: “Über die Lehre des Spinoza,” cited in Jean Paul, “Kommentar zur Vorschule der Ästhetik,” in: *Werke*, I/5, 1221; as well as in Müller, “Jean Pauls Privatencyklopädie,” 76.

terms as a contingent game of chance, like the aleatory throw of the dice.¹⁶⁴ In this respect, it follows the same principle as the combinatory machinery of his own poetics of “wit” [Witz], which in the *Vorschule* he famously likens to a “verkleidete[r] Priester, der jedes Paar kopuliert.”¹⁶⁵ By “copulating every pair” – scouting out so-called “distant similarities” [entfernte Ähnlichkeiten]¹⁶⁶ – witty association, or what in the classical teachings of rhetoric goes under the *terminus technicus* of *inventio*, no longer concerns the discovery of pre-existing knowledge, an objective *tertium comparationis*, but instead the discovery of the new through the pairing together of the most disparate objects, ideas, or even literary genres.¹⁶⁷

Far from being a mere stylistic idiosyncrasy, the seemingly capricious manner in which Jean Paul’s texts are composed concerns a poeology of contingency. Against both a subject-centered poeology oriented toward the mediation of the reader’s understanding, as well as a conception of the work as an aesthetic unity, his texts present themselves as collage-works of excerpted, glued-on, and grafted material. And they do so, curiously, by citing different forms and techniques of scholarly knowledge, such as slip boxes, academic footnotes, post-scripts, and prefaces. Not

¹⁶⁴ For more on the epistemological and poeological significance of Jean Paul’s method of excerpting, cf. Müller, “Jean Pauls Privatzyklopädie.” See also: Menke, “Ein-Fälle – aus ‘Exzerpten’”; Andrea Krauß, “Sammeln – Exzerpte – Konstellation. Jean Pauls literarische Kombinatorik,” in: *Monatshefte* 105.2 (2013), 291–314; Schmidt-Hannisa, “Lesarten,” in particular 37–42.

¹⁶⁵ “Der ästhetische Witz, oder der Witz im engsten Sinne, der verkleidete Priester, der jedes Paar kopuliert, tut es mit verschiedenen Trauformeln” (Jean Paul, *Werke* I/5, 159). For more on Jean Paul’s concept of wit, cf. Menke, “Jean Pauls Witz. Kraft und Formel.” See also: Waltraud Wiethölter, *Witzige Illumination. Studien zur Ästhetik Jean Pauls* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979), in particular 9–32.

¹⁶⁶ “Was ist nun Witz? Wenigstens keine Kraft, die ihre eigne Beschreibung zustande bringt. Einiges ist gegen die alte zu sagen, daß er nämlich ein Vermögen sei, entfernte Ähnlichkeiten zu finden” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 170). He goes on several pages later to clarify: “Außer der Kürze erfreuet daran noch, daß der Geist, der ewig fortschreiten muß, dieselbe Idee [...] zum zweiten Mal, aber als ihre eigne Widersacherin vor sich stehen und sich durch die Gleichheit genötigt sieht, einige Ähnlichkeiten zwischen ihr selber auszukundschaften” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 179).

¹⁶⁷ In the section of the *Vorschule* on “Witz” which deals with wordplay, entitled “Das Wortspiel,” Jean Paul uses the verb “gatten” in the place of “kopulieren,” which suggests a paronomastic reference to genre [Gattung]: “Der zweite wahre Reiz des Wortspiels ist das Erstaunen über den Zufall, der durch die Welt zieht, spielend mit Klängen und Weltteilen. Jeder Zufall, als eine wilde Paarung ohne Priester, gefällt uns vielleicht, weil darin der Satz der Ursachlichkeit (Kausalität) selber, wie der Witz, Unähnliches zu gatten scheinend, sich halb versteckt und halb bekennt” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 193). As will be seen, the implicit allusion to the mixing of genres is of significance for Jean Paul’s poetics of the miscellaneous, which occupies the primary focus of the fourth chapter of this section.

coincidentally, in each of his three major idylls – *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal* (1793), *Leben des Quintus Fixlein, aus fünfzehn Zettelkästen gezogen* (1796), and *Leben Fibels, des Verfassers der Bienrodischen Fibel* (1811) – Jean Paul presents the lives of scholars. Far from constituting biographies in any conventional sense, however, these three texts, which Jean Paul took to be a trio,¹⁶⁸ present the life stories of highly idiosyncratic figures who distinguish themselves above all through their unusual scholarly practices: in *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, the little schoolmaster Maria Wutz cannot afford to buy books and so composes his own hand-written pocket library based solely on his knowledge of the titles, which are published in the yearly “Meßkatalog”; in *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, the novel’s eponymous protagonist collects scholarly errata as well as makes use of “slip boxes” [Zettelkästen], an elaborate archival system devised by the eighteenth-century jurist and librarian Johann Jacob Moser, in order to record his own autobiography; and lastly in *Leben Fibels*, which begins by presenting the life story of the supposed “inventor” of the first primer or ABC book from whose name the German word for “primer,” *Fibel*, is said to be derived, yet which eventually gives way to an increasingly metalectic tale about the impossibility of the fictional biographical project which the novel itself stages. To this list of unusual scholars would also undoubtedly belong the “pageant dancing master” [Pagentanzmeister] Aubin from the short fiction “Die Taschenbibliothek” (1796).¹⁶⁹ Just like Wutz, Fixlein, and Fibel, Aubin also demonstrates polyhistoric ambitions – in his case, through the prodigious collecting of excerpts: “Bloß Exzerpten. Ich fing mir anfangs aus jedem Buche

¹⁶⁸ “Das Schulmeisterlein Wutz des uns bekannten Verfassers ist eine Idylle, aus welcher ich mehr machen würde als andere Kunstrichter, wenn es sonst die Verhältnisse mit dem Verfasser erlaubten; dahin gehört unstreitig auch desselben Mannes Fixlein und Fibel” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 259).

¹⁶⁹ Jean Paul, “Die Taschenbibliothek,” in: *Werke*, II/3, 769–73.

zwei, drei Sonderbarkeiten wie Schmetterlinge aus und machte sie durch Dinte in meinem Exzerptenbuche fest [...] Diese Exzerpten zieh' ich wie Riechwasser überall aus der Tasche, auf der Straße, im Vorzimmer, auf dem Tanzboden, und erquicke mich mit einigen Lebens-tropfen."¹⁷⁰

In these texts, life and writing stand in close, if ambiguous, proximity. They mutually presuppose one another, yet neither appears as the more "original" term from which the other would figure as the mimetic copy. The relation of life to writing in Jean Paul's texts is not an *Urbild/Abbild* relation. Instead, life and writing are chiastically intertwined, such that the writing of life – the (auto)biography – and the life of writing – the life of the scholar – become *the writing of the life of writing*. Writing life is to be understood, therefore, "nicht nur im konventionellen Sinne der rückblickenden Verschriftlichung und der Formung des einst Gelebten zum abgeschlossenen Werk, sondern mehr noch im Sinne der Verwandlung des gegenwärtigen Lebens in Schrift. Alles Leben, gerade auch das jetzige, das todnahe, nicht nur das verklärbare vergangene oder künftige, will in die Dauer der schriftlichen Fixierung gerettet werden."¹⁷¹ It is from the perspective of the transformation of present life into writing, and not merely the retrospective formation of already-lived life, that Jean Paul went so far as to consider all of his writing as "inner autobiography" [innere Selbstbiographie].¹⁷² This deceptive formula does not mean that his writing is based on a de-scription – a *Be-schreibung* – of lived life; rather, in his texts, writing attains a performative dimension which defaces and disperses the (auto)biographical subject, who becomes his own "Doppelgänger."

¹⁷⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 771.

¹⁷¹ Pfothenhauer, "Das Leben schreiben," 52.

¹⁷² "Alle meine Schreiberei ist eigentlich innere Selbstbiographie; und alle Dichtwerke sind Selberlebensbeschreibungen, denn man kennt und lebt eben kein anderes Leben als das eigne" (Jean Paul, *Ideen-Gewimmel. Texte und Aufzeichnungen aus dem unveröffentlichten Nachlaß*, eds. Kurt Wölfel and Thomas Wirtz [Frankfurt a.M. 1996], 33).

Thus in his fictional autobiographies, *Konjektural-Biographie* (1799, 1811) and *Selberlebensbeschreibung* (1818–19, 1826), Jean Paul experimented with the boundary between life and its self-textualization. In *Konjektural-Biographie*, the narrator and protagonist “Jean Paul” reveals that his “künftiger Lebenslauf”¹⁷³ is to be excerpted – “cut out” [auszuschneiden] – from fragments of his previous literary works to form a kind of autobiographical collage of the self: “Was mich am meisten beruhigt ist der neckende Hang [...] immer nach dem Szenenplan meiner fremden Geschichten meine eigne auszuschneiden und so, wenn andre mit der Wirklichkeit ihre Dichtkunst wässern, schöner jene mit dieser bei mir abzusüßen.”¹⁷⁴ If autobiography is said to forego fictional flights of fancy by tempering fantasy with the “reality” of lived life, the writer of *Konjektural-Biographie* proposes to do the exact opposite: rather than “watering down poetry with reality,” it would be better, he writes, to “sweeten reality with poetry.” The production of an imaginary self out of the aporia of antecedent fictional texts fills the (spatial-temporal) gap of the hypothetical near-future, which lies between the idyllic past of childhood “arcadia” and death as the horizon of human finitude – the end of life and the book –, resulting in a mosaic of multiple interwoven stories pieced together from fictional material to form the “conjectural” biography.

Like the autobiographical protagonist of *Konjektural-Biographie*, the lives of scholarly figures like Wutz, Fixlein, and Fibel are just as much forms of auto-bio-graphy – “des Schreibens und Lesens und als solche des Lesens als Schreiben, des Schreibens als Lesen”¹⁷⁵ – in the sense that their lives are quite literally born from the texts that they read and write: they come from pocket libraries and slip boxes, from primers and libraries of waste-paper, as well as from excerpts, from which they extract their vital “life drops.” In each case, such scholarly technologies no longer

¹⁷³ Jean Paul, *Briefe und bevorstehender Lebenslauf*, in: *Werke*, I/4, 925–1080, here: 1028.

¹⁷⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 1028.

¹⁷⁵ Menke, “Die Geburt des Gelehrten aus den Exzerpten,” 116.

serve their traditional function of archiving and organizing scholarly knowledge or public information, but are instead repurposed toward private, idiosyncratic ends, such as recording one's own childhood memories onto index cards or collecting scholarly errata. As "inner autobiographies" about the writing of (auto)biographies, Jean Paul's idylls stage the birth of the scholar from writing. It is no coincidence that, as was the case for the "real author" Jean Paul, Wutz, Fixlein, Fibel, as well as Aubin are all revealed to be avid excerpters, that is, collectors and producers of text. For Jean Paul, the life of the scholar epitomizes man as a textualized entity, as a "fold in knowledge" (Foucault) that foregrounds their finitude: they are, in the words of Moses Mendelssohn, "*literatti, Buchstabenmenschen*"¹⁷⁶ as well as "der große Gedankenstrich" – the literal gap or caesura – "im Buch der Natur," according to the motto which prefaces *Die unsichtbare Loge*.¹⁷⁷ Their (auto)biographies, which chronicle their bibliographic fantasies, present their lives – and deaths – in their irreducibly medial and textual composition.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ "Wir brauchen des erfahrenen Mannes nicht, wir brauchen nur seine Schriften. Mit einem Worte, wir sind *literatti, Buchstabenmenschen*. Vom Buchstaben hängt unser ganzes Wesen ab, und wir können kaum begreifen, wie ein Erdensohn sich bilden, und vervollkommen kann, ohne *Buch*" (Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*, vol. 2 [Berlin: Maurer, 1783], 60ff, cited in Annette Keck, *Buchstäbliche Anatomien: Vom Lesen und Schreiben des Menschen* [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007], 17). As Annette Keck argues with reference to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and the "analytic of finitude" in Foucault's *The Order of Things*, "[i]n diesem Denken der Endlichkeit entsteht in Biologie, Ökonomie und Philologie der Mensch als Subjekt und Objekt des Wissens, als eine – wie Foucault das formulierte – 'einfache Falte in unserem Wissen.' Anders als Foucault betont Mendelssohn dessen mediale und d.h. in diesem Fall schriftliche Verfasstheit. Denn gerade diese distanziert den Menschen von der grauen Vorwelt, vom 'ursprünglichen' Judentum, das mit der Moderne 'zerschrieben' erscheint" (ibid., 22).

¹⁷⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1. The hyphen, as a typographic character outside the standard alphanumeric set which no scholar can do without, proliferates in Jean Paul's texts. In his early satirical writings, he likens them to "Gebeine verstorbener Gedanken" as well as to "Brücken, über die Klüfte unähnlicher Materien geschlagen": "Alle Schriften strozen jetzt stat der Gedanken von Gedankenstrichen [...] Gedankenstriche sind Furchen ohne Samen – sind Linien, die der Chiromantist zu lesen gedenkt, und für deren Bedeutung der Zufal nicht gesorgt – sind das algebraische Zeichen der Subtraktion – sind die Gebeine verstorbener Gedanken – sind die Schleppen oder Schwänze der Perioden, welche Schwänze auch oft den Kopf der Perioden, wie die Schwänze bekannter Vögel den Kopf der Damen zieren – sind Brücken, über die Klüfte unähnlicher Materien geschlagen – sind Mittel, unsere Bewunderung vom Genus ihres Gegenstandes zu trennen, wie iener zwischen sich und seine schöne Schlafgenossin einen Degen legte. –" (Jean Paul, *Grönländische Prozesse*, in: *Werke*, II/1, 424). As he similarly announces in the preface to the second edition of *Hesperus*, "[i]n einem solchen Entwürfe halt' ich die unähnlichsten und feindlichsten Dinge bloß durch Gedankenstriche auseinander" (Jean Paul, *Hesperus*, in: *Werke*, I/1, 480). For more on Jean Paul's use of hyphens, cf. Frederike Frei, "Auf dem Gedankenstrich," in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 26/27 (1991–92), 326–31.

¹⁷⁸ "Das Lesen im Buch liest, mehr und weniger, auf Leben und Tod. *Im Buch*, das den Entscheid zwischen lebendigem und totem Buch, zwischen Lebendig und Tot, Leben und Tod suspendiert" (Thomas Schestag, "Bibliographie für Jean

By undermining the aesthetic distance between life and writing, the scholar appears as a satirical figure in Jean Paul's texts whose life is imbued with subversive potential. In contrast to Fichte, who conceived of the scholar's task to be "die oberste Aufsicht über den wirklichen Fortgang des Menschengeschlechtes im allgemeinen, und die stete Beförderung dieses Fortganges,"¹⁷⁹ Jean Paul's scholars are small and diminutive, and their lives revolve around the world of marginal secondary texts. Rather than being tasked with carrying out the (idealist) Enlightenment project of realizing man's progressive perfectibility through universal *Bildung*, as Fichte proposed, it is frequently the *material* remnants of the Republic of Scholars – "waste-paper" [Makulatur], scribblings, paper shavings, and other bits of text collected from the book printer's "junk shop" [Kramladen] – which serve as substitute or subversive sources of scholarship and knowledge for scholarly figures like Wutz, Fixlein, and Fibel. For them, the trivial secondary texts of the discourse network around 1800 come to serve as a replacement for the official channels of knowledge distribution – the book market, the university, and the encyclopedia – to which they are denied access for financial or imaginary reasons; and out of this world of forgotten and disposed-of texts,

Paul." in: *MLN* 113.3 (1998), 465–523, here 470). See also: Sabine Straub and Monika Vince, "'Wetterleuchtende Demant- und Zaubergrube.' Zur Produktivität des Todes in Jean Pauls Exzerpten und literarischen Schriften," in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 39 (2004), 27–58; Gerhard Neumann, "Der Anfang vom Ende. Jean Pauls Poetologie der letzten Dinge im Siebenkäs," in: *Das Ende. Figuren einer Denkform*, ed. Karlheinz Stiefel and Rainer Warning (Munich: W. Fink, 1996), 476–94.

¹⁷⁹ J. G. Fichte, *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, in: idem., *Fichte-Gesamtausgabe* (= GA), I/3, 23–68, here 54. Fichte further remarks: "Also der Gelehrte in der letzten Rücksicht betrachtet, soll der *sittlich beste* Mensch seines Zeitalters seyn er soll die höchste Stufe der bis auf ihn möglichen sittlichen Ausbildung in sich darstellen" (ibid., 58), in order to advance the "Veredlung des ganzen Menschen," and relatedly humanity as a whole – understood by Fichte as an individual approximation of the homogeneous conception of an "ideal" man – in his capacity as "der *Lehrer* des Menschengeschlechtes" (ibid., 56f). Whereas Fichte idealizes the figure of the scholar from the perspective of a homogeneous conception of humanity, for Jean Paul – and this is the major insight he takes from natural science – nature provides no ready-made generic templates, but produces instead only individuals and exceptions, and for him monstrosities are the exemplary singularities: "Wer kann denn aber eine Mißgeburt, die sich so wenig als ein Genie fortpflanzt – denn sie ist selber ein körperliches, eine Einzig-Perle – nicht einmal ein Sonntagkind, sondern ein Schalltagkind –, ersetzen, ich bitte jemanden?" (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 128). For more on Jean Paul's notion of monstrosities, and relatedly of the unity of the human race as lying in the possibility of differentiation, cf. Armin Schäfer, "Jean Pauls monströses Schreiben," in particular 231–33.

which hover precariously in a suspended state between life and death, they craft their own micro-logical “scholarly republic” in the form of idiosyncratic pocket libraries and “private encyclopedias,” through which they come to attribute new value to old scraps of paper material previously deemed to be valueless waste and rubbish.

In brief, it is under the signs of contingency and play that Jean Paul’s texts present the lives of scholars, and they do so above all through the exposition of their own fragmentariness and material contingency. In order to expose this specifically corporeal-material dimension of textuality, Jean Paul introduces an entirely new concept into his “monstrous” order of aesthetics: that of *humor*. Whereas wit serves as the combinatory machinery underlying Jean Paul’s excerpting practice and method of text production, it is humor which brings into view the *materiality of writing*, from which the lives of scholarly figures like Wutz, Fixlein, and Fibel are shown to be quite literally “born.” The concept of humor, which lies at the core of Jean Paul’s aesthetic program, serves as the privileged form-theoretical instrument in his texts for pivoting between the the infinite and the finite, the infinitely big and the infinitesimally small. He therefore defines humor as the form of “the inverted sublime” [das umgekehrte Erhabene],¹⁸⁰ which in part follows Kant’s definition of the sublime as the negative representation of the infinite due to the inadequacy of the faculty of presentation to give form to the formlessness of the sublime object.

Yet in contrast to the Kantian sublime, which by abandoning sensibility and employing ideas to fill the void of representation ends in the higher contemplation of the ideas of reason, humor as “the inverted sublime” “does not lead to elevated heights but into the depths of finitude – into the particular, the sensuous, the marginal, and the small.”¹⁸¹ By taking sides with the small and marginal, humor debases the great and elevates the small, placing them on the same level:

¹⁸⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 125.

¹⁸¹ Fleming, *The Pleasures of Abandonment*, 47.

Der Humor, als das umgekehrte Erhabene, vernichtet nicht das Einzelne, sondern das Endliche durch den Kontrast mit der Idee. Es gibt für ihn keine einzelne Torheit, keine Toren, sondern nur Torheit und eine tolle Welt; er hebt—ungleich dem gemeinen Spaßmacher mit seinen Seitenhieben—keine einzelne Narrheit heraus, sondern er erniedrigt das Große, aber—ungleich der Parodie—um ihm das Kleine, und erhöht das Kleine, aber—ungleich der Ironie—um ihm das Große an sie die Seite zu setzen und so beide zu vernichten, weil vor der Unendlichkeit alles gleich ist und nichts.¹⁸²

Here one finds the technique of double perspectivization at work in Jean Paul's concept of humor, which proceeds according to a paradoxical logic of continuous inversion and reversal. Humor, as Jean Paul writes, thus resembles Luther's definition of the human will as a *lex inversa*, except here in a positive sense, for its descent into hell paves its way for an ascent to heaven: "Wie Luther im schlimmen Sinn unsern Willen eine *lex inversa* nennt: so ist es der Humor im guten; und seine Höllenfahrt bahnet ihm die Himmelfahrt."¹⁸³ Through this inversion of perspective, humor is able to elevate the small and demean the great, thereby making it impossible to distinguish between the "microscopic" or "macroscopic" points of view, between the pathway to hell or heaven. Hence, in addition to Luther's notion of the *lex inversa*, Jean Paul goes on to compare humor to the mythological bird *Merops*, which "zwar dem Himmel den Schwanz zukehrt, aber doch in dieser Richtung in den Himmel auffliegt. Dieser Gaukler trinkt, auf dem Kopfe tanzend, den Nektar *hinaufwärts*."¹⁸⁴ As Jean Paul's reference to the figure of *Merops* suggests, humor does not simply invert the perspectives of the big and the small, the infinite and the finite, but presents a perspective of impossibility; for just as *Merops* is said to drink upwards while "dancing upside-down," humor inverts the sublime heights of the heavens and the microscopic frivolities of everyday life to produce nonsense, such that "alles gleich ist und nichts."

¹⁸² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 125.

¹⁸³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 129.

¹⁸⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 129.

By foregrounding the sensuous materiality of finite existence from the perspective of the infinite, humor explodes the form of the sublime from within. The concept of humor thereby distinguishes Jean Paul's aesthetics from the philosophical theories of the sublime and the subject in Kantian and post-Kantian German Idealism as well as from those of the Romantics, who drew heavily on Kant and Fichte in order to think art, language, and representation in terms of self-reflexive processes, rather than as static products. Jean Paul was neither "vor Fichte ein geborener Fichteaner,"¹⁸⁵ nor a Romantic in the vein of Friedrich Schlegel. He shuns what he refers to in his satirical text *Clavis Fichtiana seu Leibgeberiana* (1800) as the "Höchste Höhe der Reflexion."¹⁸⁶ In contrast to Friedrich Schlegel's notion of "romantic universal poetry," which prescribes an infinite process of becoming so as to achieve a progressive approximation of the absolute, Jean Paul rejects the route of infinite reflection; instead, he asserts an insuperable gap between the finite and the infinite, the real and the ideal. This marks a crucial distinction between Jean Paul's concept of humor from Schlegel's concept of irony, for whereas romantic irony takes the form of an infinite *mise en abyme*,¹⁸⁷ humor, to quote Deleuze, is "the art of the surfaces and of the doubles, of nomadic singularities and of the always displaced aleatory point; it is the art of the static genesis, the

¹⁸⁵ "Als Humorist ist Jean Paul in gewisser Weise vor Fichte ein geborener Fichtianer, so wie er als Mensch und Gestalter ein Gegen-Fichte ist. Sogar als Denker: denn sein Denken ist fülliger als das seiner Humoristen. Was aber die Verwandtschaft stiftet, ist dies: der Humorist verflüchtigt mit der Welt zugleich auch sein (erfahrungsmäßiges) Ich vor einer in ihm selbst wirkenden, aber nicht mehr persönlich faßbaren geistigen Kraft" (Max Kommerell, *Jean Paul* [Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1966], 344). For further analysis of the relationship between Jean Paul and Fichte, cf. Till Dembeck, "Fichte dem Buchstaben nach auslegen. Selbst-Lektüre bei Jean Paul," in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 44 (2009), 113–40.

¹⁸⁶ Jean Paul, *Clavis Fichtiana seu Leibgeberiana*, in: *Werke*, I/3, 1011–56, here: 1033.

¹⁸⁷ Arguably the most famous formula of infinite reflection can be found in Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenäum-Fragmente*, where Schlegel formulates the following programmatic statement: "Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen" (Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragment* Nr. 116, in: *Kritische Ausgabe*, I/2, 182f). For more on the poetics and epistemology of Schlegel's concept of irony, cf. Paul de Man, "The Concept of Irony," in: *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 163–84.

savoir-faire of the pure event, and the ‘fourth person singular’ – with every signification, denotation, and manifestation suspended, all height and depth abolished.”¹⁸⁸

Humor is thus not so much concerned with the (idealist) opposition between system and fragment, totality and part, nor that between the fragmentariness of the parts and the organic totality of the whole. As Jean Paul writes, “[a]n die humoristische Totalität knüpfen sich allerlei Erscheinungen. Z. B. sie äußert sich im sternischen Periodenbau, der durch Gedankenstriche nicht Teile, sondern Ganze verbindet [...]”¹⁸⁹ From the perspective of humor, the parts, taken on their own, appear as “wholes,” and the wholes, once connected together, appear as “parts.”¹⁹⁰ In Jean Paul’s idylls, humor stages the attempt to create an internally-closed work as an aesthetic unity, such that life appears as a seamless, gap-free whole, and at the same time unravels the hermeneutic project of writing the (auto)biography by exposing at the material level the material interfaces – the gaps – between the fragmentary (excerpted) parts that hold the whole – life and book, book and life – together. Strung together by hyphens, gaps, and stitches, they serialize and juxtapose the fragments or excerpts without transition – a typographic operation that both syntactically connects the parts together and simultaneously reveals them to be fragments.

¹⁸⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 141.

¹⁸⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 127f.

¹⁹⁰ In the introduction to a text that exists only as an appendix, *Der Jubelseniör. Ein Appendix* (1797), Jean Paul sketches out a poetics of digression that carries out precisely this reversal of the part-whole relation: “Die Digression ist nie im Roman Hauptsache, darf hingegen nie im Appendix als Nebensache behandelt werden; dort ist sie wartendes Auskehricht, hier ist sie ein musivisch in den Stubenboden eingelegtes, ein poetisches Asaroton, sowie die Alten auf ihren Fußböden musivisches Vexier-Stroh, Knochen und dergleichen, kurz die Stube des Auskehrichts wegen hatten” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 413f). Jean Paul describes digression as a “mosaic” [musivisch], a “poetic asaroton,” meaning “unswept floor,” which refers to an ancient Roman floor mosaic technique. The poetological significance of the “asaroton” lies in its reconceptualization of the relation of parts and wholes: for Jean Paul, this relation is neither logical nor organic, but the result of a specific standpoint: if from the microscopic perspective the parts appear as heterogeneous fragments that are incoherently juxtaposed together, from the macroscopic perspective the parts appear instead to constitute a loosely interconnected whole. For more on Jean Paul’s poetics of the appendix in relation to this double perspectivization, cf. Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, 134–35. See also: Wieland, *Vexierzüge: Jean Pauls Digressionspoetik* (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2013), in particular 185–93.

Humor, in short, is an aesthetics of finitude. Wutz, Fixlein, and Fibel are all humorous figures whose lives are small and skew – a “multitude of crooked lines”¹⁹¹ [Anzahl der krummen Linien]. It indifferently conflates life and book, book and life, but as fragments – as *excerpts* – of one another, torn asunder.¹⁹² They are glued and grafted together from the fragmentary materiality of unbounded sheets of paper, such as the paper scraps and scribblings and assorted “waste-paper,” from which Jean Paul’s idylls are (fictionally) stitched together. This is the technique of “humorous sensuality” [humoristische Sinnlichkeit], which “individualisiert bis ins Kleinste, und wieder die Teile des Individualisierten.”¹⁹³ Their biographies emerge from immanent differences – from heterogeneous narrative structure that undermine mimetic mirroring and suspend aesthetic distance. Their narrative situation is not a homogeneous one, but penetrated by the heterogeneous event of writing (life), which fragments the text and introduces the perspective of the “fourth person singular.” By effecting an impossible perspective, the moment of observing one’s own death, the voice the “fourth person” – neither entirely that of the author-instance “Jean Paul” nor the fictional narrator – undermines the identity of these humorous figures and their perspective, it defers the moment of narrative closure and the end of the book, and thereby seeks to overstep the medial constraints and closure of the book as a discursive form.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 102.

¹⁹² “Die irritierende Gleichgültigkeit von *Leben* und *Buch*, in der Wendung *gegenwärtiges Leben oder Buch*, präzisiert *Leben* und *Buch* zu Auszügen *auseinander*: das ins Buch – *biblos* – verzeichnete Leben – *bios* –, das vom Leben – *bios* – durchgeworfene Buch – *biblos* –.” Schestag, “Bibliographie für Jean Paul,” 506.

¹⁹³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 140.

¹⁹⁴ For a poetological specification of Deleuze’s concept of the “fourth person singular” using the example of the narrative techniques of Franz Kafka, cf. Joseph Vogl, “Vierte Person. Kafkas Erzählstimme,” in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 68:4 (1994), 745–56. “Diese vierte Person artikuliert die Erfahrung eines abgestorbenen, sich selbst fremden und vergangenen Ichs; diese vierte Person spricht als unmöglicher Zeuge einer Erfahrung, der das Ich zum Opfer gefallen ist und die Paradoxie eines ‘Ich bin tot’ auszusprechen versucht. Ein unmögliches, verwundetes und verfolgtes Ich also, zugleich aber eine unpersönliche Stimme, eine Vielheit von Stimmen, die aus den immanenten Differenzen des ‘ich,’ des ‘er,’ des Erzählers heraus reden [...]” (ibid., 755). There are uncanny parallels between the impossible perspective of witnessing one’s own death in Kafka’s writings and in Jean Paul’s, as in his 1789 satire *Meine Überzeugung, daß ich todt bin* (cf. Jean Paul, *Ausgearbeitete Schriften 1786–1792*, in: *Werke*, II/3, 96 ff.), his satirical 1790 text *Meine lebendige Begrabung* (cf. Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 280

2. “SEIN SCHREIBZEUG WAR SEINE TASCHENDRUCKEREI.” BIBLIOGRAPHIC FANTASIES IN LEBEN DES VERGNÜGTEN SCHULMEISTERLEIN WUTZ

Wir Gelehrte wissen Gelehrte, hoft man, zu schätzen und schreiben über nichts lieber als über Bücher Bücher; allein niemand thut’s so gern und oft als H. Hirsching *) und ich.¹⁹⁵

—Jean Paul, *Beschreibung der öffentlichen und Privatbibliotheken des Dorfes unweit der See Kuhpanz*

Jede Leidenschaft grenzt ja ans Chaos, die sammlerische aber an das der Erinnerungen. Doch ich will mehr sagen: Zufall, Schicksal, die das Vergangene vor meinem Blick durchfärben, sie sind zugleich in dem gewohnten Durcheinander dieser Bücher sinnfällig da. Denn was ist dieser Besitz anderes als eine Unordnung, in der Gewohnheit sich so heimisch machte, daß sie als Ordnung erscheinen kann? Sie haben schon von Leuten gehört, die am Verlust ihrer Bücher zu Kranken, von anderen, die an ihrem Erwerb zu Verbrechern geworden sind. Jede Ordnung ist gerade in diesen Bereichen nichts als ein Schwebezustand überm Abgrund.¹⁹⁶

—Walter Benjamin, “Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus”

The form or deformity of Jean Paul’s texts cite forms, techniques, and operations of scholarly knowledge. His literary texts, which appear in the form of slip boxes and post-scripts, prefaces and appendices – forms whose poetic styles and conventions Jean Paul developed in an exemplary, if bewildering, fashion – thereby disclose their own precarious and unstable integrity by coupling themselves to all different types of texts or genres, which cite themselves *as* genres. They are texts, in other words, which approximate their own textuality: they are books about the writing of books,

ff.), his visions of an imagined future death in *Konjunktural-Biographie*, as well as those in *Siebenkäs*, in which the novel’s protagonist fakes his own death by switching bodies with his “Doppeltgänger” named “Leibgeber” and is thus able to observe his own burial. As Helmut Pfotenhauer writes, “Das Motiv des sich tot Sehens, sei es im Spiritus-Licht, sei es beim Scheintod, sei es während der lebendigen Begrabung, wandert in immer anderen Ausformungen durch die verschiedenen Textsorten und kehrt dann in der bekanntesten Variante, der des *Siebenkäs* wieder.” (Pfotenhauer, “Das leben schreiben,” 49).

¹⁹⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 256. The asterisk next to Hirsching’s name continues: “*) Er schrieb eine Beschreibung der vornehmsten Bibliotheken in Deutschland, die meiner obigen so ähnlich ausfiel, daß ich und ieder seine, wäre sie nicht früher dagewesen, für eine Parodie und Satire auf meine halten müßte” (ibid.). Eduard Berend notes in his commentary to *Kuhpanz-See*: “Der Kuhpanz-See liegt, wie sich Richter in seiner Namenliste (Fasz. 10) notiert, bei Liebenwalde in der Mittelmark und stößt an den Wutz-See, nach dem er den Helden seiner ersten Idylle taufte” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 457).

¹⁹⁶ Walter Benjamin, “Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus. Eine Rede über das Sammeln,” in: idem., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV, 388–96, here: 388.

biographies about the production of biographies – and their impossibility. Much to the irritation of contemporary readers, Jean Paul rarely ascribed to his texts traditional genre designations such as “novel” [Roman], as was customary for the time. Instead, they often present themselves in the form of heterogeneous fragments or as supplements to other works, into or onto which he inserted or appended them in a seemingly arbitrary manner – and they reflect, in turn, on their own fragmentariness and supplementary dynamic. In this way, the “birth” of his texts from antecedent writings makes itself explicit and perceptible.

Such is the case with Jean Paul’s first foray into the idyllic genre, his short prose piece *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal. Eine Art Idylle* (1790/93).¹⁹⁷ Neither a “novel” nor even really a “biography,” *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* was conceived from the beginning as a supplement to a larger work, *Die unsichtbare Loge*, into which Jean Paul inserted *Wutz* as an appendix. The unusual constellation in which *Wutz* was published foregrounds the ambivalence with which Jean Paul regarded the book as a discursive form. In fact, in the preface to the second volume of *Siebenkäs* (1796–97), he even jokingly confesses to his readers, “es hat mich oft verdrüßlich gemacht, daß ich jeder Vorrede, die ich schreibe, ein Buch anhängen muß [...]”.¹⁹⁸ This comic inversion of the hierarchy between book and preface, between the work and its *parergic* supplement, through the marginalization of the book-format in favor of an excessive inter- or paratextuality – what has been termed in the secondary literature Jean Paul’s “monstrous writing”¹⁹⁹ – is therefore not without significance for the reading of *Wutz*. For it is precisely there that the status of the book itself becomes investigated in relation to reading and book-writing: “Sie diskutiert, unumwundener, buchstäblicher genommen, das Bibliographieren.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Jean Paul, *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal*, in: *Werke*, I/1, 422–62.

¹⁹⁸ Jean Paul, *Siebenkäs*, in: *Werke*, I/2, 143.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Schäfer, “Jean Pauls monströses Schreiben.”

²⁰⁰ Schestag, “Bibliographien für Jean Paul,” 477.

“Bibliographization,” or the recording of paratextual data such as author, title, genre, and date of publication, is a scholarly technique – one essential to the book trade, or *Buchwesen* – that becomes explicitly thematized in different ways in *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*. Perhaps nowhere more prominently or irritatingly does the recording of bibliographic data become reflected – and, in turn, destabilized – than in the subtitle of *Wutz*, which furnishes an unusual genre designation. It reads: “A Kind of Idyll” [Eine Art Idylle]. With this “kind of idyll,” Jean Paul does not simply designate the genre of the text as an “idyll,” but rather cites its genre *as* a genre: it is a recording of a recording, a citation as repetition or iteration, which thereby contaminates and deforms the genre which it cites. With this citation of genre, the characteristic conventions of a genre appear *as* conventions, such that genre and its citation are inscribed within a performative act.²⁰¹ In a paradoxical logic similar to that of Jean Paul’s satirical inversion of the relation of preface to book, the subtitle “a ‘kind of idyll’ does not simply name the particular makeup, the deviating mode of an idyll, but combines the kind [*Art*] with the genre [*Gattung*], in other words, it combines species and genus.”²⁰² In this reversal of the hierarchies of classification, the species – the part to be subsumed – breaks away from the coherent order – the genus – in which it is contained, which subsequently appears as a kind of supplement in which the species, “a kind of idyll,” no longer has a place in the subordinate whole. The “monstrous” potential of this metalepsis between part and whole, species and genus, points to the way in which the recording of bibliographic information in *Wutz* no

²⁰¹ In his well-known critique of J. L. Austin’s concept of the performative, Jacques Derrida refers to this as “general citationality”: “For ultimately, isn’t it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, ‘non-serious,’ *citation* (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a ‘successful’ performative? So that – a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion – a successful performative is necessarily an ‘impure’ performative, to adopt the word advanced later on by Austin when he acknowledges that there is no ‘pure’ performative” (Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in: *Limited Inc* [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988], 1–24, here: 17).

²⁰² Cf. Andrea Krauß, “‘A Kind of Idyll’: Epistemologies of Citation in Jean Paul,” in: *The Germanic Review* 89.1 (2014), 76–93, in particular 77–80, here: 86.

longer aims at a harmonious “order of things,” but brings about instead their dispersion and delimitation into indeterminacy by repetition – by the citation of a citation, the recording of a recording.²⁰³

In order to examine more precisely how Jean Paul’s first “kind of idyll,” *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, stages the formation and deformation of the idyll in relation to reading and book-writing, it is worth briefly turning to the long history of the genre, which can be traced with relative consistency from the ancient Greek and Roman pastoral poems, which established “Arcadia” – a mythological, geographically isolated paradise – as the *topos* of ancient bucolic literature, to the modern period with the genre’s revival in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Early enlightenment authors such as Johann Heinrich Voß and Salomon Geßner, among others, sought to reinvent the long-outdated genre not merely as a pastoral representation of an idealized past, but above all as a moral genre, which by harkening back to the lost golden age of Arcadia – now envisioned as a geographic site where life beyond social constraints would be possible – opened up the possibility of a social critique from the perspective of the nascent bourgeois class that sought to diagnose the constraints and limitations of the real world on individual freedom.

Jean Paul’s ‘modern idyll,’ by contrast, marks a decisive break with the Enlightenment idylls of Voß and Geßner. On the one hand, he conceives of the idyll as a kind of “Freudenspiel,” and hence as a literary form which should give rise to pleasure and happiness. On the one hand, he situates it within the epic genre, defining it several years later in the second edition of the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1813) as the “epic representation of *full* happiness in *limitation*” [epische Darstellung des *Vollglücks* in der *Beschränkung*].²⁰⁴ According to this paradoxical formula, which

²⁰³ For more on the paradoxical or ‘impure’ order of genre, see Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” in: *Critical Inquiry*, trans. Avital Ronell, 7.1 (1980), 55–81.

²⁰⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 258.

describes the idyll in quasi-Kantian terms of constraint and limitation, the conventions of the genre are no longer tied to specific geographic or temporal reference points.²⁰⁵ They can therefore apply not only to any point in time or space, but can also encompass numerous objective constraints imposed on the (bourgeois) subject, such as social standing and character: “Die Idylle fodert eben für ihre Beschränkung im Vollglück die hellsten örtlichen Farben nicht nur für Landschaft, auch für Lage, Stand, Charakter und verwirft die unbestimmten duftigen Allgemeinheiten Geßners, in welchen höchstens etwan Schaf und Bock aus den Wasserfarben auftauchen, aber die Menschen verschwimmen.”²⁰⁶

Whether such constraints on the individual’s subjective perspective situate “full happiness” [Vollglück] as an impossible goal that always remains beyond the individual’s reach or, in a more dialectical fashion, as in fact precisely what such constraints give rise to, crucial for Jean Paul is that by making limitation a condition of “full happiness,” the modern idyll no longer presupposes an undialectical contrast or harmonious balance between the deficiencies of the real world and the fantasies of an imaginary world beyond. Rather, his modernization of the idyll into a “kind of idyll” offers only a “kind of happiness.” In its representation of the small, quiet, and quotidian existence of the bourgeois individual, happiness is ineluctably shot through with pain, suffering, and death – in other words, with the insuperable “constraints” of finitude that define the modern *conditio humana*. “In the idyll, the subject never completely breaks free from the constraints of his or her surroundings. Instead one creates interruptions, like holidays and ‘blue Mondays,’ within

²⁰⁵ “So wie übrigens für die Idylle der Schauplatz gleichgültig ist [...]” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 261).

²⁰⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 260f.

one's limitations."²⁰⁷ Jean Paul's modern idylls thus seek to expose the ambivalences and antinomies contained within the poetic imagination itself.²⁰⁸

Ihr könnt die Geh-Fahrt eines Fuhrmanns bei gutem Wetter und gutem Straßenbau und bei seinen kostbaren Mahlzeiten zur Idylle erheben und ihm – es ist aber Überfluß – im Gasthofe gar seine Braut anbieten. So kann z. B. die Ferienzeit eines gedruckten Schulmannes – der blaue Montag eines Handwerkers – die Taufe des ersten Kindes – sogar der erste Tag, an welchem eine von Hoffesten mattgehetzte Fürsten-Braut endlich mit ihrem Fürsten ganz allein (das Gefolge kommt sehr spät nach) in eine volle blühende Einsiedelei hinausfährt – kurz alle diese Tage können Idyllen werden und können singen: auch wir waren in Arkadien. –²⁰⁹

Here his reference to the traditional idyllic topos “et in Arcadia ego” – potentially intended as a subtle revision of Goethe's epigraph to the *Italienische Reise*, “Auch ich in Arkadien!” – in the line “auch wir waren in Arkadien” should not be read, therefore, as a flight into a timeless “golden age” that would eliminate the experience of human finitude – of death and suffering – but rather as an embrace of the possibility of the idyll in the “microscopic amusements”²¹⁰ [mikroskopische

²⁰⁷ Jörg Kreienbrock, *Malicious Objects, Anger Management, and the Question of Modern Literature* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 88.

²⁰⁸ Thus while Gebner ascribes to fantasy the psychologically curative power to overcome the tension between happiness and melancholy in the real world by presenting the idyllic one as a closed microcosm, for Jean Paul fantasy is more complex and ambiguous. Rather than contrasting the microcosm of idyllic fantasy with the macrocosm of the real world, he uses the imagination to turn the gaze of idyllic happiness inward, toward the ‘transcendent’ present of the individual, whose childhood past becomes the reservoir of idyllic representations. This temporization of the idyll in terms of the past, present, and future of the individual's existence is suggested in the poetological text included in the appendix “Einige Jus de tablette für Mannspersonen” which concludes *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, entitled “Über die natürliche Magie der Einbildungskraft” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 195–205). There he attributes the “liveliness” or *energeia* – the Aristotelian rhetorical figure of vivid representation – “of fantasy” [Lebhaftigkeit der Phantasie] (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 196) to the perception of the *plurality* of spatial and temporal relations between images, likening it to a “telescope” [Fernrohr], which “zieht [...] einen bunten Diffusionsraum um die glücklichen Inseln der Vergangenheit, um das gelobte Land der Zukunft” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 197). The epistemological significance of this elliptical temporal structure of imagination articulates itself in his concept of the “pre-mirrored infinity” [vorgespiegelte Unendlichkeit], which stands for the ability of man's imaginative faculty to constitute a world without constraints: “Das Ideale in der Poesie ist nichts anders als diese vorgespiegelte Unendlichkeit; ohne diese Unendlichkeit gibt die Poesie nur platte abgefärbt Schieferabdrücke, aber keine Blumenstücke der hohen Natur” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 202). For more on the poetological significance of Jean Paul's theory of the imagination, cf. Ulrike Hagel, *Elliptische Zeiträume des Erzählens. Jean Paul und die Aporien der Idylle* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003); Till Dembeck, *Texte rahmen. Grenzregionen literarischer Werke im 18. Jahrhundert (Gottsched, Wieland, Moritz, Jean Paul)* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2007), 359., in particular 297–313. See also: Eckart Goebel, “Vorgespiegelte und wahre Unendlichkeit. ›Mise en abyme‹: Gide, Huxley, Jean Paul,” in: *Die Endlichkeit der Literatur* (Berlin 2002), 85–99; Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, in particular 76–81.

²⁰⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 259.

²¹⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 11.

Belustigungen] of everyday life, in the concrete *hic et nunc* of the “real” world. Against an idealizing conception of the idyll in the eighteenth century, Jean Paul’s modern idyll as a “kind of idyll” no longer presupposes the presence of a mythical unity of origin, but stages instead the aporias and interruptions – the literal caesuras – within life and book. For this reason, life and book do not complete or compliment each other as wholes, but appear instead as ‘citations’ of one another. The idyll as a “kind of idyll” specifies man, in turn, as a “kind of” caesura, “der große Gedankenstriche im Buch der Natur” – a motto which, not without coincidence, prefaces the very novel, *Die unsichtbare Loge*, to which *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* was appended – and the book as caesured, incomplete, and unbound by the part, by the supplement or fragment, namely *Wutz* itself, which appends it.

2.1. My Own Private Library: The Wutzean Art of Book-Making

In *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, Jean Paul not only stages the idyllic genre as a distinctly modern ‘small form’ – one which elevates the small, quotidian, and trivial to the center of literary representation – but also inaugurates a subversive twist on bibliographic forms of knowledge, touching upon nothing less than the literary institutions of authorship, work, and hermeneutic reading practices around 1800. The subversive thrust of *Schulemeisterlein Wutz* consists in the way it conceives the relation of life to book: far from completing each other as ‘wholes,’ both are shown to be grounded in a citational, supplementary dynamic, which reveals meaning to be a retroactively constitutive effect of the material contingency of text – in other words, of non-meaning and even of misreading. It thereby “opens up a perspective that was all but unknown in German letters: a view onto the small, the quotidian, and strange – a strangeness nevertheless

strangely familiar.”²¹¹ Just as the text of *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* relates to *Die unsichtbare Loge* as its *parergic* supplement, so too does its protagonist, the pedagogue and “kind of” scholar by the name of Maria Wutz, who in the title of the work is referred to not simply as a “schoolmaster,” but as a “*little* schoolmaster” [*Schulmeisterlein*], appear as a marginal, supplementary figure in the context of the “discourse network” around 1800.

Wutz’s diminutive stature and apparent insignificance is made all the more apparent in the text by the numerous constraints – both physical and mental – which are imposed upon him: he is a simple teacher who lives in the small village of Auenthal, and is therefore constrained by both geography and rank; he is extremely poor, and can therefore afford no personal possessions; and he has a childlike naivety, which prevents him from any kind of deeper reflection, reveling instead in the immediate pleasures of the present.²¹² In these respects, *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* seems to fulfill all the criteria of Jean Paul’s definition of the idyll; it stages an ensemble of different forms of constraints and limitations which come into witty combinatorial play with one another – as if with his own (author) name “Wutz” presents a minimal deformation, a kind of paronomasia, of the word “wit” [Witz].²¹³

²¹¹ Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, 60.

²¹² Already in the first page of *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, the narrator explains that, for Wutz, learning how to spell was a useless endeavor: “unser Maria Wutz dozierte unter seinem Vater schon in der Woche das Abc, in der er das Buchstabieren erlernte, das nichts taugt” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 422). As in all of Jean Paul’s “kind of idylls,” this ambiguous relation to language in childhood serves as the zero point for the text’s reconfiguration, and subsequent deformation, of the technical system which manifests itself between reading and writing as one of contingency and play, rather than order and meaning. While in *Wutz* this deformation of language and the Abc’s remains largely nascent, it is radicalized in Jean Paul’s third and final “kind of idyll,” entitled *Leben Fibels, des Verfassers der Bienrodischen Fibel*, which is the subject of the last chapter of this section.

²¹³ “Nicht zuletzt auch im Eigennamen *Maria Wutz*, der in *Maria* männliches und weibliches Geschlecht, sakrale und profane Sphäre mischt, in *Wutz* aber Mensch und Tier, Begriff und Onomatopoesie, Klangbild und Bedeutung” (Schestag, “Bibliographien für Jean Paul,” 482). See also: “Wutz,” in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden, vol. 30, [Leipzig 1971], 2555; as well as: “Wutz,” *Grimm-Wörterbuch*, accessed 20 Jan. 2016, <<http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=wutz>>).

While the proximity in publication history between Jean Paul's early satirical writings, such as *Grönländische Prozesse* (1783) and *Auswahl aus des Teufels Papiere* (1789), and *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* may suggest a reading of the story as a satirical narrative, in no way is Maria Wutz simply an ironic-satirical representative of bourgeois society, a "Verkörperung gemeindeutscher Kauzigkeit,"²¹⁴ as Max Kommerell contended. Rather, Wutz appears as a decidedly humorous figure whose unusual strategies of reading and writing – and of reading that which he has written – are characterized by the technique of witty juxtaposition. Due to his dire financial circumstances and limited mental abilities, his access to the conventional channels of scholarly knowledge are restricted. He is so impoverished, in fact, he can only afford the yearly "catalogue of books"²¹⁵ [Meßkatalog], rather than the books themselves, and so must write the books he wishes to own by hand based on the titles and authors' names, which are published in the book catalogue. In this way, "der Wutzischen Kunst, stets fröhlich zu sein"²¹⁶ appears to succeed against all limitations: after dutifully studying the catalogue of books to appear, Wutz checks off the works he must read and then gets down to work, writing every word of them by hand. In this way, he undertakes the impossible hermeneutic task of producing the full contents of a work based solely on its title and author:

Der wichtige Umstand, bei dem uns, wie man behauptet, so viel daran gelegen ist, ihn voraus zu hören, ist nämlich der, daß Wutz eine ganze Bibliothek – wie hätte der Mann sich eine kaufen können – sich eigenhändig schrieb. Sein Schreibzeug war seine Taschendruckerei; jedes neue Meßprodukt, dessen Titel das Meisterlein ansichtig wurde, war nun so gut als geschrieben oder gekauft [...]²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Kommerell, *Jean Paul*, 286.

²¹⁵ "Nur *ein* Buch ließ er in sein Haus, den Meßkatalog" (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 426).

²¹⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 431.

²¹⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 425f.

Wutz's book-making thus literally begins in the margins of the books – that is, not coincidentally, in the threshold space of the paratext, which by establishing an undefined 'grey zone' between interior and exterior, between book and life, is what first enables a book to become a book.²¹⁸ With his handwritten authorship – for he needs, and can afford, no more than pen and paper – he “becomes his own printing press, indeed, his own publishing house.”²¹⁹ Wutz writes down the titles of books which interest him, and under these titles the respective content of the book, and

schenkt' es seiner ansehnlichen Büchersammlung, die wie die heidnischen aus lauter Handschriften bestand [...] sein Sohn klagte oft, daß in manchen Jahren sein Vater vor literarischer Geburtarbeit kaum niesen konnte, weil er auf einmal Sturms Betrachtungen, die verbesserte Auflage, Schillers Räuber und Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft der Welt zu schenken hatte.²²⁰

Far from an author in the conventional sense, Wutz appears here as a 'kind of' “Enzyklopädist”²²¹ who “schreibt über alles,”²²² and whose personal library, like Friedrich Nicolai's *Allgemeine*

²¹⁸ For more on the theory of the paratext, cf. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For the related concept of *parergon*, see Louis Marin, “The Frame of Representation and Some of Its Figures,” in: *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 352–72; Derrida, “Parergon,” in: *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15–148. For further theories of paratextuality in Jean Paul's writing, cf. Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, in particular 1–52; Uwe Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors aus dem Geist der Herausgeberfiktion. Editoriale Rahmung im Roman um 1800: Wieland, Goethe, Brentano, Jean Paul, E.T.A. Hoffmann* (München 2008), in particular 81–142 and 338–53.

²¹⁹ Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, 61.

²²⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 426–27.

²²¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 427.

²²² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 428.

deutsche Bibliothek,²²³ seems at first glance to perfectly mirror the wider “gelehrte[n] Welt,”²²⁴ containing all the significant books of the eighteenth century, including Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Schiller’s *Die Räuber*, and Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*.

The narrator insists, however, that Wutz’s books are neither plagiarisms nor parodies: “Er war kein verdammter Nachdrucker, der das Original hinlegt und oft das meiste daraus abdruckt.”²²⁵ Instead, his hand-written method of book-making proceeds according to a witty-combinatorial logic of scouting out “distant similarities”²²⁶ [entfernte Ähnlichkeiten]: with all the rigor of a classical philologist, he takes the titles of the books that interest him, which in the place of the absent book serve as fragments or excerpts of the original, and from them alone he deduces the book’s content. For this reason, he has no need for the originals. However, as a result of this unusual twist

²²³ In *Schulmeistereien Wutz*, Jean Paul explicitly mentions Friedrich Nicolai by name: “Ich möchte seine Meisterstücke nicht schreiben. Den größten Schaden hatte der Mann davon – Verstopfung zu halben Wochen und Schnupfen auf der andern Seite –, wenn der Senior (sein Friedrich Nicolai) zu viel Gutes, das er zu schreiben hatte, anstrich und seine Hand durch die gemalte anspornte [...]” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 427). The *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* was a quarterly review journal published by Friedrich Nicolai that appeared from 1765 until 1806, during which time was largely associated with the discourse of the late Enlightenment. Not only did Jean Paul frequently excerpt from the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, as evinced by his excerpt manuscripts, but the encyclopedic ordering of knowledge of the literary journal was of profound epistemological significance for his conception of form: “Dieser formbildende Einfluß der Zeitschrift läßt sich an mindestens drei Strukturanalogien zwischen der literarischen Kommunikation in Zeitschriften und Jean Pauls Romanen vergegenwärtigen. Erstens sind Zeitschriften unabgeschlossene, dynamische Medien der Wissensproduktion. Ihre Produzenten sind sich der Vorläufigkeit und der im Prinzip infinite Revisionsbedürftigkeit des von ihnen zur Verfügung gestellten Wissens bewußt. Für Zeitschriften wie die *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* oder die *Allgemeine Litteratur-Zeitung* dürfte dieses Bewußtsein sogar Teil der Gewinnkalkulation gewesen sein. Die Vorläufigkeit des Wissens ist die Bedingung der permanenten Nachfrage nach ihrer Zeitschrift und der stetigen sekundären Textproduktion. Die Nähe Jean Pauls zu diesen publizistischen Textverfahren dokumentiert sich nicht nur in der Übernahme einzelner Gattungen [...] sonder auch in der Offenheit seiner Romanstrukturen” (Stephan Pabst, “‘Herr Gedruckt.’ Fingierte Autorschaft als Funktion der Wissensorganisation in Jean Pauls *Leben Fibels*,” in: *Kunst und Wissen. Beziehungen zwischen Ästhetik und Erkenntnistheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. Astrid Bauereisen, Stefan Pabst, Achim Vesper [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009], 237f). While Pabst focuses in his article on the significance of the newspaper as both a publication format and a form of knowledge-organization for *Leben Fibels*, I argue in the fourth chapter of this section that, in fact, this re-organization presents itself most strikingly in his anthology *Herbst-Blumene, oder gesammelte Werkchen aus Zeitschriften* (1810–20), with specific reference to his short text contained therein, entitled “Meine Miscellen,” in which Jean Paul’s ‘miscellaneous’ method of writing may be said to ‘cite’ the miscellaneous order and (un)form of contemporaneous miscellanies which widely circulated around 1800.

²²⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 428.

²²⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 426.

²²⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 170.

on the hermeneutic method, Wutz's books turn out to be unexpected – though perhaps no less incorrect – readings of the bibliographic titles. Hence the narrator remarks apropos Wutz's handwritten edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, “daß er z.B. im ganzen Federschen Traktat über Raum und Zeit von nichts handelte als vom Schiffs-*Raum* und der *Zeit*, die man bei Weibern Menses nennt.”²²⁷ This freely interpretive attitude toward pre-written titles is one of two remarkable facts mentioned by the narrator. The other, a matter of faith, results from the first: in the course of his many years of writing books by hand, this second fact helps to cement in Wutz his peculiar conception of what constitutes an ‘original’ work:

da er einige Jahre sein Bücherbrett auf diese Art voll geschrieben und durchstudiert hatte, so nahm er die Meinung an, seine Schreibbücher wären eigentlich die kanonischen Urkunden, und die gedruckten wären bloße Nachstiche seiner geschriebnen; nur das, klagt' er, könn' er – und böten die Leute ihm Balleien dafür an – nicht herauskriegen, wienach und warum der Buchführer das Gedruckte allzeit so sehr verfälsche und umsetze, daß man wahrhaftig schwören sollte, das Gedruckte und das Geschriebne hätten doppelte Verfasser, wüßte man es nicht sonst.

At first glance, this phenomenon of “double authorship” seems like mere caprice. Yet it turns out to contain an almost coherent logic, for nothing prevents one from assuming that a book is in fact nothing other than the exegesis of a title, possibly in connection with the author's name: “So wäre etwa Kants *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, das Buch dieses Titels, nichts anderes als eine, und zwar nur eine, mögliche Auslegung des Titels Kants *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Und Maria Wutzens Auslegung nur eine andere, nicht weniger mögliche, nicht weniger berechtigte und unberechenbare der selben Überschrift.”²²⁸ Hence it is possible for the narrator to claim – free of any trace of irony – “J. J. Rousseau oder Wutz (das ist einerlei).”²²⁹

²²⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 426.

²²⁸ Schestag, “Bibliographie für Jean Paul,” 478f.

²²⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 428.

Thus while bibliographies typically consist of indexes or records of book title, author and publisher name, the place of printing, and the year of publication, Wutz's erudition serves no such pragmatic function: he writes without reading, "und damit ohne jede Kenntnis der für seine Themen einschlägigen 'Realien.'" ²³⁰ The "beste Inventariestücke" ²³¹ in his book collection are not 'inventoried' works in the baroque sense of the storage of diverse materials according to a well-ordered *loci communes* – that is, in the sense of *inventio*, from which the word "inventory" etymologically derives. ²³² His bibliographies, in other words, record no pertinent scholarly information whatsoever, but only that which has been recorded; they are citations of citations, out of which he 'invents' or 'produces' the new and the novel: he writes down – cites, excerpts – the headings to books, which he himself does not possess because he cannot afford them, and in doing so he uncouples the title of the work from the 'original,' which figures as its withdrawn referent – its distant and inaccessible trace or adumbration: "Citation, we might say in the terms of Rousseau or Wutz or the narrator, is the name of the originally withdrawn. The 'authentic' citation – the source – always remains hidden in the background 'accoutered in different words.'" ²³³ By effecting in this way the displacement, as well as the fragmentation, of the original through the exegesis of the title, Wutz's book-making disrupts the semblance of identity which governs the relation of form to content, of idea to word. It thereby comes to undermine the very institutions of literature,

²³⁰ Schmidt-Hannisa, "Lesarten," 39.

²³¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 426.

²³² For a performative reading of Jean Paul's *inventio*, cf. Menke, "'Ein-Fälle – aus Exzerpten,'" in particular 294–98. In her essay Menke contends that what distinguishes the forms of knowledge produced by Jean Paul's combinatorial technique of writing from the outdated, 'baroque' forms of knowledge used by Enlightenment encyclopedists like Daniel Georg Morhof is the citational dynamic of Jean Paul's *inventio*: "Charakterisiert werden die Jean Paulschen Texte durch ihren Anschluss an eine veraltete Wissensform. Erinnert wird an Daniel Georg Morhofs *Polyhistor* [...], der die *inventio* im Sinne des topischen Suchsystems, 'das für die Zuordnung des allgemeinen Materials (der *loci communes*) mit dem besonderen Redegegenstand zuständig ist,' noch einmal vorstellt. Jean Paul 'zitiert' diesen Typus des Wissens; er zitiert derart die soeben veraltete Wissensform, und er zitiert sie als Verhalten – des exzerpierend-aus-schreibend Lesens und des *inventiven* Schreibens aus Exzerpten" (ibid., 294f).

²³³ Krauß, "Epistemologies of Citation in Jean Paul," 89.

such as the concept of work and the “author function,” both of which are premised on a reciprocal, co-originary identity formation.²³⁴

The legitimation for Wutz’s “double authorship” lies in his dire material circumstances, namely in the poverty in which he dwells. As the narrator reports, “»er würde wahrhaftig nicht so dumm sein, daß er Federn nähme und die besten Werke machte, wenn er nichts brauchte, als bloß den Beutel aufzubinden und sie zu erhandeln. Allein er habe nichts darin als zwei schwarze Hemdknöpfe und einen kotigen Kreuzer [...]«.”²³⁵ The recurring motifs of currency and money in *Wutz* go deeper, however, than merely presenting yet another constraint on Wutz’s existence. The presentation of various economic constraints on Wutz are not merely intended to satisfy the poetological criteria of the modern idyll; rather, they concern at bottom a far more fundamental problematic of circulation and exchange – in this context, the economic *dispositifs* of book-printing and the book-market – in relation to the worthless, trivial, and unexchangeable in the context of Wutz’s peculiar art of book-making:

So fällt aber auch das geschriebene Buch aus dem Schema des Tausches, nicht weniger als das Geschriebene. Und genauer: so sehr Buch und Sprache aus diesem Schema herausfallen, so sehr unterbrechen sie es. Sie stellen den *ökonomischen* Aufriß der Sprache infrage. Das Lesen im Buch, dessen, der es schrieb, weil er es nicht kaufen konnte, sucht nicht, auf seine Kosten zu kommen.²³⁶

Here it is not so much the economic motif of penury that is of significance, but rather the way in which *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* repeatedly stages financial ruin as leading to linguistic ruin; hence the real crisis of meaning (‘value’) prompted by Wutz’s book-making, which falls outside of the circulating realm of exchange and hence of value, turns out to result from a deficiency – not only

²³⁴ Cf. Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in: idem., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 113–38.

²³⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 428.

²³⁶ Schestag, “Bibliographie für Jean Paul,” 482.

from the fact that Wutz has no money, but from the very indeterminacy of words themselves which his own interpretive methods repeatedly expose.

Wutz's authorship encompasses many different authors, from Rousseau to Kant, as well as vastly different genres. We learn, for instance, that he is a prolific author of, amongst other literary genres, travelogues, namely to countries which he (like most other travel writers, according to the narrator) has, in fact, never visited.²³⁷ In addition to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, he also counts Johann Caspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* as one of the innumerable books of which he considers himself to be the true author. The reference to Lavater here is not without epistemological significance, for it is here where the text implicitly cites a method of interpretation – namely, that of physiognomic exegesis – which posits a reflective relation between inner and outer, spirit and letter, soul and body. Just as Lavater argued that one can grasp the (inner) 'morality' of an individual from the analysis of their (outer) physical, particularly facial, characteristics, Wutz – in a similar metalepsis of part and whole, cause and effect – seeks to deduce the inner contents of a book from its outer (bibliographic) properties.²³⁸ Thus it comes as no surprise to learn

²³⁷ “[...] abends aber mußte der gute Mann nach dem Abendessen noch gar um den Südpol rudern und konnte auf seiner Cookischen Reise kaum drei gescheite W orte zum Sohne nach Deutschland hinaufreden. Denn da unser Enzyklopädist nie das innere Afrika oder nur einen spanischen Maulesel-Stall betreten, oder die Einwohner von beiden gesprochen hatte: so hau’ er desto mehr Zeit und Fähigkeit, von beiden und allen Ländern reichhaltige Reisebeschreibungen zu liefern [...] Wutz zerrete sein Reisejournal auch aus niemand anders als aus sich” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 427).

²³⁸ For more on the relation of physiognomic discourse to literature and aesthetics around 1800, cf. Wolfram Grodeck and Ulrich Stadler (eds.): *Physiognomie und Pathognomie. Zur literarischen Darstellung von Individualität* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1994). For the significance of the discourse of physiognomy in relation to Jean Paul's writing, see Stefan Pabst, *Fiktionen des inneren Menschen. Die literarische Umwertung der Physiognomik bei Jean Paul und E.T.A. Hoffmann* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Heidelberg, 2007); Müller, “Jean Pauls Ästhetik im Kontext der Frühromantik und des deutschen Idealismus,” in: idem., *Jean Paul im Kontext. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1996), 63–76, in particular 69–73; Müller, *Jean Pauls Ästhetik und Naturphilosophie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983), 59f. As Müller writes: “Die Physiognomik wird als alltägliche Zeichendeutung begriffen, die aus der körperlichen Gestik und Mimik des ‘innerlich’ unbekanntem Gegenübers Schlüsse auf dessen seelische und geistige Verfassung zieht” (Müller, *Jean Pauls Ästhetik und Naturphilosophie*, 83). Müller demonstrates in particular the influence which the discourse of physiognomy had on Jean Paul. This is especially evident in Jean Paul's essay “Über die natürliche Magie der Einbildungskraft,” where he writes: “Unsere Seele schreibt mit vierundzwanzig Zeichen der Zeichen (d. h. mit vierundzwanzig Buchstaben der Wörter) an Seelen; die Natur mit Millionen. Sie zwingt uns, an fremde Ichs neben unserem zu glauben, da wir ewig nur Körper sehen – also unsere Seele in fremde

that Wutz shamelessly erases Lavater's name from his *Physiognomische Fragmente* and, in its place, stamps his own:

so ließ Wutz diesem fruchtbaren Kopfe dadurch wenig voraus, daß er sein Konzeptpapier in Quarto brach und drei Wochen lang nicht vom Sessel wegging, sondern an seinem eignen Kopfe so lange zog, bis er den physiognomischen Fötus herausgebracht (– er bettete den Fötus aufs Bücherbrett hin –) und bis er sich dem Je Schweizer nachgeschrieben hatte. Diese Wutzische Fragmente übertitelte er die Lavaterschen und merkte an: »er hätte nichts gegen die gedruckten; aber seine Hand sei hoffentlich ebenso leserlich, wenn nicht besser als irgendein Mittel-Fraktur-Druck.«²³⁹

In the name of physiognomy, Wutz's so-called "Wutzische Fragmente" do not so much bring inner and outer, soul and body, into harmony with one another as radically fragment them apart, splitting title and author name from the 'original' work. His writing – and reading that which he has written – stands the relation of spirit to letter on its head, 'defacing,' as it were, the very form of the book into an ensemble of material fragments. His technique of writing by hand thus appears as the perfect compliment to such a fragmentary-material conception of literary production, for the papers which bear the title "Wutzische Fragmente" are – not without coincidence – said to be written in Fraktur, which in Wutz's case quite literally *fractures* the text, splitting it apart and thereby effacing any trace of the 'original' referent.

Hence, just as Wutz attempts to produce his own version of Kant's first *Critique*, yet without having any clue as to how the concepts of space and time relate to Kant's argument in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" as to the *a priori* forms of intuition, his book-making is, in the end,

Augen, Nasen, Lippen überzutragen. Kurz, durch Physiognomik und Pathognomik *beseelen* wir erstlich alle Leiber – später alle unorganisierte Körper" (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 203f). Monika Schmitz-Emans reads this passage as evidence of Jean Paul's awareness of the semiotic-linguistic mediation of interpreting natural signs, which stumbles upon a larger epistemological problem with respect to language: "Die Wortsprache is Metasprache der physiognomischen, ist notwendige Vermittlerin zwischen Gegenstand und erkennendem Ich. Die Mienen müssen übersetzt werden, um verständlich zu sein: nur dem abwägenden und vergleichenden Verstand erschließt sich ihr vollständiger Sinn" (Monika Schmitz-Emans, *Schnupftuchsknoten oder Sternbild. Jean Pauls Ansätze zu einer Theorie der Sprache* [Bonn: Bouvier, 1986], 81).

²³⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 426.

only capable of reproducing his own idyllic microcosm, the spatial-temporal *hic et nunc* of his phenomenologically-constrained life-world, such that, upon Wutz's reading, Kant's conception of "space" can only naturally refer to the space of a boat, while the concept of "time" refers, on this 'distorted' reading, to a woman's menstrual cycle. In this sense, his "literarische Geburtarbeit" always yields a kind of monstrosity or *Missgeburt*, a so-called "physiognomic fetus" [physiognomischen Fötus], which foregrounds the 'corporeal' materiality of the text. Far from conjuring up the ideality of spirit, such a Wutzean maieutics of book-making thus collapses into the raw materiality of the 'fractured' letter, which his handwriting perpetually disfigures.

The repeated exposition of the literal-materiality of Wutz's technique of writing and book-making takes on almost unfathomable proportions in the case of his extraordinarily bizarre rendition of Klopstock's *Messiade*. Because Klopstock's epic poem is written in a verse form – hexameter – that is incomprehensible to modern readers, Wutz must carefully mis-trim his feather-pen in order to translate the hermeneutically incomprehensible (hexameter) into the physically ungraspable (illegibility):

so mußte der Dichter, da ers durch keine Bemühung zur geringsten Unverständlichkeit bringen konnte – er fassete allemal den Augenblick jede Zeile und jeden Fuß und pes – aus Not zum Einfall greifen, daß er die Hexameter ganz *unleserlich* schrieb, was auch gut war. Durch diese poetische Freiheit bog er dem Verstehen ungezwungen vor.²⁴⁰

If one could read Wutz's illegible, ink-spilled attempts at hexameter, one would find in the place of Klopstock's epic poem the description of the dinner with Wutz's fiancée and future father-in-law, for "[e]r dachte, in der gedruckten *Messiade* stehe der Abend auch."²⁴¹ With this contrast between the limits of cognition and those of the textual material itself, the text brings into view the

²⁴⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 441.

²⁴¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 444.

minimal, yet nonetheless crucial, gap which separates Jean Paul's poetics of the small, fragmentary, and material from that of contemporary Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel, whose concept of irony advanced to a new aesthetic norm around 1800. In his essay "Über die Unverständlichkeit" (1800),²⁴² Schlegel confronts readers steeped in the hermeneutic method with the problem of (non-)understanding, with the possibility of a code that could not be deciphered, by implying that there is no longer a self-evident, guaranteed mutual understanding between reader and author. Jean Paul, by contrast, presents in *Wutz* a figure who, from the need to produce at the semantic level no texts which are incomprehensible, produces at the level of the materiality of the medium – text – nothing but illegibility.

While Jean Paul doesn't speak explicitly here of the concept of humor, which he only first came to consider in the second preface to *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* (1796/1802) and later arrived at a programmatic theoretical formulation in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1801/13), his conception of text production as a kind of material "Flechtwerk" – a quasi-mechanical technique of wattling or wickerwork, for which no route of reflection is possible any more – in many ways anticipated his subsequent introduction of humor into the poetological frame of the idyll. One is tempted therefore to put forth the claim that, already in *Wutz*, the performativity of the citation no longer corresponds to a form of epistemological self-reflection that may be described as "romantic," as in the case of Friedrich Schlegel's concept of irony. Rather, in the place of hermeneutic incomprehensibly steps textual illegibility, and in the place of irony's capacity for infinite reflection appears

²⁴² Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, "Über die Unverständlichkeit," in: *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796–1801)*, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (henceforth as KA), ed. Hans Eichner (Munich 1967), I/2, 363–72. There Schlegel reacts to the misunderstood reception of his famous fragment in the *Athenäums-Fragments* on Goethe's *Meister*, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and the French Revolution as "tendencies" of his epoch, and therefore deems it necessary to enter into a dialogue with the reader. In a decidedly 'ironic' manner he goes on to name the author's new burden of having to "konstruieren" and "deduzieren" his own reader if understanding can no longer be posited as self-evident: "Daher hatte ich schon vor langer Zeit den Entschluß gefaßt, mich mit dem Leser in ein Gespräch über diese Materie zu versetzen, und vor seinen eignen Augen, gleichsam ihm ins Gesicht, einen andern neuen Leser nach meinem Sinne zu konstruieren, ja, wenn ich es nötig finden sollte, denselben sogar zu deduzieren" (ibid., 363)

instead the material discontinuity of writing itself – in other words, what Jean Paul will later call “humor” – which serves not only as a subversive critique of the hermeneutic method, but also as a (self-)parody of Romanticism and its own writing practices.

2.2. Bio-Bibliographization: Writing the Life of Writing – in Miniature

Jean Paul’s *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeistereien Wutz* presents not only the life story of a “kind of” scholar and book-maker, but also a fictional frame-story about the writing of a biography, namely of Wutz’s life, which takes the form of the novel *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* itself. In the course of the narration it is revealed that the narrator is not an omniscient witness to all the events of Wutz’s life, but rather acts in the capacity of his biographer,²⁴³ and therefore has access to the entire archive of Wutz’s writings which the latter has, as is revealed near the end of the text in the scene of Wutz’s death, posthumously bequeathed to the narrator precisely for this purpose. In Wutz’s life’s work, the biographer discovers a wealth of resources for the biographical project with which he has been tasked: hence the time between Wutz’s engagement and marriage, for instance, “vielleicht nirgends deutlicher beschrieben als in seinen ‘*Werther Freuden*,’ die seine Lebensbeschreiber fast nur abzuschreiben brauchen.”²⁴⁴ Thus the narrator remarks:

– Freilich du, mein Wutz, kannst *Werthers Freuden* aufsetzen, da allemal deine äußere und deine innere Welt sich wie zwei Muschelschalen aneinander löten und dich als ihr Schaltier erfassen; aber bei uns armen Schelmen, die wir hier am Ofen sitzen, ist die Außenwelt selten der Ripienist und Chorist unsrer innern fröhlichen Stimmung.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ “So beschreibt er [Wutz] wenigstens selber diese Erinnerung- *hohen-Opern* in seinen *Rousseauischen Spaziergängen*, die ich da vor mich lege, um nicht zu lügen....” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 425).

²⁴⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 433.

²⁴⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 434.

Akin to Friedrich Schlegel's (in)famous characterization of the Romantic fragment as "like a hedgehog" – "Ein Fragment muß gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel"²⁴⁶ – Wutz's existence is completely monadic and self-enclosed; he exists in his own idyllic microcosm as a "physiognomic fetus," which constitutes its own inner surroundings that cannot be irritated or stimulated from the outside. Thus in a comical twist on Wutz's unusual method of bibliographization, the biographer does not find it at all necessary to investigate or consult "objective" information related to Wutz's life in the writing of his own "kind of" biography, but only their fictional doubling in the form of various "pretexts," namely the narrations contained in Wutz's hand-written copies of famous books like Goethe's *Werther*; for all of Wutz's writing is – like Jean Paul remarked apropos his own – "inner autobiography."²⁴⁷ From this perspective, life and book, book and life, appear indeed as reflections of one another, yet in a way that completely undermines any possibility of there being an originary referent due to the inherent circularity which governs the relation of life to writing, of *bio* to *graphy*.

Thus whereas Wutz's art of book-making is characterized by the principle of "double authorship," *Wutz* itself presents a narrative technique of "double perspectivization."²⁴⁸ With the introduction of the biographer as a fictional figure, and not just narrator, the text stages an otherwise seemingly impossible perspective, namely that of retrospectively narrating the course of Wutz's entire life from the perspective of his death in order to bring the life and work of the deceased into congruity with each other – to complete each other: "da sie [Justine] mich im Gehen meine Schreibtafel vollarbeiten sah, angeschrien hätte: ob ich nicht auch ein Büchermacher wäre. – »Was

²⁴⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragment* Nr. 206, in: KA, I/2, 197.

²⁴⁷ Jean Paul, *Ideen-Gewimmel*, 33.

²⁴⁸ For more on the technique of double perspectivization in relation to Jean Paul's concept of humor and his 'poetics of paratextuality,' cf. Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, 327–59.

sonst, Liebe?« – versetzt’ ich – »jährlich mach’ ich dergleichen und schenke alles nachher dem Publikum.« – So möcht’ ich dann, fuhr sie fort, mich auf ein Stündchen zu ihrem Alten hineinbemühen, der auch ein Buchmacher sei, mit dem es aber elend aussehe.”²⁴⁹ Just as the reader learns in the course of the narration how Wutz came to be a book-maker, it is also revealed in this scene near the end of the story – in yet another moment of unusual doubling – how the narrator of the book about a book-maker himself came to be a book-maker. The reader learns that Wutz cannot die in peace until he finds someone to complete his library, for his compulsion to self-documentation demands that even the end – his death – be written: “»er müß’ aber einen haben, der seine Bibliothek übernehme, ordne und inventiere und der an seine Lebensbeschreibung, die in der ganzen Bibliothek wäre, seine letzten Stunden, falls er sie jetzt hätte, zur Komplettierung gar hinanstieße; denn seine Alte wäre keine Gelehrtin und seinen Sohn hätt’ er auf drei – Wochen auf die Universität Heidelberg gelassen.«”²⁵⁰

With his call to completion, to writing the end, to introducing the notion of the end, the narrator enters the story: “The narrator plays a crucial role in the idyll’s literary form, since he culls most of the story from Wutz’s archive, frames it, interrupts it, and directly addresses (the now dead) Wutz as well as the readers and his friends.”²⁵¹ Curiously, however, the moment in which the death of the protagonist and the life of the book appear to converge turns on a citation – one which is marked *as* a citation – drawn ostensibly from Wutz’s own fictional archive, in which Wutz refers to himself in the third person while simultaneously deploying free indirect speech. Out of this unusual, seemingly impossible, overlap of competing narrative voices – of the protagonist, Wutz, of the biographer and narrator of the story, and even of the author-instance “Jean

²⁴⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 454.

²⁵⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 454f.

²⁵¹ Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, 76.

Paul” itself – there emerges the narrative voice of the “fourth person singular.” There one encounters neither the voice of the narrator nor the protagonist, but only the polyphonous differences between voices – the echoes and adumbrations of a ‘lost’ referent. Just at the moment when the biography appears to circle in on itself and complete itself, it in fact fragments itself by introducing a foreign presence into the narration which contaminates the narrative frame: the narrator becomes a fictional character, implicated in the very biography which he himself seeks to narrate. From this perspective, the citation which recalls the moment in which the biography itself was set into motion does not so much constitute a successful act of framing, nor does it bring to completion the idyll *qua* idyll; rather, it marks the very heterogeneity of the event of writing itself, as any possibility of a straightforward referent has been obliterated through the multiple levels of intertwining citations.²⁵² Precisely in the moment when life and book appear to complete each other as wholes, the narrative establishes a retroactive loop by calling the narrator into being in the role of the fictional biographer, thus harkening back to the beginning of the narration, which constituted the moment of narration. In doing so, the text explodes its own circular movement by effecting an impossible perspective: the citationality of Wutz’s own life – the writing of the life of writing – entails the presence of an impossible ‘Other’ in order to complete the task of writing the (cited) life, of ‘bio-bibliographization.’ Biography, in idyllic sense of a “kind of idyll,” is not a homogeneous medium or narrative, but the staging of an impossible double perspectivization that may be described as “extimate”²⁵³ [extime] – that is, at once intimate and external – pervaded by disruption

²⁵² Cf. Joseph Vogl, “Vierte Person. Kafkas Erzählstimme.”

²⁵³ “[C]’est en tant qu’il est ici une place que nous pouvons designer du terme conjoignant l’intime à la radicale extériorité, c’est en tant que l’objet a est extime” (Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D’un autre à l’Autre 1968–1969*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller [Paris: Seuil 2006], 249). See also: Jacques Allain-Miller, “Extimité,” in: *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, eds. Mark Bracher, et al. (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 74–87.

and discontinuity, fragmentation and defacement, which effaces every ostensible origin and original referent.

3. *SMALL FORMS, PART I: DANCING (IN) EXCERPTS (DIE TASCHENBIBLIOTHEK)*

Wie der Taschenspieler aus einem gefalteten Papier eine Kappe macht, eine Serviette p. so macht ein Autor aus seinem Papier alles.²⁵⁴

—Jean Paul, *Merkblätter*

The notion that writing is a maieutic process of self-birth plays a central role not just in Jean Paul's "kind of idylls," such as *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, but also in his authorship. He repeatedly emphasized that autobiography is for him the core of all poetology, and concerns nothing but the task of 'writing oneself': "Alle meine Schreibung ist eigentlich innere Selbstbiographie; und alle Dichtwerke sind Selberlebensbeschreibungen [...]." ²⁵⁵ If it is only in writing that the "subject" can become readable and recognizable, then the telos of writing would consist in, "das Ganze selbst nach Außen zu kehren und in einem gewaltigen Schriftmonument zu objektivieren, das quantitativ und qualitativ mehr wäre als bloßes 'Werk.'" ²⁵⁶ As Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa argues, Jean Paul undertook numerous efforts to set out in writing his "inner life" as comprehensively as possible: that includes not only his literary texts, but also his countless notebooks, pamphlets, diaries, excerpt manuscripts, meticulous recordings of ideas, memories, projects, observations, dreams, collectanea, states of health, weather forecasts, and working conditions. This obsession with the transformation of the "inner life" of the subject into writing culminates in a negative feedback loop, in which the life of the writer is said to consist in nothing but writing life: "Das Wichtigste in einer Autobiographie eines Autors ist eigentlich das seines Schreibens." ²⁵⁷ If writing life means writing

²⁵⁴ Jean Paul, *Merkblätter*, in: *Werke*, II/6, 328.

²⁵⁵ Jean Paul, *Ideen-Gewimmel*, 33

²⁵⁶ Schmidt-Hannisa, "Lesarten," 36.

²⁵⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/6, 265.

writing, this marks in turn an inversion: “Leben hat nur noch statt im Akt des Schreibens, in der ‘Schreibstunde’; statt das Leben zu schreiben, lebt Jean Paul im Schreiben und durch Schreiben.”²⁵⁸

Despite this ostensible privileging of writing in Jean Paul’s work – a dynamic which may be said to be parodied in *Wutz* in the form of Wutz’s one-sided erudition of writing without reading – he does not at all ignore the enormous significance of reading. Its value is nonetheless based primarily on it being put into the service of writing. In that respect, Jean Paul, like his contemporaries, operates within the discursive constraints of the “discourse network” around 1800, which as Friedrich Kittler argues made reading for the first time into a necessary pre-condition of authorship: “Authorship in the discourse network around 1800 is not a function simultaneous with the act of writing, but a deferred effect of rereading.”²⁵⁹ Yet while Jean Paul doubtlessly counts among those authors who represent in an exemplary manner this literary system, he is nonetheless – and this is a circumstance which Kittler constantly overlooks in his citations of Jean Paul’s writings – an extremely marginal figure within this discourse network, who developed his own peculiar ways

²⁵⁸ Schmidt-Hannisa, 36. See also Pfothner, “Das Leben schreiben.” According to Pfothner, Jean Paul conceived of his final autobiography according to the model of such “Schreibstunden”: “In einer Notiz zur Wochenschrift *Der Apotheker* heißt es: ‘Aufsätze kleine Bücherchen [...] Papierdrache betitelt.’ Eine kleine Schrift mit dem Titel *Ausschweife für künftige Fortsetzungen von vier Werken*, 1823/24 im *Morgenblatt* erschienen – der letzte Aufsatz übrigens von Jean Paul – gibt darüber nun nähere Auskunft. Schon der Titel zeigt, wie nachdrücklich hier das Werk verabschiedet und wie sehr das Beiwerk an seine Stelle getreten ist. Wie im Titel, so auch in dem, wovon er handelt. Zunächst wird in dem Text von drei anderen Werken geredet, denen es der Fortsetzung ermangelt. Dann kommt der Autor auf sein ‘letztes Werk’ zu sprechen. Es solle unter diesem Titel und dem anderen des *Kometen* angekündigt werden. ‘*Papierdrache*’ solle es vor allem heißen und in der Form einer „Wochenschrift, wie etwa der englische Zuschauer, erscheinen und von einer gewissen fruchtbringenden Palmgenossenschaft [...] verfaßt sein“. In das Buch müsse ‘alles hineingeschrieben werden,’ ‘damit nur einmal ein Ende wird mit mir und von mir.’ Es ist ein Buch des eigenen Lebens als Schreiben. Es nimmt alles auf, ‘was ich nur von Einfällen, komischen Auftritten, Bemerkungen über Menschen und Sachen und von [...] Satan und seiner Großmutter’ ‘im Pulte und im Kopfe vorrätig beherberge.’ Ein ‘wahres umgestürztes Fruchthorn’ ergebe dies, ‘bei welchem das unter dem Schreiben und Erleben noch nachkommende Fallobst gar nicht einmal für etwas angeschlagen’ werde – „woraus allein auf eine Länge des Werks zu schließen, von dem der letzte Bogen kaum abzusehen.’ ‘Natürlich,’ so fährt Jean Paul fort, ‘wird das Werk eine Generalsalve meines ganzen Kopfes, ein Allerheiligenfest aller Gedanken, ein Polterabend, Kehraus, Chariwari aller Ideenhochzeiten’” (ibid., 57f).

²⁵⁹ Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 111.

of writing – and reading. More specifically, writing for Jean Paul does not simply mean to write his writing, but also to write his reading. Before collectanea find their way into his texts, they are always already caught within an extremely complex system of information management whose central technique is the excerpt.²⁶⁰ Jean Paul’s system of excerpting, which is of central significance to his way of reading and writing, ostensibly functions according to the model of baroque collectanea: the storage of diverse materials according to a well-ordered *loci communes* – that is, the rhetorical technique of *inventio*, the *terminus technicus* for the discovery of arguments and their “realia.”

3.1. Aubin’s “Lebenstropfen,” or How to Make Excerpts from Excerpts

The key fictional text for understanding Jean Paul’s method of excerpting is his short prose piece *Die Taschenbibliothek* (1796).²⁶¹ Like *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, *Die Taschenbibliothek* concerns a “kind of” scholar who makes use of a very similar technique for organizing information as the little schoolmaster Maria Wutz: his own private “pocket library” [Taschenbibliothek]. Yet whereas Wutz writes without reading, producing extraordinarily bizarre renditions of

²⁶⁰ In the course of his life Jean Paul amassed a collection of approximately 12,000 pages of excerpt manuscripts which contain over 100,000 individual entries. They consist of a copious handwritten collection of collectanea, which he compiled from 1778 to 1825, gathered from practically every contemporary field of knowledge, including religion, philosophy, customs and nature, as well as natural history and medicine. Since 1998, the research project “Exzerpthefte” at the University of Würzburg has undertaken to transcribe and make accessible a digital edition of all of Jean Paul’s excerpts and the respective register. Excerpts can be accessed at the following web address: <http://www.jp-exzerpte.uni-wuerzburg.de/index.php?seite=exzerpte/vorlage&navi=navi/reg01>. On the project description page on the University of Würzburg homepage, the purpose of the research project “Exzerpthefte” is explained as follows: “In der Jean-Paul-Edition hat das Projekt »Exzerpthefte« eine Art Brückenfunktion: einerseits ist es eine Ergänzung zur historisch-kritischen Edition des Nachlasses, die derzeit an der Würzburger Arbeitsstelle in den Projekten »Satiren und Ironien« und »Bausteine und Erfindungen« abgeschlossen wird; andererseits ist die Edition der Exzerpthefte eine wichtige Grundlage für die Kommentierung der Historisch-kritischen Ausgabe der zu Lebzeiten erschienenen Werke Jean Pauls. Diese wurde an der Würzburger Arbeitsstelle mit dem »Pilotband Hesperus« (erschienen 2009) begonnen; weitere Editionen (»Siebenkäs«, »Vorschule der Ästhetik«, »Komet« und »Titan«) folgen” (Sabine Straub, Monika Vince, Dr. Michael Will, “Projektbeschreibung ‘Exzerpthefte,’” *Universität Würzburg*, accessed 22. Jan. 2016, <<http://www.jp-exzerpte.uni-wuerzburg.de/index.php?seite=projekt>>). For a recent critique of the hermeneutic assumptions underlying this approach to Jean Paul’s excerpts, see Andrea Krauß, “Sammeln – Exzerpte – Konstellation. Jean Pauls literarische Kombinatorik,” in: *Monatshefte* 105.2 (2013), 291–314.

²⁶¹ Jean Paul, “Die Taschenbibliothek,” in: *Werke*, II/3, 769–73.

well-known books based solely on the interpretation of their titles, the protagonist of *Die Taschenbibliothek*, the “pageant dancing master” [Pagentanzmeister] Aubin, reads without writing: his process of reading consists merely in taking notes and making excerpts for himself of what he has read, but without turning these excerpts into new works of fiction. Thus in contrast not only to Wutz, but also to the “real author” Jean Paul, Aubin is not an author at all, but merely a collector of texts in the condensed form of excerpts. Within the discourse network around 1800, the juxtaposition of Wutz and Aubin thereby underscores, “daß Lesen und Schreiben nur als strikt aufeinander bezogene Prozesse wahrhaft legitimiert sind”;²⁶² for if reading without writing precludes authorship, then writing without reading withdraws from a subject-centered poeology oriented around the mediation of understanding.

After revealing the basic contours of Aubin’s unusual approach to reading, the narrator goes on to praise his acquisition of universal knowledge: “In der flüchtigen Viertelstunde unsers Gesprächs setzte er mich durch seine Kenntnisse in Ungewißheit, ob er außer der Tanzkunst eigentlich Theologie – oder Jurisprudenz – oder Astronomie – oder Geschichte, oder andere Wissenschaften verstehe.”²⁶³ While one might be inclined to assume that a man with such universal knowledge would have an extraordinary memory, it turns out that Aubin, in fact, “hatte wenig Zeit, wenig Geld, noch weniger Gedächtnis und Bücher: – und doch wußt’ er fast alle auswendig und war nicht bloß auf dem Tanzboden zu Hause.”²⁶⁴ Aubin, like Wutz, thus appears to satisfy the criteria of the idyll as the “epic representation of *full* happiness in *limitation*,” albeit in a somewhat different manner; for against all constraints and limitations – he is said to have “little time, little money, and even less memory and books” – he nonetheless continues to persevere and succeed in

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid., 769.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

his “polyhistoric” ambitions to accumulate and memorize a wealth of encyclopedic knowledge. And this is precisely what fills him with “full happiness”: “Ich bin so glücklich [...] daß ich keine Zeit und keine Langweile habe. Ich fühle nie, daß ich auf etwas warte; denn ich ziehe sogleich einen Teil meiner *Taschenbibliothek* aus der Tasche [...]”²⁶⁵

While at first glance this meticulous method of collecting excerpts appears to belong to the encyclopedic tradition of Daniel Georg Morhof’s *Polyhistor*, “der in *De excerpiendi ratione* die Anhäufung des Wissens als Basis für ‘neue Gedanken und Erfindungen’ rühmt,”²⁶⁶ upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that Aubin, like Jean Paul, orients himself in his excerpt manuscripts “weder an den disziplinären Grenzen und der strikten Sachbezogenheit der zeitgenössischen Wissenschaften noch an Ordnungssystemen des Polyhistorismus.”²⁶⁷ He no longer orders excerpted information according to a well-ordered *loci communes* – the traditional objective categories of knowledge that governed early-modern excerpting practices. Rather, he uses a witty-combinatorial method – akin to the poetic machinery of “wit” [Witz] – of juxtaposing “distant similarities”²⁶⁸ [entfernte Ähnlichkeiten] whose underlying realia are neither objective nor pre-existing, but radically subjective and “unstable.”²⁶⁹ In Jean Paul’s entries in his excerpt register, for instance, his idiosyncratic emphasis on certain meanings of words and their neglect has been noticed, as in the case of the keyword “Maschine.” In contrast to the polyhistoric scholars of the baroque period, Jean Paul notes everything which could belong to this *topos* according to his own

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Götz Müller, “Jean Pauls Privatzyklopädie. Eine Untersuchung der Exzerpte und Register aus Jean Pauls unveröffentlichtem Nachlaß,” in: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Wolfgang Frühwald et al., 11 (1986), 73–114, here: 75.

²⁶⁷ Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, 365.

²⁶⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 170.

²⁶⁹ Menke, “‘Ein-Fälle’ – aus Exzerpten,” 295.

understanding of the word and not its objective meaning. For Jean Paul, ‘Maschine’ loses its objective realia and means for him primarily the simulation of life.²⁷⁰ From his untamed collections of excerpted material he produces not only outlandish metaphors, but also invents essential motifs – beyond those of satire – for his novels and takes inventory of them, such that semantic fields appear in places in the text like unruly and disordered clusters of synonyms.²⁷¹

The narrator of *Die Taschenbibliothek* assigns himself the ethnological task of solving the “riddle” [Rätsel] of how the dancing pageant master Aubin acquired his enormous knowledge despite his dearth of memory and time. He comes to learn that Aubin is able to accomplish this extraordinary feat of reading without recollecting by employing a similar method of excerpting as the “real author” Jean Paul. Aubin describes his method to the narrator as follows:

Bloß Exzerpten. Ich fing mir anfangs aus jedem Buche zwei, drei Sonderbarkeiten wie Schmetterlinge aus und machte sie durch Dinte in meinem Exzerptenbuche fest. Ich hob aus allen Wissenschaften meine Rekruten aus. Drei Zeilen Platz, mehr nicht, räumt’ ich jeder Merkwürdigkeit ein [...] Oft besteht aller Geist, den ich mit meiner Kelter aus einem Buche bringe, in einem einzigen Tropfen. Diese Exzerpten zieh’ ich wie Riechwasser überall aus der Tasche, auf der Straße, im Vorzimmer, auf dem Tanzboden, und erquicke mich mit einigen Lebenstropfen. Wäre meine Gedächtnis noch schwächer: so las’ ich sie noch öfter.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ For more on the significance of “Maschine” in Jean Paul, cf. Schmidt-Biggemann, *Machine und Teufel. Jean Pauls Jugendsatiren nach ihrer Modellgeschichte* (Freiburg i. B./Munich 1975), 107f, as well as Götz Müller, *Jean Pauls Exzerpte* (Würzburg 1988), “Nachwort,” 318–47, in particular 333f. There Müller shows how the excerpts located within the register article “Maschine” follow an extremely idiosyncratic associative logic that deviates entirely from the everyday meaning of the word “machine.” Müller notes how “[i]n zahlreichen Beispielen ist von der Belebung von Statuen die Rede” (ibid., 333), as well as how Jean Paul connects the *topos* “machine” to the “magische Seite des Umgangs mit Bildern” (ibid., 334), and furthermore “[w]o von Magie die Rede ist, ist die Alchemie nicht weit [...]” (ibid.). This associative chain from statues to magic to alchemy leads in turn to excerpts concerning the corporeality of Christ as well as the non-corporeality of the divine existence of man (‘palingenesis’). Müller’s meticulous reconstruction of Jean Paul’s excerpting way of reading leads him to the following remarkable conclusion: “Warum hat Jean Paul diese theologischen Ansichten über den Körper unter dem Titel *Maschine* versammelt? Es gibt nur eine Erklärung, die dem Metapherngebrauch des 18. Jahrhunderts entspringt: er setzte schlechterdings Körper und Maschine gleich. Wann immer er bei seiner Lektüre auf theologische Konstruktionen stieß, die die Bedeutung der gehaßten Körpermaschine zugunsten der Seele herabsetzten, vermerkte er sie in der Rubrik *Maschine* seines Registers. Christus konnte als Gottmensch schlechterdings nicht von der Körpermaschine abhängig sein. Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele war stets ein zentrales Thema Jean Pauls. Dieses vitale Erkenntnisinteresse spiegelt sich in der Überdehnung des Wortfelds ‘Maschine’” (ibid., 336f).

²⁷¹ For more on Jean Paul’s serial technique of arranging words into synonym clusters, see Mainberger, *Die Kunst des Aufzählens*, 144–46.

²⁷² Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 771.

For the dancing master Aubin, the pocket library – generated from his voluminous collection of excerpts – serves a principally mnemotechnic function. The small books filled with excerpts, which comprise his pocket library, can be used at any time to repeat what he has already read and thereby commit it again to memory. Yet the result of this practice is considerably different than what one might ordinarily understand as an excerpt, for Aubin has no interest whatsoever in a systematic collection and organization of knowledge. Rather, his technique of excerpting – like Jean Paul’s – “besteht in der radikalen Dekontextualisierung von Daten und in der Auflösung aller hierarchischen Strukturen des Wissens.”²⁷³ By ordering information not according to objective categories of knowledge, but subjective ones – the collection of “oddities” [Sonderbarkeiten] and “curiosities” [Merkwürdigkeiten], reminiscent of cabinets of curiosities (*Wunderkammer*), whose categorical boundaries were in a constant state of flux and permeability – Aubin repurposes a traditional scholarly technique for his own idiosyncratic ends.

Aubin’s description of his own technique of reading in excerpts, whereby that which is read becomes immediately written down – yet, crucially, *without* being further elaborated or turned into a work of literature – foregrounds the relation between excerpts and the concept of life. By displacing and dispersing any original, objective meaning, his practice of excerpting basis itself on the continual deterritorialization of scholarly information, which allows for “oddities” in the form of idiosyncratic excerpted material to be transformed into ones own “Lebenstropfen.” Thus if the practice of recruiting “oddities like butterflies” [Sonderbarkeiten, wie Schmetterlingen] would lead to their fixation or “Festmachung” – a deadly stasis – then that which is already written down must become “zu einem flüchtigen Zwischen-Leben als ‘Sonderbarkeiten’ aufgescheucht

²⁷³ Schmidt-Hannisa, “Lesarten,” 39.

[...], um abgelöst aus ihrem Kontext erneut in eine Fixiertheit überzugehen.”²⁷⁴ This tension between life and death – between endless proliferation and deadly stasis – hints at the idyllic dimension of Aubin’s excerpting practice in *Die Taschenbibliothek*, for it is precisely the oscillation between the artificial fixity of the constraints and the withdraw of any original point of reference that generates the effect of a “flüchtigen Zwischen-Leben.”

This tension between life and death, between proliferation and stasis, becomes all the more evident in the (christological) metaphor of the “winepress” [Kelter]. Aubin distills the ‘wine of knowledge’ in order to unburden the storage capacity of his mind:

Die Hauptsache ist, daß ich Exzerpten aus meinen Exzerpten mache und den Spiritus noch einmal abziehe. Einmal les’ ich sie z.B. bloß wegen des Artikels vom »Tanze« durch, ein anderes Mal bloß über Blumen, und trage dieses mit zwei Worten in kleinere Hefte oder Register und fülle so das Faß auf Flaschen.²⁷⁵

The register, which represents “the excerpts from excerpts” and thereby the kernel of his system for managing the information contained in his pocket library, is the end-form of this distillation process.²⁷⁶ Yet the register does not yield a baroque form of knowledge, in the sense of *inventio*, which systematically organizes objective knowledge according to a well-ordered *loci communes*. Rather, it aims at discovery of the new and the novel through the witty-combinatorial juxtaposition of the most heterogeneous “excerpts from excerpts.” The repetition of this distillation process is, therefore, no longer characterized by a logic identity but of difference: from the fluidity of the spirit, the *Geist*, a “Spiritus” – Aubin’s vital “Lebenstropfen” – is distilled, which leads to drunkenness, intoxication and a permanent “disorder of things.” Aubin’s profession and choice of article,

²⁷⁴ Menke, “Ein-Fälle – aus Exzerpten,” 292.

²⁷⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 772.

²⁷⁶ As Thomas Schestag notes, this passage is prefigured in suggestive ways by other formulas which can be found in Jean Paul’s early writings: “Nach I. Exzerpten durch lesen zu[m] Exzerp[ieren]’ und ‘Extrakte aus den Exzerpten’ sind zwei unter zahllosen andern, ähnlich formulierten Wendungen, hier aus Jean Pauls *Studier-Reglement* (1795) exzerpiert. Sie führen in die *cella* seines Schreibens, das seinen Ursprung im *Auszug* aus Büchern hat. Ein irritierendes Denkmal setzt Jean Paul diesem Ursprung in der Gestalt des Pagentanzmeisters Aubin, seiner kleinen Schrift *Die Taschenbibliothek* (1795)” (Schestag, “Bibliographien für Jean Paul,” 505, note 16).

“Tanze,” is far from coincidental, for his method of excerpting – and reading in excerpts – bears little resemblance to the polyhistoric enterprise of Enlightenment scholars like Daniel Georg Morhof, who praised in *De excerptiendi ratione* the accumulation of knowledge as the basis for “new thoughts.”²⁷⁷ Rather, what the “pageant dancing master” [Pagentanzmeister] Aubin masterfully stages with his pocket library is a *performance* of reading and writing, in which the citation – the excerpt – is uncoupled from its originary referent. His pirouettes of mnemonic inscription are not therefore mere pageantry, but rather constitute the operational procedures of the scribal *page*, *der Page* – the messenger or courier who quietly unfurls the *pages* of the pocket-library books upon the floor.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Wolfgang Proß, *Jean Pauls geschichtliche Stellung* (Tübingen 1975), 172.

4. SCHOLARLY MACHINES OF FANTASY. MATERIALITY AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY IN LEBEN DES QUINTUS FIXLEIN

Und schon heute ist das Buch, wie die aktuelle wissenschaftliche Produktionsweise lehrt, eine veraltete Vermittlung zwischen zwei verschiedenen Katalogsystemen. Denn alles Wesentliche findet sich im Zettelkasten des Forschers, der's verfasste, und der Gelehrte, der darin studiert, assimiliert es seiner eigenen Kartothek.²⁷⁸

—Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstraße*

Als Ergebnis längerer Arbeit mit dieser [Zettelkasten-]Technik entsteht eine Art Zweitgedächtnis, ein Alter ego, mit dem man laufend kommunizieren kann. Es weist, darin dem eigenen Gedächtnis ähnlich, keine durchkonstruierte Gesamtordnung auf, auch keine Hierarchie und erst recht keine lineare Struktur wie ein Buch. Eben dadurch gewinnt es ein von seinem Autor unabhängiges Eigenleben. Die Gesamtheit der Notizen läßt sich nur als Unordnung beschreiben, immerhin aber als Unordnung mit nicht-beliebiger interner Struktur.²⁷⁹

—Niklas Luhmann, *Universität als Milieu*

The next chapter of the dissertation examines the relationship between life and writing in Jean Paul's other famous "kind of idyll," *Leben des Quintus Fixlein, aus fünfzehn Zettelkästen gezogen; nebst einem Mustheil und einigen Jus de tablette* (1796/1801). The central narrative of the book recounts the tale of a pedagogue and parson from Leipzig by the name of Quintus Zebedäus Egidius Fixlein, whose obsession with his own demise can only be healed by the novel's eponymous narrator "Jean Paul" through the "elementary principles of the Science of Happiness" [Elementarkenntnisse der Glückseligkeitslehre]. Jean Paul's second idyll, which he published just three years after *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, shares much in common with its predecessor. Both works narrate the life stories of minor scholars whose lives revolve around nothing but the collection and production

²⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstraße*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 84–148, here: 103.

²⁷⁹ Niklas Luhmann, "Kommunikation mit Zettelkästen," in: *Universität als Milieu. Kleine Schriften*, eds. Niklas Luhmann and André Kieserling (Bielefeld: Haux, 1992), 57f.

of text. In *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, the protagonist Fixlein finds pleasure above all in the collection of seemingly trivial and insignificant ephemera and collectanea. Moreover, just like Wutz, he is just as much constrained by his surroundings in the village of Hukelum as he is by his unusually static development and unreflective character; hence even his surname, meaning literally “little fixer,” alludes to the psychological notion of the *idée fixe*, which the novel’s preface links to the genre poetics of the modern idyll: “jede *fixe* Idee, die jedes Genie und jeden Enthusiasten wenigstens periodisch regiert, scheidet den Menschen erhaben von Tisch und Bett der Erde, von ihren Hundsfotten und Stechdornen und Teufelsmauern – gleich dem Paradiesvogel schläft er fliegend, und auf den ausgebreiteten Flügeln verschlummert er blind in seiner Höhe die untern Erdstöße und Brandungen des Lebens im langen schönen Traume von seinem idealischen Mutterland [...]”²⁸⁰

As Friedrich Kittler argues in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, the concept of the *idée fixe* was the “sole form of unreason to be accorded the rank of poetic dignity” around 1800, one which served as the privileged connection between genius aesthetics and the new human sciences, in particular that of empirical psychology, with its myriad theories and diagnoses of forms of madness and unreason.²⁸¹ According to Kittler, it is for this reason not at all a coincidence that the quintessential embodiment of the writer who cultivates the *idée fixe* in miniature would thus be named “Fixlein.”²⁸² Yet Fixlein does not present a classic case of poetic madness à la Hölderlin or the

²⁸⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 11.

²⁸¹ “The new human sciences, with their medico-psychological investigations of insanity, discovered around 1800 among the countless manifestations of unreason a distinguished form that revealed the very nature of unreason. This was the *idée fixe* [...] the fixed idea moved into the center of nosological categories, etiological explanations, and psychic cures, which were directed above all toward distract. But most importantly the fixed idea became the sole form of unreason to be accorded the rank of poetic dignity” (Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990], 110).

²⁸² Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 110.

various figures of madness which populate the ‘dark romantic’ novellas of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Rather, Fixlein’s “fixed idea” consists in the belief that he, like his father and ancestors before him, will suddenly die at the young age of thirty-two. His recovery from madness, aided by the “philosophical physician” Jean Paul, who serves as both the novel’s narrator as well as a fictional character within the text, lies not so much in being cured of his delusion and coming to terms with reality as it does in the ability to return to a uniquely naive, childlike mode of being – to an “inner world” of fantastic idealization and prelapsarian possibility far removed from the sufferings and anxieties of the real one.

By presenting an imaginary world that is nonetheless shot through with the traumatic reality of pain, suffering, and death, *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* appears on the one hand to satisfy Jean Paul’s elusive criteria of the idyll as the “epic representation of full pleasure in limitation.” On the other hand, by pathologizing the imagination as both illness and cure, revealing its potentially perilous consequences when taken to excess, *Quintus Fixlein* goes one step further than *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*. In *Wutz*, the imagination is depicted as a harmonizing force capable of transporting its protagonist from the reality of death and mortality to the “golden arcadia” of childhood fantasies – the topos of the idyll. In contrast to *Wutz*, Fixlein’s madness is shown to exceed even the limits of the mind, leading to immediate and deadly affects on the physical body. Hence, it is not the ailing body which is to be cured, but rather the mind as the source of psychic delusion: paradoxically, then, it is only by substituting one “fancy” [Einbildung] for another – the irrational fear of death for the belief that he is an eight-year-old child – that Fixlein can be cured of his imaginary illness.

Analogous to Kant’s transcendental critique of pure reason by means of pure reason alone, Jean Paul’s ‘modern idyll’ likewise demonstrates in narrative form how the imagination must be

turned against itself as the cure for its own excesses. By showing how the imagination can be transformed from a potentially deadly source of unreason into a philosophical remedy for the very madness which it itself engenders, the novel presents itself as a quasi-pedagogical exercise in instructing the reader how to attain a *kind of* happiness through fantasy, yet without succumbing to poetic madness.²⁸³ Fixlein might therefore be read an exemplary idyllic hero, for just like Wutz his happiness derives from his ability to negotiate the tension between the dream-like world of idyllic reverie and the ever-present possibility of death. From this perspective, the novel's first preface, entitled "Billet an meine Freunde anstatt der Vorrede," sketches out the program of the modern idyll in the form of three maxims or "paths" [Wege] by which humans may be said to achieve a *happier* – though not a *happy* – life. The first path, according to the narrator, "[geht] in die Höhe [...] so weit über das Gewölke des Lebens hinauszudringen, daß man die ganze äußere Welt mit ihren Wolfsgruben, Beinhäusern und Gewitterableitern von weitem unter seinen Füßen nur wie ein eingeschrumpftes Kindergärtchen liegen sieht."²⁸⁴

This first "skyward track" [Himmelfahrt] may thus be said to present an epic perspective *without limits*. That is, by ascending to the highest, most sublime heights of idyllic fantasy, it furnishes an image of an imaginary world that is completely disconnected from the real one, with its myriad "wolf dens, bee houses and lightning rods," as Jean Paul writes, and in doing so flirts with poetic madness. This first path, however, is meant only for the smallest, most diminutive figures – those like Wutz and Fixlein: "Diese Himmelfahrt ist aber nur für den geflügelten Teil des

²⁸³ For more on Jean Paul's relationship to the discourse of psychology as well as his embrace of the Stoic ideal of *ars semper gaudendi* in *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, cf. Götz Müller, *Jean Pauls Ästhetik und Naturphilosophie* (Niemeyer, 1983), in particular 203–17; Jörg Kreienbrock, *Malicious Objects*, in particular 84–95.

²⁸⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 10.

Menschengeschlechts, für den kleinsten.”²⁸⁵ By elevating the perspective of the (small, diminutive) observer to the sublime heights of the divine ‘bird’s eye view’ – “above the clouds of life” – everything in comparison appears infinitely small.

The second path, in contrast, proceeds in the opposite direction, namely by demeaning the large and grandiose and by elevating, in turn, the small, microscopic, and detailed; as the narrator writes, this path entails “ein zusammengesetztes Mikroskop zu nehmen und damit zu ersehen, daß ihr Tropfe Burgunder eigentlich ein rotes Meer, der Schmetterlingsstaub Pfauengefieder, der Schimmel ein blühendes Feld und der Sand ein Juwelenhaufe ist. Diese mikroskopischen Belustigungen sind dauerhafter als alle teuern Brunnenbelustigungen....”²⁸⁶ Here the reference to the composite microscope [zusammengesetztes Mikroskop] opens up the reading of the novel as an experimental site, or *Versuchsanordnung*, in which the infinitely small presents itself in the mode of the sublime. The microscope, as an epistemic figure of observation and perception, deforms reality in that what one sees through its lens no longer bears a mimetic resemblance to what one sees with the naked eye. The second path thereby completely transforms the representation of reality. From the microscopic perspective of the second path, everyday objects such as “drops of burgundy,” once placed under the lens of the microscope, suddenly appear defamiliarized as the sublime image of the “red sea,” or in the case of “butterfly dust” as “peacock feathers,” or of “mold” as a “blooming field.” As in Jean Paul’s formula for “wit” [Witz], the poetic machinery of *inventio*, which he tasks with scouting out “distant similarities”²⁸⁷ [entfernte Ähnlichkeiten] between heterogeneous objects, such “microscopic amusements” [mikroskopischen Belustigungen]

²⁸⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 11

²⁸⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 11.

²⁸⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 169.

yield new and unexpected meanings by juxtaposing the infinitely big and the infinitely small, the macrocosmos and the microcosmos.²⁸⁸

In the context of Fixlein's biography, his fortunate promotion from "Quintus," the fifth teacher at a school, to the vice-principal [Konrektor] and finally to the pastor of his hometown of Hukelum; his fortunate betrothal and marriage to a woman of nobility; his fortunate fate as the protagonist of his own life-story, which thousands of readers will eventually own – all of these improbable fortunes make Fixlein, for Jean Paul, not into the "Auszug," an out-dated term for the lowest-level lottery winner, but rather into the "Quinterne," the jacket pot.²⁸⁹ Thus from the second perspective of idyllic representation, the narrator advises the reader, "daß man kleine sinnliche Freuden höher achten müsse als große, den Schlafrock höher als den Bratenrock, daß man Plutos *Quinterne* seinen *Auszügen* nachstehen lassen müsse."²⁹⁰ In this way, one can magnify trivial, "microscopic" fortunes and turn them from "*Auszügen*" into "*Quinterne*."

It is from this perspective that the narrator exhorts the reader not to dwell upon the minor vexations and annoyances of everyday life, but instead to derive pleasure from them. The novel's

²⁸⁸ As Dembeck argues, Jean Paul's appreciation for the 'micrological' implies an attempt to endow the missing middle term in his comparisons with a new meaning: "Die Wertschätzung des Mikrologischen impliziert vielmehr auch, daß der verlorene 'Nexus' konkret als Grundlage einer neuen Sinnstiftung angesehen werden kann. Die 'überfließende Darstellung' manifestiert sich insbesondere in der Unterbrechung bereits gegebener Zusammenhänge, die aber alternative Verbindungsmöglichkeiten aufdecken soll. Ganz konkret sollen diese Unterbrechungen bzw. die heterogenen Zusammenstellungen, die sich aus ihnen ergeben, ernstgenommen und zum Ausgangspunkt einer Lektüre gemacht werden, die, wie in den 'occasional meditations,' gerade die zufällige Konstellation zum Mittel der (wenn auch immer nur vorläufigen) Vergewisserung über die Einheit der Welt nutzt – wenn auch auf einem gänzlich anderen Weg, nämlich auf dem des Witzes" (Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, 359).

²⁸⁹ According to the commentary to the text, the prize categories of the ancient lottery were as follows: "Auszug, Ambe, Terne, Quaterne und Quinterne, den eigentlichen Haupttreffer" (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 1142). In *Hesperus*, the term "Ehelotto" (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 530) is also mentioned; there the jack pot, or "Quinterne," is described as a "wahre[r] Engel" (ibid.), while the author is characterized as a "dummer Auszug, ein Ambe" (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 531). In *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, the text repeatedly plays with the etymologically-related words *Quintur*, *Quinterne*, and *Quintaner*; see, for instance, Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 141 and 185. The paronomastic allusion to "Auszug" in the double sense of "excerpt" is also not without poetological significance for the reading of the text, and the connection it establishes between excerpting and chance is discussed at numerous points in this chapter.

²⁹⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 12.

elevation of the “microscopic” and “micrological” to a therapeutic mode of being-in-the-world – to “biographical amusements”²⁹¹ [biographische Belustigungen] as Jean Paul titled another one of his biographical works – is reflected in the narrator’s maxim, espoused in a later passage in the text, that “[m]an muß dem *bürgerlichen* Leben und seinen Mikrologien, wofür der Pfarrer einen angeborenen Geschmack hat, einen künstlichen abgewinnen, indem man es liebt, ohne es zu achten, indem man dasselbe, so tief es auch unter dem *menschlichen* stehe, doch als eine andere Verästlung des menschlichen so poetisch genießt, als man bei dessen Darstellungen in Romanen tut.”²⁹² In other words, coping with the vexations of everyday life not only involves transforming reality into fiction, but also the privileging of “*civic* life and its micrologies.” Micrology, “die Lehre von den kleinen Dingen, die mit der Erfindung des Mikroskops ihre wissenschaftliche Nobilitieren erfahren hat,”²⁹³ lends the small its own aesthetic dignity; for from the perspective of the mundane and everyday, nothing can be too small or trivial, since everything, as Jean Paul writes, is considered a “twig” [Verästlung] of the human.

Jean Paul’s maxims for achieving a happier life are not exhausted, however, by the first and second paths. To those he adds a third and final “skyward track”: “Der dritte Himmelsweg,” he writes, “ist der Wechsel mit dem ersten und zweiten.”²⁹⁴ Though not yet formulated in the programmatic manner in which he presents it in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, Jean Paul’s formula for the third path in the “Billet an meine Freunde” bears a close resemblance to the concept of humor, his technique for contrasting between (bodily-sensual) finitude and the infinite (sublime-spiritual) idea. *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* thus marks a significant revision to his poetics of the idyll. Humor,

²⁹¹ Cf. Jean Paul, *Jean Pauls biographische Belustigungen; unter der Gehirnschale einer Riesin. Eine Geistergeschichte*, in: *Werke*, I/4, 261–408.

²⁹² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 185.

²⁹³ Marianne Schuller, *Mikrologien: Literarische und philosophische Figuren des Kleinen* (Bielefeld 2003), 6.

²⁹⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 12.

as the “third path” of idyllic representation, entails the connection of *both* narrative perspectives through perpetual alternation [Wechsel] and perspectivization. Far from being a steady, progressive path, humor proceeds through a series of endless detours and digressions, thereby deforming the narrative logic of chronological biographical narrative. The “crooked line of humor” [krumme Linie des Humors], as Jean Paul refers to it in the preface, is askew and oblique, just like the lives of his numerous off-kilter protagonists.²⁹⁵

More specifically, the introduction of the concept of humor into the framework of the idyll splits the narrative structure in two: while the ostensible “main” narrative consists of the idyllic biography of Quintus Fixlein, narrating his sufferings and eventual recovery from madness and death, the second narrative is told from the perspective of the narrator and fictional author-instance “Jean Paul” who collects the (para-)textual material from Fixlein’s fifteen “slip boxes” [Zettelkästen], in which the latter is said to have recorded all his childhood memories, in order to transform them into poetic fiction. As Till Dembeck argues, “[d]amit rücken auch die (Para-)Textsammlungen der idyllischen Charaktere in eine neue Perspektive. Im ‘Quintus Fixlein’ gibt es auf der Ebene der Erzählfiktion eine Verstrickung des Erzählens in eine der Sammeltätigkeiten Fixleins, der sich der vorliegende Text selbst verdankt” – namely, as Dembeck goes on to write, the poetological motif of the slip box.²⁹⁶ With the introduction of this second narrative reality in the form of the slip box motif, humor acts as a framing device which in the end completely desta-

²⁹⁵ In the second preface to *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, entitled “Geschichte meiner Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage des Quintus Fixlein,” Jean Paul explicitly invokes the concept of humor using the geometric metaphor of the crooked line: “[...] ferner daß die krumme Linie des Humors zwar schwerer zu rektifizieren sei, daß er aber nichts Regellooses und Willkürliches vornehme, weil er sonst niemand ergötzen könnte als seinen Inhaber - daß er mit dem Tragischen die Form und die Kunstgriffe, obwohl nicht die Materie teile - daß der Humor (nämlich der ästhetische, der vom praktischen so verschieden und zertrennlich ist wie jede Darstellung von ihrer dargestellten oder darstellenden Empfindung) nur die Frucht einer langen Vernunft-Kultur sei und daß er mit dem Alter der Welt so wie mit dem Alter eines Individuums wachsen müsse” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 27).

²⁹⁶ Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, 355.

bilizes the coherence of the biographical narrative by revealing at the material level the contingency of the novel's production from the myriad slip boxes, fragments, and other miscellaneous scraps of paper from which it was (fictionally) assembled.

Thus in contrast to *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, in which the motif of text collection is confined to the level of narrative fiction, *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* no longer narrates the straightforward story of an idyllic protagonist, but instead stages the very emergence of the biography itself – namely the narrative text inserted into the book, entitled “Des Quintus Fixlein Leben bis auf unsere Zeiten; in fünfzehn Zettelkästen” – from the fragmentary constellation of pre-existing autobiographical writings. As will be argued throughout the following pages, the novel's numerous references to the “slip box” system are therefore not only of poetological but also epistemological significance with respect to the discursive form of the book. In contrast to the medial constraints of the book as a closed and bound form of text production, the slip box system presents a technique of storing written information that ultimately leads to a contingent conception of narrative order and to a serialization of text that is no longer coupled to the rhetorical function of *memoria* or to the mimetic representation of life. From the perspective of humor, life is not conceived as something which is (re)presented as pre-given, but is rather first and foremost *presented* – that is, *produced* – as a metaleptic effect of the technics of writing. This “humorous” conception of life as a material effect of writing stands in sharp contrast, as will be shown, to the contemporaneous idealist tradition – and in particular that of Hegel, who made use of the slip box system in his own writing process – which sought to conceal the medial-technological preconditions of its representation of “spirit” as a living form.

4.1. Drafting – Collecting – Pulping: Fixlein's “Sudelbibliothek”

Leben des Quintus Fixlein narrates the life story of a “kind of” scholar whose life revolves around nothing but the collection and production of texts. Like the poor little schoolmaster Maria Wutz, Quintus Fixlein can only afford the catalogue of books rather than the books themselves. The point of departure for Fixlein’s encyclopedic writing project is thus the massive library of secondary texts of the *Gelehrtenrepublik*, the modern Republic of Letters – that is, books *about* books – such as the “Literaturzeitung”²⁹⁷ and “den Meßkatalog, den er jährlich statt der Bücher desselben kaufte.”²⁹⁸ Yet whereas Wutz undertakes the impossible hermeneutic task of reproducing by hand an entire pocket library of books based solely on the titles of previously published works, the original copies of which he is far too impoverished to afford, Fixlein specializes in the pleasure of producing new texts which no one has yet to write or in all likelihood ever will write: “wahrlich, wenn ich Xerxes einen Preis auf die Erfindung eines neuen Vergnügens aussetzte: so hatte der, der nur über die Preisfrage seine Gedanken niederschrieb, das neue Vergnügen schon wirklich auf der Zunge.”²⁹⁹

More specifically, Fixlein’s literary endeavor entails not the the writing of completed works or books, but fragments and small forms. For him, the full pleasure of writing consists in spontaneously jotting down his thoughts and ideas onto paper without further reflection or development: “Am liebsten gear er Entwürfe zu Büchern.”³⁰⁰ Fixlein finds pleasure not in the writing of the books themselves, but in the production of the “drafts” or “sketches” [Entwürfe] to books. He is not so much a writer as a “drafter” or “outliner,” whose collected works consists entirely of “small little works” [kleine Werklein]. As the narrator concurs apropos Fixlein’s production of

²⁹⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 71.

²⁹⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 89.

²⁹⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 81.

³⁰⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 82f.

drafts, “[i]ch kenne nur eine Sache, die süßer ist, als ein Buch zu machen, nämlich eines zu entwerfen. Fixlein schrieb kleine Werklein von 1/12 Alphabet, die er im Manuskript, vom Buchbinder in goldne Flügeldecken geschnürt und auf dem Rücken mit gedruckten Lettern betitelt, in die literarische Stufensammlung seines Bücherbrettes mit einstellte.”³⁰¹ The draft constitutes a microscopic form of writing, limited to just a few pages in length, that is grounded in the pleasure of free association.³⁰² In contrast to the medial closure of the book, the draft remains tentative and open as unbounded sheets of paper, thereby encouraging writing that unfolds according to a serial and metonymic, rather than sequential and linear, rhythm. In this respect, the epistemology of the draft recalls what Ernst Mach termed, with respect to the conditional status of scientific hypotheses, the “thought experiment” [Gedankenexperiment], a form of free association that foregrounds the process of thinking and the emergence and development of ideas.³⁰³ Writing in drafts, as Fixlein does, arguably goes one step further: it transforms the physical space of the material paper into an experimental space for the production of ever new thoughts and ideas, yet without conceiving of the draft as the groundwork for or precursor to a future “completed” work. For Fixlein, the point of writing is the draft itself.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 81.

³⁰² Cf. Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, 62. As Fleming remarks in a lengthy footnote on this passage, Grimm’s *Wörterbuch* defines an “Alphabet” as consisting of twenty-three sheets of paper, which means that Fixlein’s collection of books contains as many front and back covers as it does pages of content. Cf. “Alphabet,” *Grimm- Wörterbuch*, accessed 25 Nov. 2015, <<http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=alphabet>>.

³⁰³ “Der Projektenmacher, der Erbauer von Luftschlössern, der Dichter socialer oder technischer Utopien experimentiert in Gedanken. Aber auch der solide Kaufmann, der ernste Erfinder oder Forscher thut dasselbe. Alle stellen sich Umstände vor, und knüpfen an diese die Vorstellung, Erwartung, Vermutung gewisser Folgen, sie machen eine Gedankenenerfahrung” (Ernst Mach: “Über Gedankenexperimente,” in: *Zeitschrift für den Physikalischen und Chemischen Unterricht* 10 (1897), Nr. 1, 1). For more on the concept of the thought experiment and its relation to literature, science, and the arts, see Sigrid Weigel, “Das Gedankenexperiment: Nagelprobe auf die *facultas fingendi* in Wissenschaft und Literatur,” in: *Science & Fiction: über Gedankenexperimente in Wissenschaft, Philosophie und Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2004), 183–205.

³⁰⁴ For more on the epistemology of writing in drafts, cf. Karin Krauthausen and Omar W. Nasim (eds.), *Notieren, Skizzieren. Schreiben und Zeichnen als Verfahren des Entwurfs* (Zürich: diaphenes, 2010), in particular 7–26.

As the text makes clear, Fixlein's writing process quite literally gets itself entangled in the "body" and "soul" of books by incorporating the body and soul of the *writer* into the act of writing: "Der freudige Narr hatte unter dem Schreiben den Kopf geschaukelt, die Hände gerieben, mit dem Steiße gehüpft, das Gesicht gebohnt und an dem Zopfe gesogen."³⁰⁵ With Fixlein's constant "head wagging," "hand rubbing," "jumping around on his bottom," "face stroking," and "braid sucking," the scene of writing is depicted as one of lively gesture and mimicry. Fixlein's writing process, to quote Rüdiger Campe, presents itself in the form of "ein nicht-stabiles Ensemble von Sprache, Instrumentalität und Geste."³⁰⁶ That is, far from being a purely intellectual affair, the writing of drafts is an extremely *bodily* one, for which the inscription of thoughts onto draft paper cannot be divorced from the corporeality of the *gesture* of writing. Writing in drafts is therefore indeed a kind of maieutics – that is, a process of "giving birth" [gebären] to new thoughts and ideas –, yet one which emphasizes the irreducibly somatic, rather than eidetic, side of the writing process. For Fixlein, thoughts cannot but be marked by the physical birth pangs of having first brought them to life through the labor of writing.

Fixlein's talent thus lies not so much in the art of narration as it does in the art of collection. For him, there are no strict rules or criteria for what constitutes a collection; all that counts is what can be counted [gezählt] or enumerated [aufgezählt], rather than what what can be recounted or narrated [erzählt]. His collections take the form of absurd lists and miscellaneous collectanea, which, by abandoning conventional criteria for organizing information, can be virtually infinite,

³⁰⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 89.

³⁰⁶ For more on the concept of the scene of writing, cf. Rüdiger Campe, "Die Schreibszene, Schreiben," in: *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche. Situationen offener Epistemologie*, eds. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 759–72.

without a fixed number [Zahl] or end-point.³⁰⁷ As a writer who privileges lists and list-making as productive forms of writing, Fixlein confines himself in his drafts to one particular genre above all others, namely that of advising scholars, “was sie zu schreiben hätten in der Gelehrten-geschichte,” and suggests for orientation in the search for new ideas lists of works which address all possible themes: Hommel’s “index” [Register] “von Juristen [...], die Hurenkinder gewesen,” Bernhard’s index “von Gelehrten, deren Fata und Lebenslauf im Mutterleibe erheblich waren,” Baillet’s register of scholars “die etwas hatten schreiben *wollen*,” Ancillon’s list of those “die gar nichts geschrieben,” as well as the Lübeck superintendent Götze’s index of scholars “die Schuster waren, die, die ersoffen usw.”³⁰⁸ Through the enumeration of Fixlein’s seemingly incoherent and absurd lists, Jean Paul satirizes both the proliferation of marginal secondary texts in the Republic of Letters, as well as the insignificant scholars-cum-bureaucrats around 1800, such as those who merely “wanted to write something,” or those who were said to have “written nothing” – thus putting into question their status as scholars.

Fixlein’s lists thereby reveal their subversive potential with respect to the “discourse network” around 1800. In the above passage – itself a collection or series of absurd things – Fixlein organizes scholars into distinctly “unscholarly” lists, such as those who were born as “bastards” [Hurenkinder] or those for whom “Fata und Lebenslauf im Mutterleibe erheblich waren.” Here and elsewhere the text subtly links the conditions of birth to the semantics of scholarly text-production; for just as Fixlein is said to have “given birth to drafts” [gebar Entwürfe], the passage plays on the word “Lebenslauf” to refer to both gestation in the womb and to a curriculum vitae.

³⁰⁷ In her study on the poetics of enumeration, *Die Kunst des Aufzählens*, Sabine Mainberger persuasively argues that the possibilities of arranging series or lists are potentially endless. Cf. Sabine Mainberger, *Die Kunst des Aufzählens. Elemente einer Poetik des Enumerativen* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2003). See also: Jack Goody, “What’s in a list?,” in: *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 74–111.

³⁰⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 82f.

Furthermore, the close proximity in the above passage between the words “bastard” [Hurenkinder] and “cobbler” [Schuster] suggests an allusion to the technical language of the printing press. In the context of modern typesetting practices, these terms refer to the phenomena of “widowed lines” [Hurenkinder] and “orphans” [Schusterjunge], the lines at the beginning or end of a paragraph that are left dangling at the top or bottom of a column. Like the aesthetically displeasing effects of modern book-printing, which occasionally disturbed the linear flow of reading by relegating the first or last lines of a paragraph to the preceding or following page, the passage likens the scholar to a kind of typographic *Missgeburt* – to a “monstrosity” or “abortion” of writing. This satirical conception of the scholar as typo starkly diverges from the optimistic portrayal of the scholar presented by Fichte in *Über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, in which Fichte identifies the scholar as the model of the fully-formed, educated individual. For Jean Paul/Fixlein, in contrast, only the scholars who’ve produced nothing – those whose names have been figuratively “orphaned,” that is, deformed and displaced – are the ones worth counting, since their existence is no different than that of stray or surplus text.

In the end, Fixlein, as another insignificant writer-bureaucrat around 1800, remains quite similar to schoolmaster Wutz; rather than seeking to create entirely new works from scratch, it turns out that he, too, occupies himself primarily with the texts of others. For the novelty of his (incomplete) scholarly project builds upon the vast collection of what has already been written, namely upon secondary works which are considered to be the epitome of outdated and functionless. This is revealed by Fixlein’s other major scholarly passion: the accumulation of miscellaneous collectanea and typographic errata. According to the narrator, Fixlein “arbeitete [...] an einer Sammlung der *Druckfehler* in deutschen Schriften; er verglich die Errata untereinander, zeigte, welche am meisten vorkämen, bemerkte, daß daraus wichtige Resultate zu ziehen wären, und riet

dem Leser, sie zu ziehen.”³⁰⁹ In addition to these “microscopic amusements,” Fixlein’s carnivalesque collection also reflects a microcosm of the scholarly world around 1800, replete with literary annuals and miscellanies, secondary scholarly writings, as well as book-trade material such as pocket calendars, advertisements, and alphabetic lexicons of German praenumerations: “Auch sammelte der Quintus vieles: er hatte eine schöne Kalender- und Katechismus- und Sedezbücher-sammlung – auch eine Sammlung von Avertissements, die er angefangen, ist nicht so unvollständig, als man sie meistens antrifft. Er schätzt sehr sein alphabetisches Lexikon von deutschen Bücherpränumeranten [...]”³¹⁰

As a collector of the insignificant scholarly texts produced by the Republic of Letters, Fixlein demonstrates a particular obsession with the alphabet, which he perceives as a kind of contingent combinatoriality of *printed* letters – that is, as materially-embodied signs – rather than as a logical series whose sensual elements compose individual words and imbue them in turn with meaning. While this tension between the “spirit” and the “letter” of words – between the production of (transcendental) meaning and the unveiling of their material contingency in print – is even more fully realized in a radical way in Jean Paul’s *Leben Fibels*, in *Quintus Fixlein* it nonetheless comes to inform Fixlein’s peculiar practice of reading, which foregrounds the materiality of writing through the comparative analysis of letters. Instead of adopting the dominant hermeneutic approach around 1800, which instructed readers to decipher the underlying meaning of texts in a coherent, systematic fashion, Fixlein proceeds according to *statistical* methods of reading based on quantity, average, and frequency. This statistical approach manifests itself in his philological exegesis of the German *Masorethen*:

³⁰⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 81.

³¹⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 82. According to the *Lexikon des gesamten Buchwesens*, praenumeration was an early form of book subscription service in the 18th century. Cf. Severin Corsten, “Praenumeration,” in: *Lexikon des gesamten Buchwesens*, vol. 6 (Stuttgart: Verlag Anton Hiersemann, 1991), 81.

Ferner trat er unter den deutschen *Masorethen* auf. Er bemerkte ganz richtig in der Vorrede: »Die Juden hätten ihre Masora aufzuweisen, die ihnen sagte, wie oft jeder Buchstabe in ihrer Bibel vorkomme, z.B. das Aleph (das A) 43277mal – wie viel Verse darin stehen, wo alle Konsonanten auftreten (26 Verse sinds) – oder nur achtzig (3 sinds) – wie viele Verse man habe, worin gar 42 Wörter und 160 Konsonanten erscheinen (nur einer ist da, Jerem. XXI. 7) – welches der mittelste Buchstabe in einzelnen Büchern sei (im Pentateuch 3. B. Mos. XI. 42 ist [footnote – B.K.] das adelige V) oder gar in der ganzen Bibel. – Wo haben aber wir Christen einen ähnlichen Masorethen für Luthers Bibel aufzuzeigen? Ist es genau untersucht, welches in ihr das mittelste Wort oder der mittelste Buchstabe sei, welcher Vokal am wenigsten vorkomme, und wie oft jeder? – Tausend Bibelfreunde gehen aus der Welt, ohne zu erfahren, daß das deutsche A 323015mal (also über 7mal öfter als das hebräische) in ihrer Bibel stehe.«³¹¹

Here the “double perspective”³¹² of humor presents itself as an effect of reading which transforms the micrological into the sublime – in this case, with specific reference to the alphabet. The Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Bible, is no exception, since for Fixlein – and especially, as will be seen, for Fibel – what counts as sublime lies precisely in the microscopic *literality* of the text, that is, in the alphabet as the raw material of writing. It is hardly a coincidence in this regard that in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* Jean Paul explicitly cites Luther in his description of humor’s technique of double perspectivization: “Wie Luther im schlimmen Sinn unsern Willen eine *lex inversa* nennt: so ist es der Humor im guten; und seine Höllenfahrt bahnet ihm die Himmelfahrt.”³¹³ Just as Luther called the human will a “*lex inversa*” in a negative sense, Jean Paul’s humor is a “*lex inversa*” in a good sense: its descent into hell paves its way for an ascent to heaven. This reversal of the “old theology” [alte Theologie] reveals the poetological strategy of inversion at work in Jean Paul’s humor, not only between good and bad or the infinite and finite, but also between spirit (as sublime

³¹¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 81f.

³¹² Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, 355.

³¹³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 129. For more on the poetological significance of Jean Paul’s references to Luther with respect to his concept of humor, cf. Hans Esselborn, “Luther in Jean Pauls Werk,” in: *Martin Luther. Images, Appropriations, Relectures*, ed. Monique Samuel-Scheyder (Nancy 1995), 257–73.

idea) and letter (as finite/material content). In doing so, humor attributes the significance or meaning of the Bible, as the “book of books,” not to the “divine word” or *logos* of God, but rather to a marginal (paratextual) secondary text, that is, to the *masora*, the scholarly marginalia composed by rabbinic scholars as explanatory addenda to the Bible. As a result, it is the contingent repetition of letters, words, and phrases – in other words, letter and number, rather than idea or meaning – that become the decisive elements in the exegesis of the text.

As the elementary basis of all writing, the alphabet is for Fixlein just as crucial as the raw material upon which and with which text is written. On the days on which he is said to write nothing, he therefore dedicates himself to “*Abc-Schützen*” at a nearby school. It is in this context that he announces to his guests and the fictional biographer “Jean Paul,” among others, a new “clerical script” [Kanzleischrift] which he himself has invented and whose individual letters he has engraved onto copperplates in order to encourage their adoption by the Prussian bureaucracy:

Er war so glücklich gewesen, herauszubringen, daß aus einem Zuge, der einem umgekehrten lateinischen S gleichsieht, alle Anfangsbuchstaben der Kanzleischrift so schön und so verschlungen, als sie in Lehr- und Adelsbriefen stehen, herauszuspinnen sind. »Bis sie sechzig zählen,« sagt er zu mir, »hab ich aus meinem Stammzuge einen Buchstaben gemacht.« Ich kehrte es bloß um und zählte so lange sechzig, bis er ihn hin hatte. Diese Schönheitslinie, in alle Buchstaben verzogen, will er durch Kupferplatten, die er selber sticht, für die Kanzleien gemeiner machen, und ich darf dem russischen, dem preußischen Hofe und auch einigen kleinern in seinem Namen Hoffnung zu den ersten Abdrücken machen: für expedierende Sekretäre sind sie unentbehrlich.³¹⁴

From the “umgekehrten lateinischen S” – what the narrator refers to as the “Schönheitslinie”³¹⁵ – “alle Anfangsbuchstaben der Kanzleischrift” are able to be developed in a systematic fashion. The

³¹⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 167.

³¹⁵ “Fixleins Verfahren der Buchstabenproduktion kehrt ein Verhältnis um, von dem man meinen sollte, daß es für Buchstaben konstitutiv ist. *Eine* Linie, und zwar eine ‘Schönheitslinie,’ nach Hogarth etwas genuin Ornamentales, ein Moment ‘typographischer Pracht,’ ist hier die Figur, aus der *alle* Buchstaben gezogen werden können – während man doch davon ausgehen sollte, daß es die *unterschiedliche* Figuren sind, die Buchstaben als Zeichen erkennbar machen” (Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, 314). As Dembeck points out, Jean Paul’s reference to the “Schönheitslinie” in the above passage alludes to William Hogarth’s physiognomic theory of geometric lines in *The Analysis of Beauty*, in which

passage's description of Fixlein's invention of a new script makes clear once more that for him it is the somatic dimension of writing and the typographical grandeur of the ornamental figure, rather than the signifying content or underlying idea, which plays the decisive role. In particular, it is through a movement of "inversion" [umkehren] that Fixlein's "line of beauty" [Schönheitslinie] is transformed from mere ornament into the combinatory principle from which "to spin out" [herauszuspinnen] – like *textile* from a strand of yarn – the entire alphabet. By furnishing a double perspectivization between the ornamental and figural sides of the line of beauty, Fixlein's letter 's' presents itself in the form of the "crooked line of humor" [krumme Linie des Humors], which subverts the originally-intended bureaucratic ends of his clerical script. On the one hand, it produces the effect of liveliness and vitality – of *enargeia*, the rhetorical figure for the (re-)presentation of an abundance of details in order to make present an absence – through the sublime movement of its curves.³¹⁶ On the other hand, like a loose thread being "pulled" [gezogen] – or perhaps even "excerpted" [ausgezogen] – from the textile, causing it to quickly unravel, it simultaneously reveals the material contingency – the "Glückszufälle"³¹⁷ of the lotto as "Auszug" – of *all* the

Hogarth postulates the *figura serpentina*, the serpentine line, as the "line of beauty" due to its possession of the greatest variety of movements and potential for liveliness and vitality: "Though all sorts of waving-lines are ornamental, when properly applied; yet, strictly speaking, there is but one precise line, properly to be called the line of beauty," and several pages later continues, "[f]or as among the vast variety of waving-lines that may be conceived, there is but one that truly deserves the name of *the line of beauty*, so there is only one precise serpentine-line that I call *the line of grace*" (William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty. Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating Ideas of Taste* [London: J. Reeves, 1753], 38, 52). The extent to which Hogarth's "line of beauty" touched upon fundamental concepts of aesthetics in the second half of the eighteenth century manifests itself in the work of Moses Mendelssohn, who in his letters *Über die Empfindungen* (1756) equated the subtle movement of the line of beauty with a distinct "allure" [Reiz]: "Man kennt in Deutschland nunmehr die Wellenlinie, die unser Hogarth für die Maler, als die ächte Schönheitslinie festgesetzt hat. Und den Reitz? Vielleicht würde man ihn nicht unrecht durch die Schönheit der wahren oder anscheinenden Bewegung erklären. Ein Beyspiel der erstern sind die Mienen und Geberden der Menschen, die durch die Schönheit in den Bewegungen reizend werden; ein Beyspiel der letztern hingegen, die flammigten, oder mit Hogarth zu reden, die Schlangelinien, die allezeit eine Bewegung nachzuahmen scheinen" (Moses Mendelssohn, *Über die Empfindungen*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften (Jubiläumsausgabe)*, ed. Fritz Bamberger, vol. 1 [Stuttgart 1971], here: 282f).

³¹⁶ Cf. Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 27; idem., *Werke*, I/5, 102. For more on the poetological significance of Jean Paul's references to gold and currency, cf. Menke, "Jean Pauls Witz. Kraft und Formel," in particular 210–11.

³¹⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 12.

letters to the extent that they are grounded in a single “warped” or “distorted” [verzogen] typographic gesture.

Hence, despite Jean Paul’s implicit reference to Hogarth’s *The Analysis of Beauty* in this passage, there is nonetheless a clearly satirical dimension to his invocation of the letter ‘s’ as the origin of all the initial letters of the alphabet – a satirical play on letters through assonance, which Jean Paul reveals to the reader in the “Postskript” appended to *Quintus Fixlein*. In order to improve the trade balance between Germany and other nations, he suggests in the postscript that satires produced in Germany no longer be allowed to be converted as raw materials into satires abroad in the future:

Aber satirische Münzmeister werden schlecht aufgemuntert: wie die Fabriken auf die Gefäße von *Semilor* ein »s« einzeichnen müssen, um dasselbe vom *wahren* Golde zu unterscheiden: so muß ein solcher Münzer den Anfangsbuchstaben der Satire (auch ein »s«) überall einhauen, weil das Publikum alles in der Welt eher versteht (sogar seinen Kant) als Spaß, und dieses *buchstäbliche* Signieren (damit das Publikum nicht aus Spaß Ernst mache) verdirbt jedes Subjekt, es sei Schafwolle, oder Satire, oder eine Menschenstirne.³¹⁸

While the letter ‘s’ distinguishes between authentic and counterfeit, real and fictional, it cannot do so in such an obvious way that the play between reality and appearance is decided in advance. In the end, however, it must be decided – if not without some degree of ambivalence: “hier unter der Schwelle, indem die Abendglocke meines Buches läutet, würd’ es mir wie eine zersplitternde Bleikugel im Herzen sitzen bleiben, wenn ich etwas anders – etwan: leset wohl! - zu den Lesern sagte als: lebet wohl!”³¹⁹ When one takes into consideration the fact that later in life Jean Paul would polemically campaign against the use of the “Bindung-s” in written German,³²⁰ the only thing left

³¹⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 258f.

³¹⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 259.

³²⁰ Cf. Jean Paul, “Über die deutschen Doppelwörter,” in: *Werke*, II/3, 9–108.

for such an author would be to proceed according to Fixlein's own absurd approach of unsystematically collecting paper waste and errata.

In short, it is the spirit of the encyclopedia which Fixlein embodies. However, in contrast to the "polyhistoric" ambitions of the Enlightenment, which starting with Diderot conceived of the encyclopedia as a project of cataloguing and ordering all of the world's knowledge into a single book, Fixlein's encyclopedic project entails the unsystematic collection of the most trivial and insignificant scholarly publications around 1800. His library, which consists of fragmentary drafts, pocket calendars, scholarly registers, and alphabetic lexicons, amongst other kinds of "miscellanies" and collectanea, constitutes what Magnus Wieland refers to as a "Sudelbibliothek,"³²¹ a library filled with nothing but "sheets of paper waste" [Makulaturbögen]. In *Quintus Fixlein*, the collection of paper waste is not merely a minor motif or plot detail, but, as will be argued, is symptomatic with respect to Jean Paul's own method of text-production, as in the following passage which describes Fixlein's unusual reading habits:

Ist es nicht daraus zu erklären, daß [Fixlein] sich, wie Morhof rät, die einzelnen Hefte von Makulaturbögen, wie sie der Kramladen ausgab, fleißig sammelte und in solchen wie Virgil im Ennius scharfte? Ja für ihn war der Krämer ein Fortius (der Gelehrte) oder ein Friedrich (der König), weil beide letztere sich aus kompletten Büchern nur Blätter schnitten, an denen etwas war. Eben diese Achtung für Makulatur nahm ihn für die Vorschürzen gallischer Köche ein, welche bekanntlich aus vollgedrucktem Papier bestehen; und er wünschte oft, ein Deutscher übersetzte die Schürzen.³²²

Fixlein's appreciation for material paper waste shares much in common with Jean Paul's excerpting method, which as Götz Müller argues has little to do with the "polyhistoric" ambitions of Enlightenment encyclopedists like Daniel Georg Morhof, but rather with the discovery and invention

³²¹ Magnus Wieland, "Jean Pauls Sudelbibliothek. Makulatur als poetologische Chiffre," in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 46 (2011), 97–119, here: 113.

³²² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 88.

of the new through a revaluation of the old.³²³ Fixlein treats the sheets of paper waste or *Makulatur* from the “junk shop” [Kramladen] that are occasionally lying around as packaging material not as trash, but instead as carriers of important information. What appears at first glance as a kind of comic error on his part – that is, the (humorous) misrecognition of the paper waste’s useless materiality as, in fact, imbued with significance and meaning – turns out to be grounded in his sincere respect for the medium of paper waste. The text further legitimates this viewpoint by way of recourse to various historically significant precursors, including Virgil, Fortius, Morhof, and Friedrich the Great. Fixlein’s approach is thereby situated in a broader discursive context of scholarly reading practices, which by tearing out sheets of paper from a book transform the latter into fragmentary paper waste. According to this reading, the book is no longer perceived as a self-evident aesthetic unity, but one which instead disintegrates into a slew of unbounded sheets of paper – into fragments or excerpts, *Auszüge* – which appear as a kind of trash heap of paper shavings through which the reader can rummage at their own discretion.

Thus while the text dignifies Fixlein – if in a decidedly ironic manner – by portraying him as the proud inventor of a new script, it nonetheless insists on a conception of authorship which is no longer grounded in the literary tradition of “invention” [erfinden] or *inventio*, the rhetorical *terminus technicus* for the discovery of a well-ordered *loci communes*, but rather in that of “collection” [sammeln], which presents an entirely different notion of invention: that of an inventory of the bizarre and miscellaneous, and of the seemingly trivial and insignificant. From this perspective, the narrator praises the author,

³²³ “In der zeitgenössischen Rezeption fielen immer wieder die Stichwörter »barock« und »Polyhistor«. [...] Jean Paul stehe in der Tradition von Daniel Georg Morhofs *Polyhistor*, der in *De excerpiendi ratione* die Anhäufung des Wissens als Basis für »neue Gedanken und Erfindungen« rühmt. In der Tat ähnelt Jean Pauls Verteidigung des gelehrten Witzes Morhofs Lob des Exzerpts. Jean Pauls gelehrter Witz treibt eklektisch Informationen und Lehrmeinungen aus allen Ecken der Welt zusammen, um sie unter einem neuen Gesichtspunkt oder in einer neuen Färbung zu vereinigen” (Müller, “Jean Pauls Privatencyklopädie,” 75).

der mehr sammelt als erfindet – weil das letztere mit einem ängstlichen Feuer das Herz kalzinieret –; ich lobe den Antiquar, Heraldiker, Notenmacher, Sammler, ich preise den *Titelbarsch* (ein Fisch, namens *perca diagramma*, wegen seiner Buchstaben auf den Schuppen) und den *Buchdrucker* (ein Speckkäfer, namens *scarabaeus typographus*, der in die Rinde der Kienbäume Lettern wühlt) – beide brauchen keinen größern oder schönern Schauplatz der Welt als den auf dem Lumpenpapier und keinen andern Legestachel als einen spitzigen Kiel, um damit ihre vierundzwanzig Lettern-Eier zu legen.³²⁴

Just like Fixlein, who prefers to accumulate scholarly errata and produce drafts, rather than write completed books, the passage glorifies the kind of author who appears to quietly satisfy himself with his vast collections of collectanea and miscellanies.³²⁵ Such an author would no longer need to produce anything “new” at all, but would instead only need to bring about a revaluation – through a humorous inversion of perspective – of what, on the one hand, is considered trivial and insignificant and what, on the other hand, is considered important and worth being preserved in a collection.³²⁶ For the “antiquarian, heraldist, note maker, collector,” it is not so much the “content” or “soul” of the work that is significant, but rather the corporeal materiality of the text-object – its finitude, mortality, and capacity for dismemberment and “death,” in the sense of being pulped or turned into discarded “rag-paper” [Lumpenpapier].

³²⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, 1/4, 166.

³²⁵ Jean Paul’s conception of authorship as collection also has discursive consequences for his understanding of readership. If the author’s task is not so much to “invent,” but rather to “collect” – that is, to stitch together heterogeneous textual material from a variety of different sources – this liberates the reader in turn from an author-centric mode of linear, sequential narrative, allowing them to freely peruse the text, to pick and choose passages as they see fit, in a decidedly non-linear manner, as was increasingly the case for readers at the turn of the 18th century with the rise of literary short-formats such as pocket books, pocket calendars, anthologies, and collected editions. On this point, see Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, in particular 121–25. In *Quintus Fixlein*, Jean Paul thus likens the author to “a kind of bee-keeper” and the reader to a “reader-swarm” that clusters and swarms around “flora,” which in this context ostensibly functions as a paronomastic reference to *florilegium*, the Latin word for “anthology”: “Der Autor ist eine Art Bienenwirt für den Leser-Schwarm, dem zu Gefallen er die Flora, die er für ihn hält, in verschiedene Zeiten verteilt und die Aufblüte mancher Blumen hier beschleunigt, dort verschiebt, damit es in allen Kapiteln blühe. –” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, 1/4, 151). For more on the discursive and poetological significance of authorship and readership for Jean Paul, cf. Schmidt-Hannisa, “Lesarten.”

³²⁶ For more on the creation and destruction of value with respect to “waste,” cf. Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1979), in particular 77–102.

Mortality, dismemberment, and death – these are in fact the criteria of the animalistic around 1800.³²⁷ It is hardly coincidental that the text goes on to identify forms of creaturely materiality, through paronomastic references to a bestiary of unusual life-forms like the fish “title perch” [Titelbarsch] and beetle “book printer” [Buchdrucker], with the technical conditions of text-production: typography, book-printing, and the letters of the alphabet. Thus while the text presents a conception of the scholar as *Buchstabenmensch* in the form of Fixlein’s suffering from the materiality of signification and the literality of human existence, it nonetheless situates him at the precarious threshold between the human and the inhuman and the organic (biological) and the inorganic (textual/technical). With respect to the technics of writing, the *termini* “body and soul” no longer suffice as the criteria which distinguish man from animal; writing therefore ceases to be conceived as a purely human technics and comes to possess a decidedly monstrous, inhuman element, one which denaturalizes even organic life-forms.³²⁸ In the end, it is the alphabet which serves as the primary generative metaphor in the text, for according to the narrator the only “ovipositor” [Legestachel] that is needed to produce – to give birth to – the “twenty-four letter-eggs” [vierundzwanzig Letter-Eiern] of the alphabet is a “pointed quill” [spitzigen Kiel].

4.2. Thinking in Boxes: The Slip Box as “Lebens-Laboratorium”

³²⁷ “Sterblichkeit, Zerstückelung und Tod erweisen sich als Kriterien des Tierischen, Viehischen. Das Schicksal, der individuelle Lebensweg wird *gleich-gültig*, selbst die Differenz von Tod und Leben scheint angesichts der zerteilten Körper kein Kriterium mehr an die Hand zu geben. Die Gleichgültigkeit, die [Moses] Mendelssohn dem alphabetischen System attestierte, findet hier in der von keiner Transzendenz affizierten Zerstückelung des Körpers ihre parallele Inszenierung” (Keck, *Buchstäbliche Anatomien*, 30).

³²⁸ The element of the monstrous plays an especially central role in Jean Paul’s *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise*. For a poetological reading of teratological discourse in that novel, cf. Armin Schäfer, “Jean Paus monströses Schreiben,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* (37) 2002, 216–32; Maximilian Bergengruen, “Missgeburten. Vivisektionen des Humors in Jean Pauls *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise*,” in: *Anatomie. Sektionen einer medizinischen Wissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*, eds. Jürgen Helm and Karin Stukenbrock (Stuttgart 2003), 271–92.

Not only is Fixlein a collector of paper waste and a writer of drafts, but he is also, as the novel reveals, his own biographer. Fixlein connects his project of encyclopedic writing with his autobiographical writing through his use of the card-index system known as the “slip box” [Zettelkasten], a scholarly tool used for recording, ordering, and storing knowledge onto unbounded index cards, which was invented by the 18th-century legal scholar and jurist Johann Jacob Moser (1701–1785). By unbinding freely interconnected index cards from the spine of the book, Moser’s invention of the slip box paved the way for a fundamental transformation of the scholarly means of collecting excerpt material and producing, in turn, new texts and new knowledge in the 18th century.³²⁹ In his tract *Einige Vortheile vor Canzley-Verwandte und Gelehrte* (1773), Moser illustrates his method of collecting material for future writing:

Ich mache alle meine Collectaneen auf einzelne Blättlein, deren ich aus jedem Bogen Papier 16. oder aus jedem Octav-Blatt 2. mache. Finde ich nun an einem Ort etwas, davon ich glaube, dass es mir in künftigen Zeiten gute Dienste leisten könnte; so treffe ich es entweder in einem Buch, oder in einer Schrift, oder sonst an, und das Buch etc. ist nicht mein eigen, oder ich kann es künftig, wänn ich es nöthig hätte, nicht leicht, oder gar nicht, wieder zu meinem Gebrauch haben; so schreibe ich es auf halbe octav=Blättgen ab, oder extrahire es daraus; zumalen wänn es etwas wichtiges betrifft. [...] Ich lasse mir ferner vom Schreiner hölzerne Kästgen verfertigen, von denen jedes 2. Reihen solcher halber octav=Blätter fasset, welche in der Mitte durch ein dünnes Holz von einander unterschieden werden. Die Breite solcher Zettelkästgen ist so beschaffen, dass auf jeder Seite zwischen dem mitten hindurch gehenden Unterschid, ein halbes octav=Blättgen in der Breite genügsamen Plaz hat: Die Höhe ist der Höhe eines solchen halben octav=Blättgens gleich, und die Tieffe oder Länge ist etwa 1. Schuh; so dass in ein solches Zettelkästgen ungefähr 1000. dieser Zettel gehen.³³⁰

³²⁹ “Infolge ihrer einseitigen Entbindung vom Buchrücken gewähren frei verschaltbare Zettel ausgeweitete Schnittstellen, um die Konnektivität möglicher Anschlüsse zu steigern. Das Material der Gelehrtenmaschine wartet in Form ideal adressierbarer Zettel-Agglomerationen in geeigneten Kästen auf seine fachkundige Befragung” (Markus Krajevski, *Zettelwirtschaft: Die Geburt der Kartei aus dem Geiste der Bibliothek* [Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2002], 69). For a mediological reading of the slip box as a tool for knowledge-administration in the 18th century, cf. Helmut Zedelmaier, “Zettelkasten,” in: *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung. Ein interdisziplinäres Lexikon*, eds. Nicolas Pethes, Jens Ruchatz (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2001), 671–72; idem., “Buch, Exzerpt, Zettelschrank, Zettelkasten,” in: *Archivprozesse. Die Kommunikation der Aufbewahrung*, eds. Hedwig Pompe, Leander Scholz (Köln: DuMont, 2002), 38–53.

³³⁰ Johann Jacob Moser, *Einige Vortheile vor Canzley-Verwandte und Gelehrte: In Absicht auf Acten-Verzeichnisse, Auszüge und Register, desgleichen auf Sammlungen zu künftigen Schriften und wirkliche Ausarbeitung derer Schriften* (Tübingen: Heerbrandt, 1773), 42f.

After stipulating these requirements as the model for all future slip boxes, Moser goes on several pages later to attempt to persuade readers of the numerous technological advantages of the slip box system over the traditional book-format. Amongst the eight reasons he lists for using slip boxes over collectanea-books or excerpt manuscripts, arguably the two most important advantages are, first, that with slip boxes all topics remain together, rather than being written one after another as in a notebook: “So bleibt jede Materie beysammen; wo hingegen in die Collectaneen=Bücher alles unter einander geschriben werden muss, oder bey einer Materie, wänn man eine gewisse Anzahl Blätter darzu aussetzet, bald deren zu vil übrig bleibe, bald zu wenige seynd, und allzuvile dergleichen Bücher gehalten werden müssen.”³³¹ Second, rearranging an entire text, adding new chapters, or removing old ones is, according to Moser, far more easily accomplished with paper slips, while notebooks remain unchangeable: “Will ich ein ganzes Werck, oder Haupt= oder special=Materien umschmelzen, und in eine ganz andere Ordnung bringen, oder neue Capitel hinzu= oder alte Capitel heraus thun, kan es bey einzelnen Zettelgen mit geringer Mühe in kurzer Zeit bewerkstelliget werden. [...] [Collectaneen=Bücher] müssen bleiben, wie sie nun einmal seynd.”³³² In both cases, Moser emphasizes the advantage of the unbounded format of the individual index cards over the book, while also acknowledging that as a result they are more easily lost.³³³ Thanks to this technological innovation, his slip box system allows for a much great degree of flexibility and mobility in the arrangement of information, according to whatever categories or organizing principles are favored by the owner, than the traditional bound-book format.

³³¹ Moser, 50.

³³² Moser, 51.

³³³ “Wahr ist es, daß dergleichen einzelne Zettel leichter zerstreut werden oder verlohren gehen können, als was in Bücher eingetragen worden ist: Da ich aber meine Zettelkästgen in eigene Repositorien, wie die Bücher, stelle, und die Meinige wissen, daß sie keine Hand daran legen dürffen; so ist mir in langen Jahren kein widriger Zufall auch nur mit einem einigen Blättgen begegnet” (Moser, 53).

While the first mention of the slip box appears in the second preface to *Quintus Fixlein*, it features more prominently in the second chapter of the novel, in which the narrator explicitly refers to Moser by name in connection with his invention of the slip box system. There the conception of the slip box undergoes a decisive shift in meaning and function, however, from its originally-intended purpose as an exclusively scholarly instrument for the recording of objective knowledge. In the novel, by contrast, it is the fictional form given to Fixlein's autobiographical writings and serves as the micrological pendant to his encyclopedic writing project. In his slip boxes, he records the most significant moments of his life, such that even the most trivial and unremarkable events are taken into account, which he then arranges into chronological order:

Unter dem Essen fiel etwas vor, das ein Biograph nicht entbehren kann: seine Mutter mußte ihm die Landkarte seiner kindlichen Welt unter dem Käuen mappieren und ihm alle Züge erzählen, woraus von ihm auf seine jetzige Jahre etwas zu schließen war. Diesen perspektivischen Aufriss seiner kindlichen Vergangenheit trug er dann auf kleine Blätter auf, die alle unsere Aufmerksamkeit verdienen. Denn lauter solche Blätter, welche Szenen, Akte, Schauspiele seiner Kinderjahre enthielten, schlichtete er chronologisch in besondere Schubladen einer Kinder-Kommode und teilte seine Lebensbeschreibung, wie Moser seine publizistischen Materialien, in besondere *Zettelkästen* ein. Er hatte Kästen für Erinnerungszettel aus dem zwölften, dreizehnten, vierzehnten etc., aus dem einundzwanzigsten Jahre und so fort. Wollte er sich nach einem pädagogischen Baufron-Tag einen Rastabend machen: so riss er bloß ein Zettelfach, einen Registerzug seiner Lebensorgel, heraus und besann sich auf alles.³³⁴

In this remarkable passage, which stages nothing less than the primal scene of Fixlein's invention of the slip box system from the memories dictated to him by his mother, the slip box is revealed to no longer serve the purely pragmatic function of storing bureaucratic, library-oriented, or other kinds of scholarly information. Instead, Fixlein excerpts and stores information only for his own purposes, namely that of pleurably recollecting and re-reading the childhood memories which he has written down onto index cards, as when he "riss [...] bloß ein Zettelfach, einen Registerzug

³³⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 83f.

seiner Lebensorgel, heraus” and “besann sich auf alles.”³³⁵ Fixlein’s use of the slip box as a mnemonic device, which allows him to read in an excerpting manner, presents an alternative method of recollection than that recounted in *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*. For whereas Wutz’s regression to an earlier, prelapsarian state of child-like being is made possible by the “natural magic of the imagination” [natürliche Magie der Einbildungskraft], Fixlein’s construction of an inner world, by contrast, is mediated entirely by the media technology of index cards. In this way, the voice of the mother that dictates to him his own childhood memories – mapping out a kind of panorama of geographic “features” [Züge], or perhaps contingently selected “excerpts” [Auszüge] – about which he himself is completely ignorant of, becomes displaced and effaced by a bureaucratic-technical machinery.³³⁶

Fixlein’s autobiographical repurposing of the slip box system thereby transforms the “natural” magic of the imagination – here, the Mother’s voice as the source of discursive production – into a completely denaturalized mnemotechnics, that is, into a kind of prosthesis or second-hand memory for storing and archiving information. Hence, just like the dancing master Aubin, who had “keine Zeit und kein Gedächtnis und doch so viele Kenntnisse”³³⁷ thanks to his handwritten

³³⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 84.

³³⁶ According to Kittler, Romantic poetry – poetry around 1800 – consists precisely in this discursive-technical procedure of rewriting that which is posited as having been produced by and through maternal dictation – in other words, the Mother’s voice – which orally affixes an imaginary childhood existence to the scene of writing: “Dichtung um 1800 heißt nicht wie Literatur um 1900, den ‘nie wirklich ausgesprochenen Satz *ich schreibe*’ an den Grund allen Schreibens setzen. Dichtung heißt vielmehr: um diesen Satz herumschreiben, ihm aus Erinnerung ans früheste Schreibenlernen eine Mündlichkeit zuschreiben. ‘Das mütterliche Diktat fixiert – oral – zur Schreibszene und zum Schriftzeichen, was die psychologische Struktur der Kindheit, die Art der Existenz der Erinnerung am Individuum ist.’ Aus dieser imaginären, aber um so inständiger beschworenen Mündlichkeit rührt das nicht textuelle, sondern ‘gleichsam textuelle Wesen des Bourgeois’ und seiner Dichtung” (Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 128). Rüdiger Campe, in an essay on Jean Paul that Kittler cites in the above passage, reads this scene, therefore, as a parody of the scene of writing: “das Wissen dessen, was man nicht weiß, ein Lesen der diktierten und von eigenen Hand hingeschriebenen Wörter” (Campe, “Schreibstunden in Jean Pauls Idyllen,” in: *Deutsch-Französisches Jahrbuch für Text-Analytik I* [1980], 132–70, here: 153).

³³⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 772.

pocket library, Fixlein's actual memories of earlier life experiences may be long forgotten or perhaps even completely fabricated. Yet by systematically recording the "perspektivischen Aufriss seiner kindlichen Vergangenheit" onto index cards, not only can he overcome his own forgetfulness, but he can also transform these past moments into highly idealized, fairytale-like representations of his earlier life, which he subsequently organizes according to a quasi-theatrical schema of "Szenen, Akte, Schauspiele seiner Kinderjahre."

This repurposing of the slip box system into a highly idiosyncratic tool for organizing and retrieving information from one's own life makes Fixlein, like Aubin, into a decidedly humorous figure, for in spite of his meticulous accumulation and organization of autobiographical index cards he cannot grasp the larger narrative context of his own life story.³³⁸ Instead, that is the job of the novel's narrator and fictional author-instance "Jean Paul." According to the novel's full title, *Leben des Quintus Fixlein, aus fünfzehn Zettelkästen gezogen*, it is from Fixlein's autobiographical slip boxes – fifteen in total – that the narrator is said to have "drawn" [gezogen] the raw material for his own fictional biography based on Fixlein's life, which the "real author" Jean Paul subsequently inserted into his book, following the short essay "Mußteil für Mädchen," under the title "Des Quintus Fixlein Leben bis auf unsere Zeiten; in fünfzehn Zettelkästen," which he then divided not into traditional chapters, but rather into corresponding "Zettelkästen." The poetological motif of the slip box thereby introduces two different levels of narrative reality into the novel, both of which concern the collection and production of text: first, there is Fixlein's fictional autobiographical material, which he has stored in the drawers of his custom-made "Kinder-Kommode"; and second, there is the fictional frame story, in which the narrator and fictional author-instance

³³⁸ "Aubin wird zur humoristischen Figur, weil er zwar einerseits dank seiner Speichertechnik Massen isolierter Daten zu memorieren vermag, andererseits aber außerstande ist, einen schlichten narrativen Zusammenhang zu erfassen. Dies stellt sich heraus, als der Erzähler eines Tanzschülerin eine Geschichte vorträgt. Außerdem hat seine Gelehrsamkeit keinerlei pragmatische Funktion" (Schmidt-Hannisa, "Lesarten," 39).

“Jean Paul” constructs from Fixlein’s vast repository of forgotten childhood memories as building blocks, or *Bausteine*, the entire biographical project presented in the form of the novel *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* itself. At numerous points in the text, the narrator even interrupts the narrative continuity of the novel, appearing at the scene in his role as the secondary editor and collector of Fixlein’s unpublished autobiographical writings, as in the following passage in which the narrator is depicted as being in immediate physical possession of Fixlein’s slip box archive: “Fixleins Zettelkästen hab’ ich schon in der Tasche bei mir, und darf nur nachschauen und aus seinen nehmen, was in meine taugt.”³³⁹

This more complex framing technique distinguishes *Quintus Fixlein* at the narrative level from its idyllic predecessor, *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, in which the motif of writing is still largely confined to the fictional biographical narrative. In *Quintus Fixlein*, by contrast, the “life” of the life story, in the sense of the subject or subjectivity of its protagonist, is no longer represented as something ‘pre-given,’ but is instead, according to the title, “pulled from slip boxes” [aus Zettelkästen gezogen]: it is, in other words, the precipitate, remnant, or residue of a poetological-technical calculus. With the introduction of this second narrative reality in the form of an all-pervasive editorial fiction, the text presents a conception of (scholarly) life as the metaleptic effect of writing.³⁴⁰ In other words, there is no “life” in the novel which is antecedent to the slip box; instead, like Aubin, who makes “Exzerpten aus [s]einen Exzerpten [...] und den Spiritus noch einmal abzieh[t],”³⁴¹ it is the force of (re)presentation – the act of “distilling” [abziehen] or “pulling” [ziehen] from excerpts, *Auszüge* – which first constitutes life as an object of representation. Fixlein’s slip boxes thus serve as his “Lebensorgel” in a double sense, as both a carnivalesque

³³⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 165.

³⁴⁰ For more on the poetological significance of Jean Paul’s use of the editorial fiction or “scene of editing” as a framing device, cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors aus dem Geist der Herausgeberfiktion*, in particular 338–53.

³⁴¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 772.

musical instrument that can be repeatedly played simply by pressing on its “knee-lever” [Regis-terzug], as well as a kind of prosthetic organ without which he cannot live.

What the text stages, in other words, is the birth of the scholar from the spirit of excerpts,³⁴² – albeit with one major qualification: for humorous figures like Wutz, Aubin, and Fixlein, it is the *Spiritus* – meaning not only “spirit” in the sense of an “absoluter Geist,” but also in the sense of an alcoholic spirit – which is distilled from the “Lebenstropfen” or pulled from the “Lebensorgel” of the excerpts [Auszüge]. These scholars’ texts, which refer to other texts that refer, in turn, to other texts, no longer constitute an encyclopedic “order of things,” but lead instead to drunken disorder and the material contingency of the “private encyclopedia.”³⁴³ From this perspective, the novel presents itself in the form of an open experimental arrangement or *Versuchsanordnung*, such that the material traces of the biographical narrative are left open, unfinished, and exposed. It is not a representation of life in its immediacy and completion, but instead an artificial “Lebens-Laboratorium”³⁴⁴ which the text embodies – a term that the narrator uses later on to describe Fixlein’s peculiar repurposing of the slip box system for his own autobiographical ends. In this respect, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger’s characterization of the laboratory situation as a *Zettelwirtschaft* is especially relevant for the reading of *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, for as Rheinberger argues both the index card [Zettel] and the draft [Entwurf] constitute essential elements of the epistemological regime of the laboratory:

Sie sind schriftlich verfaßt in dem weiteren Sinn, den Jacques Derrida dem Begriff der Schrift gab – sie haben das Potential, sich nicht nur von ihrer ersten Referenz, von dem, worauf sie sich anfänglich bezogen, sondern auch vom Schreibenden/Experimentierenden selbst zu treffen. Der Zettel und die Kritzelei, als fixierte

³⁴² Cf. Menke, “Die Geburt des Gelehrten aus den Exzerpten.” See also: Schmitz-Emans, “Vom Leben und Schreiben der Bücher. Das Buch als Objekt bei Jean Paul,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 28 (1993), 17–46.

³⁴³ Cf. Müller, “Jean Pauls Privatencyklopädie.”

³⁴⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 109.

Spuren, reichen aber nicht in die Sphäre der gedruckten Mitteilung an die Wissenschaftlergemeinschaft, sie bleiben Funktionen des experimentellen Engagements. Sie gehören zum Erkenntnisregime des Labors.³⁴⁵

For Rheinberger, the index card and the draft are to be understood not as predetermined by their initial point of reference in a given experimental arrangement, but instead as forms of writing which imbricate at the interstice between the materiality of the experimental system and narrative order. “Sie liegen *zwischen* den Materialitäten der Experimentalsysteme einerseits und den begrifflichen und narrativen Gebäuden andererseits, die als sanktionierte Forschungsberichte den unmittelbaren Kontext des Labors verlassen.”³⁴⁶ In *Quintus Fixlein*, the poetological motif of the slip box likewise comes to stand not for a sequential, linear narration, but instead for a highly fragmentary and discontinuous one, which serves to expose the materiality and media technology that condition the writing process and the techniques of representation in the novel. By staging the transformation of Fixlein’s autobiographical writings into a fictional biography, namely the book *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, the novel’s editorial frame story introduces a double perspectivization between the “micrological” materiality of Fixlein’s written scraps of paper and the cohesion of that raw material into the fictional form of a biographical narrative.

The material traces of Jean Paul’s own writing process manifest themselves above all in the highly digressive preface which he inserted into the second edition of *Quintus Fixlein*, where he offers the reader a satirical glimpse into the conditions of his “writing laboratory.”³⁴⁷ Entitled

³⁴⁵ Cf. Rheinberger, “Zettelwirtschaft,” 442.

³⁴⁶ Rheinberger, “Zettelwirtschaft,” 442. According to Rheinberger, these traces of the research and experimentation process include “Exzerpte [...], Notizen [...], Gedankenketten oder auffälligen Überschneidung, Skizzen experimenteller Anordnungen, Datenstreifen, die ein einzelner Experimentalverlauf geliefert hat, versuchsweise Interpretationen experimenteller Ergebnisse, Korrekturen dieser Interpretationen, vorläufige Berechnungen, Kalibrierungen einzusetzender Apparate, Entwürfe neuer Vorrichtungen” (ibid.).

³⁴⁷ As Sabine Straub has shown, the second preface was already composed in 1796, the same year in which the first edition of *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* was published, though it was not included until the release of the second edition in 1801. According to Straub, text-genetic analysis of the preface reveals a highly serialized, fragmentary emergence process that bears a striking resemblance to Jean Paul’s excerpting method of text production: “Auf drei Seiten [...]

the “Geschichte der Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage des Quintus Fixlein,” the preface to the second edition tells the story of a journey by foot from Hof to Bayreuth, which is meant to result in the production of the preface itself, rather than in a finished product. There the metaphor of walking clues the reader to shift their perspective away from reading the work as a *product* of writing to a *process* of writing.³⁴⁸ Far from securing the “aesthetic unity” of the work, however, the preface instead hints at its material contingency through the proliferation of its frames. This is reflected especially in a series of subsections included in the preface entitled “Fortsetzung der Vorrede,” whose “continuation” [Fortsetzung] is punctuated, in Jean Paul’s typical fashion, by perpetual digressions of narrative. The serial arrangement of the preface manifests itself in particular in the narrator’s story of the “Zeugung einer Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage.”³⁴⁹ Just like Fixlein is said to have “given birth to drafts,” the narrator likewise makes use of reproductive metaphors with respect to his narration of the emergence of the preface, constantly conflating biological and textual metaphors in his description of its genesis. It thereby anticipates not only the novel’s use of the slip box motif, but also its fictional depiction of the novel’s own emergence. Far from being a successful birth, the preface presents a scene of writing which foregrounds the failure to bring the writing to completion: the narrator – ostensibly the “real” author Jean Paul – “trug nämlich die offene Schreibtischplatte vor mir, um die Vorrede, wie sie mir Satz für Satz entfiel, darin aufzufangen [...]”³⁵⁰ Here the narrator’s recounting of the process of writing while sitting at his “open writing desk,” rather than relating the individual sentences to the narrative whole, proceeds instead in a

bietet sich hier jedoch ein Erscheinungsbild, das auf eine ganze andere Arbeitsweise schließen läßt: wie auf einer Kette aneinandergereiht, durch Gedankenstriche getrennt, folgen [...] einzelne Gedankensplitter, Stichworte aus den Bausteinen und Wortspiele aufeinander. Umrahmt und zum Teil überschrieben werden sie von zahllosen graphischen Spielereien mit dem Buchstaben ‘d,’ von Zahlen, Brüchen und Additionen” (Sabine Straub, “‘Vorrede zur Vorrede’: Aus Jean Pauls unveröffentlichten Materialien zur *Geschichte meiner Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage des Quintus Fixlein*,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 44 [2009], 18–32, here 20f).

³⁴⁸ Cf. Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors aus dem Geist der Herausgeberschaft*, in particular 331–42.

³⁴⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 16.

³⁵⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 16f.

fragmentary manner, metonymically stringing the parts together bit by bit, sentence by sentence. In the end, the writing of the preface thus yields only a kind of half-woven monstrosity – unable to engender anything legitimate – such that each sentence of the text continually falls through the slats of the writer’s loom: “– im Webstuhl der Vorrede eingesperrt und mit dem Weberschiffchen werfend – ohne doch etwas Rechtes herauszubringen.”³⁵¹

For this reason, Jean Paul abandons his previous unsuccessful efforts at attempting to weave together a seamless whole and expresses his desire to write in a manner that would instead be “*bandfrei*,”³⁵² namely by employing the same slip box technique that Fixlein himself uses to record his forgotten memories. It is at this point in the preface that Jean Paul stages the “primal scene” of writing as a medial conjuncture between the sequentiality of the narrative whole and the serialization of the parts, namely by invoking Moser’s name for the first time in connection with his own process of writing: “Steht es dir denn nicht frei, wie Herr von Moser zu arbeiten (der Gevatter und Vorläufer deiner Zettelkästen), der in seinem Leben keinen zusammenhängenden Bogen geschrieben, sondern nur Aphorismen, Gnomen, Sinnsprüche, kurz nichts mit Flechtwerk?”³⁵³ Here he places Moser’s slip box system, as a technique for organizing written material, in opposition to his previous attempts at composing the preface in the course of his meandering peregrinations “wie ein Zwickstein,”³⁵⁴ which according to Grimm’s *Wörterbuch* refers to “kleine keilförmige steine, mit denen man löcher im pflaster und in mauern ausfüllt.”³⁵⁵ In contrast to “wickerwork” [Flechtwerk] or “pinch stones” [Zwicksteine], both of which hold the promise of a meticulously hand-crafted, gap-free whole, Jean Paul opts instead for Moser’s approach,

³⁵¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 16.

³⁵² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 19.

³⁵³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 19.

³⁵⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 19.

³⁵⁵ Cf. “Zwickstein,” *Grimm-Wörterbuch*, accessed 17 Nov. 2015, <<http://woerterbuch-netz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GZ13238>>.

which he suggestively likens in this passage to an aphoristic form of writing – one which far more resembles a kind of collage-work or *bricolage*, such that no sheets of papers or the thoughts which have been written down on them either logically “cohere” or even physically “hang together” [zusammenhängen].

To be sure, as numerous scholars have rightly pointed out, Jean Paul himself did not make use of Moser’s slip box technology to compose his novels. Yet his repeated references in *Quintus Fixlein* to Moser’s slip boxes and Daniel Georg Morfhof’s “polyhistoric” art of excerpting, as well as the pervasive motif of collection, hint at the foundations of his own method of text-production as an attempt to surpass the medial constraints of the book. As is well known, Jean Paul’s writing bases itself, as it were, on a complex apparatus for managing information in the form of his prodigious collection of excerpts. For this reason, Markus Krajevski argues that the juxtaposition of Aubin/Fixlein constitutes a medial conjuncture in Jean Paul’s work. For Krajevski, Jean Paul’s method of excerpting, a fictional account of which he claims Jean Paul sketches out in “Die Taschenbibliothek,” is not nearly as radical as either Moser’s real slip boxes or Fixlein’s fake ones, since it still remains confined to the medial and epistemological limitations of the bound book format. Yet in making this media-archaeological claim, Krajevski overlooks the material contingency of Jean Paul’s excerpting method in that he misreads the excerpts as evidence of a baroque, polyhistoric tendency. As Götz Müller among others has shown, the keyword for Jean Paul with respect to his excerpts is that of *play*: Jean Paul ascribes to his own method of excerpting a striking degree of contingency, in which “Ideen aus allen Wissenschaften ohne bestimmtes gerades Ziel – weder künstlerisches noch wissenschaftliches – sich nicht wie Gifte, sondern wie Karten mischten und folglich, ähnlich dem Lessingschen geistigen Würfeln, dem etwas eintrügen, der durch *Spiele*

zu gewinnen wüßte.”³⁵⁶ In his excerpts, and especially in the register to his excerpts, Jean Paul abandons the traditional *loci communes* and establishes an entirely new order of things, one which depends on the contingency of the aleatory throw of dice and on the idiosyncrasy of the excerpter, rather than on logical necessity or pre-established categories of knowledge.

By exposing the material interfaces of the novel and foregrounding the scholarly media technology that first make possible its production, Jean Paul’s *Quintus Fixlein* presents a conception of writing that is fundamentally at odds with the approach of another avid excerpter and slip box user around 1800, namely G. W. F. Hegel. In 1785, the same year in which Moser died and left behind instructions for how to replicate his system, the fifteen year old Hegel began to diligently transcribe excerpts onto loose sheets of paper. According to his biographer, Karl Rosenkranz, Hegel maintained this method of excerpting books throughout his entire life:

Bei seiner Lektüre ging er nun folgendermaßen zu Werke. Alles, was ihm bemerkenswerth schien – und was schien es ihm nicht! – schrieb er auf ein einzelnes Blatt, welches er oberhalb mit der allgemeinen Rubrik bezeichnete, unter welche der besondere Inhalt subsumiert werden mußte. In die Mitte des oberen Randes schrieb er dann mit großen Buchstaben, nicht selten mit Frakturschrift das Stichwort des Artikels. Diese Blätter selbst ordnete er für sich wieder nach dem Alphabet und war mittelst dieser einfachen Vorrichtung im Stande, seine Excerpte jeden Augenblick zu benutzen.³⁵⁷

Although Hegel made extensive use of the slip box system, he made one decisive and far-reaching modification to Moser’s method. As Friedrich Kittler argues, the reformulation of excerpts into new texts transforms the copyist into an artist and author. By erasing all traces of bibliographic references, Hegel’s index cards constituted an archive of knowledge that allowed for easy retrieval

³⁵⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 202f.

³⁵⁷ Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegels Leben* (Berlin: Dunker & Humboldt, 1844), 12f; cited in Stefan Andriopoulos, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media* (New York: Zone Books, 2013), 66.

of information while simultaneously concealing his sources, nowhere more so than in his philosophical magnum opus the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which elides most proper names – even Kant is only mentioned once – and scholarly footnotes, as well as veils the medial and material conditions of text production. Hence, for Kittler, Hegel’s “absolute Spirit” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* appears as a “versteckter Zettelkasten.”³⁵⁸

Thus while Hegel sought to suppress the technical materiality that renders possible his idealist theory of the “absolute Spirit,” for Jean Paul, by contrast, there is no possibility of an absolute spirit which is capable of recollecting and storing all information, only the carnivalesque contingency of the distilled *Spiritus*. In *Quintus Fixlein*, he foregrounds the materialities and media technologies that condition the production of text and its forms of literary representation. This is the double perspectivization of humor, which by introducing the motif of the slip box as an all-encompassing frame device makes possible the inversion of perspective from that of narrative order – the perspective from which the entire archive of knowledge contained in the slip box can be surveyed – to the “micrological” materiality of writing. From this perspective, Fixlein’s “knee-lever” [Registerzug] can consequently be read as a paronomastic allusion to the “register” Jean Paul employs in his own excerpting system, which brings his and Fixlein’s respective idiosyncratic methods for organizing information into proximity. By likening both to the performance of a musical instrument that can be turned around again and again through the random selection of index cards, the novel envisions scholarly knowledge-organization as an aleatory game of chance. Not coincidentally, contingency is already embodied in Fixlein’s name, which alludes to the

³⁵⁸ Friedrich Kittler, “Memories Are Made of You,” in: *Schrift, Medien, Kognition: Über die Exteriorität des Geistes*, eds. Peter Koch and Sybille Krämer (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1997), 197; see also: Krajevski, *Zettelwirtschaft*, in particular 67. For more on Hegel’s method of excerpting and its relationship to his transformation of scientific data into a philosophical subject, cf. Friedrich Kittler, *Die Nacht der Substanz* (Bern: Benteli, 1989).

“Quinterne,” the five-number Roman “lottery of chance” [Lotto des Zufalls].³⁵⁹ In its narration of the contingent series of fortunate promotions that accompany Fixlein throughout his life, the novel stages the transformation of the contingency of life – from the lowest-level of the lotto, the *Auszug* – and the material contingency of writing – the material trace of the “excerpt” [Auszug] – into the cohesion of narrative order, which only retroactively appears as an autotelic end in the form of a fortunate “fate” – in other words, the *Auszug* as *Quinterne*.

³⁵⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 141.

5. SMALL FORMS, PART II: “DOPPELTE FRAKTUREN.” ON THE CORPOREALITY OF THE INFINITELY SMALL (MEINE MISZELLEN)

Jean Pauls große Formen sind so wenig reine Art, wie er als Dichter reine Art ist: er ist ein gemischt-Mischender, und jeden Augenblick droht seine Kunst in ihre Elemente zurück-zubrechen.³⁶⁰

—Max Kommerell, *Jean Paul*

Der Autor ist eine Art Bienenwirt für den Leser-Schwarm, dem zu Gefallen er die Flora, die er für ihn hält, in verschiedene Zeiten verteilt und die Aufblüte mancher Blumen hier beschleunigt, dort verschiebt, damit es in allen Kapiteln blühe. —³⁶¹

—Jean Paul, *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*

Between the years 1810 and 1820 Jean Paul collected a series of his fragmentary short texts from newspapers and other literary annuals such as almanacs and paperbacks, and republished them in three volumes under the name *Herbst-Blumine, oder gesammelte Werkchen aus Zeitschriften*.³⁶²

This eclectic anthology of literary ephemera and marginal miscellanies, whose transience is reflected in titles like “Die Junius-Nacht-Gedanken,” “Nachlese für die *Levana*,” “Meine Miszellen,” and “Poetische Kleinigkeiten,” brings together an extraordinarily heterogeneous array of different kinds of texts. Their printed origins from newspapers, paperbacks and so-called *Musen-Almanache*³⁶³ recall the typological interconnection between a variety of different literary publication formats, such as satires, miscellanies, almanacs and journals, which distinguished themselves through their hybrid character, mixing prose with poetry, satire with sentimentality,

³⁶⁰ Kommerell, *Jean Paul*, 82.

³⁶¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/4, 151.

³⁶² Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 109–618.

³⁶³ While the publication format of the *Musen Almanach*, a kind of literary annual widespread in the 19th century, is originally of French origin – a German translation of the French *Almanach des Muses*, which was first published by Claude-Sixte Sautreau de Marsy in 1765 – its popularity in Germany can be dated back to roughly 1770 with the publication of the *Göttinger Musenalmanach* by Johann Christian Dietrich. Perhaps the most famous example of the genre, however, is Friedrich Schiller’s *Musen-Almanach* (1796–1800), whose contributors included Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Gottfried Herder, Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Hölderlin and August Wilhelm Schlegel.

dream diaries with fictional epistles. For mixed collections of texts such as these, which in the 19th century frequently bore titles like “Miszellaneen,” “Museum,” “Kritische Wälder,” and “Vermischte Schriften,” the only applicable motto would be: “Variatio delectat.”³⁶⁴

In the title of *Herbst-Blumine*, Jean Paul suggestively refers to his own literary miscellanies not as “works,” *Werke*, but instead as “minor works” – *Werkchen*. The diminutive term “Werkchen,” which implies the meaning of a ‘small whole,’ foregrounds not only the smallness and brevity of the collected short texts – particularly in contrast to his notoriously lengthy and digressive novels such as *Titan* (1800–03), which encompasses four volumes and stretches over 900 pages – but also their materiality and ephemerality as print objects. For in contrast to “major” works of literature, “minor works” are fleeting, corporeal, and finite. Unlike novels or books, they will not be preserved in the public library system, and hence are destined to quickly vanish from the book market. The narrator of the preface to the first volume of *Herbst-Blumine* specifically alludes to this medial circumstance when he observes that “nichts sich so schnell aus den Taschen verliert als Taschenbücher und keine in die Obstkammern öffentlicher Bibliotheken kommen.”³⁶⁵ In fact, the very title of the compendium, “Herbst-Blumine,” alludes in a witty manner to this circumstance in at least two respects, first by likening the short lifespan of literary anthologies – literally *Blumensammlungen* – to the seasonality of “autumn crocuses” [Herbst-Blumen], and second by paronomastically linking the autumn crocus, which as the narrator observes are a “poisonous” [giftig] and hence “unenjoyed” [ungenossen] species of flower, to the “unenjoyed” and “forgotten” minor works included in the anthology.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Johann Georg Gessler chose this motto for his “Satyrisch-moralisches Allerley voller anmuthigen Erzählungen und Gedichte” (Ulm u. Leipzig 1762).

³⁶⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 115.

³⁶⁶ “Taschenbücher erscheinen im Herbste als Herbstblumen oder Zeitlosen (welcher letztere Name auf sie doppelt paßt, da nichts sich so schnell aus den Taschen verliert als Taschenbücher und keine in die Obstkammern öffentlicher

The preface to the first volume of *Herbst-Blumine* thereby explicitly positions the collected edition in relation to the genre tradition of the *florilegium*, whose etymological origins derive from the phrase “a gathering of flowers,” and refers to a compilation of excerpts from writing. While the genre of the *florilegium* dates as far back to antiquity, from which point onward it became associated with the rhetorical tradition of *inventio* and, relatedly, with the capricious ordering of reference-, excerpt-, and commonplace-books,³⁶⁷ around 1800 the miscellany – whether it was in the German states, England, France, or the United States – served a crucial ordering function in an age of too much writing. Unlike the contemporaneous format of the collected edition or anthology, which was an attempt to re-inscribe the wild proliferation of scattered, fleeting publications back into a unified discursive format – namely, the book – under a unified authorship, for in most cases it was the author who deliberately assembled the selection of their own works for the purposes of republication, the miscellany of the 19th century was not organized around the unifying figure of the author, but instead around the figure of the reader.³⁶⁸ “Where the collected edition aimed to canonize its author and in the process create a literary canon, the miscellany was far more a document of the carnivalesque impulse to undo such rules, standards, or means. With the absence of any obvious organizing principle and the simultaneous presence of high, low, and outright weird texts, the romantic miscellany authorized the reader to create the linkages between such cultural

Bibliotheken kommen und da sie nach keiner Zeit fragen, sondern schon im Jahre 1810 sich um eine Jahrszahl älter ausgeben). Bedenkt man vollends, daß die Herbstblumen giftig sind, auf der Weide ungenossen bleiben (hier muß man sich große Schul- und Geschäftsmänner denken, die es tun), und daß sie ihre Früchte erst nach Dreivierteljahren tragen: so glaub' ich meinem meistens aus Herbst- oder Michaeliskalendern gesammelten Strauße nur mäßig mit dem schönen Titel Herbst-Blumen geschmeichelt zu haben” (ibid.).

³⁶⁷ For more on the literary tradition of *florilegia* in the early modern period, especially in relation to the miscellanies of the Renaissance, see Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know*, in particular 126–131.

³⁶⁸ For more on the distinction between collected editions and miscellany, especially in 19th-century British literature, see Barbara M. Benedict, “Collecting and the Anthology in Early Modern Culture,” in: Barbara Korte, Ralf Schneider, and Stefanie Lethbridge (eds.), *Anthologies of British Poetry: Critical Perspectives from Literary and Cultural Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 43–55.

strata.”³⁶⁹ It was not just any reader, then, that the 19th-century miscellany appealed to, but the growing community of readers who were trained in the techniques of literary “flower picking”: of skimming, selection, and collection. Hence, what distinguishes the miscellany of the 19th century from its generic predecessors in antiquity and the Renaissance is that its emergence around 1800 coincided with both the “transition from the cyclicity to the seriality of cultural production”³⁷⁰ and with the re-orientation of the book market, which in the early-19th century witnessed the rapid proliferation of cheap, easily produced and consumed “paperbacks” [Taschenbücher], around an ever-expanding reading public who consumed books in a far more fragmentary, selective, and non-linear manner.³⁷¹

Against this background, Jean Paul’s *Herbst-Blumine* can perhaps be read as the outcome of two mutually contradictory medial logics. On the one hand, the unification of scattered miscellanies into the discursive format of the collected edition or anthology reflects in part a pragmatic calculation to grant his numerous short, fleeting texts an afterlife on the book market and to reinforce, in turn, the unity and canonical stature of his authorship. Jean Paul had in fact already experimented with just such a strategy at least a year prior to the release of the first volume of *Herbst-Blumine*. In 1809, he published the first of three volumes of his novel *Dr. Katzenbergers Baderreise; nebst einer Auswahl verbesserten Werkchen*. The “selection of minor works” [Auswahl verbesserten Werkchen] which accompanied the first volume of *Dr. Katzenberger* consisted for

³⁶⁹ Cf. Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, in particular 121–25, here: 122.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁷¹ “Der im Laufe des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts expandierende Buchmarkt beeinflusst in hohem Maße die Lesegeohnheiten des gleichfalls immer zahlreicher werdenden Publikums. [...] Der Viel-Seitigkeit der Romane steht infolge dieses Befalls bzw. infolge des merkantilen Booms oft inhaltliche Einseitigkeit entgegen, der Leser beginnt zu blättern. Unter dem Stichwort ‘Blattlausfruchtbarkeit’ übt Jean Paul auch in der *Kleinen Nachschule zur ästhetischen Vorschule* (1825) Kritik an der zeitgenössischen Romanflut, die allein auf Quantität statt auf Qualität setzt und so ihrerseits das blätternde, ennuyierte Lesen befördert” (Ulrike Hagel, “Vielseitige ‘Blattlausfruchtbarkeit’ bei Jean Paul,” in: *Literatur als Blättwerk. Perspektiven einer nichtlinearen Lektüre*, eds. Jürgen Gunia and Iris Hermann (St. Ingbert 2002), 241–58, here: 242f). On this point, see also: Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, in particular 143–48, as well as Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, 125.

the most part of revised almanac and paperback entries or date back to his early satirical collections. In the introduction to *Dr. Katzenberger*, he cites literary short formats such as *Taschenkalender*, almanacs, and newspapers in order to justify the seemingly capricious juxtaposition of theoretical texts, fictional prose, and paratextual material included within the frame of a single book: “Mit den Taschenkalendern und Zeitschriften müssen die kleinen vermischten Werkchen so zunehmen – weil die Schriftsteller jene mit den besten Beiträgen zu unterstützen haben –, daß man am Ende kaum ein großes mehr schreibt.”³⁷² To be sure, he parodies here the medial relations around 1800 which led to the acceleration of book-production and text-circulation, with the result that ever more “kleinen vermischten Werkchen” began to flood the book market in ever shorter amounts of time.³⁷³

On the other hand, the medial conjuncture between “major” and “minor” works – between *Werk* and *Werkchen*, between novel and miscellany – in Jean Paul’s oeuvre is neither merely pragmatic nor satirical. Although he most often used the designation “Werkchen” pragmatically – almost all of his so-called “Werkchen” are reprises of his submissions to newspapers and almanacs – he also lent it critical potential by opposing it to the “major” work of literature, that is, to the canonical and the formally closed. Both *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise* and *Herbst-Blumine* present a tendency toward the breakdown and dismemberment of narrative closure by mixing “minor” publication formats into “major” works of literature, namely that of the novel. What Jean Paul later

³⁷² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 81.

³⁷³ With his frequent references to the economic *dispositifs* of book-printing and the book-market in connection with the concept of “minor work,” Jean Paul doubtlessly aligns himself with this satirical tradition which inveighed against the encroachment of popular literature on the book market to the detriment of major literary works, such as those of Christian Ludwig Liscow’s *Vortrefflichkeit und Nothwendigkeit der elenden Scribenten* (1734) and Friedrich Justus Riedel’s newspaper *Bibliothek der elenden Scribenten* (1768). At the same time, as Magnus Wieland argues, Jean Paul’s reflections on the material conditions of text-production around 1800 are also of central poetological significance to his writing. Cf. Wieland, “Jean Pauls Sudelbibliothek. Makulatur als poetologische Chiffre,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 46 (2011), 97–119. See also: Hagel, “Vielseitige ‘Blattlausfruchtbarkeit’ bei Jean Paul”; Schäfer, “Jean Pauls monströses Schreiben”; Schmidt-Hannisa, “Lesarten.”

called “Werkchen” may thus be read in part as a successor format to his earlier preoccupation with small, marginal, and fleeting literary forms, whose two principle characteristics are – not coincidentally – the satirical and the paratextual. This includes the “satirischen Essigfabrik”³⁷⁴ of his early satirical collections, namely the *Grönländische Prozesse* (1783) and the *Auswahl aus des Teufels Papiere* (1789), as well as the numerous digressive paratexts that Jean Paul frequently grafted onto his books, such as the “comic appendix” which he appended to *Titan* (1800–03), the desultory “extra bits of paper” [Extrablättchen] such as the “Mußteil für Mädchen” and “Jus de tablette für Mannspersonen” which inexplicably frame the novel *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* (1796); or they present themselves as collections of fragments, “remarks” [Bemerkungen], “Schwefelblumen,”³⁷⁵ and other miscellaneous collectanea which proliferate into potentially endless compendia – none more so, arguably, than Jean Paul’s massive collection of excerpts, which he gathered from nearly every conceivable domain of knowledge and juxtaposed in a manner that he likened to the aleatory throw of dice.³⁷⁶

If one considers the traditional conception of the literary work as it prevailed in the early nineteenth-century – especially with an eye toward the model of classicism –, then closure, consistency, necessity and the coherence of outer and inner form are its fundamental characteristics. Integration, in other words, is the decisive criteria for this conception of “work.” The literature and literary criticism of the 19th century advocated for such a work-concept, and the reception of Jean Paul’s writings has been determined by it ever since.³⁷⁷ In 1923, Rudolf Alexander Schröder advised readers of Jean Paul’s novels – acknowledging the ‘miscellaneous’ character of his writing – to separate the “Spreu vom Weizen, [...] das Ganze in seine gesonderten Eidyllien zu zerlegen

³⁷⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/1, 15.

³⁷⁵ Jean Paul, *Flegeljahre*, in: *Werke*, I/2, 634–37.

³⁷⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 202f.

³⁷⁷ Cf. Schmidt-Hannisa, “Lesarten,” 42–43. See also Schäfer, “Jean Pauls monströses Schreiben,” 216–20.

und dann jedes einzelne rein zu genießen.” What gets lost in this filtering – namely the “chaff” [Spreu] – is according to Schröder nothing but “ein in bezug auf Jean Paul im Grunde unwesentliches.”³⁷⁸ With such explanations, the reader is confirmed as well-versed in the techniques of reading *florilegia*, and in fact Jean Paul’s works are till this day still characterized by this selective, ‘excerpting’ way of reading. Similar judgments present themselves in the reviews of Jean Paul’s works by his contemporaries. “Die häufigen Digressionen,” reads one review of *Die unsichtbare Loge* from 1794, “erwecken nicht die Aufmerksamkeit, sondern die Ungeduld der Leser.”³⁷⁹ A reviewer of *Hesperus* likens the novel to a piece of forest, “in welchem nur das üppige Buschwerk, das die schönsten Baumgruppen und Aussichten versteckt, vorsichtig ausgehauen zu werden braucht, um sich in einen romantischen Garten zu verwandeln.”³⁸⁰ Another sees in *Siebenkäs* a kind of “Fachwerk,” into which Jean Paul “den Reichtum seiner Ideen ordnet; und seine Schriften gleichen daher einem Museum, in welchem eine Menge von Kunstwerken zusammengestellt sind, die zwar einzeln genommen die Aufmerksamkeit der Betrachtenden auf sich ziehn, aber nicht bestimmt sind, durch ihre Gruppierung die Idee eines schönen Ganzen zu geben.”³⁸¹ In the 20th century, it was arguably the literary critic Robert Minder who best summarized such views when he confessed that reading Jean Paul constitutes a unique lesson in “das Geheimrezept aller Literaturwissenschaft (wie sonst denn fräse sich unserein je durch den Bücherhirsebrei hindurch?) das Darüberhinweglesenkönnen, nobler gesagt: die Geschwindigkeitsregelung.”³⁸²

While many readers and critics still widely regard Jean Paul as an author of notoriously long, unwieldy texts, exemplified by digressive novels like *Hesperus, oder 45 Hundposttage*

³⁷⁸ R. A. Schröder, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2 (Berlin/Frankfurt a. M.: 1952), 697.

³⁷⁹ *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, vol. 11 (Kiel 1794), 317.

³⁸⁰ *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, 317, November 26, 1795, 417–22.

³⁸¹ *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, 361, November 17, 1796, 425–29.

³⁸² Robert Minder, “Jean Paul oder die Verlassenheit des Genius,” in: *Jean Paul*, ed. Uwe Schwiekert, 266–76, here: 67, cited in Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, 19.

(1795), *Siebenkäs* (1796–97), and *Titan*, which in many cases stretch multiple volumes and encompass hundreds or even thousands of pages, this article makes the case for the reading of Jean Paul above all as a writer of small forms. According to Ulrich Stadler’s formulation, “small forms” are distinguished above all by their smallness, fragmentariness and brevity, and cover a broad range of genres, from “Beispiel, Facetie, Apophthegma, Kalendargeschichte, Fabel, Anekdote, Idylle, Pastorelle,” to “Aphorismus, Fragment, [und] Kurzgeschichte.”³⁸³ That Jean Paul experimented with such a conception of “work” as a small, open form – namely what he calls “minor works” or *Werkchen* – in which the decomposition of narration went further than many of his readers were willing to go, does not exclude the obvious fact that he primarily wrote novels. For there is another kind of “small form” – one which is, paradoxically, potentially infinite in length, and which Stadler himself excludes from his definition: namely the compendium of excerpts. Again and again, it is the ‘excerpted’ character of Jean Paul’s texts – their disturbingly heterogeneous, ‘miscellaneous’ manner of representation and excessive intertextuality – which readers frequently complained about and which threatens at every point to overstep the formal strictures of the novel as a closed form. Admittedly, the novel in its origins proved itself to be a unique medium of formal experimentation – a kind of “poetic encyclopedia,”³⁸⁴ with openness counting as one of its essential attributes. Yet as a primarily plot-oriented medium, as it was influentially conceived of by Friedrich von Blanckenburg in his poetological treatise *Versuch über den Roman* (1774),³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Cf. Ulrich Stadler, “Kleines Kunstwerk, kleines Buch und kleine Form,” 15.

³⁸⁴ This is how Jean Paul himself understands and defines the novel in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, in which he writes that the novel is “eine poetische Enzyklopädie, eine poetische Freiheit aller poetischen Freiheiten” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 233). From this perspective, Wolfgang Proß influentially describes the form of Jean Paul’s novels “als ‘poetische Enzyklopädie’”: as an encyclopedia, “in einem ganz wörtlichen Sinn [...] als ein Netzwerk von wissenschaftlichen Aussagen [...], die aufeinander Bezug nehmen,” and as “‘poetisch,’ weil die wissenschaftlich-philosophischen Grundlagen in der Ära Kant ihrer einheitlichen, naturrechtlichen Fundierung verlustig gehen” (Wolfgang Proß, *Jean Pauls geschichtliche Stellung* [Tübingen 1975], 170).

³⁸⁵ For this reason, Blanckenburg not only forbids digression, which separates, rather than integrates, the individual parts of narration from the whole of the novel, but also condemns the epistolary novel due to its lack of progression

the novel cannot be considered “open” to the extent that it is premised on the epic integration, rather than the separation, of the individual parts of the narration into a cohesive, unified whole – in other words, a “work” in the sense of “eines schönen Ganzen,” as the reviewer of *Siebenkäs* wrote.

In order to advance the claim that Jean Paul be understood above all as a writer of small forms, this article will examine one of his “minor works” included in *Herbst-Blumine* entitled “Meine Miszellen.” There it will be shown how the ephemerality and fragmentariness of the miscellany serves as an experimental medium for an alternative method of text-production – one which seeks to foreground at the material level the contingency of writing – its production, distribution, and circulation – as finite and decomposable. The formal influence of the newspapers as a discursive medium is crucial in this respect, for newspapers are “unabgeschlossene, dynamische Medien der Wissensproduktion,”³⁸⁶ and Jean Paul’s proximity to journalistic methods of text-production presents itself not only in his adoption of individual genres – these include paratextual inserts such as “Extra-,” “Morgen-,” “Real-,” and “Intelligenzblätter” – but also in the radical exteriority of his writings. In the discursive-historical context not only of classicist aesthetics, but also of romanticism and the discourse of hermeneutics, Jean Paul’s conception of the literary work as a kind of recycled piece of secondary text – what he calls “Werkchen” – thereby gains subversive potential as a hybrid literary form, as a play with multiple authorships, “die über die Grenze einzelner Texte hinausreichen oder such innerhalb eines Textes zum Autorenkollektiv formieren, [...] eine

and interconnection of the inner and outer existence of the persons. Cf. Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg, *Versuch über den Roman* (Stuttgart 1965), in particular 56–58.

³⁸⁶ Stephan Pabst, “‘Herr Gedruckt.’ Fingierte Autorschaft als Funktion der Wissensorganisation in Jean Pauls *Leben Fibels*,” in: *Kunst und Wissen. Beziehungen zwischen Ästhetik und Erkenntnistheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. Astrid Bauereisen, Stefan Pabst, Achim Vesper (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 237f.

Wiederverwertung bestimmter Textpassagen [...], die Auflösung der Ganzheit zugunsten potenziell infiniten Medien der Textproduktion, der fließende Übergang zwischen Poesie und paratheoretischen Reflexionen etc.”³⁸⁷ A close engagement with his short text “Meine Miszellen” thus aims to show how his notoriously fragmentary manner of representation gains central poetological and epistemological significance in his writing.

In “Meine Miszellen,” the nexus of the small and fragmentary is reflected first and foremost in the text’s unusual, collage-like method of text-production. Not only is the edition of the text included in *Herbst-Blumine* itself recycled from an earlier work that was first published several years earlier, namely in the yearly almanac *Taschenbuch der Liebe und Freundschaft gewidmet*, but each of the text’s three separate sections – consisting respectively of satirical aphorisms (“Nro. 1: Bemerkungen über den Menschen”), a somnambular epistle (“Nro. 2: Springbrief eines Nachtwandlers”), and a collection of sentimental lyric written in so-called “polymetric” verse (“Nro. 3: Polymeter”) – were likewise first published as standalone texts, numerous passages of which are taken directly from previous books, collections, and manuscripts.³⁸⁸ From the perspective of its ‘hybrid’ principle of composition, the significance of the title of the text comes closer into view. For just as the broader arrangement of “minor works” included in *Herbst-Blumine* or those grafted onto *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise* are not at all merely random or contingent in their ordering, but arranged according to a principle of serial sequentiality for the purposes of an “intensification”

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 238.

³⁸⁸ The first section of *Meine Miszellen*, “Nro. 1: Bemerkungen über den Menschen,” is taken largely without revision from Jean Paul’s collection of aphorisms, entitled “Bemerkungen verschiedener Autoren,” which was first published as part of his posthumous writings. Earlier drafts of the second and third sections of the text, “Nro. 2: Springbrief eines Nachtwandlers” and “Nro. 3: Polymeter,” were likewise published independently prior to their inclusion in “Meine Miszellen”; a version of the latter, for instance, was first mentioned in the novel *Flegeljahre* (1804/05) and subsequently included as one of the “minor works” appended to *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise*.

[Steigerung] of rhythmic variation,³⁸⁹ so too does the seemingly capricious juxtaposition of three different kinds of texts – namely satirical “remarks,” epistolary narration, and sentimental verse – into a single “minor work” serve the crucial function of *variatio*, which in addition to the rhetorical attributes of *brevitas* and *ordo artificialis* represent the principle characteristics of the pseudo-genre of the “miscellany.”³⁹⁰ In fact, already in the first line of “Meine Miszellen,” Jean Paul explicitly aligns his text with precisely this genre tradition by citing a list of contemporaneous miscellanies from around the world in order to justify the production of his own idiosyncratic rendition. There he asks the reader, “Wenn es russische, englische, französische etc. Miszellen gibt, warum soll es nicht deutsche geben? Und wenn diese, warum nicht auch meine?”³⁹¹ The cunning irony of this hypophoric turn-of-phrase lies in Jean Paul’s characteristic tendency toward *citation of genre*, which engenders impurities, corruptions, and contaminations of any genre designation.³⁹² The citation of genre is thus a “differential concept that makes it possible to trace not so much the accordance with a supposed ideal type but the dynamics of historical modulations.”³⁹³

Hence, just as the genre designation “A kind of idyll,” which appears on the title page of *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*, marks a modulation of the genre of the idyll, so too does Jean Paul’s citation of the (pseudo-)genre “miscellany” within the paratextual threshold of “Meine Miszellen” distinguish it both from its predecessors in antiquity as well as its contemporaneous manifestation in the romantic miscellanies of the 19th century. As will be argued in the following pages, Jean

³⁸⁹ “Für die Werkchen gilt insgesamt zunächst das Prinzip der Addition, doch beginnt jede Gruppe mit einem satirischen Text und wird durch einen unsatirischen, ersten geschlossen” (Peter Horst Neumann, “Die Werkchen als Werk: Zur Form- und Wirkungsgeschichte des Katzenberger-Korpus von Jean Paul,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 10 [1975], 151–86, here: 176).

³⁹⁰ Cf. R. B. Kremer, “Miszellen,” in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 10 (2011), 711–16.

³⁹¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 129. These include the *Miszellen für die neueste Weltkunde* (1807), as well as the “Russische Miszellen” (1803/4), “Englische Miszellen” (1806) and “Französische Miszellen” (1803–06). For further citational information of miscellanies referenced by Jean Paul in “Meine Miszellen,” cf. Jean Paul, “Kommentar zu den Vermischten Schriften,” in: *Werke*, II/3, 578–79.

³⁹² For more on the paradoxical order of genre, see Derrida, “The Law of Genre.”

³⁹³ Krauß, “Epistemologies of Citation in Jean Paul,” 78.

Paul's citation of the genre "miscellany" opens up the space for his own experimental form of fragmentary writing. It is not without coincidence that he cites not a canonical genre, but a 'kind of' genre – the "miscellany" – whose principle characteristic is that it eludes any and all subsumption under a higher generic principle or unity as well as the traditional conventions of authorship. It is the paradoxical genre of no genre, or perhaps the genre of the heterogeneous, which Jean Paul imbues with the capacity to dismantle every "major" form and disperse every unity or law of subsumption under a higher generic principle.

Before proceeding further, it must be asked at this point to what extent Jean Paul's citation of the genre "miscellany" in "Meine Miszellen" approximates another, far better known kind of small form around 1800: namely the romantic fragment. A quick glance at the startling mixture of different genres in "Meine Miszellen" – aphorism, epistle, and lyrical verse – immediately recalls Friedrich Schlegel's famous dictum that romantic literature ought to bring together all genres of poetry, rhetoric and philosophy, so that "Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen."³⁹⁴ Schlegel's ambiguous invocation of the words "mischen" and "verschmelzen" with regard to the poetic program of romantic *Universalpoesie* leaves to a certain extent unanswered the question as to whether the fragment – or, for that matter, the romantic novel – ought to strive toward integration in its reflective "hovering" [Schwebe]. To be sure, while both small forms – miscellany and fragment – may be said to present a conception of writing whose fragmentariness opposes both systematic and narrative closure. Yet Jean Paul's recourse to the marginal and pragmatic genre tradition of the "miscellany" may be read as a poetic calculation to open up the small form of the fragment to a greater degree of heterogeneity than the form of the romantic fragment – in Schlegel's specific sense – allowed for at this point in time. By

³⁹⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, KA, I/2, 114.

1810, the year in which the first volume of *Herbst-Blumine* was published and nearly a decade after the publication of Friedrich Schlegel's *Lyceums- and Athenäums-Fragmente* (1797/98), the romantic fragment had advanced to an aesthetic norm – one that was subsequently canonized as a philosophical genre.³⁹⁵

In this discursive-historical context, “Meine Miszellen” brings fragmentary writing to bear on the tradition of the romantic fragment itself. There Jean Paul “überall seine nettsten romantischen Gestalten anheftet und umhängt,”³⁹⁶ standing the romantic genre tradition on its head and transforming it into an object of satire and critique. In the confrontation between romantic fragment and miscellany, it will be argued that Jean Paul's concept of humor thus comes to play a decisive role. The resistance in “Meine Miszellen” to “mix” and “melt” all genres together shows how, despite the resemblances between these two small forms, Schlegel's emphasis on hybridity and mixture proceeds in the exact opposite direction as Jean Paul's “Meine Miszellen,” which deploys the small form of the miscellany as an experimental medium of text-production in order to expose at the material level the contingency of writing – in other words, humor as the “inverted sublime.” Thus in contrast to Schlegel's theory of romantic irony, which seeks to transcendently uncouple the epistemological from the material through the infinite approximation of the absolute, Jean Paul's humor serves as the privileged form-theoretical instrument in his texts for exposing the

³⁹⁵ Around 1800, the fragment was taken up in particular by philosophers of nature, as in F. W. J. Schelling's *Aphorismen zur Einleitung in die Naturphilosophie* (1806/1807), which despite its title conforms much more closely to the formal conditions of the fragment laid out by Schlegel than to those of the aphoristic tradition; in Henrich Steffen's *Grundzüge der philosophischen Naturwissenschaft*, which explicitly cites Schelling's fragmentary-aphoristic approach as its model; as well as in J. W. Ritter's *Fragmente aus dem Nachlass eines jungen Physikers* (1810). While these later fragmentary works still operate to a certain extent within the transcendental framework established by Schlegel and the Romantics, who saw in the constrained form of the fragment the possibility of unlimited meaning-production, their primary orientation concerns not the critical epistemology of linguistic reflection, but rather the presentation of ideas of a philosophical system which in its totality lies outside the field of representability. For more on the fragment, and more broadly the aphorism, as a philosophical form around 1800, see Heinz Krüger, *Über den Aphorismus als philosophische Form* (Munich 1988), in particular 60–75.

³⁹⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 134.

small, fragmentary, and corporeal materiality of writing, which in “Meine Miszellen” gains epistemology significance in connection with his own small and fragmentary procedure of writing.³⁹⁷

5.1. Skim Reading: Dispersing Remarks in “Bemerkungen über den Menschen”

In the first section of “Meine Miszellen,” entitled “Nro. 1: Bemerkungen über den Menschen,” Jean Paul presents a heterogeneous collection of witty “remarks,” many of which are taken directly from an expansive collection of apothegm that he began to compile starting approximately around 1780.³⁹⁸ With the title’s anthropological theme, these remarks are situated within a specific literary *topos* – one that approximates the anthropological thinking of Jean Paul’s mentor Ernst Platner, and specifically the fragmentary-aphoristic style of the latter’s anthropological treatise *Anthropologie für Aerzte und Weltweise* (1772). These remarks, which are extremely brevity – one or two sentences at most – and greatly vary in their content, ranging from satirical gender clichés to political and moral discourse, sentimental anecdotes to witty reflections on philosophy and literature, thus conform on the one hand to the rhetorical attributes of the miscellany,³⁹⁹ while on the other hand its apothegmatic style bears a striking proximity to Jean Paul’s own poetics of “wit” [Witz],

³⁹⁷ “Die Philosophie ist die eigentliche Heimat der Ironie, welche man logische Schönheit definieren möchte: denn überall, wo in mündlichen oder geschriebenen Gesprächen, und nur nicht ganz systematisch philosophiert wird, soll man Ironie leisten und fordern [...] Die Poesie allein kann sich auch von dieser Seite bis zur Höhe der Philosophie erheben und ist nicht auf ironische Stellen begründet, wie die Rhetorik. Es gibt alte und moderne Gedichte, die durchgängig im ganzen und überall den göttlichen Hauch der Ironie atmen. Es lebt in ihnen eine wirkliche transzendente Buffonerie. Im Innern die Stimmung, welche alles übersieht, und sich über alles Bedingte unendlich erhebt, auch über eigne Kunst, Tugend oder Genialität: im Äußern, in der Ausführung die mimische Manier eines gewöhnlichen guten italienischen Buffo” (Friedrich Schlegel, *Lyceum-Fragment* Nr. 42, in: KA, I/2, 152). For more on the Platonic tendency in Friedrich Schlegel’s theory of irony, see: Wolfram Groddeck, *Reden über Rhetorik. Zur einen Stilistik des Lesens* (Basel/Frankfurt a. M.: Stroemfeld Verlag, 1995), 277–78.

³⁹⁸ Cf. Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/5, 145–337. In addition to the inclusion of that text in “Meine Miszellen,” Jean Paul also included parts of the original text as “Bemerkungen über den Menschen” in another one of his numerous “Werkchen” entitled *Museum* (1814) (Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/2, 975–83).

³⁹⁹ “Abgrenzungsmerkmale von [Miszellen] gegenüber anderen Textsorten sind Kürze—sowohl des Textes als auch der Herstellungszeit—sowie die Varianz ihrer Themen und ihrer Anordnung. Rhetorisch erfüllen [Miszellen] damit insbesondere die Gebote der *brevitas* and *variatio*, die dem *taedium* entgegenwirken sollen und der *memoria* dienen. [...] Durch die mehr oder weniger willkürliche Anordnung (*ordo artificialis*) und den geringen Kohärenzgrad provozieren [Miszellen]-Sammlungen meist eine nichtlineare Lektüre” (Kremer, “Miszellen,” 711f).

which he tasks with juxtaposing the most disparate similarities for the purposes of inventing the new. These witty pairs include satirical contrasts between “good” and “bad” novelists as well as “moral” and “immoral” profit, and paronomastic contrasts between words like “premonition” [Ahnen] and “revenge” [Ahnden]:

Der Furchtsame erschrickt *vor* der Gefahr, der Feige *in* ihr, der Mutige *nach* ihr.

Jede kühne Tat macht eine zweite nötig, sonst bringt sie Untergang; und eben das Ahnen und Ahnden dieser Notwendigkeit entkräftet die Menge, welche sonst wohl den größten Mut verspürte, ganz so zu handeln wie Cäsar, oder wie Sokrates, oder wie Friedrich II., aber nur *einmal* im Jahre oder im Leben.

Jeder Schmeichler hat wieder seinen Schmeichler; den Bandwurm halten wieder nadelförmige Würmchen besetzt.

Schlechte Schriftsteller sollte man *vor*, große *nach* ihren Büchern kennen lernen, um jenen mehr die Bücher, diese mehr den Büchern zu vergeben.⁴⁰⁰

As this selection of remarks demonstrates, there appears to be strikingly little in common between the remarks, and like the aphoristic genre as a whole, Jean Paul’s remarks are arranged in a manner that formally distinguishes one from the other through visual line breaks, rendering them internally closed and distinct. At the same time, their condensation and juxtaposition engenders an associate reading process, which seeks to find interconnections and relations between the remarks in order to reveal their obscure meaning. As a result, they no longer remain exclusively confined within their own distinct boundaries, but instead continuously break away from these formal constraints.⁴⁰¹ More specifically, by privileging the reader rather than the author, the seemingly inco-

⁴⁰⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 130.

⁴⁰¹ As Gerhard Neumann argues in *Ideenparadiese*, it is precisely the short form of the aphorism, maxim, or saying [Spruch] around 1800 which rhetorically, as *sentencia*, compels the reader to indefinitely reflect on its ambiguous meaning through a process of specification. More specifically, as Neumann contends, the implicit tension between individual and general which lies at the basis of this poetically condensed form that engenders in the eighteenth century the possibility of a transcendental moralistics: “Die bislang letzte Stufe dieses Prozesses bildet die ‘transzendente

herent juxtaposition and brevity of Jean Paul's miscellaneous remarks allow for the perpetual formation of unexpected connections between one another, and in doing so blur the boundaries between the various ordered remarks.

Thus while some remarks more explicitly harken back to previous ones, others appear to implicitly anticipate a remark that comes after it; in both cases, however, they compel the reader to proceed backwards and forwards, or even skip or skim around between remarks, and in doing so invite a decisively non-linear process of reading.⁴⁰² This network-like dynamic which establishes relations between the various remarks presents itself in the proliferation of small text-particles like “vor,” “in,” and “nach,” which on the one hand emphasize through their brevity the moment of witty contrast between figures within individual remarks, such as in the above-quoted remark, “Der Furchtsame erschrickt *vor* der Gefahr, der Feige *in* ihr, der Mutige *nach* ihr,” while on the other hand their spatiotemporal connotation of linearity and succession reflects, in a highly condensed manner, both the tripartite structure of the text as a whole as well as its serial ordering principle, which simultaneously draw the reader's eye toward the microscopic differences between the particles *within* a single remark and at the same time emphasize the underlying formal unity and relations *between* the remarks.

Moralistik': In ihr verdichtet sich der Konflikt von Einzellnem und Allgemeinem zur Auseinandersetzung von empfindend-erlebenden und gedanklichen Impulsen im Erkennen des Menschen, von ästhetischer und logischer Komponente im Erkenntnisprozeß und ihrer Auseinandersetzung im Aphorismus: 'Im Detail,' wird Doderer später schreiben, 'müssen Leben und Denken coagulieren'" (Neumann, *Ideenparadiese*, 79f).

⁴⁰² As Rüdiger Campe has recently argued, a similar dynamic presents itself in Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's *Waste Books* [*Sudelbücher*], another compilation of miscellaneous “remarks” [Bemerkungen] around 1800. According to Campe, a close examination of Lichtenberg's method of text production in the *Waste Books* reveals the emergence of a process of “prolepsis and analepsis” [“Vorgreifen und Zurückgreifen”] that, especially in Notebook “E,” unfolds in the space of the notebook itself. Cf. Campe, “Vorgreifen und Zurückgreifen.”

Even more so, however, this formal technique of connecting manifests itself in a number of seemingly unrelated remarks which immediately precede or follow one another. Thus in a satirical remark on the figure of “great men” [große Männer], the remark which immediately follows deals with the figure of “women” [Weiber] who “spielen auf der Bühne die Rolle der An- und Verstellung viel besser als die der Aufrichtigkeit; denn jene ist Rolle in der Rolle, diese nur Rolle.”⁴⁰³ In this remark, what at first appears to be a mere gender cliché turns out in fact to be a reflection on the rhetorical conceptualization of the theatrical. Here the term “Verstellung” – illusion or dissimulation – makes an entrance, a term which is associated with rhetoric as the art of persuasion, and specifically with irony as the rhetorical mode of dissimulation.

Yet in the following the remark, the text subtly shifts registers from a gender cliché in relation to the theater by taking up this reference to the term “dissimulation” and inscribing it into the philosophical discourse of essence and appearance: “Doch oft scheinen sie sich uns vorher verstellt zu haben, bloß weil sie sich nur nachher zu schnell veränderten; ja meistens wird selber das Verstellen Verändern und Schein Sein.”⁴⁰⁴ In this passage, the preposition “doch” establishes a syntactic connection between the two remarks as one of reflection on the ambiguity of essence versus appearance, of being versus semblance. This reflection is hardly coincidental, for it concerns the very associative movement within the text itself; that is, while the references to the discourses of theater and rhetoric foreground the epistemological ambiguity between the factual and the illusory, they also reflect on the ambiguity of the relations between the remarks. The *commercium* of the disparate words and figures, which circulate between one remark and the next and leap from one discourses or genre into a completely different one, stages this dynamic as one of

⁴⁰³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 130.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

theatrical role-playing – as “roles within roles.” It thus renders what at first appears to be seemingly stable object-formations increasingly obscure or “miscellaneous.”

This relational dynamic is repeated in the interplay between two remarks which concern the discourse of power-relations. In the second remark cited above, this manifests itself in the form of a satirical analogy between the disparate figures of Caesar, Socrates, and Friedrich the Great, while the remark which immediately follows presents a veiled reference to the preceding one with its mention of “flatterers” or “courtiers” [Schmeichler] – ostensibly in relation to Friedrich the Great. When read together, they form satirical depictions of the royal court – a trope which manifests itself in another remark on convex and concave mirrors that will be addressed momentarily – in which the king’s followers are portrayed as blind flatterers of one another and, akin to the logic of simulacra, without an initial point of reference; thus Jean Paul writes, “Jeder Schmeichler hat wieder seinen Schmeichler; den Bandwurm halten wieder nadelförmige Würmchen besetzt.”⁴⁰⁵ In the second clause, however, this remark no longer explicitly refers to the royal court, but instead juxtaposes the parasitic figure of the “ringworm” [Bandwurm] and the “needle-shaped little worms” [nadelförmige Würmchen] which possess or occupy it. Here the satirical analogy between courtly life and parasitic worms breaks down, yielding an obscure metaphor whose only underlying relation to the previous clause is its repetition of the word “wieder,” which implies a parallel between the figures of the worms and those of the flatterers featured in the first half. The text’s invocation of the signifier “Band” in this passage is for this reason all the more striking: the contrast formation between the (big) ringworm and (little) needle-shaped worms within it stages here, as it were, on the one hand the opposition between big and small, macrocosmos and microcosmos, and on the other hand an implicit reflection on the mediality of Jean Paul’s remarks, whereby the

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

poetic figure of the “Band” – the ring or volume – brings the small, fragmentary remarks into loose interconnection with one another or, in more explicit connection with the medial conjuncture between miscellany and the collected edition, like sheets of paper loosely inserted into a volume, namely *Herbst-Blumine* itself, which attempts to re-inscribe the fragmentary and heterogeneous “Werkchen” back into a unified corpus.

Jean Paul’s “Bandwurm” thus serves as a kind of condensed poetological figure for his own fragmentary, miscellaneous method of representation, and in doing so may be said to join the bestiary of creaturely-corporeal figures of the small and fragmentary around 1800, including most famously Friedrich Schlegel’s figure of the hedgehog [Igel]. As Schlegel writes of the hedgehog in Athenäums-Fragment Nr. 206: “Ein Fragment muß gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel.”⁴⁰⁶ With its quills aimed outward to provoke and irritate the reader toward infinite reflection on the fragment’s illusive meaning, the hedgehog serves for Schlegel as the poetological embodiment of the Romantic fragment. While Schlegel on the one hand emphasizes the unity of the fragment, describing it as “completely separated from the surrounding world,” it remains nonetheless fragmentary in the perspective which it opens up and in its opposition to other fragments. Its “unity” thus reflects Schlegel’s view of the whole of things not as a totality, but rather as a universality of infinite opposing stances.⁴⁰⁷ Where Jean Paul and Friedrich Schlegel part ways, however, concerns precisely the formal condition of “dissociation” [Absonderung] and “internal perfection” [in sich selbst Vollendung] with respect to his metaphor of the hedgehog. That is, in order to achieve effect

⁴⁰⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, KA, I/2, 197.

⁴⁰⁷ “Das Fragment wird den Frühromantikern zum Ort einer Reflexion, deren Medium nicht, wie bei Fichte, das Ich, sondern die Kunst ist. Was Schlegel die schriftstellerische Dialektik von ‘Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung’ in der ironischen künstlerischen ‘Selbstbeschränkung’ nennt, erscheint als Selbstreflexion, die sich Eintrag tut; dieser Eintrag ist das Fragment” (Justus Fetscher, “Fragment,” in: *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2, 551–88, here: 566).

of sublime brevity, Schlegel's fragments seek to demarcate themselves from their medial context by forming an internally closed and complete "monad" that separates or "fragments" itself from the external world – from the textual material or frame-structure that surrounds it. For Jean Paul, in contrast, his miscellaneous remarks do not constitute single, discrete hedgehogs, as they do for Schlegel, but through their perpetual contrast formations come into fleeting relation with one another and leap outside of their respective medial boundaries. While both Jean Paul and Friedrich Schlegel's fragmentary small forms thus present themselves as obstinate, "needle-shaped" forms – as hedgehogs and "nadelförmige Würmchen" – Jean Paul's miscellany point as much outward toward the reader as back within themselves, in that the disparate fragmentariness of their writing on the one hand provokes the reader into a circular, repetitive reading, while on the other hand fragmenting and suturing the body of the text in a manner analogous to the surgical instrument of the needle.

The hyperbolic process of reading provoked by Jean Paul's miscellany comes especially to the fore in the final remark of "Bemerkungen über den Menschen," in which Jean Paul explicitly refers to his own miscellany. There he satirically relates the contingent, arbitrary ordering principle of his miscellaneous collection of "dispersed thoughts" [zerstreute Gedanken], as he refers to them in the passage, to a potentially infinite, circular reading which likewise proceeds through a technique of "dispersion" or "distraction" [Zerstreuung]:

Wie unersättlich ist der Mensch, besonders der lesende! sogar zerstreute Gedanken lieset er wieder zerstreut und blättert und schauet in Sentenzen, anstatt sie von vorn anzufangen, zuerst ein wenig herum, wie jeder noch von diesen Miszellen her sich erinnern wird. Findet er seine sentenziöse Kürze und Abwechslung schon vor, wie er sie in keinem weitschweifenden Werke genoß: so will er diese gegen die Lange- weile noch einmal abgekürzt und abgewechselt sehen, wirklich als ob die Leser Große wären, oder die Großen Leser. Ich weiß nicht, wie man diesem Lesen ein Ende machen soll.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 133.

Here the contingency of the text and the repetitious form of reading – what Jean Paul satirically describes as “reading around” [herumlesen] or “skim reading” [blättern] – demeans the text’s arbitrary and capricious organization, as well as the distractedness of its readers, whose inability to digest “grandiose works” of literature furnishes in turn the ostensible *raison d’être* for Jean Paul’s “minor” form of miscellanies.⁴⁰⁹ At the same time, his satirical observation in the first line – “How insatiable is man, especially the reading kind!” – gives way to a more radical abyssal doubt or “not knowing”⁴¹⁰ in the last line, “I don’t know how one ought to end this reading,” which is impossibly connected to the text itself. While it informs the reading of the text as a potentially endless process of “reading around,” in the very same moment it contradicts this reading by bringing the collection of remarks to an end. The expression of ignorance in the final line, “I don’t know” [Ich weiß nicht], thus conceals a more radical dissimulation: the possibility that, as the witty abbreviation of Socratic irony goes, “I know that I know nothing” or “I don’t know that I know.” The effect of writing “I don’t know how one ought to end this reading” at the end of the text amounts to a paradox, which puts into doubt both the epistemic status of the utterance and more broadly reflects the epistemic uncertainty between finite conclusion and its infinite deferral which characterizes Jean Paul’s remarks.

⁴⁰⁹ Jean Paul’s remark thus reflects the widespread diagnosis around 1800 for the nosological category of “reading addiction” [Lesesucht] – the pathology of distraction [Zerstreuung] – which was said to afflict (mostly female) readers, whose consumption of low-brow literature seemed to imperil the authorship of “great authors” through an ever-expanding book market oriented around a growing female reading public. According to Friedrich Kittler, one solution to the problem of the rapidly expanding book market was to constrict the channels that made popular literature known and available to female readers, all but ensuring that “schlechte Produkte” remained “ignorier[t], so werden sie ungelesen bleiben” (Friedrich Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 174).

⁴¹⁰ For more on “not knowing” [Nichtwissen] in literature, see Ulrike Bergermann/Elisabeth Strowick, “Weiterlesen: Literatur und Wissen,” in: *Weiterlesen: Literatur und Wissen*, 11–30, in particular 13–15. “Das Wissen der Literatur [...] artikuliert sich nirgendwo anders als im Akt des Lesens. Die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Literatur und Wissen zeigt sich [...] in ihrer methodologischen Relevanz für die Literaturwissenschaften. [...] Eine Lesepraxis, die Nicht-Wissen als konstitutiv für Wissensproduktion artikuliert, stellt für die Literaturwissenschaft allemal eine methodische und disziplinäre Herausforderung dar; sie tritt in jedem ihrer Akte nicht hinter den Versuch zurück, ‘das literaturwissenschaftliche Sprechen in die Frage der Grenze des Wissens hineinzuziehen’” (ibid., 13).

Moreover, while the remark's equalization of the "great" author and the (distracted) reader – the figures of the big and the small – seems to echo a similar remark by Novalis in the *Blüthenstaub* that "the true reader has to be the extended author," for Novalis this relation is characterized by a transcendental movement in which the textual material is perpetually "filtered" *upward* in the direction of the infinite and the absolute in order to become, as Novalis writes, "a member of the effective Spirit [*Geist*]." ⁴¹¹ In other words, by turning the "true reader" into an "extended author," Novalis's fragmentary poetics leads out of the realm of rhetoric and language and into that of philosophical idealism by theorizing a reading process which seeks in each case to separate the "raw and the formed of the book" [das Rohe und das Gebildete des Buchs]. For Jean Paul, however, the dynamic is not one of "filtering" between the raw and the formed, but instead one of endless dispersion which mixes the raw and the formed together. The elevation of the reader to the position of the "great" author, in other words, yields a form of reflection that leads not to infinite approximation of the absolute or the infinite idea – the "wirksamer Geist" – but instead to the "dispersal" of meaning and poetic obscurity.

This contrast between infinite and finite, between big and small, in which the question of reading comes into play – if only implicitly – manifests itself once more in another of Jean Paul's remarks in which the figure of the mirror appears, as in earlier remarks, in connection with the discourse of power-relations. The remark concerns a satirical contrast of perspectives between royal rulers and their onlooking subjects, in which Jean Paul depicts a scenario involving two mirrors, one a "magnifying mirror" [Vergrößerungsspiegel] held on stage by the rules and aimed

⁴¹¹ "Der wahre Leser muß der erweiterte Autor sein. Er ist die höhere Instanz, die die Sache von der niedern Instanz schon vorgearbeitet erhält. Das Gefühl, vermittelt dessen der Autor die Materialien seiner Schrift geschieden hat, scheidet beim Lesen wieder das Rohe und das Gebildete des Buchs – und wenn der Leser das Buch nach seiner Idee bearbeiten würde, so würde ein 2. Leser noch mehr läutern, und so wird dadurch daß die bearbeitete Masse immer wieder in frischtätige Gefäße kommt die Masse endlich wesentlicher Bestandteil – Glied des wirksamen Geistes" (Novalis, *Blüthenstaub* Nr. 125, in: *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe* [Munich 1978], 282).

in the direction of the viewing public, and the other a mirror which renders everything smaller [Verkleinerungsspiegel] and is held by the royalty to view the crowd behind them. The two mirrors are then pointed in the same direction, the effect of which is to produce an “interstitial space” [Zwischenraum] between them in which neither group directly views the other, thus rendering the space in between paradoxically both “bigger and smaller” [größer und kleiner]:

Am Throne ist ein Vergrößerungsspiegel angebracht, worin der Menge fürstliche Mängel, fürstliche Tugenden, Freuden und Leiden größer erscheinen, als die Fürsten selber es finden können. Diese hingegen haben wieder einen Taschen-Verkleinerungsspiegel—oder ist es eine dunkle Kammer—worin sie die Zustände der Menge beobachten, also macht derselbe Zwischenraum größer und kleiner.⁴¹²

Thus while the first mirror which is brought up to a throne has the effect of magnifying the “fürstliche Mängel, fürstliche Tugenden, Freuden und Leiden,” the second, pocket-sized mirror both diminishes the size of the crowd who are observing the image presented in the first mirror for the onlooking sovereigns, as well as creates the effect of a “dark chamber” [dunkle Kammer], that is, a *camera obscura*.⁴¹³ Here there occurs a conjuncture between two epistemic spaces of the small: on the one hand, an instrument of reflection and, on the other hand, one of optical observation and perception of men. Their equivalence, however, presents a perspective of impossibility in the text; for it is unclear in this passage whether the mirrors reflect each other or instead face opposite directions, or how the pocket mirror acts as a *camera obscura*, which would constitute an entirely

⁴¹² Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 131.

⁴¹³ “Die *camera obscura* sorgt für Licht Einsichten. Sie ist nicht nur ein optisches Instrument, sie gewinnt für die Denker der Aufklärung eine Modellfunktion, an der sich Sehen, Wahrnehmen, Erkennen exemplifizieren lassen. In den dunklen Kopf fällt durch die Augenöffnungen das Licht der Welt: Ich sehe, also habe ich Wissen. Die Repräsentation der Wirklichkeit geschieht als Lichtpunkt, als Ausschnitt. [...] Die *camera obscura* ist das Konkurrenzmodell zum Spiegelkabinett; und sie hat in der Erkenntnistheorie der Neuzeit gewiss die grundlegende Rolle gespielt. Hier begegnen wir dem selbstverantwortlichen, von den Traditionen sich abwendenden einsamen Subjekt. Es imaginiert sich als Mittelpunkt, von dem aus die Welt perspektiviert wird” (Marianne Schuller, *Mikrologien: Literarische und philosophische Figuren des Kleinen* [Bielfeld 2003], 54–57.) For more on the *camera obscura* as an epistemic figure of perception in the 17th and 18th centuries, cf. Jonathon Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Massachusetts 1993). See also: Crary, “Modernizing Vision,” in: Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 29–44, cited in Schuller, *Mikrologien*, 54.

different metaphor, or even what the status of the “Zwischenraum” is in which the image of the observed object is simultaneously made bigger and smaller.

The “humor” of the passage thus lies in the paradoxical presentation of a *mise en abyme*, a scenario of infinite reflection that ultimately ends in obscurity rather than further reflection.⁴¹⁴ At the very moment in the text in which the figure of the *camera obscura* appears, the text thus inscribes a literal aporia – a “dunkle Stelle” – within itself. The mirror no longer serves an epistemic figure of reflection, but as one of obscurity, for the direction between the mirrors in the passage remains wholly unclear. This stands in marked contrast to Friedrich Schlegel’s famous invocation of the mirror as an epistemic figure of infinite reflection in connection with his concept of “progressive universal poetry” [progressive Universalpoesie]. In Athenäums-Fragment Nr. 116, Schlegel writes: “Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen.”⁴¹⁵

Against this conception of poetics as a process of infinite reflection, Jean Paul offers the concept of humor as the “inverted sublime.” In Jean Paul’s texts, humor serves as a form-theoretical instrument of contrast-formation and infinitesimal differentiation. By putting into tension the infinitely big and the infinitely small, the infinite idea (spiritual, rational) and finite existence (cor-

⁴¹⁴ As Paul Fleming argues apropos a passage from Jean Paul’s *Flegeljahre* in which he parodies the infinite reflexivity of Romanticism, “Romanticism’s program of being lifted up ‘on the wings of poetic reflection’ crashes back down to earth. [...] The sense of the infinite that such a plunge into the abîmes de réflexion is, at least in Jean Paul’s view, a *mise en abyme*. Despite its long and storied career, such a philosophy of the genitive – ‘the poetry of poetry’ or ‘the irony of irony’ – is for Jean Paul a failed project, because its movement toward an abstract, progressive infinite demands, in turn, the ‘neglect of all reality’ and, therefore, is the ‘despiser of reality’” (Fleming, *Pleasures of Abandonment*, 44).

⁴¹⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragment* Nr. 116, in: KA, I/2, 182f.

poreal, transient, sensual), humor paradoxically negates the difference. In this way, it draws specific attention to the ‘physiognomy’ of the text, that is, to the relation of its ‘external’ corporeality to its ‘interior’ sense or meaning. Rather than striving toward the negative representation of the absolute – the infinite idea – the movement of reflection it sets into motion continually collapses in on itself, exposing in turn its contingency and fragmentariness. Humor for this reason furnishes a paradoxical double-perspectivization:

er [Humor] hebt—ungleich dem gemeinen Spaßmacher mit seinen Seitenhieben—keine einzelne Narrheit heraus, sondern er erniedrigt das Große, aber—ungleich der Parodie—um ihm das Kleine, und erhöht das Kleine, aber—ungleich der Ironie—um ihm das Große an sie die Seite zu setzen und so beide zu vernichten, weil vor der Unendlichkeit alles gleich ist und nichts.⁴¹⁶

Rather than the infinity of the *mise en abyme*, humor remains at the surface as a “pure becoming without measure,”⁴¹⁷ as Deleuze writes of Alice’s paradoxical becoming bigger and smaller at the same time. “She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present.”⁴¹⁸ Just as Alice, according to Deleuze, is said to “move[] in both directions at once,”⁴¹⁹ so too does the paradoxical juxtaposition of magnification and miniaturization mirrors in the previous passage from “Meine Miszellen” imply a completely different notion of space than that of the romantic mirror. It is the impossible perspective of an incomprehensible “interstitial space” [Zwischenraum] that is bigger and smaller at once – “also macht derselbe Zwischenraum größer und kleiner” – which negates their difference and leads not to sense or idea, but to non-sense and not-knowing.

⁴¹⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 125.

⁴¹⁷ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 1.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

Humor's destructivity capacity for negating and dispersing any and all meaning manifests itself at the very performative level in the passage from the *Vorschule*. There Jean Paul opposes macrocosmos and microcosmos, big and small, as a dialectical moment of mutual self-negation. The passage's rhetorical compression of a multitude of circulating concepts such as "parody," "irony," "satire," and "the infinite," along with its overabundance of hyphenations that appear to hold the parts of the formula together, at the same time fragment the passage into pieces which cannot be unified. In the final line, humor's strategy of perpetual differentiation collapses at the moment in which all differentiations between the big and small, the infinite and finite, are ultimately suspended and, as Jean Paul writes, "everything is equal and nothing" [alles gleich ist und nichts] – that is, in other words, rendered genre-less or *miscellaneous*.

5.2. Writing in Stitches: The Materiality of the Letter in the "Springbrief"

The second section of "Meine Miszellen," entitled "Springbrief eines Nachtwandlers," features a short piece of narrative fiction said to have resulted from a night of somnambulism, which is surrounded in turn by a frame story that narrates the fictional history of the letter's production. In the preface to the letter, Jean Paul foregrounds the palimpsestic character of the letter by revealing – in an intertextual allusion to Scheherzade's *One Thousand and One Nights* – that it has emerged not just out of one dream, but in fact "aus 1001 solchen brief-zeugenden Nächten."⁴²⁰ As the result of a multitude of oneiric visions which have been scribbled onto paper during numerous somnambular states, the letter presents itself as an experimental form of text-production – a "test" (*Probe*) brought "zur Probe," as Jean Paul writes – whose contingency and fragmentariness is reflected in

⁴²⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 134.

the numerous logical and syntactical “leaps,” or “Sprünge,” in the text, which the fictional editor of the letter attempts to mediate by inserting logical connecting words and paragraph breaks:

Hier folgt ein Springbrief zur Probe. Die auffallenden Sprünge darin hab’ ich durch Absätze für die Augen vermittelt und angezeigt damit richt etwa ein unphilosophischer Leser aus den häufigen logischen Bindewörtern: “*daraus folgt aber—doch geb ich zu*” etc. gar auf logische Bindung schließe; denn ein philosophischer Kenner weiß ohne mich, daß er bei diesen logischen Stichwörtern und Stichblättern weiter nichts zu denken habe als nichts.⁴²¹

Here Jean Paul presents the insertion of “häufigen logischen Bindewörtern” – arbitrary syntactical turns of phrase like “daraus folgt aber,” “doch gib ich zu,” or later in the text particles like “doch,” “aber,” “weil,” “Apropos!,” and “denn” – as a remedy for the incomprehensibility and collage-like composition of the text. While their inclusion is intended, then, to “stitch” together the epistle into a whole, the relation between the parts is ultimately that of contiguity and juxtaposition without, in fact, an underlying logical connection; for as Jean Paul ironically remarks to the reader, “ein philosophischer Kenner weiß ohne mich, daß er bei diesen logischen Stichwörtern und Stichblättern weiter nichts zu denken habe als nichts.” In this way, the material which binds together the various parts of the letter act instead as “*Stichwörtern und Stichblättern*,” that is, as “stitches” which serve to hold together the loose fragments of the textual body, while at the same time they ironically expose at the material level the interface or wound between the “corporeal” breaks or logical leaps within the text.

The preface to the letter narrates the story of the poet-author who is said to have composed the letter while sitting in the middle of a garden with paper in front of him. As he begins to write, the verdant surroundings suddenly appear to him “mehr wie Schwarz und Nacht” and he “entschlief neben dem Briefpapier, ging ins Nachtwandeln über und fing dann auf dem Papiere

⁴²¹ Ibid.

das Schreiben an, das ich hier vorlege, aber an einen Korrespondenten, den ich eigentlich gar nicht kenne.”⁴²² With the transition to the scene of somnambular writing, the writing subject suddenly disappears from the scene of writing entirely and in its place is to be found instead the intransitive writing process itself – “the writing” [das Schreiben], as Jean Paul writes – without a determinate author or recipient. His description of the dream as the spontaneous unleashing of fantasy, in which the dreaming poet “erschrickt selber über das ermattende Abflattern aller Kräfte im Traum, über das Umherschießen dieser Nordlichtsstrahlen nach allen Richtungen,” thereby associates the dream with a form of poetic productivity, and thus more broadly reflects the poetological function of the dream around 1800.⁴²³ In Jean Paul’s text, however, it more specifically serves to bring into view the fragmentariness of his own miscellaneous manner of writing, whereby the author-poet is confronted on the sheet of paper by “das ganze Nachtgarn wimmelnd von Fang aller Art [...] im selben Netz, Phalänen und Sternschnuppen und Nachtraubvögel, oder ohne Metapher, ein bescher-tes Christgeschenk von Miszellen oder Mischlingen aus allem anzutreffen.”⁴²⁴ Like the figure of the ringworm in the first section of “Meine Miszellen,” this constellation of miscellaneous objects – ranging from shooting stars to nocturnal raptors – emphasizes their “swarming,” network-like dynamic.

While the form of the dream and the remark thus present in different ways modes of *inventio*, the rhetorical term for the invention and discovery of the new, the description of the production of the “Springbrief” simultaneously satirizes the use of dreams as inspiration for the creative process, which became widespread amongst authors and poets during the romantic period as a means of intensifying the poetic imagination through the deformation of reality. In addition to metaphors

⁴²² Ibid., 134f.

⁴²³ Ibid., 133.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 133f.

of drunkenness and inebriation, the dream served as a virulent trope for the diminished state of consciousness that would allow for uninhibited literary productivity.⁴²⁵ However, by falling asleep or even “dying” [entschlafen], the somnambular poet is fragmented into both his own “copyist and adorer” [Abschreiber und Verehrer], and in that sense serves much more as the secondary reader of the text than its author. The text’s production thus ironically puts into question the authorial status of the poet, as in a later passage in which Jean Paul refers to the (miscellaneous) production, distribution and circulation of ideas on the book-market: “Sondern viele Menschen—das mein’ ich—legen (denn ich rede von Buchschreibern) ihre Gedanken so wechselnd-umgekehrt durcheinander als gewöhnlich die Buchhändler die Bogenlagen derselben, wovon ich Beispiele gekauft.”⁴²⁶ While book-writers, in the miscellaneous manner of Jean Paul’s “Meine Miszellen,” “*legen* [...] ihre Gedanken wechselnd-umgekehrt durcheinander,” and booksellers order the sheets of paper – “die *Bogenlagen* der selben” – upon which they are printed in a likewise disorderly and miscellaneous manner, the writer or poet (re)purchases their “examples” [Beispiele] *back* from the booksellers. The writer thus paradoxically plays as much the role of the consumer as the producer in the circulation his thoughts. It is in this sense that he may be said to act as his own “publisher” [Herausgeber] as well as “copyist and admirer” [Abschreiber und Verehrer]. The ensuing circularity of exchange, as recounted alternatively in the scene of the letter’s genesis which frames the “Spring-Brief,” crucially excludes the possibility of an original source or “*Grundlage*,” as well as the exegetical “*Auslegung*” of an originally intended meaning.

⁴²⁵ “Poetic writing in 1800 always meant letting oneself go; for ‘the time for rewriting, deleting, and polishing what needs to be polished can always be found.’ Only upon returning from intoxication or dream and in rereading the unconscious handiwork does an ego appear, together with its narcissism. [...] Thus the narcissistic pleasure of rereading one’s unconscious poetic liberties gave birth to the ‘authorial function.’ Authorship in the discourse network of 1800 is not a function simultaneous with the act of reading, but a deferred effect of rereading” (Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 111).

⁴²⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, II/3, 140.

This fragmentary conception of text production is reflected in Jean Paul's peculiar analogy between the typography of the Gothic script, or "Fraktur," in which the "Springbrief" was said to have been composed, and the textual body of the text as wounded – literally *fractured*. In the following passage from the second section of the text, he paronomastically likens a "writing master" [Schreibmeister] who binds "on doubled *Fraktur*" [doppelte Fraktur] to a "wound surgeon" [Wundarzt] who binds together "doubled fractures" [doppelte Frakturen]:

Was Sie mir aber schreiben, ist mir ausgeschrieben aus der Brust, wenn Sie Schreibmeister und Wundärzte so unterscheiden, wie Sie tun. Wie wahr, Herr Ober-Zoll! Der Schreibmeister bindet an doppelte Fraktur, der Wundarzt an doppelte Frakturen; – ein wahrer arithmetischer Doppelbruch.⁴²⁷

The broken typography of the "doubled *Fraktur*" is thus compounded, so to speak, by a double break or fracture within the body of the text itself, which the figurative surgeon "heals" by stitching together the fragmented fragments with logical connecting words, which Jean Paul suggestively refers to in the earlier passages as "Stichwörtern" and "Stichblättern." The composition of the "Spring-Brief" thus presents a "true arithmetic double break" [wahrer arithmetischer Doppelbruch], as Jean Paul enigmatically asserts. That is, while the Romantic fragment obeys a dialectic of fragment and totality, of constraint and unlimited free play, Jean Paul's fragments constitute instead fragment within fragments – fractures within fractures – which continually bring into view their corporeal-material dimension of the text.

In the above passage, one can thus read in Jean Paul's use of the word "binden" a paronomastic reference to both the medial format of the work, in the sense of "Werkchen" collected into "Bändchen," as he refers to the "volumes" in which his minor works are contained, but also to his remark from the first section of the text, in which the figure of the "Bandwurm" and the "nadelför-

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 135.

mige Wörmchen” appear. As a figure of the small, corporeal, and fragmentary, Jean Paul’s ring-worm or “Bandwurm” may thus be read as that which constitutes the small form of “Bändchen” or “Werkchen” – a circularity which both “links” together the text, and at the same time fragments it into the infinitely small, as per the logic of Jean Paul’s “humorous totality” [humoristische Totalität], which rather than progressively approximating the infinite and abstract, “individualisiert [...] bis ins Kleinste, und wieder die Teile des Individualisierten.”⁴²⁸ In humor, as Jean Paul writes, one for this reason does not simply fall on one’s knees – a sign of reverence and supplication before the infinite and the divine – but on “both knee caps” [beide Kniescheiben], which constitutes not merely a surplus of particularization that subverts the intention of the gesture, but which in doing so foregrounds the finite corporeality of the supplicant and the possibility that their knee’s could in that moment be fractured.⁴²⁹

5.3. Collapsing Frames: Sentimentality and Dispersion in “Polymeter”

In the third and final section of “Meine Miszellen,” entitled “Polymeter,” Jean Paul appends to the text a selection of pseudo-poems composed in his so-called “polymetric” verse, a condensed form of rhythmical prose or “free-metric” verse, as Jean Paul characterizes it, which he first coined in the novel *Flegeljahre* (1804–05) and with which he later experimented as a form of “minor work” included in the “Auswahl verbesserten Werkchen” that he appended to *Dr. Katzenbergers Baderreise*.⁴³⁰ “Polymeter” offers yet another small form of *inventio* which Jean Paul adds to his litany

⁴²⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 140.

⁴²⁹ “er [der Komiker] fällt, z.B., nicht auf die Knie, sondern auf beide Kniescheiben, ja er kann sogar die Kniekehle gebrauchen” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 140).

⁴³⁰ Cf. Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/2, 634–37, 671–72. See also: Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 358–63.

of miscellaneous poetic forms – “eine neue Erfindung,”⁴³¹ as Jean Paul writes, which does not obey the formal rules or poetic strictures of rhyme scheme and verse.

While the entries which he includes in “Polymeter” are less epigrammatic than lyrical-sentimental, and thereby connect with the repeated appearance of sentimental rhetoric as a representational technique in Jean Paul’s texts for staging the end, as the figurative “death,” of his works, the poetic condensation of the lyrical prose in “Polymeter” picks back up in certain respects the aphoristic form of the remarks from the first section as well as the sentimental tone of the conclusion of the “Springbrief.” The tripartite organization of the text is for this reason not at all contingent or arbitrary, but suggests instead a framing structure, whereby the first and third sections, “Bemerkungen über den Menschen” and “Polymeter,” function as a symmetry axis that frames the narrative center of the text, the “Springbrief eines Nachtwandlers.” However, rather than establishing a clear demarcation between the frame and the content which it frames, the ostensible frame structure of “Meine Miszellen” remains open and porous, presenting itself in each case in the theatrical mode of a scene change, which dynamizes the transition between sections and provokes once again a non-linear, “dispersed” reading of the text. This is reflected in the first entry of “Polymeter,” entitled “An eine in der Sonne erblässende Rose,”⁴³² which immediately picks up the sentimental rhetoric of the concluding paragraph of the frame story of “Springbrief eines Nachtwandlers,” in which the narrator is overcome with “Tränentropfen [...] weil mir im

⁴³¹ “»Ah ça!« wandt’ er sich zu Walten (mehr französisch konnt’ er nicht), »Ihre Polymeter!« – »Was sinds?« fragte Knoll trinkend. »Herr Graf,« (sagte Schomaker und ließ die Pfalz weg) »in der Tat eine neue Erfindung des jungen Kandidaten, meines Schülers, er machet Gedichte nach einem freien Metrum, so nur einen einzigen, aber reimfreien Vers haben, den er nach Belieben verlängert, seiten-, bogenlang; was er den *Streckvers* nennt, ich einen *Polymeter*«” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/2, 634).

⁴³² Jean Paul, *Werke*, SW II/3, 142.

Traum vorgekommen war, der Mann, an den ich im Wachen schreiben wollen, sei vergangen, was leider später wahr genug geworden.” As the passage continues:

Plötzlich riß mir waagrecht in die Laube eindringende Sonne das Augenlid empor, die Welt trat auf; – den, den ich für gestorben gehalten, sah ich traumtrunken als Sonne auf den roten Gebirgen in Westen stehen; und noch als die Sonne dahinter versunken war, sah ich sein Bild wie einen Heiligenschein auf den Bergen schweben, bis es sich allmählich in die weiten Rosenfelder des Abendrots verlor.⁴³³

At the moment in the text in which one section breaks off and transitions into the next, the text draws the sections together, blurring their boundaries by flowing the language of the preceding section into the one which immediately follows; hence the first entry in “Polymeter” recapitulates both the figure of the sun and of the rose (“Bleiche Rose, die Sonne gab dir die Farbe, die glühende nimmt sie dir wieder”⁴³⁴) which appear in the final paragraph of the “Springbrief.” Even more so, however, is that the transition of the sun from daylight to sunset gains poetological significance in this passage as a representational technique for the very transitional character of the frame structure, which stages the dynamic between one section and the other as a dynamic process, whereby the figure of the dreamed about dead man in the above paragraph transforms or even “deforms” into the sentimental image of the sun.

This moment of quasi-theatrical transition between different “sets” or “stages” in the text may also be said to mark a return to the first remark in “Bemerkungen über den Menschen,” in which Jean Paul writes of “Wölkchen, die am Morgen die Sonne rot schmückten, hüllen sie am Tage grau zu.”⁴³⁵ Not coincidentally, that is a satirical passage about marriage [Ehe], and in that respect recalls Jean Paul’s well-known description of “wit” as the technique of coupling or “binden” – “der verkleidete Priester, der jedes Paar kopuliert” – but also of the “spouses” [Gatten]

⁴³³ Ibid., 141f.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 130.

who are betrothed or copulated, that is, “begattet,” by wit. The rising and setting of the sun at the outset and end of each of the respective sections of the text thus marks the point of insuperable mixture and transition, in which the designation of the genre or “Gattung” in their respective headings is suddenly suspended and abolished, and in which the sections suddenly flow into one another. “Meine Miszellen” thus stages itself as an arbitrary or contingent arrangement of distinct genres and text-components, whose boundaries or points of interface cannot be disaggregated and instead perpetually blur into one another.

6. “...UND ES WIRD DAS GANZE WERK EIN WRACK.” CONTINGENCY AND MATERIALITY IN LEBEN FIBELS

Erstes Bild

In diesem Buche stehen Bilder und Buchstaben.
Das erste Bild stellt das Auge vor, womit ich die Bilder sehe.

Zweites Bild

Das zweite Bild stellt einen Knaben vor, der unter einem Baum sitzt, und in einem Buche lieset.
Der Knabe hält den rechten Zeigefinger auf das Buch, damit er in der rechten Zeile bleibe.
Der Knabe ist sehr aufmerksam und gaft nicht umher.

Bei den Bildern stehen Buchstaben.
Unter den Bildern stehen Worte,

[...] *Das offene Auge sieht ins Buch.*⁴³⁶

—Karl Philipp Moritz, *Neues ABC-Buch*

“Kein Werk wurde von mir so oft [...] angefangen und unterbrochen als dieses Werkchen.”⁴³⁷

Thus opens the preface to Jean Paul’s *Leben Fibels, des Verfassers der Bienrodischen Fibel* (1811), a biography of a young bookmaker by the name of Gotthelf Fibel who is said to be the writer and inventor of the first ABC book and from whose name the German word for “primer,” *Fibel*, ostensibly derives. With these words, Jean Paul foregrounds the remarkably discontinuous process of writing the novel. In doing so, he ostensibly inverts the relation between two vastly different conceptions of work: here, the “work” [Werk] as a “finished work” appears as the point of departure for the writing process, while the “minor work” [Werkchen] figures paradoxically as the end result. In contrast to how Jean Paul had originally conceived of the term “minor work” [Werkchen] in the prefaces to *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise, nebst einer Auswahl verbesserten*

⁴³⁶ Karl Philipp Moritz, *Neues ABC-Buch, welches zugleich eine Anleitung zum Denken für Kinder enthält* [1794], in: idem., *Werke*, vol. 3, ed. Horst Günther (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag, 1980), 7f.

⁴³⁷ Jean Paul, *Leben Fibels, des Verfassers der Bienrodischen Fibel*, in: *Werke*, I/6, 367.

Werkchen and *Herbst-Blumine, oder gesammelte Werkchen aus Zeitschriften*, however, here it no longer ostensibly refers exclusively to the genre of minor works and miscellanies published in literary short formats such as newspapers and almanacs. In Jean Paul's *Leben Fibels*, rather, the term "minor work" now designates an alternative conception of "work" – one which paradoxically incorporates the discontinuity and material ephemerality of "minor works," as small, fleeting, and finite texts destined to become "waste-paper" [Makulatur], within the poetological and narratological strictures of the novel as "work."

The poetological significance of this minor conception of work becomes apparent in connection with the pervasive editorial fiction staged throughout the novel's elaborate frame story in the novel. There it presents itself as a contingent constellation of fragments, which the narrator – ostensibly the "real author" Jean Paul, who situates himself once again not so much in the role of author as that of secondary editor and collector of pre-existing material – attempts to meticulously weave together into a seamless, gap-free whole. In doing so, however, this fictional editorial project simultaneously renders visible the material interfaces of the text, at which points its fragmentariness – and relatedly the narrative gaps in Fibel's own life story – become ever more evident and impossible to cover up.⁴³⁸ Left open and exposed as a loosely glued-together ensemble of fragments and paper remnants – what the narrator refers to in the preface as "Trümmern von historischen Quellen"⁴³⁹ – that in the end cannot be brought together as a whole, this book about the writing of a book, a biography about the writing of a biography – and their impossibility – explodes the self-evident "aesthetic unity" of the work from within.

⁴³⁸ Thus Uwe Wirth argues that for Jean Paul "wird auf allen Ebenen des Diskurses eine 'Poetik der verdoppelten Erzählinstanzen' in Szene gesetzt, deren Resultat *Ego-Pluralität* ist" (Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 331). According to Wirth, this is the case not only for the fictional representations of split subjects such as between Siebenkäs and Leibgeber in *Siebenkäs*, but also for the author-instance "Jean Paul." Wirth thereby relates Jean Paul's "poetics of a double narrator-instance" to the editorial traces left behind at the paratextual margins of his books, in which the split author-subject finds itself permanently in transition between "real" author-instance and "fictional" narrator.

⁴³⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 375.

By expanding the small, the fragmentary, and the miscellaneous within the frame of the book, of the autobiographical novel, *Leben Fibels* presents the transformation and even the deformation of the “work” into the minor work, into the *Werkchen*. It carries out, in other words, the transformation of a conception of the work as a self-evident aesthetic unity into an open and incomplete form of writing, whose authorship correspondingly now comes to take the form of the editorial delivery of stacks of loose-leaf paper. As will be shown in the course of the following pages, this undermining of the conventions of writing and authorship around 1800 in *Leben Fibels* belongs to the material strategy of Jean Paul’s concept of humor – what he defines in the *Vorschule* as the form of the “inverted sublime” [umgekehrte Erhabene] – which, as has been argued throughout the previous chapters, exposes the contingency of writing and the corporeal materiality of the text – of the literal letter – in its raw, textual condition.

In the preface to *Leben Fibels*, Jean Paul introduces a series of hermeneutic cues which serve to orient the reader in the reading of the work as yet another exemplar of the idyllic genre – or, to be more precise, as yet another “kind of idyll.” In this way, the preface appears to serve the traditional function of the paratext, namely that of guiding the reception of the work according to either its genre, the stated aims or intentions of its author, or by cluing the reader in to certain facts or pre-information which are crucial to the understanding of the work, yet which can only be known after having read it.⁴⁴⁰ The preface begins with the presupposition of a threat of a potential

⁴⁴⁰ “[T]he paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or – a word Borges used apropos of a preface – a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, ‘a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text’” (Genette, *Paratexts*, 1f). See also: Dembeck, *Texte rahmen*, in particular 1–52; Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, in particular 81–142.

misreading in the guise of an “errant reader” [irrender Leser], whom Jean Paul cautions against expecting anything epic, grandiose, or exciting in the course of the novel:

Nimmt also ein irrender Leser dasselbe [Werklein] darum in die Hand, um sich darin auf seinem Sessel mit den größten Himmels- und Erden-Stürmern, die es je gegeben, in Bekanntschaft zu setzen – und mit Riesenkriegen gegen Riesenschlagen auf Riesengebirgen – mit reißenden Höllenflüssen der Leidenschaften – mit Nachhöllen voll Kreuzfeuer romantischer Liebes-Qualen – mit weiblichen Erzeugeln und männlichen Erzteufeln – ja mit Ober-Häuptern, welche auf Staatsgebäuden als Drachen-Köpfe von Tränen-Rinnen den Regen in die Traufe verwandeln –; nimmt darum der Leser geneigt mein Buch in die Hand: so wart’ er so lange, bis ers durchgelesen hat, um nach einem andern zu greifen, worin dergleichen Sachen wirklich stehen.⁴⁴¹

Instead of “giant wars against giant snakes on giant mountains” [Riesenkriegen gegen Riesenschlagen auf Riesengebirgen] or a “netherworld full of the cross-fire of romantic love-pains” [Nachhöllen voll Kreuzfeuer romantischer Liebes-Qualen], Jean Paul characterizes *Leben Fibels* in the preface instead as “a soothing still-life” [ein stillendes Still-Leben], and the reader ought to expect to find nothing else in the book:

Wahrlich in diesem nichts – einige harmlose, schuldlose, lichtlose, glanzlose Leute mit ähnlichen Schicksalen durchleben darin ihr Oktavbändchen – das Ganze ist ein stillendes Still-Leben – eine Wiege erwachsener Leser zum Farniente – ein leises graues laues Abendregen, unter welchem statt der Blumen etwan die unscheinbare Erde ausduftet, wozu höchstens noch ein Fingerbreit Abendrot und drei Strahlen Abendstern kommen möchte.
Weiter gibts nichts darin, im Buch.⁴⁴²

The calm and tranquility which pervade this idyll, in which nothing cataclysmic or exciting happens and where there are no great events or epic heroes – a tranquility which is mediated as well through the double intonation of the phrase “stillendes Still-Leben” – is nevertheless far from harmless. Upon closer inspection, the ambivalence of this description becomes increasingly evi-

⁴⁴¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 367.

⁴⁴² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 367.

dent, for not only do “still life,” “idleness” [Farniente], and “grey” [grau] suggest an implicit contrast with the “soothing” [stillend], “balancing” [wiegend], “gentle” [leise], and “tepid” [lau] – the conventional characteristics of the idyllic genre –, but the characters which appear in the book are likewise described not simply as “harmless” [harmlos] and “innocent” [schuldlos], but also as “lightless” [lichtlos] and “drab” [glanzlos]. The “stillendes Still-Leben” is situated not only in the context of calmness and tranquility, then, but also in that of boredom, stand-still, and even death, as suggested by the images of evening time in the above passage.⁴⁴³ The preface thereby subverts the reader’s expectation of an idyllic biography: here there will be no straightforwardly tranquil “arcadia,” but rather a complete standstill of representation and language – a moribund standstill, moreover, which verges on the deadly and mortifying.

The allusions to silence and death – the ceasing of all movement and meaning and in its place the literal “still-life” of life in the form of the drab, grey, and moribund – in the preface thus complicate the reading of the novel as an exemplar of the idyllic genre. In *Leben Fibels*, one thus encounter an even further turning of the screw than in Jean Paul’s previous idylls, namely *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* and *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, and a further elaboration, in turn, of his concept of humor as a technique of double perspectivization. This elaboration of the concept of humor comes to the fore in a series of passages that follow the presentation of the novel in the preface as a “stillendes Still-Leben.” There the narrator redirects the reader’s gaze inland, across the shore of this “stillen Meerchen” – the small and quiet *Werk-chen*, with an implied assonance with the word “fairytale” [Märchen] –, in order to observe a vivid scene of mining and milling:

⁴⁴³ For a close reading of this passage, see Ulrike Hagel, “‘Stillende Still-Leben’ oder: Das Paradox idyllischen Erzählens bei Jean Paul,” in: *Stillstellen. Medien/Aufzeichnungen/Zeit. Zeiterfahrung und ästhetische Wahrnehmung*, eds. Andreas Gelhard, Ulf Schmidt, and Tanja Schultz, vol. 2 (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2004), 129–39.

Wendet man sich freilich am Ufer um von diesem stillen Meerchen und blickt landeinwärts in das Treiben und Laufen jetziger Zeit und Politik samt deren daran gehängten Menschen: so erstaunt man über den Unterschied und Glanz dieser Treiber und Läufer und vergleicht sie bald mit den sogenannten Bergmännlein, welche neben den Bergknappen so ausnehmend arbeiten, in Stollen fahren, Fäustel handhaben, Erz hauen, Bergzuber ausgießen, Haspel ziehen – –.⁴⁴⁴

Here the “shoreline” [Ufer] can be read not simply as a feature of the idyllic landscape, but as an allegory for the preface itself as the paratextual threshold of the work. The scene on the horizon of ore mining and physical labor – of “Treiber und Läufer” who resemble “Bergmännlein, welche neben den Bergknappen so ausnehmend arbeiten, in Stollen Fahren, Fluster handhaben,” and so forth – hints from this perspective at an alternative reading of the novel: rather than presenting itself here as a placid and tranquil “still-life,” the passage points instead to the quasi-handcrafted character of the text. The glance into the construction site from the novel’s paratextual margins thereby opens up a view onto the work as a kind of “work in progress,” whereby the calm, tranquil of the country-side – the traditional *topos* of idyll as a “golden arcadia” – is contrasted with the raw materiality of the text’s production process, which according to Uwe Wirth always become visible at the margins of Jean Paul’s novels.⁴⁴⁵ From the perspective of the “shoreline” of the book – its preface – the novel *Leben Fibels* would thus no longer appear as an expertly pieced-together, internally-closed and complete literary “work,” but rather as a kind of “handiwork” in the most literal sense: a multi-authorial, unfinished project whose gaps and ruptures remain open and exposed to the reader – in other words, a *Werkchen*.

Not only does this scene appear to contradict the presentation of the novel as consisting of nothing but “harmlose, schuldlose, lichtlose, glanzlose Leute,” but it also reveals another (unspoken) dimension contained in the description of the work as a “stillendes Still-Leben.” The double

⁴⁴⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 367f.

⁴⁴⁵ “Die Spuren, die der Autor als Selbstherausgeber und als diskursives ‘Subjekt in Bewegung’ hinterläßt, werden an den Rändern der Romane Jean Pauls sichtbare” (Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors*, 331).

meaning of this phrase is revealed in a passage immediately following the description of the landscape scenery, in which the rural countryside and the mining operation are opposed to one another in specifically acoustic terms: “So haben leise Menschen tiefer, wenigstens fruchtbringender in die Zukunft hinein gehandelt als laute; den *Stillen* im Lande wurde öfters Raum und Zeit das Sprachgewölbe, das sie zu den *Lauten* außer Landes machte.”⁴⁴⁶ Here the landscape metaphors of the mining operation, which imply a conception of the work as a raw and incomplete construction site – that is, as a kind of “handiwork” – converge on a paradigm of orality in the architectural form of a “Sprachgewölbe,”⁴⁴⁷ which situates “silence” [Stillen] and “noise” [Lauten] both in spatial and temporal opposition, as well as in close interconnection with one another. Implicit in the metaphor is the circular, retroactive temporality, which relates the silence one cannot hear in one’s own land to the noise it makes on the other end of the arch’s focal point, namely the noise of production in the ore mines. In semiotic terms, the passage presages the circularity of Fibel’s own linguistic-pedagogical program of alphabetization, which, as will be shown, posits a double movement, which splits apart sound and letter – phoneme and grapheme – while the aural “wording” or “pronunciation” [Wortlaut] of words figures as a distant, retroactively-constitutive effect of (silent) moveable type – that is, of the written letter as empty placeholder or mere typographic “Spatium.”⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 368.

⁴⁴⁷ “SPRACHGEWÖLBE, n. ‘ein elliptisches gewölbe, wo der schall, welcher sich aus einem brennpuncte gegen die ellipse bewegt, nach dem andern brennpuncte geworfen wird; daher derjenige, welcher in dem einen brennpuncte stehet, den in dem andern brennpuncte stehenden sprechen höret, obgleich andere nichts davon vernehmen” (“Sprachgewölbe,” in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden, vol. 16, [Leipzig 1971], 2757. See also: “Sprachgewölbe,” *Grimm-Wörterbuch*, accessed 8 Jan. 2016, <<http://www.woerterbuch-netz.de/DWB?lemma=sprachgewoelbe>>).

⁴⁴⁸ “Der zweifellose Ursprung beweglicher Lettern besagt aber noch lange nicht, ihre ganze Beweglichkeit erkannt zu haben. Dass alle Buchstaben im Setzerkasten Ersetzungen sind, die an die Stelle eines leeren Platzhalters treten, dass aber dieser Platzhalter – als Spatium oder Durchschuss – ohne jede Vertretung auch selber zum gedruckten Papier kommen kann, setzt eine Geschichte voraus, deren Ursprünge älter und rätselhafter sind als Gutenbergs Unternehmen,

If the narrative principle of the idyll thus concerns the depiction of a tranquil still-life in which nothing grand or epic ever occurs, then the author-*cum*-narrator of *Leben Fibels* goes one step further by suggesting to readers how to read “ein solches Werkchen [...] auf die rechte Weise,” namely on a calm, quiet afternoon, so that one “durch ein so treffliches, ruhiges Buch (wofür dem Verfasser ewiger Dank sei!) zur Anspannung für ein eignes glänzendes ausgeholt hätte.”⁴⁴⁹ In this satire of the hermeneutic method, the narrator implies that just as important as an approach to reading which is steeped in the teachings of hermeneutics would be the way in which the reader physically comports him- or herself in the very act of reading: to read an idyll one must, according to the narrator, read in an equally idyllic time and place, “nämlich Ende Novembers (der wie der April der Teufel immer schmutzig abzieht) [...]”⁴⁵⁰

According to this description, it is in fact the authorial “I” who situates himself in the place of the reader: “So würd’ ich das Werkchen lesen; aber leider hab’ ich es selber vorher gemacht.”⁴⁵¹ As in the hermeneutic circle, which seeks to reconstruct the parts from the whole and the whole from the parts, the production of meaning is, according to this formula, only possible once the entire novel has been read – or, as in the author’s case, first written and subsequently re-read. The preface thus lays bare the circular logic of presupposition, or “vorauswissen,”⁴⁵² which is not only central to the hermeneutic method, but also becomes an object of (satirical) reflection throughout the novel. As will be argued in the course of the following pages, the inherent circularity of all meaning – meaning, that is, as the retroactive effect of a narrative feedback loop – encompasses not only the reading strategy laid out in the preface to *Leben Fibels*, but also the presentation of

Weinpressen zu Druckerpressen zu ernüchtern” (Friedrich Kittler, “Buchstaben – Zahlen – Codes,” in: *Die mathematischen Wurzeln der Kultur. Mathematische Innovationen und ihre kulturellen Folgen*, eds. Jochen Brüning and Eberhard Knobloch [Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005], 65–76, here: 65).

⁴⁴⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 368.

⁴⁵⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 368.

⁴⁵¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 368.

⁴⁵² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 368.

the text's composition, its conceptions of authorship and readership, as well the relationship between life and book, life and book – the life of the scholar and the biographical project of writing life – which it stages.

6.1. Combinatory and Contingency: The Birth of the Scholar from the *Abc's*

Like its idyllic predecessors *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Wutz* and *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*, *Leben Fibels* presents the birth of the scholar from writing in the most literal sense: it the birth of Fibel from the *Fibel*, the personification of the name of the ABC book, the *Fibel*, in the form of a fictional biography, *Leben Fibels*, in which the “Produktion eines Lebens geschieht im Modus des *misreadings*.”⁴⁵³ In a reversal of the metonymic relationship between author and work, whereby a work is identified with the author's name, “wie man etwa raffaelische Gemälde Raffaele nennt,”⁴⁵⁴ here the author – Gotthelf Fibel – is retroactively attributed to the work – the *Bienrodische Fibel*, which Jean Paul appends to his own biography of Fibel's life – as its cause, generated from the very ABC book which he is said to have written as its own metaleptic effect, and whose “life” is subsequently presented in the fictional form of a biographical novel.

According to the novel's second preface, “Vor-Geschichte oder Vor-Kapitel,” Fibel's work, which “mit den Elementen aller Wissenschaften, nämlich mit dem Abcdef etc. etc. zugleich eine kurze Religionslehre, gereimte Dichtkunst, bunte Tier- und Menschen-stücke und kleine Still-Leben dazu, eine flüchtige Natur- und Handwerks-Geschichte darbringt,” serves not simply as a fictional pretext to Jean Paul's biography, but also as a kind of *Urtext*, insofar as his ABC book “Millionen Leser nicht bloß gefunden, sondern vorher dazu gemacht [hat].”⁴⁵⁵ Fibel's book is thus

⁴⁵³ Menke, “Die Geburt des Gelehrten aus den Exzerpten,” 122.

⁴⁵⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 370.

⁴⁵⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 369.

situated not as the product of, but instead as the very foundation of the discourse network around 1800, which first programmatically made readership into a precondition of authorship.⁴⁵⁶ Later in the text, the narrator provides insight into the significance of Fibel's unusual program of alphabetization, which he satirically likens to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*:

Wer schon bloß bedenkt, was Buchstaben sind [...], wer nun oben erwägt, daß über diese Vierzundzwanziger kein Gelehrter und keine Sprache hinauszugehen vermag, sondern daß sie die wahre Wissenschaftslehre jeder Wissenschaftslehre sind und die eigentliche, so lange gesuchte und endlich gefundene allgemeine Sprache, aus welcher nicht nur alle wirkliche Sprachen zu verstehen sind, sondern auch noch tausend ganz unbekannte, indem 24 Buchstaben können 1391724288887252999425128493402200 mal versetzt werden [...], würde schwerlich sich der Frage enthalten: wer ist wohl größer als Fibel?⁴⁵⁷

Fibel's work speaks of reading and writing as a combinatory of elements, whose 'raw material' are in this case the twenty-four letters of the (German) alphabet. As such, Fibel's book constitutes a form of encyclopedic knowledge – the “Wissenschaftslehre jeder Wissenschaftslehre,” in reference to Fichte, as well as the “Enzyklopädie aller Wissenschaften” – without which, as the narrator wryly notes, there would be neither writers nor readers.⁴⁵⁸ In this way, Fibel's book flips on its head Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, which according to Till Dembeck presupposes at the communicative level “Rezipienten, die dazu in der Lage sind, wiederum ihren Geist, und war möglichst unabhängig von den Buchstaben, in denen sie sich darbietet, zu erfassen.”⁴⁵⁹ For Fibel, rather, the

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. Friedrich Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, in particular 37–55.

⁴⁵⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 489.

⁴⁵⁸ “Nirgends besser als hier lernt man begreifen, wie die Alten im dickbändigen Homer die Enzyklopädie aller Wissenschaften finden konnten, wenn man in einem so schmalen Werkchen nicht weniger antrifft, indem darin bald Geographie vorkommt, z.B. polnische (Wie grausam ist der wilde Bär, Wenn er vom Honigbaum kommt her) oder arabische (Camele tragen schwere Last) oder italienische in M (Mit Messern stich bei Leibe nicht) – bald Kriegskunst in D (Soldaten macht der Degen kund) — bald Mystizismus in L (Geduldig ist das Lämmelein. Das Licht gibt einen hellen Schein) — bald Teleologie in O (Das Ohr zu hören ist gemacht).” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 490f.).

⁴⁵⁹ Dembeck, “Fichte dem Buchstaben nach auslegen,” 115. There Dembeck cites a suggestive passage from Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*: “Die Wissenschaftslehre ist von der Art, daß sie durch den blossen Buchstaben gar nicht, sondern daß sie lediglich durch den Geist sich mittheilen läßt; weil ihre Grundideen in jedem der sie studiert, durch die schaffende Einbildungskraft selbst hervorgebracht werden müssen” (Fichte, GA, I/2, 415).

act “creation,” the birth of man – what the biblical tradition identifies with the name *Adam*, and thereby with the letter “A” as the first letter of the alphabet – lies not, as it does for Fichte, in the self-activity of an “absolute I” or “spirit” independent of the “letter” – a transcendental-philosophical notion which for Fichte is, naturally, grounded in the self-identity of the letters of the alphabet, as in the proposition: “A = A” – but begins instead with the positing of the word, *logos*, albeit here in its literal *literality*, i.e., the letters of the alphabet.⁴⁶⁰

The respective “pretext” to Fibel’s work, therefore, is not so much Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* as it is the Bible, the divine “book of books.” Hence in an earlier scene in which the narrator recalls the moment of Fibel’s calling as a genius author and scholar, the narrator likens Fibel’s ABC book to the “Buch der Bücher”: “‘Sitze ab, Student, und ziehe aus eine Schwanzfeder dem Hahn und setze auf damit das Buch der Bücher, voll aller matres et patres lectionis, [...] schreibe dergleichen, *mein* Fibel, und die Welt liest.’”⁴⁶¹ Fibel’s primer situates itself in the place of the Bible, which, as a text, it deforms from the perspective of its literality – in fact, according to Grimm’s *Wörterbuch*, the word “primer” [Fibel] is itself, not coincidentally, an etymological deformation of the very word “Bible.”⁴⁶² In Fibel’s primer, writing is decomposed into arbitrary

⁴⁶⁰ If the entries for the letter “A” in Fibel’s ABC book, “Affe” and “Apfel” – “Ein Affe gar possierlich ist, / zumal wenn er vom Apfel frißt” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 555) – are interpretable as an „Idee einer adamitischen Ursprache, in der das Wesen der Dinge durch das Wort sich aussprach” (according to Schmitz-Emans, “Der verlorene Urtext. Fibels Leben und die schriftmetaphorische Tradition,” in: *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 26/27 [1991/92], 197–222, here: 208), then the name “Adam” would already ‘in the beginning’ have been explicitly effaced by the word “Affe” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 433) and its “apfelessendes Zerrbild,” which in the beginning stands for a repetition in the place of a lack. For more on this point, cf. Menke, “Alphabetisierung. Kombinatorik und Kontingenz. Jean Pauls *Leben Fibels*, des Verfassers der *Biendrodischen Fibel*,” in: *Medienphilosophie: Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*, eds. Lorenz Engel and Bernhard Siegert [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2010], 43–60, here: 49).

⁴⁶¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 427.

⁴⁶² “FIBEL, f. abecebuch, liber literarum elementariarum, es ist noch ungefunden, wann und wo diese entstellung des wortes bibel für den angegebenen besonderen sinn aufkam, sie hat allmählich überall eingang erlangt. aus bibel machte die bairische mundart wibel (wie aus babe wawe, aus bart wart und umgekehrt aus warf barf, aus weib beiw); wenn H. Sachs in seinem gedicht vom hausrat schreibt” (“Fibel,” in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden, vol. 3, [Leipzig 1971], 1611; “Fibel,” *Grimm-Wörterbuch*, accessed 12 Jan. 2016, <<http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=fibel>>). “Das Buch – *Leben Fibels* – beschreibt, gleichsam, das Leben von Buch, der ein Buch des Titels Buch geschrieben hat. Den Ursprung des Buchs. Und genauer: dies Buch, die

elements, such that the actual “meaning” of words is shown to be produced from the meaninglessness of the letters of the alphabet: hence the letter ‘A’ can be retroactively coupled to the signifier “Affe” just as much as it can to those of “Adam” or “Apfel,” or the rest of the letters of the alphabet to signifiers like “Wolf,” “Quarkkäse,” “Hure,” “Drache,” “Munch,” “Nonne,” “Lämmlein,” “Ochse,” “Ziegenbock,” and “Zählbrett.”⁴⁶³

The origin story of Fibel’s invention of the primer, and with it his development of a highly unusual program of alphabetization, is recounted in the thirteenth chapter of the novel, entitled “Papierdrache.” There the contingency and idiosyncrasy of Fibel’s conception of language becomes explicit and discernible. On one fateful afternoon, Fibel is said to have “vor der zerbrochenen Fensterscheibe des Schulmeisters vorbeigang,” whereupon he noticed that, “darein statt des Glases der sogenannte Abc-Hahn eingeklebt war, dessen Tierstück die ältern Abcbücher mit einem Prügel in der Kralle abschließt. Aber dieser Scheiben-Hahn wird noch viel wichtiger durch einen Traum, womit er Fibels ersten Schlummer schwängerte, und welcher nachher so gewaltig alle Schulbänke und Abschützen erschütterte.”⁴⁶⁴ The significance of this “Abc-Hahn” is clarified by the narration of the dream sequence which immediately follows. Later that night while sleeping, Fibel dreamt of the birds kept by his father Siegwart, a fowler, which “flatterten und stießen gegeneinander, pfpfropften sich ineinander und wuchsen endlich zu *einem* Hahne ein.” His oneiric vision of a dancing “Abc-Hahn” owes to the imaginary “grafting” [Pfpfropfung], which transforms

Fibel, mimt die Überbietung, das Über- und Vorleben im Hintergrund nicht nur des Buchs der Bücher, *Bibel*, sondern eines jeden Buchs. Die Fibel ist – ein *Schibboleth* – jenes Buch, ohne das kein Buch je geschrieben, geschweige denn gelesen werden könnte: das Buchstaben- oder Abc-Buch. Die Fibel, und *a fortiori* dasjenige Buch, das den Ursprung der *Fibel*, das *Leben Fibels* – vorgreifende Parodie einer andern Überschrift: *Leben Jesu* – schreibt, tritt, aus Gründen, Hintergründen, die leicht einzusehen, aber schwer zu durchschauen sind, in Konkurrenz zum Buch der Bücher, *Bibel*.” For more on the theological significance of Jean Paul’s deformation of the bible in *Leben Fibels*, cf. Schestag, “Bibliographien für Jean Paul,” in particular 495–523, here: 495f.

⁴⁶³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 555–62.

⁴⁶⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 426.

the multiplicity of his father's birds into a new whole – a *single* rooster – on whose back he rides as he attempts to translate incomprehensible so-called “rooster German” into “human German”:

Der Hahn fuhr mit dem Kopfe zwischen Fibels Schenkel, und dieser mußte auf dessen Halse davonreiten, mit dem Gesichte gegen den Schwanz gekehrt. Hinter ihm krähete das Tier unaufhörlich zurück, als würd es von einem Petrus geritten - und er hatte lange Mühe, das Hahnen-Deutsch in Menschen-Deutsch zu übersetzen, bis er endlich herausbrachte, es klinge ha, ha. Es sollte damit weniger – sah er schon im Schlafe ein – der Name des Hahns ausgesprochen (das n fehlte), noch weniger ein Lachen oder gar jener Verwunderungs-Ausbruch [...] angedeutet werden, sondern als bloßes ha des Alphabets, welches h freilich der Hahn ebensogut he betiteln konnte, wie b be, oder hu, wie q ku, oder hau, wie v vau, oder ih, wie x ix.⁴⁶⁵

In this scene, which parodies the biblical tale of the Denial of Peter (in which the figure of a rooster plays an equally prominent role), Fibel's rooster is revealed not to have the task of representing the letter “H,” unlike the “monkey” [Affe] which stands for the letter “A” and the “billy goat” [Ziegenbock] for the letter “Z” in his ABC book; rather, it emerges as the so-called “Abc-Hahn” which haunts Fibel's dreams and eventually comes to emblazon his primer as its “Wappenschild.”⁴⁶⁶ By sounding out not its own name, “Hahn,” but instead the meaningless syllable “Ha” – not laughter, but the name of the letter “H” itself – the dancing rooster inspires Fibel with the idea of combining letter, syllable, and image as the experimental basis for his ABC book. Thus from the single letter “H” – the only letter in the German alphabet which, not coincidentally, was originally neither pronounceable nor audible in spoken German – Fibel goes on to develop iconic and poetic representations for all the letters of the alphabet according to a combinatorial principle.⁴⁶⁷ His primer thereby presents a conception of language, one could say, in the form of what

⁴⁶⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 426.

⁴⁶⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 502.

⁴⁶⁷ “Fibel hörte hinter sich über fünfzehn Schulbänke das Abc aufsagen, aber jedesmal das h überhüpfen; endlich fuhr der Reithahn unter sie, und sie riefen einhellig: ha, ha etc. etc., ohne zu lachen. Und Helf konnte jetzt sehen, daß jede Bank ein Abcbuch voll eingeschnittener Bilder war – z. B. bei A einen Hintern, bei B eine Birkenrute für jenen –, aber nur um H war nichts gemalt, bis der Hahn leibhaftig den Buchstaben vorstellte so wie Hennen die en” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 426). The passage's focus on the letter ‘H’ is far from coincidental, for in the discursive-historical context

the preface refers to a “Sprachgewölbe,” in which silent graphemes, *Stillen* – here the silent, superfluous letter “H” as the primal scene of all the letters of the alphabet – and aural phonemes, *Lauten*, are contingently paired together according to a combinatory logic.

Against the more contemporary phonetic method, or *Lautiermethode* which, as Friedrich Kittler argues, constituted a genuine revolution in the context of the reading culture around 1800 by making oralization into the end-goal of literacy learning for the first time, Fibel’s program of alphabetization in his ABC book has recourse to the much older letter- or syllable method of spelling, the *Buchstabier-* or *Syllabiermethode*, which demanded that the names of individual letters of the alphabet be learned, as in “Haus = Ha, A, U, Es.” This meant, however, that there was little possibility for readers to learn how to translate individual letters directly into their respective phonemes, except by guessing their phonetic expression on the basis of the external appearance of words alone.⁴⁶⁸ By drawing on the older letter or syllable method, which already by 1800 was long outdated, Fibel’s program of alphabetization foregoes the revolutionary paradigm of orality in reading pedagogy which, according to Kittler, sought to naturalize language by linking it to the

of eighteenth-century orthographic debates, the presence of the letter ‘H’ in the German alphabet was highly contentious due to its lack of a determinate phoneme. Thus in his polemical tract “Neue Apologie des Buchstaben h” (1773), J.G. Hamann defended the function of the silent letter H’s inclusion in the German alphabet on the grounds that it represents that which is inaudible, concealed, and hidden, whereas Moses Mendelssohn, among others, argued in favor of its repeal due to its apparent superfluousness. At stake in these orthographic debates, however, was a deeper medial and epistemological problematic concerning the ostensible arbitrariness of the letters of the alphabet, and relatedly the relation of phoneme to grapheme, text-image to sound, and even the (physical) “body” of the letter to its “spirit.” Cf. J. G. Hamann, “Neue Apologie des Buchstaben h. Oder: Außerordentliche Betrachtungen über die Orthographie der Deutschen von H. S. Schullehrer,” in: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3, ed. Josef Nadler (Vienna 1951), 89–108. For Moses Mendelssohn’s pro-rationalist critique, cf. Moses Mendelssohn, “Sammelrezension zu Hamann,” in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, vol. 24 (Berlin 1775), 1. Stück, 287–89.

⁴⁶⁸ “Die Revolution des europäischen Alphabets ist seine Oralisierung. Unscheinbare Fibelnen wirken mit am epistemologischen Schwenk von allgemeiner Grammatik zu Sprachwissenschaft [...] Stephanis Begriff von ‘aussprechen’ bezeichnet den Schwenk, der nach Foucaults Analyse das transzendente Wissen begründet hat, sehr genau: Lernbar heißt das Alphabet nur ‘aus der Gesichtssprache in die Gehörsprache übersetzt’” (Friedrich A. Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 43). On the following page, Kittler makes more explicit what is at stake in this epistemological shift between the old and new programs of alphabetization: “Die Lautiermethode gipfelt darin, einen neuen Körper zu ben oder vorzuschreiben. Dieser Körper hat Augen und Ohren nur, um ein großer Mund zu sein. Der Mund überführt alle Buchstaben, die zu Augen und Ohren gedrungen sind, in tönende Laute. Das ist im Bezug aufs Ohr ein alter Gedanke, im Bezug auf Augen und Buchstaben aber eine Revolution” (ibid., 44).

mother's voice. In doing so, his primer foregrounds instead the contingency of linguistic and writing systems, dissociating language and nature by breaking words down into arbitrary letters and syllables, which it then links together with hyphens – of which Fibel is also said to be their (accidental) inventor: “Er tat auf dem Papier keinen Schritt, ohne von einer Silbe zur andern auf zwei übereinander liegenden Teilungs-Strichen (z.B. Stri-che) wie auf einer Brücke überzugehen, aber auf diese Weise eben schließt er sich an das lange Narren- und Weisen-Seil der Erfinder an, nämlich als der Erfinder der – Gedankenstriche [...].”⁴⁶⁹

Not surprisingly, the most important typographic character for Fibel turns out to be a typographic character outside the standard alphanumeric set which cannot be pronounced: the hyphen, which appears as an empty placeholder – a literal gap or caesura in the text. While it appears at first to serve the pedagogical purpose of visually mediating the pronunciation of words in the ABC book by breaking them down into their constituent syllables and linking them together, “wie auf einer Brücke überzugehen,” his use of the hyphen turns out to be a completely arbitrary authorial strategy, “[um] mehr Raum auf dem Papier zu leeren und in dem Beute zu füllen.”⁴⁷⁰ The hyphen, like wit, is thus a combinatory instrument for arbitrarily joining together disparate material in order to set the writing into motion, transforming the dead letter of written language into genuine “movable type” – that is, into “Buchstabieren in Bewegung.”⁴⁷¹

Yet in the very same gesture, the hyphen also breaks the linearity of the text; it signifies an absence, creates a gap or “wound” in its physiognomy, which it simultaneously sutures and exposes. In doing so, it draws attention away from the underlying meaning of words and directs the reader's gaze instead toward the arbitrary gaps or blanks – the literal “voids” or *Leerstellen* – which

⁴⁶⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 430.

⁴⁷⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 430.

⁴⁷¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 431.

fill up the sheets of paper of the ABC book, thereby bringing into proximity “das Körperliche bei seinem geistigen Erzeugen.”⁴⁷² Like the origin of the letter “H,” the hyphen is an alphanumeric symbol which cannot be spoken: it is, in other words, a silent grapheme without a phoneme; hence a text or sheet of paper that is filled with nothing but hyphens, or alternatively with the letter “H,” would be utterly incomprehensible to a listener. It would constitute a “stillendes Still-Leben” in the most literal sense of the phrase – nothing but a ‘dead letter.’

Through the repeated inversion of the corporeal and the spiritual sides of language in Fibel’s primer, the novel stages a dynamic which may be said to approximate Jean Paul’s concept of humor as the form of the inverted sublime. For from the perspective of Fibel’s dream, which presents an inverted perspective from atop the back of the rooster – “mit dem Gesichte gegen den Schwanz gekehrt” – Fibel’s “Abc-Hahn” can be brought into proximity with the figure of *Merops*, which Jean Paul adopts in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* as the poetological symbol for his concept of humor: “Er [der Humor] gleicht dem Vogel Merops, welcher zwar dem Himmel den Schwanz zukehrt, aber doch in dieser Richtung in den Himmel auffliegt. Dieser Gaukler trinkt, auf dem Kopfe tanzend, den Nektar *hinaufwärts*.”⁴⁷³ According to this formula, humor does not simply invert the perspective between heaven and hell, between the infinite and the finite, but by opening up a “double perspective” between two opposite realms, it furnishes a perspective of impossibility – of looking in two opposing directions simultaneously. Humor is therefore not merely a conventional poetological technique of perspectivization, but one which serves as a material strategy in

⁴⁷² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 431. In the appendix which contains Fibel’s ABC book, Fibel goes on to apply his spelling method to excerpts from the Old and New Testaments: “Das hei-li-ge Va-ter Un-ser. Va-ter Un-ser, der Du bist im Him-mel. Ge-hei-liget wer-de Dein Na-me. Zu-kom-me Dein Reich,” etc. As in the etymology of “Fibel” – a deformation of the word “Bibel” – Fibel’s book likewise deforms the “word” of God – the “book of books” – into an incomprehensible ensemble of meaningless fragments of words.

⁴⁷³ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/5, 129.

Jean Paul's texts for completely disorienting the material and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite. For this reason, it is not a sense-making "idea," but instead a "destructive" or "negating" [vernichtend] force,⁴⁷⁴ as he refers to it in the *Vorschule*, which in its role as "the inverted sublime" explodes the form of the sublime from within, exposing in turn the fragmentariness and materiality that underlies every "infinite idea" (spirit, form, reason). Humor may thus be said to deface the theological – the Bible as the "book of books" – into the life of *Fibel*, whose ABC book foregrounds the sensuous materiality of language by showing how all meaning is produced from a meaningless combinatory matrix of arbitrary letters.

6.2. Textual Bodies: Collecting, Excerpting, and Engrafting the "Life of Fibel"

While Fibel's program of alphabetization is not itself directly carried out in *Leben Fibels*, the text nevertheless presents a conception of writing and reading which inscribes contingency at the material level through the principle of combinatory production. At the various levels of its nested frame stories, the novel continuously recycles previously written material: the "real author" Jean Paul grafts onto his novel Fibel's ABC book as an appendix; the fictional author-instance of the same name produces his biography from antecedent "pretexts" such as manuscripts, excerpts, and fragments; and finally the protagonist Fibel stamps his name onto numerous scholarly works which have long been out of circulation, including one that impossibly dates back to the 1600s. Just as Fibel's letter-method of alphabetization evacuates meaning from language by coupling speech back to an arbitrary writing system, the novel presents itself as a contingent constellation of fragments, which the editor and narrative voice "Jean Paul" attempts to glue together into a seamless whole, while at the same time ironically rendering visible the gaps in the text.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 131.

The material contingency of Fibel's biography is reflected in the names of various chapter titles like "Leibchen-Muster," "Herings-Papiere," "Zwirnwickler," "Papierdrache," "Kaffee-Düten," and other "fliegende *Blätter* fiblischen Lebens," which allude to the fictional scraps of "waste paper" [Makulatur] and remnants that constitute the fictional pre-texts, or "Vor-Geschichten," of (the writing of) Fibel's biography.⁴⁷⁵ The frame story presented in the "Vor-Kapitel" goes on to depict a literal paper chase in search of "Trümmern von historischen Quellen," which the fictional author-instance "Jean Paul" attempts to retrieve from the townspeople of Fibel's hometown of Heiligengut, which "hebt sich zu einer biographischen Schneiderhöhle voll zugeworfener Papier-Abschnitzel."⁴⁷⁶ In this fictional scenario of the biography's production, the preface makes explicit not only the (material) contingency of the origin of the texts which constitute it, but also the contingency of its authorship; for the author, who wishes to become the (as it later turns out, *second*) "fibelschen Lebensbeschreiber," searches in Heiligengut, "mich da ein wenig anzusetzen, um wenigstens noch so viele aufzutreiben, als etwa nötig waren, um aus allen biographischen Papierschnitzeln geschickt jenen Luftballon" – that is, the "work" *Leben Fibels*, which the text conflates as "gegenwärtiges Leben oder Buch"⁴⁷⁷ – "zusammenzuleimen," which is to then be "inflated" [aufgeblasen] and carried up into the heavens like the biographical equivalent of Christ's Ascension.⁴⁷⁸

The constellation of *Leben Fibels* as the heterogeneous product of a collage technique not only presents the paper on which it is written as palimpsestic carriers of biographical data, but also leaves the points of intersection where the different fragments of text have been stitched and glued

⁴⁷⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 376.

⁴⁷⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 375.

⁴⁷⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 376.

⁴⁷⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 375.

together open and exposed as “eingebrachten papiernen Verkröpfungen.”⁴⁷⁹ In this sense, the biography is not really a book anymore, at least in the conventional sense, but turned into a kind of three-dimensional material object – one whose (architectonic) “crankings” or “offsets” [Verkröpfungen], which feature prominently in Baroque carpet patterns, far more resembles something like the paper form of an origami. From this interstitial or enfolded perspective, the (fictional) editor’s technique of composition could perhaps be described as one of textilic enfolding and unfolding, not unlike Deleuze’s notion of the fold, which conceives of a serial logic of enfolding, an adding-in of a potentially limitless number of unrelated elements.⁴⁸⁰

In the novel’s nested story-within-the-story of Joachim Pelz, Fibel’s first biographer, the serial logic of textilic enfolding is made even more explicit with the revelation that the novel *Leben Fibels* is, in fact, a multi-authorial work – one which was erected upon the fragmentary remains of Pelz’s own forty-volume biography. In reality, this fact was already first divulged in the preface, as when the narrator presents his own biography as an excerpt – an *Auszug* – of Pelz’s fragmentary “pretext”: “Das folgende Buch ist demnach der treue Auszug aus den 40 bruchstücklichen Bänden des Christen-Judas und meiner Jünger [...]”⁴⁸¹ Later on in the novel, in the so-called “Pelz-Kapitel,” the narrator goes on to ironically reveal the “allegorical” significance of Pelz’s name in connection with Jean Paul’s own excerpting method of text production, which refers to the material usage of textual sources that serve as paper bandaging material for “engraftments” in the so-called “Pelzgarten”: “Dieses ganze Kapitel wurde in einem Impf- oder Pelzgarten im Grase gefunden und schien zum Verbinden der Pelz-Wunden gedient zu haben.”⁴⁸² Here the passage paronomastically alludes to an alternative meaning of the verb “pelzen,” which is a synonym for the process

⁴⁷⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 376.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993).

⁴⁸¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 376.

⁴⁸² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 464.

of “seeding” [impfen] or “grafting” [pfpfen], a horticultural technique whereby tissues from one plant are artificially implanted onto those of another so that the two sets can join together at the “wounded” point of intersection.⁴⁸³

While the fictional origin of the “Pelz-Kapitel” suggests an organic metaphor of gardening and natural proliferation, the text’s allusion to the origin of Pelz’s own name implies, on the contrary, a completely denaturalized technique or handiwork of grafting. As Uwe Wirth argues, “Das Verfahren der Aufpfropfung impliziert nun eine Beschleunigung dieses Hybridisierungsvorgangs. Die Aufpfropfung ist eine Kultivierungstechnik, die der künstlichen – nicht-sexuellen – Fortpflanzung dient – eine Technik, die seit alters her bekannt ist und im 18. Jahrhundert zu neuer Blüte gelangt, nämlich als Wissensfigur für einen aufgeklärten Umgang mit der Natur.”⁴⁸⁴ As Wirth goes on to argue, a glance into the technical side of engrafting, as a principle technique of (en)foldung, makes clear the extent to which it concerns a means of artificial production, namely that of healing wounds. “Dabei bringt die Kultivierungstechnik der Aufpfropfung einen Begriff der Schnittstelle ins Spiel, der ein weites Feld kulturwissenschaftlicher und medientechnischer Implikationen eröffnet.”⁴⁸⁵ One could similarly argue, in harmony with Wirth’s argument, that the technique of “engrafting” opens up an interstitial perspective onto the texture of the text itself, not only in connection with the imaginary engraftments in Fibel’s dream, which transform the multiplicity of his father’s birds into a single, unified “Abc-Hahn” – and hence with a media-technical conception of the alphabet as an *ars combinatoria* – but also with the composition process of filling in gaps and

⁴⁸³ “PELZEN, verb. gleich belzen theil 1, 1456, vergl. Kluge 24a. Schm.2 1, 389: die Griechen nennens ἐμφοτεύειν, die Lateiner inserere, die Deutschen impfen, pfpfen oder pelzen. Colerus hausbuch 110 (doch in der älteren sprache auch im sinne von pflanzen)” (“Pelzen,” in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden, vol. 13, [Leipzig 1971], 1535. See also: “Pelzen,” *Grimm-Wörterbuch*, accessed 18 Sept. 2015, <<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GP01621>>).

⁴⁸⁴ Uwe Wirth, “Aufpfropfung als Figur des Wissens in der Kultur- und Mediengeschichte,” in: *Kulturgeschichte als Mediengeschichte (oder vice versa?)*, eds. Lorenz Engell, Bernhard Siegert, and Joseph Vogl (Weimar: Universitätsverlag Weimar, 2006), 111–22, here: 111.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

suturing so-called “Pelz-Wunden” with “bandages” or “grafts” composed of previously written material, which the fictional author-instance “Jean Paul” finds lying around at various locales.

The “grafting” [aufpfrofen] or “gluing together” [zusammenleimen] of the remnants of Fibel’s life in the form of the heterogeneous remnants of text which he left behind – and the *impossibility* of that (auto-)biographical project – becomes all the more apparent as the novel progresses. Thus in the sixteenth (or seventeenth) chapter, entitled “Nicht das 16., sondern das 17. Kriminal-Kapitel,” the chapter immediately exposes itself as a gap in the text that must be arbitrarily filled in with narrative exposition. There, at the point in the novel where the gaps begin to destructively proliferate, the narrator decides to abandon his earlier effort of composing Fibel’s life on the basis of so-called “historical sources” and develops instead a strategy of interspersing the narrative of Fibel’s life story with various “cues” [Winke] or so-called “fateful cues” [Schicksals-Wink[e]] for readers, “die ich sogleich hie und da einstreuen will” and from which “[z]u erraten ist” what events presage Fibel’s future fame.⁴⁸⁶ By attempting to weave later portions of the novel back into earlier portions, allegedly in order to make more comprehensible an ever more incomprehensible and fragmentary work, the material strategy of recycling raw text-material, such as Pelz’s biography, in order to fill in gaps – *Leerstellen* – through the techniques of engrafting sets into a motion an extremely destabilizing dynamic that ultimately explodes the narrator’s attempt to narrate Fibel’s life story in a consistently chronological manner.

If at the material level the novel reveals itself to be a work of seriality, materiality, and contingency through the linking, gluing, and grafting together of heterogeneous material, then at the semiotic level it shows how meaning – in a metaleptic reversal of cause and effect – is produced and fixated in an entirely retroactive manner. In the “Pelz-Kapitel,” this becomes apparent in the

⁴⁸⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 446.

way that the biographical narrator's material process of writing threatens to narrate its own premises, encountering and repeating its own "scene of writing" by incorporating previously written material into the fragmentary gaps of the biography.⁴⁸⁷ The chapter on Pelz thereby foregrounds the inherently circular or chiasmic order of narration that was already to be found at very beginning of *Leben Fibels*, namely in the opening line of the preface, the so-called "Vor-Kapitel": "Das Zähl-Brett hält der Ziegen-Bock."⁴⁸⁸ This line is in fact a citation of the last seven words of the *parergic* appendix containing Fibel's ABC book, which – in yet another metaleptic reversal of cause and effect, of primary and secondary – now figures as the "primary" work, while the biography *Leben Fibels* itself subsequently appears as the "secondary" work, that is, as the commentary or post-text that seeks to exegetically unfold the initial citation.⁴⁸⁹

This narrative positing of presuppositions – that is, the inherently metaleptic structure of the biographical project as such – arguably finds its poetological pendant much earlier in the novel, namely in the allegorical tale of the ring, which first appears in the seventh chapter, "Der Zwirnwickler," and reappears across various chapters at the beginning of the book. There the seriality of composition and the circularity of meaning are brought together and shown to be thematically and epistemologically intertwined. In the chapter "Der Zwirnwickler," the narrator recounts the tale of Fibel's childhood as well as the unusual family constellation into which he was born: Siegwart, Fibel's father, is a mute fowler who can only whistle or mumble in broken syllables, while his mother, Engeltrut, not only suffers from constant headaches, but also gives birth to dozens of still-born children – twins, triplets, and quintuplets – which they bury in a makeshift grave in their

⁴⁸⁷ A similar narratological strategy is employed by Jean Paul in his novel *Siebenkäs*. As Gerhard Neumann argues, "Jean Pauls Roman, der Anfänge zu erzählen vorgibt, ist zugleich die Inszenierung von deren Subversion: Er setzt Anfänge, in denen das Endspiel keimt" (Neumann, "Der Anfang vom Ende," 483).

⁴⁸⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 369.

⁴⁸⁹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 562.

backyard without mourning. By presenting Fibel's family as creaturely and animalistic, the text not only anticipates Fibel's own highly idiosyncratic conception of language as evacuated of all meaning and signification, which manifests itself in the child-like language of his ABC book, but also foregrounds the potent and monstrous bodily moment in language – a “stillendes Still-Leben” in the most grotesquely literal sense – in which human fetuses, “stillborns,” can be serialized just as much as meaningless letters of the alphabet.

Several pages later after recounting the details of this grotesque birth-ritual, in which Fibel's mother finishes “delivering” [das Entbinden] her two most recent dead twins, the narrator introduces the reader to the story of the ring in connection with the appearance of a talking bird [Sprachvogel]: Fibel's father “hört [...] sich oben im Blau mit menschlichen, obwohl ausländischen Worten anreden: Filou, bourreau, diable sacre etc.; und zu gleicher Zeit fiel ein goldener Ring vor seine Füße nieder. Er hob ihn auf und sah in die Höhe; – ein grüner Vogel, so groß wie ein Papagei (wahrscheinlich auch einer), flog über ihn hin und nahm mit dem Antritts-Gruß filou Abschied.”⁴⁹⁰ The appearance of the ring, which in this scene is shown to drop from the bird's mouth as soon as he mimics human language, serves not merely as a portent of Fibel's future fame – that is, while the ring's jewel is soon stolen from his father, its gold is extracted and circulates on the market to become “zu einem Selbst-Angebilde” for Fibel, “zum Ankaufe eines schönen Werks, des sogenannten ‘Neu geöffneten *Ritterplatzes*’ in drei Duodezbanden, worin er sich in allen Wissenschaften umsehen konnte, weil er noch immer zweifelhaft war, in welcher er ein Skribent werden wolle,” before knowing that later he would of course go on to become the scribe of *all* the sciences;⁴⁹¹ rather, in the context of the novel's circular narrative, which presupposes at the outset what occurs at the end, the ring gains poetological significance in relation with

⁴⁹⁰ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 400.

⁴⁹¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 412.

the figure of the talking bird – and ostensibly with the other bird metaphors in the text, such as Fibel’s dancing “Abc-Hahn” – as an allegorical figure for the continual metalepsis in the text of cause and effect, primacy and secondarity, beginning and end. It thereby links the circularity of the novel’s narrative structure back to a conception of language for which contingency plays a central role, as in the figure of the talking bird whose mindless mimicry of human words from all different languages implies that actual “sense” or “meaning” is the retroactive effect of the production of meaningless nonsense.

Several chapters later, in the so-called “Laternen-Kapitel,” the inherent circularity of the novel *Leben Fibels* is retroactively exposed by the narrator in the course of the proceedings of the “academic club” [Gelehrter-Verein], which is convened in order to celebrate Fibel’s genius authorship and invention of the first ABC book. There “Jean Paul” reveals Pelz’s teleological method of biographical description in the latter’s forty-volume biography of Fibel’s life, which transforms the young Fibel into the fictional prototype of the messiah, in whose childhood past already lurks – like a literal homunculus – his future fame and fortune:

Große Lebensbeschreiber – sah Pelz – wetteifern in Versuchen, schon aus der Kindheit oder Zwiebelwurzel des Helden die ganze künftige Tulpe vorzuschälen, aus der kindlichen Typologie den Messias, so daß die nachherigen männlichen Kränungskleider nichts sind als die vorherigen kindischen Windeln, und daß die Kartenhäuser desselben schon die Modellzimmer seiner künftigen Lehrgebäude, Krönungssäle und babylonischen Türme u.s.f. vorstellen.⁴⁹²

In the decidedly self-ironic manner of the above passage, the narrator and author of *Leben Fibels* parodies the technique of retrospective narration at work in biographical writing, which only furnishes excerpts – *Auszüge* – from the life of the subject or hero of the biography and must present as logically plausible the successive continuity, from beginning to end, of the narration of the

⁴⁹² Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 495.

hero's life which, only in retrospect, is to be described.⁴⁹³ In contrast to the preface which claims that “[d]as folgende Buch ist demnach der treue Auszug aus den 40 bruchstücklichen Bänden des Christen-Judas und meiner Jünger,”⁴⁹⁴ *Leben Fibels*, as well as all biographies, only feign their own possibility to be “faithfully” [treu] narrated, ineluctably revealing that it is in fact the arbitrary decision of the author as to what gets included or excluded.

It is precisely at this point in the text, however, where the biographical project threatens to unravel and turn in on itself as its narration begins to narrate itself and the biography encounters the premises of its own production in the form of Pelz's 40-volume biography. This narrative doubling of the novel within the novel, of the biography within the biography, manifests itself most explicitly in the chapter which immediately follows, entitled “Patronen-Kapitel,” in which the author and narrator “Jean Paul” attempts to graft portions of Pelz's biography onto his own:

Ich kann mich hier sehr leicht lächerlich machen, wenn ich nicht verständig verfare. Setz' ich nämlich die Pelzischen Sitzungen her, so bring' ich das aus ihnen ausgehobne Leben zum zweiten Male und fange mitten im Buche wieder beim Anfange des Lebens an. Merz' ich die Sitzungen aus, so fehlt gerade der Teil des Fibelischen Lebens, der in die Vorlesungen hineinfällt, und es wird das ganze Werk ein Wrack.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ Pelz's teleological approach is further specified in a subsequent passage that parodies the discourse of physico-theology, which sought to discover the divine as pervading even the smallest objects of nature. There the Rektor magnifikus from Leipzig – the university magistrate endowed with the power to confer a scholarly degree upon Fibel, thereby altering his future (scholarly) life-course – suddenly pulls out a handheld microscope from his attaché and begins to carefully examine a louse which he finds lurking in Fibel's hair, and which he reads in turn as a portent of Fibel's destiny to become a famous author and scholar: “Aus der Laus, welche, wir wir alle gelesen, der Rektor magnifikus ihm zu mikroskopischen Belustigungen vom Kopfe abgehoben, zog Pelz viel und legte sie gleichsam, so wie jener Floh ein Kunstwägelchen zog, als Vorspann Fibels Siegwagen vor” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 495). This parodic or witty “scene of reading” which revolves around the parasitic figure of the louse becomes a discursive-poetological nodal point in the text at which the (metaleptic) relation of author to work, the “microscopic amusements” of the infinitely small, and the creaturely materiality of Jean Paul's humor all intersect.

⁴⁹⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 376.

⁴⁹⁵ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 492f.

By filling in the gaps of his own account of Fibel's life with the fragments of Pelz's, the narrative threatens to repeat itself by re-staging its beginning *media res*: "Die Leser wissen schon seit mehreren Bogen, daß der Magister Pelz alle Pflichten guter Lebensbeschreiber in den Sessionen erfüllt und des Helden Vergangenheit ausführlich abgehandelt – denn woher sollt' ich die vorigen Kapitel sonst darüber nehmen, falls ich sie nicht geradezu erfabeln wollte?"⁴⁹⁶ With the introduction of Pelz's biographical activity into the narrative, the biographer must substitute in the place of an absence a doubling: by having to narrate what the biographical academy discovers about Fibel's biography – without which the entire "Werk" would otherwise become a "Wrack," with an ironically-implied tonal assonance) – the narrator finds himself thrust into the role not of the biographer, but the "Lebensbeschreiber der Lebensbeschreiber,"⁴⁹⁷ and if he wishes to follow the chronological order of the biography, he must now recapitulate what is, in fact, to be produced as a biography. As a result, the hierarchy of material presented in the novel – between primacy and secondarity, text and pre-text – unravels, and in the place of a retroactive dependence or derivation of one text from the other surfaces a perplexingly self-referential repetition as the narrated content begins to narrate the premises of the narration.

By the twenty-fourth chapter, it turns out that not only the author and narrator of the biography, but also the reader, are caught in a circular movement of reading which repeats itself again and again without end. The infinity of the text in the form of Fibel's quasi-biblical, other-worldly age (at the end of the novel, he is reported to be approximately 125 years old), whose conclusion – namely his death, and after-life – is continually deferred and postponed in the form of numerous "post-chapters" [Nachkapitel], can only be escaped by the narrator's decision to leave: as Fibel "ganz ruhig an seine Drehorgel trat" in order to continue producing more texts, the narrator frees

⁴⁹⁶ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 498.

⁴⁹⁷ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 499.

himself “von ihm wie von einem Leben los.”⁴⁹⁸ The biographer thus brings the text to its conclusion, realizes its finitude, only by freeing himself from the “life” of Fibel, while his object, Fibel, performs – like Quintus Fixlein with his slip boxes – the seemingly endless signifying process of his “Drehorgel” and thereby initiates yet another iteration of the biography. The contrast between the biographical author’s decision to bring the text to an end at an arbitrary narrative point – that is, simply by leaving – with the ostensible infinity of the text itself – the medium of writing as a phantasm – reflects the poetological inversion of the text, which through endless feedback loops and retroactive recalls catches its own process of narration in an infinite narrative loop. The narration capitulates to the overwhelming surplus of its object – the life of the scholar, Fibel, who in himself personifies the infinity of writing – and the novel *Leben Fibels* itself retraces and re-signifies this process: from the spirals of permanent self-reflexive digression, the text stumbles into the material heterogeneity of its own writing practices.

Leben Fibels is not an expertly linked together biography, nor is it really a biography in the conventional sense. Rather, it is a biography in the most literal sense of the word: a *bio-graphy*, the writing of life – the life of a scholar, the life of writing – *without end*. In *Leben Fibels*, Jean Paul gave this peculiar model of biography a name: “Papierdrache.”⁴⁹⁹ “Im *Leben Fibels* ist dieser

⁴⁹⁸ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 546.

⁴⁹⁹ There Jean Paul formulates the model of the “Papierdrache” thusly: “Leidenschaftlicher sah wohl niemand aus als ich in der ersten Stunde, wo ich das 13te Kapitel aus dem Juden-Buche ausgerissen fand, man müßte denn mich selber in der zweiten ausnehmen, wo ich die Sache dennoch bekam, als eine spielende Knapp- oder Knabschaft (es war nicht meine biographische) das Kapitel an mein Fenster steigen ließ, als Papierdrachen. Ein artiger Schicksals-Wink! Er will damit wohl sagen: so heben wir Autoren auf Papier uns sämtlich hoch genug (höher vielleicht, als unsere Bescheidenheit anerkennen will); Wind (er bedeutet das Publikum) trägt auf- und fortwärts; an der Schnur hält den Drachen ein Knabe (er soll den Kunstrichter vorstellen), welcher durch sein Leitseil dem Flugtiere die ästhetische Höhe vorschreibt” (Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 425f).

zusammengeleimt aus Fetzen einer Biographie des Helden, aus denen wieder eine neue Lebensbeschreibung entsteht – das Leben schreiben ohne Ende, ohne endgültige Gestalt.”⁵⁰⁰ As such, Jean Paul’s model of biography as “Papierdrache” would result neither in a closed work nor the representation of “lived” life, but the writing of life – and its writing – which can go on indefinitely. Thus while the irritating conflation between “gegenwärtiges Leben oder Buch”⁵⁰¹ at the beginning of the novel implies a conception of life or book, book or life, as indifferent reflections of one another, and hence that the aspiration of the biographical project would be to furnish a “whole” (life or book), the preface reveals at the same time that life and book are not wholes, but fragments, excerpts – *Auszüge* – of one another: “[d]as folgende Buch ist demnach der treue Auszug aus den 40 bruchstücklichen Bänden des Christen-Judas und meiner Jünger [...]” Hence, “[d]ie irritierende Gleichgültigkeit von *Leben* und *Buch*, in der Wendung *gegenwärtiges Leben oder Buch*, präzisiert *Leben* und *Buch* zu Auszügen *auseinander*: das ins Buch – *biblos* – verzeichnete Leben – *bios* –, das vom Leben – *bios* – durchworfene Buch – *biblos* –. Die *bruchstückliche* Lebensbeschreibung ist nicht das ins Buch gebundene Leben, *Fibels*. Sondern *Leben Fibels* [...] wird vom Vor-Kapitel her zum *Auszug* präzisiert.”⁵⁰²

By foregrounding the relationship between life and book not in terms of a hermeneutic process of relating the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts, but instead in terms of the

⁵⁰⁰ Pfothenhauer, “Das Leben schreiben,” 49. According to Pfothenhauer, Jean Paul himself, not coincidentally, had planned his last “autobiography” to be titled *Papierdrache*: “In einer Notiz zur Wochenschrift *Der Apotheker* heißt es: ‘Aufsätze kleine Bücherchen [...] *Papierdrache* betitelt.’ [...] In das Buch müsse ‘alles hineingeschrieben werden’, ‘damit nur einmal ein Ende wird mit mir und von mir.’ Es ist ein Buch des eigenen Lebens als Schreiben. Es nimmt alles auf, ‘was ich nur von Einfällen, komischen Auftritten, Bemerkungen über Menschen und Sachen und von [...] Satan und seiner Großmutter’ ‘im Pulte und im Kopfe vorrätig beherberge.’ Ein ‘wahres umgestürztes Fruchthorn’ erbe dies, ‘bei welchem das unter dem Schreiben und Erleben noch nachkommende Fallobst gar nicht einmal für etwas angeschlagen’ werde – ‘woraus allein auf eine Länge des Werks zu schließen, von dem der letzte Bogen kaum abzusehen.’ ‘Natürlich,’ so fährt Jean Paul fort, ‘wird das Werk eine Generalsalve meines ganzen Kopfes, ein Allerheiligenfest aller Gedanken, ein Polterabend, Kehraus, Chariwari aller Ideenhochzeiten’ (ibid., 57f). For more on Jean Paul’s concept of the “Papierdrache” and its relationship to his aphoristic forms of writing, see Neumann, *Ideenparadiese*, 799–803.

⁵⁰¹ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 376.

⁵⁰² Schestag, “Bibliographien für Jean Paul,” 507.

heterogeneous writing practices and scholarly techniques of fragmentation and excerpting, Jean Paul's *Leben Fibels* brings into view its own irreducible materiality in the form of the fictional scraps of paper on which it is written, which it explicitly thematizes *as remnants*, as well as the letters of the alphabet *not* as sense-making elements, but instead as arbitrary permutations of a combinatory principle of production. This fragmentary, specifically *material*, conception of the book (and/or life) which Jean Paul presents in his novel *Leben Fibels* starkly diverges in turn from contemporary idealist thought, which sought to distinguish between the corporeal and the spiritual, the material and the formal, aspects of the book – that is, to separate “spirit” from the “letter.” Thus according to Fichte's *Beweis der Unrechtmässigkeit des Büchernachdrucks* (1793):

Wir können an einem Buche zweierlei unterscheiden: das *Körperliche* desselben, das bedruckte Papier; und sein *Geistiges*. Das Eigenthum des ersteren geht durch den Verkauf des Buches unwidersprechlich auf den Käufer über. [...] Dieses Geistige ist nemlich wieder einzutheilen: in das *Materielle*, den Inhalt des Buches, die Gedanken, die es vorträgt; und in die *Form* dieser Gedanken, die Art wie, die Verbindung in welcher, die Wendungen und die Worte, mit denen es sie vorträgt.⁵⁰³

Against Fichte's conception of the book which privileges its spiritual, i.e., formal dimension as “intellectual property,” *Leben Fibels* opens up instead a perspective of inversion between the corporeal and the spiritual, the letter and the spirit by continually dismantling and unbinding of loose sheets of “paper waste” [Makulatur] stored in Fibel's “Gewürzladen” from the spines of the book

⁵⁰³ J. G. Fichte, *Beweis der Unrechtmässigkeit des Büchernachdrucks*, in: *Fichte-Gesamtausgabe*, I/1, 410. The fact that Fibel's authorship is based above all on the act of plagiarism (cf. Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 373) suggests another way in which *Leben Fibels* satirically undermines Fichte's moral defense of Prussian copyright laws: “Jeder hat seinen eigenen Ideengang, seine besondere Art sich Begriffe zu machen, und sie unter einander zu verbinden [...]. Alles was wir uns denken sollen, müssen wir uns nach der Analogie unsrer übrigen Denken denken; und bloß durch dieses Verarbeiten fremder Gedanken [...] werden sie die unsrigen [...]. [...] Da nun reine Ideen ohne sinnliche Bilder sich nicht einmal denken, vielweniger Andern darstellen lassen, so muß freilich jeder Schriftsteller seinen Gedanken eine gewisse Form geben, und kann ihnen keine andere geben als die seinige, weil er keine andere hat; aber er kann durch die Bekanntmachung seiner Gedanken gar nicht Willens sein, auch diese *Form* gemein zu machen; denn niemand kann seine Gedanken sich zueignen, ohne dadurch dass er ihre Form verändere. Die letztere also bleibt auf immer sein ausschliessendes Eigenthum” (Fichte, *Fichte-Gesamtausgabe*, I/1, 412, cited in Dembeck, “Fichte dem Buchstaben nach auslegen,” 129).

– a perspective which Jean Paul calls humor. By coupling Fibel’s book to the discourse of philosophical idealism as the “Wissenschaftslehre jeder Wissenschaftslehre,” or the divine “Buch der Bücher,” humor as “inverted sublime” is not so much a representational technique of circularity as a form of reflection which foregrounds the decoupling of the epistemological from the material in idealist thought, for which the conception of language still remains primarily an instrumental one, whereby words are perceived as the mere carriers of underlying thoughts or ideas, without reflecting on their sensual materiality as Fibel and “Jean Paul” do.

Consisting of fragments, excerpts and remnants of paper, “Trümmern von historischen Quellen,” which cannot be brought to together or unified into a whole – whether life or book, book or life – the novel begins to turn in on itself as a biographical “Drehorgel,” which continually “sich umdreht[.]”⁵⁰⁴ Through the perpetual deferral of an end, it leaves itself open and incomplete as a book about the writing of a book, a collection of papers presented to readers in the form of a courier. Here the numerous references to the serial technique of “binding” or “linking” [binden] – the golden ring as “Angebände”; Fibel’s mother’s “unbinding” [entbinden] of her stillborn twins in the grotesque scene of birth at the beginning of the novel; and the proliferation of hyphens, *Gedanken-* or *Bindestriche*, in Fibel’s own ABC book – can be read not only as a cue not only for the reading of the novel’s fragmentary conception of language, but also for the bodily moment in language that links together mother and child, orality and writing. Jean Paul’s final idyll, one could say, necessarily entails the production and serialization of corpses – of “stillborns” and the “stillendes Still-Leben” of the material scraps of paper on which the biography itself is written. By bringing the narrative form of the series and the metalepsis of the hermeneutic process together, the motifs of binding, connecting, gluing, and linking simultaneously reveal how the novel seeks in

⁵⁰⁴ Jean Paul, *Werke*, I/6, 538.

various ways to “unbind” itself from the discourse network around 1800, while also unbinding from the infinity of sheets of paper that constitute Fibel’s life from the medial closure of the “volume” [Band], the book, which contains them – as if with his novel Jean Paul “versucht habe, das Buch über die Grenzen des Buches hinauszutreiben, als ob seine Bücher Experimente mit der Diskursform Buch wären [...]. Als ob das Buch als Form nicht genüge und immer seine fertige Gestalt verfehle, wuchert Jean Pauls Schreiben über die Ränder der Bücher hinaus.”⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁵ Schäfer, “Jean Pauls monströses Schreiben,” 221.

CHAPTER III. GOETHE

1. INTRODUCTION: EXPERIMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS

In the previous chapters on Jean Paul, I explored the myriad ways in which certain “forms of life,” namely the life of the scholar, and certain practices of writing, namely different scholarly techniques of writing and reading, gain epistemological as well as poetological significance in the context of Jean Paul’s transformation and reworking of the conventions of the idyllic genre. There it was argued that the seemingly capricious manner in which his texts are composed concerns above all a poetology of contingency; it is under the signs of contingency and play, in other words, that his texts present the lives of scholars and their discursive practices, and they do so above all through the exposition of their own fragmentariness and material heterogeneity. The key word for this poetic procedure, as I argued throughout those chapters, is what Jean Paul refers to as humor, the form of the “inverted sublime,” which in his *oeuvre* serves as the privileged material strategy for bringing into view the small, fragmentary, and heterogeneous.

The transition to the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), which occupy the focus of the following chapters, might thus strike readers as something of a forced and unnatural pairing of the disparate, to paraphrase Jean Paul’s own definition of the concept of wit. To be sure, any attempt to draw an unmediated connection between Jean Paul’s and Goethe’s disparate works presents numerous obvious obstacles. Was it not precisely Goethe, after all, who – in addition to Hegel – denounced in an exemplary fashion Jean Paul’s aesthetics, referring to his novel *Hesperus* as “ein Tragelaph von der ersten Sorte,”⁵⁰⁶ and who, furthermore, frequently

⁵⁰⁶ Emil Staiger, ed., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Schiller* (Frankfurt a. M. 1966), 110.

complained of “Gehirnkrämpfe von dem Werfen aus einer Wissenschaft in die andere”⁵⁰⁷ in Jean Paul’s texts? It should be noted, however, that by 1819 Goethe had significantly revised his earlier assessment of Jean Paul’s work; for in the two-page essay entitled “Vergleichung,” which he included in the *Noten und Abhandlungen zum besseren Verständnis* appended to the first edition of the *West-östlicher Divan*, Goethe now indicates mild praise for Jean Paul.⁵⁰⁸

While this fleeting remark, in which Goethe now alludes positively to Jean Paul’s work, is perhaps of mere biographical interest, it is nonetheless significant, as I will seek to demonstrate in the course of the following pages, in that represents a gradual yet decisive shift in Goethe’s conceptions of authorship, work, and literary form more broadly. In other words, while the early Goethe of Weimar Classicism and *Sturm und Drang* still held fast to a conception of author as genius and of the work as an indivisible “aesthetic unity” that could conceivably be brought to completion, this is no longer the case, I argue, for the late Goethe of *Faust II* and the *Wanderjahre*. As was the case with Jean Paul, the motivations behind this shift have little to do with stylistic idiosyncrasy or with the decline of literary quality wrought by senility and old age, as traditional interpretations have put forth, but are in fact intimately intertwined with a fundamental rethinking of the notion of form during Goethe’s later phase of writing. Furthermore, the seeds for this decisive shift in perspective, it will be argued, are to be found not so much in Goethe’s literary works as they are in his writings on natural science. One could perhaps say briefly and

⁵⁰⁷ Cited in Gerhard Fiegurth, *Jean Paul. Begegnungen mit Zeitgenossen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1964), 37. Jean Paul himself reports Goethe’s remark in a letter to Christian Otto dated January 17, 1798.

⁵⁰⁸ Curiously, Goethe came to praise Jean Paul’s way of writing through the prism of oriental literature and language – that is, the quintessential “Other” of Western European aesthetics: “Allerdings zeugen, um von der Persönlichkeit anzufangen, die Werke des genannten Freundes [Jean Paul – B.K.] von einem verständigen, umschauenden, einsichtigen, unterrichteten, ausgebildeten und dabei wohlwollenden, frommen Sinne. Ein so begabter Geist blickt, nach eigentlichst orientalischer Weise, munter und kühn in seiner Welt umher, erschafft die seltsamsten Bezüge, verknüpft das Unverträgliche, jedoch dergestalt, daß ein geheimer ethischer Faden sich mitschlinge, wodurch das Ganze zu einer gewissen Einheit geleitet wird” (Goethe, MA, I/11, 190).

preliminarily that it was Goethe's confrontation with the irreducible heterogeneity and plurality of objects in nature that made possible his break with the dominant aesthetic conventions and what accounts, in turn, for what Adorno refers to as the "overabundance of material" in his late works.⁵⁰⁹

As in the immediately preceding chapters on Jean Paul, then, the focus of the following chapters will likewise be on the nexus of "forms of life" and discursive practices. Here, however, it is no longer a question of the life of the scholar and the idiosyncratic repurposing of scholarly techniques of writing and reading, but the practices of observation and inscription developed in Goethe's literary and scientific works, in particular his *Notebooks on Morphology* and late prose piece *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden*, and the forms of life – worldly as well as other-worldly – in their mutual interactions that will be explored and examined. This entails an analysis of both the practices and methods underlying Goethe's morphological studies – what I refer to in the first chapter as the "morphological" or "anamorphic" gaze – as well as the related role of collection in Goethe's work as a serial method of comparison and composition. Through this analysis, it will be shown how, on the one hand, Goethe's theory of the experiment explodes the distinction between first and second order observation, and relatedly between subject and object, from within. This leads, in turn, to the proliferation of the materiality of the experimental system: traces, sketches, and drafts. On the other hand, it will be shown how contingency and death come to attain central significance in Goethe's literary and scientific writings, reflected above all

⁵⁰⁹ Adorno's remarks from his astonishing yet largely overlooked essay from 1937 on Beethoven's "late style" [Spätstil] are exemplary in this respect: "The power of subjectivity in the late works of art is the irascible gesture with which it takes leave of the works themselves. It breaks their bonds, not in order to express itself, but in order, expressionless, to cast off the appearance of art. Of the works themselves it leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself, like a cipher, only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself. Touched by death, the hand of the master sets free the masses of material that he used to form; its tears and fissures, witnesses to the finite powerlessness of the I confronted with Being, are its final work. Hence the overabundance of material in *Faust II* and in the *Wanderjahre*, hence the conventions that are no longer penetrated and mastered by subjectivity, but simply left to stand" (Theodor W. Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven," in: idem., *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002], 564–68, here: 566).

in his shift away from the paradigm of *Bildung* toward the theory of the spiral tendency as a universal pathology of nature.

In the second chapter, it will be argued this intensification of contingency and seriality in Goethe's practice of experimentation has significant repercussions for his conception of literary form. By using the example of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, it will be shown how the morphological gaze, which brings form and inform into connection – in other words, the visual perspective of anamorphosis – and the medium of text interact in Goethe's late novel. There the intermedial mediation of narration through what critics have termed its “archive fiction,” as well as the inclusion of the mysterious cosmological figure of Makarie in the novel's second edition, which Goethe likens to the spiral tendency in plant life – all point in different ways to a fundamental rethinking of the novel as a form: a shift, that is, away from the model of the *Bildungsroman* toward something far more heterogeneous, open, and fragmentary, or what Goethe called an “aggregate.”⁵¹⁰ With the novel as aggregate, authorship is transformed into the collective of editors, while the discursive unity of the book is dissolved into the collective form of the notebook, the *Heft*, into which all different kinds of text-material can be inserted.

As is well-known, it was Goethe's announcement of the discovery of the intermaxillary bone in animals and humans in 1784 that paved the way for the lifelong endeavor to establish a “new science” [neue Wissenschaft] which he called morphology, “die Lehre von der Gestalt, der Bildung und Umbildung der organischen Körper.”⁵¹¹ Since their publication, his writings on morphology – collectively entitled *Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt, besonders zur Morphologie, Erfahrung, Betrachtung, Folgerung, durch Lebensereignisse verbunden* (1817–20) – have posed

⁵¹⁰ See Goethe's letter to J. F. Rochlitz on July 28th, 1829, in: *Goethes Briefe*, ed. Karl Robert Mandelkow (Hamburg 1967), vol. 4, 339.

⁵¹¹ Goethe, “Betrachtung einer Morphologie überhaupt,” in: FA, I/24, 365.

extraordinary challenges to Goethe scholars as well as historians of science. The challenges lie not only in the difficulty of reconstructing the scientific theories and methods underlying Goethe's science of morphology, but also in the extremely heterogeneous text-constellation in which they appear. Rather than ordering the formidable ensemble of essays, sketches, tables, illustrations, and reviews that comprise his morphological "notebooks" [Hefte] into a cohesive, unified whole, Goethe chose instead to publish them in the form of a "draft" [Entwurf], referring to his *Notebooks on Morphology* not as a "work" [Werk] but as a "fragmentary collection" [fragmentarische Sammlung] of non-chronologically ordered "sketches" [Skizzen].⁵¹² As Goethe later remarked in the paratextual "Interjection" [Zwischenrede] inserted into his morphological notebooks, here the parts do not add up to a whole – "konnten [...] nimmermehr zur Einheit gediehen."⁵¹³ Because he published his notebooks in a more or less formless and unordered fashion, many of whose individual texts lack dates, Goethe's *Notebooks on Morphology* have given rise over the years to numerous competing and conflicting editions, all of which attempt to 'tame' in various ways – either by imposing a thematic order or by attempting to determine the dates of composition of

⁵¹² Goethe, "Das Unternehmen wird entschuldigt," in: FA, I/24, 390. Here Goethe implicitly contrasts the concept of "work" with that of "fragment," with the ostensible difference falling on that of closure and completion. For a broader clarification of Goethe's conception of work, see Dorothea Kuhn's commentary in the Leopoldina Edition of his *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft* in: Goethe, *Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*, Abt. II: Ergänzungen und Erläuterungen, vol. 9, Part B: *Zur Morphologie. Von 1796 bis 1815*, ed. Dorothea Kuhn [Weimar 1986], 504f). See also: Safia Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft. Goethes Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre und die Hefte Zur Morphologie* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), in particular 27–33.

⁵¹³ The full passage reads: "Nachstehende Aufsätze sind ebensowenig als die vorhergehenden für Teile eines ganzen schriftstellerischen Werkes anzusehen. Nach abwechselnden Ansichten, unter dem Einflusse entgegengesetzter Gemütsstimmungen verfaßt, zu verschiedenen Zeiten niedergeschrieben, konnte sie nimmermehr zur Einheit gediehen" (Goethe, FA, I/24, 441). He then goes on to explain why a chronological ordering of his texts would be impossible: "Die Jahrzahl läßt sich nicht hinzufügen, teils weil sie nicht immer bemerkt war, teils weil ich, gegen meine eigenen Papiere mich als Redakteur verhaltend, das Überflüssige und manches Unbehagliche daraus verbannen durfte. [...] Und so können diese Hefte denn doch, als Teile eines menschlichen Lebens, für Zeugnisse gelten, durch wie vielerlei Zustände derjenige sich durcharbeiten hat" (ibid.). Despite the gaps and inconsistencies in the *Notebooks on Morphology*, Goethe nevertheless insists that a certain interconnectedness persists through metonymic links. In her monograph on the *Wanderjahre*, entitled *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*, Safia Azzouni describes this inner principle as "morphological," and goes on to show how the collective form of the "notebook" and the figure of the "redactor" in the *Notebooks* gain poetological and epistemological significance in relation to Goethe's late novel (cf. Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*, esp. 106–29).

individual texts in order to bring them into chronological order – the disturbing heterogeneity in which Goethe originally released his writings to the public.⁵¹⁴ Thus in stark contrast to *Zur Farbenlehre* (1810), which assumes a far more systematic form and for this reason may indeed be deemed a “work” in the sense of a closed, unified whole, the formlessness and contingency that characterize the *Notebooks* make them into one of Goethe’s most heterogeneous publications.

While literary critics and Goethe philologists have troubled themselves regarding the problematic form of the notebooks and their unclear relation to Goethe’s literary productivity, historians of science have tended to stress the importance of the discursive context of Goethe’s morphological project, pointing to the fact that its beginnings coincide with a major epistemic break in the natural sciences, namely with the decline of the older field of natural history and the subsequent emergence of the modern field of biology.⁵¹⁵ In his role as a natural scientist, Goethe tends to be viewed from this perspective as a kind of threshold figure in the history of the sciences, representing a transitional moment between the ‘classical’ and ‘modern’ epistemé, and relatedly between the ‘romantic perspective’ in the sciences and the modern, empirical knowledge-regime of scientific observation, which placed greater emphasis on anonymity and objectivity in the

⁵¹⁴ Whereas the Leopoldina edition proceeds thematically, Dorothea Kuhn opted for chronology in both the Frankfurt and Hamburg editions in order to render more comprehensible to readers the scattered ideas and heterogenous order of texts presented in the original: “Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft im allgemeinen sind in chronologischer Folge gegeben. Auf diese Weise wird sowohl ihre Einheitlichkeit als auch die Befestigung und Erweiterung der Gedankengänge deutlich” (Dorothea Kuhn, “Nachwort,” in: Goethe, *Werke*, HA [Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981], Bd. 13: *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften I*, ed. Dorothea Kuhn, 563).

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Wolf Lepenies, *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte. Wandel kultureller Selbstverständlichkeit in den Wissenschaften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Hanser Verlag, 1976). For more on the broader philosophical significance of this epistemic break around 1800, see also: Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life. Teleology and Mechanics in Nineteenth Century German Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), in particular 156–94; Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life. Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), in particular 407–502. For recent scholarship on the interactions between the fields of science and literature around 1800, see Armen Avanessian, Winfried Menninghaus, and Jan Völker (eds.), *Vita aesthetica. Szenarien ästhetischer Lebendigkeit* (Zürich/Berlin: diaphenes, 2009).

realms of scientific authorship and experimentation.⁵¹⁶ These tensions and ambiguities arise in part from the fact that in his writings on natural science Goethe attempted to transcend the divide between the arts and sciences just at the time when they were beginning to considerably diverge from one another. Not only did he insert numerous elegies and other kinds of poems alongside his scientific treatises in order to stress their underlying continuity, but elsewhere in his *Notebooks on Morphology* he explicitly addresses the split between the arts and sciences by reflecting on the misunderstandings surrounding the publication and reception of his own scientific treatises by both the artistic and scientific communities.⁵¹⁷

In addition, Goethe often refuses to stake out claims that would explicitly situate him within a specific scientific camp or school of thought. While he hardly abstains from polemical engagements with other scientists in his writings on natural science, he seldom took a

⁵¹⁶ As both Michel Foucault and Wolf Lepenies have argued, the epistemic break in the natural sciences from natural history to biology did not rest so much on the empirical validity of scientific claims as it did on changing paradigms of scientific authorship around 1800 (see Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald Bouchard [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981], 113–38, in particular 125–27; Lepenies, *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte*, 52–77). It is from the perspective of competing forms of authorship – scientific and literary – that Dorothea von Mücke reads Goethe’s *Notebooks on Morphology*, arguing that it “must be read in two respects: on the one hand, it can be understood as yet another attempt to communicate what he considered his essential insight, namely, his concept of metamorphosis as a model for understanding change in nature; on the other hand, it must also be understood as an investigation of, and commentary on, the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge, a reflection on scientific authorship in analogy with, and distinction from, literary authorship” (Dorothea von Mücke, “Goethe’s Metamorphosis: Changing Forms in Nature, the Life Sciences, and Authorship,” in: *Representations* 95:1 [2006], 27–53, here: 30).

⁵¹⁷ In addition to his inclusion of poems such as “Urworte. Orphisch” and “Howard’s Ehrengedächtnis,” Goethe also emphasizes the co-origination of the sciences and arts: “Man vergaß, daß Wissenschaft sich aus Poesie entwickelt habe, man bedachte nicht, daß nach einem Umschwung von Zeiten, beide sich wieder freundlich zu beiderseitigem Vorteil, auf höherer Stelle gar wohl wieder begegnen könnten” (Goethe, FA, I/24, 420). In that section of the metamorphosis essay, entitled “Fate of the Printed Text” [Schicksal der Druckschrift], he narrates his exclusion from the scientific debates on botany by established scientists who considered him a mere layperson on account of his poetic authorship. He goes on to relay an anecdote about how a friend of his, a fellow artist, found himself in the presence of a gathering of scientists who had convened to read and discuss Goethe’s essay on the metamorphosis of plants. Distressed at the expressions of skepticism and confusion from the scientists, and wanting to rescue Goethe from being misunderstood, the friend intervened to point out to the ignorant audience: “Der Verfasser, sagte derselbe, hat eine eigene, verborgene Absicht, die ich aber vollkommen deutlich einsehe, er will den Künstler lehren wie sprossende und rankende Blumenverzierungen zu erfinden sind, nach Art und Weise der Alten in fortschreitender Bewegung” (Goethe, “Schicksal der Druckschrift,” in: FA, I/24, 419). While this anecdote appears like a harmless aside, Goethe implicitly criticizes with it a situation in which the fields of the arts and sciences have been constructed as two mutually incompatible domains.

straightforward position in the most important debates of his time, as for example in the reproductive debates between the supporters of preformation and epigenesis, which were in many respects decisive for the “discourse network” around 1800.⁵¹⁸ Quite to the contrary, he tends to oscillate between seemingly incompatible systems of thought, a fact which he did not attempt to hide from readers, referring to the often divergent theoretical positions and conflicting scientific claims which appear side by side in his writings as a “Schaukelsystem.”⁵¹⁹

It thus remains an open question as to whether Goethe’s morphology, by taking up the inherent multitude and heterogeneity of nature and its objects without recourse to a speculative system, anticipates modern scientific forms of knowledge, or whether it harkens back instead to a premodern, “mythopoetic” or anthropocentric conception of nature, as Hans Blumenberg among others has argued.⁵²⁰ With his mystical metaphor of the “mind’s eye” [das geistige Auge] and insistence on the possibility of a “third kind of knowledge” – a so-called “intuiting judgment”

⁵¹⁸ See, for instance, Goethe’s remarks on preformation and epigenesis in his 1817/18 essay on Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s concept of the *Bildungstrieb* in the *Notebooks on Morphology*. There Goethe expresses his dissatisfaction with both theories: preformation is “distasteful” to any “educated person,” while epigenesis cannot relinquish the need to conceive of an origin. “Kehren wir in das Feld der Philosophie zurück und betrachten Evolution und Epigenese nochmals, so scheinen dies Worte zu sein, mit denen wir uns nur hinhalten. Die Einschachtelungslehre wird freilich einem Höhengebildeten gar bald widerlich, aber bei der Lehre eines Auf- und Annehmend wird doch immer ein Aufnehmendes und Aufzunehmendes vorausgesetzt, und wenn wir keine Präformation denken mögen, so kommen wir auf eine Prädelineation, Prädetermination, auf ein Prästabilieren, und wie das allein heißen mag was vorausgehen müßte bis wir etwas gewahr werden könnten” (Goethe, MA, 12, 101). For more on the significance of the preformation-epigenesis debates for literature and philosophy in the nineteenth century, cf. Helmut Müller-Sievers, *Self-Generation. Biology, Philosophy, and Literature Around 1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); idem., *Epigenesis. Naturphilosophie im Sprachdenken Wilhelm von Humboldts* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1993), in particular 89–115. See also: Jocelyn Holland, *German Romanticism and Science: The Procreative Poetics of Goethe, Novalis, and Ritter* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Timothy Lenoir, “Kant, Blumenbach, and Vital Materialism in German Biology,” in: *Isis* 71, Nr. 256 (1980), 77–108.

⁵¹⁹ “Es ist z.B. die Frage: ob man eine gewisse Einheit an der die Mannigfaltigkeit sichtbar ist aus schon vorhandenem Mannigfaltigen Zusammengesetzten erklären oder aus einer produktiven Einheit entwickelt ansehen und annehmen wolle. [...] [G]enau besehen aber findet sich immer daß der Mensch dasjenige voraussetzt was er gefunden hat, und dasjenige findet was er voraussetzt. Der Naturforscher als Philosoph darf sich nicht schämen sich in diesem Schaukelsystem hin und her zu bewegen und da wo die wissenschaftliche Welt sich nicht versteht sich selbst zu verständigen” (Goethe, “Nachträge zur Metamorphose der Pflanze,” in: FA, I/24, 700–14, here: 708).

⁵²⁰ Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt a.M. 1979); idem., *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt a.M. 1983), in particular 214–32.

[anschauende Urteilskraft] or *scientia intuitiva*,⁵²¹ whereby one may be able to achieve an intuitive, that is, non-discursive, understanding of nature as a whole, the possibility of which Kant had raised in the third *Critique* only to reject⁵²² – as well as his frequent recourse to the vocabulary of “primordial types” [Urtypen] and “primordial phenomena” [Urphänomenen], terms which appear to be dependent on a Platonic distinction between (supersensible) archetypes and (sensible) appearances,⁵²³ the task of assessing the “modernity” or “pre-modernity” of Goethe’s morphology remains an admittedly challenging one and has been a recurrent theme in Goethe scholarship ever since the publication of his *Notebooks on Morphology*.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Cf. Goethe, “Anschauende Urteilskraft,” in: FA, I/24, 447–48. For more on the philosophical significance of the trope of the “mind’s eye” in Goethe’s writings and the broader philosophical tradition, see Eckart Förster, “Goethe and the ‘Auge des Geistes,’” in: *DVjs* 75.1 (2001), 87–101. For Goethe’s theory of intuitive knowledge, see idem., *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie. Eine systematische Rekonstruktion* (Frankfurt a. M. 2011); Frederick Amrine, “Goethean Intuitions,” in: *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2001), 35–50; David E. Wellbery, “Zur Methodologie des intuitiven Verstandes,” in: *Übergänge – diskursiv oder intuitiv? Essays zu Eckart Försters Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie*, eds. Johannes Haag/Markus Wild (Frankfurt a.M. 2013), 259–74. For literary-theoretical approaches to this topic, cf. Jonas Maatsch (ed.), *Morphologie und Moderne: Goethes ‘anschauliches Denken’ in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Sibylle Peters/Martin Jörg Schäfer (eds.), *Intellektuelle Anschauung. Figurationen von Evidenz zwischen Kunst und Wissen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006).

⁵²² For more on this point, cf. Förster, “Die Bedeutung von §§ 76, 77 der *Kritik der Urteilskraft* für die Entwicklung der nachkantischen Philosophie,” in: *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 56 (2002), 169–90.

⁵²³ While Goethe rarely references Plato in his *Notebooks on Morphology* – in fact, the term “morphology” itself appears instead to draw explicitly on the Aristotelian term for matter, *morphē* – the quasi-Platonic rhetoric of “archetypes” was widespread in eighteenth-century scientific discourse, and referred to the practice of collecting type specimens, which represented an attempt to stabilize the heterogeneity and imperfection of empirical manifestations of individual species. According to Lorraine Daston, this is exactly what Goethe had in mind with his notion of “pure phenomena”: “What Goethe theorized, a myriad of less contemplative naturalists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries practiced; they sought to condense and integrate a legion of individual impressions into a ‘true’ representation, in both words and images, of the natural kind in question” (Lorraine Daston, “Type Specimens and Scientific Memory,” in: *Critical Inquiry*, 31.1 [2004], 153–82, here: 167). What Daston overlooks in her otherwise persuasive essay, however, is the tremendous gap which separates Goethe from Linnaeus, who had extraordinarily different views as to what constitutes an ‘ideal’ or ‘primordial’ type. Another reading of the re-emergence of neoplatonic rhetoric in the sciences during this period is suggested by Hans Blumenberg, who argues that the “appeal to Plato is also one of the rhetorical means employed by a kind of science that, by its own self-assessment, is no longer Aristotelian – that is, is post-Scholastic – and that credits itself with a different art of translating the language of nature than that of conceptual abstraction” (Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World* [Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987], 410). Blumenberg then goes on to quote Goethe as an exemplar of this rhetorical strategy: “In order to escape into simplicity again from the boundless manifoldness, compartmentalization, and complexity of modern natural science, one must always ask oneself the question: How would Plato have acted toward nature as it may now appear to us, in, with all of its fundamental unity, a greater multiplicity?” (ibid.).

⁵²⁴ For more on the tension between the antiquity and modernity of Goethe’s concept of “living nature” in his scientific writings, see Hartmut Böhme, “Lebendige Natur. Wissenschaftskritik, Naturforschung und allegorische Hermetik bei Goethe,” in: *Natur und Subjekt* (Frankfurt a.M. 1988), 145–78.

Perhaps the most prominent reading in favor of the modernity of Goethe's morphology can be found in the work of the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, who attempted to problematize anew and resolve this question in the context of the philosophical debates on form and life at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵²⁵ In Goethe's writings on natural science, Cassirer finds a distinctly modern – if still only implicit formulated – conception of “nature,” and of “life” more broadly.⁵²⁶ For Cassirer, Goethe's concern with living forms in nature is not to be understood as an exclusively scientific one, however, but rather as an expression of a more fundamental form-problematic. Thus in his essay “Der Naturforscher Goethe,” he stresses the profound continuity between Goethe's “künstlerischen und wissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit.”⁵²⁷ As he argues, the central question which motivates Goethe's morphology is how to comprehend nature as both a law-abiding unity and, at the same time, think the plurality and multiplicity of its forms together. From this perspective, Cassirer claims that for Goethe all form is said to be “nur als lebendige Form zu denken und zu verstehen.”⁵²⁸ Accordingly, Goethe's morphological form-concept is not to be confused with the fixity and stasis of *Gestalt*, nor with the older “edeitic” conception of form as a principle of order, enclosure, and containment of “material.”⁵²⁹ Against the Scholastic and idealist traditions, which inherited the Aristotelian distinction between *morphē* (form, idea) and *hylē* (content, matter),

⁵²⁵ Other prominent figures in these debates included Georg Simmel and Ludwig Wittgenstein, both of whom made use of Goethe's concept of morphology for their own ends. For recent scholarship on the significance of Goethe's morphology for twentieth-century considerations of form and life, see Eva Geulen, *Aus dem Leben der Form. Goethe und die Nager: Auch eine Einführung in die Morphologie* (Berlin: August Verlag, forthcoming 2016).

⁵²⁶ Cf. Ernst Cassirer, “Goethe”, in: idem., *Freiheit und Form. Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, 216–67. See also: Cassirer, “Der Naturforscher Goethe,” in: idem., *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften (1932–1935), Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Birgit Recki, vol. 18 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2009), 437–41.

⁵²⁷ Cassirer, “Der Naturforscher Goethe,” 437.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 438.

⁵²⁹ “Betrachten wir aber alle Gestalten, besonders die organischen, so finden wir, daß nirgend ein Bestehendes, nirgend ein Ruhendes, ein Abgeschlossenes vorkommt, sondern daß vielmehr alles in einer steten Bewegung schwanke. Daher unsere Sprache das Wort Bildung sowohl von dem Hervorgebrachten, als von dem Hervorgebrachtwerdenden gehörig genug zu brauchen pflegt. Wollen wir also eine Morphologie einleiten, so dürfen wir nicht von Gestalt sprechen [...]” (Goethe, “Die Absicht eingeleitet,” in: FA, I/24, 391–95, here: 392).

Goethe seeks to describe natural phenomena in processual terms of change, transformation, and flux; hence he uses dynamic language such as “Bildung,” “Verwandlung,” and “Umwandlung” in order to reflect the inherent mutability, vitality, and plurality of the heterogeneous forms in nature: “Die Gestalt ist ein bewegliches, ein werdendes, ein vergehendes. Gestaltenlehre ist Verwandlungslehre.”⁵³⁰ As a result of his morphological insight, phenomena which the sciences of the time still viewed as too formless, contingent, and fleeting come to play a central role in Goethe’s morphology; for Goethe, such forms are no longer seen as formless or deformed deviations from the norm or ideal, and hence excluded from scientific inquiry, but come to be understood as moments of a more general form-process.⁵³¹

While Goethe hardly speaks of the role of the scientific observer in his *Notebooks on Morphology*, the conception of form which he presents in those texts would have been unthinkable – to paraphrase Walter Benjamin – without a corresponding transformation in the medium of perception.⁵³² As recent scholarship in the field of historical epistemology has demonstrated, what begins to take place around 1800 is a repositioning of the observer, outside of the fixed relations of interior and exterior presupposed by the camera obscura paradigm of vision, which sought to

⁵³⁰ Goethe, “Morphologie,” in: FA, I/24, 349.

⁵³¹ For more on Goethe’s transformation of the relation of form to idea around 1800, cf. Wellbery, “Form und Idee. Skizze eines Begriffsfeldes um 1800.” According to Wellbery, “[n]icht bloß in einer klassizistischen Privilegierung der formalen Elemente liegt die ästhetische Relevanz des Morphologiekonzepts, sondern in einer epochalen Transformation des Formbegriffs selbst. Die Einführung des morphologischen Konzepts auf dem Gebiet der Kunsttheorie zeitigt einen semantischen Wandel und bringt ein neues Verständnis von ästhetischer Form hervor” (ibid., 18). Wellbery then goes on to sketch out three different possible concepts of form around 1800 and 1900, which include an eidetic form-concept, an endogenes form-concept, and a constructivist form-concept, the second of which he ascribes to Goethe: “*Endogenes Formkonzept*: Form als Prozess des Sich-Herausbildens im Zusammenspiel von Varianz und Invarianz; das Verhältnis von Form und Materie wird nichts als Opposition, sondern als Durchdringung konzipiert; Gegensatzwerte sind nunmehr die verfestigte, tote, äußerliche Form sowie die Abstraktion; Reproduktion wird als Hervorbringung/Zeugung/Bildung begriffen” (ibid., 19).

⁵³² “Und wenn Veränderungen im Medium der Wahrnehmung [...] sich als Verfall der Aura begreifen lassen, so kann man dessen gesellschaftliche Bedingungen aufzeigen” (Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in: idem., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I [Frankfurt a.M. 1980], 479).

delimit nature from representation, object from experience.⁵³³ This reconfiguration between observing subject and observed phenomena is decisive for Goethe's morphology. There observer and observed are no longer relegated to ontologically distinct spheres, but belong to one and the same undemarcated plane. Such a reorganization of perception and its objects demanded in turn an entirely new semantics as well as new representational models in the field of natural science, for once objects of nature are located in time rather than in a timeless exterior world, the fixed and static taxonomies inherited from Newton in the field of optics and Linnaeus in botany are no longer adequate to the profusion of forms in nature, which are now perceived as being in a state of constant transformation, transition, and change.⁵³⁴

Thus in the text entitled "Schicksal der Druckschrift," which Goethe appended to his essay on the metamorphosis of plants, not only does he relate how he came up with his theory of metamorphosis, his own innovative approach to change in nature, but he also focuses on the difficulties he had in applying the classificatory system of Linnaeus. He introduces the narrative of how he was led to overhaul the Linnaean paradigm of cataloging existent nature with a reference to his

⁵³³ For recent scholarship in the field of historical epistemology which sheds new light on changes in the techniques of scientific observation in the nineteenth-century, especially with respect to Goethe, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York/London: Zone Books, 2010); as well as Jonathon Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990). As Crary argues, scientific and philosophical thought prior to the nineteenth century conceived of perception in a manner largely inherited from Descartes, for whom the absolute division between interiorized subject and exterior world, between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, functioned as a "pre-given condition of knowledge of the latter" (Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 46). This older paradigm of perception – what Crary calls the "camera obscura model of vision," an optical regime that delimited nature from representation, object from image – designates precisely the Cartesian quest to found human knowledge on a purely objective view of the world, which would in turn "allow[] the subject to guarantee and police the correspondence between exterior and interior representation and to exclude anything disorderly or unruly. Reflective introspection overlaps with a regime of self-discipline" (ibid., 48).

⁵³⁴ According to Daston and Galison, Goethe's approach to nature neither abides by modern science's concept of mechanical objectivity nor thinks that the subject can ever be jettisoned from scientific inquiry altogether. As Daston and Galison argue, such a notion of objectivity which fully dispenses with the subject – what they refer to as "aperceptival objectivity" or the "ethos of interchangeable and therefore featureless observer" (Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 609) – would have been unthinkable in Goethe's time and does not begin to emerge until the mid-nineteenth century. That concept of objectivity coincides instead with the emergence of German Realism.

own travels as well as his acquaintance with the botanist Karl Batsch, who had made him aware of the limitations of “books and gardens” when it came to the infinite variety of burgeoning life-forms in the various environments of wild nature.⁵³⁵ His insistence – at least retrospectively in that text – on the irreducibly temporal character of the life-forms in nature, as well as his resistance to their conceptual fixation through abstract taxonomic systems, leads him to criticize in turn the naturalist doctrine of Linnaeus and his students and to characterize their classificatory enterprise as fundamentally misconceived. Thus he compares them to

Gesetzgeber [...], die, weniger bekümmert um das was ist, als das was sein sollte, keineswegs die Natur und das Bedürfnis der Staatsbürger beachten, sondern vielmehr die schwere Aufgabe zu lösen bemüht sind: wie so viele unbändige, von heraus grenzenlose Wesen zusammen einigermassen bestehen könnten. [...] Da konnte mir denn ein ruhiger, bescheidener Blick sogleich die Einsicht gewähren, daß ein ganzes Leben erforderlich sei, um die unendlich freie Lebenstätigkeit eines einzigen Naturreichs zu überschauen und zu ordnen, gesetzt auch ein eingebornes Talent berechtige, begeistere hiezu. Dabei fühlte ich aber daß für mich noch ein anderer Weg sein möchte, analog meinem übrigen Lebensgange. Die Erscheinungen des Wandeln und Umwandeln organischer Geschöpfe hatten mich mächtig ergriffen, Einbildungskraft und Natur schienen hier mit einander zu wetteifern, wer verwegener und konsequenter zu verfahren wisse.⁵³⁶

In this passage, Goethe argues that Linnaeus and his students are more concerned with “what ought to be” [was sein sollte] than what is, preferring rather to govern and subdue nature’s heterogeneity according to pre-established laws and rules than to derive the latter from the former. For this reason, he contrasts their overly hasty, normative approach with his own “calm, modest gaze” [ruhiger, bescheidener Blick], thereby self-legitimizing his own opposing enterprise as one of careful, studious observation.⁵³⁷ As he goes on to explain, the fundamental disagreement between him

⁵³⁵ Cf. Goethe, “Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums” (1816–17), in: FA, I/24, 411–12.

⁵³⁶ Goethe, FA, I/24, 413.

⁵³⁷ In this way, Goethe attempts to portray himself as conforming to the new ideals of scientific authorship and knowledge-production around 1800, which coincided with the rise of the empirical sciences such as the modern field of biology. These new “epistemic virtues” consisted above all in abstaining from embellished rhetoric and expressions of authorial voice or individuality, which had been associated with natural history and came to be seen as a source of

and Linnaeus concerns not just his claim that the classificatory enterprise can never be successfully brought to an end because nature ceaselessly produces new forms; at bottom, it was the introduction of temporality as inescapable component of nature which made possible his break with Linnaeus, whom he criticizes for ignoring nature's intrinsic creativity and vitality, what he refers to as "the appearances of transformation and metamorphosis" [die Erscheinungen des Wandelns und Umwandelns] in nature. In other words, whereas the Linnaean approach, Goethe argues, is grounded in an abstract, atemporal view of nature, time for Goethe is elevated to a productive force that renders once fixed and static objects of nature in a constant state of flux, transformation, and transition.

The following chapters thus aim to show how from the unsystematic collection of texts, reflections, and theoretical insights which Goethe presents in his *Notebooks on Morphology* there emerges both a radical reconceptualization of the concept of form as "living form" – in the sense of formation and transformation –, as well as an implicit theory and practice of a "morphological gaze," whereby Goethe's epistemological method of experimentation and the generative phenomena which it seeks to bring forth and represent in a "vital" or "living" manner, reciprocally unfold. Because such a "morphological gaze" establishes no fixed opposition between method and object of nature, but rather consists in their ceaseless and indissoluble mutual reciprocity, it entails a *performance of perception*, one which lies beyond any mimetic distinction between *Urbild* and *Abbild* or of "re-presentation" – in the sense of making present through repetition an identical, objective referent. Goethe's morphology has little to do with an empirical claim of validity with respect to nature; it ceases to be constrained, either in its premises or conclusions, to this or that

embarrassment for the scientific community; in turn they sought to privilege instead anonymity, objectivity, and disinterestedness in the writing of scientific texts. For more on Goethe's discursive positioning vis-a-vis scientific authorship as well as his disagreement with Linnaeus and his students, cf. Dorothea von Mücke, "Goethe's Metamorphosis," in particular 39–40.

organism or object of nature. Instead, it turns out to lay the groundwork for a general theory of form, one which goes to the heart of Goethe's own morphological method as well as the heterogeneous and radically 'differential' representational forms which his *Notebooks on Morphology* present. The temporalized life-forms that present themselves in his morphological writings are, for this reason, no longer viewed as timeless "primordial" or ideal "types," but as serial forms and heterogeneous aggregates whose parts do neither constitute a whole nor have any objective correlate in the exterior world; rather, they are irreducibly marked by contingency, materiality, and finitude – elements which, not without coincidence, come to play a central role in Goethe's final novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden*.

2. “CONNECTED BY LIFE-EVENTS”: CONTINGENCY AND SERIALITY IN GOETHE’S NOTEBOOKS ON MORPHOLOGY

There is no creation without experiment.⁵³⁸

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

Since their intermittent publication between 1817 and 1824, neither Goethe nor anyone else has ever been willing to grant the *Notebooks on Morphology* the status of a “work,” be it scientific or poetic. Rather than referring to his *Notebooks* as a “work” [Werk], he called them a “fragmentary collection” [fragmentarische Sammlung] of non-chronologically ordered “sketches” [Skizzen].⁵³⁹ The publication of those “sketches” – treatises, reviews, letters, poems, schemata, and anecdotes written not only by Goethe, but also by other authors – thus appears justifiable to readers only on historical grounds, that is, as a chronicle of the development of biology during Goethe’s own lifetime. On account of their implicit synchronization of the course of science and of Goethe’s life, his notebooks have traditionally been lumped together with his autobiographical writings, alongside the *Italienische Reise* and *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.⁵⁴⁰ The awkward subtitle of the notebooks – “Erfahrung, Betrachtung, Folgerung, durch Lebensereignisse verbunden” – suggests as much, despite the fact that the entries contained in the notebooks lack almost any chronological

⁵³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (London/New York: Verso, 1994), 127.

⁵³⁹ Goethe, “Das Unternehmen wird entschuldigt,” in: FA, I/24, 390. Here Goethe implicitly contrasts the concept of “work” with that of “fragment,” with the ostensible difference falling on that of closure and completion. For a broader clarification of Goethe’s conception of work, see Dorothea Kuhn’s commentary in the Leopoldina Edition of his *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft* in: Goethe, *Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*, Abt. II: Ergänzungen und Erläuterungen, vol. 9, Part B: *Zur Morphologie. Von 1796 bis 1815*, ed. Dorothea Kuhn [Weimar 1986], 504f. See also: Safia Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft. Goethes Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre und die Hefte Zur Morphologie* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), in particular 27–33.

⁵⁴⁰ Thus in a 1962 essay which in many ways came to define modern scholarship on the *Notebooks on Morphology*, Dorothea Kuhn presents the “starke Durchsetzung mit autobiographischen Äußerungen” as the “auffälligste Kennzeichen” of Goethe’s natural-scientific publications between 1817 and 1824, and contended that any serious engagement with these texts would therefore entail, “den Sinn des Autobiographischen zu begreifen” (Dorothea Kuhn, “Das Prinzip der autobiographischen Form in Goethes Schriftenreihe *Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt, besonders zur Morphologie*,” in: *Neue Hefte zur Morphologie* 4 (1962), 120–49, here: 130.

organization. What is perhaps most intriguing and irritating about this elusive subtitle, however, is not so much the autobiographical reading which it seems to demand, but rather the inherent ambiguity contained in the phrase “connected by life-events” [durch Lebensereignisse verbunden]. Here it is interesting to note the distinctly sequential or serial structure of the notebooks. This is a syntactical moment, in other words, which already in the subtitle of the notebooks links form to life – and vice versa – in a manner that is difficult to account for if one constrains oneself to a purely autobiographical reading of the word “life-events” [Lebensereignisse]. I want to suggest at the outset that we consider a broader understanding of this word in order to encompass not simply Goethe’s life-events, whatever these may be, but all different signs or “events” of life: that the manifestation of life, in other words, takes the form of an event, and that these events are ordered not in a chronological, but rather a syntactical, sequential order. Before proceeding further with this line of inquiry, however, it is first necessary to understanding the method of experimentation that Goethe developed in the course of his efforts to initiate a new science of morphology. Through a careful exposition of his method of experimentation, and a subsequent analysis of the “forms of life” that unexpectedly erupt within his field of observation, the contours of Goethe’s semantic and visual method of ordering, along with its epistemological significance, will become discernible.

While Goethe’s botanical research on the metamorphosis of plants arguably represents his most sustained and systematic engagement with the study and observation of processes of change in nature, it was not until his short essay on the experiment, entitled *Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt*⁵⁴¹ (1793), that he concerned himself for the first time with the methodological problem of how a scientist ought to conceive of the phenomena which she or he encounters in either nature or the laboratory, despite the fact that this method is decisive for both

⁵⁴¹ Goethe, *Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt*, in: FA, I/25, 26–36.

his morphological project as well as his *Theory of Colors*. “Weder Virtuosität noch Familiarität, weder Offenheit noch Zwang, sondern die *Aufgabe* des Wissenschaftlers beschäftigt Goethe, und damit bewegt er sich im Rahmen des ‘Aufschreibesystems 1800.’”⁵⁴² In *Versuch als Vermittler*, Goethe presents nothing less than the method of scientific experimentation as such, and points in this context to his own optical and botanical experiments as examples of his method.

In that essay, Goethe warns of the dangers inherent in confirming hypotheses only through isolated and individual experiments. This is because, as he asserts in his short text “Erfahrung und Wissenschaft,” the scientific observer “nie das reine Phänomen mit Augen sieht, sondern vieles von seiner Geistesstimmung, von der Stimmung des Organs im Augenblick, von Licht, Luft, Witterung, Körpern, Behandlung und tausend andern Umständen abhängt.” Hence, if the scientist has “einer Hypothese zu lieb,” they might be erroneously inclined “ganze Zahlen in die [empirische] Brüche [zu schlagen].”⁵⁴³ In order to avoid confirmation bias and, more broadly, the intervention of the scientific observer in the process of experimentation, Goethe suggests the “*Vermannigfaltigung eines jeden einzelnen Versuches*” as the “eigentliche Pflichte eines Naturforschers.”⁵⁴⁴ “Diversification” [Vermannigfaltigung] requires “eine fortwährende systematische Variation der Erkenntnisbedingungen, eine erneute Beobachtung und den erneuten Vergleich von Daten oder auch die nochmalige Durchführung von Experimenten unter veränderten Bedingungen.”⁵⁴⁵ By networking together countless experiments and placing them in proximity with one another, they constitute an experimental field, or what Goethe refers to as “complex” or “composite” [zusammengesetzte] forms of an experiment. These consist in a “series of

⁵⁴² Rheinberger, *Experimentalsysteme*, 20f. For more on the poetology of the experiment in the nineteenth century, see Marcus Krause, Nicolas Pethes (eds.), *Literarische Experimentalkulturen. Poetologien des Experiments im 19. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005).

⁵⁴³ Goethe, “Erfahrung und Wissenschaft,” in: FA, I/25, 125.

⁵⁴⁴ Goethe, FA, I/25, 33.

⁵⁴⁵ Armin Schäfer, “Ordnung einer Idee: Goethes Morphologie,” in: *Nicht Fisch – nicht Fleisch. Ordnungssysteme und ihre Störfälle* (Zürich: diaphenes, 2011), 51–66, here: 59.

experiments” [Reihe von Versuchen] in which each experiment proceeds forth from the previous one and leads to the next in a more or less contiguous, metonymic fashion: “Haben wir also einen solchen Versuch gefaßt, eine solche Erfahrung gemacht, so können wir nicht sorgfältig genug untersuchen, was *unmittelbar* an ihn grenzt? was *zunächst* auf ihn folgt? Dieses ist, worauf wir mehr zu sehen haben, als auf das was sich auf ihn *bezieht*?”⁵⁴⁶

Goethe goes on to justify his method of serialized experimentation on the grounds that “nichts in der lebendigen Natur geschieht, was nicht in einer Verbindung mit dem Ganzen stehe, und wenn uns die Erfahrungen nur isoliert *erscheinen*, wenn wir die Versuche nur als isolierte Fakta anzusehen haben, so wird dadurch nicht gesagt, daß sie isoliert *seien*, es ist nur die Frage: wie finden wir die Verbindung dieser Phänomene, dieser Begebenheiten?”⁵⁴⁷ To be sure, he likens nature here to a kind of organic totality, in which every living part stands in connection with the “whole” [das Ganze]. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that his analogy between “living nature,” in the sense of an organic totality, and the kind of experimental arrangement he has in mind is directed above all against those scientific practices in which experiments are conducted individually and in isolation from one another. His remark that “die Versuche die Probleme der Natur zu lösen, eigentlich nur Konflikte der Denkkraft mit dem Anschauen [sind],”⁵⁴⁸ points to the problem of mediating between ideas and experiences in the context of scientific experimentation: for if the human mind is essentially incapable of escaping the circle of judgment between empirical observation and ideas – ideas which, while not capable of being immediately experienced in nature, may nonetheless be said to arise from the realm of the material

⁵⁴⁶ Goethe, FA, I/25, 33.

⁵⁴⁷ Goethe, FA, I/25, 33.

⁵⁴⁸ Goethe, “Der Kammerberg bei Eiger,” in: FA, I/25, 399–410, here: 409. See also Ernst Cassirer, “Goethe und die mathematische Physik. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Betrachtung,” in: idem., *Idee und Gestalt. Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Hölderlin* (Darmstadt 1971), 35–80, here: 41–43.

– then the only way out of this “hermeneutic circle” is through the constant serialization of experiments. As will be addressed later in this chapter, this has much to do with Goethe’s notion of “gegenständliches Denken.”⁵⁴⁹ For Goethe, as will be shown, such a notion of “objective thinking” entails the radical withdrawal of ideas from their immediate representation – that is, an initial hypothesis or “idea” which prevents the cognizing subject from being able to see how things actually are – and the provocation, in turn, of an aggregate or multiplied representation, which isolates and separates through continual processes of transformation.

“Consistency” or “sequentiality” [Folgerechtigkeit] thus constitute the essential methodological maxims which guide Goethe’s method of experimentation. This means excluding that to which an experiment is supposed to immediately refer or relate, as for instance an idea or hypothesis, in favor of what came before and what comes after – in a spatial rather than temporal sense – a given experience or experiment. This is because Goethe “proposes serialization not for the sake of connections but, on the contrary, to stave them off. The primary purpose of the series is not to link its components to each other but, conversely, to exacerbate, enforce, and radicalize the isolated nature of experiments by multiplying them and thus to reign in imagination’s hasty leaps of faith.”⁵⁵⁰ On these grounds he goes on to criticize approaches to the study of nature which he deems too teleological, contending that the “true botanist” ought to conduct experiments in a calm, consistent, and disinterested manner – that is, without recourse to the philosophical concepts of “beauty” [Schönheit] or “utility” [Nutzbarkeit].⁵⁵¹ Only by withholding judgment for as long as possible and refusing to draw connections in an overly hasty manner between the various experiments or experiences which comprise an experimental field can an intuition or “idea” be

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. Goethe, “Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges hilfreiches Wort,” in: FA, I/24, 595.

⁵⁵⁰ Geulen, “Serialization in Goethe’s Morphology,” 65.

⁵⁵¹ Goethe, FA, I/25, 26.

arrived at which is no longer a mere reflection of the interestedness or imaginative fancies of the scientific observer.

Hence, Goethe's work technique is no longer based on the retroactivity of the experiment as a test or proof of a single hypothesis; rather, it aims at bringing forth new phenomena through the diversification and serialization of experiences or experiments. This process requires a continual comparison of data, an ongoing verification of the operations of comparison, and the testing of alternate representations which ought to demonstrate the validity (or falsity) of the "type" [Typus]. Only in this way can the scientist hope to achieve what Goethe calls an experiment or experience "of a *higher* sort" [von einer *höhern* Art]: "eine solche Erfahrung, die aus mehreren andern besteht, ist offenbar von einer *höhern* Art. Sie stellt die Formel vor, unter welcher unzählige einzelne Rechnungsexempel ausgedrückt werden."⁵⁵² In direct analogy with the concept of a mathematical series, Goethe's serialization of experiments aims at discovering the underlying "formula" [Formel], in the sense of the principle of change and transformation in nature, on the basis of empirical examples. Thus in the case of his theory of the metamorphosis of plants, such a "formula" – namely, the principle which governs the transitions between the parts of the plant undergoing continual metamorphosis – can be intuited only when each part is viewed as the result of an adjacent part, and is thereby able to be brought into connection with the "whole" of appearances, or what Goethe calls the "Urpflanze."⁵⁵³

⁵⁵² Goethe, FA, I/25, 34.

⁵⁵³ As Eckart Förster argues in *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie*, Goethe's method, by mediating between Spinoza's doctrine of a *scientia intuitiva* and Kant's critical philosophy of the subject, aims at a systematic insight into the inner laws of nature which govern the transitions in the stages of development of various natural phenomena, and thereby at a certain independence from the cognizing subject. In addition to his novel systematic reconstruction of the debates which took place in the twenty-five years between the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Förster's major breakthrough is his elevation of Goethe to the level of a genuine philosopher in his own right, situating him firmly within the tradition of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), from which he is traditionally excluded. While Förster makes a strong case for the reading of Goethe's morphology and theory of colors as putting forth a coherent, systematic method for achieving a "third kind of knowledge,"

Because of the radically isolated nature of experiments, what Goethe calls “experiences of a higher sort” consist of nothing but the “materials” [Materielien] yielded by serialized experiments. These he advises the scientist merely to “collect” [sammeln] and arrange into “series” [Reihenfolgen], as for example into lists or tables, in order to arrive at a standard of comparison for the purposes of evidence-production.⁵⁵⁴ The series is the representational form which corresponds to Goethe’s demand for the diversification of experiments, for only the form of the series, as a metonymic technique of juxtaposition and contiguity, is capable of uncoupling itself from the cognizing subject. In this way, to quote Lacan, “[t]he subject is, as it were, internally excluded from its object [*en exclusion interne à son objet*].”⁵⁵⁵ Goethe reiterates this point at the end of his essay on the experiment, in which he explicitly excludes the relating of serialized experiments to a specific claim or hypothesis:

Aber diese Materialien müssen in Reihen geordnet und niedergelegt sein, nicht auf eine hypothetische Weise zusammengestellt, nicht zu einer systematischen Form verwendet. Es steht alsdenn einem jeden frei sie nach seiner Art zu verbinden und ein Ganzes daraus zu bilden, das der menschlichen Vorstellungsart überhaupt mehr oder weniger bequem und angenehm sei.⁵⁵⁶

he leaves largely unaddressed the inherent ambiguity in Goethe’s essay on the experiment whether the form of the series refers exclusively to the method of experimentation or objects in nature themselves.

⁵⁵⁴ Goethe made extensive use of lists in his morphological research: “Goethe zeigte mir Tabellen,” reports Eckermann in a conversation with Goethe from October 30, 1830, “woheinein er in lateinischer und deutscher Sprache viele Namen von Pflanzen geschrieben hatte, um sie auswendig zu lernen. Er sagte mir, daß er ein Zimmer gehabt, das ganz mit solchen Tabellen austapeziert gewesen, und worin er, an den Wänden umhergehend, studiert und gelernt habe. ‘Es tut mir leid,’ fügte er hinzu, ‘das es später überweißt worden. Auch hatte ich ein anderes, das mit chronologischen Notizen wehrend einer langen Reihe von Jahren beschrieben war, und worauf ich das Neueste immer nachtrug. Auch dieses ist leider übertüncht worden, welches ich nicht wenig bedaure, indem es mir gerade jetzt herrliche Dienste tun könnte” (Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens [1836/1848]*, ed. Fritz Bergemann [Frankfurt a.M. 1987], 699). For more on the rhetorical function of evidence-production by means of tables in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cf. Campe, *Spiel der Wahrscheinlichkeit. Literatur und Berechnung zwischen Pascal und Kleist* (Göttingen 2002), in particular 224, 240f; for more on Goethe’s use of tables, cf. Ernst Osterkamp, *Im Buchstabenbilde. Studien zum Verfahren Goethescher Bildbeschreibungen* (Stuttgart 1991), esp. 100–13.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Jacques Lacan, “Science and Truth,” in: *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 726–45, here: 731.

⁵⁵⁶ Goethe, FA, I/25, 35f.

By foregoing the application of a “systematic form” [systematischen Form] – that is, a teleological ordering principle or organic “whole” under which the manifold of observations would be subsumed – in favor of serial-forms and aggregates, Goethe opens up an entirely new semantics of the concept “experiment,” one which he presents in his essay as fundamentally open and productive. Because serialized experiments are based on isolation and separation, rather than on interconnection and transition, none can ever lead to a whole or totality. Accordingly, the parts of a series cannot be subordinated to a “whole” [ein Ganzes], since the elements of the series do not relate to each other as parts making up the whole; the whole as a whole thus remains “barred” – constitutively incomplete and forever out of reach.

By abandoning the hermeneutic relation of parts to wholes, Goethe comes to privilege distinctly collective forms of knowledge and representation.⁵⁵⁷ These are embodied by the figure of the archive. Although he undertook empirical observations throughout his life, after 1800 Goethe’s morphological research increasingly took as its starting point the massive archive of material which he had amassed in Weimar.⁵⁵⁸ As a result, the focus of his morphological studies “verschob sich hierbei allmählich von empirischen Beobachtungen auf Beobachtungen der

⁵⁵⁷ On the role of collectives, cf. Dorothea von Mücke, “Goethe’s Metamorphosis.” See also Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*. There Azzouni argues that scientific collaboration, as a form of collective knowledge, is operative in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*.

⁵⁵⁸ In Weimar the data and objects of Goethe’s experiments were collected and managed in an archive. Their procurement set into motion an extensive correspondence, including formal inquiries, gifts, and gifts in return. Goethe systematically pursued the procurement of objects for his collection. As he writes, for instance, in a letter to the daughter Georges Cuvier, whom he asked for the consignment of fossils: “Unterzeichneter besitzt eine Sammlung organischer Fossilien, welche, ohne sehr zahlreich zu seyn, von der frühesten Epoche, vom Übergangs-Thonschiefer an bis zu den letzten der aufgeschwemmten, ja der Torflager, von jeder Zeitstufe einige Beyspiele enthält. Nur fehlen durchaus Exemplare derjenigen uralten Thiergeschlechter, welche bey Paris in Gyps und Kalk gefunden werden und dem Entdeckung man ganz allein Herrn v. Cuvier schuldig ist. Nur wenige bedeutende Theile, als Zähne und dergleichen würden die Lücke genugsam ausfüllen. Könnte man von den eyerlegenden Vierfüßlern auch nur Ein Exemplar erhalten, so würde man solches mit großem Dank erkennen” (“Goethe an Clementine de Cuvier, Concept, Ende August oder Anfang September 1826,” in: WA IV/41, 135–37, here: 137, cited in Schäfer, “Ordnung einer Idee,” 61. For more on Goethe’s collections, cf. Ernst P. Hamm, “Goethes Sammlungen auspacken. Das Öffentliche und das Private im naturgeschichtlichen Sammeln,” in: *Sammeln als Wissen. Das Sammeln und seine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung*, eds. Anke te Heesen and E. C. Spary (Göttingen 2001), 85–113.

Beobachtungen.”⁵⁵⁹ This shift from empiricism to the archive, as the realm of second-order observations, corresponds to the increasing reflection in his *Notebooks on Morphology* on the forms of representation which would be adequate to his serialization of experiments. Goethe’s method of the experiment thereby relates itself to the diversity and plurality of phenomena. This is because his method does not seek to examine what lies *behind* phenomena but draws its doctrine from the phenomena themselves: “Man suche nur nichts hinter den Phänomenen; sie sind selbst die Lehre.”⁵⁶⁰ Hence, Goethe refers to the life-forms which he encounters in his studies not as organisms, which would imply that the parts relate to the whole according to a logic of “purposiveness” [Zweckmäßigkeit], but rather as “aggregates”⁵⁶¹ or “Versammlung[en]”⁵⁶² – just as he published his writings on morphology in the unsystematic form of a “collection” [Sammlung] as “notebooks” [Hefte]. Such serial or collective forms may no longer be said to comprise an ideal “whole” or correspond to a systematic form; nor do they follow the regulative development of the teleological principle “Bildung.” Instead, they are characterized by the serial dynamics of ceaseless accumulation, juxtaposition, and proliferation.

The reason for this ambiguity lies in the fact that Goethe leaves open the essential question in his essay on the experiment as to whether the concept of the series refers exclusively to the method of experimentation or, rather, to the very nature of change and transformation in nature itself.⁵⁶³ From the perspective of his morphological method, this distinction turns out to be

⁵⁵⁹ Schäfer, “Ordnung einer Idee,” 65.

⁵⁶⁰ Goethe, FA, I/25, 114.

⁵⁶¹ “Ein □ ist ein Aggregat mehrerer □, welche alle nebeneinander existieren können wenn sie sich einander nicht aufheben. Wenn einige die andern aufheben wird das Aggregat zum Körper wenn sie einander noch ausschließlicher aufheben werden die Körper immer edler und es entstehen endlich die Individuen (vorher die Genera pp) das edelste Geschöpf ist wo sich die Teile am ausschließlichsten aufheben” (Goethe, “Über organische Naturen. Notizen aus Italien [1786–88]: Durchgewachsne Nelke. Handschriften aus Goethes Nachlaß,” in: idem., FA I/24, 81).

⁵⁶² “Jedes Individuum ist kein Einzelnes, sondern eine Mehrheit; selbst insofern es uns als Individuum erscheint, bleibt es doch eine Versammlung von lebendigen selbständigen Wesen” (Goethe, FA, I/24, 391).

⁵⁶³ For more on this point, see Geulen, “Serialization in Goethe’s Morphology,” in particular 59, 65, and 68–70.

irrelevant, since at the level of representation, or *Darstellung*, the phenomena which Goethe's serialized experiments seek to present are neither entirely products of the mind nor do they refer to pre-existing forms in nature. Rather, they are completely novel forms-of-life, which the experiment is first and foremost tasked with bringing forth anew. If seriality is thus in some sense inherent in both the object as well as mimetically reflected in the experiment, the epistemological implications of this for the concept of "Bildung," which plays a central role in Goethe's theory of plant metamorphosis, are difficult to underestimate. In his initial theory of the metamorphosis of plants, which he published in 1790, the concept of "Bildung" serves as the epistemological model which retroactively posits the "whole," in the form of the *Urpflanze*, as the teleological end of the parts. However, as will be shown in the following pages, it is precisely this uncoupling of an end or *telos* from a regulative conception of nature, and life more broadly, in favor of the inherent heterogeneity and plurality of collective forms in nature which leads to the ineluctable introduction of contingency into Goethe's morphological studies.

2.1. "Alles ist Blatt": Dynamic Orders in the Metamorphosis of Plants

Already in the course of his first Italian journeys, which precede his essay on the metamorphosis of plants, entitled *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (1790), by approximately five years, Goethe assumed the possibility of a universal archetype of plants which would correspond to a principle of change and transformation underlying all empirical species of plant. Thus in a journal entry from Palermo dated April 17, 1787, the question arises as to whether among the rich diversity of plants there is not also a "primordial plant" – what Goethe calls the "Urpflanze" – waiting to be discovered:

Im Angesicht so vielerlei neuen und erneuten Gebildes fiel mir die alte Grille wieder ein, ob ich nicht unter dieser Schar die Urpflanze entdecken könnte. Eine

solche muß es denn doch geben! Woran würde ich sonst erkennen, daß dieses oder jenes Gebilde eine Pflanze sei, wenn sie nicht alle nach einem Muster gebildet wären?⁵⁶⁴

A month later, he emphatically notes in the appendix to his *Italienische Reise*: “Die Urpflanze wird das wunderlichste Geschöpf von der Welt, um welches mich die Natur selbst beneiden soll. Mit diesem Modell und dem Schlüssel dazu, kann man alsdann noch Pflanzen in’s Unendliche erfinden, die konsequent sein müssen, das heißt: die, wenn sie auch nicht existieren, doch existieren könnten.”⁵⁶⁵ According to Goethe, what makes a plant a plant is precisely this ideal whole or “model” [Muster], which he took to be the universal law of organic productivity underlying the various manifestations of the parts of the plant. Several years later, in the introduction to his essay “Botanik als Wissenschaft” (1788–94), he likewise expresses the desideratum to trace back “alle Pflanzen auf einen Begriff,”⁵⁶⁶ contending that, “Alles ist Blatt, und durch diese Einfachheit wird die größte Mannigfaltigkeit möglich.”⁵⁶⁷

The concept of the *Urpflanze* thus made it possible for Goethe to conceive of the “greatest multiplicity” [größte Mannigfaltigkeit] in the development of individual plants according to the simplest principle, one from which all different kinds of plants could subsequently be invented. By examining growth and maturation processes in different plants, he reached the conclusion that the “leaf” [Blatt] constitutes the most basic and most versatile building block, capable of assuming

⁵⁶⁴ Goethe, FA, I/15, 345

⁵⁶⁵ Goethe, “Neapel, den 17. Mai 1787,” in: FA, I/40, 346. A similar description of the ‘primal scene’ of Goethe’s theory of metamorphosis can be found in an anecdote included in his *Notebooks on Morphology*, in which he recalls an encounter in a botanical garden in Padua, Italy in 1786 with the species of flower known as *bignonia radicans*: “Als ich im September 1786 in dem botanischen Garten von Padua eine hohe und breite Mauer durchaus mit *Bignonia radicans* überzogen und die Büschel hochgelbfarbiger kelchartiger Kronen-Blüten in unsäglichem Reichtum daran herunterhängen sah, machte dies einen solchen Eindruck auf mich, daß ich dieser Pflanze besonders gewogen blieb und *sie*, wo ich sie in botanischen Gärten antraf, in den Weinarischen Anlagen, wo sie mit Neigung gepflegt ward, auch im eigenen Garten immer mit besonderer Aufmerksamkeit betrachtete. Es ist eine rankende Pflanze, welche sich ins Unendliche fortsetzen die Neigung zu haben scheint, allein es gehen ihr die Organe ab, wodurch sie sich anschieben, anklammern, festhalten könnte” (Goethe, FA, I/24, 692).

⁵⁶⁶ Goethe, “Botanik als Wissenschaft,” in: FA, I/24, 93.

⁵⁶⁷ Goethe, FA, I/24, 84.

every shape and function essential to a plant, be it a petal, a stamen, or a sepal. These processes, however, do not mark a radical break in what constitutes the kingdom of plants, but happen in accordance with the basic blueprint or “type” to which Goethe assigns the status of a “law” that governs the range of possible change.⁵⁶⁸ The underlying archetype or “model,” which is a composite of many different individuals, thus constitutes a reciprocal interplay between limitation and constraints and, at the same time, an infinite number of possible forms. Since the “type” defines the entirety of possible variations and innovations, no individual case, be it a class, a family, or a species, can therefore serve as its model:

Hat man aber die Idee von diesem Typus gefaßt, so wird man erst recht einsehen, wie unmöglich es sei eine einzelne Gattung als Kanon aufzustellen. Das Einzelne kann kein Muster vom Ganzen sein, und so dürfen wir das Muster für alle nicht im Einzelnen suchen. Die Klassen, Gattungen, Arten und Individuen verhalten sich wie die Fälle zum Gesetz; sie sind darin enthalten, aber sie enthalten und geben es nicht.⁵⁶⁹

Here Goethe claims that the archetype must not be construed as containing an implicit goal or *telos*. To be sure, his notion of an “idea” [Idee] implies a transcendental-philosophical connotation, and with it a Kantian notion of “purposiveness”; yet the platonic conception of eternal, transcendent ideas is decisively excluded. Rather, his morphological method aims for a “höheren Empirismus,” and in this respect it strictly adheres to experience in the sense of empirical observation.⁵⁷⁰ From this epistemological argument, he claims that higher degrees of complexity

⁵⁶⁸ For more on the practice of gathering type specimens and its relation to scientific memory in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific discourse, see again Daston, “Type Specimens and Scientific Memory.”

⁵⁶⁹ Goethe, “Vorträge, über die ersten drei Kapitel des Entwurfs einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie, ausgehend von der Osteologie” (1796), in: FA, I/24, 270.

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. Joseph Vogl, “Bemerkung über Goethes Empirismus,” in: *Versuchsanordnungen 1800*, eds. Sabine Schimma and Joseph Vogl (Zürich, Berlin 2009), 113–23. For more on Goethe’s concept of “idea” [Idee], see Dorothea Kuhn, *Empirische und ideelle Wirklichkeit. Studien zur Goethes Kritik der französischen Akademiestreites* (Graz, Wien, Köln 1967). As Goethe notes in his essay “Erfahrung und Wissenschaft, the value of empirical observation lies above all in amassing a legion of individual impressions which are to be subsequently condensed and integrated into a “true” representation, in both words and images, of the natural kind or “type specimen”: “Es gibt, wie ich besonders in dem

and differentiation are to be viewed as possessing greater value than simpler ones, since for him the goal of nature is not so much the achievement of perfection, but rather that of internal differentiation of the archetype through an ever increasing variety of species. Hence he privileges “composite” types and “aggregates,” or what he refers to elsewhere in his *Notebooks on Morphology* as *atroismos*, the Greek word for collection, aggregation, and accumulation.⁵⁷¹

Yet in order for this “most magical creature in the world” [wunderlichste Geschöpf von der Welt], namely the *Urpflanze*, to let itself be seen, Goethe’s theory of metamorphosis depended upon a very specific conception of the observing subject, freed from the epistemic constraints of a referential paradigm of vision grounded in the separation of interior self and exterior world. By conceiving of the observer as an active, autonomous producer of his or her own visual experience, rather than as a passive, mechanical recipient of external sensations, Goethe’s conception of vision radically breaks with the Kantian opposition between idea and experience, concept and intuition. This goes to the very heart of his famous disagreement with Friedrich Schiller. In the text “Glückliches Ereignis,” he recounts his initial enthusiasm and subsequent disappointment in sharing with Schiller his discovery of the *Urpflanze*:

[...] da trug ich die Metamorphose der Pflanzen lebhaft vor, und ließ, mit manchen charakteristischen Federstrichen, eine symbolische Pflanze vor einen Augen entstehen. Er [Schiller] vernahm und schaute das alles mit großer Teilnahme, mit entschiedener Fassungskraft; als ich aber geendet, schüttelte er den Kopf und sagte:

Fache, das ich bearbeite, oft bemerken kann, viele empirische Brüche, die man wegwerfen muß, um ein reines konstantes Phänomen zu erhalten [...] Um es darzustellen, bestimmt der menschliche Geist das empirisch Wankende, schließt das Zufällige aus, sondert das Unreine, entwickelt das Verworrene, ja entdeckt das Unbekannte” (Goethe, “Erfahrung und Wissenschaft,” in: FA, I/25, 125).

⁵⁷¹ Cf. Goethe, “ΑΘΡΟΙΣΜΟΣ” (1798–99), in: FA, I/24, 474: “Freue dich höchstes Geschöpf der Natur, du fühlst dich fähig / Ihr den höchsten Gedanken, zu dem sie schaffend sich aufschwang, / Nachzudenken...” See also the section entitled “Genetische Behandlung” of Goethe, “Versuche einer Methodik der Wissenschaft von den Lebewesen” (ca. 1798), in: FA, I/24, 352f. The commentary to the Frankfurt edition of this text reads: “[D]er Sinn des ursprünglichen Titels ist noch nicht aufgehellt. Das Wort bedeutet etwa Sammlung, Versammlung, auch Anhäufung, Aggregat. Ist er auf die Form des Gedichtes zu beziehen (fragmentarische Gedanken-Anhäufung? Quintessenz?) oder auf den Gegenstand (das Tier als Aggregat)?” (FA, I/24, 1089). As has been argued thus far, it is precisely this ambiguity of reference point which impels Goethe’s practice of serializing forms.

das ist keine Erfahrung, das ist eine Idee. Ich stutzte, verdrießlich einigermaßen: denn der Punkt der uns trennte, war dadurch aufs strengste bezeichnet. Die Behauptung aus Anmut und Würde fiel mir wieder ein, der alte Groll wollte sich regen, ich nahm mich aber zusammen und versetzte: das kann mir sehr lieb sein daß ich Ideen habe ohne es zu wissen, und sie sogar mit Augen sehe.⁵⁷²

Whereas Schiller is said to have claimed that the *Urpflanze* is “keine Erfahrung, sondern eine Idee,” Goethe insists on its visibility; for him, such a “symbolische Pflanze” is not merely a product of the mind, but something physical and real which one “mit Augen sehe.” This disagreement between Goethe and Schiller concerns not just conflicting viewpoints as to the veracity of the *Urpflanze*’s empirical existence, but also two fundamentally opposing epistemologies of perception. That is, while Schiller adheres to a more or less orthodox Kantian view that strictly opposes idea and experience, concept and intuition, for Goethe this distinction no longer abides. For him, “reality,” in the sense of *Wirklichkeit*, and perception are inextricably intertwined. In this respect, his ironic response to Schiller that he “Ideen ha[t] ohne es zu wissen, und sie sogar mit Augen s[ieht],” marks a decisive break with the Kantian conception of the subject as constitutively split between sense-perception and conceptual thinking. In his essay “Bedeutende Fördernis,” Goethe refers to this alternative conception of vision that rejects abstract thought as “objective thinking” [gegenständliches Denken], whereby “mein Anschauen selbst ein Denken, mein Denken ein Anschauen sei,” and which he furthermore conceived of as directly analogous to a form of “objective poetry” [gegenständliche Dichtung].⁵⁷³

Goethe’s insight into the processes of change and transformation in nature made it possible for him to think the inherent interrelation between all the individual parts of an organism in their development and, in this way, to perceive them as outward manifestations of an ideal whole. From

⁵⁷² Goethe, “Glückliches Ereignis,” FA, I/24, 434–38, here: 437.

⁵⁷³ Goethe, FA, I/24, 595.

this morphological perspective, he arrives at the theory of “metamorphosis,”⁵⁷⁴ a term which he uses to capture nature’s ability to generate new forms. In his numerous botanical writings, in particular his essay *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären*, it becomes the key term for conceiving of change as an open-ended process. As such it entails a powerful critique of teleological thinking, be it the traditional teleology of “preformationist” theories or the more contemporary philosophical concept of teleology as progress toward a given goal. Like his morphological method, his theory of metamorphosis is grounded in a comparative method: it entails nothing less than how to think together the lawful unity of nature as a whole and its infinitely varied appearances, diachronically as the succession of one part of an organism to the next, and synchronically as the simultaneous manifestation of one and the same underlying organ. Thus as Goethe remarks in the opening paragraph of his essay on plant metamorphosis, a careful observation of plant life reveals, “daß gewisse äußere Teile derselben, sich manchmal verwandeln und in die Gestalt der nächstliegenden Teile bald ganz, bald mehr oder weniger übergehen.”⁵⁷⁵ By viewing the parts of the plant in proximity to one another, a continuity between the parts emerges such that each part appears as the sequential result of a transition from the immediately adjacent part. This is what he calls the “primordial plant,” or *Urpflanze*.

However, in order to think simultaneity and succession as united in a single intuition – an effort which he likens to “a kind of madness”⁵⁷⁶ [eine Art Wahnsinn] – Goethe eventually came to realize that his recourse to the language of primordial types and “pure phenomena” was still too

⁵⁷⁴ While the term “metamorphosis” had been traditionally used primarily to describe the developmental stages of an insect, in the eighteenth century it became a more general term for models of change. For more on this point, cf. Dorothea von Mücke, “Goethe’s Metamorphosis,” in particular 31–33.

⁵⁷⁵ Goethe, FA, I/24, 109, Nr. 1.

⁵⁷⁶ Goethe, FA, I/24, 449.

grounded in a pre-Kantian, quasi-platonic conception of nature, which separates the world of appearances from that of eternal essences and archetypes. He therefore abandoned his search for a “universal word” [allgemeines Wort] with which to signify the “so verschiedene Gestalten metamorphosierte Organ,”⁵⁷⁷ such as “Blatt,” “Urpflanze,” “Modell,” as well as “Typus,” and in their place undertook instead to observe the transitions that occur between the parts of the plant and to describe their heterogeneous processes of transformation.⁵⁷⁸ This entails

die Erscheinungen vorwärts und rückwärts gegen einander zu halten. Denn wir können eben so gut sagen: ein Staubwerkzeug sei ein zusammengezogenes Blumenblatt, als wir von dem Blumenblatte sagen können, es sei ein Staubgefäß im Zustande der Ausdehnung; ein Kelchblatt sei ein zusammengezogenes, einem gewissen Grad der Verfeinerung sich näherndes Stengelblatt, als wir von einem Stengelblatt sagen können es sei ein, durch Zudringen roherer Säfte ausgedehntes Kelchblatt.⁵⁷⁹

In the place of a universal word, Goethe opts for the dynamic description of nature and its myriad forms. These he views not as fixed and static products of nature, or *natura naturata*, but rather as natural processes, *natura naturans*, which are in a constant state of change, transformation, and flux. Hence, he seeks to describe them according to their chiasmic movement, in their transition between the adjacent parts, that is, simultaneously in a state of prolepsis and analepsis, moving “backwards” and “forwards.” In order to reflect the “höchst mannigfaltige” and “verschiedensten Gestalten durch Modifikation eines einzigen Organs,”⁵⁸⁰ he draws on the rhetorical technique of metonymy in his essay on plant metamorphosis, which comes to displace, in turn, the conventional names of plant organs in favor of a description of their processes of transformation from one part to the next; hence, as Goethe writes in the above passage, “we could just as well say that a pollen-

⁵⁷⁷ Goethe, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären*, FA, I/24, 150.

⁵⁷⁸ For more on the epistemological significance of Goethe’s morphology for eighteenth-century taxonomic enterprises and natural-scientific nomenclature, cf. Chad Wellmon, “Goethe’s Morphology of Knowledge, or the Overgrowth of Nomenclature,” in: *Goethe Yearbook* 17 (2010), 153–77.

⁵⁷⁹ Goethe, FA, I/24, 150f.

⁵⁸⁰ Goethe, FA, I/24, 151.

mechanism is a contracted petal, as we could say of a petal that it is a stamen in the condition of extension; or that a sepal is a filament which is contracted and approximates a certain degree of refinement, as we could say of the filament that it is a sepal which extends through the excretion of its raw juices.”

By conceiving of such temporized life-forms in the absence of a determinate referent in the external world, Goethe’s theory of metamorphosis does not so much seek to *re-present*, in the sense of mimetically reproducing a pre-given object, as to *bring forth* new phenomena. Precisely for this reason, the “höchst mannigfaltige” and “verschiedensten” forms of nature that he seeks to elicit cannot be reduced to so-called “pure phenomena” or universal “archetypes.” Instead, they attain a productivity of their own, here in the double sense as both discursive and vital. This productive, even “creative” moment in nature is what Goethe repeatedly refers to in his essay on plant metamorphosis as “anastomosis” [Anastomose], the standard botanical term that is usually used to designate the (for Goethe, mysterious and revealing) process whereby the separate parts of the vascular system of the plant steadily grow towards each other and eventually come to join together, that is, to inosculate. More broadly, it is the insertion of one organ or vessel within another, or their interconnection by a channel or tube; etymologically, it refers to the process of the opening of (one or more) “mouths” [stoma].⁵⁸¹ In Goethe’s text, it comes to possess a distinctly sexual and procreative connotation with respect to the growth and development processes of plant life. For him, plant procreation presages a decisive shift in the uniformity of the plant’s growth, where the linear succession that captures the manifestation of the metamorphosing “leaf” [Blatt] or “organ” [Organ]

⁵⁸¹ “Anastomosis,” which derives from the Greek word “mouth” [stoma], refers to the union of an organism’s parts so as to “intercommunicate” to create a network. In the section of the essay on the metamorphosis of plants titled “Repetition” [Wiederholung], Goethe returns to the notion of anastomosis and groups it with what are in his view the most important concepts in the essay. He also elaborates that this particular process is not limited to plant production, but may also be observed as early as the first stage of growth, in the appearance of the cotyledons. See Goethe, FA, I/24, 148–51.

gradually gives way to a simultaneous appearance of the sexual organs, the stamen and pistil. At the moment when the plant divides into its respective reproductive organs, which for Goethe constitutes a higher, more complex, that is, aggregate, form of the plant, he integrates the concept of anastomosis into his narration of the plant's metamorphosis: "[S]o sind wir abgeneigt, die Verbindung der beiden Geschlechter eine geistige Anastomose zu nennen, und glauben wenigstens einen Augenblick die Begriffe von Wachstum und Zeugung einander näher gerückt zu haben."⁵⁸² By uniting the concepts of "growth" [Wachstum] and "reproduction" [Zeugung], the successive and the simultaneous, the concept of anastomosis not only anchors Goethe's theory that each stage of plant development entails the formation and transformation of a single organ, but also conforms to his criteria for the observation of living, metamorphosing organisms.⁵⁸³

At the same time, the progressive growth and reproduction of plants that Goethe calls "anastomosis" culminates in an uncanny moment of hybrid communication, which momentarily suspends the steady processes of growth and development. It is hardly coincidental that the term "anastomosis" designates the rhetorical *terminus technicus* for the interpolation of a graft, the insertion of one word within another. From this perspective, the process of transformation and metamorphosis described by Goethe should not be understood as a process of organic development, but one of aggregation and agglomeration, in the sense of grafting, as when the part of a plant is grafted onto the rootstock on which it grows and from which it draws its life, while nonetheless

⁵⁸² Goethe, FA, I/24, 129f. Goethe's reference to procreation as a "spiritual anastomosis" [geistige Anastomose] simultaneously reveals and veils the 'secret' of procreation, insofar as it does not seek to explain the mechanism by which the male and female organs of the plant lead to the generation of offspring, but merely ascribes to it a "miraculous" dynamic, one which hovers between the physical and the metaphysical.

⁵⁸³ Several paragraphs later, Goethe goes on to reaffirm his decision to name the act of "copulation" [Begattung] "anastomosis," insofar as it describes the act of growing together once the plant achieves a higher degree of complexity with the development of sexual organs: "und wenn die genaue Verwandtschaft desselben mit dem männlichen uns durch diese Betrachtung recht anschaulich wird, so finden wir jenen Gedanken, die Begattung eine Anastomose zu nennen, passender und einleuchtender" (Goethe, FA, I/24, 131).

preserving its difference from the original.⁵⁸⁴ Anastomosis presents itself here, then, as an act of translation, transfer, and enfolding, which continually distorts and displaces the original onto which it is grafted.⁵⁸⁵ It is not an organic concept, but rather “eine Kultivierungstechnik, die der künstlichen – nicht-sexuellen – Fortpflanzung dient – eine Technik, die seit alters her bekannt ist und im 18. Jahrhundert zu neuer Blüte gelangt, nämlich als Wissensfigur für einen aufgeklärten Umgang mit der Natur.”⁵⁸⁶

As both a rhetorical as well as horticultural technique of hybridization, Goethe’s use of the term “anastomosis” implicitly links his conception of plant development to the oral sphere of communication, which for Goethe is the privileged site of change.⁵⁸⁷ Simultaneously evoking the image of plant leaf’s sprawling veins and that of a communicative network, anastomosis thus conforms to the criteria of the double of sense of form to which Goethe ascribes the structure of second-order seriality: as both an object of nature and as a form of presentation. Insofar as Goethe’s

⁵⁸⁴ For a cultural-historical and media-theoretical approach to the terms “grafting” [pfropfen] and “engraftment” [Aufpfropfung], cf. Uwe Wirth (ed.), *Pfropfen, Impfen, Transplantieren* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2011), as well as idem., “Aufpfropfung als Figur des Wissens in der Kultur- und Mediengeschichte,” in: *Kulturgeschichte als Mediengeschichte (oder vice versa?)*, eds. Lorenz Engell, Bernhard Siegert, and Joseph Vogl (Weimar: Universitätsverlag Weimar, 2006), 87–110.

⁵⁸⁵ For a literary-theoretical and narratological approach to Goethe’s concept of anastomosis, see J. Hillis Miller, “Interlude as Anastomosis in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*,” in: *Goethe Yearbook* 6 (1992), 115–42; idem., “Anastomosis,” in: *Ariadne’s Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 144–222. As Miller points out, the root in *anastomosis* contains a double contradictory possibility, insofar as it simultaneously refers to the intercommunication both of two vessels as well as two channels. “In one case the anastomosis is an external line linking one enclosed vessel, the self, to another or to others. In the other case, the self becomes itself by actual entry into the other or by being entered into in an anastomosis of the other sort. In this case the self is the line, not something joined externally to another self by a communicating channel. Taken together, the two forms of anastomosis in their multitudinous proliferating from generation to generation make an image of all men and women joined in an immense network of navel cords and sexual couplings” (ibid., 157).

⁵⁸⁶ Uwe Wirth, “Aufpfropfung als Figur des Wissens in der Kultur- und Mediengeschichte,” in: *Kulturgeschichte als Mediengeschichte (oder vice versa?)*, eds. Lorenz Engell, Bernhard Siegert, and Joseph Vogl (Weimar: Universitätsverlag Weimar, 2006), 111–22, here: 111.

⁵⁸⁷ “As a site of exchange the oral realm is also a privileged site of change. According to Goethe, within the constraints of nature’s supposed budget [...] the interaction of the organism with the conditions of its environment is the main reason for the disturbing versatility that constantly threatens his quest for lawful metamorphosis and led him to call metamorphosis ‘a gift from above which leads into the formless and destroys knowledge’” (Geulen, “Serialization,” 69). Geulen goes on to point out the various ways in which Goethe simulates the effect of oral conversation and spontaneous orality in the *Notebooks on Morphology*, characterizing his “tendency to interrupt himself and gesture toward something not yet or never said” according to the rhetorical term *anaphosis* (ibid., 69f).

essay on plant metamorphosis does not merely seek to prove the empirical validity of his theory of metamorphosis, but also stages the very attempt to “translate” the plurality of forms in nature into linguistic and representational forms that would be commensurate with nature’s unlimited vitality and multitudinous proliferation, anastomosis, as a double formative principle, may perhaps be understood then as both a “real” property of plants as well as a performance of their description, in the sense of the serialization of the parts of the plant. Such a process of grafting, translating, and transitioning – embodied in Goethe’s efforts to represent simultaneity and succession within a single intuition – never quite congeals into an organic whole or totality, but instead makes palpable and perceptible its graft-like character.

The perspective which Goethe’s morphology opens up – the perspective of impossibility, which he likens to “a kind of madness” – may therefore be likened to the principle of anamorphosis, in at least two respects. The term anamorphosis, which in fact has a specifically botanical connotation that refers to abnormal change in the form of a plant that falsely gives it the appearance of an entirely different species of plant, is more proximately drawn here from Jacques Lacan’s well-known interpretation of Hans Holbein’s 1533 painting *The Ambassadors* in his 1964 seminar on vision, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. According to Lacan, the gaze is what eludes representation as much as it escapes vision: “In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision [or path of vision: ‘la voie de la vision’], and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze.”⁵⁸⁸ For this reason, the object of the gaze – what Lacan terms the *objet petit a*, and which he furthermore identifies with the gaze in his seminar on vision – is always, by definition, perceived in a distorted way: it is an irreducible

⁵⁸⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XI, 1964: Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), 73.

residue of an indecipherable knowledge, whose contours can only be discerned by looking awry. Only through a change in perspective can the observing subject encounter the object, which appears within the visual field a special kind of *memento mori*: in the case of Holbein's painting, it is the hidden image of the skull, which prior to the change in perspective appeared as a kind of meaningless stain within the frame of the canvas. In the case of Goethe's morphology, as will be argued, the attempt to comprehend the seemingly meaningless empirical deviations from the norm of the ideal genesis of plant life – what Goethe refers to as “contingent formations” – ultimately leads him to develop a theory of the “spiral tendency,” a nearly universal pathology in nature that paradoxically encompasses both infinite proliferation as well as death and finitude.

2.2. “In the Vortex of the Spiral-Tendency”: Contingency and Death in Nature

In spite of his occasional recourse to the rhetoric of natural laws, one finds throughout Goethe's essay on plant metamorphosis an irreducible element of contingency at work in the development of plants, which is intimately intertwined with the temporality of finitude. The most prominent manifestation of such contingency can be found in what Goethe refers to near the beginning of his essay on plant metamorphosis as “contingent formations,” or *zufällige Bildungen*, in the metamorphosis of plants. In addition to “regular” [regelmäßig] and “irregular” [unregelmäßig] formations, contingent formations constitute one of the three primary modes of plant metamorphoses.⁵⁸⁹ In the case of regular and irregular formations, Goethe conceives of these in terms of a chiasmic relation, such that the “progressive” [fortschreitend] tendency in regular formations as well as the “regressive” [rückschreitend] tendency in irregular formations in plants

⁵⁸⁹ “Es zeigt sich uns diese Metamorphose auf dreierlei Art; *regelmäßig*, *unregelmäßig*, und *zufällig*” (Goethe, FA, I/24, 110)

come to mutually reinforce one another.⁵⁹⁰ Hence, through the careful observation of irregular formations, “welche wir an dieser Metamorphose zu machen Gelegenheit haben, werden wir dasjenige enthüllen können was uns die regelmäßige verheimlicht, deutlich sehen, was wir dort nur schließen dürfen; und auf diese Weise steht es zu hoffen, daß wir unsere Absicht am sichersten erreichen.”⁵⁹¹ From this perspective, the role of contingency is largely relegated to the periphery of his theory of plant metamorphosis. In this sense, they obey the logic of supplementarity;⁵⁹² for in contrast to both regular and irregular formations, which occupy the center of his theory, contingent formations are constitutively necessary for the organization of the conceptual schema, yet cannot be explained or accounted for within the very epistemological framework of *Bildung* except as mere empirical deviations from the norm. Hence, if one pays too close attention to such contingent formations, which he likens to “monstrosities” [monströsen], it would threaten, as Goethe warns, “unsern Zweck [zu] verrücken.”⁵⁹³

By likening contingent formations in plants to monstrosities, Goethe points to the way in which they participate in a teratological discourse which threatens to disturb at every turn the regulative, lawful model of *Bildung*; as monsters, they “disrupt totalizing conceptions of nature and destroy taxonomic logics, at once defining and challenging the limits of the natural.”⁵⁹⁴ In this sense, they are not just monstrosities, but also develop monstrous potentialities. This would not be fully realized until nearly forty years after the publication of his initial theory of the metamorphosis of plants. Only then did Goethe come to elevate the role of contingency from a marginal aspect of his theory of plant development to a near universal pathology of nature. In two of his last writings

⁵⁹⁰ Goethe, FA, I/24, 110–11, §§ 6, 7.

⁵⁹¹ Goethe, FA, I/24, 111, § 7.

⁵⁹² For more on the logic of supplementarity, cf. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, in particular 141–316.

⁵⁹³ Goethe, FA, I/24, 111, § 8.

⁵⁹⁴ Colin Milburn, “Monsters in Eden: Darwin and Derrida,” in: *MLN* 118.3 (2003), 603–21, here: 604.

on the metamorphosis of plants, entitled “Über die Spiraltendenz” and “Zur Spiraltendenz der Vegetation” (1829–31), the element of contingency comes to play a central role with respect to his theory of a universal “spiral tendency” [Spiraltendenz] in vegetation. Goethe’s new theory of plant metamorphosis is largely based on the findings of Carl Friedrich von Martius, a professor of botany and curator of the royal botanical gardens in Munich, who revealed his observations of a universal spiral tendency in plants in lectures held in Berlin and Munich for the Isis Society, whose minutes were published as a two-part article in 1828 and 1829. A letter from Goethe to Martius dating from March 28, 1829, marks the earliest reference to Martius’ discovery. The flurry of correspondence, notes, and journal entries, as well as the publication of the essay “Zur Spiraltendenz,” in the three years which followed, up until the week before his death in 1832, all attest to Goethe’s continued fascination with the theory of the spiral tendency. This theory centers around the spiral vessels, or “Spiralgefäße,” of plants, which had long been known and recognized by botanists, yet which according to Goethe were nevertheless “eigentlich nur als einzelne der ganzen Spiraltendenz subordinierte Organe anzusehen, man hat sie überall aufgesucht und fast durchaus besonders im Splint gefunden, wo sie sogar ein gewisses Lebenszeichen von sich geben und nichts ist der Natur gemäßer als daß sie das was sie im ganzen intentioniert durch das Einzelste in Wirksamkeit setzt.”⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁵ Goethe, “Zur Spiraltendenz,” in: FA, I/24, 788. A similar formula for the theory of spiral formations in plants can also be found in an even earlier text by Goethe, namely his “Notizen aus Italien,” which date back to 1787–88 and which he subsequently included in his *Notebooks on Morphology*. There his nascent hypothesis of a universal archetype of plants, “Alles ist Blatt,” which he puts forth there for the first time, is accompanied by a graphic representation of two intertwining lines, or spirals. He describes these as follows: “Das Blatt hat Gefäße die in sich verschlungen wieder ein Blatt hervorbringen wo man ein krudes Bild durch Verschlingungen zweier Linien sich formieren kann” (Goethe, “Notizen aus Italien,” in: FA, I/24, 84).

In his essay on the spiral tendency in plants, Goethe draws on Martius' insights, which were themselves intended to conform to Goethe's own theory of metamorphosis,⁵⁹⁶ to now assert that these spiral vessels belong to a larger tendency which induces the various organs of a plant to develop in a spiral around a vertical axis. In that essay, he conceives of the spiral tendency as the real basis of all plant life, its "eigentlich produzierende Lebensprinzip,"⁵⁹⁷ and contrasts it with a reciprocal tendency which he calls the "vertical tendency" [Vertikaltendenz]. Whereas the vertical tendency mechanically pursues sunlight, and in doing so continuously lifts the plant's organs upwards,⁵⁹⁸ the spiral tendency is said to possess a true "Selbstleben," which Goethe characterizes with the reproductive rhetoric of "creative" or "fertile" processes [herausschöpfen], calling it "das Fortbildende," "das Vermehrende," "das Vorübergehende," and "das im Übermaß fortwirkend."⁵⁹⁹ In this way, his theory of the spiral tendency doubtlessly relates to the virulent discourse of procreation around 1800.⁶⁰⁰ At the same time, he appears to link the autonomous vitality and procreative power of the spiral tendency, which he explicitly codes as feminine,⁶⁰¹ to a centrifugal dy-

⁵⁹⁶ "Vor allem [...] bemerke ich, daß die Grundansicht, welche ich hier vorzulegen mir die Ehre gebe, nicht etwa bloß das Resultat meiner Forschungen ist, sondern daß sie theilweise wenigstens von vielen bereits angenommen worden und überhaupt das Resultat jener morphologischen Ansicht von der Blume ist, die wir unserem großen Dichter Goethe danken" (Carl Friedrich von Martius, "Über die Architektonik der Blüten," in: *Isis*, vol. XXI, 522–29, column 334).

⁵⁹⁷ Goethe, "Über die Spiraltendenz," in: FA, I/24, 777f.

⁵⁹⁸ "Die Vertikaltendenz äußert sich von den ersten Anfängen des Keimens an, sie ist es wodurch die Pflanze in der Erde wurzelt und zugleich sich in die Höhe hebt" (Goethe, FA, I/24, 778). Goethe also associates the vertical tendency with a conception of the "whole" which permeates "climbing" and "crawling" plants: "Auch ist es dieselbe Naturkraft, welche unaufhaltsam von Knoten zu Knoten in die Höhe oder sonst fortschiebt, die einzelnen Spiralgefäße mit sich fortreißt und so, indem sie Leben nach Leben fördert und steigert, eine Kontinuität des Ganzen sogar in rankenden und kriegenden Gewächsen folgerecht hervorbringt" (ibid).

⁵⁹⁹ Goethe, FA, I/24, 777.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. Holland, *German Romanticism and Science*, in particular 53–54.

⁶⁰¹ "Der Aufsatz über die Spiral-Tendenz beschreibt nämlich das Weibliche unter dem Aspekt, welcher dem des vermeintlich weiblichen Efeu in *Amyntas* genau entgegengesetzt ist: 'Da das Spiralsystem eigentlich das Nährende ist,' kann es nicht dasselbe wie dies sein, was Nahrung umgekehrt gerade von 'ihm' nimmt. Der Versuch, 'das Weibliche' unter seinen verschiedenen möglichen Aspekten zu denken – als das zugleich 'Bedürftige' und das 'Nährende' – und dabei gleichwohl an seiner polaren Bestimmung festzuhalten, verschlingt sich in sich selbst" (Robert Stockhammer, "Spiraltendenzen der Sprache: Goethes *Amyntas* und seine Theorie des Symbols," in: *Poetica. Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 25 [1993], 129–54, here: 144).

namic of de-centering, proliferation, and dispersion, such that its “organic circulations” [organische Umläufe] are said to be continually “entwining” [umschlingend], turning from inside-out, from the center to the periphery:

[...] es ist mit jenem innigst verwandt, aber vorzugsweise auf die Peripherie angewiesen [...] Wie aber auch in dem Fortschritt des Pflanzenwachstums die Spiraltendenz sich verbergen, oder irgend merklich hervordringen mag, so herrscht sie doch zuletzt bei aller Blüten- und Fruchstellung, wo sie ihren Mittelpunkt tausendfältig umschlingend, das Wunder bewirkt, daß eine einzelne Pflanze zuletzt befähigt wird, eine unendliche Vermehrung aus sich selbst herauszuschöpfen.⁶⁰²

In this passage, the relation of center to periphery no longer conforms to the paradigm of *Bildung*. Here one finds neither regular nor irregular formations, no fixed end-goal or *telos*, but instead only “monstrosities”⁶⁰³ [Monstrositäten], as well as an equally monstrous dynamic of “infinite proliferation” [unendliche Vermehrung]. From this perspective, the two opposing tendencies, vertical and spiral, which Goethe posits to be at work in the development of plants, are in no way polar forces, as in the mechanical ebb-and-flow of extension and contraction in his earlier essay on metamorphosis. “Denn ‘natürlich’ ist in der Spiraltendenz die vertikale bereits aufgehoben (sonst wäre sie eine bloß kreisförmige) und kann derart nicht deren genaues Gegenteil sein; für die in ganz ähnlichen Kategorien prozedierende Hegelsche Dialektik entspräche dies der absurden Gegenüberstellung von These und Synthese ohne Antithese.”⁶⁰⁴

For Goethe, the constitutive asymmetry between the spiral and vertical tendencies, and the suspension, in turn, of an absolute synthesis, leads him to a radical conclusion, namely the possibility of finitude, closure, and even death in nature. Compared with his earlier descriptions of the metamorphosis of plants, perhaps the most striking change in terminology which characterizes

⁶⁰² Goethe, FA, I/24, 778f.

⁶⁰³ Goethe, FA, I/24, 788.

⁶⁰⁴ Stockhammer, “Spiraltendenzen der Sprache,” 144.

his description of the spiral tendency is his repeated insistence on an “ending” [Abschluß].⁶⁰⁵ Thus Goethe writes that “das Spiralsystem ist abschließend, den Abschluß befördernd; Und zwar auf gesetzliche, vollendende Weise. Sodann aber auch auf ungesetzliche, voreilende vernichtende Weise.”⁶⁰⁶ One possibility is that Goethe might mean this in an empirical sense, as in the literal “death” of an individual plant, or perhaps simply as the imagined end of the plant’s growth cycle, “und Goethes Sprachgebrauch bewahrt eben diese Zweideutigkeit. Er definiert die Spiraltendenz als den ‘Abschluß des Blütenstandes,’ und weist an anderer Stelle darauf hin, dass sie sich ‘am auffallendsten bei Endigungen und Abschlüssen’ enthüllt.”⁶⁰⁷ With this concluding or terminal moment in the development of plant life, Goethe reintroduces the problem of contingency into his theory of plant metamorphosis, such that the end of the life cycle – as opposed to an endless growth cycle – is no longer ruled out. Thus a remark in the paralipomena which accompanies Goethe’s essay on the spiral tendency refers to “Beispiele der pathologischen Manifestationen der Spiraltendenz. Alter, Absterben, Vollendung seines organischen Laufes.”⁶⁰⁸ The potential of the spiral tendency to manifest itself as a pathology recalls Goethe’s earlier description of a “third” or “contingent” metamorphosis in his essay from 1790, in which he first articulated the element of contingency with respect to his theory of plant metamorphosis. The “pathological” potential of the spiral tendency, as an empirical rather than intuitible phenomenon, thus stands in marked contrast to his description of it as “producing,” “continuing,” and “passing by,” just as his intuition of the

⁶⁰⁵ For more on this point, as well as Goethe’s theory of the spiral tendency more broadly, see Holland, “‘Eine Art Wahnsinn.’ Intellektuelle Anschauung und Goethes Schriften zur Metamorphose,” in: *Intellektuelle Anschauung – unmögliche Evidenz*, eds. Sibylle Peters and Martin Schäfer (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006), 79–92.

⁶⁰⁶ Goethe, FA, I/24, 799.

⁶⁰⁷ Holland, “Intellektuelle Anschauung und Goethes Schriften zur Metamorphose,” 90. Holland’s citation of Goethe’s remark can be found in Goethe, FA, I/24, 778.

⁶⁰⁸ Goethe, *Goethes Werke. Herausgegeben im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen* (= WA), Abtlg. I–IV, 133 Bände in 143 Teilen (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1887–1919 [1999]), II/13, 94.

spiral tendency as a transitional moment in the development of a plant's organs simultaneously coexists and contrasts with the reality of the spiral tendency as an end-point.

This paradoxical coexistence of a procreative as well as a mortifying capacity with respect to the spiral tendency may be said to mark a decisive shift in the conception of nature, and of "life" more broadly, in Goethe's thought. For in his first essay on the metamorphosis of plants, he still posited a more or less mechanical interaction between force and counterforce – what he termed, drawing on mechanistic terminology deployed in a variety of scientific disciplines and discourses at the turn of the nineteenth century, the forces of "expansion" [Ausdehnung] and "contraction" [Zusammenziehung] – which are said to govern the formation and development of plants. In doing so, he came to situate contingency at the margin of his theory of plant metamorphosis, that is, as a supplement to the regulative "polarity" of the two prevailing forces which govern regular and irregular formations. In his final 1831 essay on the spiral tendency, however, the element of contingency now suddenly comes starkly to the fore, and in a far more radical manner than in his earliest text. With its ceaseless proliferation and drive forth, as well as its pathological, deviating, and mortifying potential, Goethe's theory of the spiral tendency presents a fundamentally modern, de-naturalized conception of nature as "monstrosity," in which the distinction between the realms of the organic and the inorganic, as well as between life and death, are now suspended.

Crucial in this regard is that Goethe's theory of spiral tendency cannot be constrained to his botanical research alone. In Goethe's writings alone, it has a considerable pre-history beyond the field of botany, connoting more broadly a centrifugal dynamic as well as a kind of cyclical motion that one might characterize as that of a vortex. In inorganic realms, for example, it can

function as a mechanical explanation and describe the formation of minerals.⁶⁰⁹ Goethe even describes the motion of the earth as a “living spiral” and an “animated screw without end,”⁶¹⁰ and several years earlier, following the publication of his *West-östlicher Divan*, justified his fascination in oriental poetry on the basis of its resemblance to the spiral motions of the earth.⁶¹¹ The figure of the spiral might thus be said to leap out from the frame of purely natural-scientific or botanical inquiry, and thereby emerge as a figure of thought for modernity as such.

To be sure, the figure of the spiral has a long history that far predates Goethe’s use, and can be traced all the way back to pre-Socratic thought, perhaps most prominently embodied by Lucretius’s atomistic conception of the *clinamen* or “swerve” in the didactic poem *De rerum natura*. Recent scholarship has also suggested that Goethe’s concept of the spiral tendency may have even anticipated certain modernist aesthetic practices in the twentieth century, from Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis to Marcel Duchamp and James Joyce.⁶¹² Yet the question as to

⁶⁰⁹ See also Goethe’s journal entry from November 6, 1830, on vertical and spiral tendencies in the mineral realm: “[...] Kam die Sendung meines Sohns von Florenz an. Wurde ausgepackt, gesondert und beurtheilt. Der: böhmische Mineralienhändler packte seine Stufen aus. Manches war in Bezug auf Vertical- und Spiraltendenz notirt worden. Mittag Hofrath Vogel und Dr. Weller. Gegen Abend Hofrath Meyer. Wir besahen und beurtheilten das von August Gesendete. Derselbe las die Fortsetzung der Kunstgeschichte von Augustus Zeiten an. Vorher den politischen und kriegerischen Zustand des römischen Reichs im ersten Jahrhundert. Kam Frau von Wolzogen. Wir besprachen die Jenaischen Angelegenheiten. Sodann einiges über Schiller und Wilhelm von Humboldt” (Goethe, WA, III, 12:327, cited in Holland, *German Romanticism and Science*, 50).

⁶¹⁰ Goethe himself even suggested the broader significance of the spiral form beyond the realm of botanics in his 1825 treatise on meteorology, entitled “Versuch einer Witterungslehre”: “wir versinnlichen sie [die Bewegung der Welt] uns als lebendige Spirale, als belebte Schraube ohne Ende” (Goethe, FA, I/25, 294f). See also: Helmut Müller-Sievers, “‘Belebte Schraube ohne Ende.’ Zur Vorgeschichte der Doppelhelix,” in: *Trajekte* 16 (April 2008), 25–28. Müller-Sievers discusses the figures of the spiral, helix, and screw as they relate to the work of Kant, Goethe, and subsequent theories of mechanics. With respect to Goethe, Müller-Sievers reads a direct connection between the spiral tendency of the earth and the spiral tendency of vegetation (ibid., 27).

⁶¹¹ In a letter to Zelter from May 11, 1820, Goethe claims he encountered in Persian poetry “heiterer Überblick des beweglichen, immer kreis- und spiralartig wiederkehrenden Erde-Treibens” (Goethe, MA, 20.1, 601, cited in Dieter Borchmeyer, “‘Lebensfluten – Tatensturm.’ Goethe – der bewegte Bewegte,” in: *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 129 [2012], 49–63, here: 50). What is peculiar is that he brings not only the circle, but also the spiral into play here, ostensibly in order to convey that rotation does not mean an ‘eternal recur of the same,’ but rather consists in “immerstrebendem Aufsteigen,” in ever new “Steigerung,” in which he saw with “Polarität” the “zwei großen Triebkräfte aller Natur” (Goethe, MA, 18.2, 359). For more on the significance of Goethe’s conception of motion for his middle and late works of literature, see Borchmeyer, “‘Lebensfluten – Tatensturm.’ Goethe – der bewegte Bewegte.”

⁶¹² For more on the significance of the spiral in twentieth-century literature and art, see Nico Israel, *Spirals: The Whirled Image in Twentieth-Century Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). While his

whether Goethe's theory of the spiral tendency owes its epistemic weight to pre-Socratic thought, or whether it in fact gains significance in light of later modernist and avant-garde aesthetic practices is not at stake in this analysis. Rather, whereas the concept of anastomosis, which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, features prominently in Goethe's first essay on the theory of plant metamorphosis, represents a radical *spatial* as well as syntactic ordering principle that encompasses at once both material as well as rhetorical techniques of hybridization – of grafting, enfolding, and translating – it is his later theory of the spiral tendency that reflects a distinctly *temporal* conception of life and form. The simultaneous affirmation of two seemingly mutually contradictory phenomena embodied by the spiral tendency – that of infinite proliferation and the possibility of an end, of death – reflect the way in which, for the late Goethe, life appears in the form of an infinite deferral – namely the deferral of death.

The temporality of deferral in Goethe's theory of the spiral tendency thus comes into surprisingly close proximity to Sigmund Freud's model of delay, or postponement, in the movement of life protecting itself through the deferral of death: "Dabei kommt das Paradoxe zustande, daß der lebende Organismus sich auf das energischste gegen Einwirkungen (Gefahren) sträubt, die ihm dazu verhelfen könnten, sein Lebensziel auf kurzem Wege (durch Kurzschluß sozusagen) zu erreichen, aber dies Verhalten charakterisiert eben ein rein triebhaftes im Gegensatz zu einem intelligenten Streben." From this perspective, his resultant theory of the death drive does not so much anticipate Goethe's notion of the spiral tendency as it appears as its modern

monograph focuses on the heterogeneous manifestations of the spiral figure in the aesthetic practices of early and high modernism, Israel does briefly take note of Goethe's contribution to this tradition in the first chapter, which sketches out the 'prehistory' of its twentieth-century incarnation(s): "[S]pecial consideration must be given to the nineteenth [century], as perhaps nowhere did the notion of the spiral as an expression of nature, or 'life,' receive more attention than in Romanticism and its aftermaths. In his essay 'Über die Spiraltendenz der Vegetation' (On the Spiral Tendency of Plant Life), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe [...] addresses two 'tendencies' in plant life, the vertical and the spiral, the merging of which accounts for what he called 'metamorphosis'" (ibid., 31). Israel then goes on, if somewhat problematically, to connect the spiral tendency in Goethe's writings on plant metamorphosis to a narratological principle employed in his late works, such as his novella *Novelle* (1828).

incarnation. For just as Freud's theory of the death drive was conceived as a revision of an emphatic conception of life – in thinking “beyond the pleasure principle,” he conceived of a paradoxical dynamic in living organisms, namely the “compulsion to repeat” [Wiederholungszwang], that potentially overrides the pleasure principle by seeking to derive pleasure from pain and even death – so too does Goethe's theory of the spiral tendency completely eclipse any symmetrical polarity between the forces of life and death. For Goethe as for Freud, then, the introduction of the problem of an end – the possibility of death and finitude – does not mark a shift from life to death, but rather seek to show how infinite proliferation and morbidity paradoxically coexist in one and the same dynamic. Whereas for Goethe this phenomenon goes under the name “spiral tendency,” for Freud it is embodied in the primordial living organism of the gamete [Keimzelle]: “So arbeiten diese Keimzellen dem Sterben der lebenden Substanz entgegen und wissen für sie zu erringen, was uns als potentielle Unsterblichkeit erscheinen muß, wengleich es vielleicht nur eine Verlängerung des Todesweges bedeutet.”⁶¹³ For Freud, the gamete's (self-)preservation of an earlier stage of organic development that precedes the higher forms of plant and animal life reflects the dynamics of the drives writ large to the extent that it seeks to infinitely defer death:

Die Triebe, welche die Schicksale dieser das Einzelwesen überlebenden Elementarorganismen in acht nehmen, für ihre sichere Unterbringung sorgen, solange sie wehrlos gegen die Reize der Außenwelt sind, ihr Zusammentreffen mit den anderen Keimzellen herbeiführen usw., bilden die Gruppe der Sexualtriebe. Sie sind in demselben Sinne konservativ wie die anderen, indem sie frühere Zustände der lebenden Substanz wiederbringen, aber sie sind es in stärkerem Maße, indem sie sich als besonders resistent gegen äußere Einwirkungen erweisen, und dann noch in einem weiteren Sinne, da sie das Leben selbst für längere Zeiten erhalten. Sie sind die eigentlichen Lebenstrieb; dadurch, daß sie der Absicht der anderen Triebe, welche durch die Funktion zum Tode führt, entgegenwirken, deutet sich ein Gegensatz zwischen ihnen und den übrigen an, den die Neurosenlehre frühzeitig als bedeutungsvoll erkannt hat. Es ist wie ein Zauderrhythmus im Leben der Organismen; die eine Triebgruppe stürmt nach vorwärts, um das Endziel des

⁶¹³ Freud, GW XIII, 42.

Lebens möglichst bald zu erreichen, die andere schnellst an einer gewissen Stelle dieses Weges zurück, um ihn von einem bestimmten Punkt an nochmals zu machen und so die Dauer des Weges zu verlängern.⁶¹⁴

According to Freud, the temporal rhythm of “hesitating” or “tarrying” [zaudern] characterizes the life of organisms. This is because, as Freud argues in the above passage, the drives contained in living organisms are not uni-directional – they are not, to paraphrase Goethe, a mere “vertical tendency” or “system” – but counteract each other insofar as one group of drives propels life as fast as possible toward its end, namely death, while the other drives seek to retard this movement in order to thereby “extend the duration of the path” [die Dauer des Weges zu verlängern] toward death for as long as possible. In this sense, life for Freud, as for Goethe, is nothing but the deferral of death – an eccentric movement of counteracting forces which simultaneously proliferates in “excess” [Übermaß] and seeks to hasten its inevitable “conclusion” [Abschluß].

As biographical information, the fact that Goethe’s fascination with the monstrous, mortifying power of the spiral tendency coincided with an increasing awareness of his own mortality, up until the very week of his death, is perhaps merely interesting. However, just as critics and colleagues of Freud dismissed his own theory of the death drive as merely a symptom of the prevailing mood of cultural pessimism at the time, one detects a similar uneasiness with respect to Goethe’s literary and scientific output near the end of his life, treating them as symptoms of senility, especially with respect to his final novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. This tension between, on the one hand, the attempts to more narrowly inscribe such disturbing theories, as by way of recourse to biographicism or to cultural context, and, on the other hand, to take them seriously, as cogent and coherent reflections and not simply self-reflections, is perhaps symptomatic of the difficulty, perhaps even the impossibility, that lies at the heart of Goethe’s

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 42ff.

morphological project, namely that of disentangling his “morphological gaze” from the objects of nature which his method seeks to bring forth. Goethe himself seems to have been aware of this dual aspect when he remarks just before his death: “Das ich nahe am End meiner Laufbahn noch von dem Strudel der Spiraltendenz ergriffen werden sollte, war auch ein wunderlich Geschick.”⁶¹⁵ As a monstrous figure of infinite repetition, the spiral designates the centrifugal dynamic that lures the gaze of the observer, sucking it into its “whirlpool” or “vortex” [Strudel]. From this perspective, its epistemology is no longer one of infinite (self-)reflection, but points instead to the elements of contingency, materiality, and even death, those de-subjectifying forces which put into question the very status of the subject. One could thus wager that, insofar as the spiral tendency comes to possess a de-centering, disruptive, and dispersing power, it thereby announces the very impossibility of any systematic or transcendental “order of things,”⁶¹⁶ as well as any stable relation of the subject to knowledge.

In the chapter which follows, it will be argued that the figure of the spiral emerges as an epistemological as well as poetological problem whenever the question of the end, in the broadest sense of the gesture of closure – a gesture which does not, in fact, come to an end in itself – presents itself. If the spiral tendency, as has been argued above, is precisely that form which concerns, at bottom, a monstrous conception of form and life that implicates the elements of contingency, materiality, and death, then the question remains as to how this reconfiguration of form-to-life and life-to-form relates to the theory of the novel. Symptomatic in this regard is Goethe’s decision late

⁶¹⁵ Goethe, *LA*, I/4, 251

⁶¹⁶ “At the foundation of all the empirical positivities, and of everything that can indicate itself as a concrete limitation of man’s existence, we discover a finitude – which is in a sense the same: it is marked by the spatiality of the body, the yawning of desire, and the time of language [...] It is within this vast but narrow space, opened up by the repetition of the positive within the fundamental, that the whole of this analytic of finitude – so closely linked to the future of modern thought—will be deployed; it is there that we shall see in succession the transcendental repeat the empirical, the cogito repeat the unthought, the return of the origin repeat its retreat [...]” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 315f.

in life to serialize *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in the form of a sequel, entitled *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden*. With his novel, which, similar to the *Notebooks on Morphology*, presents itself as a disturbingly heterogeneous collection of textual material, Goethe surpasses the epistemological and medial constraints of the closed form of the book. In fact, the final words of the novel, “(To be continued.)” [(Ist fortzusetzen.)], programmatically stage the very impossibility of a fixed conclusion or end while simultaneously instantiating a (paratextual) gesture of closure. Goethe’s *Wanderjahre*, which consists of a collection of aphorisms, letters, and novellas – among other kinds of texts – is no longer able to be designated as a *Bildungsroman* – in fact, the genre designation “novel” [Roman] was stricken at Goethe’s request from the title page of the novel’s second edition. Instead, the *Wanderjahre* demands a new theory of novel, which is organized rather as a kind of “network,” as an archive or aggregate of different texts.⁶¹⁷ In this sense, it constitutes an open experimental arrangement of heterogeneously interwoven texts. It thus marks a drastic departure not only from the literary institution of the *Bildungsroman*, which the *Lehrjahre* virtually founded, but also from the reflexive epistemology of “Bildung” upon which it is premised. If indeed for Goethe “Alles ist Blatt” – in the double sense of “everything is leaf” and “everything is paper” – then the spiral tendency announces an alternative of epistemology, one which foregrounds the centrifugal dynamic of the post-hermeneutic text. While more work will be required to make this claim, it suffices to wager that the spiral tendency figures as a new paradigm of textuality, one which no longer corresponds to hermeneutic relation of part to whole.

As will be seen, the forms of knowledge, as well as their representation, which correspond to this new paradigm of textuality are inextricably intertwined, in turn, with the novel’s virulent

⁶¹⁷ Cf. Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books. The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); see also: Martin Bez, “*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*”: *Aggregat, Archiv, Archivroman* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

motif of “renunciation” [Entsagung], which can be understood from this perspective as Goethe’s term for the very process of de-subjectivization as well as for the de-centering of the subject. In the *Wanderjahre*, renunciation is not so much a morality or an ethics as it is a process of uncoupling the subject from description, and hence relates in the text to the proliferation of numerous uncanny figures, none more so arguably than the astonishing figure of Makarie. Neither purely mythopoetic nor cosmological, neither really a figure nor a character in the traditional sense, Makarie comes to embody a distinctly spiral dynamic of infinite dissemination and proliferation, which moves from center to periphery. Moreover, she is closely linked in the *Wanderjahre* to the mysterious function of the archive, and for this reason can be read as a textual, even technical, principle, which in connection with both the oral motif of “renunciation” and the broader reconfiguration of form and life in the novel may be said to concern the very unbinding of the novel from the boundaries of the closed book form and the material dispersion of its sheets of paper.

3. “(IST FORTZUSETZEN.)” THE MATERIALITY OF THE ARCHIVE IN WILHELM MEISTERS WANDERJAHRE

Mit solchem Büchlein aber ist es wie mit dem Leben selbst: es findet sich in dem Complex des Ganzen Nothwendiges und Zufälliges, Vorgesetztes und Angeschlossenes, bald gelungen, bald vereitelt, wodurch es eine Art von Unendlichkeit erhält, die sich in verständige und vernünftige Worte nicht durchaus fassen noch einschließen läßt.⁶¹⁸

—Goethe to J. F. Rochlitz, November 23, 1829

Seit der Zeit hab’ ich fortgefahren, den Epitomator mein selbst zu machen: denn es ist gewissermaßen noch lustiger, ein vorliegendes Leben als ein vorliegendes Buch auszuziehen [...].⁶¹⁹

—Goethe to S. Boisserée, January 27, 1823).

After 1800, Goethe’s morphological research increasingly took as its point of departure the massive archive of material in Weimar. This marked a shift in his approach from the direct observation of nature and its objects to the observation of observations – in other words, to the archive as the site of second-order observation. Yet while this archive was initially intended to house only the objects and data that he had amassed in the course of his morphological studies, it soon came to serve a far different purpose: that of a private literary archive. Prior to his decision in 1822 to begin work on the final collected edition of his works – the *Ausgabe letzter Hand* – a literary archive emerged as its constitutive presupposition and foundational moment.⁶²⁰ In the weeks and months

⁶¹⁸ Goethe, *Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche, 1828–1832*, in: FA, I/38, 199.

⁶¹⁹ Goethe, WA, IV/36, 284.

⁶²⁰ On May 1, 1822, Goethe notes for the first time in his *Tagebuch* his plan for a new edition of his works: “Nach Tische Gedanken an eine neue Ausgabe meiner Werke” (Goethe, WA, III/8, 191). Already in April, 1822, Goethe began to prepare himself for such an undertaking. Thus in a letter dated April 19, 1822, to Johann Friedrich Cotta, who was already aware of Goethe’s plans and work on the new edition, Goethe writes: “Zugleich vermelde daß ich so eben beschäftigt bin, meine sämtlichen poetischen, literarischen und wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, sowohl gedruckte als ungedruckte, übersichtlich aufzustellen, sodann aber das Ganze meinem Sohne und einem geprüften gelehrten Freunde in die Hände zu legen, damit der weitläufige und in manchen Sinne bedenkliche Nachlaß in’s Klare kommen und auch von dieser Seite mein Haus bestellt sey” (Goethe, WA, IV/36, 20f).

that followed his decision to undertake this monumental project, Goethe, with the help of a collective of scribes, assistants, and editors,⁶²¹ systematically collected, sorted, catalogued, and inventoried everything which he had ever written, all of which he sought to put under the autobiographical frame of “Bruchstücke einer großen Konfession.”⁶²² Not only all the accumulated files and papers, all the drafts of complete and incomplete works, but also all the journals and letters were to be rigorously sorted and indexed, so that in the end “Gedrucktes und Ungedrucktes, Gesammeltes und Zerstreutes vollkommen geordnet beysammen steht” and “in einem Archiv beschlossen [ist] [...], worüber nicht weniger ein Verzeichniß, nach allgemeinen und besondern Rubriken, Buchstaben und Nummern aller Art gefertigt” can be exhibited.⁶²³ By the time of his death in 1832, Goethe left behind manuscripts that now fill 341 boxes, a collection of 17,800 rocks, more than 9,000 pages of illustrations, approximately 4,500 casts of gems, 8,000 books, countless paintings, sculptures, natural-scientific collections and more.⁶²⁴ His ceaseless drive, especially near the end of his life, toward self-archiving and self-editing, recounted in his above-cited essay “Archiv des

⁶²¹ Specifically, Goethe was able to manage his literary archive with the aid of the library secretary of Weimar, Friedrich Kräuter (1790–1856), who since 1818 also served as Goethe’s private secretary. On May 7, 1822, he notes, for instance, in his *Tagebuch*: “Kräuter arbeitete seit gestern, alle Acten und Documente auf mich meinen Wirkungskreis bezüglich aufzustellen und in Ordnung zu bringen” (Goethe, WA, III/8, 193). In addition to Kräuter, this collective of scribes and secretaries surrounding Goethe consisted of Johann John, Johann Schuchardt, the philologists Friedrich Reimer and Karl Götting, the art historian Johann Meyer, Goethe’s faithful secretary Eckermann, as well as Wilhelm Reichel, Cotta’s corrector in his Augsburg print shop.

⁶²² Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, in: idem., FA, I/14, 310. Apropos this remark, Andrew Piper writes: “No previous author had been as instrumental in framing the authorial life as the key to understanding the literary *corpus*. [...] According to Goethe, the poet was the message. Goethe worked assiduously to preserve and order the written traces of the life that would serve as the basis of the works. He produced eleven volumes of autobiographical writings in the final two decades of his life and oversaw the creation of a personal archive [...]. Goethe’s relentless activity as a collector, which only increased during his late period, had turned inward” (Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, 21).

⁶²³ Goethe, “Archiv des Dichters und Schriftstellers,” in: FA, I/21, 398. There he writes: “Mehr als einmal wehrend meiner Lebenszeit stellte ich mir die dreißig niedlichen Bände der Lessingschen Werke vor Augen [...]. In solchem Falle ist dem Menschen wohl erlaubt, der einer ähnlichen Lage sich bewußt ist, auf sich selbst zurückzukehren und eine Vergleichung anzustellen, was ihm gelungen oder mißlungen sey; was von ihm und für ihn geschehen und was ihm allenfalls zu thun noch obliege” (Goethe, “Archiv des Dichters und Schriftstellers,” in: FA, I/21, 366f).

⁶²⁴ For more on Goethe’s collections, cf. Hamm, “Goethes Sammlungen auspacken.” See also: Erich Trunz, “Goethe als Sammler,” in: idem., *Ein Tag aus Goethes Leben* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2006), 72–100, here: 72. There Trunz presents the motifs of collection in Goethe’s work and designates them as Goethe’s “kunsthistorisches Institut,” as his “geologisch-mineralogisches Institut” and “botanisches und zoologisches Institut” (ibid.).

Dichters und Schriftstellers” (1823), thus introduced the possibility of a consistent order into the complete representation of the scattered documents and miscellaneous objects that he had accumulated over the course of his life.

The complete preservation of written material, together with its organization in the literary archive, attests to more than simply Goethe’s growing awareness of his own historical distance from the time in which he lived and of the transience of the past. Rather, it documents a method of inscribing order into the contingency and heterogeneity of one’s own ‘life’s work,’ a method which is in fact of the exact same kind as Goethe had already developed many years earlier in his approach to the observation and collection of natural objects. That which scholars have rightly identified with the autobiographical orientation of Goethe’s late period – his conception of himself as having become “historical”⁶²⁵ – suggests nothings less than the fact that “Goethe” makes himself discernible and describable as his own object of study: “er rückt unter die Phänomene, die Farben, Mineralien, Pflanzen, Knochen und Wolken, erhält wie diese im Verlauf innerer Analyse eine Geschichte, offenbart auch Gesetzmäßigkeiten und wird zuletzt faß- und deutbar in den Formeln und Wendungen Goethischer Sinngebung.”⁶²⁶ While the unusual title given to his *Notes on Morphology* thereby invited their reading as in part an autobiographical testimony – “durch Lebensereignisse verbunden” –, a glance into Goethe’s archive in Weimar opens up an alternative perspective onto his late work: namely that with the undertaking of a final completed edition, Goethe’s own life attained the status of a morphological specimen, one which was to be collected,

⁶²⁵ That during his late period Goethe viewed himself as having become “historical” and increasingly came to observe his own life as if from the perspective of a third-person person – as if his life itself had become an object of study and observation – Goethe himself emphasizes at multiple points in letters and journal entries. Thus, for instance, in a letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt dated December 1, 1831, he writes: “Darf ich mich, mein Verehrtester, in altem Zutrauen ausdrücken, so gesteh ich gern daß in meinen hohen Jahren mir alles mehr und mehr historisch wird: ob etwas in der vergangenen Zeit, in fernen Reichen oder mir ganz nah räumlich im Augenblicke vorgeht, ist ganz eins, ja ich erschiene mir selbst immer mehr und mehr geschichtlich [...]” (Goethe, WA, IV/49, 165).

⁶²⁶ Christina Salmen, “*Die ganze merkwürdige Verlassenschaft*”: *Goethes Entsagungspoetik in Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahren* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 50.

sorted, and brought to completion in Weimar, upon whose sedimentary layers his monumental editorial enterprise – the *Ausgabe letzter Hand* – came to be founded and from whose organizational schema it drew its method and rubric.

It is from the perspective of Goethe's repurposing of his morphological archive in Weimar into a 'literary institution' that the centrality of the archive motif to his later novelistic works will be approached. As is well-known, the motif of the archive plays an especially prominent role in two of Goethe's later works, both of which were in fact originally conceived as one and the same project: namely *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809) as well as his final major prose work, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden* (1821/29), which occupies the primary focus of this chapter.⁶²⁷ In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Otilie's *Tagebuch*, which Goethe grafted onto the novel, presents itself as a kind of "commonplace book,"⁶²⁸ in which she jots down her own thoughts and observations, as well as copies the aphorisms and maxims of others from a book someone has given her. By abandoning conventional citational practices – throughout Otilie's *Tagebuch*, the absence of quotation marks makes it nearly impossible to distinguish between when

⁶²⁷ As is well-known, Goethe originally conceived *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* as an inset novella in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, only to later unfold it out of that novel and turn it into a new novel itself. For comparative analyses of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, cf. Christian Mittermüller, *Sprachskepsis und Poetologie. Goethes Romane 'Die Wahlverwandtschaften' und 'Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre'* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008); idem., "Das schiebt sich und verschiebt sich" – poetologische Reflexionen in Goethes Romanen 'Die Wahlverwandtschaften' und 'Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre,'" in: *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 121 (2004), 53–65; as well as Judith Ryan, "Pfeile mit Widerhaken": On the Aphorisms in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* and *Wanderjahre*," in: *Goethe Yearbook* 16 (2009), 1–10.

⁶²⁸ For more on the discursive tradition of commonplace books, see Earle Havens, "Of Common Places, Or Memorial Books," as well as Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know*. For the reading of Otilie's *Tagebuch* as a commonplace book, see Ryan, "Pfeile mit Widerhaken," esp. 2–3. There Ryan situates Otilie's writing within the discursive-historical context of eighteenth-century bookkeeping practices, and explicitly cites Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's *Sudelbücher* as a model of this epistemic practice. She goes on to approach the *Tagebuch* as a hybrid between an older tradition of bookkeeping and an emerging tradition of psychological reflection. For an opposite approach, see Andrew Piper, "Paraphrasis: Goethe, the Novella, and Forms of Transitional Knowledge," in: *Goethe Yearbook* 17 (2010), 179–201. There Piper argues that Otilie's *Tagebuch*, and crucial details such as the erasure of dates, suggests the way this medium is in fact gradually moving away from the pietistically informed confessional book towards a space of synoptic generalization.

Otilie speaks directly and when she is rather being spoken for –, the text presents Otilie as a kind of “chemical thinker,” who engrafts her own idiosyncratic thoughts and ideas onto other’s without clearly demarcating the difference.⁶²⁹ Eduard, her counterpart in the novel, by contrast, expresses the desideratum to reorganize his own travel diaries to assemble “aus diesen unschätzbaren, aber verworrenen Heften und Blättern ein für uns und andre erfreuliches Ganze.”⁶³⁰ This he never accomplishes, but leaves the task instead to his friend, the Hauptmann, to create an archive where his papers are to be arranged in various cabinets, slip boxes, and containers according to different criteria.

In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the motif of the archive thus serves to contrast two diametrically opposing practices of bookkeeping and citationality; in doing so, not only does it reveal the inabilities of the respective figures to understand themselves, but it also attests to a more profound crisis of communication with respect to the ability to incorporate foreign speech into one’s own.⁶³¹ In *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, by contrast, the principle of formal symmetry in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is abandoned. In its place the text presents a conception of the archive as an uncanny

⁶²⁹ Thus Andrew Piper reads Otilie’s *Tagebuch* as a substitute for the Hauptmann’s cartographic project. If the latter still reflected the possibility of an ‘overview’ or ‘total’ perspective in the form of a single, unified image, the former suggests its impossibility, substituting in its place the sequentiality of peripatetic knowledge. Piper goes on to link this to the increasing ambiguity of direct speech and citation in the *Tagebuch*, which he reads as a technology of writing premised on “decitationalizing the citation” (Piper, “Paraphrasis,” 193), which – like Maria Wutz in Jean Paul’s *Schulmeisterlein Wutz* – effaces and disperses any stable point of origin with respect to the citation: “Far from delimiting citational property, the quotation marks in the *Wahlverwandtschaften* stand as signifiers of an acute undecidability of the attribution of speech to speaker. They mark the exact reversal of the very point of such typographic signs, a point that Marjorie Garber has argued is a function of the hollowing out of intentionality in any act of citation, of having someone else speak for you [...]. Words in quotation marks are traces of probable conversations that are no longer literally transcribed or cited. The speech of others is enfolded into the speech of another, even as its externality or objectivity is preserved in some fashion” (ibid.).

⁶³⁰ Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, in: idem., FA, I/8, 276.

⁶³¹ Cf. Piper, “Paraphrasis,” 186–88. See also: Heinz Schlaffer, “Namen und Buchstaben in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*,” in: *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften. Kritische Modelle und Diskursanalysen zum Mythos Literatur*, ed. Norbert W. Bolz (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 211–29.

narrative and epistemic space – as the “primal scene” of the emergence of a disorienting, de-subjectifying perspective – where the relation of subject to object, of narration to narrated content, becomes destabilized and suspended. This archival dynamic – what the secondary literature has termed, with respect to the elaborate paratextual fiction in the novel, an “archive fiction”⁶³² – manifests itself at numerous superimposing levels in the text: it encompasses various caskets, chests, drawers, and boxes, as well as the respective documents which they contain, all of which circulate in the novel in a disorienting yet calculated manner. It also takes the form of reproductions of epistolary correspondence between various characters; of a travel diary which – just like Otilie’s *Tagebuch* – Goethe grafted onto his novel; and of collections of aphorisms located at the end of the second and third books – respectively entitled “Betrachtungen im Sinne der Wanderer” and “Aus Makariens Archiv” – which are said to have come from a fictional archive. In the course of the narrative it is revealed that this archive belongs to a mysterious and uncanny figure by the name of Makarie, who has setup an even more elaborate archive of a similar kind as Eduard’s, located in a separate room where everything is carefully arranged in boxes with identifying labels: “Rubriken mancher Art deuteten auf den verschiedensten Inhalt, Einsicht und Ordnung leuchtete hervor.”⁶³³

While much has been written on forms of mediated communication in the *Wanderjahre*, few attempts have been made to connect the motif of the archive to the organic – as well as inorganic – forms of life that Goethe came to associate with it.⁶³⁴ Neither merely a narrative device

⁶³² Cf. Volker Neuhaus, “Die Archivfiktion in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*,” in: *Euphorion* 62.1 (1968), 13–27; Ehrhard Bahr, *The Novel as Archive: The Genesis, Reception, and Criticism of Goethe’s “Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Camden: Camden House, 1998); and most recently Martin Bez, “*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*: Aggregat, Archiv, Archivroman (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

⁶³³ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden*, in: idem., FA, I/10, 388.

⁶³⁴ See, for instance, Manfred Karnick, “*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*: oder, Die Kunst des Mittelbaren; Studien zum Problem der Verständigung in Goethes Altersepoche (Munich 1968), as well as Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, in

nor a poetic figure, it will be argued that the archive constitutes, in fact, a vital self-dynamic, which unfolds according to a serial logic: it articulates an interstitial space in which form and life – here understood in the double sense of form as “living form” and the form that life takes through its textualization – intersect and intertwine. For this reason, the archive ought to be read neither as a principle of organic narration – *Bildung* – nor as the site of a well-ordered *loci communes*, as in the tradition of *inventio*. Rather, the forms-of-life that Goethe associates with the motif of the archive – among them mercury and the spiral tendency – are themselves conceived in textual and mediological terms, embodying a dynamic of aggregation and dispersion, juxtaposition and proliferation, whose parts never add up to a whole. This repurposing of the archive from a site of knowledge organization into a modern epistemic figure of dispersion plays a decisive role in Goethe’s reorganization of the novel. By unbinding the pages of the book, the archive embodies a dynamic that continually threatens to overstep its medial closure. In doing so, not only does it undermine the literary institution of the *Bildungsroman*, particularly with respect to its claims to represent an overview or totality, but it also dissolves the “aesthetic unity” of the work into a serial form. If the novel was once synonymous with the principle of aesthetic unity and, relatedly, a unified author-function, then the *Wanderjahre* opens up an interstitial perspective unto the medium that radically puts into question any semblance of such unity – one for which “Alles ist Blatt.”⁶³⁵

3.1. Serial Experiments in Literary Form: Collective, Aggregate, Aperçu

Goethe’s effort to prepare a final edition of his works – one that would bring everything he had ever written to completion and closure – inscribed within itself a paradoxical double-movement:

particular 19–52. A thorough examination of the novel’s communicative poetics can also be found in Gerhard Neumann’s commentary to the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, where he focuses on the novel’s media-theoretical interest in the idea of the “proper distance.”

⁶³⁵ Goethe, FA, I/24, 84.

for to the extent that the *Ausgabe letzter Hand* aimed at the monumental presentation of its author by unifying life and work in an exemplary fashion, both Goethe's late novelistic works as well as the self-commentaries that emerged alongside them attest to an irreducible element of dispersion and fragmentation, which displaces and distances itself from every operation of closure and completion. That Goethe's ostensible abandonment of the classical ideal of aesthetic unity during his later phase of writing coincided with a growing shift in his own working conditions from a more or less unified authorship to an increasingly collective one – nowhere more so than with respect to his close collaboration with Eckermann, a relationship which has been characterized as an exemplary case of “literary parasitism”⁶³⁶ – is far from coincidental: for if one closely examines the letters and memos produced during this period, one repeatedly stumbles across a central concept around which everything seems to revolve: that of the “collective,” under which Goethe came to treat “sein vergangenes Wesen und Treiben historisch als das Schicksal eines Drittens”⁶³⁷ and, ultimately, situate his entire collected works.

During the period of writing that coincided with his work on the *Ausgabe letzter Hand*, Goethe thus came to perceive his literary efforts as an increasingly collective undertaking, viewing himself, in turn, from the uncanny perspective of “a third” [eines Drittens]. In doing so, he situated himself not so much in the position of sovereign author as that of the redactor and secondary editor of his own texts. In 1823, the year marked by the caesura of the *Ausgabe letzter Hand*, he suggestively refers to himself as the “Epitomator mein selbst.”⁶³⁸ Whereas self-abridgment and self-redaction ascended to hallmarks of Goethe's later period of text-production and authorship, it was

⁶³⁶ Avital Ronell, *Dictations: On Haunted Writing* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 65.

⁶³⁷ Goethe to Schiller, May 22, 1803, in: *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*, ed. Emil Staiger (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1977), 991.

⁶³⁸ Goethe, *Werke*, IV/36, 284.

the outsourcing of numerous redactional tasks to his coterie of scribes and secretaries that introduced an insuperable alterity – a literal “foreign body” – into his literary corpus. Approximately a decade later in 1832, the year of his death, Goethe gave voice to this dramatic shift in his working conditions when he famously remarked to his friend Frédéric Soret, “mein Werk ist das eines Kollektivwesens, das den Namen Goethe trägt.”⁶³⁹

On the one hand, Goethe’s self-assessment of his *oeuvre* near the end of his life as a “collective entity” concerns, to be sure, an awareness of the change in the discursive conditions of text production under which he sought to produce a definitive edition of his life’s works. On the other hand, his repeated invocations in letters and memos of the concept of the “collective” cannot be strictly confined to the multi-auctorial enterprise of the *Ausgabe letzter Hand*. Rather, in connection with the increasingly archival and redactional orientation of his later phase of writing, the concept of the collective marks a decisive shift in Goethe’s approach to authorship and literary

⁶³⁹ Goethe, *Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche, 1823–1828*, in: idem., FA, I/37, ed. Horst Fleig, 522. Frédéric Soret’s own account of his conversation with Goethe contains a discussion of Mirabeau’s character, which subtly and implicitly turns out to be self-portrait of Goethe himself: “Les Français veulent que Mirabeau soit leur Hercule et ils ont raison. Mais encore faut-il qu’un Hercule se nourrisse amplement. Ils oublient, les bonnes gens, que c’est un colosse composé de pièce, que ce demi-dieu est un être collectif! Le plus grand génie ne deviendra jamais grand’chose, s’il prétend tout tirer de son propre fonds. Qu’est-ce que le génie, si ce n’est la facilité de saisir et d’utiliser tout ce qui nous frappe, de coordonner et de jeter de la vie sur tous les matériaux qui s’offrent à nous [...] Qu’ai-je fait? J’ai recueilli et mis à profit tout ce que j’ai vu, entendu, observé, j’ai mis en œuvre les productions de la nature et celles des hommes. Tout mes écrits m’ont été fournis par mille individus et mille objets divers [...]; souvent ils ont semé la moisson que j’ai recueilli. Mon œuvre est celle d’une agrégation d’êtres qui ont été pris dans la nature, elle porte le nom de Goethe [...]” (Frédéric Soret, *Notice sur Goethe*, cited in *Goethes Gespräche*, ed. Wolfgang Herweg [Zürich/Stuttgart 1965], III/3, 841f). With respect to this passage, Christina Salmen notes that while the young Goethe admired Hercules as an heroic figure, during his later period he no longer associated it with power or strength. In a subsequent conversation with Soret, Goethe speaks of Hercules as a “Koloß aus Teilen.” Salmen argues that this reformulation indicates the transformation of Goethe’s own self-conception: “Goethe, dessen Daseinskonzeption sicherlich auf der Selbstsetzung und -mächtigkeit des Individuums gründete, begriff sich, als er sich im Rahmen seiner autobiographischen und seiner redaktionellen Arbeiten an der *Ausgabe letzter Hand* zunehmend selbst historisch und literarisch wurde, nur mehr als ‘Kollektivwesen’ – als eine Versammlung, ein Aggregat von Einflüssen, Bewegungen, Kräften und Anlagen, schwankend in steter Bewegung, Veränderung, Neuformulierung” (Salmen, “*Die ganze merkwürdige Verlässenschaft*,” 54). Furthermore, in his study of Goethe in *Arbeit am Mythos*, Hans Blumenberg suggests that Goethe’s later description of himself as a “collective entity” concerns his development of a different myth, namely that of Prometheus, “zu einer zentralen Konfiguration seines Selbst- und Weltverständnisses” (Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos*, 467).

production, one which encompasses nothing less than the abandonment of authorial unity and the possibility narrative closure, and relatedly a turn toward a communicative paradigm that is increasingly characterized by the withdrawal of a unified narrative and authorial voice in favor of a de-subjectifying passivity, or what Goethe termed “renunciation” [Entsagung].

The primary site of this transformation is *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, whose preparation was in fact coextensive with the continuation of the *Ausgabe letzter Hand* – an interconnection that Goethe himself identified in an 1826 letter to Boisserée.⁶⁴⁰ First published in serial installments in 1808 with the appearance of one of the work’s novellas in Johann Cotta’s *Ladies’ Pocket-Book*, it was not until 1821 that the first completed edition of the *Wanderjahre* would be released to the public. Goethe subsequently revised and republished the work in 1829, at which point the subtitle “A Novel” [Ein Roman] was dropped from the title page.⁶⁴¹ In that same year, he wrote in a letter to J. F. Rochlitz that the *Wanderjahre* “sich selbst als kollektiv ankündigt, indem sie gewissermaßen nur zum Verband der disparatesten Einzelheiten unternommen zu seyn scheint.”⁶⁴²

⁶⁴⁰ “Übrigens werde ich im nächsten Vierteljahr vorerst alles, was an der ersten Sendung [i.e., the first delivery of the *Ausgabe letzter Hand* – B. K.] noch zu thun wäre, beseitigen und dann an einer zwar angenehmen, aber doch bedenklichen Arbeit fortfahren, d.h. an der Sonderung, Reconstruction, Ausarbeitung und Abrundung der zwey Bände *Wanderjahre*. Es gibt ein wunderliches Opus, muß es aber auch werden nach den Schicksalen, die es erdulden müssen. Und so geht es denn immer weiter fort, damit die zwar wohlgeordnete und in Einem Schranke aufbewahrte Sammlung der 40 Bände noch durch mich in allen ihren einzelnen Theilen möge zurecht gestellt werden. Dieses ist meine größte ja einzige Angelegenheit, um eine testamentarische Verordnung darüber möglichst zu erleichtern” (Goethe, WA, IV/41, 263).

⁶⁴¹ For studies on the publication history of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, see Ehrhard Bahr, *The Novel as Archive*, as well as Hans Reiss, “*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*: Der Weg von der ersten zur zweiten Fassung,” in: *DVjs* 39 (1965), 34–57.

⁶⁴² Cf. Goethe’s letter to J. F. Rochlitz on July 28th, 1829: “Eine Arbeit wie diese, die sich selbst als kollektiv ankündigt, indem sie gewissermaßen nur zum Verband der disparatesten Einzelheiten unternommen zu seyn scheint, erlaubt, ja fordert mehr als eine andere, daß jeder sich zueigne, was ihm gemäß ist” (Goethe to J. F. Rochlitz, *Goethes Briefe*, ed. Karl Robert Mandelkow [Hamburg 1967], vol. 4, 339). The word “zueignen” has a special status in Goethe’s vocabulary. Not only is it the title of the poem that introduces his collected works, but in his *Notes on Morphology* he ascribes the work of “Zueignung” to the intermaxillary bone, or *os incisivum*: “Sein vorderster breitester und stärkster Teil, dem ich den Namen des Körpers gegeben, ist nach der Art des Futters eingerichtet, das die Natur dem Tiere bestimmt hat; denn es muß seine Speise mit diesem Teile zuerst anfassen, ergreifen, abrufen, abnagen, zerschneiden, sie auf eine oder andere Weise sich *zueignen*” (Goethe, FA, I/24, 17). Andrew Piper notes that “[u]nlike his contemporaries who saw in the particular structure of the human jaw the preconditions of speech – of something going out – the function of this skeletal piece for Goethe is identified as the act of ‘Zueignung,’ of regulating the incorporation of

Several months later, in a conversation with Kanzler von Müller, he insisted against Rochlitz's "alberne Idee [...], das Ganze systematisch konstruieren zu wollen" that the book "gebe sich nur für ein Aggregat aus."⁶⁴³ With his disclosure of its form principle as a "collective" and an "aggregate," Goethe expressed his view of the *Wanderjahre* above all a work of collective authorship, whose parts consist of the most heterogeneous material and whose innumerable gaps and lacunae ought to be "palpable"⁶⁴⁴ [fühlbar].

For this reason, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that in spite of Goethe's instructions to Eckermann – to whom he had delegated much of the editing of the *Wanderjahre* after 1822 – "alle die Lücken auszufüllen,"⁶⁴⁵ his reworking of the *Wanderjahre* was not premised on the closure and completion of gaps. Rather, his method of text production – in his diary entries from the time he repeatedly speaks of "continuing" [fortsetzen], "transposing" [umstellen], and "editing" [bearbeiten] – already hints at a new manner of representation: instead of the aesthetic synthesis of the "disparate" [Disparaten], he presents his work as an aggregate, as a collective, whose parts do not add up to a whole. Not only does the *Wanderjahre* forego connecting links between the

material from the outside in" (Piper, "Paraphrasis," 187). Piper goes on to show how Goethe's later works are marked by a crisis of *Zueignung* as a communicative paradigm of enfolding foreign voices.

⁶⁴³ Cf. Goethe's conversation with Kanzler von Müller on February 18th, 1830: "Bestimmte einzelne Mitteilung der durch die Wanderjahre empfangenen Eindrücke habe Rochlitz verweigert, statt dessen die alberne Idee gefaßt, das Ganze systematisch konstruieren und analysieren zu wollen. Das sei rein unmöglich, das Buch gebe sich nur für ein Aggregat aus" (Goethe, *Goethes Gespräche*, ed. Wolfgang Herweig, vol. 3, 571).

⁶⁴⁴ According to a letter sent to his fiancée, Johanne Bertram, dated March 1, 1828, Eckermann writes that he "war glücklich das ich ihm [Goethe] wieder beystehen wolle und daß er seine Arbeiten mit mir besprechen könne, viele große Sachen würden zu Stande gebracht werden, die, allein, trüb und schwer auf ihm lasten würden. 'Vor allen, sagte er, liegen mir meine Wanderjahre am Herzen, woran, wie Sie wissen ich voriges Jahr anhaltend arbeitete, und die nun in drey Bänden im Manuskript vorliegen, unvollendet und mit manchen Lücken. [...] Nun ist meine Absicht Ihnen diese Bände zu geben. Sie werden sie studiren, die Composition wird Ihnen klar werden, Sie werden sehen, wo ich hinauswollte und mir sagen was und wo ich noch daran zu thun habe. Wir werden die Sache mit einander durchsprechen, die Gegenstände werden wieder in mir lebendig werden, und so werde ich denn leicht und frisch in wenig Monaten alle die Lücken ausfüllen, die Ihnen jetzt an diesen Bänden fühlbar seyn werden'" (Eckermann to Johanne Bertram, March 1, 1828, cited in Waltraud Hagen, ed., *Quellen und Zeugnisse zur Druckgeschichte von Goethes Werken* [Berlin: Akademie, 1966, 1982], 540f).

⁶⁴⁵ Hagen, ed., *Quellen und Zeugnisse*, 541.

various parts of the text, but it also lacks a clear narrative center, with the story of Wilhelm and Felix now counting as only one among numerous loosely interconnected narratives.⁶⁴⁶ “Mit solchem Büchlein,” remarks Goethe in a letter to Rochlitz,

ist es wie mit dem Leben selbst: es findet sich in dem Complex des Ganzen Notwendiges und Zufälliges, Vorgesetztes und Angeschlossenes, bald gelungen, bald vereitelt, wodurch es eine Art von Unendlichkeit erhält, die sich in verständige und vernünftige Worte nicht daraus fassen noch einschließen läßt. Wohin ich aber die Aufmerksamkeit meiner Freunde gerne lenke [...], sind die verschiedenen, sich von einander absondernden Einzelheiten, die doch, besonders in gegenwärtigen Falle, den Werth des Buches entscheiden. [...] Das Buch verläugnet seinen collectiven Ursprung nicht, erlaubt und fordert mehr als jedes andere die Theilnahme an hervortretenden Einzelheiten.⁶⁴⁷

Goethe’s analogy here between book and life concerns nothing less than a fundamental reconceptualization of the form of the novel. At least since Blanckenburg’s *Versuch über den Roman* (1774), the ontological foundations of the modern novel – based on his extensive explication of Wieland’s *Agathon* – were understood to consist in the lively evocation of a whole through the

⁶⁴⁶ In the reception history of the *Wanderjahre*, the fact that the ostensible “main narrative” dealing with the story of Wilhelm and Felix counts as only one among many different stories eventually gave rise to the theory of the “Novellenkranz,” which by situating Goethe’s novel in the tradition of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and Scheherazade’s *One Thousand and One Nights* sought to tame its disturbing formal heterogeneity. As Volker Neuhaus writes, “Die Beschreibung der Form von *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahren* geht meist vom Begriff des Novellenkranzes aus: Eine Rahmenhandlung um Wilhelm verbindet ‘schlecht und recht’ einzelne Novellen. Bei dieser Betrachtungsweise ist es [...] durchaus eine Möglichkeit, nur die Novellen für sich zu behandeln und ihre Verbindung als nebensächlich und ungekonnt beiseite zu lassen” (Neuhaus, “Die Archivfiktion in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*,” 14). Neuhaus goes on to show how both Emil Staiger’s and Erich Trunz’s approaches to the *Wanderjahre* depend on the problematic distinction between “Rahmenerzählung” and “Novellen” which lies at the foundation of the “Novellenkranz” theory. As an alternative to this approach, he proposes the theory of the novel as an “archive fiction,” a reading which has since become decisive for much of the secondary literature on the *Wanderjahre*.

⁶⁴⁷ Goethe to Rochlitz, November 23, 1829, in: Goethe, WA, IV/46, 166f. In *Gespräche mit Goethe*, Eckermann describes the reworking of the *Wanderjahre* as follows: “Die fünfte Lieferung seiner Werke, welche auch die *Wanderjahre* enthalten soll, muß auf Weihnachten zum Druck abgeliefert werden. Diesen früher in Einem Band erschienenen Roman hat Goethe gänzlich umzuarbeiten angefangen, und das Alte mit so viel Neuem verschmolzen, daß es als ein Werk in drei Bänden in der neuen Ausgabe hervorgehen soll. Hieran ist nun zwar bereits viel getan, aber noch sehr viel zu tun. Das Manuskript hat überall weiße Papierlücken, die noch ausgefüllt sein wollen. Hier fehlt etwas in der Exposition, hier ist ein geschickter Übergang zu finden, damit dem Leser weniger fühlbar werde, daß es ein kollektives Werk sei; hier sind Fragmente von großer Bedeutung, denen der Anfang, andere, denen das Ende mangelt, und so ist an allen drei Bänden noch sehr viel nachzuhelfen [...]” (Goethe, MA, 19, 250f).

causal interconnection of the individual parts.⁶⁴⁸ Goethe's designation of the *Wanderjahre* as an "aggregate," by contrast, transforms the novel from a unified space of representation "zum Verband der disparatesten Einzelheiten,"⁶⁴⁹ which decomposes every whole, every totality, into a serialization of the parts – into a serial *Nebeneinander* of other aggregates, as Goethe had defined the concept "aggregate" some thirty years earlier in the course of his first Italian journeys.⁶⁵⁰

In applying the term "aggregate" now to the form of the novel, he attributes to it a degree of mobility and flexibility that reflects not only its collective, composite-like structure, but also the decomposing potential of its "disparate singularities" according to a serial logic of enfolding, an adding-in of a potentially limitless number of unrelated elements, which "verläugnet seinen collectiven Ursprung nicht."⁶⁵¹ If the model of *Bildung* implied an organic continuity of the parts with respect to an autotelic process of narration, and even the narrative principle of chemical synthesis underlying *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* – arguably Goethe's first attempt to move away from a subject-centered poetics of organic narration – was grounded in a Romantic epistemology of genre poetics that still implicitly retained the novel's claims to totality, the term "aggregate," by contrast, is neither biological nor chemical, but *physical*: it designates a form-of-life – be it organic,

⁶⁴⁸ "Der Dichter hat in seinem Werke Charaktere und Begebenheiten unter einander zu ordnen und zu verknüpfen. Diese müssen nun, nach den obigen Voraussetzungen, so unter einander verbunden sein, daß sie gegenseitig Ursache und Wirkung sind, woraus ein Ganzes entsteht, in dem alle einzelne Theile unter sich, und mit diesem Ganzen in Verbindung stehen" (Blanckenburg, *Versuch über den Roman*, 313f). For more on the significance of Blanckenburg's theory of the novel for the concepts of form and life in the eighteenth century, see Campe, "Form und Leben in der Theorie des Romans," in particular 200–06.

⁶⁴⁹ Goethe, *Goethes Briefe*, vol. 4, 339.

⁶⁵⁰ The use of the term "aggregate" in Goethe's vocabulary vastly predates his letter to Kanzler von Müller; references to it can already be found in his "Notes in Italy" between 1768 and 1788, in which he writes: "Ein □ ist ein Aggregat mehrerer □, welche alle nebeneinander existieren können wenn sie sich einander nicht aufheben. Wenn einige die andern aufheben wird das Aggregat zum Körper wenn sie einander noch ausschließlicher aufheben werden die Körper immer edler und es entstehen endlich die Individuen (vorher die Genera pp) das edelste Geschöpf ist wo sich die Teile am ausschließlichsten aufheben" (Goethe, *Über organische Naturen. Notizen aus Italien [1786–88]: Durchgewachsne Nelke. Handschriften aus Goethes Nachlaß*, in: idem., FA I/24, 81). Here Goethe explicitly thematizes the inherently serial logic of the aggregate: aggregates obey a logic of contiguity and juxtaposition; as soon as they "sublate" [aufheben] one another, they are no longer aggregates, but (organic) "bodies" [Körper].

⁶⁵¹ Goethe, WA, IV/46, 166f.

be it inorganic – capable of dramatic transformations in physical state based on a change in relations between the loosely interconnected parts, or what in natural-scientific discourse are referred to as “states of aggregation” [Aggregatzustände], i.e., liquid, solid, gas.

The concept of the aggregate thus bears a close affinity to what Goethe, in his *Notes on Morphology*, refers to as *atroismos*: collection, aggregation, accumulation.⁶⁵² In the *Wanderjahre*, texts are no longer situated in a closed narrative context, but rather composed into “Aggregatzustände,” that is, into series, into mutable configurations. As argued in the previous chapter on Goethe’s morphology, Goethe describes this process of serial formation in his essay on the experiment, *Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt* (1793), when he writes:

Diese Materialien müssen in Reihen geordnet und niedergelegt sein, nicht auf eine hypothetische Weise zusammengestellt, nicht zu einer systematischen Form verwendet. Es steht alsdenn einem jeden frei, sie nach seiner Art zu verbinden und eines Ganzes daraus zu bilden, das der menschlichen Vorstellungsart überhaupt mehr oder weniger bequem und angenehm sei⁶⁵³

Both the complex formation history of Goethe’s *Wanderjahre* – prior to the publication of “part one” of the novel in 1821, six separate novellas or “excerpts” [Abschnitte] of novellas from the novel were published separately – as well as its startling formal heterogeneity thus dispel any notions of continuity, organicity, and recursiveness that might be implied by its status as a sequel to the *Lehrjahre*. Although Goethe had developed the idea of a sequel to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96) early on, its execution marks a decisive departure from the model of organic storytelling that he had developed in the *Lehrjahre*. There the story of Wilhelm and his ill-fated love for the theater is told as a quest for coherent development – *Bildung* – in which every episode bears

⁶⁵² The commentary to the Frankfurt edition of Goethe’s poem “ΑΘΡΟΙΣΜΟΣ” (1798–99) reads: “[D]er Sinn des ursprünglichen Titels ist noch nicht aufgeheilt. Das Wort bedeutet etwa Sammlung, Versammlung, auch Anhäufung, Aggregat. Ist er auf die Form des Gedichtes zu beziehen (fragmentarische Gedanken-Anhäufung? Quintessenz?) oder auf den Gegenstand (das Tier als Aggregat)?” (Goethe, FA, I/24, 1089).

⁶⁵³ Goethe, FA, I/25, 35f.

a meaningful relation to the entirety of the protagonist's life. The relentless forward-motion of the narrative subsequently gives way to a recursive movement, such that the significance of the individual episodes simultaneously points backwards and forwards.⁶⁵⁴ At the intersection of sequential narration and specular reflection emerges a conception of life which – in direct analogy with the biological theory of the organism – designates a form process tasked with taking up every individual part and bringing it into purposive relation with a 'living' whole.⁶⁵⁵ The claims of the modern novel, and specifically those of the *Bildungsroman*, to totality and transformation lie at the heart of Friedrich Schlegel's review of the *Lehrjahre*: "Durch jene Fortbildung ist der Zusammenhang, durch diese Einfassung ist die Verschiedenheit der einzelnen Massen gesichert und bestätigt; und so wird jeder notwendige Teil des einen und unteilbaren Romans ein System für sich."⁶⁵⁶ In the course of the following pages it will soon become apparent, however, just how extensively the *Wanderjahre* experiments with – and ultimately transgresses – Schlegel's insistence on the invisibility of the novel.

To be sure, the wild proliferation of genres (poems, aphorisms, diary entries, letters, as well as a variety of short narrative forms) as well as the extraordinary proliferation of different discourses in the *Wanderjahre* (myth, history, religion, art, commerce, medicine, geology, pedagogy,

⁶⁵⁴ See Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), esp. 18–22, as well as David E. Wellbery, "Die Enden des Menschen: Anthropologie und Einbildungskraft im Bildungsroman (Wieland, Goethe, Novalis)," in: *Das Ende. Poetik und Hermeneutik*, vol. 16, ed. Karlheinz Stierle and Rainer Warning (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1996), 600–39.

⁶⁵⁵ In his recent 'kinematic' study of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, Helmut Müller-Sievers argues that "[t]he problem that Goethe, and the modern novel more generally, confront can be articulated as the problem of life and form. The novel, bereft of generic parameters, claimed to have as its *raison d'être* the recounting of the Life of . . . , or at least of meaningful parts of it. Lacking form other than other than successivity, 'bare' life in its recounting has to be given meaning, and meaning can only be established by leaving the pure succession of events behind and narratively reaching backward and forward" (Müller-Sievers, "The Moment of Narration: Outlines for a Kinematic Study of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*," in: *The Science of Literature: Essays on an Incalculable Difference* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015], 209–26, here: 210). For an approach to the theory of the novel that relates questions of form, life, and narrativity, see Campe, "Form und Leben in der Theorie des Romans."

⁶⁵⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, "Über Goethes Meister," in: KA, I/2, 135.

cosmology, and politics) recall Schlegel's theory of a *progressive Universalpoesie*.⁶⁵⁷ Yet what distinguishes Goethe's work from Schlegel's Romantic genre poetics is precisely the way in which it engages with the format of the novel from a mediological perspective. Hence Goethe's paradoxical description of the *Wanderjahre* – a voluminous work that comprises no less than three volumes, each of which stretches hundreds of pages – as both a “kind of infinity” [Art der Unendlichkeit] and a “little book” [Büchlein], that is, as a *small form*. Not only is there a tremendous semantic investment in the *Wanderjahre* in the use of diminutive forms – through words like *Kästchen*, *Kügelchen*, *Fläschchen*, *Täfelchen*, and *Buchlein* – but as will be discussed in the following section, both Goethe's rejection of the systematic reading of the novel as well as his unusual prepublication strategy of printing parts of it in *Pocket-Books* (a small format literary miscellany around 1800) points in the direction of a transformation of the book as a discursive format, breaking down its boundaries through the serialization of its parts. While at the narrative level this reorganization of the novel into an “aggregate” entails a trajectory away from the representational possibility of an “overview” or “totality” and the dominance of the perspectival, at the level of Goethe's way of writing it concerns the central mediological tension between “aperçu” and “system” – between seriality and totality, between aphoristic condensation and the representation of the whole.⁶⁵⁸ As Goethe himself would write on this relationship in his *Notes on Morphology*: “Alles wahre Aperçu

⁶⁵⁷ “Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie. Ihre Bestimmung ist nicht bloß, alle getrennten Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen und die Poesie mit der Philosophie und Rhetorik in Berührung zu setzen. Sie will und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen, den Witz poetisieren und die Formen der Kunst mit gediegnem Bildungstoff jeder Art anfüllen und sättigen und durch die Schwingungen des Humors beseelen. Sie umfaßt alles, was nur poetisch ist, vom größten wieder mehrere Systeme in sich enthaltenden Systeme der Kunst bis zu dem Seufzer, dem Kuß, den das dichtende Kind aushaucht in kunstlosem Gesang” (Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragment* Nr. 116, in: KA, I/2, 182f).

⁶⁵⁸ For more on the relation of aperçu to system in Goethe's writings, cf. Neumann, *Ideenparadiese*, 726. See also Friedemann Spicker, *Der Aphorismus: Begriff und Gattung von der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts bis 1912. Quellen und Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte*, ed. Ernst Osterkamp and Werner Röcke (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1997), in particular 329–48. For the history of the rhetorical terminus “aperçu,” cf. Hartmut Köhler, “Aperçu,” in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 1, ed. Gert Ueding (Niemeyer, Tübingen 1992), 760–67.

kömmt aus einer Folge und bringt Folge. Es ist ein Mittelglied einer großen produktiv aufsteigenden Kette.”⁶⁵⁹ Whether it is the material *Nebeneinander* of the novel’s “disparate” parts or the narrative *Nacheinander* of the “communicated” [mitgeteilte] letters, papers, aphorisms, and documents, such serial forms of textuality come to manifest themselves at numerous superimposing levels in the *Wanderjahre* – nowhere more so, perhaps, than with respect to its introduction of the pervasive archive motif.

3.2. Goethe’s “Sammelsurium”: From Bildungsroman to Archive Fiction

Contributing to the impression of the novel as an aggregate is Goethe’s practice of incorporating foreign speech into the *Wanderjahre* through “poetic paraphrase” [poetische Umschreibung], which presents the texts as products of collective authorship or of polyphonous exchange.⁶⁶⁰ This is evident not only in the formation history of various chapters, none more so arguably than “Lenardos Tagebuch,” which was initially based on Johann Heinrich Meyer’s objective description of the textile industry – a text which has been likened to “ein Fremdkörper im Romantext”⁶⁶¹ – but

⁶⁵⁹ Goethe, FA, I/24, 568

⁶⁶⁰ Goethe, FA, I/10, 465. For more on paraphrastic speech in Goethe’s writings, see Piper, “Paraphrasis.”

⁶⁶¹ Ehrhard Bahr, “*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden* (1821/1829),” in: *Goethes Erzählwerk. Interpretationen*, ed. Paul Michael Lützel and James E. McLeod [Stuttgart 1985], 363–95, here: 370. For an opposite approach, see Klaus Detlef-Müller, “Lenardos Tagebuch.” There Detlef-Müller reads “Lenardos Tagebuch” as a “Sachbericht und Bestandteil romanhafter Personengestaltung zugleich” (See also Klaus-Detlef Müller, “Lenardos Tagebuch. Zum Romanbegriff in Goethes *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*,” in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* 53.2 [1979], 275–99, here: 293). On the basis of this text, he argues that the *Wanderjahre*, far from constituting an “open work” or a loosely interconnected whole, represents the totality of forms of written communication – a text whose component parts function as methodically-structured means of integrating the *Wanderjahre* into its purported “pre-text,” *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Regardless of whether one is persuaded by this argument, the secondary literature has long established that “Lenardos Tagebuch” arose from a travel report composed by Johann Heinrich Meyer in 1810. Goethe requested Meyer to record his impressions of the female spinners and weavers in the cotton mills of the Swiss alps. In a letter dated April 13, 1810, Goethe praised Meyer “für die fortgesetzte technische Beschreibung,” adding that he “brenne vor Ungeduld sich damit bekannt zu machen, und das was ich mir dabey vorgesetzt, auszuführen” (Goethe, *Briefe*, WA, IV/21, 228). In a subsequent letter from May 3, 1810, Goethe reported to Meyer his intent “den hinlänglichen realen Zettel zu einem poetischen Einschlag vorzubereiten” (ibid., 272). Goethe’s description of his process of translating Meyer’s report into a work of ‘poetic’ fiction is suggestive for its paronomastic linkage between the technical language of weaving and a mode of communication, likening Meyer’s text to a “realen Zettel,” meaning both an index card as well as a warp – the set of lengthwise yarns that are held in tension on a frame or loom

also in the novel's staging of the practice of collective or collaborative writing, such as Flavio and Hersilie's poetic exchange in the chapter "Der Mann von funfzig Jahren."⁶⁶² Just as "Lenardos Tagebuch" is grounded in the practice of incorporating foreign speech – a foreignness that will eventually be registered at a narratological level as the diary gradually shifts to a heterodiegetic narrator at its close, transforming itself back into a novella, "Das nußbraune Mädchen"⁶⁶³ –, in "Der Mann von funfzig Jahren" the traditional model of the *Wechselgedicht*, where the poet speaks

– and to his own text as a "poetischen Einschlag," which according to Grimm's *Wörterbuch* can refer to either the enfolding of a letter into another in order to cut costs on delivery (cf. "Einschlag," in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 Bde. in 32 Teilbänden, vol. 3, [Leipzig 1971], 272–76), or to the cross-weaving of threads, i.e. the weft (ibid.). In a series of aphorisms under the title "Einzelnes" from *Kunst und Altertum* (Goethe, FA, V/1), a similar analogy between "Zettel" and "Einschlag" can be found: "Indem ich mich zeither mit der Lebensgeschichte wenig und viel bedeutender Menschen anhaltender beschäftigte, kam ich auf den Gedanken: es möchten sich wohl die einen in dem Weltgewebe als Zettel, die andern als Einschlag betrachten lassen; jene gäben eigentlich die Breite des Gewebes an, diese dessen Halt, Festigkeit, vielleicht auch mit Zutat irgend eines Gebildes. Die Schere der Parze hingegen bestimmt die Länge, dem sich denn das übrige alles zusammen unterwerfen muß. Weiter wollen wir das Gleichnis nicht verfolgen" (H 230). According to Gerhard Neumann, "[d]as Gleichnis von Zettel und Einschlag [...] vergegenwärtigt exemplarisch die Struktur Goetheschen Erkenntnisverhaltens, das Gewebeartige gegenläufiger Kräfte, aus denen nicht die Starre eines Paradoxes resultiert, sondern das „Gebilde" – die gewebten Muster – eines echten, produktiven, gegenwirkende Kräfte nicht paralysierenden, sondern zur Gestaltung nützenden 'Wirkungs'(!)-Zusammenhangs. In ihm deutet sich eine Denkstruktur an, für die es kein echtes logisches Modell gibt: Gegenkräfte, die zusammenwirken, ohne sich 'aufzuheben,' Verflechtungen, die innerhalb eines nicht überschreitbaren Rahmens sich vollziehen, Dichte und Weitläufigkeit, strenge Grundtextur des Gewebes und weitgehende Freiheit im eingewebten Muster: Es ist ein Ordnungsmodell von Sprache als 'Text,' Verstehenszusammenhang als das In- und Gegeneinander von Worten, Wortverbindungen und Satzkonstruktionen" (Neumann, *Ideenparadiese*, 625).

⁶⁶² Adding to the complex formation history of the *Wanderjahre* is the additional text-genetic circumstance that whereas *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, as noted above, was originally intended to be enfolded into the *Wanderjahre*, only to be published as a standalone novella, the chapter "Der Mann von funfzig Jahren" was originally conceived as a standalone novella which Goethe eventually enfolded into the *Wanderjahre*.

⁶⁶³ While Goethe initially planned to integrate Meyer's report into the novel as a continuation of the story of "Das nußbraune Mädchen" (Goethe, FA, I/10, 717), it was not until 1824 that he finally brought his "poetic" revisions of Meyer's report to a close, noting in his diary on May 26, 1824: "Fortsetzung des nußbraunen Mädchens" (Goethe, *Tagebücher*, WA, III/9, 222). From the perspective of his exchange with Meyer, the thematic focus of the chapter on the textile industry and its machinery is far from coincidental, for it draws attention to the complex, collage-like structure of the novel as a whole, whose palimpsestic "texture" – the weaving together of radically heterogeneous text-material – is poetologically reflected in the twisting together of left- and right-handed yarns, as in the following description of textile production in "Lenardos Tagebuch": "Rechts gedreht Garn gehen 25 bis 30 auf ein Pfund, links gedreht 60 bis 80, vielleicht auch 90. Der Umgang des Haspels wird ungefähr sieben Viertel Ellen oder 'twas mehr betragen, und die schlanke, fleißige Spinnerin behauptete, 4, auch 5 Schneller, das wären 5000 Umgänge, also 8 bis 9000 Ellen Garn, täglich am Rad zu spinnen" (Goethe, FA, I/10, 622). Astonishingly, while this passage – taken almost word-for-word from Meyer's original report (cf. Neumann, FA, I/10, 881) – reads like an objective description of weaving, its foreignness with respect to the rest of the novel can be read as a performance of the editorial process of translating the heterogeneous "Zettelwirtschaft" – or more precisely, the so-called "Zettelrahmen" (Goethe, FA, I/10, 625) of the spinners and weavers – into a work of poetic fiction.

for another, is abandoned; instead, the text enfolds the voice of a third party into the place of another speaker. Thus in the narrator's words: "Man hatte einen Dritten im Sinne."⁶⁶⁴

In addition to his practice of enfolding foreign voices into the novel, Goethe translated the heterogeneity and fragmentariness of the work directly into the disunity of the textual body. This manifests itself not only in the numerous interlinear line breaks which, like creases and folds in fabric, transverse the entirety of the novel – simultaneously breaking it apart and stringing its pieces together⁶⁶⁵ – but also in the very "typographische Einrichtung"⁶⁶⁶ of the *Wanderjahre*. That Goethe presented the fragmentariness of his work as constitutive – as intertwined with the literal materiality of the text – is indicated by the abrupt shift in typography between Fraktur and Antiqua.⁶⁶⁷ For while the prose text of the *Wanderjahre* was printed in Fraktur, as was typical for the time, the inserted poems "Vermächtnis" and "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's" appear in Antiqua. Such discontinuous typesetting presents the poems as foreign bodies, as magazine inserts, and contributes to a specific media-effect: namely that of presenting the book like a serial format of a magazine or miscellany. The text's fragmentary materiality and lack of medial – not to mention narrative – closure are made even more explicit in the final line of the text. At the end of the novel, as a "Postskript,"⁶⁶⁸ Goethe appended – in Antiqua – the parenthetical line "(To be continued.)" [(Ist fortzusetzen.)], despite the fact that the end of the book already appeared to have been reached

⁶⁶⁴ Goethe, FA, I/10, 471.

⁶⁶⁵ In the *Wanderjahre*, such interlinear line breaks, notably at the beginning and end of the collections of aphorisms at the end of books two and three ("Betrachtungen im Sinne der Wanderer. Kunst, Ethisches, Natur" and "Aus Makariens Archiv"), mark caesuras in the text as "Spalten und Risse" (Goethe, FA, I/10, 292). In the Munich edition, which visually reproduces the original line breaks, their presence in the text is characterized as paratextual elements of the novel's archive fiction: "Die Zwischenstriche können als optische Segmentierungssignale aufgefaßt werden [...]. Sie erscheinen als typographischer Reflex der dem Roman zugrundeliegenden Archivfiktion und müssen deshalb als paratextuelles Aussageelement ernstgenommen werden" (MA 17, 1052f).

⁶⁶⁶ Goethe, FA, I/10, 515.

⁶⁶⁷ For more on the use of Fraktur and Antiqua in the history of the book starting in the eighteenth century, see Hannelore Schläffer, "Die Optik des Buches," in: *Epochen der deutschen Literatur in Bildern. Klassik und Romantik 1770–1830* (Stuttgart 1986), 71–77.

⁶⁶⁸ Goethe, FA, I/10, 398.

with the end of the eighteenth chapter of the third book, either with the collection of aphorisms “Aus Makariens Archiv” or the poem “Im ersten Beinhaus war’s.”⁶⁶⁹ This gesture of closure thereby poses numerous difficulties for the reading of the novel: was it intended to refer, for instance, to the inserted poem “Im ersten Beinhaus war’s,”⁶⁷⁰ to the collection of aphorisms contained in “Aus Makariens Archiv,” to the chapter of the book in which both (para)texts were inserted, or to the novel as whole? Furthermore, is the final line meant to be read as a *parergic* extension of the novel – that is, as an utterance of the “real author” Goethe – or does it belong, rather, to its pervasive archive fiction? Given the myriad of interpretative possibilities, the final line proves symptomatic with respect to the broader serial logic of the *Wanderjahre*. In effect, the closing line stumbles into a moment of undecidability with respect to the novel, making possible a reading of it as an open, unfinished, and highly fragmentary work.

In the years since its publication, both the fragmentary seriality of the *Wanderjahre* as well as its disturbing heterogeneity have proven to be lasting sources of irritation for readers and critics. Thomas Mann, for instance, once derided Goethe’s work as a “hochmüdes, würdevoll sklerotisches Sammelsurium,”⁶⁷¹ whereas Walter Benjamin criticized the *Wanderjahre* as a “Roman, der

⁶⁶⁹ Goethe composed the poem “Im ersten Beinhaus war’s” on September 25–26, 1826, during which time he was in position of Schiller’s skull. The poem forms – without a printed title – the end of the second edition of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1829); in “Goethe’s nachgelassene Gedichte,” it was posthumously published in 1833 under the title “Bei Betrachtung von Schillers Schädel.” Curiously, the Hamburg Edition of the *Wanderjahre* leaves out not only the poem, but also the final line “(Ist fortzusetzen.)” In doing so, it creates the impression of the novel as possessing a greater degree of internal cohesion and unity than Goethe himself seems to have intended.

⁶⁷⁰ The final line’s reference to “continuation” [Fortsetzen] situates itself precisely at the site at which “zierlich-tät’ge Glieder, / [...] zerstreut aus Lebensfugen” (Goethe, FA, I/10, 774) lie and death is made visible as the “gottgedachte Spur” (ibid.): “Im ersten Beinhaus war’s [...]” (In the paratext appended to his essay on the metamorphosis of plants, entitled “Schicksal der Handschrift,” Goethe speaks similarly of the font Antiqua, “mit lateinischen Lettern zierlich gedruckt” [Goethe, “Schicksal der Handschrift,” in: idem., FA, I/24, 417].) The expression “(Ist fortzusetzen.)” as the signifier of something which is incomplete and broken off, explicitly disturbs the rhythm and flow of the final verse of the poem by bringing movement into the versified eulogy. “Als ob ein Lebensquelle dem Tod entspränge” (ibid.), the phrase leaps out of the poetic apparatus and stumbles into a relentless turmoil.

⁶⁷¹ Thomas Mann, letter from April 8, 1945 to Hermann Hesse, in: idem., *Briefe 1937–1947*, ed. Erika Mann (Frankfurt a.M. 1963), 424.

lange liegen blieb, schließlich überstürzt beendet wurde, reich an Unstimmigkeiten und Widersprüchen ist, wurde zuletzt vom Dichter als *Magazin* behandelt, in den er den Inhalt seiner Notizhefte durch Eckermann einreihen ließ.”⁶⁷² Underlying both critiques is the view that Goethe’s *Wanderjahre* does not constitute a novel in the traditional sense of a unified whole, but rather a kind of miscellaneous collage-work – a “Sammelsurium,” as Mann wrote. Benjamin’s allusions to the commercial format of the magazine as well as to Eckermann’s co-editorship arguably go one step further in casting doubt on the aesthetic worth of the *Wanderjahre*, not only suggesting that Goethe is not its sole author, but also that its form is largely the result of external and contingent factors, namely the commercial exigencies of the book market. Not until Hermann Broch’s initial modernist reassessment of the *Wanderjahre* – what he termed its “Stilagglomeration” – did the novel come to be viewed not as the eclectic work of an old man, but as the key precursor to James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.⁶⁷³ In addition to a vast network of objects that circulate in the novel, including maps, inscriptions, tablets, notebooks, files, letters, and a variety of fictional texts, one also encounters all different kinds of texts, including novellas, travel diaries, epistolary correspondence, and aphorisms, many of which Goethe inserted into the novel more or less without transitions. Such a radical experiment in form, which threatens at every point to overstep the medial constraints of the book, makes the *Wanderjahre* into one of Goethe’s most heterogeneous publications, far more reminiscent in many respects to the unsystematic arrangement of fragmentary texts collected in his *Notes on Morphology* than any prior literary work.⁶⁷⁴ With its gaps and lacunae left open

⁶⁷² Walter Benjamin, *Goethe. Enzyklopädieartikel*, in: idem., *Gesammelte Schriften*, II/2 (Frankfurt a.M. 1980), 705–39, here: 733f.

⁶⁷³ Cf. Hermann Broch, “James Joyce und die Gegenwart,” in: idem., *Schriften zur Literatur*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1975), vol. 1, 63–94, here: 71.

⁶⁷⁴ From this perspective Safia Azzouni reads the “unharmonisches, uneinheitliches, offenes” form of the *Wanderjahre* in direct connection with Goethe’s *Notes on Morphology*, seeing in both a more fundamental epistemological problem that Goethe confronted near the end of his life. As she argues, after 1800, especially in the context of his *Notes on Morphology*, Goethe developed a “collective” method – one of gathering and collecting a multitude of heterogeneous,

and exposed as a serial ensemble of heterogeneous fragments, it arguably constitutes one of the first post-classical conceptions of the novel as an “open work of art”⁶⁷⁵ or, alternatively, as the first “network novel.”⁶⁷⁶

The network-like character of the *Wanderjahre* is reflected not only in the way Goethe explored different arrangements of various chapters and novellas – many of which had not been written exclusively with the novel in mind – as well as their serialization, but also in the way that the extra-diegetic mobility of the novel’s format extends to the circulation of letters, aphorisms, diaries, and stories in the text, which are sent and received by various fictional figures. Yet not all of these letters and stories are read as soon as they are sent: at various points they are presented – often first only elliptically, only to then be displaced and deferred until a later point – as source material drawn from an elaborate archive. This archive opens up a radically exterior perspective onto the texts that comprise the novel; for, as it turns out, only that which is contained in the archive can be “communicated” [mitgeteilt]. It defines, as Foucault writes, not the “library of all libraries, outside of time and space,” but is a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as events, embodying the “*general system of the formation and transformation of statements.*”⁶⁷⁷ The introduction of this intermedial mediation, as it were – between bodies and texts, between orality and its archival inscription – reveals everything which is presented in the *Wanderjahre* to be discursive formations from an archive: it is that which has already been written, that which has at

often loosely interconnected insights into natural phenomena, including contributions by other natural scientists – in order to achieve an objective knowledge that could overcome the limits of subjective perception. For Azzouni, the principle of the “collective” is, for this reason, not only decisive for the understanding of Goethe’s concept of morphology, but also is said to inform a collective process at work in the *Wanderjahre*. She thus goes on to read the polyphonous, “dialogic” character of the novel as reflective of the epistemological problem of (scientific) knowledge production and authorship around 1800. Cf. Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*.

⁶⁷⁵ Mittermüller, *Sprachskepsis und Poetologie*, 5.

⁶⁷⁶ Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, 24.

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), esp. 126–134, here: 130.

another point been jotted down, that which has been transcribed, as well as the reading of that which has already been read. Hence, nothing remains for the narration of the story than “zu überliefern was wir besitzen, mitzuteilen was sich erhalten hat,”⁶⁷⁸ and to present “was uns bekannt geworden auch unvollständig wie es vorliegt.”⁶⁷⁹

Goethe's *Wanderjahre* thus situates itself at the point where the archival work begins. It is written in constitutive relation to that which has already been written and read, and in doing so it presents itself *as* a text in which everything is framed by the reading and writing of *other* texts. This intermedial perspectivization is accompanied by at times irritating, at other times humorous, reflections on the inner motivations of the novel itself, such as the paratextual supplement that prefaces the novella “Der Mann von funfzig Jahren,” in which ostensibly the “real author” Goethe declares: “Der Angewöhnung des werten Publikums zu schmeicheln, welches seit geraumer Zeit Gefallen findet, sich stückweise unterhalten zu lassen, gedachten wir erst nachstehende Erzählung in mehreren Abteilungen vorzulegen. Der innere Zusammenhang jedoch, nach Gesinnungen, Empfindungen und Ereignissen betrachtet, veranlaßte einen fortlaufenden Vortrag.”⁶⁸⁰ However, these extra-diegetic statements are neither the voice of the author nor of the narrator, who would be able to lend the text an ‘organic’ unity, but belong to a pervasive yet nameless redactor figure, who takes over the position of the narrator in the text. In the place of the narrator’s voice, only the paper work of the redactor is to be encountered, who produces, sorts through, rearranges, and edits single texts from the mass of papers, and – at a distance from any notion of ‘originary’ speech – no longer records speech itself, but rather the text which recorded speech. With the procedures of

⁶⁷⁸ Goethe, FA, I/10, 128.

⁶⁷⁹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 738.

⁶⁸⁰ Goethe, FA, I/10, 398. Instead of telling the story without interruptions, however, the narrator later re-inserts the tale into the novel’s frame story, causing the frame structure to implode.

this fictional redactor, who steps in between reading and writing, laid bare, Goethe's text shows itself to operate entirely within the space of the "Geschriebenüberlieferten"⁶⁸¹ – in other words, of the "discourse network" around 1800: it is the already-recorded phrases, the already-read texts, the copies, transcriptions, translations, excerpts, miscellany, collectanea, and reproductions of reproductions which form the material of retroactively compiled editions of the letters and papers that circulate in the novel.

The texts of the *Wanderjahre* thereby appear as the result of a multifaceted, 'palimpsestic' technique of perspectivization, which leads to the pluralization of narrative voices. In the place a unified narrative voice, the text begins to fold in on itself, narrating its own "aggregation" of text material from the standpoint of an Other, that of an uncanny "third" – the so-called "redactor" – who repeatedly disrupts and destabilizes any ostensible 'aesthetic unity' of the work. Neither a figure nor a subject, the redactor introduces an unassimilable alterity into the novel in the form of an uncanny, impersonal voice, one which manifests itself explicitly at those points in the text where the chronological organization of texts breaks down, where the narrative cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the source material, and where an absence in the text cannot be mediated by transition. From this perspective, the redactor's function in the novel, it turns out, is not that of guiding or orienting the reader toward the 'meaning' of the texts; rather, it is to make palpable the absences in the text as well as the gaps and lacunae in the original source material.

The presence of the redactor figure thus foregrounds the radical contingency of the texts and the materiality of writing; for whenever the archive is introduced and becomes reflected as a representational matrix of text production, this occurs only ever with reference to the incomplete-

⁶⁸¹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 568.

ness and deferral of representation: in the *Wanderjahre*, the fictional redactor knows – like Annette, the maid in the inserted novella “Der Mann von funfzig Jahren” – how “überall da noch eine Lücke anschaulich zu machen, wo man eben so gut den schönsten Zusammenhang hätte finden können.”⁶⁸² The redactor also knows when “das Fehlende zur Sprache zu bringen.”⁶⁸³ Thus in the “Interjection” [Zwischenrede] in the first edition of the novel, the redactor not only presents heterogeneous material that he has collected “aus den mannigfaltigsten Papieren,” but also reflects on the possibility and limits of their representation:

Daß eine gewisse Lücke [...] im Ganzen hie und da bemerklich und doch nicht zu vermeiden sein werde, sprechen wir lieber aus [...] Bei der gegenwärtigen [...] Redaktion stoßen wir doch auf alle die Unbequemlichkeiten, welche die Herausgabe dieser Bändchen [...] verspäteten. [...] Wir sehen uns noch immer auf mehr als eine Weise gehindert und, an dieser oder jener Stelle, mit irgend einer Stockung bedroht. Denn wir haben die bedenkliche Aufgabe zu lösen, aus den mannigfaltigsten Papieren das Werteste und Wichtigste auszusuchen [...] Und so geben wir daher einige Kapitel, deren Ausführung wohl wünschenswert gewesen, nur in vorübereilender Gestalt, damit der Leser nicht nur fühle, daß hier etwas ermangelt, sondern daß er von dem Mangelnden näher unterrichtet sei und sich dasjenige selbst ausbilde, was [...] nicht vollkommen ausgebildet oder mit allen Belegen gekräftigt ihm entgentreten kann.⁶⁸⁴

Here the redactor abruptly interrupts the narrative continuity of the novel, appearing precisely at the moment when a transition is necessary, yet suddenly drops out. The gaps and lacunae to which the text repeatedly refers suddenly encroach upon the materiality of writing and the order of textuality: as text begins to approximate itself, the novel stages not so much an absence as a material fold or perforation within the order of the book itself.⁶⁸⁵ Not only does the redactor’s intrusion into

⁶⁸² Goethe, FA, I/10, 470.

⁶⁸³ Goethe, FA, I/10, 470.

⁶⁸⁴ Goethe, FA, I/10, 206f.

⁶⁸⁵ In *The Fold*, Deleuze suggestively likens the operative function of folding–unfolding to the concept of the aggregate: “A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern. The unit of matter, the smallest element of the labyrinth, is the fold, not the point which is never a part, but a simple extremity of the line. That is why parts of matter are masses or aggregates, as a correlative to elastic compressive force. Unfolding is thus not the contrary of folding, but follows the fold up to the following fold. Particles are ‘turned into folds,’ that a ‘contrary effort changes over and again’” (Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley [London: Athlone Press, 1993], 6). Later in

the novel serve to cover up a gap in the text through the plenitude of “paratextual enumeration,”⁶⁸⁶ such that ellipsis gives way to *accumulatio* – he speaks in this passage, for instance, of present “Tagebücher,” of “Heften, der wirklichen Welt gewidmet, statistischen, technischen, und sonst realen Inhalts,” of “Entwürfe, mit guter Einsicht und zu herrlichen Zwecken geschrieben,” of “kleinen Anekdoten ohne Zusammenhang, schwer unter Rubriken zu bringen,” as well as of “Gedichten,” of which there is likewise “kein Mangel”⁶⁸⁷ – but it also stages a fictional scene of writing that hints at Goethe’s own method of text production as one of continuous folding and unfolding, which turns the space of the book into a kind of material aggregate: as if everything which is disclosed in the novel would have to reveal its own form at the level of content, the text turns its folds and perforations – via the parenthetical asides and paratextual insertions of the redactor – outward. It thus behaves in a comparable way to the “künstlichen Schreibtisch von Röntgen,” whereby – as one learns in the chapter “Die Neue Melusine” – “mit einem Zug viele Federn und Ressorts in Bewegung kommen, Pult und Schreibzeug, Brief- und Geldfächer sich auf einmal oder kurz nacheinander entwickeln.”⁶⁸⁸

The *Wanderjahre* forms material gaps and fragments, inscribes them into its texture, and in doing so it yields its own productivity: the deferral of narrative resolution and the serial “continuation” [Fortsetzung] of the disparate parts. In the absence of transitions, the redactor dynamizes the empty spaces in the text by setting into motion the mass of text-material which the book itself comprises. Thus at the beginning of the eighth chapter of the third book, where the redactor’s voice

the same text, Deleuze speaks more extensively of aggregates as material collectives, whose “matter” possesses not only structures but also textures (ibid., 113–15).

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. Mainberger, *Die Kunst des Aufzählens*, in particular 119–42.

⁶⁸⁷ Goethe, FA, I/10, 207.

⁶⁸⁸ Goethe, FA, I/10, 652.

prefaces the inserted story “Die gefährliche Wette,” the employment of editorial terminology (“Papieren,” “Redaktion,” “einschalten”) makes explicit both the unmediated transition between the narrative sequences in the text as well as the radical contingency of their order at the material level: “Unter den Papieren, die uns zur Redaktion vorliegen, finden wir einen Schwank, den wir ohne weitere Vorbereitung hier einschalten, weil unsre Angelegenheiten immer ernsthafter werden und wir für dergleichen Unregelmäßigkeiten fernerhin keine Stelle finden möchten.”⁶⁸⁹ Here the redactor describes the story “Die gefährliche Wette” itself as a “Schwank” – as a farce, but also as a swerve, fluctuation, or oscillation in the text, where material is simply “inserted” [eingeschaltet]. “Swerving” [schwanken] characterizes the rhythm of unmediated transition, of editorial intrusion into the diegetic space of the novel. For this reason, it may be brought into relation with the broader medial strategy of the *Wanderjahre* of opening up a radically exterior perspective onto the materiality of the book by exposing the mobility and flexibility of its arrangement as well as its multi-auctorial, “collective” character.

3.3. Monstrous Dynamics: Makarie and the Spiral-Tendencies of Writing

While references to the archive fiction are dispersed across the *Wanderjahre*, they appear most prominently in the tenth chapter of the first book. In the course of Wilhelm’s visit to Makarie’s home, it is revealed that Makarie is not only the aunt of Lenardo and Hersilie, but also the owner of “a significant archive”⁶⁹⁰ [ein bedeutendes Archiv]. The ambivalences of this archive (while on the one hand it seems to open up a synoptic perspective onto the whole of the novel by mediating the communication of source material, on the other hand it also appears to undermine the whole

⁶⁸⁹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 659.

⁶⁹⁰ Goethe, FA, I/10, 124.

by deferring at various points the representation of this material, breaking in turn the novel's narrative continuity) manifest themselves in connection with the figure of Makarie, whom Goethe considered to be one of the "bedeutendsten Hinzufügungen"⁶⁹¹ to the second edition of the *Wanderjahre* from 1829. In the first first edition from 1821, Makarie appears nameless, merely as an anonymous "aunt" [Tante] in epistolary correspondence with her family. Only several years after the publication of the first edition did Goethe for the first time exhaustively concern himself with this figure, which around 1825 first attained the name "Makarie."⁶⁹²

In the *Wanderjahre*, information about Makarie is not concentrated in any single place, but is dispersed across numerous chapters of the novel. In fact, she manifests herself directly only twice, the first time during Wilhelm's visit in the tenth chapter of the first book and the second time at the departure of the emigrants in the fourteenth chapter of the third book. In both of these chapters, Makarie is presented not only as an ideal conception of the feminine, but also as a cosmological being who bears distinctly pre-modern features: as Angela, Makarie's caretaker and the keeper of the archive, reports to Wilhelm in Book 1, Chapter 10, "Makarieren [sind] die Verhältnisse unsres Sonnensystem [...] gründlich eingeboren."⁶⁹³ Makarie's uncanny ability to intimately intuit the relations of the solar system is characterized by a constitutive interweaving of man and cosmos, of heaven and earth, and even of spirit and letter, which as Hartmut Böhme argues is based on the alchemistic notion of *analogia entis*.⁶⁹⁴ Furthermore, her capacity to psychically penetrate "die

⁶⁹¹ Hans Reiss, "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre. Der Weg von der ersten zur zweiten Fassung," in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* 39 (1965), 34–57, here: 47.

⁶⁹² Cf. the various pre-publications and earlier editions to the later version of Book I, Chapter 10: FA, I/10, 812f, as well as WA, I/25, Nr. XVIII, 221, cited in Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*, 194.

⁶⁹³ Goethe, FA, I/10, 358.

⁶⁹⁴ For a reading of Makarie as an esoteric figure of Goethean natural science, cf. Hartmut Böhme, "Lebendige Natur – Wissenschaftskritik, Naturforschung und allegorische Hermetik bei Goethe," in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* 60 (1986), 249–72, here: 264–71. There Böhme argues that the *Wanderjahre* harkens back to a pre-modern, alchemical form of knowledge, which the novel presents through the constellation of Wilhelm, Montan, Makarie. According to

innere Natur eines jeden durch die ihn umgebende Maske,⁶⁹⁵ as we learn from Wilhelm’s conversation with an astronomer who lives alongside Makarie, seems to defy any typical notion of figuration, resembling far more the perspectival position of the author himself. Finally, at the level of text-organization, Makarie appears to assume an integrating function – in a later passage, she is reported not to bear the celestial bodies within her, but rather to move “als ein integrierender Teil darin”⁶⁹⁶ – especially toward the end of the novel, whereby countless figures present themselves in her company and seemingly disparate storylines are thereby united within a single chapter. At numerous levels, Makarie may thus be said to embody the paradigm of totality in the *Wanderjahre*, whose figuration as a cosmic entity around which various disparate figures of the novel orbit seems to continually reinforce the novel’s traditional cosmological claims to totality in spite of its overwhelming seriality.

Nevertheless, the profound ambivalence and polysemy of Makarie’s figure – at times she is and is not an aunt, is divine and mortal, as well as potentially both at the same time – have led others to conclude that she is in fact a highly ironic figure in the novel, whose significance lies precisely in her symbolic overdetermination and thus puts into question her integrating function.⁶⁹⁷ Perhaps it is not so much on account of the aura of secrecy and absence of direct speech surround-

Böhme, these three figures embody a different branch of alchemical knowledge, namely medicine, the knowledge of the mountains (“Montanwissen”), and astronomy, which their constellation in the novel unifies.

⁶⁹⁵ Goethe, FA, I/10, 348.

⁶⁹⁶ Goethe, FA, I/10, 126.

⁶⁹⁷ Ehrhard Bahr, who enumerates the ironic features of Makarie’s figure, thus argues: “Die Ironie macht jegliche Fest- und Zurechtlegung in der einen oder der anderen Seite unmöglich. Makarie ist und ist nicht die Tante, Heilige und nicht Heilige, und Tante und Heilige zugleich” (Bahr, *Die Ironie im Spätwerk Goethes. “diese sehr ernsten Scherze...” Studien zum ‘West-östlichen Divan,’ zu den ‘Wanderjahren’ und zu ‘Faust II’* [Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1972], 127). For more on this point, see also Barbara Hunfeld, who summarizes the results of her detailed interpretation of Makarie as follows: “Makarie bietet sich universalen Deutungen an [...]. So verspricht sie höchste Bedeutsamkeit, verweigert aber Vereindeutigung” (Barbara Hunfeld, *Der Blick ins All. Reflexionen des Kosmos der Zeichen bei Brockes, Jean Paul, Goethe und Stifter* [Tübingen 2004], 181).

ing Makarie than of her ostensibly overdetermined totality that the text compels the reader to approach her less as a fully-formed human life-form – in stark contrast to Wilhelm or Hersilie – and more as an aggregate of heterogeneous attributes: as an “entelechy,”⁶⁹⁸ according to the narrator. Neither a human figure nor a planet, neither an organism nor a machine, Makarie is in fact too transitory and fleeting to constitute a “figure” in any meaningful sense. Rather, she embodies a *dynamic* – one which at first glance seems intended to unite the novel’s disparate figures, story lines, and motifs, but which upon closer examination serves instead as a disfiguring force in the novel. Makarie embodies a centrifugal dynamic of aggregation and dispersion, juxtaposition and proliferation, which disperses closure and meaning. Furthermore, from the perspective of her complex relation to textuality and the order of writing, namely the “significant archive” said to be in her possession, Makarie’s inclusion in and subsequent dominance of the novel’s second edition suggests the extent to which Goethe came to revise his earlier theory of entelechy as a principle of self-enfolding.⁶⁹⁹ Instead of incorporating foreign voices into one’s own, as Goethe had accorded to the notion of *Zueignung*, the literal breakdown or *Versagen* of narration and fictional energy around Makarie opens up a radically exterior perspective – an “anamorphic gaze,” as it were – onto the texts of the *Wanderjahre*, such that no overview or cosmological totality is possible any longer. Instead, the proliferation of texts and writing around Makarie establishes ever new (“or-

⁶⁹⁸ “Daraus wurde geschlossen, daß sie [den Mond] von der Seite sehe und wirklich im Begriff sei, über dessen Bahn hinauszuschreien und in dem unendlichen Raum dem Saturn entgegenzustreben. Dorthin folgt ihr keine Einbildungskraft, aber wir hoffen, daß eine solche Entelechie sich nicht ganz aus unserm Sonnensystem entfernen, sondern, wenn sie an die Grenze desselben gelangt ist, sich wieder zurücksehen werde [...]” (Goethe, FA, I/10, 541f).

⁶⁹⁹ See, for instance, Goethe’s conversation with Eckermann on September 1, 1829, in which he is reported to have spoken of the concept of entelechy: “Ich zweifle nicht an unserer Fortdauer, denn die Natur kann die Entelechie nicht entbehren; aber wir sind nicht auf gleiche Weise unsterblich, und um sich künftig als große Entelechie zu manifestiren, muß man auch eine sein” (Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, 389).

bital”) paths that depend upon the principle of *Entsagung* (literally “not-saying”): her transformation from a textually-grounded aggregate into a visually synoptic being in the form of a disorienting spiral image.

In the opening scene of Book I, Chapter 10, Wilhelm and his son, Felix, are shown to proceed by foot into a house whose parts appear to be uncannily self-acting, as if they were limbs of an organism. Already in the first few lines of the passage, which are characterized by a series of unusual passive voice constructions, the text signals a radical shift in narrative technique away from any form of subjective perspectivization: “Sie zogen die Glocke, das Tor eröffnete sich, ohne daß eine Menschengestalt sichtbar geworden wäre, und sie gingen auf ein altes Gebäude los, das zwischen uralten Stämmen von Buchen und Eichen ihnen entgegenschimmerte.”⁷⁰⁰ In this scene, the text stages an impossible spatial and temporal field, in which impersonal objects affixed to the house – namely the bell [die Glocke] and the door [das Tor] – appear to be endowed with their own autonomous mobility and life-force, drawing Wilhelm and Felix ever closer into the orbit of Makarie’s castle. The marked absence of any noticeable human figures who would be responsible for their motion and movement finds its pendant in the paratactical quality of the description of these passive, inhuman forces, such that the perspective from which the scene itself is narrated and observed depends upon a passive past-conditional construction: “ohne daß eine Menschengestalt sichtbar geworden wäre.” The abrupt sequentiality and peripatetic rhythm of movement, the casual mention of a “Reihenfolge historischer Schilderungen”⁷⁰¹ found hanging in Makarie’s home, extensive conversations on mathematics between Wilhelm and the astronomer, and even the impermissibility of Wilhelm’s horse (“weil kein Pferd in diesen Kreis eingelassen würde”⁷⁰²) – the horse

⁷⁰⁰ Goethe, FA, I/10, 378.

⁷⁰¹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 378.

⁷⁰² Goethe, FA, I/10, 378.

being for Goethe “das Sinnbild der natürlich wilden und rohen, mit tierhaftem Instinkt begabten [...] Lebenskraft”⁷⁰³ – all point on the one hand to the overall serial logic underlying the scene’s narration, and with it to the dominance of the perspectival, and on other hand to the de-naturalization of “life” in the broadest possible sense: with the proliferation of autonomous, self-acting objects, the text presents a scene of perception that becomes completely uncoupled from any individual observer or subject – a perspectival dis-figuration whereby “no human figure would have become visible.”

As it turns out, this uncanny spectral site is the realm of Makarie, who is first introduced in person being wheeled into the room from behind a green curtain, which mysteriously draws itself open as if by its own accord (“ein grüner Vorhang zog sich auf”⁷⁰⁴). Soon it is revealed to Wilhelm that the other-worldly Makarie does not simply have visions of the solar system, but she herself quite literally *is* a planet. According to Angela, the keeper of the archive,

Makarieren [sind] die Verhältnisse unsres Sonnensystem [...] gründlich eingeboren. Erst litt sie an diesen Erscheinungen, dann vergnügte sie sich daran, und mit den Jahren wuchs das Entzücken. [...] Die Familie selbst weiß nichts Näheres hievon, diese geheimen Anschauungen, die entzückenden Gesichte sind es, die bei den Ihrigen als Krankheit gelten, wodurch sie augenblicklich gehindert sei, an der Welt und ihren Interessen teilzunehmen.⁷⁰⁵

Angela’s characterization of Makarie establishes two crucial facts: first, that Makarie suffers from a mysterious, unspecified illness – earlier, in the sixth chapter of the first book, a letter exchange of Makarie’s with her nieces is reproduced in which there is talk of her “headache”⁷⁰⁶ [Kopfweh], which hinders her ability to write –; and second, that her paradoxical relation to the cosmos as well

⁷⁰³ André Gilg, “*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*” und ihre Symbole (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1954), 53, cited in Neumann, FA, I/10, 1076.

⁷⁰⁴ Goethe, FA, I/10, 379.

⁷⁰⁵ Goethe, FA, I/10, 358.

⁷⁰⁶ Goethe, FA, I/10, 325.

as her “secret intuitions” of the solar system cannot be explained or accounted for within the diegetic framework of the novel’s narrative. Contributing to both the continuity of the cosmological motif of the tenth chapter as well as to the secretive aura surrounding Makarie there is the presence of an astronomer who has scientifically investigated her celestial existence and who mans the observatory on which Wilhelm will soon have a crucial vision.

Curiously, Makarie’s cosmic intuitions, to which Angela alluded in her conversation with Wilhelm, are not presented in the kind of coherent, totalizing manner that one might expect. Rather, the perspectival disfiguration and fragmentation which are connected with the archive fiction and redactor also emerge directly in connection with the textual mediation of Makarie’s figure: the phantasm of an all-encompassing, cosmic whole is only ever realized within a narrative order of dispersion and proliferation, of fragmentation and disruption. Especially striking in this regard is the strategy of narrative deferral whereby the disclosure of information about Makarie’s secret is continually alluded to, yet never ever actually divulged – at least until the very “end” of the novel, and then only in a mediated manner. Thus already in the first longer passage concerning Makarie, the reader anticipates an immediate revelation of her secret, but instead this is (momentarily, at least) foreclosed from explicit representation. For just before the astronomer launches into a lengthy discussion of mathematics, the redactor intervenes:

Unsere Freunde haben einen Roman in die Hand genommen, und wenn dieser hie und da schon mehr als billig didaktisch geworden, so finden wir doch geraten, die Geduld unserer Wohlwollenden nicht noch weiter auf die Probe zu stellen. Die Papiere, die uns vorliegen, gedenken wir an einem anderen Ort abdrucken zu lassen und fahren diesmal im Geschichtlichen ohne weiteres fort [...].⁷⁰⁷

Here the deferral and displacement of archival material – “die Papiere, die uns vorliegen” – to “an other place” [einem anderen Ort], which remains unspecified and which in fact will not resurface

⁷⁰⁷ Goethe, FA, I/10, 350.

until the final chapter of the last book, already hint at the way in which Makarie serves as a disfiguring force in the novel, if not directly then by the restriction of the reader's access to information about her, which fragments the linear sequentiality of the narrative. In her presence, the novel's frame story begins to erode, exposing the gaps and lacunae in the text, whose palpable absence of transitions at the very center of one of the novel's most pivotal scenes contributes as well to the effect of suspense – a crucial element of serialized narration.

Hence, just as Makarie's cosmic existence is characterized by an 'over-proximity' to both the macrocosmos (her quasi-divine relation to the solar system) and the microcosmos (her author-like ability to intuit the "inner nature" of the novel's various figures), her textual existence is characterized by an 'under-proximity' with respect to the reader's knowledge: what the reader learns of Makarie is never divulged by Makarie herself; she is "die schweigsamste aller Frauen,"⁷⁰⁸ and in fact speaks only three times in the novel in direct speech, at which points her brief utterances are not related to herself, but rather set in motion conversation with the astronomer and Wilhelm. This conversation, like all other conversations with Makarie, is reproduced as a second-hand summary. Indeed, Makarie's life, her activities, perspectives and so-called "idiosyncrasies"⁷⁰⁹ [Eigenheiten] "teilen Dritte mit [...]. Makarie wird geschildert aus der Perspektive ihrer Nichten Juliette und Hersilie, vom Astronomen, von Angela, von Wilhelm in seiner Traumerzählung und von der schönen Witwe im *Mann von fünfzig Jahren*."⁷¹⁰ The collection of aphorisms at the end of the novel, entitled "Aus Makariens Archiv," likewise contribute to her highly perspectivized characterization. The report about her relation to the solar system, coincidentally the only coherent biography of Makarie that is to be found in the entire novel, are reported to have originated – like the

⁷⁰⁸ Goethe, FA, I/10, 223.

⁷⁰⁹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 125.

⁷¹⁰ Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*, 194.

collection of aphorisms which ostensibly belong to her and even bear her name – from an unnamed source and is even “erste lange Zeit, nachdem der Inhalt mitgeteilt worden, aus dem Gedächtnis geschrieben und nicht, wie es in einem so merkwürdigen Fall wünschenswert wäre, für ganz authentisch anzusehen.”⁷¹¹

The tenth chapter of the first book thus not only introduces and explores the mysterious nature of Makarie’s celestial existence, but also reflects on the relation of bodies to text. As Gerhard Neumann notes in his extensive commentary to the second edition of the *Wanderjahre*, a close examination of this relation reveals a deeper medial and epistemological problematic in the novel, namely how to achieve the “proper distance” [richtigen Distanz].⁷¹² During the first conversation between Wilhelm and the astronomer, which deals with the topic of mathematics, it is reported (in a text that is not shared to readers) that the astronomer lectures on the inner laws of man and his capacity for establishing lawful order; soon thereafter, the problematic of the “gaze” – already alluded to as a central thematic of the chapter by the opening passage – becomes explicitly thematized. As Wilhelm, accompanied by the astronomer, is guided to the astronomical observatory at the top floor of Makarie’s home to observe the night sky, he finds himself suddenly confronted by an overwhelming, traumatic vision:

Ergriffen und erstaunt hielt er sich beide Augen zu. Das Ungeheure hört auf, erhaben zu sein, es überreicht unsre Fassungskraft, es droht, uns zu vernichten. »Was bin ich denn gegen das All?« sprach er zu seinem Geiste; »wie kann ich ihm gegenüber, wie kann ich in seiner Mitte stehen?« Nach einem kurzen Überdenken jedoch fuhr er fort: »Das Resultat unsres heutigen Abends löst ja auch das Rätsel des gegenwärtigen Augenblicks. Wie kann sich der Mensch gegen das Unendliche stellen, als wenn er alle geistigen Kräfte, die nach vielen Seiten hingezogen werden, in seinem Innersten, Tiefsten versammelt, wenn er sich fragt: ›Darfst du dich in der Mitte dieser ewig lebendigen Ordnung auch nur denken, sobald sich nicht gleichfalls in dir ein beharrlich Bewegtes, um einen reinen Mittelpunkt kreisend, hervortut? Und selbst wenn es dir schwer würde, diesen Mittelpunkt in deinem Busen

⁷¹¹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 448f.

⁷¹² Cf. Neumann, FA, I/10, 1072–76.

aufzufinden, so würdest du ihn daran erkennen, daß eine wohlwollende, wohlthätige Wirkung von ihm ausgeht und von ihm Zeugnis gibt.⁷¹³

Here the text stages an event of perception which is completely uncoupled from plot or action. As Wilhelm comes into contact with an inhuman motion outside of himself and in relation to which he finds himself ever more thrust from center to periphery, thinking himself encircling the “middle of this eternally living order,” his vision of a threatening, potentially annihilating monstrosity cannot be conclusively situated either inwardly or outwardly, either in the dream-world or the external world. This procedure or “event” of perception, which is at once outwardly negating (“es droht, uns zu vernichten”), yet itself never directly observable or localizable (“[er] hielt [...] sich beide Augen zu”), is what Lacan refers to as “anamorphosis”: it designates an aporia within the field of perception, appearing as a monstrous, distorted image, which challenges the subject’s fixed relation to the observed object, since it is only as the subject withdraws – renounces the claim to knowledge – that the object proper comes into view.⁷¹⁴

Thus while the first line of the above passage (“Ergriffen und erstaunt [...]”) appears to implicitly reference Kant’s statement in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the experience of the sublime fills the observer with “admiration and awe” for the “starry heavens above me and the moral law within me,”⁷¹⁵ the crucial turning point of the passage occurs when the monstrous image suddenly ceases to be sublime (“das Ungeheure hört auf, erhaben zu sein [...]”) and threatens to annihilate Wilhelm (“es droht, uns zu vernichten”). In contrast to Kant’s description of the sublime experience of observing the night sky, which still retains the centeredness of the observing subject

⁷¹³ Goethe, FA, I/10, 351.

⁷¹⁴ Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 79–90.

⁷¹⁵ “Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmender Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht, je öfter und anhaltender sich das Nachdenken damit beschäftigt: der bestirnte Himmel über mir und das moralische Gesetz in mir” (Kant, *Kritisch der praktischen Vernunft*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Abt. I, Bd. V, 161).

in its corporeal confrontation with the overwhelming forces of nature and the divine through the analogy between the starry heavens and the inner moral law, this scene of astronomical observation disorients above and below, intimate and external, by setting into motion the very subject-position of the observer: ““Darfst du dich in der Mitte dieser ewig lebendigen Ordnung auch nur denken, sobald sich nicht gleichfalls in dir ein beharrlich Bewegtes, um einen reinen Mittelpunkt kreisend, hervortut?”” This disorienting, de-subjectifying bodily experience which is coupled to the cosmic gaze – an experience which Wilhelm perceives as being at once intimate and external – may be described as “extimate” [extime]; for “c’est en tant qu’il est ici une place que nous pouvons désigner du terme conjoignant l’intime à la radicale extériorité, c’est en tant que l’objet a est extime.”⁷¹⁶

Immediately following the narration of this corporeal limit-experience, Wilhelm relates a dream he had of Makarie that night to the astronomer who accompanied him to the observatory. In that moment, the problematic of the gaze becomes visible once more as Wilhelm awakens from sleep and rediscovers Makarie, as he perceived her in his dream, as part of the galaxy. Here the most intimate is simultaneously conceived as the most external, and the limit between sleep and wake, between dream and reality, is realized. In strikingly similar language as the opening passage of the tenth chapter of the first book, Wilhelm has recourse in his dream narrative to many of the same passive-voice constructions previously used by the narrator:

Der grüne Vorhang ging auf, Makariens Sessel bewegte sich hervor, von selbst wie ein belebtes Wesen; er glänzte golden, ihre Kleider schienen priesterlich, ihr Anblick leuchtete sanft; ich war im Begriff, mich niederzuwerfen. Wolken entwickelten sich um ihre Füße, steigend hoben sie flügelartig die heilige Gestalt empor, an der Stelle ihres herrlichen Angesichtes sah ich zuletzt, zwischen sich teilendem Ge-

⁷¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D’un autre à l’Autre 1968–1969*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller [Paris: Seuil 2006], 249.

wölk, einen Stern blinken, der immer aufwärts getragen wurde und durch das eröffnete Deckengewölbe sich mit dem ganzen Sternhimmel vereinigte, der sich immer zu verbreiten und alles zu umschließen schien.⁷¹⁷

In this oneiric scene (“schlaftrunken taumle ich nach dem Fenster [...]”), not only do objects such as the curtain and the chair appear to move autonomously, as if they were living beings, but the semantics of appearance – of semblance [Schein], perspective [Anblick], and the presence of a “green curtain” [grüne Vorhang] – hint at the theatrical character of Makarie’s realm. Yet Makarie herself, both in this dream sequence as well as in the novel more broadly, embodies an impossible “figure” who cannot possibly be brought onto the figurative “stage” of Wilhelm’s dream: this unearthly, Raffaelian image of an ideal woman, veiled by clouds surrounding her feet, whose “majestic countenance” [herrlichen Angesichtes] transforms into the image of a twinkling star that ascends ever further upward to unite with the “starry sky” [Sternhimmel] – all of these things indicate the ways in which Makarie, far from being a human subject or a stable figure, embodies instead a fluctuating dynamic of transformation, change, and metamorphosis – of ceaseless “dissemination” [sich verbreiten] and “envelopment” [umschließen].

The same problematic of proper distance is illuminated again in the same chapter, but this time from a different perspective. While in the first case (Wilhelm’s being granted the utmost of possible human experiences) it thematized the relationship between body and soul as a regulative force, and in the second case (starting with Wilhelm’s remark, “Was bin ich denn gegen das All? [...] wie kann ich ihm gegenüber, wie kann ich in seiner Mitte stehen?”) the distance between body and cosmos was measured, the question regarding man’s position in the cosmos “wird nun auf zweierlei Weise vergegenwärtigt: situativ verkörpert im Problem des ‘Blickes,’ systematisch verzeichnet im Medium der ‘Schrift.’”⁷¹⁸ While Wilhelm’s corporeal experience remains tied to

⁷¹⁷ Goethe, FA, I/10, 386.

⁷¹⁸ Neumann, FA, I/10, 1073.

the gaze, its spiritual mastery is documented through writing. Whereas the first realm was under the supervision of the astronomer, it is Angela who is in charge of the second realm. She manages the archive in which conversations and papers are condensed, thoughts are archived, and essential results of speeches conducted in Makarie's realm are preserved. Angela points Wilhelm to "ein abgesonderte, verschlossene Fach" in the archive which bears the title "Makariens Eigenheiten,"⁷¹⁹ and which discursively unfolds precisely the context which Wilhelm, in the previous scene of astronomical observation, momentarily experienced at the level of his own corporeality; however, this "sheet" [Blatt] drawn from the archive is not shared with the reader until later, and even then not literally, but rather from the memory of the redactor, as the novel once again returns to Makarie's realm (Book III, Chapter 15).

While at first glance Makarie would naturally seem to be the preeminent figure in the novel who simultaneously embodies the both the order of writing and cosmological knowledge – for all intents and purposes, she serves as the veritable "relais that attracts and distributes texts that circulate among the renunciants and that motivate and coordinate the movements of characters in the novel,"⁷²⁰ and thereby unites both archival and cosmic forces –, her relation to textuality in the novel is in fact far more complex and ambiguous than the reader might initially assume. In one of Makarie's brief letters to Juliette (her niece as well as Hersilie's older sister) she remarks that she would gladly write to Lenardo (her cousin), "wenn sich mein Kopfweh nicht anmeldete, das mich gegenwärtiges Blatt kaum zu Ende schreiben läßt."⁷²¹ As it is later revealed, this headache concerns one of Makarie's occasional withdrawals into a state of celestial rapture. Yet the fact that her mysterious gift is said to hinder in particular her ability to write, and furthermore that this special

⁷¹⁹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 389.

⁷²⁰ Müller-Sievers, "The Moment of Narration," 223.

⁷²¹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 74.

capacity of hers does not seem to affect her ability to speak – for her next letter to her nieces ends with the parenthetical note “Diktirt”⁷²² – hints at the mode of inscription of oral utterances as Makarie’s privileged discursive domain.

This process of transformation, or *metamorphosis*, from the oral into the written is explicitly thematized in Makarie’s realm. Soon after Wilhelm’s confrontation with an extreme bodily experience of the cosmic gaze and subsequent dream narrative, the birth of the subject from discourse becomes an object of mediological reflection in the *Wanderjahre*: as the oscillation between individual statement and speech context, between vibrant conversation and laconic paraphrase – or what Goethe refers to as the tension between “aperçu” and “system.” The relation of the polyphonous exchange of voices and their textual recording in the archive comes to play a central role in this part of the tenth chapter. Thus as Angela says of Makarie:

Meine Herrin [...] ist von der Wichtigkeit des augenblicklichen Gesprächs höchlich überzeugt; dabei gehe vorüber, sagte sie, was kein Buch enthält, und doch wieder das Beste, was Bücher jemals enthalten haben. Deshalb machte sie mir’s zur Pflicht, einzelne gute Gedanken, wie Samenkörner aus einer vielästigen Pflanze, hervorspringen. Ist man treu, sagte sie, das Gegenwärtige festzuhalten, so wird man erst Freude an der Überlieferung haben, indem wir den besten Gedanken schon ausgesprochen, das liebenswerteste Gefühl schon ausgedrückt finden. Hiedurch kommen wir zum Anschauen jener Übereinstimmung, wozu der Mensch berufen ist, wozu er sich oft wider seinen Willen finden muß, da er sich gar zu gern einbildet, die Welt fange mit ihm von vorne an.⁷²³

Here the origin and cause of the archive is attributed by Angela to the “momentary conversation” [augenblicklichen Gesprächs] – to the immediate, situationally-specific oral expression – whose recording through writing is merely a surrogate for registering and transmitting spoken words. Writing, like the archivist Angela, possesses here a decidedly ancillary, rather than autotelic, function: through Angela’s archival activity – namely the co-writing or transcription of conversations

⁷²² Goethe, FA, I/10, 124.

⁷²³ Goethe, FA, I/10, 387f..

and relatedly the collection of various papers – “ein bedeutendes Archiv entstanden sei, woraus sie in schlaflosen Nächten manchmal ein Blatt Makarien vorlese [...]”⁷²⁴

Thus it is not Makarie who discursively inscribes conversations. Nor does she read the written recordings which have been collected in the archive. Rather, whereas Makarie is associated in the novel with the paradigm of orality – as already implied by the medial circumstance of her “headaches” mentioned in her letter to Juliette – it is in fact Angela who stands in closest proximity to the order of textuality in the novel.⁷²⁵ Not coincidentally, even her name – in addition to having the biblical connotation of the word “angel” (analogous to Makarie’s name as an allusion to the Mother Mary) – serves as an anagram for the archival term *Anlage*, meaning “attachment,” “enclosure,” or “annex.”⁷²⁶ In very similar language as that found in the famous opening line of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*,⁷²⁷ Angela is introduced first with the proper name and then with the undermining of this name – that this is not exactly her name or it could be anyone’s name: “Angela, so nannte man die durch Gestalt und Betragen einnehmende Schöne, verkündigte sodann die Ankunft Makariens [...]”⁷²⁸ While the semiotic contingency of the name “Angela,” like that of

⁷²⁴ Goethe, FA, I/10, 138.

⁷²⁵ Remarkable is that in Makarie’s presence, where orality plays a far more important role than textuality, Felix learns how to write from Angela. This he does in secret, which Wilhelm only first learns of this through Angela at the end of his stay at Makarie’s. As Safia Azzouni notes, this pedagogical scene of writing does not lead to Felix’s interest in writing for itself, but rather as a means of attaining an extra-textual end. Thus the only complete piece of writing of Felix’s that the novel recapitulates is an extremely terse love letter to Hersilie, whose medium is “das kleinste Schiefertäfelchen [...] wie man sie im Gebirg für die kindischen Anfänge des Schreibens zubereitet” (Goethe, FA, I/10, 265). According to Azzouni, “Dieser Umstand sowie die Kürze und Direktheit seines Briefes zeigen, daß das Schreiben für Felix ein zweckgebundenes Mittel bleibt, das er nur äußerst selten einsetzt. Schriftliches für sich genommen hat in Felix’ Leben keine Bedeutung” (Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*, 114).

⁷²⁶ As Safia Azzouni argues, even the name of Makarie can be read as an anagram, in her case for the word “America” [Amerika]: “Die kollektive ‘Denkart’ kann sich aus Goethes Sicht erst in der Zukunft entfalten und umfassend wirksam sein. Dort hat Makarie ihren Ort, in diese Richtung weist sie. Sie finanziert im Roman das Projekt der Auswanderer, das in seiner Planung durchaus noch problematische Züge trägt. Am Ziel dieser Reise zu einem neuen Leben und Denken wird Makarie die Auswanderer erwarten – anagrammatisch verwandelt in AMERIKA” (Azzouni, *Kunst als praktische Wissenschaft*, 240).

⁷²⁷ “Eduard – so nennen wir einen reichen Baron im besten Mannesalter – Eduard hatte in seiner Baumschule die schönste Stunde eines Aprilmittags zugebracht, um frisch erhaltene Pflanzfreier auf junge Stämme zu bringen” (Goethe, FA, I/8, 271). For a close reading of this passage, cf. Piper, “Paraphrasis,” esp. 189–91.

⁷²⁸ Goethe, FA, I/10, 379.

“Eduard” in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, likewise gives way to parenthetical interjection, it does so in a subtly yet crucially different way in the *Wanderjahre*. Whereas in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* the narrator’s parenthetical interjection addresses a timeless linguistic situation between author, book, and reader (“so nennen *wir* [...]”), here the obliteration of reference through the summarization of a missing narrative – the missing “weil” – goes one step further by inscribing a discursive and historical distance into the interjection (“so *nannte* man [...]”), which places the accent of the utterance’s semiotic contingency on the impossibility of assured knowledge of the past as well as on the anonymous, unknown subject responsible for the act of naming. Now, it is not the collective “we” [wir] of author and reader who “name” the figure in question, but rather an unknown and indifferent “one” [man] (“so nannte *man* [...]”). One could argue that the entire difference between the two novels is condensed in these two seemingly innocuous lines: here it concerns the introduction of the perspective of the archive, which in the *Wanderjahre* is both “the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” as well as “that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the *system of its enunciability*.”⁷²⁹

According to Angela, spoken words are precisely that which “kein Buch enthält”: they are, as her comparison with “einer vielästigen Pflanze” shows, *natural* in the most literal sense. Oral expression is “das Beste, was Bücher jemals enthalten haben,” as Makarie ostensibly assumes, to the extent that “gute Gedanken” exist naturally as “Samenkörner” in a more or less ‘primordial form’ beyond oral or written representation, such that a greater proximity to the primordial form of thoughts is attributed their utterance than to their written fixation. From Angela’s reflections on

⁷²⁹ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 129.

the function of the archive arises in turn a linguistic structure which balances the “vibrant,” “natural” context of conversation, as it is experienced in its direct immediacy, and the mediacy of the “sheet of paper” [Blatt] pulled from the archive, “bei welcher Gelegenheit denn wieder auf eine merkwürdige Weise tausend Einzelheiten hervorspringen, eben als wenn eine Masse Quecksilber fällt und sich nach allen Seiten hin in die vielfachsten unzähligen Kügelchen zerteilt.”⁷³⁰ Here Angela suddenly moves away from an organic metaphor for “good thoughts” as “Samenkörner aus einer vielästigen Pflanze” toward an inorganic one. Underlying both organic and inorganic metaphors is the lively relationship between aphorism and novel, between laconic statement or “aperçu” and narrative order, which characterizes not only the linguistic structure of Makarie’s realm, but also the entire principle of the novel’s construction.⁷³¹

Although Eckermann once claimed that the aphorisms in the *Wanderjahre* were only included in order to meet the page count required for the second and third books of the *Ausgabe letzter Hand* (1829),⁷³² Goethe himself argued two years after the novel’s publication that the two aphorism collections constitute in fact a “Vehikel [...] um eine Masse sehr bedeutender Dinge schicklich in die Welt zu bringen.”⁷³³ One should not take this to mean that the aphorisms are

⁷³⁰ Goethe, FA, I/10, 138.

⁷³¹ From this perspective one can also approach the allegory of the “thole pin” [Ruderpflock], which may be said to reveal the contingency of the novel’s construction. In Book 2, Chapter 11, Wilhelm relates in a letter to Natalie an anecdote about a man who became a sea-fairing master: “Du hast von dem Jüngling gehört, der, am Ufer des Meeres spazierend, einen Ruderpflock fand [...]. Dies aber war nun auch weiter nichts nütze; er trachtete ernstlich nach einem Kahn und gelangte dazu. Jedoch war Kahn, Ruder und Ruderpflock nicht sonderlich fördernd, er verschaffte sich Segelstangen und Segel und so nach und nach was zur Schnelligkeit und Bequemlichkeit der Schifffahrt erforderlich ist. Durch zweckmäßiges Bestreben gelangt er zu größerer Fertigkeit und Geschicklichkeit, das Glück begünstigt ihn, er sieht sich endlich als Herr und Patron eines größern Fahrzeugs, und so steigert sich das Gelingen, er gewinnt Wohlhaben, Ansehen und Namen unter den Seefahrern. —” (Goethe, FA, I/10, 541). This anecdote shows how a series of oral utterances – individual statements – can coalesce, like the juxtaposition of the aggregate parts of a boat, in a more or less contingent and disordered fashion into a coherent totality, which only retroactively appear as necessary and whole once re-inscribed into a complete narrative context: the synoptic overview which turns the discrete sentences into a story, turns parts of a boat into a successful sea-fairing enterprise.

⁷³² Cf. Neumann, FA, I/10, 1144f.

⁷³³ Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, 467.

intended to reflect the wisdom of the “real author” Goethe. Rather, they stage a proliferating dynamic – the dispersion of a “mass” [Masse] of collected “things” [Dinge], writes Goethe – which intertwines with the whole of the novel while still remaining below the threshold of its narrative organization. Angela’s analogy between the thoughts contained in the archive and the mass of mercury which spills forth once one begins to pick apart the “good thoughts” featured on the sheets of paper can be read both in relation to the mediology of the archive itself – that is, as spilt ink that transforms the vibrant immediacy of spoken conversation into the mobility of the textual – as well as at the semiotic level, which relates the elusive nature of mercury – its mobility and flexibility thanks to its peculiar “aggregate state” [Aggregatzustände], for it is both a metal and a liquid – to the radical contingency and elusiveness of meaning through the perspectivization of individual sentences.⁷³⁴ The text thereby stages here the way in which the collection and recording of text becomes uncoupled from an originary referent – the spoken word –, giving way to the dispersion and proliferation of ‘small forms,’ of “Kügelchen,” which cannot be synthesized or brought into a fixed, solid state. For this reason, the only representational form adequate to their inherent plurality and heterogeneous aggregate condition are two ambiguous signifiers – ones which play a central

⁷³⁴ A similar dynamic can be observed as Angela guides Wilhelm into a room in which he sees cabinets “all around” [ringsum] filled with “wohlgeordnete Papiere.” As Wilhelm gazes at the documents, he feels compelled to undertake the archival work of sorting through the many “notebooks” [Hefte] and “barely coherent sentences” [kaum zusammenhängender Sätze]: “Hier nun mußte der Freund bescheiden zu Werke gehen, denn es fand sich nur allzuviel Anziehendes und Wünschenswertes; besonders achtete er die Hefte kurzer, kaum zusammenhängender Sätze höchst schätzenswert. Resultate waren es, die, wenn wir nicht ihre Veranlassung wissen, als paradox erscheinen, uns aber nötigen, vermittelst eines umgekehrten Findens und Erfindens rückwärts zugehen und die Filiation solcher Gedanken von weit her, von unten herauf womöglich zu vergegenwärtigen.” While the passage can be read as a poetological reflection on the tension between “aperçu” and “system” underlying the novel’s principle of construction, it also relates to the movement of thought with respect to the poetics of the aphorism, which depends upon a chiasmus – the filiation of thoughts – and a corresponding reflection on how literary small forms are capable of continually de-contextualizing and re-contextualizing themselves.

role in Goethe's lexicon – that are used respectively in relation to Makarie's archive and to Angela's mercury metaphor: the “significant” [bedeutend] and the “remarkable” [merkwürdig].⁷³⁵ Not coincidentally, these are synoptic signifiers which, analogous to Goethe's use of the word “enough” [genug],⁷³⁶ serves a paraphrastic function, namely that of gesturing toward a deeper profundity or significance while at the same time leaving the extended explanation of this meaning itself more or less absent and open.

A similar dispersal of meaning presents itself in connection with at least two other “hermeneutic” moments in the *Wanderjahre*: first, with the exegesis of gnomic inscriptions that Wilhelm encounters in the company of the unnamed uncle, who is simply referred to in the novel as “Der Oheim,” and his nieces, Hersilie and Juliette; and second, with the hermeneutic metaphors

⁷³⁵ Goethe serialized the terms “significant” [bedeutend] and “remarkable” [merkwürdig] in much the same way as he did the signifiers “experience” and “experiment” in his essay *Versuch als Vermittler* (1793). In the *Wanderjahre*, one might say that whereas the “remarkable” outlines the contours of an intuitional procedure that rests on the identity of “kaltem Sehen” and “alles Aufschreiben,” as he spoke of in letters dating from August 9 and 16/17, 1792 – not coincidentally composed during the time in which he worked on his essay on the experiment – the term “significant” attains significance at the semiotic level (hence Goethe also speaks of “ein bedeutendes Kästchen” in the *Wanderjahre*, which is associated with the hermeneutic motif of casket and key) through the processing of notations according to a statistical model: through the condensation of “peculiarities” [Merkwürdigkeiten] into a tableau, which makes their significance *evident*. For more on this distinction and its significance for Goethe's semiotics, cf. Campe, “Merkwürdig/Bedeutend. Zu einer Stelle über das Symbolische bei Goethe,” in: *Umwege des Lesens. Aus dem Labor philologischer Neugierde*, eds. Christoph Hoffmann and Caroline Welsh (Berlin: Parerga, 2006), 245–58. As Campe argues in that essay with reference to a 1797 letter of Goethe's to Schiller on the concept of the symbolic, “*Merkwürdig* ist ein Term der Notationstechnik. Das *Bedeutende* empfangt demnach seine Bedeutung nicht durch psychologische Auferlegung oder ästhetische Reflexion, sondern durch die Verarbeitungsschritte der Notations nach Art der Apodemik und Statistik. Diese Art von *Bedeutung* emergiert für Goethe also offenbar wie beim Erstellen der Reise-, Landes- und Staatsbeschreibung durch Zusammenziehen der Merkwürdigkeiten in das Tableau, das am Ende wörtlich – als Zahlenwerk – oder übertragen – als Summe des Kompilierten – wie die Statistiker sagten: *vor Augen stehen* sollte. Die Herstellung dieses Quasi-Bildes ist für Goethe offenbar weder rein konstruktiv (sentimentalisch), noch bloßer Rückgriff ins vorkonstruktive (naiv) Auffassen. Sie ist primär Verfahren – das Sicheinspielen einer Regel des zeichnend-schreibenden Notierend in Versuchen, die ihr vorausgehen” (ibid., 254).

⁷³⁶ For more on the medial significance of the word “genug” in Goethe, see Piper, “Paraphrasis,” esp. 183–88. According to Piper's close reading of the novella *Der Mann von fünfzig Jahren*, “‘Genug’ here signifies a crucial boundary moment, one in which some narrative portion has come to an end (the act of sending the poem) and a new one is about to begin (the act of receiving the poem). But this very boundary is marked by its transgression in a double sense – it repeats, at the level of synopsis, what the narrative has previously tried to explain (‘das Jagdgedicht selbst war abgesendet’) just as it fails to continue forward, with the narrative substituting instead more synopsis (‘von welchem wir jedoch einige Worte nachzubringen haben’). In place of either the reception or citation of the poem we are offered its paraphrase. ‘Enough’ is the sign of a communicative interstice” (ibid., 183).

of casket and key, which circulate in a puzzling and seemingly impossible manner through the various chapters of the novel. Before Wilhelm becomes acquainted with the uncle and his nieces during his involuntary entry into their sphere, he encounters a number of “inscriptions”⁷³⁷ [In-schriften] which adorn a prison-like space. These inscriptions consist of various maxims which concern universal world-views, and appear just as much to the reader as to Wilhelm himself as in need of explanation.⁷³⁸ Yet the answers to Wilhelm’s repeated questions as to the meaning of these maxims are far from unambiguous: Wilhelm’s conversation partner in this circle, Juliette, describes more the character than the content of the inscriptions: “Umschreiben sie die wenigen Worte, so wird der Sinn bald hervorleuchten.”⁷³⁹ Her sister, Hersilie, whose skepticism of “Maximen der Männer”⁷⁴⁰ is evident, claims: “ich aber finde, daß man sie alle umkehren kann und daß sie alsdann ebenso wahr sind, und vielleicht noch mehr.”⁷⁴¹ While the meaning of the inscriptions themselves remains opaque, what substitutes for the mediation of understanding between text and reader is the procedure of “paraphrase” [Umschreiben]. By contrasting two different procedures of reading – the text diametrically opposes here the unsuccessful hermeneutic efforts of “exegesis” [auslegen] to those of “inverting” [umkehren],⁷⁴² Wilhelm’s experiences with the decipherment of the gnomic inscriptions in the uncle’s sphere suggest a decisive shift away from the hermeneutic paradigm of reading around 1800 in favor of the serial logic of paraphrastic writing and speech. As Andrew Piper argues, this paraphrastic stance in Goethe’s late works is no longer based on a subject-centered poetology of mediating the reader’s understanding, but on a model transformation

⁷³⁷ Goethe, FA, I/10, 47.

⁷³⁸ The three examples reproduced in the novel read as follows: “Dem Unschuldigen Befreiung und Ersatz, dem Verführten Mitleiden, dem Schuldigen ahnende Gerechtigkeit” (Goethe, FA, I/10, 47); “Vom Nützlichen durchs Wahre zum Schönen” (Goethe, FA, I/10, 65); and “Besitz und Gemeingut” (Goethe, FA, I/10, 68).

⁷³⁹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 47.

⁷⁴⁰ Goethe, FA, I/10, 66.

⁷⁴¹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 68.

⁷⁴² Goethe, FA, I/10, 68.

– the transformation of foreign speech into one’s own, and of the immediacy of oral speech into writing, which connects Goethe’s paraphrastic poetics with the introduction of the pervasive medial fiction of the archive in the *Wanderjahre*.⁷⁴³

To the extent that such paraphrastic poetics dramatically diverged from the conditions of the technical system between reading and writing around 1800, it was also not without significance for the medium of the book. This becomes an object of mediological reflection in connection with the casket and key metaphors in the *Wanderjahre*. The centrality of these metaphors to the novel was made explicit by Goethe with his decision to include an illustration of the key near the end of the novel. In the *Wanderjahre*, casket and key constitute heterochronic objects: they seem to obey no coherent temporal or spatial field with respect to the novel’s narrative order. Rather, they float more or less freely between the various threads of stories and narratives that are themselves at times only tangentially interconnected. On the one hand, the elusiveness of their meaning can be understood as an “allegory of reading,” which demands the hermeneutic exegesis of their obscurity. On the other hand, they foreclose the possibility of any fixed meaning through the strategy of narrative deferral and displacement. Thus in an earlier passage that recalls both Angela’s description of Makarie’s aphorisms as well as her own skeptical attitude toward the aphoristic inscriptions, Hersilie describes the key that does not seem to open the casket as something that continually

⁷⁴³ As Andrew Piper argues, Goethe’s turn toward paraphrase marked a departure from both the older form of commonplacing, as a technique of *memoria*, and the hermeneutic paradigm of reading around 1800: “Goethe’s own paraphrastic turn was in many ways a means of addressing a larger historical shift surrounding practices of citation at the turn of the nineteenth century. In place of an early-modern practice of common placing – of excerpting quotations from books and inscribing them in still other books – the hermeneutic paradigm that was fast emerging around 1800 depended upon an altogether different nexus of readerly citation, dissection, and inscription. There was a profound shift underway in how individuals related to the texts that they read and how those texts came to matter in their lives, but this shift still depended in crucial ways on a form of citationality, only now in a different vein. Goethe’s paraphrastic turn, by contrast, was aligned with neither the nascent hermeneutics of reading nor an older cultural practice of commonplacing. It was put forth, I want suggest, as an alternative model to *both* of these cultures of literalism. In place of either of the paradigms of citation and interpretation, which mutually reinforced one another, Goethe’s paraphrastic stance argued for a model of transformation” (Piper, “Paraphrasis,” 181).

escapes one's grasp: "Und was das wieder für Umstände sind! Das schiebt sich und verschiebt sich."⁷⁴⁴ In one of her subsequent letters to Wilhelm, she declares that the chest displays "weder Buchstaben noch Ziffer, weder Jahrzahl noch sonst Andeutung, woraus man den frühern Besitzer oder Künstler erraten könne, es sei ihm also völlig unnütz und ohne Interesse."⁷⁴⁵ The most "remarkable" feature of this "significant" chest is that it bears no features that would allow for hermeneutic access from any potential "reader" into whose hands it might contingently fall; for as Hersilie notes, there are "neither letters nor numbers, neither year nor any indication, of how to guess who its previous owner or artist was." As Hersilie continues in her letter to Wilhelm apropos the chest and key:

Ich sage nichts weiter, beschreibe nicht, entschuldige nicht; genug, hier liegt das Kästchen vor mir in meiner Schatulle, der Schlüssel daneben, und wenn Sie eine Art von Herz und Gemüt haben, so denken Sie, wie mir zumute ist, wie viele Leidenschaften sich in mir herunkämpfen, wie ich Sie herwünsche, auch wohl Felix dazu, daß es ein Ende werde, wenigstens daß eine Deutung vorgehe, was damit gemeint sei, mit diesem Wunderbaren Finden, Wiederfinden, Trennen und Vereinigen; und sollte ich auch nicht aus aller Verlegenheit gerettet werden, so wünsche ich wenigstens sehnlichst, daß diese sich aufkläre, sich endige, wenn mir auch, wie ich fürchte, etwas Schlimmeres begegnen sollte.⁷⁴⁶

In contrast to Makarie's earlier letter to her other niece, Juliette, in which "das [sich] gegenwärtiges Blatt kaum zu Ende schreiben läßt,"⁷⁴⁷ Hersilie's punctual use of the word "enough" [genug], as well as her talk of the need to come to an "end" [Ende] or "at the very least that an explanation proceeds" [wenigstens daß eine Deutung vorgehe], point to the principle of *Entsagung* – literally of "not-saying" – which comes to dominate the latter portion of the novel. If in the earlier scene concerning the exegesis of inscriptions the paraphrastic inversion of syntactical order made possible the potentially endless proliferation of different meanings, here paraphrase encounters its limit,

⁷⁴⁴ Goethe, FA, I/10, 599.

⁷⁴⁵ Goethe, FA, I/10, 657.

⁷⁴⁶ Goethe, FA, I/10, 658.

⁷⁴⁷ Goethe, FA, I/10, 74.

namely the necessity of reaching an arbitrary end-point, when speaking and writing must ultimately come to an end (“Ich sage nichts mehr, beschreibe nicht, entschuldige nicht”). Thus while the heterochronic circulation of casket and key on the one hand stimulate a hermeneutic endeavor – namely the desire to know – in the novel, the shift away from the search for their secret meaning in favor of the renunciation of the claim to know at the end of the *Wanderjahre* foreshadows the ways in which the novel will not come to a definitive or conclusive end, but will instead make use of techniques of serialization. In contrast with the route of romantic reflexivity taken by the *Lehrjahre*, this makes the *Wanderjahre* into a decisively post-hermeneutic work, which cannot even be called a “novel” any longer.⁷⁴⁸

Only at this point in the novel, in the final chapters of the third and final book – not coincidentally, right before the search for the casket and key is abandoned – does the text divulge the contents of the long-postponed letter from the archive detailing the secrets of Makarie’s celestial nature, which was first alluded to in the tenth chapter of the first book. In Book III, Chapter 15, the text presents Makarie as a paradoxical cosmic figure, and it does so by explicitly drawing on the language of plant metamorphosis – specifically, the theory of the spiral tendency – from Goethe’s *Notes on Morphology*. The archival source material that was held back and deferred until a later point in is now presented to readers for the first time, for as the redactor announces at the end of the previous chapter:

Zu diesem Punkte aber gelangt, können wir der Versuchung nicht widerstehen, ein Blatt aus unsern Archiven mitzuteilen, welches Makarien betrifft und die besondere Eigenschaft, die ihrem Geiste erteilt ward. Leider ist dieser Aufsatz erst lange Zeit nachdem der Inhalt mitgeteilt worden, aus dem Gedächtnis geschrieben und nicht, wie es in einem so merkwürdigen Fall wünschenswert wäre, für ganz authentisch anzusehen.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁸ For more on this point, cf. Mittermüller. “Das schiebt sich und verschiebt sich.”

⁷⁴⁹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 481

In this mysterious “essay” [Aufsatz], whose contents are reproduced in full, comprising the entirety of the fifteenth chapter, yet whose veracity is simultaneously put into question by the redactor on the basis of its dubious provenance – namely its transcription from the redactor’s memory, rather than on the basis of oral utterances from Makarie – it is revealed that Makarie does not merely observe the solar system, but is rather paradoxically a part of it:

Makarie befindet sich zu unserm Sonnensystem in einem Verhältnis, welches man auszusprechen kaum wagen darf. Im Geiste, der Seele, der Einbildungskraft hegt sie, schaut sie es nicht nur, sondern sie macht gleichsam einen Teil desselben; sie sieht sich in jenen himmlischen Kreisen mit fortgezogen, aber auf eine ganz eigene Art; sie wandelt seit ihrer Kindheit um die Sonne, und zwar, wie nun entdeckt ist, in einer Spirale, sich immer mehr vom Mittelpunkt entfernend und nach den äußeren Regionen hinkreisend.⁷⁵⁰

According to the “ethereal poetry”⁷⁵¹ [ätherische Dichtung] of the Makarie myth, it is claimed that she “moves around the sun [...] in a spiral,” and indeed – like Wilhelm during his extreme bodily experience of the cosmic gaze – “distancing herself ever more from the midpoint and circling toward the outer regions, [...] striving toward the periphery.”

To be sure, the peculiar tension in Makarie between, on the one hand, her highly mechanical movements and, on the other hand, her mysterious celestial existence, as well as that between her fragmentary textuality and her depiction as the very source of lively conversation, suggests in part a certain pre-modern conception of nature as a harmonious totality – on which has ostensibly been lost in the modern era, yet which is still nonetheless able to being evoked and represented as a whole. Yet at the same time the explicit analogy in the above passage between Makarie’s cosmological existence and Goethe’s theory of the spiral tendency also radically puts into question the reading of Makarie as harkening back to a pre-modern “mythpoetic” ideal. Rather, just as the

⁷⁵⁰ Goethe, FA, I/10, 484.

⁷⁵¹ Goethe, FA, I/10, 737.

spiral tendency reflects two contradictory dynamics – that is, both the capacity for infinite proliferation and that of a universal pathology in nature, namely death and finitude – so too does Makarie embody a profound ambivalence with respect to the representation of life and, relatedly, the ambitions of the novel in the age of its mechanical reproducibility.

In this regard, the analogy between the spiral tendency need not be restricted to the literal language of spiral figures used, for example, in the various cosmological scenes that reveal Makarie’s “secret.” Rather, the comparison reveals the deeper ambivalences that she embodies as soon as one recalls that Makarie experiences her own peculiar pathology, namely that of frequent headaches while writing letters. Despite her close proximity to the archive which bears her name, the text suggests that Makarie suffers in particular from the materiality of the letter, and throughout the novel she is correspondingly characterized by a noticeable dearth of text production and, relatedly, by an over-abundance of orality, the utterances of which are themselves rarely if ever directly reproduced in the novel, but rather communicated from the perspective of others – from foreign voices or textual transcriptions which have been archived. Makarie thus appears in the novel as the unrepresentable absent center – “the real” of orality – around which the symbolic – the mass of letters, papers, and recorded conversations preserved in the archive which bears her name – rotates and circulates in the novel.

On the other hand, the correspondence between her cosmic existence and the dynamics of the spiral tendency simultaneously reveals her to be a “form-of-life” distinct from that of (other) human figures in the novel – a suggestion which is already alluded to in part by the noteworthy

preponderance of various kinds of machines and other uncannily self-acting objects in her presence.⁷⁵² In fact, Makarie herself is even likened to a “lebendige Armillarsphäre.”⁷⁵³ Furthermore, in relation to Wilhelm’s traumatic visions of the night sky and his dream narrative of Makarie, she is presented as both a potentially monstrous figure, as well as an ideal conception of the feminine, yet one which is far too transitory and fleeting – in a constant state of transformation, flux, and metamorphosis – to be representable as a figure. At the mediological level, one might say that around Makarie intertwine three different medial aspects: text, image, and voice, which may be said to correspond to the Lacanian triad of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. In the novel, these map respectively on to the archive, the cosmic gaze, and the immediacy of lively conversation – the latter of which can only ever be simulated and never directly represented in the novel – all of which are directly concerned with the status of Makarie.

Makarie thus comes to paradoxically embody both a centrifugal dynamic that attracts the various figures of the novel into her orbit, thereby integrating at one level the novel’s disparate story lines into single, serialized moments, as well as a pure effect of the collective, for rarely does she communicate in direct speech, but is instead always mediated by the perspective of an other, a “third.” In both cases, however, she resolutely eludes any and all figuration or subjectivity; for the motions and movements which the text attributes to her, and upon which its narrative motion is founded, are ones which – in contrast to the activities of traveling and migration that characterize

⁷⁵² Perhaps one of the most suggestive images of machinery appears in the middle of the novel, in an otherwise unremarkable passage: “Und so standen hier, in gehörigen Entfernungen zusammengeordnet, das große Schaukelrad, wo die Auf- und Absteigenden immer gleich horizontal ruhig sitzenbleiben, andere Schaukeleien, Schwungseile, Lusthebel, Kegel- und Zellenbahnen und was nur alles erdacht werden kann, um auf einem großen Trifraum eine Menge Menschen verschiedenlichst und gleichmäßig zu beschäftigen und zu erlustigen (Goethe, FA, I/10, 108f). The image of the *Schaukelrad*, a kind of ferris wheel, alludes to the mobility and flexibility of the serialized novel – its capacity for perpetual continuation –, in much the same way as Goethe’s earlier paronomastic references to wheels of the spinners and weavers, of “warp” [Einschlag] and “weft” [Zettel] in “Lenardos Tagebuch” reflect on the collage-like method of text production that characterizes the novel’s production process.

⁷⁵³ Goethe, FA, I/10, 451.

the stories of Wilhelm and Lenardo – have no origin whatsoever in human subjectivity. Rather, these are the vibrant dynamics of the impersonal, inhuman archive, and of the machinery of text-production, which the text exposes at the fictional level as the principle of its own composition. Makarie is no longer a figure at all, but rather a dynamic of dispersion and proliferation – a disfiguring force – in which perception and textuality, gaze and writing, become blurred together in her disorienting spectral image, which “[sich] kaum zu Ende schreiben läßt.”⁷⁵⁴ Her relation to the archive thus reveals her to be a form-of-life which is entirely en-framed by discursive acts of written communication.

Through Makarie’s transformation from an aggregate of archival documents, which incessantly circulate around her orbit, into a visually synoptic being in the form of a distorted, disorienting image, as in Wilhelm’s dream, she also plays a central role with respect to the principle of “renunciation” [Entsagung] in the novel. Goethe’s emphasis on renunciation in the *Wanderjahre* is not to be thought strictly in psychoanalytic terms, along the lines of Freud’s discontent [Unbehagen] in civilization – that is, as the renunciation of the drives. Rather, in light of Makarie’s approximation to the spiral tendency, she reveals the deeper tensions between order and excess, between renunciation and the infinite “drive” of the spiral tendency – in other words, the problematic of the proper distance. Just as the breakdown – the literal *Versagen*, as in the breakdown of a machine – of representation surrounding Makarie leads to a corresponding shift at the semiotic level away from hypotaxis – from the possibility of an overview or perspective of coherent development, *Bildung* – toward the preponderance of the serial and the paratactic, so too does her embodiment of the archive point to her status as a disfiguring force whose withdrawal from direct speech more broadly underlies the alienating communicative effect of the archive fiction, which

⁷⁵⁴ Goethe, FA, I/10, 74.

de-subjectifies the figures of the novel. Perhaps more than any other figure in the novel, it is Makarie who reveals the uncanny dimension of the voice, in its radical absence or “not-saying” [entsagen], first and foremost as a media effect: “What remains of people is what media can store and communicate. What counts are not the messages or information technologies with which they equip so-called souls for the duration of a technological era, but rather (and in strict accordance to McLuhan) their circuits, the very schematism of perceptibility.”⁷⁵⁵

Goethe’s decision to incorporate Makarie into the second edition of the novel, at which point the genre designation “novel” was – perhaps not without coincidence – dropped from the title page, thus suggests the degree to which Makarie, as the embodiment of the spiral tendency, corresponds to a shift away from the genre conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, with its medial and narrative closure, toward the aggregate and collective form of the serialized novel. For whereas the “life” of the *Lehrjahre* originated in the principle autotelic narration – of *Bildung* – “life” in the *Wanderjahre* is not that of the individual, human subject, but that of writing in its uncanny alienating effect and contingent materiality: it is, in other words, the “life” of the archive, which attains its own productivity – both vital and mortifying, as *Nachlaß*. Hence, just as Goethe gradually shifted away from the paradigm of *Bildung* in his *Notes on Morphology* toward the contingency and monstrosity of the spiral tendency, his analogy between Makarie and the spiral form likewise suggests that, in the context of the serial logic of the *Wanderjahre*, no cosmological totality or overview is possible any longer, but only the possibility of an end – of death and finitude, for Makarie, as the reader is informed, is quite old and nearing death – as well as its potentially endless continuation, or as the last line of the book reads: “(Ist fortzusetzen.)”

⁷⁵⁵ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), xl–xli.

CONCLUSION: FROM AGGREGATES TO CONSTELLATIONS

Throughout the preceding pages of the dissertation, I have tried to show how relation of the contingency and materiality of writing to the finitude of corporeal, creaturely existence around 1800 connected to a form-principle of aggregation, whose techniques of engrafting, enfolding, and collecting are neither wholly organic nor inorganic. To borrow Goethe's term, such literary forms may be likened to "serial aggregates," whose parts no longer relate to each other as parts to a whole, but rather as raw material that can be recombined and rearranged according to the will of the *bricoleur* – the writer, that is, in the role of secondary editor and collector. To conclude, I want to suggest that, although the paradigm of "serial aggregates" was virulent from the late 18th to early 19th century, there is a sudden shift away from this model in the late-19 century. Around 1900, it is not so much the problem of the organic (biological-corporeal) and the inorganic (mechanic-technical) that underlies the relation of life and form, but rather that of system of environment, of actor and network, which foregrounds the contingency and differential character of form. From the early-19th century to the early-20th century, one could say that there is a pronounced shift, in other words, from the conception of form as *aggregates* to *constellations* – a term which advances in the 20th century to a fundamental concept in aesthetics and philosophy.

Although the cosmological implications of this term imply a somewhat counterintuitive claim, given that cosmology as a discourse is traditionally assumed to have waned in the 20th century after having been associated with a decidedly pre-modern ontology, the tentative claim put forth in this conclusion is that, in fact, 20th-century literary and cultural phenomena bear witness to an astonishing resurgence of cosmological discourse, which the term "constellations" – as

both a form-theoretical principle as well as a cosmic figure of thought – embodies and reflects.⁷⁵⁶ Building off of my research in the dissertation, this next project, tentatively entitled *Eccentric Orbits: Cosmology and Contingency from Alexander von Humboldt to Classical Modernism*, proposes to examine the cultural history and form-theoretical presuppositions of the emergence of cosmological discourse and poetics in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century German literature and culture. The starting point for this interdisciplinary project the reception of Alexander von Humboldt’s five-volume treatise *Kosmos. Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* (1845–62).⁷⁵⁷ While Humboldt is typically viewed as one of the last prominent exponents of the “romantic perspective” in the sciences – an anthropocentric worldview that is arguably implicit in his choice of title for the work, which harkens back to a distinctly pre-modern conception of nature as an immediately intuitable whole – I will argue that in fact a close reading of Humboldt’s *Kosmos* reveals a relativizing of the Romantic ideal of an unmediated “intuitive knowledge” by inscribing contingency and unpredictability not only into his cartographic representation of the world, but also into the work itself, whose “open form” has been likened to “das letzte Mega-Fragment der europäischen Sattelzeit.”⁷⁵⁸

In *Kosmos*, Humboldt undertakes the artistic as well as scientific representation of the entire world – all of nature in its totality –, which in this context is not limited to the earth, but encompasses even the heavens. Furthermore, he seeks in this work not only to examine the contemporary condition of this vast realm, but also considers its historical development, which is intended to be neither too general nor too concrete. This approach – this form – ought neither elevate

⁷⁵⁶ For more on the concept of constellations as a representational and form-theoretical principle, cf. Andrea Krauß, *Lenz unter anderem. Aspekte einer Theorie der Konstellation* (Zürich/Berlin: diaphenes, 2011).

⁷⁵⁷ Alexander von Humboldt, *Kosmos. Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung*, ed. Ottmar Ette und Oliver Ulbrich (Frankfurt a. M.: Eichborn Verlag, 2004).

⁷⁵⁸ Jürgen Osterhammel, “Alexander von Humboldt: Historiker der Gesellschaft, Historiker der Natur,” in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 81 (1999), 108.

itself to the level of pure theoretical speculation, nor to lose itself in the myriad of technical details, but rather represent the totality of the “world” in its manifold interconnectedness, drawing on the knowledge and methods derived from all extant disciplines, and to give it a form that would be adequate to this aesthetic purpose. Alexander von Humboldt conceived this “mad idea” [tollen Einfall], as he likened it in a letter to a friend, as an imaginary journey through the universe, which – from the most distant nebulae of the galaxy to the stones, moss, animals and humans on earth – would traverse the most heterogeneous spaces of knowledge.⁷⁵⁹

More broadly, this second project contends that Alexander von Humboldt’s *Kosmos* – and especially its popular reception stretching from roughly 1870 to 1913 – was decisive for the re-emergence of a pervasive, yet still largely overlooked, discourse of cosmology in the 20th century.⁷⁶⁰ In the project’s subsequent chapters, I plan to examine forms of cosmological representation and cosmic knowledge in the wake of Humboldt’s treatise, showing how around 1900 writers

⁷⁵⁹ On October 27, 1835, Humboldt writes to Varnhagen von Ense: “Ich habe den tollen Einfall, die ganze materielle Welt, alles, was wir heute von den Erscheinungen der Himmelsräume und des Erdenlebens, von den Nebelsternen bis zur Geographie der Moose auf den Granitfelsen wissen, alles in *einem* Werk darzustellen, und in einem Werk, das zugleich in lebendiger Sprache anregt und das Gemüt ergötzt” (Alexander von Humboldt, *Briefe von Alexander von Humboldt und Varnhagen von Ense aus den Jahren 1827 bis 1858* [Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1860], 20).

⁷⁶⁰ Although literature related to this topic of research is limited, there are several monographs and edited volumes that are worth mentioning in this context. For more on the relation of the discourse of cosmology to literature and media from the early modern period to the 20th century, see Sonja A. J. Neef, Henri Sussman, and Dietrich Boschung (eds.), *Astroculture. Figurations of Cosmology in Media and Arts* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2014), as well as Reto Rössler, Tim Sparenberg, and Philipp Weber (eds.), *Kosmos und Kontingenz* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, forthcoming 2016). For more on Alexander von Humboldt and his importance for modernity, see Ottmar Ette, Ute Hermanns, Bernd M. Scherer, and Christian Suckow (eds.), *Alexander von Humboldt. Aufbruch in die Moderne* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001); Hartmut Böhme, “Alexander von Humboldts Entwurf einer neuen Wissenschaft,” in: *Prägnanter Moment. Studien zur deutschen Literatur der Aufklärung und Klassik: Festschrift für Hans-Jürgen Schings*, eds. Peter-André Alt, Alexander Košenina, Hartmut Reinhardt, and Wolfgang Riedel (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), 495–512; Lars Friedrich, “Stardust Memories. Alexander von Humboldts Rhetorik kosmischer Kräfte,” in: *Die Realität der Idealisten. Friedrich Schiller, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Alexander von Humboldt*, eds. Hans Feger and Hans Richard Brittnacher (Köln/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 69–94; Gerhard Hard, “‘Kosmos’ und ‘Leidenschaft.’ Kosmologische und landschaftsphysiognomische Denkmotive bei Alexander von Humboldt und in der geographischen Humboldt-Auslegung des 20. Jahrhunderts,” in: *Alexander von Humboldt. Werk und Weltgeltung*, ed. Heinrich Pfeiffer (Munich 1969), 133–79; Peter J. Brenner, “Gefühl und Sachlichkeit. Humboldts Reisewerk zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Naturphilosophie,” in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 73 (1991), 135–68; as well as Karlheinz Barck, “‘Umwandlung des Ohrs zum Auge.’ Teleskopisches Sehen und ästhetische Beschreibung bei Alexander von Humboldt,” in: *Wahrnehmung und Geschichte. Markierungen zur Aisthesis materialis*, eds. Bernhard J. Dotzler and Ernst Müller (Berlin 1995), 29–42.

as seemingly disparate as Oswald Spengler, Gottfried Benn, and those of the *Kosmikerkreis* (Alfred Schuler, Ludwig Klages, Stefan George), “philosophers of life” around 1900 (Georg Simmel, Klages, Edmund Husserl), as well as avant-garde literature, philosophy, theater and poetry (Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Bertolt Brecht) all implicitly drew in different ways on cosmological figures of thought. By situating these strikingly different writes and texts within a broader cultural history of cosmology in modernity, their reflections on and reactions to the contingency and materiality of the modern world shed new light on natural-scientific, anthropological, as well as aesthetic ways of attempting to grasp man’s relation to the cosmos.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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**Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow
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Employment

2016– Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Occidental College

Education

2016 Ph.D., German Literature, Johns Hopkins University

Dissertation: *Signs of Life: Form, Life, and the Materiality of Writing around 1800 (Georg Christoph Lichtenberg – Jean Paul – Goethe)* (supervised by Elisabeth Strowick and Andrea Krauß)

2013–14 Freie Universität Berlin

2012 M.A., German Literature, Johns Hopkins University

2009 B.A. *summa cum laude*, History, German, University of Michigan

Articles

“Scholarly Machines of Fantasy: Materiality and Media Technology in Jean Paul’s *Leben des Quintus Fixlein*” (under review, *The German Quarterly*).

“Fragmenting Fragments: Humor and the Poetics of Small Form in Jean Paul’s *Meine Miszellen*” (under review, *Monatshefte*).

Book Reviews:

Review of Stefan Andriopoulos, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*. In: *Modern Language Notes* 130.3 (2015): 670–75.

Review of Paul North, *The Problem of Distraction*. In: *Modern Language Notes* 127.3 (2012): 685–89.

Work in Progress:

“‘von dem Strudel der Spiraltendenz ergriffen’: Anamorphosis and Phantasmagoria in Goethe’s Morphology” (draft article)

Research & Teaching Interests

18th–20th c. German literature & thought, 20th c. literary & critical theory, aesthetics, rhetoric and poetics, media studies, history of science, psychoanalysis, philosophy

Fellowships & Awards

- 2016– Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship, Occidental College
- 2016 DAAD Global Humanities Junior Research and Teaching Stay (3 months), Freie Universität Berlin
- 2014 McClain Dissertation Completion Grant, Johns Hopkins University
- 2013–14 Visiting Research Fellowship, Freie Universität Berlin
- 2013 Summer Research Fellowship, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- 2012–16 Max Kade Summer Travel Grant, Johns Hopkins University
- 2012 Horstmeier Memorial Fund Recipient, Johns Hopkins University
- 2010 Dahlem Humanities Center Junior Fellowship, Freie Universität Berlin
- 2010–16 Gilman Graduate Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University
- 2009 Robert Hayden Humanities Award for Outstanding Honors Thesis, University of Michigan
- 2009 Arthur Fondiler Award for Best Honors Thesis in the Department of History, University of Michigan
- 2008–09 James B. Angell Scholar Award, University of Michigan
- 2008–09 LSA Scholarship Award, University of Michigan

Papers Delivered (* = Invited Lecture)

“Scholarly Machines of Fantasy. Materiality and Media Technology in Jean Paul’s *The Life of Quintus Fixlein*.” Department of Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture, Occidental College, April 2016.*

“Discontinuous Circularities: Linking and Unlinking in Jean Paul’s *Leben Fibels*.” German Studies Association, Washington, DC, Oct 2015.

“Writing the Life of Writing: Jean Paul’s Idylls.” German Graduate Workshop, Department of German & Slavic Studies, CU Boulder, May 2015.

“‘I’ll see you again in 25 years’: Seriality in *Twin Peaks*.” Graduate Conference *On Seriality*, Department of German Studies, Cornell University, May 2015.

“Goethes morphologischer Blick: Zur Anamorphose der Perspektiv in den Heften *Zur Morphologie*.” *Studententage*, Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, Oct 2014.

“‘Ich weiß nicht, wie man diesem Lesen ein Ende machen soll’: The Poetics of ‘Witz’ in Jean Paul’s *Meine Miszellen*.” Modern Languages Association, Chicago, IL, Jan. 2014.

“An Autobiography of a Future Life: The Epistemology of Conjecture in Jean Paul’s *Konjekturalbiographie*.” Summer School *Zeit und Literatur*, Universität Bonn, July 2012.

“Aesthetics of Metamorphosis: On the ‘Spiraltendenz’ in Goethe’s Writings on Morphology.” Graduate Conference *On Limits*, Department of Comparative Literature, New York University, March 2012.

“Fragments from the Future: Freud, Benjamin and the Problem of Historical Time.” Summer School *Die “Erste Kulturwissenschaft” und ihr Potential für die Gegenwart*, Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin, July 2011.

Conferences Organized

Literature and Cosmology. Graduate Conference of the German Program, Johns Hopkins University, Feb 2013.

Counter-philologies. Graduate Conference of the Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures, Johns Hopkins University, Sept 2012.

Related Conference Activity

Panel Moderator, International Conference *Avant-garde Revisited: Else Lasker-Schüler*, Johns Hopkins University, March 2015.

Panel Moderator, *The Posthermeneutic Turn in Textual Studies*, German Studies Association, Washington, DC, Oct 2015.

Panel Moderator and Commentator, International Conference *Kosmos und Kontingenz*, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, June 2014.

Respondent, Workshop *Material Emotionality*. Program for the Study of Women, Gender and Sexuality, Johns Hopkins University, Nov 2011.

Teaching Experience

Occidental College

The Life of Form: Goethe, Science, Literature (Spring 2017)

Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles (Spring 2017)

To Be Continued: The Serial Impulse in Literature & Other Media (Fall 2016)

From Kafka to Twitter: Small Forms of the Literary (Fall 2016)

Johns Hopkins University

Advanced German II (Spring 2016)

Advanced German I (Fall 2015)

Introduction to New German Cinema (Winter 2015)

Panorama of German Thought (Teaching Assistant, Fall 2014)

Intermediate German II (Spring 2013)

Love and Death in Wagner (Winter 2013)

Intermediate German I (Fall 2012)

German Elements II (Spring 2012)

German Elements I (Fall 2011)

Service

2014–15 President, Philological Society, Johns Hopkins University

2012–15 Graduate Representative, Philological Society, Johns Hopkins University

2010–11 Graduate Representative, German Program, Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures, Johns Hopkins University

2010–11 Editorial Assistant to Andrea Krauß, *Modern Language Notes*, Johns Hopkins University

Languages

English: Native speaker

German: Fluent in speaking, reading, and writing

French: Proficient in reading and writing

Professional Memberships

German Studies Association

Modern Language Association

American Comparative Literature Association

References

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